

## THE GROWTH OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE IN THE HABUR / MIDDLE EUPHRATES AREA: A NEW PARADIGM<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Preliminary Remarks

In the general process of continual growth of the documentation and deepening of the analysis of large-scale phenomena in the Ancient Near East, the formation of the Assyrian empire constitutes an anomaly. The basic documentary sources, i.e. the major royal inscriptions (in particular the so-called “Annals”) have been known and published since the end of the last century, and their topographical ordering goes back to the first and second decades of this century. For the Habur and Middle Euphrates zone, the syntheses of those years are still in use: *Die Aramäer* by Schiffer was 1911<sup>2</sup>, Forrer’s *Provinzeinteilung* was 1920<sup>3</sup>, Horn’s *Zur Geographie Mesopotamiens*, 1922<sup>4</sup>, Musil’s *The Middle Euphrates*, 1927<sup>5</sup>. For more than fifty years, while the work of archaeology progressed in the great cities at the hub of empire, very little instead was done on the outer provinces. Yet our knowledge of the Assyrian empire (from the way it came together to its manner of functioning) needs to be pursued at its center and its outer

<sup>1</sup>) Paper read at the “International Symposium of Deir ez-Zor. History and Archaeology” (3-6 October 1983); already published in the (almost unaccessible) vol. 34 of *AAS*, but with unfortunate omission of the figures. I am very grateful to the editors of *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* for hosting this revised edition of my paper (the figures have been restored, the footnotes have been added and minor improvements introduced).

<sup>2</sup>) S. Schiffer, *Die Aramäer. Historisch-geographische Untersuchungen*, Leipzig 1911.

<sup>3</sup>) E. Forrer, *Die Provinzeinteilung des assyrischen Reiches*, Leipzig 1920.

<sup>4</sup>) S. Horn, *Zur Geographie Mesopotamiens*, *ZA* 34 (1922), pp. 123-156; already A.T. Olmstead, *The Calculated Frightfulness of Ashur nasir apal*, *JAOS* 38 (1918), pp. 209-263 contains detailed topographical notes.

<sup>5</sup>) A. Musil, *The Middle Euphrates. A Topographical Itinerary*, New York 1927 (based on trips of 1912 and 1915).

edges at one and the same time. The extensive excavation of key sites — such as Hindanu in Suhi or Dur-Aššur in Zamua — is essential to our need, but we are still waiting for it, and at the moment it is unrealizable<sup>6</sup>. If one thinks of the approach implicit in the work of a man like Layard<sup>7</sup>, who carried out large-scale excavations in Assyrian cities along with survey and trial digs in the outer centers; or if one thinks of the great reconnaissance trips of the time of von Oppenheim, Sarre and Herzfeld, Musil<sup>8</sup>, one is forced to admit that the fifty years following (ca. 1920-1970) are marked by a contraction, a closing of perspectives. After the last reconnaissance trips (adding ethnographical and antiquarian interests to the geographical picture) by European scholars in the late Ottoman empire, the following colonial age (as well as the first decades of independent states) concentrated — not by chance — on large-scale excavations<sup>9</sup>. Only in the last two decades (of “advanced capitalistic” interest on the Near East) a regional approach has been resumed, obviously substituting integrated methodologies of survey (ecology, spatial analysis, use of sophisticated technologies) for the personalized approach of the “romantic” travellers.

So, while waiting for the quantitative leap in evidence, that can only come from large excavations in the outer centers, full use of the available sources is subject to two factors: (1) we require techniques of reading the historical inscriptions that are more refined than those used in the past, techniques which will allow us to go beyond the simple categories of “conquest” and “tribute”, and permit us to free the inscriptions from their ideological framework and restore and decypher the variegated historical reality<sup>10</sup>; (2) we require, above all, broad and detailed archaeological/topographical information on the basis of which the wealth of geographical data present in the texts can be mapped with the certainty that our present knowledge of the pottery permits and which was not available to the great “romantic” travellers of the last century.

Recently some important steps forward have been made in this direction, in the frame of the new trends outlined above; and the Habur and Middle Euphrates zone is now on the forefront of our knowledge of the formation of the Assyrian empire.

<sup>6</sup>) Hindanu (whose exact location is still unknown) lies on the right bank of the Euphrates, virtually on the present Syro-Iraqi border. Dur-Aššur (be it identical with Bakr Awa, or not) lies under the lake of the Darband-i Khan dam.

<sup>7</sup>) The life and work of A. Layard is the subject of many books; see e.g. the popular biography by A.C. Brackman, *The Luck of Nineveh*, London 1980; for a good framing in the trends of his time cf. S. Lloyd, *Foundations in the Dust*, London 1947 (1980<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>8</sup>) M. von Oppenheim, *Vom Mittelmeer zum Persischen Golf*, I-II, Berlin 1899-1900; F. Sarre - E. Herzfeld, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigris-Gebiet*, I-IV, Berlin 1911-1920; cf. also G. Bell, *Amurath to Amurath*, London 1924.

<sup>9</sup>) The apparent exceptions (Mallowan, Moortgat) are in fact finalized to the choice of a tell to be dug.

<sup>10</sup>) A first attempt in this direction was published as *Studies on the Annals of Aššurnasirpal II. 1: Morphological Analysis*, VO 5 (1982), pp. 18-73.

Proposals for an overall historical interpretation can well derive from an analysis of this zone, applicable then — as required — in other regions. The Habur and Middle Euphrates area is favoured in two ways:

(1) For precisely the key-period of the 9th century there are for this area some annalistic texts (Adad-nirari II, Tukulti-Ninurta II, Ashurnasirpal II)<sup>11</sup> containing great topographical detail. These texts have been used since the beginning of this century for reconstructing a topographical picture<sup>12</sup>; and in the light of improved archaeological knowledge they have been taken up again recently by Hartmut Kühne in various excellent publications which underlie the present paper<sup>13</sup>. Further progress, however, can be based on the use of more sophisticated techniques of literary and spatial analysis — so as to derive information supplementary to the strictly topographical one (apparently the only task until now). The annals of the 9th century kings are the most suitable for a sophisticated analysis, precisely because of their historical and topographical detail.

(2) In the second place, the Habur and Middle Euphrates area is of special interest because of the extent of our archaeological knowledge. This is a result of the impetus given by the great surveys undertaken (in the last twenty years) in connection with dam projects: the Tabqa dam, the Haditha dam, now the Habur dam. It is also due to the great enterprise of the *Tübinger Atlas* which, under the direction of Wolfgang Röllig, has yielded its richest and most precise results for Upper Mesopotamia in particular<sup>14</sup>. And last, it is due to the work of excavation and surveying of the many expeditions which have made present-day Syrian Jezira, a theatre of intensive and careful research work like no other area in the Near East. It hardly needs to be underlined that all these factors are the result of the open and enlightened policy of the Direction of Antiquities and Museums of Syria — a policy that may seem “normal” from the point of view of

<sup>11</sup> Suffice it here to quote the extensive bibliography in W. Schramm, *EAK* II, and in A. K. Grayson, *ARI* II.

<sup>12</sup> Notice that Ashurnasirpal's Annals were available in cuneiform since 1861 (*I R*, pls. 17-26), and in transcription and translation in 1889 (F. E. Peiser in *KB* I, pp. 50-117) and 1902 (L. W. King in *AKA*, pp. 254-387). Tukulti-Ninurta's Annals were published much later, by V. Scheil, *Annales de Tukulti Ninip II*, Paris 1909; and Adad-nirari's Annals only in 1922 (O. Schröder in *KAH* II, 849), with first translation in 1926 (D. D. Luckenbill in *ARAB* I, §§ 355-377) and final edition in 1935 (J. Seidmann in *MAOG* 9/3, pp. 5-35).

<sup>13</sup> H. Kühne, *Zur historischen Geographie am Unteren Hābūr*, *AfO* 25 (1974-77), pp. 249-255; 26 (1978-79), pp. 181-195; *Zur Rekonstruktion der Feldzüge Adad-nīrārī II., Tukulti-Ninurta II. und Aššurnasirpal II. im Hābūr-Gebiet*, *BaM* 11 (1980), pp. 44-70. Cf. also W. Röllig, *Dur-Katlimmu*, *Or* 47 (1978), pp. 419-430. The recent summary by H. F. Russell, *The Historical Geography of the Euphrates and Habur According to the Middle- and Neo-Assyrian Sources*, *Iraq* 47 (1985), pp. 57-74 contains few original contributions.

<sup>14</sup> See esp. K. Kessler, *Untersuchungen zur historischen Topographie Nordmesopotamiens*, Wiesbaden 1980.

scientific enquiry but which is in fact unique when compared to that of other countries in the same area. It is enough to compare the wealth and detail of information on the Syrian Jezira, with the void of information on other zones (like the Kašari or the Zamua regions), to realize to what extent the working conditions influence the development of our historical knowledge.

## 2. *The Old Paradigm*

The old paradigm for the making of the Assyrian empire is a paradigm based on the concept of territorial empire, i.e. on the control (or lack of it) by Assyria of outlying lands that are conquered, in time lost and reconquered, one after another, in progression from the nearer to the most distant in relation to the central country. Access to distant regions is subordinate to control of intermediary zones; a sharp distinction is made between zones under Assyrian control and zones that are hostile; there is a correspondence between the political/military situation and the statements contained in royal inscriptions. A region is considered to have been conquered by the king who claims to have made a victorious expedition; then it is considered lost under his successors whose inscriptions are lacking; then it is reconquered from scratch by a succeeding king who claims to have made a further victorious expedition.

Territory under Assyrian control undergoes in this way a series of expansions and shrinkages in correspondence with the claims contained in the royal inscriptions. In particular we find:

(1) A phase of expansion from Aššur-uballiṭ I to Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca. 1350-1200), that is, the "Middle Assyrian Empire" which gets as far as facing the Hittites along the line of the Euphrates.

(2) An obscure phase (ca. 1200-1100) during which the empire breaks down and shrinks down to the bare Assyrian nucleus.

(3) An expansionist phase under Tiglat-pileser I (1114-1076), when it spreads as far as the Mediterranean.

(4) A second obscure phase (ca. 1075-910) in which Assyria shrinks to the original nucleus and the Aramaean invaders sweep through upper Mesopotamia.

(5) A phase of expansion under Adad-nirari II, Tukulti-Ninurta II and Ashurnasirpal II (ca. 910-860), a phase that must be considered as definitive — as far as control of Upper Mesopotamia goes (even though the empire continues to undergo later phases of shrinkage and restoration).

This sequence is shaped on the model of the later empire, which had a clear territorial character and which will take on, in the second half of the 8th century, an organization by provinces. In this later period, the process of subjection goes through the phases of pillage, occasional payment of tribute, regular tribute, and relegation to province. In this process every zone or native state is territorially homogeneous, as is

Assyria: there is no Assyrian presence in enemy zones (nor enemy presence in the Assyrian provinces!), there is no Assyrian control in non-tributary zones. The metaphor that illustrates this paradigm is that of the “oil stain” which expands systematically and uniformly.

### 3. *Critical Sample*

The Annals of Ashurnasirpal II offer the possibility of checking this scheme at its height. In the course of a seminar held at the University of Rome in 1982-83, I set about making this check with results that look promising<sup>15</sup>. The analysis needs to be broadened and deepened but already some points can be made. I shall summarize here only what is relevant to the Habur/Middle Euphrates zone, though the situation seems altogether analogous with the other zones where Ashurnasirpal was active: Kaširi and Zamua. The campaigns in question are the following:

I/2 (I 69-99): while Ashurnasirpal is in Katmuhi he has to dash to Halupe to put down a revolt (fig. 1);

VI (III 1-26): an expedition along the Habur and the left bank of the Euphrates, culminating in the battle of Suru against Suhi and Babylonian contingents (fig. 2);

VII (III 26-50): an expedition along the right bank of the Euphrates, from Haridu to the border of Bit Adini (fig. 3);

VIII (III 50-56): a “task” expedition against Bit-Adini (fig. 3);

IX (III 56-92): a “reconnaissance” expedition (on the whole peaceful) through Bit-Adini, Karkemiš and Patina and on to the Mediterranean coast (fig. 4).

In the figures, the zones are shown that supply tribute, compared to those that do not do so because they are considered to be already Assyrian, and compared to those which refuse to pay it counting on natural defences (Euphrates) or political/military aid (from Babylon or Bit-Adini). This is not the place for a detailed analysis. Here are, however, the more interesting indications, set out in an (unavoidably) unargued way:

(1) Already before the campaigns some places are “Assyrian”, have no local king, and do not pay tribute. These places alternate with places that have local kings and pay tribute. There is no territorial continuity of the Assyrian zones, in respect to the tribute-paying or enemy zones. Instead there is a structure of “islands” or outposts. In particular the zone at the confluence of Jaghjagh and Habur (Tabite, Magarisu) is Assyrian; then the middle reaches of the Habur (Ša-Dikanni, Qatni) are tributary; then Dur-Katlimmu is Assyrian; then the lower Habur (Bit Halupe) is tributary/hostile. This situation is anterior to the intervention of Ashurnasirpal, but, as we shall see, no more is

<sup>15</sup> The seminar was resumed in 1987-88, and its results are now being prepared for publication as *Studies on the Annals of Aššurnasirpal II. 2: Topographical Analysis*.

the fruit of the campaigns of his immediate predecessors (Adad-nirari and Tukulti-Ninurta), but possibly much earlier.

(2) Ashurnasirpal establishes new Assyrian centers in strategic points, isolated in the middle of tributary or hostile zones, even totally outside the area controlled by Assyria: Kar-Ashurnasirpal and Nebarti-Aššur on the Euphrates below Bit-Adini, in the 8th campaign; Aribua in the Orontes valley in the 9th campaign. The same thing happens in other zones (Kaširi, Zamua) not analysed here. Not only is there no territorial continuity between the new colonies and Assyrian territory, but a rashness that would be true folly from a territorial point of view.

(3) The progress of the campaigns is coherent and extremely rapid: launching out from chance incidents and basing every succeeding intervention on the outcome of the preceding one, in four years Ashurnasirpal reaches the Mediterranean (setting up the basis for the policy of Shalmaneser III).

(4) The campaigns are neither progresses for collecting customary tribute, nor *ex novo* conquests of enemy territory. They are moments of reinforcement and extension of a pre-existent but tenuous presence.

(5) The status of tribute-paying zones is ambiguous, between independence and integration in the Assyrian organization. Their political behaviour oscillates and depends on complex internal and external factors.

These (and other) considerations can be brought together for synthesis in the following way: both before and after the campaigns of Ashurnasirpal II, the area of Upper Mesopotamia and Middle Euphrates is, as a whole, neither Assyrian nor tributary nor enemy. It is a patchwork of situations differing even between adjacent centers and having no spatial continuity. Assyrian control is extended and becomes consolidated differently than the "oil-stain" metaphor suggests; by a thickening of pre-existing networks or by setting up other networks even at great distance. In this phase the Assyrian empire exists to the extent that the Assyrians are capable of shifting between one Assyrian center and another, and of transporting material goods from non-Assyrian centers. The empire is not a spread of land but a network of communications over which material goods are carried.

#### 4. *Extension of the Critical Sample*

If we compare the campaigns of Ashurnasirpal II with those of his predecessors Adad-nirari II and Tukulti-Ninurta II in the same area, our observations are confirmed.

Adad-nirari II, in the 18th year of his reign (895), goes down the length of the Habur from Guzana to its confluence and on down the Euphrates to Hindanu (fig. 5).

Tukulti-Ninurta II, in the 6th year of his reign (885), goes up the Euphrates from Babylonian territory (Rapiqu) to where the Habur comes in, then up that to the confluence with the Jaghjagh, and then up that as far as Nasibina (fig. 6).

One should note in particular: (1) there is the same alternation of places paying tribute and those not, and the regions are the same (the Tabite/Magarisu zone, and the Dur-Katlimmu zone, of which Adad-nirari specifies "I counted it as mine", i.e. as properly Assyrian). (2) There is no difference in procedure or extent between the campaigns of the three Assyrian kings: the expedition of the 18th year of Adad-nirari is practically identical with that of the 6th year of Ashurnasirpal.

There is, however, a higher level of conflict under Ashurnasirpal: the native kings refuse to pay tribute, the Assyrians make military interventions. Before these "rebellions", relations seem stable, a matter of routine. The campaigns therefore are not the moment of conquest, they are normally a moment of the exercise of empire: they consolidate the Assyrian presence rather than bringing it into being. By themselves they explain nothing, and we should remember that the fixed tribute was normally entrusted to other channels that do not appear in the celebrative inscriptions. There is a normal procedure, an annual one, which does not require the presence of the king and the army, and of which no mention is made in the "historical" texts. And once in a while there is a need for the actual presence of the king and the army to steady the situation, to discourage the desire of evading tribute, to put down open rebellion, and — as may be — to establish new strongholds. The new facts connected to some (not all) campaigns are the repression of revolts and the foundation of new Assyrian centers. Both these facts represent not an innovation in the system but its consolidation: not an extension of territory but a thickening of the network.

### 5. *Collateral Considerations*

Certain collateral considerations cannot be developed analytically here, but only outlined:

(a) the form of the "itinerary" with its daily listing of stop-overs is not by chance typical of the annalistic accounts of the 9th century in relation to the Habur/Euphrates zone<sup>16</sup>. The indications are much less precise for more distant zones, less well known to the Assyrians. The form of the itinerary then is the expression of the procedures of a regular contact, of established links between known centers; and for the Habur area it goes back to the 13th century<sup>17</sup>. The royal expedition, once in a while, goes over the

<sup>16</sup> Cf. also the "Zamua Itinerary" (F.E. Peiser, *Ein assyrisches Itinerar*, MVAG 6/3 [1901], pp. 40-46), which seems to be rather the result than the premise for Ashurnasirpal's conquest. As to the "Kašari road", I suspect that its importance may have been over-estimated by Kessler, *Untersuchungen*, cit., pp. 27-30 and *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> See the Middle Assyrian itinerary published by W. Röllig, *Ein Itinerar aus Dur-Katlimmu*, DaM 1 (1983), pp. 279-284.

routes that were continually travelled by contingents of the Assyrian army. In the 9th century, the principal purpose of these visits seems to have been the gathering of tribute. Whether, further back in time, there was an Old-Assyrian network of a more properly commercial nature is an open question<sup>18</sup>. Open, too, is the resulting question of a possible origin of the tribute from trade relations — the two relationships being perhaps less drastically differentiated than our terminology implies.

(b) The network of Assyrian centers is, in part, based on old sites which undergo a process of transformation (centered on the establishment of a “palace”), and to which the texts allude in specific phraseology<sup>19</sup>; in part on newly founded sites with emblematic names, mostly of the Kar-X (“port of X”) or Dur-Y (“fortress of Y”) types.

(c) The continued use of sites from the middle to the neo-Assyrian period is probably very marked. What we know from a well-dug site like Dur-Katlimmu<sup>20</sup> we may project as being valid for sites only known from surface survey or occasional finds. The degree of continuity is important for judging if and when the system failed during the phases of “crisis” or when evidence is scarce; and to what extent, instead, the Assyrian “islands” managed to endure even in precarious circumstances. One must keep in mind the fact that 13th century Assyrian sites seem to be thoroughly Assyrian(ized). For example, the middle-Assyrian texts from Tell ‘Amuda concern a population wholly Assyrian, without a native presence<sup>21</sup>. Again, the royal inscriptions of the succeeding centuries allude to Assyrians living beyond the borders of the homeland, to their difficulties in surviving, until there be some intervention of the king to bring restoration and new life<sup>22</sup>. One must keep in mind also that the network of Neo-Assyrian sites was, apart from being a network of communication and transport, a system of agricultural colonization and settlement. The royal inscriptions are clear on this point<sup>23</sup>.

(d) The status of local leaders certainly differs from native to Assyrian sites; but it is also on the whole ambiguous. The bilingual inscription from Tell Fekheriye shows that in the 9th century one and the same person — a local dynast — calls himself *mlk* “king”

<sup>18</sup>) This position was implicit in the work of J. Lewy, *Old Assyrian Caravan Roads in the Valleys of the Habur and the Euphrates and in Northern Syria*, Or 21 (1952), pp. 265-292, 393-425.

<sup>19</sup>) Cf. the recurrent idiom *ana ramānia ašbat*, and more detailed cases such as ARI II, §§ 423 (Apqu), 425 (Saraku), 426 (Huzirina), 550 (Tušha), etc.

<sup>20</sup>) Cf. the preliminary reports by H. Kühne in DaM 1 (1983), pp. 149-163; AfO 31 (1984), pp. 166-178 and the booklet *Umwelt und Technik vor 3500 Jahren*, Berlin 1983. On the problem of continuity cf. the hint (AfO 31, p. 170) to “das aus den Quellen anzunehmende (Zerbrochener Obelisk) und bisher archäologisch nicht nachweisbare aramäische Zwischenspiel” (!).

<sup>21</sup>) P. Machinist, *Provincial Governance in Middle Assyria and Some New Texts from Yale*, Assur 3/2 (1982), pp. 1-36.

<sup>22</sup>) Cf. ARI II, §§ 550, also 641.

<sup>23</sup>) See esp. ARI II, §§ 435 and 478.



in the local tongue, but *šaknu* "governor" in the Assyrian text<sup>24</sup>. This ambiguity is meaningful and was probably very widespread. Already by the 13th century the *sukkallu rabû* was also *šar Hanigalbat*<sup>25</sup>. But more important than the assumption of local dynastic titles by Assyrian officials seems the opposite phenomenon, which follows the actual evolution of political relationships. The case of Ša-Dikanni is interesting: at the time of Aššur-rabi II and Aššur-reša-iši II, Bel-ereš seems a local dynast<sup>26</sup>; he is followed by a line of tribute-payers at the time of Adad-nirari II, Tukulti-Ninurta II, and Ashurnasirpal II; the last of these, Samanuha-šar-ilani, is the grandfather of the fully Assyrianized "governor" Mušeziḫ-Ninurta<sup>27</sup>. Consider also the case of Suhi and the position of its "governors"<sup>28</sup>. We have Ilu-ibni *šakin māt Suhi* and tributary of Ashurnasirpal II<sup>29</sup>; then Marduk-apla-ušur also *šakin māt Suhi* and tributary of Shalmaneser III<sup>30</sup>; lastly Nergal-ereš who at the time of Adad-nirari III is *šaknu* of the lands stretching from Gebel Sinjar to the Middle Euphrates<sup>31</sup>. The relationships of these three "governors" with the central Assyrian power are ambiguous and do not merely go in the direction of a progressive integration, but follow the political shifts.

(e) If the Habur is crossed without difficulty or boast by the Assyrian army, the Euphrates constitutes a real frontier with two different banks: the left bank is "Assyrian" but the right bank is "Aramaic". When in the 13th century the Middle Assyrian kingdom confronts the Hittite empire across the Euphrates, the river becomes the border of Assyria "from Karkemiš as far as Rapiqu". Not just a theoretical border either, but one whose left bank is studded with Assyrian strongpoints<sup>32</sup>. Only archaeological investigation will be able to tell us how emblematic is the case of native Sirqu confronting Assyrian Mešteli<sup>33</sup>. The "encampments" on the left bank where the

<sup>24</sup>) A. Abou-Assaf - P. Bordreuil - A.R. Millard, *La statue de Tell Fekherye*, Paris 1982, pp. 111-112; a point obviously underscored by most scholars.

<sup>25</sup>) Cf. Machinist, *art. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>26</sup>) *ARI* II, §§ 344-347.

<sup>27</sup>) E. Unger, *Two Seals of the Ninth Century B. C. from Shadikanni on the Habur*, *BASOR* 130 (1953), pp. 15-21. The resumption of excavations in Tell 'Ajajaja (A. Mahmoud, *Neo-Assyrian Sculptures from Šaddikanni (Tell Ajaja)*, *Assur* 4/2 [1983], pp. 1-4) is a good opportunity for study of the Neo-Assyrian "province".

<sup>28</sup>) On the history of Suhi see recently N. Háklár, *Die Stellung Suhis in der Geschichte. Eine Zwischenbilanz*, *OrAnt* 22 (1983), pp. 25-36.

<sup>29</sup>) *ARI* II, § 548.

<sup>30</sup>) *ARAB* I, § 592.

<sup>31</sup>) Cf. the map in M. Liverani, *Antico Oriente. Storia società economia*, Roma-Bari 1988, p. 791.

<sup>32</sup>) On the substitution of Hittite by Assyrian strongpoints cf. P. Matthiae, *Ititi ed Assiri a Tell Fray: lo scavo di una città medio-siriana sull'Eufrate*, *SMEA* 22 (1980), pp. 35-52.

<sup>33</sup>) The site of Mešteli, already mentioned by Musil, *cit.*, pp. 176 and 204, has been recently surveyed by the Terqa expedition.

Assyrian army halted to receive the tribute from the native sites on the right bank were altogether makeshift or did they instead make use of permanent strongholds?<sup>34</sup>

## 6. *The New Paradigm*

The new paradigm here proposed on the basis of our increased archaeological and topographical knowledge and on a more attentive reading of the royal inscriptions, can be summarized as follows:

(1) The Middle Assyrian kingdom annexes Mitanni and spreads to face Hatti on the Euphrates. In the south its borders match with those of the Babylonian kingdom, and its border, though it shifts back and forward between Lower Zab and 'Udhaym, nevertheless is a territorial border between two distinct and compact states. The western border, once it reaches the Euphrates, tends to remain stable and, above all, the opposing bank is not strongly held unless in the northernmost reaches. Instead, through the whole arc from the Lower Zab to the Upper Euphrates, Assyria borders on a series of states and mountain tribes more or less unstable and which press immediately upon Assyria<sup>35</sup>.

(2) The Middle Assyrian presence in the Jezira is not arranged in provinces of the kind that come into being only by the 8th century. Instead there is a network of palaces and Assyrian cities embedded in a native (Hurrian) world<sup>36</sup>. There is an afflux of Assyrian settlers, there is an effort of agricultural colonization, there is a network of communications and transportation of goods (trade and tribute). There is the setting-up of strongpoints both on the borders and in the interior.

(3) Throughout the whole period from the death of Tukulti-Ninurta I to Ashurnasirpal II the picture remains unchanged in theory, and to a fair extent also in practice. The border with Babylonia continues to shift backwards and forwards according to varying power relations. The constant worry and overriding military concern is to subjugate and keep under control the mountain tribes in the arc north of the Tigris

<sup>34</sup>) The area of the Haditha dam has provided interesting data on this problem, cf. for the moment T. Cuyler Young, *The Assyrian Army on the Middle Euphrates: Evidence from Current Excavations*, Bulletin of the Society for Mesopotamian Studies 6 (1983), pp. 19-32.

<sup>35</sup>) On the borders of the Middle Assyrian kingdom, cf. my *Confine e frontiera nel Vicino Oriente del tardo bronzo: spunti di discussione e riflessione*, Scienze dell'Antichità 2 (1989), forthcoming.

<sup>36</sup>) The practice of deportation is here pertinent, cf. C. Saporetti, *Una deportazione al tempo di Salmanassar I*, ANLR 25 (1970), pp. 437-453; H. Freydank, *Die Rolle der Deportierten im mittelassyrischen Staat*, in J. Hermann - I. Sellnow (eds.), *Die Rolle der Volksmassen*, Berlin 1975, pp. 55-63; *Zur Lage der deportierten Hurriter in Assyrien*, AoF 7 (1980), pp. 89-117; P. Garelli - D. Charpin - J.-M. Durand, *Rôle des prisonniers et des déportés à l'époque médio-assyrienne*, in H. Klengel (ed.), *Gesellschaft und Kultur im alten Vorderasien*, Berlin 1982, pp. 69-76.

valley (and also in the Kašari, south of the Tigris). The Euphrates border remains what it was, with Karkemiš taking over from Hatti, and little but vacuum along the whole stretch “from Karkemiš as far as Rapiqu”.

(4) Aramaic infiltrations or invasions, which obviously took place more frequently and more easily in this “vacuum” along the border, complicate the situation but do not put in doubt the Assyrian sovereignty on the Middle Euphrates. The “Assyrian” sites remain such, the Assyrian kings have to engage in repeated military actions, in support or cleaning up — all quite modest tasks, because the problems are numerous yet they are small<sup>37</sup>. The spread of the Aramaic infiltration overlies and complements the spread of the Assyrian colonization. A series of kingdoms is set up on a tribal or local basis, with a series of local dynasts whose status with Assyria is ambiguous. The empire continues to exist to the extent that the communication network linking the Assyrian sites keeps functioning. And if here and there things gave way, nevertheless it seems clear that, overall, the system held.

(5) In the 9th century Assyrian control grows stronger. The metaphor, as we have said, is not the “oil-stain” spreading larger, but the network whose mesh thickens. This thickening of the mesh is favoured by the campaigns the king conducts personally: campaigns that follow with more pomp the normal channels of communication and control. These campaigns are not for conquest, but to strengthen a control that already exists. It is no paradox to state that they take place normally **within** the boundaries of the empire<sup>38</sup>. Every “rebellion” brings about a greater Assyrian presence, to the point that new colonies are founded, and brings about, therefore, a definitive thickening in the web, beyond which a change of system will occur: the 8th century will see the passage from an empire of communications to a territorial one.

(6) This passage brings with it interesting problems such as the transformation of the Assyrian centers into the nuclei of provinces, the progressive substitution of local dynasts by officials of central origin, the homogeneization of territory. These are anything but rapid phenomena, anything but univocal. The dialectics between Assyrian and native, between the center and outlying regions, between colonization and tribute, between bureaucracy and autonomy runs through the whole course of the Assyrian empire. I do not believe that it is only an inheritance from the formative period, and then the beginning of the break-up; I think it is a structural feature.

(7) In the very moment of passage from the “network-empire” to the “territorial empire”, an extraordinary expansion takes place. Already under Ashurnasirpal II and

<sup>37)</sup> The best picture is provided by the “Broken Obelisk” (*ARI* II, §§ 227-252).

<sup>38)</sup> Notice the peaceful character of the only two expeditions outside the border of the empire in the first half of the 9th century: Tukulti-Ninurta’s campaign in northern Babylonia (*ARI* II, §§ 469-476), and Ashurnasirpal’s campaign to the Mediterranean (*ARI* II, §§ 584-586). The novelty in the policy of Shalmaneser III is absolute.

then under Shalmaneser III, Assyria was spreading and consolidating herself in Zamua on the one side and in Syria on the other. Following the first bold attempt to extend the network by casting filaments as far away as possible, came campaigns of conquest undertaken — openly by now — **outside** the empire, with the intention of enlarging it. In the “new” zones the usual paradigm is valid enough: state by state there comes first the occasional raid, then the subjection to tribute, and finally the annexation. The Assyrian presence (cities, palaces, colonists) is the outcome of the process, not its precondition. But in the original nucleus of the empire, in Upper Mesopotamia, the partitioning into provinces overlies only secondarily a presence which had a different and much earlier story. It is not an accident that the “provinces” of Upper Mesopotamia are not entrusted to governors but to the highest dignitaries of the central court instead.

### 7. *Final Considerations*

The concept of an empire as a network of communications under the control of the central nucleus is by no means a strange one, in fact it seems to be the norm for the Bronze Age. What little we know of the great empires of the third millennium — Akkad and Ebla — seems to point in this direction: control of the highways of commerce, a network of strongholds even at great distance and isolated in the “native” political world, which keeps its own structures even though conceding certain economic privileges and political pre-eminence to the imperial state. What we know (a great deal more!) of the Egyptian presence in Syria-Palestine under the 18th and 19th dynasties is still of this kind: a general sovereignty which does not bring with it the elimination of the centers of local power, but only the installation of Egyptian centers (with stationary garrisons) as nodes in a network of communications and flow of goods. These have their normal procedures, and their moment of pomp in pharaonic campaigns that follow the same routes when it becomes necessary to reconstitute or thicken a web that — because of its very nature — constantly risks break-down.

But before any comparative or theoretical considerations take place, we need to understand more precisely the basic documentary evidence. We need to refine precise techniques of textual analysis; we need to apply to other areas the paradigm here proposed for the Habur/Middle Euphrates zone; we have to improve our knowledge of the topography of the whole Assyrian empire; we have to trace out the continuity or the shifts (in any case: the history) of the Assyrian presence from the 13th to the 8th century, and we have to do it site by site, in its concrete reality (archaeological and topographical). We must — in sum — thicken the mesh of our network of knowledge, following the same routes that the 9th century Assyrian kings travelled to thicken the mesh of their political and economic control.

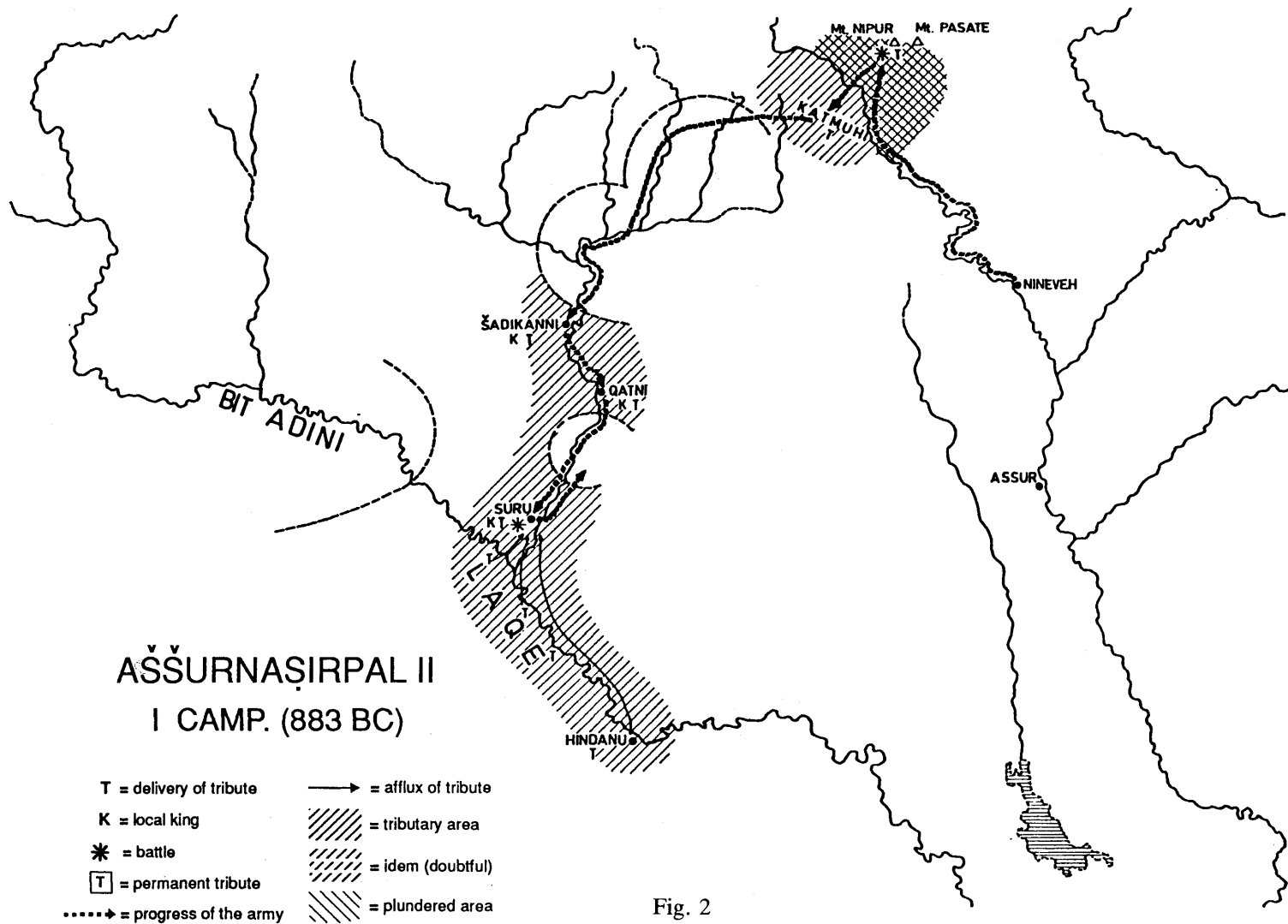


Fig. 2

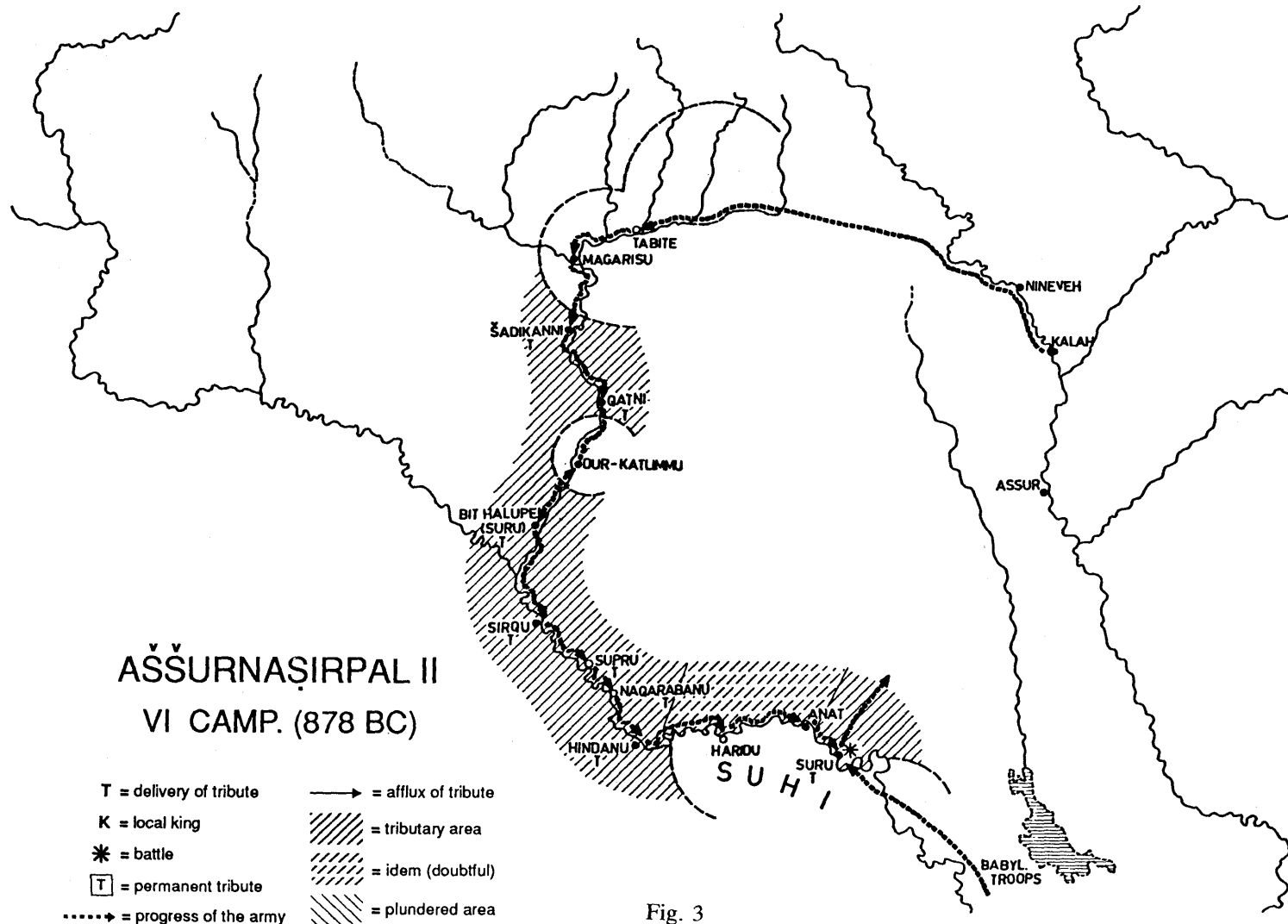


Fig. 3

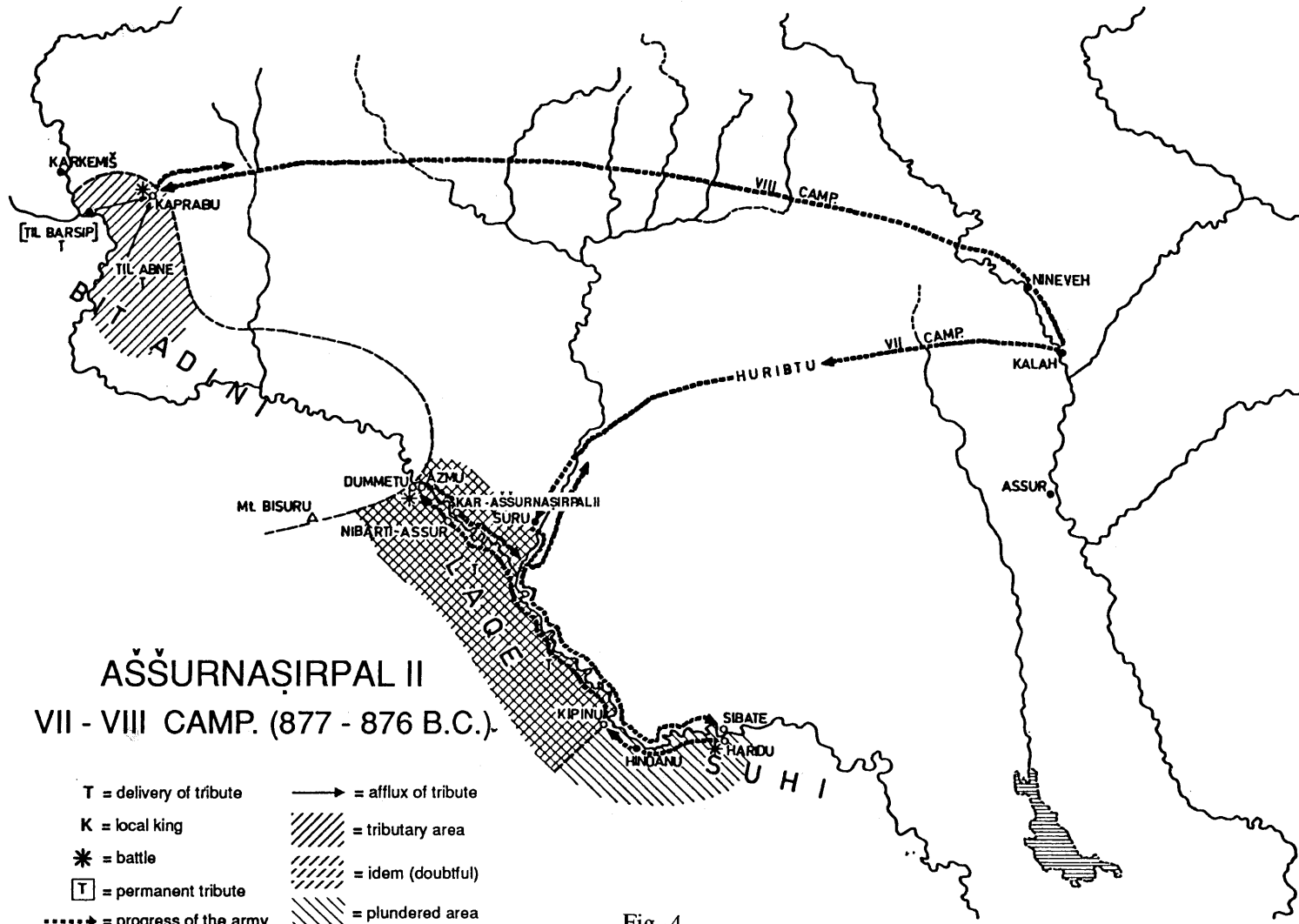


Fig. 4

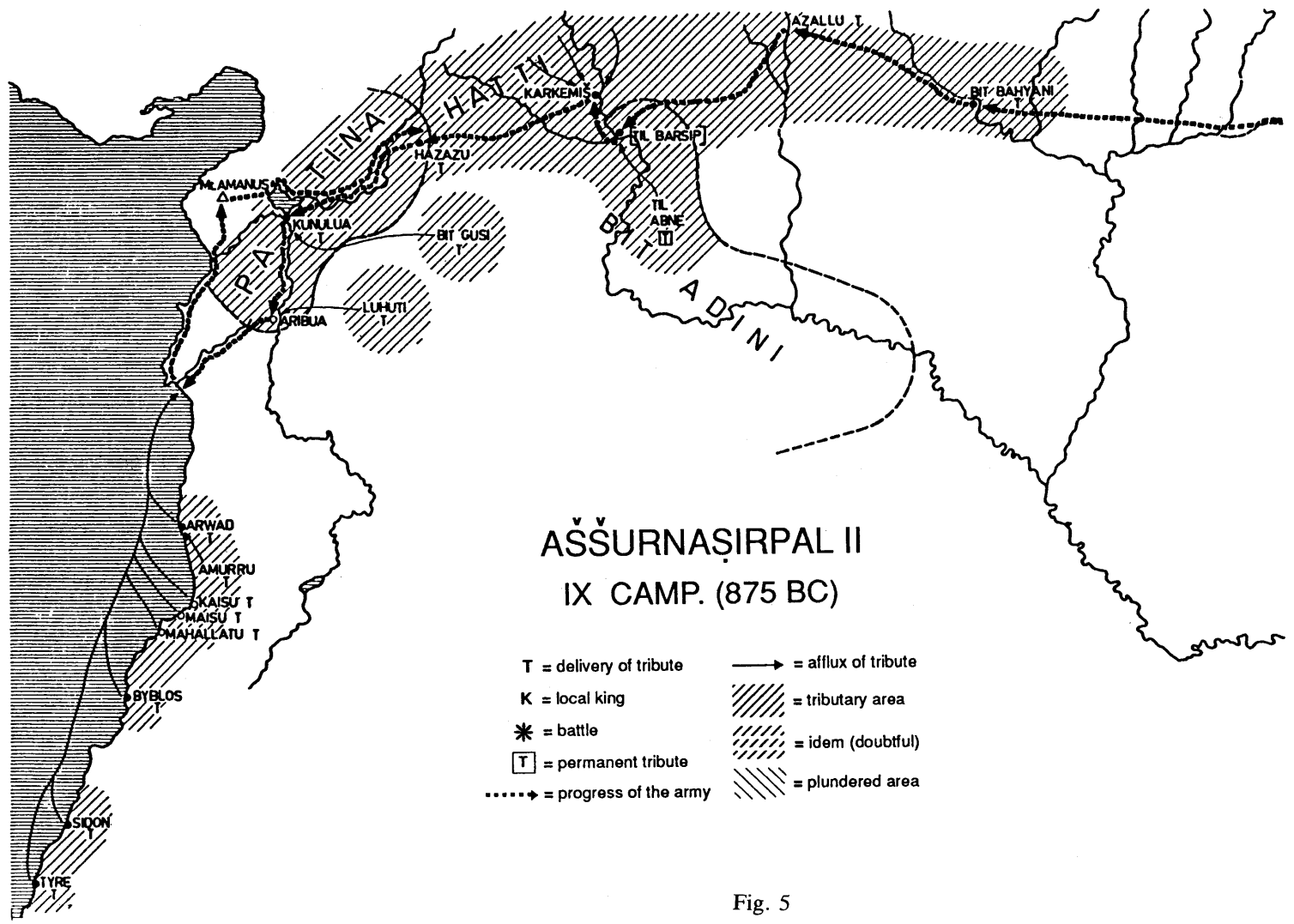


Fig. 5



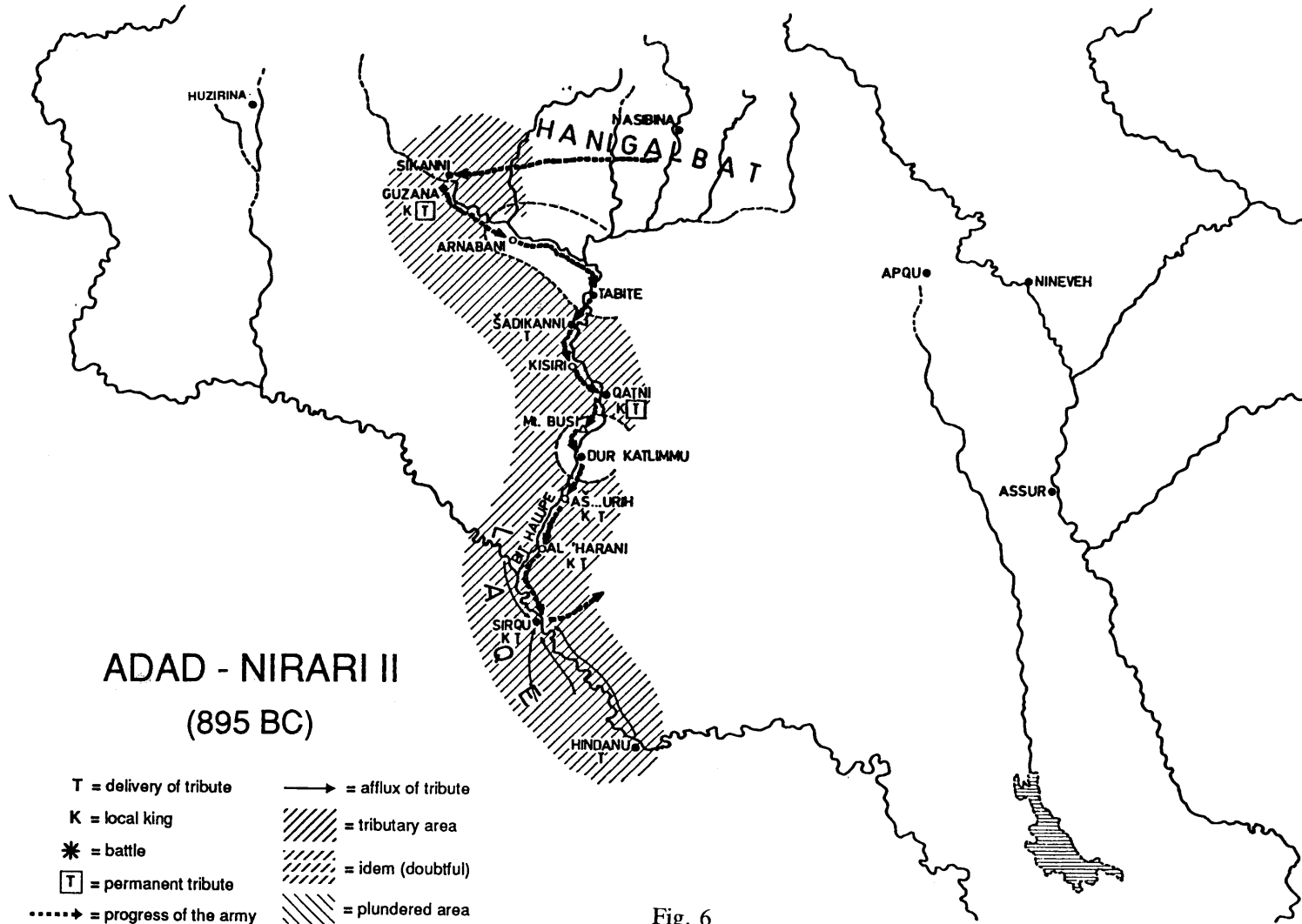


Fig. 6

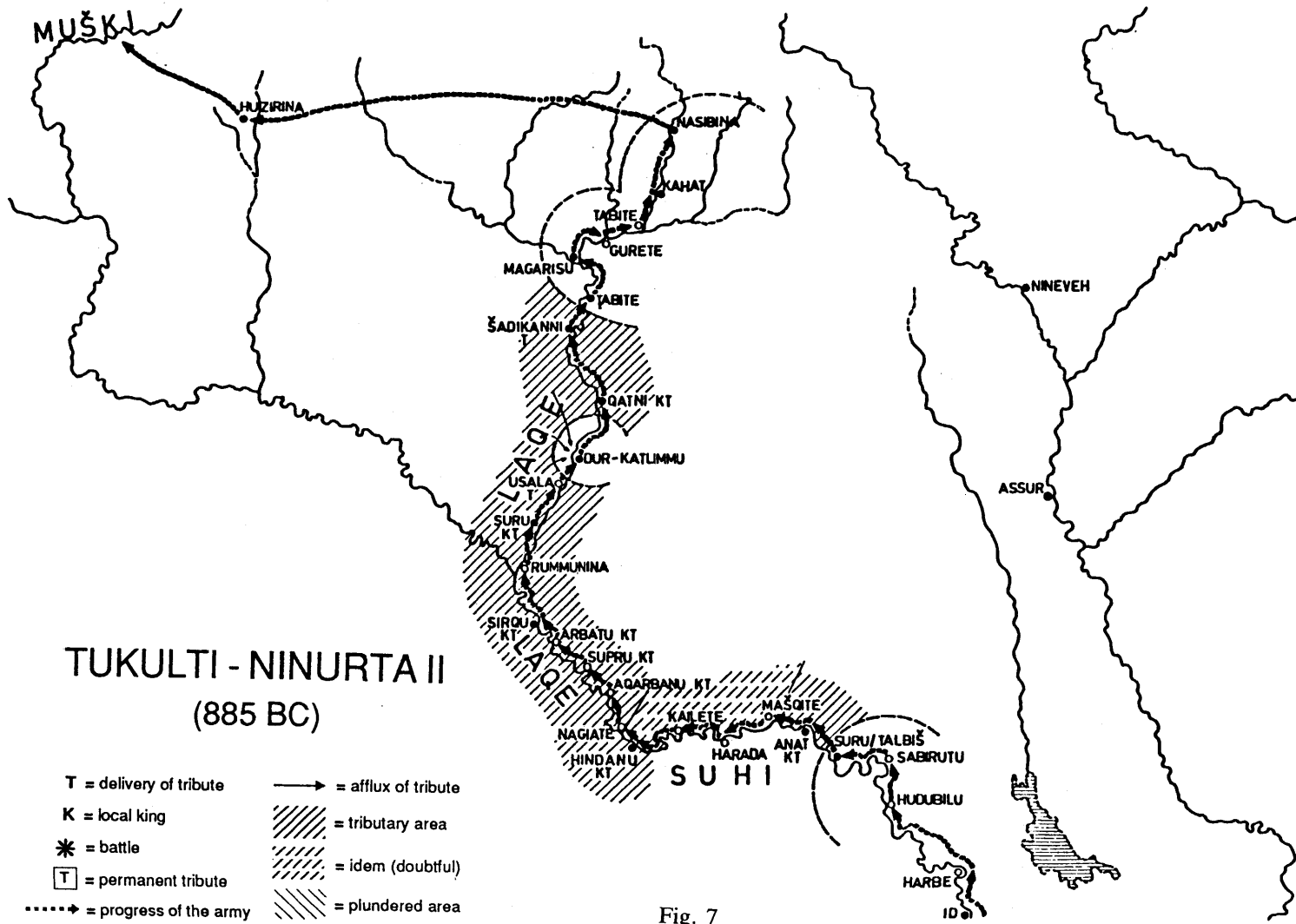


Fig. 7