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Rune Frederiksen, Silke Müth, Peter I. Schneider and Mike Schnelle

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Front cover: City wall of Herakleia on Latmos (photo: S. Müth)

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BUILDING THE FRONTIER: FRONTIER FORTIFICATIONS IN THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE*

Nathan Morello

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to give a general picture of the different roles that the act of building fortified settlements had in the creation and maintenance of frontier areas in Assyria. As is well known, ancient frontiers are not easy to define and tend to correspond to broad areas where different polities exercise their hegemony, rather than territories crossed by borderlines of modern conception. Furthermore, the analysis of textual and archaeological sources reveal the existence of different kinds of frontier's scenario, according to the strategic, political, economic and cultural peculiarities of each region affected by Assyrian expansion. I will try to show how different kinds of frontiers were affected by different kinds of Assyrian territorial policies, which included the foundation or re-foundation of different typologies of fortifications. Major attention will be given to three types of fortified settlements: the 'fortified farmstead' (*dunnu*), a unit of rural habitation with very few military functions, the 'fortified military camp' (*ušmannu*, *madaktu*, *karāšu*), and the military 'fortress' (*birtu*). The 'fortified farmstead' is attested only for the Middle Assyrian period (14th–11th century BC), whereas the two military settlements are best attested in sources from the 1st millennium, during the great expansion of the Assyrian Empire (9th–7th century). Finally, in some cases, the act of 'building the frontier' can be recognized in the care and/or foundation of premises of political and cultural importance (palaces and temples), within fortified cities of regions that have been conquered by Assyria but are not completely under its control.

The title of this paper, 'Building the Frontier', might be misleading for two reasons. First, because the very idea of continuous borderlines between adjacent territories did not exist in the Ancient Near East.[1] However, even if no Great Wall was ever built during the Assyrian Empire, it appears clear how fortified settlements of various sizes and functions were the basic means through which frontiers were created. When set in strategic areas, they could defend a territory from possible invasions, be military outposts for further conquests, and slowly strengthen the territorial control on the regions of new conquest. A second possible misunderstanding, which should be clarified, is the idea that the Assyrian Empire dealt with only one type of frontier, located at the foremost limits of its territories, and that the only fortifications that had a role in frontier policies were those with primary military functions. Quite differently, the analysis of the Assyrian case reveals, on one hand,

* I am grateful to Prof. F.M. Fales for his kind general remarks and his correction of the English text. Any mistakes or slips should be ascribed to the present writer.

[1] Cf. Parker 2001, 11, and Gandulla 2000.

the existence of different kinds of frontiers with peculiar geo-political, economic and cultural characteristics, and, on the other, an active role, in Assyrian frontier policies, of fortified settlements with both military and (also primary) civilian functions.

The purpose of this paper is to give a general picture of the relation between building a fortified settlement (but also specific premises within it) and the creation and maintenance of different kinds of frontier in the Assyrian Empire.

I will define 'fortified settlement' or 'fortification' as any settlement surrounded by defensive walls, independent of their size or typology of fortification (height of the walls, presence of one or more perimeters of walls). The mere existence of defensive walls, especially for minor centres, is a distinctive feature of (various possible degrees of) territorial instability. Furthermore, the analysis of military fortified settlements, in my opinion, can also be carried out by comparing fortifications of different sizes and primary functions, for two main reasons. First, they often share similar characteristics, in terms of use and structural features. Second, the possibility for a minor settlement to be enlarged and to become a bigger fortification is attested, which makes the comparison between the two less trivial.[2]

In royal inscriptions, human settlements are usually distinguished following a three-level hierarchy of classes of cities that defines the typical structure of a state in the eyes of the Assyrians.[3] They are the royal city (*āl šarrūti*, *āl bēlūti*), the fortified city (*āl dannūti*), both strongly fortified, and the cities in the neighbourhood (*ālāni ša limēti*), without defensive walls. On many occasions, a settlement is simply dubbed as *ālu*, a term that does not give any information about its size or fortified nature, and can correspond to a large city as well as to a simple rural village.[4] Nevertheless, there are other terms, which define more specifically some kinds of fortified settlements, typically found in frontier areas. They are the *dunnu* or 'fortified farmstead', a fortified unit of rural habitation with very few military functions – only attested for the Middle Assyrian times – and two military settlements, the fortified military camp (*ušmannu*, *madaktu*, *karāšu*) and the fortress (ḪAL.ṢU / *birtu*), both best attested especially in sources from the 1st millennium BC.

We may distinguish between three main frontier contexts, and ideally subsequent phases, in which it is possible to analyse the role of building fortified settlements. A first context is that of the military campaign led into a territory outside the limits of the empire, where there is no stable Assyrian centre. Here, we find the act of building temporary fortified camps for the settlement of the army, the act of conquering, rebuilding and often renaming cities which previously belonged to the enemy,[5] and that of building *ex novo* fortified cities and strongholds in the newly conquered land. This first phase may lead to two different scenarios. One is the slow territorialization of the region, through the creation of a network of Assyrian centres, cities and minor settlements, whose fortified nature depends on political conditions. Military penetration is followed by the creation of an administrative and political structure, which secures the Assyrian presence in the region, and ideally leads to a full territorial annexation. This is the case of the steppic region between the Tigris and Euphrates (modern Jezirah) during the Middle Assyrian period, and of other examples from the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In this context, beside the foundation of fortified settlements with functions related to political and economic colonization, it becomes significant, if not essential, to care for (or build *ex novo*) premises of political and cultural importance (palaces and temples) inside major fortified cities, aimed at a full integration of local peoples into Assyrian society.

The third context is typically encountered in regions that remain in the outer limits of the empire or within partially unstable sectors of Assyrian territory. These areas are often characterized by a strongly militarized frontier, where systems of strongholds, sometimes of massive size, are built as a stand against possible penetration of the territory and as outposts for possible punitive and expansionistic campaigns.

[2] For cases of territorial reorganization which involved the growing of minor settlements see, for example, Fales & Rigo 2014. Cf. also Gillmann 2005, for structural and functional comparisons between military fortifications of different sizes.
[3] Cf. Liverani 1992, 125 and Fales 1990, 91, 94.
[4] Cf. Van de Mieroop 1999, 10-1 and De Odorico 1995, 16.
[5] See Pongratz-Leisten 1997b for an analysis of the act of renaming conquered cities in the context of Assyrian ideology of conquest.

The Jezirah in the Middle Assyrian period

The first frontier area to be considered is the steppic region between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates (mod. Jezirah), which by the end of Tukulti-Ninurta I's reign (1244–1208 BC) had been put under Assyrian control (especially the Upper Tigris, Lower and Upper Khabur and Balikh river valleys), but was then gradually lost until the final decay of the Middle Assyrian kingdom, in the 11th century BC.

Following Mario Liverani's theory, the Middle Assyrian expansion in this area followed the so-called model of 'network-empire'. He observed the presence of a series of Assyrian enclaves (palaces and cities) 'embedded in a native world', interconnected by a complex but functional system of routes that allowed constant administrative, political and economic communication and linked them to the capital Assur. The intermediate areas between these enclaves were, in Liverani's eyes, largely unprotected and inhabited by peoples who were hostile or at least extraneous to Assyria.[6]

Recent studies on the area, based on textual and archaeological materials discovered in the past twenty years, have provided a slightly different picture. As we already knew, Assyrian control of the region (especially around two tributaries of the Euphrates, the Khabur and the Balikh) was entrusted, since the time of Shalmanaser I (1274–1245 BC), to the Assyrian Grand Vizier, or *sukkallu rabi'u*. This high official also held the title of King of Ḫanigalbat (*šar* ^{mât}*Ḫanigalbat*), from the name which the Assyrians called the region at the time, and was a viceroy of sorts, with administrative, legal, diplomatic and military functions. From his headquarters in the city of Dūr-Katlimmu (on the Lower Khabur) the Grand Vizier administered the territories of the Jezirah through a system of districts (*pāḫatu*), each one controlled by a governor (*bēl pāḫete*) and minor officials. Each governor was entrusted with a series of Assyrian settlements, defined according to their size and fortified nature as *ālu*, 'city', *birtu*, 'fortress', and *dunnu*, 'fortified farmstead'.

The *dunnu* was a fortified unit of rural habitation, whose primary function was farming.[7] It was named after its founder and was granted by the Crown to a single owner (and possibly to his family), who lived in a major city (e.g. the capital of the district). The term included the fortification and the farmland around it, which was an inseparable part of it, and all the farmers working under its administration were the owner's dependents. According to textual and archaeological sources, the size of a *dunnu* could vary, from approximately 0.36 to 36 hectares (1 to 100 *ikû*).[8] The best-known *dunnu* so far is the one discovered at Tell Sabi Abyad, on the eastern side of the river Balikh. Here, archaeologists excavated a tower (used as storage, a treasury and a jail), the owner's residence, the residence of his 'chief steward' (*masennu*), who administered the farmstead in his absence, quarters for servants and scribes, and domestic premises.[9] Beside its farming purpose, the *dunnu* could have minor military functions, such as the provisioning of horses, cavalry and war chariots to the owner, for policing the surrounding region.[10]

The archaeological surveys of the region showed a series of similar fortified settlements of one or two hectares distributed along the river valleys.[11] Even though the presence of extraneous or hostile peoples is attested in the region until the end of Middle Assyrian domination, the network formed by cities, fortresses and *dunnu*s appears to have been well thickened. As a point of fact, textual sources retrieved from the archives of Tell Sabi Abyad and from those of the city of Dūr-Katlimmu, show the existence of 'stains' of continuous territorial power, located in many sectors of the Assyrian 'network', alternating with other areas where Assyrian presence could be guaranteed through diplomatic treaties.[12] Hence, the sources seem to give us an image of the area between Khabur and Balikh as that of a frontier region where Assyria was slowly obtaining territorial control through a system of fortified settlements, which had no significant military functions. On one hand, in fact, the *dunnu*s had a primary purpose of farming (i.e. agricultural colonization). On the other hand, their security was guaranteed by regional actions of

[6] Liverani 1988, 90.
[7] The *dunnu* probably developed from the Mitannian *dimtu* 'tower', a fortified farmstead with its own territory, see Wiggermann 2000, 172, with previous bibliography.
[8] Cf. Wiggerman 2000, 173, with previous bibliography.
[9] Akkermans 2006, 204.
[10] Wiggermann 2000, 196. Another well-known *dunnu* of smaller size is Dunnu-ša-Uzibi/Giricano, on the Tigris riverbank, close to the site of Tušḫan/Zyaret Tepe. The site has produced a fully published archive belonged to a man called Aḫuni, which was in use during the reign of Aššur-bēl-kala (1074–1057 BC), the years of crisis of the Middle Assyrian kingdom that followed the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1077 BC). See Radner 2004, 52–3.
[11] Akkermans 2006, 209. Cf. also Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 99; Duistermaat 2008, 23; and Ur 2002, 74.
[12] See Fales 2011a, 21–3, with previous bibliography.

policy realized with the military equipment and personnel they provided to major cities.

A major concentration of *birtu*-type fortresses has been retrieved in southern Jezirah, on the Middle Euphrates, in the area of the ancient territory of Suḫu.[13] This was a highly militarized frontier with systems of fortifications set on both sides of the river. The settlements were discovered during the salvage excavations of the Haditha dam project in the 1980s, and included 17 fortified sites dated to the 2nd millennium (three on the islands of 'Ana, Telbis and Bijan, nine on the east bank of the river and five on the western one). Six of these sites were organized following a pattern of two triple fortification systems. One group is formed by two massive square and double walled fortresses (Sur Jur'eh and Glei'eh) facing each other on the opposite banks of the river, plus another one (Sur Mur'eh) close to the eastern bank. The second system is composed by the fortress on the island of Bijan (identified with the island of Sapirutu of Tiglath-pileser I's inscriptions[14]), and by those in the sites of 'Usyeh (western bank) and Yemniyeh (eastern bank). Moreover, 40 sites had strata dated to the 1st millennium BC. Many of them were the same sites from Middle Assyrian times which provided evidence of Neo-Assyrian (e.g. Glei'eh) and Neo-Babylonian (e.g. 'Ana) presence.[15] This large number of fortified settlements proves the existence, all through the Middle and Neo-Assyrian period, of one of the most strategic frontier zones of Assyria.[16]

The programme of slow territorial penetration shown by the sources was never completed, since in 12th and 11th centuries Assyria was hit by a crisis that forced it back to its original borders. Only starting a century later, were the first Neo-Assyrian kings able to reconquer and finally obtain full control over the region. By the end of Shalmaneser III's kingdom (858–824 BC) the Jezirah was considered as part of the Assyrian Homeland, and archaeological surveys of the area attest, for the first millennium BC, a great proliferation of unwalled farming villages (*kapru*) and a visible decreasing in the number of fortified settlements.[17]

Building the frontier in Neo-Assyrian letters

With the great imperial expansion of 8th and 7th centuries, starting with Tiglath-pileser III (745–725 BC) and Sargon II (722–705 BC), a second block of conquest is visible outside the Homeland's limits. This area can be divided, as suggested by Fales, into three main regions.[18] To the west, beyond the Euphrates, were the Neo-Hittite states, resulting from the dissolution of the Hittite Empire during the 12th century, the Aramean polities from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean coast (Bit-Zamani, Bit-Baḫiani, Bit-Adini, Bit-Agusi and Bit-Gabbari/Sam'al), and the Levantine coast up to the border with Egypt. To the north and to the east, the chains that formed the mountain ranges of Taurus and Zagros surrounded Assyria with a plethora of states of minor size, which were forced to make an alliance with more powerful polities, like Urartu or Assyria itself. To the south, the Babylonian region remained as a never completely tamed frontier, at times supported by its eastern neighbour Elam.

The penetration of these areas followed fluidly imperialistic policies, largely determined by existing geopolitical conditions and consequent opportunities, which brought to subjugation in vassalage or to the outright political annexation of conquered regions, case by case.[19] The conquered territories were gradually absorbed into the provincial system of the empire. All the empire was (at least in name) in the hands of the king, and the provinces were entrusted to his governors (*šaknu*) and magnates (*rabūte*). Each province had a capital and minor settlements, while military fortresses were positioned in unstable areas, on the outer limits of the empire and as guarding posts of the main routes that connected the core of Assyria with its foremost territories.

The letters from the royal correspondence of the 8th and 7th centuries represent an important source for the analysis of the many roles of military fortified settlements in frontier areas, defined with the term

[13] Fales 2011a, 24–30 with previous bibliography.
[14] *RIMA* 2, A.0.87.4, 41; A.0.87.10, 41–2.
[15] See al-Shukri 1985, Abdul-Amir 1997 and Tenu 2008. Note that many of these forts were used in Roman and Islamic times also.
[16] Fales 2011a, 24–30 with previous bibliography.
[17] Cf. Wilkinson *et al.* 2005.
[18] Fales 2001, 13–20.
[19] Bagg 2013.

taḫūmu.[20] These letters deal especially with two types of fortifications, the fortified military camp and the fortress.

The temporary fortified camps (*ušmannu*, *madaktu*, *karāšu*) were exclusively for military use. They were built during the military campaigns as outposts on the way for the regions affected by Assyrian conquest. This type of fortification was small and its only masonry element comprised the encircling walls, within which officers and soldiers dwelt in temporary structures (tents and pavilions).[21] Once the campaign was over, the fortified camps were abandoned but not dismantled, in case of future use.[22] Except for one (not fully clarified[23]) case, there seem to be no archaeological remains of such camps and the best sources for their analysis are the textual documentation and the iconography of the decorative reliefs attached to the walls of the Assyrian royal palaces.[24] In such reliefs, the camps often appear to have been divided in two or four quarters, for higher officials and simple soldiers, separated by one or two crossing roads.

At a higher level, in terms of size and function, is the military fortress (ḪAL.ṢU, *birtu*), for which the archaeological finds are also very poor, whereas the textual references abound, both in royal inscriptions and, above all, royal correspondence. This type of fortification was big enough to host a permanent garrison and sufficient supplies for long periods of service or for military campaigns led beyond the territory under the fortress' control.

As for the military camps, the *birtu* type also proves to have been divided in quarters. In a letter (*SAA* XIX 60) sent by the governor of the city of Tušḫan (Ziyaret Tepe) Dūr-Aššur to Tiglath-pileser III (745–725 BC), the official reports to the king about the construction of two separate quarters, one for the officials (*bīt ubri*) and one for the troops (*bīt napṭarte*).[25] These kinds of fortifications were typically used as stands against possible invasions, administrative centres for the recruitment and training of new conscripts, bases for territorial exploitation and border listening posts, where every movement of the enemy could be watched, also through intelligence reports (what can be defined with the Assyrian term *maṣṣartu*[26]).

Beside the already mentioned discovery of fortification systems in the area of the Middle Euphrates, archaeological excavations in the south-west of the Palestinian region have revealed the existence of groups of fortresses around the area of the 'Brook of Egypt' (Naḫal Muṣri, some kilometres to the west of the modern border between Israel and Egypt). From here, the Assyrian strongholds could defend the region from possible invasions and control the main trade routes that led to Egypt.[27] Regroupments of fortifications in other border zones are found in textual sources. Several letters attest the presence of militarized frontier areas, on which stands of Assyrian fortifications were built right in front (*ina pān*) of similar fortified settlements held by the enemies (e.g. in modern south-east Turkey, on the frontier between Assyria and Urartu).[28] In royal inscriptions, the king sometimes celebrates the creation of such militarized areas by founding and rebuilding cities and fortresses, as in the case of Sargon II in the region of Kammanu – situated in the foremost north-west periphery of the

[20] *taḫūmu* is the Assyrian term for 'border, frontier, frontier-territory' mainly used in the royal correspondence of the 8th and 7th centuries. Other Akkadian terms for 'border/frontier' found in the Assyrian sources (in Standard Babylonian, Assyrian and Babylonian dialects) are *miṣru*, *itû*, *šiddu*, *qannu*, *pulukku*, *pāṭu*, *kisurru*, and *kudurru*. For almost every one of them, three general meanings are involved in translations: 'border(-line)', 'boundary-stone/mark' and 'territory'. For meaning and uses of the term *taḫūmu*, see Wazana 1996 (especially fn. 2), with previous bibliography.

[21] Fales & Rigo 2014.

[22] See the pictures of abandoned (but left standing) camps on the Shalmanser III Balawat doors in King 1915, pls (possibly) XIII, XXXVI, LIV and LX. A passage from a letter to King Esarhaddon (*SAA* XVIII 175: r. 8–22) seems to confirm the hypothesis of repeated use of fortified military camps: 'I have heard the Magnates say as follows: "We will set up camp in Dilbat". (But) if they set up camp in Dilbat, the people will starve. Also, no caravan will come to them; rather, their army will go out and plunder a caravan! Let them place camp within the enclosure of the camp of Babylon of last year, so that boats and water-skins may come to them.' See also Fales & Rigo 2014.

[23] Analysing the archaeological remains discovered during the Haditha Dam Salvation Project (1982–7) on the Middle Euphrates (see above), Tenu has identified many Neo-Assyrian fortified camps. However, not everybody agrees on the fact that they can be interpreted as permanent fortified camps (Nadali 2009, 104–5).

[24] See *passim* in Botta & Flandin 1846–50; Layard 1853a and 1853b; King 1915; Barnett & Falkner 1962; Barnett *et al.* 1998.

[25] See Parker 1997, where the letter is quoted under its former cataloguing number NL 67.

[26] The *maṣṣartu*, or 'vigilance', was the duty, on the part of any subject of the Assyrian king, to keep eyes and ears open and to report anything improper taking place, whether in the capital city or in the most remote military outpost of the empire. For the different meanings of *maṣṣartu*, see Fales 2001, 119 and Fales 2011b.

[27] Cf. Na'aman 1979 and more recently Bagg 2013, 132–9.

[28] See Dubovsky 2006, 33–72 for a summary of the Urarto-Assyrian frontier-conflicts.

empire – and Sennacherib (704–681 BC) in the area of Dēr, on the border between Babylonia and Elam.[29]

Among the letters of the royal correspondence of the 8th and 7th centuries BC, there are two kinds of texts that deal with the construction of new fortified settlements or the renewal of old ones. They are the orders of construction, written directly by the king, and the reports that kept the king informed about the progress of the works. The recipients of royal orders, and authors of reports, are high officials, like governors of provinces or their deputies, but also other kinds, like officials entrusted with imperial policies in various areas of the periphery of the empire (*SAA* V 152, 160),[30] or commanders of fortresses (*rab birti*) (*SAA* XV 136). Moreover, often the letters were written not directly by the person in charge of the construction, but by a third person, who oversaw (or simply observed) the works that were conducted in the territory of his jurisdiction (*SAA* XV 166).

Frequently, the Assyrian king attentively follows every detail of the building project. The official in charge must be fast and efficient, and any delay needs to be well justified. We often find apologies and excuses for any kind of trouble or delay during the works, including preventive ones, aimed at avoiding the king's wrath, and even timid protests against any possible accusation of supposed non-compliance. In a letter (*SAA* V 211) from the province of Mazāmua (mod. Sulaymānīya, in north-east Iraq), the deputy governor Nabû-ḫamatua justifies a possible delay in the work, but ensures: 'The king, my lord, should not say: "He is a negligent servant: he does not do (his) work". I drive the servants of the king, my lord, day and night, they are glazing kiln-[fired-bricks] all day long.'[31]

The right place for the construction had to be checked in advance, for practical reasons that could also have social implications.[32] The settlement had to be founded somewhere that was strategically secure and suitable for the self-sufficiency of the troops, whose livelihood was based on agriculture, i.e. preferably adjacent to farmland (*SAA* XV 136: 12–15) and to a water course (*SAA* XIX 60: 4–7).[33]

The choice of a suitable location was entrusted to governor officials (*SAA* XV 136: 12–15), or local experts. In a letter sent to Ashurbanipal from the Babylonian city of Kutê (*SAA* XVIII 154), the sender indicates two possible positions for the setting of a fortified camp, according to where the army should cross a river (Turna). A group of Arab allies will indicate the exact positions: 'My lord should pitch [ca]mp in two places, a[nd] they [should] cross (the river) [at] Upi and at Dūr-[Šarrukku]. Let the Ar[abs] indicate (the places) to h[i]m, and let him appo[int ...]'.[34]

In a letter sent to the southern frontier, Sargon II reassures his official about the place chosen for a fortified camp despite the proximity to the Elamite territory:

> [I am writing to you] right now: this suggestion, the [way he put it], is extremely good. You [know] that this pass [leading to] Urammu is [ver]y difficult [to march through]; there is absolutely no way the Elamite [troops] will be able to get at you. Don't be afraid; at the city of Urammu where you are to place the camp [there is] a plain which is [very] good for encamping; it is also [very] good for reconnaissance expeditions, there is [much] grass there, and it is a [good] place to rest.[35]

Often orders and reports bear technical details of the building projects. We have already mentioned letter *SAA* XIX 60, in which Dūr-Aššur from Tušḫan minutely reports the construction works of a fortress. On some occasions (*SAA* V 152, 160 and *SAA* XV 136) the officials responsible for the construction works draw sketches of the project in progress to be attached to the report. In one case, for instance, Nabû-šumu-iddina, the commander of the fortress (*rab birti*) of Laḫiru (on the Babylonian border)

[29] See Sargon II: Fuchs 1994, Ann. 216–20, and Sennacherib: *RINAP* 3/1, 23 iv 47–53.
[30] Cf. Parker & Radner 1998, 153.
[31] *SAA* V 211: r. 1–10
[32] That this kind of fortified settlement had a function in the mechanism of *Pax Assyriaca* (see below, note 46) may be shown by this fragmentary (and in fact difficult to interpret) letter sent to King Esarhaddon (681–669 BC) from the Babylonian region: 'In their rear we are constructing the f[or]t and bringing [*garrison troops*] into it, so the people will become reverent, turn to other matters and broken heart(s) will be put in place' (*SAA* XVIII 142: 16'-r. 3). Cf. also *SAA* XVIII 175: r. 8–22 (see above note 22).
[33] Parker 1997, 80–4.
[34] *SAA* XVIII 154: 5–8.
[35] *SAA* I 13: 5'–19'.

informs the king about the work done, probably, on the fortification's towers, and adds: '[Now then] I have drawn a sketch of the fort [on] leather (*mašku*) and am herewith sending it [to] the king, my lord'.[36]

In a letter written by Sargon II to one of his officials in Babylonia (*SAA* I 18), the king gives detailed instructions for the building of a new fortress. The letter shows a deep concern for the possible occurrence of dangerous circumstances during the construction works. According to Sargon's words, the walls that the villagers are going to build have to be strong enough not to be easily destroyed (probably providing them with ramparts).[37] The king also orders the digging of two concentric moats around the fort at a sufficient distance one from another to set a series of temporary huts. The function of the outer moat seems to be that of giving time to the local people to take refuge behind the inner moat and within the walls under construction, in case they were attacked by the enemy during the works.[38]

In a message (*SAA* I 29: 1–21) reported by the crown prince Sennacherib to his father Sargon II,[39] the vassal king of Kumme (mod. Cizre Palin, south-east Turkey) Arije, warns that the fortress that the governors of Assyria (*šaknūte ša šar māt Aššur*) are building in his territory could be attacked soon by Ukkean troops, allied to Urartu.[40] The period of the letter is presumably before the great campaign of Sargon II against Urartu in 714 BC, and the construction of a fortress by Assyrian governors in the area of Kumme might be ascribed to the atmosphere of hostility growing in the region.[41]

A pure military strategy is not the only reason behind the many building projects carried out in the frontier regions of the empire. In some letters, there are references to similar activities accomplished by provincial governors in the context of regional territorialization, through policies aimed at consolidating and increasing the Assyrian presence. In a letter (*SAA* XIX 22) found at Nimrud and dated to Tiglath-pileser III, Qurdi-Aššur-lāmur, most probably governor of the province of Ṣimirra,[42] apologizes for the delay in the reconstruction of part of the city of Kašpuna (modern Kusbā), at the foot of Mount Lebanon, saying that now he is personally dealing with the job. He claims to have cleared the site of debris and repaired the gate of the inner wall, and to have organized a garrison for its guard. The letter deals also with the Assyrian restrictions on Phoenician trade (by forcing them to pay taxes for the lumber brought down from Mount Lebanon and prohibiting them from selling it to the Egyptians or Philistines) and with the deportation of ten Isubean families via Immiu to Kašpuna. The letter should be dated after the defeat of Tyre in 734, and possibly after 732 when, according to the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, the territory controlled by Kašpuna was entrusted to the governor of Ṣimirra.[43] It is, therefore, possible that the letter in question refers to the time when these territories passed into the hands of Qurdi-Aššur-Lāmur and that the work of reconstruction has to be considered as part of the territorial policies entrusted to this governor.

A different case is that of Lipḫur-Bēl (or Nasḫur/Nasḫir-Bēl), governor of Amīdi (modern Diyarbakir).[44] In his letter to Sargon II, he claims to have built a fortress and a city with a royal palace, on land that was formerly owned by another official (perhaps passed away). Now, the king requires the return of properties and lands, causing the governor's complaint.

> [As to] the fields of the patrimony of Aššur-remanni, about which the king, my lord, wrote me, the royal bodyguard shocked me when he said: give up the pro[perty] the well, and the arable land!

[36] For other examples of similar sketches drawn on perishable material for the king's understanding see *SAA* V 160: 10', and especially, *SAA* V 152 r. 1–5, where Aššur-alik-pani, from the border with Urartu, informs the king that when he meets him at the city of Arpad he will carry with him a sketch of the works on a wooden panel (GIŠ*le'u*): 'I shall bring [wit]h me [the wr]iting-[bo]ard on the works (in progress) [which] the king wrote [I should bring], and I shall have it read to [the king], my lord'. Writing-boards made of ivory and wood were found by Max Mallowan during the excavations at Nimrud in 1953 (Wiseman 1955).

[37] *SAA* I 18: r. 10'–1'.

[38] *SAA* I 18: r. 1'–7'.

[39] Fales 2001, 51 'Sennacherib aveva il compito di ricevere e vagliare i rapporti spionistici circa la situazione alle frontiere con Urartu, e quindi trasmetterle al padre, assente dal paese (*SAA* I 29–40; *SAA* V 281)'.

[40] For the vassal state of Kumme and its role in the Assyrian frontier policies against Urartu, see Parker 2001, 89–90. Cf. also Parker & Schmitt 1998, 131.

[41] The campaign was recorded in Sargon II's *Letter to Ashur* (Thureau-Dangin 1912). See Zimansky 1998, 45–51 for a bibliographical summary of the many studies conducted on the subject.

[42] van Buylaere 2002, 1021.

[43] Tadmor 1994, 176 Summ. 8: 9'; cf. Radner 2006, 62.

[44] *SAA* V 15: 1–20. Cf. also Baker & Streck 2001, 932–3.

> (Regarding) the fields, the king, my lord, knows that [x] years ago I built a town in the king's field. Under the aegis of [the ki]ng, my lord, I have bought and added to it 400 (hectares of) field from [the sub]jects of [A]šipâ. I have erected a fort there. The perimeter of the town is [...] cubits; I have built a royal palace and drawn the king's likeness inside it. I have placed 200 stone slabs there and settled the king's subjects there.[45]

Lipḫur-Bēl carried out the works not following a royal order, but 'under the shade/aegis of the king my lord' (*ina ṣilli šarri bēlīya*), hence according to his own rights in administrating the territory within his jurisdiction. This included the construction of administrative palaces, which were decorated with the same kind of sculpted reliefs that one could find in the main Assyrian capitals, like Nimrud, Nineveh and Dūr Šarrukīn, and which were among the main instruments of imperial propaganda. The last phase of territorialization, as was pointed out at the beginning of this paper, included policies of political and cultural absorption of the local population. In this context, the fortified cities were the centres from which the *Pax Assyriaca* could be spread.[46] Examples from the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods shed light on the significant impact brought with this kind of policy.

On one hand, recent discoveries in the Middle Assyrian frontier regions have shown a constant presence of bounds between local authorities and Assur, even after the crisis that hit the Assyrian kingdom in 12th and 11th centuries.[47] The inscriptions of the ruler of Ṭābētu (Tell Ṭāban, on the Lower Ḫabur), Aššur-reš-iši II (972–968 BC), and his successors prove the continuity of political relationships between some enclaves of Lower Ḫabur and the Assyrian core during the 'Dark Age'.[48] Similar cultural-political bounds are shown in the cities of Dūr Kathlimmu and Šaddikanni, where sculptures dated to the years of Assurnaṣirpal II (883–859 BC) were retrieved. Very recently, at the site of Satu Qala/Idu, on the Lower Zab (the Middle Assyrian south-eastern frontier), archaeologists found a series of bricks inscribed with the names of kings belonging to a local dynasty that developed after the Assyrian crisis. These bricks show a language (Assyrian dialect of Akkadian), ductus (Middle Assyrian), and some grammatical features very similar to those of the bricks found in other Assyrian provincial capitals (e.g. Tell Bderi/Dūr-Aššur-ketta-lēšer). As the authors of the report underline, 'palaeography as well as styles of the decorations reflect contemporary developments in Assyria, hinting at continued ties to the informal empire of Assyrian cultural dominance'.[49]

For the Neo-Assyrian period, in a letter (*SAA* X 349) written from the Babylonian city of Dēr on the frontier with Elam, the sender, Mar-Issār, urges the king about the need to finish the work on the city temple. Mar-Issār was the official responsible for the cult restoration of the region, he had to reorganize the cultic services and oversaw the reconstruction of the temples of Borsippa, Akkad, Uruk and other main urban centres in the region, including Dēr. For this city, Mar-Issār complains about the lack of cooperation between local Assyrian officials, which delays the works on the temple ('from the moment its foundations were laid, until now, the prelate and the officials of Dēr have been pushing it onto each other, and nobody has set about it. This year they have started to build, (but) one day they do the work, the next day they leave it.'[50]). Furthermore, the prince of Elam is taking advantage of this lack of cooperation between Assyrian officials by sending his brick masons to do the work. It is very important, then, that the king should send a troop and a master-builder to finish the work and ensure his control over the area.

As already shown by Pongratz-Leisten in her study on the Akitu festival in the context of Neo-Assyrian politics, Dēr was one of the cities situated at the limits of the Homeland's territory, which ideally represented the borders of the Assyrian empire, facing the external chaotic world.[51] By the end of his letter, Mar-Issār defines Dēr as a city 'on the frontier territory of another country' (*ina muḫḫi taḫūmu ša māt šaniti*). Here, the term *taḫūmu* seems to indicate, rather than a territorial area controlled by groups of opposing military fortresses, the degree of political and cultural/religious influence over the population of a major urban centre, which is not

[45] *SAA* V 15: 7–12.
[46] On the historical-political concept of *Pax Assyriaca* see Fales 2008.
[47] Fales 2011a, 31–2.
[48] The inscriptions were found at Tell Bedri and at Tell Ṭāban. See Maul 1992 and 2005.
[49] van Soldt *et al.* 2013, 219.
[50] *SAA* X 349 r. 11–18.
[51] Pongratz-Leisten 1997a, 248–9.

completely under Assyrian control.[52] In this context, the act of building a palace and/or a temple can be the most significant for the control of the frontier. A frontier that, we could say in this case, had to be built.

Abbreviations

RIMA 2	Grayson 1991
RINAP 3/1	Grayson & Novotny 2012
SAA I	Parpola 1987
SAA V	Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990
SAA X	Parpola 1993
SAA XV	Fuchs & Parpola 2001
SAA XVIII	Reynolds 2003
SAA XIX	Luukko 2012

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[52] This is not the only case in which cultic procedures and political control over an area are closely correlated. A well-known example from the same period is given by the letter of Urzana, the former king of Muṣaṣir who became an Assyrian vassal after Sargon II's conquest of the region (714). He reports that Urartean governors are coming to Muṣaṣir to do the service in the temple (of Ḫaldi). The importance of these practices is underlined by the fact that Sargon had explicitly forbidden any temple service without the king's permission, in order to avoid any Urartean control on the little kingdom through religious strategies (*SAA* V 147).

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