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## BIT ZAMANI AND ASSYRIA

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**Résumé** – Les fouilles et prospections récentes de la vallée du haut Tigre ont fourni de nouvelles données sur les contacts entre l'Assyrie et les populations locales du Sud-Est anatolien. Cependant elles ont généré également autant de questions que de réponses. Un des problèmes les plus frustrants concerne la nature de la transition entre le Bronze récent et l'âge du Fer, et le statut changeant du contrôle assyrien et araméen du haut Tigre. Bien que les sources écrites indiquent une longue relation entre l'Assyrie et le royaume araméen du Bît Zamani entre le XIII<sup>e</sup> et le IX<sup>e</sup> siècle, la présence des Araméens dans cette région a été difficile à démontrer du point de vue archéologique. Cet article explore le problème de cette transition dans le contexte des affrontements tribus-État, dont les conséquences peuvent être évidentes dans les données archéologiques. Les nouvelles relations culturelles qui se développent entre le haut Tigre et les tribus septentrionales du Nairi au début du Fer peuvent être liées à la structure tribale sociopolitique araméenne qui remplaça la présence administrative assyrienne dans le Bît Zamani.

**Abstract** – Recent excavations and surveys in the Upper Tigris valley have offered new evidence for contacts between Assyria and the local populations of southeast Anatolia. However, these excavations have generated as many questions as they have helped to answer. One of the most vexing of these questions concerns the nature of the transition from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age, and the changing status of Aramaean and Assyrian control of the Upper Tigris. Although the cuneiform record indicates a long relationship between Assyria and the Aramaean kingdom of Bît Zamani from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the presence of Aramaeans in this region has been difficult to demonstrate archaeologically. This paper explores the problem of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age transition within the context of tribe-state encounters, the consequences of which may be evident in the archaeological record. New cultural links that develop between the Upper Tigris and the northern tribes of Nairi at the beginning of the Iron Age may be tied to the Aramaean tribal sociopolitical structure that replaced the Assyrian administrative presence in Bît Zamani.

خلاصة – زوّدتنا آخر الحفريات وعمليات التنقيب التي أجريت في شمال وادي نهر دجلة بمعطيات جديدة عن العلاقات التي قامت بين الدولة الآشورية وسكان جنوب شرق الأناضول ولكنها أثارت تساؤلات عدّة بقدر ما قدّمتها من أجوبة. ومن المسائل المستعصية نذكر طبيعة الفترة الانتقالية بين العصر البرونزي المتأخر والعصر الحديدي وتغيّر حالة النفوذ الآشوري والآرامي في شمال نهر دجلة. رغم بعض المصادر المكتوبة التي تشير إلى أن الدولة الآشورية ومملكة بيت زاماني الآرامية قد أقامت علاقات طويلة ابتداءً من القرن الثالث عشر حتى القرن التاسع، صعب إثبات الحضور الآرامي في هذه المنطقة من منظور علم الآثار. يبحث هذا المقال في المشاكل المتعلقة بهذه الفترة الانتقالية في ظل المواجهات التي دارت بين القبائل والدولة والتي قد تظهر آثارها جليا في هذه المعطيات الأثرية. إن تطوّر العلاقات الثقافية الجديدة بين منطقة وادي نهر دجلة والقبائل الشمالية في منطقة نائيري عند بداية العصر الحديدي قد يكون مرتبطا ببنية القبائل الآرامية الاجتماعية والسياسية التي حلت محل الإدارة الآشورية في بيت زاماني.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, archaeologists have been increasingly interested in the mechanisms of Assyrian administration along its northern border. The polities north of the Tigris, including Urartu, the Aramean kingdom of Bît Zamani, the Šubrian populations, and all of the polities that were often subsumed under the toponym Nairi, appear with varying frequencies in the royal inscriptions of the early Late Assyrian empire. Although recent surveys and excavations along the Upper Tigris river in southeast Turkey have considerably increased our understanding of sociopolitical interactions in this region, those projects have generated as many new questions as they have helped to answer. One of the most vexing of these questions concerns the nature of the transition from the Late Bronze Age (LBA) to the Early Iron Age (EIA), and the changing status of the Upper Tigris under Assyrian and Aramean control. Despite the fact that Assyrian texts record a very long relationship between Assyria and the Aramean dynasty of Bît Zamani, one that stretches from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, the presence of Arameans in the Upper Tigris region has been very difficult to demonstrate in the archaeological record. This paper examines the history of interactions between Assyria and Bît Zamani, and attempts to alleviate some of the problems archaeologists have had identifying Aramean material culture by analyzing the LBA-EIA transition within the context of the tribal nature of Aramean society.

### BÎT ZAMANI IN THE ASSYRIAN SOURCES

Assyrian occupation of the Upper Tigris began in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, as the Middle Assyrian kingdom expanded under Adad-nîrârî I (1307-1275) and Shalmaneser I (1274-1245). Even in this early period, Bît Zamani appears to have been a province of the Assyrian kingdom<sup>1</sup>. The first occurrence of Bît Zamani as a geographical name<sup>2</sup> appears in a text from Tell Billa (Assyrian Šibaniba) which mentions “Aššur-kašid, son of Bel-qarrad, *hassihlu* of the *halši* of Bît Zamani” (**table 1**)<sup>3</sup>. The term *hassihlu* here is probably parallel to *bēl pāhete*, an administrative title more commonly encountered in Middle Assyrian texts<sup>4</sup>. Whatever the precise duties of the *hassihlu*, the text implies that by beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, an Assyrian official was in control of a territory called Bît Zamani, the name of which might reflect some tribal Aramean population<sup>5</sup>. There are no additional Middle Assyrian texts in which Bît Zamani appears, but in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Aššur-bēl-kala (1073-1056) campaigned against Arameans at several cities in the region of the Kašiyari mountains (Tur Abdin) and, most relevant in the context of Bît Zamani, at the city of Šinamu (Late Assyrian Sinabu)<sup>6</sup>, which is mentioned later by Aššurnaširpal II in the context of his 9<sup>th</sup> century campaign against Bît Zamani.

Whether under Aššur-bēl-kala or shortly thereafter, the Upper Tigris region was apparently lost to Assyria, and by the reign of Tukultî-ninurta II (890-884), Bît Zamani was ruled by a non-Assyrian named Amme-ba’li, who may have rebelled against Assyrian authority. In response, Tukultî-ninurta II set out

1. The association of the Upper Tigris valley with Bît Zamani during the Middle Assyrian period is not without problems. Evidence from some texts may show that this region fell within the Assyrian province of Ta’idu (NASHEF 1982, p. 256–257), with the seat of the Assyrian governor (*bēl pāhete*) centered at Üçtepe (RADNER & SCHACHNER 2001). An itinerary from Dür Katlimmu (RÖLLIG 1983; 1997), however, mentions a city named Ta’idu in the Upper Khabur region, at or near Tell Hamidiya (WÄFLER 1994). There is also evidence for a province of Tušhan, with its own governor (*šakin*) in the Upper Tigris region (POSTGATE 1985, p. 100). A text from Tell Billa (Billa 6) contains the only Middle Assyrian attestation of Bît Zamani, and it is thus impossible to locate the territory precisely, but it seems reasonable to suggest that the term Bît Zamani referred to the same geographical region, adjacent to the Middle Assyrian province of Tušhan, in both the Middle and Late Assyrian periods.

2. The personal name Zamani appears as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century (LIPINŃSKI 2000a, p. 135).

3. FINKELSTEIN 1953, p. 124, Billa 6:8; NASHEF 1982, p. 74.

4. CANCEK-KIRSCHBAUM 1996, p. 26; JAKOB 2003, p. 142.

5. However, the use of the term *hassihlu*, which recalls the Hurrian administrative hierarchy (MAIDMAN 1981), is somewhat curious. For the Semitic origin and possible meaning of Zamani, see LIPINŃSKI 2000a, p. 135.

6. RIMA 2:102, A.0.89.7.iii:8–17.

Assyrian King/Year	Events in Bît-Zamani
Adad-nîrârî I or Shalmaneser I (1305-1244)	“Aššur-Kašid, son of Bel-qarrad, <i>hassihlu</i> of <i>halsi</i> of Bît-Zamani” (Billa 6:8)
Aššur-bêl-kala (1073-1056)	Campaigns against Arameans in the district of Šinamu
Tukultî-ninurta II (890-884)	Conflict and subsequent treaty with Amme-ba’li, “man of Bît-Zamani”
Aššurnaširpal II (883-859)	
882	Receives tribute from Amme-ba’li in the city of Tušhan
880	“the nobles of Amme-ba’li rebelled against him [Amme-ba’li] and killed him” (RIMA 2, p. 251) Aššurnaširpal kills the leader of the rebellion, uproots “1,500 troops of the <i>ahlamu</i> -Arameans,” and “repossesses” Sinabu and Tidu (RIMA 2, p. 261) Appoints Ilanu <i>nasiku</i> of Bît-Zamani
866	Aššurnaširpal attacks Damdammusa and Amedi

Table 1: Assyrian involvement in Bit Zamani from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to 866 BC, based on Assyrian sources.

on a campaign “to the fortified lands of Nairi,” and against Amme-ba’li, “a man of Bît Zamani” (*am-me-ba-a’-li* DUMU *za-ma-a-ni*). During the course of the campaign, Tukultî-ninurta II destroyed two of the cities of Amme-ba’li, and entered into a treaty with him, which ensured that Amme-ba’li would not give aid to the enemies of Assyria, and most likely also involved a promise of tribute to Assyria<sup>7</sup>.

Amme-ba’li appears again during the reign of Aššurnaširpal II (883-859), who in 882 received tribute from the man of Bît Zamani, along with several other “kings of the lands Nairi”<sup>8</sup>. The tribute was accepted in the city of Tušhan, which Aššurnaširpal II had renovated and resettled with “the enfeebled Assyrians who, because of hunger (and) famine, had gone up to other lands to the land Šubru”<sup>9</sup>. Tušhan became a royal city of Aššurnaširpal, and a center for grain storage and collection of tribute.

Two years later, in 880, Aššurnaširpal records that “the nobles of Amme-ba’li (*am-me-ba-a’-li* DUMU *za-ma-ni* LÚ.GAL.MEŠ-*te-šú*) rebelled against him and killed him”<sup>10</sup>. In response, Aššurnaširpal marched against the perpetrators of the coup, killed their leader, repossessed the cities of Sinabu and Tidu, and appointed a man named Ilanu leader of Bît Zamani<sup>11</sup>. The term used to describe the leadership position of Ilanu, LÚ *na-si-ku-te*, is used in Assyrian in reference to tribal leaders, and is often translated “sheikh” or “chieftain” (CAD N vol. 2, p. 27). The term therefore probably reflects the tribal sociopolitical structure of Bît Zamani, a point which is underscored by Aššurnaširpal’s declaration that he uprooted “1,500 troops of the *ahlamû*-Arameans belonging to Amme-ba’li”. Here the association of Bît Zamani with an Aramean population, already implicit in both the name of Bît Zamani and the names of its rulers (Amme-ba’li and Bur Ramanu), is made explicit<sup>12</sup>.

In 866, Aššurnaširpal attacked Damdammusa, a fortified city of Ilanu, whom Aššurnaširpal had appointed *nasiku* fourteen years earlier<sup>13</sup>. After sacking Damdammusa, he marched directly to “the city Amedu, his [Ilanu’s] royal city,” and “fought his way inside the gate (and) cut down his orchards”. This campaign marked the beginning of the end for Amedi as the capital of a dependent, but autonomous polity of Bît Zamani. The status of Bît Zamani and its capital Amedi following the campaign of 866 is

7. RIMA 2, p. 171–172, A.0.100.5:16–21.

8. RIMA 2, p. 202, A.0.101.1.ii:12–13.

9. *Ibid.* p. 202, A.0.101.1.ii:7–8.

10. *Ibid.* p. 251, A.0.101.17.iv:109–110.

11. *Ibid.* p. 261, A.0.101.19:85–97.

12. On the Aramean names Amme-ba’li and Bur Ramanu, see LIPINSKI 2000a, p. 153, 158; ZADOK 1995, p. 270.

13. RIMA 2, p. 220, A.0.101.1.iii:105–109.

difficult to reconstruct, in large part because of the imprecise and often overlapping use of toponyms and provincial designations, such as Bît Zamani, Amedi, Tušhan, and Nairi, to refer to the territory of the Upper Tigris valley<sup>14</sup>.

#### THE TERRITORY OF BÎT ZAMANI

The extent of the territory that had been under the control of Amme-ba'li in the 9<sup>th</sup> century is unclear. Lipiński suggests that Bît Zamani occupied the area bordered on the north by Ergani, on the west by Karaca Dağ, and the south by the Tur Abdin<sup>15</sup>. The eastern border is more difficult to isolate because it seems to have changed over the course of the 10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the narrative of the Aššurnaširpal campaigns, the cities of Tušhan, Damdammusa, Sinabu, and Tidu all feature prominently, along with the capital Amedi. Tušhan, which may have been held by Arameans for a short time, soon became the royal center where Aššurnaširpal collected tribute and stored grain. Sinabu and Tidu were sites that had earlier been held by Shalmaneser I in the Middle Assyrian period, and which, according to Aššurnaširpal, "Arameans had captured by force" before he repossessed them<sup>16</sup>. Sinabu may have been a rather important city within Bît Zamani, as after killing and flaying the leader of the rebellion against Amme-ba'li<sup>17</sup>, Aššurnaširpal draped his skin over the wall of Sinabu<sup>18</sup>. Damdammusa was the fortified city which had been the first target of Aššurnaširpal's later campaign against Ilanu, who resided in Amedi. Thus, for much of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and probably throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Damdammusa, Sinabu, and Tidu, if not also Tušhan, were administered by, or at least under the influence of the kings (or better, sheikhs) of Bît Zamani at Amedi.

Most of those sites have been identified, and several recent publications address the history and historical geography of the Upper Tigris region, updating earlier publications<sup>19</sup> with new findings from recent excavations<sup>20</sup>. Without going into the details of the historical geography of the Upper Tigris valley, it will suffice to note that there is general agreement that the capital of Bît Zamani, Amedi, was located at modern Diyarbakır, Sinabu at Pornak (Murattaşı), roughly 30 km west of the modern city of Bismil, Tidu at Üçtepe, roughly 13 km west of Bismil, and Tušhan at modern Ziyaret Tepe, roughly 12 km east of Bismil. Damdammusa is more difficult to locate precisely, but it may be associated with Aktepe<sup>21</sup>. With the exception of Tušhan, which quickly came under Assyrian control, these sites were certainly located within the territory of Bît Zamani under Amme-ba'li and Ilanu's authority (**fig. 1**). The same region may have been associated with Bît Zamani of the Middle Assyrian period<sup>22</sup>, as Middle Assyrian levels are found at Üçtepe<sup>23</sup>, Ziyaret Tepe<sup>24</sup>, and also at Giricano just across the Tigris river from Ziyaret Tepe<sup>25</sup>.

The identity of the population of Bît Zamani appears to have fluctuated, and the ethnolinguistic makeup of Bît Zamani is difficult to reconstruct. In the Middle Assyrian period, the material culture of the region is exclusively Assyrian. Royal inscriptions and personal names in the texts found at Giricano also indicate Assyrian occupation during the LBA. Aramean occupation of the region in the LBA is suggested by the very name Bît Zamani and Assyrian royal inscriptions that detail campaigns against

14. See RADNER 2006; RADNER & SCHACHNER 2001.

15. LIPİŃSKI 2000a, p. 138.

16. RIMA 2, p. 261, A.0.101.19:93.

17. Bur-Ramanu, also an apparently indigenous Aramean (ZADOK 1995, p. 270).

18. RIMA 2, p. 261, A.0.101.19:91.

19. KESSLER 1980; LIVERANI 1992a.

20. PARKER 2001; RADNER & SCHACHNER 2001; ROAF 2002; ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005.

21. KESSLER 1980, p. 119; LIVERANI 1992a, p. 36.

22. LIPİŃSKI 2000a, p. 135; NASHEF 1982, p. 74.

23. KÖROĞLU 1998.

24. MATNEY, ROAF, MACGINNIS et al. 2002; MATNEY, MACGINNIS, McDONALD et al. 2003.

25. SCHACHNER 2002a.

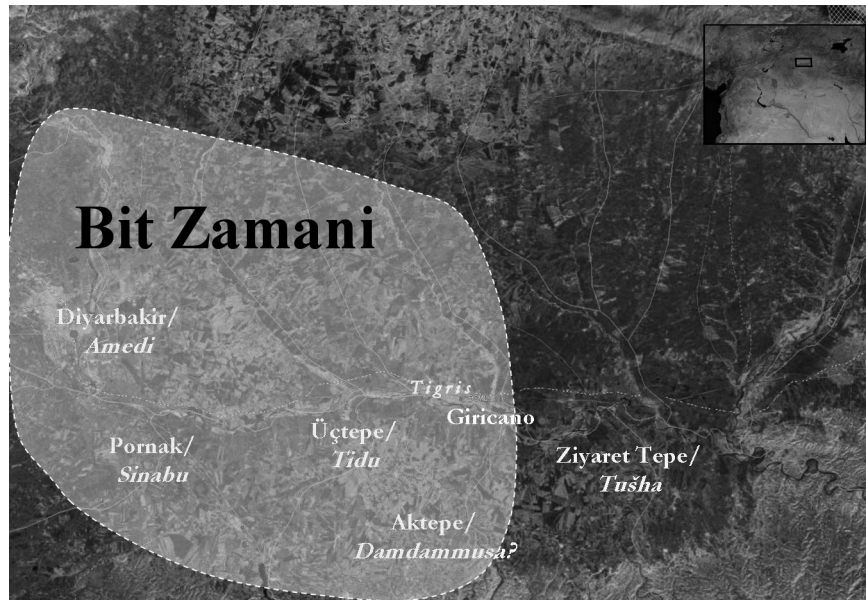


Figure 1: Map of Bit Zamani and the major sites of the Upper Tigris valley.

Arameans. In the EIA, after the Middle Assyrian abandonment, evidence of Aramean occupation comes from Assyrian inscriptions that record the personal names of the rulers of Bit Zamani. Finally, some of the toponyms, specifically Amedi and Damdammusa, may be Hurrian or Urartian<sup>26</sup>. Together, this evidence suggests that for much of the LBA, the region was a porous frontier zone, where many cultures came into contact. But by the beginning of the Iron Age, that is, following the Middle Assyrian abandonment, the region was primarily under the control of Arameans. In sum, the Assyrian sources tell us that, beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Middle Assyrian kingdom occupied a region of possibly Aramean or mixed Aramean/Hurrian territory, and beginning in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, Assyria abandoned the region, which quickly came under the control of Arameans. Beginning in 882, Assyria once again returned to the Upper Tigris region, and probably from 866 on, occupied the sites of Bit Zamani.

#### LBA AND EIA OCCUPATION IN BÎT ZAMANI

That, at least, is the history of Bit Zamani based on the evidence from Assyrian texts. The evidence from the archaeology of the Upper Tigris valley, however, is somewhat less straightforward. To date, excavations in the region have uncovered Middle and Late Assyrian occupations, with a clear interval between them, during which a markedly different culture occupied the region. However, it has been very difficult to equate that break with the archaeological reflection of Aramean presence, during the period between the Middle and the Late Assyrian occupations<sup>27</sup>. The sites of Üçtepe, Ziyaret Tepe, and Giricano all offer challenges to understanding the complex changes that occurred during the transition from the LBA to the EIA.

#### Üçtepe/Tidu

At Üçtepe, in a series of trenches on the east side of the main mound, excavators found that occupation continued with little or no interruption from the Middle to the Late Assyrian period<sup>28</sup>. A single construction

26. ZADOK 1995, p. 270. Patiškun, a city that appears in a Tukultî-ninurta II text referring to his involvement with Ammeba'li, may also be Hurrian or Urartian.

27. ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005.

28. KOROĞLU 1998, Resim 3, 4.

with two Middle Assyrian floor levels (Level 9) contained a burial with jewelry, fine vessels, and standard Middle Assyrian pottery. Just above this level, an “Early Late Assyrian” building (Level 8) sat beneath a much more substantial Late Assyrian building with a slightly different orientation (Level 7). The later Assyrian building with thick mud brick walls, painted plaster, paved brick floors, and fine palace ware suggests that the site was a large urban city for much of the Iron Age. The ceramics of the Early Late Assyrian period (Level 8) included both standard Late Assyrian wares, and some examples of the coarse, handmade Early Iron Age pottery with characteristic incised grooves that is a typical marker of the EIA in the Upper Tigris.

### *Ziyaret Tepe/Tuṣhan*

Several areas of Late Assyrian occupation have been excavated at Ziyaret Tepe, and Middle Assyrian remains have been found throughout the surface of the Upper and Lower mounds, in Operation D and in the Operation E step trench on the east slope of the mound<sup>29</sup>. In Operation E, the Middle Assyrian level was cut by a pit (E-032) that contained primarily handmade EIA grooved pottery, and that pit was cut by a room or brick-lined pit containing Late Assyrian pottery. Thus, as at Üçtepe, Ziyaret Tepe shows a stratigraphic break between the Middle and Late Assyrian periods characterized by an architectural and ceramic change.

### *Giricano*

At Giricano, several Middle Assyrian occupation levels were found in two trenches, and in the latest phase, excavators found a small archive of about fifteen tablets in a ceramic vessel. Those texts, which date to the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> year of Aššur-bêl-kala, indicate that Giricano functioned as a special type of site, known as a *dunnu* in the Middle Assyrian texts<sup>30</sup>. *Dunnus* were agricultural production centers owned by and dependent upon an elite Assyrian who resided at a nearby town. In the case of Giricano, the owner resided at Tuṣhan<sup>31</sup>. These *dunnu* sites were established all over the Middle Assyrian realm, and were watered both by annual rainfall, and probably also Assyrian hydrological projects<sup>32</sup>. The agricultural potential of the Upper Tigris meant that Giricano shared over 6,100 ha of agricultural land with four other *dunnu* sites surrounding the large urban center at Ziyaret Tepe. The region thus constituted a vital resource for the Middle Assyrian kings.

Shortly after the date of the Giricano archive, the site was abandoned, an event which may have had something to do with Aššur-bêl-kala’s campaigns against Arameans. Following a short hiatus, the EIA at Giricano is represented in two trenches, and is characterized by ephemeral stone foundations, grooved pottery and Eastern Anatolian painted wares<sup>33</sup>. There is no substantial occupation after the EIA, but the site may have been occupied on a small scale throughout the remainder of the Iron Age.

### *Early Iron Age Pottery*

At all of the excavated sites in the region of Bît Zamani, the key marker of the shift from LBA to EIA occupation is a distinctive type of pottery characterized by handmade bowls and pots with horizontal grooved lines around the rim (**fig. 2**). This “Groovy Pottery” is ubiquitous at both excavated and surveyed sites in the Upper Tigris region (**fig. 3**)<sup>34</sup>. Groovy Pottery also occurs at sites throughout

29. MATNEY, ROAF & MACGINNIS 2002, p. 537.

30. RADNER 2004.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

32. KÜHNE 1991.

33. SCHACHNER 2003.

34. KÖROĞLU 1998, p. 72–74; PARKER 2001, p. 174–179; ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005.

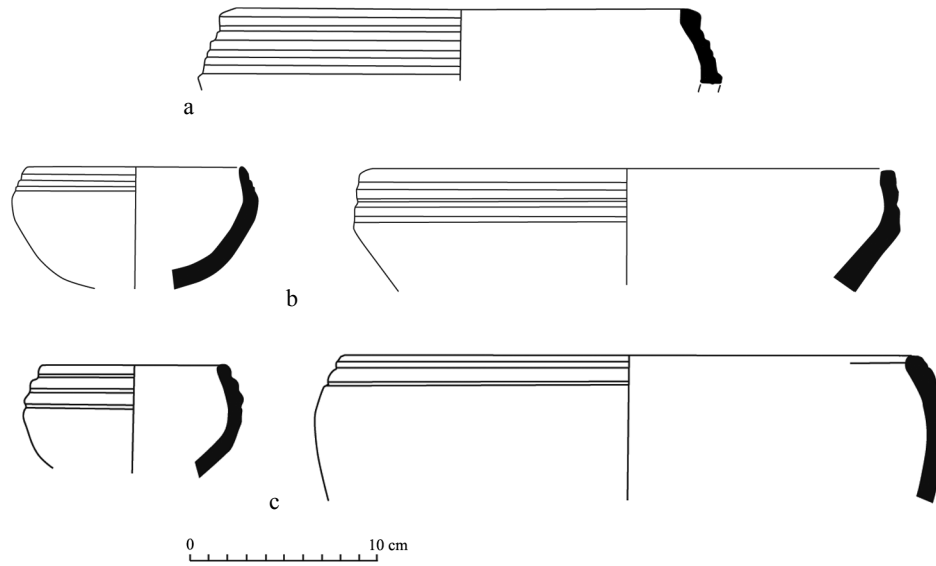


Figure 2: Groovy Pottery from (a) Üçtepe (after KÖROĞLU 1998, Fig. 9:21), (b) Ziyaret Tepe (after MATNEY & RAINVILLE 2005, Fig. 4.2,3), and (c) Giricano (after SCHACHNER 2002a, Abb 15.b,c).

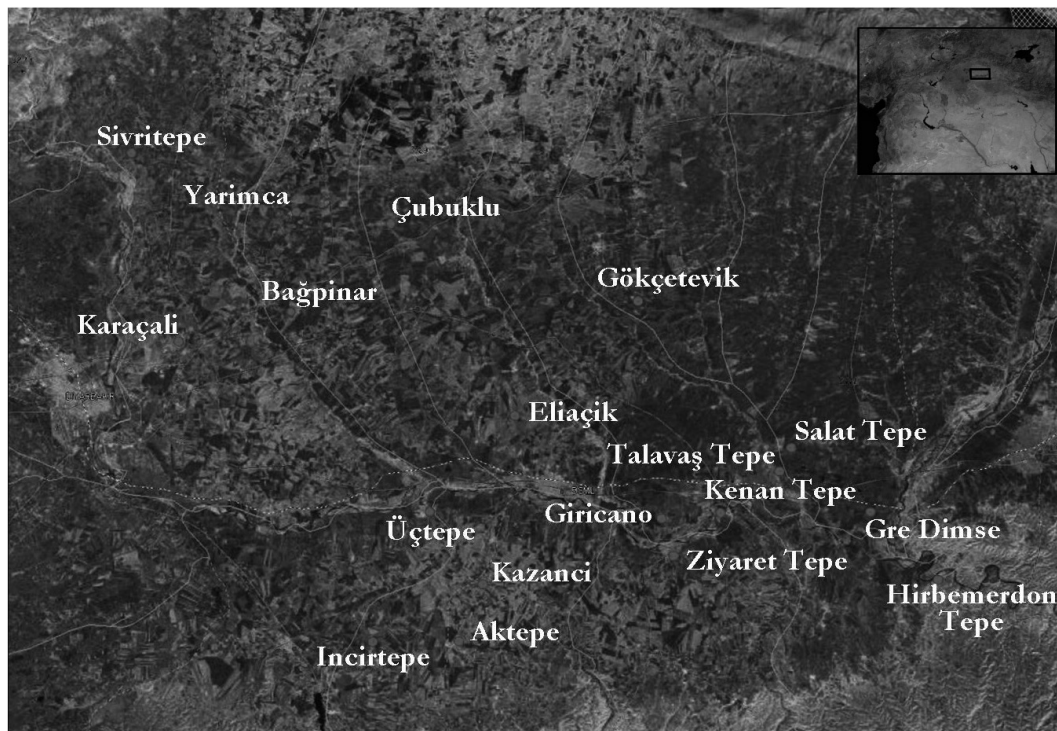


Figure 3: Sites with Groovy Pottery in the Upper Tigris valley.



eastern Anatolia from the Upper Euphrates to the Van region into northwest Iran and Armenia<sup>35</sup>, and also at a small number of sites south of the Tur Abdin, such as Tell Halaf<sup>36</sup>. Bît Zamani itself occupies only a small area within this much larger region.

Wherever Groovy Pottery appears in Turkey, it seems to coincide with the end of Hittite or Middle Assyrian political authority. The Upper Tigris valley, however, was unaffected by the events that brought the Bronze Age to an end in Syria and western Anatolia. Correspondingly, EIA pottery appears later in the Upper Tigris than it does elsewhere, only after the Middle Assyrian decline, that is, shortly after the abandonment of Giricano in 1068<sup>37</sup>, although it is possible that Groovy Pottery appears in this area in the final phases of Middle Assyrian occupation<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, EIA Groovy Pottery is ubiquitous at surveyed and excavated sites in the Upper Tigris region of Aramean occupation, whereas it is less so in Aramean regions south of the Tur Abdin.

Roaf and Schachner note that the full geographic range of Groovy Pottery roughly corresponds to the vague region that Assyrians called Nairi<sup>39</sup>. Nairi itself is an imprecise toponym, home to a number of political and ethno-linguistic groups, and it is difficult to attribute Groovy Pottery to any one or even all of those groups<sup>40</sup>. It is especially unlikely that Groovy Pottery should be associated with the Arameans, who had long occupied the Upper Tigris region, and gained political control only at the turn of the millennium, that is, after Groovy Pottery first appears elsewhere. If Groovy Pottery does not represent a migration of people, and it does not represent any specific indigenous ethnic or political grouping, then the appearance of Groovy Pottery itself offers very little information about the political or ethnic situation in Turkey during the shift from the regional urban kingdoms of the LBA (Hatti, Assyria), to indigenous localized rule of smaller EIA polities<sup>41</sup>.

In Bît Zamani, therefore, the appearance of Groovy Pottery presents a problem. If Groovy Pottery appears after the withdrawal of Assyria, but it is not a cultural marker of Arameans, then there is no direct archaeological evidence of Aramean settlement in Bît Zamani. How then, is one to reconcile those Assyrian sources that describe Aramean occupation of Bît Zamani with the lack of Aramean material culture? Put another way, if Groovy Pottery is explicitly *not* a marker of Aramean occupation, what is? Perhaps much of the difficulty lies in the way the question has been framed. It might be more fruitful to ask not, “How do we identify Arameans in the archaeological record?” but rather “Why is it so difficult to identify Arameans in the archaeological record?” The answer to that question may have to do with the tribal social structure of Bît Zamani.

#### THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TRIBAL SOCIETIES: BÎT ZAMANI AND ASSYRIA

Several meanings and preconceptions have been associated with the terms “tribe” and “tribal,” and with tribe-state interactions, and some have pointed out that the classical notion of the tribe as a kinship-based social system based on patrilinearity, egalitarianism, and segmentary lineages, is nothing more than an idealization of a much more varied, adaptive, and flexible form of organization<sup>42</sup>. Indeed that is one reason why some anthropologists have advocated abandoning the term tribe altogether. But recent work on historic and ancient tribes shows that there indeed may be some heuristic value in analyzing the “tribal” structure of ancient societies, that is, culturally distinct groups, within which interactions among individuals, families, and subgroups are primarily based on lineage and kinship, and who otherwise

35. BARTL 2001; ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005; SEVIN 1991; SUMMERS 1994.

36. BARTL 1989.

37. ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005.

38. KÖROĞLU 2003, p. 233; MATNEY, personal communication.

39. ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005.

40. *Ibid.*

41. MÜLLER 2003.

42. See, among others, TAPPER 1990, p. 54, and KHOURY & KOSTINER 1990, p. 4.

exhibit fluid forms of social organization<sup>43</sup>. In some cases, power is shared across sectors of society, rather than restricted to an individual, small group, or single family line<sup>44</sup>, but in other cases, social hierarchies and even royal lineages are indeed a feature of tribal societies<sup>45</sup>. Tribal social structures are fluid, and accordingly allow for flexibility in adapting to internal or external changes and threats. This flexibility can be expressed in shifting political allegiances, geographic boundaries, and social identities<sup>46</sup>. Of course, none of the features of tribes are incompatible with social complexity, and tribes and the states could coexist within a single system that exhibited both corporate and restrictive forms of authority<sup>47</sup>. The terms “tribe” and “tribal” can therefore apply to urban polities that incorporate, for example, seasonal pastoralist communities along with settled agriculturalists, and both heterarchical and hierarchical power structures. And because tribal structure often becomes most relevant, and therefore most visible, during times of transition or instability<sup>48</sup>, approaching the archaeology of the Upper Tigris from this perspective may help explain the changes that took place there as Assyria withdrew its military, bureaucratic, and economic apparatus from the Upper Tigris.

That the Arameans of Bît Zamani were organized into this type of integrated sociopolitical tribal system is suggested, in the first place, by the terminology used in Assyrian texts in the context of Bît Zamani. The tribal undertones of the name Bît Zamani, itself, are underscored by the Assyrian kings’ use of the phrase “DUMU Zamani,” literally “son of Zamani” (but which is translated “man of Zamani”), to refer to the leaders of Bît Zamani. The position of *nasiku*, sheikh, suggests a type of leadership different than Assyrian kingship, perhaps one that is not based on hereditary qualities, or simply understood as a leader of a non-state society.

But how would the tribal polity of Bît Zamani be identified in the archaeological record of the EIA? One suggestion is that corporate tribal polities may be reflected materially in a lack of prestige goods and a focus on utilitarian ceramics for domestic use rather than decorated or technologically sophisticated wares<sup>49</sup>. But the integration of tribes into the Mari state suggests that tribal communities, or even pastoralists in urban environments, may well adopt those sophisticated material indicators of exclusionary states<sup>50</sup>. In the Upper Euphrates region during the EBA, it is not merely a lack of urban features that points to heterarchical polities, as many of the sites excavated in the Euphrates valley have fortifications, large secular and religious buildings, rich craft traditions, and monumental features. Rather it is the co-occurrence of that evidence for social hierarchy with evidence for heterarchical social structure that suggests that the region was home to tribal societies<sup>51</sup>.

In the Upper Tigris valley, the evidence for non-Assyrian presence in the Early Iron Age is dominated by two characteristics: a lack of urban features, and Groovy Pottery. The lack of urban features in a period following one that had been characterized by large public and elite structures may correlate with a change in the sociopolitical makeup of the region. At Giricano, the EIA occupation consists of simple stone foundations with no evidence of elite classes residing at the site. At Üçtepe, the “Early Late Assyrian” level is much more ephemeral than the later Late Assyrian period wall, and lacks the painted plaster, palace ware, and other luxury features of the later Assyrian building. At Ziyaret Tepe, the Middle Assyrian building is cut by pits that may have been used for grain storage, which suggests that, although no domestic or public structures were uncovered from the EIA, the region was farmed intensively<sup>52</sup>. But

43. PARKINSON 2002.

44. PORTER 2004; COOPER 2006b, p. 61–63; BLANTON, FEINMAN, KOWALEWSKI et al. 1996.

45. BAŞTUĞ 1998, p. 112–113.

46. PARKINSON 2006.

47. FLEMING 2004; SZUCHMAN 2009.

48. VAN DER STEEN 2004.

49. BLANTON, FEINMAN, KOWALEWSKI, et al. 1996, p. 13.

50. PORTER 2004.

51. COOPER 2006a.

52. ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005, p. 121.

the production, storage, and access to grain need not have been centrally controlled, as was the case in the Middle Assyrian period, when the elites of Ziyaret Tepe owned exclusive rights to Giricano and the other surrounding *dunnus*. If the EIA pits at Ziyaret Tepe were used for grain storage, the fact that they cut into a Middle Assyrian building suggests a reorientation of control over agricultural resources in the EIA, perhaps away from restricted access and toward communal access to surplus grain<sup>53</sup>. Thus, the cultural break in this region between periods of large, and sometimes public or elite Assyrian architecture attests to a change in the sociopolitical organization of the region between the Middle and Late Assyrian periods, perhaps reflecting tribal communities.

In the context of this change in the sociopolitical orientation of the Upper Tigris valley, the appearance of Groovy Pottery there may represent a deliberate realignment of the cultural boundary of the inhabitants of the region that corresponds to a changing social boundary<sup>54</sup>. In other words, the shift from Middle Assyrian pottery to Groovy Pottery is not merely a reflection of the withdrawal of Assyria, but it also suggests an explicit rejection of Assyrian forms of cultural and political domination. In the LBA, city and village sites in the Upper Tigris within the Assyrian sphere of control were aligned culturally with the entire region of the Middle Assyrian kingdom, south of the Tigris. By the EIA, the material culture of those same sites became realigned with the northern and western areas – regions that had been beyond the reach of the Middle Assyrian kings in the LBA (fig. 4)<sup>55</sup>. The possibility that Groovy Pottery may begin to appear in Middle Assyrian levels indicates that the rejection of Assyrian culture would have coincided with and corresponded to Aramean political and military hostilities against Assyria. Aramean adoption of the Anatolian Groovy Pottery tradition was thus the crystallization of a changing social boundary in which Bît Zamani aligned itself with the other polities of Nairi against Assyria.

The Aramean inhabitants of Bît Zamani did not develop anything similar to the unique hybrid material culture complex that later marks Aramean presence elsewhere in northern Mesopotamia. Rather, they adopted the ceramic tradition of their neighbors whose mechanisms of social organization were in line with that of the tribal community of Bît Zamani. And even in the context of that type of tribal polity, the changing pattern of social alignment at the transition from the Bronze to the Iron Age may have been orchestrated by a central authority, perhaps a forerunner of Amme-ba'li, the *nasiku* with whom Tukultî-Ninurta II first entered into a treaty. Thus, although the texts are silent concerning the formation of the Aramean state of Bît Zamani after 1050, changes in ceramic style, architectural tradition, and possibly economic organization, show that following the withdrawal of the Middle Assyrian kingdom, the inhabitants of the Upper Tigris valley were organized tribally, and called upon this type of social organization to align themselves with their northern neighbors, and to reject Assyrian forms of authority. Those developments are very much in line with what the written sources describe concerning the expansion of Aramean authority in Bît Zamani in the 10<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

53. Similar grain storage pits were found in EIA contexts at Salat Tepe. An additional two pits there had hearths on their floors, and the excavators suggest that these may have been semi-subterranean dwellings of nomadic families (ÖKSE & GÖRMÜŞ 2006, p. 190, fig. 5), which would support the association of these features at Ziyaret Tepe with a tribal social system.

54. On cultural and social boundaries in tribal contexts, see PARKINSON 2006.

55. ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005, Fig. 2, 3.

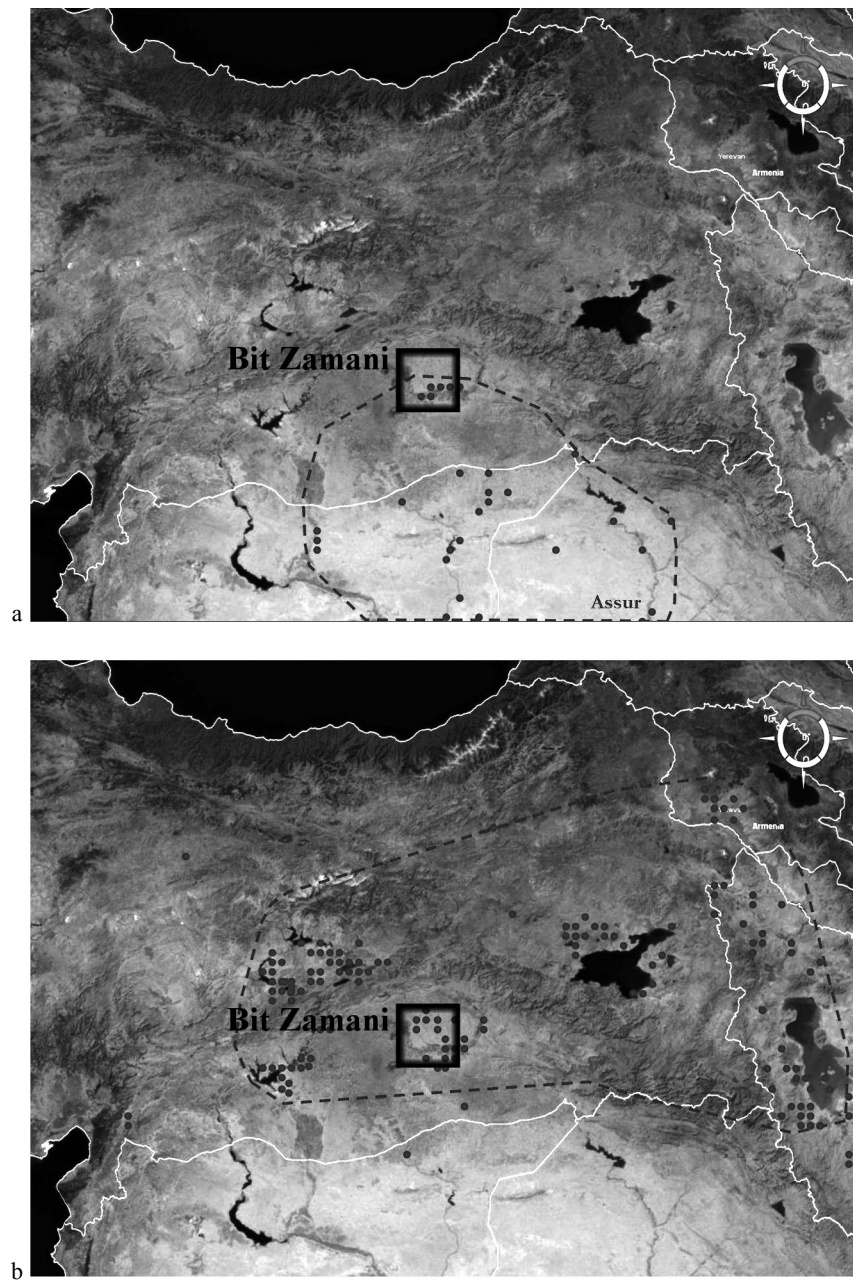


Figure 4: Cultural boundaries delineating (a) zone of Middle Assyrian Pottery, and (b) zone of Groovy Pottery, showing location of Bit Zamani in each. Adapted from ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005, Figs. 2, 3.

