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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Application of new technologies in archaeological research

FRONTIERS AND FORTIFICATIONS IN ASSYRIA: AN INTRODUCTION

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to give a bird's-eye view on the textual and archaeological sources and their relevant interpretations on the role of fortified settlements in the creation and maintenance of the Assyrian frontiers. In the first part of the paper, I briefly discuss a methodological problem of interpretation of the many terms for 'border/frontier' and for different kinds of human settlements. In particular, three fortifications, typically found in frontier contexts, are analysed in their architectural features and main functions. They are the 'fortified farmstead' or dunnu (attested only for the Middle-Assyrian period), the fortified 'military camp', called ušmannu, madaktu, or karāšu, and the military 'fortress' or birtu. If the first had a primary purpose of farming, and very little military use, the other two were essentially military premises, which had, especially the fortress, many different functions (defence, vigilance, control, territorial exploitation) in the frontier policies of the Assyrian Empire. In the second part of the paper, I briefly try to analyse the changes in the territorial control and the shifting of frontiers between Middle-Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian period, with a particular interest for the transition phase between 12th and 10th century BC.

Defining ancient frontiers is particularly difficult for two main reasons. First, imposing modern categories on past realities is always a dangerous, even though inevitable, process, which can lead to misunderstandings and methodological missteps[1] – and the lack of clear definitions of what is a frontier also in modern times does not make the task easier.[2] Second, the sources at our disposal are often not enough or sufficiently detailed to give a comprehensive picture of the subject. On the other hand, recent studies have provided new data that can help in clarifying some important aspects concerning the role of fortifications in the creation and maintenance of Assyrian frontiers.

1. FRONTIERS AND FORTIFICATIONS

To begin with, we will refute the idea of continuous borderlines encircling, like in modern political maps, entire territories, and making accurate divisions between polities. We will imagine, instead, the existence of hegemonic regions, and we will prefer the use of broader terms like 'frontier', which recalls a 'much more loosely area or transition zone between two regions or political entities'.[3] In such frontier territories, we will then suppose the presence of strategic boundary-marks, i.e. natural or man-made objects on the landscape culturally shaped *as* borders, like a passage through the mountains, the control over a river, or a fortified settlement.

Assyrian sources often show an apparent incoherence in the use of terms for 'border' with quite different meanings, which require an accurate contextualization.[4] A first differ-

ence is observed between the lack of precision in locating national borders, and the accuracy adopted in administrative texts for the definition of local property boundaries. Furthermore, for national borders difficulties abound when trying to separate ideology from geographical observation.[5] A similar interpretative problem (and the consequent need for its contextualization) is encountered when dealing with the terminology used to identify human settlements on the landscape. More specifically, the sources do not offer a picture clear enough to define a precise taxonomy of the different settlements according to size or fortified nature. In royal inscriptions, the main urban centres are the royal city (*āl šarrūti, āl bēlūti*), and the strongly fortified city (*āl dannūti*), which are both certainly fortified, while around them a series of smaller townships without defences (*ālāni, ālāni ša limēti, ālāni ṣeḫrūti*) are located. When a city is defined simply as *ālu* (as it often happens), only the contextualisation of the inscription (e.g. if the king asserts to have besieged it) or the comparison with other (textual and/or archaeological) sources can help in understanding whether or not it had defensive walls.[6]

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[1] Bloch 1998, 121.

[2] See Pastore 2007.

[3] Parker 2001, 11.

[4] Sumerian terms for 'border' are ZAG, BULUG, KI.SUR.RA, MAŠ/ BAR, whereas in Akkadian one can find *miṣru, itû, šiddu, qannu, pulukku, pāṭu, kisurru, kudurru* and *taḫūmu*. For almost every one of them, three general meanings are involved in translations: 'border(-line)' 'boundary-stone/mark' and 'territory'. Sometimes, the original

or main meaning of the terms can be deduced (as in *pulukku*, 'boundary-stone' but in many cases the translations shift from one meaning to the other through ideal associations in form of metonymy and synecdoche (*pars pro toto*, *totum pro parte*, etc.). Semantically, the terms give two general ideas of *separation* and *periphery*, to which a further idea of *inviolability* is added, especially in ideological context.

[5] In a brief essay, Gandulla compares the imprecise nature and permeability of frontiers in Ancient Near East with the use of Akkadian terminology, as in those terms: 'usually the connotative sense is an idea of geographical domain but not a strictly political concept' (Gandulla 2000, 41). On similar basis, Tenu argues that the difficulty in translating the terms related to the idea of 'border', their high number and polysemy, 'invite à penser que c'est ce concept même qui est polymorphe et semblent désigner une réalité lointaine et mal définie' (Tenu 2009, 151a).

[6] Cfr. Van de Mieroop 1999, 10-1: 'The translation of 'city' is thus misleading, since we classify settlements by size, and reserve the term city for larger ones, although an exact definition also eludes us'. Although I would not agree with the statement that 'The lack of differentiation among settlements seems to reflect a perception that all of them were equivalent and sovereign communities'. See also De Odorico 1995, 16: 'For the Assyrian editors of later times the distinction between the various 'categories' of cities was not very important, not as much as that between 'central' cities and cities 'of the neighbourhood', regardless of whether these were 'small' or not'.

Even though this is not the place for a deeper analysis on the contextualization of terms for borders and settlements in the Assyrian sources, two observations – which were already made by Fales in his 1990 study of Neo-Assyrian rural landscape – should be taken into account. First, the three-level hierarchical pattern (royal city, fortified city, city in the neighbourhood),[7] with which foreign polities are described in royal inscriptions, reproduces the administrative realm of inner Assyria. The topographical localization (rural territories in the 'environs' of a major city), but also the juridical identification of a settlement in relation with a major city, were adopted by the Assyrian scribes to describe (and interpret) the territories encountered at the periphery of the Empire. Second, the terms hence adopted could then be used in different contexts according to the type of source. Differently than in day-to-day archival documents (especially letters and administrative texts), in fact, in royal inscriptions royal ideology is projected on the geographical-topographical reality, involving moral qualities (Assyrian righteousness vs. enemy's savagery), and motifs of heroic undertakings (e.g. the harsh uncivilized landscape which is overcome only with the help of the suzerain's super-human qualities). As a point of fact, a certain number of terms attested in both kind of sources acquire 'two different sets of meanings' according to different contexts.[8]

Nonetheless, by comparing textual sources and the data retrieved from archaeological surveys and excavations in the Near East, some distinctions can be made, in terms of structures and functions, between different kinds of minor fortified settlements, especially for those founded in frontier territories.

Besides royal and fortified cities, the textual sources deal with 'fortified farmstead' (*dunnu*), 'fortresses' (ḪAL.ṢU/ *birtu*) and fortified 'military camps' (*ušmannu, madaktu, karāšu*).

The 'fortified farmstead' or *dunnu* is a kind of fortification only attested for the Middle-Assyrian period. Quite differently than for other kinds of settlements, in the case of the *dunnu* we hold both archaeological data of great interest, coming especially from the site of Tell Sabi Abyad (old name unknown), and textual sources, as archives from this and other sites (especially Dunni-ša-Uzibi/ Giricano, Dūr-Katlimmu and Assur). By analysing these sources, it is possible to draw a picture of the average size and layout of a *dunnu* and its function in the context of Assyrian territorial policies.

The *dunnu* was a fortified unit of rural habitation, which probably developed from the Mitannian *dimtu* 'tower', a fortified farmstead with its own territory.[9] Usually named after its founder, the *dunnu* was granted by the Crown to a single individual (and possibly his family), who could have a residence in it, although he lived elsewhere, in a major city (e.g. provincial capital). The farmland around a *dunnu* was an inseparable part of it, and all the farmers working under its administration were the owner's dependents.

So far, the best-known *dunnu* is (as already noted) Tell Sabi Abyad, on the eastern side of the Baliḫ river, for which we know the timespan of existence (ca. 1225-1120), and the name of one of its owners, Ili-ipadda, who hold the titles of Grand Vizier (*sukkallu rabi'u*) and 'King of Ḫanigalbat' (*šar ᵐᵃᵗḪanigalbat*, see below).

The size of the fortified settlement is of ca. 60 x 60 meters,[10] and inside its walled perimeter, the excavators discovered a tower (used as storage, treasury and jail), the owner residence, the residence of his 'chief steward' (*masennu*) who administered the farmstead in his absence, quarters for servants and scribes, and domestic premises.[11]

Moving northwards, another *dunnu*, of smaller size is Dunnu-ša-Uzibi/Giricano, on the Tigris riverbank, close to the site of Tušḫan/Zyaret Tepe. The site has produced a fully published archive belonged to a man called Aḫuni, which was in use during the reign of Aššur-bēl-kala (1074-1057), the years of crisis of Middle-Assyrian kingdom that followed the reign of Tiglath-pielser I (1115-1077).[12] A period for which the Aššur-bēl-kala's 'Broken Obelisk' (RIMA 2 A.0.89.7) records a series of battles engaged with people of the region known as Ḫanigalbat, on which the Assyrians had gradually lost control since the end of Tukulti-Ninurta I's reign (1244-1208). Apparently, even though some of these skirmishes took place in the environs of Dunnu-ša-Uzibi, they did not directly affect the activities of the people inside the *dunnu*, which does not seem to have been involved in the military responses to the hostile peoples.

Hence, it appears that the main purpose of a *dunnu* was farming, and that it did not have important military functions. Nevertheless, the texts show military activities of the *dunnu*s, which provisioned horses, cavalry, and war chariots to the owner, for police actions in the surrounding region.[13] As Akkermans writes, the site was 'a small and yet heavy fortified frontier settlement or *dunnu*, built by the Assyrians to protect and administer the western most province of their kingdom'.[14] In other words, these fortified settlements had, from a military point of view, only a defensive and controlling function, i.e. secure colonization aimed at a slow territorialization of the region and were not outposts for further expansionistic incursions.

Differently, fortified military camps and fortresses, for which the majority of attestation date to the Neo-Assyrian Empire, had a primary military use. As frontier fortified settlements, they were used like secure defensive outposts, and from them the army would often leave for expansionistic campaigns. Furthermore, through frontier fortresses it was possible to gain control over road networks, to create defensive buffer zones outside homeland's limits and to promote policies of territorial exploitation, trade control, and (like for the Middle-Assyrian *dunnu*s) agricultural colonization.

The main sources for the analysis of fortresses and fortified military camps are textual – royal inscriptions and (espe-

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[7] Liverani 1992, 125.

[8] Fales 1990, 91, 94.

[9] See Wiggermann 2000, 172, with previous bibliography.

[10] 0.36ha, which corresponds to 1 *ikû*, not very big if compared with other similar fortifications attested in the sale contracts from Assur: KAJ 162: 10 *ikû* (3.6ha), KAJ 160: 60 *ikû* (21.6ha), KAJ 177: 100 *ikû* (36ha); cfr. Wiggermann 2000, 175, with previous bibliography.

[11] Akkermans 2006.

[12] Cfr. Radner 2004, 52-53.

[13] Wiggermann 2000, 196.

[14] Akkermans 2006, 201.

cially) letters coming from the royal correspondence of 8th and 7th century – and figurative (only for the analysis of military camps).

The fortified military camps (*ušmannu, madaktu* and *karā šu*) were settlements of temporary use. They were built in the context of military campaigns, by rising a defensive wall of round, oval or square shape, while in their insides the army would settle in temporary dwellings, like tends and pavilions. Once the campaign was over, the army would abandon the camp, leaving the defensive wall for possible future uses.[15] As the iconography of the Assyrian palace reliefs show, inside the walls two or four different quarters, for higher officials and for simple soldiers, were separated by one or two crossing roads (very similar to the *cardo* and *decumanus* of Roman military camps).

The fortress (ḪAL.ṢU/*birtu*) was a bigger and more complex fortification. It had mainly military functions like the military camp, but could host a semi-permanent garrison, together with civilian personnel. It is the kind of frontier fortification most attested in the royal correspondence from 8th and 7th century, with main function as a guarding outpost in frontier areas (*taḫūmu*). Many textual sources attest the existence of groups of such *birtus* founded in frontier territories, right in front (*ina pān*) of similar fortifications held by the enemy. From a letter written to Tiglath-pileser III (745-725) by the governor of Tušḫan, Dūr-Aššur (SAA XIX 60), we have evidence of internal division in the *birtu*'s layout. In its insides were built two quarters, one for the officials (*būt ubri*) and the other for simpler military barracks (*būt napṭarte*).[16] The same letter also refers to the water supply provided to the fort through a cistern situated outside its walls (SAA XIX 60: 3-7). In other letters and some royal inscriptions is attested the existence of defensive moats around the forts, that, depending on the region, could be filled or not with water.[17]

As already mentioned, archaeological findings are very few, but of great interest. The most important case of Assyrian system of military fortification known until now comes from the Middle Euphrates, where it was discovered during the salvage excavations held in the context of the Haditha dam project in the 1980s. The excavation brought to the discovery of 17 fortified settlements dated to the 2nd millennium (3 on the islands of 'Ana, Telbis and Bijan, 9 on the east bank of the river and 5 on the western one). Six of these sites were organized following a pattern of two triple fortification system. One group is composed

by Sur Jur'eh and Glei'eh, two massive square and double walled fortresses facing each other on the opposite banks of the river, plus Sur Mur'eh, close to the eastern bank. The second system corresponds to the fortress on the island of Bijan (identified with the Sapirutu island of Tiglath-pileser I's inscriptions[18]), with 'Usyeh (western bank) and Yemniyeh (eastern bank). Forty sites had strata dated to the 1st millennium. Many of them were the same sites from Middle-Assyrian times which provided evidence of Neo-Assyrian (e.g. Glei'eh) and Neo-Babylonian (e.g. 'Ana) presence.[19] A hypothetical identification of 28 fortified military camps the 1st millennium settlements has been recently criticized.[20]

This large number of discovered fortified settlements prove the existence a frontier zone (one of the most strategic for Assyria), the territory of Suḫu, that did not ceased to be of great importance after the transition from Middle to Neo-Assyrian times.[21]

Other reaserches in the Palestinian area revealed the existence of a series of Neo-Assyrian fortifications in the southern part of the region, all along the routes that connected it to Egypt, with a major concentration in the area of the Naḫal Muṣur, right in front of the territories under Egyptian control.[22] Furthermore, in the royal inscriptions it is possible to find passages in which the king declares to have created defensive groups of fortifications of this sort in similar contexts, as in the territory of Kammanu at the extreme north-west periphery of the Empire, and in the area of Dēr, against Elam.[23]

Other attestations of multiple systems of fortifications come from textual sources, especially letters, from the northern frontier with Urartu, where groups of fortresses can be conquered and lost in a relatively short period of time. An example is given by the royal inscriptions of the sixth and seventh years of Sargon II (722-705), where 22 *birtū* situated in the region between Manni and Urartu, are 'stolen' by Rusa of Urartu, 'given as bribe' to the vassal king of Manni, Ullusunnu, re-taken by Sargon and the next year re-stolen by Rusa and re-taken again by Sargon.[24] In a letter from the correspondence of Sargon II with the governor of Amidi is also recorded the loss of some Assyrian fortifications.[25]

The many functions of fortresses that can be analysed through the royal correspondence, include the *maṣṣartu*, the territorial exploitation and the internal control. The *maññartu*, or 'vigilance', was the duty, on the part of any subject of the Assyrian king, to keep eyes and ears open and to report anything-improper taking place, whether in the capital city or in the most remote military outpost of

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[15] See the pictures of abandoned (but left standing) camps on the Shalmanser III Balawat doors in King 1915, pl. XIII (possibly), XXXVI, LIV and LX. A passage from letter to king Esarhaddon (SAA XIII 175, r. 8-22) seems to confirm the hypothesis of reiterated use of fortified military camps: 'I have heard the Magnates say as follows: "We will set up camp in Dilbat". (But) if they set up camp in Dilbat, the people will starve. Also, no caravan will come to them; rather, their army will go out and plunder a caravan! Let them place camp within the fortified enclosure of the camp of Babylon of last year, so that boats and water-skins may come to them'. See also Fales and Rigo, *forthcoming*.

[16] Cfr. Parker 1997. Even though this is the only attestation we have on such quarter division, besides the comparable iconography of the military camps, a similar separation in the architecture of main military buildings can be seen in the archaeological evidences from Fort Shalmaneser, the *ekal mašarti* or Review Palace of Kalḫu, where the divisions between the quarters of soldiers, officials and king's entourage are indeed clear (Oates and Oates 2001, 188).

[17] See, for example, SAA I 18: 1-7, and TCL 3: 190.

[18] RIMA 2, A.0.87.4, 41; A.0.87.10, 41-42.

[19] See al-Shukri 1983; Abdul-Amir 1997; Tenu 2008. Note that many of these forts were used also in Roman and Islamic times.

[20] Nadali 2009, 104-105.

[21] Fales 2011b, 24-30 with previous bibliography.

[22] Cfr. Na'aman 1979 and more recently Bagg 2013, 132-139.

[23] Sargon II: Fuchs 1994, Ann. 216-220; Sennacherib: RINAP 3, 23: iv 47-53.

[24] Fuchs 1994, Prunk. 38-39, Ann. 101-103.

[25] SAA V 2.

the empire.[26]

In the context of the fortresses functions, the *maññartu* corresponded to different activities. First, vigilance, also through intelligence reports, on military movement of the enemy. Second, keeping the king informed about the attacks against the enemy conducted by external populations, like in the case of the Cimmerians against Urartu.[27] Third, the control on possible hostile nomadic and semi-nomadic populations living in the Assyrian territories. Fourth, border watching over people, like runaways, deserters and smugglers, who illegally tried to cross the border.

Territorial exploitation consisted mainly on gaining of raw materials, like timber from the northern regions. In a letter coming from the Urartean frontier, the Assyrian soldiers are said to be cutting trees in a territory that is specifically said to be Urartean.[28] An activity that could only be achieved with the close presence of fortified outposts, where the soldiers could easily retreat.

Fortresses also functioned as centres for the collection of tributes from vassal states, and for the control on the trade routes. Finally, fortified sites had a key role in the policies of agricultural colonization and of internal control, which was concerned with the care of captive people deported form war fronts and settled in territories of new colonization, and the actions of internal police, also made through the recruitment of specific ethnic groups like the Aramean tribes of Itu'eans and Gurreans.[29]

2. FROM MIDDLE-ASSYRIAN KINGDOM TO NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

Recent studies based on the last twenty years of archaeological discoveries (including archives) in the north of Syria and in Iraqi Kurdistan have shed new light on the transitional period between 13th and 10th century in Assyria, i.e. from the apex of the Middle-Assyrian kingdom to the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.[30] In these studies, two aspects are of great interest: the analysis of settlement patterns, and the degree of territorial control over the steppic region between Tigris and Euphrates (mod. Jezirah) between 13th and 11th century; and the maintenance of cultural and political bounds between the core of Assyria and its peripheryies during the so-called 'Dark Age'.

Since the time of Shalmaneser I (1274-1245), the western sector of Middle-Assyrian kingdom (mod. Jezirah) appears to be under the authority of the Grand Vizier, or *sukkallu rabi'u*. This high official or Magnate, held also the additional title of *šar* ⁽ᵐᵃᵗ⁾*Ḫanigalbat*, 'King of Ḫanigalbat', from the name with which the region was known.[31] He was a viceroy of sorts, with administrative, legal, diplomatic and military functions. From his residence at

Dūr-Katlimmu,[32] the Grand Vizier governed over a number of districts (*pāḫatu*), whose main settlements were defined according to their more or less fortified nature, as *ālu*, 'city', *birtu* 'fortress' and *dunnu* 'fortified farmstead'. Each district was under the responsibility of a governor, or *bēl pāḫete*,[33] who had his residence in a major urban centre, e.g. capital of province, while minor settlements were under the administration of minor officials.

The archaeological and textual sources for this region in Middle-Assyrian times give a complex picture of the degree of Assyrian territorial control. On one hand, they seem to confirm the model of 'network empire', as theorized by Liverani, who observes the presence of a network of Assyrian enclaves 'embedded in a native world'.[34] These enclaves were connected to each other through a complex system of routes that allowed political and administrative intercommunication, as well as transfer of goods from and to the core of the kingdom. Following Liverani, the areas between Assyrian enclaves were largely unprotected. Indeed, updated evidences from the region confirm the presence of settled and non-settled hostile peoples of different ethnicities in many sectors of the region.[35] On the other hand, archaeological surveys and textual sources from the region show the presence of 'stains' of continuous territorial control (through provincial capitals, *birtu*s and *dunnu*s) in some of the network's sectors.[36] Furthermore, there are attestations of covenants and treaty-documents with Semitic nomadic groups of the area (like the one retrieved in Tell Saby Abiad between Ili-ipadda and the Sutean chiefs of the Niḫsanu tribe), that guaranteed (together with the protection of military contingents provisioned by the fortified centres) a free Assyrian passage from one site to the other.[37]

After the end of Tukulti-Ninurta I's reign, the Middle-Assyrian kingdom faced a decline that would not have found any real interruption until the rise of Assyrian Empire in 10th-9th century. The only apparent recovery (an 'ephemeral realization' in the words of Liverani[38]) was brought by Tiglath-pileser I in the 11th century, but after his death, the crisis became irreversible and Assyria was forced back to its home frontiers. The withering of Assyrian power necessarily left peripheral enclaves to fend for themselves. The activities of Tell Sabi Abyad suffered of devastation and conflagration around 1180, during the reign of Ninurta-apil-Ekur. Afterwards, a partial reoccupation with renovation of parts of the structure is attested, but in 1120 its final abandonment took place. As for Dunnu-ša-Uzibi/Giricano, there are no attestations of its use later than Aššur-bēl-kala's reign, and for its neighbour and referent city, Tušḫan, it is renowned the inscription of Assurnaṣirpal II

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[26] Fales 2001, 119; 2011a.

[27] See SAA V 90, 92, 144, 145. Cfr. Lanfranchi 1990.

[28] SAA V 33 r. 1-3.

[29] Fales 2001, 76-77.

[30] See Fales 2012 (with previous bibliography); Pappi 2012; van Soldt *et al.* 2013.

[31] For an alternative reading, and consequent historical implications, of KUR.*Ḫa-ni-rab-bat* instead of KUR.*Ḫa-ni-gal-bat*, see Valerio 2011; Fales 2012, 116-117.

[32] For a discussion on the institutional significance and importance of the title of *šar* ⁽ᵐᵃᵗ⁾*Ḫanigalbat*, see Fales 2011a; Fales 2012 with previous bibliography.

[33] This hierarchy substituted, in 13th century, the very similar one attested in Mitannian administration, whose terminology was based on the concept of *ḫalṣu* 'fortified district', governed by a *ḫalṣuḫlu* or *ḫaṣṣiḫlu* (Cfr. Jakob 2003, 17-19, but also Fales 2001, 54 fn 79).

[34] Liverani 1988b, 90.

[35] Fales 2011a, 21-22.

[36] Cfr. Duistermaat 2008, 23; Ur 2002, 74.

[37] Fales 2011a, 21-22, with previous bibliography.

[38] Liverani 1988a, 760.

(883-859), in which the king celebrates the reconquest and reconstruction of the city in 882 BC.

'I took Tušḫa in hand for renovation. I cleared away its old wall, delineated its area, reached its foundation pit, (and) built (and) completed in a splendid fashion a new wall from top to bottom. A palace for my royal residence I founded inside. (...) I brought back the enfeebled Assyrians who, because of hunger (and) famine, had gone up to other lands to the land of Šubru.'[39]

Under the light of the new textual and archaeological data coming from the western and eastern periphery, the highly ideological motif of the 'enfeebled Assyrians' (UN.MEŠ KUR *aš-šur an-ša-te*), rescued by the king and brought back to their city after years of abandonment, acquires more historical grounds. As a point of fact, the inscriptions of the ruler of Ṭābētu (Tell Ṭaban, on the Lower Ḫabur), Aššur-reš-iši II (972-968), and his successors prove the continuity of political relationships between some enclaves of Lower Ḫabur and the Assyrian core during the 'Dark Age'.[40] Nor any particular difficulty is encountered during the 10th-9th century reaffirmation of Assyrian power in Dūr-Kathlimmu or Šadikanni (Tell 'Aǧāǧā), were examples of Assyrian sculptures dated to the reign of Assur-naṣirapli II were found.[41]

A just-published and exceptionally interesting example in this sense comes from the site of Tell Satu Qala. The site has been recently identified with the Idu of Middle-Assyrian sources, shifting the position of Middle-Assyrian most southern frontier, from the area of Hit, on the Middle Euphrates, to the northern bank of the Lower Zab, were Tell Satu Qala is located.[42] The Assyrian domination of the city presumably began around the years of reign of Adad-nirari I (1307-1275), and lasted ca. a century-and-a-half.[43] The archaeological and textual material retrieved during the excavations has shown the existence of a local dynasty of kings of KUR URU *I-di*, 'land of the city of Idu', which 'most likely arose in the wake of the disintegration of Middle-Assyrian imperial control, either late in the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (after year 20) or during the reigns of Ašarēd-apil-Ekur or Aššur-bēl-kala'.[44] The names of the kings of Idu's local dynasty, which lasted about seven generations, have been found on some inscribed bricks, whose language (Assyrian dialect of Akkadian), ductus (Middle-Assyrian) and some grammatical features are very similar to those of the bricks found in other Assyrian provincial capitals (e.g. Tell Bderi/Dūr-Aššur-ketta-lēšer). As the authors of the report underline 'palaeography as well as styles of the decorations reflect contemporary developments in Assyria, hinting at continued ties to the informal empire of Assyrian cultural dominance'.[45]

With the reigns of Assurnañirpal II and Shalmaneser III the *Reconquista* of the Middle-Assyrian territories was fulfilled and the borders of Assyrian Homeland established up to the Euphrates. After a period of crisis, which followed the death of Shalmaneser III, the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II brought the Assyrian Empire to its maximal expansion. These kings conducted military campaigns in the territories beyond the Homeland's limits, where, as said, systems of frontier fortifications kept control on the regions of new conquest. In the Assyrian Homeland, after a series of military campaigns that had secured the region, the provincial territories were administrated through a pattern of cities around which villages (*kapru*) with no wall defences were located. Outside this central Homeland, three major regions were interested by the Assyrian intervention. The western sector, from the Euphrates to the mountainous region of Tabal, on the north-west, and to the Palestinian coast up to the border with Egypt, to the southwest. The northern and eastern regions of the mountain chains and valleys of Taurus and Zagros, where Assyria and Urartu were separated by a series of buffer states under the hegemony of one or the other. And the southern frontier with Babylonia, beyond which was the Elamite kingdom. Assyrian territory appears, at this point, divided in two great blocks: the Homeland, where a full territorial control (requiring only, at most, intervention by military police for fugitives and petty criminals) was established, and the three main areas of Assyrian expansion, which represent three different frontier scenarios, with their specific military, political and cultural peculiarities. The penetration of these areas followed fluidly imperialistic policies, largely determined by existing geopolitical conditions and consequent opportunities, which brought to subjugation in vassalage or to the outright political annexation of conquered regions, case by case.[46] As seen above, major regroupments of military fortifications are attested in strategic points located in the fringe territories between the areas controlled by the Assyrians and the hegemonic regions of other powerful polities. These front-line fortification systems also guaranteed the control on the trade routes that led to the regions beyond the Empire's limits.

To conclude, the role of fortified settlements highly depended on the kind of frontier that characterized a particular territory in a particular time. In fact, the term 'frontier' appears to be suitable for many and sometimes very different contexts. The western frontier of Middle-Assyrian kingdom is proving to be, instead of a network of isolated enclaves, a more dynamic territory with 'stains' of full Assyrian control – held through cities, fortresses and *dunnu*s – alternate to network-areas in which free passage is guaranteed only through diplomatic relations. A situation that Fales defined of 'work in progress'.[47] Defensive walls protected unites of agricultural colonization and hosted military contingents that guaranteed the region's security through police actions. Looking southward, at a different kind of frontier scenario (much more militarized and less tameable), a line of fortresses controlled the Middle Euphrates against Babylonian hegemony, and could be used

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[39] RIMA 2, A.0.101.1, ii 3-8.

[40] The inscriptions were found at Tell Bedri and at Tell Ṭaban. See Maul 1992; 2005.

[41] Kühne 1995, 76-77.

[42] Pappi 2012.

[43] van Soldt *et al.* 2013, 217.

[44] van Soldt *et al.* 2013, 219.

[45] van Soldt *et al.* 2013, 219.

[46] Bagg 2013.

[47] Fales 2011a, 23.

as an outpost for expansionistic campaigns. With the rise of the Assyrian Empire, the Jezirah was secure and under complete control of the State, and fortified farmsteads were no more necessary for its security. On the other hand, the different fronts of new territorial expansion constituted very different kinds of frontier territories, with militarized areas at their foremost fringes.

Finally, recent discoveries have dramatically changed our vision of the Assyrian 'lost frontier' in the 11th century, and have shed new light on the importance of peripheral cities as centres of preservation of cultural traditions and bonds with Assyrian power. The examples of Ṭābetu, Šadikanni and Idu/Tell Satu Qala, where, somehow, inside local dynasties were kept alive political connections and cultural traditions for long time, give the impression that in these cases the walls of fortified cities were, in a way, the *very* borders of Assyria.

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