

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“The nature of the Babylonian conquests
in the North-western Periphery of Mesopotamia during the
late 7th and early 6th century BC“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2020 / Vienna 2020

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 672

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Altorientalische Philologie und
Orientalische Archäologie

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Michael Jursa

Table of Contents

Danksagung.....	vii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 General Introduction and research Question	1
1.2 Chronology.....	6
1.3 Methodology	6
2. Historical Framework and State of Research.....	7
2.1 Historical and Chronological Framework.....	7
2.1.1 The Sources.....	7
2.1.2 Mesopotamia during Assyria's Pre-imperial Phase	9
2.1.3 The Neo-Assyrian Empire (744-609 BC)	13
2.1.3.1 Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC).....	14
2.1.3.2 Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC)	18
2.1.3.3 Sargon II (721-705 BC).....	18
2.1.3.4 Sennacherib (704-681 BCE)	21
2.1.3.5 Esarhaddon (681-669 BC).....	24
2.1.3.6 Aššurbanipal (668-631 BC)	27
2.1.4 The Neo-Babylonian Empire (627-539 BC)	31
2.1.4.1 Aššur-etel-ilani (631/630-627 BC).....	31
2.1.4.2 Nabopolassar (626-605 BC).....	31
2.1.4.3 Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC)	33
2.1.4.4 Amīl-Marduk (561-560 BC)	38
2.1.4.5 Neriglissar (559-556 BC).....	38
2.1.4.6 Labaši-Marduk (556 BC)	38
2.1.4.7 Nabonidus (555-539 BC)	39

2.2	The Southern Levant	41
2.2.1	The Assyrian and Egyptian Periods in the 1 st Millennium BC until the Babylonian conquest.....	41
2.2.1.1	Historical framework.....	41
2.2.1.2	The Assyrian system of imperial control	45
2.2.1.3	Social and economic implications and results of the Assyrian conquest	48
2.2.2	The Babylonian conquest and its aftermath	55
2.2.2.1	Historical Framework.....	55
2.2.2.2	The Babylonian system of imperial control	63
2.2.2.3	Social and economic implications and results of the Babylonian conquest.....	67
3.	Areas.....	81
3.1	Possible indicators for a Babylonian presence	81
3.2	Cilicia	84
3.2.1	Topography	84
3.2.2	Historical overview and textual evidence	86
3.2.3	Archaeological evidence	88
3.2.4	Cilicia: Conclusion.....	97
3.3	The ‘Amuq valley.....	99
3.3.1.	Topography	99
3.3.2	Historical overview and textual evidence	100
3.3.3	Archaeological Evidence.....	102
3.3.3.1	Tell Ta’yinat.....	103
3.3.3.2	Chatal Höyük.....	107
3.3.3.3	Tell Judaidah	111
3.3.3.5	Further Studies	112
3.3.4	‘Amuq: Conclusions.....	114

3.4 The Ḥabur area	115
3.4.1 Topography	115
3.4.2 Historical overview and textual evidence	116
3.4.3 Archaeological Evidence.....	122
3.4.3.1 Tell Sheikh Ḥamad.....	122
3.4.3.2 Tell Halaf.....	135
3.4.3.3 Tell Feḥerīye	141
3.4.3.4 Tell Beydar	145
3.4.3.5 Tell Brak.....	147
3.4.3.6 Tell Barri	151
3.4.3.7 Tell Hamoukar.....	154
3.4.3.8 Other surveys.....	157
3.4.4 The Ḥabur area: Conclusions	160
 4. Conclusions	 163
 5. Maps	 167
5.1 Entire area under investigation.....	167
5.2 Mesopotamia	169
5.3 The Levant.....	171
5.4 Cilicia	173
5.5 The ‘Amuq valley.....	175
5.6 The Ḥabur region	177
 6. List of Figures	 179
 7. Bibliography.....	 183

Danksagung

Zunächst möchte ich meinem Betreuer Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Michael Jursa für Möglichkeit bedanken, die vorliegende Arbeit beim ihm schreiben zu können. Darüber hinaus gebührt ihm Dank, mich nach Kräften unterstützt und mir weitgehenden Freiraum hinsichtlich des Verfassens der Arbeit gewährt zu haben.

Großer Dank gebührt meiner Familie für Motivation, Geduld und auch finanzielle Unterstützung ohne derer es mir nicht möglich gewesen wäre an zahlreichen Ausgrabung im Ausland teilzunehmen.

In diesem Sinne möchte ich auch allen Grabungs- und ProjektleiterInnen, sowie Grabungsmitarbeitern danken, die mir das Archäologenhandwerk nähergebracht haben. Insbesondere seien hierbei Prof. Dr. Dr. Peter M. Fischer, Prof. Dr. Barbara Horejs und Assoz. Prof. Mag. Dr. Marta Luciani und Hikmat Ta’ani genannt.

Weiterern besonderen Dank möchte ich all meinen Freunden und Kollegen am Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien und am Institut für Orientalische und Europäische Archäologie der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften aussprechen. Insbesondere seien dabei meine Kollegen aus der Forschungsgruppe “Prehistoric Phenomena”, dem DigiLab, sowie dem Rohmateriallabor genannt.

Rosaura Cauchi möchte ich für die langanhaltende Geduld, den ständigen Zuspruch, anregende Gespräch sowie das entgegengebrachte Verständnis während dieser mitunter intensiven Zeit danken.

1. Introduction

1.1 General Introduction and research Question

The Neo-Babylonian Empire (626-539 BC) spanned from the Mesopotamian heartland until the Levant, over the modern-day countries of Iraq, Syria, parts of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Saudi-Arabia. Before the rise of the Babylonian Empire, these territories were occupied by the Neo-Assyrian Empire (744-609 BC), which was defeated and conquered by an alliance of Medians and Babylonians at the end of the 7th century BCE. The following period of the Neo-Babylonian Empire is known as the long 6th century, which was characterized by a centralized state apparatus and a thriving social and economic life in the Babylonian heartland.¹

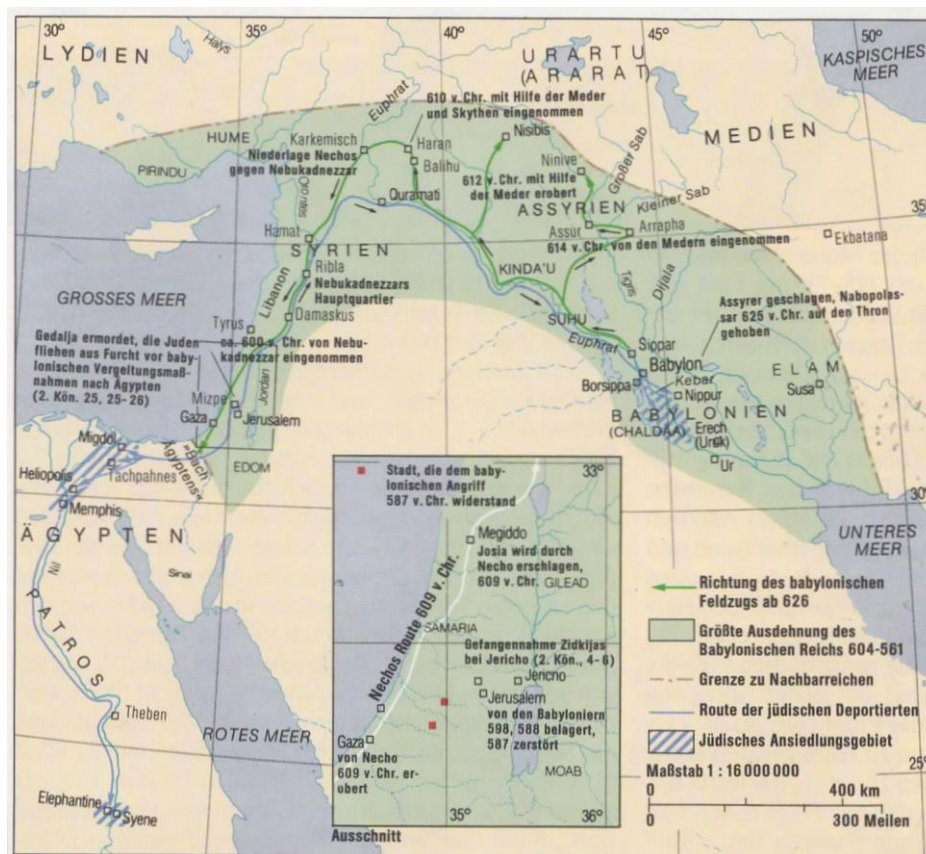


Figure 1: Approximate Extent of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the 6th century BC

The Babylonian conquests during the transitional period in between the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empire and subsequent rule still represent a crucial point in the religious and cultural history of the Jewish people. Many of these events – such as the destruction of the

¹ Beaulieu 2018, 236; Jursa 2014, 127; Jursa 2010, 4-5.

first temple in Jerusalem and the subsequent Babylonian Exile – are portrayed in the Hebrew Bible and shaped its further theological development. Therefore, major research efforts were undertaken in Israel in order to find out more about this period. The great number of archaeological excavations and the collected data from them seem to largely confirm the Biblical narrative, stating that the land was destroyed, and most people had either died in course of the conflict or were taken into exile by the Babylonians. The Babylonian conquests and policies were therefore often assessed as having been destructive and exploitative, only aimed at defeating its enemies and procuring as many resources for the Babylonian core as possible, without implementing long-term strategies and/ or actions aimed at consolidating their power in newly conquered regions and developing them.²



Figure 2: "The Flight of the Prisoner" by J. Tissot, painted 1896-1902

In other areas, which were likewise peripheral to the later Neo-Babylonian core, we are still confronted with major research gaps. In part, as the textual evidence left behind by the Babylonians tends not to focus on military achievements, but on building projects and religious events, but also because the archaeological evidence has not been systematically

² Beaulieu 2018, 235; Jursa 2014, 124; For the impact of the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile see for example Lipschits 2005, in particular Chapter 5 (272-359).

collected and processed with assessing this specific period in mind. Without a doubt, this has to do with specific problems concerning the material evidence from the period, which will be discussed further below.³

As the results from Israel could be constricted to this relatively small area, they should not be seen as necessarily representative for the whole of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, i.e., the former provinces of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and its policies towards them, without reviewing the evidence available from other regions conquered by the Babylonians.

Since a full evaluation of all evidence for a Babylonian presence throughout the empire would go well beyond the scope of this study⁴, some carefully selected peripheral regions with different geographical and strategical properties towards the Babylonian core will act as case studies, the evidence from which will be explored and put in contrast to the results from Israel. In doing so, some light will be shed on the nature of the Babylonian conquests and presence in these regions and help us extend our understanding of Babylonian foreign policies and strategies in forming a new empire. Additionally, the aforementioned gap in research will be – at least partially – filled, and the evidence from Israel put in a wider geographical and historical context.

In the first part of the thesis – after giving some information on the methodology used in the thesis – a historical overview from the beginnings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire under Tiglath-pileser III until its demise and the subsequent rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nabopolassar until its end at the hands of Cyrus the Great, followed by an assessment of the state of research in the Southern Levant, i.e. modern-day Israel will be given. Besides providing a historical framework in which the material discussed within the thesis is embedded, the historical overview will provide background information necessary to understand the events surrounding the Babylonian conquests and any possibly connected actions of destruction. Furthermore, this section will help us understand if such actions might have been motivated by events, which occurred in the course of the relationship in between Babylonia and Assyria before the Babylonian conquests that might have caused negative sentiments, such as revenge. At the same time, we will see if the Neo-Babylonian Empire developed new mechanisms to deal with foreign entities, or if the implemented strategies

³ Beaulieu 2018, 220-221; Jursa 2010, 3; Jursa 2014, 121-122.

⁴ In this regard see Morrison 2001, 7: „Extending archaeological understandings across very large spatial scales moves beyond any one scholar’s own fieldwork; the masses of local data to be assimilated make supra-regional analysis on the basis of archaeological evidence difficult, though of course far from impossible. “

were based upon already known and practiced techniques. In addition, looking at the time period after the initial conquest will make it possible to assess, if the taken actions fell into a larger plan or vision tried to be achieved and could be understood as such.

The next part of the thesis will focus on the research conducted in modern-day Israel and provide a comprehensive overview on the state of research concerning the periods of Neo-Assyrian, Egyptian and Neo-Babylonian domination of the region. Furthermore, some specific historical information will be provided, as the political environment in the Southern Levant, its geographical location and/ or demeanour of its inhabitants might have influenced the Babylonian decision-making process on how to act and interact with the region and its inhabitants. The presentation of an up-to-date state of research is absolutely imperative, as the very narrative and situation in the Southern Levant will be put in contrast to other regions. Additionally, the methodology employed in Israel might prove to be useful in answering similar questions in the to be discussed areas.

The following part of the thesis will be composed of the aforementioned case studies, exploring the impact of the Neo-Babylonian Empire conquests in several peripheral regions to the empire. Furthermore, a short overview of possible indicators and archaeological and archaeometric methods for a Babylonian presence will be given.

The first area to be investigated is the region of Cilicia in the south of modern-day Turkey. Cilicia was chosen as it was a province of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (akk. *Que*), in a rather remote geographical location relative to the Mesopotamian, and even more so, Babylonian core. Additionally, Cilicia lies geographically opposite to where the Neo-Babylonian Empire interacted with their main rival, Egypt.⁵

The 'Amuq valley, the next region to be discussed, was chosen as it represents the link between Cilicia and the wider Mesopotamian area and with that a strategically significant route for trade and the flow of information. Furthermore, understanding and combining the results from both Cilicia and the 'Amuq valley will permit to contextualize these outcomes in a wider geographical area and might enhance our knowledge on developments in both regions.⁶

The last and largest region to be investigated is the Ḫabur region, as it was a central part of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. It both represented an opportunity and a threat to the Neo-

⁵ Radner 2008, 62.

⁶ Yener 2005, 2.

Babylonians, as the close cultural ties with the Assyrians could have facilitated an incorporation of the region into the realm, but at the same time, the inhabitants could have easily risen up in an effort to reclaim independence from their former subjects. The policies implemented in the Habur area therefore were clearly crucial for the longevity and maybe even survival of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Exploring evidence of these strategies will grant valuable insights into thinking processes and approaches towards foreign policies, as well as long-term plans for the region.

In the final part of the thesis, the discussion and conclusions of the previous chapters and final answers to the research question at hand will be presented.

The geographic positions of all places and sites discussed in thesis – as long as they have been identified – are provided on maps in the last part of the thesis.

1.2 Chronology

As the goal of this thesis is not to discuss chronological matters *per se*, the chronology used in is based on widely available standard chronologies, such as published in Beaulieu 2018⁷, Frahm 2017⁸ or Van De Mieroop 2016⁹. For more information on the Mesopotamian chronology of the 1st Millennium BC see Beaulieu 2018, pages 20-22, or Van De Mieroop 2016, pages 17-18.

Nabopolassar (Nabu-aplu-usur)	626–605
Nebuchadnezzar II (Nabu-kudurru-usur)	604–562
Amel-Marduk	561–560
Neriglissar (Nergal-sharru-usur)	559–556
Labashi-Marduk	556
Nabonidus (Nabu-na'id)	555–539

Figure 3: The Neo-Babylonian Dynasty

1.3 Methodology

In order to answer the questions outlined above, the available literature on each of these topics will first be collected, read and analysed according to our questions. Besides drawing our own conclusions and/ or critically reassessing the collected information, we will attempt to apply strategies which have been used in the study of the material from modern-day Israel. In doing so, we shall try to either confirm or disprove the narrative from Judah for the other regions of the Mesopotamian periphery under investigation.

⁷ Beaulieu 2018, 178, 195, 220

⁸ Frahm 2017, 615.

⁹ Van De Mieroop 2016, 358-360, 363, 387-388.

2. Historical Framework and State of Research

2.1 Historical and Chronological Framework

2.1.1 The Sources

A basic framework for the Assyrian chronology is provided by the Assyrian kings list, eponym lists and eponym chronicles. As for the last decades of the Neo-Assyrian empire (after 649 BC) no such eponym lists are available, some uncertainties remain for this period. Solar eclipses and other celestial events, which can be cross-referenced with these lists, allow us to associate these models of relative succession with absolute dates.¹⁰

Other chronological and historical information for the Neo-Assyrian Empire can be derived from royal inscriptions, which inform us about military campaigns and building endeavours. Even though most of them prove to be reliable, some caution is required, as some events are not listed in chronological order and sometimes the kings tried to exaggerate their achievements. Additionally, letters and archives are a precious source for information. In the case of the Neo-Assyrian Empire the state archives of the state were discovered in Kalḫu and Nineveh and give a relatively realistic view upon the events and state affairs. Likewise, sources from outside the empire, such as Babylonian chronicles and royal inscriptions, or the Hebrew Bible can provide us with a different viewpoint of events.¹¹

The same is true for archaeological remains, i.e. objects of the material culture and the contexts in which they were found, which provide us with insights into aspects and strata of society, which were not documented in textual form. Pictorial remains from cylinder seals or reliefs contribute visual information. Architectural remains inform us about aspects of spatial organization and building techniques.¹²

For the Neo-Babylonian period, we mostly rely upon the Babylonian chronicle series for historical information. No official state archives have been discovered up to this point and royal inscriptions focus more on building activities and the religious role of the ruler and his

¹⁰ Frahm 2017, 162-163.

¹¹ Frahm 2017, 163-165; Beaulieu 2018, 193.

¹² Frahm 2017, 165.

devotion to the gods than historical information. Classical and Jewish accounts remain sketchy and Persian records can be classified as propaganda demonizing especially the last Babylonian king, Nabonidus.¹³

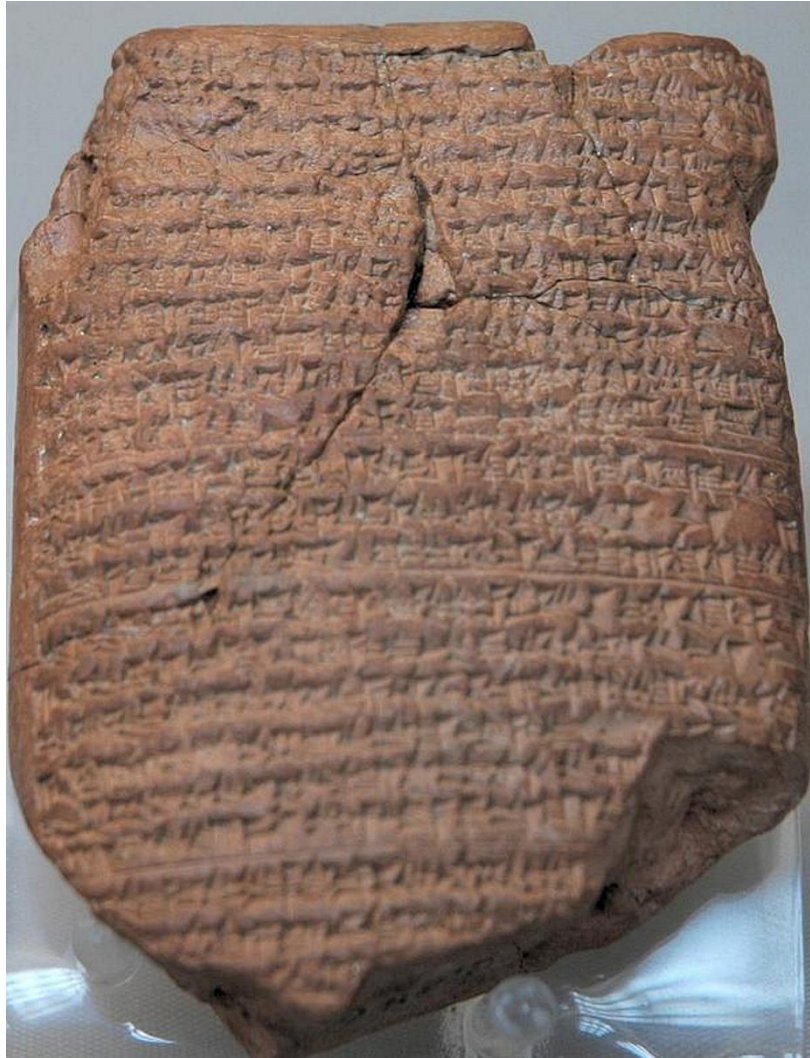


Figure 4: Nebuchadnezzar II chronicle (ABC 05)

In contrast to the Neo-Assyrian period, a series of private and temple archives, sometimes spanning several generations, were discovered in southern Mesopotamia, such as the Eanna archive from Uruk, the Ebabbar archive from Sippar or the private archive of the merchant family of Egibi. These texts, even though restricted to the upper echelons of Babylonian society, provide us with detailed information about the economic history of Babylonia. Next to these large archives, a series of medium and smaller archives were discovered.¹⁴

¹³ Beaulieu 2018, 171, 220-222; Jursa 2014, 121.

¹⁴ Beaulieu 2018, 220-222.

2.1.2 Mesopotamia during Assyria's Pre-imperial Phase

The late 2nd Millennium BC is characterized by the collapse of an international system of trade and communication and the subsequent demise of the regional, palatial systems embedded within it. Many reasons for this collapse were suggested and reach from invasions, migrations, social revolutions and ecological disasters.

Especially ancient sources repeatedly mention invading groups of people, such as the so called “Sea People” in Anatolia, the Levant and Egypt, but also in Assyria, we find references to Arameans, which might suggest attempts of infiltrating the region. Many of these reports contain contradictions, as some of the “invading forces” were already living in these areas many years before the reported invasions took place.¹⁵

The aforementioned palatial system of the Late Bronze Age was based upon social and economic inequality, i.e. the exploitation of agricultural communities. Crippled by debts, many left behind these structures and became outcasts, who lived outside the city walls in regions, which were difficult to access and control. Many texts refer to these *habiru* as being hostile. Even though, leaving the countryside constituted a threat to the system, they were hired as mercenaries and through that gained experience in wielding weaponry. As more and more people left the inherent inequality of the palatial system, the rulers might have increased their demands of goods of the remaining population, resulting in perpetuating the problem even further. With time, the oppressed population might have revolted and toppled the elites, which is supported by rather selective patterns of destruction.¹⁶



Figure 5: Imprints of childrens feet sold into slavery from Late Bronze Age Syria

¹⁵ Van De Mieroop 2016, 210.

¹⁶ Van De Mieroop 2016, 211-212; Killebrew – Lehmann 2011, 7.

At the same time natural causes, such as periods of drought or the change in river courses, might have aggravated the situation even further, as some texts, speaking about a lack of food and even famine confirm. Even though these texts might represent isolated cases, they still could represent a contributing factor to the aforementioned collapse.¹⁷

As none of these explanations can be identified as the sole cause for the breakdown of the international palace system, which had characterized Mesopotamia as well as the eastern Mediterranean for the entirety of the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 BC), it seems likely that it was the combination of all of them, which eventually caused the collapse.¹⁸

What followed was a period often referred to as a “Dark Age” with little to no documentation (archaeological as well as textual) available to us, which lasted until the Middle of the 10th century. The formerly grand territorial states of Assyria, Babylonia and Elam were reduced to their core areas. On the one hand the lack of written documentation can be explained by the lack of international trade or diplomatic relations, as well as central administration in general, which led to a reduced need for bureaucracy. On the other hand, the institutions, i.e. the palaces, which provided the necessary framework for the education and support of scribes in former times, did not exist anymore. The first textual documentation available to us emerges in Assyria around the second half of the 10th century- in Babylonia this gap lasts until the middle of the 8th century.¹⁹

The void resulting from the fall of the big territorial states – especially in the countryside – was used by nomadic pastoralist groups, such as the Arameans, Chaldeans and to a certain degree also Arabs, to move in and settle the rural areas in between the old Mesopotamian cities, which continued to preserve the Mesopotamian traditions and culture of administration. Some of these old cities, especially in the central alluvial plain, were ruled by governors and city councils, who acted almost independently from the throne.²⁰

The Arameans were initially described as hostile and intrusive, but managed to settle all over Babylonia, especially along the Tigris. Eventually they settled down, combining agriculture and pastoralism. Their biggest impact on Ancient Near Eastern society was of linguistic nature. Aramean is a Semitic language, which was written in an alphabetical script, which derived from Phoenician. At first it was used as an administrative language by Aramean

¹⁷ Kaniewski et al. 2010, 214.

¹⁸ Van De Mieroop 2016, 212.

¹⁹ Beaulieu 2018, 171; Liverani 2017, 538; Van De Mieroop 2016, 213.

²⁰ Van De Mieroop, 217-218; Jursa 2014, 123.

States in Syria, but after Assyria annexed these regions and deported its inhabitants, the language spread until it eventually was used as the common vernacular by the 7th century BC. From the 8th century BC onwards Neo-Assyrian, as well as Neo-Babylonian show signs of Aramaic influences.²¹

The Chaldeans were first documented from the 9th century BC onwards. Their main area of influence was located in southern Babylonia and along the Euphrates River, a densely populated area, which included most of the major Babylonian cities. Five major tribal groups can be identified, all of which are named “House of” and the name of the tribal ancestor- for example *Bīt Amūkāni*. During the time of Sennacherib (704-681 BC), the Chaldean territory encompassed at least 88 cities and 900 villages. Furthermore, most Chaldeans bore Babylonian names, which – according to Beaulieu²² – reflects their rapid acculturation. The few instances from which we encounter Chaldeans with non-Babylonian names, suggest that they are of wider West-Semitic origin, implying some connection to the Arameans. Nonetheless, the Chaldean identity and social structure remains unique and distinctive in comparison to the Arameans and certainly contributed to the spread of Aramaic in Babylonia.²³

Other than that, this period brought a significant technological improvement – the use of iron, respectively steel. The international trade systems of the Late Bronze Age were essential for the production of Bronze, as both raw materials – copper, as well as tin – had to be imported. With the disappearance of these systems, iron proved to be the perfect substitute, as it was both cheap and widely available. Alloying iron with charcoal in the course of the smelting process allowed for the production of steel, which proved to be much more durable and harder than Bronze.²⁴

As already mentioned, the situation in Babylonia remained chaotic and confused from the end of the second dynasty of Isin at the end of the 2nd Millennium B. C., until the second half of the 8th century. The period is characterized by economic decline and urban life reached a nadir. Texts frequently record fights against tribal groups and revolts, the Babylonian King List A subsumes the rulers under the designation “Dynasty of E”. The old Babylonian cities remained places of order for the king in an unruly landscape, which, as already mentioned,

²¹ Beaulieu 2018, 172-173; Jursa 2014, 123.

²² Beaulieu 2018, 175.

²³ Beaulieu 2018, 173-175.

²⁴ Frahm 2017, 168; Van De Mieroop 2016, 215-216.

was engrossed by tribal groups. In return for their loyalty, the king granted them privileges, such as the exemption from taxes and/ or corvée labour.²⁵

Assyria managed to re-emerge from the “Dark Age” at the beginning of the late 10th to early 9th century. What followed was initially a period of reconquest (934-824 BC), during which many of the areas, which were lost during the previous period. The military efforts mostly focused on areas in the east, north and west, during which Assyrian kings displayed – according to their own accounts in royal inscriptions – great brutality towards the subjugated entities. In a second phase, the Assyrian capital was moved from Assur to Kalḫu, a city on the east bank of the Tigris, situated roughly in the centre of the Assyrian triangle, formed by the cities Assur, Nineveh and Arbila. The considerable building efforts were possible due to booty and tribute collected during campaigns in the west, which even reached the Phoenician cities Tyre, Sidon and Byblos. Other than the central location of Kalḫu the wish for more independence from the influential, old families in Assur might have motivated the relocation of the capital.²⁶

What followed was a period during which a small group of generals and court officials – the so called “magnates” – seem to have had considerable influence over Assyria. The number of royal inscriptions is smaller, and Assyria’s territorial expansions came to a halt. If this reflects a time of crisis remains debated, as it could be either interpreted as a time of stagnation or consolidation. Since none of the officials tried to usurp the throne, we can presume that no major crisis occurred. Furthermore, the rapid expansion during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) must have been supported by strong and reliable economic as well as military structures, which most likely were developed during this period of stagnation and/ or consolidation.²⁷

²⁵ Beaulieu 2018, 171; Jursa 2014, 123.

²⁶ Frahm 2017, 167-173.

²⁷ Frahm 2017, 173-174.

2.1.3 The Neo-Assyrian Empire (744-609 BC)

As already mentioned, some scholars proposed that the Assyrian state was plagued by internal problems until the middle of the 8th century BC. Assyria did not campaign outside its borders and state officials, such as governors of provinces, enjoyed great freedom in their ability to make decisions and seem to have acted almost autonomously, although the latter remains a matter of scholarly discussion.²⁸

The following epoch has been labelled the “true empire phase in Assyrian history”²⁹, during which Assyria emerged as the “first true empire in world history”³⁰. This was possible through a series of strong kings who introduced reforms regarding the administrative and military structure of the Assyria, upon which all Near Eastern Empires to come from the Babylonian, Persians and Abbasids to the Ottomans would be based. Concurrently this period was characterized by the enormous territorial expansion, which eventually led the Neo-Assyrian Empire to control western Iran, Assyria, Babylonia, southern Anatolia, the Levant, the Eastern Mediterranean (including Cyprus) and Egypt.³¹

This sense of “acquisitiveness” extended to commercial enterprises, which were slowly replaced by means of exploiting neighbouring states through yearly raids and levying tribute. This tributary mode of production eventually replaced the exchange systems of trading partners acting on an equal level, making the state dependent on tribute and the goods collected by provincial governors.³²

The administrative structure of the Assyrian Empire was heavily centralized and based upon a strong idea of order, with the king on the top. He directly appointed high officials, such as governors (*pāḫutu* or *bēl pāḫete*, “proxy”), delegates (*qēpu*, “trusted one”) and other high officials who served at the Assyrian court (such as the chief cupbearer (*rab šāqē*), or the palace herald (*nāgir ekalli*)). Together they formed a group called magnates (LÚ.GAL.MEŠ = *rab(b)ûte*, “the great ones”), of whom 100-120 existed at any given time, forming the backbone of the imperial administrative apparatus of the Assyrian empire. Each of these positions also had a substitute official (*šaniu*, “second one”, also directly appointed by the king) assigned to it, which made the Assyrian empire exceptionally flexible and stable,

²⁸ Frahm 2017, 173; Van De Mieroop 2016, 266.

²⁹ Van De Mieroop 2007, 247.

³⁰ Frahm 2017, 178.

³¹ Frahm 2017, 161, 178; Van De Mieroop 2016, 266.

³² Frahm 2017, 162.

especially considering that its geographical extent made it necessary that decisions could be made fast, regardless of inconvenient circumstances. Furthermore, all officials were drafted from a class of professional administrators, without ties to noble families, which made sure that they were chosen based on their merits and not their heritage, as well as securing the position of the king. Yet another measure with this goal taken was that these positions, except that of the crown prince, were not inheritable, which might be the reason why eunuchs (*ša rēši*) were disproportionately represented. The background of these individual often remains elusive, as many of them gave up their family name and took a new one. The relationship in between the king and his officials was defined by personal loyalty. At times oaths were imposed upon the entire state apparatus, as well as the population, which could indicate periods of internal struggle, especially regarding royal succession.³³

Even though all rulers of the Neo-Assyrian Empire belonged to the same family, the country was plagued by continuing internal difficulties, as succeeding kings often were not the first in line of succession and had difficulties to establish control.³⁴ Furthermore, the Urartian state proved to be a persevering antagonist in the north-west³⁵ and Babylonia in the south repeatedly tried to regain its independence. The conflict eventually peaked in the destruction of Babylon through the hands of King Sennacherib in 689 BC, which would remain to be a major point of resentment in between Assyria and Babylonia, as well as the justification for the destructions invoked upon Assyria during the Babylonian conquest at the end of the 7th century.³⁶

2.1.3.1 Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC)

The reign of Tiglath-pileser III marks the beginning of full-scale Neo-Assyrian imperial expansion. At the beginning of his reign, he undertook several reforms, which mostly aimed at reducing the power of the aforementioned “magnates”, by assigning two individuals to positions formerly held by one official. Additionally, he divided large provinces under their

³³ Van De Mieroop 2016, 277-279; Radner 2011, 359-361; <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/sargon/>, Date of access: 09.03.2019; For further information on the high officials specific duties see Mattila 2000.

³⁴ Van De Mieroop 2016, 265-266.

³⁵ Van De Mieroop 2016, 270.

³⁶ Beaulieu 2018, 208.

control (doubling their number from 12 to 25) and appointed governors loyal to him and the throne. Furthermore, they were no longer authorized to commission inscriptions in their own name.³⁷



Figure 6: Detail of Stela of Tiglath-pileser III

As time went by, provinces in the heartland of Assyria were considerably smaller in the centre of the realm compared to those on the fringes of the empire. The reason for this may lie in the fact that all governors – regardless on which province they administrated – had to contribute the same amount of goods and work force, meaning that every region was judged in regard to its economic potential and divided into provinces accordingly. Following this approach, the provinces in the Assyrian heartland were probably best developed and therefore smaller.³⁸

³⁷ Frahm 2017, 177.

³⁸ Radner 2017, 215-216.

Tiglath-pileser III also conducted a series of major, successful military campaigns to Babylonia, Urartu, northern Syria, the Levant and Egypt, during which he greatly reduced the size of the kingdom of Israel and turned several kingdoms, such as Judah, Ammon, Moab and Edom, into vassals, from whom he demanded heavy tribute. This represents another modernization. Whereas Assyria until this point only raided neighbouring territories for booty, subjugated countries were now either turned into vassal states, or right out annexed and integrated into the empire. This went along with considerable expenditures in goods and work force, as the local administrative and agricultural infrastructure (administrative structures, way and information network, and canals) had to be developed.³⁹

The military campaigns were made possible by a reorganization of the Assyrian military apparatus. While before it relied on yearly drafts, it now had a standing army at its command. Assyrians served as the core troops, made up of cavalry and chariotry, while the infantry was composed of individuals from subjugated territories.⁴⁰

Tiglath-pileser III developed new means of staying in control over conquered lands – mass deportations, which should continue to be employed by future empires in the Near East. These deportations were frequently mentioned in royal inscriptions, either in the context of pillage and violence, or using language of horticulture – the deportees being compared to precious trees, which were uprooted and replanted in the heart of the empire.⁴¹ This already gives an insight into the main interests of the kings, which were twofold:

- 1) Deportations were a convenient method to break resisting populations by robbing them of part of their tangible cultural heritage as well as dispersing groups of resisting entities, while at the same time
- 2) Making sure that the resources of the Empire were used in the best way possible, as the deportees were often brought into territories, which were supposed to be developed agriculturally.⁴²

In total around 1,5 million individuals were displaced during of the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The effects of these deportation are best understood in Israel and the H̱abur area, and

³⁹ Frahm 2017, 177-178; Radner 2017, 215-216.

⁴⁰ Van De Mieroop 2016, 266.

⁴¹ Radner 2017, 210.

⁴² Radner 2017, 209-211.

are still recognizable today, as it changed the ethnolinguistic composition of the Near East forever. At the same time, the rise of Aramean as common vernacular in the region was stimulated.⁴³

It has to be emphasized that being deported cannot be compared to what we might associate with it today. For the Assyrian state deportees were highly valuable and being deported was even presented and described as a privilege. The empire continued to support relocated individuals after their arrival, emphasized that they were not to be treated differently from the rest of the population, and encouraged intermixing, as a means to create a homogenous society. Of course, the effects on the regions from which the deportees originated were dire, as they often were not replaced with new groups of people.⁴⁴

The reign of Tiglath-pileser III also marks a new phase in the complicated relationship between Assyria and Babylonia. The Babylonian state was still weak and had – at best – control over the old cities in southern Mesopotamia, whereas the countryside was in the hands of the Arameans. In the beginning of Tiglath-pileser III's reign Nabonassar (747-734 BC) was king of Babylonia. The Assyrian king already led military campaigns against northern Babylon during his early years, which were mostly directed against Aramean tribespeople and not Babylonia itself. Nabonassar was allowed to rule over south-western Babylonia, but even there his rule was far from stable, as we know of a revolt in Borsippa and building inscriptions from Uruk, commemorating repairs on a temple for which not the king but two influential citizens are credited.⁴⁵

According to Berossos, Nabonassar collected and destroyed the documentation of kings before him – which would explain the hiatus in available information – so that the list of Chaldean kings may start with him, even though he seems to have stemmed from a traditional Babylonian family. His son, Nabu-nadin-zeri succeeded him, but was removed from the throne after two years. The leader of this revolt himself was removed after only one month by Nabu-mukin-zeri, who remained on the throne for three years (731-729 BC). Nabu-mukin-zeri, a Chaldean himself, and several other Chaldean cities were defeated by Tiglath-pileser III, who was deeply invested in Babylonian affairs and saw his ascension to the throne as an

⁴³ Frahm 2017, 177-178; Radner 2017, 210.

⁴⁴ Radner 2017, 210-212.

⁴⁵ Beaulieu 2018, 188; Frahm 2017, 178-180; Jursa 2014, 123.

attack on Assyrian interests. He subsequently declared himself king of Babylon in 729 BC and showed great interest in the Babylonian religious customs as he participated in the Babylonian *akītu* festival at the beginning of the New Year.⁴⁶

The Assyrian appropriation of Babylonian kingship marks a crucial point in the relationship in between the two regionw. Assyria was well aware that much of its culture and religion was inspired by Babylonia and therefore, and other religious reasons, could not be reduced to a normal province. Even though Assyria was willing to grant Babylonia with a series of special privileges, Babylonia was not willing to recognize Assyrian supremacy, which eventually ended in disaster when the Assyrians destroyed Babylon, the religious and political capital of Babylonia, in 689 BC. For the time being, creating a double kingship seemed like the best idea, as it guaranteed Assyrian control over Babylonia, but also gave Babylonia a sense of self-governance and preserved its special status.⁴⁷

2.1.3.2 Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC)

The son of Tiglath-pileser III ruled over Assyria and Babylonia for five years. His reign, during which he focused mostly on the region of modern-day Syria and the Levant, was largely stable. During one of his military campaigns, he conquered Samaria, the kingdom of Israel. Other than that, information remains scarce, as no royal inscriptions of Shalmaneser V are preserved or discovered yet. Most of what we know of him derives from later texts.⁴⁸

2.1.3.3 Sargon II (721-705 BC)

Sargon II ascended the throne in 721 BC. The exact circumstances under which this happened remain unknown and dubious. The fact that right after his rise to power 6300 “guilty Assyrians” were deported, indicate serious internal troubles.⁴⁹

In the wake of these dynastic uncertainties, a Chaldean named Marduk-apla-iddina II (721-709 BC) declared himself king of Babylonia. He already appeared as “the king of the Sealand” in sources dating to the times of Tiglath-pileser III. Sargon II tried immediately to

⁴⁶ Frahm 2017, 178, Beaulieu 2018, 188-190.

⁴⁷ Beaulieu 2018, 198; Frahm 2017, 180.

⁴⁸ Frahm 2017, 180.

⁴⁹ Frahm 2017, 180.

stabilize the situation in Babylonia and marched southwards. Marduk-apla-iddina II had entered an alliance with Elam, with whom the Assyrian army clashed near Der in eastern Babylonia. The accounts on the result of the battle differ. Sargon II himself claims to have won the battle and in fact kept the control over the city of Der. According to the Babylonian chronicle, the Assyrians suffered a defeat, which seems plausible, given the fact that the Assyrians refrained from waging war against Babylonia for a decade after the battle took place.⁵⁰



Figure 7: Relief of Sargon II (right) with dignitary from Dūr-Šarrukīn

⁵⁰ Beaulieu 2018, 198; Frahm 2017, 181.

Marduk-apla-iddina II's reign over Babylonia is marked by a slight increase of available sources. He fostered temples and continued the tradition of exempting Babylon and Borsippa from paying taxes. He portrayed himself as the rightful heir to the Babylonian throne, stating that Assyria was only allowed to rule over Babylonia because Marduk had been angry.⁵¹

Meanwhile, Assyria concentrated its military efforts on the kingdom of Urartu and the Levant, when Sargon II subdued a rebellion of several kingdoms (Damascus, Samaria, Arpad and Simirra) against him. The following deportations, respectively deportees found reflection in the Hebrew Bible as the ten lost tribes of Israel. The area was subsequently resettled with Arabs. Another uprising took place in the Philistine city of Ashdod in 711 BC, which was turned into an Assyrian province in 707 BC.⁵²

In 717 BC, he subjugated the city of Carchemish. The extensive amount of silver looted, resulted in the introduction of silver as standard currency in the Neo-Assyrian Empire and provided Sargon II with the funds to finance the construction of a new capital – Dūr-Šarrukīn – where he moved his court in 706 BC. The foundation of a new capital and the fact that over the course of his reign he increasingly relied on family members in powerful positions, indicate serious internal troubles.⁵³

As the alliance in between Babylonia and the Elamites disintegrated towards the end of Sargon II's reign and the Assyrians had established military superiority by 710 BC, it was decided to once more march towards the south. As Marduk-apla-iddina II fled from Babylon into the marches to the Chaldean city of Dūr-Yakīn, the citizens of Babylon and Borsippa opened the gates of their cities without waging a fight. Sargon II advanced into the marches in order to hunt down his opponent but eventually allowed Marduk-apla-iddina II to flee to Elam.⁵⁴

Sargon II spent the following years in Babylon, repeatedly mentioning how the Babylonian priesthood and citizens welcomed him. His claim to the throne was officially recognized, as he participated in the Babylonian New Year's festival. Furthermore, he restored the city wall of Babylon and commissioned repair work on the Eanna in Uruk. In general, he seems to have displayed a distinctive Pro-Babylonian attitude and wielded the traditional Babylonian titles,

⁵¹ Beaulieu 2018, 199.

⁵² Frahm 181-183.

⁵³ Frahm 2017, 181.

⁵⁴ Beaulieu 2018, 199; Frahm 2017, 182.

such as “king of Babylon” or “king of Sumer and Akkad”. Meanwhile his son Sennacherib took care of the political affairs in Assyria.⁵⁵

Sargon II was killed during a military campaign to Anatolia in 705 BC. As it was not possible to recover his body, he could not be buried according to Assyrian customs, which proved to have long lasting psychological effects on the line of succeeding Assyrian kings.⁵⁶

2.1.3.4 Sennacherib (704-681 BCE)

The time of Sennacherib’s reign was characterized by his efforts to distance himself from his father, whose violent death was interpreted as a divine punishment for favouring the Babylonian god Marduk over the Assyrian god Aššur. In order to do so, he moved his residence back to Nineveh and commissioned the restoration of a temple of the underworld god Nergal.⁵⁷

Furthermore, his reign was marked by numerous conflicts with Levantine polities, as well as the Babylonians and Elamites in the south, which eventually ended in the destruction of Babylon.⁵⁸

As Sennacherib ascended to the throne, revolts, motivated by the death of his father broke out throughout the empire. In Babylonia, an individual named Marduk-zakir-šumi II claimed the throne, only to be replaced after only nine months on the throne by Marduk-apla-iddina II, who had returned from Elam. After consolidating his position in the Assyrian heartland, Sennacherib immediately marched towards the south and soon regained control over the major Babylonian cities by defeating an alliance of Babylonians, Arameans, Chaldeans, Elamites and Arabs. The rebellion resulted in the deportation of allegedly more than 200 000 Babylonians and the installation of a puppet king, called Bēl-ibni in 702 BC.⁵⁹

While Sennacherib was occupied in Babylonia, several vassals and provinces in the Levant stopped to pay taxes and tribute. This prompted an Assyrian campaign in 701 BC, during which the Egyptians, who had supported the Levantine uprisings, suffered a defeat – putting an end to their ambitions in the Levant. Several villages and cities in Judah were destroyed and

⁵⁵ Beaulieu 2018, 200-201, Frahm 2017, 183.

⁵⁶ Frahm 2017, 183.

⁵⁷ Frahm 2017, 183.

⁵⁸ Frahm 2017, 184-186.

⁵⁹ Beaulieu 2018, 202-203; Frahm 2017, 184.

a considerable amount of people was deported – Jerusalem however was spared. The Hebrew Bible reports about an Assyrian defeat at the city, while Sennacherib declares a grand victory. Most likely the biblical accounts are wrong.⁶⁰

After the revolt in the Levant was contained, Sennacherib had to return to Babylonia, as Marduk-apla-iddina II, who was still supported by Elam and active in the marches of Babylonia, plotted against Bēl-ibni. It took until 700 BC to eventually subjugate him and Bēl-ibni was subsequently replaced with Aššur-nadin-šumi (699-694 BC), the son of Sennacherib. The reasons for this remain elusive, although it seems possible that Bēl-ibni was not as compliant with Assyrian rule as predicted.⁶¹



Figure 8: Kudurru of Marduk-apla-iddina II

⁶⁰ Frahm 2017, 184-185.

⁶¹ Beaulieu 2018, 203-204; Frahm 2017, 185.

After five years of preparations, in 694 BC, Sennacherib decided to invade Elam. After he had crossed the Arabian Gulf and destroyed the city, the Elamites launched a counter offensive directly into northern Babylonia. The Babylonians, as they realized what had happened seized Aššur-nadin-šumi during the battle of Sippar and sent him to Elam, where he was most likely killed. Nergal-ušeziḫ, a Babylonian noble, was placed in his stead on the throne, only to be defeated near Nippur in 693 BC. Still, the Assyrians were not able to establish control in Babylonia, as Mušeziḫ-Marduk, a Chaldean and passionate opponent of the Assyrians, ascended the throne. He gathered a vast coalition in between Babylonians, Chaldeans, Arameans and Iranian states and confronted the Assyrian king near the city of Halule in 691 BC. As both sides claim a victory in their according sources, the result of the battle was most likely undecided. The Assyrians however managed to consolidate their powers faster and proceeded to siege Babylon for a total of 15 months.⁶²



Figure 9: Sennacherib on his way to Babylonia

Eventually Sennacherib took the city, destroyed its walls, temples and temple tower and carried off the statue of Marduk. According to his account, he even diverted a canal into the city, to eradicate it completely. Even though the destructions must have been terrible, life certainly did not end in Babylon. These acts were remembered for generations and were one

⁶² Beaulieu 2018, 204-206; Frahm 2017, 185-186.

of the justifications for the destructions committed by the Babylonians during their conquest of Assyria 70 years later. Sennacherib never declared himself king of Babylonia, effectively abolishing the institution.⁶³

It seems as if Sennacherib also tried to destroy the ideological bond between Assyria and Babylonia, replacing all traces of Babylonia and Babylon in the theological framework of Assyrian Theology. Following this approach, the creation myth *Enūma-eliš* was rewritten by replacing the Babylonian main god – Marduk – with the Assyrian main god, Aššur. At the same time Aššur was identified with the primeval god Anšar, who was originally an ancestor of Marduk, and after the changes to the *Enūma-eliš*, Aššur himself. Hence, Aššur was called the “self-originate” from this time forward. Furthermore, the cultic infrastructure of Assur was remodelled after Babylon, symbolizing its replacement.⁶⁴

Sennacherib was killed in 681 BC in a palace conspiracy devised by his son Urdu-Mullissi⁶⁵, who himself was overthrown after a few weeks of conflict and Esarhaddon, the second born son of Sennacherib and crown prince ascended the Assyrian throne.⁶⁶

2.1.3.5 Esarhaddon (681-669 BC)

Esarhaddon conceived a way to interpret why his predecessors had found a violent death. In his conception, Sargon II died because he had neglected the Assyrian gods in favour of the Babylonian, and Sennacherib was killed because he had desecrated Babylon and humiliated its gods. Following this logic, he tried to find a balance in between respecting the Babylonian cult, while not neglecting Assyrian traditions. As a first step, he tried to distance himself from the actions of Sennacherib and exonerate him, by ascribing the destruction of Babylon to the will of the gods. Furthermore, he commissioned the rebuilding of Babylon (Esagil, Etemenanki, the processional way, the city walls, the temple of Nabu-ša-ḫare and the E-niggidri-kalamma-summa), omitted all debts of its inhabitants, freed those who had become slaves, confirmed the special status of the city by exempting it from all taxes and returned stolen objects. At the end of his reign, the statue of Marduk was returned. The efforts of Esarhaddon to calm the situation, extended to official, administrative documents. Even though

⁶³ Beaulieu 2018, 206-207; Frahm 2017, 186; Jursa 2014, 123.

⁶⁴ Beaulieu 2018, 207; Frahm 2017, 186.

⁶⁵ Alternatively, Arad-Mullissu, according to Beaulieu 2018, 207.

⁶⁶ Beaulieu 2018, 207; Frahm 2017, 186.

he had taken on traditional Babylonian royal titles, he only refers to the Assyrian ones in administrative documents from Babylonia.⁶⁷



Figure 10: Depiction of Esarhaddon on victory stela, commemorating his victory against Egypt

He also commissioned building projects in Borsippa (temple of Gula) and Nippur (Ekur of Enlil and the E-bara-durgarra of Ištar). As the Assyrians enjoyed considerable support in Uruk, where Aššur was worshipped in the form of Anšar, a lot of their efforts were also focused building projects there, such as the Eanna of Ištar and one of her chapels as well as

⁶⁷ Beaulieu 2018, 208; Frahm 2017, 186-187.

the chapel of Nanaya. Additionally, Esarhaddon also returned the statues of the gods, which had been removed by Sennacherib.⁶⁸

Nonetheless, the relationship and situation in Babylonia remained complicated. As a son of Marduk-apla-iddina II tried to conquer the city of Ur in the Sealand in 680 BC, failed and fled to Elam where he was put to death by the Elamites. This caused another son of Marduk-apla-iddina II to flee to Assyria. He was pardoned and instated as governor for the whole Sealand. Consequently, the Elamites tried to invade Babylonia in 675 BC and entered the city of Sippar. After the Elamite king had died soon after, Assyria and Elam negotiated a peace treaty. The Sealand remained a problematic and rebellious region throughout Esarhaddon reign.⁶⁹

In addition, Assyria faced internal problems, specifically assaults on King Esarhaddon, which had the goal to replace him, but only resulted in several high officials being put to death in 670 BC.⁷⁰

After settling the situation with Babylonia and Elam, Esarhaddon concentrated his efforts on Egypt. Already in 674 BC, he attempted to subjugate his rival after yet another attempt to interfere with Assyrian affairs in the Levant. This first attack failed, but another was undertaken in 671 BC, during which Esarhaddon crossed the Sinai Peninsula with his army, instead of following the coastline, surprising the Egyptians and securing his victory. He conquered Memphis, where he deployed royal representatives, without removing the local rulers. This marked the largest geographical extension of the Neo-Assyrian Empire up until this point in history.⁷¹

Before Esarhaddon died, he declared that his first-born son, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, should inherit him in becoming the king of Babylon – a largely ceremonial position, while his brother Aššurbanipal should follow him on the Assyrian throne. As a safeguard, he made every official swear oaths to respect his wishes. As Esarhaddon died in 669 BC there seem to have been some dissatisfaction with the arrangement, the situation overall remained peaceful and stable.⁷²

⁶⁸ Beaulieu 2018, 209.

⁶⁹ Beaulieu 2018, 209-210.

⁷⁰ Beaulieu 2018, 211; Frahm 2017, 188.

⁷¹ Beaulieu 2018, 210; Frahm 2017, 187.

⁷² Beaulieu 2018, 211; Frahm 2017, 188-189.

2.1.3.6 Aššurbanipal (668-631 BC)

During the first phase of his reign, Aššurbanipal mostly focused on the conquest of Egypt, which ended with the capture of Thebes in 664 BC and a conflict with Elam, which had attacked Babylonia in 664 BC but was defeated in 653 BC. The Assyrians captured the Elamite king Teumman, killed him and brought his head to Nineveh, where it was put on display, as depicted in the Banquet scene relief from the North Palace in Nineveh. As the Assyrian forces were tied up in Elam, Egypt was lost again in 656 BC to the founder of the 26th dynasty, Psammetichus, who was supported by the Lydians.⁷³



Figure 11: Relief of Banquet with Aššurbanipal from Nineveh, Teumman's head in top left corner

The relationship between Assyria and Babylonia remained peaceful during this period, until Šamaš-šumu-ukin rebelled against Aššurbanipal in 652 BC. The reasons for this probably lied in the inherent inequality in their relationship. Even though Šamaš-šumu-ukin bore the title “King of Babylon”, he was little more than a vassal to his younger brother. Aššurbanipal remained in exclusive control of any international or domestic affairs as well as the military, and more importantly in religious affairs. Furthermore, the extensive Assyrian espionage apparatus regularly reported on Šamaš-šumu-ukin. In inscriptions from Ur, which commemorate construction works, the local governor acknowledges Aššurbanipal, but not Šamaš-šumu-ukin, which gives the impression that throughout the realm Šamaš-šumu-ukin was not taken seriously as an independent and important political entity. Even Aššurbanipal praised himself for having installed his brother on the throne and waited until the 15th year of his reign until he released the cultic bed and chariot from Assyria back to Babylon, which

⁷³ Beaulieu 2018, 213; Frahm 2017, 189.

seems to confirm this notion. On the other hand, all economic and administrative document from Babylonia were dated according to Šamaš-šumu-ukins reign and some building inscriptions from Borsippa and Sippar were written in his name as well.⁷⁴



Figure 12: Detail of lion hunt relief from Nineveh

The coalition Šamaš-šumu-ukin led against his brother consisted of Babylonians, Chaldeans, parts of the Sealand, Arameans, Elamites, Gutians, Arabs and groups from Amurru and Meluhḫa. The particularity of this conflict lied therein that not everybody within the mentioned regions supported Šamaš-šumu-ukin, such as the big cities of Ur, Uruk, Kullab, Kissik and Eridu in the – usually Babylonian – Sealand, some of which even switched their allegiance throughout the conflict. Economic documents proof to be a reliable source in this regard, as they are dated to whomever was recognized as king at any given time in the place they originate from.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Beaulieu 2018, 212-214; Frahm 2017, 189.

⁷⁵ Beaulieu 2018, 212-214-215.

The first battle at Hiritu in 652/651 BC ended with a defeat of the Babylonians. Subsequently the Assyrians gained the upper hand in the Sealand and Nippur switched its allegiance away from Šamaš-šumu-ukin. The Assyrians proceeded to lay siege on Babylon in 650 BC, which lasted for two years before it was taken, which resulted in enormous hardship for the local population. Šamaš-šumu-ukin was killed during either the siege or the conquest of the city. This however did not end the war, Elam still supported pro-Babylonian rebels in the south and so Aššurbanipal launched two devastating campaign against them in 647 and 645 BC.⁷⁶

Meanwhile a new king named Kandalānu, was installed in Babylon in 647 BC. Even though he was mentioned in date formulas and appears in chronographic texts, not much is known of his reign, but it seems he was not much more than a placeholder, as all royal inscriptions from his reign, credit Aššurbanipal. Nonetheless, his reign marks a period of peace for Babylonia.⁷⁷

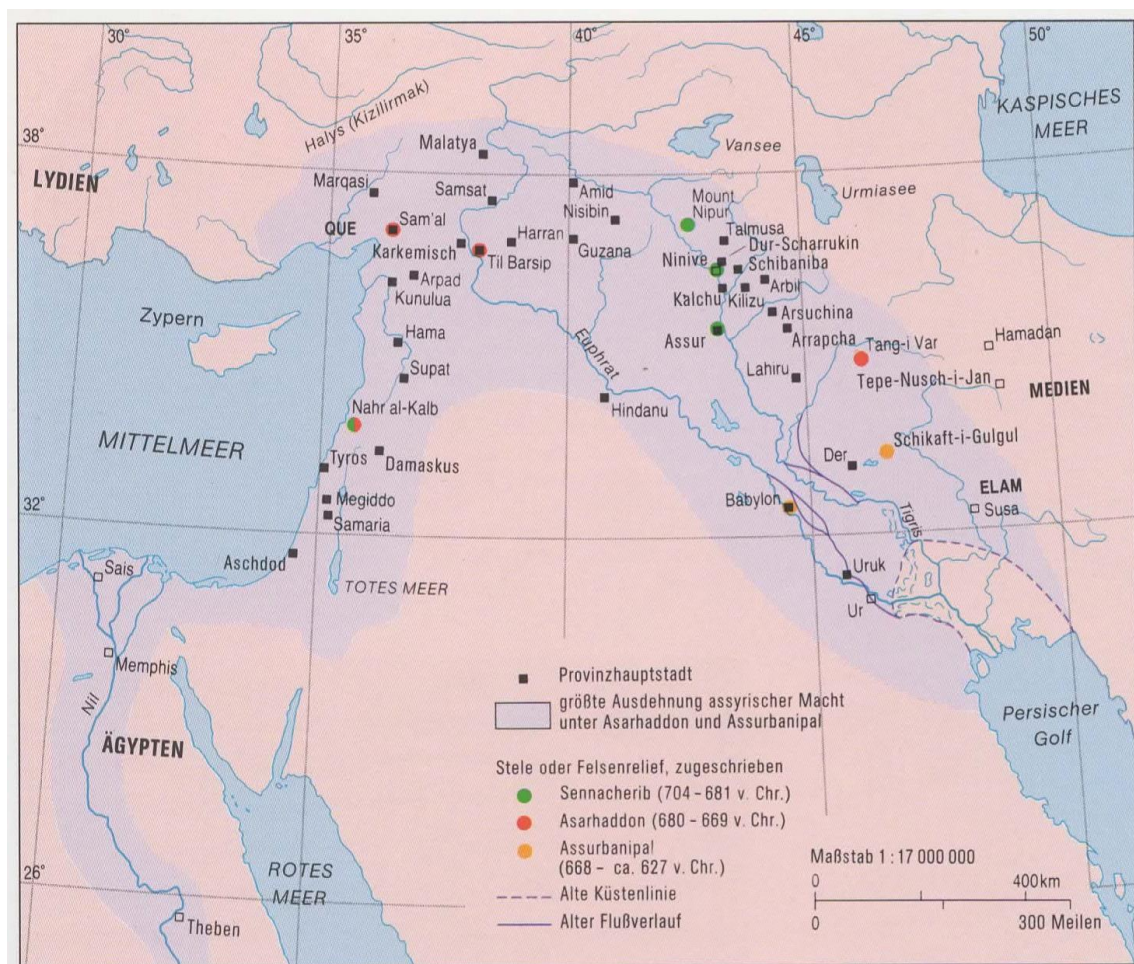


Figure 13: Largest extent of the Neo-Assyrian Empire under Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal

⁷⁶ Beaulieu 2018, 215-217.

⁷⁷ Beaulieu, 2018, 217; Jursa 2014, 124.

The events of the last decade of Aššurbanipal's reign remain elusive, as his annals – our sole textual source for this period – come to an end in 643 BC. The relationship with Babylonia was peaceful, although the general situation of the Neo-Assyrian Empire seems to have deteriorated. Besides the general scarcity of textual sources, this is indicated by the fact that eunuchs became increasingly powerful, received large land grants and were exempt from paying taxes. This favouring of courtiers directly dependent on the king indicates a break in between the king and the traditional Assyrian elites.⁷⁸

Aššurbanipal probably died in 631 or 630 BC, as the reign of his son and successor Aššur-etel-ilani who occupied the throne for four years, must have ended before 625 BC. During his reign he seems to have returned the corpse of a Chaldean leader to Babylonia, in order to be buried. This might indicate that Assyria lost its grip on Babylonia already before the rise of Nabopolassar, the first king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Frahm 2017, 190-191.

⁷⁹ Beaulieu, 2018, 217; Frahm 2017, 190-191.

2.1.4 The Neo-Babylonian Empire (627-539 BC)

2.1.4.1 Aššur-etel-ilani (631/630-627 BC)

Aššur-etel-ilani ascended the Assyrian throne most likely while he was still a minor and against the will of the chief eunuch Sîn-šumu-lišir. After Aššur-etel-ilani disappeared in 627 BC under dubious circumstances, he was succeeded by the chief eunuch, who himself was overthrown after a few months by another son of Aššurbanipal, Sîn-šarru-iškun. To make matters for the Assyrians even worse, Kandalānu – the puppet king of Babylonia – died in 627 BC and was not immediately replaced by somebody loyal to the Assyrian throne. Documents from this period are dated to “the year after Kandalānu”. The chaotic situation in Assyria and power vacuum resulting from Kandalānu’s death gave Nabopolassar the possibility to rise to the throne of Babylonia.⁸⁰

2.1.4.2 Nabopolassar (626-605 BC)

The origins of Nabopolassar are unclear. While he himself describes himself as the “son of a nobody”, there is evidence that he was the descendant of an influential family from Uruk, who held several high positions on behalf of the Assyrians and might even have served as a governor – which would fit his nebulous accounts.⁸¹ Beaulieu assesses the evidence as non-conclusive.⁸² However, he was recognized as king first in Uruk in 626 BC. During the following six years, the situation in Babylonia remained chaotic, with some cities recognizing Sîn-šarru-iškun as rightful king and others Nabopolassar. Probably by 620 BC, Nabopolassar had consolidated his position as king over the whole of Babylonia, including Nippur, the former main military base of Assyria in Babylonia.⁸³

As a next step, Nabopolassar entered an alliance with the Medes, a pastoral mountain people from central Zagros to the east of Assyria and continued his campaign against the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 616 BC. The Median homeland had been part of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, from where horses were acquired for the Assyrian army. As the Medians had no form of native written tradition, we have to rely on Assyrian sources for information about them.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Beaulieu, 2018, 217, 223; Frahm 2017, 191.

⁸¹ Jursa 2007.

⁸² Beaulieu 2018, 224.

⁸³ Beaulieu 2018, 223.

⁸⁴ Van De Mieroop 2016, 290-294.

The Babylonians and Medes joined forces in 614 BC, after the latter had conquered Arrapha and Assur. The Assyrian king Sîn-šarru-iškun died during the conquest of Nineveh after having been sieged for two⁸⁵ – respectively three⁸⁶ – months. In the aftermath, the Assyrian royal tombs were looted, and large parts of the city were destroyed. Aššur-uballit II was declared new king of Assyria and fled to northern Syria, to the city of Ḫarran, where he tried to build up a resistance with the help of the Egyptians. The Babylonian-Mede alliance took the city in 610 BC and Aššur-uballit II vanished from the records after his attempt to retake the city with Egyptian help had failed in 609 BC.⁸⁷

This marks the downfall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The fall came suddenly and left a lasting impression on the political and religious landscape as well as memory of the Near East. Classical and Biblical authors identified personal shortcomings of the last kings and their hubris as the decisive reasons because of which the gods decided to punish the entire realm. This thought process might already have found reflection in Nabopolassar's inscriptions, which emphasize a pious and contemplative life, putting trust in the wisdom of the gods. This provided the remerging state a foundation myth and basic identity, which was built upon under the succeeding kings.⁸⁸

Modern scholarship naturally focuses on other factors, both internal and external, for the downfall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. For one, the chaos and problems in legitimacy in succession in between 631 to 627 BC played a decisive role. At the same time, the state apparatus was weakened as many capable high officials had been killed and/or replaced by Eunuchs, already during the reign of Essarhaddon. As external problems, factors such as “imperial overstretch”, or the approach that the Neo-Assyrian Empire had no higher mission to offer to its subjugates and was just about extracting the highest possible amount of goods for a minimal effort, while spreading fear and terror in return, have been offered. Furthermore, the possibility for a severe drought in the middle of the 7th century, after a massive increase of population in the Assyrian heartland was suggested.⁸⁹

The fall the Neo-Assyrian Empire also marks the sudden ebbing in available cuneiform sources. It seems as if nobody in Assyria ever wrote on clay tablets again after 600 BC. To which extent the urban and cultural life in Assyria continued remains debated. While the

⁸⁵ Frahm 2017, 192.

⁸⁶ Beaulieu 2018, 226.

⁸⁷ Beaulieu 2018, 226, Frahm 2017, 192.

⁸⁸ Beaulieu 2018, 226, Frahm 2017, 191.

⁸⁹ Frahm 2017, 192-193.

population declined substantially and in general very little (re-)construction work was conducted, urban life certainly continued to some extent in Arbila, Nineveh, as well as Assur, where a temple seems to have been in use as sort of a *lieu de memoire* until the 3rd century A.D.⁹⁰

Assyrian life and legacy continued also in Babylonia, as Assyrian families were allowed to hold on to their heritage. Furthermore, several texts from Nebuchadnezzar's archives were written in Assyrian script, suggesting that Assyrian writers were employed in the palace. Additionally, the cult of the god Anšar continued until the reign of the Persian king Cambyses.⁹¹

To a certain degree, the legacy of the Neo-Assyrian Empire is still alive today as its policies and political structures shaped the Near East for centuries to come and inspired classical writers many years later. As already mentioned, it reshaped the ethno-linguistic composition of the entire region and found reflection in the religious and chronographic texts of the Hebrew Bible.

After Nabopolassar had defeated the Neo-Assyrian Empire, he commissioned large building projects in Babylonia, mostly in Babylon (city walls, royal palace, Ziggurat, E-ḫur-sağ-il) and Sippar. His inscriptions show clear signs of antiquarianism, for which Old-Akkadian and Old-Babylonian texts provided inspiration. This regress on the rich cultural history of Babylonia lend legitimacy to the new dynasty and provided the people within Babylonia, which at this point was of multi-ethnic origin, with a common past and therefore national identity.⁹²

2.1.4.3 Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC)

Nebuchadnezzar II, who had served several years as a general in the Babylonian army, took over the throne after the death of his father. Before he ascended the throne, he participated in military campaigns against Urartu and near Carchemish.⁹³

After the Neo-Assyrian Empire had faded, both the Babylonians and Egyptians tried to fill the ensuing vacuum of power in the Levant. A crucial victory in a battle near Carchemish against the Egyptians in 605 BC brought the decisive swing and Nebuchadnezzar II spent the next

⁹⁰ Frahm 2017, 193-194.

⁹¹ Frahm 2017, 194.

⁹² Beaulieu 2018, 227, Van De Mieroop 2016, 304.

⁹³ Beaulieu 2018, 227.

years until 601 BC focusing his efforts on subduing the area. He encountered relatively little opposition in the previously Assyrian provinces, but faced resistance in the Southern Levant, as Egypt continued to support and agitate the relatively small states there against the Babylonians. In 604 BC, he laid siege to the Philistine city of Ashkelon, eventually capturing and destroying it, which was confirmed by archaeological excavations. The city of Ekron met the same fate.⁹⁴



Figure 14: Illustration of the Battle of Carchemish

The kingdom of Judah openly challenged Babylonia in 601 BC, which resulted in the first siege of its capital Jerusalem in 598 BC. After the city fell, a first wave of prisoners was deported, and Nebuchadnezzar II installed the uncle of the former king as vassal ruler.⁹⁵

As Apries (hebr.: Hophra) ascended to be Pharaoh in Egypt in 589 BC, the kingdoms of Judah and Ammon rebelled against Babylonia, resulting in Nebuchadnezzar II launching an attack and laying siege on Jerusalem once more from 589 until 586 BC. The city was captured again, heavily destroyed and the Judean monarchy, with the annexation of Judah, effectively abolished. What followed was an extensive wave of deportations, resulting in what is known

⁹⁴ Beaulieu 2018, 227-228.

⁹⁵ Beaulieu 2018, 228.

today as the “Second Babylonian Exile”. Archaeological surveys conducted around Jerusalem clearly indicate destructive events and widespread abandonment in the Judean core, but also along the western border of Judah and in the cities of Ashkelon and Ekron.⁹⁶

Yet another wave of deportations occurred in 682 BC, after Nebuchadnezzar II had initiated another campaign against Ammon and Moab, as part of a larger plan to raid Egypt. Archaeological evidence confirms widespread destructions and abandonment in Moab during this time period, although it is not entirely clear, if these might have resulted from Nabonidus campaign into Transjordan and Arabia.⁹⁷

These just mentioned waves of destruction represent a new policy towards the Southern Levant, as Nebuchadnezzar II realized that he could not rely on the old system of vassal kingdoms in border regions (especially with the reemerging Egyptian kingdom as his opponent), which had been employed by the Assyrians. Therefore, he annexed these territories and deliberately tried to establish an impoverished, weakened buffer zone through a scorched earth policy. The exact nature and extent of this policy remains an intensely and passionately discussed topic among scholars. For the current state of research in the Southern Levant (especially Israel), see chapter 2.3.⁹⁸

The situation of the port city of Tyre seems interesting in this context. It had vassal status from 598 to 597 BC but switched sides in wake of Apries rise in the Levant. Nebuchadnezzar II besieged the city for 13 years, but – contrary to Jerusalem – did not destroyed it, as both parties came to a mutual agreement according to which the city continued to be ruled by local kings but was forced to pay heavier tribute. Furthermore, the city was established as the Babylonian centre of operations in the region. Even though Tyre lay further north than Jerusalem and therefore might not have had the same strategic importance, it shows that Nebuchadnezzar II did not deliberately destroy cities.⁹⁹

As a result of the massive amount of booty and tribute from the Levant and Syria, as well as the spoils of war from Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar II was able to initiate massive building projects throughout Babylonia, but especially Babylon. He restored and rebuilt Esagil and the South Palace, completed the Etemenanki, built the North Palace and remade the processional way, including the Ištar Gate. Nebuchadnezzar II claims to have introduced *corvée* work

⁹⁶ Beaulieu 2018, 228; Radner – Van Der Brugge 2016, 194-195.

⁹⁷ Beaulieu 2018, 229.

⁹⁸ Beaulieu 2018, 229; Lipschits 2005, 365-366.

⁹⁹ Beaulieu 2018, 229; Radner – Van Der Brugge 2016, 194-195.

throughout the empire in order to fulfil his colossal ambitions. Unfortunately, the details of the certainly immense logistical undertaking remain elusive. During Nebuchadnezzar II's reign, Babylon developed into one, if not the, most fascinating cities of its time and throughout human history. Most of what is being associated with the city was built during this period and remained to be admired for many years to come.¹⁰⁰

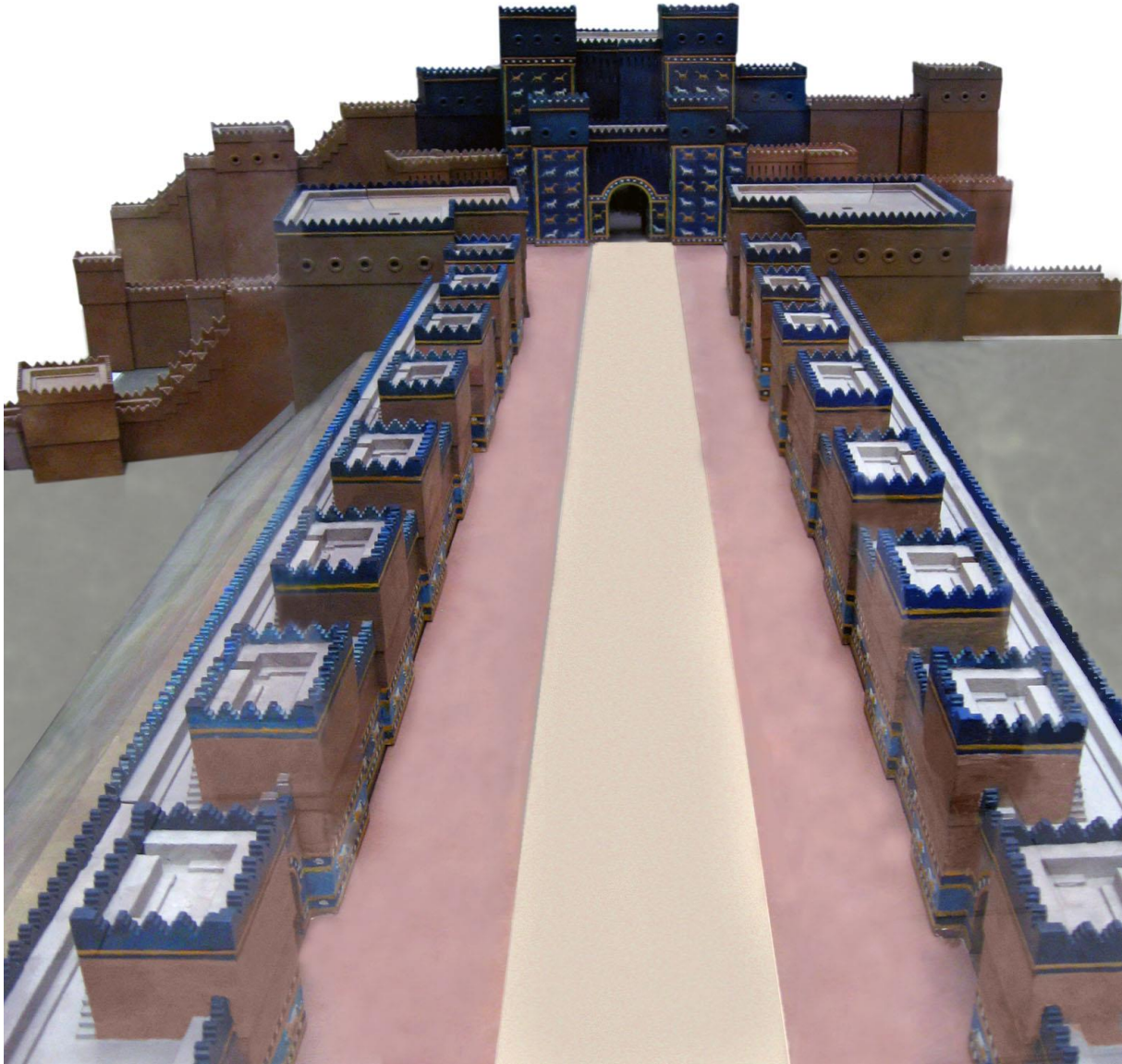


Figure 15: Model of Ishtar Gate and processional street

Clearly, Babylonia developed into a prosperous realm under Nebuchadnezzar II. More than half of the population lived in cities and settlements, and a multitude of building projects, aimed at improving the rural infrastructure and agricultural development, such as hydrological works and land reclamation projects resulted in economic stability. Land was leased out by

¹⁰⁰ Beaulieu 2018, 229-230; Jursa 2014, 124.

big institutions, such as the palace, to entrepreneurs, who further divided the land among rent farmers, while the leasing institution was promised a fixed return on the harvest. This system was also implemented by temples, which formerly functioned as autarchic economic systems, but now became more integrated into the national economic apparatus. Due to the monetization of the Neo-Babylonian economy, Babylonia further enhanced its standing as an international economic power. Wages were high and Babylonian families owned larger houses and more material possessions than during previous periods. At the same time, these changes went along with increased social inequality.¹⁰¹

During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, the Babylonian governmental and administrative structure fully developed. In large parts, it was based upon Assyrian models¹⁰², but a lack of large palace archives prevents us from reconstructing it in detail. From one of Nebuchadnezzar II's royal inscriptions – the so-called *Hofkalender* – the names of a series of palace offices are known, a majority of which are of Assyrian descent.¹⁰³ The government was organized in pyramidal form, with the king on the top, and palace officials, tribal leaders, magnates – who were in charge of territories – and military commanders underneath. Similar to the Assyrians, the Neo-Babylonian king attributed his legitimacy to divine legitimation, but in contrast to the Assyrians, wanted to be perceived as a religious leader and teacher, not as a conqueror, administrator or provider of social justice.¹⁰⁴

The geographical division of the empire was trifold with the Sealand in the south, Babylonia proper in the centre and Assyria in the north. Beyond these areas, the descriptions of areas in the periphery under Babylonian control remain fairly vague and seem to have consisted of an irregular network of regions, although in the *Hofkalender* several vassal kings from the Levant are mentioned. The power of the Empire was based on three entities:

- 1) The king
- 2) The big cities, which had distinct local administrative institutions, such as temples and local assemblies, and a long history of semi-autonomy. Governors and mayors, appointed by the crown, counterbalanced these local structures.

¹⁰¹ Beaulieu 2018, 232-233. Van De Mieroop 2016, 301-302.

¹⁰² Beaulieu 2018, 234; Frahm 2017, 194-95; Jursa 2014, 129.

¹⁰³ For a list and description of their respective duties, see Jursa 2014, 128-129.

¹⁰⁴ Jursa 2014, 126.

- 3) The tribes, which wielded significant military power and controlled the countryside in between the cities. As the written documentation originates from urban contexts and the urban population remained among itself for the most part, the tribes are not well represented in the textual sources. The fact that all kings of the Neo-Babylonian Empire had a tribal background lets us adumbrate their importance.¹⁰⁵

Another aspect of the state, justice and jurisdiction, was also centralized and standardized under Nebuchadnezzar II. Royally appointed judges wielded considerable power to which traditional judiciary bodies, presided by chief priests or city elders had to yield.¹⁰⁶

2.1.4.4 Amīl-Marduk (561-560 BC)

Nebuchadnezzar II was succeeded by his son Amīl-Marduk, who was depicted as being incompetent in later sources. According to Berossus, he was killed by his brother in law, Neriglissar.¹⁰⁷

2.1.4.5 Neriglissar (559-556 BC)

Neriglissar, the sheikh of an Aramean tribe and “son of a wise prince”, led a campaign to Cilicia, but died shortly after his return to Babylon. His persona serves as a good example to illustrate the flexibility in terms of ethnic and social boundaries in the Neo-Babylonian Empire.¹⁰⁸

2.1.4.6 Labaši-Marduk (556 BC)

Labaši-Marduk was the son of Neriglissar and lost the throne only a few weeks after having ascended it. The inherent instability within the highest levels of Babylonian administration can be ascribed to influential military leaders and governors of peripheral, tribal regions, giving testimony of the powerful position of these Aramean and Chaldean tribes.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Jursa 2014, 127.

¹⁰⁶ Beaulieu 2018, 234; Jursa 2014, 136.

¹⁰⁷ Beaulieu 2018, 237.

¹⁰⁸ Beaulieu 2018, 237-238.

¹⁰⁹ Beaulieu 2018, 238; Jursa 2014, 125.

2.1.4.7 Nabonidus (555-539 BC)

Nabonidus, again a son of a “wise prince”, was part of a conspiracy against Labaši-Marduk and ascended the throne after him. He was introduced to the royal court by his mother, who originated from the Assyrian city of Ḫarran and immigrated to Babylonia after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Much of her life’s story is known from a funerary stele, dedicated by Nabonidus in her honour in Ḫarran.¹¹⁰



Figure 16: Relief with depiction of Nabonidus

From 553 BC onwards, Nabonidus spent considerable amounts of time and effort on the conquest of north-western Arabia, where he eventually resided for ten years, circulating between the cities of Tayma, Dadanu, Padakku, Hibra, Yadihu and Yatribu. During his absence he was represented by his son Bēl-šarru-ušur. This behaviour might reflect a discord in between him and influential groups in Babylon or could also have resulted from the apparently unstable political situation already present during the reign of the previous kings. His campaign in north-western Arabia however extended the Babylonian sphere of influence considerably.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Beaulieu 2018, 238-239.

¹¹¹ Beaulieu 2018, 240.

The reason for the dissonance in between him and other Babylonian groups may have resulted from his religious agenda, which strongly favoured the Moon god Sîn over the traditional head of the Babylonian pantheon, Marduk. His devotion to this deity probably stemmed from his mother, as Ḫarran was a cult centre of Sîn.¹¹²

After Nabonidus had returned to Babylon in 543 BC, he resumed full power over Babylonia. In his inscriptions, Sîn had completely replaced Marduk at this point.¹¹³

During the reign of Nabonidus a decisive change in power occurred in Iran. Cyrus, the king of Anšan overthrew his overlord, the Median king with the support of Nabonidus and continued conquering territory in Anatolia. The reason for Nabonidus' support probably lied in his wish to restore the sanctuary of Sîn in Ḫarran, which was occupied by the Medes.¹¹⁴

In 539 BC, the Babylonians apparently expected a massive invasion, since Nabonidus ordered the gathering of all city gods, i.e. their cult statues, in Babylon. Persian troops subsequently invaded Babylonia in the autumn of the same year. The only military confrontation took place at Opis along the Tigris, which most likely was won by the Persians, as they entered Sippar on the 10th of October and Babylon on the 12th. As Nabonidus tried to return to Babylon, he was captured and sent to southern Iran into exile.¹¹⁵

This marked the sudden end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which was consequently integrated into the Persian Empire. The notion that the city gates of Babylon were opened by the disillusioned priesthood of Marduk are not confirmed by contemporary sources and might be based on Persian propaganda, which aimed at discrediting the last Babylonian rulers. In fact, the societal structures were so stable that the economic and social structures in Babylonia were not seriously disturbed by these events.¹¹⁶

A last effort to revive the Babylonian state was undertaken in 484 BC by Babylonian elites, which were removed after the coup had failed. This marks the definite end of Babylonia as political entity. The period in between the rise of the Babylonian empire in 626 BC and this last stand is known as the long 6th century BC.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Beaulieu 2018, 238-239.

¹¹³ Beaulieu 2018, 240-243; Jursa 2014, 125.

¹¹⁴ Beaulieu 2018, 240-242.

¹¹⁵ Beaulieu 2018, 243.

¹¹⁶ Jursa 2014, 125.

¹¹⁷ Jursa 2010, 4-5.

2.2 The Southern Levant

2.2.1 The Assyrian and Egyptian Periods in the 1st Millennium BC until the Babylonian conquest

2.2.1.1 Historical framework

The History of Assyrian incursions and military campaigns did not start with the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire under Tiglath-pileser III (744-726 BC), but long before him. Already under Shalmaneser III (858-827 BC) more than 21 military campaign were conducted into the territory of the Levant, during which he subdued several Phoenician cities (Tyre, Sidon and Byblos) along the mediterranean coast as well as several kingdoms further inland, such as Israel. Contrary to later periods, these territories were not incorporated into the empire, but entered the state of vassals and as such were obliged to pay tribute. While some of these territories accepted the situation and complied, others revolted and even formed anti-Assyrian coalitions, setting back Assyrian ambitions in the west.¹¹⁸ Especially the city of Damascus proofed to be a resilient opponent, which was also struggling with the kingdom of Israel during this period.¹¹⁹

Due to internal problems, the Assyrians put their ambitions in the west on hold for about 20 years, which several of the just subdued vassals used to regain their independence, until Adad-nirari III (810-793 BC), after having regaining control over Assyria, renewed his claim to power in the Levant, which took him almost ten years. In the following years, the Assyrian state was once again plagued by internal problems and rebellions in other parts of the country, which led to territorial losses also in the Levant.¹²⁰

As already described in chapter 2.1.3, the Neo-Assyrian Empire regained its strength under the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744-737 BC). He implemented several new policies to strengthen his position and conducted a series of successful military campaigns in Syria and the Levant. Over the course of 12 years (from 743 until 732 BC) or eight military campaigns, he regained control over the entirety of Syria and the Levant. He implemented a new policy of either annexing and implementing areas into the administrative structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire as provinces, such as Arpad or Šimarra, or making them vassals, such as the

¹¹⁸ Bagg 2017, 268-269.

¹¹⁹ Finkelstein 2013, 162.

¹²⁰ Bagg 2017, 269-270.

Southern Levantine states and cities Judah or Ashkelon.¹²¹ These vassal states were used as a buffer towards Egypt – the biggest rival of the Assyrians in the Levant.¹²²

The years under Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC) were characterized by rebellions and the refusal to pay tribute, which leads to the assumption that the military presence in the Levant was quite weak. Ultimately, at the beginning of Sargon II's (721-705 BC) reign, the resistance was broken, the rebellious kingdoms annexed, and the provinces of Samaria and Ashdod created. Furthermore, Sargon deported around 27 000 individuals from Samaria to north-western Syria and western Iran and settled the region with people from Babylonia and Hamat.¹²³



Figure 17: Sennacherib giving the order to destroy Lachish

During the reign of Sennacherib (704-681 BC) a military campaign, often referred to as “The Campaign against Judah” took place in 701 BC and is also attested in several books of the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 18: 13- 19: 37, 2 Chr 32: 1-22, Isa 36- 7: 37 as well as Mic 1: 8-16) . The campaign was most likely prompted by another revolt and/ or refusal to pay tribute. In course of the campaign, large areas of Judah and the Phoenician and Philistine cities along the coast were destroyed and devastated. As King Hezekiah capitulated in time, the city of Jerusalem was spared. Contrary to how this campaign is described in the Bible, we can deduct

¹²¹ Bagg 2017, 270-271.

¹²² Finkelstein 2013, 162.

¹²³ Bagg 2017, 271; Van De Mieroop 2016, 268.

that the military campaign was not exclusively directed against the cities of Judah, but against all the political entities, not under direct Assyrian control in the Levant.¹²⁴

King Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) was confronted with uprisings in the north-western Levant and suffered territorial losses there. The Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre revolted as well. While Sidon was destroyed and replaced with a newly founded Assyrian city (Kar-Aššur-aḫu-iddinna), Tyre, even though it was sieged, was not destroyed, nor annexed. The king, Ba'al, was allowed to continue to rule, but was stripped of all cities in his possession.¹²⁵

Under King Assurbanipal (668-631 BC), another military operation against Tyre took place between 663 and 657 BC. After the siege of the city, Ba'al capitulated and had to pay heavy tribute – still, the city was not annexed. The last Assyrian military campaign took place against two cities in the vicinity of Tyre. The inhabitants were punished with executions and deportations, the survivors were deported to Assyria.¹²⁶

Despite regular rebellions, the situation in the Levant can be described as relatively stable and peaceful, especially considering the weak Assyrian presence in the conquered territories. In total 21 provinces were created, while the Phoenician cities (Arwad, Byblos, Samsimurruna and Tyre), Philistia (Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and Ḥazzat) and the kingdoms of Judah, Ammon, Moab and Edom remained vassals.¹²⁷ These semi-independent states served as a buffer towards Egypt. Furthermore, heavy taxes and tribute were imposed on them.¹²⁸

During Assurbanipal's reign, Egypt experienced a political renaissance, during which Psammetichus I (664-610 BC), founder of the 26th Dynasty, and former Assyrian ally united the country and expelled the Assyrians from Egypt. As the Assyrians grew even weaker towards the end of the 7th century BC, Psammetichus I moved into the Levant. In a contemporary inscription, he describes the Mediterranean coast until Phoenicia as being under his control. Given the fact that Psammetichus I was a former ally of Assyria it seems possible that Assyria and Egypt reached an understanding, making the Egyptians the heirs of the formerly Assyrian Levantine provinces up until the Euphrates in exchange for military support.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Bagg 2017, 272; Bagg 2013, 120.

¹²⁵ Bagg 2017, 272.

¹²⁶ Bagg 2017, 272-273.

¹²⁷ Bagg 2017, 273.

¹²⁸ Finkelstein 2013, 162; Lipschits 2005, 360; Van De Mieroop 2016, 270;

¹²⁹ Frahm 2017, 190; Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 281-282; Lipschits 2005, 361.

The Egyptians concentrated their efforts on the Philistine and Phoenician cities in the coastal plain, the so-called *Via Maris*, employing the help of Greek mercenaries¹³⁰, resulting in the kingdoms in the relatively isolated coastal periphery, such as Judah in the highlands to enjoy some autonomy, even though they still were Egyptian vassals.¹³¹

During this time Josiah, King of Judah ascended the throne, whose reign marks the climate of Judah's monarchic history. Under his reign the book of Deuteronomy was created, which was supposed to provide the people of Judah and Israel with a powerful national epic, in which all the tribes of Israel liberate themselves from an Egyptian Pharaoh. Especially in the light of Josiah's efforts to purify and centralize the cult in Jerusalem, and rid it of foreign influences, such as idol worshipping, it should be considered a work of propaganda. Interestingly the form of the text is strikingly reminiscent of Assyrian vassal treaties, in which the right and obligations of a people or political entity towards its ruler were outlined. The book of Deuteronomy also served the purpose of promoting a Pan-Israelite state. In fact, it is possible that Judah expanded towards the north during this period.¹³²

As Assyria declined further, the Egyptians supported them militarily, as they were interested in a weakened Assyrian buffer state in between themselves and the rising Babylonians. In 610 BC, Psammetichus I was succeeded by his son Necho II (610-595 BC), who failed to assist the Assyrians in their struggle for the last Assyrian bastion at Harran against the Babylonians. This resulted in the Euphrates being the border in between the Neo-Babylonian and the Egyptian Empire.¹³³

In the same year Josiah of Judah was killed by Necho II at Megiddo, as described in 2 Kgs 23: 29 and 2 Chr 35 :20- 24. The exact circumstances of the events and reasons for these events remain unclear, but it seems unlikely that Josiah went to Megiddo in order to confront Necho II on the field of battle to stop him from advancing and helping the Assyrians against the Babylonians ("Battle of Megiddo"). It is more probable that Josiah was summoned to the Egyptian stronghold to renew his oath of allegiance to the new Pharaoh, as it was custom after a new ruler had ascended the throne. It is unclear for which reasons Necho II might have killed Josiah, but his independent and quite radical policies along the sensitive

¹³⁰ Waldbaum 2002, 65.

¹³¹ Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 283; Lipschits 2005, 362.

¹³² Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 275-276, 281, 283.

¹³³ Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 289; Lipschits 2005, 362.

trade routes with Arabia might have been a factor. After Necho II returned from H̱arran, Jehoiakim was put on the throne of Judah and heavy tribute was imposed on him.¹³⁴

The Egyptians did not have enough time to consolidate their position along the Euphrates, as the following years were characterized by continuous conflicts along the river in between them and the Babylonians. These clashes eventually culminated in the battle at Carchemish in 605 BC, which ended in a decisive win of the Babylonian forces. Until 603 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC) conquered the entire Levant as Necho II withdrew to Egypt, resulting in the third substantial shift of power in around 30 years. The only city to resist the Babylonian advances – Ashkelon – was destroyed. This conflict also marks the steady decline of Judah. First because of its geopolitical location and second because of reckless policies fuelled by fanaticism and political, as well as religious unrest, eventually resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the first temple in 586 BC.¹³⁵

2.2.1.2 The Assyrian system of imperial control

The logic and ultimate goal of the Assyrian system of control for the regions and provinces outside of its core area was mainly directed towards economic profit. This was done according to the principle of attaining maximum profits with minimum infrastructural investments, or as Kuhrt (as quoted by Faust¹³⁶) puts it: “[...] the Assyrian king simply creamed off the profits from subject territories and failed to reinvest in provincial development [...]”.¹³⁷

For this purpose, of drawing raw materials, livestock, luxury objects and manpower from the subdued peripheral regions of the realm, these regions were either annexed or remained vassals to the Neo-Assyrian Empire. These strategies were both based upon superior military power, which was consequentially used for conquests and as a threat to those who were left as semi-independent political entities, which were obliged to pay tribute to the Assyrian crown. In other words, vassal states stood under indirect rule, which granted a certain amount of independence, while those who were incorporated into the imperial administrative structure, i.e. annexed, lost their political independence¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 290-292;

¹³⁵ Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 292; Lipschits 2005, 363.

¹³⁶ Faust 2018, 22.

¹³⁷ Bagg 2013, 131.

¹³⁸ Bagg 2013, 120, 125, 131.

In the case of the Levant, this process proved to be slow and difficult for the Assyrian Empire. In about 200 years of Assyrian presence 67 military campaigns are attested, which resulted in the creation of 21 provinces, as well as the subjugation of several semi-independent vassal states, such as Judah, the Philistine and Phoenician city states, as well as some areas in Transjordan. For our purposes, it is important to mention that the former kingdom of Israel was divided into two provinces- the province of Magidû, with its capital Megiddo in 732 BC and the province of Samerîna, with its capital Samaria, in 720 BC.¹³⁹

As already mentioned, these areas were most likely left independent in order to create a buffer towards the Egyptian kingdom.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, it is likely that it was in Assyria's interest to create a somewhat neutral political entity, through which these large interregional trade systems could operate with each other.¹⁴¹ Additionally, caravans and traders could be taxed by levying customs duties (*miksu* tax¹⁴²) upon entering Assyria, which benefited the Assyrian Empire even further.¹⁴³

Still, following the principle of minimal investments, the Assyrian state did not get involved in the expansion of the urban or regional infrastructure of Palestine, nor were any new settlements founded or cities remodelled according to Assyrian standards.¹⁴⁴ Nonetheless, an important aim of the Assyrian administration was to control and secure newly conquered areas, as can be deduced from the building of fortresses in and around the coastal plain in Palestine.¹⁴⁵

The administrative structure of the western provinces was reconstructed mostly from cuneiform documents found in the royal archives discovered in the Assyrian capitals and can be summarized as follows: Each province was controlled by a governor, the so called *bēl-pāḫiti* or *šaknu*, who's main responsibility was to collect taxes and to supply materials and money to the Assyrian core area. The next lower level of the Assyrian administration consisted of the so-called *ḫazannu* and *rab-ālāni* officials, who were in charge of the daily administration responsibilities and executed the governors' commands. Furthermore, they were concerned with the collection of taxes and the management of accounts, among many

¹³⁹ Bagg 2013, 119, 123; Lipschits 2005, 360.

¹⁴⁰ Finkelstein 2013, 162; Lipschits 2005, 360; Van De Mieroop 2016, 270;

¹⁴¹ Fantalkin 2018, 178; Faust – Weiss 2011, 196.

¹⁴² Zilberg 2018, 73.

¹⁴³ Fales 2018; 99; Faust 2018, 39-40, 46.

¹⁴⁴ Bagg 2013, 127.

¹⁴⁵ Faust 2018, 40 for a list of Assyrian forts; Zilberg 2018, 56.

other duties¹⁴⁶. Another important official who seems to have been in close contact with the royal administration and acted in the context of collecting taxes was the *ša-qurbūti*.¹⁴⁷

The local population in the Assyrian provinces was obliged to serve in the Assyrian army (notably in this context are Samarian chariot troops, which were integrated into the Assyrian royal forces¹⁴⁸) and participate in corvée labour and, as already mentioned deliver goods and taxes to the Assyrian core. These taxes encompassed *ilku* duties by certain individuals within the borders of the Assyrian empire, as well as *maddattu* and *nāmurtu* taxes, which were imposed on vassal states.¹⁴⁹

The policy of minimal investments also implied the absence of forced “Assyrianization” of the population in conquered territories. By using the Aramaic Language and alphabetic writing system next to the Assyrian language and cuneiform writing system within the local organizational system, Assyria exhibited a certain pragmatism. The same is true for granting religious freedom to those living within the borders of the Assyrian Empire. The local systems of weights and measurements were kept (at least as far as we can tell, the source material is rather limited regarding this topic¹⁵⁰), as well as the local toponymy- provinces kept on being named after their respective centres (see above).¹⁵¹

Even though the Assyrian system of believes and values was not forced upon the people, deportations and resettlement of large parts of the population served as prominent tools in shaping the demographic landscape of Assyria. Important hereby is that Assyrians were rather rarely resettled in the Levant or in Palestine, but rather people from Elam or Babylonia. This practice undoubtedly weakened local populations regarding their traditions, believe systems and social cohesion, which in turn made it more unlikely for them to resist or rebel, but under no circumstances, this represented an “Assyrianisation” of these people.¹⁵²

Furthermore, the people were certainly subject to Assyrian propaganda works, especially in the bigger cities and administrative centres, as we have both direct archaeological, as well as

¹⁴⁶ For an overview of texts in which these officials are mentioned see Zilberg 2018, 68-69.

¹⁴⁷ Zilberg 2018, 67-69.

¹⁴⁸ Radner 2018, 113-117.

¹⁴⁹ Fales 2018, 97-98; Zilberg 2018, 73.

¹⁵⁰ Zilberg 2018, 74.

¹⁵¹ Bagg 2013, 125-127, 130-131; Zilberg 2018, 77.

¹⁵² Bagg 2013, 127-128; Fantalkin 2018, 178; Frahm 2017, 177; Radner 2014, 106.

indirect textual evidence for royal inscriptions and royal statues. The aforementioned erection of citadels and fortresses might be also considered a passive form of propaganda.¹⁵³

The inability or maybe unwillingness to provide its subjects with a social framework, as well as the lack of effort to acculturate conquered areas lead Bagg to characterize the Neo-Assyrian Empire as an “empire without a mission”. At the same time, he underlines that the absence of such a mission for its foreign subjects, did not mean that there was no imperial ideology. It just served internal purposes, like the self-legitimation and self-indoctrination of the elite and a sense of belonging for the Assyrian population.¹⁵⁴

2.2.1.3 Social and economic implications and results of the Assyrian conquest

The period of Assyrian rule in the Levant during the 7th century BC is often described as a period of stability and relative peace – the so-called “Pax Assyrica”, during which the Assyrian provinces and adjacent vassal states experienced economic growth and unprecedented prosperity. These changes were supposedly initiated and accompanied by the foundation of new cities, the construction of forts along the *Via Maris* and a series of Assyrian policies, which promoted population growth, urbanism, advanced administration, scribal activity and a surge of cultural activities. Finkelstein goes as far as referring to the Bible as a product of Assyrian imperialism.¹⁵⁵

As already discussed in the previous chapter, these initiatives – if we believe this theory – were put in place in order to support and develop the local economy, which then in turn supplied the Assyrian core with specialized personal, goods and silver, all while investing as little as possible in these regions.¹⁵⁶

Especially in comparison with the Neo-Babylonian period in the 6th century B.C, the period of Neo-Assyrian rule in the Levant has been judged more positively, due to the economic prosperity in the semi-independent Phoenician cities and regions of Judah and Philistia.¹⁵⁷

The lack of written documentation from the Assyrian provinces of Magidû and Samerîna makes the situation difficult to assess but was – according to Faust¹⁵⁸ – by far not as

¹⁵³ Faust 2018, 41; Zilberg 2018, 74-75.

¹⁵⁴ Bagg 2013, 132.

¹⁵⁵ Faust 2011b, 62, 64; Faust – Weiss 2011, 189; Finkelstein 2013, 162; Lipschits 2005, 360; Na’aman 2003, 87; Van De Mieroop 2016, 295-296.

¹⁵⁶ Bagg 2013, 120, 125, 131.

¹⁵⁷ Lipschits 2005, 360; Van De Mieroop 2016, 295-296; Faust 2018, 22.

prosperous as before the Assyrian conquests. Even though the Assyrians seem to have destroyed a few larger cities in course of their initial conquest and reign, the demographic development hit a nadir during the time of Assyrian rule. On the one hand, this had to do with the initial losses the population suffered during the war and its immediate aftermath¹⁵⁹ (executions, diseases) and on the other hand with deportations, which significantly affected the local culture and identity. The same development was observed in Transjordan – as soon as regions were incorporated into the Assyrian empire, they declined considerably.¹⁶⁰

The decline of the previously dominant kingdom of Israel prompted the rise of Judah and its capital Jerusalem to become the leading cultural and religious institutions in the region.¹⁶¹



Figure 18: Olive oil press area in Ekron

The supposed interest of the Assyrian empire in the local olive oil industry, as suggested by Fales¹⁶² has to be analysed critically as well. Before the incorporation of the kingdom of Israel into the Assyrian provincial system, it was home to a thriving olive oil industry during the 9th and 8th century BC. None of these economic centres persisted afterwards and no new centres (were) developed. At the same time the semi-independent kingdoms in the south prospered

¹⁵⁸ Faust 2018, 25-29; Faust 2011, 69-77; Faust – Weiss 2011, 193-195.

¹⁵⁹ See also the mass burials at Ashdod and Lachish- Faust 2018, 32.

¹⁶⁰ Faust 2011b, 77; Radner 2018, 123; Zertal 2003, 405.

¹⁶¹ Faust 2018, 29; Finkelstein 2013, 162.

¹⁶² Fales 2018, 96.

and built up an olive oil economy of their own, which had considerable production capabilities, such as Ekron where 115 olive oil presses were excavated, implying an impressive amount of specialization and industrialization for the time. Furthermore, Ekron was not the only industrial centre in the coastal plain during this time. If the Assyrians would have had an interest in rebuilding and stimulating the economy within their own borders, these new provinces would have presented a perfect opportunity to do so.¹⁶³

Of course, the possibility that the people, knowledgeable in the production of olive oil, emigrated to the southern kingdoms and by that prompted the formation of this industry there must be considered. Additionally, we must not forget both, the policy of deportations of qualified craftsmen and the policy of as little investment into subdued regions in our assessment of the situation.¹⁶⁴

Furthermore, it is doubtful that agricultural products, such as olive oil or grain from the Southern Levant were ever transported to Assyria in the first place, as the transportation costs would have been too high. Assyria rather profited from leveraging tribute and taxes from traders and the vassal states around its borders.¹⁶⁵

The regions towards the south of the Assyrian provinces, the kingdoms of Philistia and Judah all prospered. The regions within Judah, the Judean highlands, the region of Jerusalem and its environs, the region of Benjamin and the western coast of the Dead Sea flourished, or even peaked in their development during the time of Assyrian overlordship. Just the region of the Shephelah experienced a decline in settlements and settlement activity- most likely due to Sennacherib's campaign in 701 BC.¹⁶⁶

The areas in the coastal plane in the Southern Levant seem to have developed specialized economic tasks within the local trade and production network. These tasks depended on their geographic location and were always oriented towards the next major economic centre- in most cases a wealthy port city, such as Ashkelon. These coastal cities played an important role in connecting the local trade networks with the Mediterranean trade routes, maintained by the Phoenicians.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Faust 2018, 22-24, 27; Faust 2011b, 66, 69-71; Faust – Weiss 2011, 195; Na'aman 2003, 87.

¹⁶⁴ Faust 2011b, 76.

¹⁶⁵ Faust 2018, 27; Faust 2011b, 72; Faust – Weiss 2011, 194-195.

¹⁶⁶ Faust 2018, 34-36.

¹⁶⁷ Faust 2018 26-27; Faust – Weiss 2011, 190-195.

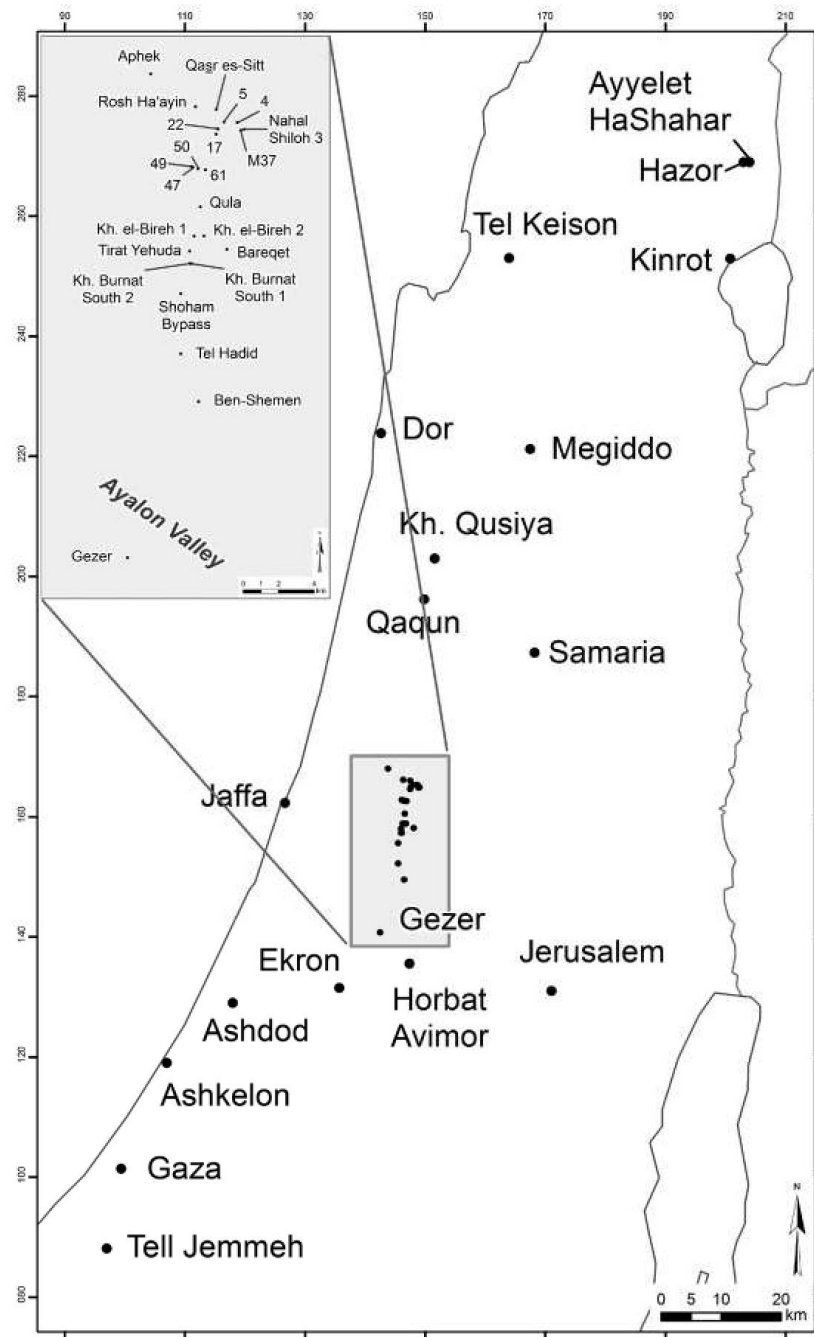


Figure 19: Distribution and concentration of cuneiform texts in Southern Levant

The importance of the tribute levied from the vassal kingdoms by the Assyrians also find reflection in the distribution of cuneiform sources in the provinces bordering Judah and Philistia. Most texts were found along the ancient road system and along the border. It was exactly this area (and the only one), which experienced growth during the Assyrian period within the provinces and gives us information about the administrative centre of the region. The geographical position in the Tel Hadid-Gezer area implies that the Assyrians were not so much focused on the province itself, but on the regions outside of their territories. This most

likely had to do with the international highway running from north to south in this very region. On the one hand, tribute and goods were brought into Assyrian territories and were it was stored for at least some time was located here. On the other, the region acted as starting and gathering point of troops for military campaigns, making it necessary to store considerable amounts of food and provisions there.¹⁶⁸

This international highway with the Assyrian administrative centre, as well as the coastal route – the *Via Maris* – were both the focus of Assyrian building activities, as both were secured with several fortresses and garrisons. Overall, the Assyrian buildings remain relatively few in number and most of them, which were labelled as being Assyrian, just show some Mesopotamian features, which seems reasonable in a general sense, as it reflects the spirit of the time.¹⁶⁹ The same signs of acculturation can be observed in the vassal states in the south and in other elements of the material culture, such as pottery glyptic and inscribed remains, as well as funerary customs.¹⁷⁰

In conclusion, it seems as if Assyria was not interested in developing its provinces in the Levant, but more in harvesting the profits generated by them and the adjacent vassal kingdoms. The continuous good will towards the Phoenician city of Tyre, and major force in trade seems especially interesting in this regard.¹⁷¹

It was speculated that the high tributes imposed by the Assyrians on its vassals might have acted as a stimulating or at least contributing factors to prompt the prosperity in the Southern Levant, i.e. prosperity as a product of extortion and exploitation. The semi-independent regions were forced to develop strategies, such as the specialized production of certain goods or the Phoenician trade network, to fulfil the Assyrian demands. The Phoenicians in turn were often considered the sole driving force behind these trade networks, which were seen as the sole cause for the resulting prosperity.¹⁷²

In reality, we are confronted with a complex situation with many interconnected factors to be considered. While it is true that the Neo-Assyrian Empire provided a protecting umbrella for the trade in the Mediterranean and all involved parties in terms of guaranteeing stability and peace, it seems doubtful that the imposition of high tribute was a deliberate strategy put in

¹⁶⁸ Faust 2018, 39-40; Zertal 2003, Fig. 14 as compared with Fig. 15, 400-404.

¹⁶⁹ A reason for this might be that the Assyrians commissioned buildings, which were then constructed by the local population, see Fantalkin 2018, 178.

¹⁷⁰ Bagg 2013, 128-129; Faust 2018, 31-32, 40; Na'aman 2003, 87; Zertal 2003, 405.

¹⁷¹ Faust 2018, 44; Faust 2011b, 75-77; Faust – Weiss 2011, 195.

¹⁷² Faust 2001b, 73-77; Faust – Weiss 2011, 190-195.

place in order to stimulate trade or promote the development of new production strategies. The Assyrian Empire was simply interested in generating as much profits as possible, creating a geopolitical situation and atmosphere, which made it possible to attain these profits. That the kingdoms to the south of its provinces were not annexed on purpose, with the very intention of profiting from their ingenuity, seems doubtful at best. Their development had more to do with market processes, supported by the political stability in the region and their geographic position in between the big powers (and markets) of the time – Egypt, Assyria, Arabia and the Mediterranean Sea, which were all integrated in this international trade network. The Southern Levant very much acted as a gateway for these trade activities and in turn heavily profited from them. Rural areas, such as the Negev – the Judean desert – could be settled for the first time and the trade networks to South Arabia acted as a catalyst for the formation of states, such as Edom in Transjordan.¹⁷³

As for the Egyptian period in the Southern Levant, we are to some degree confronted with the same problems we encounter in the Neo-Babylonian Period, as it only encompasses a period of about 20 to 30 years¹⁷⁴. Nonetheless, we can make some assumptions based on the archaeological remains discovered in the debris of cities destroyed during the Babylonian conquests.

For instance, in Ekron, which was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II in 604 BC, an array of Egyptian luxury items was unearthed. Due to these objects it is reasonable to assume the economic activities in Ekron, i.e. the production of olive oil on a large scale, to have continued under Egyptian rule. Most notably because of evidence which attests to the construction of new olive oil production facilities in the last third of the 7th century BC. Six silver hoards, which were formerly ascribed to the Assyrian period, might actually belong to the Egyptian period as well.¹⁷⁵

These finds led some scholars to ascribe the entirety of the economic prosperity we encounter in Philistia during the 7th century BC to the Egyptians.¹⁷⁶ In the case of Ekron we can safely say that the economic rise of the region had already started – at least to a certain degree – before the Assyrians withdrew from the region. This is confirmed by some inscriptions from the elite quarters in Ekron, which can be dated to the Assyrian period. Given the old

¹⁷³ Faust 2018, 22-24, 43; Faust 2011b, 64-65; Faust – Weiss 2011, 189-195; Fantalkin 2018, 177-178; Na'aman 2003, 87.

¹⁷⁴ Vanderhooft 2003, 236-237.

¹⁷⁵ Na'aman 2003, 85-86.

¹⁷⁶ Stager 1996.

excavation data, clearly reflecting the spirit of the time, it should be emphasized that it is not always clear which features in the archaeological record should be ascribed to which period.¹⁷⁷

Archaeological remains unearthed in Ashkelon also testify to the city's prosperity under Egyptian rule. As in the case of Ekron, some scholars suggested that the period of prosperity should exclusively be ascribed to this period, as the layers in which these objects and contexts were discovered, should be dated to the later, Egyptian period. Greek pottery found within these layers, at first thought to represent Greek trade activities, might actually attest to the presence of Greek mercenaries, who were employed by Egypt. This assumption is based on the presence of used domestic pottery, such as cooking pots. We encounter such pieces also at other sites, which could represent smaller garrisons in different cities. The large amount of domestic pottery in Ashkelon (over 200 unique vessels were found) seems strange in such a context and would rather imply the presence of settlers or merchants, as does the large quantity of fine wares, rather excessive to be part of simple soldier's personal equipment kits. Contrary to this theory, no traces of Greek architecture, graves, inscriptions or other objects were found at the site. A definite answer has not been reached thus far, even though a mix of trade activities as well as the presence of mercenaries seems to be a reasonable option.¹⁷⁸

Another reason why Fantalkin doubts the popular assumption that Ashkelon played a dominant role in the interregional trading network – indirectly connected to the Assyrian empire, is the fact that it did not feature prominently in contemporary inscriptions. He adds that the idea of Ashkelon as a “port of power”, connected with the interpretation of it having been the main trading hub of the region should be revised. He further underlines though that the city was indeed an important trading city, just not as exceptional as it has been portrayed¹⁷⁹ until now and one city of many, which served the Phoenician trade and mediated goods in between Assyria and Egypt.¹⁸⁰

In conclusion, based on the results from Ekron and Ashkelon, we can suppose that the region continued to prosper under Egyptian rule until the Babylonian conquest, possibly even more than under the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

¹⁷⁷ Na'aman 2003, 85-86.

¹⁷⁸ Fantalkin 2018, 163, 177; Waldbaum 2002, 65.

¹⁷⁹ For example: Faust 2018, 25 or Faust – Weiss 2011, 191-192.

¹⁸⁰ Fantalkin 2018, 163-166, 177-178.

2.2.2 The Babylonian conquest and its aftermath

2.2.2.1 Historical Framework

The sources for the historical reconstruction of the Neo-Babylonian period in the Levant are not as plentiful as for the Neo-Assyrian period. The official inscriptions, such as monumental or building inscriptions rather concentrate on the deeds of the kings regarding their devotion to the gods, rather than providing historical data. This sort of information is given to a large degree by the Babylonian Chronicles, in which – among other events – the first siege of Jerusalem in 598 BC was recorded. Unfortunately, the Chronicles are not preserved after the 12th year (594/593 BC) of Nebuchadnezzar II's reign, leaving us with no other written records of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, other than Biblical sources, which are not always reliable (more on this further below).¹⁸¹

This leaves us essentially with archaeological sources for the historical reconstruction of the events and trends in the Neo-Babylonian period in the Southern Levant after the destruction of Jerusalem. Egyptian epigraphical sources can be employed, but are only available to a limited degree, as the tradition to commemorate military successes and events fell out of tradition during the New Kingdom.¹⁸²

As described in the chapters above, the Egyptian Empire, first under Psammetichus I and then under Necho II, moved into the Levant as the Neo-Assyrian Empire declined and tried to support it in later years in order to create a buffer state towards the Babylonian Empire. This plan did not come to fruition as the Babylonians, together with the Medes defeated the Assyrians and conquered the regions east of the Euphrates. This transformed the river into the border between the two empires, who were now in direct competition for the former Neo-Assyrian territories.¹⁸³

Babylonia had two main reasons to enter into open conflict with Egypt. On the one hand, the Levant was rich in resources, which were directly needed in the core of the Babylonian empire for the rebuilding of cities and the stimulation of commercial life, which had suffered and stagnated under Assyrian rule. Furthermore, the Arabian trade routes, as well as the Mediterranean trade networks promised high revenues. On the other hand, Babylonia could

¹⁸¹ Beaulieu 2018, 220-221; Van De Mieroop 2016, 295; For the Babylonian Chronicles see: Glassner 2004 and Grayson 1975; Wiseman 1956.

¹⁸² Lipschits 2005, 362; Redford 2000, 183; For the (scarce) relevant Egyptian sources see Redford 2000.

¹⁸³ Beaulieu 2018, 227; Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 292; Lipschits 2005, 363.

not permit Egypt to establish itself along the Euphrates, as it would pose a constant threat to Babylonian rule in the region – either by encouraging or supporting anti-Babylonian rebellions, or by openly waging war on the young empire. It seems as if the Egyptians, and later on the Egyptian core, were the primary targets of the Babylonian campaigns.¹⁸⁴

The conflict eventually erupted in 609 BC, as both parties tried to establish themselves (or the Assyrians respectively) at Harran. Nebuchadnezzar could decide the first encounter for himself. The Egyptians established themselves thereupon in Riblah, along the Orontes River, which was transformed into an administrative centre for Syria¹⁸⁵, as well as in Carchemish. Furthermore, they tried to strengthen their position along the *Via Maris*. As one of these measures, Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, was put on the throne of Judah in an effort to stabilize the kingdom.¹⁸⁶

In 607 BC, the Babylonians crossed the Euphrates and conquered the Egyptian outpost of Kimuḫu. A garrison was established, which was supposed to serve as a starting point for future expeditions. These outposts were not designed to permanently establish Babylonian control over a certain region and certainly not to withstand a substantial onslaught. Accordingly, the garrison in Kimuḫu was conquered and destroyed soon after by Necho II in 606 BC.¹⁸⁷

During the following year, the Babylonians established a new base of operations on the eastern bank of the Euphrates at Quramati, in order to conquer the Egyptian-held cities of Sunadiri, Elammu and Dahammu on the western side of the Euphrates. After Nebuchadnezzar had returned to Babylonia, the Egyptians set out from Carchemish, conquered this new Babylonian centre and established an outpost for future operations of their own.¹⁸⁸

As a reaction, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army set out for Carchemish, where they encountered the Egyptians and gained a decisive victory, ultimately deciding over who would rule the Levant for the next 60 years, as the Egyptian forces were forced to withdraw to Egypt.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Lipschits 2005, 30-31.

¹⁸⁵ Kobayashi 1992, 721.

¹⁸⁶ Glassner 2004, 222-225; Lipschits 2005, 32

¹⁸⁷ Glassner 2004, 224-227; Lipschits 2005, 33-34; Vanderhooft 2003, 244

¹⁸⁸ Glassner 2004, 226-227; Lipschits 2005, 34.

¹⁸⁹ Beaulieu 2018, 227; Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 292; Glassner 2004, 226-229; Lipschits 2005, 34.

During 604 BC Nebuchadnezzar II, now king, undertook two successful campaigns into Hatti land. The first one was dedicated to securing the area until the Orontes, where the formerly Egyptian centre of Riblah was transformed into the Babylonian centre of administration for the region. The second campaign was aimed at the Southern Levant. During both campaigns, Nebuchadnezzar collected vast tribute and encountered little to no resistance, except at Ashkelon, which he destroyed and subsequently deported its elites.¹⁹⁰

Lipschits notes in this regard that the territory of Ashkelon was given to the neighbouring kingdom of Ashdod, which represents the only action of administrative change commanded by the Babylonians.¹⁹¹ This assumption is purely speculative – it might very well have been the case that Ashdod seized the opportunity and moved into the territory, capitalizing on the vacuum of power in the region.

In any case, it seems possible that the Babylonians established at least a limited amount of control in the region, possibly along the Mediterranean coast. Lipschits speculates that Babylonian troops were stationed directly on the border to Egypt in 603 BC, the respective parts of the Babylonian Chronicles, are unfortunately damaged. It is written that Nebuchadnezzar II set up quarters, but neither Egypt nor any other places are mentioned. As in the next section of the text “large siege towers” are mentioned, it seems more reasonable to assume that quarters were indeed set up, but only in course of the siege of an unknown city. It is doubtful that this camp would have been permanent. In this context it seems important to mention that Nebuchadnezzar also “set up his quarters” in course of the first siege of Jerusalem in 598 BC.¹⁹²

There are no indications for any other Babylonian activities in the Southern Levant, such as changes to the administrative structure within the subdued kingdoms. In fact, no claims for any sorts of annexations for this year, or the first twelve years of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, for that matter, are recorded. Congruously, the Babylonian activities for these years could be interpreted as not much more than annual incursions in order to extract as much raw materials and tribute as possible, as well as minimizing Egyptian influence and presence in the Southern Levant.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Beaulieu 2018, 228; Glassner 2004, 228-229; Lipschits 2005, 39.

¹⁹¹ Lipschits 2005, 40-41.

¹⁹² Glassner 2004, 228-231; Lipschits 2005, 42.

¹⁹³ Glassner 2004, 228-231; Jursa 2014, 124; Lipschits 2005, 42, 48-49; Vanderhooft 2003, 242.

In 601 BC, Nebuchadnezzar launched an attack onto the Egyptian empire. Apparently, the Egyptians heard of his plans and were able to prepare accordingly and meet Nebuchadnezzar in open field battle. The Egyptian fort of Tel Qedwa in the northern Sinai, on the way between the Egyptian heartland and the Southern Levant was destroyed during the late 7th century BC, which might be connected with this Babylonian incursion. Both parties suffered major losses, whereupon Nebuchadnezzar had to withdraw to Babylonia and Egypt was able to retake territories in the Southern Levant, such as Gaza.¹⁹⁴

In the wake of the reestablishment of Egyptian power in Palestine the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, seized to send tribute to Babylonia, which was considered an act of rebellion. Most likely, this was not so much an act of treason, as a matter of self-preservation, since the Babylonian presence was weakened, and the Egyptians were in the process of retaking the Levant. As Jehoiakim was put on the throne by the Egyptians in the first place and could be considered to be part of a pro-Egyptian faction in Jerusalem, it seems equally possible that he was in fact defying the Babylonians.¹⁹⁵

Nebuchadnezzar had to consolidate his forces until 598 B. C., when he started to re-establish Babylonian control over the land of Hatti, a broad term for the lands west of the Euphrates. As such, he marched against Gaza, Ekron – about the fate of which nothing is known – and Judah, particularly Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died, either shortly before or after, the Babylonian siege had started due to natural causes and his son Jehoiachin ascended to the throne, whose only official act was to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar II.¹⁹⁶

As repercussion for their disobedience, the Babylonians deported the administrative, economic and military elite of Jerusalem to Babylonia, where they were settled in distinctive settlements, such as Al-Yahudu (in Akkadian: “The city of Judah”)¹⁹⁷, and obliged to develop the respective regions agriculturally. Around 10 000 individuals were exiled, which represented a bit less than 10% of the total population of Judah. This meant a severe blow to the kingdom, but still kept it functional. Among the deportees was also Jehoiachin, who was replaced by his uncle Zedekiah. This decision probably aimed at eradicating pro-Egyptian tendencies, while still provided a certain degree of stability for the region by leaving a member of the Davidic dynasty on the throne and thereby preventing a vacuum from forming

¹⁹⁴ Glassner 2004, 228-229; Lipschits 2005, 49; Redford 2000, 185-186.

¹⁹⁵ Beaulieu 2018, 228; Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 292; Katzenstein 1983, 249-250; Lipschits 2003, 51.

¹⁹⁶ Bible 2 Kgs 24:10-12; Glassner 2004, 230-231; Lipschits 2005, 49-54;

¹⁹⁷ For more information see Alstola 2019, Pearce – Wunsch 2014 or Vanderhooft 1999, 110-112.

which the Egyptians in turn could have used to move back into Judah. These events were both recorded in the Babylonian chronicle as well as in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁹⁸

Due to problems along the Tigris during the years 596 and 595 B. C. as well as in the Babylonian heartland in 595 and 594 BC, during which Nebuchadnezzar even executed members of the military, his focus shifted away from the Levant. These circumstances were used Pharaoh Psammetichus II, who had ascended the throne in 595 BC, to campaign along the Mediterranean coast and create an Anti-Babylonian alliance in between Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre Sidon and Judah.¹⁹⁹

In turn, Nebuchadnezzar II left for Hatti Land in order to demonstrate strength and conducted two campaigns in the region. The following year Zedekiah was summoned to Babylon for reasons not entirely clear to us. It seems reasonable to assume that he either had to renew his pledge of fealty, report on the status of the region or deliver tribute, or any combination of those.²⁰⁰

We do not have any information of further Babylonian campaigns, or any events in the Levant for that matter, during the following years, as the Babylonian Chronicles break off at this point.²⁰¹ It has been proposed that the Egyptians further established themselves in Judah, Transjordan, as well as along the Phoenician coast and that the Babylonians did not react at first. Only after the ascension of Apries in 589 B. C., Babylonia started to take back these regions.²⁰²

In the literature, which mostly focuses on the fate of Judah– and Jerusalem in particular – the Babylonian campaign in the Levant, and the severity with which Jerusalem was attacked, is explained by the lack of loyalty exhibited by the Levantine vassal kingdoms, such as Judah, Moab and Ammon, which participated in the aforementioned Anti-Babylonian Alliance. Even the formation of another such pact, again under the auspice of Egypt, has been postulated. The ascension of Apries is seen as further intensification of the threat to not only the Babylonian rule in the Levant, but Babylonia in general.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Beaulieu 2018, 228; Bible 2 Kgs 24:14-17; Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 293-294; Lipschits 2005, 55-60.

¹⁹⁹ Glassner 2004, 230-231; Lipschits 2005, 62-64.

²⁰⁰ Glassner 2004, 230-231; Lipschits 2005, 65.

²⁰¹ Beaulieu 2018, 228, Glassner 2004, 230-231; Lipschits 2005, 66.

²⁰² Bible Jer 44:30; Hoffmeier 1981, 165-170; Lipschits 2005, 365.

²⁰³ Lipschits 2005, 66, 68, 365; Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 294.

Even though the long-lasting unrest, instability as well as the considerable military resources already invested in the region certainly played a role in the Babylonian decision to engage in the Levant once again, it seems more reasonable to the author to assume that the Babylonians chose to do this specifically at this point in time to capitalize on potential internal struggles in Egypt caused by the change in rulership, not because of an immediate threat. Why Nebuchadnezzar II decided to leave Zedekiah on the throne of Judah, after he had already participated in seemingly Anti-Babylonian activities until the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B. C., cannot be answered, but should certainly be investigated further.

The Babylonian campaign in the Levant at first focused on Judah and specifically Jerusalem. The Babylonian forces seem to have advanced along the Levantine coast and then moved through the Shephelah, where most local centres were destroyed, towards Jerusalem. At the beginning of the siege in January 587 BC, a wall was erected around the city. For what happened during the siege, no documentation, except for Biblical sources, is preserved. At some point, an Egyptian army seems to have approached in order to help those enclosed in the city. While the Babylonian forces were occupied, a group of people left the city, surrendered to the Babylonians and was subsequently settled in the city Mizpah in the region of Benjamin under the leadership of Gedaliah.²⁰⁴



Figure 20: Babylonian destruction layer in Jerusalem

²⁰⁴ Bible 2 Kgs 25:1-4, Jer 37:5-16; Lipschits 2005, 69, 73, 75-76, 366-367.

The city eventually fell in July of 586 BC, certainly weakened by the summer temperatures and a severe lack of food, when the Babylonians managed to breach the northern city wall. Traces of the siege were found here in the form of arrowheads. Zedekiah escaped towards the south, towards Egypt and the Transjordanian kingdoms, but was caught in Jericho. He was brought to Riblah, where his sons were killed in front of him and he himself blinded and deported to Babylon. This marks the end of the Davidic dynasty.²⁰⁵

One month after the city had been taken, Nebuzaradan, the chief cook, was tasked with the systematic destruction of Jerusalem, which lasted several weeks. From these events traces of conflagration were discovered almost everywhere in the city. During this one-month period, the population of Jerusalem who had remained in the city as it was conquered, as well as those who had surrendered during the siege were deported to Babylonia. As the economic, political as well as religious elite of the country had already been deported years earlier this represents a further sorting out of the population.²⁰⁶



Figure 21: Illustration of the siege of Jerusalem, *Bible Historiale* 1372

²⁰⁵ Beaulieu 2018, 228; Bible 2 Kgs 25: 6-7; Lipschits 2005 78-79, 367; Finkelstein-Silberman 2001, 294-295.

²⁰⁶ Beaulieu 2018, 228; Bible 2 Kgs 25:8-12; Lipschits 2005, 79-82, 367; Finkelstein-Silberman 2001 295.

During the siege of Jerusalem, other Babylonian forces conquered the remaining parts of the country. Azekah and Lachish were the last cities to withstand the Babylonians, as ostraca and inscribed potsherds graphically illustrate.²⁰⁷ Other Levantine states, such as Ammon, Moab, the Philistine, as well as Phoenician city-states were only attacked in 585 BC, after Judah had already been conquered.²⁰⁸

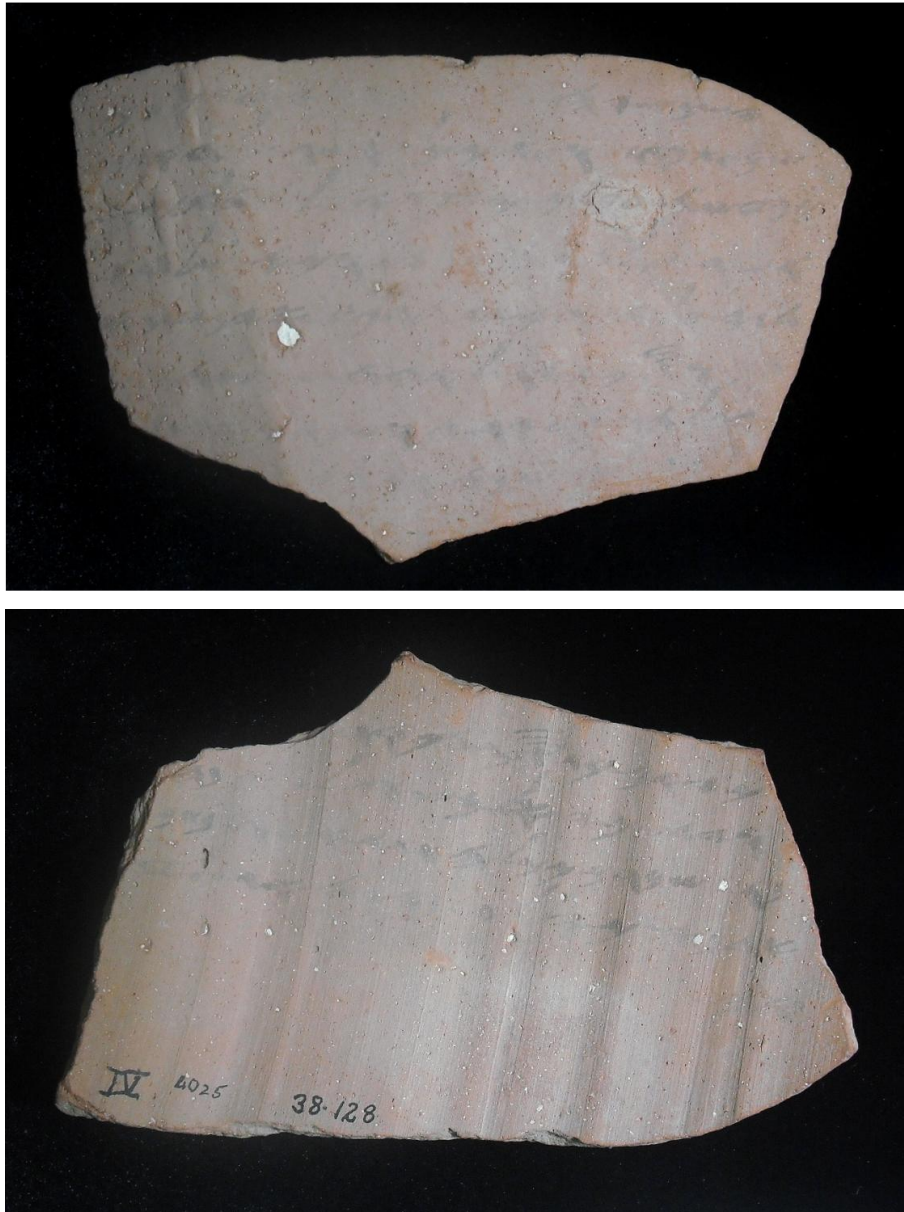


Figure 22: Lachish Letter 4, talking about how the author "cannot see (the signal fires of) Azekah"²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Bible Jer 34:7; Finkelstein – Silberman 2001, 294.

²⁰⁸ Lipschits 2005, 66-67.

²⁰⁹ Zammit 2016, 13.

Within Judah, the local administrative centre of the new province Yehud was most likely transferred to Mizpah, which underwent substantial construction efforts under the leadership of Gedaliah. He was murdered after only 3 weeks “in office” by Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, a member of the royal family, possibly because he was seen as a threat to the future of the Davidic house. Gedaliah’s followers thereupon fled to Egypt.²¹⁰

Another wave of deportations seems to have occurred in 582 B. C., as Nebuchadnezzar led an expedition against Ammon and Moab. These events might be connected with war efforts attested in Egyptian sources.²¹¹

The degree to which Judah overall was affected by the Babylonian conquest has been debated intensively and shall be discussed further below. With the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, Judah and the Levant became a part of the Persian Empire. The Persian king Cyrus consequently granted the Judean deportees, who had developed new ideological and religious traditions in Babylonia, to return to Judah, which found reflection in several parts of the Hebrew Bible. Jerusalem and the temple were eventually rebuilt in the 5th century BC.²¹²

2.2.2.2 The Babylonian system of imperial control

The situation regarding source material on the Babylonian system of imperial control, especially in the areas west of the Euphrates, i.e. the newly conquered regions, is difficult, especially when compared with the evidence left by the Assyrian presence in the Southern Levant. While we have a multitude of different elements of material culture, such as imported Assyrian pottery and local imitations, architecture, cuneiform texts, monumental inscriptions and glyptic art at our disposal to examine the period of Assyrian hegemony; it almost seems as if we are comparatively blind for the following Babylonian one. It has to be kept in mind that the absence of material might be an indicator for the scale of activities as well.²¹³ Faust writes in this regard that the contrast in finds attests to different systems of imperial control.²¹⁴

To a certain extent, the administrative system in the Assyrian heartland was based upon the Neo-Assyrian system, without having been influenced by the Babylonians much, as is well documented by cuneiform tablets unearthed in Tell Sheikh Ḥamad (for more information see

²¹⁰ Beaulieu 2018, 228; Bible 2 Kgs 25:22-26; Lipschits 2005, 366, 369, 372; Finkelstein-Silberman 2001, 297.

²¹¹ Beaulieu 2018, 229; Bible Jer 52:30.

²¹² Lipschits 2005, 371-372, 374-375; Finkelstein-Silberman 2001, 298.

²¹³ Beaulieu 2018, 235; Jursa 2014, 138, Vanderhooft 2003, 253; Zertal 2003, 405.

²¹⁴ Faust 2012, 196.

below). The fact that these tablets were written in Assyrian, rather than Babylonian, implies that the Babylonians not only took over the land, but also the administrative personal and administrative structure. This system was not so much changed, rather than modified, within the first few years of Nebuchadnezzar II's early reign, at least in Dūr-Katlimmu (Tell Sheik Ḥamad), where the Babylonian scribal traditions were employed to a limited degree.²¹⁵

For some areas west of the Euphrates, more firm, mostly textual evidence for the attempt to establish an administrative imperial structure is available. For instance, we know of garrisons, small outposts, supposed to maintain a formal presence in a town or city, in Harran and Kimiūḫu, as well as Riblah, where they were erected during Nabopolassar's reign, after ousting the Egyptians from the respective areas (see historical framework).²¹⁶

For the Levant it has often been proposed²¹⁷ that the Babylonians took over the already established provincial structure almost unchanged from the Assyrians, i.e. that the Babylonians did not only inherit the Neo-Assyrian Empire in its borders, but also its administrative structure not only in its heartland, but also its periphery.²¹⁸

As many Babylonian institutions were indeed modelled after similar Assyrian, preceding offices, it seems at least possible, if not probable that the Babylonians would have tried to follow the Assyrian ambitions west of the Euphrates.²¹⁹

Furthermore, it is true that some elements of the Babylonian strategy of control seem to have been based on the Assyrian model. For example, the economic structure was similarly focused on providing goods and skilled labour for the Babylonian core regions, be it for cultivation or construction efforts, especially under Nebuchadnezzar II. The raw materials and human resources necessary were extracted from newly conquered regions. It is unclear, however, if these extraction procedures were based solely on military force or on administrative measures. In this regard, it is imperative to emphasize that regional, as well as chronological factors have to be taken into account, as especially towards the end of Babylonian rule, initiatives to repopulate provinces in Assyria were undertaken!²²⁰

²¹⁵ Akkermans – Schwartz 2003, 389; Beaulieu 2018, 235; Jursa 2014, 138-139.

²¹⁶ Glassner 2004, 226-229; Grayson 1975, 96-97; Jursa 2014, 139; Vanderhooft 2003, 244.

²¹⁷ Grayson 1991, 161; Oppenheim 1979, 163; Aharoni 1979, 408.

²¹⁸ Aharoni 1979, 408; Grayson 1991, 161; Oppenheim 1979, 163.

²¹⁹ Jursa 2014, 139.

²²⁰ Beaulieu 2018, 235; Glassner 2004, 228-231; Jursa 2014, 138-139, 142.

In contrast to the Assyrians, the deportations during the Babylonian rule seem to have been one-way operations, *i.e.* the deportees were not replaced by population groups from other parts of the empire. This does not give the impression that the Babylonian rulers had long-term plans for these regions, as the local population consequently dwindled. The Babylonian core on the other hand prospered and the economic capabilities of the Babylonian population reached unprecedented highs.²²¹

Another similarity lies within the field of propaganda. Like the Neo-Assyrian kings, both Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus commissioned monumental rock inscriptions – symbols of political power and territorial domination and imperial control. Nebuchadnezzar II only in the area of modern Lebanon, Nabonidus in modern day Jordan and even Saudi Arabia. While the imagery of these monuments resembles Neo-Assyrian imagery (some might even say imitates it²²²), the accompanying inscription shows that Nebuchadnezzar II and the kings after him clearly tried to distance themselves from his Assyrian predecessors, by utilizing archaic language, particularly from the Old Babylonian period, when Babylonia rose to be an important state for the first time.²²³

In other aspects, the idea of a continuation of Mesopotamian rule in the Levant has to be clearly rejected. As demonstrated in the last chapter, the Assyrians retreated from the Levant at the beginning of the 7th century BC and were succeeded by the Egyptian Empire, which by itself represents a clear break in the continuity of administrative customs. During the period of Egyptian rule, many regions which were formerly integrated in the Assyrian imperial provincial structure, went back to more traditional governmental formats. For example, the Phoenician cities of Sidon and Arwad both had kings at the time of the Babylonian conquests in 598 BC. Further kings from the region of Hatti are mentioned in various textual sources as tributaries of the Babylonian king, which indicates that the Babylonian Empire did not have an imperial provincial administrative system established in these regions at least until the middle reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. This lack of governmental structures also explains why the matter of deportations was approached differently than under the Assyrian Empire. Furthermore, the existence of tributaries indicates that military campaigns into the Levant were not as successful as the Babylonian Chronicles, which exclusively report about sweeping victories and tend to exaggerate the ruler's achievements, might assert. That is, if

²²¹ Lipschits, 2005, 48; Vanderhooft 2003, 247; Vanderhooft 1999, 110-112.

²²² Da Riva 2018, 25.

²²³ Beaulieu 2018, 235; Da Riva 2018, 19, 21; Vanderhooft 1999, 50-51.

Nebuchadnezzar II's goal was, to actually conquer these territories in the first place and were not aimed at only extracting tribute through regular campaigns.²²⁴

Only during the later years of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II some sort of administrative imperial structure seems to have been implemented west of the Euphrates. References in the Etemenanki cylinder and Istanbul prism of Nebuchadnezzar to governors and kings in Ḫatti and the payment of *biltu* tribute in the Babylonian Chronicles, might refer to a dual system of provinces and/ or vassal states. The presence of *piḫatu* and *šakanakku* officials in Ḫatti and Arpad, the capital of the Assyrian province of Bīt-Agusi, furthers this interpretation. The archaeological evidence from Mizpah, the capital of the region of Benjamin north of Jerusalem, makes a Babylonian presence tangible, if not likely (further information, see below). However, the exact nature of a Neo-Babylonian permanent presence remains elusive for the most part and might have been connected with the goal to conquer Egypt, or at least prevent it from interfering in the region.²²⁵

Lipschits proposes that the continuous rebellions and the Egyptian presence and threat, especially after the ascendance of Apries in 589 BC, warranted a profound change in imperial policy towards the Levantine vassal states. As such, these formerly semi-independent states were to be fully integrated into the Babylonian provincial administrative structure. Furthermore, centres of rebellion and local identity, such as Jerusalem were destroyed. Lipschits argues that not only Judah, but also Philistia, Ammon and Moab fell victim to this new policy. Only Tyre and the Phoenician cities, even though they were put under siege as a reaction for participating in anti-Babylonian activities, were spared. This, on the one hand had to do with their geographical position further northwards than the Philistine states- not directly on the border to Egypt, and Babylonian economic interests in the taxable revenue generated by the Phoenicians on the other. The (now) provinces on the Egyptian border were to be an impoverished, devastated buffer zone- an interpretation which is shared, also by Faust.²²⁶

The continuity in regional names in Transjordan and Syria, as mentioned in the Bible, does not necessarily indicate that the Babylonians did not change and just inherited the Assyrian

²²⁴ Beaulieu 2018, 235-237; Glassner 2004, 228-231; Jursa 2014, 138; Unger 1970, 286; Vanderhooft 2003, 238, 241-242.

²²⁵ Beaulieu 2018, 237; Carter 2003, 309; Jursa 2014, 137; Vanderhooft 2003, 237, 240, 245, 248; Zertal 2003, 405; Zorn 2013, 189-190; Zorn 2003, 433-441, 444; For the Etemenanki cylinder see: Da Riva 2013; for the Istanbul prism see: Unger 1970.

²²⁶ Faust 2012, 188-194; Lipschits 2005, 66-68.

system as suggested by Zertal²²⁷, but that the Babylonians took over regional denominations for certain geographical regions, which might very well have persisted from the Neo-Assyrian period onwards. Additionally, the former Assyrian provincial capitals had the necessary means to continue to act as local central places. The decision of the Babylonians to establish their presence in such places, like Samaria, rather represents a practical decision, than one based on former governmental structures.²²⁸

The explanation for the differing approach to imperial rule in between the Neo-Babylonian and Assyrian Empire might also lie in different imperial ideologies. In contrast to the Assyrian Empire, which had a divinely ordained mission to extend its borders, the Babylonian kings' most important objective was to provide for their gods. Another reason might lie in the relatively short period of Babylonian rule – we simply cannot make assumptions how the system of imperial rule in the west might have developed, just that first steps to reclaim and integrate territories in the imperial periphery were taken under Nabonidus. The reason why these steps were taken at such a late time, certainly had to do with a certain lack of knowledge and experience in how to manage, maintain and control such a vast empire. This might also serve as another explanation for the limited involvement of Babylonia in the development of the region in the early years of their conquest, as the primary goal was to keep the Egyptians in check on the one hand and, and to redevelop the Babylonian core, on the other.²²⁹

2.2.2.3 Social and economic implications and results of the Babylonian conquest

In previous chapters, we heard about the conquest of Jerusalem, the destruction of the first temple and the ensuing deportation of certain parts of the Judean population.

The exact extent of both the destructions in Judah, as well as the deportations and ensuing situation in Judah were the topic of fierce discussions between archaeologists, historians and Biblical scholars. The reason for these are different interpretations of, or discrepancies in between the Biblical and archaeological sources, which unfortunately are the only ones at our disposal for this time period, as already mentioned in previous chapters. While talking about the results of the Babylonian conquests, we have to keep in mind that Judah – modern-day Israel – is special in terms of its geographical location, the density of available archaeological

²²⁷ Zertal 2003, 405.

²²⁸ Vanderhooft 2003; 235, 237, 243-244, Zertal 2003, 405.

²²⁹ Jursa 2014, 137, 139; Lipschits 2005, 36, Vanderhooft 1999, 41.

data, and the availability of written sources – as debatable as they may be – in form of the Bible exist. A similar combination and density of evidence is not the case for other regions, as shall be seen further below.

The events of the Babylonian conquest and the following time in Exile were extensively documented and reflected upon in several sections of the Hebrew Bible (Books 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah²³⁰, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Lamentations, Psalms, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah), in the form of historical accounts, references and prophecies.²³¹ Interestingly enough the Babylonians (or Chaldeans, as they are being called in these sections) always merely act as an instrument of gods wrath, who wants to destroy Judah and Jerusalem because of the sins committed by the inhabitants and its rulers.²³² These references extensively shaped the picture of the Babylonians in the historical reception and perception. Its actual worth for the historical reconstruction of events remains limited.²³³

Another factor to consider in this regard is that these accounts might have been altered by those, who returned from exile to Judah after the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. There, new ideas and modes of both communal organization and worship had been developed, while keeping Jerusalem and the house of David at its centre. These developments later formed the basis for the Judaism of the 2nd temple. The ideological developments in Judah proper during the period of the Babylonian exile do not seem to have been incorporated to the same extent and conflicts in between the returnees and those who had remained in Judah cannot be excluded. Furthermore, parts of the Pentateuch and Deuteronomic history underwent significant alterations, which caused alternative ritual sites that had developed during the 6th century to be abandoned and furthered the development of a rather nationalistic and closed society.²³⁴

In the traditional research from the 19th century, the notion was that the exile was almost total, i.e. that the entire population of Judah either had died during the Babylonian conquest or had been carried away to Babylonia and the country was left almost empty, with only the poorest of the poor remaining, as was written in the Bible.²³⁵

²³⁰ For example, see Clements 1980.

²³¹ Finkelstein-Silberman 2011, 297; Vanderhooft 2016, 132-133.

²³² See Ezechiel 22, 2 Chronicles 36, or 2 Kgs 23-24.

²³³ Jursa 2014, 121.

²³⁴ Faust 2012, 187; Finkelstein- Silberman 2001, 296; Lipschits 2005, 371, 374-375.

²³⁵ Barstad 2003, 3; Bible 2 Kgs 25:12; Finkelstein-Silberman 2011, 305; Oded 2003, 58.

During the 20th century, the Biblical descriptions were dismissed as myths and propagandistic material, useless for accurate historical research, mostly created to generate a common history and national identity for an ethnically varied society of those who had remained in Judah and those returning from exile.²³⁶

This view is – to a certain degree – still prevalent in recent literature, with most authors either dismissing the Biblical accounts or accusing proponents of differing schools of thoughts as being influenced by Biblical scholars or the Biblical narrative.²³⁷

The absolute – one might even say blind – refusal, of the Biblical narrative in order to free research from religious influences led to the creation of what was coined the “Myth of the Empty Land” and the Continuity theory. Advocates of this idea generally state that after the destruction of Jerusalem life in Judah did not change much and mostly stayed the same as before, with the deportations being by far not as a dramatic event as portrayed in the Bible. It was stated that only few – the aristocracy of Judah, which did not have much influence over daily life – were deported and that the remaining population included not only poor peasants, but also artisans, scribes, priests as well as prophets. Furthermore, it was stated that the Judean state was replaced by a Babylonian administration.²³⁸

One argument brought forth by advocates of the continuity theory states that the region of Judah was economically important to the Babylonians for the production of wine and olive oil, has to be dismissed as speculation, as no concrete evidence for the exchange of these goods exists.²³⁹ Faust furthermore adds that Ekron, an important centre for olive oil production during the Egyptian and possibly Assyrian periods (see previous chapters), was not rebuilt – which certainly would have happened if the Southern Levant had been economically important for the Neo-Babylonian empire. A possible explanation for this might be that Babylonia was simply too far away, and that the transport of olive oil or wine was not economically viable, as the cost of transportation was too high and the received these kinds of goods from regions closer to the Babylonian core. The Mediterranean coast- especially Phoenicia was much more important for the import of luxury goods, rather than produce.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ For further literature, see Oded 2003, 55-57.

²³⁷ For example, see: Faust 2012, 203, 212, 228, 244, 246-253; Lipschits 2004, 105.

²³⁸ Barstad 2003, 3-4, 6-7; Faust 2012, 181-182; Finkelstein-Silberman 2011, 306-307; Fried 2003, 21; Oded 2003, 57

²³⁹ Barstad 2003, 13 already admits that we cannot be certain about such exchanges.

²⁴⁰ Barstad 2003, 9-13; Edelman 2003, 156-157; Faust 2012, 190-192.

In the context of economy, it shall be mentioned that the Judean weight system seems to have fallen out of use after 586 BC. This was explained by the general decline of trade in the region on the one hand and the lack of organization, which could have organized such trade, as well as controlled the compliance of the individuals involved in trade.²⁴¹ Of course- if the Babylonians would have taken over local trade, they might have introduced their own system, but since no evidence for such activities was found so far, this assumption remains speculative.

The second argument, brought forth repeatedly in favour of continuity in Judah, concerns the area of Benjamin, with its four main sites, Mizpah/ Tell en-Nasbeh, Gibeah/ Tell el-Fûl, Bethel/ Beitin and Gibeon/ El-Jîb. There, no destruction horizons, and therefore no indication for Babylonian destructions, were excavated, and some indication for continuity, as well as traces of a Babylonian presence can be observed. Until the end of the 6th century BC the region declined, potentially because the security situation all over Judah improved and people moved to other parts of the country, either for economic opportunities, religious or ideological reasons, or because it was possible to return to and live in Jerusalem.²⁴²

Especially in Mizpah, which was extensively excavated from 1926 to 1935, a certain continuity can be observed. From the Bible we know that this area seems to have surrendered during the early stages of the Babylonian conquest and that some people who fled from the besieged city of Jerusalem were relocated to the region of Benjamin, which was ruled by Gedaliah.²⁴³

These accounts seem trustworthy, at least as far as the city does not seem to have been destroyed, since no destruction horizons for the period in question could be identified. On the contrary, we can observe large-scale rebuilding and restructuring efforts throughout the entire city, from stratum 3 to 2, with stratum 2 representing the later stage. These rebuilding efforts affected defensive structures, such as the city gate, but also domestic buildings, which grew in size²⁴⁴ and were built with higher quality materials and configurations, such as wider walls, stone paved floor or monolithic pillars. These changes were interpreted by Zorn as a

²⁴¹ Denver 2001, 227; Kletter 1998, 42.

²⁴² Finkelstein-Silberman 2001, 307; Lipschits 2005, 373; Lipschits 2004, 104; Lipschits, 2003, 347; Oded 2003, 66-67; Zorn 2013, 186; Zorn 2003, 416; For more information on the sites besides Mizpah see: Gibeah/ Tell el-Fûl: Carter 2003; Barstad 2003; Bethel/ Beitin: Blenkinsopp 2003; Carter 2003; Gibeon/ El-Jîb: Barstad 2000; Carter 2003; Edelman 2003.

²⁴³ Lipschits 2005, 69, 73, 75-76, 366-367; Lipschits 2004, 104; Zorn 2003, 414.

²⁴⁴ Lipschits estimates that half the population continued to live in the Benjamin region. Lipschits 2005, 373.

reflection of the new role as a regional administrative capital, which Mizpah took during the Neo-Babylonian period.²⁴⁵

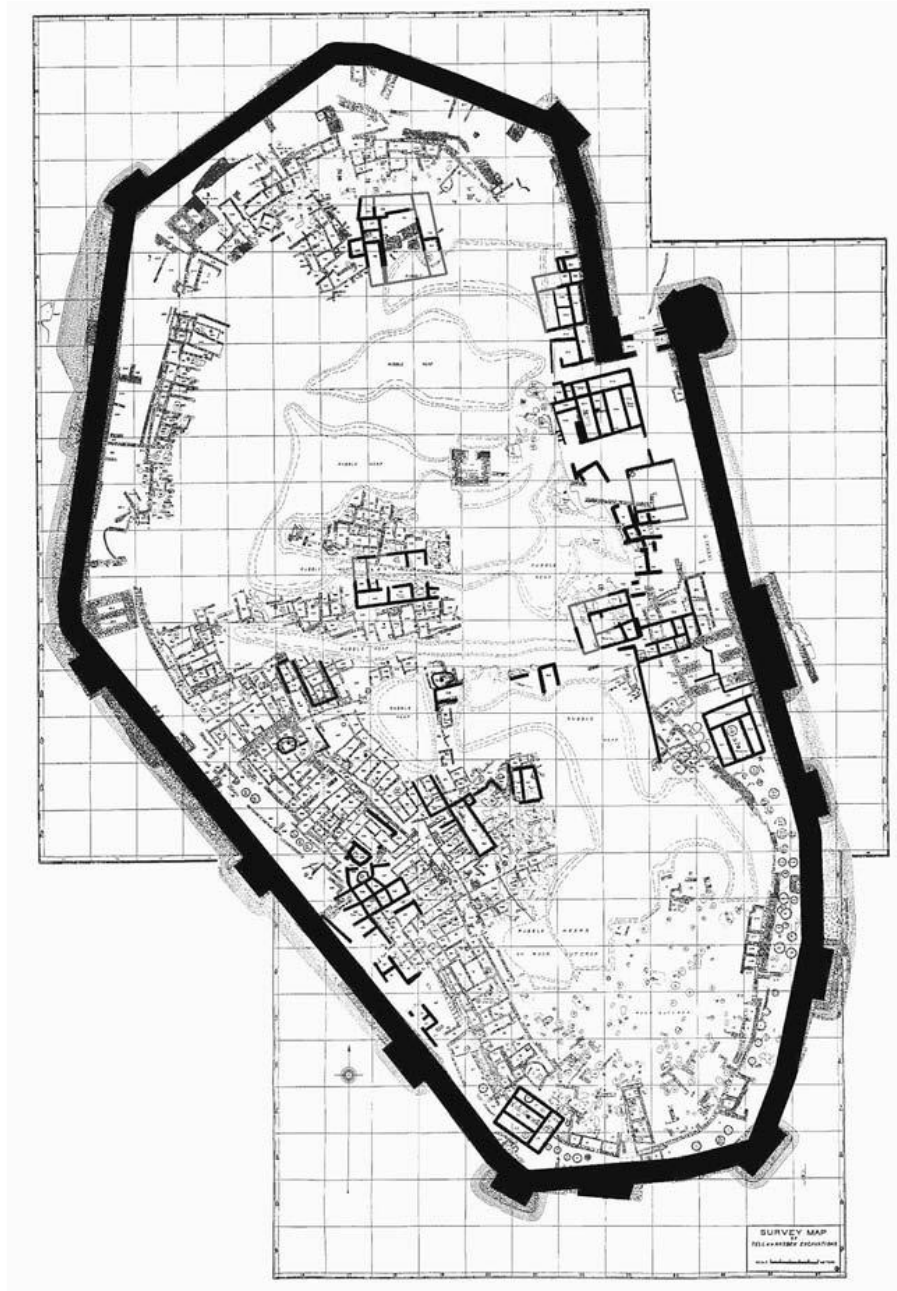


Figure 23: Mizpah, Stratum 2

This change in status and the presence of a certain Mesopotamian influence is maybe even more clearly reflected in the find material. As such a small bronze button base beaker, a bronze circlet with a private donation inscription, written in cuneiform as well as and ostrakon with a Mesopotamian name written in Hebrew characters, read and translated as “[be]n mar-

²⁴⁵ Barstad 2003, 7; Lipschits 2005, 366, 372; Zorn 2013, 189-190; Zorn 2003, 419, 427-429, 442.

šarri-ušur” – “[so]n of [?], protect the crown prince”, were found.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, fragments of Mesopotamian style bathtub shaped coffins were discovered. As it was the local, Judean custom to always bury the dead in outside areas, as they were considered to be ritually polluting, whereas custom of burying the dead underneath the floors of the houses was Mesopotamian, this find might be one of the most obvious proofs for Mesopotamian influence, if not presence, at Mizpah.²⁴⁷



Figure 24: Fragment of Mesopotamian-style "bathtub" coffin from Mizpah

As for Mizpah's role as a local administrative centre, stamped jar handles from this period, certainly a symbol of administrative power, most of which were found in Mizpah might serve as a good indicator for its importance and a good lead for the extent of its administrative and economic influence. Together with fragments of Attic pottery, found in the same contexts, they also serve as proof for continuity from the late 6th to the 5th century in Mizpah, as well as far reaching contacts and the presence of some sort of local elite. Furthermore, Mizpah might

²⁴⁶ Preserved signs are: נַמְדַּסְדָּד; Wampler 1941, 31; Zorn 2003, 436-437.

²⁴⁷ Zorn 2013, 189-190; Zorn 2003, 433-436.

have served as a production centre for a specific type of pottery, decorated with rows of impressed circles or wedges, which might have been connected to the incense trade.²⁴⁸



Figure 25: Bronze circlet with cuneiform inscription from Mizpah

As for the proposition that the religious centre of the region shifted to Mizpah after the destruction of Jerusalem, no concrete evidence exists.²⁴⁹

Of course, we are also confronted with problems at Mizpah. One of the most important of which, might be the time of excavation. Much of the stratigraphical interpretation has been done recently and is based on the reappraisal and –interpretation of the old plans. The fact that stratum 3 seems to have been razed as Mizpah was transformed into an administrative centre, as well as the long usage of the thereupon built stratum 2 for approximately 150 years, make it exceedingly difficult to find clean *in situ* deposits of material or characterize the artefactual assemblages for any specific (sub-)period of the site. This would not only help in a more in-depth interpretation of Mizpah, but also the surrounding sites.²⁵⁰

Faust agrees that the region of Benjamin was not immediately destroyed during the initial Babylonian conquest, but stresses that it experienced a gradual decline – most likely during the first two decades of Neo-Babylonian rule, especially in the rural sector. Such interpretations were also brought forward by other scholars. This assertion is based on the result of surveys and salvage excavations, which show a significant decline in the number rural sites from the Neo-Assyrian to the Persian period, which most likely was the result of the deteriorating security situation, which affected rural areas disproportionately. This, in turn, caused people to move into the cities. Together with the refugees from Jerusalem, the

²⁴⁸ Carter 2003, 309; Zorn 2013, 189-190; Zorn 2003, 437-441, 444.

²⁴⁹ Blenkinsopp 2003, 98.

²⁵⁰ Carter 2003, 309; Zorn 2003, 414-417; 444-445.

situation in the big cities, which needed to adapt to the influx of people, was interpreted as a state of flourishing. Furthermore, the provenance of the finds used for dating certain contexts and entire sites is in his opinion too uncertain and should be reevaluated, as for him the as being indicative proposed pieces only date to the earlier phase of the 6th century BC. For Faust the widespread continuity in Benjamin proposed by others is exaggerated, archaeologically baseless, and driven by Biblical agenda (even though admitting that the story of Gedaliah has some historical value). The continuity at some major sites, for him does not indicate prosperity in other areas of the region, which – in general – certainly is correct.²⁵¹

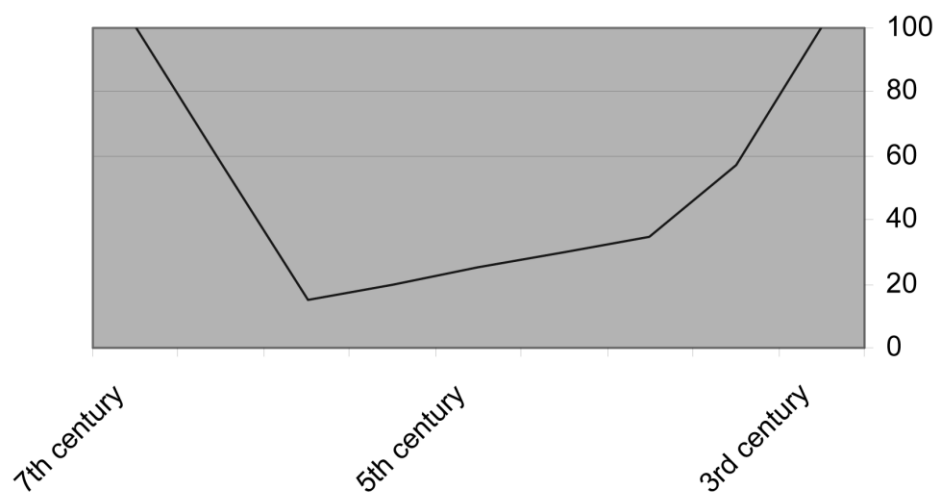


Figure 26: Demographic development in Judah according to Faust

Even though Faust seems maybe overly critical in some areas, it is true that the material culture of the Neo-Babylonian period in the Southern Levant is poorly understood. On the one hand, this has to do with the brevity of the Babylonian occupation of only around 50 years. On the other hand, local pottery traditions from the 7th and early 6th century seem to have been preserved during the Neo-Babylonian period, without implementing noticeable changes, making it hard to assign specific shapes to this period. As the land seems to have been very sparsely inhabited and secure contexts from this period are extremely rare, the lack of specific shapes might be the consequence of limited knowledge. Only from the middle of the 5th century BC onwards, a significant change in the pottery tradition – typical for the Persian period – is noticeable, which is being denied by Barstad²⁵², who states that the Persians almost left no traces in the material culture, even though reigning for 200 years. The same notion is shared by Edelman, who states that the Persian pottery shapes are equally difficult to

²⁵¹ Faust 2007, 32; Faust 2012, 209-212, 216, 227-229, 230-231; Faust 2007, 46; Lipschits 2004, 104; Lipschits 2003, 349-350.

²⁵² Barstad 2003, 4.

identify, as they seem to continue trends from the Iron Age. These shapes from the late 7th century could therefore, span across a period of around 200 years. This clearly indicates a certain continuity in the region, but also – since the material is poorly understood – that extreme care has to be taken when working with publications concerning this era and might have to reevaluate the results of the original excavators by incorporating newer results in the field of pottery studies. As Zorn notes, sites with contexts followed by some sort of gap or hiatus which resemble strata from sites that clearly had been destroyed by the Babylonians, such as Lachish II, were often assigned as being similarly destroyed by the Babylonians. This happened without considering the possibility that other political players might have been responsible for their destruction, or that they might have been simply abandoned. Because of this situation some scholars outright refuse to include pottery studies in their historical analysis of the Neo-Babylonian period and prefer the Bible as a source, until the pottery from this period is better understood.²⁵³

Faust, a proponent of the so called “Empty-Land” theory, also explores other aspects of Judean material culture, traditions and to a certain degree linguistics from the Iron Age II to the Persian period in order to illuminate the events after the Neo-Babylonian conquests.

As such, he notices that the rock-hewn Judahite tomb seems to mostly fall out of usage during this time. This type of burial cave was in use since the 8th century BC – usually for many generations by one family and was interpreted as being connected with a generational continuity in the possession of land and beliefs. The occupants were members of the middle and upper classes of the Judean society. According to Faust the tombs layout resembles the so called 4-room house, a type of domestic dwelling, which was coined being specifically Israelite. It appeared at the end of the Late Bronze Age and was used all throughout the Southern Levant and parts of Transjordan in both rural and urban settings by rich and poor families and even as public buildings. After the Neo-Babylonian conquests, it fell out of use – except in Mizpah –and did not come back.²⁵⁴

Another change concerns religious practices. During the 7th century BC specific local customs, referred to by Stern as “national Judean paganism”, existed in Judah, part of which seem to have been local shrines and figurines, supposedly shaped in the image of the Judean god. Hundreds of these objects were discovered at Iron Age sites but are entirely missing

²⁵³ Barstad 2003, 4-5; Betlyon 2003, 271; Carter 2003, 306; Edelman 2014, 164; Faust 2012, 116; Faust 2004, 158-159; Faust 2003, 37, 39; Lapp 2014, 237; Lipschits 2005, 373-374; Oded 2003, 58; Zorn 2013, 186.

²⁵⁴ Faust 2004, 160-166; Netzer 1998, 193; for further literature see Faust 2004, 160.

from sites dated to the Persian period with a Jewish presence. The cultic figurines found from the Persian period are more reminiscent of the Mediterranean koine, either produced in the Phoenician or Greek style. From the areas supposedly inhabited by a Jewish population, not a single figurine or shrine has been excavated so far.²⁵⁵

Linguistic changes encompass changes regarding kinship terminology, as well as the switch from classical – or Standard Biblical Hebrew, to Late Biblical Hebrew, characterized by many Aramaic influences, but is only dated to the period from the 5th to the 4th century BC. Nonetheless, this change might have been influenced by those returning from the Babylonian exile and facilitated by a weak social structure in Judah.²⁵⁶

Further changes were observed regarding cosmological concepts. Where the entrances of houses, city gates and the temple oriented towards the east, this custom is not encountered as often in the Persian period. From later textual evidence it can be derived that this custom did not exist anymore.²⁵⁷

For Faust all these events represent a major socio-cultural break, only explainable by a major demographic decline, which resulted in long term changes in lifestyle, ethos and beliefs. Other scholars note that much of the described phenomena, such as the lack of Greek pottery and the Judahite rock tombs falling out of use, might be ascribed to exiling the elites, but not the “normal” population. Zorn adds that the evidence for domestic architecture for the Persian period is not conclusive either, and that the change in linguistics, religion and cosmology might tell us more about those who returned from exile, than what happened in Judah during this period.²⁵⁸

Even though we already heard about the limitations of the archaeological data, it can still be used to a certain extent. Data can be extracted from rescue, salvage, as well as scientific excavations and surveys. While excavations are not as prone to errors as surveys, they might be concentrated on areas with high building activities and only cover relatively small areas in contrast to surveys. Thus, a sensible and differentiated combination of both is essential for creating a comprehensive picture. Especially important when working with data from excavations is a solid methodological background. Conflicts surrounding the Neo-Babylonian period very often focus on the methodological approaches of opposing authors. A point

²⁵⁵ Faust 2012; 106-109; Stern 2006, 199-201.

²⁵⁶ Faust 2012, 110-114; for an extensive list of further literature see Faust 2012, 110.

²⁵⁷ Faust 2012, 114-115; Faust 2001, 149.

²⁵⁸ Faust 2012, 116, 166; Zorn 2013, 186-187.

brought forward several times is that modern-day borders should have as little influence as possible when working with archaeological data. Furthermore, results should be looked at on a regional level, before including them in a big picture, as small scale, potentially crucial differences, might be lost otherwise – especially when trying to extract data for rural, only sparsely settled areas.²⁵⁹

The general consensus about the situation in Judah after the Babylonian conquests is quite bleak, with the country not only suffering a major decline in population and small sites, its capital and bigger cities and economic basis destroyed, and its society torn apart. Some smaller, formerly rather peripheral areas, such as Benjamin and possibly areas to the south and west of Jerusalem continued to exist, at least to a certain degree. Similarly, the coastal regions show continuity and only moderate decline, albeit being outside Judah proper. Within Judah, some further continuity can be observed around destroyed forts, such as Khirbet Abu Twein. The Babylonians seem to have focused mostly on the Judean core, Jerusalem and its hinterland, which seems reasonable considering that the city was besieged for an extended period of time during which the army certainly lived off the land. Other parts of the country, such as the Shephelah, the Judean highlands, the Negev, the Jordan valley or the Dead Sea environs were gradually abandoned, as semi nomadic, Arabian or Idumean groups began to move into these border regions without a central apparatus stopping them. Some claim that also other parts of the country were laid to waste as part of a deliberate scorched earth policy, in order to prevent the Egyptians being able to re-establish themselves in the region. This situation also found reflection in the Bible.²⁶⁰

Faust supposes that the remaining population was too small to organize a functioning society, which might also be true for other regions of Judah, not only Benjamin. Furthermore, it is plausible that some small-scale production of goods took place, which were traded on a local level, but overall did not result in much profit.²⁶¹

With the Iron Age being the peak of social, cultural and economic prosperity of Judah in the first half of the 1st Millennium BC, the general decline in settlements and population lasted well into the Persian period. A slight upwards trend can be recognized from the Hellenistic

²⁵⁹ Faust 2007, 47; Faust 2004, 158; Faust 2003, 37, 39; Lipschits 2004, 101-102.

²⁶⁰ Beaulieu 2018, 229; Carter 2003, 307, 310; Faust 2012, 23-31 for a list of cities that were destroyed, 235, 237-238, 240-241; Faust 2007, 27, 29; Faust 2004, 167-177; Faust 2003, 40-45; Finkelstein-Silberman 2001, 295; Lipschits 2005, 69, 368-369, Lipschits 2004, 99; Lipschits 2003, 336, 338-339, 341, 364.

²⁶¹ Faust 2012, 239; Lipschits 2004, 100.

period, when formerly abandoned settlements and regions, such as the Shephelah or the region of Benjamin were resettled.²⁶²

The translation of archaeological data into absolute numbers regarding a decline in population is always problematic, very much dependent on the models used and the statistical data available; and it must remain speculative to some degree. For the Iron Age, a number of 110 000 individuals in Judah can be expected, which is based on the number of settled dunam, a unit of measure encompassing 1000 m² in the Southern Levant. Additional to the archaeological data, we also have numbers from Biblical sources. For the first wave of deportations in 597 BC between 8 000 and 10 000 people were deported, for 586 a number of 4 600 is stated, although we cannot be sure, if this means individuals or families, as was custom at the time. Regardless, Finkelstein, a proponent of the continuity theory, expects around 75 000 individuals to have remained in Judah – a number which is certainly set too high.²⁶³

Lipschits proposes a number of 40 000 inhabitants after the initial conquests, which further declined during the period of Babylonian rule to about 30 000 until the Persian period or about 70% in settled area. The overall trend of a reduction in population continued until the middle of the 5th century B.C, with a further reduction in settled area up to 89% around cities and 83,5% overall.²⁶⁴

Faust suggest even a reduction of settlement activity around Jerusalem of around 90%, 45% in the Shephelah and 25% in the wider Hebron area, resulting in an average reduction of 73%, with an above average reduction in the rural sector down to about 15%. These estimates translate to a reduction in terms of a population of around 80 to 90% at its lowest during the Babylonian period, as survey data for any given period always represents a maximum in settlement activity, as to why the actual number of contemporaneously occupied must be set lower. Faust also includes data from the Persian period in order to show long-term trends. As already mentioned above, we have to be conscious that the classification of certain sites to specific periods might not be correct. While Zorn generally agrees, he argues that the number should be set a bit higher, as there might have been an unknown percentage of individuals

²⁶² Faust 2007, 27, 32; Lipschits 2005, 113, 149, 178; Lipschits 2003, 344, 366.

²⁶³ Finkelstein-Silberman 2001, 306, Lipschits 2005, 368; Lipschits 2004, 324-333.

²⁶⁴ Lipschits 2005 366, 372; Lipschits 2004, 105, 355, 363.

living in tents, among ruins or other installations, who might not have left a representative mark in the survey or excavation data.²⁶⁵

The reasons for the initial decline in population should be quite obvious, consisting of the loss of life during the war on the one hand and the deportations afterwards. Executions are another factor, which has to be expected in a war setting. With a collapse of the administration and security apparatus in wide areas of the country, and as such a reduction in productive capabilities of foodstuffs, famines, epidemics and refugeeism, especially in the countryside but also a larger scale have to be presumed.²⁶⁶

In essence, neither the Empty-Land-Theory, nor the Continuity-Theory represent the reality of the Neo-Babylonian period in Judah. In addition, the opinions of Lipschits and Faust, one would expect to be far apart when only following their writings are not as contrasting as they might want to make it seem, when compared carefully. They might differ in the exact numbers, but agree concerning the overall trend and picture of the Neo-Babylonian conquest and period in Judah, being one of major decline, while not being completely empty, with only some regions preserving a limited amount of continuity. The archaeological data, even for Israel, which is one of the most extensively excavated areas in the world, still is inconclusive in parts and requires further analysis.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Faust 2012, 233; Faust 2007, 24-26, 33; Zorn 2013, 186.

²⁶⁶ Faust 2012, 186; Faust 2011a, 91; Faust 2004, 166.

²⁶⁷ Carter 2003, 318; Edelman 2014, 165; Faust 2012, 116; Faust 2003, 46; Lipschits 2004, 105; Oded 2003, 71; Zorn 2013, 185-186.

3. Areas

3.1 Possible indicators for a Babylonian presence

In the last chapter, the different types of evidence used to determine the nature of the Babylonian conquests for the region of Judah were presented. In the following, we will compile and extend this list in order to determine which kinds of evidence can and should be taken into consideration when trying to classify the impact of foreign powers on a given region.

Even though some types of evidence are clearly more archaeological or philological than others, we refrained from dividing the list in such a way, as in certain cases a strict division is not possible or would not be sensible.

One of the most obvious proofs for some sort of presence are ancient texts, such as cuneiform documents – either originating directly from the places under investigation, or referring to them, for example mentioning tribute or the instalment of local representatives by the ruler. Inscriptions on objects, such as on the cuneiform inscription on a circlet discovered in Mizpah²⁶⁸, can be useful for determining the nature of a foreign presence as well.

When it comes to elements of the material culture, we are confronted with a wide array of options. One of the most important archaeological find categories is pottery. A foreign influence or presence can be indicated by direct imports – either to or from the place under investigation. Further indications for contacts in between regions might be the local imitation of foreign pottery.

Unfortunately, the material published concerning Neo-Babylonian pottery typology is rather scarce.²⁶⁹ Some pieces were published for individual sites. Woolley for instance presented a catalogue concerning his excavations in Ur²⁷⁰, and others published similar work for other sites, but the assignation of some objects to the Neo-Babylonian period does not seem to be as secure as Woolley makes it seem.²⁷¹ The reasons why the Neo-Babylonian pottery was not comprehensively processed yet lie on the one hand in its general unattractiveness and large numbers. On the other hand, many of the key sites where relevant pieces were discovered

²⁶⁸ Zorn 2013, 190.

²⁶⁹ As is for the case Neo-Babylonian Material culture in general. For an overview of studies see Baker 2012, 930.

²⁷⁰ Woolley 1962.

²⁷¹ Moorey 1994, 161.

were excavated during a time when pottery (especially non-decorated examples) had a secondary status in comparison to other find categories, which meant that sherds were not documented and often discarded. Without the respective contexts and the possibility to stratigraphically relate finds to each other, the creation of a typology, as well as the establishment of a relative and/or absolute chronology is exceedingly difficult.²⁷²

For all other elements of material culture preserved in the archaeological record, be they made of clay, metal or vegetable raw materials, the same principles for establishing a connection to or with foreign influences can be applied as for pottery, using their typology regarding their shape and/or decoration. When it comes to the forceful or violent conquest of regions, weaponry discovered in layers implying destructive events, such as arrowheads²⁷³, might be of special interest in this regard. Studies regarding military strategies might help us in interpreting text and archaeological context.²⁷⁴

Destruction layers in themselves might serve as proof for the presence of foreign powers, especially in combination with textual sources, referencing raids, campaigns or conquests. However, especially in the case of the Southern Levant, a region which was constantly contested among several big powers, the correlation of a specific destructive event with a certain textual reference is not always clear. As we saw in the previous chapter, this led to the maybe premature designation of destructive events as being of Babylonian origin.²⁷⁵

A critical point for the dating of such destructive events would under normal circumstances be ¹⁴C analyses, as under normal circumstances seeds and other short-lived samples could be expected to be found within associated layers. Unfortunately, the period from approximately 700 to 400 BC is not particularly suited for this method, as the calibration curve features a plateau – the so-called Hallstatt plateau – for this time frame, resulting in samples not being able to be dated accurately.²⁷⁶

Other phenomena, such as the end of occupation in an area might serve as indicators for problems regarding the security situation, or the administration in a region, which might have

²⁷² Hrouda 1998, 282-283; Müller 1996, 9.

²⁷³ For the equipment of the Neo-Babylonian army see: Gombert 2018 and Kleber 2014. For an overview over specifically arrowheads see Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel (forthcoming) and Hellmuth Kramberg 2016.

²⁷⁴ For the Neo-Babylonian period, the only sources, which could possibly be used in this regard, are the Babylonian Chronicles. For the Neo-Assyrian period more reports exist. For what can be deduced from such texts see: Marriott – Radner 2015.

²⁷⁵ Chapter 3.2.2.3, destruction contexts, which resembled similar contexts at Lachish were designated as remnants of the Babylonian conquests.

²⁷⁶ Hajdas 2008, 16.

their origin in the presence and impact of foreign powers. The same might be true for large-scale construction efforts, as described in Mizpah.

For the region of Judah changes in the customs and socio-cultural reality, specifically in architecture, the language, cosmological beliefs and burial customs were observed for the period of and after the Neo-Babylonian conquest of the region.

Further evidence can be generated through the analysis of finds material employing archaeometric methods. Thin sections of pottery as well as content analysis, the macroscopic and microscopic analysis of stone materials (for example from chert tools or objects, such as anchor stones) as well as lead isotope analysis of metal objects can be used in order to determine the origin of raw materials used in their production or their original contents. A precondition for this is of course the existence of available materials to compare results to. A newer method very much in fashion at the current moment is ancient DNA (aDNA), for which skeletal material could for example be obtained from tombs, which show characteristics of non-local burial customs. In a similar vein, teeth of humans and animals alike can be used for isotope analysis, through which the environment and ideally the region in which the individual was born and raised in can be determined. As with isotope analysis of objects, *comparanda* for the results have to be available.²⁷⁷

When employing these methods, special care has to be taken during the interpretation process. Especially aDNA lends itself well to rash interpretations. We have to remind ourselves that the genetic makeup of an individual does not necessarily translate into a proof of their cultural background, identity nor ethnicity.²⁷⁸ The same holds true when working with any element of material culture. Objects are indeed just that – objects, which certainly can act as evidence for contacts and connections but are not proof for the cultural or ethnic background of the people who used them. The presence of certain objects might as well be a matter of availability or prestige. The link in between identity and material culture has been discussed extensively in archaeology and anthropology under the label “pots and people”.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ For an in-depth overview regarding archaeometry see: Artioli 2010 or Edwards – Vandenabeele 2012.

²⁷⁸ Callaway 2018.

²⁷⁹ See for example Kramer 1985, as one of the older contributions to this discussion.

3.2 Cilicia

3.2.1 Topography

The region of Cilicia is situated in the southern central part of Turkey and encompasses two distinct geographical regions, which are historically known as “Plain Cilicia” (gr. Cilicia Pedias, lat. Cilicia Campestris) and “Rough Cilicia” (gr. Cilicia Tracheia, lat. Cilicia Aspera).²⁸⁰

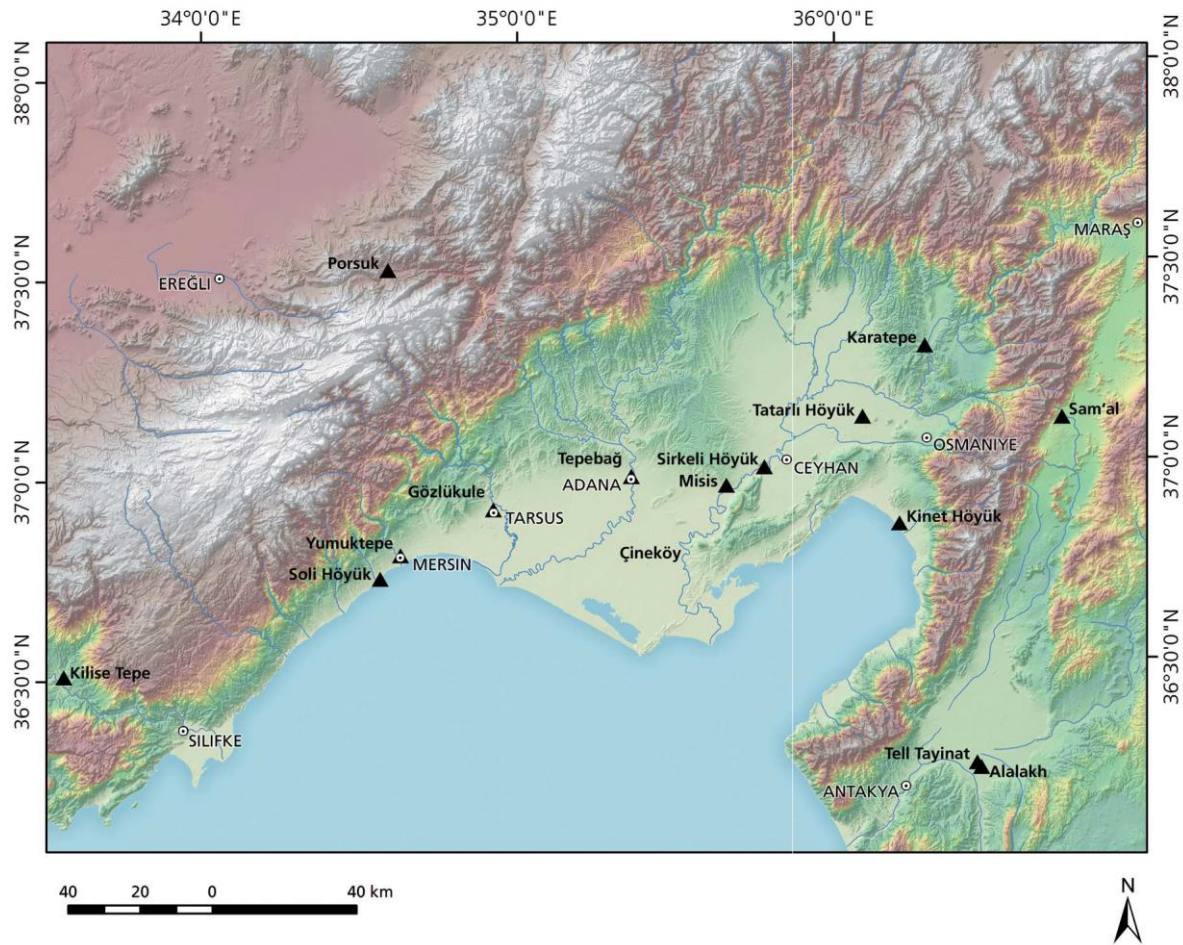


Figure 27: Map of Plain Cilicia

“Plain Cilicia” is an alluvial plain in the east of Cilicia and enclosed by the Taurus mountain range towards its north and west, the Anti-Taurus, or Amanus Mountains in the east and the Mediterranean Sea towards its south. The region is in itself divided into a western part (Çukurova plain), bordering the sea and an eastern part (Yukarıova plain) further inland. Several rivers, the Berdan or Tarsus Çayı (gr. Kydnos), the Seyhan (gr. Saros), which both

²⁸⁰ Bryce 2009, 165; Gates 2011, 399-401; Novák et al. 2017, 150-151.

come down from the Taurus Mountains, the Ceyhan (gr. Pyramos), coming down from the Anti-Taurus mountains, as well as high rainfall and a temperate climate make it an extraordinarily fertile region. These favourable conditions guarantee regular, predictable yields and make it one of the most fertile regions of modern-day Turkey, which for this reason has been settled since the Early Neolithic period. The Amanus Gates (Bahçe) and the Syrian Gates (Belen Pass) connect the region with the İslahiye Plain and the Amuq towards the east, i.e. Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt. Plain Cilicia corresponds for the most part with the ancient kingdom of Que in Assyrian sources, or Ḫumê in Neo-Babylonian texts respectively.²⁸¹

The western, mountainous part of Cilicia (“Rough Cilicia”) encompasses the Göksu (gr. Kalkyadnos) river, its valley and the surrounding Taurus Mountains, which together form the Cilician Gates (Gülek Boğazı), one of the few communication routes over the Taurus Massif, connecting the Mediterranean coast with the Central Anatolian plateau. The area was especially important for its rich resources in timber. In Babylonian sources the region, the exact borders of which are still unknown, is called Pirindu, in Assyrian sources Ḫilakku, from which the modern-day name Cilicia most likely derives from.²⁸² The geographical analogy of Ḫilakku and Pirindu has been generally assumed, but also challenged.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Bryce 2009, 165, 583-584; Gates 2011, 399-401; Korkmaz 2016, 147; Novák et al. 2017, 150-151, 182; Seton-Williams 1954, 121-123.

²⁸² Hawkins 1995, 143; Bryce 2009, 165, 309; Denker – Oniz 2018, 290; Hawkins 1975, 402; Jasink – Bombardieri 2013, 16, 23; Korkmaz 2016, 147; Streck 2005, 572-573; Zoroğlu 1994, 301.

²⁸³ Zoroğlu 1994, 303.

3.2.2 Historical overview and textual evidence

During the Neo-Assyrian period Plain Cilicia, or Que, was raided under Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) and Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC), and remained contested until a province was established under Shalmaneser V (727-724 BC). Que remained under Assyrian control until the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, which is well attested through textual, as well as archaeological evidence.²⁸⁴

The fate of the region during the early years of the Neo-Babylonian Empire is uncertain. It is first mentioned under the name ̤umê, in the context of a military operation during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC) against ̤umê and Pirindu. During the reign of Neriglissar (559-556 BC) both regions are mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicles, as the king gathered his troops to encounter Appuašu, the ruler of Pirindu, who apparently had mustered an army in order to plunder Syria. According to the text, Neriglissar defeats the king, who had tried to ambush him on a mountain pass and follows him after he escapes to his royal residence Ura'. Neriglissar then takes and plunders the city and continues on to yet another city – Kiršu – which met the same fate. At the same time, another city, Pitusu, described as a land in the middle of the ocean, is captured by Babylonian boats. The last reference to ̤umê in the Babylonian Chronicles comes from the reign of Nabonidus (555-539 BC), referring to a military operation during the first year of his reign.²⁸⁵

Further textual references in Neo-Babylonian sources to Cilicia were found in Sippar, Uruk and Babylon, which refer to two commodities extracted from the region – iron and workers. Iron is mentioned in ten instances, always in fairly low amounts (30 kg, 13,5 kg, 5,66 kg, 9,45 kg, 7,41 kg and 7,5 kg in the texts in which the amount was preserved). It is unclear if these amounts were brought into Babylonia by the means of trade or were the remnants of the goods brought back from raids. Nonetheless, the fact that the sources specifically refer to it as being from ̤umê, serves as proof for its importance and special status over iron from other sources.²⁸⁶

Workers from Cilicia are mentioned – similarly to the iron – in administrative documents from the times of Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus²⁸⁷, from Babylon, Sippar and Uruk. In all instances they are being referred to as prisoners from ̤umê, mostly in the context of ration

²⁸⁴ Bryce 2009, 583-584; Jasink – Bombardieri 2008, 32-38, 42-44; Radner 2008, 62; Tülek – Ögüt 2013, 59.

²⁸⁵ Bryce 2009, 583-584; Glassner 2004, 232-235; Joannès 1991, 262-263.

²⁸⁶ For a list see Joannès 1991, 263-264.

²⁸⁷ For a list see Joannès 1991, 265.

lists for oil, grain, wool and clothes, and must have been brought to Mesopotamia in the course of the conquests of either those kings or Neriglissar.²⁸⁸

From these sources, the exact status of Ḫumê within the framework of the Neo-Babylonian Empire cannot be determined with absolute certainty. It seems reasonable to assume that Ḫumê was – at least to some degree – considered a tributary of the Empire after Nebuchadnezzar II's conquests, at least until Neriglissar's reign, who acted as the lord of Ḫumê, when he confronted Appuašu. The fact that Herodotus tells us that the king of Syennesis, together with Nebuchadnezzar II, acted as mediators between the Medes and the Lydians seems to confirm this interpretation. During the following years, the Neo-Babylonian control over Ḫumê seems to have gradually decreased, to the point that Nabonidus raided the region at the beginning of his reign.²⁸⁹

As for Pirindu, no concrete evidence for direct or indirect Neo-Babylonian control can be deduced from the texts. Jasink and Bombardieri suggest that Syennesis (or the dynasty thereof/ from) was in fact the king of Pirindu²⁹⁰, which would not significantly alter the interpretation given on Ḫumê above, but would further support the argument for a generally independent status of Pirindu, occasionally raided by Mesopotamian forces, as suggested by Hawkins.²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Joannès 1991, 264-265.

²⁸⁹ Albright 1950, 24-25; Jasink – Bombardieri 2008, 45-46; Joannès 1991, 263.

²⁹⁰ Jasink – Bombardieri 2008, 45.

²⁹¹ Hawkins 1995, 144.

3.2.3 Archaeological evidence

The archaeological evidence for a Neo-Babylonian presence is scarce at best, as we are confronted with several problems and do not know much about what happened during the Late Iron Age in general and even less during the Neo-Babylonian period. During the Mid of the 20th century, when first surveys were conducted in the region, it seems to have been generally assumed that there was an occupational hiatus in between the 8th and 4th century BC.²⁹² This notion prevails also in recent research on the region of southern Anatolia, as Cilicia was not included in “The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Anatolia” in the chapter concerning the Iron Age.²⁹³ Furthermore, relatively few data exist from excavations and surveys concerning possible Neo-Babylonian influences, which – considering the short time period during which a Neo-Babylonian presence could be postulated – is not surprising. Nonetheless, the scarce, available evidence from excavations and surveys is listed below.

The region of Cilicia has always been a crossroads in between Anatolia, Greece, Cyprus, Crete, the Levant (Phoenicia) and Syria, including Mesopotamia. Especially along the coast in both Rough and Plain Cilicia Greek and Phoenician merchant colonies existed. It is not surprising that the pottery and its decoration are a product of influences from all these regions and its cultures, although some distinctively local elements could be identified. Probably the most important site regarding pottery studies, at which the first chronological sequence was established, is Tarsus close to modern day Mersin. Characteristic local decorative elements constitute of red bands, often carelessly painted on a white or buff background. Pottery with this type of decoration was discovered all throughout Cilicia from the Göksu valley to the east of the Cilician Plain all throughout the Iron Age.²⁹⁴

In general, it seems as if especially Greek and Phoenician influences found reflection in the pottery repertoire during the Late Iron Age, which has been described as a period of Hellenization. Neither the Assyrian nor the Neo-Babylonian presence in the region seem to have left any traces in this regard.²⁹⁵

Other find material hints more towards connections with the Levant and Syria rather than with central Mesopotamia. For example, a group of terracotta figurines was discovered at the village of Gözsüzce along the Mediterranean coast west of Silifke, in what most likely

²⁹² Seton-Williams 1954, 125.

²⁹³ Steadman – McMahon 2011.

²⁹⁴ Symington 1995, 173-174, Lafli 1999, 341; Tülek – Ögüt 2013, 59.

²⁹⁵ Tülek – Ögüt 2013, 58, 66.

belonged to the region of Pirindu/ Khilakku. These statuettes depict naked women in a frontal position, supporting their breasts with their hands and are reminiscent of similar Astarte-type figurines, dated to the 7th and 6th century BC.²⁹⁶

At the site of Meydancikkale near modern Gülnar, two small stonewalls were discovered which supposedly date to the Neo-Babylonian period, based on the associated pottery fragments, which were dated to last quarter of the 7th century BC.²⁹⁷ Unless the walls were actually built upon these pottery fragments, which is not specified, the dating seems questionable. Furthermore, a semi-circular fibula was discovered at the site, which was common in northern Mesopotamia, Syria and the Levant. A fibula of this type was also discovered in the Post-Assyrian levels of Nimrud, which similarly to the walls does not guarantee a Neo-Babylonian date. Furthermore, two arrowheads were discovered in the same context, similar to the types discovered in Tarsus. Since all arrowheads discovered – according to the official excavation report concerning the Iron Age strata from 1963²⁹⁸ - do not seem to be of Neo-Babylonian origin (according to the article of Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel (forthcoming)), the arrowheads from Meydancikkale most likely do not correspond to the destruction of Kiršu/ Meydancikkale by Neriglissar, or a Babylonian presence thereafter.²⁹⁹

An important factor regarding the localization and identification of sites in ancient Pirindu was the detailed account of the military campaign of Neriglissar given in the Babylonian Chronicles, already mentioned above. Within the text three cities – ‘Ura, Kiršu and Pitusu – are named and described.

The first site mentioned is the royal city of Ura’. Regarding its localization, a few sites or regions were proposed. The first is located close to the modern-day city of Uzuncaburç, known as Classical Olbē, to the north-east of Silifke (Classical Seleukia). After it was discovered that a city called Ura’ was an important seaport during the Bronze Age Hittite period, several other sites along the Mediterranean coast, mostly in the vicinity of Silifke were proposed. Beal suggested the port of Gilindere (Classical Kelenderis), near modern Aydınçık.

²⁹⁶ Zoroğlu 1994, 304.

²⁹⁷ Davesne et al. 1987, 360.

²⁹⁸ Goldman 1963.

²⁹⁹ Jasink-Bombardieri 2007, 102.

As of yet no secure location for Late Iron Age Ura' has been determined, as Hawkins emphasizes.³⁰⁰

At the site of Kelenderis, similarly to the site of Nagidos further westwards, also situated at the coastline of the Mediterranean, mostly local, Greek and Cypriot pottery was discovered in contexts belonging to the Late Iron Age. Both sites were most likely Greek colonies. None of the two sites exhibits either destruction layers or any other indicators for a Neo-Babylonian presence. The era experienced a nadir during the Persian period, as much of the trade with Ancient Greece came to a halt and sites along the coast were abandoned.³⁰¹

For the site of Kiršu two possible identifications have been proposed: the site of Meydancikkale, already mentioned above, and the other one on the eastern side of the Göksu near modern-day Mut, for which no archaeological record seem to exist as of yet.³⁰²

The site of Pitusu, described as “a mountain in the midst of the ocean”, has been identified as the Dana Island (turk. Kargıncık Adası, gr. Pithyoussa). As of now, no archaeological evidence for the conquest by the Babylonian army or any Babylonian presence was discovered or published.³⁰³

Kilise Tepe is another site situated in the Göksu valley, close to Silifke. During the first surveys of the region, a gap in between 600 and 300 BC, i.e. the Middle Iron Age and the Hellenistic period, was postulated due to the lack of Late Iron Age pottery.³⁰⁴ This first impression was confirmed by the following excavations, which continued until 2011. Pottery from the Later Iron Age was found in a disused kiln but showed only strong ties to the Mediterranean. Specifically Cypriot wares, which seem to have been produced locally, can be dated to around 600 BC. Following this sequence, Hellenistic strata were uncovered. This interpretation is also supported by recently published ¹⁴C data.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ Hawkins 1995, 146-148, Beal 1992, 65-66, 73; Jasink – Bombardieri 2013, 23.

³⁰¹ Durugönül 2007, 439-440; Durukan 2007, 413-416, 421; Korkmaz 2016, 158.

³⁰² Jasink – Bombardieri 2013, 23.

³⁰³ Jasink – Bombardieri 2013, 23; Varinlioğlu et al. 2017.

³⁰⁴ Postgate 1995, 139-142; Collon 1995, 164, 172.

³⁰⁵ Dee – Higham – Postgate 2017; Korkmaz 2016, 153; Postgate 2008, 171-175.



Figure 28: Cypriot wares from Kilise Tepe

Another site for which a hiatus during the Late Iron Age period, i.e. the period of possible Neo-Babylonian occupation, was determined, is Misis Höyük, located along right bank of the lower course of the Ceyhan in south-eastern Turkey. The Iron Age occupation here ends around 700 BC, which might indicate a destruction by the Assyrian campaign in 696 BC.³⁰⁶

Tarsus, or Gözlükule, is a settlement hill in between Mersin and Adana and acted as an important trade centre in the region. Additionally, much of the pottery chronology of the region is based on the results from this site, which was excavated during the first half of the 20th century. An Assyrian presence in Tarsus is well established through tablets dated to the 7th century, some pottery, as well as terracotta figurines and seals. Goldman ascribed an episode of destruction to the Assyrian campaign under Sennacherib in 696 BC. This interpretation was later questioned by Postgate³⁰⁷ and Korkmaz³⁰⁸. There are some architectural remains dated to the Post-Assyrian period, but no direct Babylonian influence is recognizable, as it is essentially a phase of rebuilding and renovation. After this phase, the site seems to have been abandoned for about two centuries, followed by the Hellenistic occupation levels.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ D'Agata. 2017, 166-169.

³⁰⁷ Postgate 2008, 173.

³⁰⁸ Korkmaz 2016, 152.

³⁰⁹ Goldman 1963, 8, 11-14, 337; Hanfmann 1963, 238; Korkmaz 2016, 150-153; Porada 1963, 353-354; Symington 1995, 173.

Regarding the finds from Tarsus, both, direct imports from Assyria, as well as from Babylonia are exceedingly rare. Only one vessel – a glazed alabastron – was identified as an import from Mesopotamia. The overwhelming majority of finds is either of local origin, or from the Mediterranean.³¹⁰ Furthermore, a seal from an unstratified context, depicting a monster chasing a horned animal, dated to the 7th to 6th century BC, cut in the Neo-Babylonian style, was discovered.³¹¹

None of the arrowheads published in the original publication were specifically classified as being of Neo-Babylonian origin.³¹² The examples made of iron are all tanged, and those made of Bronze with a socket, which could be compared to Neo-Babylonian arrowheads, following the study by Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel³¹³, do not fit their classification.

Dardeniz analysed some formerly unpublished arrowheads from Tarsus in course of her MA-thesis, all of which could apparently be dated to the Iron Age or Hellenistic/ Roman periods according to their chemical composition.³¹⁴ Of these 12 examples, specimens 67, 68, 71 and 73³¹⁵, show clear parallels to the Neo-Babylonian arrowheads from the Southern Levant and should be classified as such, broadening the array of available evidence for a Neo-Babylonian presence in the region.

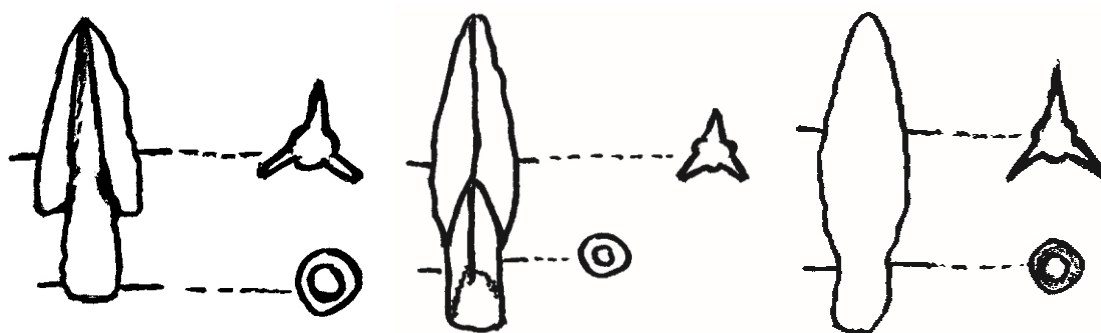


Figure 29: Arrowheads from Tarsus, specimen 67, 68 and 71 after Dardeniz 2005, not to scale

³¹⁰ Hanfmann 1963, 155, 252.

³¹¹ Porada 1963, 353.

³¹² Goldman 1963, 360, 362, 365-367, 368-369, 371-374.

³¹³ Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel (forthcoming), Type T1: Socketed, Trilobate, Rhomboid or Leaf shaped with and without additional barb.

³¹⁴ Dardeniz 2005, 56-57.

³¹⁵ Dardeniz 2005, 83-85.

Another site with a continuous occupation during the 7th and 6th century is the site of Soli Höyük (gr. Soli-Pompeiopolis), close to the city of Mersin. Some oriental elements, like craters, were dated to the last quarter of the 7th century, but other than that, no traces of a Neo-Babylonian presence were discovered. The archaeological remains excavated in the layers belonging to the 6th century rather indicate connections with central Anatolia, Cyprus and the Greek world and developed into an important centre of trade.³¹⁶



Figure 30: Excavations at Soli Höyük

A similar situation can be deduced from Yumuktepe, also close to Mersin. The Iron Age layers here were heavily disturbed by later activities and could not be studied stratigraphically. The discovery of amphorae fragments indicates trade relations with the Aegean Islands, western Anatolia, as well as Syria and the Levant.³¹⁷

Tepebağ Höyük is located in Adana's city centre along the western banks of the Seyhan river, at the centre of the Çukurova plain. Even though it is one of the biggest Tells in the region, excavations only started in 2013 and are not concluded yet. In what has been published so far, the excavator points out the problems with the material culture during the Iron Age but emphasized the important role of Tepebağ Höyük as a bridge between Mesopotamia and Central Anatolia, displaying unique cultural developments. It seems as if this mostly refers to

³¹⁶ Yağcı 2017, 155-156; Yağcı 2013, 7, 9.

³¹⁷ Caneva et al. 2017, 160-161.

the Early and Middle Iron Age. During the Late Iron Age, further contacts with Cyprus and the Greek world are indicated by corresponding pottery imports. No evidence for a Neo-Babylonian presence has been documented and/ or published yet.³¹⁸

Sirkeli Höyük, 40 km to the east of Adana and situated along the Ceyhan river was also continuously inhabited during the Late Iron Age. The lower city was enclosed by a city wall, which also enclosed two citadels- one on the central mound and the other further towards the south, an architectural element possibly deriving from Mesopotamia. The strata corresponding to the period of a possible Neo-Babylonian presence is phase Neo-Cilician (NCI) 5. Due to the absence of destruction horizons in the archaeological record, a peaceful development and existence of the site during the Neo-Assyrian, as well as Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods were suggested, even though a slight decline due to the abandonment of monumental buildings and an overall smaller size of residential buildings is noticeable. The pottery discovered in Iron Age layers in general, shows strong connections with Cyprus, but also the Levant – particularly Phoenicia, Assyria and Phrygia. The finds assemblage from the NCI 5 layers³¹⁹ is similar to Post-Assyrian contexts from Syro-Mesopotamia.³²⁰

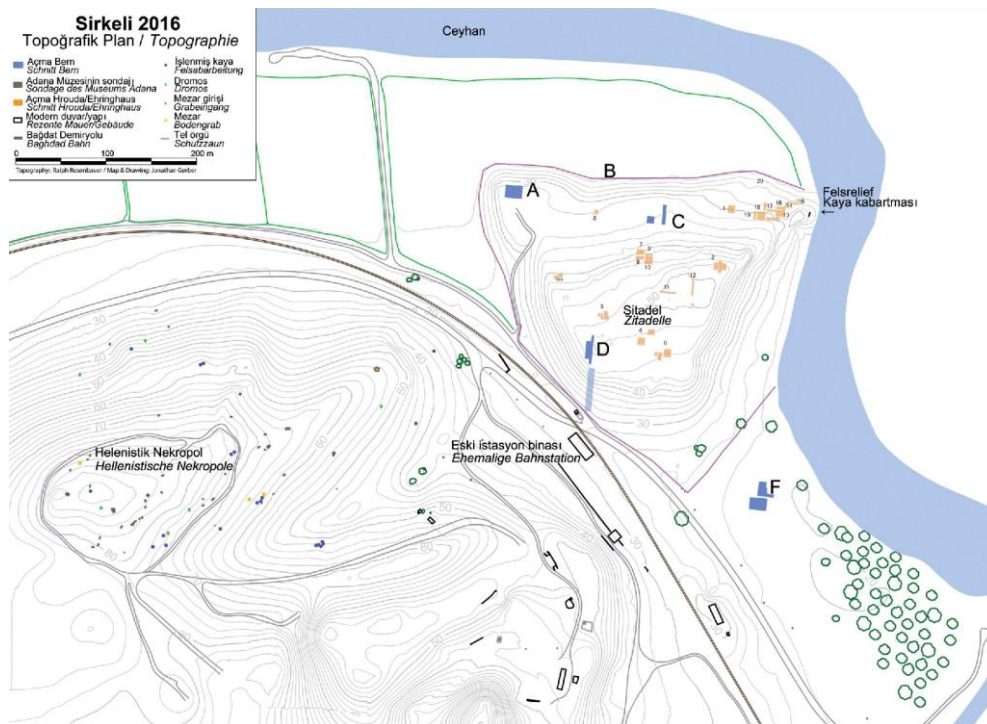


Figure 31: Topographic plan of Sirkeli Höyük

³¹⁸ Şahin 2017a, 165-166; Şahin 2017b, 1, 7-8.

³¹⁹ Published material from these layers is rare. Novák – Kozal – Yaşin 2019 was unfortunately not available at the present moment. It includes detailed chapters on finds from the Iron Age contexts.

³²⁰ Ahrens – Kozal 2009, 45; Ahrens – Kozal – Novák 2010, 62-63; Novák 2020, 209-211, 220; Novák 2018, 263; Novák et al. 2017, 172.

Another settlement mound to the east of Adana is Tatarlı Höyük, which was one of the largest settlements in the eastern Cilician Plain. Even though the site was settled without interruption from the Neo-Assyrian to the Persian period, no find material indicating a Neo-Babylonian presence was discovered. In fact, the period for which such a presence would be possible is omitted in the published chronologies of the site. For the Neo-Assyrian period, Cypriot, Phoenician, as well as Levantine finds were discovered.³²¹

Kinet Höyük is a site situated along the eastern shores of the Gulf of Iskenderun. Layers dating to the Neo-Babylonian period were discovered and mainly consist of workshop areas and ovens, most likely dedicated to the production of pottery and purple dye, as suggested by the discovery of Murex shells around the ovens.³²² In other publications, the Murex shells are interpreted as elements of a unique flooring technique, mentioning that it is not clear what was produced in the ovens.³²³ The pottery includes Aegean style wares and imports from the Aegean and Greek mainland. As the buildings of this “Period 6” show signs of conflagration, it was suggested that the city was destroyed by the Babylonians in the late 7th/ early 6th century BC. The site was reoccupied during the Persian period.³²⁴

For Plain Cilicia some data from surveys is available, allowing us to analyse the long-term development of the region and putting them in contrast with the situation in Judah. The preliminary results from the Osmaniye Survey, concerning the region of east Plain Cilicia, tells us that the settlement activity in the region increased by almost double during the Late Iron Age period, after a dramatic decrease of settlements during the Middle Iron Age, which might be related to the Assyrian activities in the region. The Iron Age pottery is in general comparable with the material from Tarsus, i.e. contains predominantly imports and imitations of Greek and Phoenician origin. According to the authors, the incorporation of the region into the Neo-Assyrian and later Neo-Babylonian Empire did not leave any traces in the pottery assemblage and/ or traditions. Unfortunately, no data concerning the period of Persian rule is given, although the study states that Persian pottery was found in some cases.³²⁵

³²¹ Girginer – Oyman-Girginer 2020, 211; Girginer - Oyman-Girginer 2017, 173-175.

³²² Eslick et al. 2017, 176, 180; Korkmaz 2016, 150.

³²³ Gates et al. 2014, 164.

³²⁴ Eslick et al. 2017, 180; Gates et al. 2014, 164-165.

³²⁵ Tülek – Ögüt 2013, 66-67

The Cilician Survey, conducted by Seton-Williams in 1951, encompassed the entirety of the Cilician Plain and dealt with 149 sites, occupied from the Neolithic until the Islamic period. Seton-Williams does not include a Neo-Babylonian period and proposes a general lack of occupation or material culture in between the Assyrian and the Hellenistic and Roman periods. For the period in between, which he calls Persian period, he describes the pottery as being plain and undecorated, made of green fabric used in northern Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia at the time. For the period thereafter, a surge of settlement activity is indicated by a wealth of finds.³²⁶

Contrary to that, Jasink and Bombardieri state that the settlement distribution and density during the Iron Age did not change and new settlements were founded in the northern Ceyhan plain and along the coast around Adana and Iskenderun. They suppose that the reason for this increase in settlement activity was the stable situation in the region, as they consider Hûmê to be part of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Additionally, these areas are located along an important communication route between east and west. Furthermore, they summarize that the Cilician plain was politically in the hands of Mesopotamia, while its material culture indicates an increasing focus towards the Greek, Cypriot and Phoenician world.³²⁷

³²⁶ Seton-Williams 1954, 125, 137-138, 145.

³²⁷ Jasink – Bombardieri 2008, 46; Jasink – Bombardieri 2007, 102-105.

3.2.4 Cilicia: Conclusion

As already mentioned in the beginning of this section and hopefully demonstrated on the foregoing pages, the archaeological evidence for a Neo-Babylonian presence in the region is scarce. Nonetheless, we are able to interpret the available archaeological evidence together with the textual sources in order to develop a hypothesis for what might have happened in Cilicia during the Neo-Babylonian period.

Given the facts that in the whole of Cilicia only one destructive event can possibly be attributed to the Babylonians³²⁸ and that the settlement density either stayed the same³²⁹ or even increased³³⁰ during the Late Iron Age period, it is safe to say that the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire did not have any negative effects on the region. The apparent ease with which the Neo-Babylonian king Neriglissar moved towards Pirindu in course of his campaign and that no fights in Ҳumê are mentioned in his report indicates that at this point in time Ҳumê was either ruled or closely connected to the Neo-Babylonian Empire. If the region was an official province, or rather a boundary march, i.e., a tributary or client kingdom, as Joannès suggests³³¹, remains unclear. It seems logical to assume that this status was most likely imposed after the initial campaign of Nebuchadnezzar II and deteriorated over time, as also indicated by the archaeological record, increasingly displaying Greek and Cypriot influences. This development might have been the reason why Nabonidus saw the need for a military campaign. It was also suggested³³² that the rise of the Neo-Babylonian empire caused a decline in trading activity in between Syria and Cilicia, which might be the reason for the increase in Greek and Cypriot pottery on the one hand and the decline in material indicating trade relations, as for example amphorae.

The records concerning Cilician captives are not surprising, given the common practice of deportations already discussed in previous chapters. The Cilician Iron mentioned could have been obtained by means of either trade or exploitation and merely reflects the importance of the region at the time and the existence of contacts.

³²⁸ Eslick et al. 2017, 180 are not sure if it was in fact the Babylonians who caused the destruction. Given the fact that the area was used as a workshop with many ovens and kilns, the fire might as well have been caused through other means.

³²⁹ Jasink – Bombardieri 2007, 103.

³³⁰ Tülek – Ögüt 2013, 67.

³³¹ Joannès 1991, 263.

³³² Durugönül 2007, 416.

If there was a permanent Neo-Babylonian presence in Ḫumê, the site of Tarsus is the only one sensible to suggest, given the archaeological record. This seems reminiscent of Judah, where a Neo-Babylonian presence was also only detected at Mizpah in the region of Benjamin.

The region of Pirindu was most likely never part of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. This is not only suggested by the textual sources, but also the archaeological record, which clearly shows close connections towards the west and the Greek world, rather than the east. It would be of special interest if the sites mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicles could be identified in order to expand our knowledge towards a better understanding of these events.

3.3 The ‘Amuq valley

3.3.1. Topography

The ‘Amuq area is generally part of the Hatay region in modern-day Turkey, but also encompasses the coastal plain in between the Nur Mountains (türk. Nur Dağları, gr. Amanus) and the Gulf of Iskenderun. Its central part, an alluvial plain is also known as the Plain of Antioch or either ‘Amuq plain or valley (arab. al-’A’ māq), is limited towards the west by the Nur mountain range and in the north-west by the foothills of the Taurus Mountains. In the south, the Orontes towards the Ğebel el-Aqra and in the east the hills of the Ğebel el-’Ala und the Ğebel el-Seman define the borders of the region.³³³

The temperate climate, as well as sufficient rainfall and a steady, reliable supply of fresh water from numerous rivers, the biggest among them being the Orontes (turk. Asi), the Afrin and the Karasu, make the ‘Amuq valley a fertile region, ideal for agriculture. The Nur Mountains can be crossed at two points – the Belen pass (turk. Beylan) or Syrian Gates, and the Amanic Gates (turk. Arslanlı Bel) further northwards. This connects the ‘Amuq valley with the Caucasus region in general towards the north, and the Southern Levant, as well as Transjordan towards the south, making it one of the main routes in between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia, through which it was also possible to access Cilicia. Similar to Cilicia and the Levant, this made the region an important communication hub and intersection for people and ideas, which had been continuously occupied since the Neolithic period.³³⁴

The Lake of Antioch (turk. Amik Gölü) at the centre of the ‘Amuq plain formed in between the 7th and 4th century BC, possibly as a result of extensive alterations to the natural landscape due to human activities, such as deforestation and agriculture in general. During the earlier periods of the Iron Age, the plain consisted of a patchwork of marshes and bodies of open water, which accords well with depictions of the region from Assyrian times, for example on the Balawat gates. It is possible though that these are depictions represent a moat around the city, as detected at the sites of Tell Hasanuşağı and Tell Davutpaşa. The Lake of Antioch was drained in the 20th century to reclaim the bed of the lake as farmland for the cotton industry.³³⁵

³³³ Braidwood 1937, 8-11; Meyer 2008, 7.

³³⁴ Meyer 2008, 7; Ünlü 2017; 602; Yener 2005, 2.

³³⁵ Casana – Wilkinson 2005, 38, 45-46; Meyer 2008, 7; Osborne et al. 2019, 268; Yener 2005, 3, 10, 220, 234.

3.3.2 Historical overview and textual evidence

The textual resources referring to the ‘Amuq region during the Iron Age are exclusively from pre-Neo-Babylonian periods.

The earliest references to the ‘Amuq valley derive from the reign of Aššurnāṣirpal II (883-859 BC), when it was mentioned in the royal annals, as well as the Banquet stele, in the context of a military campaign and the victory over the kingdom of Patina and its capital Kunulua/ Kinalia. Even though other sites were proposed as possible candidates for the identification of Kunulua/ Kinalia, the description of the campaign route, placing Patina in the ‘Amuq valley, as well as the discovery of the succession treaty of Esarhaddon on site in building XVI, leave no doubt in identifying the site of Tell Ta’yinat as Kunulua/ Kinalia. Based on the distribution of texts it is possible to reconstruct the dominion of Patina encompassing the area from the Mediterranean coast, west of the Nur Mountain range, to the Orontes valley north of Hama and the ‘Amuq and Afrin valley at least as far as Aleppo, during this early phase of the Iron Age.³³⁶



Figure 32: Succession treaty of Esarhaddon discovered at Tell Ta'yinat

³³⁶ Harrison – Osborne 2012, 125; Osborne et al. 2019, 262-263.

Further military campaigns to the ‘Amuq were undertaken by Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC), who received tribute from the local kings. At least one of them, called Qalparunda of Unqi, was mentioned by the Assyrian king. Additionally, the name of the region seems to gradually shift from Patina to Unqi in the Assyrian inscriptions during this period, the reasons for which remain unknown.³³⁷

During the Reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) Unqi was conquered – apparently because the local king broke his oath of loyalty towards the Assyrians. The population was deported and replaced, and the region transformed into the Assyrian province Kullani. For this purpose, Tiglath-pileser III declares to have rebuilt the local capital and having installed an Assyrian governor. From this point onwards, the region is only occasionally mentioned and remained under Assyrian control at least until the reign of Assurbanipal, until the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Unfortunately, no textual evidence for a Babylonian presence in the region exists.³³⁸

³³⁷ Batiuk et al. 2005, 174; Harrison – Osborne 2012, 125; Hawkins 2009, 167; Osborne et al. 2019, 262-263.

³³⁸ Batiuk et al. 2005, 174; Harrison – Osborne 2012, 125-126; Hawkins 2009, 168; Osborne et al. 2019, 262-263.

3.3.3 Archaeological Evidence

The archaeological phases in the ‘Amuq are mainly based on the works of Braidwood, who established a regional archaeological sequence in course of his surveys conducted during the 1930s as part of the Syrian Expedition of the Oriental Institute of Chicago. In course of this project, a total of 178 sites were visited and catalogued. Braidwood’s sequence is mainly based on the results of his excavations at the site of Tell al-Judaidah, where he was able to obtain the most complete and wide-ranging stratigraphic sequence. It was later expanded based on the results from the excavations at Tell Tayinat and Chatal Höyük, ranging from the Neolithic to the modern Arab period, divided into 22 phases and distinguished by the letters A to V. The phase corresponding to the Iron Age and relevant for us is Phase O, roughly encompassing the time period from 1000 to 500 BC.³³⁹

Based on the pottery discovered at the three main Iron Age sites of the region, Tell Ta’yinat, Chatal Höyük and Tell el-Judaidah, Swift suggested to further divide Phase O into four sub-phases (a-d). The characteristic wares of Phase Od, dating from 725 to 550 BC are – according to Swift – Corinthian Ware, Attic Black Ware and Assyrian Palace Ware.³⁴⁰ Swift’s PhD thesis remains unpublished, but is being referred to in the recent literature.³⁴¹ In general, much of the excavations from Braidwood, such as Tell el-Judaidah, and associated material studies remain to be published.

The settlement system of the ‘Amuq seems to be stable from the Early Bronze Age until the Late Iron Age, the regional capitals being either Tell Atchana (Alalakh) or Tell Ta’yinat. The reason for these periodic switches might have been changes in the course of the Orontes River, on the banks of which both sites lie. Some other sites, such as Bozhöyük, Yurt Höyük (Tell Hasanuşağı), Karatepe and Tell Salihyiyah, seem to have been continuously occupied during this period as well and remain to be excavated. The settlement pattern often follows a satellite design, with a central site or place in the middle, surrounded by smaller villages.³⁴²

The main (excavated) sites occupied during the Iron Age are Tell Ta’yinat, Chatal Höyük and Tell Judaidah. Tell Atchana, ancient Alalakh, which was a major centre during the Middle and Late Bronze Age was destroyed around 1200 BC and often considered to be abandoned

³³⁹ Braidwood 1937, 1, 4, 6-7, 20-37; Braidwood – Braidwood 1960, 4; Haines 1971, 1-2; Pucci 2019b, 148; Yener 2005, 5.

³⁴⁰ Batiuk et al. 2005, 172; Swift 1958; 139-141, 154-155.

³⁴¹ Pucci 2019a, 8.

³⁴² Casana – Wilkinson 2005, 37-39; Osborne et al. 2019, 267.

ever since. Recent excavations yielded some material from Iron Age I and II periods, indicating a scarce occupation until the 9th century BC.³⁴³ The PhD thesis discussing this material in detail is unfortunately yet to be published.³⁴⁴

3.3.3.1 Tell Ta'yinat

Tell Ta'yinat is a large, flat mound measuring approximately 620 by 300 m, covering at least 35 ha, in the east of the 'Amuq plain just to the north of the Orontes River and the site of ancient Alalakh. The site can be divided into the citadel mound and a lower city, the exact extent of which is unknown as most of it is covered by a thick layer of river alluvium.³⁴⁵ As already mentioned above, it was suggested that the alternating settlement history of this micro-region between Tell Ta'yinat and Tell Atchana (ancient Alalakh) could be explained by the shifting of the Orontes River.³⁴⁶

The site was first excavated by Braidwood in the 1930s in course of the aforementioned Syrian Expedition of the Oriental Institute of Chicago. Further field investigations were undertaken by the University of Toronto's Tayinat Archaeological Project since 1999 – excavations have been conducted since 2004 and are still ongoing.³⁴⁷

In addition to traditional fieldwork, geomorphological examinations were undertaken and drill cores from around the mound were taken, from which was deducted that a shallow lake was located to the west of the city, whereas the environment towards the north and north-east was marshy.³⁴⁸

During the original excavation, or processing of its results respectively, five distinct building phases belonging to 'Amuq Phase O could be distinguished in the archaeological record.³⁴⁹ Several monumental buildings, such as three *bît hilāni* (buildings I, IV and XIII) and a small temple (building II), which in part predate the Neo-Assyrian occupation of the mound, were discovered. The Assyrian conquest and earlier conflicts are clearly indicated as signs of

³⁴³ Montesanto 2018a; Yener 2005, 6.

³⁴⁴ Montesanto 2018b.

³⁴⁵ The rather extreme quantity of valley floor sedimentation in the 'Amuq valley can be connected with a change in land usage and settlement at the end of the 1st millennium B.C., which resulted in the destabilization of the landscape, see Casana – Wilkinson 2005, 46 and Osborne et al. 2019, 267 – also with further literature on the topic.

³⁴⁶ Haines 1971, 37; Harrison – Osborne 2012, 126, 129; Osborne et al. 2019, 261, 267.

³⁴⁷ Harrison – Osborne 2012, 126, 129; Osborne et al. 2019, 261.

³⁴⁸ Osborne et al. 2019, 268.

³⁴⁹ Haines 1971, 80; Harrison – Osborne 2012, 126; Osborne et al. 2019, 269.

conflagration in several parts of the city, especially at building I on the highest point of the Tell.³⁵⁰ The establishment of the region as a Neo-Assyrian province went along with extensive (re-) building efforts, such as building IX, which resembles an Assyrian palace, most likely erected for the Assyrian governor, which supports Tiglath-pileser III's claim to have integrated the region into the Neo-Assyrian Empire.³⁵¹

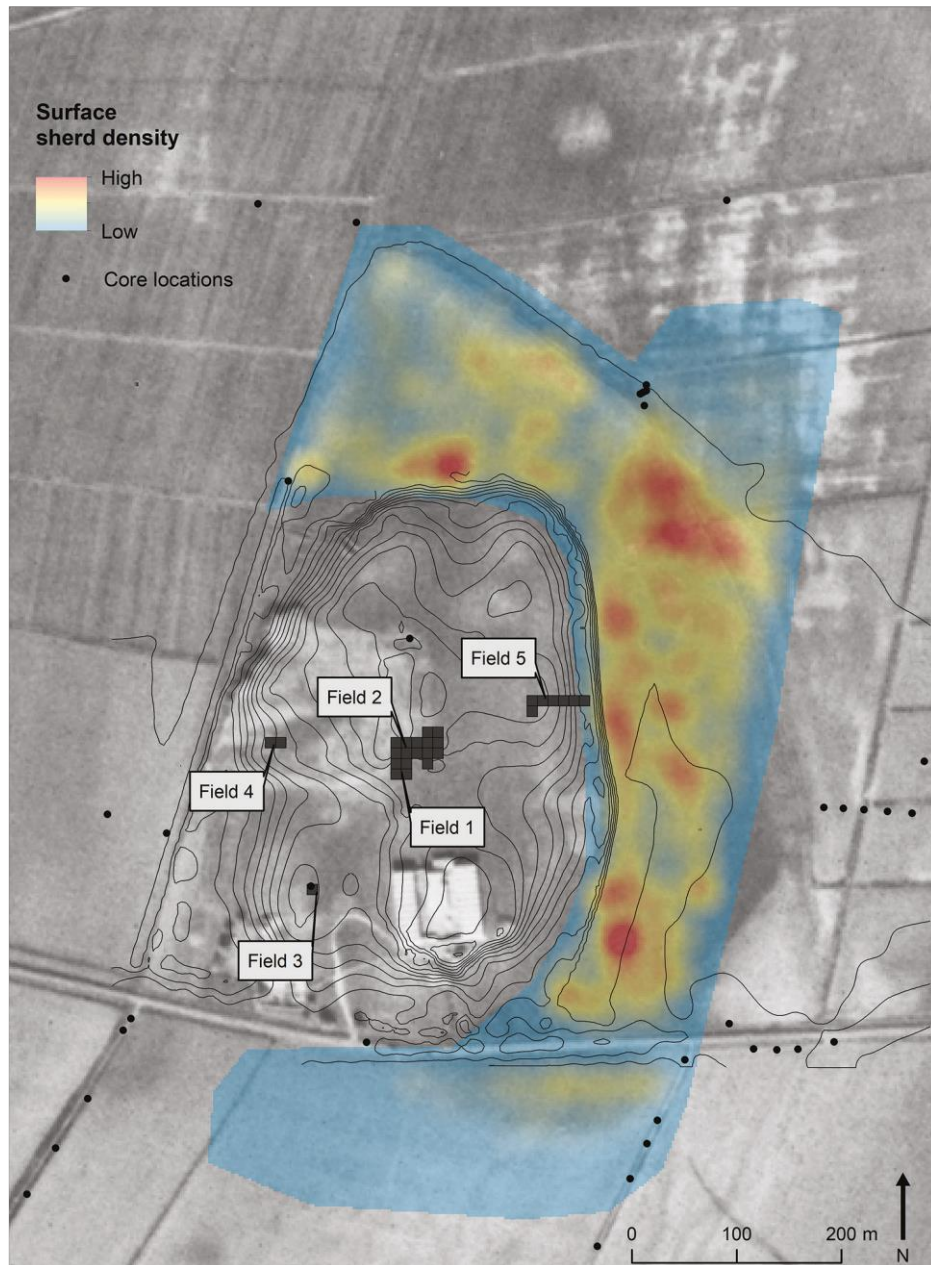


Figure 33: Map of Tell Ta'yinat

³⁵⁰ Haines 1971, 44, 52-53.

³⁵¹ Haines 1971, 52-53, 61-63; Harrison – Osborne 2012, 126-130; Hawkins 2009, 166, 168; Osborne et al. 2019, 302, 304, 306; Pucci 2019b; 160.

Another small temple, building XVI, was excavated by the university of Toronto, in which some cuneiform tablets (among them Essarhaddons succession treaty), as well as cultic objects and pottery which could be dated to the 7th century BC were discovered. The temple already existed before the city was the Assyrian provincial capital but continued to exist thereafter. Because it is located just next to building I (the *bît hilāni* at the highest point of the Tell) and its entrance is oriented towards the same open area as the other temple (building II), the excavators interpreted the area as a Neo-Assyrian sacred precinct.³⁵²

All three buildings show clear indications of heavy conflagration, which destroyed or at least heavily damaged all of them, as only in building I another occupational phase above the last destruction event was reconstructed, based on a floor level (floor 1a) close to the modern-day surface. It is not clear whether all buildings were destroyed at the same time, even though it seems likely. Haines suggests, but is apparently not certain that building II already fell out of use before the final phase of the Neo-Assyrian occupation, while building I was still in use after having been rebuilt. This would suggest that the temple (building II) burnt down and remained unused until the end of the Neo-Assyrian occupation. Especially in light of the Canadian excavations, this interpretation seems rather questionable.³⁵³

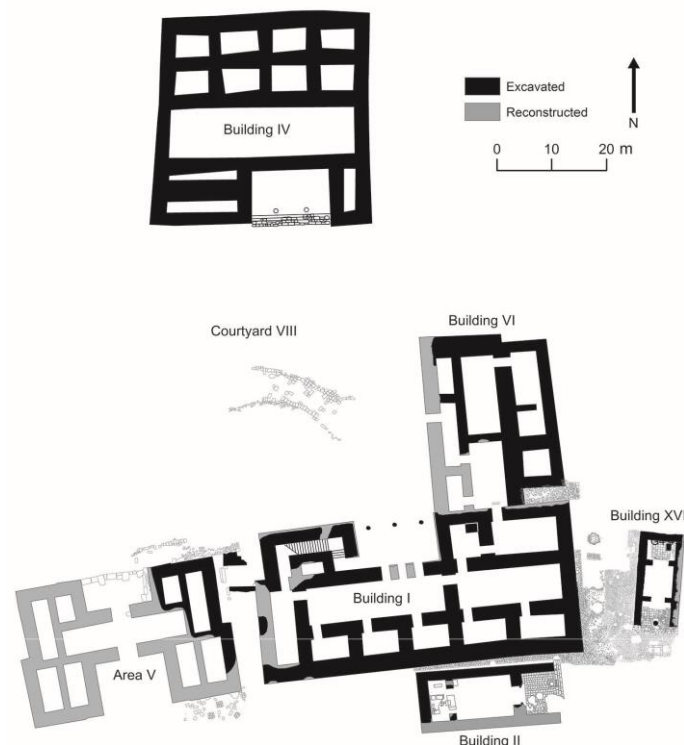


Figure 34: Palace compound of Tell Ta'ynat

³⁵² Harrison – Osborne 2012, 130-139; Osborne et al. 2019, 279-293.

³⁵³ Haines 1971, 44, 52-53, 65-66; Harrison – Osborne 2012, 130-134; Osborne et al. 2019, 271-273, 279-283.

The situation in the recently excavated temple, building XVI, seems of interest in this regard, as all aforementioned objects were discovered *in situ* in the midst of, or underneath the destruction layer, which marks the destruction of the temple. As it seems reasonable to assume that efforts would have been undertaken to secure some of the buried objects underneath the rubble if the Neo-Assyrians would still have been present and in a position of power, we might further assume that the fire occurred at or towards the end of the Neo-Assyrian occupation of the city.³⁵⁴

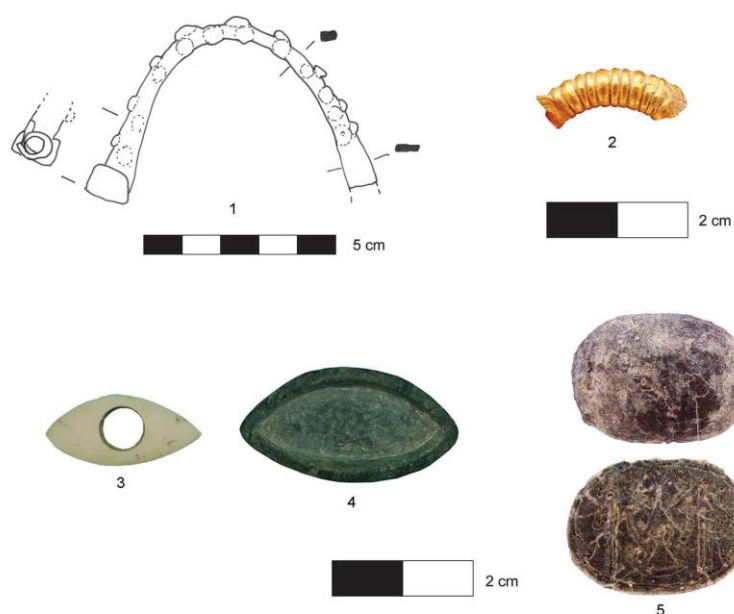


Figure 35: Finds from within building XVI

Unfortunately, the finds from building II have not been published yet, as it would certainly be interesting and helpful to compare and possibly link the situation of both buildings. In addition, further publication of ¹⁴C dates from within the destruction layer in building XVI (if available) could potentially prove to be useful in order to determine the exact date of its destruction.

Based on the information available to us at this point, a connection in between the destruction at the end of the Neo-Assyrian occupational phase at Tell Ta'yinat and the Neo-Babylonian military operations in north-western Syria at the end of the 7th/ beginning of the 6th century BC seems possible, but cannot be proven. This theory was already put forward by Meyer in 2008³⁵⁵, before the publication of the most recent results from Tell Ta'yinat.

³⁵⁴ Harrison – Osborne 2012, 130-134; Osborne et al. 2019, 279-283.

³⁵⁵ Meyer 2008, 16-17.

The latest occupational layer above the supposedly last Neo-Assyrian occupational phase and destruction layer, which could provide further information on the fate of the city during the Neo-Babylonian period, is unfortunately only preserved in two areas on the tell, which were already excavated in the 1930s and published in the 1970s by Haines. On the one hand there is a patch of floor preserved in room G of building I, and on the other some limestone retaining walls, the floor associated with which was either on, or even above the modern surface. As the associated finds have not been published in detail, no clear statement can be made on either the dating and/or the nature of the occupation. Haines suggests the 6th century BC, which would fit well with at least a limited occupation during the Neo-Babylonian period, for which some evidence from other sources exist (see below). Another publication on the Tel Ta'yinat excavations seems to be planned by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago and the Canadian excavations are ongoing, so new results can be expected in the near future.³⁵⁶

3.3.3.2 Chatal Höyük

Chatal Höyük is a large, oval mound, measuring approximately 430 by 265 m, is situated on the western bank of the Afrin River and was excavated during the 1930s, first by Martin, then Prost and finally by McEwan and Braidwood. The earliest traces of settlement activity stem from the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. The site seems to have been occupied until around 500 BC and then again during the Roman/ Byzantine and Arab periods. Furthermore, the town can be divided in an upper mound, which encompasses an area of about 7,8 ha and a lower town of approximately 6,8 ha, with both parts of the city probably having been fortified – although archaeological excavations were only carried out on the upper part of the tell.³⁵⁷

The layout of the town and the discovered structures in the various excavation areas indicate that Chatal Höyük was divided in distinct neighbourhoods with different functions. In Areas I, II and III, mostly domestic structures were uncovered, while in Area IV a – at least compared to Tell Ta'yinat – rather small *bît hilāni*, was unearthed. This building most likely can be connected with higher status residents, as well as religious and/ or ritual activities, as most of the material discovered in this area was imported and a cache of objects (S-9/3), containing some exceptionally fine pieces of pottery, together with a Kernos and the only libation vessel

³⁵⁶ Haines 1971, 61, 66; Snow – Batiuk, forthcoming.

³⁵⁷ Haines 1971, 3, 4; Pucci 2019a, 2, 157, 196-199, 285-286.

discovered at the site. In none of these areas, destructive events were recognized in the archaeological context, which makes it difficult to synchronize specific historic events or periods with occupational horizons.³⁵⁸

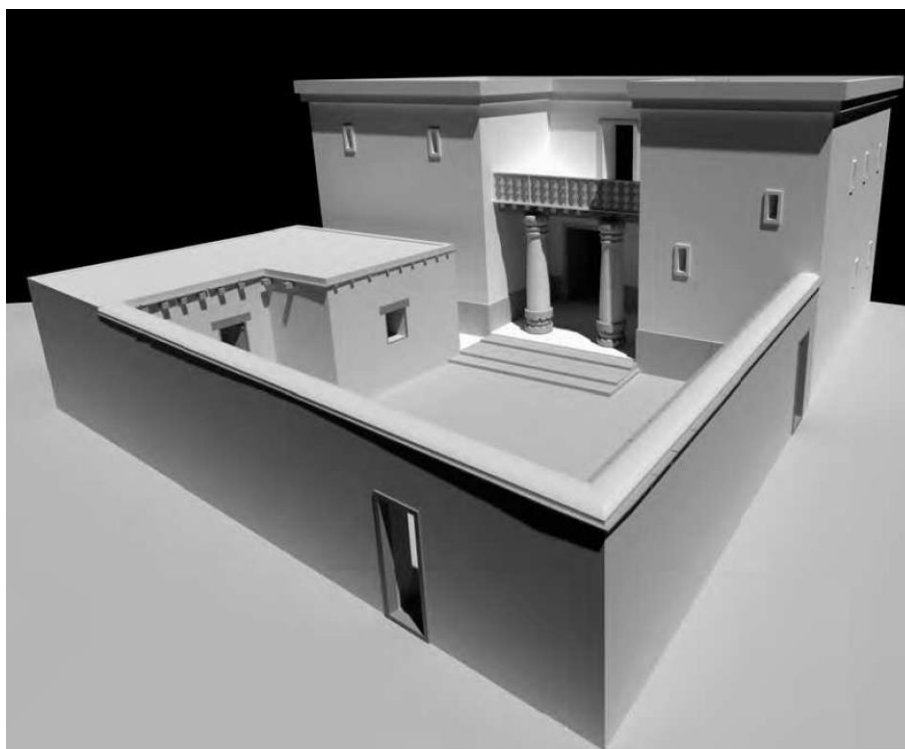


Figure 36: Reconstruction of bît hilāni in area IVa

The Neo-Assyrian period only had very little impact on the material and/ or architectural tradition in Chatal Höyük and can only be observed regarding the local production of cylinder seals. It seems as if the Assyrians concentrated their efforts on the local capital, Tell Ta'yinat. This notion is also being reflected in the amount and types of imported pottery, which, for the most part, come from Cyprus and Greece, which can be explained by the coastal proximity of Chatal Höyük. The local pottery production is highly standardized, which implies work specialization and centralized mass production during the Iron Age.³⁵⁹

The town experienced its maximum growth during the middle of Phase O, which roughly corresponds with the period between 750 and 600 BC³⁶⁰, i.e. roughly the phase of Neo-Assyrian occupation of the 'Amuq valley. As during this period of very dense occupation most of the structures on top of the mound seem to have been domestic, it has been proposed

³⁵⁸ Haines 1971, 5-9, 14-20; Pucci 2019b, 155, 294-298.

³⁵⁹ Pucci 2019a, 201-229, 294-296. Pucci 2019b, 155-156, 160.

³⁶⁰ Unfortunately, as no ¹⁴C data is available for any of the excavated contexts, much of the dating had to be done through stratigraphical analysis, paired with material studies.

that many of the representative buildings, which might have been built during this time, were situated in the lower town.³⁶¹

Even though no destructive events could be detected during the last occupational Phase O_Late, the town progressively shrank in size towards the end of the 6th century BC. The only new developments regarding the architecture are pebble paved outside areas and drainage systems, which in itself certainly represent architectural advancements. The settlement structure on the top of the tell gets less dense, with structures being rather isolated. A graveyard on the upper mound further increases the impression of a slow decline. This development has been connected with a change in trading routes through the 'Amuq, triggered by the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which ultimately led to the town's abandonment.³⁶²

Similarly to the Neo-Assyrian phase, no real indication of a Mesopotamian presence during the period of possible Neo-Babylonian period could be detected regarding architecture or pottery typology, although the city was continuously occupied and structures dated to this period could be identified in areas I (Level I_03-02), II (Level II_04-03) and IV (Level IV_02a-d).³⁶³

In terms of finds some indications for a Neo-Babylonian presence, or at least contacts, with the empire exists:

In Area IV, locus N-12, a stone pendant was discovered on top of a floor level, displaying a Lamaštu on one side, and three lines of a pseudo-cuneiform inscription, as well as a crescent and star on the other. The Lamaštu, a Mesopotamian composite being, usually has an apotropaic meaning connected with pregnancy and childbirth. The crescent is usually a representation of the Mesopotamian moon-god Sîn and the star represents the Mesopotamian goddess of war and love, Ištar. Pseudo-inscriptions were usually in use during the 2nd millennium BC and were replaced by canonized Lamaštu texts by the 1st millennium BC.³⁶⁴ The find context, approximately dating to the 6th century BC, and a similar find from Babylon, dated to the same period. Additionally, the cuneiform inscription imitates

³⁶¹ Pucci 2019a, 285-286, 294-295.

³⁶² Pucci 2019a, 297-299; Pucci 2019b, 160.

³⁶³ Pucci 2019a, 58-61, 95-103, 126-134.

³⁶⁴ For more information on the Lamaštu and connected texts see Farber 2014.

contemporary cuneiform styles, which together allowed to date the object to the Neo-Babylonian period, although it was most likely produced locally.³⁶⁵



Figure 37: *Lamashtu amulet from Chatal Höyük, not to scale*

Unfortunately, no Scythian arrowheads as outlined by the study of Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel³⁶⁶ were discovered, although a similar object, a trilobate arrow point with a tang – not a socket – described as a Scythian arrowhead (Catalogue number 313, unfortunately without a picture) was discovered. The arrowheads discovered at Chatal Höyük in general were all found in fill layers in areas I and II, which did not allow further functional analysis of the areas in which they were discovered.³⁶⁷

Just as for the Neo-Assyrian Period, the most Neo-Babylonian influence or indications for contacts with Babylonia can be noticed in the stamp and cylinder seals from Chatal Höyük, some of which were identified by Pucci³⁶⁸, others by Meyer³⁶⁹ (see further below). Combined, a total number of six Neo-Babylonian seals were identified:

- Catalogue number 776: Cylinder seal displaying Neo-Babylonian imagery (Adoration scene in front of standing god), found above a floor in Area I, Level I_01.³⁷⁰
- Catalogue number 816: Scaraboid seal, cut in a Neo-Babylonian style, displaying a bearded sphinx surrounded by concentric circles, from an unstratified context.³⁷¹

³⁶⁵ Götting 2019, 303-304.

³⁶⁶ Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel (forthcoming), Type T1: Socketed, Trilobate, Rhomboid or Leaf shaped with and without additional barb.

³⁶⁷ Pucci 2019a, 231-232.

³⁶⁸ Pucci 2019a.

³⁶⁹ Meyer 2005.

³⁷⁰ Pucci 2019c, 104.

³⁷¹ Pucci 2019c, 113.

- Catalogue number 841: Cone stamp seal, shaped like a truncated pyramid with a loop and a square base, which is a distinct Neo-Babylonian shape, also listed in Meyer 2005 as number 125. Made of Egyptian blue and incised with parallel lines along its sides.³⁷²
- Catalogue number 849: Sone stamp seal, cut in a Neo-Babylonian or Achaemenid style, displaying a sun (symbol representing the Mesopotamian god Šamaš) and a star (symbol associated with Mesopotamian goddess Ištar) and listed in Meyer 2005 as number 191.³⁷³
- Catalogue number 850: Cone stamp seal with a slightly convex base. Pierced on top, made of quartz and cut in a Neo-Babylonian or Achaemenid style. The seal displays two rampant animals in front of a tree and is listed in Meyer 2005 as number 17.³⁷⁴
- Catalogue number 1044: Squared stamp seal, cut in a Neo-Babylonian provincial style, listed and described in Meyer 2005 as number 86, see below.³⁷⁵



Figure 38: Seal 1044, not to scale

3.3.3.3 Tell Judaiah

Tell Judaiah (Ğudeideh in Meyer 2008) is an oval mound, measuring 370 by 250 m on the eastern bank of the Nahr al Judaiah, which is fed by a pond towards the south of the site. The Tell was originally excavated by Braidwood in course of the Syrian Expedition and still awaits final publication. As for the Iron Age period, it seems like mostly domestic architecture has been excavated, with the exception of one large rectangular building in squares D-F 7-10. No signs or indications for destructions are mentioned in Braidwood's or Haines' reports.³⁷⁶

³⁷² Meyer 2008, 62, 69; Pucci 2019c, 117.

³⁷³ Pucci 2019c, 117.

³⁷⁴ Pucci 2019c, 118.

³⁷⁵ Pucci 2019c, 145.

³⁷⁶ Haines 1971, 26, 28-30.

3.3.3.5 Further Studies

Regarding material studies from the ‘Amuq valley region other than the material from Chatal Höyük, an extensive examination of the seals from the ‘Amuq region, which catalogues and extensively discusses more than 550 individual objects was accomplished by Meyer (2008). Even though a chronological classification, based on typological and/or stylistic grounds, especially when stratigraphic information is not sufficiently available, is not always easy or possible, 102 seals³⁷⁷ could – at least approximately – be dated to the Neo-Babylonian period or 6th century BC.³⁷⁸

Of these 102 these seals, five were classified as showing distinctive Neo-Babylonian style elements or typological characteristics of Neo-Babylonian origin:

- Seal no. 27 from Çatal Höyük, found in layer 1 and made of Chalcedon, is a conical stamp seal with faceted sides- a typically Neo-Babylonian shape. Another seal of this shape is mentioned in the text but could not be further identified. Most likely, it is seal no. 125, according to Pucci 2019.³⁷⁹
- Seal no. 86 also from Çatal Höyük made from Steatite and found within the surface debris, depict among other symbols a star, crescent and a creature with two wings with a flat and just slightly drilled body in the Neo-Babylonian style. Furthermore, the pictures are highly abstracted – another characteristic of Neo-Babylonian seals.³⁸⁰
- Seal no. 99 discovered in Tell el-Ğudeideh in trench j-14 and made of quartz, features the depiction of a composite being, a goat-fish, which is modelled in the style of the Neo-Babylonian period.³⁸¹
- Seal no. 147 from Tell Ta’yinat found on the surface and made from Chalcedon is very similar to seal no. 86 and shows the same Neo-Babylonian characteristics.³⁸²

³⁷⁷ (no. 7, 14, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31, 32, 33, 39, 54a, b, c, d, 61, 62, 74, 81, 86, 91, 92, 96, 97, 99, 110, 119, 120, 125, 127, 129, 146, 147, 149, 150, 166, 176, 188, 189, 191, 192, 201, 231, 239, 240, 241, 243, 252, 257, 261, 262, 265, 266, 276, 277, 279, 285, 287, 293, 295, 300, 302, 314, 316, 318, 326, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 346, 351, 379, 394, 395, 420, 422, 424, 426, 428, 445, 449, 463, 480, 496, 497, 499, 503, 507, 521, 527, 530, 531, 533, 540 and 545 and some other without a catalogue number and depiction in the catalogue)

³⁷⁸ Meyer 2008, 380-381, 384-397, 408-409, 412-413, 416-419, 422-423, 426-433, 436-437, 442-447, 456-461, 474-475, 480-481, 486-491, 494-495, 506-507, 510-513, 516-523, 526-539, 546-547, 550-555, 560-563, 576-577, 582-583, 592- 597, 604-607, 614-615, 622-623, 630-637, 642-643, 646-649, 652-655.

³⁷⁹ Meyer 2008, 62, 69; Pucci 2019c, 117

³⁸⁰ Meyer 2008, 193, 194.

³⁸¹ Meyer 2008, 307.

³⁸² Meyer 2008, 193, 194.

- Seal no. 331 from Tell el-Ğudeideh, made from Steatite and discovered in the surface debris, shows the depiction of a rooster, for which a stylistic equivalent from Babylon has been dated to the 6th century BC.³⁸³

Even though stone is not a material broadly available in the Mesopotamian heartland, material analyses of these seals could help in determining if the objects were imported or locally produced.

Furthermore, the final phase of the Amuq Phase O – Phase Oc – is being dated to have lasted from around 700 BC until the end of the 6th, possibly even the beginning of the 5th century BC.³⁸⁴

³⁸³ Meyer 2008, 296-297

³⁸⁴ Meyer 2008, 323.

3.3.4 'Amuq: Conclusions

Just as for Cilicia, the evidence for a Neo-Babylonian presence and its nature in the 'Amuq valley region is scarce, but again some interesting observations can be made.

Even though no concrete proof for the destruction of Tell Ta'yinat by the Babylonians exists, it seems reasonable, or at least possible, to assume that the local provincial capital of the Neo-Assyrian province was conquered in the wake of the conflicts in the north-west of Syria at the beginning of the 6th century BC. This could have happened either during the war against the Assyrians, or later on, during conflicts with the Egyptians.

Afterwards it seems as if the region, despite its important strategic position and connection to Cilicia, was largely left to its own devices, as no major building activities or textual references are attested. This might have had to do with the region's environmental conditions, like marshes and lakes, but most likely, with much more pressing issues further southwards. Access to the Mediterranean was also easier to obtain towards the south and the rich Phoenician cities along the coast promised more abundant bounty and, maybe even more importantly, tribute, than the Greek cities in the Orontes delta.

The theories, ascribing the growing Greek influence in Cilicia during the final period of Iron Age to the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire seem reasonable, as the 'Amuq plain, the major trade and information highway between Syria and Cilicia, seems to have not been used as much as during previous periods, given the information from Chatal Höyük.

The data indicating contacts with Babylonia and a Neo-Babylonian presence in the 'Amuq valley point towards rather isolated, small-scale instances, possibly connected with trade and surveillance, rather than political control, in order to control the flank of the Empire as military campaigns in the Levant were carried out.

Even though the sample size is rather small, it should be mentioned that the only site displaying destructive events during the period when of the Neo-Babylonian conquests is Tell Ta'yinat, the site with a considerable Assyrian presence. Even though it is difficult to assess, it seems reasonable to assume a direct connotation.

3.4 The Ḥabur area

3.4.1 Topography

The Ḥabur area is situated in modern-day northern Syria in the so called Jezireh (Arabic for island), which is defined as the area in between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The Ḥabur itself is the biggest tributary to the Euphrates River and is formed by several springs and tributary wadis south of the Tur Abdin mountain range along the Syrian-Turkish border. The region also known as the Upper Ḥabur area, or Ḥabur triangle, is a productive agricultural area, capable of sustaining a large population. This is possible due to participation levels in between 500 to 250 mm of rainfall per year, permitting rainfed agriculture to be practiced. All tributaries and most important wadis join near the modern-day city of Hasseke, from which point onward the region is called lower Ḥabur. In contrast, this area is very dry with rainfall levels of only 250 to less than 150 mm per year, in which agriculture is only possible by employing artificial irrigation.³⁸⁵

In recent times, several dam projects around Hasseke led to several archaeologically significant areas being endangered to be flooded and submerged, which in turn led to several salvage excavations being conducted along the Middle Ḥabur.³⁸⁶

Due to the agricultural activities along the river and the connected exploitation of the natural water resources, as well climatological changes, the river has been factually dead since around the year 2000.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ Akkermans – Schwartz 2003, 5-6; Bryce 2009, 270-271; McClellan 1997, 286; Kühne 2008, 216; Kreppner 2006, 5; Wilkinson et al. 2005, 43; Wright et al. 2006, 8.

³⁸⁶ Akkermans – Schwartz 2003, 11; Monchambert 1984a, 1; Monchambert 1984b, 181.

³⁸⁷ Kühne 2008, 216; Wright et al. 2006, 8.

3.4.2 Historical overview and textual evidence

The first archaeological excavations in the Jezireh and with that the Ḥabur region, already started during the middle of the 19th century with Layard's excavations at Tell Agaga, (ancient Šadikanni). Further research was conducted by Oppenheim from the turn of the century until the 1930s at Tell Ḥalaf and by Mallowan at Tell Brak and Chagar Bazar in the early 1930s. Since then several surveys and other excavations at more than 30 sites were conducted in the Ḥabur area.³⁸⁸

The particular interest in the region, also in recent times, might be explained by its proximity to Mesopotamia and the relatively early traces of human occupation, and more specifically the emerging of organized, complex societies from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period (PPNB, approximately 7000 BC) onwards. The recent building activities of dams and therefore conducted salvage excavations certainly contributed to the seemingly larger scientific interest for the region.³⁸⁹

The Ḥabur region was continuously settled from the PPNB period, throughout the Chalcolithic and Uruk periods. A break in settlement continuity appeared in the early 3rd Millennium BC, the reasons for which remain disputed, but might be connected to climatic and environmental changes in the region and/ or the collapse of the Akkadian empire. However, the area seems to have been resettled soon after, peaking in the late 3rd to early 2nd Millennium BC. From around 1500 BC, upper Mesopotamia was controlled by the Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni, which collapsed towards the end of the Millennium due to Hittite pressure. This void was used by the Assyrians to annex part of the region, which was subsequently lost again to Aramean population groups settling in the area. With the reemergence of the Assyrians during the 9th century BC the Aramean city-states and kingdoms, such as Bit Adini or Bit Bahyan were incorporated into the Neo-Assyrian Empire and eventually lost their autonomy during the 8th century BC. The regions adjacent to the Ḥabur were divided into several provinces: Guzāna in the west and Našībīna in the east of the Ḥabur triangle, and Lāqê on the west as well as Ḥalzi-abdāri along the east of the lower Ḥabur, both of which originally seem to have been part of the older province of Rašappa.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Akkermans – Schwartz 2003, 9-10; McClellan 1997, 286.

³⁸⁹ Akkermans – Schwartz 2003, 48-49, 401; McClellan 1997, 286

³⁹⁰ Bryce 2009, 270-271; McClellan 1997, 286-287; Millard – Bordreuil 1982, 139; Radner 2008, 51-52, 54-55; Wilkinson et al. 2005, 38; Wilkinson – Barbanes 2000, 401-405.

The settlement patterns in the Ḫabur area during the Assyrian occupation are well known due to several surveys (see further below, in chapter 3.4.3.8) conducted in the different parts of the region. Whereas in the western Ḫabur triangle, in the Tell Beydar area, relatively few occupied Tells, and many smaller sites could be identified, the eastern region around Tell Brak and Tell Leilan seem to have been only minimally settled. Wilkinson and Barbanes remark in this regard that these results might not be fully reliable, as the material culture from the period is not well understood.³⁹¹

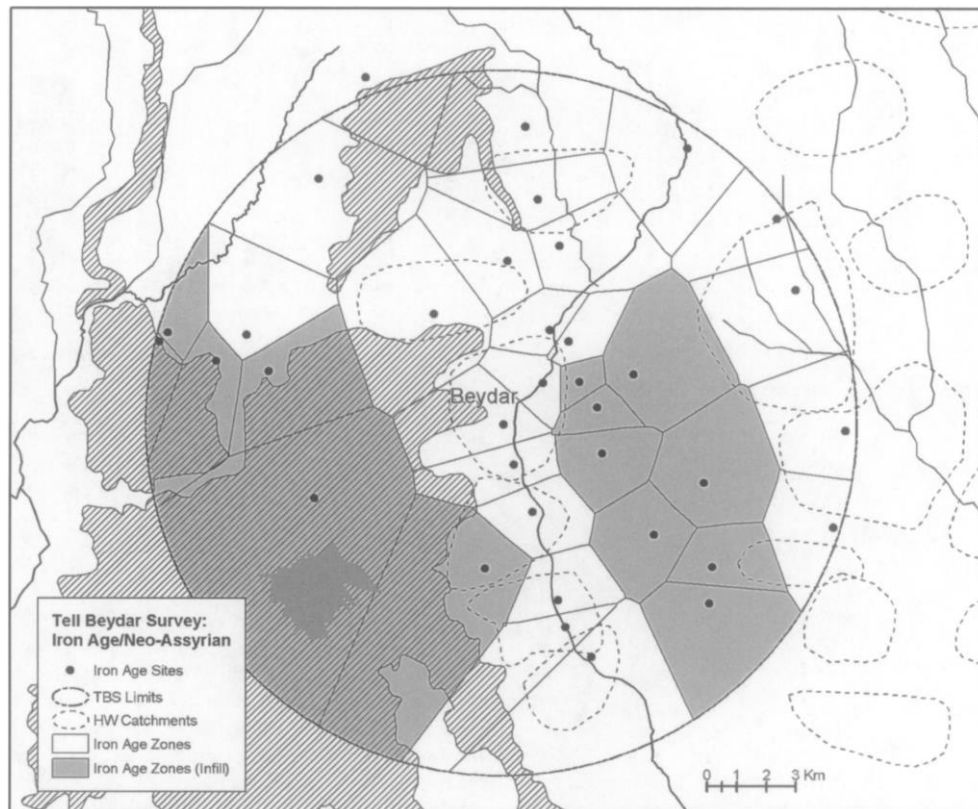


Figure 39: Settlement pattern around Tell Beydar during the Iron Age

An entirely different situation unfolded in the south along the Lower Ḫabur. Here the landscape seems to have been developed for large-scale agricultural purposes, as a dense network of small farmsteads and villages (*akk. kapru*), as well as canals and only a few bigger towns covered the plain. The peak of this development occurred around 750-600 BC, and while the cultural identity of the inhabitants is not entirely clear, it seems likely to assume that it reflects the Neo-Assyrian policy to reclaim land by resettling prisoner of wars and/ or other deportees from conquered regions, with the goal of increasing agricultural productivity. The scale of these projects must not be underestimated, as massive amounts of labour were needed

³⁹¹ Wilkinson et al. 2005, 47; Wilkinson – Barbanes 2000, 413-417.

for digging the canals and building up the connected infrastructure. During this time, also the local administrative centre of Tell Sheikh Ḥamad (ancient Dūr-Katlimmu) was enlarged.³⁹²

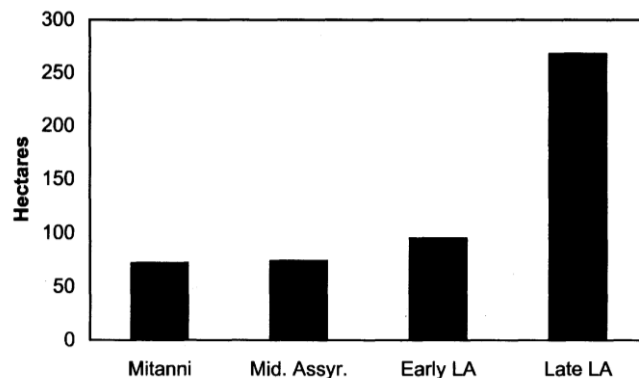


Figure 40: Increase in settled area along the Lower Ḥabur until the Late Iron Age

As not much is known of what happened after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire along the Ḥabur, this period sometimes has been described as a dark age. However, even though the archaeological record for the Neo-Babylonian, Persian and to a certain degree Hellenistic periods does not seem to be substantial – mostly due to problems with the specific material culture of the period (or lack thereof), some conclusions can be made on the basis of textual evidence.³⁹³

At Tell Sheikh Ḥamad, several cuneiform documents were discovered in a structure called the “Red House” – a provincial palace named after the colour of the plaster covering the first excavated rooms. The majority of these texts date to the Neo-Assyrian period, but four land-sale contracts, despite being written entirely in Assyrian script and using Assyrian legal clauses, were dated to the second and fifth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II “king of (the city of) Babylon”, i.e. the years 602, 603 and 600 BC.³⁹⁴

These texts allow several conclusions to be drawn on what happened in the region after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, as well as the consequences of the change in rule on a local level. First, we see that Assyrian scribal traditions and formulae continued to be in use. Whether this was the case because the scribe, called Urdu-Nabû, who wrote all texts published so far, was educated in Assyria or not, might be a matter of debate. The fact that certain elements of the texts were changed from the Neo-Assyrian to the Neo-Babylonian

³⁹² Bryce 2009, 271; McClellan 1997, 287; Kühne 2013, 238, 240; Wilkinson et al. 2005, 38-44; Wilkinson – Barbanes 2000, 416, 420.

³⁹³ Akkermans – Schwartz 2003, 389-390; Kreppner 2008a, 148; McClellan 1997, 287; for an overview of cuneiform from outside of Babylonia during Neo-Babylonian period see Jursa 2005, n. 1172.

³⁹⁴ Postgate 1993, 99, 112, 115, 117, 119; Radner 2002, 16, 41-42, 61-69.

tradition, like the dating system from being eponym based to the regnal year of the king, indicate that some measures were taken by the Babylonians to ensure a continuation of order and uniformity in newly conquered regions. It should be noted, however that this process did not start immediately after the initial conquest, as for the first years after 612 BC local eponyms were in use. Furthermore, it seems like the local population and hierarchical structure were neither replaced nor changed, as the elite families mentioned in the texts remained the same throughout the Neo-Assyrian to the Neo-Babylonian periods. All this indicates that the Neo-Babylonian Empire tried to make use of already existing local administrative as well as hierarchical structures in order to guarantee a smooth change in rule. It has been proposed that the Neo-Assyrian policies of large-scale deportations and exchanges of local populations might have facilitated the Neo-Babylonian takeover of certain regions, like the lower Ḫabur area.³⁹⁵

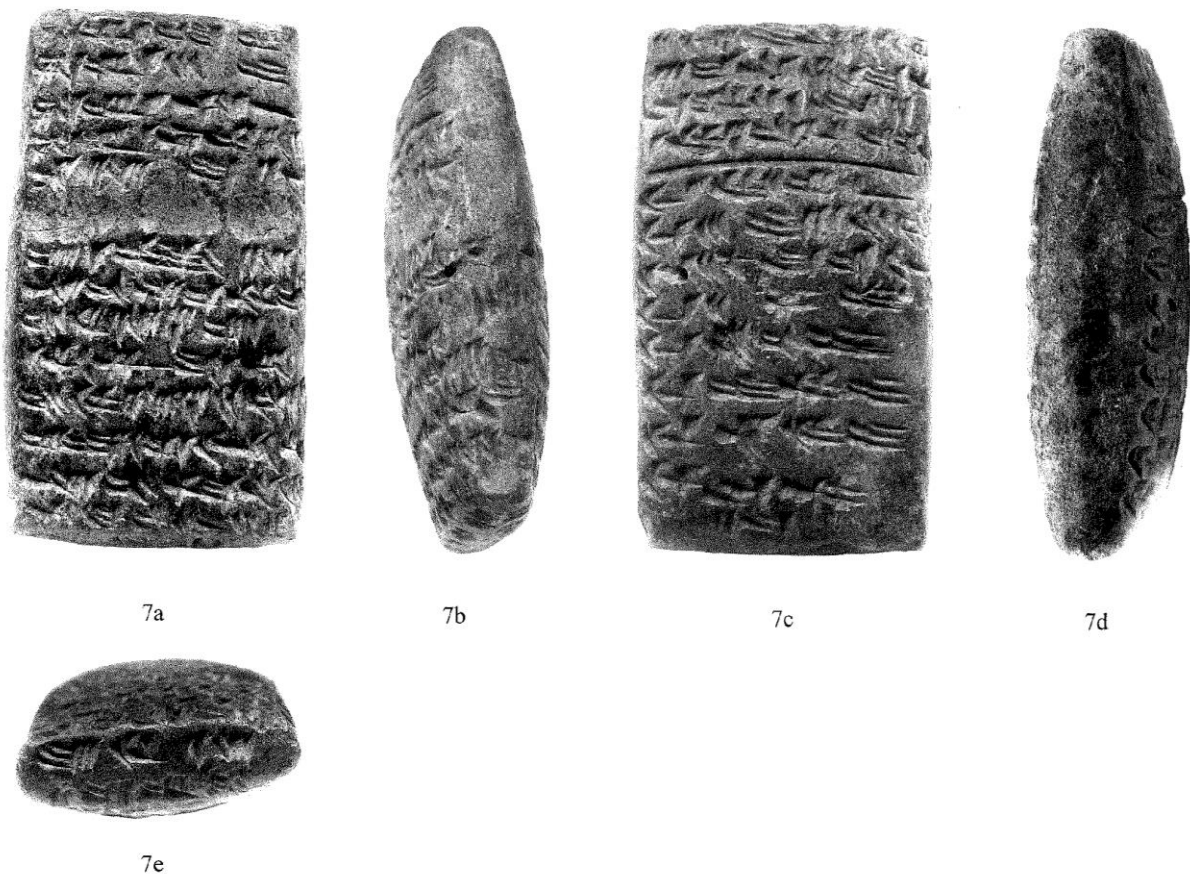


Figure 41: Text 40 from the Red House, dated to 600BC, not to scale

³⁹⁵ Akkermans – Schwartz 2003, 389; Brinkman 1993, 134-135; Radner 2002, 16-19; Röllig 1993, 132.

Two additional texts, a Neo-Babylonian letter, still in its original clay envelope, and a legal document, dated to either the seventh or eleventh year of Nebuchadnezzar II, i.e. either 598 or 594 BC, were discovered in room B of the North-West Building in the lower city. Unfortunately, the translations of these texts still await publication. As of now, only a photograph of the letter and its envelope were published.³⁹⁶

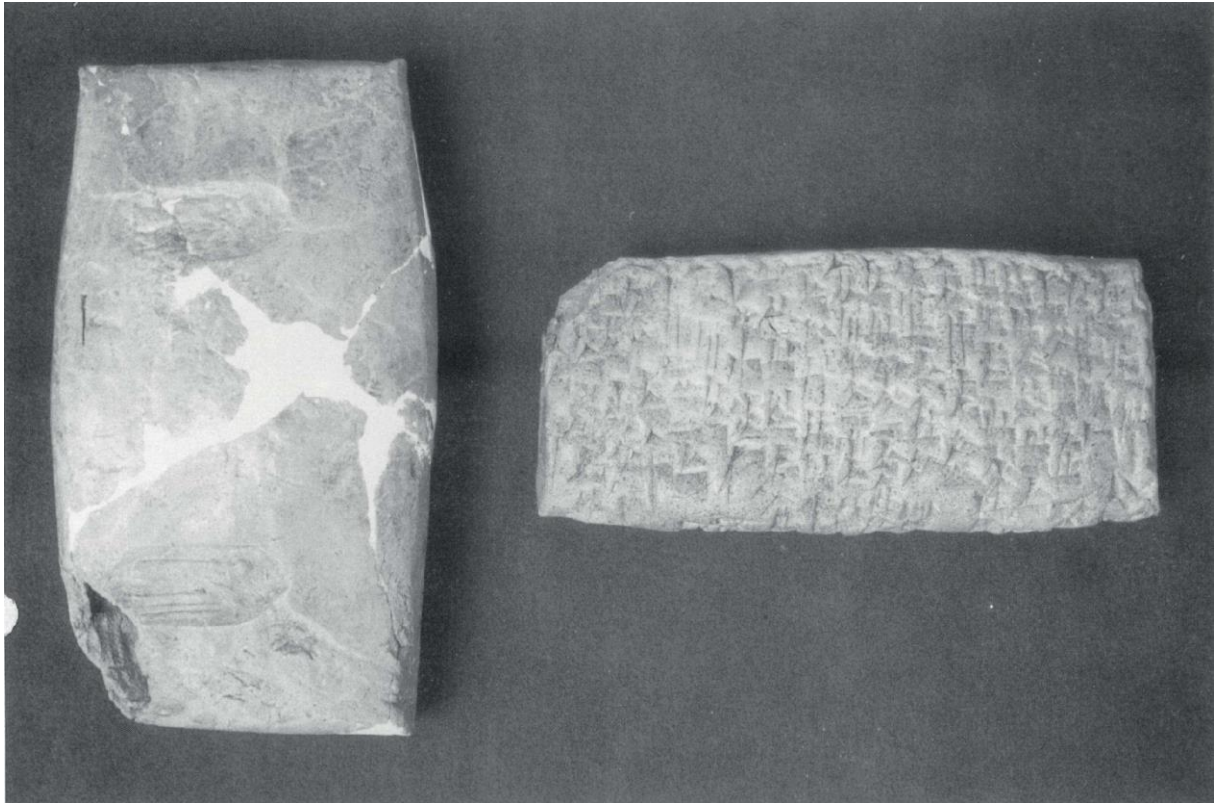


Figure 42: The texts awaiting publication from the North-West Building, Room B

Additional evidence for Babylonian attempts to gain a foothold along the Ḥabur and to integrate the region into the economic framework of central Mesopotamia is available for the Ḥabur triangle. According to several cuneiform documents, the Babylonian crown granted land holdings (akk. *nidinti šarri*) to at least three temples – the Ebabbar of Sippar, the Esagila of Babylon as well as the Ezida of Borsippa. The exact location and size of these estates are not known, the frequent use of the term Ḥabūrū and the fact that the expected yields were estimated to be quite low, indicates the Ḥabur triangle in which rainfed agriculture was practiced. Additionally, the number of people mentioned in the texts is low and their supply with work-animals does not seem to have been the best either. The cultivated crops wheat and wine (which traditionally was a product imported from Syria), serve as additional indicators

³⁹⁶ Radner 2002, 3, 26. Kühne 1989/1990, 312 Abb. 137.

for a localization in this region. All documents referring directly or indirectly to these holdings along the Ḥabur were written mostly during the reign of Nabonidus, and only one document during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. This indicates that the endeavour to incorporate these regions was a rather slow process, which might not come as a surprise, considering the long distance in between southern Mesopotamia and northern Syria and the considerable administrative efforts necessary, in order to guarantee orderly land allocations in a foreign, only recently conquered land.³⁹⁷

Another three Neo-Babylonian letters and one of its clay envelopes were discovered in Tell Ḥalaf, ancient Guzāna, one of which (119, Tell Halaf III 2373a) mentions a *ḥarrānu* business venture. The classification of these documents as Neo-Babylonian is based on the mentioned personal names being exclusively Babylonian. This is also the reason why it was proposed that at this time some sort of Babylonian colony – possibly connected with business interests – existed at the site.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ Jursa – Wagensonner 2014, 109-111, 113-115, Levavi 2020, 71-72.

³⁹⁸ Ungnad 1940, 47, 66-68.

3.4.3 Archaeological Evidence

3.4.3.1 Tell Sheikh Hamad

The site of Tell Sheikh Ḥamad is situated in modern-day Syria, on the eastern bank of the Ḥabur river, about 70 km to the north-east of the regional capital Deir az-Zor. The city was founded on a spur formed by the confluence of the Wadis Gharibe and Sa'ib Ḥamad. This guaranteed a reasonably steady supply with water and allowed for rainfed agriculture to be practiced in the vicinity of the city, even though it is about 100 km to the south of the dry farming belt. This specific location, close to a ford across the stream in an elevated position also provided both economic and strategic benefits as well as security in case of conflict and therefore cannot only be described as favourable, but rather unique along the lower Ḥabur and vital for the Assyrian Empire, in terms of guaranteeing control over the Jezireh. This region in between the Tigris and Euphrates river was described as Aššur's hinterland and part of the Assyrian core. First efforts to permanently occupy it were taken already during the Middle Assyrian period, during which also Tell Sheikh Ḥamad was enlarged considerably and made a provincial capital and bridgehead along the Ḥabur. This importance within the realm might have contributed to the city god Salmānu³⁹⁹ being featured in the names of five Assyrian kings during the Middle Assyrian period.⁴⁰⁰

The site was first settled from the late Uruk period around 3300-3000 BC. At first the settlement activities were focused on the citadel mound – a natural mound of about 5 ha, rising 25 m above the rest of the surroundings. During the early 2nd Millennium, the town was enlarged by Lower Town I, encompassing 12 ha in the south and east. At the beginning of the Iron Age the city was enlarged once again by the Lower Town II towards the north-east of the citadel, which covered an area of about 40 ha. Another 50 ha were covered by an extramural suburban area towards the north and east, so the largest extent of the city constituted an area of around 110 ha during the times of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. During the Achaemenid, Parthian and Roman periods the city shrank down to its 2nd Millennium extent, i.e. the citadel and Lower Town I, until it was eventually abandoned during Byzantine times around 500 AD.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ The name of the city god might be etymologically connected to the favourable conditions in the otherwise harsh environment along the lower Ḥabur, as the root *slm* usually means something along the lines of “being good, friendly and/ or healthy”. See Kühne 2008, 217; Reiner – Biggs 1984, 89.

⁴⁰⁰ Kühne 2013, 238-239, 244-245; Kühne 2011, 101, 103; Kühne 2008, 216-217; Kreppner 2006, 5.

⁴⁰¹ Kreppner 2013, 4; Kreppner 2006, 5; Kühne 2013, 238, 240; Kühne 2008, 218.

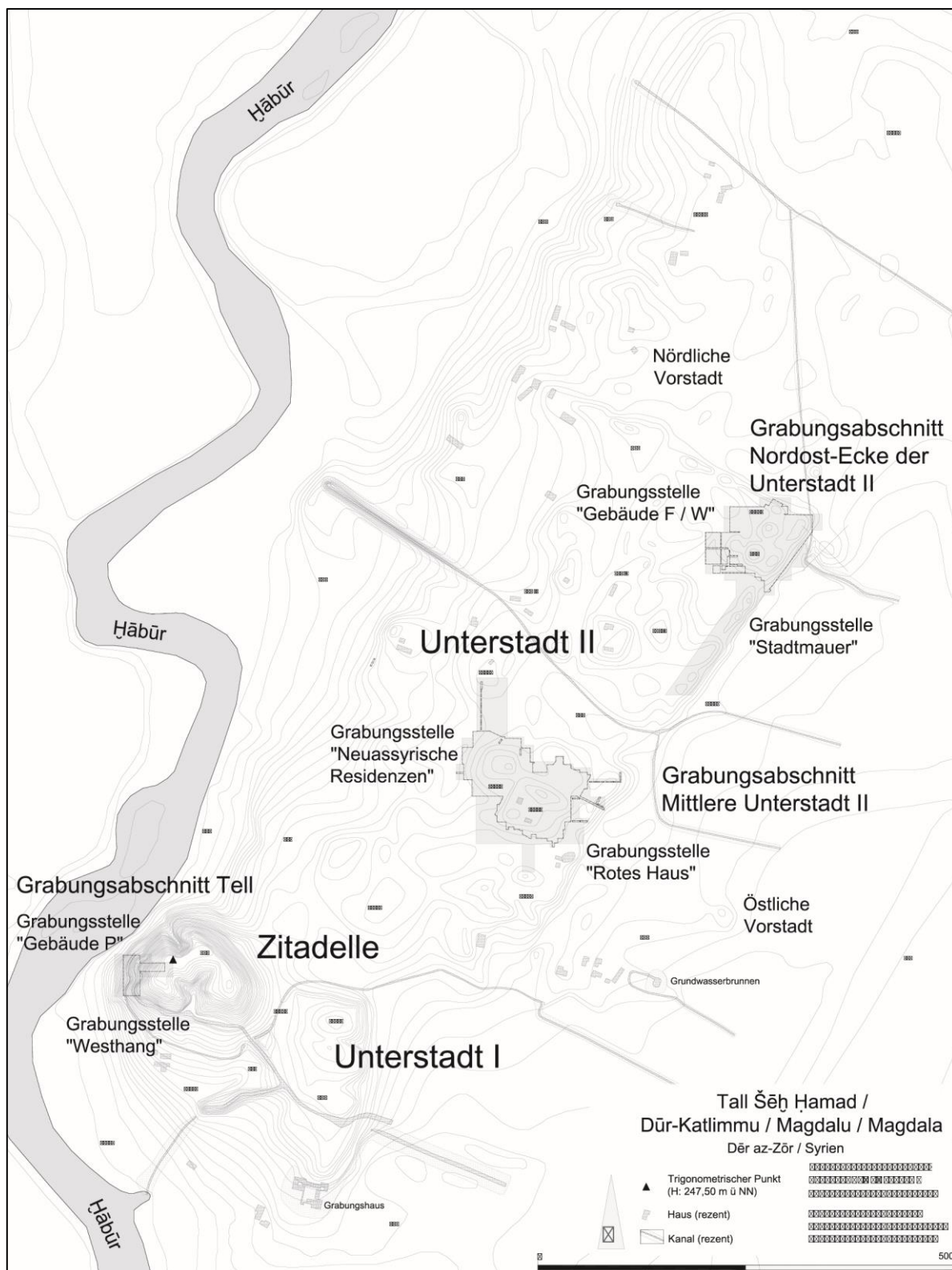


Figure 43: Topography of Tell Sheikh Ḥamad

Tell Sheikh Ḥamad has been identified as ancient Dūr Katlimmu, due to Middle Assyrian cuneiform documents discovered at the site. The Aramean name of the site was Magdalu, which survived as “Magdala” until Parthian/ Roman occupation of the site. The practice of a double name for certain cities is known for other sites, most famously Aššur.⁴⁰²

The first archaeological research at Tell Sheikh Ḥamad was conducted in 1879, when a fragment of a basalt stele of Adad-Nirari III (1192-1177 BC) was discovered. It took almost another 100 years for further investigations until 1975 and 1977, when the region was surveyed in course of the Lower Khabur Survey, conducted by the *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients*, during which several fragments of cuneiform tablets were discovered on the main mound. These texts identified the site as ancient Dūr Katlimmu. Subsequent excavations were conducted starting in 1978 until 2010 over the course of 32 campaigns during which a total of 28 occupational horizons could be distinguished.⁴⁰³

The site experienced its first heyday during the Middle Assyrian period, during which Tell Sheikh Ḥamad was established as the administrative centre of the entire region and seat of the local governor. From this period, Palace P was excavated on the main mound.⁴⁰⁴

The Neo-Assyrian period, during which Tell Sheikh Ḥamad experienced another period of affluence, was investigated mostly in the Lower Town II, which was founded during the 8th and/ or 7th century. It was occupied only for a rather short period of time until the Achaemenids took control over the region and therefore could be excavated on a large scale with relatively few disturbances from later period occupations. The Lower Town II was excavated in two areas from 1984 until 2010: The north-eastern corner, measuring about 10 000 m², in which the palace-like building F/W as well as the city wall and a city gate were discovered, and the area of the Neo-Assyrian residences, which covers an area of about 12 000 m². Both of these and therefore most likely the entirety of the Lower Town II, continued to be inhabited during the time after the Neo-Assyrian Empire had fallen. Unfortunately, the results of the excavations in the area of the north-eastern corner have not been published yet, so we will focus on the area of the Neo-Assyrian residences.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² Kühne 2013, 240-241; Kühne – Luther 2013, 337-338.

⁴⁰³ Hellmuth Kramberg 2013, 2; Kreppner 2006, 5; Kühne 2013, 236, 243; Schmid 2013, 255; Van De Mieroop 2016, 361.

⁴⁰⁴ Kühne 2013, 243-245.

⁴⁰⁵ Hellmuth Kramberg 2013, 5; Kreppner 2013, 1, 4; Kühne 2013, 246-248.



Figure 44: Aerial picture of elite city quarter with Red House in Lower Town II at Tell Sheikh Ḥamad

Here, an elite city quarter consisting of five buildings was discovered. As one of these buildings, the so-called Red House, named after its red painted walls, was built on top of one of the other dwellings, reusing parts of it (House 4), it clearly belongs to a younger occupational phase. Additionally, the foundations of an older building, most likely belonging to the same occupational phase as the other older houses next to and/ or underneath the Red House were discovered. These Neo-Assyrian residences were built between the 8th and 7th century and are clearly distinguishable as elite residences due to their size and features, such as bathrooms, kitchens, reception halls endowed with wall paintings, plant pits and wells. The exact date of the construction of the Red House remains unclear, but based on cuneiform texts discovered within the building it seems likely that it was built during the last third of the 7th century BC. The buildings originally in its place were torn down and dismantled in a controlled manner rather than having been destroyed by fire as originally proposed. As for the owner of the Red House, a very wealthy and politically influential individual called Šulmu-

šarri, of whom 191 cuneiform texts and 155 dockets with Aramean script were discovered within the Red House, certainly seems like a good candidate. Most of these texts were written in between 676 and 615 BC, documenting land sales and business transactions. Most likely, the construction began after 630 BC, when Šulmu Šarri acquired the title of *ša qurbūti*, a confidant of the Assyrian king, possibly even after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.⁴⁰⁶

The Red House was first excavated in 1992, and uncovered in its entirety, after four tablets written in Assyrian dialect, following Assyrian administrative customs, but dated to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II had been discovered (see above). Further studies on specific aspects of the building like its stratigraphy, architecture and finds were carried out until 2010.⁴⁰⁷

In total, including open spaces in the south and east, the Red House occupied an area of about 7077 m², of which 5176 m² belong to the structure proper including open courtyards and 3403 m² without, although some areas of the house certainly had additional living spaces and storage areas on the second floor. The complex was divided in three wings, which all were erected within a short time period and used immediately after their construction, with the main entrance along the western side. The eastern and western wing were private areas, while the northern wing was interpreted to have served as the official, representative area of the building.⁴⁰⁸

The entire complex of the Red House can be compared to Neo-Assyrian palaces of the same period, consisted of 85 rooms arranged around five courtyards, which were further divided in 25 functional room groups during the main occupational phase of the building. Among them were wet rooms with floors constructed from fired bricks and lime plaster as well as drainages towards the outer areas. Two wells secured the supply with fresh water were located in the courtyards, which were paved with fired bricks and were also equipped with drainages towards the outer areas. Representative rooms were adorned with wall paintings and featured niches along the walls, fireplaces constructed with fired bricks and double wing doors with decorated doorframes. In total about 2500 man-made installations were uncovered during the excavation of the building.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Hellmuth Kramberg 2013, 5; Kreppner 2016, 179; Kreppner 2013a, 1; Kreppner 2013b, 355, 358-359; Kreppner 2006, 1, 13-15; Kühne 2013, 248-249, 252; Rohde 2013, 342, 353.

⁴⁰⁷ Kreppner 2013a, 1; Kreppner 2013b, 355; Kreppner 2008b, 168.

⁴⁰⁸ Kreppner 2016, 177; Kreppner 2013a, 1; Kreppner 2013b, 355; Kreppner 2006, 1, 8; Kühne 2013, 248, 252; Rohde 2013, 344.

⁴⁰⁹ Kreppner 2016, 177; Kreppner 2013a, 1; Kreppner 2013b, 355-356, 358; Kreppner 2006, 1, 8, 15; Kühne 2013, 252; Rohde 2013, 336.

Relatively soon after the destruction of the Red House the ruins of the building were reoccupied, possibly by the returning former residents. Parts of the building were cleaned from debris and small-scale renovations were conducted. Nonetheless, the upper floor of the building was no longer in use and/ or accessible and ceilings began to collapse. The number occupied rooms steadily grew, indicating either a growing number of inhabitants or a steady increase in repaired, used and/ or needed space. In any case, it is clear that the inhabitants lived in completely different socio-economic circumstances than those of the main occupational phase. The lack of legal documents indicates that also the administrative system changed profoundly. Nonetheless, some limited proof for continuity, such as burial customs, the types used pottery and the use of Assyrian names, written ostraca, exists and further solidify the notion that these people were former inhabitants and not mere squatters. A total of 10 individual phases could be distinguished for this secondary occupational phase. Towards the end of continuously fewer rooms were inhabited, indicating a slow and steady decline, as well as abandonment of the Red House.⁴¹¹

A *terminus post quem* for the final occupation of the Red House is given by two ostraca, with an Aramaic inscription dated to the turn from the 6th to the 5th century BC, i.e. the Achaemenid period and therefore had been continuously in use for in between 100 to 150 years after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. During the Parthian/ Roman period the area of the Lower Town II was abandoned and was used as a cemetery.⁴¹²

The situation that presents itself to us at Tell Sheikh Ḥamad, with textual sources within secure contexts, providing absolute dates, is rather unique for this time period and important for this thesis for two reasons:

First, the local Assyrian elites living at Dūr Katlimmu seemingly remained unaffected by the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and takeover by the Babylonians. They continued to conduct business transactions, did not lose any of their economic potential and were not exchanged in their function as local elites. The only thing which seems to have changed was the name of the king in the date formula. Additionally, it does not seem as if the Babylonians were present, based on the texts, as no Babylonian names are attested. Similar processes seem to have occurred at Tell Barri and Tell Halaf within the Ḥabur area (see below), but also in other

⁴¹¹ Kreppner 2016, 179, 186, Kreppner 2013b, 355-356, 359, 361; Kühne 2013, 256; Rohde 2013, 343-344.

⁴¹² Kreppner 2013a; 1, 4; Kreppner 2008a, 151; Rohde 2013, 353.

areas and sites, such as Tell Šiuḥ Fawqānī or Til Barsip and even in the Assyrian core proper, such as Aššur, Nimrud, Khorsabad and Nineveh.⁴¹³

Secondly, the material culture – the pottery in particular – is not very well known for the exact period the Red House was inhabited during its main occupational phase. Therefore, the excavated material allows us insights, not available at other sites and/ or regions and opens up the possibility to develop typologies and discover specific shapes and vessels, which were in use during this period. In this regard, it is important to note that a pottery kiln was excavated in the south of the Red House. As the area in which the kiln was located was made accessible by a doorway from the Red House, it seems reasonable to assume that it was used by the inhabitants of the building in order to produce the pottery which was needed within the household. This in turn means that the pottery found within the Red House was indeed specifically produced during the main occupational phase in this specific geographic locality, making it all the more important of a possible marker of both the period, i.e. the post-Assyrian period, as well as the region. Additionally, it was possible to analyse the entire range of pottery used in all functional parts of a household at the time.⁴¹⁴



Figure 46: The kiln excavated in the south of the Red House in Tell Sheikh Hamad

⁴¹³ Kreppner 2016, 183, 186; Kreppner 2013a, 4, 7-10; Kreppner 2013b, 359, 361; Kreppner 2006, 128; Kühne 2013, 253, 256; Kühne 2011, 111.

⁴¹⁴ Kreppner 2008a, 150; Kreppner 2006, 18, 25, 125.



Figure 47: Pottery found in situ in the Red House, Room PW at Tell Sheikh Hamad

The total number of pottery fragments excavated within the territory of the Red House amounts to 51 767 individual pieces, of which 32 639 belong to the main occupational phase (and therefore date to the first half of the 6th century BC), about 5000 of which are diagnostic. About 1700 pieces belong to the secondary occupational phase and the rest belong to either earlier or later phases. The array of shapes and functional groups of the vessels present is wide, but still very similar to the types present before the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, also serving as proof for continuity of Neo-Assyrian pottery traditions from the mid-7th until as far as the beginning of the 5th century BC. Neo-Babylonian pottery does not seem to have been introduced throughout this period.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁵ Kreppner 2016, 183; Kreppner 2008a, 151-152, 154; Kreppner 2008b, 168, 171; Kreppner 2006, 1.

The pottery from the Red House was manufactured from four different wares, Ware-type A being the most common, with about 90% of all vessels having been produced with it. Ware-type B, consisting of finer grain clay, seems to have been used for finer pottery, using higher temperatures during the firing process, as well as featuring more intricate shapes. Both mineral as well as organic temper was used in the production process, regardless of vessel shape. The vessels were formed either by hand, on the fast wheel, or by using the coil building technique, mostly depending on the shape and size of the desired end product. Much of the pottery seems to have been produced rather sloppy, as openings and profiles are not always evenly shaped. The most common vessels among the 2129 that could be identified were bottles (39,60%), bowls (29,37%), pots (14,04%), large storage vessels (6,58%) and beakers (3,99%). The bottles are usually rather thin and up to 1 m tall with either pointed, rounded or ring bases, although also smaller varieties exist. Usually, they feature thickened rims with an oval, triangular or circular profile. The bowls commonly have ribbed or inverted, thickened rims and their walls are either rounded or feature a carination. Only 2,34% of vessels were decorated. The most common type of decoration (2,07% or 674 pieces) are wavy grooves. These also define the Sheikh Ḥamad ware, which is not attested in other places and thus seems to be significant for the region. Additionally, some shapes which are usually assigned to different periods, seem to be in use at the same time in the Red House. Unfortunately, the state of research does not allow any further periodization, as comparable data for the periods before and/or after the main occupational phase of the Red House is not available or not as in detail as necessary.⁴¹⁶

Parallels regarding shapes and the inventory as a whole were discovered in the Tigris region, at sites such as Aššur, Nimrud, Khorsabad, Niniveh, Tall Rimaḥ or at the Qasrīg Cliff. Along the Ḥabur parallels were observed at Tell Halaf, Tell Beydar as well as Tell Barri (for more information see below). Further sites with similarities, such as Tell Šiuḥ Fawqānī, Tall Aḥmar, ‘Ānā or Sultantepe are situated along the Euphrates, or even along the upper Euphrates in Anatolia, in the case of Lidar Höyük.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Kreppner 2008a, 153, 155; Kreppner 2008b, 169-171; Kreppner 2006, 126.

⁴¹⁷ Kreppner 2006, 111, 113-114, 116-123.

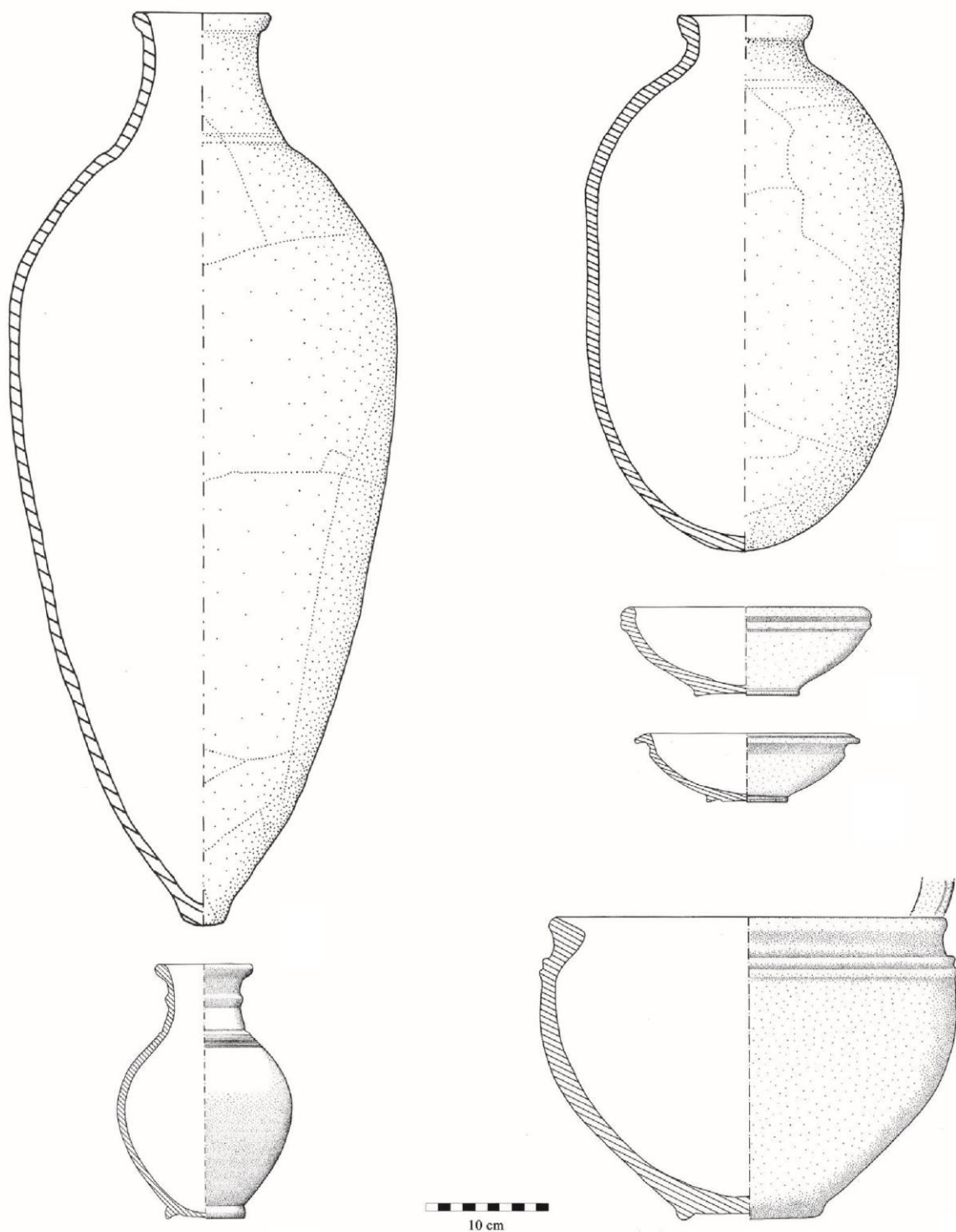


Figure 48: Some characteristic shapes for the "Post-Assyrian" period from Tell Sheikh Ḥamad

The pottery found in the latest context of the second occupational phase of the Red House features shapes which would usually be identified as being from the Neo-Assyrian period. This illustrates how less known periods with unknown material culture can be further diminished in their importance and presence by well understood and known periods – especially on multi-phase sites, and therefore remain hidden. The socio- economic decline is also recognizable in the array of shapes in use during this period.⁴¹⁸

The arrowheads discovered at Tell Sheikh Ḥamad were published in a separate, extensive study by Hellmuth Kramberg. While a multitude of different types of arrowheads are being discussed, the stratigraphical and typological analysis concerning specifically Scythian arrowheads – which are relevant for us – confirm the results of Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel. All examples of this type were discovered in the area of the Lower Town II. The find-contexts, in which the bilobate arrowheads, of which four were found in total, indicate use during the 8th and 7th century BC. Two of them stem from within a pit cremation grave, which usually does not confirm to Mesopotamian customs, but in this case might represent the political and social interactions in between the Assyrians and Scythians towards the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The bent tip of one arrow suggests that it had been actively used but cannot be connected to the cause of the death of the cremated individual, as they were found in the corner of the grave.⁴¹⁹

Of the trilobite Scythian arrowheads 15 individual pieces were excavated, most of which were either discovered in the north-eastern corner of the Lower Town II, or in contexts belonging to the Red House. One example with a bent tip was discovered outside the city wall, indicating that it might have been used in an attack against the Tell Sheikh Ḥamad. Similar pieces were found, among other places in Aššur, Nimrud and Tell Halaf (see below), all indicating a usage of these type of arrow heads up until the 5th century BC, making it a bit younger than the bilobate arrowheads and a good marker for especially the Neo-Babylonian period, as also suggested by Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel.⁴²⁰

Hellmuth Kramberg does conclude that the used arrowheads found inside the grave and outside the city walls do not indicate a singular event, but rather repeated attacks against the city by marauding nomadic groups, after the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. The finds

⁴¹⁸ Kreppner 2008a, 155; Kreppner 2006, 128.

⁴¹⁹ Hellmuth Kramberg 2013, 14, 22, 31, 34, 56.

⁴²⁰ Hellmuth Kramberg 2013, 28-29, 31.

within the Red House in layers belonging both to the main, as well as secondary occupation further suggest some degree of continuity.⁴²¹

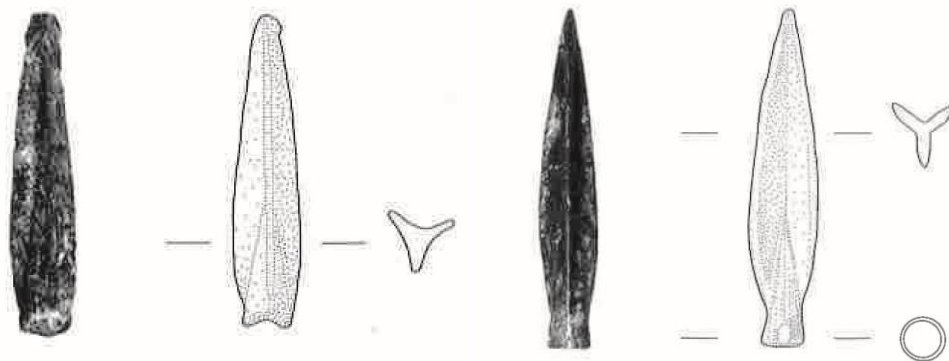


Figure 49: Arrowheads from Tell Sheikh Hamad, left piece with bent tip from tomb 94/034, not to scale

Besides the excavations at Tell Sheikh Ḥamad, a survey was conducted along the Lower Ḥabur. The collected data indicates that region experienced a heyday during the 8th century BC, when also Tell Sheikh Ḥamad's settlement area was extended considerably. The establishment of new settlements, all of them distributed evenly along the Ḥabur river, seems to have been facilitated and/ or made possible by an extension of the canal system during the same period. Such projects were only possible to realize due to the central, administrative power, along with the necessary capabilities to mobilize enough workforce the Neo-Assyrian Empire could provide. Besides agricultural settlements and central places, also settlements with specific functions, such as the protection of fords across the river, or safeguarding and renovation of canals and dams, as well as streets seem to have been developed. During the survey 66 of such settlements – 8% of which had a strictly urban character, dating to the Neo-Assyrian period could be identified. With the number of settlements, also the number of inhabitants increased exponentially, until about 24 000 people were living along the Lower Ḥabur – 58% of them in cities. This distribution in between rural and urban areas was only possible to hight productivity of the farmland, the high efficiency of the Neo-Assyrian road system for the transport of goods, as well as a centralized, highly developed tax system.⁴²²

For the period of Neo-Babylonian supremacy, only 24 settlements could be detected, with an additional eight not being attributable. The settlements which survived were usually central places, which had an economic and demographic advantage to begin with, enabling them to survive even in troublesome times, or and additionally situated in the Ḥabur floodplain, rather

⁴²¹ Hellmuth Kramberg 2013, 34, 56.

⁴²² Bonacossi 2008, 190-199; Wilkinson et al. 2005, 38.

than the river terraces. To the south of Tell Sheikh Ḥamad no settlements seem to have survived into the Neo-Babylonian period. It was suggested that the inhabitants might have migrated into bigger cities due to the lack of central power and therefore security, although a renomadisation of these areas is also possible as well. Additionally, it is important to remember that smaller places and the materials left behind by them might not be as represented in the archaeological record as bigger cities. However, the distribution of sites surviving and the general climatic circumstances along the Lower Ḥabur suggest that the ruralisation of the area and abandonment of a majority of sites might have been connected to the breakdown of the canal- and therefore watering-system. The lack of a central authority taking care of periodic renovations and the interdependence of certain parts of this system would have inevitably caused water shortages and by that a reduction in productivity of raw materials and food stuffs. Bigger cities and their hinterland would have had the possibility to resist these developments for a certain amount of time due to their potential in available workforce, as well as an elite, used to administrate and plan such tasks, but would eventually succumb to the ever more difficult circumstances, resulting in a general depopulation. Unfortunately, it is unclear, if the Babylonians intervened or interacted in this process – it has been speculated that they left the administration of the region initially to the elites already in place and familiar with the regional processes as long as they accepted them as their new overlords. It seems as if the situation deteriorated even further when the Achaemenid took over from the Babylonians – most likely because the Jezireh became even more marginal in relation to the Achaemenid capitals, than to the Assyrian and Babylonian ones before.⁴²³

3.4.3.2 Tell Halaf

Tell Halaf, ancient Gūzāna (akk.; hebr. Gōzān, aram. Gwzn/ Gawzān), is the second city mentioned in the inscription on the statue of Hadad-yis'ī and located approximately 3,5 km to the south-west of Tell Feḥerīye, the other site mentioned in the inscription, and the modern city of Ras al-‘Ain. As such, the site is also located in the same karstic landscape, which is source to the Ḥabur River and due to the ample availability of water from these springs and high precipitation levels equally suited for agriculture. Furthermore, the site is located along the already mentioned Kings Road (akk. *ḥarrān šarri*), an important trade and communication route connecting Upper Mesopotamia with the Euphrates and the Mediterranean. The

⁴²³ Bonacossi 2008, 196-197; Kühne 2013, 254; Kühne 2011, 108, 110-112.

importance of the city as an important logistical station on this route and the region in general is reflected by its Aramean name Gwzn/ Gawzān, which can be translated as waystation.⁴²⁴

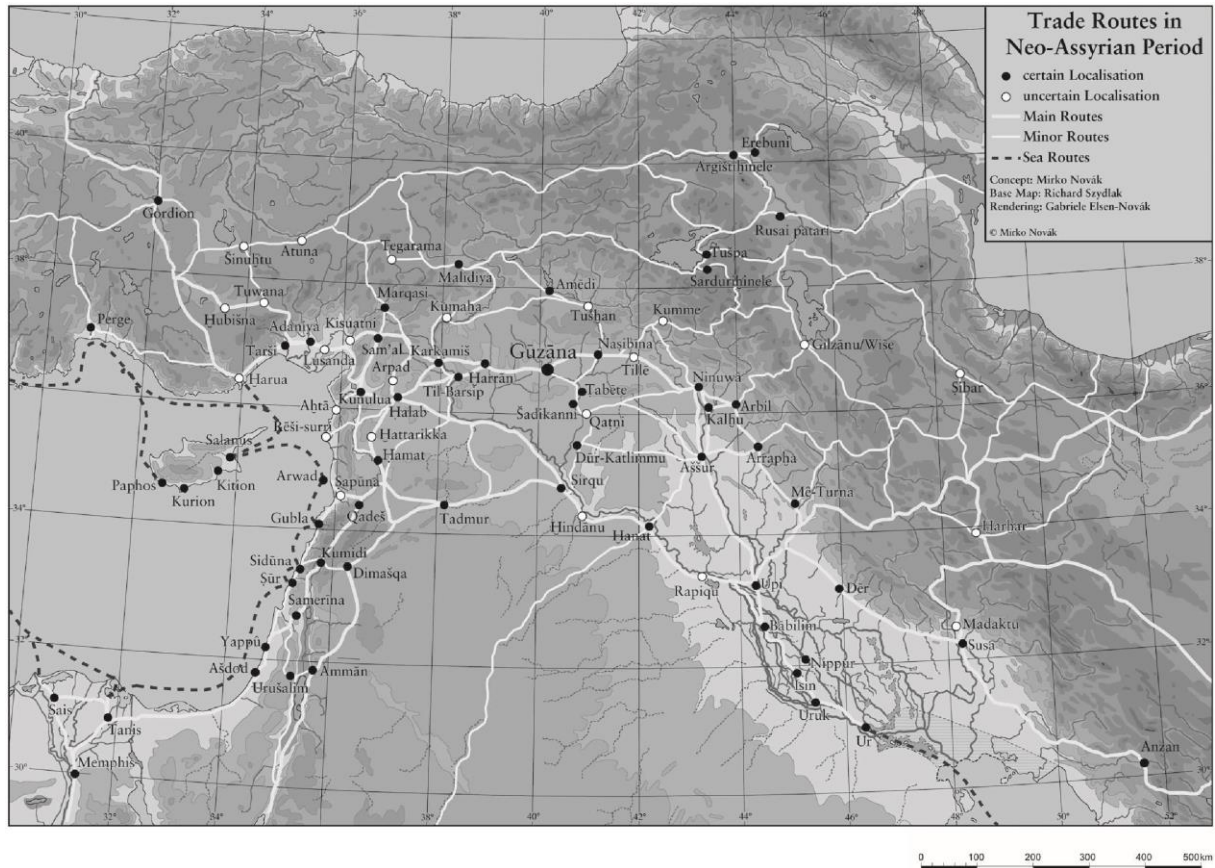


Figure 50: The Neo-Assyrian ḥarrān šarri network

The former city is situated on the southern bank of the Ḥabur River and expands over an area of approximately 55 to 75 ha (the exact numbers differ depending on the source), of which the citadel takes up about 6 ha and rises 20 m above the Ḥabur plain.⁴²⁵

The site was discovered by von Oppenheim in 1899, who immediately opened several test trenches, in which numerous orthostats covered in reliefs were excavated. The first large scale excavations were conducted from 1911 until 1913, and again after the First World War in 1929 both on the citadel and in the lower city. Due to the fact that most of the documentation of these years had been destroyed during the Second World War, it took several decades until the results were published. Unfortunately, it was no longer possible to date specific layers and also a correlation between a majority of the finds and layers/ contexts was either very difficult

⁴²⁴ Baghdo et al. 2009, 7; Cholidis – Martin 2002, 10; Novák 2013, 259; Novák 2009, 94-95.

⁴²⁵ Cholidis – Martin 2002, 11; Langenegger et al. 1950, 3; Martin 2011, 224.

or not possible in many cases. Further excavations were conducted from 2006 until 2010 by a joint German – Syrian mission, the results of which have been published during the last years.⁴²⁶

Nonetheless, the importance of the site and the find material discovered there cannot be denied. It was first settled during the Early Pottery Neolithic period (7000 BC) and was continuously occupied until the end of the Chalcolithic (3000 BC). The Tell lends its name to the Halaf culture, which is characterized by its architecture (round and rectangular buildings) and its pottery, decorated in colourful geometric patterns and made from fine clays.⁴²⁷

During the following period until the end of the 2nd Millennium BC, settlement activity seems to have been occasional and greatly reduced, although the site was not totally abandoned. At the beginning of the Iron Age, around 1100 BC, the Arameans, an originally nomadic people, settled in orthern Mesopotamia, founded several city-states and/ or smaller kingdoms, among which Tell Halaf was the capital of Bit Baḥiani/ Beet-Baḡyān. The city was developed accordingly, among other structures the so-called West-, or Temple-palace, a *hilāni* type building with a monumental entrance supported by anthropomorphic basalt columns atop of animal statues cut from basalt, was constructed.⁴²⁸

The city seems to have fallen into the hands of the Assyrians during the 9th century and, after a period of providing tribute, was eventually incorporated into the administrative provincial structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire as a local capital of the province of the same name. As the governor of the city was regularly featured in the yearly eponym lists, the city must have had an important status within the Empire, which was most likely based on its agricultural capabilities, as well as location along the *ḥarrān šarri*.⁴²⁹

During the period of Neo-Assyrian rule, especially the citadel was thoroughly transformed from an Aramean city into a Neo-Assyrian regional capital. The Necropolis originally situated in the north-west of the citadel was covered by a massive mudbrick platform on top of which the so-called North-Eastern Palace, as well as houses of the local elite were constructed. The true dimensions of the North-Eastern Palace, which originally covered most of the eastern half of the citadel, were only discovered during the German – Syrian excavations and was clearly built according to the blueprint of a Neo-Assyrian governor's palace. In the lower

⁴²⁶ Baghdo et al. 2009, 7-8; Martin 2011, 216-217; Oppenheim 1943, 3-4, 9.

⁴²⁷ Martin 2011, 219-220; Novák 2013, 277-278

⁴²⁸ Cholidis – Martin 2002, 12; Martin 2011, 220-221, 226; Novák 2009, 93.

⁴²⁹ Novák 2009, 94-95.

town a monumental temple, dwellings of the elite as well as ordinary houses were discovered. Bilingual administrative texts discovered in the lower town, written in Aramaean and Assyrian, allow insights into the administrative, as well as demographic situation at the time and are similar to texts discovered at Tell Sheikh Ḥamad.⁴³⁰

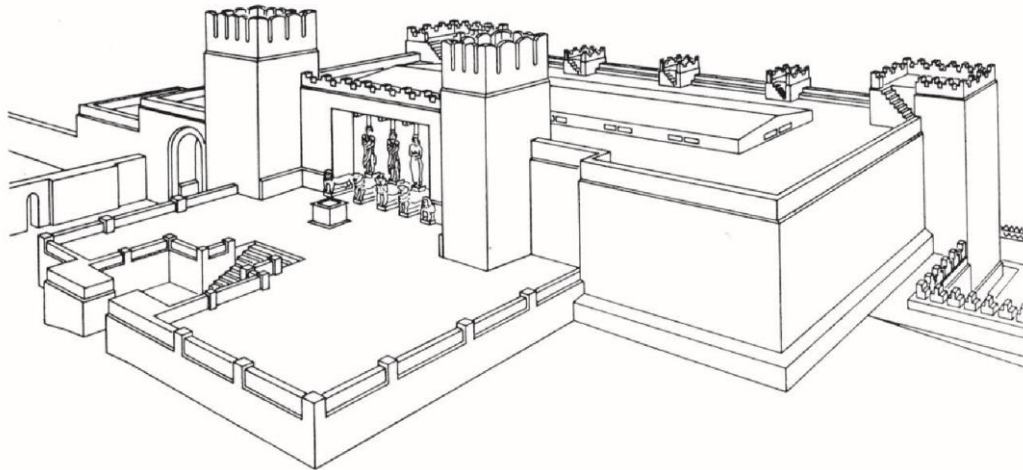


Figure 51: Illustration of the *bît hilāni* or Western Palace at Tell Halaf

What exactly happened at Tell Halaf after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire was long unclear. It is known that the Babylonians undertook several military expeditions to northern Mesopotamia, but never mentioned Gūzāna specifically. Traces of conflagration in the Upper city were connected with the rebellion of the city from 761-758 BC against the Neo-Assyrian Empire, during which the city had been besieged for two years. Textual sources indicated at least some limited continuity at the site, with a literate elite population, which tried to preserve Assyrian customs at least to a limited degree. Finds from Achaemenid and Hellenistic times support this level of continuity. From the point of view of the material culture and occupational horizons, no traces of a Neo-Babylonian occupation were discovered during von Oppenheim's excavations, resulting in him postulating a hiatus in occupation for the Neo-Babylonian period. In any case, the city had lost its importance by the Hellenistic period and was abandoned in favour of Tell Feḥerīye during the Roman period.⁴³¹

This interpretation and/ or situation remained *communis opinio* until the Syrian-German expeditions took place, although some arrowheads, originally dated to the Achaemenid

⁴³⁰ Martin 2011, 227-228, 231; Moortgart 1955, 30; Novák 2013, 273-274; Novák – Ghafour 2009, 41, 59.

⁴³¹ Becker - Novák 2012, 229; Cholidis – Martin 2002, 11, 18; Hrouda 1962, 49-50; Langenegger et al. 1950, 402; Novák 2013, 272; Novák 2009, 95.

period, published by Hrouda, would much rather qualify to be dated to the Neo-Babylonian period, according to the criteria outlined by Dugaw, Lipschits and Stiebel.⁴³²

In course of the Syrian-German excavations, conducted from 2006 until 2010, several areas in both the upper and lower town were re-examined. In the lower town and along the city wall indeed no traces of a Neo-Babylonian occupation, or any other sort of destructive events could be detected.⁴³³

In the upper town, on the citadel, the results of the digs, certainly due to more modern and careful excavation as well as documentation techniques, are rather different. In Area A, close to the West-Palace, close to which the Neo-Babylonian tablets from Tell Halaf had been found (see above), some more tablet fragments were discovered. Additionally, a building – A1 – built on top of the mudbrick platform which had originally been thought to have been empty except the West-Palace, was discovered. Within this building, occupational horizon A6, preserved in rooms AA and AB, was dated to the 7th and 6th century BC. The find inventory connected to this layer is typical for an elite residence and consists of small finds – Bronze fibulas, Gold earrings and a glass bead, dated to the Neo-Babylonian to Achaemenid period. Several Scythian arrowheads discovered there, were dated to this period as well, should – according to the data from Israel - be dated to Achaemenid or even Hellenistic times instead though. The remainder of the pottery inventory is characterized by several different types of bottles and fine wares, mostly fine-ware vessels, mostly bowls and beakers, which can be well compared to the material from Area C. Additionally, several rather ordinary vessels for cooking and storage were excavated.⁴³⁴

Area C is situated within the perimeters of the North-Eastern Palace. Several rooms – CB, CD, CE, D, E and C1:B as well as courtyard C1:CF – were identified to have been occupied during the Neo-Babylonian period, defined as phase C6. Rooms B and F could not be stratigraphically connected but would fit according to levels of their floors. The rooms seem to reflect small-scale industrial and/ or productive activities, as within room CB a *ṭannur*, in room CD a basalt mortar and in courtyard C1:CF a kiln, together with metal slag as well as several pieces of Iron – mostly arrow heads – were discovered. Additionally, eight Bronze Fibulas and two Scythian arrowheads, all of which dating to the Neo-Babylonian and

⁴³² Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel (forthcoming); Hrouda 1962, 54, TAF. 36, #134-136, B.M. 536-538; On the arrow heads from Tell Halaf see also Pesonen 2012.

⁴³³ Orthmann et al. 2012, 112, 123, 130

⁴³⁴ Dugaw – Lipschits – Stiebel (forthcoming); Martin – Fakhru 2009, 17, 20-23, Sievertson 2009, 69.

Achaemenid period were excavated. The pottery from this layer is defined by high, slim bottles as well as some jugs and bowls, mostly reflecting functional necessities and productive activities. Fine wares are by far not as prominently represented as in Area A. Additionally, the remains of a handmade basin with horizontal and vertical plastic bands, similar to a basin discovered in Area A, are attested.⁴³⁵

These finds indicate that the former residence of the Assyrian governor had lost its function as a representative, administrative building and reflects a certain degree of impoverishment, as indicated by the rather poor quality of renovations and architectural changes. Nonetheless, the amount of pottery indicates a high degree of activities.⁴³⁶



Figure 52: Excavations in the southern courtyard of the North-Eastern Palace at Tell Halaf

The building was eventually destroyed by fire, as indicated by destruction horizons, which – although present – are not clearly recognizable in all areas of the building. Additionally, the high amount of arrow- and spearheads, as well as scales from an Iron armour and skeletons, which seem to have not been buried properly, indicate a violent conflict which seem to have ended occupation activities at Tell Halaf. It is not clear who caused these destructions. As it falls towards the end of the Neo-Babylonian or beginning of the Achaemenid period, they

⁴³⁵ Novák - Ghafour 2012, 99; Novák – Ghafour 2009, 54-57; Sievertsen 2012, 159; Sievertson 2009, 72.

⁴³⁶ Novák - Ghafour et al. 2012, 99.

might have resulted from the change of rule and generally insecurities during this transitional period. In any case, it is clear that Tell Halaf was occupied continuously from the Neo-Babylonian until the Achaemenid and/ or Hellenistic period, even though the beginning of the associated layers cannot be defined exactly.⁴³⁷

The pottery material from both phases A6 and C6 shows striking similarities to the inventory of the “Red House”, excavated at Tell Sheikh Ḥamad, indicating some sort of regional standard for the production of pottery, possibly according to some predefined standards or a common tradition. For the first time, this enables us to define some aspects of the material culture (such as high, slim bottles with pointed bases) for this specific period in northern Mesopotamia.⁴³⁸

3.4.3.3 Tell Feḥerīye

Tell Feḥerīye is a site in northern Syria, close to the Syrian-Turkish border in the centre of the karst spring area at the head of the Ḥabur River. The position of the site is reflected in the name of the nearby modern town of Ras al-‘Ain, which can be translated as “head of the spring” and derives from the Roman name Resaina, which itself is based on the Aramaic equivalent of Akkadian *rēš īni*, already mentioned in the annals of Adad-Nirari II (911-891 BC). In recent years some of the springs dried up due to the over exploitation of the ground water, making it possible to excavate layers, which were not accessible due to the high ground water table. This location and the year-round availability of fresh water and high level of precipitation of around 800 mm per year, not only makes the region highly fertile and ideal for agriculture, but also meaningful in a political, religious and strategic regard. Additionally, Tell Feḥerīye is situated along the route connecting northern Assyria to the Euphrates and Mediterranean.⁴³⁹

The site was first visited in 1927 by von Oppenheim, who soon after proposed it to be Wašukanni, the capital of the Late Bronze Age Mitanni state. Due to the Second World War, von Oppenheim was not able to excavate the site himself and an American team from the Oriental Institute of Chicago and the Boston Museum of fine Arts attained a permit and began their research in 1940. Due to German protests with the Vichy regime, the project was

⁴³⁷ Martin 2011, 229; Novák - Ghafour 2012, 99-100, 107, 230; Novák – Ghafour 2009, 60.

⁴³⁸ Novák - Ghafour 2012, 99; Sievertson 2009, 59, 77-78.

⁴³⁹ Bonatz 2015, 13-14, 26; Bonatz et al. 2008, 91; Millard – Bordreuil 1982, 136-137; Pruß – Bagdo 2002, 311.

stopped soon after and the site abandoned until 1955 and 1956 when Moortgart returned in order to clarify if Tell Feherīye could be identified as ancient Wašukanni. Due to difficult environmental circumstances, he eventually left the site for Tell Chuera.⁴⁴⁰

In 1979, during the removal of soil at the edge of the site, a farmer discovered a basalt statue of a standing man, both hands clasped at his waist, which also carries a bilingual Assyrian-Aramaic inscription. The statue was dated to the 9th century BC and the inscription identifies the depicted individual as being the local king (in the Aramean) or governor (in the Assyrian) akk: Hadad-yis'ī/ aram: Had-yis'i of Sikan and Guzan, dedicated to the god (H)Adad and supposed to be put on display in the latter's temple in Sikan. Besides giving us interesting insights into the political constellations of the time, the text most and foremost identifies Tell Feherīye as ancient Sikan, as Tell Halaf had already been identified as ancient Gūzāna, and confirms that it was a place of worship with a temple at least during the 9th century. Additionally, the name Sikan might be a derivative of Wašukanni.⁴⁴¹

Further excavations were carried out in 2001 and from 2006 to 2010 by German – Syrian projects, first under Pruß and Bagdo and later under Bonatz.⁴⁴²



*Figure 53:
Statue of Hadad-yis'ī*

The site was occupied from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic until the Islamic period and extends over a total area of about 90 ha, 12 of which comprise the upper mound, which rises about 15 m above the Ḥabur plain, and the remaining 78 ha being the lower mound, with about 6 m in height. As the lower area of the Tell was exposed to considerable alluvial processes, the latest archaeological remains there, dated to the Byzantine period, were discovered 5,5 m below the modern day surface, illustrating the considerable difference in appearance in between the modern and ancient site.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Bonatz 2015, 13-14; Kraeling 1958, v-vi; Oppenheim 1943, 10.

⁴⁴¹ Millard – Bordreuil 1982, 136-139; Sasson 1985, 86-87.

⁴⁴² Bonatz 2015, 14-15; Pruß – Bagdo 2002, 311.

⁴⁴³ Bonatz 2015, 14, 16-17; Bonatz et al. 2008, 93-94; Kantor 1958a, 21.

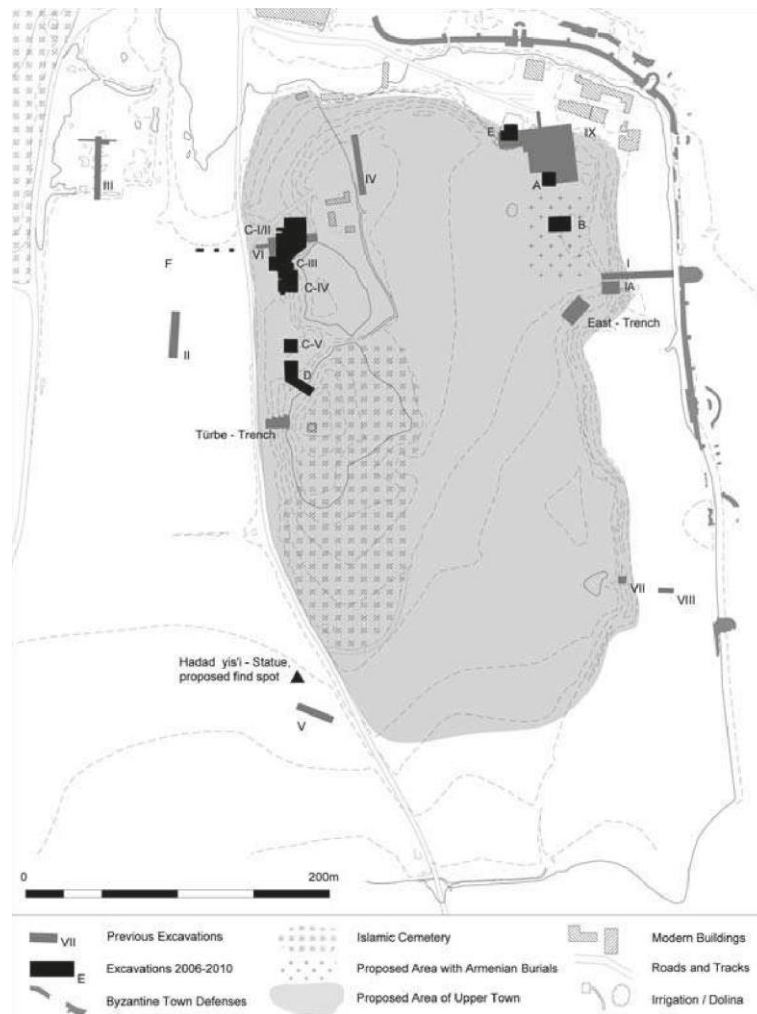


Figure 54: Map of Tell Feheriye

Besides the aforementioned statue, indicating the existence of a temple for the Neo-Assyrian period, McEwan excavated an Assyrian palace in the *hilāni*-style, which seems to have been occupied from the 9th to the 7th century BC, as several floor levels (floors 3-5) indicate. The building was further excavated and examined by Pruß, after it had been discovered that considerable areas of the Tell – including parts of the Neo-Assyrian palace – had been destroyed during the 1980s in the course of levelling activities for agricultural purposes. In general, it seems as if mostly Roman and Byzantine layers and remains had been removed and destroyed.⁴⁴⁴

The palace does not show any traces of artificial destruction and/ or conflagration, indicating a gradual abandonment of the building towards the end of the Neo-Assyrian period, rather than a violent conquest. Additionally, a floor above the *hilāni* (floor 2) also contained Iron Age material, which could indicate an occupation during a later phase of the Iron Age, but as

⁴⁴⁴ McEwan 1958, 20; Pruß – Bagdo 2002, 314, 318-319.

these finds cannot be connected with architecture and might be just stray finds, they cannot be considered to have been found *in situ*. Thus, the floor cannot be dated to the Neo-Babylonian period, or any other Iron Age period. Additionally, no indicators for an occupation during the Persian period was discovered at the site, which – according to Kantor – might be accidental and/ or connected to the rather poor knowledge of the material culture of the time.⁴⁴⁵

In some areas in the northern half of the upper mound a thick layer of homogenous soil in between the Neo-Assyrian palace and the late-antique strata was discovered. Within this material, several tombs built of mudbricks (*Lehmziegelkistengrab*) were discovered. The pottery discovered within the graves was difficult to date but would broadly indicate a date for the Late Iron Age – either Post-Neo-Assyrian, or Achaemenid. In contrast, the tomb architecture would point towards a Parthian or Roman date.⁴⁴⁶



Figure 55: Mudbrick tomb in Trench IIIC at Tell Tell Feheriye

In recent years, the scope of the Neo-Assyrian occupation of Tell Feheriye has been questioned. The notion of a well-connected, important Assyrian city was based on the results of the American excavations under McEwan and the discovery of the *hilāni* palace, as well as associated finds, such as Assyrian palace ware. This impression was further reinforced by the discovery of the statue of Hadad-yis'i, implying the existence of a temple at the site. During the most recent excavations, it was discovered that in many areas of the site the Roman and Byzantine occupation layers are directly based upon, or cut into, Middle Assyrian strata. If there was indeed an extensive Neo-Assyrian presence at the site, it would have had to be

⁴⁴⁵ McEwan 1958, 6, 20; Kantor 1958a, 22; Kantor 1958b, 51.

⁴⁴⁶ Bonatz et al. 2008, 100; Kantor 1958b, 45-46, Pruß – Bagdo 2002, 320-321.

removed entirely in these areas, before the Romans and/ or Byzantines constructed their buildings, which seems at least questionable. Furthermore, it seems as if pottery datable to the 9th century BC is more common than distinct Assyrian pottery of the 8th and 7th centuries BC.⁴⁴⁷

The situation at Tell Feḫerīye at this time has to be closely observed and put in contrast with the situation at Tell Halaf. In the occupational history of both sites, it seems to be quite common that periods, which are not attested at the one, are at the other and vice versa.⁴⁴⁸

3.4.3.4 Tell Beydar

Tell Beydar is situated in the west of the Ḥabur triangle, about 30 km to the north of the local capital Hasseke, near the right bank of Wadi Uwaij, a tributary to the Ḥabur River. The Tell covers a circular area of about 28 ha, is about 27 m high and can be divided in a central upper and lower citadel, of which the upper encompasses an area of about 7 ha. The site is most famous for its occupation during the second half of the 3rd Millennium BC, during which it was one of the so-called “Kranzhügel” cities, featuring double ring-walls around both the upper and the lower city. Besides some minor research conducted during the 1920s by Brossé, an aerial photograph of the site exists from 1927, made by Poidebard. The first large scale excavations were conducted from 1992 until 2010 – in total 17 campaigns – by a European-Syrian team, during which also a Hurrian, as well as Seleucid/ Parthian occupational phases of the Tell could be detected.⁴⁴⁹

In the west of the citadel, an area of about 30 ha features hills of about 4 m in height, covering the lower town of the city. During surveys in the area new- and “post”-Assyrian pottery was collected, because of which a contemporary occupation of the lower town for this period was postulated. These claims could be proven right by excavations, during which occupational horizons for the Neo-Babylonian period were uncovered in three rooms and a courtyard with two ṭannurs and a grinding stone installation. Additionally, roughly on the same level as the floor (the stratigraphical situation is difficult due to erosion) a tomb was discovered, the grave

⁴⁴⁷ Bonatz 2015, 16; Kantor 1958a, 26, 28.

⁴⁴⁸ Bonatz 2015, 17-18; Kantor 1958a; 25.

⁴⁴⁹ Bretschneider et al. 1995a, 5-6; Bretschneider et al. 1995b, 1, 4; Bryce 2009, 123; Pruß 2013, 133-135.

goods of which could be dated to roughly the same period, most likely a bit younger than the occupational horizon itself. Among them are a Bronze fibula, and pottery, which are, just as the architecture of these layers, very much comparable to the finds from Tell Sheikh Ḥamad and Tell Halaf.⁴⁵⁰

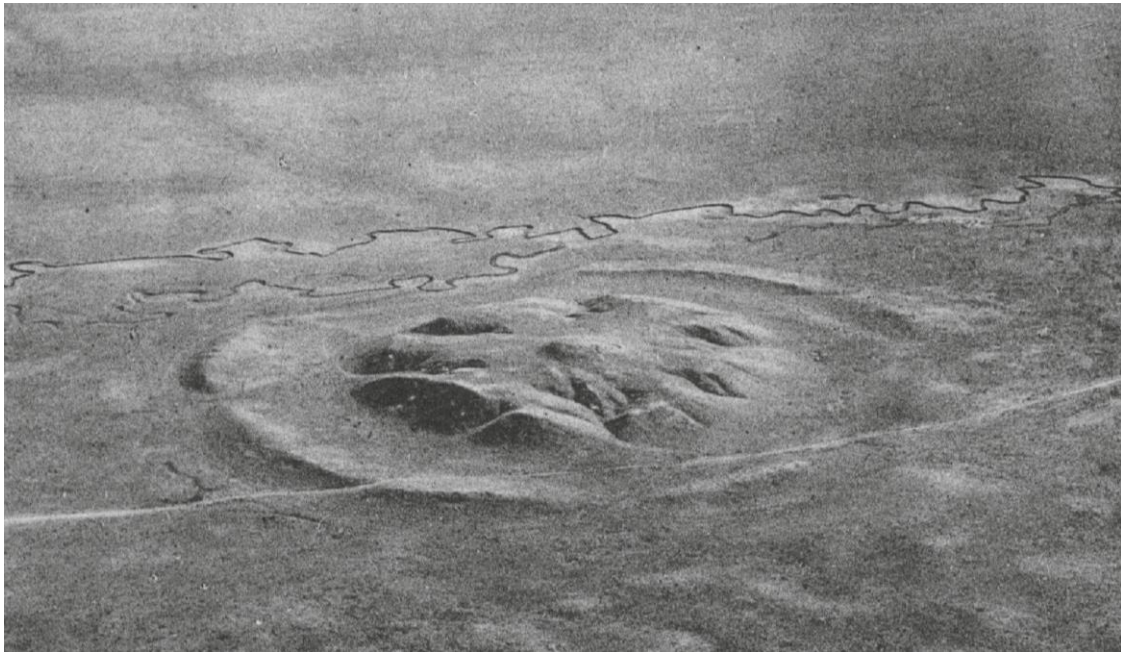


Figure 56: Aerial picture of Tell Beydar

Additionally to the excavations at the main site, a survey was conducted during 1997 and 1998 in a radius of approximately 12 km around the Tell, encompassing an area of about 450 km², during which a total of 83 sites (including Tell Beydar) could be identified.⁴⁵¹

The settlement pattern for the Iron Age period is being described as dispersed, with a large amount of small settlement covering the entire area in an even matrix, even covering parts of the basalt plateau to the west of Tell Beydar. Although it seems likely that this development was a result of the considerable administrative capabilities and possible deliberate policies of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, it is equally possible that it was a result of nomadic Aramean groups becoming sedentary, caused by the long lasting peaceful and stable conditions in the area during the period. Other factors might include local political, economic and/ or social conditions, as well as traditions. As the material culture of the Iron Age was not well known at the time the surveys were conducted, it was not possible to divide the period further.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Bretschneider et al. 1995a, 6, 18-19; Bretschneider 1997, 209-211.

⁴⁵¹ Cuncliff 2014, 91-92; Wilkinson – Cuncliff 2012, 665.

⁴⁵² Wilkinson 2000, 12; Wilkinson 1998, 28; Wilkinson – Cuncliff 2012, 667-668; Ur – Wilkinson 2008, 308-309; Wilkinson et al. 2005, 49; Wilkinson – Barbanes 2000, 397, 420.

After the Neo-Assyrian period, the number of settlements in the area at first fell rapidly and continued to decline steadily throughout the Hellenistic, Parthian and Islamic periods, although the region was never completely abandoned. Most sites during this post-Iron Age periods seem to have been located to the north of Tell Beydar, where conditions regarding rain-fed agriculture are more stable. Additionally, as no large sites existed in the area, no settlement hierarchy seem to have existed.⁴⁵³

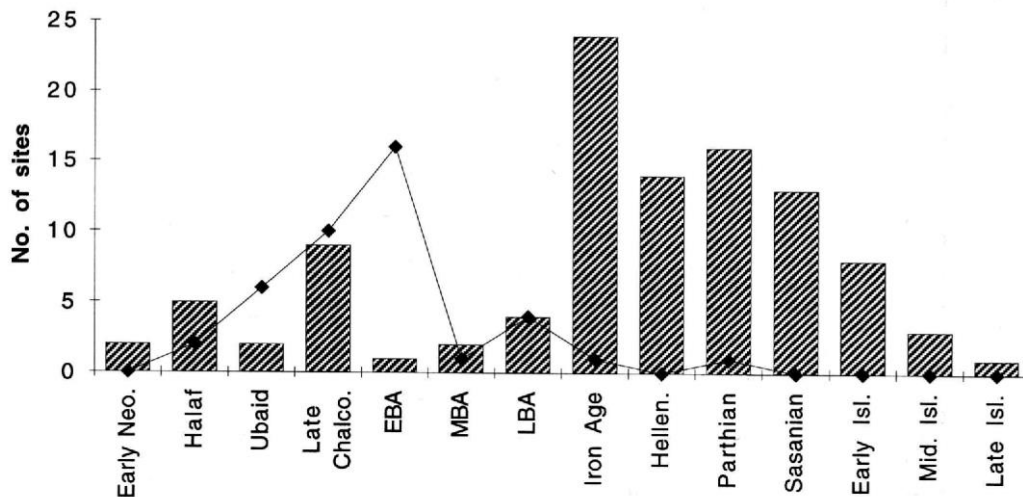


Figure 57: Number of settlements in the Tell Beydar region throughout the ages

In recent years, further studies concerning settlement patterns and the identification of possible sites were conducted, using satellite imagery. These studies largely confirmed the already available data, although stating that the number of sites for the Iron Age might have been severely underestimated. However, all possible sites discovered by the use of satellite imagery have to be validated – especially in terms of chronology – in the field, and as such neither validate, nor invalidate previous studies until this is possible.⁴⁵⁴

3.4.3.5 Tell Brak

The site of Tell Brak is located in the Upper Habur area along an important overland trade route, which connected Upper Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean, and extends over an area of about 60 ha, measuring approximately 800 by 600 m and rising 43 m above the plain along its northern ridge. The site has been continuously occupied from the 7th Millennium BC until the early 1st Millennium BC, the 4th and 3rd Millennium BC with the so-called “Eye Temple”

⁴⁵³ Wilkinson 2000, 12-13; Wilkinson 1998, 27.

⁴⁵⁴ Cunliffe 2014, 91; Wilkinson – Cunliffe 2012, 674, 676.

and the palace of Naram-Sîn respectively, being of particular importance. Some very limited evidence for a Roman and Islamic occupation exist, although these most likely derive from other sites close by.⁴⁵⁵

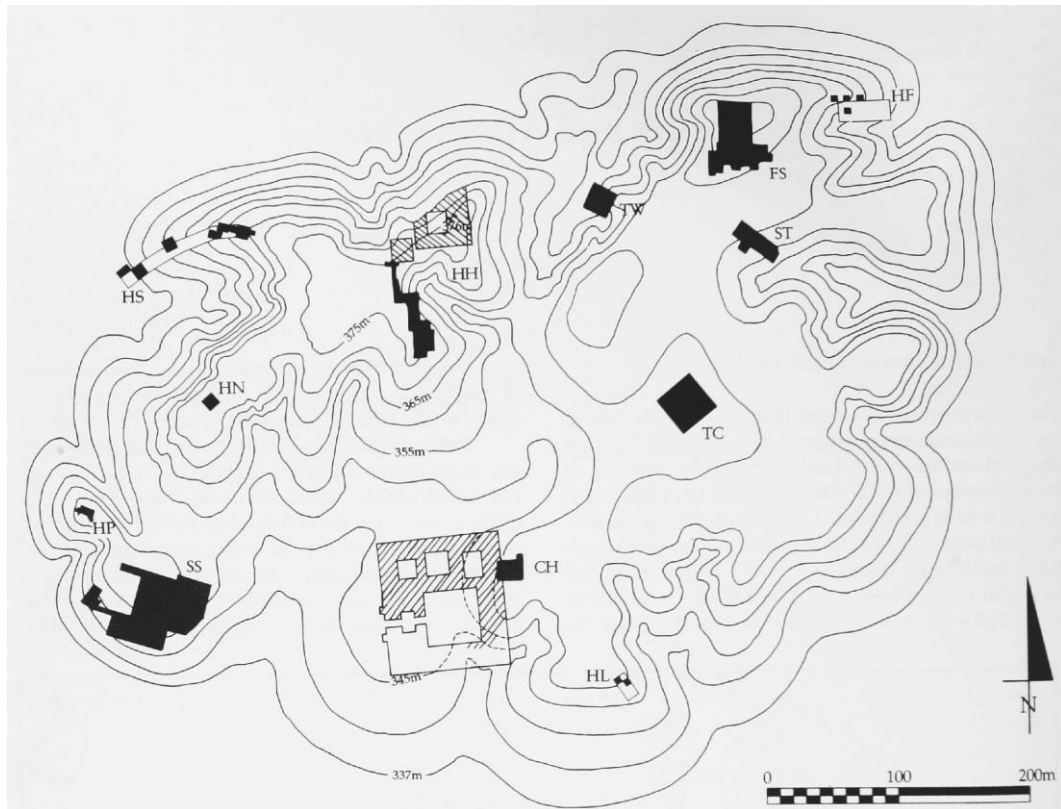


Figure 58: Topographic map of Tell Brak

The site was first excavated in 1930 by Father Poidebard, of whom unfortunately only very limited records exist. M. E. L. Mallowan conducted large-scale excavations from 1937 to 1938, during which the aforementioned Eye temple, as well as the palace of Naram-Sîn were unearthed. Further research was undertaken from 1976 to 1993 under D. and J. Oates, from 1994- 1996 under R. Matthews, from 1999- 2004 under D. Emberling and H. McDonald and finally since 2006 under A. McMahon, each of which focused on different periods of the occupational history of the site.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Mallowan 1947; Matthews 2003, 1-2, 5; McMahon 2013, 67; Oates 2005, 1; Oates et al.1997, xvii-xix, 61, 93.

⁴⁵⁶ Mallowan 1947; McMahon 2013, 67-68; Oates et al. 1997, xix.

Unfortunately, no proof for Neo-Babylonian presence at the site exists and even for the Neo-Assyrian period the evidence is extremely limited, essentially consisting of a few sherds of pottery, which might as well be dated to the Achaemenid, Parthian, Hellenistic or even later periods. At the foot of the Tell several pieces of a possibly Aramean basalt sculpture and a fragment of a Late Assyrian “Hand of Ishtar” architectural element made of basalt. Similar pieces seem to have been excavated and/ or removed from the site during the period of Poidebard’s excavations but could not be recovered. These architectural elements might be connected with a platform built of red mudbrick at the very top of the Tell in area HH, just below the surface above the Middle Assyrian occupation layers, the exact purpose of which is unknown. According to the excavators, the presence of the “Hand of Ishtar” at the site and the aforementioned platform indicate the existence of a monumental building and a settlement of the same date, which might be identified with ancient Tabitu. Additionally, some Late Assyrian pottery was discovered in ploughed fields close to the site. Unfortunately, the plough already had destroyed any kind of associated architecture. On aerial pictures from the 1930s a circular structure was identifiable in the north of the site, which might have been a Neo-Assyrian military camp.⁴⁵⁷



Figure 59: Late-Assyrian architectural "Hand of Ishtar" element, discovered at Tell Brak

⁴⁵⁷ Oates et al. 1997, xix, 78-79; 153-154.

At the site of Tell Majnuneh, in the north of Tell Brak, a Late Assyrian Fibula was discovered, which might indicate some settlement activity during this period there. Unfortunately, no further information about the site, excavations and/ or its stratigraphy seem to be available as of now.⁴⁵⁸

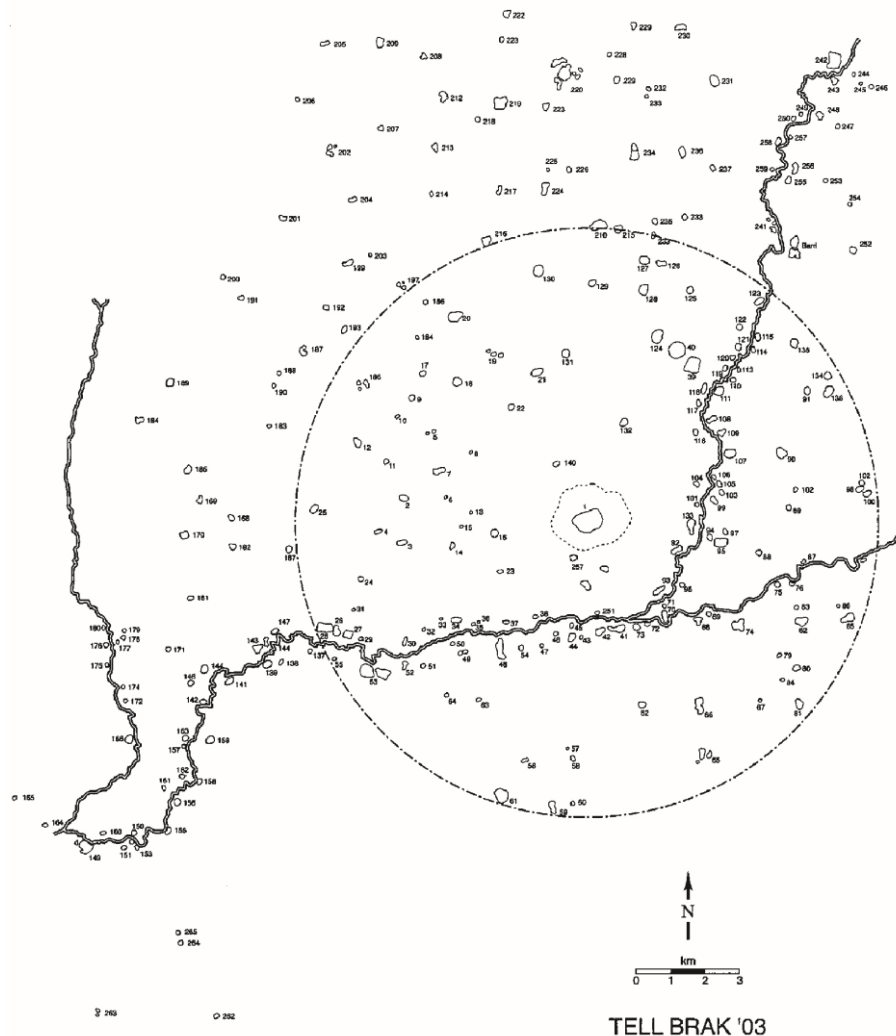


Figure 60: Tell Brak and sites surveyed during the Tell Brak Survey

Additionally, to the excavations at the Tell itself, several surveys were conducted in the surrounding area since the 1920s. As the knowledge of the material culture concerning the 1st Millennium BC has changed profoundly over the years and is still under discussion, we will focus here on the most recent survey⁴⁵⁹, conducted during 2002 and 2003 under the direction

⁴⁵⁸ Oates et al. 1997, 153; For the location of the site see Oates – Oates 1993, 183.

⁴⁵⁹ To illustrate: During a survey conducted in 1988 in a 170 km² around Tell Brak, only 56 sites could be identified. Of these, none could be securely dated to neither the Neo-Babylonian, nor Achaemenid period. 28 sites were either dated to the Late-Assyrian or Hellenistic period (sites 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32, 35, 36, 38, 45, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52), of which 2 (sites 5 and 31) were occupied during both of them. For more information see: Eidem – Warburton 1996.

of Oates. After the first two seasons, an area of about 500 km² had been surveyed, in which 268 sites could be identified. Rather unsurprisingly, 141 relatively large and closely spaced sites were occupied during the Neo-Assyrian period, which represents a maximum in sites at any given point in time. For the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid period, 90 rather small sites could be identified which resemble the neo-Assyrian settlement pattern. The occupational deposits from larger sites are irregular, but could be the result of erosion, just as at Tell Brak. During the Hellenistic period, 87 sites were occupied, many of which were newly established, meaning that either during the Neo-Babylonian and/ or Achaemenid period many sites were abandoned. The pottery shapes specific for this for this time span are jars with rolled rims and exterior grooves on the rim, as well as heavy-rimmed bowls, often with multiple grooves on top of the rim. In general, it was noted that the knowledge of shapes common during this period remains insufficient.⁴⁶⁰

3.4.3.6 Tell Barri

Tell Barri is situated in the eastern Habur triangle, about 8 km to the north of Tell Brak, between the modern towns of Hasseke and Qanishly on the eastern bank of Wadi Jaghjagh, a small river, which guaranteed a steady supply with fresh water, as ancient Mygdonios or Hyrmas. The site occupies an area of about 34 ha, rises 32 m above the surrounding landscape and was divided into an upper and lower town. The general climatic and environmental conditions can be described as stable and favourable, as semi-arid agriculture could be practiced with participation levels of about 300 mm per year.⁴⁶¹

As most of the surface of the Tell was covered with material from the Roman and Islamic periods, research was only conducted after an inscription was found at the site, making it possible to identify the site as ancient Kahat. Excavations began in 1980 and lasted until 2006 over the course of 30 seasons, at first under Pecorella and afterwards under Pierobon-Benoit.⁴⁶²

The site was continuously occupied from the late 4th Millennium BC until the Middle Ages (13th century BC) and even in modern times. Especially during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta II (890-884 BC), the site was profoundly restructured, when the acropolis was enclosed by a

⁴⁶⁰ Oates 2005, 28, 31-32; Wright et al. 2006, 7-8, 13.

⁴⁶¹ Palermo 2013, 475; Pierobon-Benoit 2013, 193-194; Sołtysiak 2008, 67; Sołtysiak – Schutkowski 2015, 178.

⁴⁶² Pierobon-Benoit 2013, 194-195, Sołtysiak 2008, 67; Sołtysiak – Schutkowski 2015, 178.

massive city wall and a palace was erected on the north-west of the tell in Area J. This building continued to be occupied during the Neo-Babylonian period, although it seems as if its function changed, as it underwent numerous renovations and structural alterations. Some rooms which originally had a residential function, such as bathrooms, were remodelled and used for workshops and storage areas. In one such room used for the storage of goods, 69 sealings, 20 of which could be connected with Neo-Babylonian stamp seals were discovered, indicating administrative activities at the site. In total, 5 occupational phases, named stratum 12A to 14A, could be identified.⁴⁶³

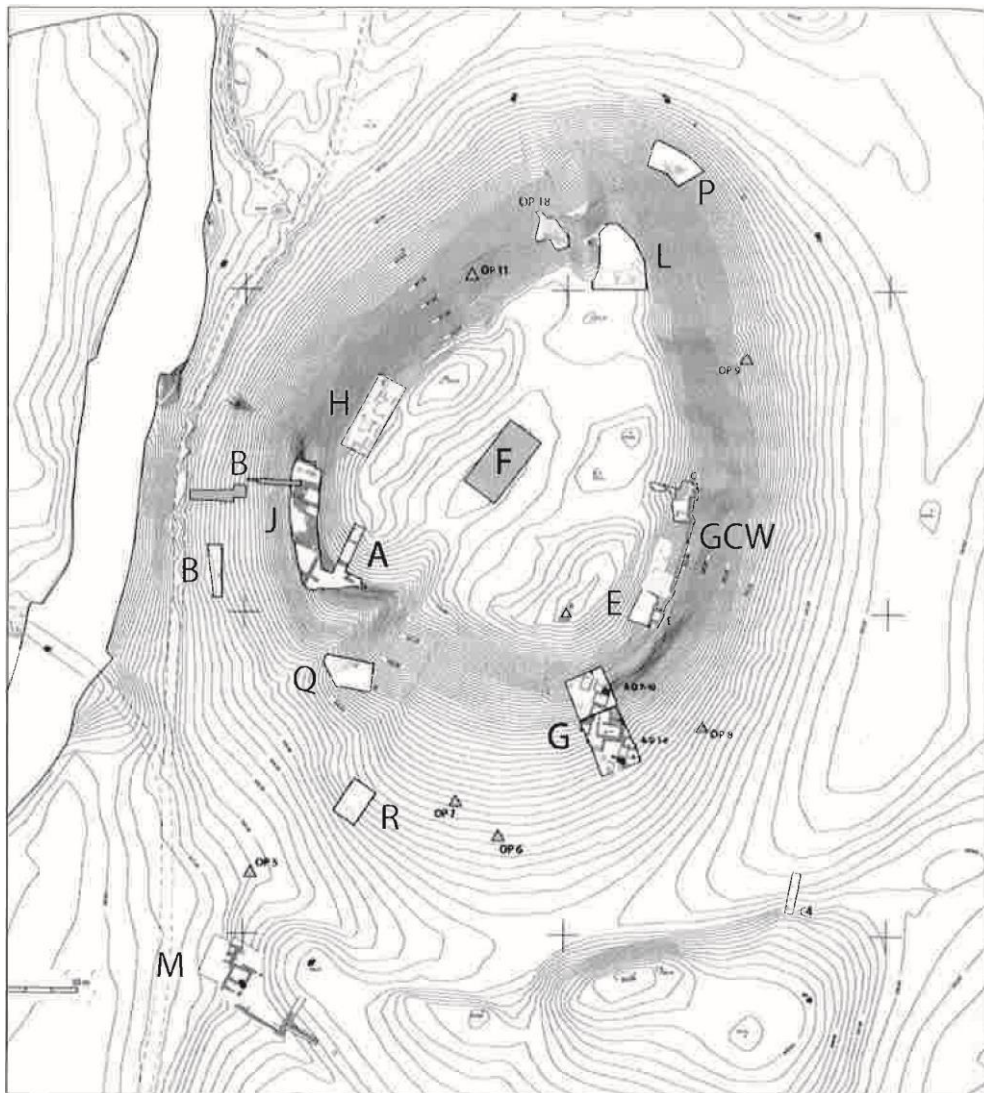


Figure 61: Map of Tell Barri

⁴⁶³ Bombardieri – Forasassi 2008, 323-325; Pierobon-Benoit 2013, 196, 203; Sołtysiak 2008, 67; Sołtysiak – Schutkowski 2015, 178.

In Area G on the south-eastern slope of the Tell a domestic quarter with three occupational periods from the same period was excavated. A central building in this quarter seems to have been used for several domestic and/ or productive activities, such as milling, cooking, spinning and weaving. Additionally, a tomb connected with the first occupational phase of this building was discovered, in which a stamp seal made of blue Chalcedony, bearing a scene of worship mainly used in Babylonia and dated anywhere in between the second half of the 7th to the beginning of the 5th century BC was found.⁴⁶⁴

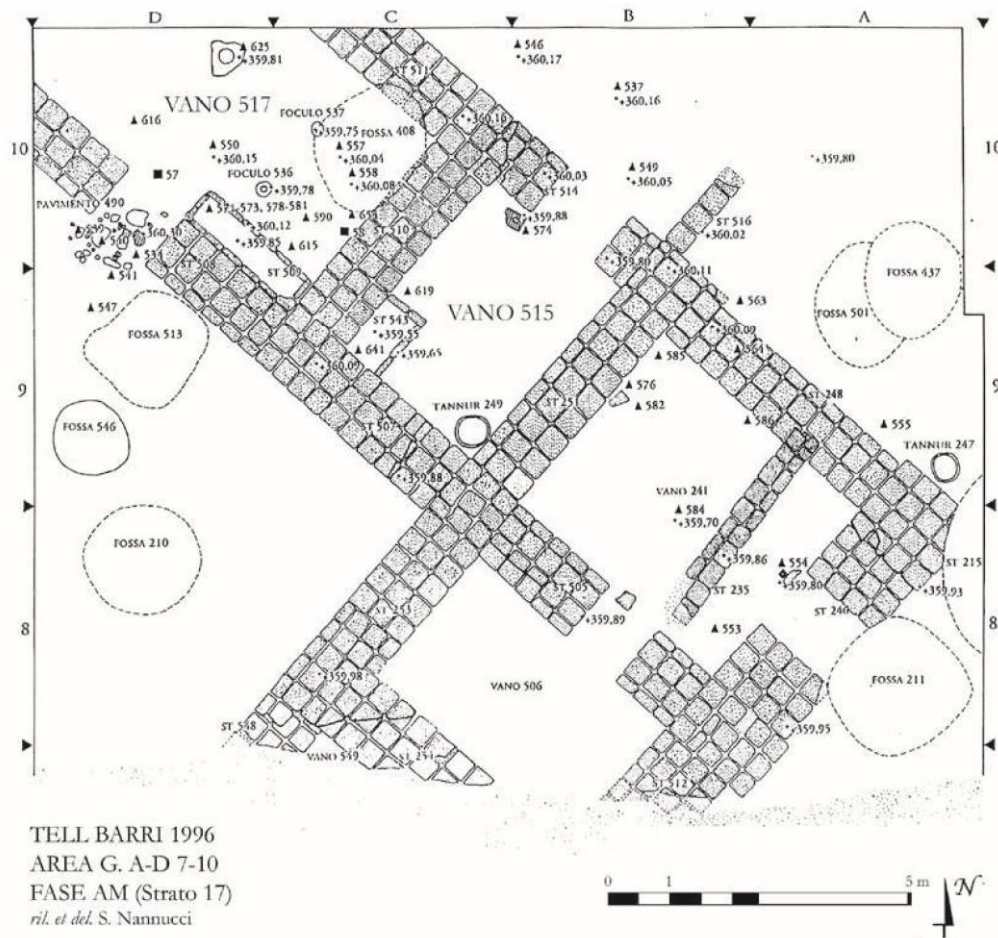


Figure 62: Plan of Neo-Babylonian occupational horizon in Area G at Tell Barri

In Area P, pits and structures dated to Achaemenid period were discovered. Unfortunately, older structures were levelled in course of their construction. The fact that pottery dated to the 6th century BC was found in levelling layers and older pits suggests that the area had to occupied to some degree during this time.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Bombardieri – Forasassi 2008, 323-324.

⁴⁶⁵ Pierobon-Benoit 2013, 205.

About 4700 vessels and/ or diagnostic sherds could be retrieved from the buildings occupied during the Neo-Babylonian period. The pottery was produced from four different wares, featuring both vegetable and grit temper. All of the vessels seem to have been produced locally, in the same manner and, rather than featuring new shapes and/ or decorative elements seem to have modified and developed already known Assyrian shapes, suggesting a strong continuity in terms of pottery production and tradition from the Neo-Assyrian to the Neo-Babylonian and even Achaemenid period. The most common vessel types were bowls with either curved or carinated walls and jars with either a short or long neck. Additionally, a small group of beakers and goblets, featuring finer fabric and finger impressions were excavated, which seem to be connected to the Neo-Assyrian Palace Ware. In terms of decoration, the most interesting and distinctive features are ribbed rims on bowls as well as applied ribs with an incised rope motive on the neck or should of the short neck jars. Similar assemblages were discovered at in the Red House at Tell Sheikh Ḥamad, Tell Beydar and even Nimrud and Tell Ahmar, ancient Til Barsip on the upper Euphrates River.⁴⁶⁶

3.4.3.7 Tell Hamoukar

Tell Hamoukar is located on the very eastern fringes of the Ḥabur triangle on the watershed in between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, 8 km to the west of the modern town of Yarubiya. As there are no perennial sources of water nearby, the water supply of the site was guaranteed by digging wells. Just as the other sites in the Upper Ḥabur area discussed here, Tell Hamoukar was a station along the *ḥarrān šarri*, a major communication route connecting Mesopotamia with the Mediterranean.⁴⁶⁷

Even though the site had been known for a majority of the 20th century and was even suggested to be identified with the capital of the Mitanni, Wašukanni, the first excavations were conducted in 1999 and lasted, with interruptions due to the Iraq war, until 2010. The site can be divided in an upper, core area, encompassing an area of about 500 by 400 m or about 15 ha, rising 18 m above the surrounding plain and a lower town, measuring 105 ha with an elevation of 3 to 4 m, of which roughly 40% are covered by a modern town.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ Bombardieri – Forasassi 2008, 325-328, 331.

⁴⁶⁷ Bryce 2009, 285; Gibson et al. 2002, 45-46; Gibson 2000, 55; Ur 2002a, 57; Wilkinson 2002, 45.

⁴⁶⁸ Gibson et al. 2002, 48-49; Reichel 2012, 69; Reichel 2006, 65; Ur 2010, 19-20.

Even though Tell Hamoukar is most well-known for its early traces of warfare in the 4th Millennium BC, the site has been occupied to a limited degree also during the 1st Millennium BC. In Area C, situated in the north-east of the lower town, several buildings, including wells and some burials, dated to the 7th century BC were excavated. According to a survey conducted within the limits of the city, the occupied area during this time roughly covered an area of about 3 ha, most likely representing a small village or rural estate. Due to the shallowness of the contexts, the occupation was most likely short lived. Unfortunately, the material from these areas has not been published as of yet, but shows some signs of wealth, such as baked brick pavements, some palace ware, as well as metal objects and a cylinder seal in one burial.⁴⁶⁹

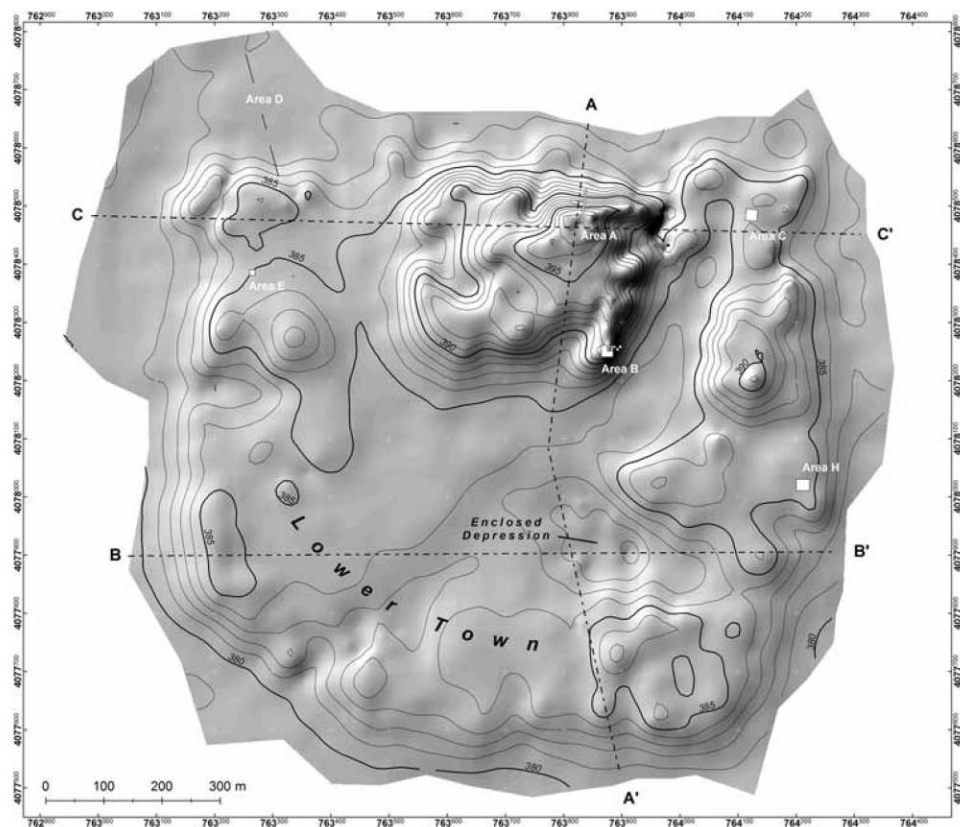


Figure 63: Topographic map of Tell Hamoukar

In course of the Tell Hamoukar survey project, conducted in 2000 and 2001, the area in a 5 km radius – about 125 km² – around the site was thoroughly surveyed and another 67 sites, dating from the Neolithic until the Late-Islamic period were identified. During the Neo-Assyrian period, 22 sites, with a settled area of about 71 ha were occupied, which represents

⁴⁶⁹ Bryce 2009, 285; Gibson et al. 2002, 50; Gibson 2001, 81; Gibson 2000, 57; Reichel 2006, 72-73; Ur 2010, 113; Ur 2002a, 74; Ur 2002b, 23.

the occupational maximum in the region throughout all periods. The settlements were evenly distributed throughout the region and seem rural in nature. It is difficult to discern if this surge in settlement is connected with Assyrian policies, such as granting rural estates to Assyrian officials or the deportation and resettlement of conquered peoples, or the settlement of Aramean groups. As the trend towards and expansion of settlement activity and more small settlements seems to have already started during the Late Bronze Age, it might also be connected with policies of the Mitanni kingdom.⁴⁷⁰

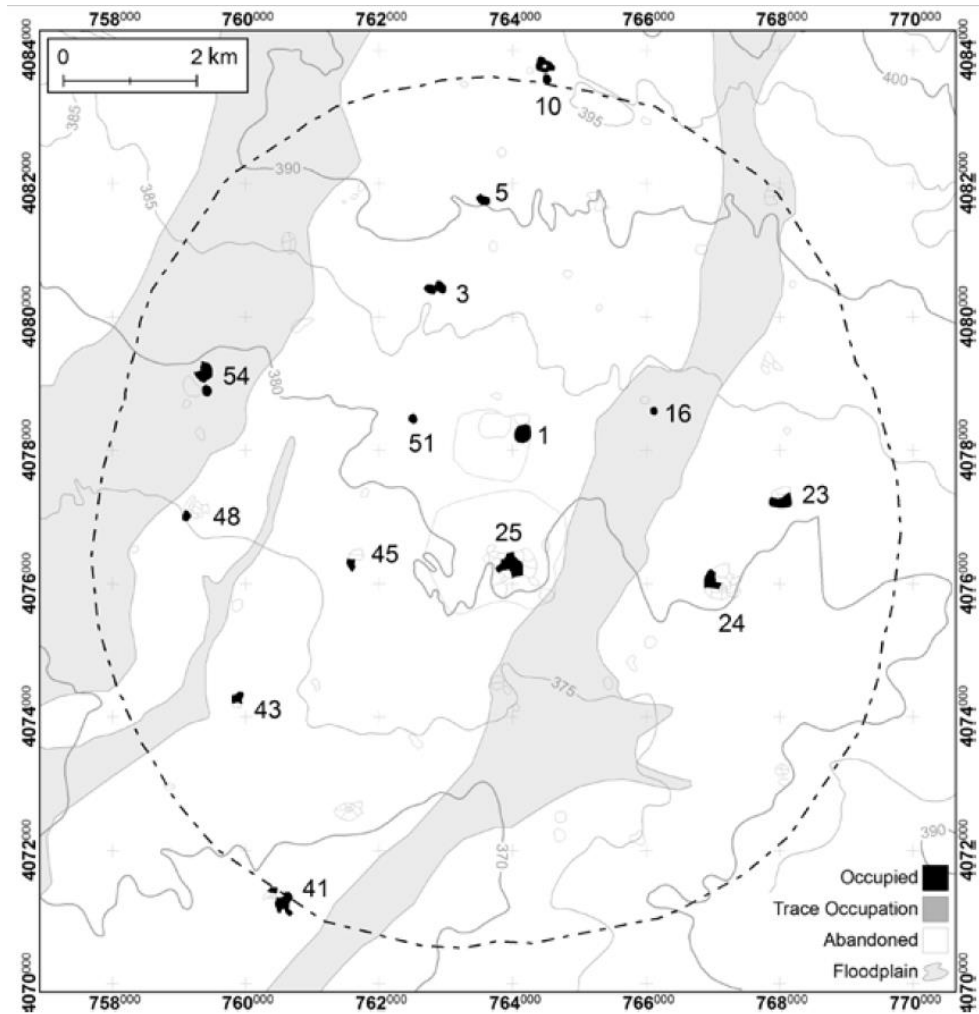


Figure 64: Survey area around Tell Hamoukar and spatial distribution of "Post-Assyrian" sites

The fact that the settlements during the Iron Age are less clustered and more evenly spread across the landscape seem to reflect an attempt to maximize the land cultivated by each settlement. Additionally, the surge in settlement being a regional trend across the Habur triangle during the Iron Age, make it more likely that the settlement strategy followed some sort of vision and was not accidental. Even though it seems reasonable to assume that the only

⁴⁷⁰ Ur 2002a, 58, 62, 74; Ur 2010, 113-114, 161-162.

power capable of having the administrative capabilities for such an endeavour was the Neo-Assyrian Empire, it cannot be proven as of yet. Additionally, it does not seem as if these villages were exclusively concerned with their subsistence and surviving, as excavations at some of these sites, such as Tell Hamoukar, revealed signs of wealth.⁴⁷¹

For the Post-Assyrian period a certain degree of continuation can be proven, as also during this period 22 sites were occupied, some of which had not been settled before. During the successive periods – as the political centres moved further and further away, the number of sites diminished continuously. During the Hellenistic period, only 12 sites continued to be occupied. Comparatively the amount of Post-Assyrian pottery collected during the survey was rather small and consisted mostly of shallow, carinated bowls and grooved-top bowls.⁴⁷²

3.4.3.8 Other surveys

Other than the surveys focused on the area around specific sites mentioned above, several others were conducted.

Lyonett conducted a survey in the western part of the Ḥabur triangle in the triangle between the cities of Hasseke, Ras al-‘Ain and Qamishlya, during 1989 and 1990. The material was studied and catalogued until 1997. In total 64 sites were visited and surveyed. According to the results of the survey, which have not been published in its entirety yet, the area was quite densely settled during the Iron Age with around 50 sites being occupied. During the Achaemenid period this number went down considerably, as only 3 sites stayed occupied, all of which seem to have been located near the Persian king’s road. Lyonett remarks that the material for this period is not well known and Neo-Assyrian period pottery might have stayed in use. Nonetheless, a reduction in settlement activity can be presumed.⁴⁷³

The Iron Age Material from the *Prospection Archéologique du Haut-Khabur (Syrie du N.E.)* was eventually published in a rather short report by Anastasio in 1999. The pottery material was divided into several wares – among them Tell Sheikh Ḥamad Ware – mainly divided based on their appearance. Most of the material, however, was manufactured in the so called “standard ware” using fast turning wheel, although larger vessels were either partly or entirely

⁴⁷¹ Ur 2010, 113-114, 162.

⁴⁷² Ur 2010, 115, 278; Ur 2002a, 76.

⁴⁷³ Anastasio 1999, 172; Lyonett 2000, 19-20, 33-37, 39-40; Lyonett 1996a, 372; Lyonett 1996b, 349-352; Lyonett – Faivre 2014, 213-214.

made by hand. The fabrics seem to have been similar in both Middle- as well as Neo-Assyrian pieces, and were tempered with either vegetable or mineral temper. Typology wise the most common shapes are bowls and jars, some of which were decorated with incised patterns on either the rim or neck of the vessels. Among the bowls shallow bowls with thickened rims, small, carinated bowls with flaring rims and deep bowls with grooved rims are the most common types. Jars and jugs are usually necked, although jars without necks and ribbon and grooved rims seem to be especially typical for the post-Assyrian period. Altogether the material seems to be rather similar to the material already discussed from Tell Halaf and Tell Sheikh Ḥamad and shows clear signs of continuity from the Middle- throughout the Neo-Assyrian, until the Neo-Babylonian period. Especially the sites of Tell Ahmar, Tell Badan and Ain el-Qerd in the north-eastern part of the surveyed area seem to have been especially rich in finds for this period. Unfortunately, no more detailed information concerning these sites seem to exist as of yet.⁴⁷⁴

In course of the same survey, the northern-central Ḥabur triangle, roughly between the cities of Derbassiye, Amouda and the site of Chagar Bazar in the south, was surveyed in more detail by Nishiaki during 1990 and 1991 in the search for prehistoric sites. During this survey, also 10 Neo-Assyrian sites were identified, of which 7 (and one possible) were resettled during or continuously occupied into the Hellenistic period.⁴⁷⁵

Another survey in the eastern part of the Ḥabur triangle was conducted by Meijer, the results of which were published in 1986. Unfortunately, this publication was not available to be included into this study. From a review of the book by McClellan, it seems as if during the Iran Age 21 sites were inhabited and during the Hellenistic/ Roman/ Parthian period 18 showed signs of occupation. Also in this case the resolution – which certainly is the result of rather poor knowledge of this periods material – is rather poor and limited in its importance for this study.⁴⁷⁶

Another survey was conducted in the area 10 km to the north and south of Tell Leilan, which is situated in the north-eastern Ḥabur triangle, along the banks of the Wadi Jarrah in 1987. A total of 58 sites could be identified and a total amount of 50000 sherds were collected. Unfortunately, the focus of the survey was the period in between 3300 and 1750 BC, meaning

⁴⁷⁴ Anastasio 1999, 173-176, 184, 185, 187.

⁴⁷⁵ Lyonett 2000, 39-40; Nishiaki 1992, 97.

⁴⁷⁶ Meijer 1986; McClellan 1994, 137.

that the next period after 1750 BC, distinguished in the material analysis of the survey, was the Roman one⁴⁷⁷. This renders the Tell Leilan survey rather unusable for our purposes.⁴⁷⁸

Monchambert surveyed the Ḥabur river valley south of Hasseke – the Middle Ḥabur – for about 30 km during two seasons in 1983, in preparation of a dam building project, which eventually destroyed the sites situated in the river valley. During this project 60 sites were identified in total, of which most of the bigger ones are situated on the eastern bank of the Ḥabur. Most likely due to the rather poor state of research on our period at the time, the resolution of the dating of the sites is rather poor, but still let us draw some conclusions. 21 of the surveyed sites were occupied during the Iron Age, with another eight being not unsure. During the Hellenistic and/ or Roman period 25 sites were inhabited for sure, with another 5 showing possible indications for an occupation. Of the sites which were occupied for sure, 13 sites show continuity from the Iron Age to the Hellenistic/ Roman period and if including the potential sites, up to 20 settlements, or about 60%, seem to have been continuously occupied from one period to the next.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ For what is being called the Leilan period I up to 1750 B.C., 20 sites were occupied. During the Roman period, only seven sites were inhabited.

⁴⁷⁸ Stein - Wattenmaker 1990, 11-12; Stein – Wattenmaker 1989, 283; Weiss 1986, 87.

⁴⁷⁹ Monchambert 1984a, 1-7; Monchambert 1984b, 181, 183, 216-218.

3.4.4 The Ḥabur area: Conclusions

In the previous chapter, the available archaeological, as well as textual evidence for the Ḥabur area was thoroughly taken under investigation and compiled. Tell Sheikh Ḥamad along the Lower Ḥabur and in the Ḥabur-triangle, going from west to east Tell Halaf and Tell Fecheriye in the north-west, Tell Beydar in the western Centre, Tell Brak and Tell Barri in the Centre and Tell Hamoukar on the eastern fringes. Additionally, survey projects around these sites and between them, to close any gaps, such as around Tell Leilan or along the Middle Ḥabur, south of Hasseke, were included as well.

Although we are still confronted and have to struggle with some gaps, mostly due to different states of research regarding the material culture of the Neo-Babylonian period, some conclusions can be drawn.

Signs of continuity, even if limited, can be observed at all sites and regions included in this study, although – as already mentioned – the data from some surveys is not necessarily reliable due to the time when they were conducted. Based on the evidence from Tell Sheikh Ḥamad it can be postulated that this continuity happened under the auspices of the previously ruling, Assyrian elite.

Kühne suggests that the Babylonians made use of well trained and organized regional administrative structures and left them in place, at least for the immediate time after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. This notion that the Assyrian elite was largely left to its own devices is further confirmed by textual evidence, such as titles and the continuance of certain institutions, such as the temple of Salmānu.⁴⁸⁰

Regarding the evidence from Tell Sheikh Ḥamad it should be remarked that the data is – in the opinion of the author – not as clear as it is presented. As we do not know much about the actual deposition processes of the texts found inside the Red House, the evidence for the erection of the building as well as the end of the main occupational phase could easily be interpreted, in such a way making it possible to assign them to slightly earlier and/ or later decades. In other words, it would be equally possible for the building to have been erected after the Neo-Babylonian conquests, or destroyed right after the texts dated to Nebuchadnezzar's reign had been put into storage. This would mainly impact our understanding of the pottery and its being assignment to the “post-Assyrian” period.

⁴⁸⁰ Kühne 2011, 108, 110-111; Radner 2002, 17.

Additionally, indicators of some degree of wealth could be identified at most sites. These could either be remnants of “better times” or indeed proof for social stratification and/ or functioning exchange networks. Finding a satisfiable “truth” in this regard might seem difficult, but most likely lies somewhere in between, i.e. that such items were most likely both stored and/ or circulated as well as traded among the population who were either able or needed to do so.

The unearthed finds as well as installations in the contexts dating to the Neo-Babylonian period seem to be mostly connected with agricultural production, indicating that the land around the bigger settlements was still cultivated. This interpretation is confirmed by the survey data, which overarchingly suggests continuous occupation – at least at first – in the rural areas.

The sense of continuity is also confirmed by the material culture, i.e. the pottery, the typology of which can be related in most cases to Assyrian shapes, without any signs of a Babylonian influence. Many shapes, for example of bowls and bottles, and even specific decorative pattern, such as on the Tell Sheikh Ḥamad Ware, are similar across the entire Ḥabur region, indicating at least some degree of over-regional contacts as far as the regions along the Euphrates to the west or central Assyria.⁴⁸¹

Eventually the region declined, and even bigger cities were abandoned. This process has been connected to the rise of the Achaemenid Empire, as the Ḥabur region was even more peripheral to the realm’s core than it was to the Babylonian one. Additionally, the lack of a central power and lack of security might have caused people to move into the cities which could not support the influx of people without having the support of the agricultural sector. Also, the possibility of the renomadisation of certain areas has been proposed. Maybe even more importantly, at least along the Lower Ḥabur, was the gradual breakdown of the canal system, which had made the colonization of this region possible in the first place, caused by the lack of a central over-regional authority responsible for planning and carrying out maintenance work.⁴⁸²

A point which – at least to my knowledge – has not been brought forward yet, is the possibility that parts of the population, namely the descendants of those who had been deported to the Ḥabur in order to reclaim the land, left after the power who had brought and

⁴⁸¹ Bonacossi 2008, 195-199; Sievertsen 2009, 78.

⁴⁸² Kühne 2013, 256.

kept them there was no longer. Such a theory is of course difficult to prove but given the fact that the Judeans famously returned to Judah from Babylonia after the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, it seems at least possible. The process of people leaving and a lack of workforce, might have further contributed to the deterioration of the canal network and agricultural support system of the bigger cities, resulting in a vicious cycle, ending in the abandonment of the region.

Even though such activities have not been detected in the archaeological record (so far), we know from the written sources that some Babylonian institutions received land holdings from the king in the Ḥabur region and tried to gain an economic foothold there.⁴⁸³ To which degree these attempts were successful is not entirely clear, although we have to remind ourselves that the sources available only represent the first attempts to develop agricultural structures, before the Achaemenid Empire brought them to an end. In light of the theories concerning a deteriorating canal system and the potential migration of laborers from the Ḥabur, it seems fitting that these attempts seem to have focused on the Ḥabur triangle, where less labour intensive rainfed agriculture could be practiced.

Putting together all the available information, it is clear that the claim that the Neo-Babylonian Empire was only interested in exploiting the newly conquered regions for the benefit of the Babylonian core and did not invest in rebuilding its new provinces – at least for the Ḥabur region – cannot be maintained.

⁴⁸³ Levavi 2020, 76-78

4. Conclusions

As the results of the research conducted on each individual region discussed in the last part of the thesis were already presented at the end of each of the corresponding (sub-)chapters, the focus of the following pages will lie on answering the overarching questions asked at the very beginning of the thesis.

One of the most common assessments of the Neo-Babylonian Empire is that it was essentially a destructive – almost parasitic – structure, the main aim of which was to exploit its subjects for its own benefit. This notion was already demonstrated to be wrong for the Ḫabur region, where the Neo-Babylonian Empire in fact tried to rebuild agricultural structures and thereby stimulating the incorporation of this region into the empire's framework.

This approach certainly required some sort of vision, a larger, more sustainable plan for the future of the realm, although the main mechanisms and policies employed up to this point were clearly inspired by the Neo-Assyrian Empire. This is clear in the treatment of the Neo-Babylonian Empire's vassals – notably when they were perceived as being disloyal. Then, mechanisms such as punitive military campaign and deportations were used as tools and punishments, just as under the Assyrians.

In comparison to the other regions under investigation, the kingdom of Judah seems to have been hit especially hard by these punitive actions. This certainly had to do with the difficulty to control Judah and the Judeans, which had already manifested itself during the Neo-Assyrian period. As this might sound a bit too polemic and one-sided, it shall be emphasized that Judah certainly was not in an easy position, jammed in between the Neo-Babylonian and the Egyptian Empires, both of which tried to stay in control over its territory. In order to survive, Judah simply had no other choice other than switching sides to whomever had the advantageous position and posed the bigger threat. In comparison to other regions, such as Cilicia, the 'Amuq and even the Ḫabur it seems as if the population was largely left to its own devices with the Babylonians just keeping a limited presence for as long as conditions remained stable. The geographical location of Judah certainly was the deciding factor in why the Babylonians eventually resorted to destroying large parts of it, especially as some cities – such as Jerusalem – were able to resist potential invaders for a long time. Strategically speaking it was better for the Neo-Babylonian Empire to create an economically worthless buffer zone, which could not be used as a vantage point, rather than continue to bind troops

and resources in the area. Mizpah most likely served as a surveillance point, with a limited Babylonian presence in order to guarantee some stability in the region.

All this was done in order to keep the Egyptians at bay, who posed the biggest threat to the Neo-Babylonian Empire, having both supported the Neo-Assyrian Empire and instigated rebellions in neighbouring kingdoms, in order to strengthen their position in the Levant, which had considerable economic potential.

The other region which was hit particularly hard by the Babylonian conquest was the Assyrian core. A large part of why this area was destroyed was most likely connected to feelings of revenge towards the Assyrians after they had exploited and humiliated Babylonia for decades. Interestingly, these policies seem not have been executed in all former Assyrian provinces, as the case of Tell Sheikh Ḥamad proves, where the local Assyrian elites were left in control. As to why Tell Ta'yinat, the local administrative, Assyrian capital of the 'Amuq was destroyed then, can only be speculated, but it seems likely that this city might have resisted the Babylonian or Median armies during the initial conquest of the region.

In general, it seems as if the Neo-Babylonians initially tried to preserve structures already present in newly conquered territories, as was certainly the case for Judah and the Ḥabur region. This strategy also finds reflection in the material culture, as no sudden changes can be observed in neither the shape nor function of the pottery or architecture. As similar developments can be observed for Cilicia and the 'Amuq region, analogous political developments can be expected. The growing influence of Greek pottery can most likely be ascribed to a shift in trading relations towards the west, as is not surprising, given the situation in the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

Nonetheless, attempts to develop regions were undertaken by the Babylonians, as seen in the Ḥabur triangle. The reason why these efforts were taken not immediately after the regions had been conquered is trifold. First, much of the Babylonian resources were bound along the Levant, such as the siege of Tyre and more importantly the conflict with Egypt. Additionally, the Neo-Babylonian Empire was plagued by internal problems after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, which most likely delayed any attempts to develop the realm. Finally, the Babylonian core itself was impoverished after years of having been exploited by the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Naturally, the initial focus – also in order to stabilize the position of the royal family – was to rebuild Babylonia proper. In order to do so, newly conquered areas, especially in the Levant, seem to have been plundered and exploited accordingly.

Unfortunately, this meant that the efforts to rebuild parts of the Mesopotamian periphery did not come to fruition and were put to a sudden end, when the Achaemenid Empire conquered Babylonia.

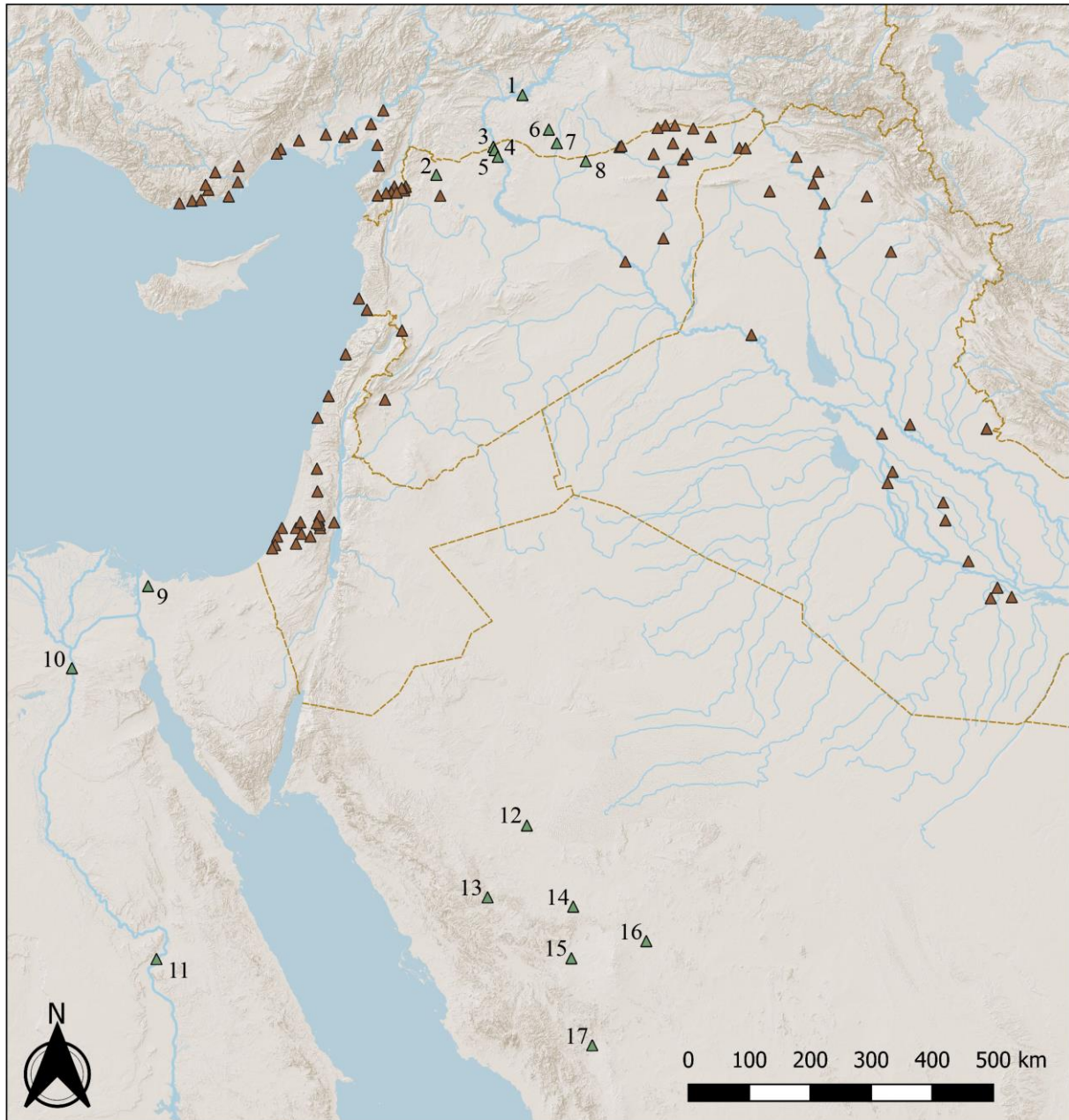
The reason why especially the regions in the Levant were exploited, might have been the constant Egyptian threat, because of which the Babylonians basically took whatever they could before the Egyptians could. Another possibility could be the Babylonian perception of these regions as not belonging to “wider” Mesopotamia. This notion is mainly based on Nebuchadnezzar’s rock inscriptions in Lebanon, which could have been put there in order to mark the Babylonian borders.⁴⁸⁴

Overall, we can summarize that the results from Israel are not representative for the nature of the Babylonian conquests and policies in the Mesopotamian periphery. As always, circumstances must be analysed on a regional level, as decisions were made just as such. The resulting image is, as so often, not homogenous throughout, but complicated and interwoven with a multitude of factors, many of which are only tangible and understandable by combining a multitude of source-materials.

⁴⁸⁴ Beaulieu 2020, 17-18; Levavi 2020, 65.

5. Maps

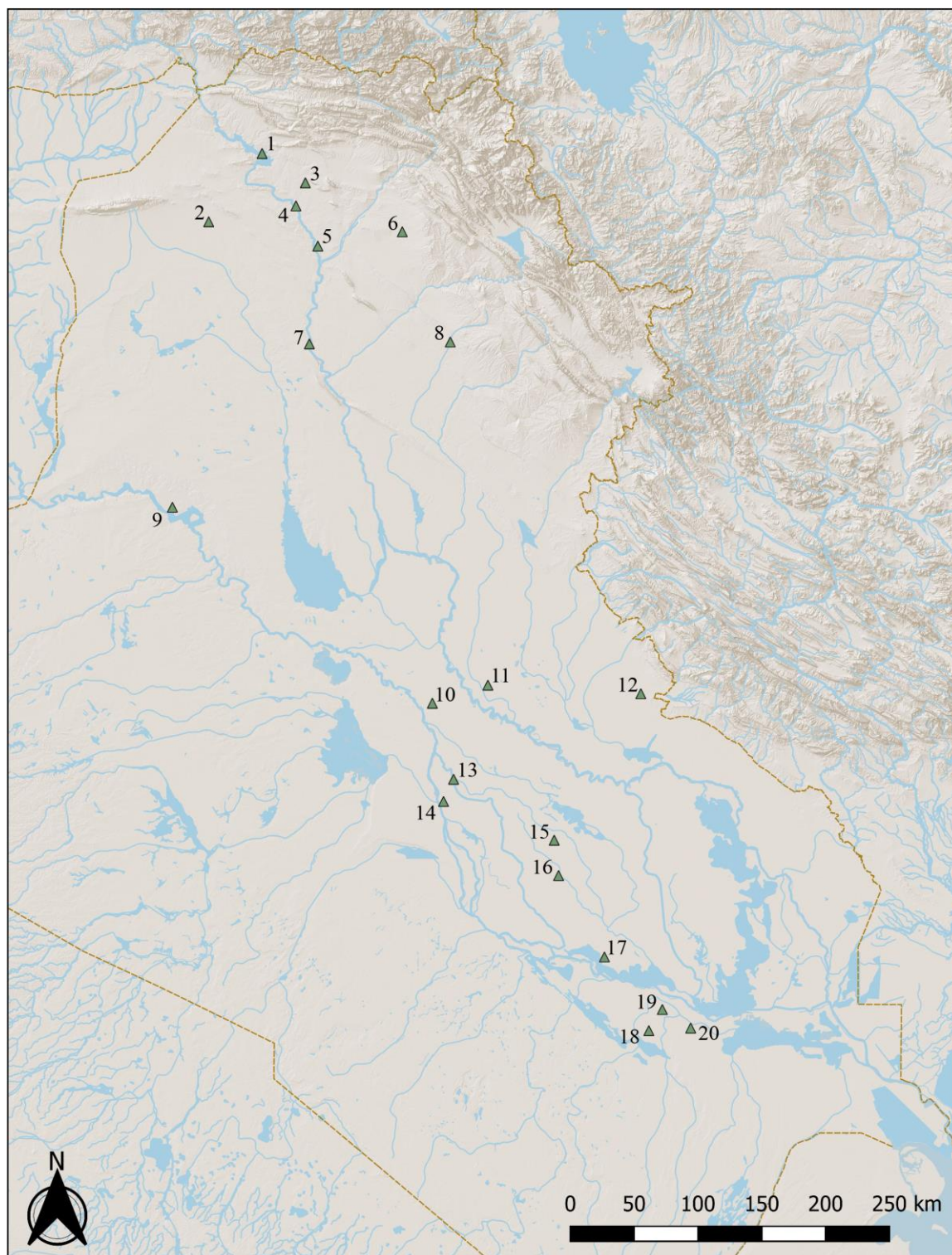
5.1 Entire area under investigation



All sites marked in brown can be found on the maps on the following pages.

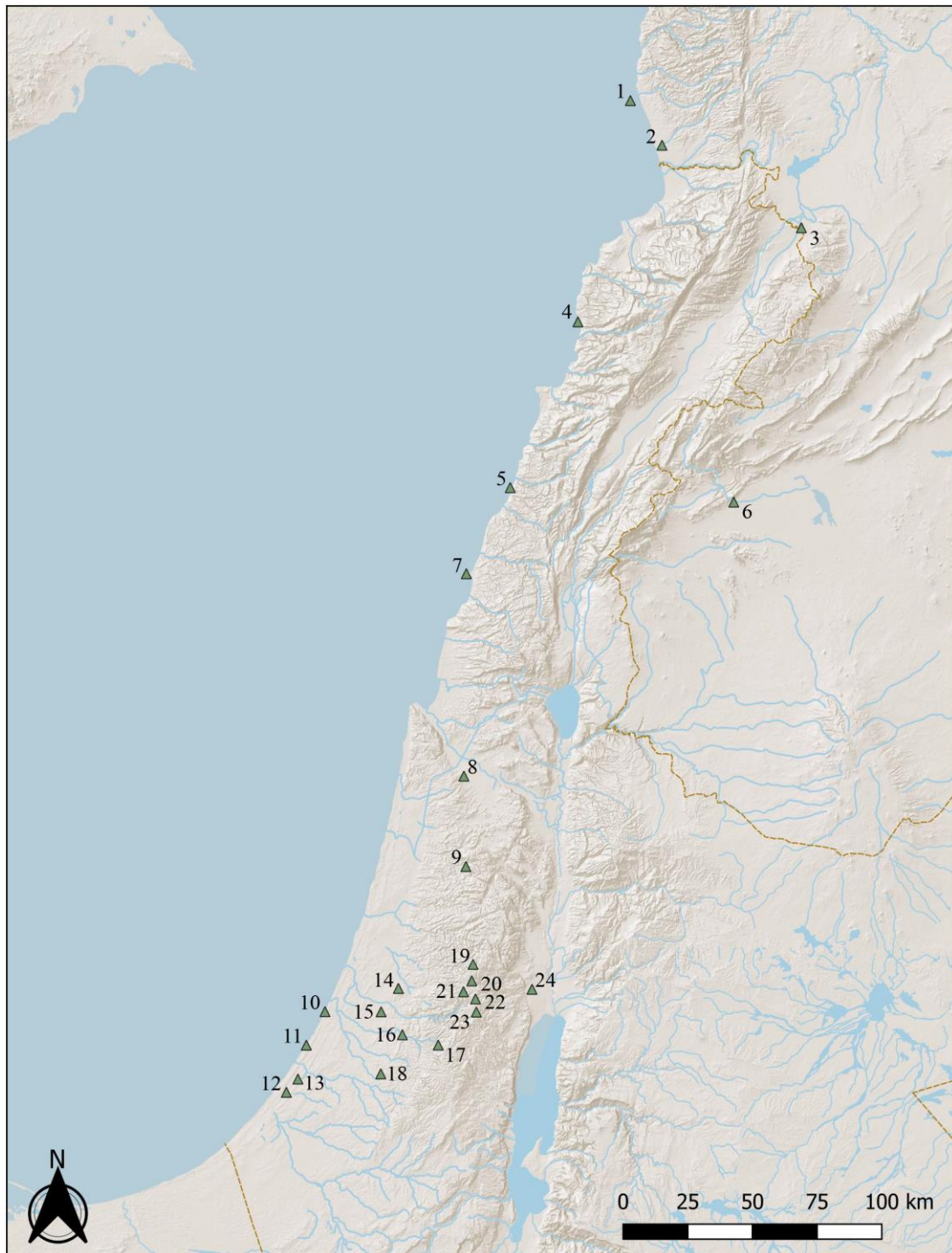
1) Lidar Höyük, 2) Arpad, 3) Carchemish, 4) Tell Šiuḥ Fawqānī, 5) Til Barsip/ Tell Ahmar, 6) Sultantepe, 7) Harran, 8) Tell Chuera, 9) Tel Qedwa, 10) Memphis, 11) Thebes, 12) Tayma, 13) Dadanu, 14) Yadihu, 15) Hibra, 16) Padakku, 17) Yatribu

5.2 Mesopotamia



- 1) Qasrīg Cliff, 2) Tall Rimaḥ, 3) Dūr-Šarrukīn / Khorsabad, 4) Nineveh, 5) Kalḥu/ Nimrud, 6) Erbil/ Arbila, 7) Assur, 8) Arrapha, 9) ‘Ānā, 10) Sippar, 11) Opis, 12) Der, 13) Babylon, 14) Borsippa, 15) Nippur, 16) Isin, 17) Uruk, 18) Eridu, 19) Ur, 20) Kissik

5.3 The Levant



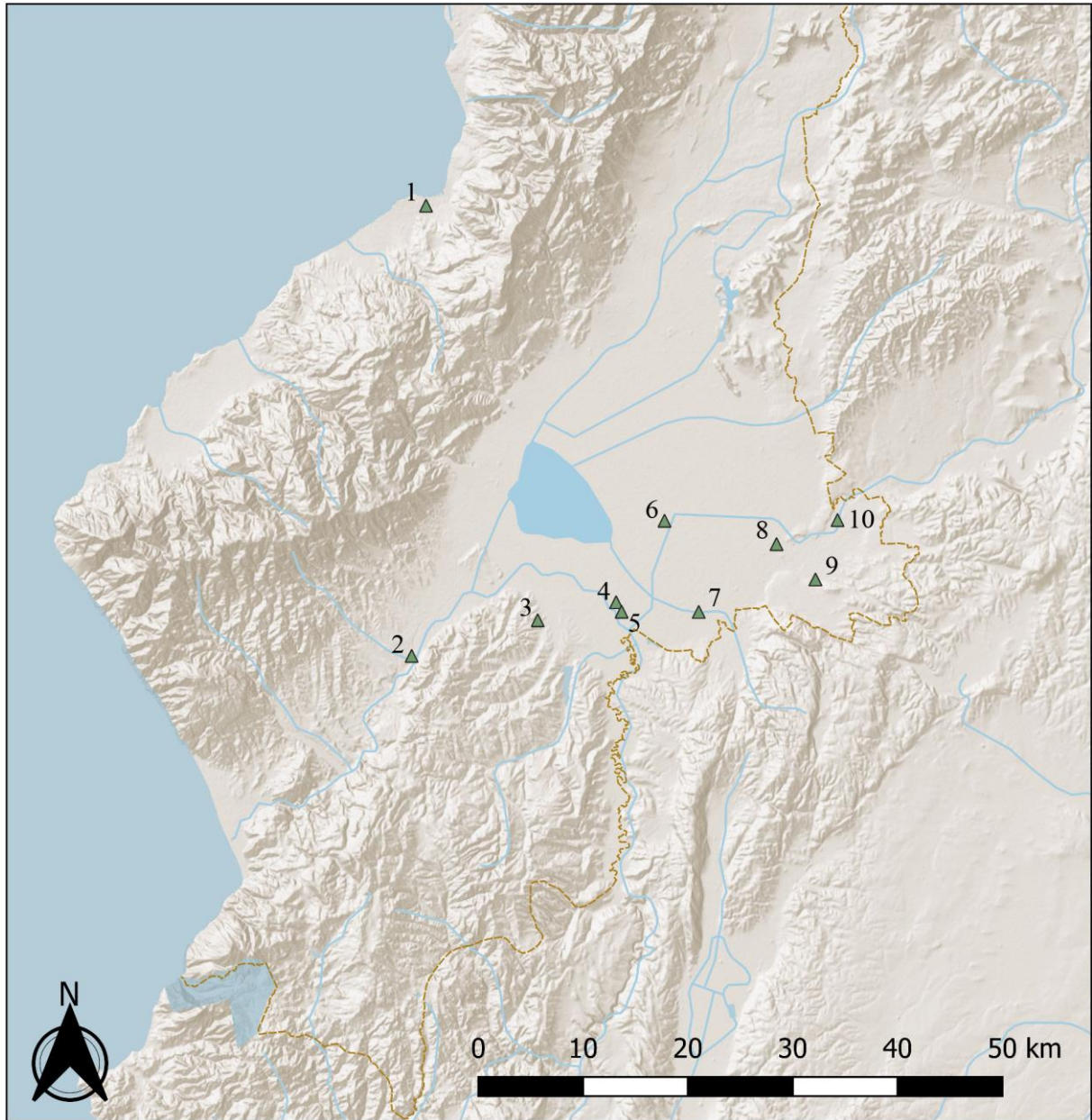
- 1) Arwad, 2) Simirra, 3) Riblah, 4) Byblos, 5) Sidon, 6) Damascus, 7) Tyre, 8) Megiddo, 9) Samaria, 10) Ashdod, 11) Ashkelon, 12) Gaza, 13) Hazzat, 14) Gezer/ Tel Hadid, 15) Ekron, 16) Azekah, 17) Khirbet Abu Twein, 18) Lachish, 19) Bethel, 20) Mizpah, 21) Gibeon, 22) Gibeah/ Tell el-Fûl, 23) Jerusalem, 24) Jericho

5.4 Cilicia



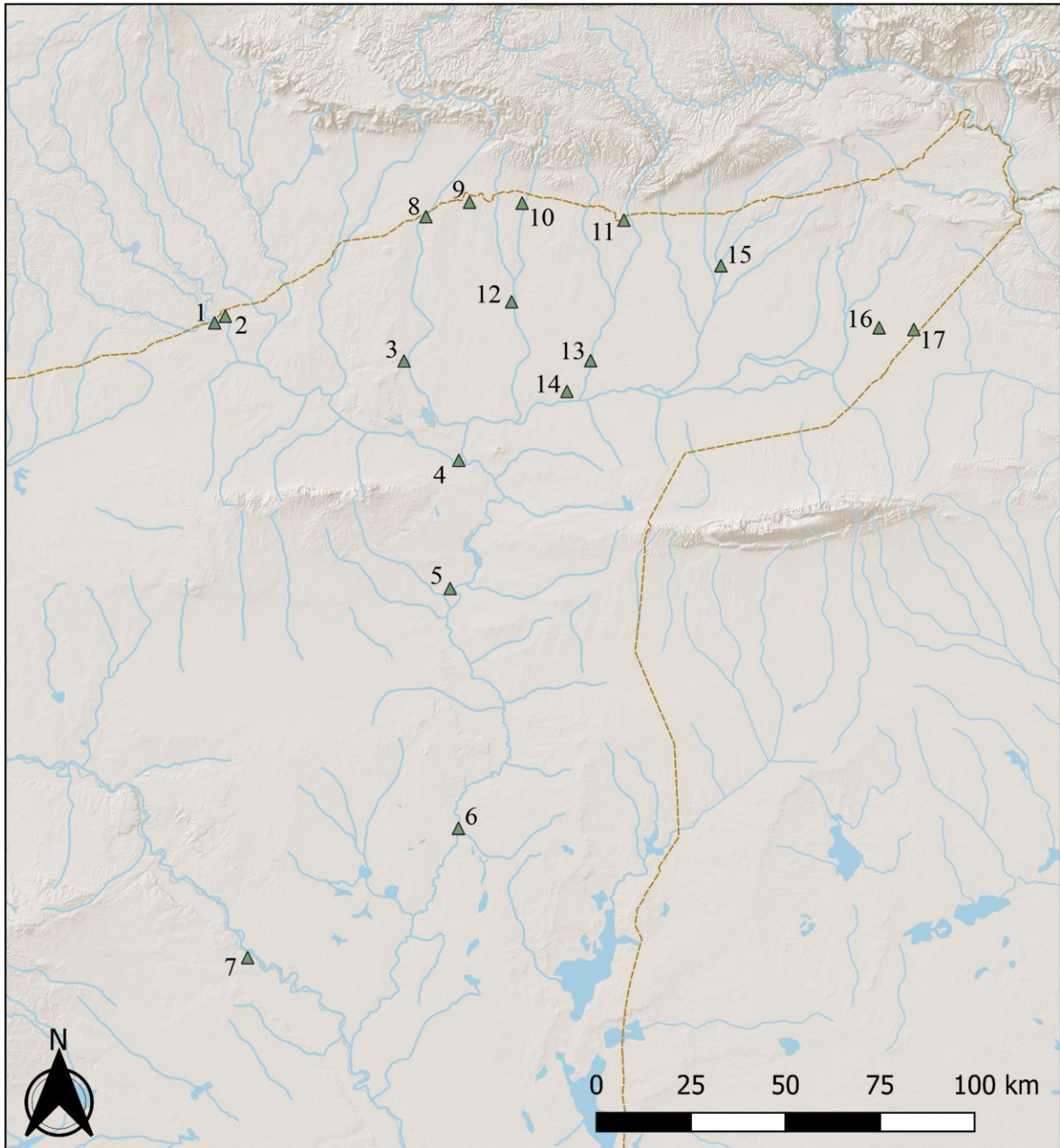
- 1) Nagidos, 2) Gözsüzce, 3) Gilindere/ Kelenderis/ Aydıncık, 4) Gülnar, 5) Meydancikkale/ Kiršu, 6) Kilise Tepe,
- 7) Dana Island/ Pitusu, 8) Silifke, 9) Uzuncaburç/ Olbē, 10) Soli Höyük, 11) Mersin/ Yumuktepe, 12) Tarsus/ Gözlükule,
- 13) Adana/ Tepebag Höyük, 14) Misis Höyük, 15) Sirkeli Höyük, 16) Tatarlı Höyük, 17) Karatepe, 18) Kinet Höyük,
- 19) Iskenderun

5.5 The ‘Amuq valley



1) Iskenderun, 2) Antakya/ Antiochia, 3) Bözhöyük, 4) Tell Ta'yinat, 5) Tell Atchana, 6) Tell Hasanuşağı/ Yurt Höyük, 7) Tell Salihyyah, 8) Chatal Höyük, 9) Tell el-Judaidah, 10) Tell Davutpaşa

5.6 The Ḥabur region



- 1) Tell Halaf, 2) Ras al-‘Ain/ Tell Feḥerīye, 3) Tell Beydar, 4) Hasseke, 5) Tell Agaga, 6) Tell Sheikh Ḥamad, 7) Deir az-Zor, 8) Derbassiye, 9) Ain el-Qerd, 10) Amouda, 11) Tell Badan, 12) Chagar Bazar, 13) Tell Barri, 14) Tell Brak, 15) Tell Leilan, 16) Tell Hamoukar, 17) Yarubiya

6. List of Figures

Figure 1: Rogerson 1997, 35.

Figure 2: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8f/Tissot_The_Flight_of_the_Prisoners.jpg (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 3: Beaulieu 2018, 220.

Figure 4: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1a/ABC_05_Early_Years_of_Nebuchadnezzar_chronicle.jpg (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 5: Lewis 2008, 78.

Figure 6: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/88/Tilglath_pileser_iii.jpg (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 7: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/50/Sargon_II_and_dignitary.jpg (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 8: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/04/Marduk-apla-iddina_II.jpg (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 9: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/99/Sennacherib.jpg> (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 10: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e4/Detail._Sam%27al_stele_of_Esarhaddon%2C_671_BCE%2C_Pergamon_Museum.jpg (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 11: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f1/Assyrian_Relief_of_the_Banquet_of_Ashurbanipal_From_Nineveh_Gypsum_N_Palace_British_Museum_01.jpg (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 12: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dc/The_Royal_lion_hunt_reliefs_from_the_Assyrian_palace_at_Nineveh%2C_the_king_is_hunting%2C_about_645-635_BC%2C_British_Museum_%2812254914313%29.jpg (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 13: Roaf 1998, 190.

Figure 14: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e8/Battle_of_Carchemish.png
(date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 15: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9a/Pergamon_Museum_Berlin_2007109.jpg (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 16: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cc/Nabonidus.jpg> (date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 17: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Lachish_inscription.jpeg
(date of access: 14.10.2020)

Figure 18: <https://books.openedition.org/editions-cnrs/docannexe/image/8184/img-4.jpg> (date of access: 15.10.2020)

Figure 19: Faust 2018, 31.

Figure 20: Faust 2012, 2.

Figure 21: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4c/Nebuchadnezzar_camp_outside_Jerusalem._Famine_in_the_city.jpg (date of access: 15.10.2020)

Figure 22: Zmit 2016, 11.

Figure 23: Zorn 2003, 415.

Figure 24: Zorn 2003, 436.

Figure 25: Zorn 2003, 438.

Figure 26: Faust 2007, 40.

Figure 27: Novák et al. 2017, 151.

Figure 28: Postgate 2008, 186.

Figure 29: Dardeniz 2005, 83-84.

Figure 30: Novák et al. 2017, 154.

Figure 31: Novák et al. 2017, 169.

Figure 32: Osborne et al. 2019, 293.

Figure 33: Osborne et al. 2019, 266.

Figure 34: Osborne et al. 2019, 270.

Figure 35: Osborne et al. 2019, 293.

Figure 36: Pucci 2019a, 127.

Figure 37: Götting 2019, 303.

Figure 38: Pucci 2019c, 145.

Figure 39: Wilkinson et al. 2005, 43.

Figure 40: Wilkinson et al. 2005, 44.

Figure 41: Radner 2002, 270.

Figure 42: Kühne 1989/1990, 312.

Figure 43: Kühne 2013, 239.

Figure 44: Kühne 2013, 248.

Figure 45: Kühne 2013, 253.

Figure 46: Kreppner 2008a, 161.

Figure 47: Kreppner 2008a, 164.

Figure 48: Kreppner 2008b, 177.

Figure 49: Hellmuth Kramberg 2016, 62, 64.

Figure 50: Novák 2013, 260.

Figure 51: Novák 2013, 263.

Figure 52: Martin 2012, 229.

Figure 53: Millard – Bordreuil 1982, 135.

Figure 54: Bonatz 2015, 15.

Figure 55: Bonatz 2015, 26.

Figure 56: Pruß 2013, 134.

Figure 57: Wilkinson – Barbanes 2000, 413.

Figure 58: Matthews 2003, 2.

Figure 59: Oates et al. 1997, 154.

Figure 60: Oates 2005, 32.

Figure 61: Pierobon-Benoit 2013, 194.

Figure 62: Pecorella – Pierobon-Benoit 2005, 168.

Figure 63: Ur 2010, 22.

Figure 64: Ur 2010, 116.

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Zusammenfassung:

Das Neubabylonische Reich (626-539 v. Chr.) erstreckte sich vom mesopotamischen Kernland bis an die Levante und Teile der arabischen Halbinsel. Es trat damit die Nachfolge des Neuassyrischen Reiches (744-609 v. Chr.) an, das diese Regionen zuvor beherrschte und von einer Allianz aus Babyloniern und Medern gestürzt wurde. Dieser Eroberungszug und die nachfolgenden Jahrzehnte, mit der Zerstörung Jerusalems durch die Babylonier und dem darauffolgenden Babylonischen Exil, repräsentieren bis heute einen wichtigen Teil in der kulturellen Geschichte des Judentums. Aufgrund der Tatsache, dass schriftliche Quellen für diese Zeit äußerst rar sind, wurde die Zeitperiode der babylonischen Herrschaft insbesondere in Israel intensiv archäologisch erforscht. Das Resultat dieser Ausgrabung unterstützt zumeist das biblische Narrativ, wodurch die babylonischen Eroberungen größtenteils als äußerst destruktiv und auf den eigenen Vorteil abzielend beurteilt wurden. Allerdings wurden andere Bereiche des ehemaligen Herrschaftsgebietes – insbesondere in der Peripherie – nicht mit derselben Intensität bearbeitet wie das Gebiet des heutigen Israels.

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit versucht diese Forschungslücke in einigen ausgewählten Regionen zu schließen, in dem vor allem die archäologischen Forschungsergebnisse, aber auch die schriftlichen Quellen aus bzw. die entsprechenden Gebiete betreffend, gesammelt und einer neuen Interpretation unterzogen werden. Dies soll zum besseren Verständnis der babylonischen Eroberungen, aber auch der Außenpolitik und Strategien im Umgang mit unterworfenen Bevölkerungsgruppen des Neubabylonischen Reiches beitragen.