Assyrian imperial frontiers during the first millennium BC: the case of the Iraqi Middle Euphrates

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Abstract

Many recent studies have dealt with the nature of the Assyrian imperial frontiers, demonstrating how diversified they have been through time and space, with cases such as Khabur and Upper Tigris regions. On the other hand, the Assyrian periphery along the Iraqi middle Euphrates – ancient region of Suḫu – is archaeologically less known. The archaeological investigations before the construction of the Haditha Dam revealed many sites datable to the Iron Age, some of which seemed to have a marked military nature. The region was therefore seen as a seat for fortresses of the Assyrian Empire. The present paper, through a preliminary analysis of the material culture of the sites, the settlement pattern using GIS and satellite images, aims to suggest a more multi-faced nature of the settlement in the region.

Keywords

Settlement patterns, Haditha dam, CORONA satellite images, Suḫu, Assyria

1. Introduction

The Assyrian frontiers, their nature and their settlement patterns, have been studied together within the broader topic of the Iron Age settlement patterns.[1] Relevant information about the ways Assyrians dealt with their frontiers come from regions like the Habur[2] and the Upper Tigris:[3] thanks to the archaeological surveys, excavations and detailed pottery analysis, it is known that a precise plan of landscape reorganization was set in place by the Assyrians, mainly during the eighth and seventh Century BC. Some typical elements of this reorganization can be traced in both the Habur and the Upper Tigris region and more generally in many areas of Northern Mesopotamia. These features can be identified with the significant alterations to previous settlement patterns, the occupation of previously unsettled areas, the creation of a regional provincial centre, and the enhancement of a communication network with the Assyrian core regions.[4] Most of these interpretations were also possible thanks to a series of multidisciplinary approaches applied to the archaeological landscape of Northern Mesopotamian regions.

On the other hand, the Iraqi Middle Euphrates (the ancient region of Suḫu), on the South-Western periphery of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, still lacks a landscape approach to the settlement patterns, and the local archaeological data are generally less known. In fact, even if many archaeological projects of salvage excavations were carried out during the construction of the Haditha Dam, most sites were later analysed based on the presence and type of their fortification walls and were interpreted as assyrian fortresses within a widely militarized region.[5] The aim of this paper is to provide an alternative view on the settlement in the region by including in the analysis different data rather than only the morphological one, such as sites location in the landscape, historical sources, and archaeological features from the inside of the fortification walls. Even if the Iraqi Middle Euphrates is characterized by a general patchiness of data, this preliminary analysis will show how the integration of different kind of data can help to provide a more varied view on the settlement in the valley.

2. Natural and archaeological landscape

The region of interest here extends along the Iraqi Euphrates, from the Syrian border to the Haditha dam, in the modern governorate of Anbar. The region, identified with the ancient land of Suḫu, is well known from ancient textual sources[6] but, unlike the neighboring Syrian regions, it received less attention regarding the study of the occupation and the relation of the sites with the surrounding riverine landscape. Regarding the river, in this area, the Euphrates flows more rapidly than in the Syrian region upstream, in a narrow alluvial valley surrounded by the Jazirah steppe to the East and the Western Desert to the West. The nature of the valley, which is quite fertile despite its limited extension (1 or 2 km), easy to irrigate and almost lacking any salinity problems, could have influenced the choice for settlements location in antiquity.[7] Complementary to this landscape are the wadis, in particular, the Wadi Hauran, Amji, and Husaynat, which offer favorable condition for irrigation and agriculture, laying moreover on some routes that linked Mesopotamia and Levant[8] (fig. 1). In those wadis are located some iron ore mines, a mineral

[1] On the Iron Age archaeological landscape and settlement patterns of Northern Mesopotamia and Jazira: Wilkinson 1995; Morandi 2000; Wilkinson et Al. 2005.

[2] Morandi 1996.

[3] Parker 2001.

[4] For a detailed overview: Parker 2003; Wilkinson et Al. 2005, pp. 25-45.

[5] Al-Shukri 1988; Tenu 2008.

[6] For example, being the target of some Assyrian campaigns, the region of Suhu is mentioned in the records of Tiglath-Pileser I, Adad-Nirari II, Tukulti-Ninurta II, Ashurnasirpal II (Grayson 1991), plus some Assyrian letters of the VIII century BC (Parpola 1987) and in a Babylonian Chronicle referring to the campaigns of Nabopolassar (Glassner 2004).

[7] Al-Shukri 1988; Geyer 1992;

[8] Joannes 1997 analysed trade routes between Palmyra and the Middle Euphrates. Moreover, a mention of a caravan can be found also in one textual source of Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur, governor of Suhu (Cavigneaux, Ismail 1990; Frame 1995).

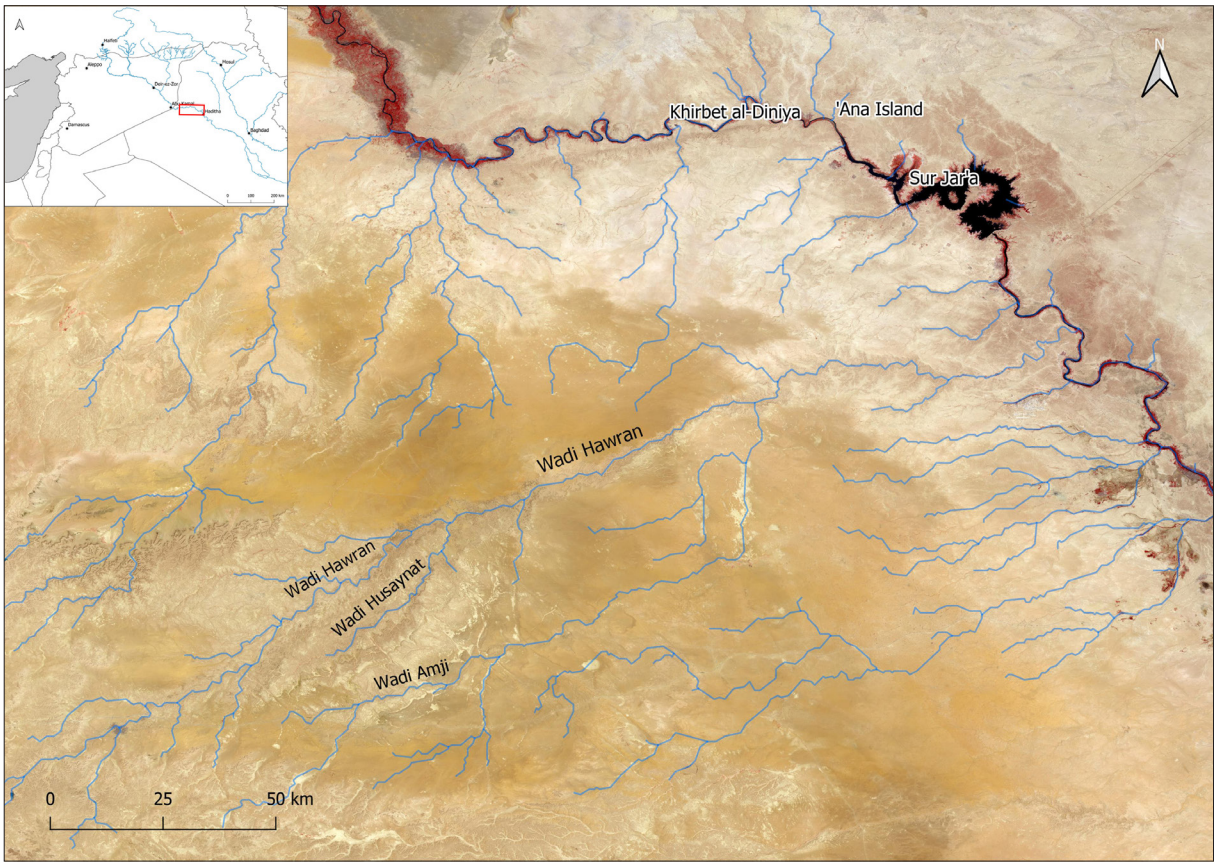

Figure 1
The Haditha Dam Region, some Iron Age Archaeological Sites and Wadis are highlighted. Landsat 8 mosaic, band combination 5-4-3, personal elaboration

found in some sites of the region,[9] while other resources characteristics of the region are bitumen springs and sulfur next to the valley.[10] The latter is subjected to inundations, particularly dangerous and critical to the foundation and position of settlements; traces of water erosion were found on the sites themselves and the excavators suggested they were the sign of those inundations. Perhaps the extensive use of bitumen and stone in buildings and foundations were adopted to counteract the effect of inundations in the past.[11] Despite the presence of the river, its very nature seems to have made navigation a difficult task. The natural features of the river like meanders, rapids and shallow boulders seem to have prevented extensive navigation upstream and downstream at least from Hit to Haradum/Khirbet al-Diniya. [12] Also, in modern times, motorized vessels have a hard time navigating upstream. [13]

The Haditha dam region was investigated with archaeological surveys and rescue excavations preceding the construction of the dam and the formation of the al-Qadisiya lake between 1978 and 1986. The results were published in books, journals and in the unpublished PhD thesis by

[9] Hashimi, Skocek 1982.

[10] 12 bitumen springs are attested near Hit, Tukulti-Ninurta II itself mention a bitumen spring near which he pitched camp on his way up to Suhu. Grayson 1991, p. 174.

[11] Geyer 1992, p. 40; Al-Shukri 1988, pp. 10-30.

[12] Geyer 1992, p. 39; Simpson 1983, pp. 75-76.

[13] The topic of the navigability of the Euphrates river is still debated, as shown in Morandi 1996, p. 98 and note 52.

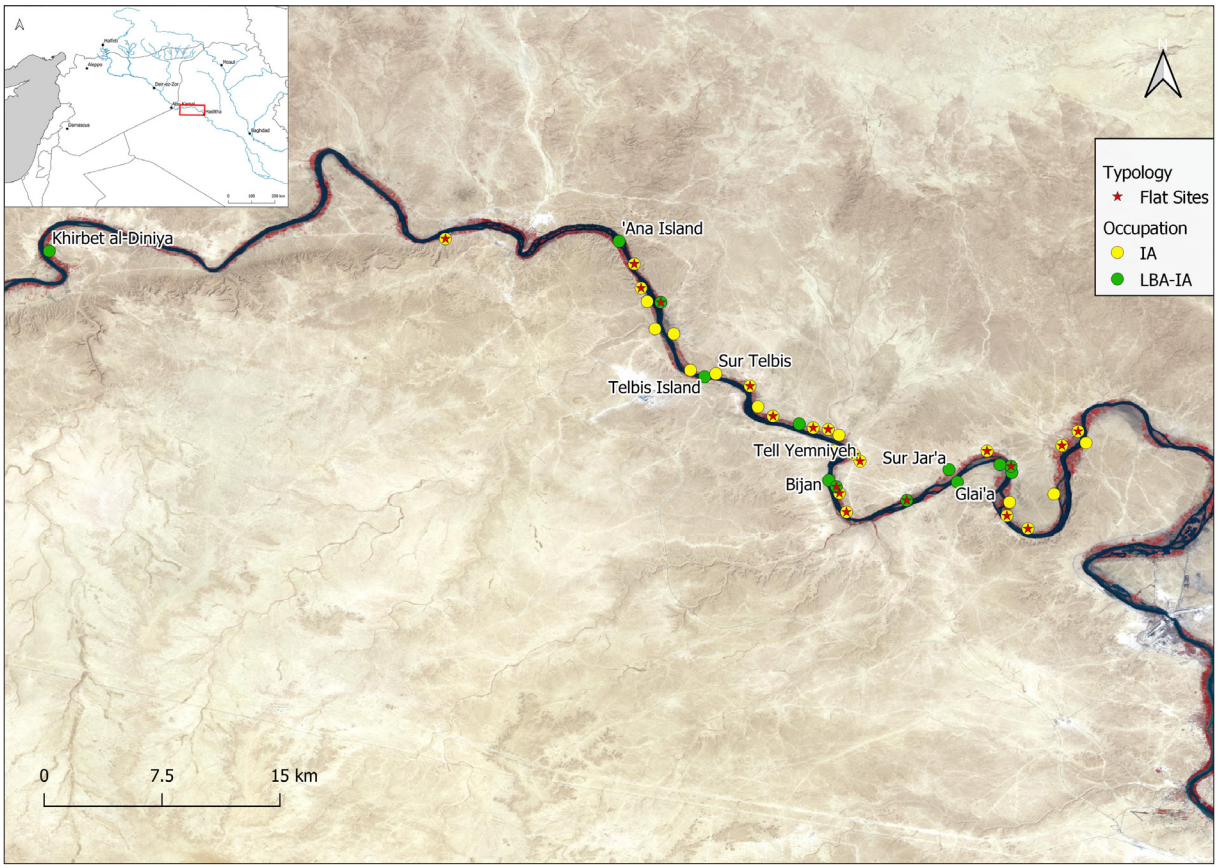

FIGURE 2
Iron Age Archaeological Sites, Landsat 5 TM (acquired 06-06-1984) band combination 4-3-2, personal elaboration

Sabah Jasim al-Shukri.[14] The work of al-Shukri is the main source of information for the area, as it collects data – published and unpublished – from foreign and Iraqi missions otherwise hardly accessible. Even if the surveys made by al-Shukri were not intensive, the total number of sites recognized was 82, covering a chronological scope spanning from the Palaeolithic to modern times and located on both river banks and on the islands.[15] Surveyors reported some difficulties as the sites were not easily recognizable in the hilly landscape, which made them appear as natural mounds when they were not. Forty sites were assigned to the Iron Age, named by al-Shukri "early first millennium BC". Among these sites, 28 were on the left bank, nine on the right one, and three on the islands. Settlements were located along or at the edges of the narrow strip of the alluvial plain, in a linear and not homogenous pattern, forming some clusters (fig. 2). According to al-Shukri, the lack of sites in some areas could be caused by the destroying effect of the inundations preventing the foundation of earlier settlements, and strongly evident from the few Islamic sites that survived in this zone.[16]

[14] AL-SHUKRI 1988. For individual sites: NORTHEDGE, ROAF 1988 (eds.) ('Ana); GAWLIKOWSKI 1985; KROGULSKA 1992; REICHE 1992; STEPNIOWSKI 1992 (Bijan); KEPINSKI-LECOMTE 1992; KEPINSKI, LECOMTE, TENU 2006; KEPINSKI, CLANCIER, TENU 2012 (Khirbet al-Diniya); HENRICKSON, COOPER 2006 (Tell Yemniyeh).

[15] The work of al-Shukri was divided in three main phases: a preliminary survey in 1975, a more intensive survey and some soundings (1978-1980), then final surveys and excavations, both Iraqis and International (1980-1985). AL-SHUKRI 1988, pp. 3-4, 77-79.

[16] AL-SHUKRI 1988, pp. 126-138.

3. Archaeological sites

Some sites have a prominent role in the area under investigation. For instance, Tell Yemniyeh, was interpreted by most scholars as a surveillance tower. In fact, Yemniyeh is the only site of the region not in the immediate proximity of the river, and it lies roughly 1 km away on a natural mound 40 m above the plain. The steepness of the hill protects the site on two sides, while on the others a fortification wall was built. A second wall encloses an open space surrounded by several rooms and casemates. The site delivered only potsherds, without evidence of pottery production *in situ*. Analyses made by the Canadian mission evidenced the presence of a kitchen, dwellings, and storages. The Canadian archaeologists dated the site at the Iron Age II, between tenth and ninth century BC and as said, they interpreted it as a tower, depending on a near settlement for sustaining the garrison. [17] Roughly 5 km away from this site there were the two paired sites of Glai'a and Sur Jar'a, clearly visible from the satellite images (fig. 3). The former stands on the right bank of the Euphrates, which probably eroded the wall facing the river. The site, characterized by two circuits of walls, with an entrance on the south-west side, incorporates a small hill on the southeast side. On this hill, there was a mudbrick building with buttresses and recesses, with rooms some of which with benches along the walls, and a probable second story. [18] Many units were excavated inside the inner wall of the site, arranged around an open area in which a kiln with two rooms was found. In the same open-area number of graves were found, probably witnessing a second phase of occupation unfortunately not dated. Some workshops were located on the south corner and on the south-west side – that of the site's entrance – where some units show traces of reconstruction attributed to the second half of the first millennium BC. Materials from the site include a number of relief fragments of Assyrian style uncovered in the debris of the foundation of this second phase and one cylinder seal from an unspecified grave.[19] The site was dated to the late Bronze age and Iron age and was identified also with one of the settlements founded by the independent governors of the eighth century BC, namely Kar-Apladad or Kar-Shamash-resh-usur, built respectively by Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur and his father Shamash-resh-Usur. [20]

In front of Glai'a on the other side of the river, lies the site of Sur Jar'a, the largest of the area in this period but with many limits regarding documentation. The site extends over 33 hectares with three circuits of walls surrounding it on all sides. It is not clear whether the walls were used at the same time, and it was noted that at least the third one belongs to a second phase (still in the early first millennium BC) of probable extension of a smaller settlement of 9 hectares, with two walls and a moat. The outer wall shows two phases of construction, the earlier one with buttresses and a second one with units (probably casemates) placed against his inner side, a fort or a tower was noted on the north angle. The inner wall was instead buttressed and had units leaning on it in the north-east and northwest side. Investigation on the site reveals a system of cisterns and canals, and a system of water supply in the middle of an open area, unfortunately not indicated on the published plan of the site. Inside the same open area, on the west of these cisterns, some pottery and bricks kilns were found. Another production area was identified by the British expedition, and in the same building, a cache of tablets belonging to Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur was also found. [21] A tablet

[17] Al-Shukri 1988, pp. 443-444. Henrickson, Cooper 2006, pl. 1-2.

[18] Al-Shukri 1988, pp. 166-180, fig. 19; Tenu 2008, pp. 155-157, fig. 3-6. While Iron Age materials are surely present on the site, the urban layout and the so-called citadel could reflect a late bronze age period. Tenu 2009, p. 185-186. The interpretation of the so-called citadel is still debated, al-Shukri (1988, p. 179) proposed a comparison with the Sin-Shamash temple in Assur, but as already stated by Tenu (2009, p. 186), this interpretation is unsure due to the higher dating of the Sin-Shamash temple and the paucity of information on the building of Glai'a.

[19] Al-Houri 1986.

[20] A tablet attributed to Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur was found on the site according to Cavigneaux, Ismail (1990, pp. 396-399) but al-Shukri didn't make any reference to it in his reports. Apart from ceramic material, the urban layout is similar to that of the Bronze Age Haradum, Kepinski, Clancier, Tenu 2012. Haradum itself was not included in these descriptions as it has already a lot of well-known publications.

[21] Unfortunately, the report of the British expedition was never published, and it is unavailable to me.

FIGURE 3
The paired sites of Glai'a and Sur Jar'a as seen from a CORONA KH-4B satellite image (acquired 11-12-1967, mission 1102), downloaded from the CORONA Atlas of the Middle East (http://corona.cast.uark.edu/atlas)

belonging to Shamash-resh-usur was found in the sectioning of the middle wall.[22] Thanks to the textual data the site was identified with Gabbari-ibni/bani, a new foundation of Shamash-resh-usur with later works by Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur.[23]

A characteristic typology of settlement is that on the islands, for which the best documented are 'Ana (the Anat of the classical sources) and Bijan.[24] On the former, it seems that the Iron Age occupation was concentrated in the middle and southern part of the island, although some fortifications along the river were also noted in the north.[25] On the southern part, the British soundings uncovered phases of occupation belonging to the Iron Age, dated in particular at the Iron Age II, between ninth and eighth century BC. The British mission investigated the walls on the southern side of the island: their function is not clear, but they have been interpreted as a fortification, banks or quays[26]. The Iraqi excavations on the other hand produced more data, however poorly published. In the middle of the island was unearthed a monumental building with rooms arranged around two courts: this building opened on a road to the east, while there was another

[22] AL-SHUKRI 1988, pp. 214-216, 376-377, fig. 39 (note that the plan published by al-Shukri seems to include only the middle and inner wall); TENU 2008, pp. 157-158; KILLICK, ROAF 1983, p. 221; CAVIGNEAUX, ISMAIL 1990; FRAME 1995.

[23] FRAME 1995, pp. 299-300; CAVIGNEAUX, ISMAIL 1990, pp. 321-322.

[24] For a brief history of 'Ana in classical periods: NORTHEDGE, ROAF 1988 (eds.), pp. 6-9.

[25] IBRAHIM 1986, p. 80.

[26] NORTHEDGE, ROAF 1988 (eds.), pp. 25-52, fig. 5, 9.

building interpreted as subsidiary to the south, both were levelled by the construction of a second building not preserved. These buildings were dated to the Neo-Assyrian period. A more precise dating for the buildings comes from fragments of reliefs, one with an inscription of Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur (eighth cent. BC), but unfortunately no more clear data on the context of the findings was given. Out of context there were also other "Assyrian style" reliefs.[27]

Twenty-two km. south of 'Ana lies the island of Bijan, a smaller but more extensively investigated site. The northern part of the island is surrounded by stone walls directly above the river, and the Polish mission recognised two phases of construction unfortunately damaged by the following Roman and Parthian reuses: a rectangular fortress belongs to the first phase, together with a bastion at the north, and a curved wall first interpreted as delimitating a dock.[28] In the second phase, the fortress was enlarged to the south and to the west with a thinner wall, while a quay/dock and an entrance close to it was identified on the south-eastern side of the wall.[29] No proper building of the first millennium BC was identified, due to the intensive reuse of the fortress, with the only exception of one pavement in the south-east corner of the fortress associated with the wall of the second phase. The entrance mentioned above and the possible quay/dock oriented towards the left bank of the river belong to the same phase. Opposed to the island there are two limestone caves with traces of extraction in antiquity; the excavator hypothesizes that they were the sources of the building material for the fortification on the island.[30]

The other walled sites have the same features of the sites already discussed, but they were characterised by only one perimeter wall and more elusive archaeological data, except Haradum/Khirbet al-Diniya, as already mentioned. On the other hand, unwalled and smaller sites were only briefly investigated, so that only surface material and graves in double or single jar were recorded. [31]

4. Sites functions and interpretation

Moving to a regional perspective, the early first millennium BC marks an increase in the number of settlements, from 17 to 40, partially following the disposition of the sites of the late II millennium BC (fig. 4-5). At the moment, is not possible to establish the dimensions of sites in different periods with accuracy, nor to determine the extent of occupation of a site for a single period. This problem is mainly caused by the incomplete state of publication of some sites, and the difficulties during the surveys already described. Among the Iron Age sites, 11 show fortification walls and were tentatively. Apart from these fortified settlements, the other sites measured approximately 1 hectare or less. By contrast, fortified sites had variable dimensions ranging from 2 to 10 hectares, with three major sites exceeding the size of 10 hectares such as: Sur Telbis, 'Ana and Sur Jar'a (respectively of 13, 17 and 33 hectares). Only one fortified site is very small, Tell Yemniyeh, which extends for less than one hectare.

Sites along the Iraqi middle Euphrates were analyzed mostly from a wall-centered morphological and typological point of view.[32] Based solely on these

[27] For findings and report on the Iraqi excavations Al-Shukri 1988, pp. 252-260; Tenu 2008, pp. 152-154. An Assyrian-style relief is also mentioned in Bell 1910, p. 536 (a photograph is present on the Gertrude Bell Archive website, but it is unknown whether it is the same or not (Photo J_231 available at: http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/).

[28] The curved wall presents a "narrowing" (from 7 m to 5.5 m), first interpreted as the adjoining point between the walls of the two phases, with the older wall functioning as a breakwater, Gawlikowski 1985. However, after clearing the adjoining point, the excavators confirmed instead the continuity of the embankment wall of the Phase II, running from South to the NW angle of the Phase I fortress. The interpretation given by the excavators for this narrowing is that the thinner wall – due to its position – would not have been too exposed to the river current as the thicker wall was, allowing for more stability, less construction materials and amount of labour. Stepniowski 1992, pp. 425-426, fig. 1.

[29] Stepniowski 1992, pp. 425-427, fig. 2-5. The "quay" complex consists of a small courtyard, an entrance or gatehouse and a platform (the supposed quay), the level of which is equal to the entrance but drops gradually to the south by about 2 m, meaning that it can be accessed by boats accordingly to the varying water level (observed variation being up to 2 m).

[30] Stepniowski 1992, pp. 431-432.

[31] Al-Shukri 1988, pp. 205-210, 217-218.

[32] Al-Shukri identified four typologies of settlements: Quadrangular Fortresses, Fortresses on the Islands, "Other types of Fortresses" and Temporary Encampments, Al-Shukri 1988, pp. 126-146. Tenu, criticizing the typology of Al-Shukri,

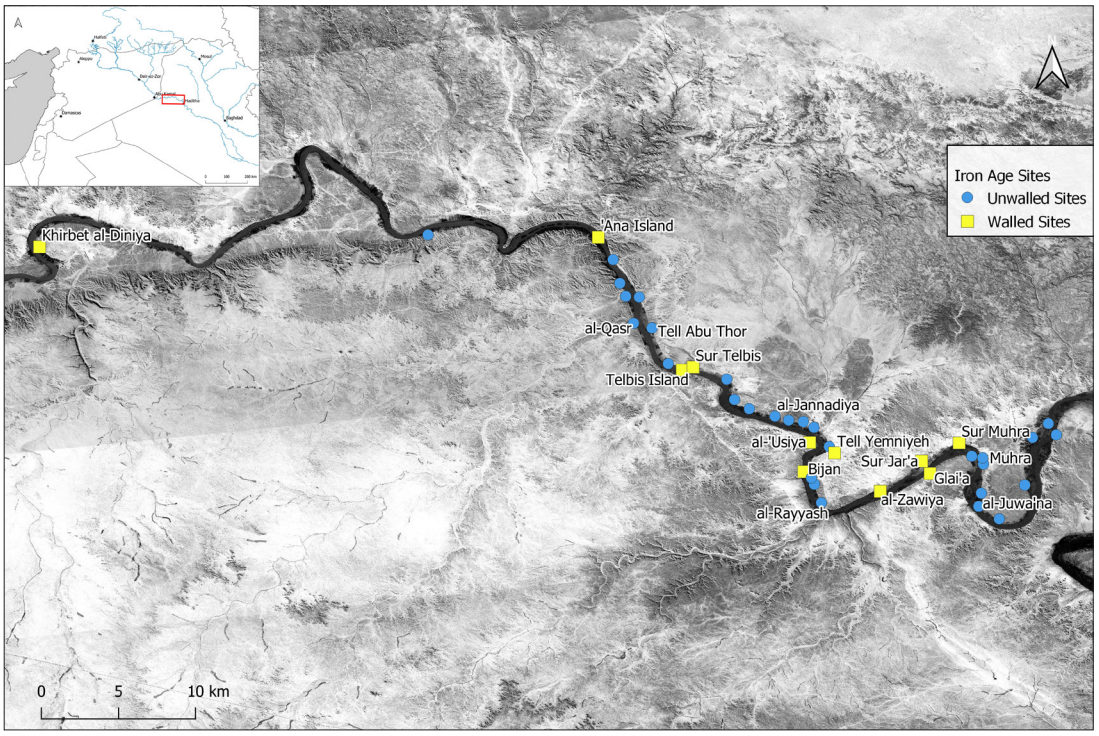

FIGURE 4
Iron Age Settlement Pattern with walled and unwalled sites, CORONA KH-4B satellite images mosaic (acquired December 1967, mission 1102-1025)

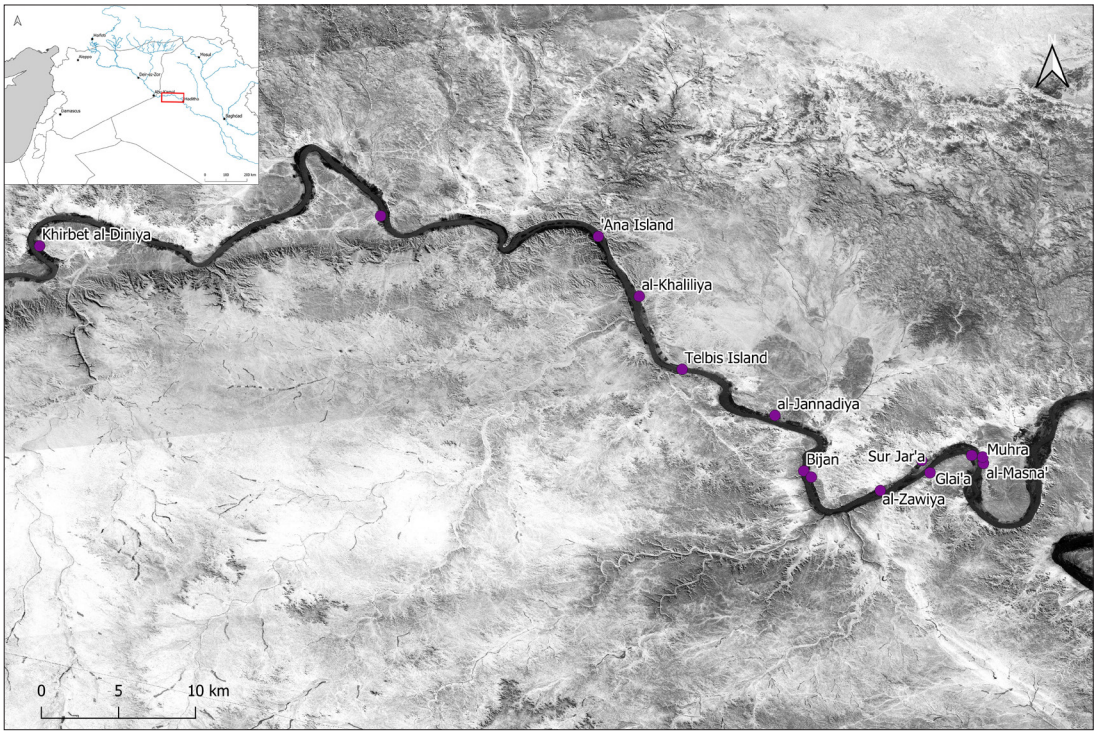

FIGURE 5
Late Bronze Age Settlement Pattern, CORONA KH-4B satellite images mosaic (acquired December 1967, mission 1102-1025)

two aspects, it is natural to give much importance to the military function and to the fortified nature of these sites since walls are quite well preserved if compared with the other archaeological features. To better understand the nature of the occupation in the region, I believe that it is necessary to integrate not only a morphological analysis of the walls but also a study of the archaeological data preserved inside of a fortified settlement. In addition, this kind of analysis should also consider the relation between archaeological sites and landscape, and any data available from historical sources. Recent hypothesis on the political chronology of the region can also be used together with the data above.[33] Despite the patchiness of the archaeological evidence, it is worth providing a first assessment of the settlement hierarchy occurring in the area. The main criteria in the definition of major sites should not be based on the size alone as textual sources can provide more detailed information. We know from written sources that ʿAna was an important center, the seat of the governors of Suḫu preceding the campaigns of Ashurnasirpal II and then the seat of those governors "probably" tributary of the Assyrians. Later, in the first half of the eighth century BC, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur restored an *akītu* temple and built a palace here, and it was at ʿAna that the major numbers of relief fragments from the region were recovered, some of them dated at the same governor. I believe that, together with the data from the Iraqi excavations and British soundings, these elements could be an indicator of a function other than the only military one. The same could be said about Glai'a and Sur Jar'a: for the latter, the archaeological data are more elusive, but the identification with Gabbari-ibni/bani – a settlement founded *ex novo* by the independent governors – and the recovery of buildings, tablets, and other facilities suggest that the site was covering more functions rather than one exclusively military. The importance of the site is also highlighted by the fact that it is the only one for which we have written evidence related to both the independent governors. As for Glai'a, the phases of construction and reuse in addition to the presence of buildings not directly related to the warfare could be a glimpse of a more complex nature of the site.[34] Archaeological excavations from these three sites also recovered reliefs, statues, stelae, and seals, linked to the local governors of the eighth century BC, in which both Assyrian and Babylonian influences are evident.[35] Bijan is less known from the historical sources, even if the morphology of the site and the presence of a dock or quay make this settlement unique. This evidence suggests that the site could have acted as a sort of crossing point of the river to obtain resources from the right bank.[36] Considering the occupation of the valley, the presence of the nomadic or pastoral element, well-known also from the written sources of the reign of Sargon II, should not be overlooked.[37] It cannot be excluded, as already noted by Tenu,[38] that the smaller settlements were linked in some way to those elements. Moreover, we should not forget that the region is known not only as a frontier but also as a link between South Mesopotamia, Syria and the Levant,[39] and some sites could have been trading outposts. It is also important to point out that Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur

proposed to identify: Strongholds, Fortresses and Forts, Walled Encampments Tenu 2008, pp. 167-169.

[33] According to the reconstruction in Clancier 2006, 2017; Tenu, Clancier 2012, after the conquest of Ashurnasirpal II, Suhu was divided in a "Western Suhu" with a governor tributary of the Assyrians seated in the city of ʿAna, and "Eastern Suhu", maybe tied more to the Babylonian Kingdom, with the seat of the governors located in Sur Telbis and then moved to Gabbari-ibni (Sur-Jar'a). The two best-known rulers of "Eastern Suhu", Shamash-resh-Usur and his son, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur would have achieved the unification of the region by conquering ʿAna in some obscure way, while around the half of the eighth century BC Suhu would have been later subjugated by Tiglath-Pileser III between 745 and 730 BC (Clancier 2017, pp. 93-94).

[34] Moreover, if the identification with Kar-Apladad is true (if we take as true the finding of a tablet of Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur) some more hypothesis on its function could be possible according to what we know about the Kar-X type of settlements from the Assyrian sources, Yamada 2005.

[35] Hausleiter 2017, pp. 113-115.

[36] It should also be mentioned the presence of the limestone mines on the right bank of the river, and that of iron ore sources along the wadis to the West. Moreover, the supposed inability to use the river for extensive navigation could point to the use of the wadi and wells in the desert as alternative means of movement across the region (the presence of wells on alternative routes are explicitly mentioned both in Assyrian and Suḫean sources, Grayson 1991, p. 173 (Tukulti-Ninurta II) Frame 1995, p. 300 (Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur).

[37] Parpola 1987, SAA I 82.

[38] Tenu 2008, pp. 168-169.

[39] Joannes 1997.

mentions his assault on a caravan passing or directed to Hindanu from South Arabia.[40]

5. A regional perspective

The archaeological sites are distributed on both banks of the river, but as it is evident, the majority is on the left one, both for walled and unwalled settlements (Fig. 4).[41] The archaeological data from these small unwalled sites consist mainly of surface material and single or double-jar graves, already difficult to date. The sites were interpreted by al-Shukri as temporary camps of the Assyrian army and Tenu already noted how problematic is this interpretation.[42] It is indeed difficult to think of such a widespread presence of so many encampments in the same area, so close to each other, and most of all without comparison for such a characteristic type of occupation. It cannot be excluded for them a specific function inside the settlement system, as small specialized settlements, maybe in relation with the major sites. Obviously, not all settlements would have had the same function, and it's also possible that they were not all contemporaries as al-Shukri's analysis seems to presume. Regarding some specific disposition on the landscape, it is known that two paired sites (like Glei'eh and Sur Jar'a in this case) could highlight a river crossing, as it is known from other sites in Syria, for example, Tell Ahmar-Aushariye, Tell Shioukh Fawqani and Jerablus Tahtani.[43] Sites on an island like Bijan could provide access to particular resources and trade routes that were on the right bank of the river and along the wadis. Undoubtedly strategic positions are those of Yemniyeh, that can guard the two sides of the river, and that of the site of Haradum/Khirbet al-Diniya which on the other hand effectively controlled the access to the entire region of Suḫu. In both his campaigns in Suḫu Ashurnasirpal II passed through Haradum, and the fact that he did not lay siege to the settlement is one thing that suggests that the western part of Suḫu was somehow linked to Assyria. These links are also evident from the tribute that the governor Ilu-ibni submit to the Assyrian king and to his father before him[44]. Moreover, the position of one or possibly two sites founded *ex novo* by the independent governors of the VIII century BC can support the recent hypothesis that Suḫu was politically divided at least after the campaigns of Ashurnasirpal II. Shamash resh-usur would have indeed concentrated his building activity in Kar-Shamash-resh-usur and Gabbari-ibni/bani in the eastern part of his dominion, avoiding the western part of the old capital of Suḫu, Suru/Sur Telbis, too close to the Assyrian-dominated 'Ana.[45] Diachronically, the region, even with limited data at our disposal, seems to follow a common trend of settlement pattern of the Iron Age.[46] An increase in the number of settlements is evident, and even if the morphology of the sites itself it is not always clear, it seems that most of the "new foundations" of the Iron Age are located on flat sites, representative of a short span of occupation. The number of small and flat settlements increased from 6 to 20 but settlements on tells continue to be occupied during this period, while 2 tells abandoned after the Middle Bronze age were resettled (fig. 6). Considering the amount of data at our disposal, the close disposition of sites with one another could depend on the natural features of the valley that could have affected the spatial distribution of settlements similarly to what happened in Syria, for example in the area of Carchemish or Tell Masaikh.[47]

[40] Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur 2, Frame 1995.

[41] Critical for the location of archaeological sites in GIS were CORONA satellite images, taken between 1960-1972 (and declassified in 1995), which portray the landscape before major landscape changes. In this precise case study, CORONA images show the river before the construction of the Haditha dam. On the CORONA and their use in the Near East: Casana, Cothren 2008, 2013; Ur 2003, 2013 with related bibliography.

[42] Tenu 2008, pp. 165-166.

[43] Lawrence, Ricci 2016, p. 64; Bunnens 1999, pp. 616-617.

[44] Grayson 1991, pp. 174, 200.

[45] Clancier 2006, 2012, 2017.

[46] This trend consists of the new foundation of a great number of small settlements. These come to fill the spaces between major older sites. Moreover, as in this region, many new foundations are supposed to be on flat mounds, representative of a short span of occupation. This trend is labelled by Wilkinson as "The Great Dispersal", Wilkinson 2003, pp. 128-150.

[47] Lawrence, Ricci 2016; Geyer, Monchambert 2003.

6. Conclusions

To conclude, the study of the archaeological data from the sites in the region, their positioning on the landscape and comparisons with Syrian archaeological data, allowed a preliminary reconsideration of the nature of the occupation of the valley. The fortified nature of these sites is evident, but it should not lead to the exclusion of other possible functions, feasible by comparing historical and archaeological data. I think that all these elements can provide a better understanding of the nature of the occupation of the region, especially in the period between Ashurnasirpal II and Tiglath-Pileser III. A future research endeavour may investigate if the observed settlement patterns could be the result of the Assyrian intervention, or if they are the results of local developments that the Assyrians exploited later.

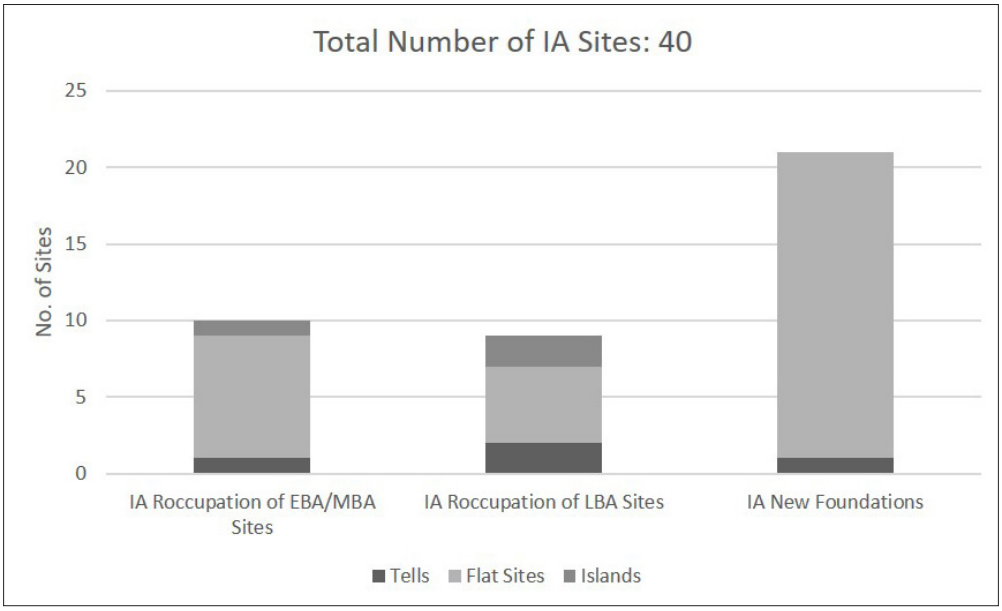

Figure 6
Reoccupations and typologies of sites during the Iron Age

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