

Kein Land für sich allein

Studien zum Kulturkontakt
in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri
für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag

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Central Syria in the Letters to Sargon II

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For Manfred Weippert, in fond recollection of our encounter some 20 years ago in the *campagna* of the Etruscans, I hereby offer a small contribution on a similarly fascinating ancient rural landscape, of which he is a renowned expert. To a future reunion – as friendly and fruitful as the first one – on the ramparts of Qatna, *inshallah*.

The scant dozen letters written to Sargon II by his officials in the Central Syrian region – republished in 1987 by Simo Parpola in vol. I of the SAA text series¹ – represent only 4% of the total correspondence attributed to this ruler within the Assyrian state archives of Nineveh and other Assyrian capital cities. From this point of view, the *dossier* of letters on the Central Syrian region is – presumably by mere chance – among the smallest within Sargon's correspondence²; and the information it offers is in no way comparable to that of other contemporaneous *dossiers*, such as e.g. the letters from the north-eastern frontier of Assyria, which yield a relatively clear sequential picture of the diplomatic and spying activities of the Assyrians against the strong neighboring power of Urartu during the years which preceded the successful campaign of 714 BC³.

Yet, despite their limited quantity, the epistolary texts sent to this king from the area of Šupat (presumably in the general vicinity of modern Ḥoms)⁴ and Hamat (present-day Ḥamāh) are of particular importance, since they illustrate the early phases of Assyrian domination in the Levant, just a few decades after Tiglath-

¹ SAA I, nos. 171-182.

² Cf. FALES 2001, 99-102; 309-310, for an overview of the archives of the approx. 3000 epistolary documents from the Assyrian empire.

³ Cf. LANFRANCHI & PARPOLA, SAA V, Introduction, with previous literature.

⁴ The problem of the localization of Šupite/Šupat, *per se* and in its probable correspondence to Biblical Šobah, has attracted the opinions of numerous specialists, among whom the scholar fêted with this volume must be comprised (WEIPPERT 1976, 62, with a general localization «im nördlichen Biqā' und dem nördlichen Antilibanus»; cf., somewhat similarly, NA'AMAN 1995, 104). A clear-cut identification of Šupat with Ḥoms is suggested in the recent atlas by PARPOLA & PORTER 2001, maps 8; 24, but without reference to a recent study on a Mari letter of the «Qatna dossier» by D. Charpin (CHARPIN 1998) which, to my mind, presents a reasonably acceptable confirmation for the location in this exact area, due to the mention of a *têmtum*, to be understood as «lake» in this particular context. On the other hand, NA'AMAN 1999, 424-425, returns with good arguments to a location to the south of Lake Ḥoms, and specifically near «present-day Quşer, halfway between Qidisi/Qidšu and Rablê/Riblah», with a territory extended «between Qidisi in the north and Lab'u in the south», while reaching «the northern slopes of Mount Lebanon» to the west, and bordering on the desert in the east (cf. map on p. 425).

pileser's military conquest of the region and his administrative reorganization of the empire in a coherent network of provinces⁵. As such, they have been already touched upon, in various ways, by numerous specialists in Assyrian history and historical geography, including the present writer⁶. However, they seem to deserve a further overview at present, not only in the light of the updated textual editions available nowadays, but also and especially because a detailed look at their contents yields information which may be tested against some recent advancements in the historical perspective on the Assyrian empire.

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The *dossier* of letters to Sargon from Central Syria may be divided into four parts, in relation to the different authors: Bel-duri (SAA I, 171-172), who is reputed to have been governor of the Damascus region, but who might alternatively have been a personal envoy of Sargon with special powers over a large part of the Transeuphratic area⁷; Adda-hati, governor of Hamat (SAA I, 173-176)⁸; Bel-(l)iqbi, governor – or vice-governor – of Şupat (SAA I, 177-179, perhaps also 181)⁹, and one or more

⁵ On the provincial organization of the Assyrian empire in the area under investigation, cf. e.g. the recent overviews by WEIPPERT 1982, NA'AMAN 1995, and especially p. 105, fig. 1; also HAWKINS 1995, 95-97.

⁶ A partial bibliography of extensive quotes or full-length treatments of the letters studied here comprises: EPH'AL 1984, 94-99, FALES 1983 (for SAA I 177), FALES 1989, COLE 1996, 34-42, ELAT 1998, NA'AMAN 1999.

⁷ Cf. PNA 1/II, 292a-b, for the relevant texts and extensive discussion, aiming at the conclusion that this man was the governor of Damascus, although «his title is nowhere given». In point of fact, however, the evidence for this professional identification is far from conclusive: it may be noted that (a) SAA I 171 seems to be based in Hatarikka (and the note in SAA I, p. 134, claiming that «since Bel-duri was governor of Damascus, the present letter strongly favours locating Hatarikka (Bibl. Hadrach) in the vicinity of that city... and factually refutes the identification with Afis in upper Syria...», represents a fine piece of circular reasoning!); (b) SAA I 172 presents a single geographical reference, but to Hamat (Obv. 15-16), and Bel-duri is the object of two references in the plural (Obv. 6, Rev. 32); (c) SAA I 3, an *abat šarri*, undoubtedly mentions Bel-duri as stationed in Damascus, but the context – the dispatching of a high-ranking local official and his family to Assyria – rather recalls the well-known letter from Nimrud (CTN 2, 194), relating the varying moods of the *turtānu* as to the concession of POWs to the envoy of the governor of Kalhu; (d) the letters that prove that Bel-duri was greatly in Sargon's favor, holding as a consequence vast landed properties, refer to the province of Guzana (SAA I 233) and to the Kašiyari range (SAA I 240).

⁸ PNA 1/I, 45b. This man's governorship over Hamat seems certain in view of the formula *šulmu ana nagē ša Hamat* in SAA I 173 and 174; on the other hand, it may be noted that SAA I 176 holds references exclusively pertaining to Şupat and its region. Perhaps a larger Hamat-Şupat province was split up over the course of time, with Bel-(l)iqbi taking over the administrative duties for the southern area? This view would tally with the Biblical references to Hamath-Şobah, as shown by NA'AMAN 1999.

⁹ PNA 1/II, 322 a, and cf. 314b, *ad* 2. The mention of Hēsa as «a road-station of mine» in SAA I 177 indicates this man's administrative responsibilities over the territory of Şupat. Cf., however, the previous and next footnotes.

unidentified writers, at least in one case possibly corresponding to Bel-(l)iqbi (SAA I, 180, 182)¹⁰. The temporal frame of reference within Sargon's reign is decidedly vague: Adda-hati and Bel-(l)iqbi seem to operate in mutual contact in SAA I 175 and 177, but otherwise no connections between the named individuals are apparent. The reference to Dūr-Šarrukēn in SAA I 179, Rev. 15, sets this letter in the central part of Sargon's reign, but no more precisely than this.

In very general terms, it may be said that these letters present a common theme: a certain urge on the part of the authors to prove to the king that an enforcement of the *pax Assyriaca* in the Central Syrian area was in progress, and that it was being carried out according to specific guidelines – i.e. preferably through the research of political consensus to Assyrian policy among the subjected peoples, rather than through harsh measures of punishment. This particularly restrained «style» of Assyrian government is by now recognized as one of the hallmarks of Sargon's foreign policy as viewed through the everyday texts of the age¹¹, and a close analysis reveals its mechanisms at work even through the violent and war-mongering wording of the king's official inscriptions: we may thus see it operating on the eastern front, in the Cilician region, as well as in Samaria, where the king states «I opened the seal of the Egyptian *kāru*, I mingled together Egyptians and Assyrians to make market»¹².

Yet, despite this tactically careful approach to the issues of the local population, the Assyrian officials prove to have been no less keen than their predecessors under Tiglath-pileser III, in exploiting the riches of the region as a productive area and as a crossroads for commerce. It is thus not surprising to find them concerned with the bountiful harvests of barley, indispensable for the support of the troops, cavalry, and beasts of burden¹³, as well as with the revenues from taxes or inter-regional trade, particularly in the realm of precious metals or other valued goods which could be shipped to the royal treasury as income or gifts. Exemplary, in this sense, is the proud report of the governor of Hamat, Adda-hati:

¹⁰ In both texts, the name of the sender is lost: the integration Bel-(l)iqbi is offered by the editor for SAA I, 181. It may be noticed that, if this authorship were to be proved, the (at least temporary) rank of this individual as *šaniu* of the governor (i.e. possibly of Adda-hati), could be suggested on the basis of the clause in Obv. 18.

¹¹ Cf. the paradigmatic study by LANFRANCHI 1997, with previous literature, on this point; and most recently FALES 2001, 227-230.

¹² FUCHS 1994, Ann. 13.

¹³ This would seem to have been the case already in the letters written to Tiglath-pileser III: cf. e.g. ND 2671 (= Nimrud Letter LXXIX), now in SAGGS 2001, 178-179, where the *turtānu* is quoted as having ordered his subordinates to cultivate 1000 hectares (*emēru*'s) of arable land. It may be noted, however, that the subordinate's reply bears a complaint on the shortage of agricultural implements and draught-animals, not – as will be the case during Sargon's reign – on the shortage of manpower.

«The silver dues of the prefects and village managers, which were imposed on the people of the region, have been gathered: 2 talents and 18 minas of silver according to the Karkemiš standard¹⁴. In addition, I (personally) have sent to the king my lord half a shekel of gold, two togas and three tunics with my messenger»¹⁵.

It might at this point be concluded that, all other factors being equal, the operational objectives of the Assyrian governors and their armed forces in Central Syria were not different from those in other areas of recent conquest during Sargon's reign. On the other hand, the corpus of letters under examination bears out two sets of problems – one administrative, the other political – which would seem to have uniquely marked the occupation of this area, and to have caused a number of practical difficulties for the Assyrians.

The administrative problem was that the Assyrian presence – both of military and of civilian personnel – was too thinly spread out on the territory to be held and controlled. This scarcity of personnel could have been due to Sargon's military interest in the northeastern front at the time, but also to the heavy load of manpower which the king drained from all conquered regions to build the walls and palaces of the new capital city of Dūr-Šarruken¹⁶. The political problem – perhaps somehow tied to the previous issue – was an increasingly obtrusive presence of tribes of Arabs (LÚ.Aribi), already well attested in the Central Syrian area since the reign of Tiglath-pileser III¹⁷. These tribes appear to have been relatively free to roam and even settle to a certain extent in the region, at the same time entering into an ill-defined neighbourly (and even institutional) relation with the Assyrians, while not relinquishing their nomadic customs of self-government and violent appropriation of precious goods, whether belonging to the local population or to the occupying forces themselves.

These two issues may at this point be taken up in this order in the light of the available epistolary evidence – to which some small additions are possible through data on Central Syria from the Nimrud letters of Tiglath-pileser's reign and information from later historical periods¹⁸.

¹⁴ For the «mina of Karkemiš» – i.e. the normal weight/value standard of the western part of the Assyrian empire – in relation to the Assyrian mina, cf. most recently ZACCAGNINI 1999-2001, with previous literature.

¹⁵ ND 2437 (= Nimrud Letter XX) = SAA I 176, Obv. 4-9. Cf. the most recent re-edition of the text in SAGGS 2001, 169-171, with some differences in reading and in translation vis-à-vis the SAA version.

¹⁶ For an overview on the documents concerning the building of Dūr-Šarruken, cf. most recently FALES 2001, 146-155, 320-323, with previous literature. Within the corpus examined here, cf. SAA I 179, Rev. 13-17, for mention of the king's orders to send craftsmen from Šupat to Dūr-Šarruken.

¹⁷ Cf. ND 2644 (= Nimrud Letter XXIII), for which cf. most recently SAGGS 2001, 175-177.

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. SAPIN 1989, LIMET 2000 (although with some imprecision in the use of the Neo-Assyrian sources).

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As is well known, one of the main administrative requirements of the Assyrian provincial structure was a «postal service», i.e. a working network for the transfer of written messages on safe and viable roads linking the new regions to the «royal highways» (*hūl šarri*) at the heart of the empire. The overall road system of the Assyrian state – at least, insofar as it may be reconstructed as such – appears to have been subdivided in many different «stretches» (*mardītu*), under the responsibility of the local provincial governors¹⁹; each of such stretches was split up in a number of «post stations» (*bēt mardītu*), where the horses of the messengers could be changed²⁰.

One of these stations lay at Hēsa, a village of the province of Šupat, and possibly to the south of this area, on the road to Damascus²¹; and a letter by the Bel-(I)iqbi (ABL 414 = SAA I 177) points out to the king the complexities of the management of this outpost. The text is here presented in a slightly varying version on previous editions, with the aim of clarifying the variety of issues discussed by the governor, despite his slightly cryptical form of writing:

The town of Hēsa, a road station of mine – there is no personnel (UN.MEŠ) in it; the postmaster and the commander of the recruits by themselves cannot attend to it. Now, I would like to get together 30 families (É.MEŠ) and place them there, (from the) recruitable people (ERIM.MEŠ) under Nabu-šalla the prefect.

¹⁹ Thus, e.g., in SAA I 172 (= Nimrud Letter LXXXVIII), Rev. 30-33, the governor of Damascus, Bel-duri (but the name is totally lost in Obv, 2 of the tablet: cf. SAGGS 2001, 174) claims responsibility for transport of food staples as concerns three «stretches», while the governors of adjacent regions limit their control over two stretches each.

²⁰ For a quick sketch of the Assyrian road system, cf. S. Parpola in SAA I, xiii-xiv. Cf. also KESSLER 1980, for a number of observations of detail, especially as regards the *hūl šarri* joining the Tigris and the Euphrates, and the same author's more circumspect approach on the possibility of reconstructing the Assyrian road system in a recent contribution (KESSLER 1997). On this count, it may be however noted that – while it is true (*ibid.*, 131) that there is «a complete absence of the term *hūl šarri* for the whole region west of the Euphrates» – the letter SAA I 177 (quoted below) mentions a post station «of» (i.e. presumably allotted from the administrative point of view to) the local governor, which must have implicitly lain on the *hūl šarri* itself. Cf. also the next footnote.

²¹ Hēsa is identified with present-day Ḥasiya/Ḥasya in PARPOLA & PORTER 2001, 10; the suggestion (noted *ibid.*) goes back to DUSSAUD 1927; but cf. also ALT 1945, 157, and EPH'AL 1984, 97 (with previous refs.). The site (also called Ḥisyah) lies just off the present-day M1 highway in the Ḥoms-Damascus stretch, some 35 kms. south of Ḥoms, but still well within the *muḥāfaẓa* boundary line. This location of the settlement near the main N-S thoroughfare – where, curiously enough, one of the relatively far-in-between stations of the Syrian road police is located – makes the suggested identification with ancient Hēsa quite plausible, although the site seems to have attracted no archaeological interest until now.

(At present,) there are military craftsmen – a full cohort – living in Hēsa²²; he should move them out, and settle them in the town of Argite, giving to them fields and gardens.

If it is acceptable to the king my lord, may a letter be sent to Nabu-šalla the prefect. May I (thereupon) appoint Ia'iru the second in command as village manager on site, and Sin-iddina, the majordomo of Adda-hati (similarly) in the town of Sazanâ, so that they will attend to these road stations faithfully for the Crown (*lit.*: and fear the king).²³

As may be seen, the letter records a complaint on the fact that the *mardītu* of Hēsa had become, presumably in the course of time, quite empty of people – of low-ranking if not directly servile status²⁴ – required for the tilling of fields and orchards in support of the resident Assyrians. The governor thus recommends moving out an unnecessary cohort of craftsmen tied to the army to the (presumably nearby) town of Argite²⁵, and giving over their agricultural holdings in Hēsa to 30 families drawn from the human reserves at the disposal of the prefect, which are to be displaced for the purpose²⁶. The appointment of two persons, present in the area as junior-ranking officials, to the role of village managers, i.e. as intermediaries between the deportees and the military, in Hēsa itself, and in the next road station, Sazanâ²⁷, would – so

²² SAA I 177, Obv. 11-13: LÚ*. DUMU-ki-{it-ki}-te-e 1-en / LÚ*.ki-sfir ina ŠA-bi URU.he-sa / kam-mu-su.

²³ SAA I 177, Obv. 4-16.

²⁴ The mention of people organized into «households» (É.MEŠ), to be drawn from the ERIM.MEŠ under the local *šaknu*, cannot but bring to mind personnel of a status similar to that listed in the texts of the «Harran census» (SAA XI, 201-220, also probably from Sargon's time) or of the «schedules» appended to the royal grants (SAA XII, 27; etc.)

²⁵ Argite might be mentioned also in SAA I, 176, b.e. 21, albeit in broken context, together with Šupite. No hypotheses on the location of Argite are expressed in PARPOLA & PORTER 2001. Cf., on the other hand, WEIPPERT 1976, 62, following previous views, who considers that this site should be identified with URU.Ha-ar-ge-e in Assurbanipal's annals, both resulting in «einer noch nicht lokalisierten Stadt, die wahrscheinlich am Rand der Wüste im mittleren Syrien gelegen hat»; and cf. also EPH'AL 1984, 97. In this connection, a possibility that comes to mind – on the sole, and often unreliable, basis of toponomastic similarity – is the site of 'Arjūn, quite close to Tell Nebī Mend/Qadesh to the south of Lake Ḥoms: on this site, cf. PÉZARD 1931, 25, who recalls the presence of a Roman milestone, as well as of shreds of Roman and Byzantine buildings.

²⁶ The expression «to give fields and gardens» to specific people in the place of destination is, obviously, a fixed way of stating the point, that the same peoples' rural holdings are to requisitioned by the Assyrian state in the place of origin: notice, e.g., how the same notion is applied to the Arab chieftain Ammi-li'ti, whose «fields and gardens» have been clearly taken away by Bēl-(I)iqbi, in SAA I 179, Obv. 17-18.

²⁷ Sazanâ has been identified with a site mentioned in a Late Bronze Age letter from Kāmid el-Lōz, and thus is considered to be in the Lebanon Valley, «probably near the junction of the Beqā' route and the Beirut-Damascus route» (EPH'AL 1984, 97). However, NA'AMAN 1999, 423, locates it «along the modern Homs-Damascus road, either north or south of Hēsa»; similarly, PARPOLA & PORTER 2001, map 8 B2, place it – albeit with a question-mark – at the junction of the M1 Syrian highway with the road leading eastwards to Palmyra.

the governor assures the king – greatly improve the efficiency of the royal road and mail service.

A complaint on the overall scarcity of Assyrian officials, soldiers and agricultural personnel in the area of Şupat may be found in a further letter, this time by Addahati, discovered at Nimrud (SAA I 176):

I myself harvest the sown fields of the city of He[sa(?)]²⁸, and I harvest 1000 hectares of sown fields of the city of Laba'u in addition.

Now, the king should give (me) Assyrian people and Itu'ean (auxiliary troops) so I may settle them in the open countryside (*ina madbar*).

There is not one Assyrian city-overseer nor one Assyrian gate-guard (left) in all (the province of) Şupat!²⁹

The sequence of facts and requests presented here to the king is of particular interest: first, the governor relates that the charge of harvests in two local townships³⁰ has been taken up by himself (i.e. by his own personnel); secondly, he asks the ruler to send over from the Assyrian heartland a contingent of farmers, together with the Itu'ean military police required to guard them³¹, as a permanent work force in the open countryside. Finally, to mark his point, he claims that – obviously through displacements such as the one concerning the «deputy» Ia'iru in the letter above, and due to general shortage – the administrative structure in the area of Şupat is so thinly stretched out, that no official with juridical power (from the higher «city overseer» to the simple «gate guard») is left in the entire province.

One of the issues borne out in passing by this letter, is that the *madbaru/mud(a)buru*³², i.e. the open countryside between one township and the next, was left

²⁸ The integration of URU.Hi[x x] as Hēsa is of course conjectural. An alternative suggestion for integration as Hi[rmil], or sim., is made by NA'AMAN 1999, 423.

²⁹ SAA I 176, Rev. 25-33.

³⁰ For Laba'u, corresponding to Biblical Lebô, cf. most recently NA'AMAN 1999, 419-421, with previous lit., and PARPOLA & PORTER 2001, 12 and map 8. The site should correspond to Tell Qaşr Lebwe on the main highway of the Beqā' north of Baalbek, alongside present-day Labwa/Labwe, near the sources of the Orontes. This location is crucial to the argument that the province (or sub-province) of Şupat stretched – similarly to that of Damascus to the south – on both sides of the Anti-Lebanon, with a clear reflex on the implications of the word *madbaru*, below.

³¹ On the particular role of the Itu'eans within the armed forces of Assyria, cf. most recently FALES 2001, 76-77, 304, with previous literature.

³² The Neo-Assyrian term *madbaru/mud(a)buru* in these texts should – again – be understood with an eye to the descriptions of land and people in the «Harran Census», where *madbaru* refers to the areas which neither within the administrative limits of a particular township, nor in the surrounding agricultural strip (*qannu*), but rather in the «open countryside» – which, if not cultivated, may rapidly revert to steppe. Thus, the translation «desert», often employed with an eye to the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, and to West Semitic (and especially Biblical) usages, should be critically evaluated in relation to the specific geographical context under examination: just by way of example, the text ND 2766 (= Nimrud Letter LXX), now republished in SAGGS 2001, 161-162, patently concerns the destination of pack-animals in the *madbaru* of Rablê (modern Riblah) and

largely to its own devices, since the sparse village communities which populated it were virtually uncontrollable by the Assyrians – a security problem of this Central Syrian area which had arisen already in the age of Tiglath-pileser III³³. Not by chance, our letter goes on to deal with a further problem, that of the isolation of specific communities living high up on ancient *tells* in the countryside, and thus at some distance from their cultivated fields, which could thus fall prey to the marauding Arabs – a situation which is clearly hinted at in the final clause of Adda-hati's message, when he says «There is continual hostility [in the] open countryside, (but) I am not negligent in my watch»³⁴. The king thus recommends that the people build new mud-brick structures at the base of the mounds – although the governor subtly expresses his doubts on abandoning those villages endowed with walled fortifications:

As to what the king my lord ordered: «The people living on the *tells* (*tilāni*) should come down to build (houses) *at the bottom*»³⁵ – they have come down. (Now,) should (the people from) those ten fortified settlements (URU.MEŠ É.BAD) in the open countryside come down as well? What does the king my lord say?³⁶

The difficulty in keeping track of the *madbaru* and of its agricultural output would seem to be mentioned in a further letter, by Bel-duri (SAA I 172). Following a request by the king to raise grain for bread and fodder from the region, with an order to funnel the provisions through specific channels, the author is forced to report that the governors are against the planned measure, since no administrative subdivision of the villages in the open countryside has been hitherto effected:

«Why (call them) «ours»? The villages in the open countryside belong to all the governors, and (these) villages *thresh* (*e²-nu-gu*) within each other!» (Accordingly), may the king my lord send word that they write down (which are) their villages in the open countryside.³⁷

Qadesh, i.e. between the southern Ḥoms region and the upper Beqā', well within the Orontes catchment basin.

³³ Cf. ND 2766 (see the previous footnote), where the clause (Rev. 10'-14') *šarru bêli ūda ša ālāni ša ašappu ina libbi usseribāni qabassi mudabiri šunu* indicates that «The king my lord knows that the townships in which the pack-animals have been introduced are in the open countryside», although the author thereafter (Rev. 19'-20') takes pains to specify that *mašartu ša URU.Rablê uššurat*, «the watch of the city Rablê is in order».

³⁴ SAA I 176, Rev. 40-Upper Edge 2. The text follows SAGGS 2001, 170-171, and the copy in *ibid.*, Pl. 34.

³⁵ *ina šab.šú*, presumably to be understood – following J. N. Postgate *apud* SAGGS 2001, 171 – as *ina šap<-li->-šú*.

³⁶ SAA I 176, Rev. 34-39. For «fortresses» inside the Hamat-Šupat territory, cf. the mention of various *birāte* along the Orontes, among which Ni'u (= Qal'at el-Muḏīq, near Apamea, cf. NA'AMAN 1999, 422 fn. 14) and Qadesh in ND 2644.

³⁷ SAA I 172 (= Nimrud Letter LXXXVIII), Rev. 10-14. It must be noted that the three extant transliterations of this text (POSTGATE 1974, 381-383; SAA I, 172; and most recently SAGGS 2001, 173-175) still do not yield a version to be accepted without reservations. Following POSTGATE 1974 and SAGGS 2001, the name Šamaš-ahu-iddina should be integra-

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In any case, whether reaped by state personnel, by commoners, or by the local population, the potentially rich barley produce from the flat plateau of limestone that forms the relatively well-watered Central Syrian area – stretching northwards from Homs to Aleppo, and eastwards from the particularly fertile zone of the Orontes valley to the more sparsely populated steppe opening toward the desert of Palmyra – was of primary interest to the Assyrians, both for immediate and long-term purposes. The royal granaries which had been built in the different agricultural villages were thus expected not only to provide bread and fodder rations for the locally based occupiers, but also, and especially, for the vast number of men, horses and mules levied all over the Levant and which passed through the Šupat-Hamat area, prior to being sent eastwards, through the *hūl šarri* running from the upper Euphrates to the upper Tigris.

As hinted above, letters from all over the empire indicate that the pressure put by Sargon on his governors to levy men and animals for the construction of Dūr-Šarruken or for the annual military campaigns was very great; therefore the food rations in the local granaries were always barely sufficient. It is of little surprise, therefore, to learn that in one letter, the author – possibly the governor of Šupat, Bel-(l)iqbi – denounces another official (or perhaps a member of the military) who was been given permission to supply his horsemen (LÚ.GIŠ.GIGIR)³⁸ from the royal granaries, but who, without his permission, took enough grain feed the horses as well:

The king my lord ordered [me to] give bread to the horsemen. Now, when [PN] came, I told him [«Take it» (?)], but he replied: «The king has given (direct) orders to me and I will take two [months' worth] of each provision». I did not agree to give it to him, but he went and opened a *silo* (*padakku*) in one of my villages, brought in his measurers, and poured out [n] sound men's worth of grain. I went and remonstrated with him, saying, «Why did you, on your own, without the permission of the deputy governor, open the royal granaries?» He did not look at me

ted at the end of Obv. 5, against the U[RU¹.MEŠ *mad-ba*]r of SAA I – a difference in reading which changes to some extent the overall meaning of the following passages, and possibly of the letter in its entirety. As for the final term in Obv. 12, SAA I has the rendering *pa-nu-gu* with no translation, which seems to be contradicted by Saggs' copy (pl. 34) as well as by Postgate's reading (reproduced above): a tentative possibility for interpretation of these signs – hitherto not suggested – is that of an Aramaic verb (*nqy*) which is attested in the meaning «to clean (grain), to thresh» (cf. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, II, 757), and for which the suggested *e-nu-gu* would satisfy both the temporal aspect (imperfect) and the person (3rd plural), as well as – possibly – the phonetic realization. In any case, a verb denoting an activity (agricultural or otherwise) would not seem to contrast with the following *ina libbi ahīši*, proposed in SAA.

³⁸ In this context, the meaning for LÚ.GIŠ.GIGIR as «horseman» established by FUCHS 1998, 108-11, seems applicable.

(straight) in the eye, [replying:] «In the month of Nisan, my (supply of) grass diminished, but – so he said – horses keep coming to me; I c[an]not cope»³⁹.

Needless to say, the consequences of this episode – as related by the author to the king – are that a severe shortage had befallen the local granaries, involving at least two months' worth of supplies⁴⁰. Whether these very circumstances, or others, were at the base of what seems to have been a very heated discussion concerning available grain supplies in a fragmentary letter, presumed to come from the same region (SAA I 182), is hard to tell. In any case, the author warns the king:

I do want to [feed] the horses of the king my lord, (but) they should not bring in at the same time [their] horsemen (L.Ú.GIŠ.GIGIR) and their horses!⁴¹

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The need to keep «law and order» in the area under their jurisdiction seems to have been the main reason for concern on the part of the Assyrian governors in Central Syria. As has been long known, it was part of the duties of every Assyrian official to keep a constant vigilance (*maššartu*) on anything that was happening, and report to the king all that was «seen» and «heard»: thus many letters of this period comprise brief reports on the state of affairs in different regions of the empire⁴². The letters from the Central Syrian region are particular in this respect, because such reports regularly hint to a state of alert concerning the movements of Arab tribesmen, as in the following example from Adda-hati, which was written shortly after a visit by the king to the area:

To the king my lord, (from) your servant Adda-hati. Good health to the king my lord! Everything is going very well with my vigilance. It is well with the whole district of Hamat. The king, my lord, can be glad. We have not heard anything particular about the Arabs since the king my lord went back to Assyria. All is well⁴³.

The sources on the earliest relations of the Assyrians with the Arabs have been widely treated in recent historiography⁴⁴. The first known encounter of the Assyrians

³⁹ SAA I 181, Obv 6- Rev. 1.

⁴⁰ SAA I 181: Rev. 2-6. It is a pity that in Obv. 15, the number of ERIM.MEŠ *šal-mu-te* whose monthly rations were taken, is broken off. For the calculation of the mean daily ration of an Assyrian soldier, and the quantity of existing grain stocks in one of the royal granaries of this age, cf. FALES 1990.

⁴¹ SAA I 182, Rev. 5-9.

⁴² For an overview of the concept of *maššartu* and its practical applications. cf. FALES 2001, 117-122, 316.

⁴³ SAA I 174.

⁴⁴ Cf. e.g. BRIANT 1982, 113-179, and especially EPH'AL 1984, with an updated overview in COLE 1996, 34-36. On the North Arabian tribes and their locale, cf. KNAUF 1989, EDENS & BOWDEN 1989; on the economic contacts, ELAT 1998. The letters from Sargon's reign have been treated in detail in Fales 1989; some of the results given therein will be taken up again here, albeit with the necessary updating.

with the peoples named *Aribi* or *Arbay* dates to the reign of Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC), and the ethnonym attested since that date must be taken to refer to the one that these peoples applied to themselves, aside from detailed specifications in relation to specific tribal communities⁴⁵. The Arabs in the Neo-Assyrian sources are consistently indicated as nomadic peoples, endowed with greater mobility than other similar groups – such as Arameans, Chaldeans, and Suteans – due to their specialization in camel breeding on a very large scale. It may thus be recalled that the Arab chieftain Gindibu' supplied «1000 camels» (i.e. an equivalent number of armed camel-riders) to the coalition against the Assyrians which culminated in the battle of Qarqar in the Hamat region in 853 BC⁴⁶.

The mid-eighth century faces us with increasing mentions of the presence of Arabs within the Fertile Crescent. Thus, around 750 BC, Ninurta-kudurri-ušur, the pro-Babylonian «governor of the land of Sūhu and Mari» reports in his official inscriptions⁴⁷ of having attacked a caravan of people from Tēma and Saba (*Šaba'ayyu*) – i.e. a «joint venture» by South- and North-Arabian merchants⁴⁸, which had made its way up the desert routes possibly pointing towards the Assyrian heartland – capturing 100 people, 200 camels, and goods, among which iron, precious stones, fine wool, and the like. A few years later (738 BC) one Zabibe, «queen of the Arabs», is said to have paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser III along with a number of kings from southern Anatolia to Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine⁴⁹. During the campaigns of the years 733-732, a further «queen of the Arabs», Samsi – who in one of the relevant texts is said to have rebelled against a previously sworn oath of loyalty to Assyria – lost to the army led by Tiglath-pileser III «1000 people, 30,000 camels, 20,000 oxen, and ... 5000 (sacks) of all kinds of spices» after being defeated near Mount Saqurri (presumably in the Hauran area of southernmost Syria)⁵⁰, and was thereafter obliged to provide a heavy tribute of «camels, she-camels, and their young»⁵¹. The

⁴⁵ EPH'AL 1984, 6-11.

⁴⁶ RIMA 3, 23:94.

⁴⁷ RIMB 2, 300: 26b'-38a'.

⁴⁸ Or, possibly, bearers of tribute, if the clause «whose country is far away, (whose) messenger(s) had never come to me, and (who) had never traveled to (meet) me» (*ibid.*, 27'-29') should be taken as significant, in an ideological sense, for a polemic against the Assyrians which are, far and wide in Ninurta-kudurri-ušur's inscriptions, object of particular – and justified – animosity. On the identification of the *S/Šaba*) mentioned here, cf. already EPH'AL 1984, 88-89, who noted that Tēma and Saba occur side by side in a tribute list in Tiglath-pileser III's annals, together with other nomadic groups which may be traced back to North Arabia and North Sinai, and thus wondered whether we should not consider the existence of «a Sabeian trading colony in North Arabia» (the idea goes back, in fact, to Van den Branden and others before him, quoted *apud* BRIANT 1982, 119). More recently, the identification of the toponym with the well-known South-Arabian kingdom has gained ground: cf. e.g. GALTER 1993, with previous literature.

⁴⁹ TADMOR 1994, 108-109:19; and cf. 265-268. The passage is treated by EPH'AL 1984, 82-83.

⁵⁰ The location is given by EPH'AL 1984, 85.

⁵¹ TADMOR 1994, 228-229, §§1-5 (synoptical reconstruction of the episode, narrated in various sources of this king).

same king claims to have received thereafter ample tribute from a number of tribal groups, which may be located in general between the Syro-Arabian desert, the North Arabian oases and the Sinaitic area⁵².

The picture of Assyrian-Arab relations under Sargon shows various facets. On one hand, the king's official inscriptions show the reaffirmation of Assyrian power in the southwestern Levant, presumably at the issue of the trade routes from the Hejāz⁵³: a number of tribes – one of which (Hayappâ) coincides with a group already subjugated by Tiglath-pileser III – are said to have been defeated, and «their remainders I took up and settled in Samaria»⁵⁴. Immediately after this, the king relates that the Arabian queen Samsi, together with Pharaoh, and It'amara of Saba, described together as «the kings of the seacoast and the steppe», offered a heavy tribute, consisting of gold, precious stones, ivory, ebony, spices, as well as horses and camels⁵⁵. Finally, a prism fragment from Assur relates how the king settled deportees on the border of the town of Nahal-Mušur (present-day Wādī el-'Arīš, or Naḥal Besor⁵⁶), entrusting them to the sheikh (*nasīku*) of the township of Laban.

These sources thus show Assyrian involvement with the Arabs exclusively in the area of the southwestern border of Sargon's conquests (the «Brook of Egypt» represents, in point of fact, one of the limits of Sargon's empire as drawn by himself in his official texts). In none of these inscriptions are we told of a contact or interaction with Arabs elsewhere within the territories of the Assyrian state.

Yet, a totally different scenario issues from the «everyday» documents of the same period. Two letters to the king from the ample *dossier* of the governor of the province of Assur, Ṭāb-šill-Ešarra, concern troublesome movements of Arab nomads in central-southern Mesopotamia. The first of these letters (SAA I 82) is of particular interest, since it gives us a clear image of the difficulty of the Assyrians in keeping the nomadic groups under control. After having noted the tendency of the pastoralist groups toward plunder of the agricultural villages in the countryside, the king had decided to open up a vast «reservation» in the heart of the virtually deserted southern Jezīrah, from the Tharthar westwards to the land of Sūhu on the Euphrates, thus hoping to keep them away from settled areas; however, the governor gives a desolate report on the outcome of this measure, noting that the Arabs tend to move out of bounds, and to use the Euphrates route to attack the sites on the riverbank:

Regarding the Arabs about which the king my lord wrote to me, saying, '[Why] do they graze [their sheep] and camels [in the open countryside]... in their hunger,

⁵² TADMOR 1994, 228-229, §§7-8. Cf. EPH'AL 1984, 87-91, on the location of the habitat of these groups.

⁵³ EPH'AL 1984, 90-91, makes the point that not only do the sources not speak of an outright invasion of the desert areas, but «it is even doubtful whether the Assyrian army was capable of conducting such a desert campaign, given its organization and equipment».

⁵⁴ Khorsabad Annals, 120-123: FUCHS 1994, 110: 120-123.

⁵⁵ FUCHS 1994, 110:123-125; 198:27. Queen Samsi is mentioned in connection with the Arabs, in relation to fugitive men and stray camels, in a quite cryptical administrative text, SAA XI 162.

⁵⁶ On the location of the «Brook of Egypt», cf. most recently NA'AMAN 1995, 111.

[they will plunder!]' – This [year], ra[ins were sca]rce; [...]; they have been settling in[...]. As to what the king my lord wrote to me, saying, '«Now, go to Hinzanu, and let them go and graze with you! There shall be no restrictions from the banks of the Tharthar river up to the land of Suhu!» – I am going to Hinzanu, but they (tend to) leave the territory I assign to them, they move downstream and plunder. They pay absolutely no heed to the chief of the scouts I appointed⁵⁷.

In the next passage, we learn that some of the tribes were to be found even further north, in the region of Kalhu (Nimrud). Thus, Ṭāb-šill-Ešarra calls for a coordinated effort of the Kalhu governor with himself in finding adequate grazing grounds, although he insists that the encampments of the pastoralists must be kept rigidly apart:

May the governor of Kalhu be ordered to appoint a eunuch of his over the Arabs in his charge. May they (then) inquire from me of the territory, on which they may graze. All the same, [their] tents should [remain placed] within the territory of the governor of Kalhu, even though they may be grazing in [...] (*break*).⁵⁸

Finally, in a note on the left-hand margin of the tablet (perhaps meant to be inserted somewhere at the center of the text), there is a lapidary judgment on the specific methods of scavenging on the part of the nomads:

They plunder settlements, but they never plunder sheep or camels; they (just) plunder people.⁵⁹

Ṭāb-šill-Ešarra's fears of the Arabs capacity for raiding downstream were justified, it seems. His second letter (SAA I 83) contains within itself the report of a Northern Babylonian *qēpu* who, being afraid of the king's irritated reaction, has decided to report to the governor of Assur first and foremost, as follows:

I received a royal message, saying: «... ... 'Why is it that the Arabs plundered Sippar, and you did not go out with your servants, but kept them away (from trouble)?»⁶⁰

Under what circumstances were these Arab groups present well inside Mesopotamia, and in fact at a stone's throw from the main cities of the Assyrian heartland? One possibility for explanation is that, since Sargon's armies had completed the repression of Aramean tribes in the area of the Wadi Tharthar, already begun by Tiglath-pileser III⁶¹, the vast steppe stretching westwards from Assur to the Euphrates had become somewhat «open» to an infiltration of Arab camel pastoralists, which had

⁵⁷ SAA I 82, Obv. 5-Rev. 7

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Rev. 8-17. The break regards the Upper Edge, 18-20.

⁵⁹ Left Hand Edge 1-2.

⁶⁰ SAA I 83, Rev. 3-5.

⁶¹ For a brief but clear overview of the problems posed by the Arameans in the central-southern Jezīrah during Tiglath-pileser's and Sargon's reign, cf. LIVERANI 1992, esp. p. 37 (notice however that ND 436 is a letter from the Governor's Palace of Kalhu, and not – of course – from Fort Shalmaneser).

slowly grown in numbers and obnoxiousness. On the other hand, it may be noted that, although these two letters constitute truly scanty evidence, there is no hint in them that the Assyrians were thinking of deploying armed forces to cope with the problems posed by the nomads; to the contrary, it is exclusively from members of the civilian officialdom that Sargon expects action.

In this light – short of believing that even in their own homeland the Assyrians were fatally understaffed for peace-keeping purposes, which is not stated in these letters and which seems truly far-fetched – we should envisage the possibility, that these Arabs groups were «friendly». In other words, we should consider that they had been originally brought in to graze their camels in the Jezirah as part of a specific policy (whether as deportees, or to keep out the Arameans, or in view of a plan to make them into Sargon's *meharis*, etc.⁶²) – a policy which did not, all told, work out as intended. Just how long their stay in Mesopotamia lasted, and how they were eventually dismissed, remains for the moment obscure.

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In any case, a somewhat similar political situation may be suggested for the Arabs mentioned in the contemporaneous letters from the Hamat-Şupat sector – albeit, with the essential difference that these groups appear to be decidedly at home in the area – and the information to be gained from the correspondence during Tiglath-pileser's reign seems to confirm their presence of long standing here⁶³. These «Syrian» tribal groups appear specifically involved in an activity of pastoral transhumance, which caused them to pass constantly between the steppe and the cultivated strip, and thus before the eyes of the worried Assyrian officials. («We keep vigilance on the open countryside» and «The Arabs go in and out» are standard phrases to the king in our letters⁶⁴). On one occasion (SAA I 180), Bel-(l)iqbi of Şupat reports that the herding groups had penetrated well within the territory of his province, but fortunately, heavy rains had arrived, and the flocks could be brought back to the outskirts of the rural zone.

⁶² The presence of foreign contingents in Sargon's army is well known; cf. DALLEY & POSTGATE 1984, 27-47.

⁶³ ND 2644 (= Nimrud Letter XXIII), at present republished in SAGGS 2001, 175-177. The text is now relatively clear as an *abat šarri* concerning the concession of grazing rights on behalf of the Assyrians to a group of shepherds manned by a local person. An element of reassurance for the operation is given through the announcement that «now, the *turtānu* has captured those Arabs» (Obv. 9-10). However, the recipient of the letter is asked to be as vigilant as previously concerning the *madbaru* (Obv. 11-13); in fact, it deemed advisable to bring back the the flocks to pasture «[in] the open countryside which is within the land» (Obv. 15-Rev. 17), rather than elsewhere.

⁶⁴ The link of *erēbu-ašū* in the present context with merchant activities is underscored by M. Elat (ELAT 1998, 45 fn. 35), but it may be noted that the parallel context that he quotes for his argument, referring to the well-known letter regarding the Sidonians (ND 2715) has, quite clearly, the two verbs for movement distinct from two further verbs for commerce (*erubū ušū, iddunū imahharūni*).

The Arabs have en[tered] into the interior, but (then) the rains arrived to [...], and (now) they go in and out (again).⁶⁵

The relations of the tribes with the cultivated area were of a «dimorphic» type, in ethnological terms: a letter shows us the Arab chieftain Ammi-li'ti, of the tribe of Amiri⁶⁶, pestilence-stricken within his encampment of tents on the outskirts of Riblâ in the northern Beqâ'⁶⁷, and another letter by Bel-(l)iqbi points to the tribes' present stay «on the other side of the river Hadina» (possibly a branch of the Orontes)⁶⁸. On the other hand, the very same text indicates that Ammi-li'ti personally held fields and gardens within various townships of the Şupat region, which were manned by farmers and gardeners of his, and he had built a large sheepfold in one of them⁶⁹.

It is unclear whether these were ancient agricultural holdings, or ones recently acquired by the Arab sheikh. In any case, as soon as the governor of Şupat drives Ammi-li'ti's servants from the towns – possibly to repopulate them with agricultural personnel useful to him, as in the case of Hēsa –, the tribal chief arrives protesting vigorously, saying that he will write to Sargon himself, denouncing the governor. The latter replies defensively, invoking mistreatments of his people by the Arabs' servants, but proposes in the same breath a friendly solution, that of a one-to-one substitution of the requisitioned landed holdings with others, in the agricultural area of Yas(u)buqu, further north within the Şupat region⁷⁰:

«Your servants molested my servants. But insofar as you yourself are a subject of the king (L Ú*.ARAD ša LUGAL), I will give you (in exchange) fields and gardens in the land of Yasubuqu. Take (them)!» The king my lord should be informed, in case he writes to the king my lord⁷¹.

The focal point of this passage is obviously the institutional framework against which it is cast, since both of the contending sides are in agreement on one issue: that Ammi-li'ti enjoys the status of *urdu ša šarri*, i.e. that he enjoys the full condition of an Assyrian subject – a status which, in Sargon's time, does not appear necessarily tied to origins at birth, but which could be extended to foreigners tied to the Assyrian state in specific forms of alliance and vassaldom⁷². It is his very status – on the basis of the *abat šarri zakāru* norm, i.e. the possibility given to every

⁶⁵ SAA 1 178, 6-11.

⁶⁶ Cf. PNA 1/1, 105 a.

⁶⁷ SAA 1 180, Obv. 10'-14'.

⁶⁸ SAA 179, Obv. 5-6.

⁶⁹ SAA 1 179, 8-12.

⁷⁰ The location is suggested by NA'AMAN 1999, 424, who recalls that Bur-Anate of Yasbuq was one of the members of the coalition against Shalmaneser III in 853. It may be further noted that Yasbuqians are said to be part of the Assyrian army in Esarhaddon's time, on the basis of the extispicy texts SAA IV, 144 and 145 (cf. FALES 2001, 59-61, 77-78 for a reading-out of these lists).

⁷¹ SAA 1 179, 14-18.

⁷² Cf. Fales 2001, 61-63, 301-302.

Assyrian subject to appeal directly to the king for a solution of his case⁷³ – which allows the Arab sheikh to threaten Bel-(l)iqbi with a written recourse to Sargon. At the same time, it forces the governor of Şupat to show a particular leniency in his action of land requisition, obliging him to allot landed holdings to Ammi-li'ti elsewhere in the region. Finally, it is this very status that moves Bel-(l)iqbi to relate the episode to the ruler, in the unfortunate event that the Arab's threat were to be carried out.

We are thus led to consider that Ammi-li'ti enjoyed the status of an accepted subject of the Assyrian empire: i.e. that an institutional tie of sorts, such as a loyalty oath or similar, had passed between this group of Arabs and Sargon. The thesis that «in the time of Tiglath-pileser and Sargon, the Assyrian authorities clearly tended to integrate various nomad groups into their control system in the border regions of Palestine and Syria» had already been suggested by I. Eph'al⁷⁴; it may now be reaffirmed, with the recognition of a background of institutional ties between the pastoralist group and Assyrian kingship – although no actual *adê* between Assyrians and Arab peoples is known for the time prior to Assurbanipal.

But pacts may be broken, of course. Thus, a «son of Amiri» – thus, quite probably the very same chieftain – is denounced in another letter, by Adda-hati to Sargon (SAA I 175)⁷⁵, as having planned a full-fledged raid against an Assyrian caravan:

The son of Amiri readied himself with 300 she-camels, saying (to himself): «I will fall upon the booty which they are sending on from Damascus to Assyria»⁷⁶

Despite a preliminary warning, and the support of the armed contingent of Bel-(l)iqbi of Şupat arriving from the north, the Arab attack came swiftly from the rear, and at least 3000 sheep, booty from various Syrian townships, on their way to the heart of the empire, were captured. A delayed attempt by Assyrians to pursue the fugitives with stronger troops ended in nothing: perhaps the Arabs had found refuge in the steep hills of the Jebel Halamun:

We returned and went in pursuit [after] him, getting as far as the land of Ill[ab]ani, but could not catch up with him; it was difficult, (terrain) not fit for horses or chariots.⁷⁷

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Possibly to avoid attacks of this kind, but more in general in order to funnel all available sources of iron directly to the Assyrian state and its ramifications, a prohibition to sell iron to the Arabs was in force. Thus in SAA I 179, Bel-(l)iqbi is

⁷³ On this (the *princeps iudex*) norm, cf. most recently FALES 2001, 179-183, 327-328, with previous literature.

⁷⁴ EPH'AL 1984, 99.

⁷⁵ ND 2381 = Nimrud Letter 19, now republished in SAGGS 2001, 167-189.

⁷⁶ SAA I 175, Obv. 4-9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Rev. 30-37.

accused by the king of organizing the transfer of iron to the Arabs from the merchants who are supposed to sell it to the Assyrians:

«You have made Huzaza into a town of merchants! The people (there) have been selling iron to the Arabs!»⁷⁸

The governor is outraged at this accusation and replies that the only merchants in Huzaza are two or three very old men, who stock grapes and provide the Arabs with the seasonal produce; he has nothing to do with this:

I sell iron only to the deportees; to the Arabs I sell copper⁷⁹.

But the royal rebuke has had its effect, as the governor must admit:

A toll collector had (already) been placed at the city-gate of Şupat, and now they are placing another one in Huzaza; but the Arabs are leaving and do not come any more, because they have become scared⁸⁰.

So the governor concludes his polemic with a parting shot; too many restrictions, and exceeding fear of illegal deals, are killing business with the tribesmen – which the Assyrians would have only been too happy to pursue⁸¹.

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These twelve letters from the last two decades of the 8th century BC constitute, of course, a mere drop in the ocean in relation to the complex history of the Assyrian empire. However, a detailed analysis shows that they provide various insights on the political and socio-economic issues of the Central Syrian region under Assyrian occupation. The region, with its rich produce, and as a causeway for men and goods from the Southern Levant to the Upper Euphrates basin, was certainly of great strategic importance for the economy of the empire, so that its administrative upkeep and its internal security were a primary requirement as well as a heavy burden, felt as such jointly by Sargon and by his men operating on the field.

⁷⁸ SAA 1 179, Obv. 20-23. Huzaza is placed to the north of Hēsa and equated with modern Huzaiz in PÄRPOLA & PORTER 2001, 10; but the latter toponym is not readily apparent in detailed maps of the area (I refer e.g. to *Atlas touristique de la Syrie*, a 36-page booklet of maps published by the Ministry of Tourism of the Syrian Arab Republic).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Rev. 1-2.

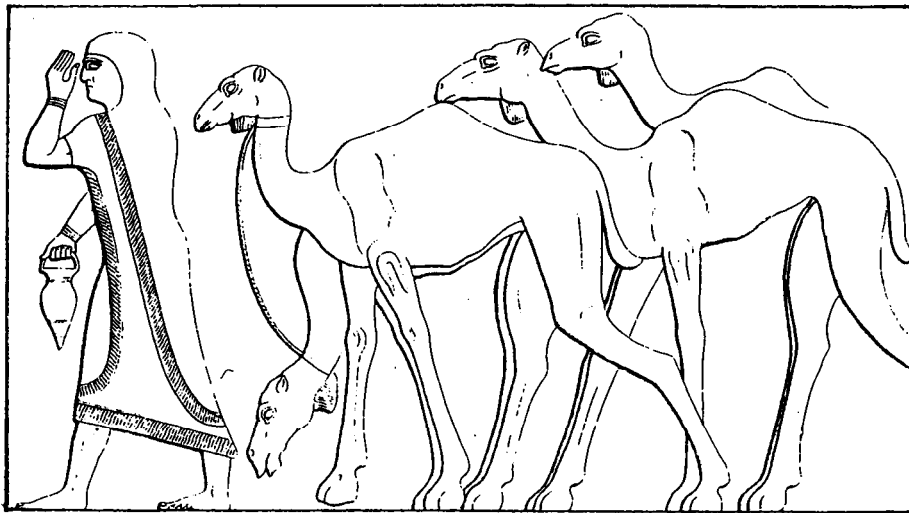
⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Rev. 7-10.

⁸¹ In *ibid.*, Rev. 4-5, the author claims that he personally has sold 30 homers of grapes for silver in Huzaza, presumably to the Arabs again.

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