

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND CULTURAL INTERACTIONS IN NORTHERN MESOPOTAMIA

2ND – 4TH CENTURY CE

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SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND CULTURAL INTERACTIONS IN NORTHERN MESOPOTAMIA (2ND – 4TH CENTURY CE)

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAAS	Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syrienne.
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> , ed. H. Temporini (Berlin 1972-).
BAR-IS	British Archaeological Report. International Series.
BZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift.
CAD	Chicago Assyrian Dictionary.
CAH	The Cambridge Ancient History, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923-.
CHI	The Cambridge History of Iran, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
CJ	Classical Journal.
CRAI	Comptes rendus de séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.
CSHB	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae.
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers.
GJ	Geographical Journal.
JSav	Journal des savants.
JRA	Journal of Roman Archaeology.
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies.
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies.
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library.
PdP	La Parola del Passato, Napoli.
PLRE	A.H.M.Jones, <i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.
YCIS	Yale Classical Studies.
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik.

FOREWORD

“One of the less known and less understood areas of the ancient world”

(Fergus Millar)

The present study has been conceived on the trails of those significant works about the Roman Near East and the relations and interactions with the Eastern neighbours and the local populations. In recent years some of the most important general works on the theme have faced the issue, such as the still fundamental works of Fergus Millar (*The Roman Near East. 31 BC- AD 337*, 1993) and Maurice Sartre (*D'Alexandre à Zenobie. Histoire du Levant antique IV^{ème} siècle av. J.-C.-III^{ème} ap. J.-C.*, 2001), passing through the studies of Nigel Pollard (*Soldiers, Cities and Civilians in Roman Syria*, 2000), Kevin Butcher (*Roman Syria and the Near East*, 2004), and Peter Edwell (*Between Rome and Persia: The Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia and Palmyra under Roman control*, 2008).

These latter works, more focused on the land *beyond* the Euphrates, should be seen as a direct consequence of the flourishing of the Roman frontier studies since the mid '90s. Works such as *Roman Army in the East (BAR Supp. Series)* edited by David Kennedy and the more general works by Benjamin Isaac (*The limits of the empire*, 1993) and C.R. Whittaker (*Frontiers of Roman Empire*, 1994) have all put the focus on the specific nature of the eastern *limes* and the dynamics that went over in the region, with different and significant approaches to the theme. The oriental frontier studies, however, had an important initial impulse with Louis Dillemann (*Haute-Mesopotamie orientale et pays adjacents*, 1962), David Oates (*Studies in Ancient History of Northern Iraq*, 1968) and, even earlier, the pioneering studies of Antoine Poidebard (*La trace de Rome dans le desert de la Syrie*, 1934) and sir Aurel Stein with the re-edition of his *Limes Reports* by David Kennedy and Shelagh Gregory (*Sir Aurel Stein's Limes Reports*, 1985).

All these works had the credit to having defined the guidelines of the research often using pioneeristic methods such as the aerial photography, which has permitted a considerable development in the study of the eastern frontier.

In more recent times, the on-going excavations projects in the area and the new notions of *interaction* and *integration* in relation with the Roman presence have made possible a further step in the knowledge of the topic. Considering exclusively *Roman* or, at the contrary, exclusively *Parthian* (or *Sasanian*) a site means, nowadays, ignoring the dynamics that distinguished the whole area in the period at issue.

It is doubtless that the starting point for the understanding of such dynamics must be the identification of the points of interactions with their difference and analogies, although the hybridisations must keep in count as well.

The term *hybridisation*, tough if it is a modern word, perfectly fits with the mixture of races, religions and social institutions that shaped the Near East in the period from 1st to late 4th century indeed. The phenomenon is quite easily applicable in the major centres, where the abundance of archaeological *data* is widely used to identify this kind of hybridisation such as the distinctive unmistakable features of a given culture as well, while it appear to be slightly more difficult to track in the minor settlements. The relative scarcity of historical and archaeological evidence, indeed, affects our knowledge about the rural landscape and the countryside itself. The few minor sites mentioned in the literary sources are still not only unexcavated, but quite often unidentified too, while the fewer where excavation works have been conducted are the same sites almost practically unknown to the ancient sources (Tell Barri, Tuneinir, Tell Shaik Hamad and, partially, Seh Qubba just to mention some of them). Notwithstanding this lack of evidence on both sides the countryside and territory out of the large cities remains a keystone for the understanding of the Roman *occupation* in the area, as well as the organization and administration of the newly acquired territory after the severian annexation.

The integration of the archaeological *data* with the known literary and epigraphic evidence could be the only way through which the presence of Rome beyond the Euphrates could be at least understandable. The region itself, indeed, represents one of the most archaeologically important areas of the world and thus the isolation of a given event in a specific chronological period forcedly needs more elements than the ones needed in other regions.

The area that lies between the Euphrates and the Tigris has been interested by complex societies since the pre-pottery Neolithic¹. During the 3rd and 2nd millennium

¹ See, for instance, the recent discoveries at Tell Seker: Nishiaki & Le Mière 2005, 55-68.

BCE the whole region was the centre of the expansionistic desires of different empires, some of them coming from the South (Akkad), others from the North (Mitanni). After the collapse of the Assyrian Empire the region passed to the Babylonian kingdom that fell short time later (early 6th cent. BCE). The Achaemenid presence is, unfortunately, not well attested, mainly because of a huge lack of archaeological evidence. It is known from classical literary sources (Herodotus), that the Royal Road of the empire passed through these region and that the whole Upper Mesopotamia was a satrapy of the Achaemenid kingdom. It is with the acquisition of these lands by the Seleucid kingdom that the social and civic features of the West came into contact with the complex eastern societies and their older features. The foundations and, sometimes, symbolic re-foundations, of cities and villages during the Seleucid occupation confirms a large and widespread presence of *western* soldiers, civilians and officers. Few sites in the proposed area have returned a massive Seleucid presence in archaeological terms. Jebel Khalid, a fortified site on the right bank of the Syrian Euphrates, is one of them, together with scattered evidence from Dura Europos, and very few materials from sites of the region (Tell Barri, Tell Beydar, Tell Arbid in Northeastern Syria, Qara Quzaq, Sirrin, Balis/Emar on the Upper Syrian Euphrates, in example).² By the way the lack of stratified Seleucid material is in a certain way compensating by the massive quantity of contemporary pottery collected in the surveys conducted in the whole Northern Mesopotamia. This should be seen as a sign of a relative peaceful and prosperous area, much more characterised by small settlements and large farms rather than big centres.

The interest for this area in relation to the Roman presence is mainly because of that *frontier steppe zone* the region constituted during the Roman era. The studies about the frontier and the Roman Army in the East have hugely developed since the already mentioned early works and nowadays the Roman presence in these zones can be understood only through the comprehension of the dynamics related to the cultural, religious and political diversities. Starting from these assumptions, should be always considered the complex *substratum* of the whole region, considering at the same time the different aspects of effectively different ethnic groups (Greeks, Romans, Parthians, Arabs, Nomads...) all present in a relative small area which,

² Jebel Khalid has been identified with *Amphipolis*, the settlement Pliny placed not so far from Europos (Jerablus/Carcemish?) on the Euphrates (Gawlikowski 1996, 128).

moreover, was still occupied by its own social structures (and super-structures) long before the coming of Alexander the Great³.



Fig. 1. General view of the Eastern Mediterranean region and part of the Arabic peninsula. The area treated by this work is highlighted in red.

Even the definition of *presence* when dealing with Rome in the East should be revisited and put temporarily aside in favour of terms such as *interaction*, *integration* and *relation*, which surely identify the reciprocity of the events and the active parts the local communities and the pre-existing social structures played during the period. In the next chapters I will try to define these aspects by describing both the historical and archaeological evidence of these interactions which was based upon three main factors: the cities, the rural landscape and the pre-existing cultures (nomads, Arabs, Aramaic-speaking minorances). A historical overview will be provided to contextualize the events and the west-east interactions, struggles and confrontation. The following chapter will mainly regard then the historical geography of the region which will also constitute the main body of the work itself. I have divided this

³ Opposite opinions about the topic have been expressed by Mazza (1992, 160) and by Gnoli (2005, 495).

section in three different parts regarding the main centres, the rural landscape and minor settlements and the route system in the area.

Cities like Nisibis, Resaina and Singara (as well as Hatra) must, indeed, be considered as nodal points and strategic ones through the centuries, but also the countryside and the rural landscape of the region is fundamental for the general understanding of the matter especially if related to the route system, the social mobility and the movements of the armies. As Susan Alcock has rightly shown, the administration of a given province largely depends upon the cooperation of local power networks and the richer and wealthier they are the better the central power is⁴. Although the study of Alcock is based on Roman Greece, it clearly shows that the Roman intentions, the pre-existing cultures and the local factors should be considered as parts of a whole to understand the provincial dynamics of large parts of the Roman empire, especially in eastern Mediterranean regions. The local changes should be only partially directly related to the Roman presence while they should be analysed as direct consequences of a transformation in their own context.

The geographical importance of Northern Mesopotamia and its outstanding strategic position at the top of the fertile crescent (and one of the most fertile areas as well) was at the basis of a complex route system which developed since the Achaemenid period (and probably before) through the Seleucid domination and the later periods. Nevertheless the uncertain fate of these lands, always in the midst of struggles between empires, the commercial routes that crossed the region were some of the most important axes in the whole Near East. Starting from this assumption a study of reconstruction of the historical geography of the area will be here conducted having as reference the ancient itineraries (over all the Table of Peutinger which constitutes the most important document about the issue) and the modern satellite photos as well.

As already mentioned the interaction occurred in the region in the period from 2nd to 4th century CE was also highly characterised by the local populations and nomadic tribes (often Arabs) who seasonally settled in the area. The importance of such a local community is fundamental for the understanding of the large variety of social, religious and political aspects of the area. The interaction occurred along the Middle Euphrates and is vividly testified by the account of the *papyri* of the Euphrates and

⁴ Alcock 1995, 33-46. The study has demonstrated that since the late republican period in Greece there was a re-distribution of people in the countryside and the slow disappearing of small settlements in favour of wealthy farms and landowners

Dura Europos spreads the light on a complex society, which was mixed and culturally not homogeneous. An important role was played by these nomadic tribes, which quite often provided a sort of missed link between the settled population and the environment and were thus considered important by Rome too.

The two last chapters of the work will regard two different aspects of a same theme which also represent two of the most discussed problems about the Roman Near East: the cultural borrowings and the local impulses and will be synthesized by a brief overview of the history and role of the Nomadic tribes in the region with a specific attention to the relations that occurred between these local people and the Rome's role in the region as well as by the general conclusions of the work. Here I will try to sum up the evidence proposed in order to track these change and continuity in the period at issue.

Large part of the researches on the Roman provinces, indeed, moved from the assumptions regarding the acculturation and the cultural transmission, often putting in background the local features of given area in order to track the western and, moreover, roman characteristics.

Traditionally, indeed, the Roman western provinces all experienced important changes in linguistic and material culture as it could be easily observed in Gaul, Roman Britain and part of the Rhine limes, while the local identity in the Near East strongly maintained its role despite the proved inclusions of western impulses. The interpretation of cultures as single and stable unit cannot be applied, thus, to the Roman Near East. The *local* existed long before the *greek* and the *roman* and all these feature must have dealt through the centuries with the pulses from East and the rising of regional identities. The roman *colonial* system was only partially applicable to the Near East (the only veteran colony was Berytus) where the settlement landscape dealt with highly different factors from the ones in the West.

Nevertheless large part of Western Syria were re-populated on large scale since the Bronze Age during the Roman period, most of the areas west of the Euphrates were intensively inhabited long before the coming of the Roman Army. The Assyrian kingdom, e.g., strongly contributed to the development of the region between the 12th and the 7th century BCE. Even the so called *polis* structure in Roman Syria is not a *fait accompli*. Graf had demonstrated, e.g., that even the Decapolis region was featured, before the coming of Rome, by fortified villages and town led by local

tyrants and chiefs⁵. The political structure of the others regions of Syria before the coming of Rome is still matter of discussion and the areas east of the Euphrates constituted a sort of cultural mix between the strong local and Arab roots and the presence of the Macedonian/Seleucid dominion on the other side.

Starting from this assumption, each main centre in the area east of the Euphrates must be considered in three ways. The first is represented by the origins, as related to pre-classical period or Hellenistic age, with all the issues regarding the *local* substratum, the second is represented by the role the same centre played during the Roman occupation of the region and how this role was experienced both by a political/social and material point of view. The third point, instead, mainly regards the interaction (formal and informal) between the local nature and western (or eastern) impulses and how they are reflected in material culture, political, religious or social scene.

Another important factor to bear in mind dealing with the Roman interactions in the Near east is the impact of the rural landscape on the imperial and larger events. The several survey conducted in the area have spread the light on the regional changes in the landscape since the Neolithic period, some of them with a real interesting in the changes that occurred after the collapse of the pre-hellenistic kingdom and before the rise of Islam. Notwithstanding the crucial role the Northern Mesopotamia played in the confrontation between the major empires in the region, the area was inhabited and certainly featured by small inter-connected settlements that developed despite the political issues and strongly maintaining a certain local appeal. Some of the sites mentioned in the Table of Perutinger, which still is nowadays one of the most important document to reconstruct the regional landscape in the Roman period, are practically unknown at all but they clear testify the presence of a rural territory which was featured by several urban centres (obviously with different dimensions and importance) aside of the main centres of the region.

Thus the structure of the work has been conceived in three different sections: the historical background, with the analysis and narration of the events that took place in the region from the early 2nd century to 363 CE, the study of the main centres and minor settlements in the area, mainly focusing both on the historical and archaeological data and on their insertion in the road and trade networks of Northern Mesopotamia as well, and a third section more focused on some aspects too often

⁵ GRAF 1992, 3-5; 22

side-placed in these studies: the nomadic presence and interaction as well as the persistence of local material culture traditions in minor sites.

CHAPTER 1

GEOGRAPHIC AND CLIMATE

"[...]the entire army was sick and the troops from Illyricum especially were seriously ill and dying, being accustomed to moist, cool air [...]"

Herodian, VI, 6, 2.

The area interested by this research mainly concerns three different geographic regions, with their analogies and differences. The Northern limits are represented by Tur Abdin massif and Taurus Mountains in South Eastern Turkey. The southern limits are defined by the Ḥabur-Euphrates confluence. Western limits are represented by Western Ḥabur River basin, while the eastern ones by Upper Tigris. (Fig. 1). The area is known with then name of Jezirah (arabic for “*island*”), because of its geographic location between the upper courses of the Euphrates and the Tigris. The whole region is primarily composed of Tertiary (Mio-Pliocene) sedimentary rocks partially overlaid by alluvial gravel and basalt lava flows, mainly in the area of the Kaukab, Northeastern Syria, the Jebel Abd-el-Aziz and the areas around the modern city of Mosul.

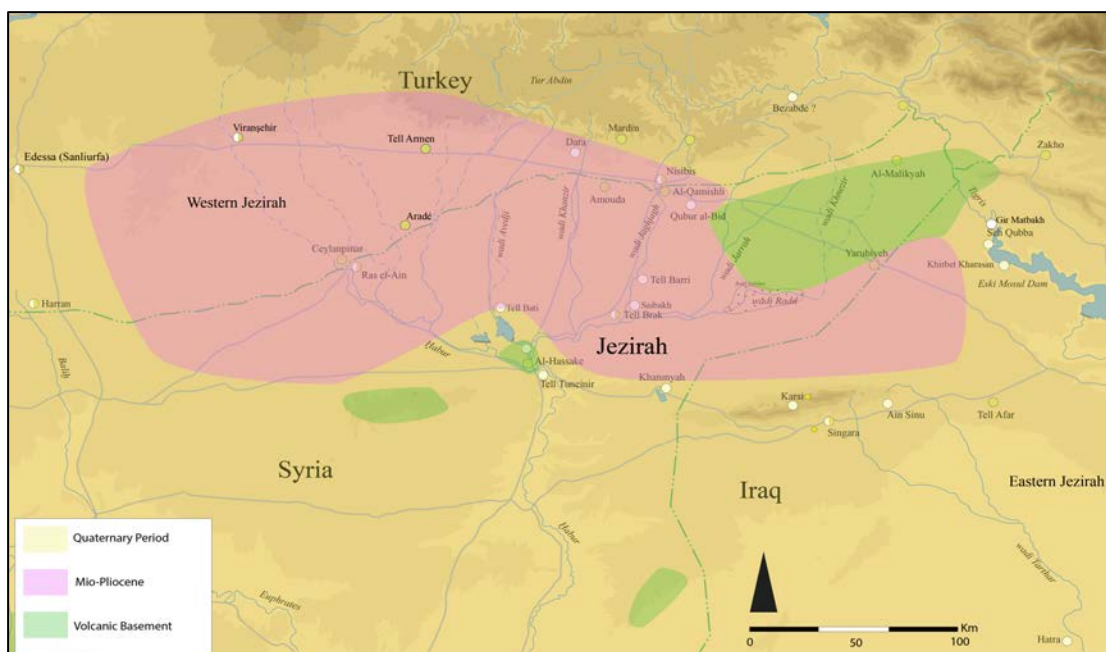


Fig. 2. Geological map of the area. The three main soils of the region are here represented: quaternary period (yellow), Mio-Pliocene (pink) and the basement volcanic complex quite widespread in the region (green).

The region of the Upper Ḥabur basin, in particular, consists of Mediterranean brown and red calcareous soils on conglomerate⁶. The agricultural exploitation brought the soils of the area to an impoverishment caused by the continuation of the dry-farming cultures due to low rainfall. This impoverishment made the soils suffering of leaching and erosion⁷. A recent study about the agriculture during the third millennium BCE conducted in the area of Tell Brak has revealed that great changes in climate and soil composition went over before the 4th millennium BCE and that the soil cultivated in the those periods is more or less the same kind of the one during the Roman occupation and, most important, which is, by the way, not so different from the actual situation⁸.

At the contrary, the area of the Taurus and the northern fringes of the Tur Abdin have a continental climate, although with dry and hot summer. This region is heavily affected during winter by snowstorms and temperatures frequently drop below zero. Below the Taurus Mountains, in modern Syria, the context is quite different. Even if the whole region lies beyond the 200 mm isohyet, the steppe land is much more extended and the sources of water quite poor. Three major rivers run in this area. They are from West to East: the Balih, the Ḥabur and the Jaghjagh (or Djaghdjagh). They are attested in the literary sources of classical period respectively as *Balichus*, *Aborras* and *Mygdonius*. This area lying mainly in modern Syrian region of Al-Hassake can supply a modest and basilar agriculture, which is improved by the management of water resources and channels since the Assyrian period⁹. These channels, known in the late antiquity and Islamic period, as *qanawat*, are still used to manage the water through the fields¹⁰.

Thus, though the water regime of the *wadis* considerably varies from spring to fall, it is generally considered that the Ḥabur area, in example, receives enough rainwater to allow to the local population a non-irrigated agriculture¹¹.

Further South the area that lies below the Ḥabur-Euphrates confluence is unfortunately around or below the 250mm rainfall line per year and so the

⁶ WEISS 1986, 81-2.

⁷ HALD 2008, 5.

⁸ HALD 2008.

⁹ UR 2005, 317-345.

¹⁰ The situation nowadays is still more difficult. The recent political problems between Syria and Turkey have brought the Turkish government to the construction of a series of dams and closes to stop the water flows towards the Syrian land, mainly during the summer period.

¹¹ WEISS 1986.

agriculture and the sustainability of the region are heavily influenced by the few rain days and by the proximity to the flood land of the Euphrates. This area includes the modern regions of Deir Ez-Zor (Syria) and Ninawa (Iraq). Cities like Hatra and Dura Europos, and a significant amount of small settlement lie here. Dura itself lies on the boundary between two ecological zones, steppe or semi-desert plains and Euphrates river valley. The fertile floodplain, circa 5-15 km wide, constitutes an oasis and an arable ribbon between the two steppe *plateau* of Jeziarh to the East and Shamiyeh to the West¹². At Hatra, instead, the steppe environment has made possible the perfect sustaining interaction between dwellers and nomads (see below, p. 188-198).

The rainfall varies from zone to zone. It goes mainly from the 400mm per year in Taurus *plateau* to minus 50 mm per year in mid-Euphrates area¹³. The rain, when it arrives, has the trend to transform the whole area in a *mud-plateau*¹⁴. Guest (1966) designed a useful sheet with all differences in terms of rainfall between the areas of Mesopotamia. The environmental zones are so classified:

a. Anatolia and Iran.

Annual rainfall (mm): 600-1000

Altitude (m): 500-1800

b. Northern Mesopotamia: Upper zones, moist steppe.

Annual rainfall (mm): 350-500

Altitude (m): 300-500

c. Northern Mesopotamia; Lower zones, dry steppe

Annual rainfall (mm): 200-350

Altitude (m): 100:350

d. Southern Mesopotamia: Desert

Annual rainfall (mm): 100-200

Altitude (m): 200

¹² GEYER 1998; JAMES 2004,13.

¹³ SANLAVILLE AND TRABOULSI 1996, figs. 4,6,8.

¹⁴ HOPKINS 1979,118.

Resuming we can clearly distinguish two major rainfall areas interested by this research:

1. 600 mm and over: South-Eastern Turkey and Taurus mountains.
2. 300 mm to 550 mm: Large part of the areas interested by this work. The region represents *grossomodo* the modern province of Al-Hassake in Syria and part of the North-Western Iraq, modern Ninawa governorate.

The temperature in the whole region, indeed, can be quite different and, moreover, it can have fluctuations and seasonal variations, from extreme hot on summer days (the region of Dura Europos has daily maximum temperature of over 35° C for 100 days in a year) to sub-zero temperatures (in Batman region in South Eastern Turkey snowstorms and icing are quite frequent).

The orographic situation of the area is another interesting factor to bear in mind, over all when dealing with the movement of troops and soldiers, presence/absence of roads and dislocation of defensive systems. Highest peaks are attested just in the Northern fringes of the Upper Mesopotamia: Taurus mountains are almost all over 1000 m, with some of them over 2000 m. Further south the limit of the 300 mm rainfall per year is marked by two groups of hills/mountains of volcanic origin: Jebel Abd-el-Aziz (west) and Jebel Sinjar (east)¹⁵. The highest peak among them is a 1300 m peak in Jebel Sinjar, in modern Iraq.

No mountains or hills are present below this area while an enormous limestone plateau is clearly visible to the traveller going southwards from the Ḥabur region. The limestone rocks are much more frequent close the confluence Ḥabur-Euphrates and the modern Syrian centre of Deir Ez-Zor.

Another important factor to bear in mind writing about this area is the main role the water sources played in the development of cities and human presence.

Due to the severe climate conditions of the zone few natural lakes are attested¹⁶. The exceptions are represented by Khatunye Lake, in North-Eastern Syria, close to Jebel Sinjar and the seasonal Bouara Lake, formed by the *wadi* Aġiġ, in a desert area

¹⁵ The Jebel Sinjar is flanked along its edges by two minor mountain ranges, the Jebel Jeribe at East and the Jebel Ishkaft at West.

¹⁶ The ones visible today are the consequence of the modern dam projects conducted by Syria (Assad Lake) Turkey (Ataturk Dam Project) and Iraq (Saddam Dam Project/Eski Mosul Dam).

between Singara and Dura Europos. Khathounyie Lake is nowadays close to the Syrian village of Al-Hol and it was yet known during the Roman period with the name of *Lacus Beberaci* (it is also marked on the Table of Peutinger)¹⁷.

The problem of the water supply is one of the most unsolved themes about the human occupation of the Mesopotamian plateau in the early 1st millennium CE. There is none or very few traces of aqueducts in the region, neither in the countryside neither outside the most important centres (Nisibis, Dura, Singara)¹⁸. It is possible that the water was taken directly from the source (Euphrates, lakes, *wadis*) with the aid of donkeys or horses, but we should admit the usage of the same channels for the irrigation as supplying method for water¹⁹.

All the arable land in the modern Syrian region is possible only along the floodplains of the rivers where the desert and the steppe land leave space to green fields (with a trend to become smaller year by year). The distance of the areas interested by this study from the Mediterranean climate conditions (and the vicinity of the same areas to the steppe-like ones) is a factor not to be underrated. The decay of environmental carrying capacity is a point to consider writing about the Roman presence (and soldiers presence) in the region. The movement of troops along a West-East route followed certainly the isohyet of 200 mm and the dislocation of the legionary camps has been forced more by the water supplies than “*Grand Strategy*”²⁰.

In all the area the subsurface water can be reached 3-4 m depth by digging wells quite close to *wadi* bottom locations. The wells often dry out in late summer or early autumn. In modern days more resistant wells are built in all the area (in a depth of about 60-70m) and the temporary ones are just built occasionally by the nomads (Bedouins).

Such a variation in climatic conditions and water supply surely affected the settlement patterns of the area through a very long span of time. Northern Jezirah, in

¹⁷ Layard noticed the remains of an ancient settlement close to the lake now completely disappeared.

¹⁸ The only exception seems to be the 6th century CE aqueduct at Dara (see below, p. 132)

¹⁹ At Dura probably the water was taken directly from the Euphrates through a system of mechanical means from the cliff-tops, nonetheless no archaeological proof seems to confirm this theory (ALLARA 2002 and JAMES 2004).

²⁰ GNOLI 2007, 71. Luttwak’s theories, apart of the easy considerations about the “no-scientific” aspect of his research, must be forcedly reconsidered. It is quite impossible that Rome planned to conquer remote regions centuries before their effective conquest. Economic, political and social factors of a given period must be taken in count when talking (and writing) about the Roman expansion.

example, was scatterly occupied during the Sasanian era, with a small number of sites of quite big dimensions (see below, p. 171-187). This *datum* could be linked mainly to a dry-climatic phase that interested the all region starting from the end of the 4th century CE. This occasional event encouraged probably a shift to pastoral nomadism and agrarian re-location to the river valleys, as already suggested in the case of rural land-use in parts of eastern Mediterranean and Northern Syria²¹. A study conducted primarily around the area of the Khatouniye Lake shows arid and semi-arid conditions with some fluctuations: more humid conditions are attested between 90 BC and 323 CE²², from Hellenistic to Roman-Sasanian period), while major dryness said to start in Byzantine/Sasanian times²³.

Again, palynological researches conducted in the area of the lake Bouara, between Singara and Dura Europos, confirmed that there have been no major changes in climate in this region at least since the 4th millennium BCE²⁴. A survey carried out during the late '80s, and a book nicely published by R. Bernbeck (1994) have put the light on the geography (natural and human) of the region east of the Euphrates, in the basin of the *wadi* Aḡiḡ. The results have shown a complete sequence of abandonment and resettlement during 1st millennium CE, as well as different degrees of mobility of groups who occupied the area.

1.1 Major centres and rural landscape in modern times

The whole area has a population of about 5,000,000 with more than a half concentrated in large cities of Syria, Turkey and Iraq. The major Syrian cities are Deir Ez-Zor, on the Euphrates, few kilometres below the confluence with the Ḥabur, Ar-Raqqā (ancient *Callinicum*) on the Upper Syrian Euphrates (close to the confluence with the Baliḡ River), Al-Qamishli, on the Jaghjagh, immediately below the Turkish border and Al-Hassake, on the Ḥabur river, ca 80 kms south of Al-Qamishli. The major Turkish centres are Mardin, on the Taurus Mountains in the Dyarbakir region, Urfa (ancient *Edessa*) and Dyarbakir (ancient *Amida*) and the border city of Cizre.

²¹ RANDBORG 1991, 47-53; SIMPSON 1996, 91.

²² RÖSNER AND SCHÄBITZ 1991, 77-87.

²³ LYONNET 1996, 370.

²⁴ GREMMEN AND BOTTEMA 1991, 112.

Major Iraqi centres are mainly represented by the two most important cities of the North: Mosul, on the Tigris River (second largest city in modern Iraq) and Erbil (ancient *Arbela*), the capital cities of the KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government).

Apart of these important centres a great number of medium-size scattered cities are quite widespread in the all countries. Cities like Ras el-Ain, Mambij or Amuda in Syria, Nusaybin, Viransehir and Batman in Turkey and Tell Afar or Beled Sinjar in Iraq are important connection centres between the large cities and the villages of the area (the Christaller model for the distribution of this kind of settlements is still valid). According to central place theory, such a pattern occurs in “market-oriented systems”, where sites of secondary importance can provide themselves from two or more sites of first order with equal energy expenditure²⁵. The modern movement of people is mainly constituted by a commercial interest. Roads between large cities are, nowadays, full of enormous trucks used for transportation of sheep and goods.

1.2 Human Geography

Nowadays the area lies between the lands of Syria, Turkey and Iraq and the human and natural geography is not so different from the ancient times. The region is still populated by Bedouin tribes with their herds, but also by people of Armenian and Assyrian origins. After an initial re-population of the *bec de canard* (the northeastern Syria as was called by the French) during the 1920s French mandate, it was mainly in the 1960s that the Syrian government forced a lot of people to move in the area in order to populate the large arable lands of Upper Jezirah. The human *substratum* is therefore quite different from village to village too, with the addition in last years of an increasing Kurdish presence. The policy of the modern countries in Jezirah is a policy leading to the exploitation of the natural resources of the area, such as the arable land, the cotton production and the large fields to be used for the herds. The movement of nomadic tribes (such as the Bedouins) brings during the winter many people and their herds to move southwards (in Deir Ez-Zor region) to avoid the cooler climate of the north to come back northwards in the late spring days.

The ethnic component is still today quite complex as it was during the antiquity. Still today in the major centres of the area different ethnic groups are living in a relative

²⁵ ALGAZE 2009, 24. The “central place theory” has been formulated for the first time by Walter CHRISTALLER (1939). The application of this theory to the Mesopotamian early urbanization Landscape was already suggested by POTTS 1997, 306.

peace and tolerance. Kurdish, Syrian and Bedouins are present in almost every city of the region, while the religious interaction is much more complex.

Large part of the populations of the area is Sunni Muslim, while important minorities are Orthodox, Armenians and Assyrians (these latter ones specially in North Eastern Syria and North Western Iraq), all with a Christian tradition, and minor confessions such as the Yezidi, who are quite present in Iraq, from Sinjar to Mosul. Few Jews are also present in the area, mainly in cities like Al-Qamishli and Mosul, but their number is decreased rapidly in last years.

The Nomads, or Bedouins tribes, use to live in the area between the ancient city of Singara and Dura Europos, in mid-Euphrates region. They set up their summer camps in relatively favourable locations such as the ones close to *wadis*, while in winter most of them move rapidly South-West towards the Jebel Bishri massif, not so far from Palmyra, in example. This also happens in other regions of the area. In Ḥabur area, in example, during rain season entire households move on the steppe with their herds, while during summer the herds are moved back in more favourable regions.

In the desert east of the middle Euphrates region permanent settlements are not attested. They were unknown also to the European travellers who firstly reached these remote regions in late 700. According the theory of Bernbeck the whole region was quite deserted, and occasionally settled, from the end of the Assyrian domination up to the Hellenistic period and onward, when the whole area became much more populated²⁶. The buffer states of Palmyra and Hatra flourished in these years and the urban population of these cities was strictly connected and related with the nomadic tribes surrounding the cities²⁷. Differences between urban and rural way of life were not as strong as the modern scholar and ethnographers believed for a long time. Today, in some parts of the Near East, tribal identities are important as membership in socioeconomic classes²⁸. Up to last century, “dimorphic chiefdoms” with tribal and non-tribal populations segment were quite frequent²⁹. Modern Afghanistan and Iraq are clearly examples of this dimorphism. In both countries the sedentary and non-sedentary groups have been elected as essential in the political life of some areas of that countries.

²⁶ BERNBECK 1996, 406.

²⁷ IBRAHIM 1974, 2-4.

²⁸ BARTH 1972, 2.

²⁹ ROWTON 1973, 202-4.

The use of tribal groups can be applied also to the story of the late frontier area between the Romans/Byzantines and the Sasanian. It is therefore to note, as has perfectly pointed out Fisher (2011), the reappearance of hegemonic structures in the periphery of both the Empires.

In the period from the 4th and the 7th century CE, the border regions between the Byzantine and the Sasanians were controlled by client kingdoms like the Ghassanids (whose first king, al-Harith, was an ally of Byzance)³⁰ and the Lakhmids, allies of the Sasanians³¹. These changes in policy may have revealed the tensions between the imperial centres and the tribal peripheries³². After the economic crisis of the two major trade centres in the area such as Palmyra and Hatra, the crisis was so deep in the area east of the middle Euphrates region that the Nomads probably came back northwards in more favourable zones near the Ḥabur.

³⁰ KAWAR 1957, 83-5.

³¹ PARKER 1986, 150-2.

³² FISHER 2011.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

2.1.1 Introduction

A narration concerning the Roman historical events in Upper Mesopotamia should firstly deal with two main issues, which are related to the chronology and the context. Writing about the Roman presence in a so remote area means, indeed, focusing on the several dynamics that went over in the region *before* the arrival of the Romans, considering as fundamental certain processes that are clearly recognizable and traceable even later. The local background fulfilled the "normal" life in the region and this *substratum* highly influenced the Roman processes and dynamics in the region. The social and economic structures built up during the Assyrian Empire, the Achaemenid domination and in the Seleucid period surely affected the Rome's impact in the area. After the fall of the Seleucid Empire, the territories beyond the Euphrates were the westernmost part of the Parthian realm and they were probably administrated like a sort of western satrapies, with a kind of semi-independence by the central power in Iran (*Parthava* region)³³. The impact of Rome upon these areas, starting from the early 2nd century CE, has changed some dynamics while other ones, at the contrary, have been preserved. The Roman army dealt with the local population in several ways, from the official interventions to the private disputes and, although the local aspects of the villages still remained, the presence of Rome is well reflected in different sources: both archaeological and literary ones.

2.1.2 Mesopotamia during the campaigns of Trajan

Although the first Roman military operation in Mesopotamia is represented by the defeat at Carrhae in 53 BCE (modern Harran, in current Turkey), earliest interactions of Rome with the area beyond the Habur are dated to the period of Lucullus, when

³³ COLLEDGE 1977; WIESEHOFER 2001; CURTIS & STEWART 2007; SHAYEGAN 2011.

the general crossed the Euphrates at Melitene and reached the Tigris (in order to enter the Armenia, from the South). After having passed through the whole northern Mesopotamian plateau Lucullus sieged and occupied Nisibis, which will always be the nodal and most strategic point in the region³⁴. Circa a century later Corbulo, a Nero's general, invaded the area again. The Roman Army, indeed, sieged and conquered Nisibis in 68 CE, always in strict relation with the Armenian front³⁵.

The approach was completely different, however, starting from the Trajanic period, when for the very first time a large-scale occupation is attested, accomplished through the military operations *for* the area itself, and a tentative of provincial organization³⁶. This presence, in the early years of the 2nd century CE, could be explained starting from the relation with the missed Nero's threat with the Arsacid dynasty. Axidares, king of Armenia endorsed by Rome, was deposed by his brother Parthamasiris, politically close to Parthian king Osroes³⁷.

Nevertheless the event bore not a particularly significance, the Roman army departed for the East in order to reaffirm the imperial power in Armenia³⁸. This sort of pretext was also noticed by the ancient sources. Dio (68.17.1) writes that Trajan decided for the eastern campaigns only to have more personal glory. The explication provided by Dio it is probably too much simplistic and should be related to the period when the historian wrote, during the campaigns of Severus. Anyway two different factors should be kept in mind when facing the real purposes of the trajanic campaigns.

The first is strictly related to the defence of the roman commercial interests in the area³⁹, while the second one chiefly concerns the setup of the eastern *limes* and its control⁴⁰. The two purposes anyway should be considered complementary each other for better understanding the real nature of the trajanic expedition in the area⁴¹. Given this assumption the operations led by Trajan have been significantly charaterised by

³⁴ Plutarch, *Lucullus*, 24.8. Dio XXXVI, 6.3.

³⁵ Tac., *Ann.*, 15.5 (see chapter 4 for further evidence).

³⁶ The Roman Army did not overpass the Baliḡ river before.

³⁷ LEROUGE 2007,149. On the history of the Parthians in the region see the recent contribution of HAUSER (2012).

³⁸ ANGELI BERTINELLI 1976, 8.

³⁹ GUEY 1937, 19; MARICQ 1959, 263.

⁴⁰ This theory has been strongly endorsed by LEPPER 1948,158-204.

⁴¹ On the various motivations of the Trajan's campaigns see ANGELI BERTINELLI 1976, 10. We should here underline that the motivation of the "personal glory", of a "revenge feeling" and the motive of the emulation of Alexander the Great, are merely hypotheses that give to the war a "personal feature".

the consequences of the Armenian campaigns since it was most likely impossible to take the Armenia without controlling the Mesopotamian region as well⁴².

During the war operations Trajan, indeed, counted on a large numbers of legions, some of them stationed at Antioch, the others moving and patrolling the eastern front. The Roman army was flanked by several auxiliary units, mainly horsemen and bowmen, because of the nature of the enemy and of the land⁴³.

In 114 CE the entire roman army arrived in Armenia and during the next year the whole region was under the control of Rome⁴⁴. The coming of the Roman troops in Upper Mesopotamia is therefore dated to September 114 CE⁴⁵. One of the first goals achieved was the conquest of Nisibis and Batnae (along the river Baliḥ) which seems that took place in a period between September and the end of 114 CE (Dio 68.18.3), since Trajan, with large part of the army, retired to Antioch during the winter of 114-115 CE⁴⁶. The entry in Mesopotamia, however, poses some problems. Any ancient source describes the right march the army took to enter from Armenia in the dry plains of Mesopotamia and the topic has been extensively discussed among the scholars. Lepper suggests that probably Trajan conquered Nisibis while he was marching down towards Edessa and that the large part of the Roman army arrived in Mesopotamia passing through the Tur Abdin, east of river Ḥabur⁴⁷. M.G. Angeli-Bertinelli, argues that the coming of the army on the Mesopotamian *plateau* was made possible because of the passage through the Bitlis pass, and that the conquest of Nisibis was achieved during the march toward the Osrhoene, maybe in a later moment⁴⁸. K. Ross, at the contrary, suggests that Nisibis was conquered during the march towards Edessa, during the early momentd of the campaign⁴⁹. Given these assumptions one should propose that the conquests of Nisibis and Batnae were

⁴² BIRLEY 1952, 118.

⁴³ GABBA 1965, 51-73.

⁴⁴ STRACK 1931, 218-220 e fig.450; CHAUMONT 1976, tab. 3 and fig. 15. The chronological matter of the Trajan's Parthian campaigns has been largely debated by LONDGEN (1931) and LEPPER (1948), especially on the base of the literary evidence and coins legends. The topic has been analysed also by CHAUMONT (cf. above), and LIGHTFOOT (1990).

⁴⁵ LIGHTFOOT 1990, 117.

⁴⁶ LEPPER 1948, 208. Anyway few detachments of the army remained in Upper Mesopotamia and Armenia. In a fragment from *Parthikà*, Arrian (fr. 85 ed. Roos) mentions indeed the terrible weather conditions in Armenia, during the winter 114-115. The army that stationed there was certainly not prepared to it.

⁴⁷ LEPPER 1948, 208.

⁴⁸ ANGELI BERTINELLI 1976, 14.

⁴⁹ Dio 68.21.Ross 2001, 31.

operated chronologically in this order. Batnae is located quite close to Edessa. The city is mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus (14.3.3), who placed in the region of *Anthemusia*, and by Eutropius too (8.3)⁵⁰. Another crucial issue of the Parthian campaigns of Trajan concerns the title PARTHICUS. In the already mentioned passage, in Dio's account of the events 68.18.2), the title appears after the conquest of Batnae⁵¹. In a fragment of *Fasti Ostienses* (dated to 116 CE), the title is present next to the emperor's name, confirming that probably the celebration happened at least during the 115 CE⁵². It should be proposed that probably the title was re-given symbolically to Trajan after the conquest of the capital, although it seems more likely that the title *Parthicus* was given to the emperor after the conquest of Batnae. In 115 CE the Roman Army moved towards the river Tigris, after having put in safety the region of Nisibis, which was now occupied and controlled by the imperial troops. Furthermore, Dio provides us some interesting data for the movements of the troops. Lusius Quietus, indeed, led a small group of soldiers to the conquest of Singara and then the Roman troops conquered *Adenystrae* (Dio, 68.22.2)⁵³. According the Dio's account the ruler of Singara was Ma'anu who early surrendered to Quietus who conquered not only the town, but also the surrounding area. Another interesting datum, which comes out from from the historic narration is that in the first years of the 2nd century CE, the major centres of Upper Mesopotamia (Edessa, Nisibis and Singara) were independent and each one was ruled by a local tribe with a local king (Abgar at Edessa, Ma'anu at Singara), probably within an "arab" and "local" political sphere rather than arsacid (specially for Singara, not so far from Hatra, the arab town *par excellence*). Batnae and the *Adiabene*, moreover, were conquered after having defeat local rulers (cf. for the narration Cassius Dio 68.18.3 for Batnae and 68.22.3 for the *Adiabene* and *Adenystrae*). Batnae had been ruled by Sporake⁵⁴, while the king of *Adiabene*, Mebarsapes, providentially sent ambassadors to Trajan

⁵⁰ Nowadays the ancient site corresponds to the modern Turkish centre of Buruç, near Bireçik.

⁵¹ The chronology of the Trajan's campaign has been analysed in detail by EGEA VIVANCOS 2005, 203-226.

Usually the conquest of Ctesiphon is associated with the XII imperial salutation to Trajan, which has been dated to the 116 CE, also considering the mention of the same event in two inscriptions, one from North Africa (*AE* 1968, 599) and the other from Cyzicus (Aidindjik, *AE* 1888, 60). *Contra* see GUEY 1937, 108.

⁵² CALZA 1934, 247; LEPPER 1948, 39; ROSS 2001, 32.

⁵³ The site has been placed in Adiabene, although not certainly identified. Suggesting hypothesis led to the identification with the modern Erbil, but this is not a proven fact.

⁵⁴ LEPPER 1948, 240.

to avoid the war⁵⁵. The next year, 116 CE, was entirely occupied by the march towards Ctesiphon and by its conquest, but also by a local revolt in Upper Mesopotamia, calmed down by Quietus and Appius Massimus Santra (Dio 68.30.1). The revolt, blew up in the Jewish community of Nisibis⁵⁶, was endorsed by the Parthian usurper, Osrhoes, as testified by a brief account by Malalas (11. 270). In the text the princes Meerdotes and Sanatruq are mentioned as leaders of Parthian army. In the same account it is said that after the death of Meerdotes, Osroes I, king of Parthia, nominated general together with Sanatruq Parthamaspates, who will be remembered on the Roman coins with the legend REX PARTHIS DATUS after the conquest of Ctesiphon by Trajan (cf. BMCRE III, 23 / RIC 667).



Fig. 3. The coins struck after the conquest of Trajan bore the legend “PARTHIA CAPTA” / Courtesy of the British Museum (RIC 234).

The recently archaeological data have spread a new light upon the literary evidence⁵⁷. The excavations carried out at Tell Barri during 2009 and 2010 (40 km south of Al-Qamishli) have provided, under a clear destruction evidence, an important clue for the understanding of the trajanic events in Upper Mesopotamia⁵⁸. Under a filling of debris came out from the destruction of the parthian fortification of the settlement, a coin dated back to the reign of Osroes I (115-117 CE) has been found. The coin, which has been found upon an earthen floor entirely covered by the debris of the destroyed fortification, could represent a *terminus post quem* for the destruction itself. The coin, indeed, was struck in 115 CE, before the Quietus intervention in the region. The connection between the destruction of the fortification

⁵⁵ Dio 68.22.2. The king was restored on the throne by Hadrian (FRYE 1984, 279).

⁵⁶ PUCCI 2005, 191-217. BLOOM 2010, 195; 202.

⁵⁷ See mainly the account of Malalas, cf. ANGELI BERTINELLI 1976, 20 and n. 88

⁵⁸ PALERMO 2013, 479-492; PIEORBON 2013, *in press*.

at Barri and the campaigns of Quietus to calm down the Jewish revolt is quite suggestive, but it needs further evidence to be confirmed⁵⁹.

The aftermath of the Parthian campaigns led to the probably creation of three provinces: *Armenia*, *Assyria* and *Mesopotamia*, but their status and their organization are quite difficult to understand. Also the geographical definition of the conquered territories is far away to be certain. Only two later sources mention the creation of the provinces. Eutrope (8.3) and Festus (chap. 14 ed. Banchich-Meka) who write about the *tres provincias* while a passage from Orosius (7.12) just mention the creation of *provincias* beyond Euphrates and Tigris, without naming them or providing any further detail⁶⁰.

The sources agree each other regarding the creation of the provinces, but the explication of the extended limits of the empire in these years is still unknown. The name *Assyria* mentioned both by Eutropius and Festus points out probably the *land of Assur*, nowadays in northern Iraq, while the term *Mesopotamia* could be referred to the lower Mesopotamia⁶¹. The mention of the creation of the provinces by Orosius, then, is even more difficult to understand. The expression *trans Tigrim* used by the historian is probably wrong. The only archaeologically attested site, with strata and pottery related to a possible Roman presence, is Seh Qubba, on the western bank of the river⁶². No proven roman presence has been, moreover, attested beyond the Tigris, although the *Historia Augusta* mentions the extension of the eastern limits beyond the river⁶³.

Given all these evidence is still difficult to say if the territories conquered by Trajan had been effectively made into provinces (and with what status) or not. A milestone from Karsi (on Jebel Sinjar, Northern Iraq, 15 km northwest of Singara) is the unique clue attesting the presence of a Roman road during the years 116-117 CE⁶⁴:

The road probably linked the area of Nisibis with Singara and then the region of Hatra. Moreover, below the Jebel Sinjar a second road is attested, that went from the Tigris to the confluence Jaghjagh- Ḥabur, and then, along the river, up to

⁵⁹ PALERMO 2012, 9. See over chapter 8.4.4.3 in this work.

⁶⁰ On the mention of the *tres provincias* in Festus see also LUTHER 2004, 341.

⁶¹ MILLAR 1993, 101.

⁶² On Seh Qubba see below, p. 152-159.

⁶³ HA, *Hadr.* 5.3.

⁶⁴ CAGNAT 1927, 53.

Circesium, and the confluence with the Euphrates⁶⁵. Customhouses and *portoria* were probably created on the Euphrates and Tigris (Fronto, *Princ. Hist.* 209.15-17) and a passage from *Historia Augusta* mentions some tributes that were canceled by Hadrian at the moment of his renounce to the territories conquered by Trajan⁶⁶. Starting from this assumption one should admit that probably the tributes were imposed as a consequence of the trajanic campaigns, but it is not certain if these were *una tantum* or rather they were part of a more complex tributaries system set up in the newly acquired region⁶⁷. It is clear that an imposition of tributes had to be followed by a collection of them and therefore the area should have been relatively calm to permit these operations, even if the territories were given up by Hadrian later⁶⁸. The very short presence of Roman troops in the area did not leave, as said, a recognizable archaeological evidence. Some major centres like Edessa and Singara have only traces of later occupation. Even Nisibis, which was supposed to have host the headquarters of the operations, is still now archaeologically unknown. It is most likely that Trajan occupied the major towns of the area (Nisibis, Edessa and Singara), but it is also true that the whole area was not so available to a *Romanization* (the term is still wrongly used, when referred to the Near East, but it gives the idea of the concept). The episode of the Jewish revolt, endorsed by the local arsacid usurper, calmed down by Quietus, shows that the local substratum was still very strong in the region if Trajan had to ordered to his general the destruction of each single village who sustained the revolt. The economic and military interests were focused therefore upon the major centres leaving the small communities living the life as usual, but attacking them if did not accept the Roman power.

2.1.3 The archaeology of the Trajan's Parthian campaigns

Following to the narration of the events, the real data concerning the war and the occupation of the area during the years 115-117 are very poor. Apart of the mentioned evidence (the milestone of Karsi) nothing proves a "real" Roman

⁶⁵ MILLAR 1993, 101. On the creation of a road up to *Circesium* see also GSCHWIND 2009, 1600. The road was part of a complex route system in severian period linking the lower Habur, with Nisibis, and the Euphrates near Sura (cf. KONRAD 2001).

⁶⁶ HA, *Hadr.* 21.12.

⁶⁷ BENNET 1997, 207.

⁶⁸ MCLAUGHLIN 2010, 98.

presence in the area⁶⁹. No camps or military installations have been yet excavated and all the stratified material of the period is not quite distinctive. In sites like Tell Barri and Tell Fekherye (Rhesaina), the recovered pottery shows no changes between the years before the coming of Trajan, as well as in the years following the cession of the area by Hadrian. The social continuity in the villages was probably mirrored by a situation similar to the one that will be experienced on the Middle Euphrates and along the lower Ḥabur during the early decades of the 3rd century CE⁷⁰.

The situation, however, is not uniform and other areas of the Syrian region experienced a different circumstance. Unlike the situation in the East, indeed, the several excavations projects carried out since the mid 1970s on the Upper Syrian Euphrates have shown a sort of transformation between the late Hellenistic period and the mid-empire period. Sites like Barbalissos⁷¹, Zeugma⁷² and Sura⁷³ have experienced important traces of occupation during the 1st and part of the 2nd century CE, but all the mentioned sites also had a crucial role in severian and later periods (the city of Sura was enlarged also during the Justinian period as many other sites in the area).

More eastwards, as said, the situation radically changes. All the known military sites in Syrian and Iraqi Jezirah are chronologically dated to a period later than early 2nd century CE. The camp at Ain Sinu (with all the issues related the chronology and the function) whose destruction is dated to mid-3rd century CE, does not permit to establish a higher chronology, while the fortified city of Singara, albeit mentioned in the literary sources referring to the trajanic expeditions, has not yielded any structures chronologically contemporary to the events (see below, Chapter 5).

The on-going excavations in the Upper Ḥabur Basin (Tell Barri, Tell Fekherye) will surely provide, in a near future interesting data and hopefully structures or evidence concerning the socio-political aspects of this part of empire during the Trajan reign. Boths sites, unfortunately, have revealed no significant structure concerning a Roman presence, but the portion of the defensive walls discovered at Fekherye albeit later than the trajanic period testify the importance of the site in a later phase

⁶⁹ The coin of Trajan found at Tell Barri does not certify a roman presence at all, albeit it can confirm the contacts between the village and the western Syria.

⁷⁰ FEISSEL & GASCOU 1989, 535-561; MAZZA 1992, 159-235, GNOLI 1999, 321-358.

⁷¹ Harper 1975.

⁷² KENNEDY 1998. On Zeugma, in general, see ABADIE REYNAL & ERGEÇ 2008 (with further and detailed references).

⁷³ KONRAD 1999, 392-410. See also KONRAD 2001 with further details also on the nerby small forts of Tetrygium and Cholle, and KONRAD 2008, 433-452.

that could recall the importance of the settlement in a previous period and during the previous campaigns⁷⁴. The milestone of Karsi could be therefore the only evidence of an administrative organization of the territories⁷⁵. Although this kind of document does not prove necessarily the existence of an important road, it is quite likely that it had been used just as a *temporary* indication for the movements of troops in the area. This track, connecting Nisibis to Singara, could have been used by the army of Quietus for his march towards Singara and then abandoned after the conclusion of the war⁷⁶.

2.2 The Parthian campaigns of Lucius Verus (161-166 CE)

What happened after the end of the Trajan's parthian campaigns is completely cloaked in the darkness⁷⁷. After the cession by Hadrian of the recently acquired territories, indeed, the whole Upper Mesopotamia came back probably within the Arsacid's sphere of influence. Interesting evidence related to the period between the abandonment of the area by Roman army and the coming of Lucius Verus troops (161 CE) has been recently provided by a study by Michael Sommer⁷⁸. Further evidence is provided by the Pseudo-Dionysius, who mentions a period of *interregnum* at Edessa, followed by two local rulers with Iranian names (*PRNTSPT* and *MN'* in example). This datum should confirm that the local (and Parthian) ruling was established, once again, in the area after the departure of Trajan's army.

The catalyst event of the war in mid 2nd century CE, was, also in this occasion, the ingeference of the Parthian kingdom in Armenia. In 161 CE the Parthian army, led by Cosroes entered in Armenia and defeated Roman troops at Elegeia. After these events the local Parthian ruler Pacorus (*Paqor*) was nominated king of Armenia.⁷⁹ Another section of the Parthian troops, however were defeated by the Roman troops stationed along the Euphrates and led by the governor of the provincia *L. Attidius Cornelianus*. The event is also mentioned in the *Historia Augusta (Marc.*

⁷⁴ On Tell Fekheriyie / Rhesaina see below (Chapter 6).

⁷⁵ Oates 1956, 190-199.

⁷⁶ The north-west / south-east paths from Nisibis to the Sinjar were probably used also in pre-roman times (see below, p. 183-187).

⁷⁷ DRIJVERS 1977, 875; LUTHER 1999, 191.

⁷⁸ SOMMER 2010, 221.

⁷⁹ The Roman legions led by M. Sedatius Severianus, *legatus* in Cappadocia (Dio 71.2). The commander of the arsacid troops is mentioned by Lucian (*Hist. Conscr.* 21).

8.6), while Fronto (16 and 17) remembers the assassination of an imperial *legatus*, Cornelianus (or Severianus) by Parthian hands⁸⁰.

In consequence of these events the expedition of Lucius Verus was therefore organized. The troops departed from Rome in the spring of 162 CE. To the Syrian legions were also added, at Anioch, headquarters for the operations, other troops such as the *Legio I Minerva* from *Germania Inferior*, the *II Adiutrix* from *Pannonia Inferior* and the *V Macedonica* from *Moesia Inferior*. The command of the operation was given to M. *Staius Priscus*, C. *Iulius Severus*, P. *Martius Verus* and *Avidius Cassius* (on this latter see mainly Dio 71.2.2). The re-conquest of Armenia, under the command of M. *Staius Priscus*, was the first goal achieved by the Roman Army. The troops moved towards Artaxata taking the city at the end of 163 CE. During this period Verus obtained the title *Armeniicus*, followed the next year by Marcus Aurelius. A new capital was created, at Nainepolis, not so far from Artaxata, and the reign was given to the local ruler Sohaemus⁸¹. The southern front, however, suddenly, gained importance for Rome.

The military operations were committed to Avidius Cassius, who led the army into the Mesopotamian territory from the north and conquered the cities of Edessa, Dausara⁸² and Nisibis. Fronto mentions that the cities of Dausara and Nicephorium, conquered by the Roman troops, were previously occupied by the Parthian army, suggesting that the Parthian influence was extended, in this time, also on the right bank of the Euphrates (*Ep.* 1.2).

In a later moment, with a large part of his troops Lucius Verus moved southwards where the Roman army defeated the Parthians and conquered the important city of Dura Europos (165 CE)⁸³. From this moment the city becomes a Roman garrison town and it will remain so up to the 256 CE. The next year Roman troops arrived in Adiabene and in Media Atropatene, beyond the Tigris, confirming the precise will of Rome to control the areas close and beyond the river too⁸⁴. In consequence of

⁸⁰ The chronology of the mentioned text is referred to the Trajanic period, but ANGELI-BERTINELLI (1976, 26) suggests it could be a mistake.

⁸¹ It is interesting to note that the name of the new ruler recalls a geographical area far from Armenia, the Kingdom of Emesa, since ever a loyal ally of Rome (Elagabalus and Alexander Severus came from this area in example).

⁸² On the Euphrates, probably modern Qala'at Jabar, see MUSIL 1927, 95

⁸³ SARTRE (1991, 50) writes that the conquest of Dura Europos was the only important acquisition achieved during the Verus campaigns.

⁸⁴ Controlling the Upper Tigris basin, indeed, meant first of all controlling the commercial routes connecting the Mediterranean Sea to Central Asia and part of the Silk Road. On the

these campaigns Lucius Verus received the titles of *Armeniacus Parthicus Maximus Medicus* in Rome on 23 August 166 CE.⁸⁵

2.2.1 Archaeological Evidence of the Campaigns of Lucius Verus

The evidence concerning the Verus campaigns in the East against the Parthians have much more dark points than the other events occurred in the region. The aftermaths of the events, indeed, can be only suggested on the basis of the later events especially the ones related to the Severian campaigns.

The territorial earnings of the campaigns were scanty and the areas that had been partially conquered have been then left to local rulers with the usual *formula* of the client kingdom (at Edessa, capital of Osroene, was placed an ally of Rome, Ma'nu VIII⁸⁶). It is possible that a sort of protectorate was extended also in the Adiabene. Roman soldiers, in addition, were stationed at Nisibis on the coming of Septimius Severus in the East suggesting a presence in the town since the time of Lucius Verus. On some later coins (Severian period, BMC *Arabia*, 112), moreover, Singara is said *Aurelia* and therefore the creation of a Roman colony could be connected to the Verus operations in Mesopotamia. The control of the road along the Euphrates, with the troops stationing in strategic point, like *Circesium* (modern al-Buseire, in Syria) where the Habur flows into the Euphrates, was probably one of the goals achieved by the emperors. The capture of Dura Europos, in addition, must have represented a crucial point for the political and economical purposes of Rome in the area⁸⁷. The city, a Macedonian settlement on a natural cliff of the Euphrates, will remain in Roman hands up to the siege of Shapur I (256 CE) permitting to Rome to have an important and strategic stronghold on the river. The importance of the city is not only related to the military operations, but it regards also some economical aspects⁸⁸. Dura is situated along a major west-east route that links Palmyra, and the Syriac desert, to the Euphrates and then to Hit (modern Iraq) and from here to the Charakene and the Persian Gulf. In these years, even other minor sites started to expand their influence on the middle Euphrates. Strengthened by the Roman (military?) presence,

relation between Rome and its commercial partners in Asia see the recent volume of MCLAUGHLIN (2010).

⁸⁵ STROBEL 1994, 1322

⁸⁶ ROSS 2001.

⁸⁷ MILLAR 1993, 467; EDWELL 2008, 214.

⁸⁸ On Dura's detachment role in the economy of the Roman Near East see POLLARD 1996, 224-225.

settlements like Kifrin (*Becchoufrein*)⁸⁹ and Ana (*Anatha*)⁹⁰ developed from small villages to town hosting small roman garrisons with the aim of control and secure the road for the caravans in the area. Albeit the Roman presence at Dura is quite certain in the period comprised between the second quarter of the 2nd century CE and the final conquest of the city by the Sassanian in mid-3rd century CE, further explications about the precise moment of the Roman conquest of the city have to be done.

Several evidence, at the contrary, mention the Roman presence at Dura as a direct consequence of the successes achieved by Avidius Cassius. The excavations carried out by French and American expeditions (*Académie de Belles Létres-Yale University*) have permitted to record at least three archaeological proves of the Roman presence at Dura since the 165 CE:

1. An inscription, undated, but found by Cumont in the Artemis temple and bearing a dedicance to Lucius Verus⁹¹.
2. A tunnel, excavated under the secondary gate of the city, and dated at the moment of the Verus conquest⁹².
3. Two inscriptions found in the Mithraeum that undoubtedly attest a change of political control at Dura. The first is in palmyrene (168 CE) the second in Greek (170/71 CE)⁹³.

It is generally accepted the hypothesis that at Dura, in this time, an auxiliary *cohors* of Palmyrene archers was garrisoned in the city, but should be remembered that the very early attestation of Roman soldiers in the city is related to the presence of some members of *Cohors II Ulpia Equitata* probably in town since the end of Verus' Parthian war (the attestation, on the basis of an inscription is dated back to 193 CE)⁹⁴.

The consequences of the Parthian campaigns of Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius were quite different from the ones of the Trajan's war. The territorial conquests were

⁸⁹ On Kifrin, see in general INVERNIZZI 1983, 207-209; INVERNIZZI 1985, 22-26; INVERNIZZI 1986 and INVERNIZZI 1986a, 53-54.

⁹⁰ GAWLIKOWSKI 1983, 60-61; GAWLIKOWSKI 1987, 78.

⁹¹ CUMONT 1926, 173 and 410, inscr. n. 53

⁹² ABDUL MASSIH 1997, 47-54

⁹³ ROSTOVITZEFF *et alii* 1936, 83-4, inscr. n. 84

⁹⁴ SPEIDEL 1998, 172. The name of the *Cohors* could recall a trajanic creation. Although we have no evidences of such a *Cohors* during the Trajan's invasion of Mesopotamia, it is anyway suggestive to think about the creation of the detachment in that period.

not supported by an administrative asset and the areas east of the Euphrates were, neither this time, brought in a real Roman sphere of influence. The *limes* as in the Augustan period, seems to be placed in the third quarter of the 2nd century along the Euphrates, with few Roman garrisons (and we have to suppose they were poor in numbers too) in the major cities beyond the river (Nisibis and Singara, more doubts about a Roman military presence at Edessa in this period)⁹⁵ and on the stronghold of Dura Europos, where the later *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* will be stationed in the early 3rd century CE.

It is also true that the consequences of the Verus wars provided a different view of the Euphrates itself, albeit it was the *limes* of the empire. The newly acquired controlling position in Armenia at North, and the local allied kingdom of Osrhoene at East, made possible for Rome to strategically occupy both the banks of the river⁹⁶. This strategic occupation of the area will definitely result fundamental at the moment the severian campaigns started.

2.3 The Severian period and the newly acquired Eastern provinces

The eastern *problema* gained a renewed importance at the end of the 2nd century CE when the struggle for the imperial *purpura* and the parthian campaigns occurred at the very same time. The literary sources concerning the wars against the Parthians of Septimius Severus appear to be more or less relevant as the ones regarding the previous campaigns (Trajan and Lucius Verus). The most relevant source is the account of Dio, even through many *excerpta* (such as Xiphilinus e.g.), but other evidence, regarding overall the second and the third campaigns are mentioned in Herodianus⁹⁷. Some references are also present in Aelius Spartianus (*Vita Severi*) and Eutropius, Festus, Orosius, Aurelius Victor and, also, Ammianus Marcellinus⁹⁸. The contender of Severus and governor of Syria at that time was Pescennius Niger, who was acclaimed as emperor by the oriental troops at the death of Pertinax. Niger made alliances with the Parthians and the local Kingdoms (specially with the kingdom of Osrhoene and Hatra). The alliance with Vologaeses IV, king of the

⁹⁵ ROSS 2001, 36-39.

⁹⁶ EDWELL 2008, 25.

⁹⁷ On Herodian and its sources as historical evidence of the events see CASSOLA 1957, 271-285.

⁹⁸ For all the references see ANGELI BERTINELLI 1976, 33.

Parthians and Barsemius, ruler of Hatra (who endorsed the policy of Niger giving him some archers, *Herod.* 3, 1-3), strengthened the Niger's role in the region.

The endorsement to Niger by Vologaeses IV has been seen as a failed attempt of regaining power by the inner struggles in the Roman Empire. In the siege of Nisibis, decided by Niger, was probably involved even the ruler of Parthia who considered the city and the surrounded region as a nodal and important point for the control and the securing of all the Upper Mesopotamia⁹⁹. The siege of Nisibis was probably intended for demanding to removal the troops here stationed¹⁰⁰. The siege failed and the troops of Niger were defeated. Niger himself was caught and killed while he was trying to flee to Antioch. Albeit the account of Dio underlines how Septimius was conditioned by his *epitumia doxes*, the real motives of the campaigns (the power in hands of an usurper, the inference of the Parthian realm in the Roman affairs) appear this time to be very serious.

The first campaign started with the crossing of the Euphrates in the early summer of ad 195 (the chronology has been debated among the scholar, Millar proposed that everything started at the end of 194 CE)¹⁰¹. After the crossing the army arrived at Nisibis. The account of Dio reports also the sufferences the army had because of the lack of water during the journey towards the city. The note is quite interesting because underlines the difficulty of passing through the dry steppe between the Euphrates and the Ḥabur river (still nowadays quite arid), where few remains and traces of settlements, dated to the 2nd - 3rd century CE, have been identified¹⁰².

As soon as Severus entered at Nisibis he sent three of his commanders (Lateranus, Candidus and Iulius Laetus) in three different directions on order to secure the whole territory. The campaigns beyond the Tigris (the region where *Arbela*, modern Erbil, was) were conducted only after having put in safety, at least partially, the western section of the Upper Mesopotamia. The expeditions against the Arab tribes and Hatra (albeit not sure this latter) were achieved just before the end of the first campaign, dated to the last days of 195 CE.

⁹⁹ ANGELI BERTINELLI 1976, 35; EDWELL 2008, 26. The will of Vologaeses of taking part at the siege seems confirmed also by the author of the *Chronicon* of Arbela, Msiha Zkha. See overall RAMELLI 2002.

¹⁰⁰ POLLARD 2000, 58. Dio (75.1.1-3) mentions the presence of Roman soldiers in the city at the moment the troops of Niger marched against the city walls.

¹⁰¹ For the complete discussion see Angeli Berinelli 1976, 36 and n. 197.

¹⁰² The Baliḥ river survey has underlined how the trends in settlement patterns decreased in the early centuries of our era to re-increase in the late bizantyne period (when the scattered farms took the place of the small villages).

The Osrhoene, instead, was probably annexed to the empire after the first campaign and the *Historia Augusta* reports that the emperor assumed the titles of *Adiabenicus* and *Arabicus*, but probably not *Parthicus*, in order to not offend the still powerful Arsacid dynasty in the area. It is moreover interesting to note the absence of a title *Osrhoenicus*. The little kingdom was threatened as an ally of Niger, but it was not dismantled, albeit limited in its western extension (see below). The revolts in the West, led by Clodius Albinus, recalled the attention of the emperor who left Antioch to come back in Europe¹⁰³.

The second campaign started in 197 CE and it is quite difficult to determine if the reprise of the hostilities was due to the Parthians or to the Romans¹⁰⁴. The siege of Nisibis and the struggles for the conquest of the city will always represent the focal point of the operations. The city, where a Roman garrison was stationed under the command of Iulius Laetus, strongly resisted to the enemies.

At the second campaign is dated also the submission of Abgar VIII of Osrhoene to the emperor, who sent to Severus goods and hostages, in change of a relatively strong position at Edessa¹⁰⁵. The Roman troops after having secured the Upper Mesopotamia descended along the river Euphrates and entered in Mesopotamia besieging Babylonia and Seleucia and finally taking Ctesiphon, with the Parthian ruler, Vologaeses who gave up to Severus on January 198 CE. Consequently to the victories achieved in Mesopotamia, Severus obtained the title of *Parthicus Maximus*¹⁰⁶.

2.3.1 Provincial Order in Upper Mesopotamia during the 3rd century CE

The creation of the *provincia Mesopotamia* is, unfortunately, not a *fait accompli* in the scholar tradition. It has been proposed that the date of creation should be established somewhere between the 195 and the 197-199 CE¹⁰⁷. The literary sources mention the creation of the province, however they call it *Arabia* probably in connection with the “land of the Arabs” which effectively was East of the

¹⁰³ ROSS 2001, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Dio, 75.9.1 mentions a siege laid at Nisibis by Parthian troops. EDWELL (2008, 26) suggests that probably Nisibis was caught by the enemies, even if the city was strongly defended by Laetus as the account in Dio clearly suggests.

¹⁰⁵ Herod. III. 9.2.

¹⁰⁶ BIRLEY 1999, 116.

¹⁰⁷ ANGELI BERTINELLI 1976, 40.

Euphrates¹⁰⁸. In this period Nisibis was made *colonia* as remembered by the literary sources, by some *papyri*¹⁰⁹, and, over all, by the numismatic evidence¹¹⁰. The city is now called *Septimia Colonia Nisibis* (see chapter 4). The conquest of the trans-Euphratene areas also gave the chance to Septimius Severus to achieve a particular diplomatic move in order to create new provinces from the Osrohene and all the lands previously controlled by of the Abgarids. An inscription from Kizilburç (AE 1984, 00919 = AE 2007, +01631), Turkey, (dated to 195 CE) reports that the already mentioned Pacatianus was ordered to define the limits of the region now comprised between a Roman province and the reign of Abgar:

Ex auctoritate Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) / L(uci) Septimi Severi Pii Per/tinacis Aug(usti) Arab(ici) Adiab(enici) / pontif(icis) max(im)i trib(unicia) pot(estate) III / imp(eratoris) VII co(n)s(ulis) II p(atris) p(atriciae) G(aius) Iul(ius) / Pacatianus proc(urator) Aug(usti) inter / provinciam Osrhoenam et / regnum Abgari fines posuit.

It is interesting to note that a second inscription from Vienne (France, *CIL* XII.1856 = AE 1960, 00247) mentions *Pacatianus* as *praefectus Osrhoenae*, probably the first of the new province¹¹¹. A second inscription from Kizilburç (AE 1984, 00920), moreover, mentions the creation of a road between the Roman territory and the reign of the Abgarids during the year 205 CE¹¹². The text mentions also *L. Aelius Ianuarius* who probably was another *procurator provinciae Osrhoenae*:

Imp(erator) Caes(ar) L(ucius) Septimius / Severus Pius Pertinax / Aug(ustus) Arab(icus) Adiab(enicus) Parth(icus) / max(imus) pont(ifex) max(imus) trib(unicia) pot(estate) / XIII imp(erator) XII co(n)s(ul) III p(ater) p(atriciae) / et Imp(erator) Caes(ar) M(arcus) Aurel(ius) / Antoninus Aug(ustus) Augusti / n(ostr)i fil(ius) trib(unicia) pot(estate) VIII co(n)s(ul) / II et [[P(ublius) Septimius Geta]] / Caes(ar) co(n)s(ul) fil(ius) et frater / Aug(ustorum) nn(ostrorum) viam ab Euphrate / usque ad fines regni Sept(im)i / Ab(g)ari a novo munierunt

¹⁰⁸ HA, *Sev.*, 18.1; Eutr. VIII, 18.4; Festus XXI; Vict. Lib. De Caes. 20.15; Zosim. I, 8.2. Herodianus, mistaking the geography, call the new territories *eudaimonia Arabia* (III.9.3). Should not be forgotten that Strabo (XVI, 1.8 and *passim*) calls the region like the “one of the Arabs”.

¹⁰⁹ *P.Euphr 8-9 and 17* (see over all FEISSEL & GASCOU 1989, 535-561. The historical issue has been partially treated also by MAZZA 1992, 159-235 and GNOLI 1999, 321-358. See also MEROLA 2012.

¹¹⁰ *BMC Mesopotamia*, 119-124. Further informations in the "Nisibis" section in this work.

¹¹¹ MAGIONCALDA 1982, 267-238. The reign of Abgar became, in this way, a sort of *enclave* in the Roman provinces. It was therefore enclosed by the *provincia Osrhoenae*.

¹¹² MITCHELL 1983, 114-116.

/ per L(ucium) Aelium Ianuarium / proc(uratorem) Aug(usti) prov(inciae) Osrhoenam(!) / m(ilia) p(assuum) XXXXVIII.

The same person is also attested on another inscription from *Tarraco* (CIL II, 04135 = AE 2007, +01631) in which he is said to have been *procurator Hosdroenae* and *procurator Syriae Coele*:

[L(ucio)] Ael(io) Ianuario / [v(iro) p(erfectissimo) p]roc(uratori) hereditat[i]/[um] proc(uratori) Hosdroe[n(ae)](!) / Syriae Coeles / [proc(uratori)] vect(igalis) Illyric[or(um)] / [proc(uratori)] prov(inciae) Hispa[n(iae)] / [cite]rioris Tarrac(onensis) / [prae]sidi prov(inciae) Ting[it(anae)] / [praes]idi prov(inciae) Mau[r(etaniae)] / [Caes(ariensis) ---] / [---].

The constitution of Osrohene as a Roman territory must be viewed in a broader context of redefinition of the Eastern territories of the empire and strictly connected to the creation of the *provincia Mesopotamia* which since this moment constituted the easternmost limit of the Roman empire, leaving the Osrohene in a more secure position between the war fronts and the western Syria

The first *praefectus* of the new province of Mesopotamia, instead, was probably *Tiberius Claudius Subatianus Aquila*, a horseman, who was named by Severus as *praefectus Mesopotamiae*. The evidence mainly lies in an inscription from Taşköprü (*Pompeipolis*, Bythinia) where the man is also indicated as *praefectus Aegypti* in 206¹¹³. The gap between the charge in Upper Mesopotamia, and the mention as *praefectus* in Egypt should be probably identified with the period Aquila passed at Nisibis as *praefectus*. The eleven years that passed since the creation of the province and the 206, mentioned in the inscription, may be therefore related, at least in part, to the years Aquila spent in Mesopotamia¹¹⁴.

After the death of Severus the political order of the region did not change too much if, under the reign of Caracalla if the same *Caius Iulius Pacatianus* is mentioned as being the *praefectus Mesopotamia[e]* on another inscription (CIL VI 1642). The inscription mentions the *cursus honorum* and it seems to complete a second document, from Vienne (France)¹¹⁵, adding, as titles of *Pacatianus*, also the

¹¹³ SEG-43, 00919 = AE 1979, 00625 = AE 1982, 0093.

¹¹⁴ SPEIDEL 2007, 407.

¹¹⁵ CIL XII, 1856.

vexillationum per Orientem, which seems to confirm the date to a moment after the Caracalla campaigns in the region:

G(aio) Iulio Pacatiano [v(iro) e(gregio)] proc(uratori) / Augustorum nostrorum militiis / equestribus perfuncto proc(uratori) provinc(iae) / O[sr]hoenae, praefecto legionis Parthi/cae, pr[o]c(uratori) Alpium Co[r]ttiarum, adlecto / inter comit[es A]uggg(ustorum) nnn(ostrorum), procurator(i) / pro legato provinc(iae) Mauretaniae Tingi/tanae, col[o]nia Aelia Aug(usta) Italica / [patr]ono merentissimo.

Iulius Pacatianus is remembered as being the prefect of the *Legio Parthica* (the number is not given, but it probably was the First *Parthica*), which was physically located in Mesopotamia (most likely at Singara). A second inscription mentions a *L. Valerius Valerianus*, who is indicated as *praepositus summae felicissimae expeditionis Mesopotamena*¹¹⁶. Since the second expedition of Severus was known as *expeditio Parthica* one might suppose that the document mentioning *Valerianus* and the one attesting the presence of *Pacatianus* might belong to the very start of the campaigns, in 195 CE. *Valerianus* was probably a general of Severus to whom had been ordered to end the military expedition, which was started by Severus himself.

At this period is dated also the assimilation of the Edessan territory in the newly acquired *provincia Osrhoenae*, since Caracalla made *colonia* the capital of the Abgarids (see below). The *status* of *colonia* of Edessa is also mentioned in two *papyri* (P.Mesopotamia B¹¹⁷ and P.Dura 28¹¹⁸) and dates back to a period between the 212 and 213 CE, probably related also to the *Constitutio Antoniniana* dated to 212 CE.

The provincial order of the region after the death of Caracalla poses the interesting issue if the two provinces of *Mesopotamia* and *Osrhoene* were unified or not. To sustain the theory of the unification there are two epigraphs, the first, from Puteoli being the funerary inscription of *L. Valerius Valerianus* (*AE* 1972, 109)¹¹⁹, the second, coming from *Caesarea Maritima*, which mentions *L. Valerius Calpurnianus* (*AE* 1985, 830a). In both the inscriptions the men are said to be *praefectus Mesopotamia et Osroheane* (being *Hosroenae* in the text from *Caesarea*). Must be

¹¹⁶ SPEIDEL 1985, 321-326. The title of *praepositus* was usually given, since the period of Marcus Aurelius, to the *equites* who had not been *legati*.

¹¹⁷ *PMesopotamia* 1 is actually a parchment and it has been published by TEIXIDOR (1990, 144-166).

¹¹⁸ Syriac Document A/ P. Dura 28. DRIJVERS AND HEALEY 1999, 232 line 4 and 238 line 5.

¹¹⁹ EDR 074975. Camodeca dates the inscription to the years 250-260 CE.

add that the inscription of *Pacatianus*, already mentioned, is fragmentary just after the words "*praefectus Mesopotamiae*" and it could have been completed with the add of "[*et Osrhoenae*]", but lacking any certain clue it remains just a working hypothesis. The unification of the territories, therefore, must have been achieved in the years after the campaigns of Caracalla, probably around 221/222 CE.

The capital of the province was probably Nisibis, and not Edessa. However it is likely that the "unification" of the two provinces did not last for a long, if already before the half of the 3rd century CE, different *praefecti* are attested for both the provinces. An inscription from the Mauretania Caesarensis also remembers the features of the new governor¹²⁰:

Sex(to) Cornelio/ Sex(ti) fil(io) Quir(ina) Ho/norato Port(umagnensi)/ milit(iis) equestrib(us)/ exornato proc(uratori)/ sexagenario/ prov(inciae) Mesopota/miae e(gregiae) m(emoriae) v(iro) ex tes/tament(o) eiusdem / M(arcus) Caecil(ius) Caecilianus / heres

Sextus Cornelius, which was honoured in his own city, Portus Magnus, is labelled with the title of *procurator sexagenarius*, a datum that forcedly excludes his charge as governor. Thus it is more likely that he was a financial procurator, which had to deal with the abundant incoming of the cities of the region (such as Nisibis), which prospered and grew wealthy because of their strategic commercial positions and the tolls¹²¹. In addition we have to admit that the *praefectura* of the *provincia Mesopotamia* was probably a ducenary prefecture (on the type of the one in Egypt, for instance)¹²².

2.4 The rise of the Sasanians

The results Rome achieved in Upper Mesopotamia, unfortunately, were seriously troubled during the following years when the political and military balances beyond the Tigris changed completely. Since the 224 CE indeed the Sasanian dynasty, coming from the Fars province of the Parthian Empire, took the power in Central and

¹²⁰ *CIL* VIII 9760.

¹²¹ Strab. XVI, 4.22 mentions the creation of tolls for the *portoria*, in the region, already during the trajanic campaigns.

¹²² This seems to be confirmed also by another inscription (*CIL* VI 42281) where Aelius Firmus is said to be *praefectus Meopotamiae* just before being mentioned as *praefectus pretorii* of the emperor Decius. The importance of the charge in Mesopotamia seems to suggest that probably, at least in the mid-3rd century CE, the province was a ducenary one.

Western Asia, defeating the Parthians (troubled by inner conflict, the 224 was the year with two ruler: Artabanus and Vologaeses), and menacing the Roman territories in eastern provinces for at the least two centuries¹²³. The campaigns of Gordian III (238-244) marked the very first defeat of the Roman army by the hands of the Sasanians. Moreover, the emperor himself died after the wounds he received in the battle near *Meshik* (*Mesiche*, also attested on the ŠKZ 1, 8¹²⁴). The Upper Mesopotamia was interested in those years by a new series of events, which were strictly related to the rise of the new power from East and the rebellion followed the period of instability.

In this same period (or, anyway, before the coming of Gordian III in the area) is dated the split of the *Mesopotamia* and *Osrhoenae* in two different provinces, probably to better control the areas. The presence on the throne of Edessa of *Aelius Septimius Abgar* in 240 CE could confirm the separations between the two provinces as well as the restoration of a sort of client kingdom in the area¹²⁵. On the other side, the first prefect of the new Mesopotamian jurisdiction was probably *C. Iulius Priscus*, mentioned by two inscriptions in Philippopolis (*CIG* III 4602 and 4603) and in a papyrus from the Euphrates (P. Euphr. 1)¹²⁶. This latter bears the precise date of 28 August 245 CE, meaning that *Priscus*, at that time was still in charge as *praefectus Mesopotamiae*¹²⁷.

The study of the period that followed the campaigns of Septimius Severus in Mesopotamia must deal not only with the scarceness of both literary and archaeological sources, but also with a *shift of enemy* that changes the techniques, the politics and, over all, the relations with Rome. Although the defeat of Carrhae is a turning point in the history of the Roman presence in Near East, indeed, it has never compelled to Corbulo, Trajan, Verus and, over all, Septimius Severus to reach the areas beyond the Euphrates and to establish in those regions several Roman military

¹²³The bibliography on the Sasanians is vast. Only recent and general works are listed here: CURTIS & STEWART 2007 and DARYAEE 2009; SHAYEGAN 2011.

¹²⁴ Shapur Kaba-yei Zardusht (“The cube of Shapur and Zoroaster”, SKZ) is a royal monument at Nasq-i Rostam (current Iran) where had been sculpted and listed all the cities conquered by the military campaigns of Shapur I in Syria and Mesopotamia as well as the victories he achieved against three roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab and Valerian.

¹²⁵ MILLAR 1993, 151.

¹²⁶ POLLARD 2000, 92.

¹²⁷ Iulius Priscus moreover was the brother of the emperor Philip the Arab, and this has permitted to date all the inscriptions from Philippopolis in a period later than the 244, when Iulius obtained the charge of *praefectus*.

detachments as well as civic and political institutions, while at the very same time the whole region was partially secured and the the main cities in the area such as Nisibis and Singara included in a broader system of routes not only with the Western Syria and the Mediterranean, but also with the lower Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.

Given all these assumptions it must have been quite disarming the appearing of the Sasanian dynasty in that period. The period of instability started with the campaigns of Severus Alexander in Mesopotamia since Ardashir, in 230 CE, laid siege to Nisibis and, at the very same time, several revolts raised in Syria following the news of Ardashir's preparation to war¹²⁸. As P. Edwell has rightly pointed out the rhetoric in communication with the Sasanians by Severus Alexander in quoting the success the Roman previously had against the Parthians let figure out that the high spheres of the Roman Empire did not well perceive the real change that went over with the rising of the Sasanian dynasty¹²⁹. In 231 CE therefore, in consequence of the siege of Nisibis and of attacks in Mesopotamia, Severus Alexander decided to campaign against Ardashir and gathered the army at the Campus Martius in Rome before leaving for the East. Must be noted that the bulk of the army was mainly composed by veterans of the Septimius Severus wars against the Parthians as well as by the ones who fought during the campaigns of Caracalla (respectively 30 and 15 years earlier). The other part was made out of newly raised soldiers partially unprepared to the wars in the East. This dichotomy is quite significant in order to understand the difficulty the Romans had against the Sasanians, not only in that specific period, but even in the following years¹³⁰. 11 Legions, anyway, were already in the eastern regions according to Dio's account¹³¹, including the *III Parthica* (and probably the *I Parthica*) in Mesopotamia, and the *XVI Flavia Firma* as well as the *IV Scythica* in Syria. In Upper Mesopotamia the Roman army was, moreover, completed by two *auxiliary* corps already stationed in the region: the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* at Dura Europos and the *Cohors XII Palaestinorum Severiana Alexandriana* in the lower Habur. The legions based in Mesopotamia surely took part to the campaigns, and so probably did the *Legio II Traiana* (based in Egypt) as can be retrieved from the account of Herodian mentions a rebellion of the Egyptian troops just before the

¹²⁸ The panic was widespread in all the Mesopotamia during those years as testified also by the killing of a Roman military commander by the hand of his soldiers (Dio 80. 4.2).

¹²⁹ EDWELL 2008, 156.

¹³⁰ Herod. VI, 2, 3.1-4.3; EDWELL 2008, 161.

¹³¹ Dio 75.23.

campaign¹³². The occupation of the Mesopotamian regions by the Sasanians was led by the ancient right to settle in the areas once ruled by the Achaemenids, and the hopes of Ardashir were also to provoke the Romans and eventually defeat the whole army after having crossed the Euphrates¹³³. One of the most interesting things to note is that the early operations were conducted in Media, meaning that the Armenia was not the centre of the operation this time. After reached Palmyra¹³⁴, the Roman army crossed the desert and arrived at Singara. Trying to reconstruct the route the army took to reach the Northern Mesopotamia from Palmyra could be extremely interesting in order to understand the precise location of some detachments that were already present in the region before the arrival of the emperor at Antioch. A papyrus from Dura reporting a marriage contract of 232 (the same years in which the war operations started) names the winter-quarter of the *Cohors XII Palaestinorum Severiana Alexandriana*, which is thought to have taken part to the expedition. The legion was, indeed, based in a place called Qatna, circa 100 Km North of the confluence Habur-Euphrates¹³⁵. The location of the site is archaeologically unknown, unfortunately, but it may have been located along a major route in the Habur region and that the Army passed on that route, recruited the *Cohors* and then continued the march toward Singara. The already mentioned account of Herodian that recalls how the hot weather and the climate caused hundreds of death among the Roman soldiers (most of them from *Illyricum*) is one of the signs of the failure of the expedition, which resulted to be composed by an unexperienced and unprompted army. After returning to Antioch both the Roman army and the Persian one have suffered several losses, but it is likely that, not being mentioned at all a peace treaty between the empires, the territorial possessions of Rome in Mesopotamia and on the Euphrates had been probably left unchanged¹³⁶. A major problem, however, dealing with the events of those years is, as said, the lack of written sources (apart the exception of Herodian). The account of the *Historia Augusta*, as well as the scanty narrations of

¹³² Herod. 6. 4. 7. For the identification of these troops with the ones of the *Legio II Traiana* see over all POTTER 1990, 21.

¹³³ The narration of the events related to the campaigns of Severus Alexander has been accounted by Herodian (VI, 5, 1-6 and beyond).

¹³⁴ An inscription from Palmyra (PAT 0278) attests the visit of Severus Alexander in the city. After Hadrian this was the second imperial visit at Palmyra, a fact that surely underline how the city was integrated and fundamental in the Roman dynamics in the Near East.

¹³⁵ Unfortunately the place has not yet been identified. It should be searched, however, around the Bronze age site of Tell Seh Hamad most likely.

¹³⁶ EDWELL 2008, 166.

Eutropius and Festus, should be viewed from a point of view of the so-called *Kaisergeschichte*¹³⁷. The campaign of Severus Alexander resembled, in certain ways, the ones that were prepared and fought by Trajan or Septimius. As the campaigns of the 2nd century CE chiefly started because of the Parthian interferences in Armenia, the first confrontation between the Sasanians was caused by the same kind of interferences, albeit this time it happened directly in Mesopotamia and with an enemy's invasion. The Roman Army, as happened during the 2nd century CE, moved in the East with a large number of effectives in order not only to push back the Sasanians out of the Mesopotamian lands, but also to try to acquire a large part of territories toward the Tigris, with the goal to create a thicker *buffer zone* between the Euphrates and the eastern limits of the empire¹³⁸.

One of the mistakes Rome made in this period was, however, to consider the losses suffered by the Sasanian army as fundamental and limiting the re-assemblage of a new force. The *Historia Augusta* mentions an eastern campaign set up by Maximinus Thrax already in 238, probably in response to Persian attacks in Mesopotamia¹³⁹. A further reference to the campaigns of Maximinus Thrax is in a passage from Syncellus (p. 443, 3.9) where it is clearly said that the cities of Nisibis and Carrhae were regained by the Romans under Gordian III after they had been conquered by the Persians somewhere between the 235 and the 238, during the reign of Maximinus¹⁴⁰. Must be noted that in those years the increasing power of Hatra in the region was a further motive of conflict between the Romans and the Sasanians. Some late sources like Ta'bari mention the extension of the power of Hatra in the region east of the Ḥabur and West of the Tigris River¹⁴¹. The King of Hatra, Daizan, controlled *de facto* all the Upper Jezirah, the modern region comprised between the Ḥabur and the Syro-Iraqi border. The presence of Roman troops at Hatra in 235 CE should therefore be reconsidered in order to define the relation between the Hatrene kingdoms

¹³⁷ BARNES 1978, 92-96.

¹³⁸ EDWELL 2008, 167.

¹³⁹ HA, *Max. et Balb.*, 13.5.

¹⁴⁰ The Persian attacks in Mesopotamia and the capture of Nisibis and Carrhae at the end of the reign of Maximinus must be viewed in the broader context of the Persian attacks also at Dura Europos in 239 and Hatra 239/240. There is also dispute on the chronology of the capture of Mesopotamia: OATES (1968, 89) wrote it was in 237/8 on the basis of the archaeological evidence at Ain Sinu, while Lorient (1975, 763) proposed 240/1. The most interesting theory has been proposed, moreover, by KETTENHOFEN (1982, 28-31) who dated the capture to 237/8 adducing as motive the suspension of the Mesopotamian mints (Rhesaina, Nisibis, Singara) in this period.

¹⁴¹ *Ann.*, ed. Noödelke, 35 = DOGDEON AND LIEU 1989, 283.

and the Romans in a so strategic area¹⁴². Anyway it was during the end of the reign of Ardashir that the relations between Rome and Persian became tougher, since his heir, Shapur I wrote one of the saddest pages in the Roman History.

The Persian campaigns of the 40s of the 3rd century CE have been led by Gordian III, Philip the Arab and then by Valerian and they should be analysed by different points of view for a series of different reasons: the mention of the conquered cities in the *SKZ*, the representation of the Roman emperor begging the pardon to Shapur on the rock-carved reliefs at Nasq-i-Rustam and, over all, the consciousness of a *real* enemy for the Romans, an enemy who seriously, and for the very first time, threatened and, somehow, reduced the Roman political and military power in the region. Unfortunately only few literary sources mention the events of those years since the works of Herodian end with the proclamation of Gordian III as emperor and the *History* of Cassius Dio ends in 231 CE, long before the campaign against Shapur I. The only surviving text about those events is the *Historia Augusta* (in the section of the "*Lives of the Three Gordians*") with all the problems related to the work itself¹⁴³. However, the emperor moved with the army from Rome in late 242 or very early 243 CE, passed by Athens (where Gordian visited the sanctuary of Athena *Promachos*)¹⁴⁴, reached Antioch in Pisidia and then Antioch in late 243 CE. As already mentioned, the starting of the campaigns was the occupation of key-cities in Roman Mesopotamia, which were no longer in Roman hands since there is a gap in the coins from Mesopotamian mints in the previous period¹⁴⁵. The numismatic evidence provides also a further information for the events that went over after the arrival of Gordian III, since the same mints struck again *roman* coins in the period following the 243, indicating a successful Roman victory (and the re-gaining of the territories which had been previously lost) in the meanwhile. This happened probably during the siege of Rhesaina, which was well described also by Ammianus¹⁴⁶. The second stage of the war was mainly interested by the march of the Roman army down the *Ḥabur*, past Dura Europos and along the middle Euphrates, where in a crucial

¹⁴² On the relations between Hatra and Rome see ch. 7 in this work.

¹⁴³ On the problem of the sources of the *Historia Augusta* see the fundamental work of Timothy David BARNES (1978).

¹⁴⁴ The visit to a sacred place, related to the victory over the Persians during the V century BC, makes clear that probably the links between the Sasanians and the Achaemenid have been often exaggerated by the Roman *propaganda*. The claims to be related to the past challenges seem to be Roman as well as Sasanian too.

¹⁴⁵ KETTENHOFEN 1982, 23-5.

¹⁴⁶ Amm. Marc. 23.5.17.

battle at Meshik (*Mesiche*) Gordian himself was severely wounded and he found the death some days later¹⁴⁷.

The sources narrating the events of the war appear to be in contrast with the evidence provided for instance, by the *SKZ* and the monuments related. In the relief of Nasq-i-Rustam, indeed, the triumph of the Sasanian army is well symbolised by the corpse of Gordian under the horse of Shapur, and by a begging Philip the Arab on his knees. The later Roman sources, such as the text in the *Oracula Sybillina XIII*, refers more on the fate of Gordian than on the effective events¹⁴⁸. The account of Ammianus reports, indeed, that Gordian III was buried in a place called Zaitha (Amm. Marc. XXIII.5.7). Identification of Zaitha is nowadays matter of discussion¹⁴⁹. On the basis of the works carried out by Geyer and Monchambert in the Middle-Euphrates Valley the location must be searched in an area 50/360 kms south of Deir Ez-Zor, where a series of three small sites, near the modern village of Anbar, can be observed all along the left bank of the Euphrates¹⁵⁰. A passage by Zosimus (III. 32. 4) tells us that Gordian III found the death "*in the enemy's land*". The passage must be forcedly wrong because it is clearly in contrast with the account of Ammianus. The above mentioned passage is, indeed, referred to the visit Ammianus himself paid to the tomb of Gordian while leading part of the Julian's Army down the Ḥabur and the Euphrates, on the road between Circesium and Dura Europos, before reaching this latter city. Therefore the tomb of Gordian was in an area North of Dura, probably in the same area where the villages mentioned in the papyri from Dura and the Euphrates¹⁵¹. The *crux* of the death of Gordian is also enriched by other accounts that report the death of the emperor by the hands of Philip the Arab, in a moment soon after the campaign against the Sasanians, when the roman Army regained the *safe* territories¹⁵². Even the role Philip played is controversial: the Roman and Byzantine sources are quite dubious regarding the prefect and the lack of further details can only be explained with the role Philip gained after the death of Gordian. On the other

¹⁴⁷ Amm. Marc. 23. 5.17-18. See also KETTENHOFEN 1982, 31.

¹⁴⁸ *Oracula Sybillina*, XIII, 13.20.

¹⁴⁹ It is likely that the place should be located somewhere near the modern city of Falluja, in central Iraq.

¹⁵⁰ GEYER AND MOCHAMBERT 2003, 161.

¹⁵¹ Ammianus refers to a long-distance recognizable tomb, probably of the type still standing at Palmyra.

¹⁵² Victor, *Caes.*, 27.8; Festus, *Brev.*, 22, 64, 2-7; Zonaras (12.17) writes, moreover, about the death of the emperor at Rome, in consequence of wounds reported during a horse fell in Persia. The *HA* (Gord. 27-30) reports a different story: the emperor took a speech to the Senate after the return from Persia and only later he had killed by Philip.

hands, the *SKZ* clearly reports the death of the roman emperor in Persia and by the hands of Persian soldiers. The consequences of the campaigns of Gordian in Mesopotamia, therefore, must be viewed in two ways: the management of the treaty by Philip who assured a *peaceful* (although brief) period in the area and the exploitation of the events by Shapur in order to gain a significant rhetorical effect.

Anyway, the lack of sources for the events occurred during the reign of Gordian III heavily increase for the successive years. Among the few evidence referring to the relations between the Romans and the Persians in those years there is the *SKZ*, which, in addition provides also an external point of view on the events. The other source is represented, as said, by the XIII books of the *Oracula Sybillina* which certainly used older contemporary writings for the narration of the events¹⁵³. The combined analysis of the lines of the *SKZ* with the few archaeological evidence along the Middle Euphrates and Dura, in addition to the data that could be retrieved by the *papyri* (mainly the ones referring to the villages and to the detachments in the Euphrates valley) can be the starting point for a critical discussion about the mid-3rd century CE relations between Rome and the Persia.

2.4.1 Consequence and Aftermath of Gordian III Persian wars

After the death of Gordian III, his praetorian prefect, Philip the Arab was hailed as emperor by his troops on the field. The event is also mentioned on the *SKZ* where is said that the new emperor paid 500.000 *denarii* to Shapur as a tribute for the peace (*SKZ*, line 8 greek). However, the peace treaty did not last long even if several coins struck at Antioch bore the legend *Pax Fundata cum Persis*. This probably consisted in the payment of a ransom (as said, circa 500.000 *denarii*) for the Roman soldiers that were captured in Persia. The financial arrangement seems to be the only treaty mentioned in the *SKZ*, while, at the contrary, a statement from Zonaras also mentions territorial concessions as part of the agreement. Zonaras wrote, indeed, that Philip ceded to the Persians the territories of Armenia and Mesopotamia, but that they were suddenly re-acquired¹⁵⁴. A passage by Evagrius (*Hist. Eccl.* V, 7) let us intend that only the eastern portion of Armenia was given, while another evidence by Zosimus

¹⁵³ POTTER 1984.

¹⁵⁴ Zon. 12. 19.

does not mention any territorial concessions in the treat¹⁵⁵. The modern scholarly¹⁵⁶ tends to consider the events in this succession: Mesopotamia was lost in 236/7 and briefly re-gained in 243 by Gordian before being ceded to the Persians in 244 (treaty of Philip) and re-captured by Philip himself in 245. The proofs supporting these theories are majorly focused on the archaeological evidence of sites such as Ain Sinu and Kifrin. At Ain Sinu, the excavations carried out by David Oates have revealed a camp and a *castellum* whose last phase is dated back to the time of Philip, mainly because of the numismatic evidence¹⁵⁷. The chronology proposed by Oates, indeed, is due to the coins found on the site which are no later than 244 CE. This brought the British Team to argue that the site was probably captured in 236/7 and briefly re-captured by Gordian III in 243 before being taken respectively by the Persian and again by the Roman Army, led by Philip in 244, before its complete abandonment in mid-3rd century CE.

Must be add, however, that the excavations at Ain Sinu have not been so extensive and further investigations could better make clear all the chronological relations of the site. The coins at the basis of the Oates' supposition, indeed, have all been found in surface layers and may not be the last evidence for the destruction and last phase of the site (see chapter 8.6.2). The data coming from Ain Sinu are quite similar to the one the excavators carried out at Kifrin. This is a fortified site, located on a limestone cliff on the Euphrates, south of Ana (Anatha) and formed, with the island of Bijan and other small sites, a series of Roman strongholds in central Mesopotamia, according to the excavators¹⁵⁸. The site, excavated in the '80s by an Italian expedition have revealed both military and domestic structures, together with a large quantity of ceramic material and in-context finds, most of all coins¹⁵⁹. Anyway the presence of the *principia* results to be quite controversial since none of the so-called *military* structures at Kifrin could be noticed¹⁶⁰. The analysis of the structures has led S. Gregory to conclude that they are not related to a "*Roman presence*" but they can be related to a "*local and native origin and occupation*".

¹⁵⁵ Zosimus, *Nov. Hist.* 3. 32. 4, where the historian compares the treaty of Philip with the one of Jovian in 363 CE, writing that, eventually, Philip did not give up any territory to the enemy.

¹⁵⁶ Over all BLECKMANN 1992, 79 and EDWELL 2008, 178.

¹⁵⁷ Oates 1959 and 1968. On the interpretation of the remains at Ain Sinu, see below.

¹⁵⁸ INVERNIZZI 1986, 53-84; INVERNIZZI 1986a, 357-381.

¹⁵⁹ INVERNIZZI 1986a and 1986b; Valtz 1982 and Valtz 1985.

¹⁶⁰ GREGORY 1995-7, 164-170, vol. 2.

The main severe issue regarding Kifrin is, by the way, the dispute between the same excavators being Invernizzi sure of the foundation of the site under Septimius Severus and the fall after the campaigns of Ardashir (233 CE) or slightly before Gordian III death, probably in 243 (mainly on the basis of 40 coins dated between the Severian period and the Gordian III's death)¹⁶¹. Therefore the whole area below Anatha was ceded, according to Invernizzi, after the treaty of 244 between Shapur and Philip and never re-gained as it seems to happen to Upper Mesopotamian region. On the other hand, Elisabetta Valtz argues that the site was founded during the reign of Severus Alexander and then rapidly abandoned during the final march of Shapur in the area and before the capture of Dura Europos in 256/7 CE¹⁶².

In conclusion I think that the conquest of Mesopotamia by the Shapur's army must not be viewed as a territorial annexation but as the conquest of the key cities of the area, leaving the villages and the campaigns generally untouched. The same re-appropriation of the territory the next year (245 CE) by Philip the Arab could be a further clue for the weak will of the Persian to control and defend the area. Certainly the third campaign and the relative fall of Dura Europos must have influenced the whole economic and political life of the region, since that date several centres disappear, but the centre of Nisibis, in example, in Northern Mesopotamia, seems to flourish in those years and during the reign of Diocletian with the thirty years peace treaty. The evidence of destruction at Ain Sinu could be referred to the sole military nature of the site, being occupied by military troops and being used only for military purposes. A further re-occupation of the site, therefore, should result quite strange. The same theory could be applied at Kifrin too, although both sites necessarily need more archaeological investigations in order to achieve more data concerning their foundation, uses and abandonment.

As already seen the treaty between Philip the Arab and the Persian did not last long and in 245 the cities in Mesopotamia were again under the Roman rule. After the death of Philip by the hands of Decius at Verona¹⁶³, the sources are poor of informations regarding the conflicts between the Romans and Persia. It is more likely that the varying levels of conflicts in Armenia and Mesopotamia continued throughout the reign of Decius although they are hardly recognizable both in literary

¹⁶¹ INVERNIZZI 1986a, 53-84.

¹⁶² VALTZ 1982,81-90. A relatively recent article by Invernizzi has tried to mediate between the two positions. See INVERNIZZI 2007, 151-164.

¹⁶³ KIENAST 1990, 197.

and in archaeological evidence. The third campaign of Shapur, instead, the one occurred around 260 CE, was also the most terrific one for the Roman empire, facing for the first time the capture of the emperor and the slavery of the same emperor and his guards, deported in Iran and used as workers in building bridges and other structures¹⁶⁴.

2.5 The SKZ and the archaeological evidence

The movement of Persian troops in Syria and along the Euphrates has been widely discussed since the discovery of the *SKZ* in 1930¹⁶⁵. The focus has been, moreover, put on the list of cities, and chiefly upon the order they appear on the inscription, to track back and reconstruct the movements of the Shapur's Army in Syria and Mesopotamia. They are listed from Anatha, on the Middle Euphrates to Antioch, tracking an upward march along the river and the Western Syria¹⁶⁶. The dates of the first campaigns can be identified through the account of Zosimus¹⁶⁷. The historian claims that the conquest of Antioch was achieved during the period of Trebonianus Gallus (251-253 CE). These dates, however, correspond to the *second* campaign of Shapur against the Romans, since the *first* campaign mentioned in the *SKZ* is referred to the one related to the defense of Persia during the invasion by Gordian in 243¹⁶⁸. The attack of the Roman territory began in Southern Euphrates with the capture of Anatha (probably to identify with the island of Ana, see Kennedy 1986), then the Greek version refers to a defeat at Barbalissos where, according to the text, the Romans lost 60.000 men, before list all the cities conquered (or at least sieged) by the Persian Army.

A rapid look to the names could make clear some important aspects, overall the ones regarding the *effective* strategic importance of some sites:

(10) *The nations of Syria and whatever nations and plains that were above it, we set on fire and devastated [...] and we took the following cities: Anatha [...], BIRTHA ASPORAKOS, SURA, BARBALISSOS, HIERAPOLIS, BEROEA, CHALCIS, APAMEA, REPHANEA, ZEUGMA, OURIMA, GINDAROS,*

¹⁶⁴ MILLAR 1993, 162; EDWELL 2008, 185.

¹⁶⁵ On the *SKZ* (Shapur Kaba Zartusht) see KETTENHOFEN 1982 and HUYSE 1999.

¹⁶⁶ Other cities listed after the capture of Antioch, sparsely mentioned, could be an evidence of different attacks during the campaigns.

¹⁶⁷ Zosimus, *Nov. Hist.* 1, 27.2.

¹⁶⁸ In the greek part of the *SKZ*, indeed, a "*third invasion*" is mentioned as the last event of the Shapur's wars in Syria.

Larmenaza, Seleucia, Antioch, Cyrrhus, another (!) Seleucia, Alexandria (ad Issum ?), Nikopolis, Sinzara, Chamath (Epiphania), Aristia, Dichor, Doliche, Doura, Circesium, Germanica, Batna. Chanar [...] Satala, Domana, Artangil, Souisa, Suid, Phreata [...] (17).

At the end of the list another important note is the mention of the conquest of those "37 cities and their surrounding territories" meaning by this probably also the areas *between* the major centres, including villages, trading posts and deserted regions, were effectively conquered by Shapur's armies¹⁶⁹. Anatha, as said, has been identified as Ana, the small island in the Euphrates. The next city is *Birtha Asporakos*, probably to identify with the later Zenobia and modern Halabyia, on the middle Syrian Euphrates. Asporakos could be the seleucid name of the site while the word *Birtha* means simply *fortress (BYRT)* in Aramaic (along with 'DUR). Then, the three cities of Sura, Barbalissos and Hierapolis are much more related to the Upper Syrian Euphrates and probably connected to the defeat of the Roman Army previously mentioned. Sura is nowadays the modern village of As-Sura¹⁷⁰, while Barbalissos (Balis), close to the pre-classical site of Emar (Tell Meskene), is partially underwater due to the construction of the Assad Lake in the 1970s¹⁷¹.

The site of Hierapolis, instead, has to be certainly located in the modern Syrian centre of Membij, few kilometres from the Euphrates in direction of Alep. The city was an important religious centre, being the site of the temple of the *Dea Syria* and the sanctuary (only partially excavated¹⁷²) was one of the most important religious centres in Northern Syria. It is quite interesting to note that the other major worship centre in the region, Doliche, site of the temple of *Iuppiter Dolichenus*, is also listed in the SKZ. After the mention of Hierapolis the list of cities on the SKZ follows a non-linear order meaning that the order used for the list from Anatha to Hierapolis (from South to North) is no longer respected. The cities are, indeed, listed as the Persian Army moved in a *zig-zag* march in northern Syria. If the conquest naturally followed the East-West route from Hierapolis to Chalcis, it is quite strange that cities like Zeugma are listed before Cyrrhus (closer to Chalcis and Western Syrian cities), as well as Dura before Circesium (the site at the confluence Habur-Euphrates). The

¹⁶⁹ EDWELL 2008, 186. On the number of cities conquered by Shapur see also MARICQ - HONIGMANN 1953, 144.

¹⁷⁰ KONRAD 2004, 433-452.

¹⁷¹ A relatively recent identification of the cities listed in the SKZ is reported in EDWELL 2008, 185 and ff..

¹⁷² GONZALEZ-BLANCO 2000.

hypothesis proposed for the reconstruction of the order in which the cities are listed are mainly two. The first is that after the battle of Barbalissos (252/3 CE) the whole Persian Army split up in two (or three) parts, each one moving toward the main important centres of the Northern and Western Syria, while the second theory is that probably, being the *SKZ* a document for public use in Iran, the order the cities were conquered was not the main aim of Shapur. Certain cities, probably, needed, indeed, more time to be conquered and the Persian Army may have returned to such sites twice or more in order to conquer them. None of the sites present in the *papyri* of Dura is mentioned in the *SKZ*. This lack is easily explicable considering the minor importance of the sites themselves in a broader war context. Sites like Appadana, Neapolis, Gazica or Biblada, which had relations with Dura and the military detachment in the city, were probably just villages without any strategic importance¹⁷³. The *SKZ*, indeed, mentions Circesium and Dura, and those are the only sites along the middle-Syrian Euphrates (excluding Birtha Asporakos). As said, moreover, the inscription also cites "*the surrounding regions*" and probably this must represent the areas between the major centres where the villages of the *papyri* were located. The chronology of the *papyri*, in addition, constitutes an useful tool for the chronology of the presence of the Persian army, since several contracts and selling are attested only before the Shapur's invasion of Syria, and not later¹⁷⁴. It is widely known that this date marked the end of the city and one may think that probably all the villages related and strictly depended by Dura fell over in few years after the abandonment of the major centre of the area.

2.6 From the capture of Valerian to the cession of Mesopotamia (260-363 CE)

After the campaigns of Shapur I in Syria and Mesopotamia the balance of the political power in the Near East moved further from the two great empires in direction of the increased power of Palmyra and its dynasty. However this is not the place to talk about the rise and development of the Palmyrene politics in mid- 3rd century CE, but the role the city-state played in the political and economical dynamics went over in the region during those years was significant and should also

¹⁷³ For a historical geography of the region see GABORIT & LERICHE 1998, 167-200 and GABORIT 2013, *in press*.

¹⁷⁴ FEISSEL & GASCOU 1989, 535-561.

be noticed the importance the army of Palmyra had in preventing the invasion of coastal Syria and Levant by the hands of the Sasanians (during the third Shapur's campaign in Syria, a column of the Persian Army was stopped and defeated at Emesa by Palmyrene troops led by Odenathus). The autonomy of Palmyra, eventually, was drastically reduced by the capture of the city by the Roman Army led by Aurelian in 272 CE. Back to the events, the fall of Dura Europos was part of the third campaign of Shapur in Syria. After the capture of Dura, the Persian army went up along the Euphrates and met the large part of the Roman army at Edessa. The city was made *colonia* by the time of Caracalla and probably had been used as base for the operations during the reign of Valerian. The defeat of the Romans at Edessa also marked one of the darkest points in the Roman history: the capture and the death in slavery of the emperor Valerian¹⁷⁵.

Lactantius (*De mort. pers.*, 5) mentions the episode of the Shapur's feet on the back of Valerian and recalls the long period of slavery in which the emperor-prisoner lived in Persia underlining, at the same time, how this was probably the punishment for the man himself, who acted with no prudence and in no respect to others. The lack of prudence has been remarked also by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* VII, 13) and Orosius (*adversus paganos*, VII, 22, 3-4). Valerian, indeed, was responsible for an edict against the Christians and therefore the vision the later sources and commentators had of the emperor was highly influenced by those events. Other sources (Aurl. Vict., *Lib. de Caesar*, 32, 5 and the *Chronicon Paschale*), at the contrary, mention the slavery referring mainly to the old age of Valerian (probably dead at 65 years). Consequently to the death of Valerianus, Macrianus, a high equestrian officer became usurper (together with his sons Macrianus and Quietus). He was recognised in Egypt before Macrianus (his son) was killed in the West, probably the Balkans, and Quietus sieged at Emesa by the troops led by Odenathus. In this context indeed the role of Palmyra as local power was born and rose up. The first even that brought Odenathus under the attention of Rome was his involvement in the attack against the retiring troops of Shapur as well as against the usurpers. Palmyra, in fact, formally recognized Gallienus as the only emperor (and, more-over the one without a co-emperor)¹⁷⁶. The events following the defeat of Quietus at Emesa are, unfortunately, not so clear. Odenathus probably recovered in a second moment the whole upper

¹⁷⁵ KETTENHOFEN 1982, 97-99.

¹⁷⁶ MILLAR 1993, 168; MILLAR 1971, 1 and ff.; STARCKY AND GAWLIKOWSKI 1985; 59 and ff..

Mesopotamia that was occupied by the Sasanian troops. He laid siege and conquered Nisibis and Carrhae, and later he advanced towards lower Mesopotamia and even Ctesiphon. The role Odenathus had in consequences of these actions is, however, still unknown. The *Historia Augusta* refers to him as “*Augustus*” and reports that he received the *imperium*. Later Byzantine sources (Syncellus, *Chron.* 1, 716 and Zonaras 12. 24) mention Odenathus as a *strategos* of the East. However contemporary documents (from the reign of Zenobia and his son Vaballathus) such as a milestone and a base of a statue, both from the palmyrene region refer to Odenathus in different ways. The first one labels him as a “king of kings “ (MLK MLK’), while on the base is clearly readable MTQNN’ DY MDNH’ KLH “*restorer of the whole East*”. As Fergus Millar noted, it is not certain if these expressions were official *formula* rather than simple “laudatory allusion to his victories in the early 260s”¹⁷⁷. After the death of Odenathus Palmyra reached its maximum extension with his widow Zenobia and his son Vaballathus. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the role the city had in the Near East but it is doubtless that Aurelian, the emperor who destroyed the Palmyrene power in the region, was threatened by the Palmyra dynasty which reached even Egypt with its troops. Vaballathus was proclaimed in several inscriptions as *Augustus* or even Emperor, as well as his mother Zenobia who was labelled with the insolite title of *Augusta*¹⁷⁸. Vaballathus (in some inscription from Jordan known as Baballathus) was also remembered in a bilingual inscription from Palmyra as ‘PRNT’ DY MDNH’ KLH “*epanorthôtes (corrector) of the whole East*”, a term which indicates the role the brief reign of Palmyra had in the political relations in the region.

Unfortunately the sources are very scanty regarding the Palmyrene power and its relations with upper Mesopotamia. Since the Palmyrene troops marched down towards Ctesiphon, one may suppose that they passed through the upper Habur basin, probably exploiting the same routes Trajan and Septimius Severus used during their military campaigns.

But the Palmyrene rule did not last long in upper Mesopotamia, if Nisibis and the surrounding area were already conquered by Narsēs I in 297 CE and then re-

¹⁷⁷ MILLAR 1993, 170.

¹⁷⁸ Further examinations in MILLAR 1993, 171.

conquered by Diocletian in 298¹⁷⁹. This year also marks an important date for the all region, since the new emperor proclaimed the so-called “thirty years peace” during which Nisibis itself and its surrounding region flourished and grew wealthy. The importance of Nisibis and the northern Mesopotamian corridor was a direct consequence, in fact, of the role the city and the region had in the commercial routes and economic transactions between East and West being the region the eastern limit of the Roman Empire directly facing the western Sasanian territories. In the spring of 297 CE, indeed, the army of Narsē and Galerius (which was appointed as Caesar by Diocletian) clashed in a place between Kallinikos and Carrhae (probably in the Baliḥ river valley)¹⁸⁰ and the Romans were utterly defeated by the Persian Army. The next year, however, the same army, always led by Galerius, won an important battle near Satala, at North¹⁸¹.

This success made forget the disastrous campaigns against Shapur I and put back the old glory of the Roman foreign policy. Diocletian and Galerius instilled in the Romans the old sense of power, which was temporarily lost during the wars of the 3rd century CE¹⁸². On the coins from the diocletianic period the most common legends were, indeed, *pax aeterna* and *securitas orbis*¹⁸³, and even if the message was partly a propagandistic one, the intention of the Roman world was more likely to maintain those conditions. The already mentioned peace-treaty was therefore signed at Nisibis¹⁸⁴. In this new context the trade flourished uninterrupted by military operations making the cities of Nisibis and Edessa wealthy and reach¹⁸⁵. The trade with the East continued long after the peace treaty and did not cease in consequence of the fall of Hatra. It has been suggested, in addition, that a sort of shift in the trade

¹⁷⁹ Only when Persia’s internal struggle for power ended in favour of king Narsē (293-302 CE) was the Eastern power able to revert to the policy of expansion in the West. On the struggle for the power see TANABE 1991, 7-39; see also DIGNAS-WINTER 2007, 28.

¹⁸⁰ The most important centre of this area certainly is Batnae, which lies halfway along the Baliḥ river.

¹⁸¹ BARNES 1982, 54- 55.

¹⁸² Diocletian was seen by the Roman historiography as the restaurer of the peace in the eastern territory. In the *Historia Augusta* he is called *aureus parens saeculi* (HA, *Heliogab.* 35.4) and the same concept is mentioned also by the other sources (Aur.Vict, *Caes.* 39.8; Eus., *HE*, VIII, 3.9). The emperor Julian refers to Diocletian as the “ruler of the entire world” (Iul., *Or.*, 1. 18a-b).

¹⁸³ *RIC* VI, 1967, 145.

¹⁸⁴ Although the *foedus* of 298 undoubtedly put the Sasanians in disadvantage, the will of Rome certainly was to respect the sovereignty of Persia.

¹⁸⁵ On Nisibis see below, p. 87-107. The importance of both cities as trading points is mentioned in the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, 22. (p. 156, ed. Rougé).

routes occurred in this period when the Tigris became more important than before and so did the Roman fortresses east of Nisibis (like Bezabde and Castra Maurorum)¹⁸⁶. The period immediately following the signature of the peace-treaty is, as it should be expected, poor of historical data since the conflict between the two empires was quite sleepy¹⁸⁷. An important turning point in the relations between the Sasanian Persian and the Roman empire certainly was the 338 CE when the emperor Constantine the Great died and Shapur II (309-379 CE) used the opportunity to move against Armenia which had been a Christian area since the early 4th century CE. The relations in this period between Rome and Persia, indeed, were highly and inevitably influenced by the changes in the religious affairs that interested both the empires. During the reign of Constantine, indeed, the Christians were no longer persecuted in the West and so they had several contacts with the other Christians in the Sasanian Persia who became ever more related to their faith-fellow in the West. This context brought Shapur II to persecute the Christian in its realm. Several acts of martyrs have highlighted how those persecutions were actually more *political* than *religious*.¹⁸⁸

The attacks of the Persian army in Northern Mesopotamia were quite frequent during the reign of Constantine and lasted up to the death of Constantius II (337-361 CE). According to Festus (who was appointed as an *official historian* by the emperor Valens) during the reign of Constantius II nine major battles were fought between the Romans and the Persians, with the most important one at Singara (the famous “*nyktomachia*”, the night battle, see below chapter 4) and Narasara, where apparently Narsē was killed¹⁸⁹. The Persians also besieged Nisibis three times in those years

¹⁸⁶ On Bezabde see paragraph 8.3; On *Castra Maurorum* see paragraph 8.2.

¹⁸⁷ Very little is known of the period between 302 and 309 CE (the Sasanian rulers were Hormizd II and then Adanarsē). A scanty reference in the *Chronicle of Arbela* (*Chr. Arb.* II, p. 67, 9-11, tr. Kawerau) mentions Hormizd II (who was the son of Narsē) tried to break the treaty on the basis of a vengeance against the way Rome treated the Christians, however it seems that his will did not bear an impact on the treaty itself.

¹⁸⁸ As during the Diocletianic period the “Edict against the Manichaeans” was issued in order to restore the original Roman religious against the cults originated in the East, intended as the political force of Persia, during the Constantine period the persecutions of Christians in Persia occurred because of the relation they had with the political power in Rome (see *Martyrologium of Mar Simon, Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, ed. P. Bedjan, II, 135-136). Persecutions of Christians in Persia are also remembered in Eusebius (*Vita Constantini*, IV, 8 and IV, 13).

¹⁸⁹ Festus 27, 1-3. The death of the Sasanian king is mentioned only here, while in later sources such as Teophanes (*Chron. A.M.* 5815 [p. 20-21 ed. de Boor]) a younger brother of Shapur II, also named Narsē, died fighting in a battle against Constantius II. On Singara and the night battle see below (p. 109-114) for detailed history and location. Narasara is a

(337, 346 and 350) without success¹⁹⁰, while they were victorious at Amida (current Dyarbakir) and Singara, which were taken by the Persian army and partially destroyed¹⁹¹. According to Ammianus a peace-treaty was proposed to Constantius II by Shapur II mainly regarding the restitution of Armenia and Mesopotamia to the Persians, conditions that were judged unacceptable by Rome. The skirmishes in Mesopotamia so lasted up to the death of Constantius II and they reached their apex during the reign of Julian, which, unfortunately, also marked the last period of Roman presence in Mesopotamia as well. In the spring of 356 CE Julian, with large part of his army, left Antioch and moved against the Persians in Mesopotamia. It has been suggested that the Roman army somewhere was split up in two blocks, the main one reached Nisibis, while the one led by the emperor himself crossed the Euphrates at Nikephorion (modern Ar-Raqqa, in Syria) and consequently marched downstream toward the heart of the Sasanian power in Mesopotamia: Ctesiphon. After a terrible march lasted three months in the desert the bulk of the Julian's army reached Ctesiphon but the emperor decided not to lay siege to the city preferring to secure the inner routes and the background area nearby the Tigris¹⁹². The decision, as seen, was highly criticized by Ammianus, and by Zosimus as well who points as an error the fire that the Romans set to their own fleet¹⁹³. After the decision of not taking the capital Ctesiphon, the Romans moved back upstream to reach the large part of the Army in Northern Mesopotamia who was facing the Persians there. The Army led by Julian clashed, along his way back, the Persians near the modern city of Samarra, in central Iraq and, although, the battle was victorious for Rome, but the emperor died by the wounds received, later that day on 26 June 363 CE. The account of the death of Julian is reported by Zosimus (III. 28.3-29.1) who says the emperor was struck by a sword in battle and died the night after having been transported on a shield by his

place, unfortunately, not yet identified, albeit it may be somewhere below the Jabel Sinjar, not so far from Singara and the river Nahr Ghiran (DIGNAS AND WINTER 2007, 89 and n. 68).

¹⁹⁰ LIGHTFOOT 1989, 285-294. In the third attack the Persian army also diverted the river Mygdonius and used assault machines set on the ships (see below, Chapter 4).

¹⁹¹ Amm. Marc. XX, 6, 1-9 and XIX, 1-9. According to Ammianus the Chionites or Kidarites fought side by side with the Sasanians in those years. This tribe, which was originary of the Transoxiana, the land after the modern Afghanistan, is often identified with the original group of the Huns (the Kidarites were said "Huns of the Kidarites" by Priscus, see LITVINSKY, GUANG DA and SAMGHABADI 1999, 120).

¹⁹² Amm. Marc. XXIV, 7, 1 and 3-6. Smitih 1999, 85-104.

¹⁹³ Zosimus, III, 28,3-29,1.

soldier in his tent¹⁹⁴. The death of Julian has been highly revisited by later sources and if on a side the pagan sources and Zosimus describe the emperor as a hero and a courageous emperor, on the other side, other source claim that Julian died because of an intrigue.¹⁹⁵



Fig. 4. Rock relief at Taq-i-Bustan with Ardashir II crowned by Mithras and Ahura Mazda. The corpse under the three standing figures is thought to be the emperor Julian. The rock relief was placed along the route to Ctesiphon in a highly symbolic position.

The death of Julian marks the end of the Roman presence beyond the Habur river and represents in a certain way the end of the Roman political interaction in the Near East. Late in 363, his cousin Jovian who succeeded to Julian as emperor, proclaimed by his own army, had absolutely no choice but to sign and accept the peace-treaty imposed by the Persians.

The advantages Rome gained in consequence of the *foedus* of 298 CE were now lost. In 363, indeed, was a Roman emperor who had to agree to the enemy's conditions. The account of the events is mentioned, of course, in several sources from poets to historians and chroniclers,¹⁹⁶ even if our best witness surely is Ammianus who took part actively in those events. According to the historian's evidence the Romans left

¹⁹⁴ On Julian's death see Büttner-Wobst 1979, 24-47; Conduché 1978, 355-380.

¹⁹⁵ A complete analysis of the Julian's campaign as seen through the accounts of Ammianus Marcellinus and Zosimus can be found in Carrara 1991, 1-15

¹⁹⁶ A complete list of references is in CHRYSOS 1993, 166-167.

five regions beyond the Tigris: Arzanene, Moxoene, Zabdicene, Rehimene and Karduene, along with fifteen fortresses and the important cities of Nisibis, Singara and *Castra Maurorum*¹⁹⁷. It is doubtless that the treaty was quite unfortunate for the Romans and the loss of Nisibis and Singara was a total loss of prestige as well strategic strongholds in North-eastern Mesopotamia. The treaty, however, has some dark points. Nevertheless Shapur II demanded the return of the all territories beyond the Tigris, apparently the small regions of Sophaene and Ingilene remained under roman control. After the death of Jovian, the invasion of Armenia by Shapur II seems to prove that Persia claimed with the swords what it did not achieve with the agreement. The ancient sources, in addition, do not mention any economic aspect of the *foedus* even if the loss of Nisibis, which represented the major commercial port in the area, substantially eliminated the roman monopoly in the area¹⁹⁸. At the end of his reports Ammianus anyway recognizes that the operations conducted by Jovian were mainly aimed to secure the troops and save the civilians of both Singara and Nisibis, which represented the primary interest to respect during those trouble years.

¹⁹⁷ Amm. Marc. XXV.7.9-14. Nisibis and Singara were left without their inhabitants who partially transferred westward a Edessa. *Castra Maurorum* is still unidentified nowadays. Suggestions about the location are made further below, see p. 157-159. The treaty the included also the term that Roman had not to help Arakes against the Armenia

¹⁹⁸ The account provided by Joshua the Stylite in the 6th century (Ios. Styl. 18) reports that Nisibis was ceded for 120 years to Persia and that after the end of the period a new dispute arose since the Sasanians refused to hand over the city. As noted by B.Digans and E. Winter the discussion about the 120 years stipuated in the 363 *foedus* even in the 6th century demonstrates that the formula was not a diplomatic one but it was a real aspect to be repected (DIGNAS AND WINTER 2007, 134 and n.87).

CHAPTER 3

THE CITIES AND THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

3.1 Introduction

Dealing with the human presence in Northern Mesopotamia in the period between the early 2nd century and the late 4th century CE means first of all understanding the dynamics that went over in the main centres of the region: how they developed, how they sustained themselves, how they interrelated with the countryside and how they related to the Roman power and to the events that interested the whole area during the several moments of crisis. This operation can be started by the definition of *main* and *minor* centre as well as *city* and *rural landscape*. A main centre is a site, of relative large dimensions, which was highly involved in the events (both political and military ones) of the area during the period at issue. This is the case of cities like Nisibis, Singara and Resaina which were all important strategic points in the area, and directly related to the military presence of the Roman troops during each different campaign. But the region was also featured by numerous minor settlements and rural towns which, although not directly interested by the most important events, they contributed to the development of the countryside and they have been strictly related to the main centres in a binary relationship. Among these secondary sites must be reminded those centres which appears to be almost unknown to the literary sources although the archaeological operations have revealed a conspicuous amount of data contemporary to the period at issue. Sites like Tell Barri, e.g., have shown a certain continuity of occupation during the troubled years of crisis in Upper Mesopotamia, even if with peaks and lows regarding the dynamics of occupation (see below, p. 183-184). A different section is represented by Hatra which appears to be a sort of *isolated* case in the regional framework of the events. The city, which developed around the sanctuary of the Sun-God (see below, chapter 7), is undoubtedly a main centre nevertheless its position and despite the fact that the only known interactions with the Roman empire are dated to the 3rd century CE and mainly regard military operations. Anyway, despite the importance of the entire area during the period 2nd- 4th century CE evidence regarding the main and minor

settlement is less than what would be expected. The situation could be more easily explained with the use of a graph, where the numbers of sites mentioned in the literary sources have been listed, together with the the ones archaeologically investigated but not mentioned by the ancient sources and the ones which have been only partially identified by the survey projects:

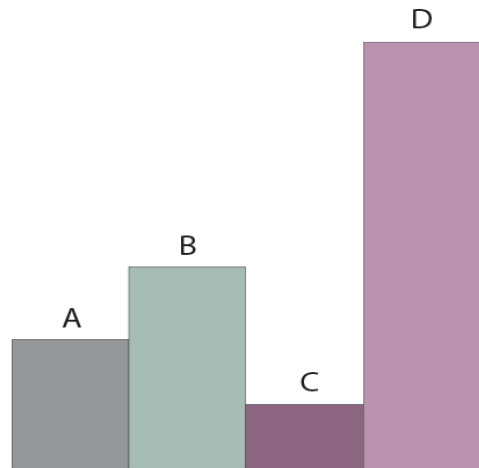


Fig. 5. The graph represents a highly simplified table showing the four different categories of sites for the Upper Mesopotamia during the period stretching from the 2nd to the 4th century CE, listed according to their occurrence. A: sites mentioned in the literary sources. B: sites where archaeological investigations have been carried out. C: sites both mentioned in the literary sources and partially investigated. D: minor and rural sites identified only through the field walking surveys in the area.

Given these assumptions the historical reconstruction seems quite tough to achieve, although the combined use of the scanty available data for certain sites, can be put together trying at least to delineate the main features that interested the specific settlement in the period at issue. I have tried in the following chapter to define the common points, the analogies and the differences between the most important sites in the area as well as other minor centres, trying to define the relations that occurred between them and the countryside and rural landscape. One of the most important forms of interaction to bear in mind is the one that interested these cities during the struggles for the icntrol of the area and, later, during the Roman occupation of the region. This is a long-debated issue among the scholars, mainly based on the discussion of somehow obsolete terms such as *Romanization* or *Hellenization*. It is nowadays widely accepted that the dynamics that went over in the western regions

of the Roman empire did not match at all with the ones occurred in the East and especially in the zone between the marginal Euphrates area and the Tigris. Here, indeed, the interactions with the local people, the local kingdoms and the eastern empires, characterised the Roman presence, making it sensibly different from the events occurred in the West and, in a certain way, even in western Syria. This chapter, thus, wants primarily to be a sort of catalogue of the main sites in the region which I will tentatively describe according to three different aspects: the geographic environment, the historical documentation and, when available the archaeological data. From these description it will be much more easier to understand the common features of the main centres of the region which were interested by the war conflicts between West and East on different stages. Marking each time the ecological background and the geographical features as well is important to note the slight differences and the analogies between sites within a large region. Since the ecology has much influenced the human and urban development of the Northern Mesopotamia, it is fundamental to start an examination of those centres with the description of their environmental characteristics. Even the historical data, sometimes, have been influenced and highly conditioned by these environmental aspects in the whole area, sometimes in a reciprocal and mutual affection.

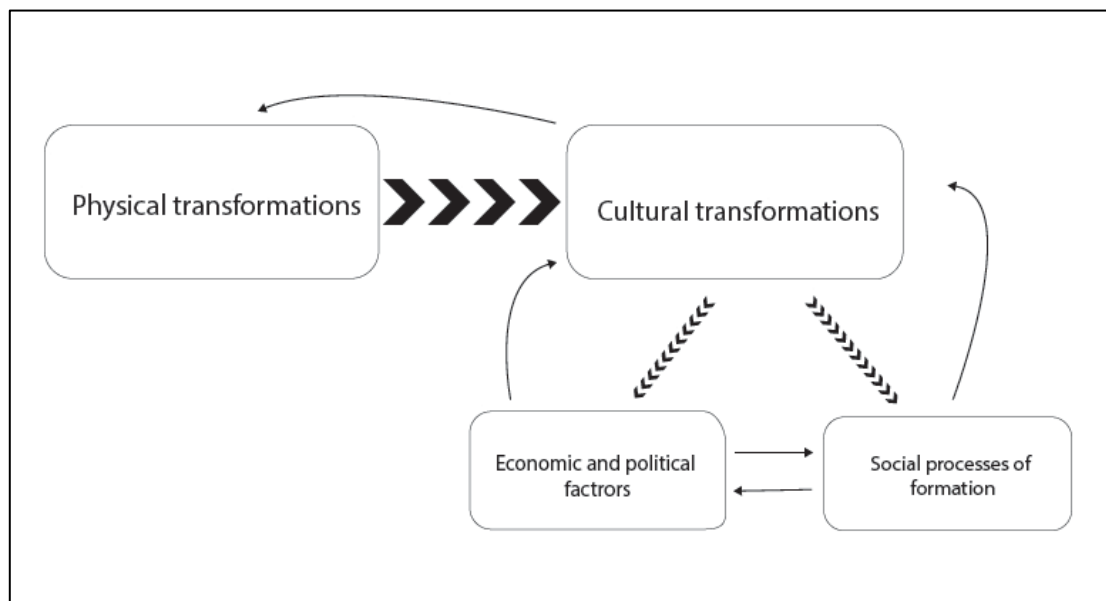


Fig. 6: Model of the relations usually occurring in an ancient landscape. Datched arrows indicate the direction of the analysis, while the thinner arrows represent the feedbacks recorded.

The second section of each site profile will mainly regards the historical reconstruction and the connection with other major events both in war and in peace periods. In this section the ancient sources have been used as a tool for the understanding of certain dynamics in the wider context of the roman presence in the area. Both literary and epigraphic sources have been considered, as well as the coins, which sometimes represent a really useful instrument for dating specific events.

The whole chapter will include paragraphs about the cities of Nisibis, Singara, Rhesaina, Constantina and several secondary settlements such as Ain Sinu, Bezabde, Tell Barri, Seh Qubba and Tell Tuneinir, in order to obtain a clear picture of both the large and small centres in the framework of the roman Mesopotamia. Two chapters will be, eventually, dedicated, more specifically to the surveys in Northern Mesopotamia. The lack of medium and large size excavated sites, indeed, largely coincides with a high number of surveyed zones, which have provided the scholar community of surface data and distribution charts based on a v long-period analysis. Despite the issues of the data retrievable from the surveys, they provide a valuable amount of information about the small settlements, how the countryside was exploited and how the rural zones related with the large centres. The advantage of the survey projects also resides in the use they make of new techniques and special databases. One of the best useful and widely available resources is represented, for instance, by the CORONA declassified satellite images, which will be used in the following chapter. These images, indeed, let us have a complete look to different areas and sites interested by this study *before* the modern urbanization and thus with some better recognizable features and in a much clear way¹⁹⁹. Other basic imaging system for the landscape archaeology, such as the Google images and the Ikonos and Aster shots, will be also used.

The study of the main and secondary centres of the area therefore is strictly related to both the ecological environment and to the events that occurred between the 2nd and the 4th century CE. However, the historical *substratum* of the inhabitants of these centres, should be not forgotten. Even if the *greek* component has highly augmented since the Hellenistic period, after the fall of the Seleucid kingdom a sort of *rebirth* of the local tradition is clearly noticeable in the whole area (the shift of name from Europos to Dura is only the most significant trace of this), and thus the

¹⁹⁹ The CORONA project is a now declassified satellite program which was mainly used to prevent a possible threat for the US government in 1960s and 1970s. The image are freely available at <http://edcwww.cr.usgs.gov/>.

easternmost centres, which were quite far from the Hellenistic *tetrapolis* of the West, have been largely affected by the eastern impulses and the local traditions. In this framework the settlement dynamics of the area during the Roman period must therefore be considered more as interactions (as stated elsewhere in this work) rather than anything else. Both in large and minor centres, indeed, the Roman component is not easily recognizable and, at the contrary, would be sometimes impossible to state the presence, even temporary, of the Roman army in a given zone if the literary sources would not mention it. This interaction occurred according several different factors as the *papyri* from Dura Europos and the so-called ones “from the Euphrates” have shown. In Northern Mesopotamia is even harder to recognize these interactions, mainly because of the lack of data, but one may suggest that it largely happened in the main centres of the region, while the minor settlement always retained their local roots.

CHAPTER 4

NISIBIS: A FRONTIER CITY IN UPPER MESOPOTAMIA

4.1 Geography and location

Nisibis (in Turkish *Nusaybin*) lies in South-Eastern Turkey, close to the modern Syrian border, just below the southern fringes of Tur Abdin, ancient *Mons Masius* (nowadays Mount Izala), in a dry steppe-plain, 300 m. ca above sea level (Fig. 1)²⁰⁰. The settlement is flanked by the Khnes, a seasonal minor *wadi* at West and by the Jaghjagh (ancient *Hyrmas* and *Mygdonius*)²⁰¹, a *wadi* tributary of the Habur River (ancient *Chaboras*), at East.²⁰² The geographic position, largely within the 200mm rainfall line, moreover, helped the development of the city and the surrounding

²⁰⁰ In the early 1930s A. POIDEBARD studied the city. In *La Trace de Rome dans le desert de Syrie* there is an aerial photo of Qamishli (built in that years) and on the background the Turkish city of Nusaybin. Poidebard highlights that this was the site of the ancient city but he also complains the lack of any archaeological structure due to the presence of both modern centres. Nisibis is also mentioned in the works of DILLEMANN (1962) and OATES (1968) both trying to reconstruct the layout of the roman presence in the region and the implication of the *limes* in the area. On 1988 Lightfoot proposes a new study about Nisibis, and especially about the siege of 350 CE and its implication in the 4th century sources. New data concerning the city come at last from two studies by RUSSELL (2005) and LIEU (2006). From an archaeological point of view no data are available and just few years ago a survey was started in the area between Syria and Turkey, but the works soon were stopped due to the presence of mines (KOZBE 2009, personal information; for the archaeological evidences of Nisibis see below).

²⁰¹ Strabo, *Geogr.*, 11.13

²⁰² Plin. *Nat.Hist.*, XXXI, 37 e XXXIII, 16. The river location is actually a matter of discussion between the scholars, mainly on the basis of the literary evidences. RUSSELL (2005, 20) states that the Jaghjagh did not pass through the city, but it was on its side, quite close to the eastern city walls, as previously stated by LIGHTFOOT (1988, 110). Some Arabic sources (see LE STRANGE 1930, 94-5) and early European travellers (above all Otter 1748, 121) confirm that the river, coming from north, passed close to the city and not in the middle. This information could be proved also reading a passage in Ephrem's *Carmina Nisibena* (XIII I, 18). Here we can clearly distinguish "(the river) flows close to the city". Zonaras (XIII I, 7), at the contrary, mentions the river as flowing through the city, but probably in this period a suburb developed outside the city centre and was separated by the Jaghjagh itself. (LIGHTFOOT 1988, 111). In the aerial images taken during the French Mandate the river is just at East of the modern centre of Nusaybin (see below).

region (Fig 2)²⁰³. The fertility of the area, in ancient times, seems to be proved also by an epigraphic document (CIG IV, 6856=IGUR 1151)²⁰⁴. The stele, found in Rome, was probably part of a tombstone belonged to Amazaspus, king of Armenian Iberia, involved in Trajan's entourage during the eastern campaigns of 115-116 CE. On the row 5 is therefore readable "[...] *beyond the holy city of Nisibis, built by Nicator, on the Mygdonius River feeding olive trees*"²⁰⁵.

The mention of a fertile land confirmed by the other available sources where is clearly said that the boat-bridge used during the Trajan's campaigns was built using the wood of the forests surrounding Nisibis²⁰⁶. Mentions of the fertility of the area are also presents in Dio (XXXV, 5) and Ephrem (CN 9.4) where is said that the agricultural operations were made possible also by the accurate canal system of the area²⁰⁷. In later periods Nisibis is defined as "*the city with 40.000 gardens and larger than Mosul*"²⁰⁸.

4.2 Historical Background

The first attestations of the city are dated to the Assyrian period. In a tablet found in North Western palace at Nimrud the name **na-si-pi-na* appears on rows 21 and 22 in a list of Aramean tribes in the region²⁰⁹. In 896 BCE **na-si-pi-na* was besieged and

²⁰³ The annual rainfall ranges from 350 to 400 mm in Nusaybin area (WILKINSON 1994, 484; UR 2010, 10).

²⁰⁴ CANALI DE ROSSI (2004, 3). The inscription seems to be currently lost.

²⁰⁵ STURM 1936, 727; DILLEMANN 1962, 78 and n. 2; SHERK 1988, 173-4; BRAUND (1984, 48) writes that probably this was the tombstone of the prince *Amazaspus*, member of the royal family of Iberia. He was an ally of Trajan during the campaigns of 115-6 CE. The inscription testifies not only the death of the prince, but also that his grave was at Nisibis. The finding of the stele at Rome could be explained with the transport of the corpse after the end of the Parthian wars.

²⁰⁶ Many scholars have studied and discussed how the land and the climate conditions were different from nowadays in ancient Mesopotamia. It is a common opinion (UR 2010) that the climate became warmer in the first two centuries of our era, but it was still more humid and wet than the actual situation in the region. See also WILKINSON 2004, 14-17.

²⁰⁷ The role the canals played in agriculture in Northern Mesopotamia, especially during the Assyrian period, has been well discussed by OATES (1968) and RAEDE (1978), and more recently by UR (2010).

²⁰⁸ Yet in 1841 SOUTHGATE (1844, 119) describes, at the contrary, the poor health conditions of its inhabitants and the garbage everywhere in Nusaybin.

²⁰⁹ The city is mentioned regarding: "*117 persons under H[...]nu from Nasipina*". POSTGATE (2000, 101-102) suggested that in the tablet were listed different groups with Aramaean origins used in the army of Assur-nasi-apli. The missing name before *Nasipina* is thought to

occupied by the army of Adad-Nirari, who deported the local king Nur Adad to Ninive²¹⁰. From 9th to 7th cent. BCE is also dated the presence of Jews in the area, most of them coming from the nearby regions²¹¹.

During the Achaemenid period Nisibis was probably a nodal point and one of the major cities in the area²¹². The territorial division followed to the death of Alexander the Great brought the whole Mesopotamia, such as a large part of the Near East, under the Seleucid domination. The city was probably re-founded in this period,²¹³ with the name of *Antiochia in Mygdonia*, as many cities of the Near East were in the early Seleucid occupation, over all in the areas beyond the Euphrates where the settlements were small and scattered.²¹⁴ The re-foundation was probably not a *pro forma* foundation, such as the ones that interested several settlements in Seleucid West, but was much more related to an over-imposition of the Seleucid political power in these remote regions²¹⁵. From 27 BCE circa, moreover, the city became

be *Habinu*. The name could indicate, with some reserves, an Aramaean tribe settled in Upper Mesopotamia (for the Aramaeans in Nisibis region see over all: LIPINSKI 2000).

²¹⁰ In one of the Louvre's reliefs *na-si-pi-na* is mentioned as residence of an officer for the time 825-1 BCE during the reign of Shamash-Abua (GLASSNER 1993, text 9)

²¹¹ In ancient sources the city is said to be one of the sieges of the *temple tax* (Fl. Jos., *AJ*, 18. 311-312). In the passage the city is said to be on the Euphrates (like Nehardea, the other residence) and recently OPPENHEIMER (2005, 418) has suggested that we still have few evidences to know if the passage is talking about Nisibis in Mesopotamia or another settlement at the South. On the Jewish *diaspora* in Upper Mesopotamia and on its relations between Parthia and Rome see SARTRE (2001, 932-948). On the Jews at Nisibis during the Trajan's Parthian war see PUCCI (1981; 2005). On the Jews and their integration at Nisibis in 4th cent. CE see RUSSELL (2005, 29-60)

²¹² The name of the city in this period is, unfortunately, still unknown, but we can assume that it was of Semitic origin.

²¹³ App., *Sy.r.*, 57; Euseb, *Chron.*, I, 116-117 (ed. Schoene).

²¹⁴ Philostratus (1.20) writes that the Mesopotamian cities are in large part scattered villages and settled by Arabs. Pliny (6.30.117) mentions the scattered villages (*vicatim*) and Ammianus remembers how the Seleucid foundations in Mesopotamia changed the previous situation made of scattered and small villages (14.8.6). The goal of controlling the lands in Northern Syria was probably given to Nikanor after the battle of Ipsos, to secure the area between the East and the Tetrapolis region on the Mediterranean (CAPDETREY 2007, 75).

²¹⁵ Sartre 2001, 130-141. It is also possible that Seleucus implanted a small colony on the site, but the name "*Antiochia in Mygdonia*" must have been added later (CAPDETREY 2007, 74 and n. 139. see also Primo 2011, 1). As strongly pointed out by Capdetrey (2007, 73), the early foundations in Mesopotamia during the Seleucid period were just *katoikiai* (see the examples of Zeugma and Jebel Khalid). The Macedonian presence did not put on a second stage the *local* cultures as the return to the previous names after the abandonment of the *Greeks* seems to prove. The case of **na-si-pi-na / Antiochia / Nisibis* well testifies this dynamic. The change of name from *Nisibis* to *Antiochia in Mygdonia* occurred probably during the reign of Seleucus I (BOUSDROUKIS 2003, 12-13, and n. 10).

quite important and coins were struck at Nisibis²¹⁶. During the reign of Antiochos IV, moreover, the city obtained also the title of *polis*²¹⁷.

The name of the city should therefore recall the one of the King, while *Mygdonia* the one of the region in Macedonia from where the large part of settled soldiers came²¹⁸. On the origin of the name Mygdonia there is also a variant that recalls the Syriac word for “fruit” **mugda*, probably related to the high fertility of the region²¹⁹. Another hypothesis is strictly connected to the root **NSB* meaning also “*baetyl*” in Aramaic. In 129 BCE Arsaces VIII conquered the city and proclaimed his brother Valashark (Valarsaces) as the local ruler. Nisibis was therefore made capital of the province²²⁰. A single cuneiform document proves that Nisibis was under parthian

²¹⁶ The high population density of the region could be a clue for a so large coins production, although it is also possible that the coins struck at Nisibis served a broader area, specially the middle Euphrates regions (APERGHIS 2004, 219 and, previously, BIKERMAN 1938, 214). It is also interesting to note the presence of gold coins at Nisibis during the reign of Antiochos III I (the same event is verifiable also at Seleucia on the Tigris and Susa). The production could be associated with the salaries of the soldiers located in the region. The salaries probably came from the sack of temple of Aines (Polybe 10.27.13), but they could be also view as a clue for the new commercial appeal of the whole Mesopotamian area.

²¹⁷ In a Pliny’s passage (*NH*, VI, 26), Nicanor, governor of Mesopotamia, is pointed out as the founder of a settlement called *Antiochia Mygdoniae* (the general is said to be a *dux Mesopotamiae*). On the “Nicanor” founder of cities, interpreted as Seleucus, see over all Primo 2011. The “double-identification” of *Nikanor* and *Nikator* with Seleucus, propose by Primo seems to be quite weak over all in relation with the dynamics at the basis of the foundation of Dura. The passage of Pliny seems to be, by the way, contradicted by the mentioned epigraphic text (CIG IV, 6856, cf. above), in which is written “[...] beyond the holy cities, built by Nicator[...]”. Nicator was the Seleucus I who probably founded (or re-founded symbolically) the city around the 302 BCE. TSCHERIKOWER (1927, 80) suggested that the *Antiochia Arabis* mentioned by Pliny could be identified with Nisibis (called so before the reign of Antiochos IV). DILLEMANN (1962, 78) endorses the Pliny’s narration writing that *Antiochia Arabis* could be identified with *Costantina* (modern Viransehir, Turkey, see below). Recently LIEU (2006, 2) has suggested that the change of name at Nisibis could have been happened during a later re-foundation under Antiochos IV (see also CAPDETREY 2007, 74).

²¹⁸ Strab. 16, 1, 23 mentions the Mygdonia as the largest area in Mesopotamia. Apart of the account of in Strabo, only an inscription from Delos (dated back to the period of Demetrios I or Demetrios III mentions the existence of the *Mygdonia* (ID 15, 1, 2). The adoption of the Macedonian name could recall the institution of a Seleucid district in this region since the first half of the 3rd cent. BCE (CAPDETREY 2007, 251). A passage in Plutarch (*Lucullus* 32.6) confirms instead a Spartan origin for the soldiers settled at Nisibis after the Seleucid conquest.

²¹⁹ This theory is based on a sentence mentioned by the anonym author of *Chronichon* of Khuzestan (GUIDI 1903, 15-32) and has been more recently proposed also by PIGULEVSKAJA (1963) and RUSSELL (2005, 12).

²²⁰ DIO (36.6.2).

influence in 112 BCE²²¹. Since the early 1st cent. BCE, Nisibis, as the whole surrounding area, is in the political sphere of the kingdom of Tigranes the Great (100-56 BCE). In summer of 68 BCE Lucullus besieged and conquered Nisibis that will be his headquarter for the next two years.²²² A gap in the documentary sources does not provide us much data about the passage between the 1st BCE and the 1st CE, but a mention in Flavius Josephus (*AJ*, 20.3.68) remembers that the city, in 36 CE, was under Parthian control and then was given by Artabanus IV to Izates, king of Adiabene, in change of his loyalty²²³.

The very first tentative of conquest of Rome in the area is dated back to the reign of Nero. The only reference to the town is in Tacitus (*Ann.*, 15.5) where is said that the centurion Casperius was sent by Corbulo in embassy to the king Vologaeses who stationed at Nisibis, defined “*a city in Adiabene*”²²⁴.

At the end of the summer of 114, Nisibis was conquered by Trajan’s army. This seems to confirm that the city was in the Parthian political sphere, at least since after the campaigns of Corbulo²²⁵.

The event related to the campaigns of Trajan reveal that the political will of Rome was mainly to control the territories around Nisibis. Although few literary sources mention the creation of a “province” at this time²²⁶, it is interesting to note that probably in these years an organization (albeit not completed) started to be set up in

²²¹ KESSLER 2000, 962.

²²² Plutarch 32.4 and Dio 36.6-8. The brevity of the roman occupation, in these years, seems to be a widely accepted *datum* (1936, 730) and PIGULEVSKAJA (1963, 50).

²²³ EDWELL 2008, 12. Nisibis so became a city in the kingdom of Adiabene, vassal state of the Parthian empire, together with other important cities in the region such as Hatra and Singara (LIGHTFOOT 1990, 118).

²²⁴ The lack of any clue about Nisibis in these events must be related probably to the secondary role the whole Mesopotamian plateau played in the campaigns of Corbulo, mainly focused on Armenia and Upper Taurus.

²²⁵ Dio 68.17.1-3. According to his account (68.18.3) at the end of the military operations just the three large cities of the region were in Roman hands (Edessa, Nisibis and, less probably, Hatra), while the rest of the area was not so well controlled by Rome. Also the town of *Adenystrae* (still not located, see GREGORY and KENNEDY 1985: 399), was conquered by the army of Lusius Quietus (68.22).

²²⁶ Eutr. 8.3.2; 6.2.; Festus. 14, 20. Both authors talk about provinces of *Assyria*, *Armenia* e *Mesopotamia*. For the discussion about it see specially ANGELI-BETINELLI 1976. Dillemann (1962, 117) and ANGELI-BERTINELLI (1976, 20) writes that given the actual evidences is quite hard to determine the organization and the socio-political aspects of the new acquired territories.

the region, as the milestone, found at Karsi (along the road between Nisibis and Singara, on the Jebel Sinjar) now lost, testifies²²⁷.

The Roman presence in the town was probably relatively short. Nisibis was, indeed, besieged and caught by Roman Army again during the Parthian campaigns of Lucius Verus (163-165 CE)²²⁸. In consequence of these events some garrisons have been probably stationed in the city and surrounding area, since during the Parthian wars of Septimius Severus, Roman troops were yet at Nisibis²²⁹.

In the last years of the 3rd century CE, indeed, Parthian armies, coming from *Osrhoene*, *Adiabaene* and some Arab tribes (probably from Hatra), besieged the city without success. The capture of Nisibis had been avoided by the Roman troops led by Iulius Laetus²³⁰.

It is therefore likely that the town was in Roman hands in this period and that it never returned, probably, to the Parthian empire since the campaigns of Verus. In a moment, almost certainly not later than 198 CE, the city was made *colonia*, with the name of *Septimia Colonia Nesibis*, in consequence of its loyalty to Septimius Severus²³¹. After the second military campaign (199 CE), Septimius Severus created the *provincia Mesopotamia*, with Nisibis as capital. The city, in this moment,

²²⁷ On the milestones see also p. 41-43 in this research. The “great amount of “roman pottery”, as mentioned by LIGHTFOOT (1990, 123-124) to spot a “real” Roman presence in the area must be actually revisited. The “local” nature of the pottery in the excavated sites, together with few examples of real “roman” pottery must be seen as a clue of a light control by Roman troops.

²²⁸ A passage in Lucian (*Hist. Conscr.*, 15) reminds, moreover, that Nisibis was affected by a terrible plague during the siege. For the campaigns of Lucius Verus see, in general, MILLAR 1993: 111-114.

²²⁹ MILLAR 1993, 114. The troops were probably used to patrol the area and the road that from Edessa led to Tigris River via Singara (MILLAR 1993, 114). These theories have been recently endorsed also by BUTCHER (2003, 48) and EDWELL (2008, 24).

²³⁰ Cassius Dio 75.6-1-3, and also HA *Severus* 15, 2-3. See also SOUTHERN 2007, 319. The presence of *Osrhoeni* and *Adiabaeni* suggests, according to ROSS (2001, 47), that these populations were in support of Pescennius Niger and that Nisibis and its population endorsed at the contrary Septimius Severus.

²³¹ Nisibis is said to be “roman” at the end of the 3rd century CE. Rhesaina, modern Ras el-Ain (*Septimia Rhesaina*) and probably Singara, modern Sinjar (*Aurelia Septimia Singara*) were also made *coloniae*. On the creation of Roman colonies during the Severian period in Mesopotamia see overall: OATES 1968, 62-68; MILLAR 1990, 38-39 and 1993, 124-126; POLLARD 2000, 120-122; EDWELL 2008, 24-26. Several later coins bear the legend CEP. KOL. NECIBH (BMC 4), with the addition of MHT (*metropolis*) after Philip’s reign (BMC 21).

probably hosted also the *Legio I Parthica*, one of the three legions created by the emperor just for the Parthian war²³².

A clue for the presence of the *Legio I Parthica* at Nisibis, in consequence of the campaigns of Septimius Severus, is provided by a mention of the city in one the *papyri* from the Euphrates valley. In *P.Euphr.* 9, indeed, in a sale contract from the town of *Beth Phouraia* is mentioned a certain *Aurelios Oua [-]*, centurion of the *I Parthica* in 252 CE (οίκουσα δέ ἐν Νεσιβειν, συνπαρόωτος αὐτῆ Αὐρ(ηλίου) Οὐα-λεγ(εώνος) α Π(αρθικῆς) (ἐκατοντάρχου) πριμοπίλου ἄνδρος αὐτής)²³³. The only other source that seems to confirm the presence of a legion at Nisibis is, anyway, the *Notitia Dignitatum* (*Not. Dig. Or.* 26.29), while the same legion, called *Antoniniana*, is certainly located at Singara during the campaigns of Julian (*Amm. Marc.* 20.6.8)²³⁴. The problem of the *double location* is solved considering that the presence of the Roman legion at Nisibis during the 4th cent. CE (as testified by the *Notitia Dignitatum*) has to be viewed as a shift of stationing during that period in consequence of the capture of Singara by the Sasanians and the re-organization of the frontier. After the death of Caracalla, Opellius Macrinus, praetorian prefect, and his successor was defeated by Artabanus IV in a crucial battle at Nisibis²³⁵. The battle between Macrinus and Artabanus IV was also the last struggle Rome had with the

²³² The *Legio I Parthica* was initially stationed at Singara while the *Legio II Parthica* was in Italy (*Albanum*, Albano Laziale), and the *III Parthica* at Rhesaina, see Edwell 2008, 28. All the three legions were probably created before the departure from Rome and specifically for the war (maybe one for the first campaign and the others for the next). According to David KENNEDY (1987, 59) the legions were probably created between the first and the second campaign, and were stationed there to patrol the newly conquered territories (KENNEDY 1987, 59). It is more likely, anyway, that the legions have been created by Septimius before the campaigns and in order to achieve a sudden victory (EDWELL 2008, 216 and n. 122). The presence of two legions, in a so small area, should be seen as a further clue of the Rome's will of gaining and controlling a strategic and relevant area. A recent discovered inscription in Turkey seems to be related to a soldier of the II Parthica (STAUNER & STAUNER 2012, 86-91).

²³³ It has been suggested (FEISSEL & GASCOU 1997, 41) that the centurion probably retired at Nisibis after having been stationed at Singara. It is possible that at least a part of the legio was moved at Nisibis from Singara. Anyway the issue is not easily solvable. The presence of the legion at Singara is recorded also on an undated inscription from Aphrodisias in Caria (*BCH IX*, 1885, 81 and DESSAU 9477 and cf. *Amm. Marc.* 20.6.8).

²³⁴ The appellative *Antoniniana* is a further clue for the chronology of the legion itself. It must have been created by the emperor before the 211 CE. The *Notitia* mentions also the epithet *Nisibena*, probably in relation to the strong defence of the city during the three sieges of the 4th century CE (see LIGHTFOOT 1990, 109).

²³⁵ Dio 74.26. In Dio's account it is said that the early skirmishes were started due to water problems. This passage could therefore confirm that the river was outside the city.

Parthians. In the first quarter of the 3rd cent. CE the Arsacid dynasty was defeated and depowered by the Sasanian dynasty (Shahansha) led by Ardashir I²³⁶. In 230 CE Ardashir I besieges Nisibis, which however was successfully defended by Roman troops led by Severus Alexander. After this victory the new emperor added the title *metropolis* to the official name of Nisibis (*Septimia Colonia Nesibis Metropolis*). The first coins with the new name are dated back to 230 CE. During the reign of Maximinus the city was taken by the Persians and re-captured by Rome under Gordianus III (238-244 CE). The emperor, after a victorious battle against Shapur I at Rhesaina in 243 CE, conquered Nisibis and probably Singara. After the death of Gordianus III, Philip the Arab negotiates a peace-treat with Shapur I and obtains from Persia the whole Upper Mesopotamia and Nisibis. Now the name of the city bears also the title *Iulia* (in honour of the emperor, *Iulius Philippus*)²³⁷. The *Historia Augusta* mentions a re-conquest of the city with Odenathus during the reign of Gallienus, together with Carrae and the all Upper Mesopotamia²³⁸.

Nisibis was almost certainly taken, again, by the armies of Narsē I and re-conquered again in 298 by Diocletian. In this period the city flourished and became the only commercial port between the two empires also thanks to a peace treaty (lasted up to 337 CE).

Following the end of this treaty the city was probably the siege of the *dux Mesopotamiae*, and the collecting point for the army under the leading role of the *magister militum per Orientem*. In the years between 337 and 350 CE Nisibis was besieged several times by the Persians. In consequence of the three sieges and the resistance proved by Nisibis, the city was called at that time *Orientis firmissimum claustrum* (Amm. Marc. 25.8.14). In the following years the city appears to be in Roman hands and was not touched the march of Shapur III toward Amida in 359 CE. Few years later, anyway, the city was included in the peace-treat signed after the death of Julian, which included the restitution to the Persians of the whole Upper Mesopotamia and Nisibis and Singara. This happened on 25 August 363 CE.

²³⁶ Zonaras 12.15. BUTCHER (2003, 51) proposes 224 CE as the passage year, upon the basis of a relief in Firuzabad in which are clearly recognizable the Persian horsemen that lead in chains the Arsacid enemies.

²³⁷ It's quite interesting to notice that Nisibis does not appear in the list of cities conquered during the second and third campaign of Shapur I remembered on the *SKZ*.

²³⁸ HA, *Gall.* 10.3 and 12.

4.3 The Archaeological Context and the Support of the Satellite Imagery

The peculiar location of the ancient city of Nisibis, indeed, nowadays close to the modern border between Syria and Turkey, has forbidden in the recent years extensive archaeological investigations and the few remains of the ancient settlement are practically unrecognizable in the modern Nusaybin (Turkey) and Al-Qamishli (Syria) layouts²³⁹. No systematic archaeological investigations has been carried out in both modern centres and the only way to retrieve more detailed information about the ancient city lies in the analysis of coins legends, comparative studies, early 20th century aerial photo and modern satellite imagery.

The city was known anyway, in the ancient sources, for its defensive walls, which the only *real* evidence is the representation, although probably standardized, on one of the panels of the arch of Septimius Severus in Rome (see Fig. 8)²⁴⁰. They were double-curtain wall, with towers, and a ditch separated them from the surrounding plain. As remembered by Cassius Dio, the soldiers of Lucullus were astonished by the impressive defensive walls of the city, meaning that a fortification system had to exist since the 1st century BCE. An aerial view of Qamishli area in 1932 (Fig. 2) shows the gap between the modern centres of Al-Qamishli and Nusaybin.

²³⁹ The most important one is the still standing baptistery in Nusaybin. This is the baptistery (heavily modified during the centuries) with the tomb of St. Jacob. The early construction phase of the building is dated back to 359 CE under the guidance of the bishop Vologaeses and it was modified twice, during the 7th cent. CE and at the end of 18th century. The baptistery was built on a central quadrangular main structure with a pyramidal roof. A reconstruction provided by SARRE and HERTZFELD (in KRATCHATRIAN 1954) shows how the main building was surrounded by a *pronaos* with columns. The structure is nowadays partially enclosed in other religious buildings in Nusaybin historical centre (on the archeological remains previous to the 7th century see below).

²⁴⁰ The walls are described as a double curtain system, although the inner wall was less efficient than the outer one. Dio (35.7) and Ammianus describe the massive walls (25.8.14 and 9.1) and the latter refers to an *arx* where a flag was placed after the conquest of the city in 363.



Fig. 7. Aerial view of the Qamishli-Nusaybin area in 1932 from South. Nusaybin lies in the background, while the newly born centre of Al-Qamishli in the foreground. Between them the hill of Dharhet al-Khazna (A) and the small mounds of the probable ancient towers of the city (T). (© Aviation du Levant. After Dillemann 1962, 80, modified).

Although no archaeological trace of the fortification walls has been found to determine its layout and typology, a preliminary tentative of reconstruction of the circuit could be done starting from the analogies with the preserved walls of other Mesopotamian cities in that period: Rhesaina and Singara. At Singara, indeed, the walls, made out of large stones, fired bricks and rubble mortar core have several U-Shaped towers. They have multiple rooms and two storeys. The whole curtain had also two main entrance gates. These gates are quite similar, in typology, to the gate represented in the *adlocutio* scene (*see above*) at Nisibis on the arch of Septimius Severus at Rome. At Tell Fekheryie (ancient *Rhesaina*, modern Ras el-Ain, *see p.* 122-128 in this work) a series of U-shaped guard-towers and pieces of defensive walls have been revealed during the excavations carried out in late '50s (McEwan 1958) and partially re-excavated in last years (Pruss-Bagdo 2002, 311-329). Both Singara and Resaina have been, as said, siege of a legion, together with Nisibis, during the Severian period. Summing up it is interesting to suppose that the walls and towers of Singara (Oates 1968) may be similar to the ones Nisibis had, due mainly to the similar role both city played in the region in a given span of time. A mention in Ammianus (XX, 6, 3-7) refers to the wall of Singara as destroyed by rams

during the siege of 360. At Nisibis the defensive walls were yet in use during the Severian campaigns. The representation of the city in the Arch of Severus in Rome shows a huge fortification and a single U-shaped tower. The debate upon the use of the U-Shaped towers, therefore, is still active. In the so-called *playing card* forts, there is no trace of such towers, while they are quite frequent in *later* periods. At Lejjun, in example, in central Jordan, the archaeological works conducted upon the U-shaped towers of the forts have clearly stated their *later* chronology²⁴¹. It is possible however, that the defensive system had several phases, and was rebuilt, transformed and modified through time.

The images of the CORONA project, in example, provide us a series of useful *data* on the whole region before the development of the modern urban layouts²⁴². The observation and the study of the satellite images shows interesting *data* that need to be explained and proved by a further investigation on the field. Images taken by the US satellites before the intensive urban development across the Syro-Turkish border let us have a brighter view of the Nisibis/Al-Qamishli area than the modern images. The contrast between the situation in the area in 1960s and the same zone nowadays is very impressive (Fig. 3). In the image of December 1967 (Fig. 4) the white areas around the modern centre of Nusaybin (primarily south and East) and along the modern border, represent the anthropogenic soil. The colour of the soil (brighter than the surrounding area), indeed, probably reflects the ancient southern layout of the site, because of the highly intensive anthropic events.

The river Jaghjagh flew along the eastern limits of the city, while the South-Western corner, occupied by a low *tell* (locally known as Tell Badan), is nowadays in Syrian territory, just across the modern border. The *tell* could be interpreted as the early settlement of the site, dated to the mid-Bronze Age. The red line in the image is supposed to be the southern extension of the ancient Nisibis, primarily based on the different colour soils and visible traces. As said, the *no man's land*, is clearly featured by many holes, signs and traces of anomalies, almost certainly related to an ancient anthropic action as well as traces of later periods hollow ways. In the Nusaybin area

²⁴¹ It has been noted also how the evolution from this kind of fort toward the medieval *kahns* is quite immediate in the Near Eastern regions (PARKER and BETLYON 2007, 209-211). According to Parker the chronology is dated back to the Tetrarchic period and it must have been influenced by city fortification or by Parthian/Persian stone-works.

²⁴² CORONA images are part of a now declassified project of the US government developed during the cold war. On the use of these images in archaeological contexts see UR 2003 and UR 2010. See also below, paragraph 8.7.

images some of these hollow ways are clearly recognizable and can be put in relation with the city itself. Although only a field survey can prove the existence or not of such tracks, on the basis of the satellite images and the colours featured in the fields surrounding the settlement one may try to draft up a partial road-network system arriving to and departing from Nisibis (Fig. 5).



Fig. 8. Ancient track visible from the CORONA image (December 1967, Mission 1102, © University of Arkansas). The yellow lines represent the hypothesis of inner and outer tracks on the basis of the visible traces in the photographs. The red line could indicate the southern limits of the supposed fortification.

Few archaeological remains are still visible in the modern centre of Nusaybin, while in the *no man's land* between Syria and Turkey nowadays there are five columns (Fig. 6) partially hidden in the soil, with Corinthian capitals²⁴³. There is no further cue for the identification of the structure the columns belonged to. It is neither certain if they are part of a sacred complex or rather a public structure. A temple with four columns on the facade is by the way recognizable also on some coins dated back to the period of Philip the Arab (Fig. 7). The tetrastyle temple, with a pediment and a central arch, has four fluted columns and a statue of the *Tyche* is visible through the entrance. In both the specimens from the British Museum, the Goddess is seated upon a representation of a river-god, probably the *Mygdonius*. A similar temple is also visible on a relief of the Arch of Septimius Severus at Rome²⁴⁴.

²⁴³ See also DILLEMANN 1962, 81-2.

²⁴⁴ BRILLIANT 1966.



Fig. 9. The columns in the "no man's land" between Syria and Turkey, from the North (personal photo). They belong probably to an unknown temple. It is also interesting to note the huge amount of potsherds in the foreground field.

Furthermore, a local tradition, reminds that the columns probably were the entrance of the school of Nisibis, but there is no additional clue about it.



Fig. 10. Two *denarii* dated to the period of Philip the Arab with the representation of the Temple (Tycheaion ?) at Nisibis (a: BMC 21. b: BMC 22).

If one gives a look to the modern satellite images it turns out that traces of anthropic soils lie between the two modern centres, immediately east of the columns mentioned above (Fig. 9). The area between the two modern frontiers is, unfortunately, land-mined and thus no archaeological work has been conducted there so far. From the satellite image the columns are well recognizable, as well as a series of alignments (yellow lines) which could represent a series of probable emerging old structures. In addition, the whole area east of the columns and toward the Jaghjagh seems to be featured by several other anomalies.



Fig. 11. The area of Nusaybin/Al-Qamishli as seen through a CORONA images (December 1967 / © Centre for Advanced Spatial Studies / University of Arkansas). The letter A indicated the remains of the Mar Yacoub church in the historical centre of Nusaybin. The letter B shows the position of the columns in the frontier area. The eastern part (letter C) represents one of the area where field anomalies are recognizable.

In Al-Qamishli area, which is supposed to be an *extra-moenia* zone, few objects have been recovered in the past century, mainly in the area of the *dharet al-khazna*, a hill once occupied by the French Post Office during the mandate²⁴⁵. Here in 1937, a basaltic statue has been discovered²⁴⁶. The statue, headless, has been interpreted as a

²⁴⁵ DILLEMANN (1962, 80) also reports that some broken *sarcophagi* with few associated materials have been found on this hill.

²⁴⁶ PARROT 1939, 21-22, a three side view photo is at page 20.

Hermes and approximately dated "*à la période romaine*". The statue does not find any parallel in the whole upper Mesopotamia, albeit it shows stylistic features that are clearly older than the proposed chronology. At the contrary, the standing figures and the heaviness of the body resemble more an Assyrian style. It is possible that the statue, dated to the Assyrian period, was modified and re-used in later periods, as often happened.

On the same hill, in 1955, a coins hoard was also found²⁴⁷. The hoard was composed by 624 bronze coins of various provenance and chronology. They are all comprised between the 140 BCE and 31 BCE and a large part of them are dated to a period stretching from 84 and 52 BCE (385 specimens, 214 from Antioch and 171 without any indication of provenance, but related to the reigns of Seleucus IV and Antiochos XIII). Among them, the most recent coin comes from the mint of Seleucia on the Tigris and it is dated to 31 BCE. One of the problems related to the hoard is the definition itself. Although Nisibis was part of the Armenian realm from 85 to 36 BCE, just few Armenian coins are present in the hoard (11 coins dated back to the period of Tigranes the Great). It is therefore possible that the hoard was an old treasure of ancient Seleucid coins (and of western cities) and that the coins from Antioch were brought at Nisibis, as Seyrig states hazardously, by Pacorus or by Parthian dignitaries following the expedition toward the coasts of the Mediterranean sea (and the battle of Carrhae). This suggestive hypothesis, although without real evidence, could mean that the Parthians reached Nisibis after Carrhae. Two reliefs, moreover, come from the same area. One is a funerary stele belonging to a child, *Loukios*, which bears the image of the little child and on the sides two hands with the inner part visible. Below the image, in a lower frame, a Greek epitaph (in hexametres) mentions the cult of the Sun God. This epigraphic evidence confirms the diffusion of the Sun-God cult in Upper Mesopotamia, and a similar motive is present also on steles from Baalbek, Palmyra and Antioch²⁴⁸. The second *stèle* is quadrangular limestone slab with a central epigraph framed on both sides²⁴⁹. The epitaph remembers a woman, *Domnina*, who died at 45. The stele was offered by her husband *Lucius Saturninus* from *Ammedara* (nowadays Haidra, in Tunisia). The man appears as a soldier of the *Legio I Minerva* in another stele found near Düsseldorf²⁵⁰. The legion took part in two campaigns in Upper Mesopotamia during the period of

²⁴⁷ SEYRIG 1955, 85-128.

²⁴⁸ DILLEMANN 1962, plate 8.

²⁴⁹ GATIER 1988, 227-229.

²⁵⁰ *CIL* XIII, 8033. ALFÖLDY 1988, 220.

Lucius Verus and Alexander Severus and it is highly probable that the soldier was at Nisibis during that campaigns. The stele is dated to a period between the 2nd and the 3rd century CE, albeit the lower chronology seems to be more accurate. The inscriptions could resemble the one that appears on the *Loukios* stele too. The stele of *Domnina* lacks of the upper part, albeit, is still visible over the frame a probable feminine bust. It is possible furthermore that the stele of *Domnina* was (such as the one of *Loukios*) enriched with religious and symbolic representations. The only surviving building of the ancient Nisibis is, therefore, the Baptistery of Mar Jacob, or Mar Yacoub, (bishop of the city in the period 309-338 CE), in the historical centre of Nusaybin. The baptistery was added to the local church previously built up by Jacob himself in the years 320s CE. The building has been extensively studied by Sarre and Herzfeld (1920), Krathcatrian (1954) and Falla-Castelfranchi (1990) and the chronology is well known because of the inscription on the architrave remembering the bishop Vologaeses who erected the baptistery in 359 CE: *This baptistery was erected and completed in the year 671 in the time of Bishop Volageses through the zeal of the priest Akepsimas. My this inscription be a memorial of them*²⁵¹. The use of the Greek, instead of the Syriac, may also underline that he bishop, as well as his entourage were probably more fluent in a language more than the other.



²⁵¹ SARRE & HERZFELD 1911, 337.

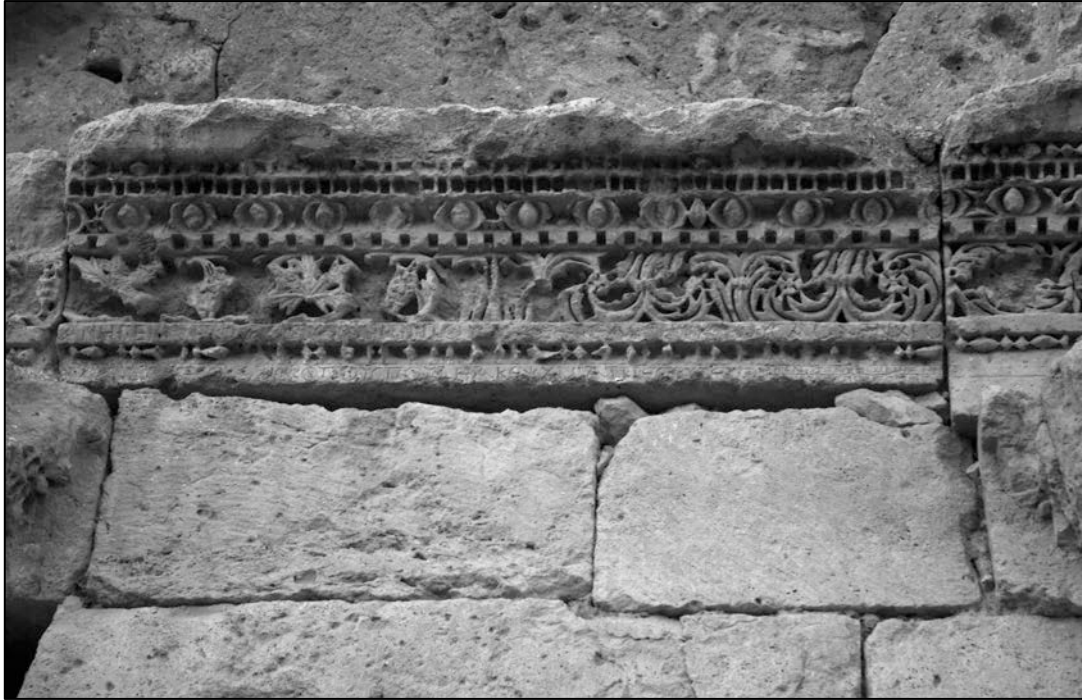


Fig. 12: view of the baptistery in the modern centre of Nusaybin with the close-up of the inscription between the two front doors (© IFPO / Justine Gaborit).

At the moment of writing this section of the work, the area of the Baptistery, in the historical centre of Nusaybin, is undergoing a series of excavations and take-over projects in order to provide more *data* about the pre-4th century settlement²⁵².

4.4 Conclusions

The archaeological context of the city is far to be known, and the accounts of the sieges, the battles and the life in the ancient times are the only *data* we have about the capital of the *provincia Mesopotamia*. The importance of the site is doubtless, being it a crucial and nodal crossing point in Upper Mesopotamia and the whole Roman Near East. The mentions of Nisibis both on the Table of Peutinger and Ptolemy's Geography confirm the importance of the settlement in the area, as well as its strategic importance in the military operations

However, the relation between the legionary presence and the civilian settlement has not been well cleared with the few archaeological data and literary sources and also

²⁵² I would like to thank here Justine Gaborit who very kindly gave me some recent and interesting photos of the inscription of the baptistery. The on-going project directed by her and the members of the IFPO will certainly provide the scholar community of more data about the city.

the locations of the military structures is not so sure, but Nisibis was surely the highest point of a triangle together with Rhesaina and Singara, all legionary fortresses starting since the end of 3rd century CE, with the particular aim to control the region and support the Roman presence on the eastern frontier on the Tigris (at least for the period late 3rd / mid-4th century). At Nisibis however, the lack of archaeological works represents a real negative situation, hoping to be temporary in order to have a slightly better knowledge of the city and its history.

CHAPTER 5

SINGARA: A ROMAN FORTRESS IN NORTHERN IRAQ

5.1 Introduction

Among the several cities completely ignored by the ancient sources and archaeologically unknown as well, Singara represents a sort of exception. The site, indeed, has been widely mentioned by ancient authors and the excavations carried out in late 1950s have permitted to obtain a larger view of a fortress town in Upper Mesopotamia, which was directly involved in the events that went over in the region since the Trajan's period.

5.2 Geography and location

The modern site of Singara (36.328178 N / 41.855121 E) lies within the limit of the Iraqi village of Beled Sinjar (*beled* = arabic for "town, city"), in the province of Nineveh, not far from Tell Afar, at the foothills of Jebel Sinjar, quite close to the modern Syrian-Iraqi border²⁵³. Some of the ancient remains of the city are nowadays visible in the modern layout of the village. The geographic environment where Singara is located can be classified as *steppe-desert* and the city is just below the 250mm line of rainfall per year. Apparently no important stream or *wadi* is present in the area, albeit one cannot exclude that seasonal streams were present in the proximity of the city in ancient times. Like *Resaina* also Singara was located in one of those "*major channels*" whose geographical and environmental factors favoured both trade and the movement of troops²⁵⁴. The city was an important nodal point also because of its position along the network of routes from Antioch to Palmyra (via Apamea and Emesa) and then up to the Euphrates-Ḥabur line toward *Circesiums* and Dura Europos. The route then followed the Ḥabur northward before arriving at the confluence with the *wadi* Jaghjagh/Radd and split itself in two branches, the northern

²⁵³ The site is located at 36.326017 N and 41.858726 E, along a modern road from the border with Syria to Tell Afar.

²⁵⁴ STOLL 2009, 252.

one leading to Nisibis, the eastern one to Singara, Ain Sinu and then Hatra. The current city is linked to Tell Afar eastward by a modern asphalt road²⁵⁵, while scattered paths crossing the Jebel Sinjar still arrive at Singara from north/north-west.

5.3 History and Events

The site is one of considerable antiquity and it is also mentioned in the Assyrian lists, but no archaeological trace of a pre-classical occupation has been identified at Singara. A Bronze Age and older occupation of the area is, anyway, proved by the several tells widespread nearby Singara. On the other side Singara is mentioned several times in the ancient Latin and Greek sources and gained a significant importance during the Severian period when it hosted an entire Roman legion, making Singara one of the most strategic Roman fortresses in Mesopotamia. One of the earliest mentions of the city is in Pliny (*NH*, V, 21). Here Singara is said to be the capital of an Arab tribe, the *Praetavi*. Retsö (2003, 415) has pointed out that probably the *Praetavi* must be identified with another tribe called *Eldamari* by Iuba. The name *Pratevavi* by the way is quite significant from a linguistic point of view, having, indeed, the part *-tav*, related to the word *tayenoi* or *tayyaye* which according to Retsö (2003, 415) refer to a specific group of people who lived in the Syrian desert and western Adiabene according to 3rd century CE sources²⁵⁶. Singara was taken during the campaigns of Trajan by Lusius Quietus, without particular difficulties according to the sources (Dio Cassius 68.22-23.1-2, see chapter 2.3.1, p. 43-45 in this work), while it was ruled by Ma'nu who easily surrendered to the Roman Army. The city soon became a bullwark of the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire becoming a *colonia* with the name of *Aurelia Septimia Singara*²⁵⁷ at the end of the 3rd century CE. The establishment of a Roman legion in the area of Singara is also dated to the Severian campaigns against the Parthians (195-197/8 CE) when the political control of the surrounding zones was achieved. The presence of a *procurator* in Osrhoene (*Caius Iulius Pacatianus*, 195 CE)²⁵⁸ and of a *Praefectus* in the newly formed *provincia*

²⁵⁵ This road follows the ancient route that reached the Tigris through Singara passing below the Jebel Sinjar.

²⁵⁶ On the role of the Arab tribes in the region see below, paragraph 9.2.

²⁵⁷ The name *Aurelia* also suggests that probably a particular status was achieved by the city already during the mid 2nd century CE, after the campaign of Lucius Verus in the area. MILLAR 1990, 38-39 and 1993, 124-126; POLLARD 2000, 120-122; EDWELL 2008, 24-26

²⁵⁸ AE 1984, 919. MILLAR 1993b: 125; ROSS 2001, *passim*; SARTRE 2001, 617.

Mesopotamia (Tiberius Claudius Subatianus Aquila) certainly made the area safe for the movements of troops²⁵⁹. However the historical issue about the effective presence of a roman legion in the city still represents a matter of discussion to be deepened. As already seen, the creation of the Severian legion in late II century CE brought Rome to have a considerable force in the area. The account of Dio remembers the presence of the legions III Parthica at Rhesaina, while the I Parthica was probably stationed at Singara as an inscription from Aphrodisias in Caria seems to confirm (ILS 9477) where is also said that the city was "close to the Tigris"²⁶⁰. The geographical mistake (the river Tigris is more than 50 miles eastward) must be considered as a known place to indicate a remote region or as to identifying the all *Tigritana* region where Singara effectively was. This permits to date the inscription (and the presence of the milita detachment at Singara) in the period 198-217 CE when the whole area constituted the eastern limit of the empire that reached the western bank of the Tigris (cf. chapter on Seh Qubba in this work, *infra*). However the legion seems to have had his headquarter in the city in the 360s as it appears from the account of Ammianus Marcellinus (XX, 6, 8)²⁶¹.

Those data lead to consider that the presence of the legion at Singara lasted for circa 150 years. The presence of a legion for a similar time in a civilian settlement is only attested at Bostra, the capital of the *provincia Arabia*, where the *Legio III Cyrenaica* is attested (mainly by the numismatic evidence) in the period comprised between the mid II century CE up to the 60s of the 3rd century CE (Stoll 2003: 74; 81). The soldiers stationed at Singara (as well as the ones at Rhesaina) they all came probably from Asia Minor (mainly related to logistic and geographic considerations) as several inscription from *Bythinia*,²⁶² *Isauria*,²⁶³ *Pisidia*, *Galatia*,²⁶⁴ *Cappadocia*, *Paphlagonia* or *Cilicia* confirm. A veteran of the *I Parthica*, *B. Aurelius Kornous* (IGR III 479) came from *Pamphylia* and an unknown soldier (*III Parthica*, IGR III, 814) from *Cilicia* too. Another veteran at Singara, instead, *C. Lucius Marcellus*, is remembered in an inscription from Hippos (Decapolis area)²⁶⁵.

²⁵⁹ AE 1969/1970, 109; AE 1985, 829; KENNEDY 1979, 255-262.

²⁶⁰ Stoll (2009, 268) complains the fact that the presence of a legion at Singara during the Severian period is confirmed only by an inscription without any coin legend to prove it.

²⁶¹ Later the *I Parthica* is attested by the *Notitia Dignitatum* at Nisibis (*Not. Dig. Or.* 36.29).

²⁶² A *speculator* of the *III Parthica* came from Nicomedia: CIL IV 36775; ILS 484 (in Rome).

²⁶³ A soldier of the *III Parthica* (Fitz 1983, 118).

²⁶⁴ A veteran of the *I Parthica* named Nicetes, from *Ancyra* (AE 1981, 784).

²⁶⁵ SEYRIG 1950, 247, nr. 7.

Starting from the late severian period the city also struck coins, an evidence which brought David Oates to sustain some preliminary remarks about the effective life of the city as a *Roman* post in Northern Iraq. According to Oates, indeed, the presence of coins dated back to Gordian III period, found among the debris of the city walls, should constitute a definitive clue for the siege the Persians laid to Singara during the expeditions of Shapur I²⁶⁶. The city, moreover, seems to have been conquered by the Persians in late 60s of the 3rd century and reconquered by Carus in 283 (Oates 1968, 99). Singara was lost along with Nisibis, Resaina and the small fort of Ain Sinu (Zaguræ) soon after the fall of Hatra by the hands of the Sasanians. This event, indeed, must have marked the final stage of the conquest of the whole Upper Mesopotamia for the Persians.

The conquest of Singara, in addition, is also testified by the complete suspension of minting during the reign of Maximinus Thrax (253-258). The importance of Singara in the region is underlined also by the precise will of Shapur II in 361-2 of conquering the city without set up a large scale conquest of the Upper Mesopotamia. The end of Singara as a Roman legionary fortress begun during the reign of Constantius II (337-361 CE) when the city was involved in the campaigns of Shapur II (337-363). Festus (ch. 27) writes about the siege of Singara (probably in the 344) mentioning also the presence of the emperor himself on the defensive walls. Eventually in 359 CE Singara hosted two legions (*I Parthica* and *Legio Prima Flavia Constantia*) when the final siege took part. Many soldiers were killed and others deported in Persia²⁶⁷.

The account of Ammianus (XXV, 7, 13) reports also the humiliating way the Roman soldiers were treated: [...] *vincitis manibus ducebantur*. A major debate is born around the chronology and the typology of the Singara battle, which happened, according several sources, at night, or at least, after the sunset. The chronological problem mainly regards the debate on the year the battle was fought, varying between 344 and 348 according to the sources. At least 11 writers: Libanius (Liban. *Or.* XVIII. 208; *Or.* LIX. 99-120), Julian the Apostate (Iul. *Or.* I. 23A - 25B), Festus (*Fest.* XXVII. 1 - 3), Eutropius (*Eutrop.* X. 10. 1), Ammianus Marcellinus (*Amm. Marc.* XVIII. 5. 7), Jerome (*Chron.* 2363), Paul Orosius (*Oros.* VII. 29. 6), Socrates

²⁶⁶ OATES 1968, 98.

²⁶⁷ The account of Ammianus (20.6.8) also mentions *indigenes plures* as being part of the defensive force at Singara. This evidence seems to me quite important within the context of that *interaction* between the Roman soldiers and the local populations in the area.

Scholastic (Socr. Schol. II. 25. 5), the author (or, more likely, authors) of the "Chronicle of Constantinople" (*Chron. Min.*, 236), Jacob of Edessa (*Jac. Edes. Chron.*, 311) and John Zonaras (*Zon. XIII. 5. 33*), report the episode as a fundamental one among the events that occurred between the Romans and the Persians in that period. Jacob of Edessa reports the date of 348, and the same chronology is also reported by the *Fasti Hydatii* and by Jerome and, in a certain way, Libanius too²⁶⁸. An earlier date, at the contrary, has been proposed on the basis of the account provided by Julian, which in his eulogy to Constantius writes of the night battle at Singara as happened six year before the usurper Magnentius self-proclaimed emperor in 350 CE.

The earlier chronology seems to find a confirmation also in Libanius which mentions the battle in his 59th speech as happened in 345 CE²⁶⁹. The problem of chronology is, luckily, solved by two other sources: Ammianus Marcellinus and Festus who refer to two different night battles, one at Singara in an early phase of the war (344?) and the second one happened at Eleia or Alaia, ca 27 west of Singara, at the foothills of Jebels Sinjar, after the first (348 ?), and that probably took the name of "battle of Singara" in order to better locate the place of the events²⁷⁰.

This was the last important event at Singara since after the peace treaty of 363 the whole city, emptied of the populations and the troops, was entirely ceded to the Persians.

5.3 Archaeological Data

The remains of the ancient fortress of Singara are still visible in the layout of the modern village of Sinjar. The northern sector of the circuit walls still encloses the

²⁶⁸ Jerome writes about the battle as happened during the 12th year of Constantius II (which succeeded to his father Constantine in 337). Thus the year must be found in 348/9 and since the battle was more likely fought during the summer should be the 348. The *Fasti Hydatii* report the battle as fought in the year of consuls Philip and Salia, dated to 348, while Jacob of Edessa mention the event as happened in the year 660 of the Seleucid era, which is 348 CE. On the issues related to the account of Libanius see note 228.

²⁶⁹ Libanius mentions twice the battle in his speech, letting us suggest that he referred to two different battles at Singara.

²⁷⁰ The long-debated discussion about the battle (or the battles of Singara) has been well documented and analysed by MOSIG-WALLBURG (1999, 330-384) and more recently by DMITRIEV (2012, 77-86, in russian). The second battle was probably named after Singara, just as the famous battle at Gaugamela was, in certain sources, remembered with the name "battle of Arbela", mentioning the largest nearby centre.

modern houses, which however exploited the other stubs of the fortification and the inner structures of the city.



Fig. 13. CORONA image (© Centre for Advanced Spatial Studies / University of Arkansas) of the town of Beled Sinjar (anc. Singara), in current North-Western Iraq. Letters A indicate the visible remains of the guarding towers in the fortification layout.

The walls cover an area of ca 17 ha, almost a third as large as the camp at Dura Europos. The hypothesis suggested by Kennedy and Riley is that the space was probably too large for a single legion and therefore the city must have hosted a consistent *nucleus* of civilians²⁷¹. A similar organization is clearly recognizable at Dura Europos where the military quarter occupied only a part of the whole settlement. At Nisibis too, for instance, the soldiers shared the same area with the civilians. A citadel was also present at Singara, most likely located in the eastern part of the settlement²⁷². The current visible layout of the walls is dated to the 4th century CE when probably two legions were stationed in town²⁷³: the *I Parthica* and the *I Flavia* while, unfortunately, nothing is known of the severian camp. The chronology of the fortification has been suggested starting from some typological observations. Some survived parts, indeed, are provided with several U-shaped projecting towers, often with two storeys. They were built in masonry and huge rectangular limestone blocks and stones²⁷⁴.

²⁷¹ KENNEDY & RILEY 1992, 128.

²⁷² STOLL 2009, 267.

²⁷³ PARKER 2000, 126; POLLARD 2000, 274.

²⁷⁴ OATES 1968, 98.

The type of the tower is widely known in the all Near East (albeit much more widespread in the Levant region and Jordan) and it is dated to the period between the end of the 3rd and the 5th century CE. Must be add, however, that this type of structure is at the base of the development of the Medieval and Islamic fort (*khan*) in the all Syria and Eastern regions, and thus some of the still-standing squared structures with these kinds of towers may have been affected by later architectural changes²⁷⁵. The projecting towers are attested in the north Mesopotamian area also at *Amida* (modern Dyarbakir) and, partially, at Costantina (modern Viransehir), albeit the excavations carried out at Rhesaina (Ras el-Ain, in Syria) during the 1950s (McEwan 1957) have partially revealed the remains of such towers along the circuit walls²⁷⁶. Similar U-shaped towers have been also excavated at *Tetrapyrgium* (Quseir al-Sayla) where a late Roman fortlet has been identified²⁷⁷. Furthermore, even a passage in Ammianus (XX, 6, 9). see also refers to the presence of "round towers" with merlons during the siege of 360 CE when one of those towers was destroyed by a Persian ram and opened a breach in the city walls²⁷⁸. If the account of Ammianus provides us a *terminus ante quem* for the aedification of the walls, this must be found, I suppose, in a period immediately after the campaigns of Trajan, when the city became an important strategic place both as a nodal crossing point and supply base for the campaigning troops in the area.

²⁷⁵ A famous example is the *khan* or palace of Qasr Heir al-Sharqi (in the Palmyrene desert in Syria), but fortress of this type, probably developed from later roman camps, exist elsewhere in Syria and also in Jordan (Mshatta and Lejjun, in example) and even in Egypt (?). About the development of the forts in pre-Islamic Arabia see over all NORTHEDGE 2008, 243-259).

²⁷⁶ The cases of Constantina and Rhesaina are described below. It has been nowadays largely accepted by scholars that the walls of Constantinople, which were built at the same manner, were not the archetype, but the final *apex* of this technique (OATES 1956, 192).

²⁷⁷ KONRAD 2008, 433-452.

²⁷⁸ DODGEON & LIEU 1991 (2005), 167.



Fig. 14. One of the gates of Singara inserted within the modern context of Beled Sinjar.

The absence of a more deep archaeological investigation on the site does not let us have further information about the existence or not of a pre-Roman defensive system. The mention of Singara by Dio (see *supra*) and the role the city played in the campaigns of Trajan and Lucius Verus is a certain clue for the importance of the site itself and, consequently, for the obvious presence of a defensive system. Apart of the defensive walls no other structure of the *Roman* Singara has been recovered by the British excavators although, as said, the modern layout completely covered the ancient site. From the CORONA satellites photos is barely visible a sort of low hill in the eastern section of the site. The area could indicate the location of the citadel mentioned in Ammianus (cf. *supra*), but lacking archaeological investigations in the area this remains only a mere suggestion.

5.4 Singara and the Table of Peutinger

The role Singara played in the commercial and military route system of Northern Mesopotamia during the Roman occupation of the area should be considered as a fundamental one. The presence of a legion in the city should have affected the road

system, which was heavily influenced by this primary role. On the Table of Peutinger Singara is marked as a station post between Baba and Zaguræ, respectively 33 roman miles westward (ca 50 kms) and 21 roman miles eastward (31,5 kms). A second road reached Singara from the West passing through the station of *Sihinnus* (30 roman miles westward, corresponding to 45 kms) and joining the road from Baba halfway between Baba itself and Singara. A third road arrives at Singara from North (apparently) after having passed the station of *Arcamo* (?), 30 roman miles at North of the settlement, probably also north of Jebel Sinjar²⁷⁹.

A roman milestone, discovered 5 kms south-west of Beled Sinjar, seems to prove the existence and the use of a road at the time of Severus Alezander²⁸⁰. The piece was found nearby the small village of Faghdani, along the road that connected Singara with the mid-Ḥabur valley at West²⁸¹. The document reports the following inscription:

1. *Imp(erator) Caesar*
M(arcus) Aurelius
Severus
Alexander
5. *Pius [fel(ix)] Aug(ustus)*
Pont(ifex) maxim(us)
Trib(unicia) pot(estate) XI
Co(n)s(ul) III, [p(atriciae), proc(onsul)
A Sing(ara)
10. *M(ilia) p(assum)*
III

The mention of the eleventh *tribunicia potestas* permits us to have an accurate chronological definition of the document. This happened, indeed, in 231/232 CE and thus the road should have been (re)fixed in this period. A second milestone, found at Karsi (or Kursi) a small village guarding a narrow gorge in the Jebel Sinjar, provides

²⁷⁹ The several surveys projects jave confirmed that the major paths crossed the northern Mesopotamian following the direction nort-west (Nisibis) toward sout-east (after having crossed the Jebel Sinjar). On the directions of these tracks in the region see also p. 185-187.

²⁸⁰ MARICQ 1957, 294.

²⁸¹ OATES 1968, 74 and n.3.

other interesting information²⁸². The inscription mentions the title *Parthicus* and thus it should be dated to the last years of the Trajanic campaigns in Mesopotamia when the emperor obtained the title in consequence of his achievements against the Parthian army. The presence of such a document in the middle of Jebel Sinjar leads us to two different suggestions. Assuming that the milestone was not significantly moved from its original position one should suppose the existence both of a pass through the mountain west of Baba (the only accessible passage to cross the Jebel) and the presence of a second road linking Singara to north and Nisibis which pointed to the Jaghjagh to reach the capital. In this framework the role of Singara emerges as the one of a significant and strategic point of the area. The city controlled both the road below the Jebel Sinjar, which connected the Upper Ḥabur valley with the Tigris at East, and a second road from North toward the steppe to the South.

5.5 Conclusions

Singara, together with Nisibis and Rhesaina, represents one of the three main cities in the whole northern Mesopotamia during the Roman occupation. The role the city had in the context of the Roman-Parthian and Roman-Persian relations is definitely important. The presence of a legion and then two legions in the city together with local militia in the 4th century CE is the marker of this importance. Nonetheless the archaeological works carried out in the modern city of Sinjar we will need further suggestions to improve our knowledge of this fortress. It is likely that the city was populated by a mixed social component, more or less as happens at Dura, and that the interactions between the Roman soldiers and the local people occurred on different levels on the model of the interactions which have been recognized and analysed for the middle Euphrates area.

²⁸² OATES 1968, 71. The milestone was found inglobed in a modern house, as reported by René CAGNAT (1927, 53) and was lost at the moment Oates visited the area.

CHAPTER 6

THE WESTERN JEZIRAH: RHESAINA AND CONSTANTINA

6.1 Introduction

The western Jezirah should be taken in consideration in this work chiefly because of two major centres that somehow defined the dynamics of the area: Rhesaina and Constantina. Despite the proximity (still nowadays the two centres are less than 50 kms far each other) they had a quite different history. Rhesaina lies at the edge of the modern centre of Ras-el-Ain, whose territory has been inhabited since prehistoric times (Tell Halaf, ancient *Guzana*, is relatively close to Ras-el-Ain) through the middle-Bronze age when the main site in the area is Wašukanni (modern Tell Fekheryie, which is the modern name for the Wašukanni-Rhesaina site, the name means “tell of the pottery” in Arabic).

The role Rhesaina played in the Rome’s eastern campaigns is thus strictly related also to the strategic position the site had. The centre was made *colonia* in the Severian period and hosted a legion of the Roman army. A totally different history had, instead, Constantina, whose role in the campaigns of the 2nd and 3rd century CE seems to be secondary. The city indeed, gained importance in the 4th century even if the centre was already settled in the Hellenistic period with the name of Antiochia Arabis²⁸³.

Both the centres are connected with their surrounding environment, which however, does not differ too much from the one of the proper Jezirah. Ancient sources complain the lack of water of the region and the absence of vegetation²⁸⁴.

The whole Western Jezirah, however, was a crucial area in the optics of the Roman expansion in Northern Mesopotamia since the region is the natural link between the

²⁸³ On this phase see also above, paragraph 4.2.

²⁸⁴ However from an ecological point of view the centres are slightly different from each other since Constantina lies below the ridge of the Anatolian mountains and therefore receives much more rainfall than Rhesaina, even if Rhesaina, however, lies very close to the Habur’s source and so the agricultural development of the area highly depended by the proximity of the river itself.

proper Osrhoene, and Edessa, and the easternmost territories of the empire, the ones that directly faces the enemy. The region is crossed, indeed, by several tracks going west-east from Euphrates to the Ḥabur basin.

The Table of Peutinger mentions various tracks crossing the region from Edessa to Nisibis, even if unfortunately, large part of the sites present as stop stations on the map are actually still unidentified on the ground. The main road probably went from Edessa (after having crossed the Euphrates at Zeugma) to Nisibis, passing below the southern fringes of the Anatolian plateau. A secondary road reached the conjunction between the Ḥabur and the Jahjagh after having crossed the western Jezirah south of the current syro-turkish border and after having reached Rhesaina too.

6.2 Rhesaina

6.2.1 Introduction

Rhesaina, modern Ras el-Ain, lies in the so called *bec de canard*, in Northeastern Syria, ca 60 km south-west of Al-Qamishli (Nisibis), half the way between the Baliḥ and the Jahjagh, along the upper course of the Ḥabur river.

The ancient site is almost completely covered by the modern town, while parts of the Bronze Age settlement have been put in light by a Syro-German expedition in a town's zone called Tell Fekheriye, which by the way covers parts of the classical city too²⁸⁵. The continuous occupation of the area is also testified by the nearby site of Tell Halaf, whose main phase has been dated to a period between the 7th and the 6th millennium BCE²⁸⁶.

The site was firstly and briefly excavated by an American team in the late 1950s and has been only partially re-investigated in last years²⁸⁷.

²⁸⁵ BONATZ-BAGHDO 2009.

²⁸⁶ VON OPPENHEIM 1941. CAMPBELL 1992, 182-187.

²⁸⁷ MCEWAN *ET AL.* 1958. Few information about the roman and byzantine levels at Tell Fekheriye are present at: http://www.fecheriye.de/campaigns_2007_b.php?l=ger



Fig. 15. Modern satellite image (©Google 2013) of Tell Fekheryie. The mound partly lies where the classical site of Rhesaina was. The area is immediately in the outskirts of the modern city, a thing that have enormously limited the archaeological investigations.

6.2.2 Archaeological Data

Although von Oppenheim claimed to have identified archaeological remains in an area larger than 100 ha, including a military camp and an amphitheatre there is no trace of them on the site of Ras el-Ain / Tell Fekheryie²⁸⁸. No archaeological investigation, furthermore, has been carried out on the site of ancient Rhesaina since the end of the 1950s. Even those operations had only partially uncovered the remains that must have been of great importance, considering the role the city had in the eastern campaigns and in the all region²⁸⁹. However, the most impressive remain of the old city certainly is certainly represented by the stone fortification which runs

²⁸⁸ VON OPPENHEIM 1929, 74.

²⁸⁹ The site has been excavated, since ten years, by a Syro-German expedition which is more focused on the history of the pre-classical Rhesaina (identified with the city of Wasukanni that flourished in the 2nd millennium BCE). More informations available on the website of the project, at: <http://www.fecheryie.de/research.php?l=eng> (last visited on March, 20 2013).

throughout the limits of the site, albeit it is not always easily recognizable²⁹⁰. Actually the soundings conducted at Rhesaina von by Oppenheim and later by the american team have revealed two different defensive systems, being one older than the other. The first defensive wall revealed, indeed, was a *libn* wall, a wall made out of mudbricks, which has been dated, on the base of the few in-context materials, to a generic *Parthian phase*²⁹¹. This wall was also provided of guarding-towers, probably square-shaped. The thickness of the walls (3,70 m and 11,20 m with the towers) resembles the one of other still standing parthian fortifications like those at Hatra, Dura Europos, and were probably set up also at Assur.

Anyway this earlier fortification was dismantled and covered by another one, outer, and made out of stones. This fortification has been traced for circa 800 m along the eastern side of the city, even if scattered stubs have been revealed in other areas of the site too²⁹². The whole structure was also characterised by several buttresses, which worked as reinforcement for the curtain as well as the remains of 7 towers. These are projecting from the outer face of the fortification and they were probably two-storeys towers, as the remains of internal ladders seem to suggest. The chronology of the wall as proposed by the American excavators leaves more than a doubt being it simply dated to a period between “*the Roman and the Byzantine period*”. Starting from some historical assumptions a better accurate chronology can be proposed. Rhesaina was made *colonia* during the severian period, it probably hosted a legion in 3rd century CE (albeit it is not sure, see below), the *Legio III Parthica* and, as it is recorded by the account of Ammianus an important battle was fought out the wall of the city at the time of Gordian III²⁹³. This evidence confirms the importance of the city, which certainly was not a legionary camp *tout court* but a fortress with both military quarters and civilian structures. Another chronological marker, also can be retrieved by the shape of the towers which are U-shaped towers. As seen for Singara this kind of tower was quite widespread in the whole Roman Near East, being the best examples the remains of the *castella* of the so-called Roman-Arabian limes such as the ones at Odruh, Lejjun, al-Dumir or Qasr al-Swab²⁹⁴. This type of towers was, furthermore, used also in later fortifications (such as the famous Islamic forts of Qasr al-heir al Sharqi and Qasr al-heir al-Gharbi) in

²⁹⁰ KRAELING and HAINES 1958, 11.

²⁹¹ MCEWAN 1958, 17.

²⁹² MCEWAN 1958, 11.

²⁹³ HA *Gord.* 26.6; Sync. 681; Zonaras 12.18; Amm.Marc. 23.5.17.

²⁹⁴ KENNEDY 2000.

the Syrian desert. Thus the long period of use, unfortunately, does not provide itself an accurate chronology for the remains at Rhesaina. However the importance gained by the city in the Severian period let us suggest that the early setup of the stone-fortification occurred slightly before the Severian conquest of the region. It is more than likely that the whole circuit suffered the Persian attacks of the 3rd and 4th century CE and it is almost certain, moreover, that the defensive system was renewed and improved by Theodosius in 383 CE when the settlement was *re-founded* with the new name of Theodosiopolis. Apart of the remains of the fortification there is, unfortunately, no further prove of the roman Rhesaina. A single but very important discover was made in 1996 while the northern part of the ancient site was undergoing several modern construction works. Here, probably in a secondary position, a marble statue of a roman soldier has been found. Unluckily the statue is headless, but it certainly represented a high military or political character and it should not be excluded that it could even be a representation of an emperor himself while dressed up as a general²⁹⁵.

6.2.3 Rhesaina as a Roman colony

As Nigel Pollard rightly pointed out the use of the term *colonia* in Upper Mesopotamia “*is not found subsequently until the Severian period*”²⁹⁶. The new status, indeed, was probably granted to the cities that endorsed Septimius Severus in his war against Pescennius Niger for the imperial throne²⁹⁷. After the elevation to *colonia* the city seems also to strike coins as it appears starting from the period of Severus Alexander²⁹⁸. The existence of a mint at Rhesaina may be a direct consequence of the presence of veterans or even of an entire legion. As previously mentioned the creation of the three “Parthians” legion is almost certainly dated to the early phases of the Severian campaigns (195 ?). Although the coins from Rhesaina bears the *vexillum* of the legion it is quite improbable that a city like Nisibis did not

²⁹⁵ Unfortunately no study has been conducted on the statue which until now is still preserved and sometimes displayed in the museum of Deir-ez-Zor, in Syria. It has been approximately dated to the 3rd century. A low resolution image of the statue is available on the website of the Syro-German expedition at Tell Fecheriye at: <http://www.fecheriye.de/research.php?l=eng> (last visited on 11 March 2013).

²⁹⁶ POLLARD 2000, 63.

²⁹⁷ A similar situation can be observed also at Nisibis too.

²⁹⁸ The types show a military vexillum with the legend LEG III P S (BMC Mesopotamia, 113).

host a legion, being also the capital of the newly insticreatedduted *provincia* of Mesopotamia. The only evidence in favour of Rhesaina as a garrison town is, of course, the massive presence of these coins, although they can be related also to the presence within the walls of a small detachment from that legion stationed at Nisibis²⁹⁹.

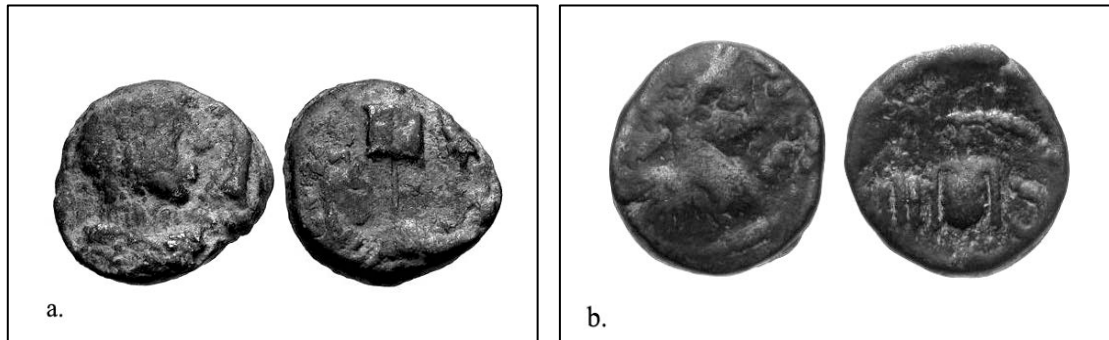


Fig. 16. Denarii from the mint of Rhesaina struck at the time of Elagabalus (Castelin 1946, n.108). The emperor is side-viewed on the recto, while the verso bears the image of two centaurs going in opposite direction with a vexillum (the one from the Legio III Parthica ?) standing in the middle (specimen A), a centaur running with the numeral III and a symbol (specimen B).

It is thus likely that a small detachment of veterans was settled at Rhesaina (after the battle?) and so the coins from the city show the *vexillum* to remember this small presence, being the large part of the legion stationed at Nisibis. This evidence, anyway, is only a suggestion, which absolutely needs further evidence to be confirmed.

The importance of the city, anyway, is doubtless. Rhesaina was a fundamental stop, after the conquest of the whole region, in the complex route system of the Roman Mesopotamia. The city was, indeed, somehow halfway between the Euphrates and Zeugma, and the proper Northern Mesopotamia and was connected to both to Nisibis and to Singara. This latter one probably followed the Ḫabur up to its confluence with the Jaghjagh (near *Thallaba* ?) and then passed below the Jebel Sinjar to reach Singara from the West.

Rhesaina, is marked as a *statio* on the Table of Peutinger between the sites of *Sabal* (35 roman miles westward) and *Rene* (36 roman miles eastward). Both the stations are archaeologically and historically completely unknown, but the importance of

²⁹⁹ KENNEDY 1987, 57-66; SARTRE 2001, 619 and n.41.

Rhesaina is testified by the use of the *two-houses* symbol, which denotes the main station on the map³⁰⁰.

According to K.Ross another route seems to connect Edessa to Rhesaina (which appears to be marked as *Fons Scaborae*)³⁰¹. The term clearly refers to the source of the river Ḥabur, which is not so far from Rhesaina. However it may be suggested that the site refers to a general place rather than a specific settlement.

6.3 Constantina

6.3.1 Geography and location

The ancient settlement of Constantina (or Constantia) lies approximately under the modern centre of Viransehir ($37^{\circ}13'53.66''\text{N} / 39^{\circ}45'37.76''\text{E}$)³⁰², in south-eastern Turkey, in Saniurfa province, circa 93 kms east of Sanliurfa (Edessa) and 53 kms north-west of the syrian border at Ceylanpinar. The modern city is flanked at West by the Ḥabur river and it constitutes an important nodal point for the traffic of goods from the western Turkey to the eastern Anatolia.



Fig 17. The modern centre of Viransehir as photographed by a CORONA satellite in 1967 (© Centre for Advanced Spatial Studies / University of Arkansas). Supposed traces of the eastern defensive wall of the city are recognizable at the right edges of the settlement.

³⁰⁰ TALBERT 2012.

³⁰¹ ROSS 2001, 18.

³⁰² The name literally means “*old city*” in Turkish.

6.3.2 History and events

The story of the settlement is quite tough to reconstruct³⁰³. The place was known with then name of *Tella* in the Assyrian times. Pliny (*NH*, 6.26) mentions the city as founded by Seleukos Nicanor with the name of *Antiochia Arabis*³⁰⁴. Ammianus Marcellinus also mentions the site and calls it *Antoniopolis* because of Caracalla (Marcus Aurelius Septimius Bassianus Antoninus, originally) who died nearby. The author of the *Chronicle of Edessa* refers to the city as Antipolis (more likely to be read *Antoniopolis*) and mentions his construction (probably re-construction, at least of the city walls) by Constantius³⁰⁵. Millar (1993, 209) complained the lack of further information to identify this city with the Maximiniapolis of Osrhoene which Malalas (*Chron.* 323) claimed it was re-built by Constantine and thus called Constantina³⁰⁶. The city gained a great importance, however, after the fall of Nisibis and before the foundation of Dara in 505 CE. In the early 5th century CE the *Notitia Dignitatum* refers to the *I Parthica* “Nisibena” as stationed at Constantina after the loss of Nisibis³⁰⁷.

6.3.3 Archaeological Data

Despite the few archaeological works conducted in the city, nowadays are still very visible, among the modern constructions, the massive basalt rampart of the city, which were re-built (or fixed) by Justinian during the 6th century.³⁰⁸ These have a canonic horseshoe shape (or U-shape) and they were alternate by squared towers. Remains of a main gate are still visible at Viransehir. The defensive system closely recalls the one used in several fortification in northern Mesopotamia, especially during the 4th century CE. Similar walls have been attested, indeed, at Amida, Edessa

³⁰³ The claim of BALL (2000, 170) that the city appears to be date from 4th century onwards should be totally reconsidered since it does not count the existence of the settlement *before* the name Constantina was given to it.

³⁰⁴ As noted by GRAINGER (1990, 96) the city is mentioned just by Pliny.

³⁰⁵ *Chron. Edess.* 5. 14-17. Other sources also mention the foundation: *Teoph.*, 36.10-13; Jacob Edess., *Chron.*, 218.

³⁰⁶ MILLAR 1993, 209.

³⁰⁷ MILLAR 1993, 511.

³⁰⁸ The rebuilt of the wall at Constatina is contemporary to other construction works of Justinian in the area such as Amida, Edessa and Resafa.

and Resaina. An interesting passage in Procopius () spreads the light upon the walls *before* the restoration of Justinian³⁰⁹.

It is worth to read it as whole:

“The work that he carried out in Constantina is also worthy of mention. Formerly the circuit-wall of this city was of such a height that it could be scaled with a ladder, and its whole method of construction made it easy to attack, built as it was by men of former times in a casual sort of way. Indeed the towers were so widely separated that if any attackers advanced to make an assault upon the space between them, the defenders posted on the towers had no means of driving them back. Moreover the wall had suffered from the passage of time, and for the most part had come to be not very far from a state of collapse. Furthermore, the outworks (proteichisma) protecting the city were of such a sort that they looked like a wall built for the purpose of attacking it (epiteichisma). In fact their thickness had not been made more than three feet, and even that was held together with mud, the lower courses for a short space being built of hard stone suitable for making mill-stones (lithos mylites), but the upper portion consisting of so-called "white stone" (leukolithos), which is untrustworthy and very soft. So the whole place was easy for assailants to capture. But the Emperor Justinian rebuilt with new masonry those portions of the circuit-wall which had suffered, particularly the parts which faced the west and the north. And in all parts of the defences he inserted a new tower between each pair of towers, and consequently all the towers stood out from the circuit-wall very close to one another. Also he added greatly to the height of the whole wall and of all the tower, and thus made the defences of the city impregnable to the enemy. And he also built covered approaches (anodoi) to the towers, and made them three-storied (triôrophoi) by adding courses of stones curved in the form of vaults (tholoi); thus he made each one of them a pyrgo-castellum, as it was called and as it actually was. For they call forts castella in the Latin tongue. Furthermore, Constantina in former times used to suffer terribly for want of water. Outside the city, about a mile away, there are springs of sweet water and then a very large grove planted with trees which reach to the sky; but within the walls, where the streets happen to be sloping, and not level, the city had been without water from early times, and the inhabitants always suffered from thirst and from the great difficulty of obtaining water. But the Emperor Justinian brought the stream within the wall by means of an aqueduct, and adorned the city with ever-flowing fountains, so that he might justly be called its founder. All this, then, is what was done by the Emperor Justinian for these cities”.

³⁰⁹ De Aed. 2.5.2-11.

Given the length of the passage several interesting suggestions can be made. Firstly we know from the account of Procopius that the city had a fortification before the restoration of Justinian, although it is not clear when originally Constantina was provided by a defensive system.

The earlier defensive walls were made indeed, according to Procopius, of mud, basalt and probably limestone in the upper part and thus not suitable for a siege. The new works completed by Justinian provided, instead, the city of close projecting three-storeys towers, which are defined, because of their dimensions *pyrgo-castella*.

The description of the rebuilt happened at Constantina interested other cities in the region in the 6th century and it is interesting to think that the earlier typology of wall here could have been observed also elsewhere. It is even more intriguing to suggest that the walls of Nisibis, completely disappeared now, could have been built in the same way. In the same passage Procopius also mentions the lack of water of the city and the nearby area, although he also states that less than 2 kms away from the city-walls were present streams and sources.

Then Procopius mentions the construction of an aqueduct to bring the water in town. This should have been similar to the remains of an aqueduct, surprisingly being the only one preserved east of the Orontes river, whose main cisterns and structures are still clearly visible west of the village Oğuz . The aqueduct probably took the water from the stream immediately beyond Dara, the Cordes³¹⁰.

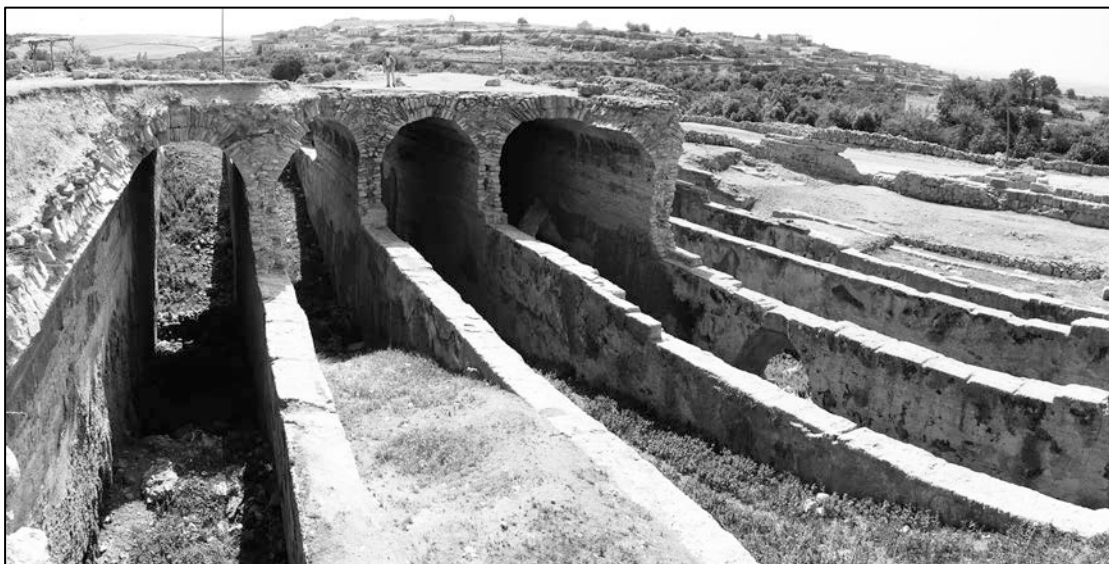


Fig. 18. The remains of the cisterns at Dara. The water was taken directly from the stream which is visible in background in this image (where the trees are). Similar constructions must have adorned the cities re-built by Justinian in the 6th century CE.

³¹⁰ ZANINI 2003, 202-204 and 212 (with further references on Dara).

CHAPTER 7

HATRA AND THE INTERACTION WITH ROME

7.1 Introduction

Hatra always represented in the history of the Roman Near East a sort of isolated case, which was never completely integrated, even temporarily, within the roman control of the region. The position and the nature itself of the site made Hatra a particular case that should be not separated from the geographical context as well as the historical and social events. The eastern Jezirah, indeed, gradually changed starting from the 1st century CE onward into a more urbanized area and therefore urban elements became more predominant in a region, which was, in previous times, mainly interested only by nomadic groups of people. In this chapter I have tried to analyse the role Hatra played within the context of the Rome's interaction in the region. Although the city, indeed, always retained a certain peculiar and local aspect, it was also considered as a strong major centre in the area and therefore important for the military strategy of Rome.

Furthermore, indeed, Hatra did not serve just like a political and economic centre in the region, but it was also an important religious centre, or as defined by L. Dirven a "*pilgrimage centre [...] more adequately compared with Panathenaic Athens than with Islamic Mecca*"³¹¹. However no important cultic or religious centre in the whole world could have survived in these extreme ecological conditions and with such a large population and therefore, the success of Hatra must forcedly be found in its role in a dimorphic society with the people outside the city walls. Jointly performed long-distance trade is, beside the exchange of food, the base upon which the dimorphic societies are built. These societies, indeed, tend to establish themselves along the ecological borders of a given region in order to make a best use of the complementary resources offered by different environments and ways of life, in this case nomad pastoralism and sedentary agriculture³¹². Eventually this made Hatra a highly complex site, where the interactions between all the cultural groups of the region are expressed at every stage. Hatra gained significant importance in the 2nd

³¹¹ DIRVEN 2008, 213.

³¹² GAWLIKOWSKI 2010,37.

century CE and the prestige the city achieved is perfectly embedded in the context of mutual relationships between the great hegemonic states, the Roman Empire and the Parthian realm.

The social component of Hatra, as well as its religion, clearly reflects the mixed substratum of the whole region. All these elements are anyway linked together to what happened on the level of inter-imperial politics and struggles. It is because of this mix that the interactions occurred between Hatra and Rome in the region absolutely need further investigations. Two major important aspects of these interactions will be here faced: the adaptation of the people to the cultural ambient of the city as well as the insertion of the settlement in the complex and so far only partially known route system in Northern Mesopotamia during the period up to the end of the 4th century CE.

7.2 Geography and environment

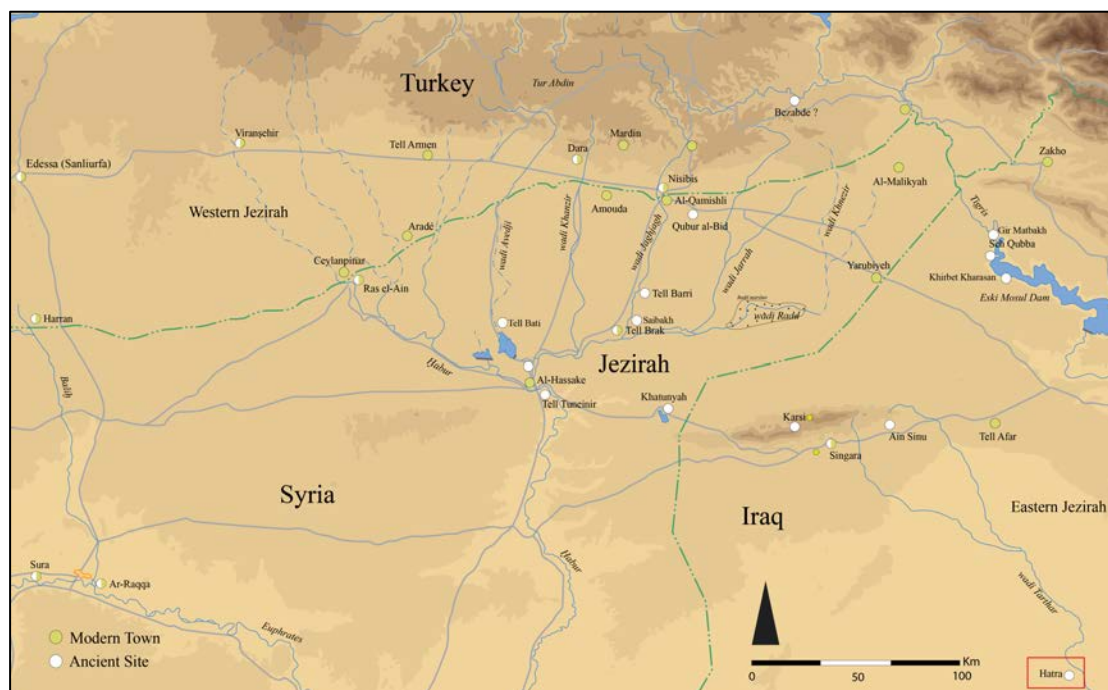


Fig. 19. The location of Hatra within the context of Upper Mesopotamia

Hatra, the modern site of Al-Hadr, lies in northern Iraq, not so far from Mosul and ca 80 km west of the river Tigris. The site is 50 km west of Assur and circa 50 km south of Nineveh. The particular location of the city was already noted and underlined by the ancient sources if Ammianus Marcellinus, visiting the area with the Roman army of Julian, defined Hatra “*vetus oppidum in media solitudine positum olimque*

desertum”³¹³. Probably the location of the city was at the base also of another particular description of Hatra. During the march of Trajan towards the city in 116-117 CE, Cassius Dio (68.31.1) defined it neither large neither wealthy, but the modern scholars have suggested a different interpretation of the account³¹⁴. On the basis of the classification proposed by Guest³¹⁵, Hatra lies, as mentioned, under the southern fringes of the dry-steppe area and therefore the cultivation, without the aid of specific and complex irrigation systems could have not been possible³¹⁶. Therefore Hatra has been really strictly related to its climate conditions and to its role of isolated and self-sustaining city in Upper Jezirah.

The conditions in which Hatra grew and exploited the surrounding territory are, indeed, very hard. Large parts of the Western Jezirah are classified as arid or semi-arid and the few *wadis* that run through the steppe usually dry or, like the *wadi* Tarthar, ends up in salt marshes in the desert. The 200 mm isohyet is located, indeed, something like 30 kms north of Hatra. In addition must be said that the critical water situation is aggravated by the fact that the rain season does not coincide with the growing season.

In addition, most of the water of the region is rich in salts, due to the specific features of the soils themselves. Despite these critical ecological conditions, the fortune of Hatra was highly determined by the presence of the only clean water wells of they are around the site, which made it flourish through the centuries³¹⁷.

The climate of the area, eventually, did not dramatically change from the Partho/Roman period and today, but the over-grazing of the recent years certainly have contributed to the disappearing of some herbs, plants and animals, once quite widespread in this part of Jezirah.

³¹³ Amm. Marc. 25.8.5.

³¹⁴ SOMMER 2005, 369 and n. 55 suggests that probably, in the early years of 2nd Century CE, when Trajan visited the city it was not so large, also considering that the second circular wall who enclosed the inner walls was not built up and the large part of the building in the *temenos* are dated back to the late 2nd century CE.

³¹⁵ GUEST 1966, 71-72.

³¹⁶ However, the area surrounding Hatra is also rich in natural wells.

³¹⁷ The survey carried by Ibrahim showed how the area around site was featured by scattered small settlements (most of them occupied since the Assyrian period). Large part of these sites lie in the zone immediately south of Hatra (IBRAHIM 1986, plates 9 and 10). These sites appear as small rural settlements probably strictly related to Hatra itself. Large sites have been spotted only 70kms south of Hatra, such as the one at Tell Ajiri (IBRAHIM 1986, 73).

7.3 Hatra between history and archaeology

Nonetheless the huge remains of the ancient city, and the excavations carried out more or less systematically on the site, the knowledge of the *hatrene* architecture and of the cultural aspects of its society certainly need further considerations³¹⁸.

There is no archaeological evidence of a pre-parthian settlement and although Ibrahim³¹⁹ claimed to have found remains of an unspecified Assyrian settlement, we must admit that the first bulk of the “Sun-God City” started to develop in late 1st century BCE and reached its climax in late 2nd century CE. Several scholars have debated about the origin of the city itself³²⁰, and nowadays it seems quite certain that the creation and the development of the city started from a group of nomadic people of the steppe that gradually, through a sort of sedentarization, moved close to the stream and settled there³²¹.

The origins of these nomads are still unknown (we must suppose that probably they came from the central Asia plains) but we have to admit, however, that the cultural *substratum* was undoubtedly “local”, intending with this term the local nature of the language, the social aspects and the politics, strictly related to the city itself, with very few intrusions from elsewhere. Some of the markers of the peculiarity of Hatra are most of all recognizable in the huge and marvellous archaeological remains. The city, built as a round town, occupies a large plan of about 130 ha. The plan does not resemble the classic scheme of the ancient western town, since its rounded configuration appears to be more similar to the some of the Bronze age settlements quite widespread in the near East (Zincirli, dated to the 8th century BCE and Ecbatana, 7th century BCE in example) as well as the contemporary city of Ctesiphon. The particular plan will be also reprised in the Sasanian cities of Shiz, modern Azerbaijan, and Gur, nowadays close to the modern centre of Firuzabad, in Iran. This could be a further clue for the local nature of the social *substratum* of Hatra, which must be searched in the nomadic roots of its people. The city was,

³¹⁸ On Hatra, in general, see VENCO 1990; VENCO 2002; SOMMER 2005 (chapter on Hatra). See also the EAA, s.v. *Hatra* and the Cambridge History of Iran, s.v. *Hatra*. The current political situation in Iraq strongly limits the archaeological works and so the evidence concerning the life of Hatra are, more or less, the same since 2002, when the last Italian expedition took place.

³¹⁹ 1986, *passim*. The survey conducted by Ibrahim also proved that the number of small sites around Hatra did not decrease in the Parthian period and, at the contrary, remained the same of the previous periods, mainly because of the availability of water resources in the area.

³²⁰ The most recent information about the topic have been summarized in SOMMER 2005,

³²¹ On the Arab tribes of the area see Chapter 9.

indeed, always in a “*Arab orbit*”, quite distant both from the Parthians and Romans (later, when Hatra was besieged and caught by the Sasanians it was completely abandoned) and, mainly because of its geographic location, Hatra was the centre of various Arab tribes which settled the region before the arrive of the Parthians, since the 3rd century BCE. The archaeology of the city helps to understand this self-sustaining model.

Hatra was firstly excavated in the period comprised between 1906-1911 by the German Archaeological Expedition at Assur, under the direction of W. Andrae, who partially discovered some remains in the western part of the city³²².

More systematic excavations were conducted only after the Second World War (1951) and in the mid 1980s³²³. An Italian team started operations of excavations and restorations in 1987 but unfortunately they stopped the works twice due to the political situation of modern Iraq³²⁴. A single excavation season conducted by a Polish team has revealed parts of an older defensive wall³²⁵.

The remains of the city spread a particular and interesting light upon the life in Eastern Jezirah. The settlement is defined by the massive defensive walls, whose construction is dated at the end of the 1st century CE³²⁶. The fortification with a diameter of about 2 kms, encloses an area of 310 ha. It presents moreover 28 towers (and more than 150 structures related, from service rooms to small and secondary guarding points. To this enceinte another was added later (probably before the 3rd century), enclosing both the city and the previous wall, reaching a diameter of more than 3 kms.

³²² ANDRAE 1908-1912.

³²³ The survey project carried out by Ibrahim (1986, 89-140) also interests some test trench in the city area.

³²⁴ VENCO RICCIARDI: 1988; VENCO RICCIARDI 1990; VENCO RICCIARDI 2002, VENCO RICCIARDI 2008.

³²⁵ GAWLIKOWSKI 1990, 119-121.

³²⁶ Two inscriptions, dated presumably to the end of the 1st century CE, confirm the construction of an early defensive system (H293 which is dated after the 89 CE and H214 dated to 98 CE). See also DIJKSTRA 1995, 173.

The layout of the city, which is clearly visible from the satellite images (Fig. 21), testifies the intense construction within the walls. The central part of the settlement is



Fig.20. View from the top of the towers 22 (from the North). (© Roberta Ricciardi Venco / Missione Archeologica Italiana ad Hatra).

entirely occupied by the so-called *great temenos* (Beit Alaha, *bt 'lh'*, "the House of the Gods"), a huge rectangle of 437 x 321 m enclosing an area of 14 ha circa, where the main temples of Hatra are located. These are dedicated to a triad, composed by the Sun-God and two other deities³²⁷.

The immense temple structures of the *temenos*, with their particular decorations, unknown at Assur and Warka, probably testify the presence of workers (or even architects) from the West³²⁸. Other 14 temples have been discovered in the city and all of them are completely different in architecture form the temples in the *temenos*. The archaeological data at Hatra have revealed, through hundreds of inscriptions and several statues, a polytheistic *pantheon* that tends to

combine Greek and classical deities with Mesopotamian, Arab and tribal elements³²⁹. As it has been precisely pointed out by Sartre (1991) and Millar (1993) the study of the religious aspects of Hatra must be almost absolutely considered in a strict relation

³²⁷ The *civic* deity was undoubtedly Shamash, and even the Hatra coins bore the legend "the enclosure of Shamash". The word *Hatra*, written in hatrene (a local aramaic dialect) as HTR', means indeed, *enclosure*, as to indicate that the whole city was actually a great sanctuary for the deity and that the structures and the temples there developed were strictly related to the cult practices. Dio (76, 16, 2) also mentions the several offers the people of Hatra gave to the Sun god each year. The Sun God, *Shamash*, was also known as Maren and was part of a triad including Maren itself ("our Lord"), Marten and Bar-Maren, probably related to ancient Mesopotamia pantheon (DIRVEN 2008, 216). It is generally accepted the identification Shamash-Maren, while Marten and Bar Maren are still matter of discussion among the scholars. It is certain that one of the deities should represent the Moon (Marten?).

³²⁸ PARAPETTI-VENCO RICCIARDI 2000, 111.

³²⁹ KAIZER 2000, 230.

with other important sites in Mesopotamia such as Edessa, Harran and Assur to mention some of them, but not forget the interactions and the strong presence of the Nomads and the Arabs in this analysis. Two important inscriptions from Hatra (H79 and H336) attest these strong relations between the "city-dwellers" and the "people from outside", meaning the Nomads, but also the local tribes who lived outside the city walls in the basin of the *wadi* Tarthar. The presence of local small temples or cultic places, aside of the main deity worshipped in the city, is probably strictly related to these different ethnic groups present on the site (a similar situation, although with differences is partially recognizable also at Dura)³³⁰. Architecturally speaking the differences between the great temples and the small ones are quite interesting. The small temples, indeed, resembles more the type of the so-called Mesopotamian temple, developed since the 3rd millennium BCE and planned on the model of the *Breiraumtempel*³³¹, while the large complex in the *temenos* have different architectural features, such as vaulted *iwans* and open spaces³³². All the most important buildings in the city have been dated to a period between the final years of the 2nd century and the start of the 3rd century CE.

7.4 Relations and Interaction with Rome

Since the publication of the monumental work of Fergus Millar (*The Roman Near East*, see references) for more than a decade, the scholar community thought of Hatra as the easternmost vivid evidence of a Roman occupation, even if very short, in the area. As already said the city appears for the first time in the classical source during the campaigns of Trajan. The emperor tried unsuccessfully to besiege Hatra and according to the inscription found within the walls the city, it was defended by a king named 'WRD (probably Orodes), which is labelled also as 'MRY ("king", or "lord") together with his family³³³. The second try of the Roman Army to enter the walls of

³³⁰ Must be noted that the gods worshipped in the large temples have been attested by inscriptions also in the smaller shrines, while it is never mentioned the contrary (KAIZER 2000, 231).

³³¹ COLLEDGE 1977, 47-8. There is also an Arabic publication (which unfortunately I did not read) by K.A.HASSAN, *The small private shrines at Hatra*, 1994. It is thought that all the small shrines were originally built up in mudbricks (see LENZEN 1956, 361 and KAIZER 2000, 239).

³³² SAFAR-MUSTAFA 1974 *in Arabic*; VENCO RICCIARDI 1996.

³³³ RETSÖ 2007, 436. The rulers of Hatra in this period probably belonged to the Arab tribe of the *Praetavi* (elsewhere remembered as *Skenitai*) which also was the tribe of King Ma'anu at

Hatra dates back to the end of the 2nd century CE when the troops of Septimius Severus were involved in the Parthian campaigns in the region. Septimius Severus laid siege to Hatra in two different times. Although the accounts of Dio and Herodian are not so much clear about, we must suppose that the city was attacked in 193-4 CE and a second time in 197-99 CE. Both the attempts failed and many soldiers died under the city walls.³³⁴

Both the authors, moreover, mention the difficulties of the operations, the lack of water for the soldiers and the definitive abandon of any attempt to get the city. A first attempt by Severus' army was set up in 198 CE, but it failed and many soldiers died³³⁵. The use of war machines was not so determining and Severus decided to make a second attempt. In Dio's account the real motivation and the precise will of the emperor to take over the city are not clearly stated, but one may suppose that a semi-independent kingdom with such a strategic position and an even stronger fortress, should have constituted a real reason for the roman siege.

Apart of the severian siege the city did not have a close relationship with Rome if not in the few years after the establishment of the Mesopotamia as a province on behalf of Septimius Severus himself. First of all must be said that a presence or a connection between the roman Army and Hatra should be viewed in a broader context involving the contacts between the soldiers, the detached allies of Rome in the region, the populations of Hatra and the Nomads in the area (see Chapter 9). Three Latin inscriptions found at Hatra has been seen as the clue for a *real* roman presence within the walls. These inscriptions have been firstly published by David Oates in 1955 and briefly reviewed and updated by A. Maricq in 1957³³⁶. The three texts have been labelled as nos 79, 80 and 81 of the *Hatrene corpus* and they have been all of them found in the *antecella* of the 9th shrine which was dug up by the Iraqi Antiquities Department in 1954. The first one (no. 79) is dated, thanks to the mention of the consuls in the text, to 235 CE:

Singara (the city where connected through a old track that run along the western bank of the wadi Tarthar whose source is not so far from Singara). For a complete account and chronology of the Hatra rulers as attested by the epigraphic evidence see also SOMMER 2004, 237.

³³⁴ The episode is mentioned in Dio (75.11-12).

³³⁵ Dio, 76.10.1.

³³⁶ OATES 1955, 39-43. MARICQ also noticed some errors Oates made. The new transcriptions, as proposed in a volume of Syria (1957, 291), seem to be more accurate.

d(onum) d(edit) non(is)
Iunis Seve-
ro et Quin
tiano co(n)s(ulibus)

Unfortunately the initial part of the text was written on the side of the altar, which was eroded at the moment of the discovery and thus the only clue, retrievable from the text, is the chronology, which puts the inscription in the period of Severus Alexander (probably his very last moments of his reign, which ended up in 235 CE). The other inscriptions (nos. 80-81) have been engraved on two different bases of statues (unfortunately lost). They are dedications by a *tribunus militum*, Q. Petrinonius Quintianus. Even in this case, among the engraved lines, is retrievable the chronology. The *cohors* mentioned in the texts (see below), indeed, is labelled with the title of *Gordiana*, which refers to the period of Gordian III (238-243 CE):

Inscription no. 80:

1. *Deo Soli Invicto*
Q. Petr(onius) Quintianus
Trib(unus) mil(itum) leg(ionis) I Part(hicae)
Trib(unus) coh(ortis) IX Maur(orum)
5. *Gordianae*
votum re-
ligioni lo-
ci posuit.

Inscription no. 81

1. *Erculi Sanct(o),*
pro salute do-
mini nostri Au[g(usti) Q.]
Petronius Qu[in-]
5. *Tianus, dom(o) [Nico-]*
Midia, trib(unus) mil(itum)
Leg(ionis) I P(arthicae), trib(unus) coh(ortis) IX

*Gordianae, genio coh(ortis)*³³⁷

Both the inscriptions refer to a sun-deity, which is represented in one of the cases by Heracles itself (who was also venerated as *Nergal* at Hatra), underlining how important was the relation between the city and the Solar cult. The text, moreover, represents a sort of evidence of an alliance that occurred with Rome, which is publicly witnessed by the city-god as well. One of the most interesting passages of the texts is the mention to the military context. Q. Petronius Quintianus, indeed, is said to be part of the *Legio I Parthica* that was probably stationed at that time at Singara (see p. 109-114). The presence of a soldier from that legion at Hatra should be seen as the presence of a small detachment (but how large it was we are unable to say) within the city walls. The chronology related to the late period of the Severus Alexander's reign reminds us that the Mesopotamian campaigns were ended since two years and that probably a sort of peace period followed soon after. From Singara (which is not so far from Hatra and, moreover, was connected to it through one of the most important routes of the area) a small detachment was probably sent at Hatra in order to be present in this important nodal point of the region.

Another interesting thing to note is the mention, within the lines of the text, of the *Cohors IX Maurorum* a group of auxiliaries that present more than a historical issue (see also below, chapter 8.2, p. 154-159). The cohorts refer to a group of Moorish soldiers, probably used because of their skills with cavalry and knowledge of the area, during the Mesopotamian campaigns. The exact location of the main fort of the *Cohors* is, unfortunately, unknown. In a later period, Ammianus Marcellinus, writes that a fortress, called *Castrum Maurorum*, was given back to Persia together with Nisibis and Singara, after a peace-treaty with Shapur II³³⁸. It is possible that the presence of the *cohors* (or at least, part of the *cohors*) at Hatra could be related to the mobility of the troops within the newly conquered area. Quintianus was probably at the command of the *cohors*, but he also was *tribunus* of a legion. After the campaigns of Severus Alexander, as said, the area was interested by a sort of brief peace that surely permitted the movements of troops and goods. Anyways the garrison at Hatra was not isolated since probably small forts and observation posts were located all along the route from Hatra to Singara, northward, and, but it is less

³³⁷ The transcription proposed by Maricq has been here preferred to the initial one by David Oates. The discussion about the differences is in MARICQ 1957, 289

³³⁸ The issues regarding the location of the *castrum* will be discussed below.

likely, from Hatra toward South, along the routes from Upper Mesopotamia to Ctesiphon. Unfortunately none of these *southern* forts has been dug up, or, in most cases, even identified. The survey of Sir Aurel Stein identified some of these structures but their chronology still remains a matter of discussion among the scholars since the squared forts may be later in time or even early modern³³⁹. More certain is the Hatra-Singara line, which was probably more integrated in this system than the southern sector.

7.5 Hatra and the route system in the steppe

The integration of the Hatrene region in the Roman-controlled territory, even for a very short period, certainly dealt with the local nomad tribes but it was definitely increased by the use of the commercial and military routes in the region. The city was an important *carrefour* and the strategic importance of Hatra was therefore also exploited by Rome. The position itself of the city immediately recalls the strategic importance of the site which was located along the most important route system connecting the Northern Mesopotamia to the central and lower Mesopotamia and from then to the Characene, Mesene and the Gulf³⁴⁰. The site certainly served as a stop point for the nomadic people in the region and, although it has been tentatively stated to define Hatra a caravan city, it is nowadays sure that the city served as a resting place for the local nomads rather than a commercial port like Palmyra³⁴¹. The prospection conducted by Ibrahim in mid 1980s showed how even a dry-steppe/arid territory was actually featured by scattered villages (usually of small dimension, with few exceptions, see above, n. 19) strictly related to the Hatra in a relation of highly dependence³⁴². These settlements probably developed along the tracks that were used by the nomadic groups of the area which settled progressively around the city.. On

³³⁹ GREGORY AND KENNEDY 1995, 124.

³⁴⁰ The most natural route from Ctesiphon to the North obviously followed the right bank of the Tigris, at least up to a place called Beiji, where the hills of the Jebel Mahqul preclude the use of the Tigris route. Thus the track left the river and reached Hatra through the wadi Tarthar basin, and from there Singara and the route system in Northern Jezirah.

³⁴¹ On the long debated theme of *caravan cities* started from M. ROSTOVITZ (1932) see, in general, the contributions of MILLAR (1993), SARTRE (2001), BUTCHER (2005), SOMMER (2005).

³⁴² The theory has been also re-proposed by HAUSER 2000, 187-201.

the Table of Peutinger, furthermore, Hatra is marked as *Hatris* and it has a “two-houses” symbol that denotes the importance of the stop along that specific track.

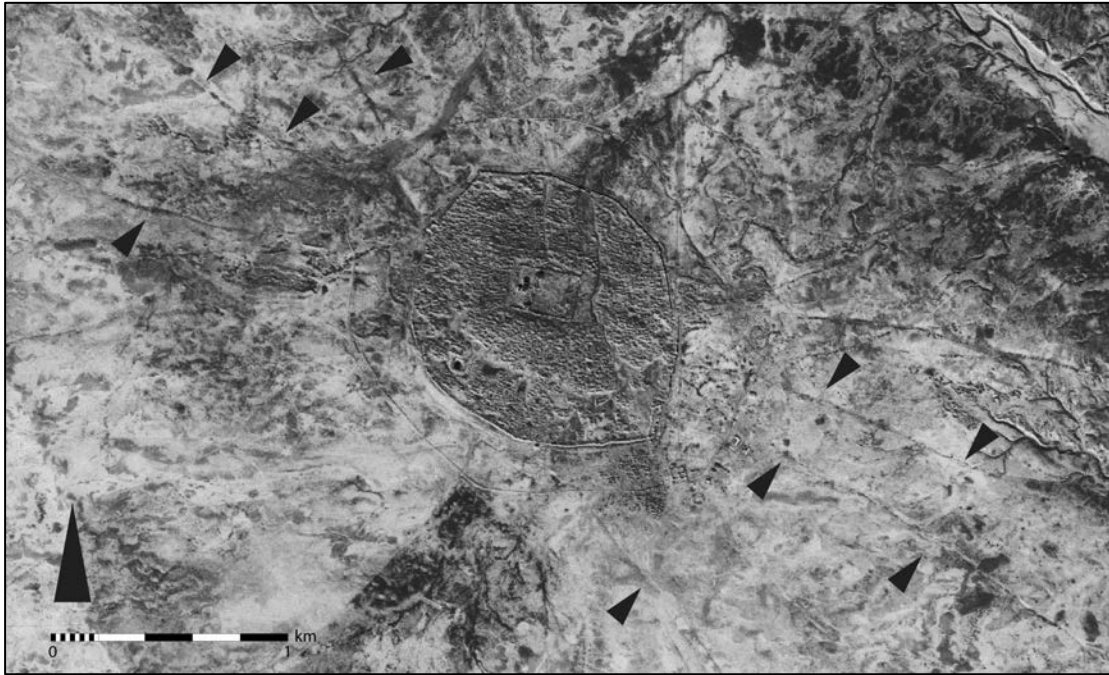


Fig. 21. Hatra as seen from the space in December 1967 (CORONA image /© Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey). Each black arrows indicates a probable ancient track. As the image clearly shows the role of Hatra as a nodal point in the route system in the region is of enormous importance.

According to the Table indeed, two were actually the major routes reaching Hatra. The main road coming form North-West reached lower Mesopotamia and Ctesiphon, making Hatra a necessary stop-point during the travel. Before arriving at Hatra, the road passed along the southern fringes of the Jebel Sinjar and towards the western bank of the Tigris (probably at the station marked with the name of *Ad Flumen Tigrim*) through the stations of *Ad Pontem* and *Abdeae*. All these sites have not been recognized on the ground and in this case neither the aerial images can provide interesting data³⁴³. The easternmost known site along the route Singara-Tigris is Ain Sinu, which has been identified with the toponym of *Zaguræ* (or *Zagorrae*) mentioned on the Table of Peutinger³⁴⁴. Excavations have been conducted on the site, while the aerial images only show the remains of what seems to be a fort faced by an

³⁴³ The location of these sites mentioned in the Table of Peutinger should be searched around the modern city of Mosul which constituted an important crossing point of the river in antiquity.

³⁴⁴ Aside of Ain Sinu, none of the mentioned places in the Table of Peutinger have been identified. David Oates proposed to identify the site of Tell Ibra with the Vicat of the Table (OATES 1968, 92).

unidentified squared structures which was called *castellum* by David Oates³⁴⁵. Moving southward, a second road connected Hatra to the city of *Gibrata* which is mentioned on the Table of Peutinger (probably to locate close to the modern city of Tekrit, in Iraq) and then to lower Mesopotamia. The road marked on the Table from South to the North, indeed, did not follow the course of the Tigris, but went straight toward the steppe and Hatra.

CHAPTER 8

MINOR SETTLEMENTS

³⁴⁵ OATES 1968, p. 85-88.

8.1 Introduction

Considering the scant archaeological data that can be retrieved from the whole northern Mesopotamian region for the period between the 2nd and the 4th century CE, this chapter will constitute a lucky exception since it will mainly include those villages or minor centres that have been partially investigated, as well as a short summary about the role the archaeological surveys have had in the comprehension of the settlements trends in the region in the period here at issue. As it has already shown, the roman occupation in northern Mesopotamia was much more focused on the major centres, transforming sometimes those cities in military strongholds with the add of a military quarter *within* the civic walls. The control of the vast territory between those strongholds, despite the on-going archaeological and historical researches, still is only partially known. The only data we have about the relations between a major centre and the local nearby villages during the period of the Roman occupation of the transeuphratene region are the ones that have been recorded in the papyri from Dura and from the Euphrates region³⁴⁶. The framework for the upper areas of the Mesopotamian land is, however, not so well defined. Among these minor centres four of them will be treated with much more attention, mainly because of the results the archaeological works carried out on those sites have achieved: Seh Qubba, Bezabde, Tell Tuneinir and Tell Barri. This last one will be taken, moreover, as a case study for the distribution of contemporary ceramic material in the region. I have tried, indeed, to statistically analyse the pottery from the levels at Barri dated to the period between the 2nd and the 4th century CE, in order to track and mark the presence of eastern and western imports in a local ceramic context. The last part of the chapter will regard the so-called *squared forts*, which although quite widespread in the western roman world, their presence in Mesopotamia brings more than a single issue. The most famous example is the fort at Ain Sinu, but the re-analysis of the

³⁴⁶ On the papyri from Dura see: WELLES, FINK & GILLIAM 1959. Most of the papyri from Dura can be currently view also at: <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/papyrus-collection-database>. The papyri from Euphrates (probably from the village of Beth Phouraia), see FEISSEL, GASCOU & TEIXIDOR 1997, 3-57; FEISSEL & GASCOU 2000, 257-208 . The relations that occurred between the cities and the villages in that area have been also studied by MAZZA 1992, 159-235, GNOLI 1999, 321-358 and MEROLA (2012).

early 20th century images with the combined use of the modern satellite imagery permits to have more than an example and, moreover, to better define the characteristics and, sometimes, the dynamics at the base of the presence/absence of the squared forts in Mesopotamia. The very last section of the chapter, in addition, will be briefly focused on the results that some among survey projects carried out in the region, have achieved. They will be examined mainly because of their geographic dislocation: the Tell Beydar Survey in Western Jezirah, the Tell Brak Sustaining Area Survey (as well as the results of the brief *Oates survey* of the late 1980s) which interested the middle Jaghjagh and the central Jezirah, the Tell Leilan Survey, which was carried out around the 3rd millennium site of Tell Leilan in northeastern Jezirah, Tell Hamoukar Survey in southeastern syrian Jezirah, which has provided a lot of interesting data and the two important projects undertook in the territory of current Iraq: the North Jazira project and the Zammar regional survey project, which have spread the light upon easternmost zones.

Obviously the pattern of the minor centres and rural landscape in the region will need further investigations in the next years, over all considering that the records we are dealing with in this chapter are often only surface data, coming from field-walking recognition surveys that can be quite misleading, especially considering the quantities and percentages of a given pottery on a specific site. Only complete and focused archaeological projects will make clearer the trends in the settlement patterns in the area during the period between the 2nd and the 4th century CE.

8.2 Seh Qubba

8.2.1 Introduction



Fig 22. The site of See Qubba as seen from the space after the construction of the Eski Mosul Dam (former Saddam Dam). The remains of the late Islamic village are still visible on the top of the hill. ©Google 2013.

Seh Qubba is the modern name of a site that lies on a bluff overlooking the Tigris River in modern northern Iraq, circa 90 km North of Mosul and 2 km upstream of Tell Abu Dhahir. The modern Kurdish name means “*three tombs*”, since three (but a fourth one is heavily ruined) small shrines are still visible on the top of the hill, close to the late village. They are domed structures built up with stones and mortar. According to Warwick Ball and Susan Gill only one seems to be still venerated on the site³⁴⁷. The original position of the site must have been very spectacular and strategically important on a cliff 40 m high overlooking the river and one of its major tributaries *wadi* from west, the *wadi* Suwaidiya, which entered the Tigris few meters south of the site. The strategic importance of the settlement is also remarked by the presence of an ancient track, which runs all along the western bank of the Tigris and very close to the hill. According to the suggestions of Sir Aurel Stein this road may have been the one Alexander the Great used when he was marching in the region

³⁴⁷ BALL & GILL 2003, 65.

before the battle of Gaugamela³⁴⁸. The site therefore probably controlled the area, the river in this point and the routes around it as well. The top of the hill is almost entirely occupied by the site itself, which covers an area of almost 26 ha. The southern part of the bluff is featured by the remains of the modern village and its modern cemetery, while the sections of the site not covered by the houses have revealed a series of mortar wall foundations, as well as scattered building debris and a some ceramic material, mainly concentrated in the northern part. Among these remains it is remarkable to note the presence of a paved road flanked by small rooms and walls (see below). All along the northern side of the bluff, moreover, the survey carried out by an English team has spotted the traces of a possible defensive wall, which is testified by a 5m high mound all along the edge of the hill. Three possible gateways have been located, two on the western slope, facing West, and a third one on the northern side.

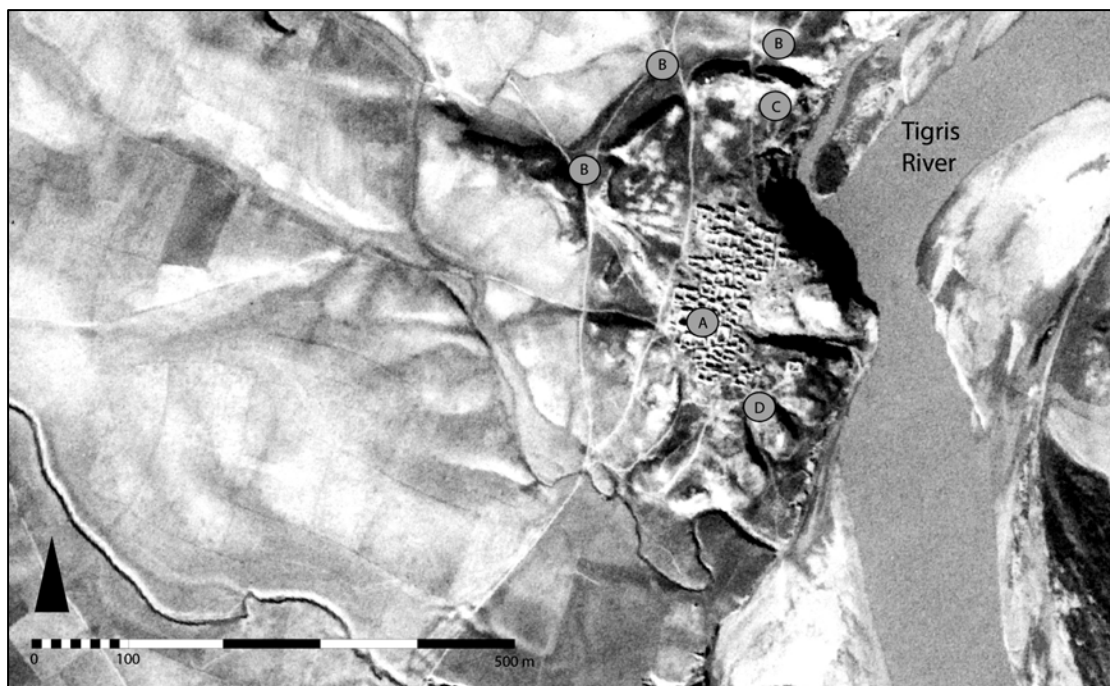


Fig. 23. Seh Qubba as seen from the space (CORONA image December 1967, © Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey). The image shows the site before the flooding of the Saddam Dam (now Eski Mosul Dam). The remains of the former modern village are visible in the centre (A), while the cemetery is immediately south (D). The excavation conducted by the British team were focused on the Northern part of the bluff (C) and in the white area immediately east of the village (Area A), while the three possible entrances have been identified all along the northern and eastern edge of the hill (B).

³⁴⁸ GREGORY & KENNEDY 1985, 128-129.

Immediately below the edge of the hill a large ditch (3-4 m wide) runs. It is possibly what remains of a water channel running below the site in order to provide the necessary quantity of water to the nearby area.

8.2.2 Archaeological Data

The most important archaeological remains from Seh Qubba, however, come from the so-called area A, which is a small plateau east of the modern village in the northern sector of the site. A sounding conducted by the British team, has permitted to identify several phases of occupation³⁴⁹. The first phase was represented by a large wall made out of bricks foundations and mud-brick superstructure probably related to a late moment of the Partho-Roman occupation of the site. The second phase has revealed, instead, the most important and significant remain of Seh Qubba. Below the foundation of the mentioned wall, two rooms have been exposed. The walls were made of large stones with the mud used as mortar between them. The floors of both rooms are quite meaningful. In Room 1, the smaller one, the floor consists of a thick layer of good white plaster which laid on a bottom level of small stones and pebbles (15 cm thick), while the floor of Room 2, which was mainly composed by a partially ruined white plaster, was also featured by a small water pipe mainly composed by small bricks and stones which probably laid underneath the soil itself. In a corner, the plaster floor was probably enriched by a mosaic, as some *tesserae* there found seem to prove. They are mainly white and black, but some pink *tesserae* have also been found³⁵⁰. It is noteworthy, furthermore, that the next phases of occupation on the site (dated to the Sasanian period) are mainly interested by a radical change in building techniques. The stones, indeed, are replaced by the mudbricks structures or by the *tauf*, a sort of sun-dried pisé. A trench was also excavated in the ramparts (trench C2), but the archaeological material there found was very scanty³⁵¹. Only few sherds have been found, mostly of them dated to the Islamic period, but it is possible that the visible topsoil was not the original one and that the ramparts must have undergone a series of changes through the centuries of human occupation on the site. In all the archaeological contexts revealed at Seh Qubba the chronology has been obtained through the recover of several potsherds, which have also permitted to

³⁴⁹ Details in BALL *ET AL.* 2003, 69 and ff.

³⁵⁰ The detailed report of the operation in the Sounding A at Seh Qubba are present in the volume edited by Warwick BALL (2003, 65-87). Here only the most important findings have been reported, in order to relate them with the historical situation of the site.

³⁵¹ BALL & GILL 2003, 72.

distinguish the different phases of occupation on the site. The main dating evidence for the Partho-Roman (which is the definition the excavators gave to the period comprised between the 2nd and the 3rd century CE) period is entirely based, indeed, on the ceramics. According to Warwick Ball and Susan Gill the most diagnostic types recovered belong to the so-called *Brittle* ware, which apparently is “often associated with Roman period material in the Near East”³⁵². A large number of grooved rim jars and squared rim jars has been also recovered, as well as some specimens of the so-called *diamonds* stamped ware, which is widespread in the all region and seems to be date to a period not later than the mid 3rd century CE³⁵³.



Fig. 24. The north-western section of the site as seen in a CORONA image from December 1967 (© Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey). The ramparts are quite visible in this shot. They stand 4-5 m high above the field. They probably enclosed the settlement on three side, leaving the eastern part undefended because of the presence of the river (as it happened in Dura Europos, i.e.). The main entrances, as already shown, are located in the western section. The main roads of the area reached Seh Qubba from the West.

³⁵² BALL & GILL 2003, 79. On the *Brittle* ware in Syria and the Levant see p. 143.

³⁵³ The chronology provided by BALL AND GILL (2003, 79) for the so called *diamonds* stamped ware is mainly based upon the considerations David Oates made for the specimens found at Ain Sinu, OATES 1959, nos. 49-50 and 54-55; OATES 1968, 93). If one accepts this chronology, indeed, it should be also admitted that the end of use of the site happened before the Diocletianic era. In addition, the excavations carried out at Tell Barri, have convincingly demonstrated that these sherds do not appear in levels late than the mid 3rd century CE (see PIEROBON BENOIT 2008, 188-190).

8.2.3 Conclusions and Observations

As W. Ball has rightly pointed out it is quite suggestive to consider the remains of Seh Qubba as the ones of a site inserted in the wide and complex context of the Roman frontier, especially in the period during the Persian wars of the 4th century CE³⁵⁴. As already said nothing but the ceramic material put the site in this chronological horizon, and even the ramparts may be related to a previous occupation, even Hellenistic as well. It is, however, interesting to note that the strategic position of the site did not escape probably to the Roman army's leaders and that the earthwork ramparts may have been set up in a hurry and, obviously, with the nearby available material. It is certainly premature to put the site in relation with the Roman eastern frontier (more investigations certainly are needed), but there are few points to consider even if only playing the game of pinpointing sites on a map.

In mid-4th century CE, when the Roman Army was about to surrender to the Shapur II invasion of the eastern territories, three were the main cities in the region: Nisibis, Singara and, presumably a military camp called *Castra Maurorum*. The name itself bears the identification in it, since it was named after the Moorish auxiliaries that were detached there³⁵⁵. The fortress, together with the two larger cities, was included in the threat with Shapur II in 363 CE when the centres, and part of the eastern roman territories, were given to the Persians, in order to end the war.

The location of Nisibis and Singara, as said (see chapter 4 and 5 respectively) is a matter of fact, while the scholars are still debating where *Castra Maurorum* was. Anyway the identification the site should first of all start from the surviving description of the camp that was made by Ammianus Marcellinus. The historian (18.6.9) wrote that “*smoke and gleaming fires always shone from the Tigris on past Castra Maurorum and Sisara*” during the military campaigns of Gordian III against the Persians in mid 3rd century CE. The first point to note is that, according to Ammianus (and one may not doubt him) the site was quite close to the Tigris.

³⁵⁴ BALL & GILL 2003, 80.

³⁵⁵ One of the three latin inscriptions recovered at Hatra (n.80, see OATES 1955, 41 and MARICQ 1957, 289-290) bears the name of a certain Quintus Petronius Quintianus who is remembered as tribune of the I Parthica and, on the next line, as “*tribunus cohortis IX Maurorum*” which was probably hosted, partially, at Hatra itself. It is likely to suggest that large part of the *Cohors* was detached elsewhere than Hatra, maybe even at *Castra Maurorum* (sic!).

Modern commentators of Ammianus have put *Castra Maurorum* close to Nisibis³⁵⁶, while David Oates put the site in the area of Tell al-Hawa, ca 50 kms south-west of Seh Qubba. A. Maricq suggested, instead, borrowing the hypothesis provided by Honigmann³⁵⁷, that the site must be located close to the modern Iraqi centre of Babil, north of the Jebel Sinjar, along the Tigris³⁵⁸, even if no certain remains have been there found to endorse this hypothesis.

Given these assumptions it seems more likely that the site at Seh Qubba could perfectly fits with the description provided by Ammianus and the excavated remains could therefore represent the ones of the fortress of *Castra Maurorum*. However without an epigraphic *datum* these suggestions must be remain as mere hypotheses. The dimensions of the site certainly are suitable for a military camp, as well as not only the large amount of *roman* pottery but also the mosaic floor recovered in the sounding A (see above), which surely denotes a certain importance of the site.

Moreover in 2004, a small squared fort has been discovered south-east of Al-Qamishli (part of the ancient Nisibis), close to the modern village of Qubur al-Bid by a team led by George Wood³⁵⁹. The late professor Wood wrote that the interpretation of the remains at Qubur al-Bid with the Roman fortress of *Castra Maurorum* are more suitable than the previous hypothesis, mainly on the base of the modern commentary to Ammianus Marcellinus³⁶⁰.

³⁵⁶ ROLFE 1935-40, *Ammianus Marcellinus* XVIII, 6, 9 and note 3.

³⁵⁷ HONIGMANN 1934, 478.

³⁵⁸ MARICQ 1957, 291.

³⁵⁹ WOOD 2004 and below, p. 165-170 in this research.

³⁶⁰ See paragraph 8.6.3 for further considerations about Qubur al-Bid.

8.3 Bezabde

8.3.1 Geographic introduction

The legion city of Bezabde frequently appears in the accounts of the roman campaigns in northern Mesopotamia, especially during the 4th century CE wars against the Persians, and it is widely mentioned by Ammianus who personally took part in the events. The identification of the site has been a matter of discussion. It has been firstly identified in the modern town of Cizre, but, after Algaze's survey in the region in late 1980s, has now been accepted the identification with the archaeological remains of Eski Hendek³⁶¹. The site of Eski Hendek (turkish for “*the old Endek*”) is located in the southeastern Turkey. It oversees a bend of the Tigris 700 meters north of the modern village of Hendekköy, circa 15 km north-west of Cizre (42° 3' 58' N / 37° 24' 8' E)³⁶².

8.3.2 History and Archaeological Data

Ammianus Marcellinus (20.7.1 and ff.) remembers a double-walled fortress in a position overlooking the Tigris, which could perfectly fit with the visible remains at Eski Hendek where the traces of a double curtain wall are still clearly recognizable and, moreover, in a prominent position over the river. The same passage in Ammianus testifies also the presence, in 360 CE, of several military units on the site. They were part of the *Legio II Flavia*, the *Legio II Armeniaca* and, maybe, the *Legio II Parthica*. Together with soldiers from these three legions, Bezabde probably also hosted a local auxiliary unit, the archers *Zabdiceni* (called after the river Zab, tributary of the Tigris)³⁶³. The main squared structure measures 275 m per side, enclosing an area of 7.5 ha. The whole area is flanked on its eastern and southern side by a double ditch and, probably, a moat (3-4 meters wide). West of this enclosure a second area is recognizable. It is a trapezoidal shaped structure with U-shaped projecting towers, which almost certainly constitutes a later adjoining part, on the model of the one visible at other sites such as Sura on the Euphrates, in

³⁶¹ ALGAZE 1989.

³⁶² ALGAZE 1991, 191 and ff..

³⁶³ POLLARD 2000, 287.

example³⁶⁴. The towers, moreover, resemble the ones visible at Singara and chronologically dated to the 4th century CE³⁶⁵.



Fig. 25. The site of Eski Hendek (Bezadbe) in a Google image (© Google 2012). The squared fort is marked with the letter A, while the later adjoined trapezoidal shaped section at west is marked with the letter B. The round-shaped projecting towers are clearly visible along the western and southern part of the settlement.

At least one entrance has been identified on the eastern wall of the older squared structure. It consists of a simple gate flanked by two solid towers still standing for a couple of meters, just above the supposed moat. The towers have also permitted to identify the construction technique that was used for the fort. They have been built, indeed, using alternating rows of ashlar blocks (both in limestone and basalt) and baked bricks (they have been set up in bands of three-four bricks thick). Other extramural remains have been also identified indicating a larger area of occupation of ca 24 ha³⁶⁶. Unfortunately not so much ceramics finds have been recovered, probably because of the looting actions through the centuries, although the specimens collected throughout the whole area seem to confirm a period of use comprised

³⁶⁴ KONRAD, 2008. 433-452.

³⁶⁵ See chapter 5 and paragraph 5.3 in this work.

³⁶⁶ ALGAZE 2012, 44

between the late 2nd and the early 3rd century CE. In addition to the pottery, ca 40 coins have been found scattered all over the area by local villagers and collected by the Turkish antiquities authority. They have been studied and chronologically placed in a period stretching throughout the 4th century CE (from 312 to 360 CE)³⁶⁷. Afterwards, the chronology of the site is relatively clear. The eastern section, indeed, resembles the typical shape of roman *castella* in eastern Anatolia³⁶⁸, although larger than the usual one, while the western part certainly was added in a later period, probably during the 4th century when the region was interested by the Persian-Roman wars.

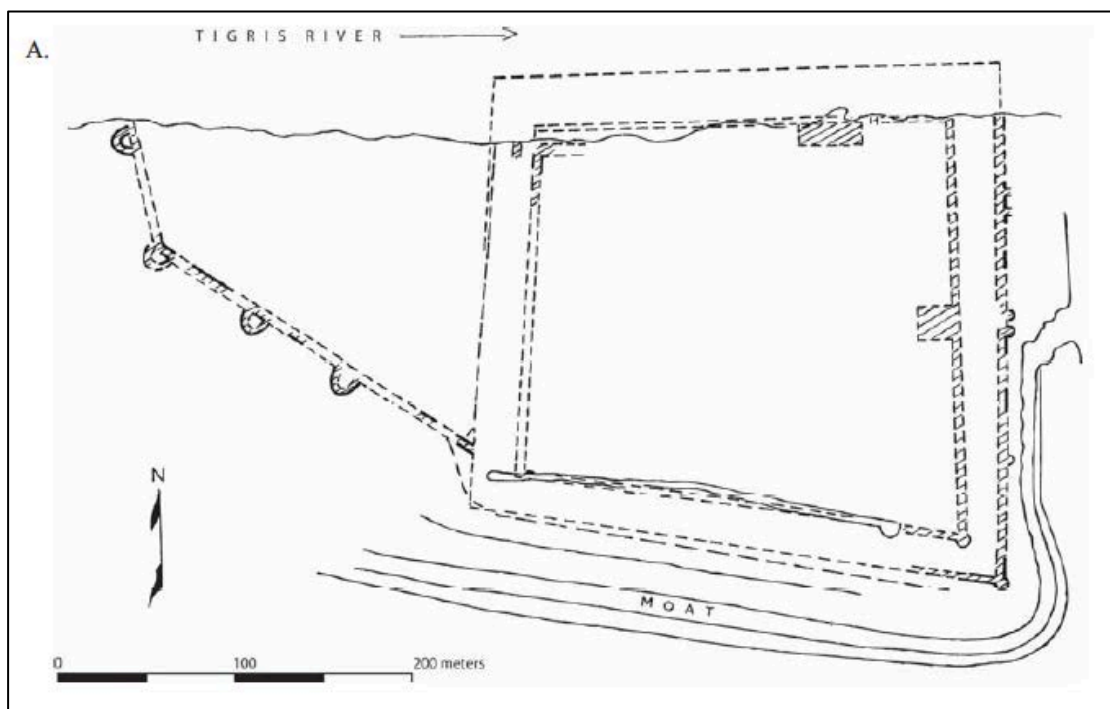


Fig. 26. Plan of the remains at Eski Hendek (after Algaze 2012, 82).

Given these assumptions, it is likely to identify the remains at Eski Hendek with the roman fortress of Bezadbe/Phaenicia³⁶⁹. The identification, furthermore, is also supported by several important factors. First of all the chronology of the western part of the site, which perfectly fits in the events occurred in this area, secondly the position itself of the site which, as said, perfectly fits with the description provided by Ammianus (20.7.1). Third point: the entire dimension of the settlement itself. The

³⁶⁷ SÖLYEMEZ AND LIGHTFOOT 1991. It is interesting to note that the later coins have been dated to the period of the Persian invasion that probably also marked the end of the life at the fortress.

³⁶⁸ LANDER 1984; ALGAZE 2012, 43.

³⁶⁹ ALGAZE 1989; ALGAZE 2012; SÖLYEMENEZ AND LIGHTFOOT 1991; COMFORT 2009).

south side of the fortification (considering both the squared structures and the later trapezoidal section) measures, indeed, more than half a kilometre. This evidence could be easily related to the presence of a legionary camp, where, it must be reminded, moreover, during the last phases of the Sasanian siege, parts of three different legions were stationed defending the site, implying thus a quite large camp. So the site was probably inserted in a wider context regarding the roman military dispositions along the upper mesopotamian plateau and the control of the access routes from North during the Sasanian campaigns of Shapur II. As said for Seh Qubba the prominent position on the bend of the river overlooking the opposite direction and the plain is a typical feature of some later roman fortresses³⁷⁰.

Unlike Seh Qubba, the remains of another site, probably a bridgehead opposite Eski Hendek, have been revealed close to the modern village of Fenik.³⁷¹ Fenik could not be located through the satellites images due to the erosion of the cliff overlooking the site at the north, but ceramic materials and other finds have been collected by the Algaze's survey (1988-1990), and recently published enriched of plans and photos by Algaze himself (2012, see references). Fenik has been identified with the village of Pinaka, mentioned by Strabo (16.1.24) and later by Ammianus Marcellinus (who call it *Phaenicia*, 18.9.1) during the campaigns in 360 CE. According to Ammianus (20.11.6) the Roman Army, led by Costance, tried twice to defend the fortress in 360 CE before the Sasanian entered the walls at the end of the year³⁷². The conquest of the fortress was quite important in order to control the routes in the remote regions of Corduene, Zabdicene and Moxuene (all these areas where located in Upper Tigris basin, between the Mesopotamia *tout court* and the Adiabene). The survey of Algaze has shown that a lot of Parthian distinctive potsherds have been collected at Fenik revealing an earlier "parthian" phase of the site, long before the roman presence in the area. Some of the defensive remains may be, in fact, related to the Parthian occupation of the site, which certainly was exploited because of its highly strategic position. A Parthian rock-cut relief, in addition, has been also found close to the modern village of Fenik³⁷³. Anyways the impressive defensive remains at Fenik are

³⁷⁰ A similar geographic location is attested at Sura and Halabyia-Zenobia along the Euphrates, for instance.

³⁷¹ A similar situation has been spotted also further south in Syrian Desert, on the site of Qreyre where a roman *castellum* has been excavated by a DAI expedition and a small bridgehead has been investigated on the opposite bend of the river Euphrates (see GSCHWIND & HASAN 2008, 455-471).

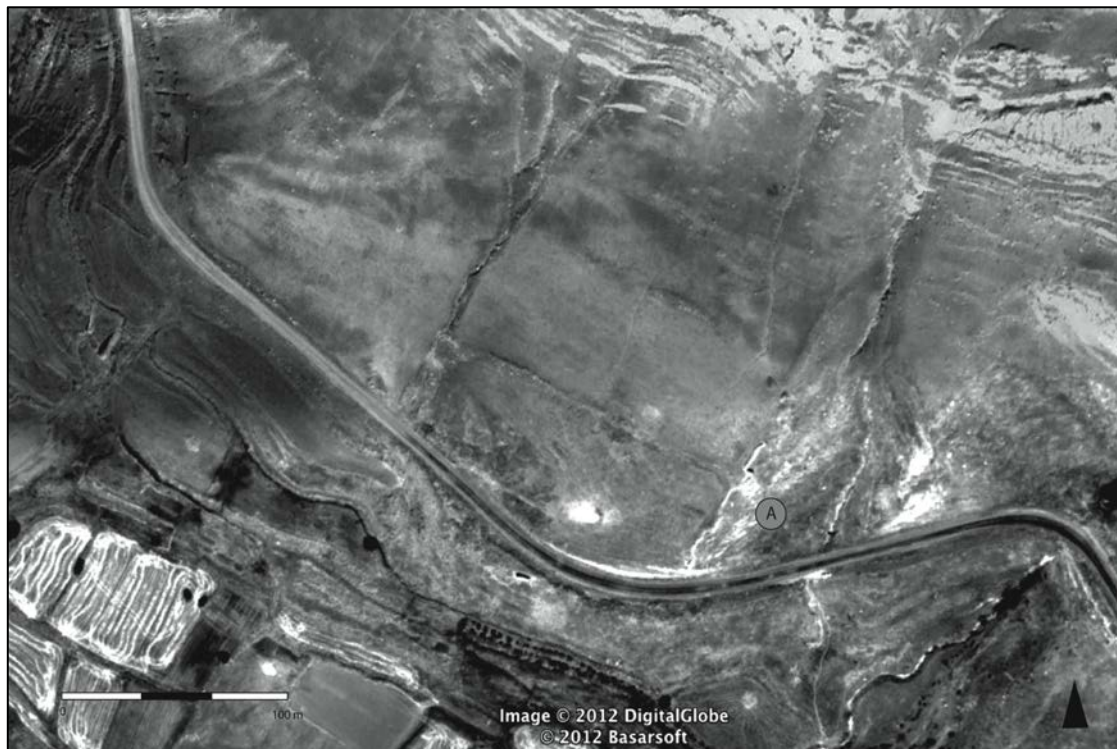
³⁷² LIZZI TESTA 2004, 390.

³⁷³ ALGAZE 1989, 395 and 402.

though to locate chronologically, and one may suppose different phases through which the fortification was augmented and improved. Unfortunately they are scanty visible on the ground, but the entire area on the other side of Eski Hendek seems to have been interested by a massive defensive architecture, probably to be related with the attack at Bezadbe from North.

What seems to have a parallel is the so-called *Parthian fortification* which has been identified by Algaze all along the eastern area of Fenik. This is a simple curtain wall made out of bricks enclosing a large zone which also results to be quite irregular. The enclosed area, indeed, represents the southern and eastern slope of a natural hill, whose top was probably occupied by a citadel (Ammianus writes about three citadels at Bezadbe/Phaenicia). It is more likely like the later remains at Zenobia/Halabyia where the defensive system was shaped according to the natural disposition of the hill and whose summit was also there occupied by a sort of citadel or little palace.

Fig. 27. The area of Fenik as seen from the Google satellite image (©Google 2012). The



letter A indicates the lower part of the main wall (SW-NE).

8.3.3 Conclusions

During the 4th century CE, Ammianus mentions the site with the two names of Phaenicia and Bezadbe, probably considering the two fortresses on both the banks of

the river, as a whole defensive system on a strategic position at the foothills of the mountainous regions of eastern Anatolia. The role of Bezabde has been also remarked by Sartre, who underlined the presence of a fundamental track that formed the complex road network system in the area during the severian period (from Nisibis to Bezabde)³⁷⁴.

8.4 TELL BARRI

³⁷⁴ SARTRE 2001, 143.

8.4.1 Introduction

The case of Tell Barri perfectly fits in the context of the so-called minor settlements indirectly involved in the historical events of the region. The chapter will be mainly centred on the results retrieved by the excavation of the archaeological layers dated to the period from 2nd to 4th century CE, trying to analyse the historical and socio-economic aspects of a village in the disputed area. The attention will be given to the archaeological remains both of the acropolis and the lower town where different and important evidence have been excavated, and mainly to the in-context material. Although indeed the major data here presented will be focused on the pottery findings, as a clue for the understanding of certain dynamics that went over in the region during the period at issue, the architectural remains will be also presented in order to contextualize the ceramic material and trying to find analogies and, maybe, differences with other investigated sites in the area. The investigation of a specific minor site through its archaeological remains, indeed, can be a sort of guideline for the understanding of the all those small-scale sites scattered in the area.

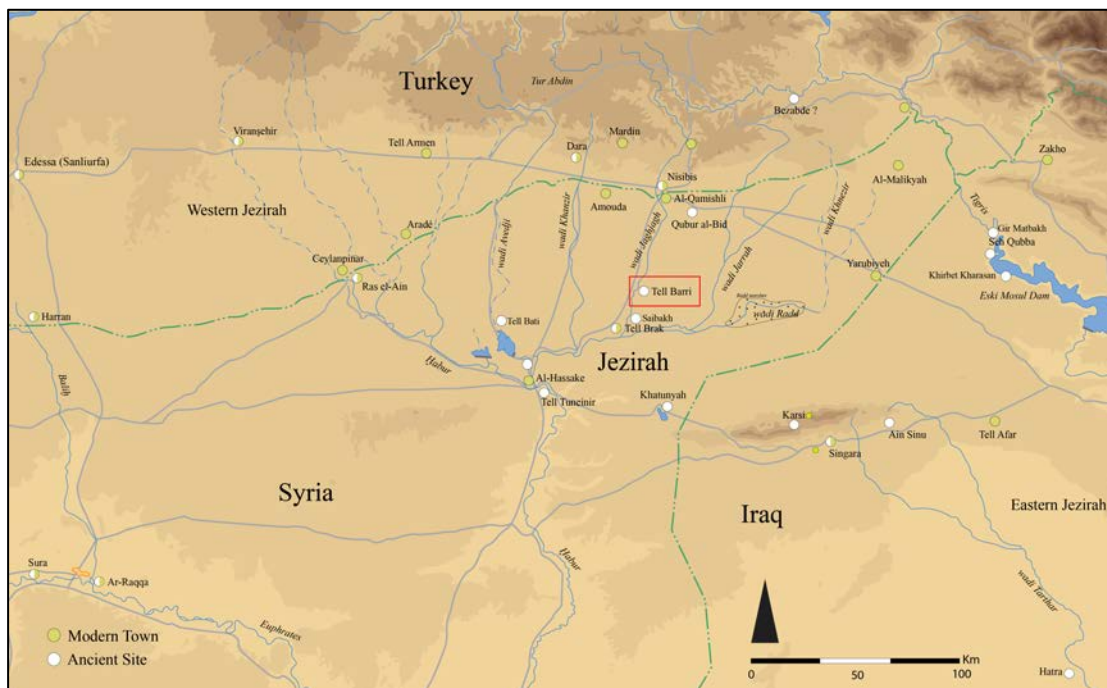


Fig. 28. The location of Tell Barri within the Upper Habur Basin.

8.4.2 Geography and climate

Tell Barri lies in North-eastern Syria, in the so-called *bec de canard*, in the modern Mohafazat of Al-Hassake, circa 8 km north of Tell Brak and not so far from the current Syria-Iraq border (Fig. 28). The classical name of the site is unfortunately still unknown, while *Kahat* is the name of the site during the Assyrian period as

retrieved from the threshold slab found on the site and published by Georges Dossin in 1961³⁷⁵. The tell has been interested by a long history that goes to the late Chalcolithic period (late 4th millennium BCE) to the modern period, whose results are clearly visible in the impressive archaeological stratification.

The site is located approximately on the 250mm rainfall line per year and so the dry-farming cultivations has been slightly assisted by scattered rains throughout the history³⁷⁶. The surrounding area, also known as Jezirah (arabic for "island"), has been completely filled by Tertiary and Quaternary soils and the soil of the all region can be identified as Calcic xerosol, which is a very fertile soil (Wilkinson et. al. 1997: 70-2 and Ur 2011: 6). The climate of the area is strong Mediterranean climate, with the rain periods usually in winter months.

The rainfall varies among the different geographic zones of the area. In Northern fringes of Anatolian plateau and in the Tur Abdin massif the precipitations are something like 700mm per year. This datum slowly decreases moving south, with the southernmost limit of the area roughly comprised in the 150-200 mm per year rainfall line. The region is also featured by several seasonal watercourses (arabic *wadi*) and by two major rivers: the Ḥabur and the Baliḥ, at East.

Tell Barri lies on the left bank of one of these wadis, the wadi Jaghjagh (ancient *Hyrmas* and later *Mygdonius*)³⁷⁷, tributary of the Ḥabur and therefore sub-tributary of the Euphrates River. The entire plain roughly overpasses the 350 m in altitude, while at the contrary the plateau decreases moving southward. Tell Barri stands in a large plain between the Jaghjagh and the Jebel Sinjar with an average altitude above the sea level of 330 m ca. The top of the tell, as marked by the high point, is 374 m³⁷⁸.

8.4.3 Physical Description

The archaeological site is mainly constituted by a high mound (*tell*) and by the adjacent lower town. The whole area measures more than 20 ha and encloses both the houses of the Italian expedition and the mud-bricks modern structures of two families living nearby the tell. This is 32 m high with a total area of 7 ha. It consists of a huge mound with very sharp slopes, especially the northern one, more exposed

³⁷⁵ DOSSIN 1962, 197-207. A complete and comprehensive bibliography on Tell Barri can be found at: http://www.tellbarri.com/?page_id=6 (last time visited on March 20, 2013).

³⁷⁶ See especially Ur 2010, 20-23.

³⁷⁷ See also chapter 4 "Nisibis" for further geographical consideration of the area.

³⁷⁸ MARCHAND 2004, 154.

to the winds from the northern mountains. Its formation is strictly connected to the settlements that occupied the place through the millennia and mainly caused by the decay of the buildings of each settlement, up to the modern period. Different areas of excavations have been opened along the slopes and, as consequence of the significant archaeological investigations through the years the chronological sequence exposed is impressive, going from the late 4th millennium up to the modern period. The top of the tell is moreover, nowadays, occupied by a modern cemetery, developed since the '40s around a tomb of a shaykh (shaykh Barri), that has hugely re-used ancient stones and partially destroyed the later archaeological levels.

The nearby wadi Jaghjagh, is nowadays almost completely dry, with few exceptions during the early months of a year. The watercourse, once, was certainly more important than the actual conditions let suppose, and surely it was a fundamental source of water for the settlement, in a region where most of the times, other contemporary sites, are not so close to an available source of water.

Tell Barri was labelled by Poidebard, in the 1930s (mistaking the correct name, Poidebard called it Tell Beri), as a byzantine period site. In 1961 George Dossin, travelling in all the Jezirah found a slab-stone, probably belonging to a royal palace of neo-Assyrian period on the southern slope of the tell. The cuneiform inscription recalls the belonging of the threshold to the palace of Kahat .

Excavations carried out since 1980 have revealed important structures concerning the period at issue. Three main areas are interested by the presence of those remains. Two of them are located on the acropolis (Area H and Area E), while a third excavation area is located in the Lower Town (Area M, see Fig.29). All the three areas have been interested, after the abandon of the territory by the Roman Army in 363, by the Sasanian and, later, Islamic and Medieval occupation too. Both the periods have left evidences in the areas, apart of the ceramic material, which will be discussed in an appendix at the end of the chapter.



Fig. 29. The tell as seen from South. The two large excavation areas are visible on the right (Area G) and on the left (Area J). The position of the analysed area is also marked (© Missione Archeologica Italiana a Tell Barri).

8.4.4 Historical Overview

8.4.4.1 From the 4th millennium to the late Iron Age

The human presence at Barri is attested since the 4th millennium BCE³⁷⁹. Soundings along the western slope of the tell have revealed archaeological levels (with small houses and narrow courtyards) as well as pottery dated to the late Chalcolithic period³⁸⁰. One of the most important phases of occupation on the site, instead, is well and largely represented by the 3rd millennium BCE remains. A sacred complex belongs to this phase³⁸¹. In a squared walled courtyard two shrines have been revealed, alongside with service structures and small kitchens³⁸².

³⁷⁹ The largest and most important overviews of the works carried out at Tell Barri are PECORELLA 1982, Pecorella 1998 and Pierobon-Benoit 2008.

³⁸⁰ PIEROBON BENOIT 2013, *in press*; RACCIDI 2013, *in press*.

³⁸¹ PECORELLA & PIEROBON BENOIT 2008, 13-48

³⁸² PIEROBON BENOIT 2008, 49.

Another important phase at Barri is represented by the Middle-Assyrian period. A rich necropolis has been dated to this phase³⁸³. The funerary goods exposed have revealed a rich and wealthy community that surely exploited the primary position of the site after the fall of the larger 3rd millennium sites in the area (Brak, Leilan, Mozan). Imported materials as well as golden objects from the graves testify the importance of the site in this moment³⁸⁴. Furthermore, a small palace, entirely built in mud-bricks, and date to the reign of Adad-Nirari I has been discovered in Area G, on the southern slopes of the tell³⁸⁵.

The Neo-Assyrian presence on the site is well attested too. Apart of the already mentioned stele of Tukulti Ninurta II, a consistent part of a palace (presumably the one whom the stele belonged) has been exposed all along the western side of the hill. The whole structure is mainly composed by mud-bricks walls and paved courtyards. Several thresholds have been revealed, some of them bearing the classical rosette decoration of the Assyrian time³⁸⁶. Unfortunately the rooms have been probably looted after the collapse of the Assyrian empire and therefore there is almost no trace of the likely rich furnitures as well as other materials of the palace.

After the collapse of the Assyrian empire a troubled (and archaeologically *dark*) period is attested in the area. No large Achaemenid levels have been excavated at Barri. The phase is mainly represented by small houses (one of them with a terracotta system of plumbing) which must have been exploited the surviving and visible remains of 10th century BCE structures.

8.4.4.2 The Hellenistic period

The years between the late 4th century BCE and the 1st century BCE deserve separate considerations being the most attested *classical* period in the region (Oates and Oates 1990). Unfortunately, the Hellenistic presence at Barri is scarcely attested and only few collapsed structures have been revealed, even if the ceramic material is abundant. This is probably mainly because of the excavations that have been focused on the edges of the hill. It could be thus suggest that the Hellenistic settlement was smaller and so, so far, still covered by later occupation phases. It is, however, quite interesting to underline the presence of well-known pottery types in those levels

³⁸³ PECORELLA AND PIEROBON 2008, 49-76; D'AGOSTINO 2008, 127-142.

³⁸⁴ D'AGOSTINO 2008, 127-141. A partial catalogue of the finds is in D'AGOSTINO 2007, 332-347.

³⁸⁵ PECORELLA & PIEROBON BENOIT 2001, 59-61

³⁸⁶ PECORELLA

which shows a certain uniformity in the all region (examples of the same types have been collected in several surveys in the area and beyond such as the Tell Leilan survey³⁸⁷, the Hamoukar survey³⁸⁸, the Tell Beydar³⁸⁹ and the recent PARTeN project in the Iraqi Kurdistan³⁹⁰. These specimens are directly inspired by imported western traditions, sometimes with morphological and typological change³⁹¹. The most interesting architectural remain of this period, instead, is a group of three (or four) chalk-covered tubs, which were likely used to dyeing clothes and suedes³⁹².

8.4.4.3 Tell Barri between the 1st century BCE and the 4th century CE

After the fall of the Seleucid kingdom, the whole area comprised between the Euphrates and the Tigris in their upper courses became a western territory of the Parthian Kingdom³⁹³. The role the settlement at Barri played in the period between the late 1st century BCE and the end of the 4th century CE can be barely understood through the literary sources, even if it appears to be better determinable through the archaeological data. The archaeological evidence of the period stretching from the 1st to the 4th century CE represent, indeed, one of the most attested and well-documented phases at Tell Barri.

During the Parthian occupation of the region, the site appears to be fortified, as the excavations of the so-called GCW (Great Circuit Wall) testify. The wall that runs along three sides of the hill is mainly made out of fired bricks (but it is not excluded an upper part in mud-bricks, which unfortunately it is not preserved) and it consists of a double curtain defensive system, with towers, gates and small accesses (chiefly on the eastern side) which connected the limits of the acropolis with the settlement

³⁸⁷ DE ALOE 2008, 575-586.

³⁸⁸ UR 2010, 117.

³⁸⁹ MARTÍN GALAN & OLIVARES PANTOJA 2007, 211-225.

³⁹⁰ PALERMO 2013, in press.

³⁹¹ For instance, the so-called *in-curved* rim bowls, or the palmette decorated fish-plates, which are quite widespread in the whole Northern Mesopotamia during the Hellenistic period have been probably mutated and imported from western centres such as Antioch, Hama, Cyprus and even the Asia Minor and Greece. See ROMANO 1994, 57-104 and plates 16-20 in particular; PAPUCI-WLADIKA 1995, 65-78 and fig. 5 in particular; See also the examples from Nimrud: OATES 1957, 114-157. Recent on-going survey projects in Iraqi Kurdistan are proving the diffusion of these shapes even further East.

³⁹² The fact that the tubs are the only visible evidence of the Hellenistic settlement at Barri seems to confirm that the dimensions of the site were smaller at that time. Being the dyeing works usually set at the edges of a settlement because of their smell it is likely that the town centre was far from these installations, somewhere on the hill, but still unexcavated.

³⁹³ On the Parthian period in Mesopotamia see the recent works (with further references) by GRAJETZKI (2011) and HAUSER (2012).

inside³⁹⁴. The absence of the wall on the southern side of the tell could be easily explained with the extension of the settlement itself in this area. In the Area H, on the western slope of the tell, indeed, stubs of the fortification which seem to suggest the presence of a gate or a small entrance, have been discovered. These stubs can be, therefore, the only attestation of the southern section of the fortification on the acropolis. Unfortunately, no literary source does any mention of a fortified site in the region in the period stretching from the 1st century BCE and the 1st CE and so there is no further clue in this sense for the remains at Barri. However one should admit that probably the site was not a minor and rural village at that time, being the fortification at Barri the only preserved of the period in the whole region. Unfortunately we do not have further evidence to better frame the role of the site in its regional context.

The chronology of the whole fortification is, therefore, mainly based upon the associated ceramic material as well as other small finds. An older chronology for the construction of the fortification seems to put it at the end of the 2nd century BCE, while the end of use of the related structures have been recently updated to the early years of the 2nd century CE³⁹⁵. This last chronology is principally based upon the recent finds from the 2008 campaign. Under a level of destruction of the stubs of the eastern gate, a coin, dated back to the period of Osroes, has been found sealed upon an earthen soil. The coin, which was certainly struck between 115-117 CE, refers to the rule of the usurper Osroes during the early years of the 2nd century and the troubled moments of the Trajanic presence in the area³⁹⁶.

³⁹⁴ PIEROBON BENOIT 1998, 230-231; PIEROBON BENOIT 2008, 182-185.

³⁹⁵ PIEROBON BENOIT 2008, 184-185.

³⁹⁶ PALERMO 2013, 488-489.



Fig. 30. The eastern section of the fortification at Tell Barri as seen from North. © Missione Archeologica Italiana a Tell Barri.

Unfortunately there is actually no trace of a Roman involvement in the destruction of the wall at Barri, although there is an interesting hypothesis about a counter-attack by Lusius Quietus against local Jewish and Parthian communities (the so-called *Kitos* war, mentioned in Cassius Dio LXVI, 32), which destroyed all the villages who supported the uprising in the area of Nisibis and the valley of the Mygdonius (Jaghjagh)³⁹⁷. Unfortunately few parallels have been found with the construction at Barri. Similar walls, made out of a mixed technique of fired-bricks and mud-bricks were used in Central Asia (like Nisa)³⁹⁸ and in the Southern Caspian region (see the famous wall of Gorgan)³⁹⁹ or at Failaka (Hellenistic Ikaros, in modern Kuwait)⁴⁰⁰. Anyway, As R. Pierobon Benoit noted, because of the lack of a complete planimetry of the whole structure, it is quite tough to attribute the construction of the fortification at Barri to a given model.⁴⁰¹ The major phase of use of the fortification is thus dated to the early stages of the Parthian period in the region. As seen, the

³⁹⁷ For the “Kitos War” see *supra*. Also see PUCCI 1981.

³⁹⁸ WIESEHOFER 2001, 126

³⁹⁹ REKAVANDI *et al.* 2007, 95-136.

⁴⁰⁰ GELIN 2013 (<http://ifpo.hypotheses.org/4929>) (last time visited on March 20, 2013).

⁴⁰¹ PIEROBON BENOIT 2008, 184.

Parthian influence is archaeologically retrievable both on the tell and in the lower town. Here, close to the Jaghajagh, a large fired-bricks building has been revealed through several campaigns. The function of the whole structure, made out of different inter-connected rooms with a sort of central courtyard (see Fig. 31) is still a matter of discussion although some hypothesis can be conducted upon the basis of the location and the plan.

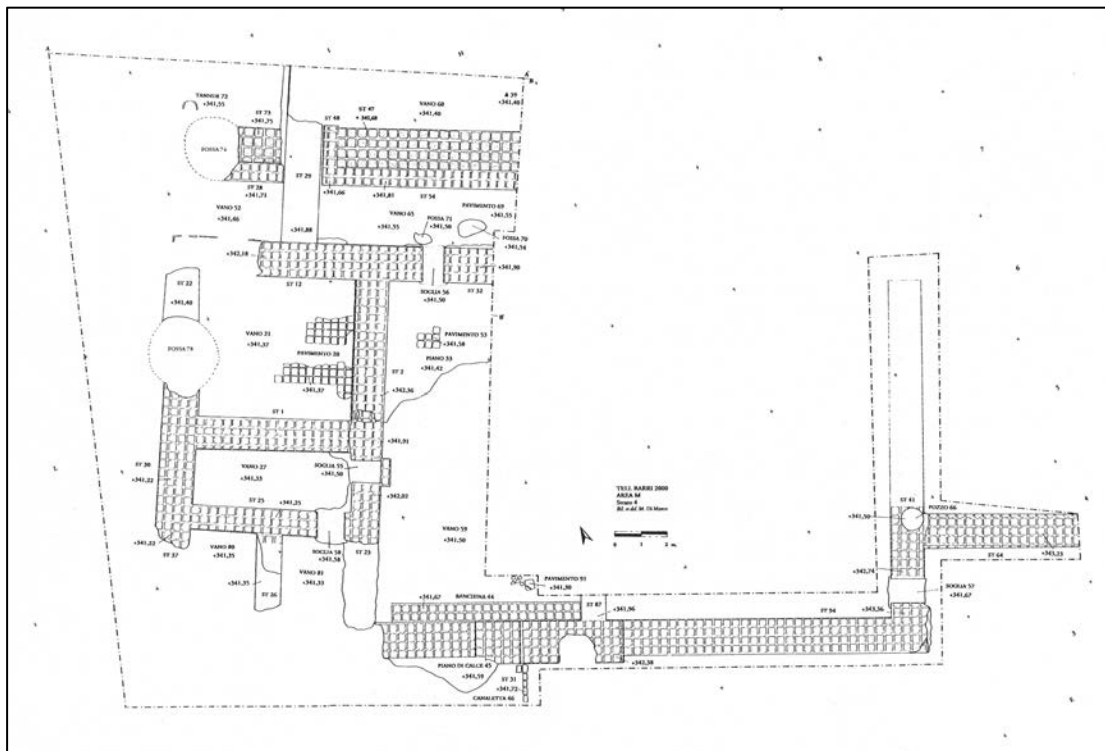


Fig. 31. The public building in Area M (lower town) as it appeared at the end of the 2000 season of excavations. © Missione Archeologica Italiana a Tell Barri.

The building, indeed, lies very close to the river (and probably to the supposed ancient route from Nisibis toward the Jaghajagh-Ḫabur confluence) and the presence of several rooms enclosing a central courtyard, together with the absence of a real uniform ceramic assemblage, let us think that the building had a public more than domestic function. The interpretation as a *toll-station* is suggestive, but it still lacks of certain proves. The planimetry of the building recalls that of some late Hellenistic buildings of the Near East⁴⁰².

The whole Parthian influence on the site, at least on an early stage, has been identified through the study and the analysis of the ceramic repertoire, which helped the archaeologists with the chronological definition of the revealed layers. The material culture of the early parthian phase at Tell Barri is mainly represented by a

⁴⁰² PIEROBON BENOIT 2008, 182.

pottery assemblage quite homogenous and mainly composed by large storage jar, buff-ware jars and white/greenish glazed bowls, often in association with local materials and it is characterised by very few imported ones (see below).

The main evidence of a transformation between the early and the later Parthian phase at Barri is clearly represented by the destruction of the Great Defensive Wall which also constitutes a sort of *vacat* in the political power of the region, although the available data are still full of blanks. The later phase of the Parthian occupation on the site appears to be quite different from the previous one. Indeed now the occupation seems to interest only the acropolis with no evidence of a settled lower town⁴⁰³. This later occupation has been mainly excavated in two different areas (Area H on the western slope and Area E, on the eastern one), with significantly interesting results. The settlement in this period lacks of a fortification (a possible clue about the strategic importance of the site itself in this moment) and moreover, the surviving structures of the defensive wall are now occupied by small mud-brick houses and working spaces. The major houses' complex, however, has been excavated in Area H through different campaigns. Here the works have revealed a series of levels mainly occupied by private houses and small storage rooms, often with common paved bricks courtyard and small passages between them. All the houses of the Area H are made of mud-bricks, sometimes with stone foundation, and in a certain moment they exploited even the small stubs of the Great Defensive Wall that were still visible in the area. These are two or room houses, with earthen soils and, in some cases, white plaster onto the inner walls. This phase, chronologically related to a period comprised between initial years of the 2nd century and the first quarter/half of the 3rd century, is also featured by a shift of centre from eastern slope to the western one if considering the relevance of the archaeological remains.

⁴⁰³ The excavations, which have been stopped in 2010 for safety reasons, could one day, eventually, confirm the contrary.



Fig. 32: Collapsed storage jars in the Area H. The domestic use of this area is proved up to the 6th century CE. © Missione Archeologica Italiana a Tell Barri.

The eastern slope, the one where the main gate of the fortification was, is now occupied by small houses (often exploiting the visible stubs of the fortification as well as spoiling the fired bricks of the stubs themselves), while the western part of the tell, where only three stubs and a probably small gate of the wall have been found seems to be the residential quarter of the acropolis during that period. Unfortunately one cannot say why this shift happened albeit it is more likely that the eastern area was still featured by the debris and the survived structures of the wall and so the reconstruction and the re-occupation must have been more complicated than on the western slope.

These changes at Barri can be put in relation with several factors, most of them archaeologically unknown on the site. The Northern Jezirah was interested, indeed, during the early centuries of our era by a sort of shrinking in sites distribution, meaning with this term a reduction of the scattered human presence as widely testified by the several surveys carried out in the area⁴⁰⁴. The absence of a fortification in the late Parthian phase (together with the lack of any contemporary

⁴⁰⁴ WILKINSON & TUCKER 1995, 68-69. See also paragraph 8.7.

building in the lower town) let us suppose that the contraction of the settlements was probably flanked by a loss of importance at Tell Barri too.

The situation radically changed starting from the late 3rd century CE, when the Roman presence in the area became more intense. Starting from the severian period, indeed, the Upper Mesopotamia has become roman province under Septimius Severus and one may suppose that the security of the area was achieved through the military power as well as the political one, and the eastern limits of the area which was controlled by the Roman troops, was extended further East, reaching the western bank of the Tigris river⁴⁰⁵. Therefore the area of the Jaghjagh basin was now converted in a sort of buffer zone between the safer limits of the Euphrates and the newly acquired territories along the Tigris. The site was probably smaller than before in this period, and inserted within a relatively local economy instead of being possibly involved in larger schemes as it more probably was before the severian time. The *roman presence* on the site is not easily recognizable, and the only proves of an interaction of the village at Barri with the *roma sphere* is testified by some coins⁴⁰⁶, as well as by the presence of a conspicuous amount of *terra sigillata* pottery which certainly proves the site was inserted in a relatively wide network of commercial exchanges⁴⁰⁷. Another significant indicator of the contacts of the site with western regions is represented by a high amount of the so-called *Brittle Ware*, which is a gritty and usually ribbed pottery, with a relatively iron-rich clay. It was widespread in the Levantine coast and Syria for a very long period. One of the most important production areas was the western coast of Syria, while nearby productions zones at Tell Barri were probably located on the Euphrates, in the region of Zeugma and Barbalissos⁴⁰⁸.

⁴⁰⁵ The easternmost identified site with a supposed roman *presence* in the area is Seh Qubba, which is discussed below, p. 152-159.

⁴⁰⁶ LIGHTFOOT (1990, 123) suggested the integration of the site within the roman *limes* on the base of a coin dated to the trajanic period. Although the hypothesis needs to be verified by further archaeological investigations, one should admit that the most important phase at Tell Barri, as confirmed by the presence of the defensive wall, was the period between the end of the 1st and the early 2nd century CE. See also PECORELLA & SALVINI 1982, 93.

⁴⁰⁷ On the *terra sigillata* repertoire from Tell Barri see PARMEGIANI 1985, 113-128 and Martucci 2008, 305-321.

⁴⁰⁸ The chronology of this ceramic type ranges from the Hellenistic to the Mameluk period, and the specimens which have been dated to the *roman* period in the Levantine coast and Syria have been differentiated in three different groups. On the Brittle ware in Syria and the Levant see over all VOKAER 2007, 701-714; VOKAER 2010, 115-129; MARTZ 2009 (available at: http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/index.php?halsid=94d5d84vdab7ni07d23i6afhu4&view_this_doc=hal-

8.4.5 Pottery as a chronological and typological indicator at Barri

The study of the ceramic assemblages found in stratified layers constitutes the bulk of every good archaeological (but also historical, in some way) work. The role of the pottery in archaeology should therefore be the role of the main indicator in a puzzle to solve⁴⁰⁹. The contribution of the pottery study in an archaeological context, which unfortunately lacks of accurate historical data, can certainly be considered a main reference to undertake in order to obtain a sort of chronological and typological definition of a given specific site. This is quite important when dealing with archaeological sites in the eastern regions of the Roman Empire (but, extending the theory, in every *frontier* zone) where the interactions and the connections with other cultures and people have always produced a series of clear material culture markers in contraposition, sometime, with a lack in literary and historical data. The case of Tell Barri well represents, therefore, this situation, being the site completely unknown in the historical source, even if the excavations have revealed the existence of a settlement (in some periods quite flourishing) from the Hellenistic up to the early modern times.

The study will basically move from the considerations about the ceramic assemblages of Tell Barri in the first three centuries of our era in order to track continuities and change in the material culture through the troubled years of the Roman presence in the area.

The analysis of the pottery material recovered at Barri through 30 years of excavations will obviously need a specific work, completely dedicated to the matter, but a short preliminary summary of the obtained results, could also be achieved starting from the analysis of separate assemblages excavated in different areas of the tell during a period of four years⁴¹⁰. Pottery recovered from Area E/CGW and Area H (and minor amounts from Area M and Area A) will be analysed, in its context and with parallels from other nearby sites. The partiality of the data reflects the on-going work that will be here presented as a sort of short summary of the recent campaigns went over in two different areas of the acropolis, one related to the period 1st BCE-early 2nd CE (Area E/GCW), the other to the period 2nd - 4th CE (Area H).

[00380481&version=1](#); last time visited on March 21, 2013). See also DYSON 1968. The *Brittle ware* of Tell Barri has been preliminarily analysed by AMODIO 2008, 322-336.

⁴⁰⁹ PEÑA 2010.

⁴¹⁰ The analysis will cover the excavations season between the 2007 and the 2010 when the archaeological works at Tell Barri have been temporarily interrupted.

A study about the pottery in Upper Mesopotamia, although brief, must forcedly starts from the definition of the diagnostic types that often result to be the most important chronological marker in the area. Several surveys and excavations carried out in the Ḥabur basin have established the attestation and the definition of a human settlement by the presence of some distinctive shapes and types, which were widespread in the region during the period from the 2nd century BCE to the 4th century CE. The span of time itself, moreover, should be divided in three main periods. Even if this method seems to appear quite simplistic, at least it helps us to better contextualize the different pottery material within a more complex historical framework:

1. Hellenistic (late 4th century BCE – early 1st century BCE)
2. Partho-Roman (1st century BCE – early 3rd century CE)
3. Roman/Byzantine-Sasanian (3rd century CE – 7th century CE)

These chronological categories have been used since early 1950s to spot and separate phases in several settlements, mainly on the basis of the presence/absence of certain ceramic types. Must be said, however, that an important factor to bear in mind dealing with the ceramic production and distribution in a specific frontier area is the overlapping rather than the sequenciality of the different phases as well as the usability of a given type. This basically means that the diffusion of a certain type, widely spread in a given period, does not disappear with the collapse of a particular political power, but it continues in order to evolve in a slightly different shape, in example, or with the add of a particular or specific decoration. Therefore the chronological aspects of certain types should be reviewed in a broader period, with peaks and lows in distribution and presence, even in a small area.

A total number of 4998 potsherds has been analysed, drawn and documented⁴¹¹. This amount of pottery basically comes from the domestic layers of the Area H and from the re-use of the Parthian Fortification on the eastern slope (Area E/GCW), as well as a minor quantity from the buildings in the lower town, explored in the Area M, close to the Jaghjagh river, and a large building partially excavated in two different phases in Area A, in the south-western corner of the tell. The chronological span of time goes from the mid Parthian period (late 1st century CE) up to the mid 4th century CE.

⁴¹¹ The study of the potsheds have started from the database which was arranged by the Italian Expedition at Tell Barri.

8.4.5.1 Method and analysis

Being this work not a ceramic dedicated one the method used in the analysis of the pottery is mainly based on the percentages, frequencies and absence/presence of certain diagnostic types. These are, indeed, chiefly identified with the most current types occurring in the nearby excavations in the region, as well as the specimens found and dated in several surveys carried in the Upper Ḥabur basin. Among them the most recognizable types should be mentioned the ones classified by David Oates (1957; 1959 and then largely expressed in 1968), as well as those recently included in the Working Ceramic Typology, a survey-based book (unpublished) which collects the most diagnostic ceramic types of the region from 5th millennium BCE to the Islamic period spotted during several surveys through the last ten years (see also below, paragraph 8.7). The ceramic material from Tell Barri has been partially published in the past years and the on-going studies upon the ceramic assemblages from the later levels at Barri will push forward the data about the topic⁴¹². However must be add that the lacks of stratified data on the pottery at issue in the whole region makes always difficult to have a real idea of the circulation and diffusion of certain types. Therefore the method will move quite distant from the one used in the pottery-focused dissertations, being the statistic the most important way to obtain the results useful in this work. Percentages and presence/absence will be identified throughout the excavations, as well as a further division will be conducted on the base of the stratigraphic contexts *ad hoc*. The analysis will move from the percentages of the diagnostic specimens in the period at issue in order to provide a preliminary picture of the material culture at Barri, with the aim to relate the site to the wider context of the Roman interactions in the region. The definition itself of diagnostic type refers, indeed, to a specific kind of pottery already classified both by its morphological and chronological aspects within the excavated sites in the region or other areas, in case of imported materials. The method of registration used at Barri is mainly based upon an alphanumeric database where each aspect of the process of pottery analysis is represented by a single field. Subdivisions interest principally the wares, as well as some diagnostic types upon the basis of morphological and chronological aspects.

⁴¹² Here are listed the main publications related to the *later* pottery assemblages: see over all VENCO 1982, 55-75; PARMEGIANI 1985, 113-128; PIEROBON-BENOIT 1998, 199-256; PIEROBON-BENOIT 2008, 169-202; MARTUCCI 2008, 305-321; AMODIO 2008, 322-336.

8.4.5.2 Percentages and computation of the pottery of the Areas H and E from Tell Barri (Syria)

The computation and the percentages of the pottery recovered at Tell Barri in the 2nd-4th century CE levels bears more than a single particularity. Only two areas have been considered, being this not a ceramic designated work (both areas are the most important ones of the period on the site, anyway), and therefore analysis mainly moves from a statistic point of view, considering presences and absences as an important datum to deal with. A further important feature will be the parallel with the other contextualized materials of the region both in Syro-Iraqi Jezirah and beyond the Tigris where the roman expansion did not arrive.

The importance of the ceramic material from Tell Barri chiefly lies in the fact that it stil nowadays represents the only excavated site in the region for what concerns the period 2nd- 4th CE and so the contexts result to be the clearest ones in the region. The reference model for the identification of the single wares is the Codex used at Barri for the analytical description of the pottery ⁴¹³.

Area H

The work on the pottery from Area H has been mainly conducted starting from the layers discovered from 2002 to 2010 being them the most representative ones of the period stretching from the 1st to the 4th century CE. The emerging data show several interesting things and, although they should be threatened as preliminary data, they can provide helpful suggestions about the local aspects of a small settlement during the Roman military presence in the area and, later, during the existence of the *provincia Mesopotamia* itself. The Figure 33 shows the chart of the distribution of the recovered pottery material in the Area H through each single excavated layer. The potsherds have been divided according to their belonging to specific wares. The subdivision, although already created during the early years of excavation on the site, has been also based upon the parallels with other excavated or surveyed nearby sites that have yielded a similar ceramic assemblage. Some of the most significant types are labelled as follows:

⁴¹³ The *codex* is an alphanumerical working list where each single feature of a given potsherd has been labelled with a letter or a number (or a combination of both) in order to simplify and accelerate the registration operations. The *codex* has been conceived by Paolo Emilio Pecorella and it has been explained by N. PARMEGIANI (1990, 61-66). A further explanation can also be found in ORSI 2012, 30-31.

HA: Commonware	IG: Painted commonware	AG: Painted rim	IA: Kitchenware
LF: Common Fine ware	IK: Tar lined commonware	AL: Painted fine ware	IB: Brittle ware
99: Glazed ware	LA: Large vessels and Storage Jars.	IL: Decorated commonware	IA: Pseudo Brittle ware
BC: Eastern Sigillata ESA	BD: Eastern Sigillata ESB	BA: Eastern Sigillata	B0: Undetermined Sigillata

Percentages of the ceramic material found in Area H									
Wares	Stratum 7	Stratum 8	Stratum 9	Stratum 10	Stratum 11 A	Stratum 11 B	Stratum 11 C	Stratum 12	Stratum 13
HA	14	14	162	221	248	86	107	41	114
LF	14	4	122	274	286	95	74	47	67
99	2	3	45	179	186	89	81	8	42
BC	1		10	12	13	5	1	1	6
IK	1						9		14
IG	5			3	2	1	1		
LA		1	16	43	46	21	16	24	11
AL			5	5	6	3	1		
AG				12	9		6	12	1
AK			2	3	3		7		
IB	29	5	75	84	95	13	9	17	2
IA		5	4	9	10	8	3		10
IL	3	1	3	8	2		1		1
2	2			4	3			1	
0				179	5		4	7	2
Total	71	33	444	1036	914	321	320	158	270

Fig. 33. Chart showing the computation of the all potsherds, differentiated by each single ware, within the levels revealed in Area H.

What emerges from the chart here displayed is the massive presence among the recovered ceramic materials of commonwares (HA and LF) and glazed specimens (99). A high percentage is also represented by the kitchenwares (IB) as well as by the storage jars or large containers (LA). Among the commonwares must be noted that the LF specimens mainly regard some significant *parthian* types widespread in the region, such as the straight or groove jars, the flat-collared rim jars and, over all, the *diamonds* decorated jars. The peaks in the distribution of the ceramic material are obviously related to the most frequented levels. Strata 10 and 11 are, indeed, the most represented ones. Those are mainly interested by the main phase of a large domestic complex and the later re-occupation of the area after a brief hiatus. The total number of potsherds recovered in each single stratum underlines how the

reconstructions consequently to periods of abandonment probably due to natural events were sudden, often exploiting the surviving structures too⁴¹⁴.

Area E/GCW

The situation appears to be sensibly different in the Area E/GCW where the total number of potsherds, minor in numbers than in Area H, testifies the different functional destination of this part of the tell, especially after the destruction of the Great Defensive Wall in the early years of the 2nd century CE. The re-occupation of these areas, indeed, has been basically characterized by the presence of small houses, often exploiting the survived stubs of the wall. Even the division of a same sector of the tell in two separate areas (Area E and GCW) testifies the different dynamics that went over along the eastern slope of the hill. If on a side the GCW area is featured by the huge remains of the fortification and by one of its gates the area E, immediately North of the eastern gate, has been heavily exploited after the end of use of the wall itself. In Area GCW the pottery, very low in percentage if compared to the later strata in Area H or Area E, is not diagnostic for the understanding of the use of the area over all because the structures of the wall have been not occupied or exploited later (at least, not totally). The high percentage of potsherds in Area E, at the contrary, confirms the re-occupation of this sector and the use of the stubs of the wall for the construction of small domestic spaces.

Wares	Stratum 1	Stratum	Stratum	Stratum	Stratum	Stratum	Stratum 7	Stratum 8	Stratum 9	Stratum 10	Stratum 18	Stratum 20	Surface
HA	16	16	17	25	9	9	13	15		314	12		
LF		6		1	2	1		5		98	2	4	
99	6	6		8	3	2				10	7	3	
BC		1				1					2		
IG		1								8			
LA	1										1	1	
AL										96			
AG													
AK													
IB	1	5	1	2		3	5	1		135			
IC	1	1		3	1								
IA		2	1				1	3		6			
IL	7	2	4										
IK							2						
IM													
2		2	6	5		2	1	1					
0			3					2					
Total	32	42	32	44	15	18	22	27		669	22	8	75

Fig. 34. Total number of potsherds revealed in Area E by stratum.

⁴¹⁴ PALERMO 2012, 636-647.

Stratum 10, as can be observed in Fig. 34, appears to be the most represented one on the chart, basically due to a specific motive. It is, indeed, the first level of re-occupation of the area after the destruction and flattening of the visible debris of the Great Wall (a sort of hard-gritted conglomerate), which results to be a mix of broken fired bricks, chalk and stones, that were used as foundation for the successive reconstructions in the area⁴¹⁵. Area E appears to be therefore a border zone of the settlement in the period after the destruction of the fortification, being the western slope the major domestic area on the site.

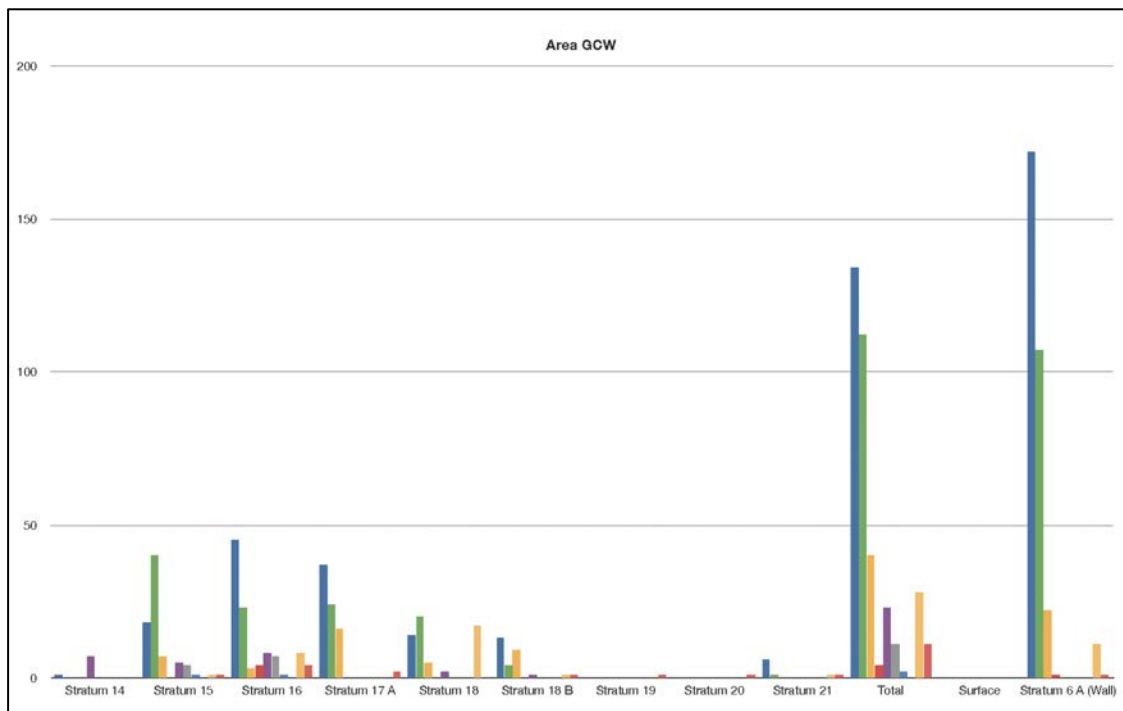


Fig. 35. Computation and stats of the pottery recovered in GCW area (©Missione Archeologica Italiana a Tell Barri).

8.4.6 Observations and Comments

The computation and statistical analysis of the pottery material from Tell Barri wants to be, first of all, a sort of summary of the recovered wares in a relative small settlement in Mesopotamia during the period interested by the Roman presence in the area.

The theories and the analysis of this material, in order to provide helpful data for a preliminary socio-political restitution of the whole zone in the period at issue, are

⁴¹⁵ PIEROBON BENOIT 2008, 185-186.

chiefly based on the content of presence/absence of certain wares and on the incidence of the imported material in a widely local assemblage.

Considering the presence of the ESA as a marker for the imports on the site, the number of 49 potsherds revealed during the excavations of the levels, which dates back to the period (2nd- 4th CE) in Area H and the 6 potsherds from the eastern sectors (Area E/GCW) underlines how poorly attested are the western ceramic production at Tell Barri.

Most represented ware is, obviously, the common-ware, which results to be the 28% of the whole assemblage from Area H, the 37% in Area GCW and the 47% in Area E. The high percentages of common-wares are strictly related to the function of the structures revealed both on the western slope and on the eastern one. Houses, courtyards and small working areas testify the domestic context of both areas, albeit, as mentioned above, with different dynamics. Obviously the common-wares are much more connected to a local horizon and no trace of importation can be spotted among these potsherds. Anyway similar parallels with nearby excavated sites in the region as well as with the collected material from the surveys confirm a regional trend in the diffusion of certain locally widespread types. The folded rim jar, in example, highly present among the common wares at Barri, results to be the most frequent common ceramic in other sites and surveys too⁴¹⁶.

Aside of the common-wares, locally produced and with a longer period of use, the most important evidence is the massive presence of the so-called LF (almost fine common-ware). This ware has been attested as 27% of the whole assemblage in Area H (987 specimens), 31% of the GCW assemblage (112 specimens) and 16% (162 specimens) in Area E. Most of the recovered potsherds are closed shapes such as jars (handled and not), jugs of various dimensions and small bottles. Very few bowls or open shapes have been attested. The fabric of these wares is usually light buff or even white (MUN 2.5 10 YR) and with very few inclusions.

The presence of this kind of wares, with slightly different features such as the flat-collared rim or the hole-mouth jar with grooved rim, is also attested in other areas of the region, as the surveys carried out by Wilkinson and Tucker (1997) and Ur (2010) have proved. In all the cases the fabric is quite plain, very poor in sand and with a consistent amount of small grits and lithic inclusions, while the colours can range from buff/whitish to pinkish/orange. The material found at Tell Barri therefore

⁴¹⁶ WILKINSON & TUCKER 1995, 69.

results to be the only stratified one of this kind in the whole region (excluding the late Parthian pottery from Ain Sinu). A significant amount of straight and grooved rim jars has been also recovered on the site. This particular shape is sometimes decorated with the impressed diamonds and rock-pattern motives making it quite recognizable as a diagnostic Parthian potsherd also codified by the findings at Ain Sinu in late 1950s. The same kind of ware has been collected in easternmost sites in Jezirah⁴¹⁷ but it also appears in the upper Tigris region⁴¹⁸. The widespread of the diamonds stamped pottery makes it one of the chronological markers of the region, and the presence of this kind of ware in areas beyond the Tigris confirms the local use of the ware which must have been used somewhere between the late 1st/early 2nd century CE and the end of the 3rd century CE⁴¹⁹. The fabric, although no scientific analysis has been so far conducted, seems to be quite local, and, moreover, must be add that these jugs are prevalently tar lined inside. The Upper Mesopotamia, indeed, is quite rich in bitumen, specially the basaltic/volcanic soils around the Jebel Kaukab and Jebel Abd-el-Aziz, as well as the area close to Mosul and the western Iraqi Jezirah. The local frame of this kind of pottery is also confirmed by its absence or very low percentages of this ware among the assemblages of Dura Europos and Seleucia on the Tigris.

Quite impressive, at the contrary, is the presence of glazed ware among the mentioned levels. Found in early Parthian levels at Dura and Seleucia, this kind of ware has been probably used for a much longer time later evolving in the Sasanian glazed ware. Common shapes are plates and bowls, while less frequent are jugs and small amphorae, which appears to be more common in southernmost regions. Among the other representative wares, the so-called Brittle Ware is the most recovered one. Despite the large period of use of the ware itself some shapes are more recognizable than others in a given span of time. Casseroles and pots, in example, appears to be the most representative types in both areas at issue, with a significant prevalence in Area H where domestic structures have been dug. Few specimens of Parthian painted ware have been found, although the ware is less widespread than other types in the whole region.

⁴¹⁷ WILKINSON & TUCKER 1995, 68.

⁴¹⁸ ALGAZE 1989, 241-281.

⁴¹⁹ OATES 1968, 213. The recent survey projects in northern Iraq have collected *diamonds* decorated sherds also in the areas beyond the Tigris and around the modern city of Suleimanyia, below the Zagros mountains.

An interesting point, as mentioned above, is the presence, in a small percentage, of the Eastern Sigillata A. The higher number of ESA is certainly due to the proximity of the centres of production (western Syria, more likely the Antioch region), but it surely does not confirm a regular importation. It must have been more likely single specimens that travelled up to Jezirah with single persons.

An assemblage like the one found at Barri, has several parallels in the region, although no other site has been so extensively excavated. The ceramic material from regional survey shows impressive similarities with it. Some of the diagnostic chronological types revealed at Barri result to be diagnostic types in the field surveys too. Diamonds stamped Parthian pottery, Glazed wares, Brittle Ware and other particular wares such as the straight grooved rim jars, in example, have been attested in the all Upper Habur basin from the countryside of Leilan⁴²⁰ to the Brak survey⁴²¹, but also eastward, at Hamoukar⁴²², Tell al-Hawa⁴²³, and, more recently, in the area beyond the Tigris⁴²⁴.

8.4.7 Conclusions

What emerges from this preliminary and merely statistic computation of the pottery from Area H and E at Tell Barri is a framework of a settlement with a high number of locally produced pottery and regional wares, which probably pre-existed long before the campaigns of Trajan and Septimius Severus and that will last, partially, up to the abandonment of the region by the Romans and Sasanian period too. The settlement at Barri must have played a relatively important role during the early years of the 2nd century CE as the fortification testifies, while it may have been politically and strategically reduced in importance at the end of the same century when the roman power in the region was much more stabilized. Although the pottery does not represent a marker for the belonging or not of a certain settlement to a given political power, the absence of western imported wares, as well as the abundance of certain types, quite widespread not only in the nearby region, but also eastward and even beyond the Tigris (a not-romanized area, being not touched by the eastern expansion of the Roman army), let us suppose that the Jaghjagh basin was not

⁴²⁰ DE ALOE 2008, 575-586.

⁴²¹ OATES AND OATES 1990, 228.

⁴²² UR 2010.

⁴²³ WILKINSON *et alii* 1997.

⁴²⁴ MORANDI-BONACOSSO 2013, ASOR *in press*.

modified in the few years of Roman occupation and, at the contrary, it always retained a local aspect, being the Roman power more focused in the major centres (Nisibis, Singara, Resaina) rather than in the countryside.

The same countryside surveyed through the years seems to show a similar trend. The locally produced pottery is higher in number than the exported one and, most important, no other diagnostic marker of the Roman presence in the small villages has been so far found out of the major centres.

Such a high presence of HA wares, as well as LF wares proves the domestic nature of the excavated strata. These wares are basically local production with a relative little geographic circulation from the Ḥabur valley up to the Tigris Basin eastward. Similar common-ware specimens, as well as large containers and storage jars have been also attested at Seh Hamad on the lower Ḥabur⁴²⁵. Some of the collected specimens at Barri, as well as a large majority of this kind of vessels results to be tar lined on the inside due to their specific purpose as liquid or grain containers.

⁴²⁵ KÜHNE 2005.

8.5 Tell Tuneinir

8.5.1 Geography and location

Tell Tuneinir or Tell Tneinir (36 °25'6.0004" N / 40° 49'0.0012" E) is located along the Ḥabur river, circa 13 kilometres south-east of the modern centre of Al-Hassake, in Syria. The tell is a quite large one, measuring slightly less than 40 ha (lower town included). The site has been briefly excavated in late 1980s by an american team⁴²⁶, in conjunction with the creation of the Hassake dam which has partially affected the archaeological lower town and the nearby minor sites⁴²⁷. The tell is relatively high (more than 20 m) with the main mound overlooking the eastern bank of the river.

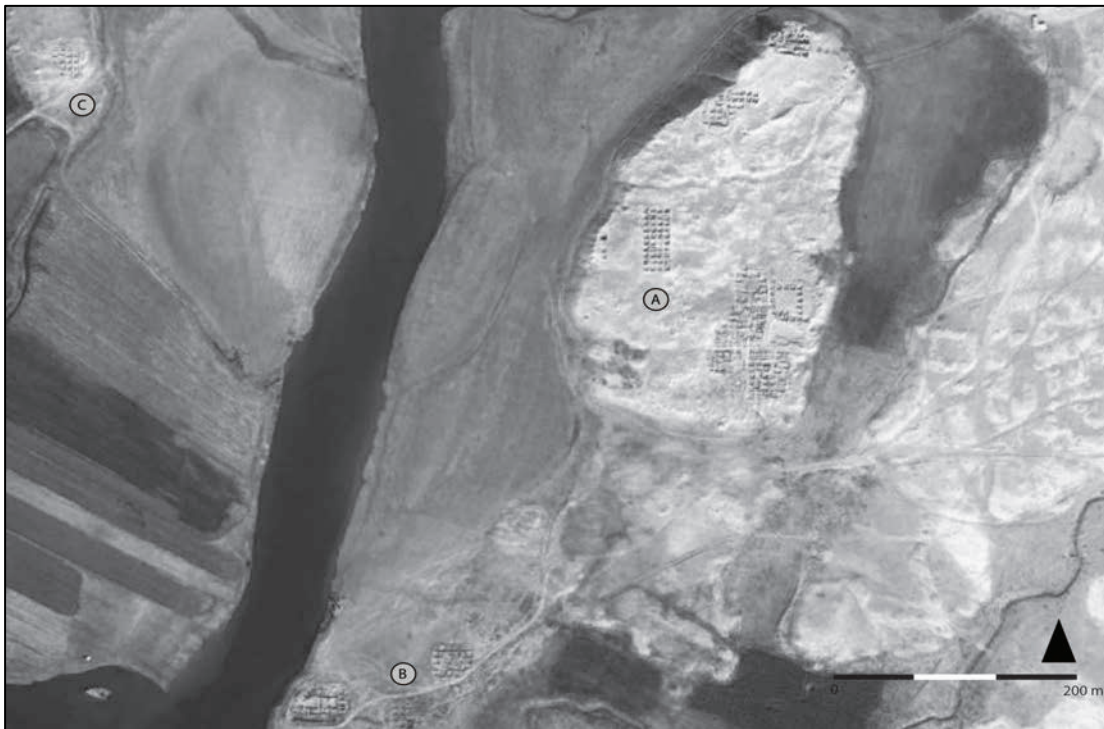


Fig. 36. The area of Tell Tuneinir as seen in a recent Google image (© Google 2012). The main site is located immediately east of the river (A), while few excavations works have been carried out south (B) and west (C) of the tell.

⁴²⁶ Under the direction of Michael Fuller, University of St. Louis.

⁴²⁷ On the archaeological landscape before the construction of the dam see MONCHAMBERT 1984, 181-218. The best resource for the all information concerning the site of Tell Tuneinir is the very valid website created and managed by Michael FULLER himself, which is located at : <http://users.stlcc.edu/mfuller/tuneinir/> (last time visited on February 28, 2013)

8.5.2 History and Archaeological Data (2nd -4th century CE)

Like several sites in the region, Tell Tuneinir also presents a relatively continuous occupation which dates back to the 3rd millennium BCE, while the abandonment of the ancient settlement has been marked, according to Fuller, by the Mongolian invasion of the 13th century⁴²⁸. The site includes a high mound but also a very large lower town whose remains were highly visible through the crops when Poidebard took his aerial photo of Tunenir⁴²⁹. Despite the high potential of the site, the dam works highly affected the archaeological investigations and thus the excavated and very well documented levels are only the 10% of the total archaeological area. Furthermore, the most interesting results achieved at Tell Tuneinir belong to the Byzantine and Ayubbid period⁴³⁰. However the importance the site had in older times, and mainly, between the mid and late imperial period, is testified by the presence of the toponym *Thannouris* (which is quite likely to be the ancient name of the settlement) in the *Notitia Dignitatum Orientis*. The site was also mentioned by Procopius as “Thannouris the Great”⁴³¹.

According to the Fullers the complete transformation of Tell Tuneinir from a small village in a larger settlement should be chronologically located after the rise of Dura Europos at south (last years of the 2nd century more likely) because the site along the Ḥabur grew in importance for its strategic position between the Northern Mesopotamia and the middle Euphrates⁴³². Unfortunately there seems to be no significant archaeological trace of the middle-imperial period settlement and beside the remains of the so-called *parthian shrine* (where an altar with a *patra* in situ has been uncovered) the only others visible remains are dated back to the later roman/early byzantine period when the site gained a certain importance as a religious centre as the discovery of a church and the relative small private houses of the monks have proved⁴³³.

⁴²⁸ FULLER & FULLER 1998, 69.

⁴²⁹ POIDEBARD 1934, pl. CXV.

⁴³⁰ An islamic *khan* has been also partially dug up north-west of the site. The area is marked with the letter C in Fig. 36.

⁴³¹ Proc., *Aed.* II, 6, 13-16. See also GREGORY 1996, 216. Thannouris, however is not mentioned in the Table of Peutinger, probably because of its scant strategic importance at the time when the map was redacted.

⁴³² FULLER & FULLER 1998, 70.

⁴³³ Other architectural remains are some walls vaguely dated to the roman period which enclosed small rooms probably part of private houses. On the church see FULLER & FULLER 1998, 71-74. Michael FULLER, moreover, proposes to identify a small reliquary found on the

Despite the site, as said, has been only investigated partially, the material culture recovered as well as the ceramics and other small finds result to be quite interesting and, certainly are worth of further considerations. The pottery material dated to the period between the 2nd and the 4th century CE, indeed, shows incredible similarities with the one of Tell Barri, as well as with the potsherds, which have been collected in the surveys in the region. Common wares found at Tell Tuneinir and dated to the late roman period by Michael Fuller are surprisingly of the same type found in 4th and 5th century CE levels at Tell Barri⁴³⁴ such as the thatched large bowls and the large tar lined jars. Some of the mouldmade lamps from Tel Tuneinir have been also found at Barri, as well as at Dura, at least partially confirming the movement of these goods in a relatively small range of time (more or less between the mid 3rd and the late 5th century CE). Several roman coins have been also found at Tuneinir. Large part of them date to the early and mid 4th century CE (Constantine, Constans and Constantine II), while a single copper coin from the period of Philip the Arab (244-249 CE) has been uncovered below a byzantine floor.

Sites like Barri and Tuneinir represent, thus, the model of the minor centre or rural village in the area of the Upper Ḥabur basin where the large centre were alternately interested by the roman military presence, while the rural landscape continued to retain its own roots and dynamics even if they maintained significant relationships with the cities.

8.5.3 Observations and comments

The site of Tell Tunenir seems to have represented a sort of nodal point between two or more routes in the region. Even the location of the site itself, at the junction of the North-South route from Nisibis to the Ḥabur and the one from the Euphrates toward the Tigris through Singara, highlight the importance of the site. As said, the ancient name, *Thannouris*, is only known by the *Notitia Dignitatum*, but I can suggest that it was used long before the its effective compilation.

The excavations carried out on the site and in the nearby area have shown the existence of a village which was certainly settled before the coming of Rome in the area a thus, it is part of that large majority of minor sites and settlement which barely

site as the one where a teeht of St.Febronina was preserved after the woman had been prosecuted in Nisibis at the time of Diocletian (1998, 74).

⁴³⁴ PIEROBON BENOIT 2008, 194-195.

have been touched by the roman presence (at least in during an early stage), to be, consequently, reconsidered on the basis of thie strategic position during specific historical events (such as the campaigns of the 4th century CE).

8.6 Ain Sinu and the other supposed squared forts in the region

8.6.1 Introduction

The Roman military expansion in Europe has been much more studied and analysed than the one in the East and thus the dynamics, relations and military architecture on the Britain and along the Rhine *limes* have provided the scholar community of valuable data on the matter. One of the best markers of the Roman military presence in Northern Europe is undoubtedly represented by the so-called *playing-card* shaped forts, which were intensively widespread along the fringes of the empire in the West⁴³⁵.

The Northern Mesopotamia did not experience this architectural solution in the same way it was widespread in the West and, at the contrary, the *playing-card* shaped forts are almost completely absent in the region, and poorly distributed elsewhere in the Levant (with the largest concentration along the so-called *limes Arabicus*, in Jordan)⁴³⁶. The Roman Army in the Near East, indeed, was usually hosted within the cities, usually transforming and adapting some areas within to city-walls to its own purposes (this most famous case is, obviously, Dura Europos, but also the Diocletian camp at Palmyra and the legionary base at Zeugma on the Euphrates). Parker complained about the difficulty of this situation even in the recognition and localization of those military structures in a civilian settlement⁴³⁷.

As already mentioned in the previous chapters the presence of the roman legions in the main centres of the region did not favour therefore the development of the squared *castra* in northern Mesopotamia, albeit with few interesting exceptions. Despite the scant investigations on the ground at least four squared forts are

⁴³⁵ On Britain see: BREEZE 1983; BIDWELL 2007; SOUTHERN 2007, 179-182; On the Rhine *limes* see mainly MCKENDRICK 1970 and, more recently WAMSER *ET AL.* 2000. On the North-west sector of the european *limes* see the recent volume edited by VERMEULEN, SAS and DHAEZE (2004). An interesting study about the interactions that occurred in central Europe between Rome and the local populations has been published by WELLS (1999). The process that brought these military installations to become cities has been widely discussed, and the role the same *castra* had in the development of the region nearby is nowadays a *fait accompli*, see MILLET 1990, 124-127.

⁴³⁶ The best examples are the forts of Qasr Bhsir and Lejjun, see overall PARKER 2006. Parker himself (2006, 111) notes the extraordinary situation of some of these forts, which were probably built up *ex-novo* in late roman empire.

⁴³⁷ PARKER 2006, 112.

recognizable in the region, each one with its own characteristics and differently inserted in the defensive context.

8.6.2 Ain Sinu

The most famous and well-preserved fort in the region certainly is the one at Ain Sinu, in modern Iraq, which was partially excavated during the late '50s and still represents a sort of isolated case in the area. After the initial enthusiasm for the discovery of such a structure in a so remote zone of the empire, the scholar community has become more cautious about several aspects of the structures.

8.6.3 Geography and location

Ain Sinu (or '*Ain Sind*') is located in modern northern Iraq ($36^{\circ} 21' 7.80''$ N, $42^{\circ} 10' 51.55''$ E), in the province of Nināwa, circa 30 kms east of Beled Sinjar (ancient Singara) along the modern road toward Tell Afar. The site is located immediately below the eastern fringes of the Jebel Ishkaft which is separated by the Jebel Sinjar by the Gaulat pass, circa 5kms west of Ain Sinu. As the name of the site suggest ('*ain*' means "source, stream" in Arabic) the water sources are very close to the ancient remains (*Ain Sharqi*, "the eastern source", and *Ain Sinu*, lie circa 600 m west of the site) and they should have favoured the choice of the place for such a military outpost⁴³⁸. The site, indeed, is located below the 200 mm line of rainfall per year and thus the natural sources played a fundamental role for the development of the human settlement⁴³⁹. The remains are nowadays threatened by the expansion of the modern centre and by the presence of some houses and stables, which are very close to the ancient remains (Fig. 37).

⁴³⁸ Oates 1968, 81.

⁴³⁹ However, Oates (1968, 81) mentions the presence of underground channels to prove that the water resources were probably more abundant in antiquity.

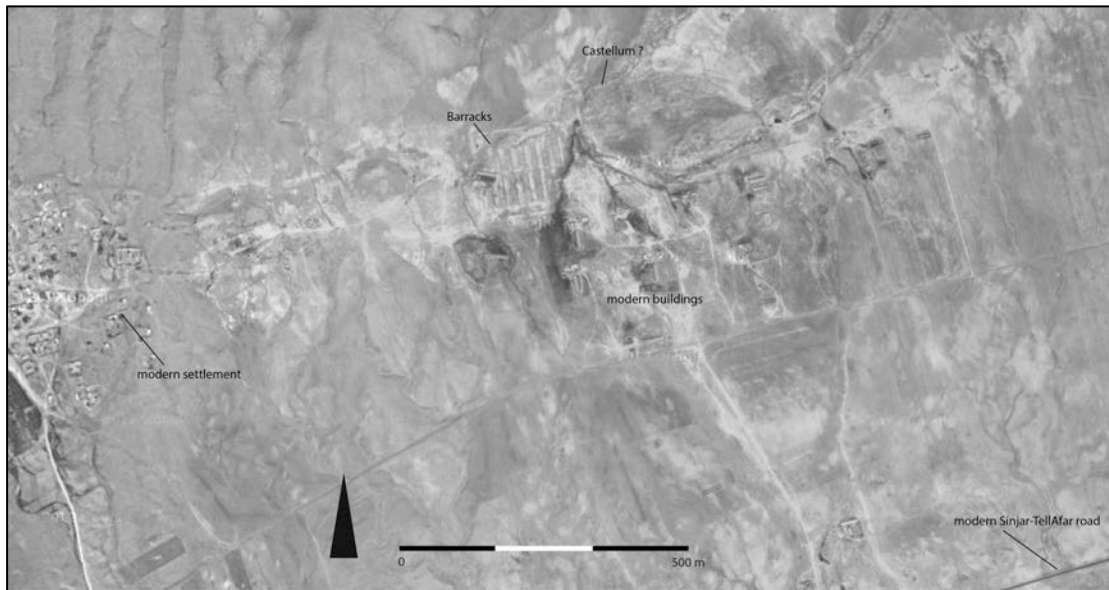


Fig. 37. A modified Google Earth snapshot (©Google 2013) of the Ain Sinu area. As can be seen the ancient site lies in the immediate outskirts of the modern village, 500 m from the modern asphalt road Sinjar-Tell Afar.

8.6.4 History and Archaeology

Ain Sinu is also known by its ancient name: *Zaguræ* (or *Zagorrae*), which is also mentioned on the Table of Peutinger. Unfortunately as several sites in northern Mesopotamia there is no trace of the name among the contemporary or later literary sources. The area of Ain Sinu was, in a certain way, secured after the severian campaigns in the region and it is likely that the site gained importance from this period. Anyway Ain Sinu was briefly occupied and there is no trace of occupation on the site late than the end of the 3rd century when the area was probably abandoned. According to Oates a single possible reference to this event could be found in Ammianus Marcellinus (25.8.7) when is said that the retreating army led by Jovian was helped with supplies by the *Dux Mesopotamiae* somewhere along the Sinjar-Mosul line, which was then in Persian territory. The importance of the site at Ain Sinu is mainly due to the excavations carried there in late 1950s, which uncovered a series of structures in three different area. Two of them have been marked as AS I and AS II and are, respectively, a large square-shaped walled series of barracks and a sort of *castellum* which was also walled with visible remains of u-shaped towers⁴⁴⁰. The barracks constitute the most important building on the site. They are hosted within a large walled structure of circa 200 m per side with four different entrances

⁴⁴⁰ The unique and best archaeological description of the site is in OATES 1968, 80-92.

on each side. The inner part is mainly featured by 5 couples of long buildings formed by 22 small chambers (8,10 x 3,60 m) arranged in pairs and with their entrances at East, with a total of 528 small rooms of unequal size⁴⁴¹. On the back of each of these rooms a smaller space was probably used as stable. Two more blocks, at the west and east side of the camp, are only featured by the 22 main chambers and do not present the smaller rooms on the back. The whole structure was of mud-bricks which was the most common building material in the region. Sometimes the walls are laid upon a rubber foundation, even if most of the walls directly lie on the ground⁴⁴². There is no sign of a military command building or headquarter, and the uniformity of the walled area seems to suggest that they should be searched elsewhere. A different situation present, instead, the second structure revealed on the site, the so called *castellum* and marked as AS II. This is an almost squared structure of circa 100 m per side which is located immediately north-east of the barracks. Although both the buildings refer to a same period of construction the technique used for the *castellum* is completely different. The outer walls, indeed, are of dressed limestone both on inner and outer face, and they are filled with loosely mortared rubble and earth, having an average thickness throughout the fortification of ca 3 m. This was completed with 2 m projecting towers that flanked each of the four entrances, one per side. The trench excavated by the British team close to the northern gate of the structure uncovered a small part of a military quarter adjoining the walls and the northern gate. The rooms were probably service spaces in strict connection with the gate and the guarding towers⁴⁴³. A large quantity of potsherd has been collected during the excavation of the four-rooms house adjoining the walls. Most common specimens are the plain-wares and the so-called *diamonds* stamped pottery, but also ribbed sherds (Brittle ware) and a single sherd which had three greek letters incised on it: CEII, probably and indication of a personal name (Septimius?)⁴⁴⁴. In addition to the pottery several iron fragments were recovered, as well as broken weapons and three roman coins,

⁴⁴¹ They are made of 220 two-rooms units and 88 single room units. Of these 308 units OATES assumes (2005, 83) that hosted 8 persons per rooms, or, in the case that the small rooms were used as stables (which, however, is archaeologically unproven) four persons. Thus the total soldiers hosted at AS I probably were 2240 (or slightly more than 1000 in the case of the presence of stables).

⁴⁴² OATES (1968, 84) noted the almost total absence of straw in the bricks, a fact that was probably imputed to a scarce availability in the nearby area or, most important, to a hasty manufacture, which could denote a short-time construction.

⁴⁴³ The "service" role has been moreover proved by the discovery of a sort of stands for large vessels in one of the rooms that faced the inner part of the camp.

⁴⁴⁴ The pottery recovered at Ain Sinu has been published as an Appendix to the volume of OATES (1968,145-160) and curated by Joan Oates.

two issues of Caracalla probably from Rhesaina and dated to 216 CE and a single coin dated to the period of Severus Alexander, which came from the same mint but unfortunately with no further chronological indication⁴⁴⁵. The third area of the site is represented by the remains east of the *castellum* which have been not extensively investigated by the British team. They are probably houses or buildings of a later occupation since a large quantity of Islamic and early modern ceramics has been found on the surface among the visible remains.

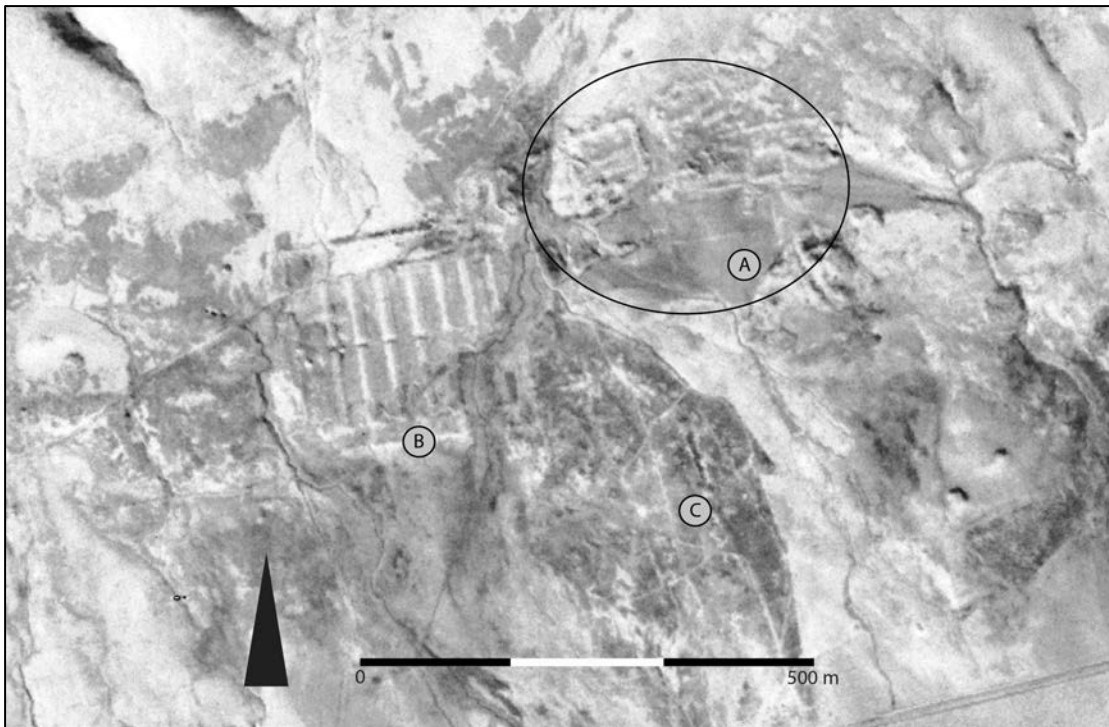


Fig. 36. Ain Sinu as it appeared in 1967 in a CORONA image (© Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey). The main components of the site are visible here: the castellum with the nearby later structures (circled, A), the barracks (B) and the traces of what could be the ancient tracks that led to the site from the main road (probably covered by the modern track, which is recognizable in the bottom-right corner of the image).

⁴⁴⁵ Another coin, from the time of Elagabal from the mint of Edessa, has been found on the surface ground immediately outside the western gate where the remains of one of the semi-circular tower has been also excavated. In addition a small limestone lion's head has been also recovered nearby (OATES 1968, 88).

8.6.5 Conclusions and interpretations

As M. Gschwind has recently pointed out not every squared structure should be interpreted as a roman fort⁴⁴⁶. The structures uncovered at Ain Sinu if in an early moment moved the enthusiasm of the specialists of the roman eastern frontier, now they set more answers than certitudes. St. John Simpson has been the first scholar to draw the attention onto the typological architectural remains of Ain Sinu⁴⁴⁷. According to the British scholar the fort has been mainly dated on the base of unclear and unstratified material and even the potsherds in the mud-bricks that Oates (1968, 85) claimed to be extremely useful for the chronology of the remains can be interpreted as residual in a later re-occupation probably dated to the Sasanian period⁴⁴⁸. The fact is that the data collected among the remains of the barracks of AS I do not prove with certitude to which army the fort belonged. The chronology proposed by Oates to the 3rd century CE does not give any clue about the soldiers that were stationed there. The pottery, as seen, ranges in a quite local horizon with very few intrusions from the West. Coins dated back to the roman period, as widely known, are technically useless to solve the question. A possible hypothesis can be done, however, on the base of the architectural remains. The barracks of AS I are quite similar in shape and typology to the so-called Fort 4 which has been excavated along the Gorgan Walls, in northern Iran⁴⁴⁹. As above stated, the usual roman forts had other buildings beside the barracks, while the typical Sasanian forts in 5th and 6th centuries were shaped like the one at Ain Sinu. Must be add, however, that few late roman *castrum* show the same setup with no further buildings but the barracks⁴⁵⁰. A suggestive hypothesis should be searched in the troubled events that stroke the area between the 3rd and the 4th century CE. Avoiding unnecessary architectural buildings probably reflected the political situation of the period where the speed marked the success or the failure. Although a certain solution needs further archaeological investigations it could be suggested that the fort was used by the roman troops in a

⁴⁴⁶ GSCHWIND 2009, 1593-1601.

⁴⁴⁷ SIMPSON 1996, 90-92.

⁴⁴⁸ If the fort was built up on a virgin soil, as it has been stated, very few if not any sherd should have been embedded in the mudbricks walls (SIMPSON 1996, 90).

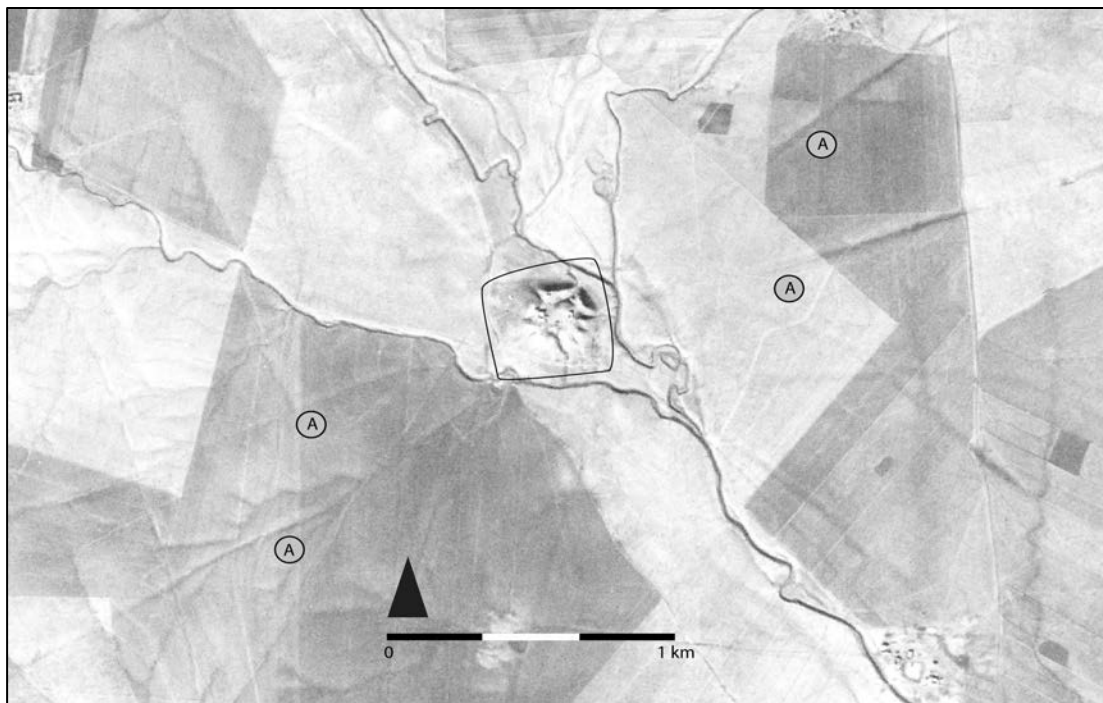
⁴⁴⁹ The size of the bricks at AS I (43x43x9) is the same of the ones of the Fort 4, as well as the fired bricks used in the Gorgan wall. Moreover, some of the barracks of AS I are located within a walled courtyard and, the geophysical works carried out in the Fort 4 as well as in other minor forts along the Gorgan wall, have proved that the same setup was used.

⁴⁵⁰ SOUTHERN and DIXON 1996, 91.

given period (almost surely after the severian campaigns) and later re-used by the Sasanian army.

8.6.6 The other *square-shaped sites* in the region

Given these assumptions the fort at Ain Sinu seems to be the only squared fort ever revealed in the region, even if other very few examples has been suggested: Tell Bati, Saibakh and Qubur al-Bid. A. Poidebard⁴⁵¹ photographed two of them: Tell Bati and Saibakh. Tell Bati (36° 43' 0.0012" N 40° 43' 0.0012" E), is located circa 15 kilometres northeast of Abu Hureira and 25 kilometres North of Hassake, in modern Syria. Oates (1968, 80) states that the site hosted military barracks mainly because of its shape, which slightly resembles the so-called playing card forts widespread in the west. No extensive field investigations have been carried out on the site, but it seems highly improbable that the site could have hosted a detachment of roman soldiers. The analysis of the CORONA image of Tell Bati, indeed, shows how the site looks more like a 3rd millennium BCE (or even later) mound rather than a roman building. Moreover, the large amount of hollow ways around the site perfectly fits with its supposed important role in a period previous to the roman occupation of the area⁴⁵².



⁴⁵¹ POIDEBARD 1934, pl. CXXXIX.

⁴⁵² Tell Bati is a pretty large site. It measures circa 6.6 ha and has more than 30 associated hollow ways (UR 2010, 269).

Fig. 37. Tell Bati in a recent Goggle earth image (© Google 2012). The outline of the supposed squared follows the ground anomalies all along the edges of the mound.

However these data do not forcibly exclude a later occupation, even as a military fort (without further clues one cannot say if the fort has been occupied by roman soldiers). The Fig. 38 shows the site of Tell Bati as it appears in a relatively recent shot from the Google's satellites.

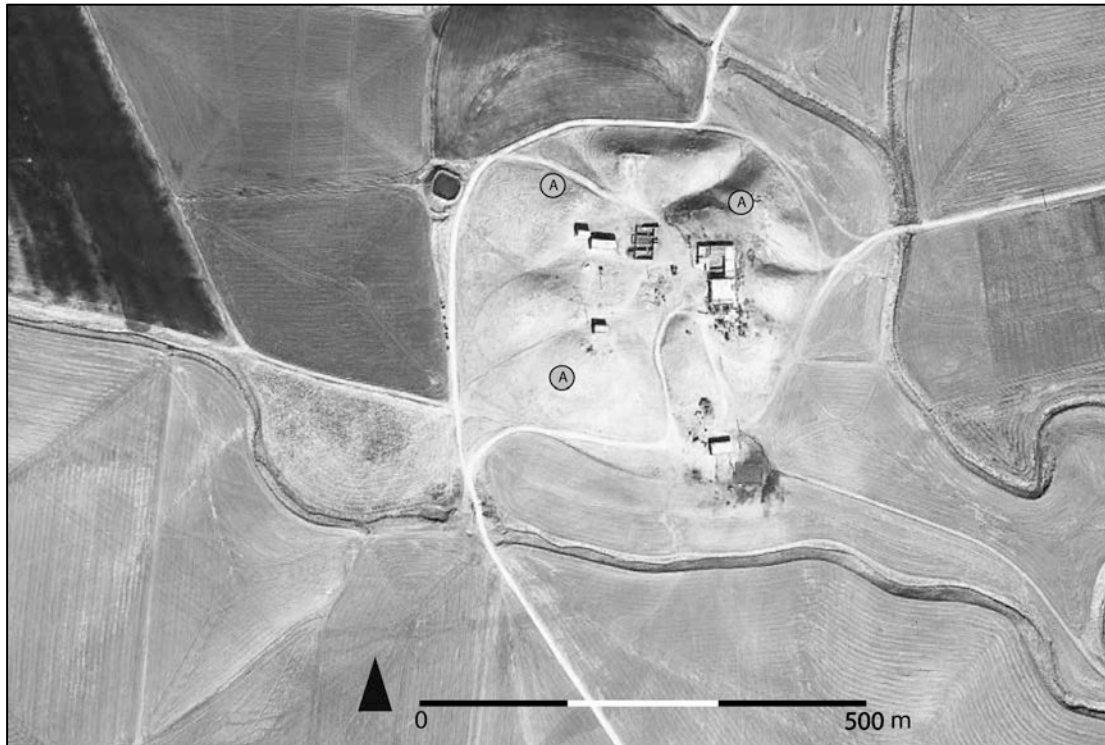


Fig. 38. The site of Tell Bati as seen in a Google satellite image (© Google 2012). The outline of the ancient site is quite visible. The letters A indicate the highest peak on the mound.

The edge of the mound, all along the modern houses, could indicate a walled circuit, whitout any chronological suggestion. Something similar, however, has been observed (mainly with the aid of geophysical works) and partially excavated at Qreiye-AYYash and Tell ar-Rum (on the middle-Euphrates), which have more than one chance to be late roman military installations⁴⁵³. However, lacking stratified data, these hypothesis only remain as interesting suggestions. The second fort that has been photographed by Poidebard (see *supra*) and also mentioned by David Oates was located, according to the scholars, near Saibakh. This is a modern Syrian small village ca 3 kilometres east of Tell Brak, very close to the eastern bank of the

⁴⁵³ GSCHWIND & HASAN 2008, 316-334.

Jaghjagh (36°39'43" N 41° 5'56.28"E)⁴⁵⁴. The site is morphologically similar to Tell Bati, being a squared shaped mound with visible edges, which has been occupied, in the middle, by the modern houses. The site has been surveyed by the Oates in late '80s, but no interesting potsherds was collected apart of a complete unreadable bronze coin which Oates claimed to be an *Antoninianus*. Saibakh was surveyed a second time during the Tell Brak Sustaining Area Survey (TBS) in 2002-2003 and this time several significant materials have been collected such as sherds of amphorae, mortaria and some arretine ware potsherds which could indicate a frequentation during the period 2nd-4th century CE⁴⁵⁵. However, one of the most interesting thing regarding the remains at Saibkah is the apparently connection and relation with the rests of ancient buildings north-west of the Brak mound, which has been known for years as the *castellum* at Tell Brak.

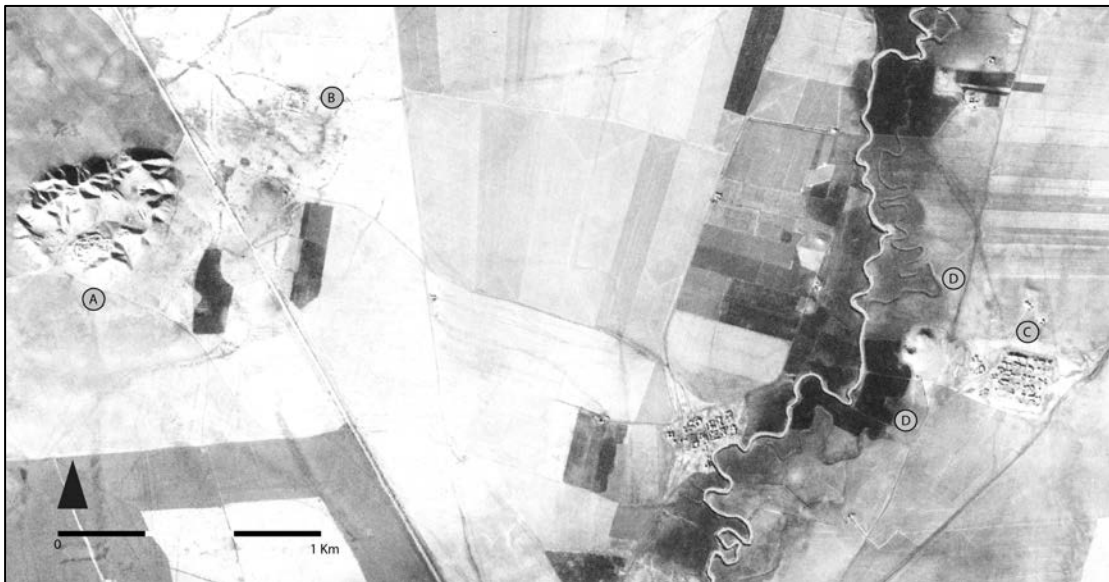


Fig 39. CORONA image (December 1967 / © Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey) of the Brak-Saibakh area. The 3rd millennium mound is marked with the letter A. The remains of the so-called castellum (B) lie immediately outside the mound, while the site of Sibakh (C) is in axis with it, but on the other side of the river (whose ancient course, marked with the letter D, is clearly visible in this image).

Unfortunately no archaeological investigations have been carried out in both sites if we exclude the pottery collection during the Oates survey (which, however did not provide useful data as well). David Oates also reported that a *probable* roman ford

⁴⁵⁴ OATES & OATES 1990, 229-231. The site was also recorded and photographed by POIDEBARD (1934, pl. CXXII) before the modern village was built.

⁴⁵⁵ WRIGHT & ALII 2007, 14 and fig. 5.

was spotted close to the modern course of the river⁴⁵⁶, suggesting the existence of a track linking the structures at Brak with those at Saibakh. Assuming that all the three structures could have been contemporarily used somewhere between the end of the mid of the 2nd century and the mid of the 4th (and currently there is no prove for it), we can suggest that the system Brak-Jaghjagh-Saibakh worked in the same way as the one Qreiye-Euphrates-Tell ar Rum along the middle Euphrates (see *supra*).

The most recently identified supposed squared fort in the region is the one which has been spotted by George Wood in 2003 near the village of Qubur al-Bid (37° 0'41.64"N, 41°31'43.81"E)⁴⁵⁷. The site has been briefly excavated before the sudden and tragic death of Wood in Iraq.



Fig. 38. CORONA image (December 1967, © Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey) of the area around the site of Qubur al-Bid. The architectural remains (A) are clearly visible around the bend of the wadi.

The fort, however, is completely covered by earth and only is visible tanks to the soil marks in the field. According to George Wood the fort measures circa 120 x 160 m, enclosing an area of approximately 1.92ha⁴⁵⁸. Despite what he states no particular crop marker can be traced and the road, which Wood claimed to be visible inside the fort along its southern edge is currently unidentifiable. Even the *fossae*, the two large

⁴⁵⁶ OATES & OATES 1990, 230.

⁴⁵⁷ WOOD 2004, 397-404.

⁴⁵⁸ WOOD 2004, 401.

ditches which must have surrounded the fort are slightly visible in the ground. Notwithstanding these poorly evidence, the internal layout of the fort provides few data to propose suggestions. In the CORONA image here provided, some of the internal structures of the buildings, at least the ones built up along the northern side, are quite recognizable⁴⁵⁹. These structures have been interpreted by Wood as parts of barracks and stable⁴⁶⁰. However it is more likely that these buildings were actually used as *service rooms*. Considering the dimensions of the structures, indeed, the fort resembles more to the *desert castle* of the Jordanian *limes* (see the marvellous example of Qasr al-Bshir) rather than a fort with barracks which is supposed to be able to host an auxiliary unit.

Wood stated that the fort could have hosted an *ala* even if there is not significant evidence on the ground. Anyway, the most important issue, related to the remains of Qubur al-Bid mainly regards its supposed identification with the location of *Castra Maurorum* which, as already seen, is mentioned in the ancient sources (see above, p. 132-137). The main clue for the identification is the account of Ammianus about the fire signals visible from Nisibis (25.7.9) and that could have been absolutely not visible from a far place such as Seh Qubba, according to Wood⁴⁶¹.

Considering all the available data it is quite probable that the problem of the identification of *Castra Maurorum* will remain unsolved. The matter of the fire signals mentioned by Ammianus, however, should not be seen as fundamental, since it could have meant a *series* of signals (which, in any case, makes much more sense in war period) which could have started from an eastern strongholds or fort and then through other minor military positions to Nisibis which was the most important stronghold of the region.

⁴⁵⁹ The CORONA images have been completely ignored by Wood who has based his archaeological reconstruction of the structures with the aid of a modern satellite photograph, which does not provide the same data.

⁴⁶⁰ WOOD 2004, 401-402.

⁴⁶¹ WOOD 2004, 403. The localization of Seh Qubba however is not a relatively recent dispute between the interpretation of Warwick BALL and Susan GILL (2003) and the one proposed by George WOOD (2004), but has a long history. POIDEBARD (1934, 160) did not identify the site but placed it between “*Nisibe et le Tigre*”, DILLEMANN (1962, 212) proposed the main location, but refused the interpretation of Honigmann to locate the site at Bâbil (1934, 478) which was later re-named Rhabdium after the re-conquest in Byzantine period. David Oates (1959, 39-43) proposed, instead, to localize the site in the area of the Upper Iraqi Tigris, near the sites of Tell Abu Dhahir. SINCLAIR (1987-89, 367 and 370) located Seh Qubba at the Turkish village of Hatem tai Kale which he proposes to identify with the Byzantine Rhabdium as well. The theory of W. Ball and the localization of *Castra Maurorum* with the site of Seh Qubba, on the eastern side of the Eski Mosul Dam in Northern Iraq, have already been discussed elsewhere in this work.

8.7 Survey projects

Introduction

The importance of the field survey (or field walking survey) projects within a specific geographical area is an archaeological *fait accompli*, which have been stressed also by the studies of Tony Wilkinson⁴⁶² and, earlier, of Susan Alcock⁴⁶³ for the western regions. They have furtherly proven, beyond any doubt, that the reconstruction of the archaeological landscape, as well as the understanding of certain dynamiques on a large period scale are, sometimes, more useful than a single site excavation⁴⁶⁴.

In recent years this is become particularly significant in the Near East mainly because of the long history that affected each part of the Levant. The observations of changes and continuity from a given chronological period to another, as well as the studies in settlements trends on a long-period scale have constituted the basis of several archaeological surveys in Northern Mesopotamia. These, conducted in different moments through a period of more than twenty years, have of course provided different results. Even the technique used to survey the territory (field walking, satellite reconnaissance, large mounds and *off-site* investigations) should be taken into account when analysing and considering the data they have retrieved. Anyway, despite the natural differences between the projects and the historical and ecological variances between the investigated, the contribution of these surveys to the understanding of the dynamics of the region in the period stretching from the 2nd to the 4th century CE should be valued as a fundamental one. I have tried here to summing up all the results of the field walking surveys in the region, which have yielded ceramic material of the period at issue. The first thing to point out, however, is the definition of this ceramic material, since it is alternately labelled as *parthian*, *partho-roman*, *parthian-sasanian*, or, more generally, *early 1st millennium CE*. Lacking a common guide to the comprehension of this material the misunderstanding, even the methodological ones, result to be quite frequent. The only try of uniformity has been recently proposed by Jason Ur which started to collect the

⁴⁶² WILKINSON 2003.

⁴⁶³ ALCOCK 2004.

⁴⁶⁴ Anyway the useful combination of an excavation project and the relative field survey in the nearby area is the best solution to get micro and macro-regional results.

diagnostic ceramic types of the all historical period attested in the region in excavated archaeological contexts, in order to create a *working ceramic typology* to be used as a reference for the field surveys⁴⁶⁵. A significant part of this *corpus* has been devoted to the pottery types usually dated between the end of the Seleucid domination in the area and the rise of Islam and which, unfortunately, have been excavated and chronologically contextualized in the few sites (like Tell Barri and Ain Sinu, for instance) where contemporary levels have been examined.

8.7.1 Field surveys in Northern Mesopotamia: overview of the later periods occupation

Since the mid 1980s the field archaeologists who dealt with the Near East and specially the ones working in Northern Mesopotamia focused their attention on the field survey as an interesting way to investigate the archaeological landscape of the area. The use of such methods to have a comprehensive view of a given territory is nowadays a matter of fact, widely used even in the more-urbanized western regions⁴⁶⁶. In less urbanized area, such as large part of the Near East, the use of modern methods of surveying and the crossed-analysis with the declassified satellite images have provided a lot of useful research data⁴⁶⁷. The enormous advantage of a field survey investigation certainly is the ability to analyse a given region and the changes that occurred within that area on a very long time, noticing the peaks and the lows in settlement distribution as well as the over-representations and the under-representation in the same zone.

The application of these methods permits to have, therefore, a map of distribution that, even if does not tell us which kind of settlements we are dealing with, at least let us be able to reconstruct a pattern for each period. The percentage of surface pottery

⁴⁶⁵ The “Working Ceramic Typology” is so far unpublished and, even if started by Jason Ur, sees the continuous contribution of several scholars who deal with or dealt with the survey projects in the area Major contributions to the typology come from these past and on-going projects: Iraqi North Jazira Project, Tell Beydar Survey 1997-1998, Tell Hamoukar Survey 1999-2001, Tell Brak Survey 2002-2005, Hirbermedon Tepe Survey 2007-2011, Erbil Plain Archaeological Survey 2012, Land of Nineveh Regional Survey 2012.

⁴⁶⁶ In general see Howard 2006; the application of standard and innovative methods to the Mesopotamian landscape is well treated in Ur 2010.

⁴⁶⁷ An interesting volume on the matter and the differences between East and West has been published by Susan ALCOCK and John CHERRY (2004). In particular should be considered in that same volume the contribution of WILKINSON, CASANA and UR (2004, see references). On the use of declassified satellite images see also paragraph 8.7.

as well as the type of the pottery, and the other artifacts collected during the walking survey, provide us more detailed suggestions on a given site, in order to reconstruct a sort of hierarchy in site distribution within each single period.

The use of a field survey method to reconstruct or trying to delineate some aspects of the roman presence in Northern Mesopotamia could be, anyway, misleading. Being the survey a sample collection work it is much more probable that the collected specimens will not lead to a certain identification of *roman* or *not roman*, mainly because large part of the pottery material used in minor settlements in the region was locally produced. Give this assumption a specific site where *contemporary* (from 2nd to 4th century CE datable) material has been found does not tell us if the site was briefly occupied, or longer, or even untouched by the *roman* presence, but its location on a map, together with other period sites in the surveyed area, lets us have at least an idea of the distribution of contemporary settlements in a given geographical range. In the same way few *roman* potsherds collected on a site (e.g. *terra sigillata* specimens) do not confirm a certain *roman* presence on the place. Therefore, the field survey data must forcedly crossed-analysed with other *historical* data in order to better define certain dynamics that otherwise will stay uncompleted.

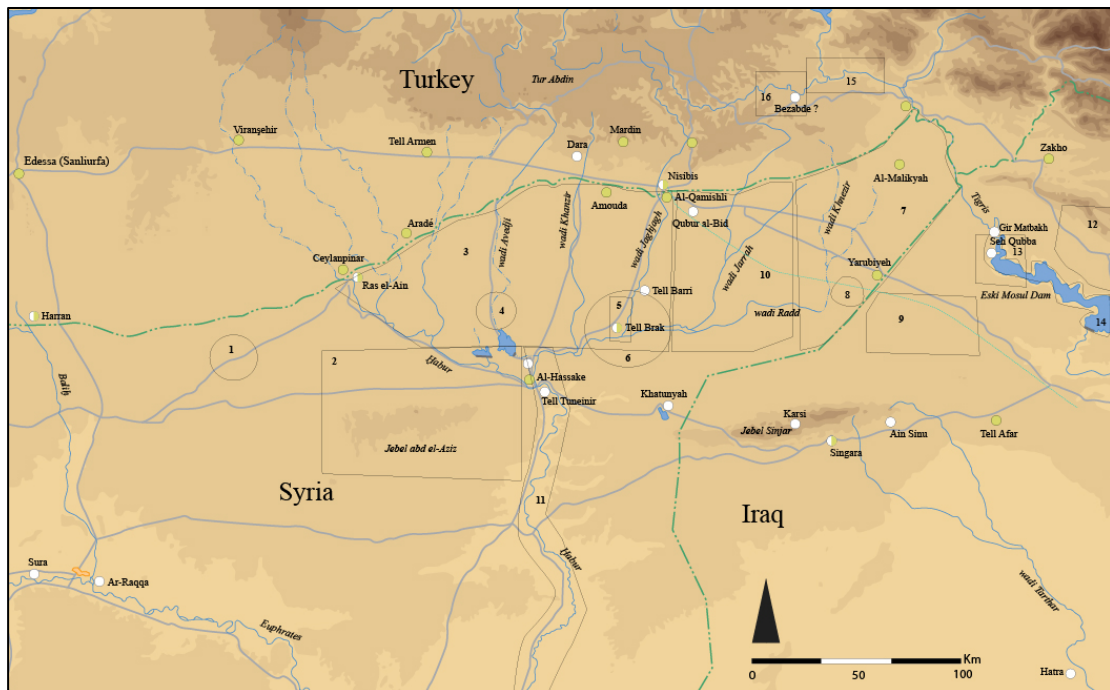


Fig. 40. Schematic representation of the surveyed areas in Northern Mesopotamia (Wossink 2012, 66, modified). The surveys briefly described in this work are marked as follows: Tell Beydar (4), Tell barj Survey / Tell Brak Sustaining Area Survey (5-6), Tell Leilan survey (10), Tell Hamoukar Survey (8), North Jazira Project (9), Zammar regional project (13).

As the Fig. 40 shows a very large part of the *bec de canard* has been surveyed through the years. The Upper Ḥabur basin represent, indeed, one of the most complete archaeological areas in terms of chronological sequence spanning almost without interruption from the PPN to the modern times.

The surveys which will be taken in examination here are the Tell Beydar Survey (1997-1998)⁴⁶⁸, the Tell Brak Sustaining Survey Area (2002-2003)⁴⁶⁹, the Tell Leilan Survey (1995-1997)⁴⁷⁰, the Tell Hamoukar Survey (2000-2001)⁴⁷¹, the North Jazira Project (1986-1989)⁴⁷² and the Zammar Area project (1985-1986)⁴⁷³. A fundamental factor to bear in mind before proceed to the analysis of the data retrieved, is the different chronological range of the surveys themselves. Spanning from mid 1980s to early 2000s these projects have faced the increasing technological in the archaeological field and thus, the most recent works may have taken significant advantage from the use of these tools. As a direct consequence of the use of specific tools small area surveys, like Tell Hamoukar, have experienced a relatively high number of sites if compared to larger areas surveyed like Tell Leilan, for instance. However the number of surveyed sites highly depended also by the way the field walking was carried out, being it intensive or extensive, more focused on a single aspect of the region or set up to notice the changes in the ancient landscape through a significant span of time.

All these surveys have collected a lot of interesting data for the period at issue in this work, although some conclusions can vary from a zone to another

The Tell Beydar survey, for instance, has experienced a very low percentage of later periods sites, with a significant shrink in distribution during the so-called Roman-Byzantine period. In the first three centuries of our era, the settlements in this area appear to be relatively small and much more concentrated along the water courses, specially along the *wadi* Aweidj, which runs north-south toward the Ḥabur river. According to Bertille Lyonnet (1996) and Jason Ur & Tony Wilkinson (2008, 309) this is mainly imputable to the role the area had in the continuous political instability of the region during the conflicts between the Roman and the eastern empires. The political instability could, moreover, represent the main factor of this sites decline,

⁴⁶⁸ UR & WILKINSON 2008, 305-327.

⁴⁶⁹ WRIGHT *et. al.* 2007, 7-21.

⁴⁷⁰ DE ALOE 2008, 575-586.

⁴⁷¹ UR 2010.

⁴⁷² WILKINSON & TUCKER 1995.

⁴⁷³ BALL & GILL (with contribution of Simpson) 2008. This was a British excavations and survey project within the context of the Mosul Dam Salvage Project.

and this also seems to be proved by the lower peaks in hollow ways, in example in the Tell Beydar region, from the Iron age, which represented the most attested period for them after the EJ III-V (3rd mill. BCE), through the Sasanian period when the survey carried out in western Jezirah has shown an almost complete absence of such routes probably in consequence of the continuous struggles between the Byzantine empire (over all in the period of Justinian) and the Sasanian kingdom. The low percentages of certainly dated hollow ways, however, does not necessarily mean that at least some of the previous tracks have not been used also in later periods, but that the political situation highly affected the distribution of the minor sites in the area.

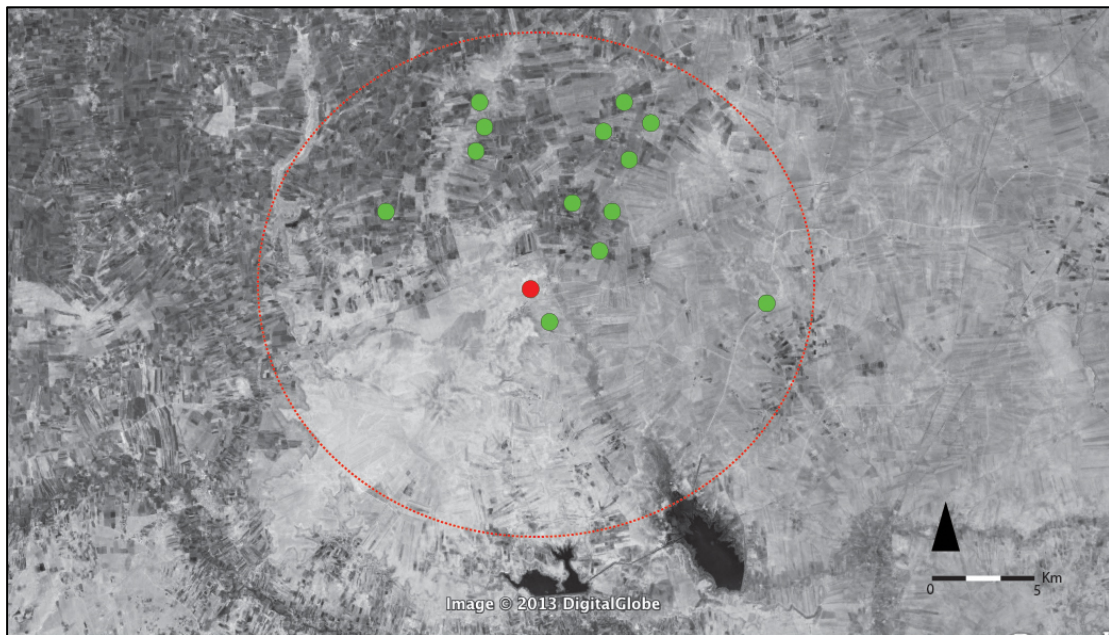


Fig. 41. Modified and adapted Google image (©Google 2013) of the Tell Beydar Survey area. Green dots indicate the sites where partho-roman material has been collected. Tell Beydar is represented by the red dot.

As said, however, the scenario is not uniform and the area of the western Jezirah (Ur & Wilkinson 2008) has retrieved results, which does not find a comparable situation in other zones of Northern Mesopotamia since, as observed for the case of the fort at Saibakh, the area of mid and lower Jaghjagh, does not seem to have been struck by this shrink of the settlements (Fig. 42, and Wright *et al.* 2007).

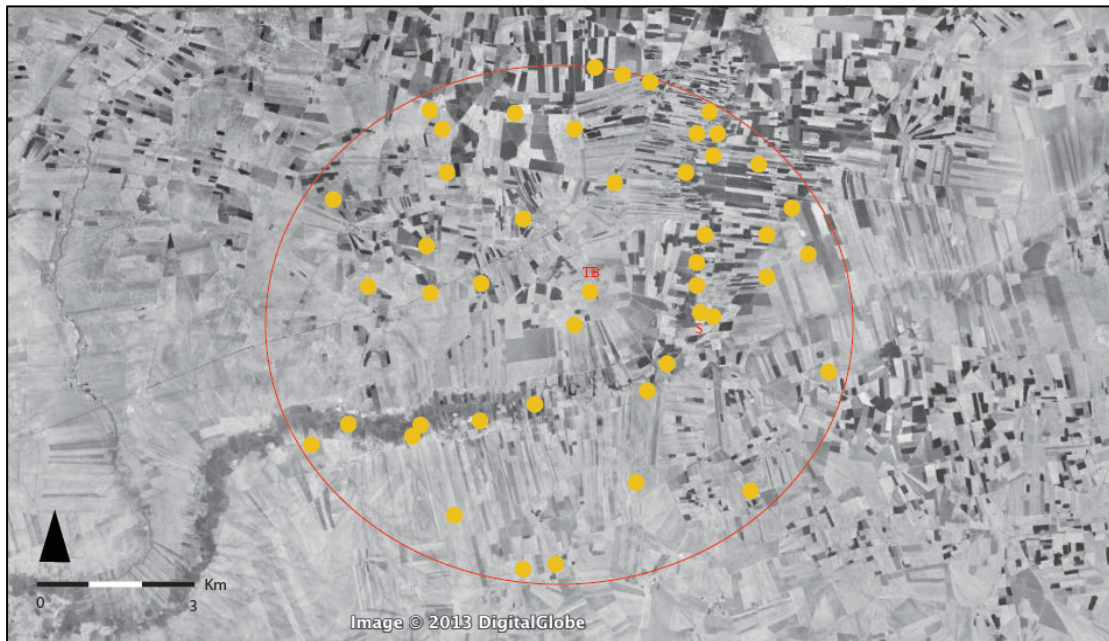


Fig. 42. Google image (© Google 2013) of the TBS (Tell Brak Sustaining Survey) area. The yellow dots represent the sites which have yielded early 1st millennium CE pottery (unfortunately there is no further chronological specification). TB represents Tell Brak itself, while the S marks the location of Saibakh (data retrieved by Wright et al. 2007, 19).

The distribution of the sites in the TBS area clearly indicates the strict connection between settlements and water courses in the region. The majority of the early 1st millennium sites of the TBS are, indeed, located along the Jagjagh river on both the banks. It is quite interesting to note also the distribution of other sites west of Tell Brak, along the ancient routes which linked the Brak area to the Beydar region in the 3rd millennium BCE. The tracks probably have been used for a long time favouring the development of long-period settlements associated to them. Unfortunately, without any accurate chronological classification, one cannot say if the ceramic material recovered on those sites is *parthian* rather than *local* or even *roman*. In late 1990s, a large part of the TBS area was investigated by the Oates, with the goal of verify some of the Poidebard's conjectures about the roman *limes*⁴⁷⁴.

⁴⁷⁴ Oates & Oates 1990, 227-248

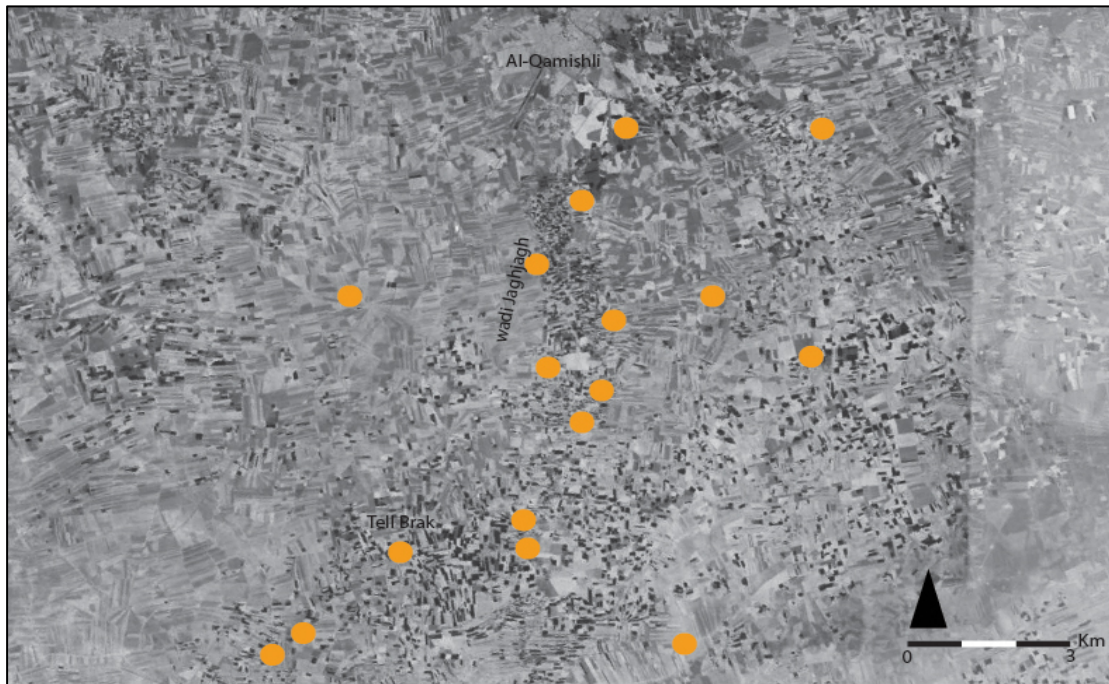


Fig. 43. Google image (©Google 2013) of the Jagjagh basin with the sites surveyed by Oates in late 1980s (data retrieved by Oates 1990, 248).

As a further example, the Fig. 44 shows the distribution of the *Roman* and *Parthian* sites recognised during the Tell Leilan Survey project, which was carried out in the area around the 3rd millennium site of Tell Leilan (Shubat Enlil) in 1995-1997 (see Weiss 2007, online).

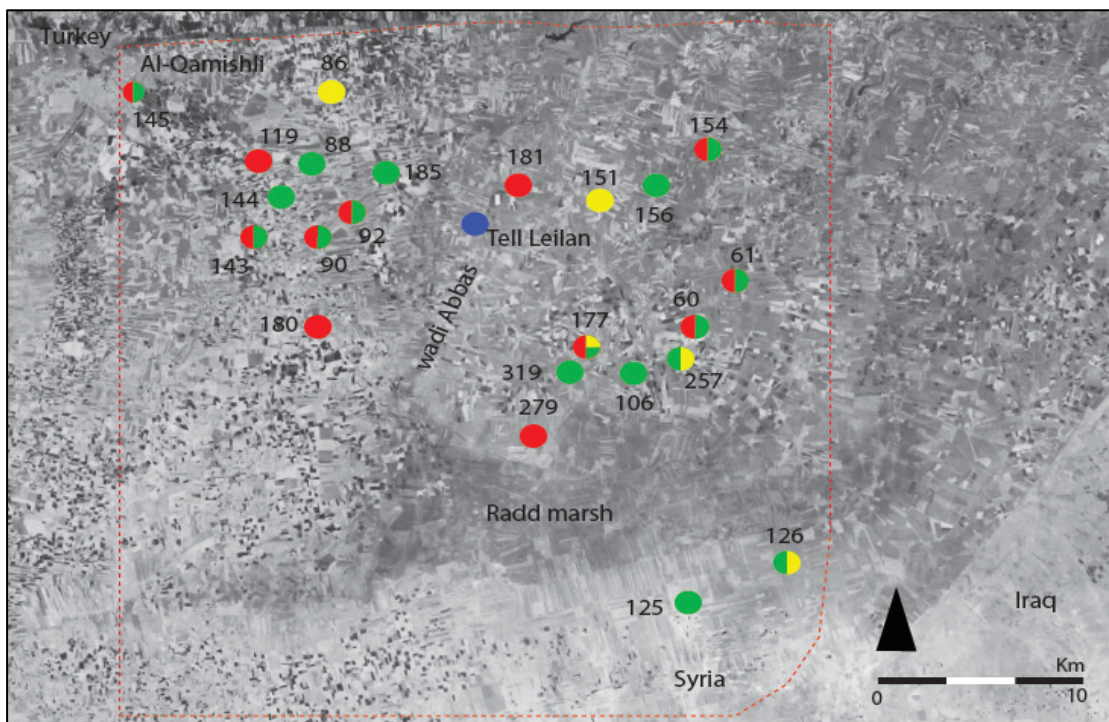


Fig. 44. Modified and adapted Google image (© Google 2013) of the Tell Leilan Survey area with the location of the sites which have yielded Parthian (red), Roman (green) and Sasanian

(yellow) pottery. Tell Leilan is indicated by the blue dot. The distribution almost uniform is a clue for the continuity of small settlements life even during and after the events that occurred in the region. The spreading of the site along a southeastern direction could indicate the presence of ancient tracks and routes connecting Nisibis to the Jebel Sinjar at South.

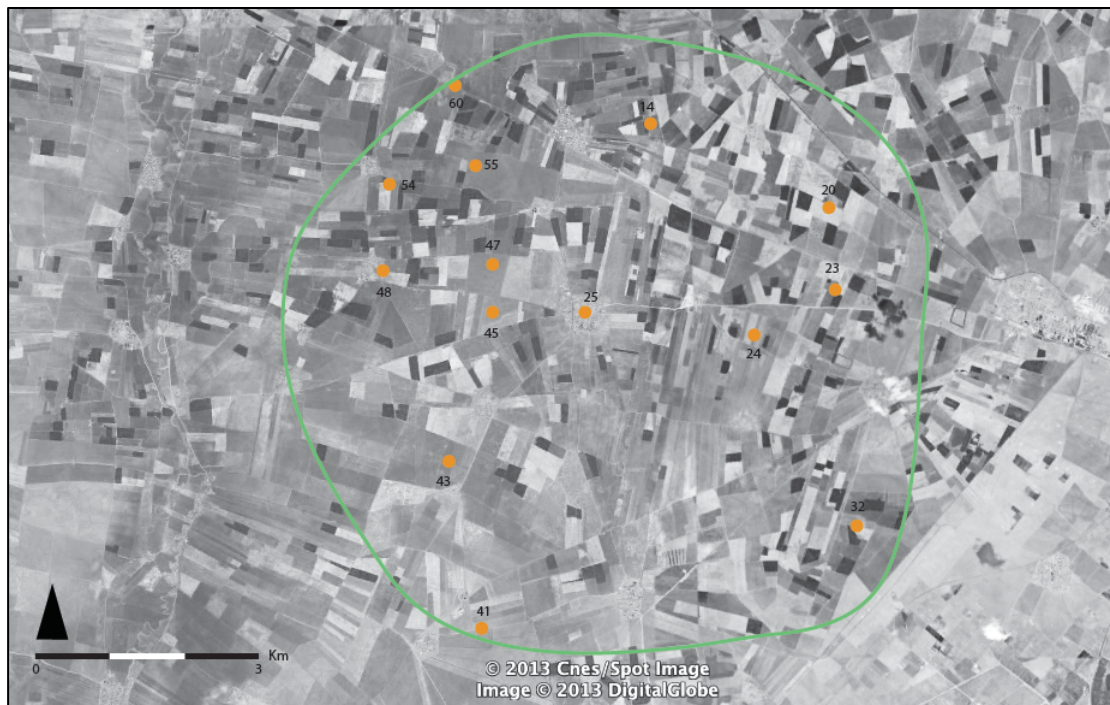
The contemporary period sites spotted during the Leilan survey have indicated a possible route system connecting Nisibis to southern regions because of the distribution of the sites in a specific direction toward South-East. Anyway, this kind of suggestion does not permit us, unfortunately, to have a clearer picture of the Roman Mesopotamia, since none of these sites can tell us more than that its surface has yielded. Moreover, as for Tell Barri, the pottery as indicator of a *Roman presence* is highly misleading and can put the scholar far from the real issue⁴⁷⁵.

The local ceramic assemblages recovered on several sites in the region, from the excavated ones to those only surveyed, highlights the diffusion of certain types rather than others in the area. The most important survey specifically intended to recognize *classical* sites in the region was the one carried out by the Oates and the Tell Brak Project in late '80s early '90s which interested the whole Jaghjagh basin⁴⁷⁶. The results obtained have shown a large amount of Hellenistic pottery in several sites from the confluence Jaghjagh-Radd up to Al-Qamishli, while a later occupation seems to have been less nucleated. This presence is overall recognizable through some distinctive pottery specimens such as, e.g., the *diamonds stamped* potsherds which have by now chronologically connected to the period 2nd -4th century CE and whose presence is widely attested in the region. The area of the Jaghjagh, moreover, represents a so-called *high density* zone since the valley connected an important city like Nisibis to the southern territories of the area and, moreover, to lower Jaghjagh where passed important east-west trade routes that linked the whole Northern Mesopotamia to western Syrian regions. Although suggesting hypothesis about a North-South road along the Jaghjagh have been proposed (even Oates suggests the presence of such route, 1990, 230), none of the field survey that interested the area have been able to recognize traces of this track on the ground. It is, however, worth to notice that the CORONA images which have permitted to spot ancient tracks and paths of the pre-classical and classical period in the region, could be used in the next future to reconstruct the possible *classical* paths, in the same way it has been done

⁴⁷⁵ On Tell Barri see paragraph 8.4 in this research.

⁴⁷⁶ OATES AND OATES 1990, 227-248

with the 3rd millennium BCE period in the same region. Eventually other analysed surveys has shown different kind of results. The Tell Hamoukar survey has been carried out mainly in the period 1999-2001 around the 3rd millennium site of Tell Hamoukar in Northeastern Syria in an area very close to the modern Syro-Iraqi border. Notwithstanding the small covered area by the Hamoukar survey some interesting suggestion can be made on the archaeological landscape of this zone during the early centuries of our era. The so-called “Roman period”, which was labelled as the “Period 14” by the American équipe, has been attested on 16 sites around Hamoukar presenting a relatively low ceramic percentage, which is however highly affected by the massive number of *untyped* sherds spread throughout the surface. As Jason Ur noticed⁴⁷⁷, the 57% of these 16 sites in the Hamoukar are, present a previous occupation, while other occupied abandoned mounds and only one site (identified as THS 60, current name unknown) seems to be a completely new foundation⁴⁷⁸. Also the results achieved by the Tell Hamoukar Survey have shown this considerable reduction in settlements number after the fall of the Seleucid kingdom with a significant difference in number of sites comparing to the previous periods.



⁴⁷⁷ UR 2010, 118

⁴⁷⁸ Nevertheless only a further collection will make clear this suggestion, a rapid collection have highlighted the presence of potsherds of the so-called *diamonds* stamped pottery, which is dated to the mid and late Parthian period in the region.

Fig. 45. Modified Google image (© Google 2013) of the Tell Hamoukar Survey area with the partho-roman sites (and their relative survey number) marked in orange. N. 25 is Tell Hamoukar (data retrieved from Ur 2010,118).

On the other side of the frontier, around the modern site of Tell al-Hawa, the field survey has witnessed another situation, proving just a small diminution in settlements between the Hellenistic and the Parthian period⁴⁷⁹. Out 184 sites identified 66 of them have been marked as “partho-roman” (late 1st millennium BCE /early 1st millennium CE) on a total covered area of 475 sq Kms. These sites have been so classified on the basis of very few diagnostic sherds recovered (sometimes even one single sherd). Among them the most significant type is the *diamonds* decorated pottery (which has important parallels in the all region and which was, codified, as seen, after the excavations at Ain Sinu, see above).

Many of the *parthian* sites, however, were slightly bigger than farms, even if they certainly occupied a full landscape at the edge of the fed-rain cultivation area. During the North Jazira Project, moreover, several squared structures, which Sir Aurel Stein claimed to be *roman*, have been investigated. From the field walking survey emerged actually that usually these squared structures belonged to the period between the early and middle Islamic times and were more likely used as *khans* or stop point for nomadic and local caravans.

The attribution of a given site to the *roman* period has been based, moreover, on the presence of the *Brittle ware* which is widely considered as a marker of a roman interaction or relation. Only 7 sites out of a total of 184 have yielded this kind of pottery (and never more than 3 potsherds). Nevertheless the fact that the presence/absence of the *Brittle ware* define in a certain way an interaction/relation of the site with Rome, it is interesting at least to note the very low incidence of western-imported types in the area.

⁴⁷⁹ WILKINSON, TUCKER & BALL 1997, 67 and ff. Should be added however, that these simplistic chronological definitions (“Parthian”, “Roman” and even “Hellenistic”) do not reflect the material culture as well as the historical dynamics of the region. Despite this inaccuracy the picture of the region in the early centuries of our era is hugely affected also by an only provisional definition of the standard ceramic types.

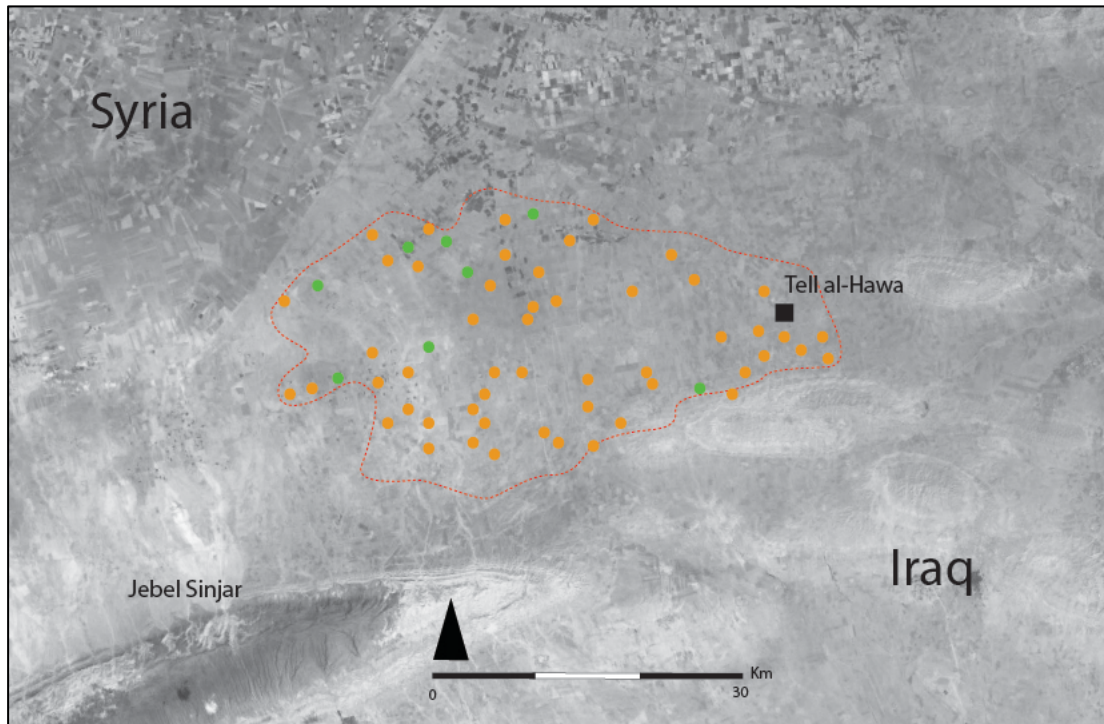


Fig. 46. Modified and adapted Google image (©Google 2013) with the limits of the area surveyed by the North Jazira Project. The sites which have yielded ceramic material from the first four centuries of our era are represented in orange. The green dots show the sites where Btrille ware potsherds have been collected.

From the distribution chart of the identified sites by the North Jazira Project clearly emerge certain features which, as seen, are common to other areas of Northern Mesopotamia. In addition to the decrease in settlements number, the geographic disposition of the sites, along two major north-west / south-east courses, seems to provide the same data already retrieved by the Tell Leilan survey.

Given these assumptions one can suggest the effective existence of a more frequented track (in addition to the minor one along the Jaghjagh, which, moreover, is a mere hypothesis) exploiting the natural gap between the Jebel Sinjar and the Jebel Ishkaft to overpass the mountain ranges at the South.

These tracks, then reached the major west-east route which from the Ḥabur went to the Tigris through Singara. Moreover, putting aside the problems of chronology and belonging of the fort at Ain Sinu (which is not far from the southern limit of the North Jazira project), it is interesting to note the strategic position of the fort, at the junction of these two major routes. It is quite intriguing after these assumptions to propose a sort of over-imposition of the data provided by the North Jazira project and the representations of the 4th century CE route network on the Table of Peutinger.

The road which came from Nisibis through the Jebel Ishkaft pass, indeed, could recall the one marked on the Table which, moreover, met the west-east road below the Jebel Sinjar. The Map 7 (see Appendix) shows the hypothetical distribution of the stops mentioned in the Table within the modern geographical context. Further east, instead, the Zammar region project⁴⁸⁰, which was undertaken in mid-1980s and only recently published has witnessed an interesting increase in post-hellenistic sites (even of medium dimensions) and, moreover, three of them, Seh Qubba⁴⁸¹, Gir Matbakh⁴⁸² and Khirbet Kharasan⁴⁸³, having being also briefly investigated interested by excavations and test trenches, they have revealed at partho-roman and byzantine-sasanian potsherds⁴⁸⁴. Anyway only 14 sites have revealed traces of a partho-roman (8 sites) and byzantine-sasanian (4 sites) occupation. Of these 14 sites only Seh Qubba seems to have witnessed a continuous occupation between the two periods. None of these sites, moreover, presented a Hellenistic phase (which has been very poorly attested in the whole region).

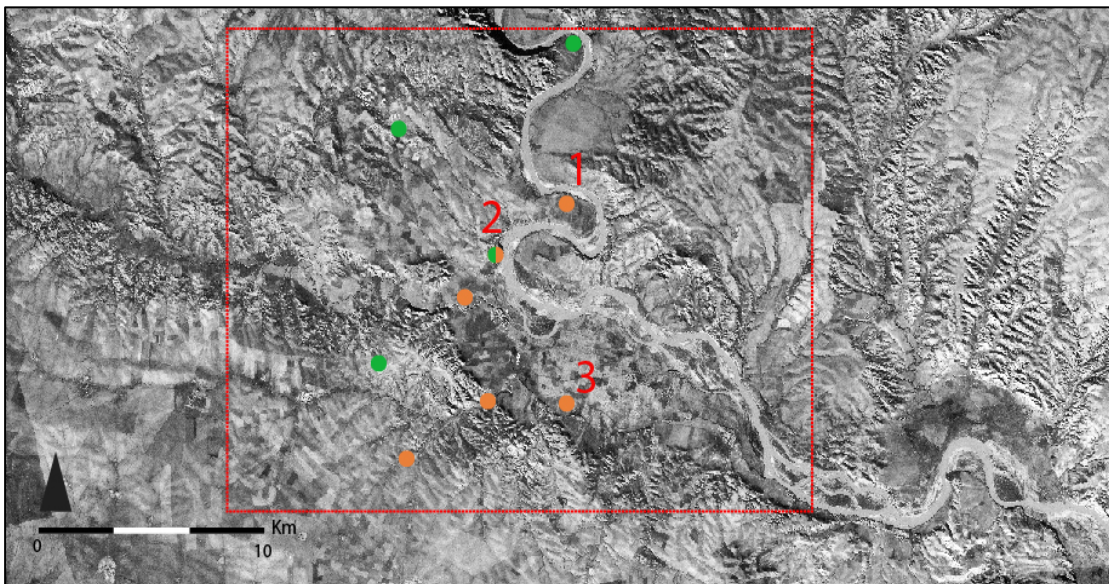


Fig. 47. December 1967 CORONA image (© Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey) of the Upper Tigris River before the Eski Mosul Dam was built (formerly known as Saddam Dam). The framed area encloses the Zammar region survey. The sites mentioned in the text, where test trenches have been opened

⁴⁸⁰ BALL 2003.

⁴⁸¹ BALL & GILL 2003, 64-96.

⁴⁸² CAMPBELL 2003, 121-148.

⁴⁸³ TUCKER 2003, 97-120.

⁴⁸⁴ No significant structures dated to the period has been, however, discovered. Traces of late occupation are, indeed, mainly represented by *sigillata* (rarely) and *Brittle* (more frequently) potsherds which have been collected on the surface. The case of Seh Qubba and its particular role and supposed identification is also treated in this work, see paragraph 8.2.

during the project, are Gir Matbakh (1), Seh Qubba (2) and Khirbet Kharasan (3). Orange dots represent the sites patho-roman ceramic material has been collected, green dots represent the ones of the byzantine-sasanian pottery (data retrieved from BALL 2003, 6).

8.7.2 Conclusions

Despite the obvious difficulties of the research, the data collected through the years have spread the light upon some interesting points, which can be largely summarised as follows:

1. the occupation sensibly decreased between the Hellenistic and the Parthian-Roman period
2. sites are still small-sized ones, mainly located along trade routes or water-courses
3. after the cession of the region to the Sasanians a highly visible decrease in number of sites is accompanied by an increase in their dimensions.

Given all these assumptions what clearly emerges from the numerous survey projects carried out in the whole north Mesopotamian plateau is an alternate picture of shrinking and size reduction in settlements patterns, overall if compared to the previous periods. The number of settlements, however, vary from area to area and could have been significantly affected both by the political events of the region as well as by the environmental factors such as droughts and water needs. Thus what appears to be a constant in the trends of settlement distribution is a strong centralization in proximity of the water courses (such as the *wadi* Jaghjagh, for instance).

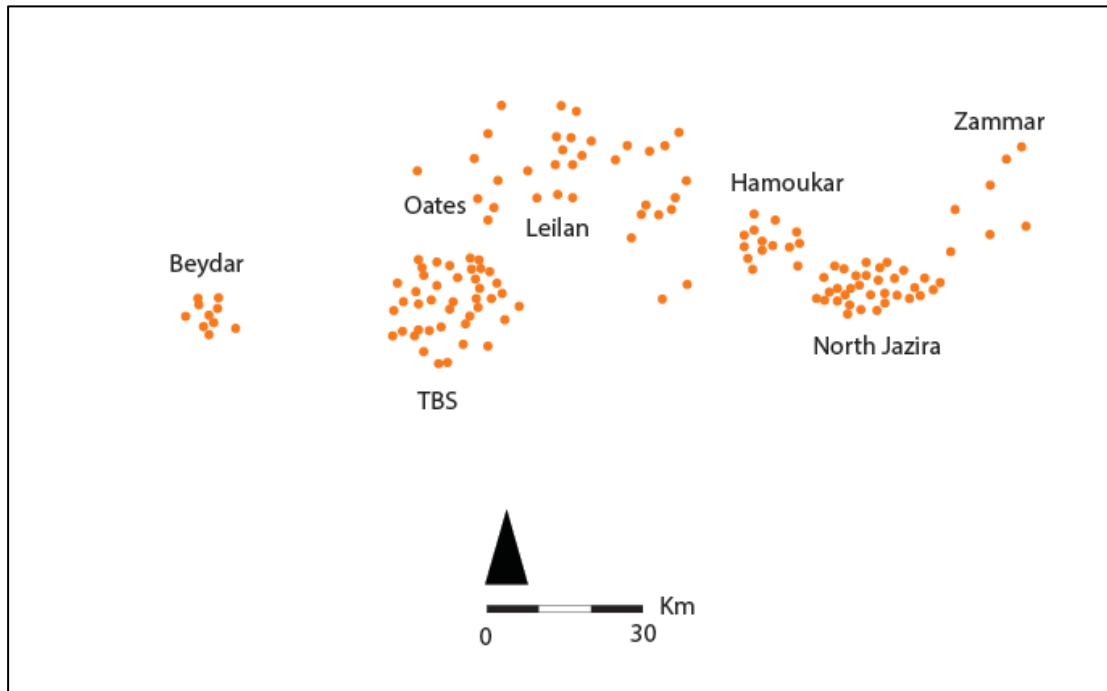


Fig. 48. Graphic representation of the partho-roman / early 1st millennium CE sites identified by the different survey projects in Northern Mesopotamia

As the Fig. 48 shows, the distribution of the orange dots is thus generally based upon two main factors: water courses and regional tracks. All the examined surveys have pointed out this spatial organization as a matter of fact. The decrease of settlements in terms of number, at the contrary, as already suggested, mainly depends on the base of the local surveyed area. A sensible decrease in the region has been witnessed by the Tell Beydar Survey as well as by the Zammar regional project, both areas located at the extreme fringes of the northern Mesopotamian plateau.

Although it is quite difficult to determine which kinds of settlements were widespread in the region between the 2nd and the 4th century CE, it is more likely that apart the major cities, the rural landscape was mainly composed by scattered small villages and rural farms. Furthermore, if we consider the geographic range of the sites these perfectly fits in two major directions. The axis of the Jaghjagh from Nisibis to the confluence with the Ḥabur and the axis of the supposed main eastern route of the area which crossed the Northern Mesopotamia from the North towards South-East and the Jebel Sinjar.

8.7.3 Hollow ways as ancient tracks: a clue for the understanding of the rural landscape

The numerous survey projects carried out in Northern Mesopotamia have all of them faced the issues of the so-called *hollow ways*, whose role has been firstly noted by Van Liere and Lauffray⁴⁸⁵, then partially underrated⁴⁸⁶, and only in a second moment their importance for the reconstruction of the ancient landscape has been widely recognized also through the use of the CORONA satellite images (see above).

In any case, even if not the totality of these *anomalies* on the ground can be identified as tracks, paths or small routes, it is undoubtless that these signs shaped the area acting both as link between the small centres and field-paths as well. Their visibility is one of the most important feature in the archaeological landscape of Northern Mesopotamia. These tracks, indeed, retain the moisture that has been collected through the centuries and thus they appear with a darker colour than the surrounding land⁴⁸⁷. They occur on the dry farming plains of northern Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the Middle East, and are generally 60–120 m wide and 0.50–1.5 m deep. However, these tracks are not so easily recognizable on the field. In northern Mesopotamia, for instance, their visibility can be explained differently in different seasons. In the summer and autumn they are detectable as soil marks because their troughs retain moisture and promote weed growth. In the spring, these moisture-retaining properties encourage denser growth of grass crops, producing distinctive crop marks⁴⁸⁸. The chronology of the hollow ways, unfortunately, has not been certainly proved and the datation on the basis of the mound-association should be taken with caution⁴⁸⁹. Should be add, however, that the majority of the 3rd millennium BCE sites in Northern Mesopotamia with whom the hollow ways are often associated result to be multi-period site and thus the routes themselves have been probably used for a very long time. It has been proved that the late hollow ways are narrower than the ones related to 3rd millennium mound, but it cannot be excluded

⁴⁸⁵ VAN LIERE & LAUFFRAY 1954; VAN LIERE 1963.

⁴⁸⁶ WEISS 1997. He mainly suggests that the *hollow ways* must be modern.

⁴⁸⁷ It should be added that a different interpretation proposes to see the *hollow ways* as kind of channels to retain the water for agriculture (see MCLELLAN *et. al.* 2000). Jason UR (2003, 104) argues that the villagers from the area of Hamoukar, for instance, call these *tracks*, wadi and they claim that none of the spotted hollow ways has been used as a path since the repopulation of the area in late 1950s. However, Tony Wilkinson, has convincingly demonstrated that some of these *hollow ways* actually cut the *wadis* (WILKINSON & TUCKER 1995, 26-27).

⁴⁸⁸ UR 2003, 103.

⁴⁸⁹ UR 2003, 102-115.

the use of a tracks that appear to be older, in a later period, only on the base of their width.



Fig. 49. Modelled image obtained by the merge of several single CORONA images of the mid and lower Jaghjagh river valley (© Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey). The ancient tracks (hollow ways) can be easily spotted around the sites of Tell Brak (center) and Tell Barri (upper). Thickness, colour and other related factors are used to distinguish the pre-classical tracks from the later ones.

However, it is also possible that some tracks had a long period of use because of their strategic and commercial importance and thus some of the paths that seems to have been used only in 3rd and 2nd millennium BCE could have been exploited even later.

The importance of the survey projects for the *classical* periods in the region absolutely needs a further step in order to better understand the trends in settlement patterns. However a combined study based on the *later* data from the main investigations in the region can be a useful starting point to face the topic.

As Tony Wilkinson has rightly pointed out, the chronology of some later hollow ways should be better defined in association with settled mounds an field scatter surveys, in order to have a clearer idea of the regional landscape in the period

between the 3rd and the 6th century CE⁴⁹⁰. Even if these tracks were mainly used to reach the field all around a specific site, it has been proven also that a series of this short tracks formed a continuous path through the region linking non only sme of the minor sites between them, but probably also the main routes of the region⁴⁹¹.

How does the presence of such paths affected the landscape of the region during the period between the 2nd and the 4th century CE is an issue covered by a huge question mark. Given the current archaeological research in the region one cannot say if a path or a track was used in a period and then dismissed later, and so the try of schematization risks to fail. However the shrink in distribution of small sites, as seen for the period between the 2nd and the 4th century CE, could be flanked by a sort of disappearing of some of these small tracks in the area. Even the combination of data from the Table of Peutnger with the satellite imagery does not provide good results, mainly because of the lack of a ground-investigations that would certainly male more clear some chronological aspects. The only suggestion that can be made is, however, that the tracks survived where they were associated to a small centres or one of the scattered farms, bu they have been probably abandoned elsewhere.

⁴⁹⁰ WILKINSON 2003, 115-116 and *passim*.

⁴⁹¹ Ur 2003, 102-115.

CHAPTER 9

NOMADIC PRESENCE IN THE ROMAN MESOPOTAMIA

*Archaeology of the settled community in
Jezirah remains in its infancy, to say
nothing of the archaeology of its nomadic
group.*

(Ch. F. Robinson, 1996)

9.1 Introduction

Roger Matthews significantly pointed out that in Mesopotamia “there is no question that urban life existed only as a part of an integrated urban/rural interaction”⁴⁹². Given this assumption it is quite easy to recognize that the heterogeneity of the near eastern regions through the millennia is a matter of fact. Different social and ethnic groups shared the lands between the Levantine coast and the inner Syria, each one featured by their cults, economies, and their social rules. The framework that emerges, therefore, is a mix of contacts and interactions, which are clearly recognizable in many aspects of the historical and archaeological investigations. Those interactions must be considered according to two significant factors: the *same-level* interactions, which dealt with contacts and exchanges between similar structured societies (Romans, Aramaic-speaking people, Parthians, Jews), and the *outer-level* interactions, which happened when a structured society dealt with the unsettled and nomadic tribes in the very same area.

This presence is, indeed, a typical element to deal with when treating the historical and archaeological landscape of the land between the Mediterranean and the Tigris. Such a presence should be primarily imputed to geographical features of the area itself. The few stripes of cultivable lands have always attracted the people and their herds from other desertic zones, making the movements of men and animals a constant in the history of the Ancient Near East. The sedentarization of those groups of people

⁴⁹² MATTHEWS 2003, 182.

led to the formation of the first organized civilizations in the world, albeit large part of the same groups preserved their *mobility* as a distinctive feature⁴⁹³.

A chapter about the nomadic and tribal presences in Upper Mesopotamia during the early centuries of our era must forcedly have a methodology and theoretical foreword about the terms "Nomad" and "Nomadism", moreover when used in historical contexts and Near East contexts. The presence of Nomads in the Near East is attested since the 3rd millenium BCE and it has been widely studied and analysed by many scholars⁴⁹⁴.

In the cuneiform sources, mainly the Akkadian ones, the nomads are defined by the expressions *sābē sēri* - people from the steppe - or *sēr halqātī* - offspring of the runaways - or *laššim* - the people who have-not-⁴⁹⁵. Sometimes they are also defined as *šāhitim* (leapers)⁴⁹⁶. The modern term *nomad*, instead, stems from the Greek word *nomov*, which is pasture, and from here the adjective *nomav*, which means *gading* around the pastures⁴⁹⁷. The contrast between the Akkadian and Hebrew term and the Greek one is quite fundamental. The older terms are, indeed, mainly referred to the *land* the nomads settled in, while the Greek term makes chiefly reference to a certain specific economy and a certain specific way of life (mobility). The difference can reside in the scarce knowledge the Greeks had of the dynamics going over in the desertic and steppe fringes of Syria and Arabia, while the same dynamics have been well perceived by the *sedentary* population of those same areas.

The concept of *nomad* has been often view, in the Roman East, strictly connected with the one of ethnicity, meaning the sense of belonging to certain tribes and circles through time. Modern studies about the Nomadic presence in Near Eastern regions have shown how the difference between Nomad groups can be tracked starting from two main topics: the animal breed and the surrounding environment⁴⁹⁸. Differences have been stated between the groups breeding goats and sheep and the ones dealing with camels, especially in connection with specific environmental needs (pastures for the goat/sheep-more arid zones for the camels). This leads to the second category of selection: the environment where the nomads lived. A distinction is usually made between the ones living in the steppe regions (or desert) and the groups dwelling in

⁴⁹³ Matthews 2003, 182-187.

⁴⁹⁴ See, in general, SZUCHMAN 2009.

⁴⁹⁵ KLENGEL 1972, 32-34.

⁴⁹⁶ CAD, s.v. *sēru*, A3f.

⁴⁹⁷ Liddell-Scott, s.v. *nomav*. See also HARTOG 1988, 194 and n. 4.

⁴⁹⁸ SCHARRER 2010, 241-335.

more fertile territories⁴⁹⁹. Another point of interest is the use in modern literature of terms such as semi-nomads to indicate different levels of nomadism according to the movements of the people themselves. Also the concept of *tribe* must be related to the Nomadic sphere meaning with this term the strongest characteristic of a Nomadic society. Anyway the presence of a *tribe* does not forcedly imply an absence of a *state* and often the term can be interchangeable and can communicate and interact on different levels⁵⁰⁰. This appears to be the specific case of the role the Nomads of the Syrian steppe played in Roman times. The interaction must be, therefore, at the basis of the deal and the communication between the groups.

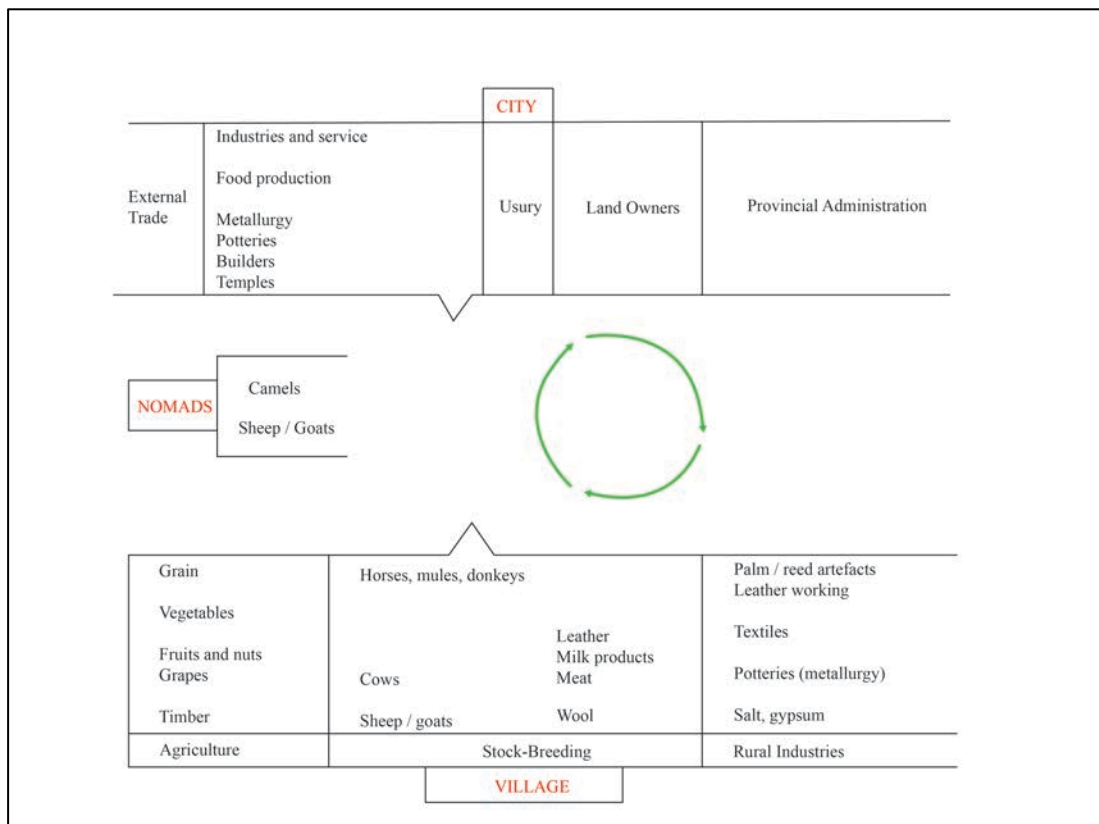


Fig. 50. Resources and productions in terms of city/village/nomad interactions. Data retrieved by Postgate 1979, chart 2 (modified).

Each nomadic group can, indeed, become *sedentary* without letting go their nomadic identity, as well as each *tribe* can become a *state*, or even better a *state-like*, without giving away the features of a basically tribal system. Starting from this assumption one may affirm (with reason) that none of these terms (*state*, *tribe*, *nomads*) can effectively be split from the other when talking about the nomadic presence in the

⁴⁹⁹ The Arabic term *badw* (meaning *bedouin*) is usually referred to the groups whose economy is mainly based on the camels (i.e.: they live in desert or steppe).

⁵⁰⁰ SZUCHMANN 2009, 5.

Near East. Every study of socio-political interaction in the Ancient Near East must therefore bear in mind these relations in order to obtain a large comprehensive picture of the events. The concept itself of *tribe* deals with several features like *honor, religion, leadership, and family* and, over all, the out-of-the-tribe relations with other groups⁵⁰¹. The theories of Briant summarized in the causality from poverty to mobility and aggressivity⁵⁰², have been considered by Gutsfeld as based on stereotypes and lacking of the real interactions that certainly happened between different groups (i.e. the *tribe-tribe* and the *tribe-sedentary state* relations)⁵⁰³. The robbery, anyway, is marked a sign of *nomadism* in several ancient authors, while others did not depict them as robbers⁵⁰⁴. Thus basically means that the main characteristic must be searched in the change of place rather than in the robbery itself. Evidence of Nomadic presence in the Roman Near East can be found, as said, in several authors (Greek, Latin and medieval ones) as well as inscriptions (over all the Thamudic and Safaitic ones). Invaluable sources for the study of a nomadic presence in these regions the Thamudic texts come from the northwestern regions of Northern Arabia, while the Safaitic are spread in the Syrian territory east of Jordan⁵⁰⁵. The Thamudic inscriptions mainly deal with themes such as owning a field, passing through a field, leaving or arriving in a given places or simply being temporarily present. They also mention valleys, pastures, fields and water places. All these *data* spread the light upon a seasonal presence in a remote area, not forgetting that in this context the inscriptions themselves could be used also as landmarks and signs. Some of the inscriptions also show *graffiti* and sketches such as donkeys, camels and other animals, moreover underlining the use of these animals in the nomadic context. Some of those inscriptions are referred also to skirmishes and struggles between the tribesmen and the Roman soldiers meaning probably that these tribes (in times before and after the coming of Rome) saw the raidings as a specific way of life⁵⁰⁶. Only few Greek inscriptions, eventually, confirm the presence of

⁵⁰¹ The usual features of a nomadic *tribe* have been well described by VAN DER STEEN 2009, 101.

⁵⁰² BRIANT 1982, 9-55.

⁵⁰³ GUSTEFELD 1989, 15-24. See also Scharrer 2004, 312.

⁵⁰⁴ See, for instance, Pseudo Hyppocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places* 18, 20-22

⁵⁰⁵ For both the groups of inscriptions see overall SCHARRER 2009.

⁵⁰⁶ BUTCHER 2003, 409.

Nomads in Syria and Northern Arabia⁵⁰⁷, while only one Latin inscription mentions the *skenitai* Arabs⁵⁰⁸.

Anyway limiting the contacts between the Nomads of the desert (and from the steppe) to the only raids and skirmishes on the fringes of the desertland, means first of all ignoring the complex relationships that went over between them and the sedentary populations (i.e. the Romans) and the deals both the groups made to survive in these extreme lands.

9.2 The case of the nomadic groups in Jezirah

The archaeological interpretation of a Nomadic presence is quite tough to identify⁵⁰⁹. The *not-stantial* feature of a Nomadic group makes hard to determine specific guidelines to recognize them. The literary sources and the epigraphic ones, as said, appear to be the only tools useful to locate and try to track not only the groups themselves in a so large area, but also the social dynamics and the economical features at the basis of their lives. Geographically speaking, the Jezirah, the whole region comprised between the Ḥabur and the Upper Tigris and southernly limited by the confluence Ḥabur-Euphrates, is quite suitable to those groups⁵¹⁰. The *dimorphic* aspect of the societies settled in the area has been already discussed and it dates back long before the coming of Rome⁵¹¹. The recent CORONA images have shown how important was the presence of the several routes and paths in northern Mesopotamia, not only for connecting different sites, but also for providing a fast *medium* for people and herds moves. B. Lyonnet has rightly pointed out the importance the Nomads had into the development of the rounded city (e.g. Tell Beydar, but also

⁵⁰⁷ The inscriptions has been published and stued by SARTRE (1982, 121-126). Other iscriptions mentioning nomadic groups can be found in AS'AD & YON (2001) and KAIZER (2002).

⁵⁰⁸ *CIL* III, 128. On the term *skenitai* see over all SCHARRER 2010, 247 and *passim*. The inscription comes from Khan Kosseir. See PARKER 2006, 536.

⁵⁰⁹ LYONNET 2004 and NÄSER 2005.

⁵¹⁰ Being a sort of *alley* between the Iran and the Mediterranean region, the Jezirah represents, indeed, a *transit-zone*. Still nowadays herds from the Syrian desert pass the summer period (slightly cooler) in these regions, rather than in southernmost areas. The city of Deir-ez-Zor, on the Syrian Euphrates, is since the 19th century the centre of a large sheep and goat market. This appears to be the result of the particular position of the city along the main pastoral routes of Mesopotamia.

⁵¹¹ LYONNET 2009, 179-200

Mari) and how the interaction worked in the area during the 3rd and 2nd mill. BCE⁵¹². The origin of the Jezirah tribes in the classical period can be tracked back to the period of Xenophon when is said that they live in the so-called *Arabia*, a marginal area he locates in the proximity of the Ḥabur River valley (*Anabasis*, 1. 4.19 -5.1)⁵¹³. The description of Xenophon, however, has been much discussed by Donner, as being inaccurate, especially if compared with the description of other authors (Pliny, Strabo)⁵¹⁴. The pastoralism and the agriculture are present in the Xenophon's account, while the same account completely lacks of reference to the nomadism⁵¹⁵. According to Strabo (16.26) and Pliny (*NH* 6.125), instead, the nomads occupied the large part of Mesopotamia, particularly the area between *Thapsacus* on the Euphrates and the Persian Gulf, although groups of nomads have been attested also in western regions of Syria: in the Apamea area (Strabo 16.2.11), in the zone between the Euphrates and the Coele Syria (Strabo 16.1.27), as well as in Northern Arabia (Strabo 16.4.2 and Diod. 2.54.1)⁵¹⁶. The most important nomad tribe of Mesopotamia, according to Strabo, thus is the one of the *Skenitai* (tent-dwellers), which are similar to the same group of people living in the area of Apamea. More than a real name, *Skenitai* probably was the term to identify a large group of people according their way of living. In the same passage Strabo (16. 2. 11) points out an implicit difference between those *Skenitai* and the *Arabs*. The latter ones, indeed, have the *phylarchoi*, while the *Skenitai*, as the name suggests, live in tents, probably without a real form of standard leadership except the one related to the family or to the tribe. Another difference is probably to be tracked in the geographical features of each group. The *Arabes* lived in Parapotamia, along the eastern bank of the Euphrates, while the *Skenitai* occupy the area east of the river, so the *proper* Mesopotamia. In 16.1.26-28 is clearly said that to reach the lands of the *Skenitai* one has to leave the Euphrates back of a three days journey. The description of the Syrian

⁵¹² LYONNET 2009, 180-184.

⁵¹³ The same term referred to the Ḥabur river valley is also present in Eratosthenes (cf. Knaack, *Eratosthenes* 371-372).

⁵¹⁴ Donner 1986, 1-14

⁵¹⁵ An interesting hypothesis by DONNER (1986, 2) is that probably the author forgot to mention the presence of camels and nomads in the area due to the 20 years gap occurred between the campaign and the writing.

⁵¹⁶ The main source for Strabo seems to have been a lost work by Posidonius of Apamea (*Peri Okeanou*) about the differences between people and the influence the environment had on them. The informations of Posidonius must have been *first-hand* informations being the author was anative of Apamea and so the *data* provided by Strabo about the lands and people beyond the Euphrates owe much to the Posidonius direct observations See also RETSÖ 2003, 351

Euphrates valley and the Eastern Syrian Desert by Strabo let us think that probably the *Skenitai* occupied the Jezirah up to the Tigris, while the Arabs were much more concentrated along the river. The *Skenitai*, however, are said to live in peace with the *Syrians (!)*, the Aramaic-speaking sedentary people of Northern Mesopotamia (Strabo 16, 3.1). The mention of the *Syrians* let us suppose that the Northern Mesopotamia (*grosso modo* the area of the modern governorate of Al-Hassake, in Syria, and part of the north-western Iraq) was featured by a mixed population with their main ethnic group recognizable in those Aramaic-speaking people who settled also at Nisibis together with the Greeks⁵¹⁷, but continuously dealing with the nomads and the western and eastern populations. Among the different ethnic groups settled in the region during the first centuries of our era, indeed, the Arabs certainly constituted a major part. Since the campaigns of Trajan in Mesopotamia, they have been attested by several sources as being a sort of independent population in the region.

The presence of *Arabes* in Jezirah is attested also by an account of the emperor Claudius, who wrote a book about the topic and which included also the Tigris area⁵¹⁸. The description of the zone was probably re-used by Pliny in a well-known passage of the *Naturalis Historia* (VI.129). The Tigris here is said to be a frontier between the *Orrhoei Arabes* and the *Adiabeni* [*Arabes*] forming the region of Mesopotamia.

In another passage (VI. 25) Pliny underlines that the region between the two rivers was settled by the *Arabes Orroei*. Given these *data* one can assume that, probably, the *Arabes* (the ones living in the Osrhoene) settled the modern Jezirah, while the *Arabes* (the ones who lived in the Adiabene, the region East of the Tigris River) settled, instead, the steppe area in the modern region of Mosul-Erbil (Iraq).

The perception of a difference between the settled populations and the Arabs who lived in those same areas is common. During the winter of 114/5 CE, in example, Trajan received the submission of *Osrhoeni* and *Arabes*, whose areas previously he occupied (Festus, *Brev.*, 20). The most important thing to note in the Festus' account is the separation between *Osrhoeni* and *Arabes*. The same difference is perceived in Dio where is clearly stated that the Arabs were *Arabs of Osrhoene*.

A passage in Pliny (V, 85-86-87) mentions also the existence of Arabs, called *Rhoali*, in the nearby areas of Mesopotamia (86), while the *Arabes Orroei* occupied the Northern fringes of the area (87). The historical reconstruction is anyway quite

⁵¹⁷ On the role of the nomadic tribes in relation with Nisibis see chapter 4 in this work.

⁵¹⁸ See GEHAIS, *Claudius* 2837 and Retsö 2003, 412.

though since in the same chapter (V, 85) Pliny writes that the area East of *Sura* (therefore east of the Euphrates) was occupied by the "*Arabes qui Praetavi vocantur, horum caput Singara*". The large ethnic group is represented in the Jebel Sinjar region by the tribe of the *Praetavi*. The *data* provided by Pliny does not forcedly imply that this was the only tribe present in the area, since the same author seems to know at least a second group of Arabs in the same area (*Rhoali*). The *Praetavi*, unfortunately, are not attested in other sources albeit a sort of identification with another tribe, the *Eldamari*, has been proposed by Retsö⁵¹⁹.

The presence of different groups of Arabs in Mesopotamia reflects the opposite situation of the Arabs in central and southern Syria who had been pacificated by the Romans (such as the Itureans in the Hawran), and in the Nabataea, which in 106/7 CE is included in the empire. This presence of the Arabs in Northern Mesopotamia strongly affected the social and political component of the region balancing their power between the Romans and the Parthians. The role these tribes played certainly increased after the fall of the Seleucid realm and the emergence of local rulers in the whole region. The less the two empires controlled the regions between the Euphrates and the Tigris the more the local Arab tribes and Nomads played a significant role in the area.

A document from Dura Europos (*PDura 20*), for instance, dated to 121 CE, mentions a certain Mamesos who appears to be *strategós* of Mesopotamia and Parapotamia, as well as *arabárkhēs* on the account of the King of the Kings (in those years Vologases II)⁵²⁰. The document, a loan contract, spreads the light upon a period when the Roman presence was quite weak (or absent after the withdrawal decided by Hadrian) and the Mesopotamia returned in the political sphere of Parthia⁵²¹. Other two documents, instead, (one dated to 133 and the second one to 180 CE) mention the city of *Europos* as being (*pròs*) *Arabía*⁵²². The picture that emerges from these *data* is quite similar to the account of Posidonius mentioned above. The *Arabs* and the Nomad tribes controlled the eastern bank of the Euphrates and it cannot be excluded that they are the same *Praetavi* settled in the region of Singara at the North. The importance of the Arabs at Singara increased after the campaigns of Lucius Verus since the Rome's influence area was now moved along the Habur Valley and so the

⁵¹⁹ RETSÖ 2003, 415.

⁵²⁰ In this years Dura, probably, was in *Parapotamia* as other two documents (*P.Dura 18*, 87 CE and *P.Dura 19*, 88/89 CE).

⁵²¹ MILLAR 1996, 102

⁵²² WELLES, FINK, GILLIAM 1959: Civil Texts 119-20; 126 ff.

buffer zone of the Sinjar would have been constituted a strong vanguard for the Parthian empire⁵²³.

Moving westward, the presence of Arabs is mentioned in the Baliḥ river valley. This zone has been known for centuries as being inhospitable mainly due to the scarce sources of water (see the mention of the *Tabula Peutingeriana* below). Still nowadays the Baliḥ river valley is featured by the presence of *bedouins* with their herds and the environment did not change much from the ancient times. A study about the environment of the entire valley, conducted by M.A. Mulders (1969), confirmed that the actual aridity of the region was, more or less, the same during the *roman* period. The abandonment of several sites in the area since the end of the 6th century CE were not due to an increasing in aridification but rather to economic deterioration and to the augmentation of the political instability occurred after the fall of the Roman/Byzantine empires⁵²⁴.

The area was known in the Roman period as being almost empty and with no important cities (aside of Harran, albeit it is located further North, and Batnai (or Batnae) and Ichnae) and was systematically avoided by the military expeditions. The *Tabula Peutingeriana* labels, in addition, the zone as lacking of water (*propter aquae inopiam*) and this factor must have played a significant role in the decisions the Roman army made in the area. Part of the zone was, however, included in the Osrhoene, while the eastern fringes, the area nearby the Ḥabur, was a sort of *alley* between the Osrhoene itself and the Mesopotamia. The difference between the upper Baliḥ valley and the lower one is marked also by Ammianus Marcellinus. The historian, indeed, mentions the city of Batnae (Anthemusia), as being not so far from the Euphrates, close to the source of the Baliḥ. The centre, as testified by his account, every September a fair is held, with people, merchants and goods even from China and India⁵²⁵.

One of the main characteristic of the Nomadic people in these regions certainly is the presence of several routes linking different centres from west to east, from the Euphrates toward the Tigris and beyond passing through the Upper and Central Mesopotamia. Dillemann⁵²⁶ suggested that probably the routes coming from Nisibis and the western section of the Upper Mesopotamia and headed at Singara at Hatra recalled the ancient nomadic routes up to Gibrata (a small centre between Ctesiphon

⁵²³ DILLEMANN 1962: maps at p. 202 and 205

⁵²⁴ MULDEERS 1969, 29.

⁵²⁵ Amm. Marc. XXIII, 3, 1.

⁵²⁶ DILLEMANN 1962, 187.

and Hatra probably to be identified with the modern city of Kirkuk, in Iraq)⁵²⁷. The route proceeded then up to *Scenae*, close to the modern Baghdad, being along the right bank of the Tigris River⁵²⁸. The nomadic routes therefore, did not work probably in a straight way from a specific site to another one, but it was surely featured by several branches and minor paths linking the main centres with the villages and the minor tracks with the large ones, also on the basis of the wells presence and the resting places. It is quite likely that this kind of system existed long before the classical times and that the exploitation of those routes played an main role in the movements of troops, men and goods in the area during the first three centuries of our era⁵²⁹. One of the main roads, later exploited by the Romans, certainly was the one that went from Costantina (modern Viransehir, in Turkey) toward the Tigris and the region of the Jebel Sinjar. The area of Costantina was known as the *Land of the Arabs* ('Arbyestan or Beth Arbaye) and the city itself is mentioned as *Antiochia Arabis* by Pliny (VI, 30), being located at the area that formed a crossing point between the tribes of the *Orrhoenes* (or *Orrhoei*) and the *Mardes* (Pliny, VI, 30.17)⁵³⁰. The name *Mardes* recalls the one *Mardonioi*, which is present in Xenophon (*Anab.* IV, 3. 4) and usually identifies the tribe that lived in the area between Şanlıurfa (anc. Edessa) and Nusaybin (anc. Nisibis). A mention in John of Epiphaneia also remembers the foundation of a *frouion Mardhj* (modern Mardin, in Turkey) that seems to identify the fortress with the name of its inhabitants⁵³¹. The picture that emerges from the analysis of the nomads and Arab tribes in the regions suggests that the presence of non-sedentary populations of a given tribe was probably flanked by other people (of the same *clan* or *circle*) who became sedentary and settled in small villages around the main (and culturally mixed) centres of the area (e.g. Nisibis, Resaina, Edessa).

⁵²⁷ ROAF & SIMPSON 1994, 1310. The proposition of M. Roaf and St. John Simpson is included in the commentary (as map 91) to the *Barrington Atlas of Greek and Roman World*, edited by R. TALBERT.

⁵²⁸ The site is also mentioned by the Anonymus of Ravenna (II, 5) as *Scene*.

⁵²⁹ Must be add, however, that even the so called *Royal Road* of the Persian times could have been exploited pre-existent tracks.

⁵³⁰ On Constantina see also chapter 6.3 in this work.

⁵³¹ 275 § 5, quoted in DILLEMANN 1962, 99.

9.3 Hatra and the Arab People

Writing about the Arabs means underlining first of all the nature of the term, the vision ancient scholars had of it and the erroneous transposition in the modern literature. Sartre has rightly pointed out how the term “*Arab*” should be interpreted aside of the languages or the geographic location but only with the capacity of a given group of people to living in the desert: the Arabs for the ancient sources were those we nowadays know as Bedouins⁵³². The social patterns of those communities are strictly related to the tribe, the family and the group itself who played a consistently and crucial role (see *supra*). In the whole Near Eastern region the Arabs were settled in different regions, maintaining anyway their local roots and traditions. At Hatra the term *Arab* has been identified in several inscriptions as chiefly related the region surrounding the city⁵³³. A similar suggestion was already expressed also by Millar⁵³⁴. He states that the term *Arab(s)* leads to a double interpretation: the land and the area of the Arabs (in the specific case of Hatra the eastern Jezirah), but overall a sort of way of living that must have been easily recognizable by the other settled groups of the area.

Anyways, the rulers of Hatra (starting from Sanatruq II, in 177 CE) called themselves “*Kings of the Arabs*”. Drijvers states that the use of the title recalls a sort of control Hatra exercised on the surrounding areas as well as a kind of *independence* from the Arsacid ruler who proclaimed himself “King of Kings”⁵³⁵. The interactions of nomads and sedentary populations have been widely stressed in the case of Hatra. The peaceful interactions in land use, herding, trade and political co-operation were enhanced by the rulers of each group and by the tribal ties⁵³⁶. The co-operation at Hatra usually depended by the differentiation of subsistence strategies within the tribes. Members of a given tribe specialized in agricultural operations adopted a sedentary way of life, while, at the same time, other members of the same group (or a strictly related one) specialized in herding and trade preferred a non-sedentary way of living⁵³⁷.

⁵³² SARTRE 2008, 498.

⁵³³ VATTIONI 1994, 4 and ff..

⁵³⁴ MILLAR 1993, 495.

⁵³⁵ DRIJVERS 1977, 822. The expression “King of the Arabs” used at Hatra recalls also similar terms used by the other Nomadic groups in Osrhoene and in the Hauran. MILLAR (1993, 512 and 495) suggests the term implies “*relations of control of a hostile element or area rather than statements of identity with people in question*”.

⁵³⁶ ROWTON 1973; 1981.

⁵³⁷ CRIBB 2004, 16-19.

The nomadic groups also inevitably mingled themselves with the Aramaic tribes who settled in the same area. At Hatra, indeed, in several inscriptions, aside of Aramaic, Greek or Iranian personal names, Arab names are present. The same presence is also attested in the cults. The worship of the “eagle-god” *Nasr* has a clear Arab origin and the same probably occurred in Edessa with the worship of the twins-Gods *Monimos* and *Azizos*⁵³⁸. The case of Hatra is moreover interesting because the Arab presence is in some way attested on a flourishing Aramaic *substratum* with reminiscences of inner Syria (the presence of Baalshamin’s cult) and far eastern regions (the city was a centre of cult of Shamash and was sometimes called on coins “City of Shamash”). The city, incredibly flourished and developed in the 2nd century CE, must have been the crucial point in which the nomadic early Arab tribes became more “sedentary” enriching Hatra and exploiting the surrounding area⁵³⁹.

⁵³⁸ SOMMER 2003 and SARTRE 2008, 500

⁵³⁹ On the ecological environment as a fundamental factor for the development of Hatra and its surrounding region see HAUSER 2000, 187-201. The survey conducted by IBRAHIM (1986) has moreover stressed the presence of several small sites around Hatra which certainly experienced a similar situation and were mutual related to the major centre.

CHAPTER 10

TRACKING THE EVIDENCE

10.1 Relations and interactions in Northern Mesopotamia

The Roman presence and the interactions occurred in the Near East during the period between the 2nd and the 4th century CE have been widely analysed by several scholars, even if they focused on the western Syrian regions and, more generally the Levant, rather than the territories beyond the Euphrates. Here the cultural, social and religious background was more than a factor to deal with for Rome. The pre-hellenistic cultures have been never put aside in the Near East and the social structures, although apparently modified and integrated during the Seleucid domination, always retained their local and older characteristics. On the base of this assumption, the coming of Rome in the area did not massively interfere in the local community on the side of the social structures and religious one, although the political will of Rome and the proved organization of the western provinces was largely used to control and maintain the power.

However, the analysis about this marvellous example of integration and domination on a side, and relations and exchanges on the other, should forcedly consider the enormous geographical and cultural differences in the Near East. Pretending to analyse at the same way different regions like the southern Levant and the Upper Euphrates means first of all mistaking the *mélange* of the East, which should be studied on the basis of regional (or micro-regional sometimes) factors⁵⁴⁰.

The areas beyond the Euphrates have been seen, through the years, as *uncivilized*, *not-greek* and plenty of nomadic tribes with their own religious and social behalf. Aside of the theories of Mommsen about the failure of a *romanized* or *hellenized* Near East because of the small and local communities (e.g. the Jews, according to Mommsen's perspective) and the hypothesis of Rostovtzeff about the failed *Romanization* of certain peripheries which brought the Roman empire to the collapse,

⁵⁴⁰ It is because of the enormous difference in the all Near East that the studies about the classical period in the region are highly fragmented by the geographical point of view, even providing vivid analysis of micro-regional events.

the modern literature has been more prudent and rather focused on the *real* local aspects, putting aside the hellenistic/roman imprinting in the region⁵⁴¹.

It is easily tempting to see at Rome's expansion in the east as a deliberate and organized move since the annexation of Pompey in 64/63 BCE to ebnd with the Jovian's cession and even the Yarmuk battle (636 CE), but one might always consider the different approaches of the empire to the several collateral events, not forgetting the basilar ecological features which highly characterized the interactions at different levels.

Current scholarly never more looks at the Euphrates as the limit between the cities and the steppe, which was of course an erroneous point view, mixing up the urban features from a side with the ecological environment in the other, but rather as a marginal zone with its features and factors to be considered within the general events that affected the region during the period between the 2nd and the 4th century CE.

In the previous chapters I have tried to underline some of these aspects related to the interaction between the Roman Empire and the mesopotamian background through the study of significant settlements, the nomadic factors and the relations occurred between all these elements. Although the operation has been featured by still too many question marks, the whole picture is provisionally retrievable by the analysis of the existing evidence. The history of the region before the coming of Alexander the Great, as seen, constituted a real fundamental basis to deal with considering the later develop of some of the examined centres. Aramaic-speaking community and Arab-oriented societies were the bulk of the population Rome had to manage and, sometimes, accommodate, in order to gain control over a large part of territory, which alternately happened to be on extreme fringes of the empire. The concept itself of *fringe of the empire* and *frontier* (not to mention the complex background of the word *limes*) always need further suggestions. Nevertheless the several works on the eastern frontier and the Roman *limes* in Mesopotamia, one of the best definition of the complex dynamics that went over in the are was expressed some years ago by Edmond Frézouls when he was writing about the "*fluctuations de la frontière*

⁵⁴¹ Mommsen 1909; Rostovtzeff 1971, 272. This sort of idealized view of Rome was also shared by F. Haverfield in his most famous volume (*The Romanization of Roman Britain*, 1923) which is highly influenced by the author's experiences in the period in which the work was written, the European expansion overseas for Haverfield as well as the political liberalism for Mommsen.

orientale de l'empire romain"⁵⁴². Even this definition, as well, should be better discussed. The word *frontière*, indeed, necessarily implies a defensive system or a *castra*-based line from a given point to another⁵⁴³, while the eastern limits of the Roman empire were effectively more featured by a continuous series of overlapping areas between Rome, Iranic world (meaning both Persia and Parthia) and the Nomad and Arab tribes of the region. The results of this overlap can be recognized in several aspects of the political and social life, which goes from the language to the religion, to the administrative system and the military characteristics. An important evidence to consider is also the material culture, which in the zones beyond the Euphrates is characterized both by western traces (the *Brittle ware* and the late terra sigillata specimens) and by traditional wares and shapes that recall a local substratum rather than impulses from the East⁵⁴⁴. Although the material culture has been mainly studied through the excavations and the surveys carried out in the whole area, no extensive archaeological investigation has been so far taken in the supposed major centres of the region, and therefore the most important cities are more or less unknown by an architectural point of view as well as their daily life material. The analysis here conducted on cities such as Nisibis, Singara and Rhesaina has shown how the available data are still too partial to retrieve enough information about the cities themselves, even if they certainly represent an obliged starting point to define the peculiar aspects of the whole region. Nisibis, which was the capital of the province, is slightly more mentioned in the literary sources, but it represents also the less investigated of the three⁵⁴⁵. Both Rhesaina and Singara, have been instead archaeologically investigated more than 60 years ago and, however, not extensively. Given these data the status of the archaeological research in the three major centres that acted like nodal point in the area during the period at issue, absolutely will need

⁵⁴² Frezouls 1981, 177-225. See also the remarks of Potter (BMCR 1)1990, 40-41.

⁵⁴³ The most famous case is obviously the Hadrian wall, which goes from the mouth of the river Solvey to the one of the Tyne. Also the Rhine limes was a *more fixed* line than the eastern frontier.

⁵⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that after the Sasanian rise, some of the specimens clearly sasanian found in Jezira, e.g., have several parallels with both the metalware and the pottery from easternmost region such as inner Iran. The uniformity of a certain material culture in the period could be interpreted as a direct consequence of the uniformity of power under the Sasanian rulers, which is an event that rarely happened under the Parthian domination.

⁵⁴⁵ I have to thank here Justine Gaborit (CNRS/IFPO) who provided me some interesting photos (see pp. 105-106) taken during the works of a brand new project in the historical centre of Nusaybin, around the baptistery, which hopefully will make clear some interesting aspects of the pre-4th century CE settlement too.

a further and deeper analysis. A preliminary try of historical reconstruction has been made possible in this work because of other sources, often underrated by the proper archaeologists as well as too much overrated by the historians, such as the literary evidence, the cartography (both ancient and modern) and the satellite imagery which has provided in the recent year an enormous amount of useful data about the topic.

It may be suggested that the Roman interaction was organised on three levels in Northern Mesopotamia. The first one regarded the economic issue. Being the region a natural commercial route between the Euphrates and the northern passage for the lower Mesopotamia and Central Asia, the Roman interests primarily were to secure the area and the enormous commercial potential of a passage Zeugma-Nisibis, but also to have an easier access to the mid-Euphrates route from the Ḥabur confluence downstream. The second aspect to consider is the political one, which obviously was never underrated by Rome. Controlling the area meant first of all controlling a region directly facing the enemy and, at the very same time, keeping the Parthian/Persian army far away from the Euphrates and the cities of western Syria. Eventually, the occupation of the main centres let the Romans have a regional countryside still quite local where there had been no particular need of military intervention (all the major confrontations in the Roman-Persian struggles actually regarded and happened in the outskirts or even at the gates of the main centres: Singara, Nisibis, Edessa, e.g.) and where the *formal* interaction seems to have regarded only certain aspects of the daily life (e.g. see the role of Dura's papyri). These interactions, at least the ones mentioned in the papyri, directly interested the villages and small centres along the Euphrates, from Dura upstream, and must be more likely to be put in relation with the minor or major role these villages played in the military control of the main route along the river. A similar situation could be suggested also for the area of Northern Mesopotamia, even if the lack of such documents does not permit to make further considerations.

The inner countryside of the region, indeed, as the example of Tell Barri has shown, only partially reflects the traces of a *roman presence*, which is, anyway, barely recognizable by an archaeological point of view. The whole Upper Ḥabur basin does not seem to reflect the importance, in terms of small settlements, as it appears to be elsewhere, especially on the Euphrates. Even if some of the small villages, substantially unknown to us, are cited by the Table of Peutinger, we lack enough data to say if they were also militarily important, if they hosted roman soldiers, auxiliary cohorts or not. It could be suggested, anyway, that the whole area comprised between

the Ḥabur and the Upper Tigris river was interested by a Roman military presence only in the main centres, and that the local communities had been rarely affected by the struggles and confrontations between the empires. Surveys and excavations works have also shown that minor settlements like Tell Barri still used local pottery and only little suggestions can be made about their effective role within the complex events that interested the region⁵⁴⁶. However, this consideration should not appear as an unexpected one, mainly considering the Roman ability to provide local populations and their rulers with the autonomy they need, albeit the Northern Mesopotamia must be considered differently from other regions of the Near East where local kingship was in a certain way retained even during the Roman presence in the area. This is the case (at least in a certain period) of the Osrhoene, the reign of Emesa and even the Judaea, in southern Levant. Northern Mesopotamia, at the contrary, did not experience such kinds of governments and so the main centres assumed the role they had in the local context as well, being politically isolated and without a common kingship. This is the case of two of the most important cities in the area: Nisibis and Singara. While Singara was, before the annexation and the acquisition of the colonial status, ruled by a local chief (Ma'nu, probably leader of the main Arab tribe of the region), Nisibis, which surely was strictly related and connected by routes to Singara and deeply inserted in the political and geographical context of the *same* region, seemed to be ruled alternatively by a Roman garrison, Parthian soldiers, Parthian and Roman loyal lords, before the complete integration in the context of the Mesopotamian province after the conquest of Septimius Severus. Indeed, it is only with the events at the end of the 2nd century CE that the Roman interests became stronger in the area. The easiness with which Hadrian left the region and the newly conquered city of Nisibis after the death of Trajan, let us think that the Roman will, at that time, was rather to use the area as a military operational zone, without a concrete need of occupation. This decision made the region open to the incursions from the East for large part of the 2nd century, even during the campaigns of Lucius Verus in the region. At that time, as seen, is dated the only traceable evidence of a Roman intervention to calm down a revolt burst up in the region and that also affected the small settlements apart of the major centres. The particular position of Northern Mesopotamia gained much more importance, however, after the conquest of Severus and the formal annexation of the territory to the Roman Empire. We have already seen how the region was

⁵⁴⁶ For Tell Barri we already have discussed the specific case of the revolt calmed down by Quietus during the mid-2nd century CE (see above, chapter 8.4).

managed and, moreover, which was the provincial order set up for the area. The problem if Pacatianus was or not the first governor of the province is debatable but it represents here not the primary issue. This is, indeed, the apparently complete assimilation within the political, social and economic context of the Roman Empire of a region, which always represented a sort of transitional area between the Euphrates (with its complex of routes, forts and the commercial nodal point of Zeugma), and a territory whose political balance was always in danger. Thus the Roman occupation of the Northern Mesopotamia chiefly interested a sort of triangle-shaped area connecting Rhesaina, Nisibis and Singara, which were the most important centres in the area and the one that were also made *coloniae* during the Severian period or later. The area highlighted by this triangle (see Map 1 and 2), comprises large part of the Upper Ḥabur basin and the small valley formed by the *wadi* Jaghjagh and the *wadi* Radd (as well as the marsh area of this river) as well as the mountain ranges of the Jebel Sinjar and Jebel Abd-el Aziz at the South. Trying to define the features or to identify a cultural common impulse in the region at that time is a quite hard work. Even the military structures, where preserved, seem to suggest that the uniformity was not adapted here (as well as in large part of Syria, must be said) and the very few probable *castra*, which were quite widespread in the west, here they have been flanked or, better, replaced by fortified cities. These were also the most important strongholds let us think that the bulk of the Roman occupation army was *within* the secure walls of those cities rather than in small squared-forts that were probably mainly used by small detachments or auxiliary troops⁵⁴⁷. Which was, therefore, the role of these small forts in the region? Although the matter has been already discussed elsewhere in this research, it is important here to note the presence of these small forts along some of the main routes of the area. Qubur al-Bid, Tell Zanatri and Ain Sinu, all lie along the tracks connecting a main city (Nisibis, Singara) to another or even to the Tigris at East. The aim of these forts was probably to secure the tracks that have been alternatively used for military and commercial purposes.

⁵⁴⁷ This is the case of a relatively recently discovered fort at Qubur-al-Bid (see chapter 8.6.3, above) which has been identified not so far from Nisibis and which obviously was not used as a main fort since the capital of the region hosting an entire legion was less than 20 kms westward. As Qubur al-Bid other small forts were widespread in the region. Some of them have been only recently identified by aerial photographs or satellite images, although a precise confirmation on the chronology should be obtained only with a field survey on the site (this is the case of the remains mentioned by Oates at Tell Zanatri, or even the partially excavated camp at Ain Sinu)

Indeed, the control of each conquered territory by the Romans has been always firstly based on the exploitation, construction and control of the roads, tracks and paths of a given region, in order to relate and connect the main centres, to facilitate the movement of goods and troops and to put in safety these movements. The case of Northern Mesopotamia, as seen, does not differ too much from the examples in the West. We should let aside, for now, the Table of Peutinger, which still constitutes the main tool for the understanding of the road patterns in the area, and trying to focus our attention on those tracks that connected the small sites in the region in Bronze and Iron Ages in order to have a better idea of the exploitation of these tracks in the later periods. As has been widely and well demonstrated by Jason Ur this road pattern was highly complex and with a surprising network of main roads and secondary paths. The whole area was, indeed, an obliged zone to cross for the routes that went from the Euphrates toward the Tigris and even during the Achaemenid period, the so-called Royal Route passed through the region. This was the main road, with an East-West axis that connected inner Persia with the western satrapies. Northern Mesopotamia was therefore right in the middle of a journey from the capitals of the kingdom and the westernmost regions of Anatolia. As already noted it is almost certain that the Roman army exploited the pre-existent tracks and probably only fixed and improved some of them, and as I have already suggested elsewhere, the importance of the road network and the specific nature of the settlement patterns in Northern Mesopotamia must represent the starting point for a new analysis of the Roman presence in the area. Unfortunately, the dramatic archaeological situation of the large centres, become even more unrecognizable when we turn to the countryside and try to define the guidelines of the settlement patterns in the region during the two centuries of Rome's interactions in the area. Thus the hypothetically reconstruction provided by the over-imposition of the data from the Table of Peutinger with the aerial and the modern satellite imagery, forcedly results one of the the best way to operate in this sense. Further field survey investigations will make clear those aspects, which still appear though.

Aside of the road network, another factor that has been considered as a fundamental one for the understanding of the Roman interaction in Northern Mesopotamia is the relations that occurred between the local and civilians and the soldiers, which also represents the best way to investigate the relationships between the main centres and the villages in the whole area.

Although, indeed, the organization of the newly acquired territory was an immediate task in the roman management of a given area, Northern Mesopotamia was never completely secured and always faced both the incursions from East and the presence of Arab tribes. A tentative of alliance with these local rulers, and the long-settled tribes, is represented by the aftermaths of the failed conquest of Hatra by Septimius Severus. After Trajan, indeed, also the African emperor tried to seize the Sun-God city with no success, but in the years immediately after his reign a brief roman presence, with few remarkable evidence, can be spotted at Hatra. Given these assumptions therefore, it is quite easy to figure out the social component of the region, which was in a certain way narrowed by the two large empires claiming for the entire region. The role of the Arab and nomadic tribes, indeed, should be not underrated when dealing with the historical events in Northern Mesopotamia. As Retsö pointed out, the local tribes, highly related to the territory, never felt their importance reduced or decreased and still had an important role within the commercial and economic aspects. The question has been debated elsewhere in this work, but it should be reminded that the contribution of the local populations to the economic growth and to the sustenance of the large centres in the region, over all the ones located at the fringes of the desert or within the area below the 200mm of rainfall per year, was fundamental, not only in period of drought.

Thus, the Roman affairs in Northern Mesopotamia, had not only been affected by the relations and confrontations with the eastern rivals, but also with the local population and the Arab tribes, which helped alternatively one or the other power in order to prosecute their interests. The theory of the dimorphic societies perfectly fits with these interactions, since the exploitation of certain areas during the roman occupation (Dura's region, e.g.) had been possible only through a strict cooperation between three agents: roman soldiers, civilians and the tribes outside the city walls.

The last sections of this work have been mainly focused on the results from the excavations carried out at Tell Barri and in other minor centres of the area, as well as on the results achieved by the survey projects carried out through the years in the whole region. As seen, the material culture which always represents the most clear evidence of a specific site and culture as well, and, in particular, the pottery which has been dug up in the levels at issue at Tell Barri, shows how the local roots did not were particularly influenced by the political events in the region and, at the contrary, no sign of rupture can be observed throughout the whole time. It is already noted, moreover, that only a small and rather surprising percentage of western imported

material comes from those levels at Tell Barri. This is a further evidence of the minor interest by the Romans in the small villages, which have been left more or less unaffected (albeit with few exceptions, and this could be the case of Tell Barri too) during the military occupation of the region.

The survey projects, moreover, have provided interesting data concerning over all the distribution of these small centres. The watercourses and the main tracks of the region should be, indeed, seen as important key factors for what regards the geographical range and position of the minor sites in the area.

Given these assumptions I still think that the study of the settlement patterns in the region during the period stretching from the early 2nd century and the late 4th century CE should forcedly deal with the evidence that can be retrieved by a micro-regional area and its impulses, its culture, its structure and, even, superstructure.

What emerges from this study is a picture of a still poorly known area, which was, however, strategically important both for the roman and parthian/persian interests. Although the archaeological works carried out in the region are still at a surface level (meaning it literally since the lot of data come from surface collection in surveys rather than excavation projects *tout court*) it is quite evident the enormous archaeological potential of the whole zone.

Eventually the real aim of this research has been pursued through all the pages as the study of the roman presence while, as we have seen, it will be more accurate to talk about *roman interaction* and this must be seen as a multi-level interaction, which goes from the civic institutions to the road networks passing through the inevitable compromise dictated by the dimorphic system with the local nomadic tribes.

Even if the total understanding of the dynamics that went over in a roman province during the mid and late empire period constantly needs further investigations, the picture emerging from the analysis of the available data regarding the northern Mesopotamia will certainly need a double effort to achieve at least some missing evidence.

LIST OF FIGURES AND CAPTIONS

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2. Geological map of North-Eastern Syria and Upper Ḥabur basin. The three main soils of the region are here represented: quaternary period (grey), Mio-Pliocene (light green) and the basement volcanic complex quite widespread in the region (red).
3. The coins struck after the conquest of Trajan bore the legend “PARTHIA CAPTA” / Courtesy of the British Museum (RIC 234).
4. Rock relief at Taq-i-Bustan with Ardashir II crowned by Mithras and Ahura Mazda. The corpse under the three standing figures is thought to be the emperor Julian. The rock relief was placed along the route to Ctesiphon in a highly symbolic position.
5. The graph represents a highly simplified table showing the four different categories of sites for the Upper Mesopotamia during the period stretching from the 2nd to the 4th century CE, listed according to their occurrence. A: sites mentioned in the literary sources. B: sites where archaeological investigations have been carried out. C: sites both mentioned in the literary sources and partially investigated. D: minor and rural sites identified only through the field walking surveys in the area.
6. Model of the relation that occurs in an ancient landscape. Dashed arrows indicate the direction of the analysis, while the thinner arrows represent the feedbacks recorded.
7. Aerial view of the Qamishli-Nusaybin area in 1932 from South. Nusaybin lies in the background, while the newly born centre of Al-Qamishli in the foreground. Between them the hill of Dharhet al-Khazna (A) and the small mounds of the probable ancient towers of the city (T). (© Aviation du Levant. After Dillemann 1962, 80, modified).
8. Ancient track visible from the CORONA image (December 1967, Mission 1102, © University of Arkansas). The yellow lines represent the hypothesis of inner and outer tracks on the basis of the visible traces in the photographs. The red line could indicate the southern limits of the supposed fortification.

9. The columns in the "no man's land" between Syria and Turkey, from the North (personal photo). They belong probably to an unknown temple. It is also interesting to note the huge amount of potsherds in the foreground field.
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17. Denarii from the mint of Rhesaina struck at the time of Elagabalus (Castelin 1946, n.108). The emperor is side-viewed on the recto, while the verso bears the image of two centaurs going in opposite direction with a vexillum (the one from the Legio III Parthica ?) standing in the middle (specimen A), a centaur running with the numeral III and a symbol (specimen B).
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20. The location of Hatra within the context of Upper Mesopotamia.

21. Part of the defensive wall as seen from the top of the tower 22 (©Missione Archeologica Italiana a Hatra / Roberta Ricciardi Venco).

22. . Hatra as seen from the space in December 1967 (CORONA image /© Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey). Each black arrows indicates a probable ancient track. As the image clearly shows the role of Hatra as a nodal point in the route system in the region is of enormous importance.

23. The site of See Qubba as seen from the space after the construction of the Eski Mosul Dam (former Saddam Dam). The remains of the late Islamic village are still visible on the top of the hill. ©Google 2013.

24. Seh Qubba as seen from the space (CORONA image December 1967, © Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey). The image shows the site before the flooding of the Saddam Dam (now Eski Mosul Dam). The remains of the former modern village are visible in the centre (A), while the cemetery is immediately south (D). The excavation conducted by the British team were focused on the Northern part of the bluff (C) and in the white area immediately east of the village (Area A), while the three possible entrances have been identified all along the northern and eastern edge of the hill (B).

25. The north-western section of the site as seen in a CORONA image from December 1967 (© Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey). The ramparts are quite visible in this shot. They stand 4-5 m high above the field. They probably enclosed the settlement on three side, leaving the eastern part undefended because of the presence of the river (as it happened in Dura Europos, i.e.). The main entrances, as already shown, are located in the western section. The main roads of the area reached Seh Qubba from the West.

26. The site of Eski Hendek (Bezadbe) in a Google image (© Google 2012). The squared fort is marked with the letter A, while the later adjoined trapezoidal shaped section at west is

marked with the letter B. The round-shaped projecting towers are clearly visible along the western and southern part of the settlement.

27. Plan of the remains at Eski Hendek (after Algaze 2012, 82).

28. The area of Fenik as seen from the Google satellite image. The letter A indicates the lower part of the main wall (SW-NE).

29. The location of Tell Barri (marked with the red dot) within the Upper Ḥabur Basin.

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31. The eastern section of the fortification at Tell Barri as seen from North. © Missione Archeologica Italiana a Tell Barri.

32. The public building in Area M (lower town) as it appeared at the end of the 2000 season of excavations. © Missione Archeologica Italiana a Tell Barri.

33. Collapsed storage jars in the Area H. The domestic use of this area is proved up to the 6th century CE. © Missione Archeologica Italiana a Tell Barri.

34. Chart showing the computation of the all potsherds, differentiated by each single ware, within the levels revealed in Area H

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37. The area of Tell Tuneinir as seen in a recent Google image (© Google 2012). The main site is located immediately east of the river (A), while few excavations works have been carried out south (B) and west (C) of the tell.

38. . A modified Google Earth snapshot (© Google 2013) of the Ain Sinu area. As can be seen the ancient site lies in the immediate outskirts of the modern village, 500 m from the modern asphalt road Sinjar-Tell Afar.

39. Ain Sinu as it appeared in 1967 in a CORONA image (© Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey). The main components of the site are visible here: the castellum with the nearby later structures (circled, A), the barracks (B) and the traces of what could be the ancient tracks that led to the site from the main road (probably covered by the modern track, which is recognizable in the bottom-right corner of the image).

40. CORONA image (December 1967 / © Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey) of the Brak-Saibakh area. The 3rd millennium mound is marked with the letter A. The remains of the so-called castellum (B) lie immediately outside the mound, while the site of Sibakh (C) is in axis with it, but on the other side of the river (whose ancient course, marked with the letter D, is clearly visible in this image).

41. CORONA image (December 1967, © Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey) of the area around the site of Qubur al-Bid. The architectural remains (A) are clearly visible around the bend of the wadi.

42. Graphic schematic representation of the all surveyed areas in Northern Mesopotamia (Wossink 2012, 66, modified). The surveys briefly described in this work are marked as follows: Tell Beydar (4), Tell Brak Sustaining Area Survey (5-6), Tell Leilan survey (10), Tell Hamoukar Survey (8), North Jazira Project (9), Zammar regional project (13).

43. Modified and adapted Google image (©Google 2013) of the Tell Beydar Survey area. Green dots indicate the sites where partho-roman material has been collected. Tell Beydar is represented by the red dot.

44. Google image (© Google 2013) of the TBS (Tell Brak Sustaining Survey) area. The yellow dots represent the sites which have yielded early 1st millennium CE pottery (unfortunately there is no further chronological specification). TB represents Tell Brak itself, while the S marks the location of Saibakh (data retrieved by Wright et al. 2007, 19).

45. Google image (©Google 2013) of the Jagjagh basin with the sites surveyed by Oates in late 1980s (data retrieved by Oates 1990, 248).

46. Modified and adapted Google image (© Google 2013) of the Tell Leilan Survey area with the location of the sites which have yielded parthian (red), roman (green) and sasanian (yellow) pottery. Tell Leilan is indicated by the blue dot. The distribution almost uniform is a clue for the continuity of small settlements life even during and after the events that occurred

in the region. The spreading of the site along a southeastern direction could indicate the presence of ancient tracks and routes connecting Nisibis to the Jebel Sinjar at South.

47. Modified Google image (© Google 2013) of the Tell Hamoukar Survey area with the partho-roman sites (and their relative survey number) marked in orange. N. 25 is Tell Hamoukar (data retrieved from Ur 2010,118).

48. Modified and adapted Google image (©Google 2013) with the limits of the area surveyed by the North Jazira Project. The sites which have yielded ceramic material from the first four centuries of our era are represented in orange. The green dots show the sites where Brille ware potsherds have been collected.

49. December 1967 CORONA image (© Center for Advances Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey) of the Upper Tigris River before the Eski Mosul Dam was built (formerly known as Saddam Dam). The framed area encloses the Zammar region survey. The sites mentioned in the text, where test trenches have been opened during the project, are Gir Matbakh (1), Seh Qubba (2) and Khirbet Kharasan (3). Orange dots represent the sites partho-roman ceramic material has been collected, green dots represent the ones of the byzantine-sasanian pottery (data retrieved from Ball 2003, 6).

50. Graphic representation of the partho-roman / early 1st millennium CE sites identified by the different survey projects in Northern Mesopotamia

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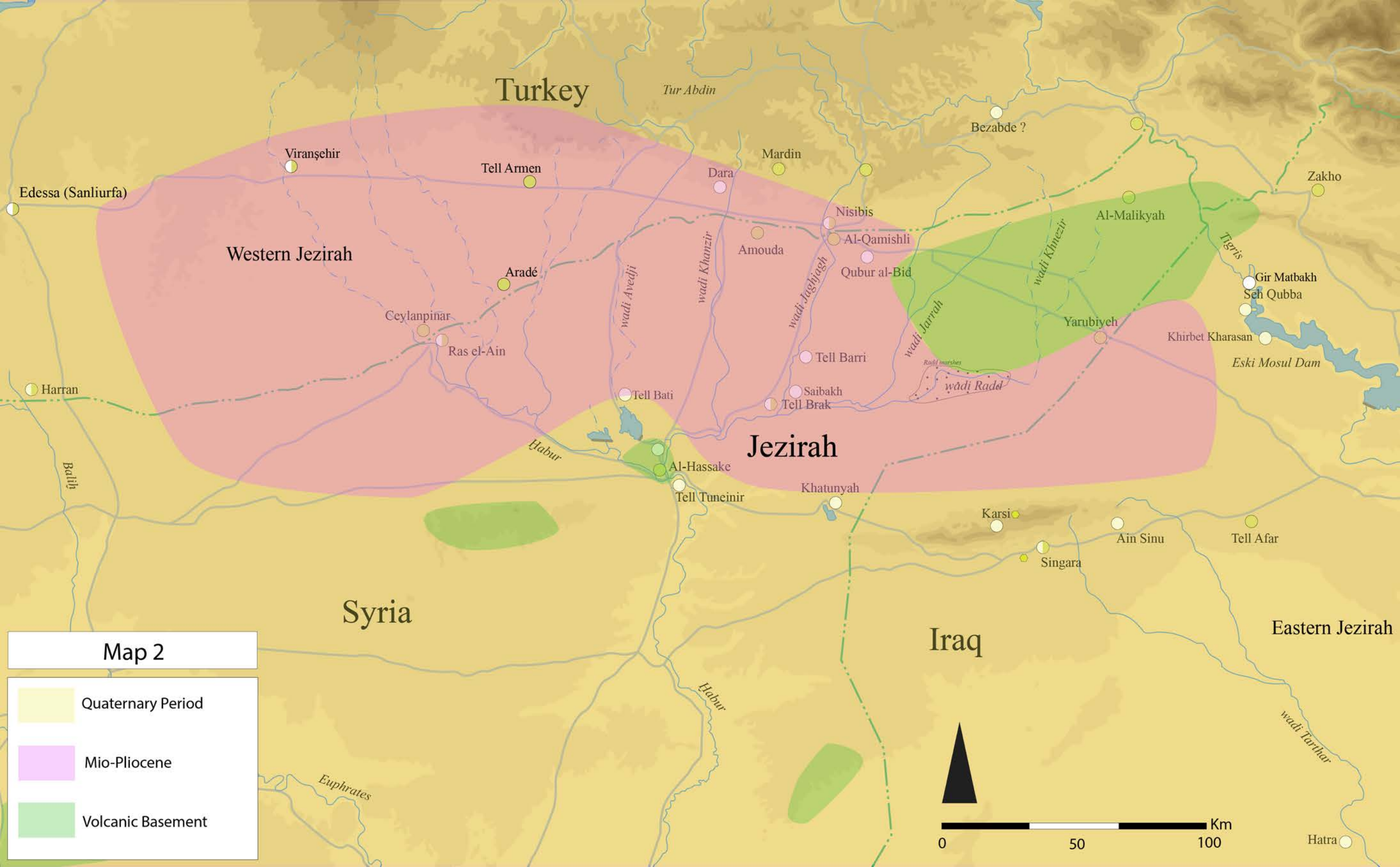
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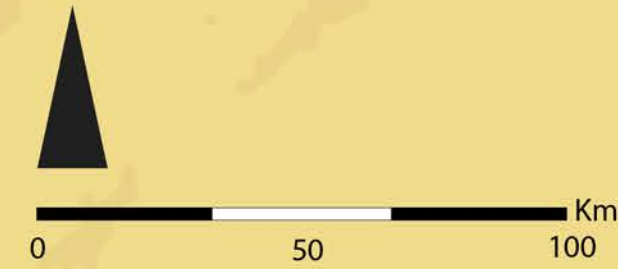
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Map 2

- Quaternary Period
- Mio-Pliocene
- Volcanic Basement



Turkey

Syria

Iraq

Western Jezirah

Jezirah

Eastern Jezirah

Edessa (Sanliurfa)

Viranşehir

Tell Armen

Dara

Mardin

Bezabde ?

Zakho

Aradé

Amouda

Nisibis

Al-Malikiyah

Ceylanpinar

Ras el-Ain

wadi Avedji

wadi Khanzir

wadi Jaghraqh

Al-Qamishli

Qubur al-Bid

wadi Khmezir

Tigris

Gir Matbakh

Seh Qubba

Khirbet Kharasan

Eski Mosul Dam

Harran

Balikh

Tell Bati

Tell Barri

Saibakh

Tell Brak

wadi Jarrah

Raddi marshes

wadi Radd

Yarubiyeh

Habur

Al-Hassake

Tell Tuneinir

Khatunyah

Karsi

Singara

Ain Sinu

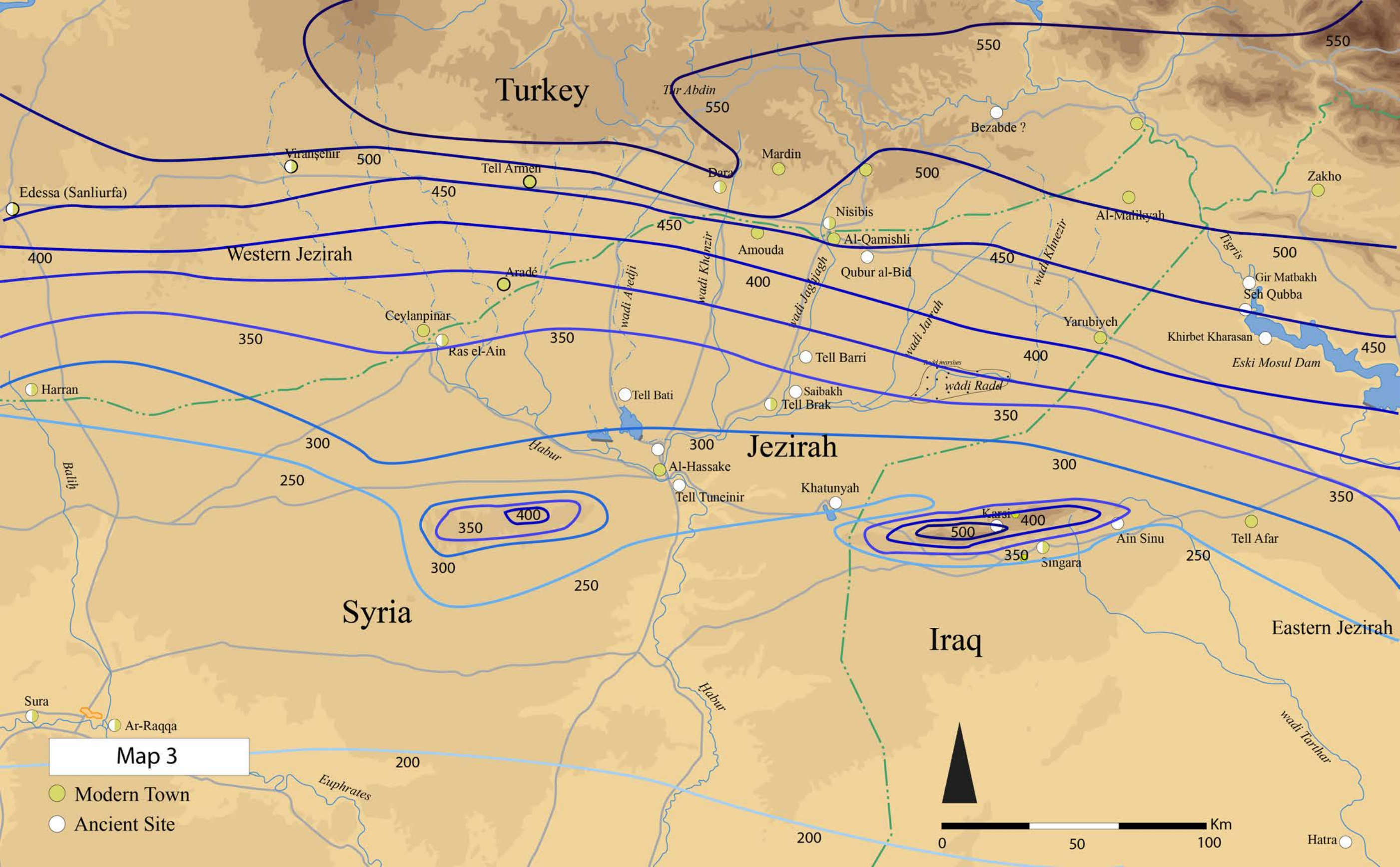
Tell Afar

Euphrates

Habur

wadi Tarhar

Hatra



Turkey

Western Jezirah

Jezirah

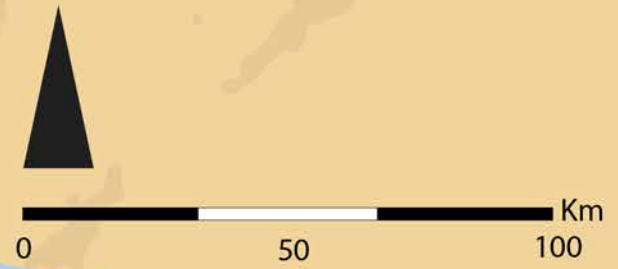
Syria

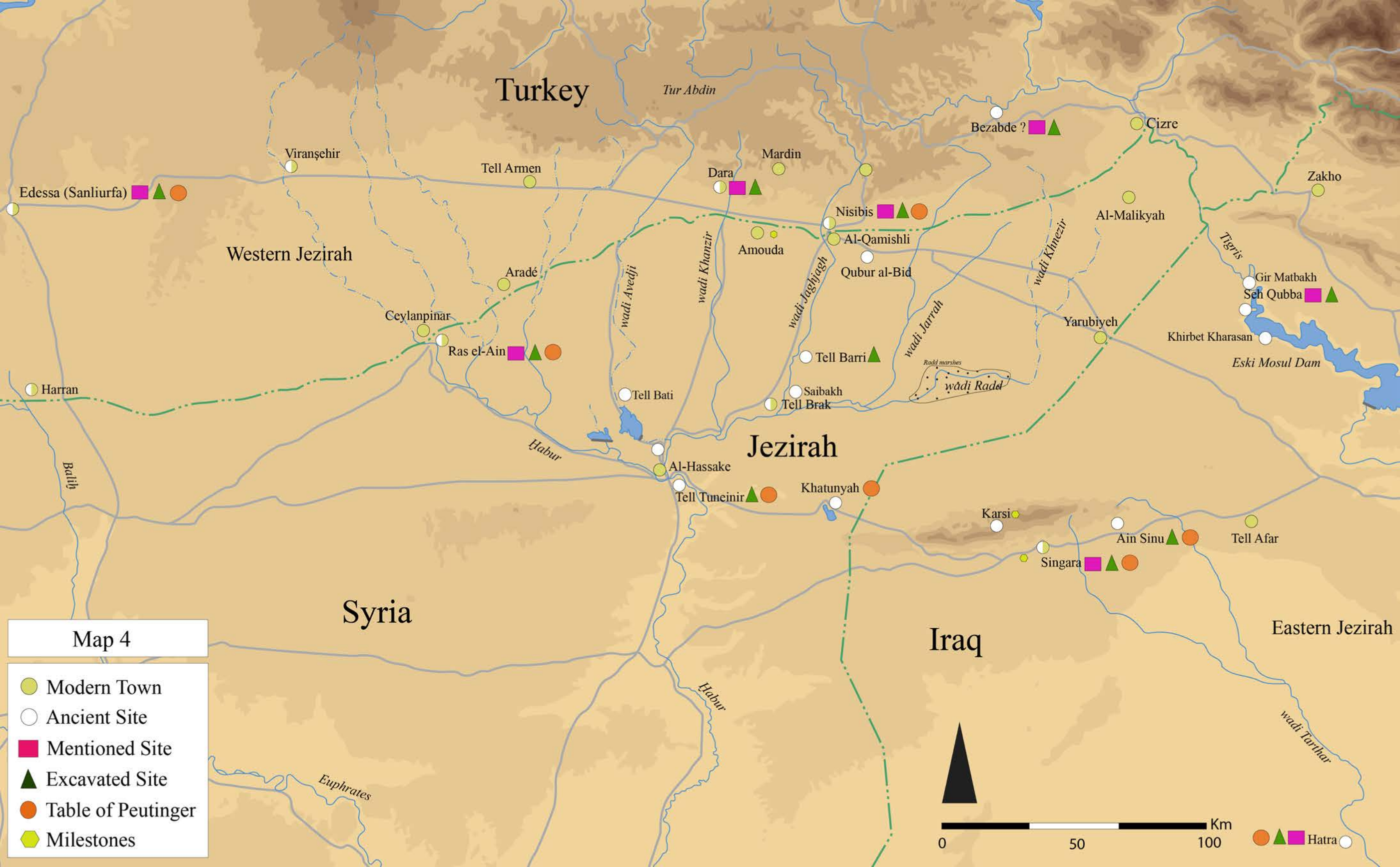
Iraq

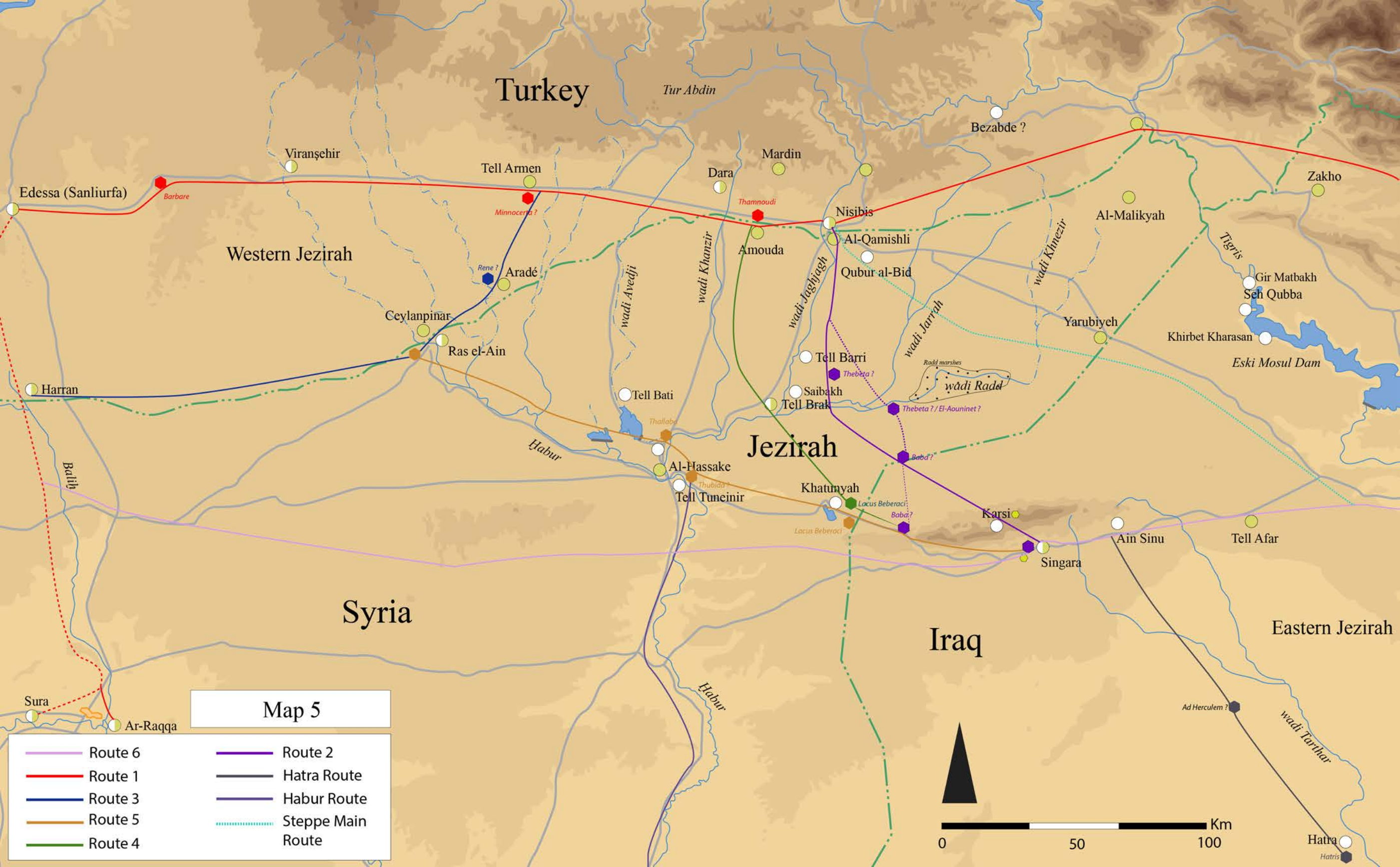
Eastern Jezirah

Map 3

- Modern Town
- Ancient Site







Turkey

Western Jezirah

Jezirah

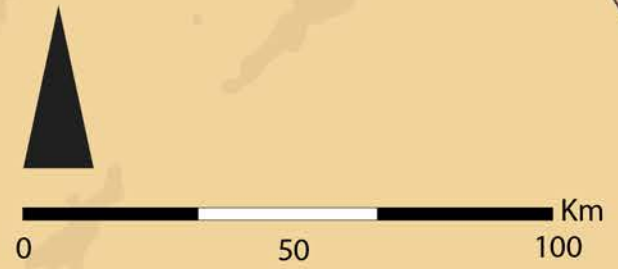
Syria

Iraq

Eastern Jezirah

Map 5

- | | |
|---------|-------------------|
| Route 6 | Route 2 |
| Route 1 | Hatra Route |
| Route 3 | Habur Route |
| Route 5 | Steppe Main Route |
| Route 4 | |



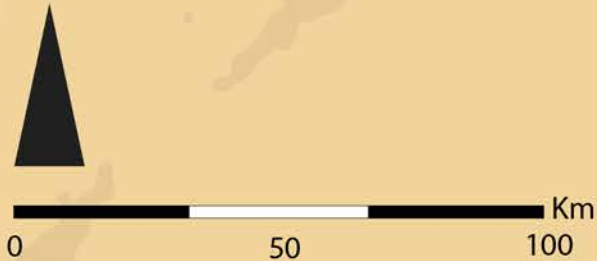
Hatra
Hatriss



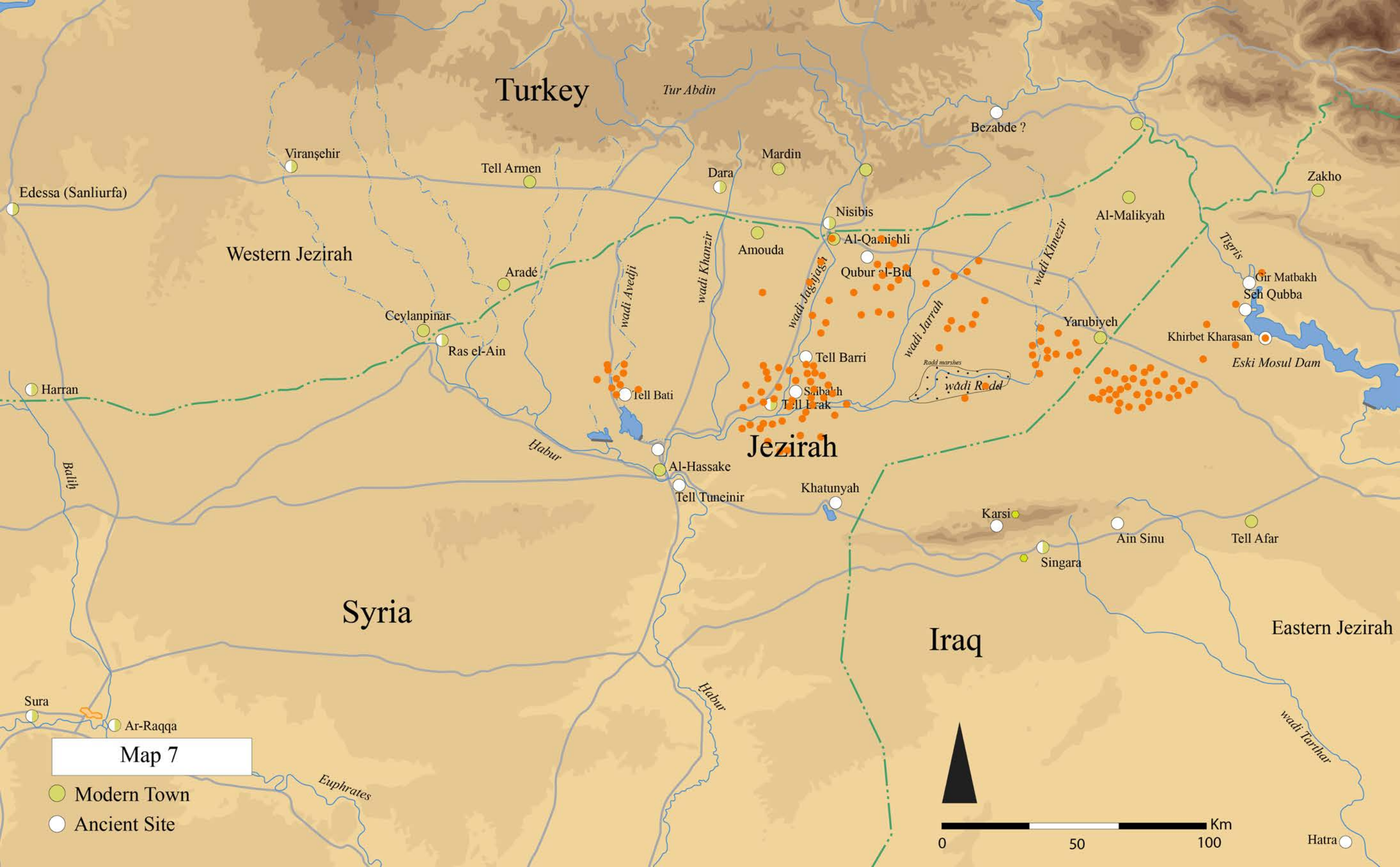
Map 6

- 1. Balih River Survey
- 2. Western Jezirah Survey
- 3. Upper Habur Survey
- 4. Tell Beydar Survey
- 5. Tell Brak Sustaining Area Survey
- 6. Tell Brak Survey
- 7. Northeastern Syria Survey
- 8. Tell Hamoukar Survey
- 9. North Jazira Project
- 10. Tell Leilan Survey
- 11. Habur Valley Survey
- 12. PARTen Project Survey
- 13. Zammar Region Project
- 14. Eski Mosul Dam Project
- 15. Upper Tigris Survey

● Modern Town
● Ancient Site



Hatra



Turkey

Western Jezirah

Jezirah

Syria

Iraq

Eastern Jezirah

Map 7

- Modern Town
- Ancient Site

