

MIDDLE ASSYRIAN SETTLEMENT IN THE SOUTH

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Plate (XIII-XIV)

The question of when the Middle Assyrian Period began can be answered in various ways, and the moment of the origin of the Middle Assyrian State depends on the historical point of view. If one defines the end of the Old-Assyrian Period in connection with the collapse of the Assyrian commercial network in Anatolia or with the fall of the Upper-Mesopotamian state of king Šamši-Adad I, the transition to the Middle Assyrian Period must be set shortly after these events in the 17th and 16th century BC. However, neither the historical events nor the material culture of this time, however, give any evidence of a new political or cultural development, which could be significant enough for the emergence of Assyria in the Late Bronze Age. Therefore, one talks therefore about a so-called ‘Dunkles Zeitalter’ – ‘Dark Ages’ (after Landsberger 1954), which ends only with the downfall of the kingdom of Mittani and the attainment of sovereignty by the rulers of Ashur, that means not until 1400 BC. In this consideration the reign of the Assyrian kings Aššur-nadin-aḫḫē II (1390–1381), Eriba-Adad I (1380–1354) or Aššur-uballiṭ (1353–1318) possibly mark the beginning of the new epoch. The origin of the Assyrian art, manifested in the stylistic and thematic development of representations on cylinder seals during the 14th century BC supports such a determination.

Another possibility is to set the starting point of the Middle Assyrian Period at the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. Klaas Veenhof and Jesper Eidem reflect about the time limits of the Old Assyrian Period:

“Historians usually let the Middle Assyrian Period start in the second half of the fifteenth century BC, when documentation – both archival texts and some royal inscriptions, beginning with those of king 59, Šamši-Adad III – resumes. But for lack of data it is not easy to say what was then new or different, apart from the fact that the city was enlarged by adding of the southern ‘new town’ (ālum eššum), whose walls were constructed by Puzur-Aššur III. The city also became the capital of a territorial state, whose rulers now called themselves ‘king of the land of Assur (māt Aššur)’, and would soon join the ‘club of the great powers’ of the Amarna Age, in the 14th century BC” (Veenhof & Eidem 2008, 23).

Despite the fact that only a few royal inscriptions are known from mid of the 2nd millennium BC there were certainly more changes during the rule of Puzur-Aššur III than just the enlargement of the area of the city of Ashur. Although historical information from the post-Old Assyrian Period is lacking one can observe new trends about 1500 BC. manifesting themselves in the change of the settlement landscape of the Assyrian core region. This development is characterized by the founding of new towns in the southern neighborhood of Ashur as a result of concerted efforts of the Assyrian policy.

Up to now our knowledge of the Middle Assyrian settlement is mostly based on the finds from the Assyrian capital cities Ashur and Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. The basic archaeological information comes also from the territories to the north and west of the Assyrian capitals, particularly from the Ḥabūr-Region which, however, became Assyrian only in the 13th century BC. On the other hand, the region to the south and southeast of Ashur, where for a long time the borders between Assyria, the kingdom of Arrapḫe and Babylonia ran, was rather insufficiently investigated. Only scanty data is available and this data is based on old archaeological material from such sites like Tall al-Dahab (see below) or a coincidental discovery of the archive cuneiform tablets from the 13th century BC at Tall ʿAli,

ancient city Natmani located on the Lesser Zab (Ismail 1982; Ismail & Postgate 2008; see also Fadhil 1983, 60; Müller 1994, 187-190). Archaeological investigations at another site on the Zab River, Tall Māḥūz, ancient Turša, which started 1997, had to be stopped because of the political situation in Iraq (Córdoba 1997; 2000). At Tall ʿAḡāḡī near al-Fatḥa an inscribed brick of king Adad-nēraḥī I (1295-1264) was found on the surface and for this reason this site is supposed to be Kār-Ištar what is probably an erroneous identification¹. On the other hand the material collected by M. al-Amin and M. Mallowan at Tall Akra, a site in the Maḥmur Plain about 15 km northeast of Ashur, comprises painted Nuzi- and Ḥabūr pottery, seal impressions dated to the second half of the 2nd millennium BC, and typical Middle Assyrian burials in two jars put together mouth to mouth (Amin & Mallowan 1950, 60ff. Pl. VIII. IX. XV; Dittmann 1995, 95f.).

The Iraqi rescue project of the Makhūl Dam, which was carried out by the Iraqi Antiquity Service (director Burhan Shakir Sulaiman), characterized a new complexion on the Tigridian landscape between Ashur and the mouth of the Lesser Zab (Sulaiman 2010; Miglus & Mühl forthcoming). The Iraqi surveys provided evidence for approximately 60 archaeological sites, and two third of them delivered Assyrian pottery and other small finds. Afterwards 15 sites were chosen for excavation. Eight of these mounds located to the south of Ashur and Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta showed remains of an intensive Middle Assyrian settlement, in order from north to south (Pl. XIIIa): Tall Hanas, Ḥirbat Ḡalmūd, Tall al-Ḥukna, Tall al-Naml, Tall al-Nūl, Tall al-ʿAḡāmiyya I, Tall al-Farḥa, and Tall al-Ḍahab. Following is a brief summary of these results and a preliminary historical interpretation:

At Tall Hanas opposite Ashur one Parthian and three Middle Assyrian building levels appeared. The level 3 produced particularly comprehensive archaeological evidence of structural remains and numerous burials. Several changes of the architecture complex during this time indicates its long period of use. Concerning of the burials it is striking that the individuals were buried in graves composed of two big jars (Pl. XIIIb), a custom of the Late Bronze Age which is confirmed also at Ashur (v. Haller 1954, 45-47 Nr. 598-611). The Late Bronze Age pottery (Fig. 1) shows typical forms, but some examples seem to have a resemblance to the late Old Babylonian pottery and can be dated back to the early Middle Assyrian Period. Jewelry and amulets of frit as well as bottles of alabaster (Fig. 7) are among the found objects. Also a small series of cuneiform tablets were found there (copies were not available). From the lowest level 5 next to the virgin soil no archaeological objects were registered, but in the opinion of the excavator it could be Middle Assyrian too.

At the neighboring mound of Ḥirbat Ḡalmūd there were two Middle Assyrian building levels covered with a Parthian one. Among the pottery examples of carinated bowls (‘Knickwandschalen’) appear as well as shouldered and footed beakers were recovered, some of them painted with parallel dark colour bands (Fig. 2). The excavators didn’t observe any traces of older occupation.

Tall al-Ḥukna which is also located on the Eastern bank of Tigris shows a similar settlement pattern. Next to a brick tomb several double jar graves like those in Tall Hanas were excavated and were included frequently with the simply painted Mittani pottery (‘jüngere Ḥabūr-Ware’) as well as with the elaborated Nuzi ware (Fig. 3).

¹ This identification is shown on the *TAVO* map B III 7, but the site Tall ʿAḡāḡī is only 27 m in diameter and produced prehistoric material: Jaber Khalil 1972, 233. The brick must be originally from another site; see Nashef 1982, 155f. A possible localization for Kār-Ištar proposed by Dittmann 1995, 100 n. 20, could be Tall al-Ḍahab situated to the north of al-Fatḥa on the eastern bank of the Tigris. Herzfeld (1907, 96) mentioned, however, that he did not find any incised or stamped bricks there. See also commentary by Grayson 1975a/2000, 160 (to: Chronicle 21, i 25’).

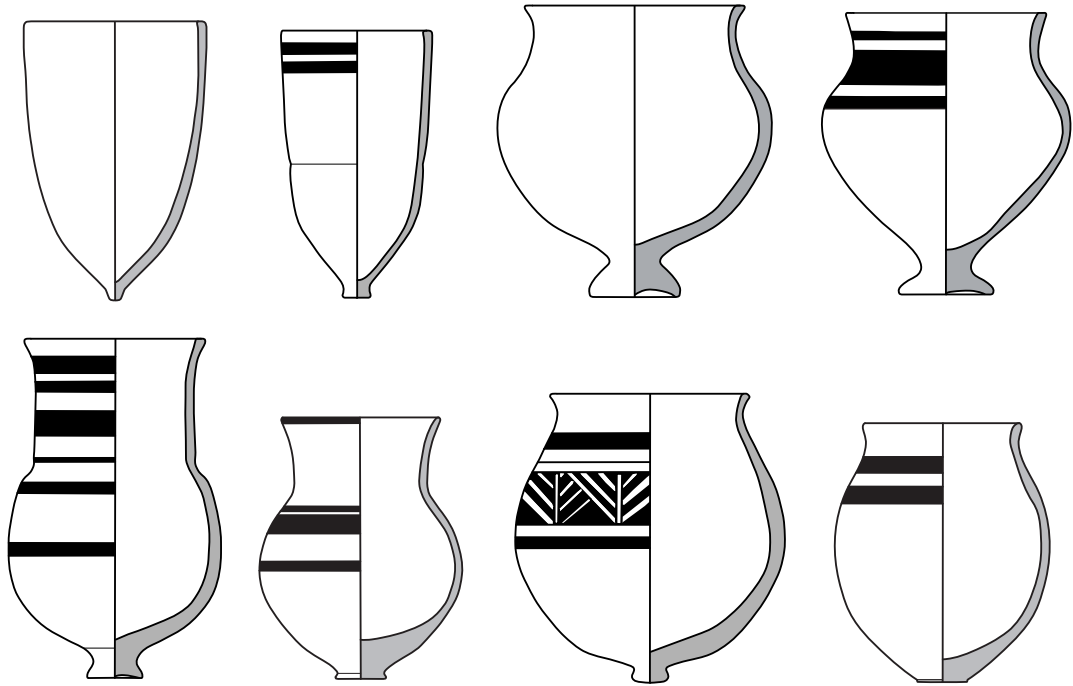


Fig. 1. Pottery from Tall Hanas, scale 1:3 (Sulaiman 2010, Pl. 128, 2. 3. 6. 8-10; 129, 3. 9).

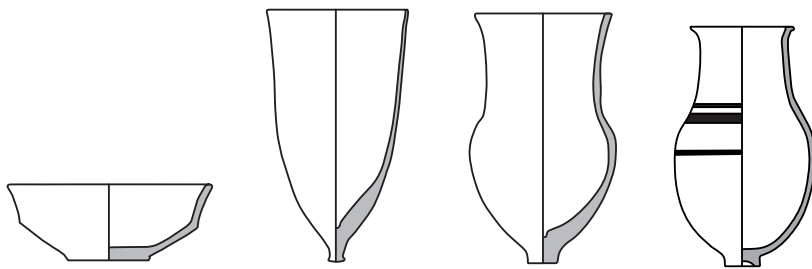


Fig. 2. Pottery from Tall Ġalmūd, scale 1:3 (Sulaiman 2010, Pl. 149, 1; 150, 2. 3. 5).

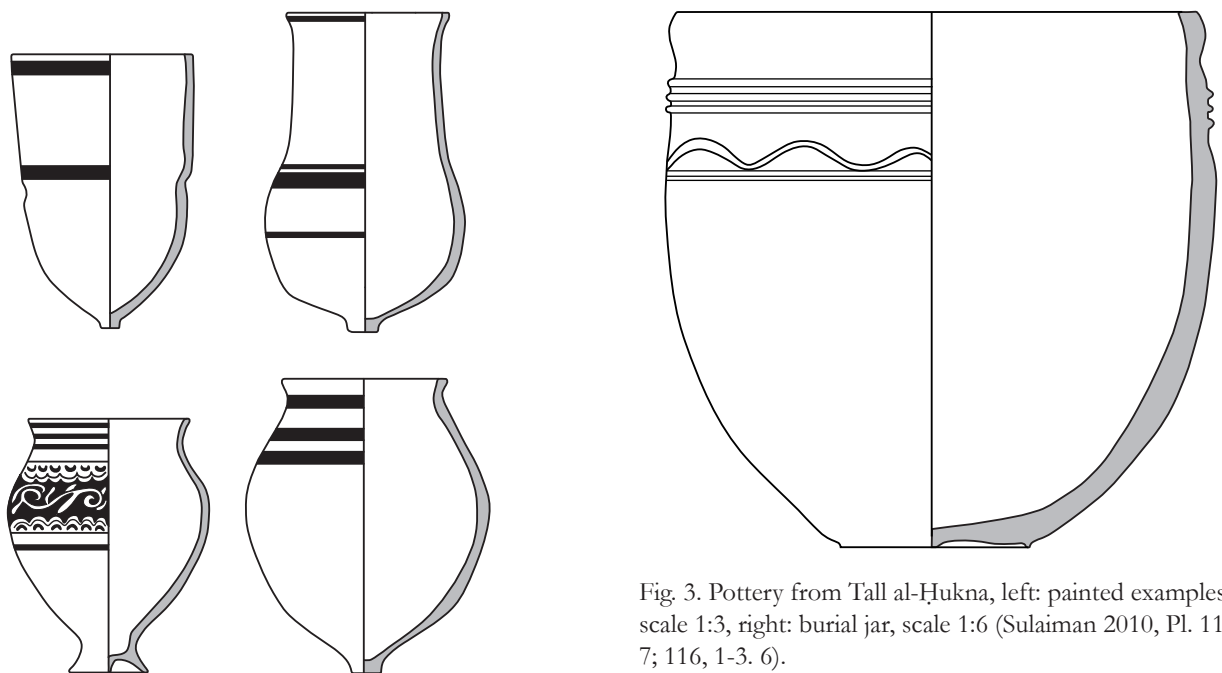


Fig. 3. Pottery from Tall al-Ḥukna, left: painted examples, scale 1:3, right: burial jar, scale 1:6 (Sulaiman 2010, Pl. 115, 7; 116, 1-3. 6).

At the north and south slope of the mound of Tall al-Naml, directly above the Early Dynastic round building (see M. Heil in this volume) a severely destroyed Middle Assyrian layer was excavated (Sulaiman 2001-2002, 1f. 28. 45 Figs. 1-2; Sulaiman 2010, 116. 123 Pl. 196. 201). A few walls, some pottery and approximately 10 burials came into light (Fig. 4). Remains of the fragmentary wall do not allow any reconstruction of plans of the former buildings.

At the small Tall al-^cAğāmiyya I southeast of Tall al-Naml on the eastern side of the Tigris remains of the Middle Assyrian architecture and pottery were relatively sparse. Among the objects was a brick with the palace inscription of the king Tukultī-Ninurta I, but no information about other periods at this place is recorded.

Tall al-Nūl north of the mouth of the Lower Zab contained two Middle Assyrian levels with architectural structures. 28 burials in single and double jars were discovered in these strata (Pl. XIIIc). They were equipped with painted shouldered beakers and carinated bowls (Fig. 5). The Middle Assyrian horizon doesn't represent the first occupation at this site, but there is a gap in its stratigraphy and the older level is dated from the Uruk Period.

The largest of the Middle Assyrian mounds examined during the Makḥūl Project is Tall al-Farḥa on the right bank of the Lesser Zab, 6 km to the east of the Tigris. It is a middle sized site measuring approximately 240 m in diameter. The soundings carried out there revealed three Middle Assyrian building levels with spacious architectural remains and 177 burials between them. The rooms and the graves contained a rich body of material: Mittani respectively Middle Assyrian ceramic jars (Fig. 6, Pl. XIIId) and alabaster vessels (Fig. 7), cylinder seals of the 'Common Style', and different objects of frit. 12 cuneiform tablets were among the finds, but unfortunately neither copies of them nor information about their contents are available. The only better preserved building found in the level 3 (Fig. 9) shows the plan of the 'main room house' type ('Mittelsaalhaus') known from the living quarters in Ashur (Preußner 1954, 10ff. Pl. 6). The excavation report does not indicate whether the virgin soil was reached, but there were no traces of an older occupation at Farḥa. In the uppermost level the Neo-Assyrian pottery emerged.

The mound of Dahab located not far from the place where the Tigris breaks through the Hamrin Mountains lies outside the area of the rescue project. The site was already described by E. Herzfeld in the early 20th century, and his published drawings show a spectrum of pottery forms of the Uruk up to the Parthian Period (Herzfeld 1907, 94ff. Abb. 1-2). Later Jaber Khalil registered an accumulation of pottery from the Uruk-, Ġamdat Naṣr-, Akkad- and Neo-Assyrian Periods on the surface of Tall Dahab (Jaber Khalil 1972, 234f.). The last investigation carried out by Burhan Shakir confirmed an intensive occupation of the Tall Dahab during the Early and Late Bronze Age which corresponds with the report by Herzfeld, who mentioned painted shouldered beakers and Nuzi pottery were found there (Fig. 8), even if Herzfeld tried to date this pottery in the 1st millennium BC.² For this reason we can assume that the Late Bronze Age occupation at Tall al-Dahab originated already about the mid-2nd millennium B.C. Extending approximately 700 × 600 m Dahab seems to have been an important city which was in the Late Bronze Age probably at first Hurrian and later Assyrian.

The described sites are with the exception of Tall al-Dahab small and medium sized, and their diameters range between 70 and 250 m. They provide archaeological evidence of the dense occupation in the second half of the 2nd millennium BC. Astonishingly the Old Assyrian layers were entirely absent at

² Herzfeld 1907, 95f., refers to *MDOG* 27 (1905) 31ff. Abb. 6, and compare painted sherds from Dahab with the similar pottery found at Ashur.

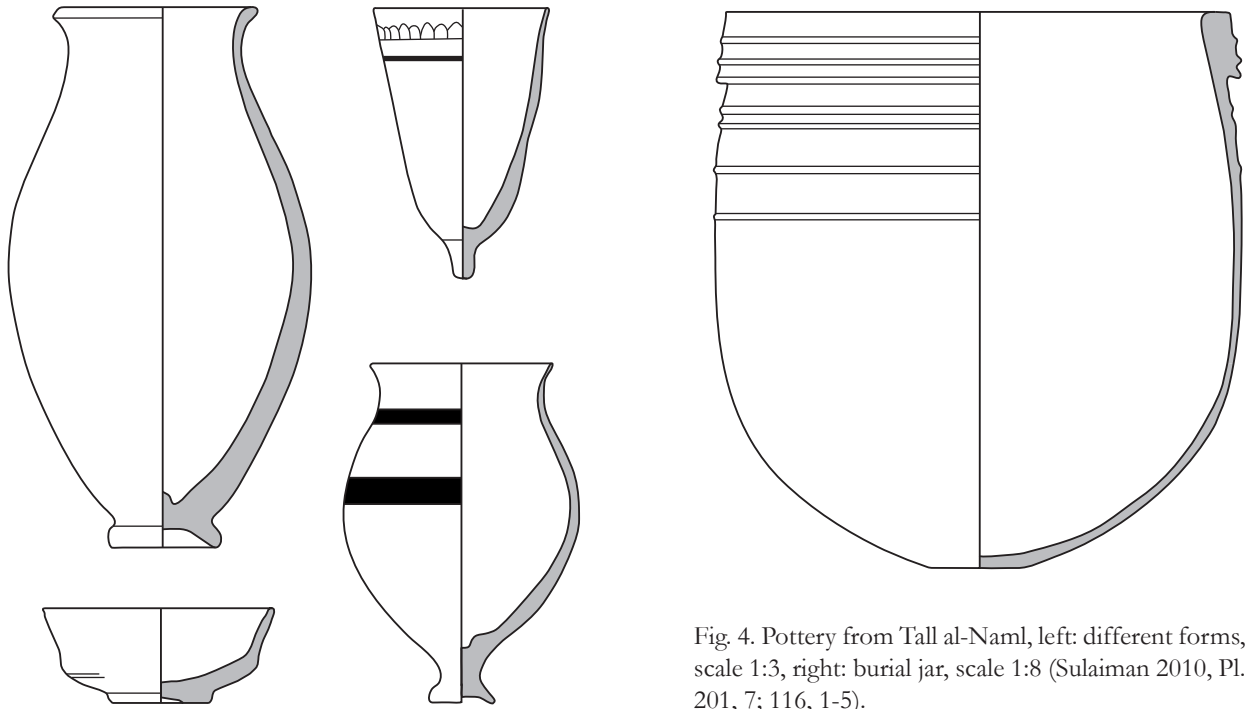


Fig. 4. Pottery from Tall al-Naml, left: different forms, scale 1:3, right: burial jar, scale 1:8 (Sulaiman 2010, Pl. 201, 7; 116, 1-5).



Fig. 5. Pottery from Tall al-Nūl, scale 1:3 (Sulaiman 2010, Pl. 89, 7-9; 90, 1. 2).

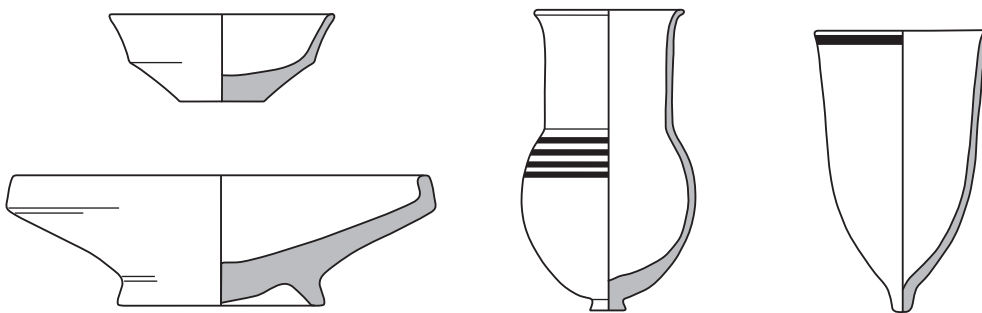


Fig. 6. Pottery from Tall al-Farḥa, scale 1:3 (Sulaiman 2010, Pl. 77, 4. 7; 78, 3. 5).

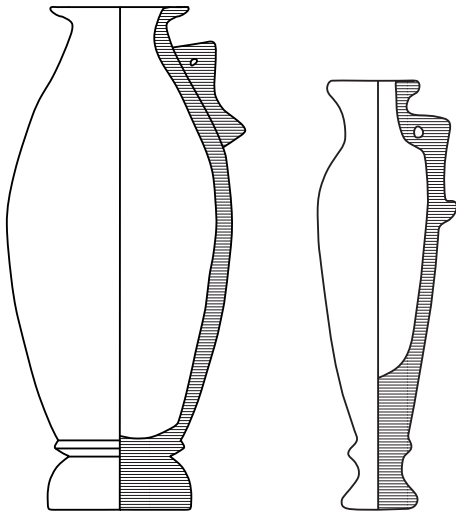


Fig. 7. Alabaster bottles from Tall Hanas (left) and Tall al-Farḥa (right), scale 1:3 (Sulaiman 2010, Pl. 79, 7; 130, 2).

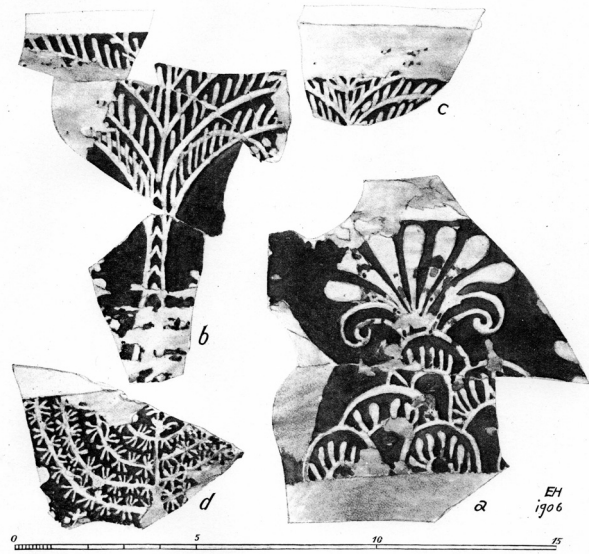


Fig. 8. Nuzi sherds from Tall al-Dahab (Herzfeld 1907, Fig. 2).

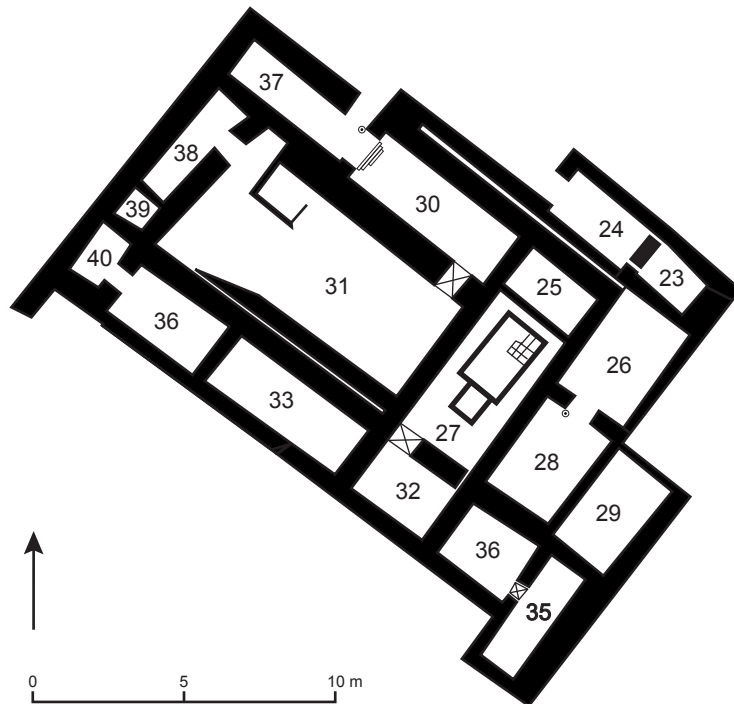


Fig. 9. House in Tall al-Farḥa, section 3, level 3, scale 1:250 (Sulaiman 2010, Pl. 74 detail).

all these mounds. This indicates that the whole landscape to the south of Ashur was newly organized and examples of painted Mittani and late Ḥabūr pottery seem to confirm that the new settlement activities to the south of Ashur were initiated in the early Middle Assyrian Period. A few pottery forms indicate the transition from Late Old Babylonian to Mittani horizon (for example wide open shouldered beakers, ‘grain measure’ cup from Tall al-Nūl, Fig. 4, or stands from Tall al-Farḥa, Pl. XIIIId – cf. Oates, Oates & McDonald 1997, 190. 195; Postgate, Oates & Oates 1997, Pls 78. 98).

The material from Tall al-Farḥa allows an even more precise dating. In two different *loci* in the Middle Assyrian levels of this site two documents of the ruler Puzur-Aššur III were found. Both inscriptions written on clay cones are identical, and report the foundation of a new city (Pl. XIVa)³:

(1) <i>pu-zu-ur-^aa-šūr</i>	(1) Puzur-Aššur,
(2) <i>ÉNSI ^aa-šūr</i>	(2) vice-regent of the god Aššur,
(3) <i>DUMU ^aa-sūr-né-ra-ri</i>	(3) son of Aššur-nērārī,
(4) <i>ÉNSI ^aa-sūr-ma</i>	(4) (who was) also vice-regent of Aššur,
(5) <i>a-na ba-l[á]-ti-šu ù ša-lá-am URU.KI-šu</i>	(5) for his lif[e] and the well-being of his city:
(6) <i>URU^{ki} ḥa-bu-ba i-na a-ḥi ÍD za-bi ša-ap-li</i>	(6) The city Ḥabuba on the Lesser Zab
(7) <i>iš -tù uš-šé-šu a-di ša-ap-ti-šu e-pu-uš</i>	(7) I built (it) from bottom to top,
(8) <i>te-me-ni-ia ù na-re-ia aš-ku-un</i>	(8) (and) deposited my foundation documents.
(9) <i>ru-ba-ú ur-ki-ú i-nu-ma URU šu</i>	(9) When a later prince (re)builds that city,
(10) <i>i-na-ḥu-ma e-pu-šu ^aa-sūr</i>	(10) when it becomes dilapidated, Aššur
(11) <i>^aŠKUR ik-ri-bi-šu i-ša-me-ú</i>	(11) (and) Adad will listen to his prayers.
(12) <i>te-me-ni na-re</i>	(12-14) May he return my foundation documents to
(13) <i>a-na aš-ri-šu</i>	their place.
(14) <i>lu-te-er</i>	

This text resembles the foundation documents written on cones by Puzur-Aššur III for his fortifications in Ashur. The first of those documents (*RIMA* 1 A.0.61.1) reports the rebuilding of the *mušlālum* structure on the north side of the city (Andrae 1913, 156 Pl. 87; Nunn 2006, 149 Pls 11. 27 – Pl. XIVb). The second one concerns the erection of a new wall in the southern part of Ashur – so called New City (*alum eššū*) – which did not exist before (Borger 1964, 20ff.; Miglus 2010, 235f.)⁴. The lines 1 to 5 of the text from Tall al-Farḥa are identical with the first six respectively five lines in the both Ashur texts⁵. The line 6 in the text of Farḥa which corresponds with the same line of the foundation document for the New City in Ashur calls the concerned building. The line 7 which describes the extension of the building operations is shorter than the lines 7-8 of the text from Ashur, but the same formula ‘from bottom to top’ is used. However, a different phrase appears in the line 8: *temeni-ia ù nare-ia aš-ku-un* (respective in line 12). In this case Puzur-Aššur follows the terms used before by Šamšī-Adad I (*RIMA* 1 A.0.39.1, 93f. 99f.; A.0.39.2 iii 3f. 19f.; iv 4f. 9f.). Nevertheless a clear similarity with the foundation text of the New City of Ashur suggests that the inscription from Farḥa follows a pattern chosen for documents concerning Puzur-Aššur’s fortification activities.

The new documents which were found at Tall al-Farḥa describe the foundation of a new city called Ḥabuba. This ancient name appears also in the texts from Nuzi *JEN* 525 = *JEN* 670, *HSS* XVI 328 and BM 132.165 which were already discussed by Abdulillah Fadhil and Gerfried Müller in connection with the settlement of the kingdom of Arrapḥe (Fadhil 1983, 198, 247; Müller 1994, 81, 178, 202; Finke 1993, 94f.). Using this evidence Fadhil locates this place correctly on the right bank of the Lesser Zab (Fadhil 1983, 198, 247).

³ The excavation records do not contain any copy of these inscriptions. The presented reading made out from three partly sharp photographs (Pl. XIVa) is certain except that a few signs on the right edge (each last sign in the lines 5-7, and line 14) are not visible on the pictures.

⁴ A further text dealing with the new city wall is probably the inscription on the clay cone fragment *RIMA* 1 A.0.62.1001 – see Miglus 2010, 237.

⁵ Line 4 of *RIMA* 1 A.0.61.1 should be obviously completed ^aa-š[ūr-ma].

On the basis of the analysis of the hurrian settlement presented by the above mentioned authors the following conclusion can be drawn: The originally Assyrian city of Ḥabuba came later in the 15th century BC under the control of the kings of Arrapḫe. The text *HSS XVI 328* names a judge Šulpen from Ḥabuba, and in the text *BM 132.165* a field in the *dimtu Šantullak* is mentioned, which laid “to the north of the roads to Ḥabuba” (Müller 1994, 44). In the first half of the 14th century BC, when the princes of Ashur could shake off the superiority of Mittani, the boundary between Assyria und Arrapḫe moved again to the East. The texts *JEN 525* and *JEN 670* report some people from Arrapḫe who were kidnapped by Assyrians after a belligerent conflict were imprisoned at different places on the Assyrian territory. Ḥabuba – that means Tall al-Farḫa – was one of these places⁶.

The political situation at the Assyrian southern border should be explained from the perspective of the Assyrian activities in Ashur. According the Assyrian royal list in the mid of the 2nd millennium B.C. three Assyrian kings, Aššur-nērarī I, Puzur-Aššur III and Enlil-nāšir I ruled together for 63 years. The political stability profited presumably by a good economical situation because these rulers were able to start extended public building projects. Specifically, Puzur-Aššur III rebuilt the northern fortification and surrounded the south area of Ashur with a new wall which connected the old city with its southern part for the first time. The fortification of the southern city is to be seen in connection with the new settlement foundations up to the Lesser Zab, which presumably were carried out not only for a demographic, but also a military reason. The situation of Ashur being close to the boundaries to Babylonia and to Arrapḫe forced defensive steps to be taken already at the capital city. The historical events prove this necessity: after 1500 BC the rulers of Assyria lost the sovereignty to Mittani, and during the later centuries their arduous defense against Babylonia in the region south of the city of Ashur is evident from the Assyrian chronicle called ‘Synchronistic History’ (Grayson 1975a/2000, 157-170; see also Galter 2000) which relates: “*Puzur-Aššur, king of Assyria, and Burna-Buriaš, king of Karduniaš, took an oath and fixed this very boundary-line*” (i 5’-7’). Even if this passage was inserted by the scribe on the wrong place of the chronicle (Puzur-Aššur III follows here Aššur-bēl-nišēšu, a later ruler according to the Assyrian King List), the text seems to record a real conflict between Assyria and Babylonia during this period, and indicates that Puzur-Aššur’s defense policy aimed not only at the Hurrians but also at the Babylonians. Still the later Assyrian rulers Enlil-nērarī (1317–1308) and Adad-nērarī I (1295–1264) had to lead battles against the Babylonians at Sugagu, only a days distance of Ashur⁷.

The foundation document of Ḥabuba is of special importance. As it is already mentioned above the text is almost identical to those which Puzur-Aššur III used for the southern fortification and for the northern *mušlalum*-wall in Ashur on his foundation cones, and only the lines describing the building construction distinguish them from each other. Between the rule of Puzur-Aššur III and Shalmaneser III (858-824) who rebuilt the whole fortification system of Ashur, that means during the period of more than 600 years, there was a tradition of using clay cones for the foundation documents concerne with fortress works in Ashur (Miglus 2010). The use of this form of document for the foundation of Ḥabuba places particular emphasis on its role as a part of the Middle Assyrian defense system.

The other Middle Assyrian sites between the city of Ashur and the Lesser Zab held presumably a similar function. They lost their importance in the 13th century B.C. after the kingdom of Arrapḫe

⁶ For this reason Müller 1994, 44, presumes that Ḥabuba became Assyrian only in the final phase of the Arrapḫe state.

⁷ Nashef 1982, 235; Grayson 1975a/2000, 160 Z. 19’. Sugagu as a place of a battle between Kurigalzu II. and Adad-nērarī I is mentioned also in ‘Chronicle P’ (Chronicle 22) 175 III 21; there p. 263: “Sugagu was probably on the west side of the Tigris River just north of the confluence of the Lower Zab“.

had collapsed and Babylonia had moved to the south. Most of Assyrians foundations which had been set up in the middle of the 2nd millennium no longer existed in the 1st millennium BC.⁸

From the archaeological point of view the extension of the Assyrian settlement on the territory between Ashur and the north ridge of Hamrin in the of the 15th century BC can be understood as the initial stage of the formative process of the Middle Assyrian state. In spite of the temporary political dependence on Mittani the ruler of Ashur created an at that time apparently solid basis for the territorial enlargement in the future.

⁸The uppermost layer of Tall al-Farḥa/Ḥabuba seems to be Neo-Assyrian, but Neo-Assyrian layers were found at other sites on Maḫḫūl Dam area: at Tall al-Faras, Tall al-Zāb, and Tall Marmūṣ II.

