

SEYYARE EICHLER / MARKUS WÄFLER  
DAVID WARBURTON

# TALL AL-ḤAMĪDĪYA 2

Symposium

## RECENT EXCAVATIONS IN THE UPPER KHABUR REGION

Berne, December 9–11, 1986

with contributions by

A. Bounni, G. Buccellati, D. Charpin, M. Kelly-Buccellati, D.J.W. Meijer, D. Oates,  
J. Oates, P.E. Pecorella, A. de Pury, M. Wäfler, H. Weiss, R.M. Whiting

## VORBERICHT 1985–1987

mit Beiträgen von  
C. Bellmann und K. Deller

UNIVERSITÄTSVERLAG FREIBURG SCHWEIZ  
VANDENHOECK & RUPRECHT GÖTTINGEN  
1990

**"RIVER BANK", "HIGH COUNTRY", AND "PASTURE LAND":  
THE GROWTH OF NOMADISM ON THE MIDDLE EUPHRATES AND THE KHABUR<sup>1</sup>**

Giorgio Buccellati - Los Angeles

Ancient Syria has clearly emerged as a pivotal point in the early development of civilization; and the Khabur region is rapidly acquiring unique prominence within these newly opened vistas. That such dramatic changes may occur at so fast a pace we owe to the extremely enlightened policies of the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, whom it is a pleasure to recognize here in the person of our common friend and colleague, Dr. Adnan Bounni. And that the rethinking of the early history of the Khabur region may keep pace with the avalanche of new data we owe, today, to the kindness and the foresight of our host, Dr. Markus Wäfler.

---

<sup>1</sup> I reproduce here the text of my oral presentation at the Berne Symposium 'Recent Excavations in the Upper Khabur Region' in December 1986, with some changes and a minimum of documentation which is only indicative in nature. Earlier versions of this paper had been presented at the Symposium on Multi-culturalism in Mesopotamia (Toronto 1983) and at the meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Atlanta in November 1986. This is the first in a series of six articles currently in press or in preparation which deal with the history and geography of ancient Hana. The sequence of articles is as follows:

- (1) "Salt at the Dawn of History: The Case of the Bevelled Rim Bowls" (to appear in a volume edited by M. van Loon, P. Matthiae and H. Weiss);
- (2) "'River Bank', 'High Country', and 'Pasture Land': The Growth of Nomadism on the Middle Euphrates and the Khabur" (published here);
- (3) "The Rural Landscape of the Ancient Zor: The Terqa Evidence" (to appear in B.Geyer (ed.), *Les techniques et les pratiques hydro-agricoles traditionnelles en domaine irrigué*, BAH, Paris);
- (4) "The Kingdom and Period of Khana" (to appear in BASOR);
- (5) "The People of Terqa and Their Names (in preparation);
- (6) "From Khana to Laqê: The End of Syro-Mesopotamia" (to appear in a volume edited by O. Tunca).

I plan to eventually integrate these articles into a full-size monograph and at that time I will include a fuller documentation than is possible here, and will include in particular photographic illustrations of the geographical phenomena described.

The goal of my presentation is to reflect on some of the presuppositions which may help us focus more sharply on the data we are excavating. If there is something of a general research design that we all broadly share as we wield our tools on the rich mounds of the Khabur plains it is the expectation that we are dealing with major and distinctive political and ethnic configurations. We know that the natural environment sets this region apart from the mountains in the north and the alluvium in the south, and we also know enough already about the material culture to recognize its many original traits vis-à-vis the other great Syro-Mesopotamian cultures. We attribute, further, a certain ethnic and geo-political identity to the various human groups in the region, as when we speak of Amorite kingdoms or of Hurrian consolidation. In my paper I would like to look at the question of the socio-ethnic configuration of the populations of the Middle Euphrates and the Khabur<sup>2</sup> from the point of view of the ancient geographical perception of the landscape as documented in the texts.

I will deal with the Khabur plains (which are the proper scope of this Symposium) largely from the vantage point of the Middle Euphrates, inasmuch as

- the major phenomena which I am reconstructing here originated, in my view, on the Middle Euphrates, and
- the pertinent written documentation is especially rich for the Middle Euphrates.

But the larger picture which emerges from my analysis fully involves the Khabur plains and thus justifies, I believe, this presentation within the framework of our Symposium.

The chronological scope of the research is the third and early second millennium B.C. It should be noted that the pertinent written evidence is dated primarily to the early second millennium, coming as it does from the archives of Mari and to a more limited extent from Shemshara, Rimah, Chagar Bazar, and Terqa. Yet, inferentially at least, the processes described here can be projected back into the third millennium B.C.: this is done on the basis of a comparison with earlier texts from other regions, the evidence of non-textual sources, and the structural presuppositions inherent in the phenomena here described for the later periods.

#### REMARKS ON METHOD

I wish to clarify at the onset the two basic concepts which underly the research presented here. The first is the concept of ethnicity, which is generally not defined but is nevertheless in common use and as a result is loaded with a variety of implications and presuppositions which, if not clarified, may obscure a proper understanding of the concept itself. The second is the concept of 'perceptual geography', which is hardly present in the literature and thus requires some explanation. Since the focus of our Symposium is substantive rather than methodological, I will keep my remarks to a minimum.

---

<sup>2</sup> To some extent, these considerations are also applicable to the Balikh basin, although references to it will not be explicitly introduced here.

The concept of ethnicity<sup>3</sup> is on the one hand so pervasive that from reading the literature one would conclude it represents a major reality of ancient Near Eastern history; and yet it is, on the other hand, so vague in its normal acceptance that one wonders at times if it is not simply introduced as a catch-all explanatory mechanism, which loses its power precisely through the diffuseness of its use. At times, for instance, a human group is defined as ethnic simply because it is known to make use of a specific cultural trait, or to exhibit a certain linguistic affiliation, or to be identified by a given proper name. But linguistic affiliation in and of itself can only be ground for linguistic, not ethnic, identification; use of a proper name may have a purely political connotation; specific cultural traits such as material assemblages may reflect functional preferences. To assume ethnicity as a correlative for any one of the above is a form of nominalism which may serve a useful purpose in labeling items of analysis but should not otherwise be taken to necessarily reflect historical reality. Yet, such a nominalistic understanding may be carried to harmful extremes when one hears, for instance, of such presumed historical realities as 'Hittite hieroglyphic blood', whereby a philological concept is raised to the status of biological identifier or, concretely, it is assumed that a human group was racially integrated just because it used a specific type of writing. Quasi-ethnic labeling should remain at most a form of mental stenography, whether for philologists or archaeologists (the latter might find it expedient, for instance, to speak of 'bevelled rim bowl people'), but we must stop at that, and beware of making the next step, which is to assume social integration for the 'people' so labeled (and which then would lead one to speak of 'bevelled rim bowl blood'!).

While I cannot develop here a description of my theoretical understanding of ethnicity, and while I will not be able to show in any detail how these concepts can be applied to our data, I will at least provide the definitions with which I am operating. I understand an ethnic group to be a large and cohesive human group with a long-term and marked sense of identity which derives from an ascribed set of non-organizational factors. 'Large' implies that the solidarity bonds are not based on face-to-face association, and 'long-term' is understood as spanning several generations. 'Identity' is 'marked' in the sense that it has to be explicit (generally through use of a proper name referring to the group), and is perceived both within the group (self-identity) and without. The relevant 'factors' form a 'set', *i.e.* a distributional class of elements which are found to co-occur in a patterned way, and they are both 'ascribed' (they are acquired at birth or through a birth-like process of assimilation) and they are 'non-organizational', *i.e.* they do not in and of themselves motivate the group into a special kind of coordinate and systematic action, and are generally symbolic in

---

<sup>3</sup> On the subject of ethnic identification derived from the analysis of archaeological data see the recent discussion (with which I am in partial disagreement) in: K.A. Kamp, N. Yoffee, *Ethnicity in Ancient Western Asia During the Early Second Millennium B.C.: Archaeological Assessments and Ethnoarchaeological Prospectives*, BASOR 237, 1980, pp. 85-104. I will not be able to deal in this context with the concept of ethno-archaeology, for which see *e.g.*: C. Kramer (ed.), *Ethnoarchaeology: Implications of Ethnography for Archaeology*, New York 1979, O. Aurenche (ed.), *Nomades et sédentaires: Perspectives ethnoarchéologiques*, Paris 1984.

nature. On the basis of archaeological and textual sources, I identify a group as 'ethnic' when such a distributional patterning can be found recurrently over a large area and long period of time.

Starting from this definition of ethnic group, I further understand the tribe as an organizational subset of an ethnic group, *i.e.* a full ethnic group or a portion thereof which is also held together through some form of actual or potential organizational mechanism (political, religious, *etc.*). Similarly, I use the term nation to refer to an organizational subset of an ethnic group which has additionally achieved full political autonomy as an independent state.

A specific approach that I will use in my presentation is the one that may be considered under the rubric of 'perceptual geography'. By this is meant the cultural understanding of land forms, and as such it can be contrasted with physical geography proper: while the latter tells us (in an *-etic*<sup>4</sup> fashion) about objective measurements, the former (*i.e.*, perceptual geography) tells us (in an *-emic* fashion) about the impact that these observable phenomena have on human culture and the way in which they condition the human response. It is natural that such perceptions should be reflected in the language, in fact more so, one might expect, than the 'objective' data of physical geography. But we can only begin to appreciate the full range of information which is being so conveyed in language if we look not for *ad hoc* and seemingly transparent translations (a river is a river is a river), but rather for structural wholes within which individual words, and the perceptions they represent, acquire new meanings (so that, as we shall see, a river may, after all, be more than just a river). The approach which is normally referred to as *-emic* implies a systemic overlap of two symbolic systems, so that for instance graphemics is the systemic correlation between writing and linguistic sound, phonemics the systemic correlation between sound and meaning, and so on. Analogously, perceptual geography, viewed '*-emically*', is the systemic correlation between physical geography and the symbolic categorization of the landscape. This is in line with work done by some historians (first and foremost the French school of the 'paysage'<sup>5</sup>) and geographers.<sup>6</sup> The special approach that I will follow here is an attempt to provide a four-way

---

<sup>4</sup> While I consider the terms '*-etic*' and '*-emic*' inappropriate in the acceptance in which they are commonly employed, and this for reasons which I cannot discuss here, their use is so widespread that I retain them here for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>5</sup> See especially: M. Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics*, Berkeley, Los Angeles 1966; G. Duby, *L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l'Occident médiévale: Essai de synthèse et perspectives de recherches*, 2 vols., Paris 1962. For some significant applications in the Syrian and Mesopotamian fields see: C. Zaccagnini, *The Rural Landscape of the Land of Arraphe*, *Quaderni di Geografia Storica* 1, Roma 1979, and the important earlier studies by M. Liverani cited there.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance: K.W. Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt: A Study in Cultural Ecology*, Chicago 1976; K.W. Butzer (ed.), *Dimensions of Human Geography: Essays on Some Familiar and Neglected Themes*, Chicago 1978; K.W. Butzer, *Archaeology as Human Ecology: Method and Theory for a Contextual Approach*, Cambridge 1982. See also: T. Jacobsen, *Salinity and Irrigation Agriculture in Antiquity: Diyala Basin Archaeological Projects: Report on Essential Results, 1957-58*, BM 14, Malibu 1982, which represents an excellent prototype for ancient Mesopotamia of the method advocated here.  
A special perceptual imaging of the landscape is also an important part of religious, and particularly mytho-

match between: the modern perception (as observed in my own field work), the ancient perception (as evidenced in the cuneiform texts), the reality of physical geography, and the evidence of archaeology.

### THE "BANK OF THE EUPHRATES"

The major dimension of the urban landscape along the Middle Euphrates is the river. This is obvious enough. What is not obvious instead in the literature is that the river has cut for itself a deep valley which places the irrigable area quite a bit below the surface of the surrounding steppe. The net result is that the area available for agricultural purposes is very limited, since no work of hydraulic engineering could ever have raised the water of the river to an elevation of 200 feet or more. There is a sharp boundary between the two, marked by what is often a steep escarpment at the edge of the irrigated agricultural area. It is, as it is called in modern geographical terms, a 'river oasis'. The local Arabic dialect refers to it today as the *zor*, a distinctive term that is found for instance in the name of the capital of the modern province of Syria, Der ez-Zor. Most maps of the area highlight this phenomenon by including the 200 m. contour line even when the normal interval for the higher elevations is in increments of 500 m. Satellite views of the same region also show well the configuration of the terrain and especially the narrowness of the valley.

One can appreciate such narrowness from a site like Terqa: the distance to the escarpment is about 10 kms. to the west, a mere ten minutes by car - and even less to the east, no more than five minutes by car. It is readily apparent that the agricultural hinterland available to Terqa (or Mari for that matter) is extremely limited.

This fact, quite obviously, could not have escaped the attention of the ancient inhabitants. So, how did they refer to this narrow canyon? We find occasionally the term *'amqum*, a West-Semitic noun which means valley: it occurs in the texts of Mari as the "valley of Dūr-Yahḏun-Lim"<sup>7</sup> or the "valley of Terqa"<sup>8</sup>. But the technical term used in Akkadian to refer to

---

logical, aetiology: the most imaginative scholarly rendering of this theme is to be found in the work of T. Jacobsen, from the early formulation in 1946 to the more recent one in 1976; see: T. Jacobsen, *Mesopotamia*, in: H. Frankfort *et al.*, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East*, Chicago, London 1946, pp. 123-219; T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, New Haven, London 1976. For different approaches see for instance: J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Rebel Lands: An Investigation into the Origins of Early Mesopotamian Mythology*, Cambridge 1979; W. Heimpel, *The Natural History of the Tigris According to the Sumerian Literary Composition Lugal*, JNES 46, 1987, pp. 309-317. For the 'organization of space' among modern nomads see for instance: A. Bourgeot, *Structure de classe, pouvoir politique et organisation de l'espace en pays touareg*, in: *Pastoral Production and Society - Production pastorale et société: Proceedings of the international meeting on nomadic pastoralism*, Paris 1-3 Déc. 1976, Cambridge, Paris 1979, pp. 141-153.

The role of perception has of course been stressed in other disciplines as well, such as aesthetics, see especially: J. Albers, *Interaction of Color*, New Haven 1963; R. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye: The New Version*, Berkeley, Los Angeles 1974.

<sup>7</sup> ARM II: 107, 22-23.

<sup>8</sup> ARM III: 30, 16.

the *zor* was, I propose, the term *aḫ Purattim*.<sup>9</sup> Literally, this means the "Bank of the Euphrates", but it is used often in ways that seem to transcend the physical connotation of "edge of the water".<sup>10</sup> A simple reference to the river name (e.g. *ina Purattim*) may also refer to the *zor*.<sup>11</sup> When the meaning intended is "edge of the water", then the term *aḫ nārim* "bank of the river" is used instead.<sup>12</sup>

Generally, the concept of 'river banks' plays, I think, a major role in the ancient perception of the landscape, as it does today. Along similar lines of reasoning, I think that the Akkadian expression *šar kibrātīm arba'im* which is normally translated as "king of the four quarters of the world"<sup>13</sup> may in fact have meant "king of the four river banks", this being after all the common meaning of the term *kibrum*; specifically, the four river banks would include the left and right banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris respectively. If so, then the term 'four river banks' would in effect be the ancient equivalent of 'Mesopotamia'<sup>14</sup> (Fig. 1), in terms of the semantic substance conveyed if not in terms of the etymology of the word; the title *šar Akkade u kibrātīm arba'im*<sup>15</sup> could then be taken to mean "king of Akkad and of Mesopotamia", i.e. king of the civilized Mesopotamian regions and especially its (current)

<sup>9</sup> This is often understood as a proper name, and as such it is often capitalized: this implies that the term is taken with a connotation wider than that of 'edge of the river' - thus for instance in: M. Birot, J.-R. Kupper, O. Rouault, *Répertoire analytique* (2<sup>e</sup> volume): Tomes I-XIV, XVIII et textes divers hors-collection, première partie: noms propres, ARMT XVI/1, Paris 1979, pp. 3-4. However, the specific understanding of the term as *zor* and its contrast with the steppe above the surrounding escarpment has not, to my knowledge, been noted in the literature.

<sup>10</sup> Thus the frequent expression *šāb aḫ Purattim* (ARM I: 60, 17 and *passim*) or *šābum ša aḫ Purattim* (ARM I: 23, 10 and *passim*) "the crew/troop of the Bank of Euphrates" does not imply physical proximity to the water edge, but rather refers to people of the *zor* as opposed to people of the steppe.

<sup>11</sup> ARM III: 12, 10-11: "The Suteans are located in the *zor* (*ina Purattim*) some 30 kms. upstream of Terqa".

<sup>12</sup> E.g. ARM VI: 43, 8; see: M.L. Burke, *Textes administratifs de la salle 111 du palais*, ARMT XI, Paris 1963, p. 132.

<sup>13</sup> For a recent discussion of the term see: J.J. Glassner, *La division quinaire de la terre*, *Akkadica* 40, 1984, pp. 17-34, esp. pp. 18, 26-29. Glassner interprets the term as referring to four parts of the world such as Elam, Meluḫḫa, Mardu and Subartu, which are viewed as the peripheral regions, outside civilization proper, so that a royal title such as *šar Akkade u kibrātīm arba'im* would then refer to Akkad and these four regions. Glassner's article is very informative, and the documentation he provides seems to me to indirectly support the interpretation I am proposing here, since his presentation leaves two important questions unanswered. First, how could the term 'river bank' (which is generally recognized as the literal translation of the term) be applicable to Mardu (which refers to the Syrian steppe) or Subartu (which refers to the mountainous area in the north)? Second, why would a title such as this include only one part of the 'civilized world' (e.g. Akkad), and then add to it the regions which are admittedly viewed as the barbarian periphery? (Note how a late text refers specifically to the empire of Sargon as extending to the border of Meluḫḫa, excluding it therefore from his control, see Glassner, p. 25.) Quite obviously, it would not have been politically acceptable for a king such as Naram-Sin to call himself "king of Akkad and of the 'uncivilized, unknown, strange, savage countries which are not a part of the socialized world'" (!) - which would follow inescapably if we were to use the characterization that Glassner, p. 26, gives for the four parts of the world allegedly corresponding to the four *kibrātīm*.

<sup>14</sup> The terms discussed by J.J. Finkelstein, 'Mesopotamia', *JNES* 21, 1962, pp. 73-92, as antecedents of Greek 'Mesopotamia' do not, as the author stresses, refer to the area "between the two rivers", but rather to the area flanked in a semi-circular way by the bank of one and the same river - in its major acceptation, *māt birītīm* refers to the big bend of the Euphrates, and *māt ebertīm* to the Trans-Euphratian area toward the Amanus range. Note how in this terminology too it is the concept of river bank that is in evidence.

<sup>15</sup> See: J.J. Glassner, *La division quinaire de la terre*, *Akkadica* 40, 1984, pp. 17-34, esp. p. 18.

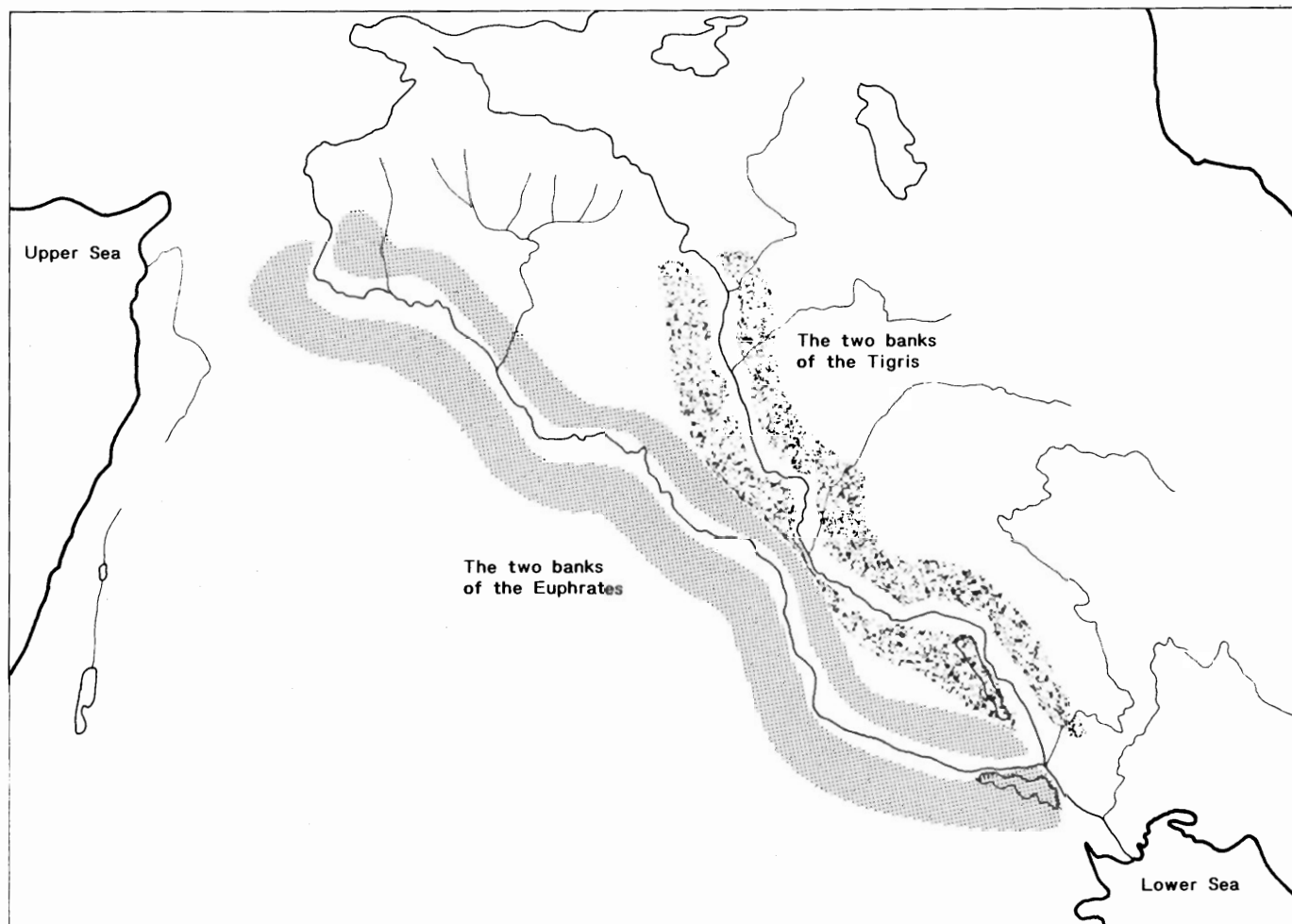


Fig. 1: "The Four River Banks", *i.e.* the Syro-Mesopotamian World

political center. In this light, the royal title acquires a stronger connotation than it would have if it referred to an abstract symmetrical quadripartite sectoring of the world. A similar perception, if different in scope because limited to one river, is reflected in the inscription of Yaḥdun-Lim who boasts control of the "bank of the Euphrates" (*kišād Purattim*).<sup>16</sup>

At any rate, the two banks of the river represent two very major points of reference in the geographical perspective of today's inhabitants of the region: for the people on the Terqa side of the river the 'Jezire', which corresponds to the east bank, is quite literally a different world.

There are two well known terms in the Mari texts which clearly apply to the two banks, the *aqdamātum* and the *aḥarātum*, terms which may be considered West-Semitic because of their phonology. The precise meaning of these two terms remains uncertain. The traditional interpretation places the two in positions exactly opposite of what I am proposing here, and assumes that *aqdamātum* refers to the East. The reason for the location I am suggesting here

<sup>16</sup> RA 33, p. 50, l 8; Syria 32, p. 8, IV 4. The use of the singular form may be due to the fact that in the *zor* the two banks of the river represent a narrow and well defined strip of land.



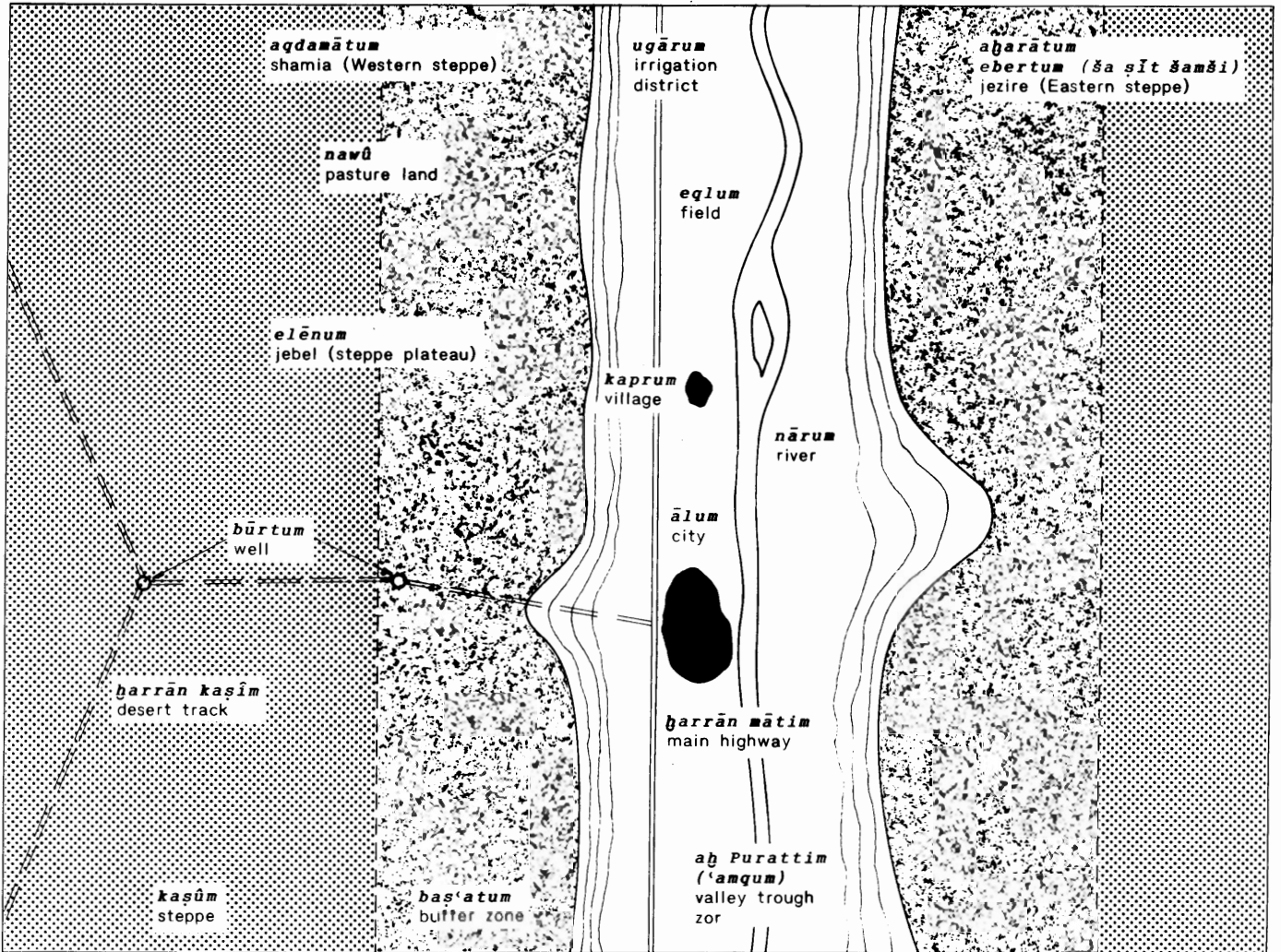


Fig. 2: The Middle Euphrates Landscape

(Fig. 2<sup>17</sup>) is derived from the tentative consideration that the two terms may represent the geographical perspective from the vantage point of the two major cities that were situated on the Middle Euphrates, Mari and Terqa. Since both cities are on the west bank, *aqdamātum* would be the 'frontal bank' or the bank where the main cities are found and *aḥarātum* the 'farther bank' or the bank on the other side of the river. The term *ebertum* occurs a few times in the texts of Mari and Terqa with the meaning 'the other bank' or 'the other side'<sup>18</sup>; this seems to be semantically the Akkadian equivalent of *aḥarātum*, and since on one occasion it is qualified by the addition *šīt šamši*, "of the rising of the Sun"<sup>19</sup>, it would seem to support the interpretation of *aḥarātum* as the left or east bank.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Please refer to the schematic map on this Figure for a representation of the various features discussed in the rest of my text.

<sup>18</sup> J. Bottéro, A. Finet, Répertoire analytique des tomes I à V, ARMT XV, Paris 1954, p. 184.

<sup>19</sup> ARM II: 67, 4.

<sup>20</sup> See also: TFR 1: 2, 1: *mūšarum ša ebertim*, "the garden of the other side". Today, in the area of Terqa, to which this text refers, the gardens are mostly located on the eastern bank of the river.

A term which is occasionally associated with the banks of the river is the one transliterated as *ba-za-ḥa-tum*.<sup>21</sup> I interpret it as referring to the buffer zone at the edge of the steppe overlooking the valley, a stretch running parallel to the river and extending some 30 or 50 kms. inland from the river banks without any natural boundaries but extending perhaps to the line of the first wells in the steppe.<sup>22</sup> I suggest that it may be read *baṣa'ātum*, and that it may be a plural form (normally the texts speak of the two buffer zones on either side of the river) from a singular *baṣ'atum* attested only once.<sup>23</sup> Knowing what to expect, one never fails finding a corroborating etymology, so here is the one that can be marshalled for the case in point: in Hebrew, *beṣā'* stands for "break, cut" - in a moral sense in Biblical Hebrew, and in a geographical sense in Mishnaic Hebrew: "fissures produced by an earthquake".<sup>24</sup> Be that as it may, the textual occurrences in Mari make very good sense if the terms are taken in the proposed meaning. The troops "of the *baṣa'ātum*" appear in this light as the border patrol - not the border of the kingdom as a whole, which includes nominally at least the outer steppe as well, but the border of the urban area which is situated in the "valley", the *aḥ Purattim*.

One reason why the notion of a buffer zone along the edge of the valley makes good sense is because of the general geographical situation. The valley cannot easily be defended from below: the sides of the valley can be very steep, and would give any attacker coming from above the ridge a definite military advantage. Interestingly, and a good example of what is meant by 'perceptual geography', the contemporary inhabitants of the *zor* refer to this ridge and the steppe beyond it as the *jebel*, the "mountain". While not very high, being on the average some 200 feet, the demarcation line is so sharp and the discontinuity in land use so substantial that it does in fact appear, perceptually, as an altogether different land form, a real mountain in its psychological impact even if it cannot be so mapped in terms of contour lines. If the same perception was operative in ancient times, what terms were used to express it?

---

<sup>21</sup> See: M. Anbar, *Les sakbû et les bazaḥātum à Mari*, UF 6, 1974, pp. 439-441; M. Anbar, "Les sakbû et les bazaḥātum à Mari" - une mise au point, UF 7, 1975, p. 592.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g.: ARM II: 98, 4'-9': "Let the desert rangers (*sakbû*) remain on the other side of the river from Appan [a town in the *zor*] up until our well (*adi niātim būrtim*): anybody who attempts to go beyond into the central steppe, let them be apprehended and brought over to the Khanaean headmen"; ARM III: 17, 21-24: "The troops of the buffer zone are in full control: they have gone out on inspection some 50 or 60 kilometers and they bring back (reports that all is) at peace".

<sup>23</sup> ARM X: 155, 4 (*ba-az-ḥa-ti-ia*); see also: ARM VI: 64, 3.7 (*ba-za-ḥa-tam*).

<sup>24</sup> Šebu'ot, fol. 16a, see: A.E. Silverstone, *Shebu'oth*, London 1935, p. 78. I owe this reference to the courtesy of Robert D. Wexler.

## "HIGH COUNTRY" AND "PASTURE LAND"

I suggest that the various words that mean 'high' and 'low' in the Akkadian texts apply in many cases to just this distinction. The terms *elû*, *elītum*, *elēnum*, *eliš* on the one hand (for 'high') and *šaplû*, *šaplītum*, *šaplānum*, *šapliš* on the other hand (for 'low'), as well as the verbs *elû*, 'to go up', and *arādu*, 'to go down', would refer then in many instances to the geographical differentiation between the valley floor and the higher steppe that surrounds it.<sup>25</sup> If true, this understanding of the terms has far-reaching implications. In the literature, the polarity 'high/low' is generally understood as referring to a north/south orientation, whereby the *mātum elītum* would then refer regularly to the northern Khabur plains. Now in some instances this is indeed the case, and it may be explained, perceptually, in terms of the flow of the river. On several occasions, *elēnum* and related terms for 'high' mean 'upstream'<sup>26</sup>, while the corresponding terms for 'low' mean 'downstream'. The northern and southern orientation, I think, derived indirectly from this primary perception, the north being, in some cases, upstream, for instance along the Euphrates from Mari to Terqa and along the full stretch of the Khabur. On the other hand, the Upper Sea (*tāmtum elītum*) is in fact not directly north, but rather to the west. Also note that in the description of fields contained in contracts, the 'upper side' means upstream along the feeder canal, which is the most advantageous side in terms of irrigation.

There are, however, many instances where the term 'high country' refers not to the north but rather to the steppe east and west of the Euphrates<sup>27</sup> and if so we must redefine the geographical horizon of many among the Mari texts. It is also clear that Fall and Winter transhumance could not have taken the herds to the north (no more than they could have to the *zor*) because both would have been under cultivation at that time.

The separation between the valley floor and the steppe is also marked by the presence of cemeteries on the edge of the escarpment, Baghuz in the area of Mari and possibly a site called Kishme in the area of Terqa. Here too we can see an interesting perceptual nuance. The steppe is the 'high country' from the point of view of the valley floor, a wilderness that

<sup>25</sup> M. Weippert suggests that *mātum elītum* may refer to "'mountains' or 'hills' in contrast with the Euphrates valley", and not just the Khabur plains; by this he thinks in particular of the Jebel Bishri; cf. M. Weippert, *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Palestine: A Critical Survey of Recent Scholarly Debate*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series 21, London 1971, p. 113. My suggestion, on the other hand, is that the *mātum elītum* refers to the steppe beginning immediately at the escarpment that flanks the *zor*.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g.: ARM III: 12, 10-11 (quoted above, note 11); ARM VI: 47, 7; ARM XIII: 46, 9.20 (the verb *illīem* refers to Qatna from the point of view of Ešnunna, and the verb *urrad* refers to Mari from the point of view of Karkamiš - along an east-west/northwest transect, corresponding to the course of the river).

<sup>27</sup> See e.g.: ARM II: 102, 18-21: "My troops of the buffer zone are strong and will catch any Yaminite trying to go from low to high ground" (*ištu šaplānum ana eliš*); ARM III: 12, 17-20: "... the Yaminites are all hostile and they come and go from the high ground to their cities" (*ištu elēnum ana ālānēšunu illakūnimma u iturrū*: it would hardly be possible to "come and go" from the Khabur plains to Terqa! rather, this is a situation similar to that envisaged in ARM III: 16, where the "enemies" come at night to visit their wives in the valley towns, and go back in the day time - obviously to the steppe); ARM V: 81, 5-12, referring to sheep that have crossed (the river) and are grazing in the lower grounds near a certain city (GN *u šapliš ire*); ARM XIII: 102, 20-22: "... a vanguard of 1500 Khanaeans has gone down (*urdam*) to the river".

is known to be above and beyond, but is generally beyond the ken of the city people in the valley floor. One wonders whether kings or scribes ever visited this high beyond. Certainly there are *very few* explicit references in the texts.<sup>28</sup> The term *kašû* refers to the inner steppe on either side of the river (much as the term *badia* does in Arabic); and it is possible that the troops qualified as *sakbû* were in charge of patrolling this territory, albeit on a rather sporadic and occasional basis.

The only term which occurs frequently in connection with the steppe is *nawû*, which I think refers properly to the concept of pasture lands. Since the largest extent of such pasture lands is found in the steppe or high ground, the *nawû* is practically synonymous with 'steppe' (in the specific sense of 'steppe with water holes', for which see presently) but in fact *nawû* lands can also be found in the valley. Other acceptations of the term are found in the texts, as already suggested by various authors, e.g. 'camp' or 'herd',<sup>29</sup> but in my estimation the meaning of pasture land or (by extension) steppe is the most common meaning of the term in the Mari texts.

Hardly any specific reference can be found in the texts about the landscape of the steppe, or about events that take place in the steppe, or about the nature of human presence in the steppe. It is largely a *terra incognita* for the scribes and their clientele in the river valley. Perceptually, Mari was much farther from the Jebel Bishri than from Ebla or Kiš. This is in sharp contrast with the picture we can reconstruct of the valley floor, the *aḥ Purattim*, for which we can reconstruct a very detailed map, which I have in fact drawn up on the basis of the texts of Terqa. While this is not the place to go into the details of the Terqa rural landscape in the valley floor,<sup>30</sup> the simple fact that such map can be established will make one point clear: no picture even remotely resembling such a map of the valley floor could be drawn up for the steppe from all the texts of Mari or other texts from the same period.

One important feature of the steppe landscape that we can, I believe, project back into those time periods from the modern situation is the development of wells. Wells are mentioned seldom in the texts,<sup>31</sup> but they were an essential precondition to the large scale utilization of the steppe that was taking place. These wells dot today the steppe, and make it possible to have an effective utilization of the pasture lands which extended at great distances from nat-

---

<sup>28</sup> See e.g.: ARM II: 78, 31-35; ARM II: 120, 19-24; ARM VI: 42, 5. New evidence dealing with the steppe landscape is announced, and briefly described, in: D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, 'Fils de Sim'al': les origines tribales des rois de Mari, RA 80, 1986, pp. 141-183, esp. pp. 147-148 with note 34, p. 156 with note 76; hereafter cited as 'Fils de Sim'al'.

<sup>29</sup> D.O Edzard, Altbabylonisch *nawûm*, ZA 53, 1959, pp. 158-173; V.H. Matthews, Pastoral Nomadism in the Mari Kingdom (ca. 1830-1760 B.C.), ASOR Dissertation Series 3, Cambridge, Mass. 1978, pp. 59-63.

<sup>30</sup> I have done so in my article "The Rural Landscape in the Ancient Zor: The Terqa Evidence" mentioned above in note 1.

<sup>31</sup> See e.g.: ARM II: 98, Rv 4-5: "The eastern buffer zone (*aḥarātum*) from Appan until our well" - which seems to suggest that the first line of wells was controlled by the state, while the others were by default under direct tribal control.

is known to be above and beyond, but is generally beyond the ken of the city people in the valley floor. One wonders whether kings or scribes ever visited this high beyond. Certainly there are v e r y f e w explicit references in the texts.<sup>28</sup> The term *kaṣû* refers to the inner steppe on either side of the river (much as the term *badia* does in Arabic); and it is possible that the troops qualified as *sakbû* were in charge of patrolling this territory, albeit on a rather sporadic and occasional basis.

The only term which occurs frequently in connection with the steppe is *nawû*, which I think refers properly to the concept of pasture lands. Since the largest extent of such pasture lands is found in the steppe or high ground, the *nawû* is practically synonymous with 'steppe' (in the specific sense of 'steppe with water holes', for which see presently) but in fact *nawû* lands can also be found in the valley. Other acceptations of the term are found in the texts, as already suggested by various authors, e.g. 'camp' or 'herd',<sup>29</sup> but in my estimation the meaning of pasture land or (by extension) steppe is the most common meaning of the term in the Mari texts.

Hardly any specific reference can be found in the texts about the landscape of the steppe, or about events that take place in the steppe, or about the nature of human presence in the steppe. It is largely a *terra incognita* for the scribes and their clientele in the river valley. Perceptually, Mari was much farther from the Jebel Bishri than from Ebla or Kiš. This is in sharp contrast with the picture we can reconstruct of the valley floor, the *aḥ Purattim*, for which we can reconstruct a very detailed map, which I have in fact drawn up on the basis of the texts of Terqa. While this is not the place to go into the details of the Terqa rural landscape in the valley floor,<sup>30</sup> the simple fact that such map can be established will make one point clear: no picture even remotely resembling such a map of the valley floor could be drawn up for the steppe from all the texts of Mari or other texts from the same period.

One important feature of the steppe landscape that we can, I believe, project back into those time periods from the modern situation is the development of wells. Wells are mentioned seldom in the texts,<sup>31</sup> but they were an essential precondition to the large scale utilization of the steppe that was taking place. These wells dot today the steppe, and make it possible to have an effective utilization of the pasture lands which extended at great distances from nat-

---

<sup>28</sup> See e.g.: ARM II: 78, 31-35; ARM II: 120, 19-24; ARM VI: 42, 5. New evidence dealing with the steppe landscape is announced, and briefly described, in: D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, 'Fils de Sim'al': les origines tribales des rois de Mari, RA 80, 1986, pp. 141-183, esp. pp. 147-148 with note 34, p. 156 with note 76; hereafter cited as 'Fils de Sim'al'.

<sup>29</sup> D.O Edzard, Altbabylonisch *nawûm*, ZA 53, 1959, pp. 158-173; V.H. Matthews, Pastoral Nomadism in the Mari Kingdom (ca. 1830-1760 B.C.), ASOR Dissertation Series 3, Cambridge, Mass. 1978, pp. 59-63.

<sup>30</sup> I have done so in my article "The Rural Landscape in the Ancient Zor: The Terqa Evidence" mentioned above in note 1.

<sup>31</sup> See e.g.: ARM II: 98, Rv 4-5: "The eastern buffer zone (*aḥarātum*) from Appan until o u r well" - which seems to suggest that the first line of wells was controlled by the state, while the others were by default under direct tribal control.

ural water resources, such as rivers or oases. While oases were certainly used in prehistoric times, and there are occasional indications that wells too were used, we are generally at a loss in determining the 'occupational period' of wells. On the basis of circumstantial evidence I am assuming that they came into use primarily in historic times, *i.e.* during the third millennium, as herders from the river valleys sought out new territories beyond the restricted limits of irrigable lands. This development may be called the industrialization of the steppe, in the sense that through the systematic development of a large scale network of wells, herding became possible on a massive scale, certainly such as the limited river valley could never have supported. It is significant by way of contrast with the south that wells are not found there in the way they are found in the Syrian steppe: this was observed by David and Joan Oates in a perceptive article on Mesopotamian geography,<sup>32</sup> and can be noted by looking, for instance, at the toponymy which shows that geographical names with the word *bīr* (that is, 'well' in Arabic) abound in Syria but not in Iraq. This dual nature of a steppe landscape is reflected, I think, in the important dichotomy between the Akkadian words *ṣēru* on the one hand for 'arid steppe outside the limits of irrigation land' (common in the south and practically unknown in Mari or Terqa) and the word *nawû* on the other for 'steppe with water holes' which is common in Mari and which occurs less frequently in the south in the meaning of 'non-cultivated pasture land with access to canals'.

#### THE AGRO-PASTORALISTS

With this new awareness of the landscape we are in a better position to understand the people who utilized the steppe and their relationship to the people who utilized exclusively the valley. To begin with, there is no reason to believe that there existed in prehistory nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists who would have undergone in the steppe a social and demographic development comparable to that of the populations settled in the river valleys.<sup>33</sup> Historic nomadism is not an offshoot of prehistoric wandering bands: there is neither evidence for such a development, nor reason to assume it.<sup>34</sup> Instead, large scale nomadism, I suggest, developed as a form of land reclamation: the peasants of the Middle Euphrates outgrew the boundaries of the valley and while they could not bring agriculture to the steppe,

---

<sup>32</sup> D. Oates, J. Oates, Early Irrigation Agriculture in Mesopotamia, in: G. de G. Sieveking, I.H. Longworth, K.E. Wilson (eds.), *Problems in Economic and Social Archaeology*, London 1976, pp. 109-135, esp. p. 114.

<sup>33</sup> This point was first made, with general reference to the southern alluvium, by: S.H. Lees, D.G. Bates, *The Origins of Specialized Nomadic Pastoralism: A Systemic Model*, *American Antiquity* 39, 1974, pp. 187-193.

<sup>34</sup> On the topic of early domestication and its relation to settled villages in late prehistoric times, see: A.M.T. Moore, *A Pre-Neolithic Farmer's Village on the Euphrates*, *Scientific American* 241, 1979, pp. 62-70; A.M.T. Moore, *North Syria in Neolithic 2*, in: *Préhistoire du Levant: Chronologie et organisation de l'espace depuis les origines jusqu'au VI<sup>e</sup> millénaire*, Lyon 10-14 juin 1980, *Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, N° 598, Paris 1981, pp. 445-456; A.M.T. Moore, *Agricultural origins in the Near East: A model for the 1980s*, *World Archaeology* 14, 1982, pp. 224-236; A.M.T. Moore, *A Four-Stage Sequence for the Levantine Neolithic, ca. 8500-3750 B.C.*, *BASOR* 246, 1982, pp. 1-34.



they discovered that they could bring their herds to it, once they had learned to drill wells. I call them agro-pastoralists. This is quite in line with the Mendenhall/Luke<sup>35</sup> line of reasoning, and with Rowton's dimorphic society.<sup>36</sup> If there is a difference, it is because I stress on the one hand the agrarian component, while on the other I view the trend towards nomadism as in course of development. Let me dwell briefly on these two points.

The so-called 'nomads' may in fact be viewed as the rural class, or peasants, who were primarily at home in the valley and by necessity came to 'settle', as it were, the steppe. Such a situation was most likely to develop first, at least on a major scale, along the Middle Euphrates, because of the narrowness of the valley floor available for agriculture. From the beginning of the publication of the Mari evidence, the texts clearly showed that the so-called 'nomads' had, in fact, a very strong sedentary component.<sup>37</sup> What is becoming clearer is that they were in fact primarily sedentary, but in the process of taking up, partially and selectively, pastoral nomadism. The important work by Kathleen Galvin on the faunal remains from Terqa<sup>38</sup> has shown that culling practices as known from that site in the Old Babylonian period do not correspond to the standards one would expect from fully developed or 'professional' pastoralists: this matches well with the suggestion advanced here that pastoralism as such was just then being developed.

---

<sup>35</sup> G.E. Mendenhall, *The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine*, BiAr 25, 1962, pp. 66-87; G.E. Mendenhall, Review of "M. Weippert, *Die Landnahme der israelitischen Stämme in der neuen wissenschaftlichen Diskussion: Ein kritischer Bericht, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 92, Göttingen 1967", *Biblica* 50, 1969, pp. 432-436; G.E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition*, Baltimore, London 1973, esp. chapter V: 'The *'Apiru* Movements in the Late Bronze Age' (pp. 122-141), chapter VII: 'Tribe and State in the Ancient World: The Nature of the Biblical Community' (pp. 174-197); J.T. Luke, *Pastoralism and Politics in the Mari Period: A Reexamination of the Character and Political Significance of the Major West Semitic Tribal Groups on the Middle Euphrates, ca. 1828-1758 B.C.*, Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, Michigan 1965; J.T. Luke, *Your Father was an Amorite*, in: H.B. Huffmon, F.A. Spina, A.R.W. Green (eds.), *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, Winona Lake 1983, pp. 221-237. - To some extent, there are similarities also with the position of Gottwald pertaining to the pre-monarchic period in ancient Israel, cf. N.K. Gottwald, *The Hypothesis of the Revolutionary Origins of Ancient Israel: A Response to Hauser and Thompson*, JSOT 7, 1978, pp. 37-52; N.K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.*, Maryknoll, N.Y. 1979; N.K. Gottwald, *The Participation of Free Agrarians in the Introduction of Monarchy to Ancient Israel: An Application of H.A. Landsberger's Framework for the Analysis of Peasant Movements*, *Semeia* 37, 1986, pp. 77-106; but see the 'appraisal' of Gottwald's theory by: G.E. Mendenhall, *Ancient Israel's Hyphenated History*, in: D.N. Freedman, D.F. Graf (eds.), *Palestine in Transition: The Emergence of Ancient Israel*, Sheffield 1983, pp. 91-103.

<sup>36</sup> See the fifteen articles on this topic by M.B. Rowton listed in the bibliography at the end of this article.

<sup>37</sup> Remember for instance the 'grain tribute of the Yaminites' or the many references to farming on the part of groups which are otherwise generally identified as 'nomadic' on the basis of their name. The 'cities' of the nomads were explained as tents; but whenever these cities are named and can be tracked down geographically, they appear to have been situated in the valley, and certainly there is no archaeological trace whatsoever of them in the steppe - nor does, as already mentioned, the horizon of the scribes extend to the steppe, which is hardly ever described whether in connection with the nomads or otherwise. A military muster tablet of Baḥdi-Lim (ARM XXIII: 428, 429) lists some 354 Yaminites divided in groups, each of them assigned to a town - i.e., they were susceptible to state control inasmuch as they were registered in conjunction with a settlement.

<sup>38</sup> K.F. Galvin, *Early State Economic Organization and the Role of Specialized Pastoralism: Terqa in the Middle Euphrates Region, Syria*, Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles 1981 (forthcoming in the series *Terqa Final Reports*); K.F. Galvin, *Forms of Finance and Forms of Production: The Evolution of Specialized Livestock Production in the Ancient Near East*, in: E.M. Brumfiel, T.K. Earle (eds.), *Specialization, Exchange, and Complex Societies*, Cambridge 1987, pp. 119-129. - I am happy to acknowledge that it was as a result of Galvin's research that I began to rethink the role of pastoralism in Terqa and its region, out of which the present study has developed.

The situation depicted in the texts is in fact quite fluid: on the one hand there is evidence for movements and institutions similar to those for 'nomads' from other periods, and yet the same types of groups and individuals are also represented as sedentary. This may be explained, I submit, by assuming that we are dealing with an evolving nomadization trend: as I read it, the steppe is the place whereto one hides from the valley, rather than the irrepressible gene pool from which nomadic waves originate. Rather than seeing only occasional evidence for a sedentary life, I see in the texts pervasive evidence for a peasant settled population that takes to the steppe for economic and to some extent for political reasons. Instead of sedentarization of nomads, I think we must speak of *n o m a d i z a t i o n o f t h e p e a s a n t s*.<sup>39</sup>

A series of schematic maps (Figs. 3.1-4) will summarize this graphically, bringing out a comparison of my interpretation with the three major previous theories about the origin of nomadism in the Syro-Mesopotamian area:<sup>40</sup>

- The invasion model (Fig. 3.1) is the one with which we all grew up: large waves from a desert viewed as a major source of demographic pressure (the 'Völkerkammer' of Winckler<sup>41</sup>).
- The more subtle view of infiltration (Fig. 3.2) is the one made classic by Kupper's great work<sup>42</sup>: the change of perspective was reflected in the metaphor of a river replacing that of sea waves.
- Luke (building on Mendenhall) and Rowton brought out the systemic interaction of nomadic and sedentary populations (Fig. 3.3), in a symbiotic relationship where both poles

<sup>39</sup> Many of the texts that deal with the 'hostilities of the nomads' may be so interpreted. For instance, ARM III: 16 speaks of 'enemies' who come surreptitiously at night to visit their wives in the valley towns (!), but spend the daytime in the steppe with their comrades to whom they bring news of the valley floor. Also notice how often hostility is described as a change in attitude or temporary state, rather than a permanent disposition (e.g. ARM IV: 80, 4-5). Also interesting is the fact that the victory of Zimri-Lim on the Yaminites is said to have taken place not in the steppe, but in Sagaratum (see already: G. Dossin, *Les noms d'années et d'éponymes dans les 'Archives de Mari'*, in: A. Parrot (ed.), *Studia Mariana*, Leiden 1950, pp. 51-61, esp. p. 55). ARM XXII: 262 and ARM XXIII: 76, 77, 421 (see the discussion in: G. Bardet et al., *Archives administratives de Mari 1*, ARMT XXIII, Paris 1984, pp. 476-503) relate the restoration to freedom of individuals who had been taken captive during a campaign against the Yaminites: they are handed over to close relatives (in ARM XXIII: 76 without payment of ransom!), who are apparently known to the central administration; this too implies that the 'campaign' had taken place very close to home. Finally it may be noticed that the Yaminites who had been registered on a military roll recorded in ARM XXIII: 428, 429 (already quoted) did not in fact show up for the muster (428, 38-40 and 429, 39-41: *ša ... ina Dīr lā itiqū ...*) - a high incidence of desertion (the total being 354 individuals), which points to the general unreliability of the Yaminite troops. - For a similar concept applied to southern Mesopotamia, see: H.J. Nissen, *The Mobility between Settled and Non-Settled in Early Mesopotamia: Theory and Evidence*, in: *L'archéologie de l'Iraq du début de l'époque néolithique à 333 avant notre ère: Perspectives et limites de l'interprétation anthropologique des documents*, Paris 13-15 juin 1978, *Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, N° 580, Paris 1980, pp. 285-290.

<sup>40</sup> For a very good review of the pertinent literature, see: J.T. Luke, *Pastoralism and Politics in the Mari Period: A Reexamination of the Character and Political Significance of the Major West Semitic Tribal Groups on the Middle Euphrates, ca. 1828-1758 B.C.*, Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, Michigan 1965, pp. 1-50.

<sup>41</sup> See e.g.: H. Winckler, *Auszug aus der Vorderasiatischen Geschichte*, Leipzig 1905, p. 2.

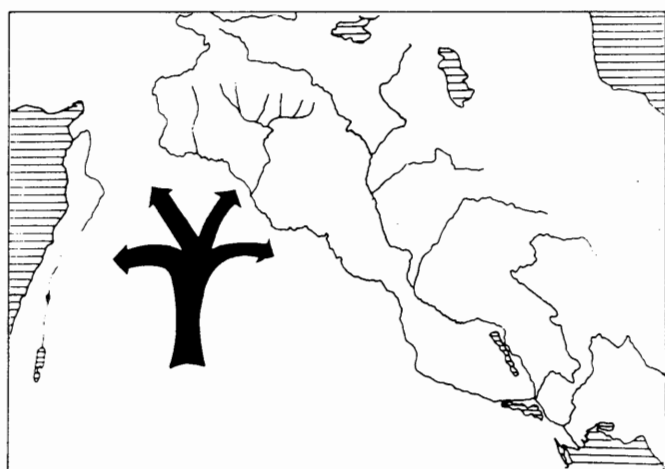
<sup>42</sup> J.-R. Kupper, *Les nomades en Mésopotamie au temps des rois de Mari*, Paris 1957.



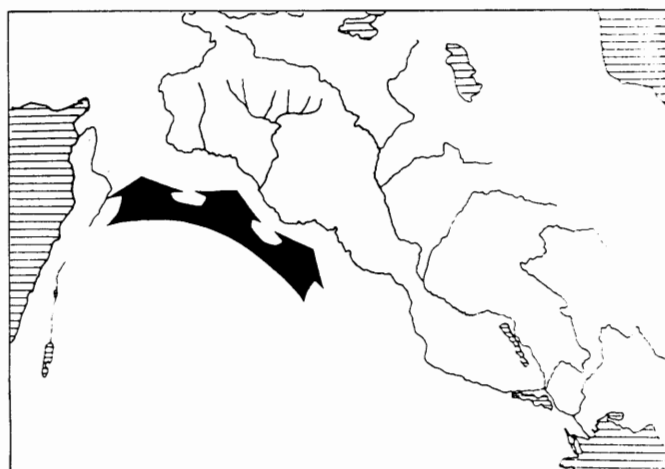
were just as much in need of each other and were subsumed under a unified socio-political system, symbolized on my schematic map by the elliptical frames that enclose both the arrows and the settlements.

- My point of view (Fig. 3.4), on the other hand, is that we are dealing with the transitional stage when the peasants have taken so systematically to the steppe that they are in fact becoming nomadic.

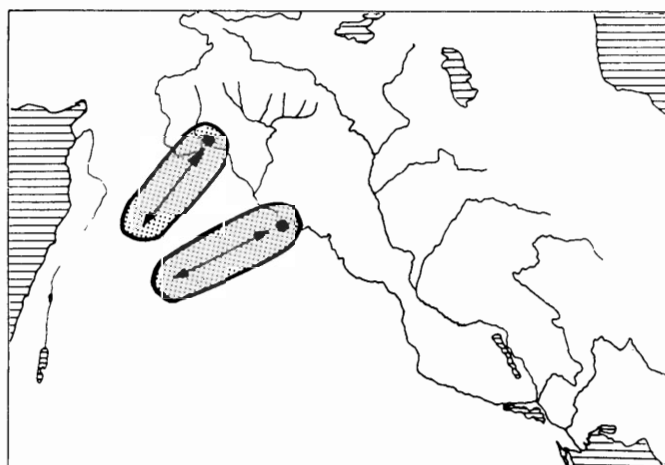
By developing a systematic exploitation of the immense range-land of the steppe, made newly possible as a result of the network of wells they had established, they had discovered a new socio-political base which made them much less dependent on the urban state power of the *zor*. They could come back to the *zor*, and beyond that they could go as far as the southern alluvium, the northern Khabur plains and even the Orontes and the Jordan valleys with a newly developed sense of power and autonomy. In a sense, we can repropose the wave and invasion theory - but, very significantly, not from the core of the desert, but rather from the *zor* via the desert. This is why we can indeed see in the record evidence for both nomads and peasants: they were two poles of a development that was still in its developmental stages.



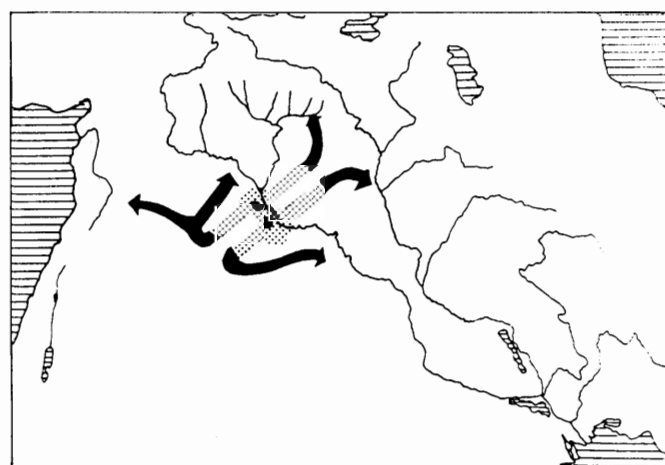
.1: Invasions (traditional)



.2: Infiltration (Kupper '57)



.3: Dimorphic State & Enclosed Nomadism (Rowton '67, '73-76)



.4: Nomadization (proposed)

Figs. 3.1-4:

Alternative Interpretations of the Interaction between the Middle Euphrates Basin and the Steppe

At what point did this process of nomadization begin? If demographic pressure was a reason behind it, then it would have had to start some time after the beginning of urbanization, that is some time into the third millennium. The texts of Ebla<sup>43</sup> and the pre-Sargonic or Sargonic texts from the south do not show evidence of major 'Amorite' (and consequently, in the sense suggested here, of 'nomadic') presence. A major change is reflected, for the south, at the time of the third dynasty of Ur:<sup>44</sup> this would imply that the process had already evolved to a point where the thrust away from the *zor* had reached its fullest momentum. The establishment of the 'Amorite' dynasties<sup>45</sup> in the early part of the second millennium would be the result of this thrust. Now the texts of Mari, which give us the most information about the agro-pastoralists, date precisely from this period, *i.e.* from a period when the process of 'nomadization' would seem to have peaked already. Such a dichotomy, whereby we seem to have continued evidence of a formative stage at a time when a climax had already been reached, is only apparent. The 'climax' does not necessarily mean that the process of nomadization had resulted in the complete dislocation of tribal groups from the *zor* to the steppe; rather, tribal groups remained fully anchored to their agrarian base, but under certain circumstances they shifted the location of such base. In other words, if they started out, as I am assuming, to use the steppe from their base in the *zor*, they may at some point have taken up as their new base the urban areas at the other end of the steppe, practically in all directions. It is probably only in the latter part of the second millennium that the steppe develops into a full-fledged home base, with such entities as the kingdom of Amurru.<sup>46</sup>

#### TRIBAL-URBAN INTERACTION

One fundamental corollary of this interpretation has to do with our understanding of tribal relations. The process whereby large social groups came to maintain and in fact nurture an effective group solidarity not directly tied to territorial contiguity fostered the sense of group self-identity. The organizational imperatives of herding in the steppe were a significant part of this process, but ideological factors seem to have played a role as well. At any rate, these groups, or 'tribes', interjected a new social order in the fabric of urban society as it had developed in the valley. The potential for tribal autonomy within the state was enormous. Not only was there the dimension of ideological self-identity, signaled especially

---

<sup>43</sup> See: A. Archi, *Mardu in the Ebla Texts*, OrNS 54, 1985, pp. 7-13.

<sup>44</sup> G. Buccellati, *The Amorites of the Ur III Period*, Pubblicazioni del Seminario di Semitistica, Ricerche 1, Naples 1966; C. Wilcke, *Zur Geschichte der Amurriter in der Ur-III-Zeit*, WO 5, 1969-1970, pp. 1-31.

<sup>45</sup> Whose strong sense of tribal affinity has been emphatically illustrated by: D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, 'Fils de Sim'al', section III, pp. 157-174. The deep roots of these traditions would also argue for a process which would have taken place over a relatively long period of time. Differently: P. Michalowski, *History as Charter: Some Observations on the Sumerian King List*, in: J.M. Sasson (ed.), *Studies in Literature from the Ancient Near East*, dedicated to Samuel Noah Kramer, AOS 65, New Haven 1984, pp. 237-248.

<sup>46</sup> On this, see the last of the articles quoted in note 1.

by the use of tribal proper names and of a distinctive group of dialects (*i.e.* Amorite, which I understand as the rural counterpart of urban Akkadian/Eblaite<sup>47</sup>), but also the real possibility of evading the control of the state by taking to the steppe for indefinite periods of time, *i.e.* without returning, if so desired, to the home base in the valley.

The provisions taken against this trend by the central power of the state were limited to the valley and the buffer zones: a tribal commissioner (thus I understand the office of the *mer'ū*), tribal headmen (the *sugāgū*, residing in valley towns and appointed by the palace upon payment of an appropriate fee), the census<sup>48</sup>, the control of the herds at the time of shearing and when they had to cross the river, the border patrol (*bazaḥatum*) and (only minimally) the desert rangers (*sakbū*). The political and administrative apparatus of the state effectively controlled the steppe only insofar as it could intercept in the river valley the people who did use the steppe but who were ultimately still based in the valley: there was apparently no direct effort on the part of the state to control the steppe itself, precisely because there were no people associated exclusively with the steppe. This made it easier for the tribal population to maintain and develop its strong sense of cohesion and political power. It is no accident that we hear so much about this rural population, while we hear so little about their counterparts in the south.

There is another major difference between the Middle Euphrates and the south that needs stressing. In the south the state exercised direct control over the herds, or at least over some herds. There are enough texts that attest to the fact that the state bureaucracy accounted for herds numbering 1000 or more animals down to the minutest details of newborn lambs or dead animals.<sup>49</sup> No texts of this type have been found in Mari or Terqa, and while this may of course be disproven at any time, it seems to be in fact the pattern that we would expect: on the Middle Euphrates, the herds were not handled by the state but by the tribal elements who alone knew how to exploit the farther recesses of the steppe. I would not expect, therefore, to find in the *zor* a site that might be the equivalent of Puzriš-Dagan in the south.

Let us review the relationships between the tribal and the non-tribal populations in the valley, which one will also find sketched diagrammatically in chart form (Fig. 4). The

---

<sup>47</sup> We may consider in this light the views of Garbini about the chronological priority of Amorite, see *e.g.*: G. Garbini, *Sulle origini della lingua araba*, in: A. Francesco Gabrieli: *Studi orientalistici offerti nel sessantesimo compleanno dai suoi colleghi a discepoli*, *Studi Orientali pubblicati a cura della Scuola Orientale* 5, Roma 1964, pp. 123-134. - I present my views on the socio-linguistic aspect of Amorite *vs.* Akkadian/Eblaite in the fifth of the articles quoted above in note 1.

<sup>48</sup> Which is carried out regularly in the *zor*, *e.g.* ARM II: 130, 33 (*tēbibtam ina aḥ Purattim*).

<sup>49</sup> Besides the vast amounts of animals recorded in the public archives of the Ur III period, especially at Puzriš-Dagan, and besides individual texts dealing either with herding contracts (for a recently published example, see: M. Stol, *Fragment of a Herding Contract*, in: J.-M. Durand, J.-R. Kupper (eds.), *Miscellanea Babylonica: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot*, Paris 1985, pp. 273-275) or special topics (see *e.g.*: I.J. Gelb, *Growth of a Herd of Cattle in Ten Years*, *JCS* 21, 1967, pp. 64-69), see especially: F.R. Kraus, *Staatliche Viehhaltung im altbabylonischen Lande Larsa*, *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde*, N.R. 29/5, Amsterdam 1966, on the public administration of herds in Old Babylonian Larsa.

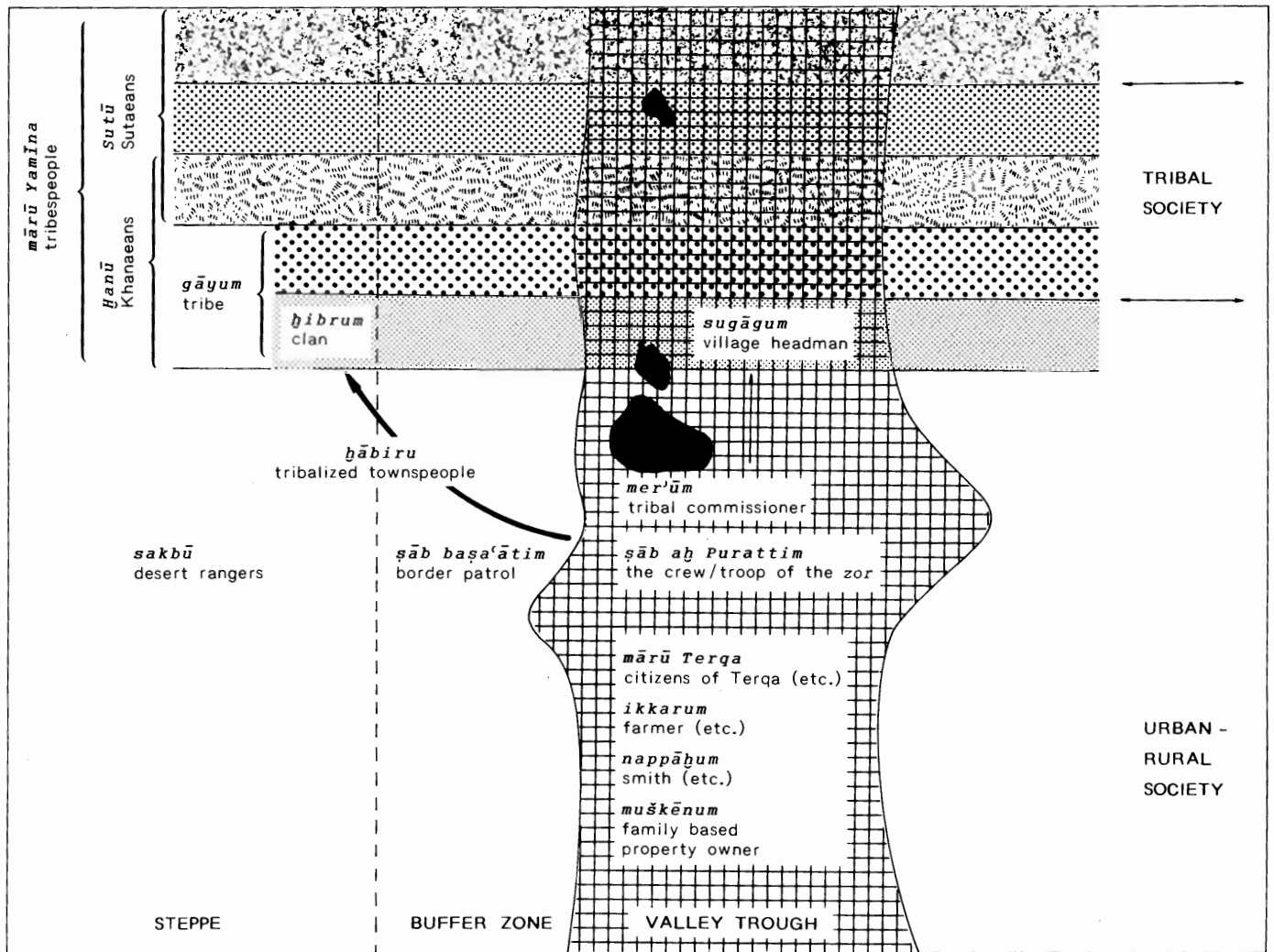


Fig. 4: The Setting of Urban, Rural and Tribal Societies

non-tribal urban population is referred in many different ways in the texts - for instance as the "sons of a given city" (e.g. *mārū Terqa*<sup>50</sup>) or as the "crew" or "troop of the bank of the Euphrates" (*ṣāb aḫ Purattim*<sup>51</sup>). While these were presumably city people, there seem to have been also non-tribal peasants: the term *muškēnum*<sup>52</sup> may well

50 E.g. ARM III: 6, 5.

51 See above, note 10.

52 See e.g. ARM V: 81, 5 (*muškēnum ša aḫ Purattim*: their sheep are mentioned together with those of the Khanaeans); ARM VI: 2, 7-8; ARM VI: 3, 10-11; ARM X: 151, 19; ARM XIV: 81, 37 (*eqlum ša muškēnim* or the like); ARM XIV: 48 (*alpī ša muškēnim*); ARM XIV: 121, 39-47 (connections with the steppe). See: W. von Soden, *muškēnum* und die Mawālī des frühen Islam, ZA 56, 1964, pp. 133-141; R. McC. Adams, *Property Rights and Functional Tenure in Mesopotamian Rural Communities*, in: M.A. Dandamayev et al. (eds.), *Societies and Languages of the Ancient Near East: Studies in Honour of I.M. Diakonoff*, Warminster 1982, pp. 1-14, esp. p. 12.

have this meaning on a number of occasions. Conversely, there was certainly a phenomenon of urbanization of tribal peasants: leaving aside the witness of onomastics (which is applicable even to the royal family<sup>53</sup>), there are several cases of Khanaeans or Sutaeans, for example, who are listed with various dignitaries as receiving garments or animals from the central administration,<sup>54</sup> or are attested with very urban titles such as *suk-kallu* (a high court functionary)<sup>55</sup> or professions such as smith.<sup>56</sup> The opposite was also possible: the tribalization of urban people. What this might have meant concretely was that individuals or small groups that had no tribal self-identity could attach themselves to tribes: this may have been the value of the term *ḥa-pí-ru* in Mari, to judge from the few occurrences where it is found.<sup>57</sup>

If the tribal dimension was so pervasive that it colored directly or indirectly the value of several terms referring to social groupings, it would seem logical that there should be a correlative ancient term used to express the concept of 'tribal people'.<sup>58</sup> As a tentative candidate for a term describing such a social category we may consider the ubiquitous *mārū Yamīna* and related terms, the 'Yaminites'. They are generally considered to constitute a specific tribe.<sup>59</sup> But there are curious distributional anomalies, which are summarized here briefly in chart form (Fig. 5). There seems to be no individual mentioned by a profession or title (*i.e.* no urban individual) who is qualified as Yaminite, as is instead true for Khanaeans;<sup>60</sup> also, there seems to be no Yaminite listed as either bringing animals to, or receiv-

<sup>53</sup> Charpin and Durand, 'Fils de Sim'al', develop at length the issue of the tribal origins of the dynasty of Zimri-Lim and of Amorite dynasties in general.

<sup>54</sup> ARM XXIII: 243. 446. 448.

<sup>55</sup> ARM XXIII: 235, iii 34.

<sup>56</sup> ARM XXIII: 235, iii 33. 36; see also ARM XIII: 30, 5, which refers to the Khanaeans "of Mari and of Suprum".

<sup>57</sup> See perhaps ARM II: 131, 10-15. On the *ḥapiru* see recently: O. Loretz, *Habiru-Hebräer: Eine sozio-linguistische Studie über die Herkunft des Gentiliziums 'ibrī vom Appellativum ḥabiru*, Berlin, New York 1984; N. Na'aman, *Ḥabiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere*, JNES 45, 1986, pp. 271-288.

<sup>58</sup> For a recent discussion of the term *gā'um*, translated as "clan", see: P. Talon, *Quelques réflexions sur les clans Hanéens*, in: J.-M. Durand, J.-R. Kupper (eds.), *Miscellanea Babylonica: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot*, Paris 1985, pp. 277-284, esp. pp. 278-280.

<sup>59</sup> See recently: M. Anbar, *La distribution géographique des Bini-Yamina d'après les archives royales de Mari*, in: J.-M. Durand, J.-R. Kupper (eds.), *Miscellanea Babylonica: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot*, Paris 1985, pp. 17-24. - The fundamental article by Charpin and Durand, 'Fils de Sim'al', of which I have been able to see the galley proofs through the courtesy of the authors (after the text of my own article had been completed), deals at great length with the issue of the Yaminites and the concept of tribal identity. On the basis of a wealth of new information, they consider the Yaminites and the Sim'alites as major tribal subdivisions of the Khanaeans - *i.e.* as groups that retain true tribal status even though they belong at the same time to a larger tribal entity. My impression, after a quick initial reading of their article, is that my interpretation (whereby the Yaminites do not constitute a real tribe) may still be maintained, and that in fact the nuances of their own interpretation are not wholly at variance with mine. A few remarks are added below; but their impressive documentation and brilliant interpretation requires more reflection than I have been able to accord them at this stage.

<sup>60</sup> See above, notes 55 and 56.

	LÚ(.MEŠ)	DUMU(.MEŠ)	KUR	profession or activity	PN
city (e.g. Mari)	■	■	□	■	■
country (e.g. Yamḥad)	□	■	■	■	■
tribe (e.g. Sutū)	■	□	□	■	■
region (e.g. Yamina)	□	■	□	□	□
type:	■	attested	□	non-attested	

Fig. 5: Distributional Patterns for Human Groups Nomenclature

ing gifts from, the central administration, as is also the case with Khanaeans.<sup>61</sup> In fact, it is rare that single individuals be qualified as Yaminites,<sup>62</sup> whereas normally the term is applied to groups of people. The appellative that is common with other tribal names, in particular the term LÚ(.MEŠ), "man (men)", is not used with Yamina: the term *mārū*, "sons", is used instead,<sup>63</sup> which is conversely not otherwise used with tribal names. And, it seems, there are Khanaeans qualified as Yaminites<sup>64</sup> but no Khanaeans, for instance, qualified as Sutaean. The expression "sons of Yamina" seems thus to correspond structurally to expressions such as "sons of the city" (*mārū ālim*) or even better "sons of the plain" (*mārū ugārim*)<sup>65</sup> - of a type which might recommend, as it were, a rendering with lower case, *i.e.* *mārū yamīna* or "yaminites". In any case, there seems to be no human group that is qualified, in and of itself, as *Yamīn(a)*, so that for instance an expression such as BALA *Yamīn(a)*, parallel to BALA *Ḥana*<sup>66</sup>, does not seem possible. Whether Yamina/yamina refers to the south as in the later West-Semitic orientation system, or possibly to the right bank of the Euphrates, meaning the steppe as it extends to the right of the river course (and hence also south if one considers the stretch from the Big Bend to the confluence with the Khabur), in either case the term might be understood in a socio-geographical nuance.

<sup>61</sup> *E.g.* ARM VII: 203; see also above, note 54.

<sup>62</sup> To the extent that *mār Sim'al* is parallel to *mār Yamīna*, the most notable occurrence of this type is the one discussed at some length in D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, 'Fils de Sim'al', pp. 150-152 with note 47, where the term DUMU *Sim'al* is used as a qualification of king Zimri-Lim.

<sup>63</sup> For Ḥana (LÚ(.MEŠ)) and Yamina (*mārū*) respectively, see: M. Birot, J.-R. Kupper, O. Rouault, Répertoire analytique (2<sup>e</sup> volume): Tomes I-XIV, XVIII et textes divers hors-collection, première partie: noms propres, ARMT XVI/1, Paris 1979, pp. 13-14 and 39 respectively.

<sup>64</sup> See: D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, 'Fils de Sim'al', pp. 153-156 with note 77.

<sup>65</sup> See: F.R. Kraus, Vom mesopotamischen Menschen der altbabylonischen Zeit und seiner Welt: Eine Reihe Vorlesungen, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, N.R. 36/6, Amsterdam, London 1973, pp. 67-68.

<sup>66</sup> For which see the very insightful suggestions by: D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, 'Fils de Sim'al', pp. 166-170. - The (semantically parallel) name of the Aramaic kingdom, Sam'al (B. Landsberger, Sam'al: Studien zur Entdeckung der Ruinenstätte Karatepe, Erste Lieferung, Veröffentlichungen der Türkischen Historischen Gesellschaft, VII. Serie, Nr. 16, Ankara 1948), seems to represent a special case, and is at any rate later.

In much the same way as the 'sons of the city' are the urban classes, so the 'sons of the right (or steppe)' are the tribal-peasant classes. And just as the term 'men of Terqa' entails greater specificity vis-à-vis the term 'sons of the city', so does the term 'men of Ḫana' vis-à-vis the term 'sons of the right'.<sup>67</sup> In this light it stands to reason that no Yaminite should normally appear with titles or professions which are suited for urban individuals: there is in fact at times a derogatory nuance in the use of the term, such as city people traditionally reserve for the rural classes. The formation of a new noun *marmû*, which is generally assumed to be derived from *mārû Yamīna*,<sup>68</sup> is one more distributional phenomenon which seems to be unique for this type of expression,<sup>69</sup> and it may be taken, in the light of my interpretation, as a nominalization of the generic value of 'tribal individual(s)'.

#### PATTERNS OF RURAL-URBAN INTERACTION

The agro-pastoralists of the Middle Euphrates and the lower Khabur represent the major rural class for that region, and what is especially distinctive about them from a socio-political point of view is, as I have pointed out, their ability to escape the controls of the central government and thus develop their own power base within or, as the case may be, against the state. It is useful to compare and contrast this situation with two other regions, to the south (or south-east, and perhaps also the west) and to the north.<sup>70</sup>

In the south we have a rural class that seems to have no distinctiveness of its own, and to be wholly under the control of the urban class. I call them urban A and rural A, and have represented them on the sketch map (Fig. 6) as being wholly overlapping. An argument *ex silentio* is that we hardly ever hear in texts from the south about any type of political initiative on the part of the local rural classes.<sup>71</sup> And more positively, we know that the state exercised a very close control not only on agriculture but also on herding.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> While D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand, 'Fils de Sim'al', pp. 152-156, are certainly right in saying that Yaminites and Sim'alites are two subdivisions of the Khanaeans, I do not think we can exclude the possibility that the same subdivision may have applied to other tribal groups as well. In other words, there may have been 'southern' and 'northern' portions for several, if not all, major tribes.

<sup>68</sup> See: M. Birot, J.-R. Kupper, O. Rouault, Répertoire analytique (2<sup>e</sup> volume): Tomes I-XIV, XVIII et textes divers hors-collection, première partie: noms propres, ARMT 16/1, Paris 1979, p. 23.

<sup>69</sup> I.e. we do not have, and do not expect to find, a term such as \**marnû* from \**mārû Ḫana*.

<sup>70</sup> Studies on villages, and excavations of pertinent sites, for Mesopotamia proper and for the *zor* would help considerably in clarifying the overall picture. For an excellent study, dealing especially with the latter part of the second millennium, see: M. Liverani, Communautés rurales dans la Syrie du II<sup>e</sup> millénaire A.C., in: Les communautés rurales - Rural communities, II: Antiquité - Antiquity, Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l'histoire comparative des institutions 41, Paris 1983, pp. 147-185. See also: J.M. Sasson, The ENGAR/*ikkarum* at Mari, in: B.L. Eichler (ed.), Kramer Anniversary Volume: Cuneiform Studies in Honor of Samuel Noah Kramer, AOAT 25, Kevelaer, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1976, pp. 401-410; R.McC. Adams, Property Rights and Functional Tenure in Mesopotamian Rural Communities, in: M.A. Dandamayev et al. (eds.), Societies and Languages of the Ancient Near East: Studies in Honour of I.M. Diakonoff, Warminster 1982, pp. 1-14.

<sup>71</sup> See for instance the articles dealing with Mesopotamia proper in: A. Finet (ed.), La voix de l'opposition en Mésopotamie: Colloque organisé par l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de Belgique, 19 et 20 mars 1973, Bruxelles 1973.

<sup>72</sup> See above, note 49.

