

MEDIEVAL URBAN LANDSCAPE IN NORTHEASTERN MESOPOTAMIA

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1. Introduction

This volume represents a final report on the three-year MULINEM project (Medieval Urban Landscape in Northeastern Mesopotamia), supported by the Czech Science Foundation and undertaken between 2013–15. The principal intention of the report is to make available all the relevant data collected within the framework of the project, as well as our preliminary interpretations. Given the limited time between the fieldwork completion and publication, it is clear that individual aspects of the research should be discussed in-depth in the future.

It is generally known that surveys of urban networks in pre-defined territories are lacking in the field of Islamic urban studies. Research and long-distance comparison of isolated sites, arising from different cultural backgrounds, tend to lead to overgeneralized views biased towards the largest residential cities of the Islamic Near East. The case can be exemplified by Sāmarrā', a super-city of the Abbasid caliphate, which is considered, after 100 years of extraordinarily extensive and systematic investigation, to be a representative occurrence of early Islamic urbanism. Nevertheless, a dense network of smaller centres, and varied central sites, developed in the wider hinterland of the capital, representing an economic backbone of the empire. This structure has been barely studied.

The MULINEM project focused attention on the final historical periods of urban development in Hidyāb, the historical province having roots in the Assyrian administrative system.¹ Our goal was to analyse the diversity, temporal dynamics, and hierarchy of the central sites over a long period, from the Sasanian to the Late Ottoman eras (Figure 1). The region, peripheral from the point of view of the nascent Islamic caliphate, occupied a more and more important position in the economic geography of the caliphate. It was tempting to analyse the relationship between the general processes and development of the particular urban landscapes in an area situated not very far from the heart of the empire. The abandonment of almost all of these centres, particularly in the Central Tigris area, is a sign of the depth of the social collapse which occurred after the end of the Abbasid caliphate.

The preliminary assessment based on historical topographies and the satellite imagery revealed nearly fifteen Late Sasanian to Islamic urban sites in Hidyāb. Their actual diversity prevents us from easily placing them in a uniform category of towns. Reflecting on the long, unresolved debate about what constitutes an 'Islamic

town', a working definition has been applied within the project. This definition combines the occurrence of urban denomination of sites in textual sources with the criteria which are based on generally acceptable urban features (e.g. a significant size of settlement, the presence of religious and/or secular public buildings and institutions, the existence of fortifications, signs of commercial activity or non-agrarian production). Every urban site in our study area meets these criteria to a greater or lesser extent but not necessarily for every period.

The sites under study were abandoned before or during the Ottoman era with the exception of two towns: Arbīl and Altın Köprü. Of these, only Altın Köprü is included in this report, because the regional capital of Arbīl has been the subject of previous in-depth investigations (Nováček *et al.* 2013). As for the present-day, rapidly growing centres in Hidyāb (such as the modern towns of Makhmūr, Gwer, Khabat, Quštappa, Bākirta, al-Zāb, Bnaslawā, Bahirka, Taqtaq, etc.), these have only a weak urban tradition which reaches back only in exceptional cases before World War II.

The province of Hidyāb (Adiabene in the Hellenistic to Sasanian periods) has been defined in the past in either the broader or narrower geographical sense (Marciak 2014: 199; Morony 2005: 132). In the latter, the unit can be understood as the area between the Tigris, Great Zāb and Little Zāb rivers and the Zagros piedmonts. The region was by no means homogeneous, but consisted of three, sharply delimited zones: the Arbīl Plain, the Makhmūr Plain (including the east bank of the Tigris) and the Kandīnāwa Plain in between. These three zones are isolated from each other by a pair of relatively high, hardly penetrable, anticlinal mountain ridges running NW–SE, i.e. the northern Awēna Dagh and the southern Qara Tšōkh Dagh. The plains, albeit geologically similar, consisting of Pleistocene-Holocene polygenetic synclinal filling (Al-Jubouri and Al-Miamary 2009: Fig. 2), differ from each other by climatic and agricultural conditions. All the plains are extremely fertile, but while the Arbīl Plain can still rely on seasonal precipitation and dry farming methods can be performed here, the Daštī Kandīnāwa and Makhmūr Plains receive less than 200mm of precipitation annually and cannot be cultivated without irrigation. These differences played an important role in the settlement, as well as in the development of the urban network, and are well visible even in the present-day landscape.

Methodologically, the project was designed as a projection of three complementary source pillars: history and historical topography; remote sensing; and archaeological survey. Initially, we aimed to record and analyse all sites of possible central function which could be dated into

¹ The aims and first results of the project have been described in several interim reports (Nováček 2012; Nováček 2016; Nováček and Melčák 2016).

the period from the 6th to 19th century in the region. For the Little Zāb Basin region we included also the highly urbanised southern bank of the river into the study area, except for the deserted city of al-Sinn, a complex site situated below the southernmost tip of the research area (Figure 1). This territory belonged in fact to the historical province of Bēt Garmai, but the geographical ties of this transitional region appeared to be stronger to the Adiabene centres (particularly Arbīl and al-Hadītha) than to the south, at least in the Early and Middle Islamic periods. It became clear during the realization of the project that the evenness of the analysis was not achievable in all cases, mostly due to a necessary coordination with other ongoing projects in the region. Some other surveyed sites have been excluded from the analysis since their urban status was not proven (such as the castle at Duwīn or the site of Soran near Altın Köprü). On the other hand, the recently revealed central site of Kona Makhmūr, whose archaeological remains are well preserved in the surface micro-relief, offered the possibility to apply a variety of complementary non-invasive survey methods.

The war crisis in northern Iraq, which broke out in 2013–14, resulted in the total inaccessibility of most of sites of interest to the project and perceptibly limited our intentions. On the other hand, the ongoing conflict highlighted the key importance of the data management relating to Islamic sites, because such sites have proven to be the least evaluated and most vulnerable part of the archaeological heritage in the Iraqi territory. It is worth pointing out, however, that the ongoing sectarian assaults and collateral war damages are only the most visible factors impacting fatally on the Islamic-period sites in the region under study. The current intensive development of agricultural cultivation, with long-term weak administration and heritage management, which is indisputably the case for the Central Tigris, Little Zāb Basin and Makhmūr Plain areas, has caused the near-total obliteration of often excellently preserved surface remains of entire urban sites, e.g. Māhōza d-Arēwān, al-Bawāzīj or Town 2.

All locations, either in the text or on maps, are given using the UTM co-ordinate system, Zone 38 North, in the 1984-revision. All dimensions of archaeological features are given in N–S to E–W order. If not specified otherwise, all photographs, drawings and maps are authored by MULINEM members (Karel Nováček, Lenka Starková, Hynek Švácha).

Throughout the text we have utilized a slightly modified archaeological periodization suggested by Donald Whitcomb (1992: 386), which divides the Islamic era into six periods, independent of any milestones of political or dynastic history:

early Islamic period		middle Islamic period		late Islamic period	
EIP 1	EIP 2	MIP 1	MIP 2	LIP 1	LIP 2
AD 600–800	800–1000	1000–1200	1200–1400	1400–1600	1600–1900

Abbreviations of other archaeological periods are used as follows: LC (Late Chalcolithic), EBA (Early Bronze Age), MBA (Middle Bronze Age), HEL (Hellenistic/Seleucid period), PAR (Parthian), SAS (Sasanian).

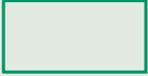
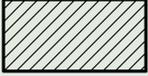
If not specified, the dates given are in AD (Anno Domini), otherwise the abbreviations AH (Anno Hegirae) or AG (Anno Graecorum) are used and accompanied with the equivalent in AD (e.g. 635 AH / AD 1237–8).

Transliteration of Arabic names and terminology is according to IJMES transliteration system with several modifications: dots below consonants are not applied; ‘sh’ is substituted for ‘š’, and the endings ‘-iyya’ and ‘-uwwa’ for ‘-īya’ and ‘-ūwa’.

The MULINEM team consisted of the following members and collaborators:

- Narmin Ali Muhammad Amin (Salahaddin University-Hawler and CRNS Paris, UMR 8167 – Orient et Méditerranée): project co-director, archaeologist
- Sheida Amin (Inspectorate of Antiquities and Heritage, Kirkūk): representative, survey
- Khalil Ali Barzinji (Directorate of Antiquities, Hawler): representative, survey
- Bapir Rashid Bawil (Hawler): driver, manager and interpreter
- Osama Muhammad Khorshid (Inspectorate of Antiquities and Heritage, Kirkūk): representative, survey
- Miroslav Melčák (Oriental Institute, The Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague): historian
- Emily Neumeier (University of Pennsylvania): Ottoman-period historian
- Karel Nováček (formerly University of West Bohemia Plzeň, currently Palacký University Olomouc): project director, archaeologist and historian of architecture
- Hezha T. Nuri (Hawler): driver
- Karel Pavelka (Czech Technical University Prague): digital photogrammetry, mapping and 3D modelling
- Jan Petřík (Masaryk University, Brno, Institute of Geological Sciences): chemical and micro-petrographical analysis of pottery
- Shaxo Sami (Hawler): driver
- Lenka Starková (University of West Bohemia Plzeň): remote sensing, mapping, archaeological survey
- Hynek Švácha (Labrys Company, Prague): pottery documentation and archaeological survey

Legend

	Brick scatter		Qanat
	Canal		Qasr
 	Cemetery		Settlement extent
	City Outline		Survey sectors
	Excavation		Terrace edge
	Features		Tell
	Features already razed	+	Vegetation marks
	Paths/Roads		Wall

Free FORMOSAT-2 Satellite Imagery project No.54 (2014-2015), CTU in Prague, FCE

WorldView-2/QuickBird© Digital Globe Inc., distribution e-GEOS/ARCDATA PRAHA s.r.o.

List of graphic symbols used in maps and interpreted satellite images

MEDIEVAL URBAN LANDSCAPE IN NORTHEASTERN MESOPOTAMIA

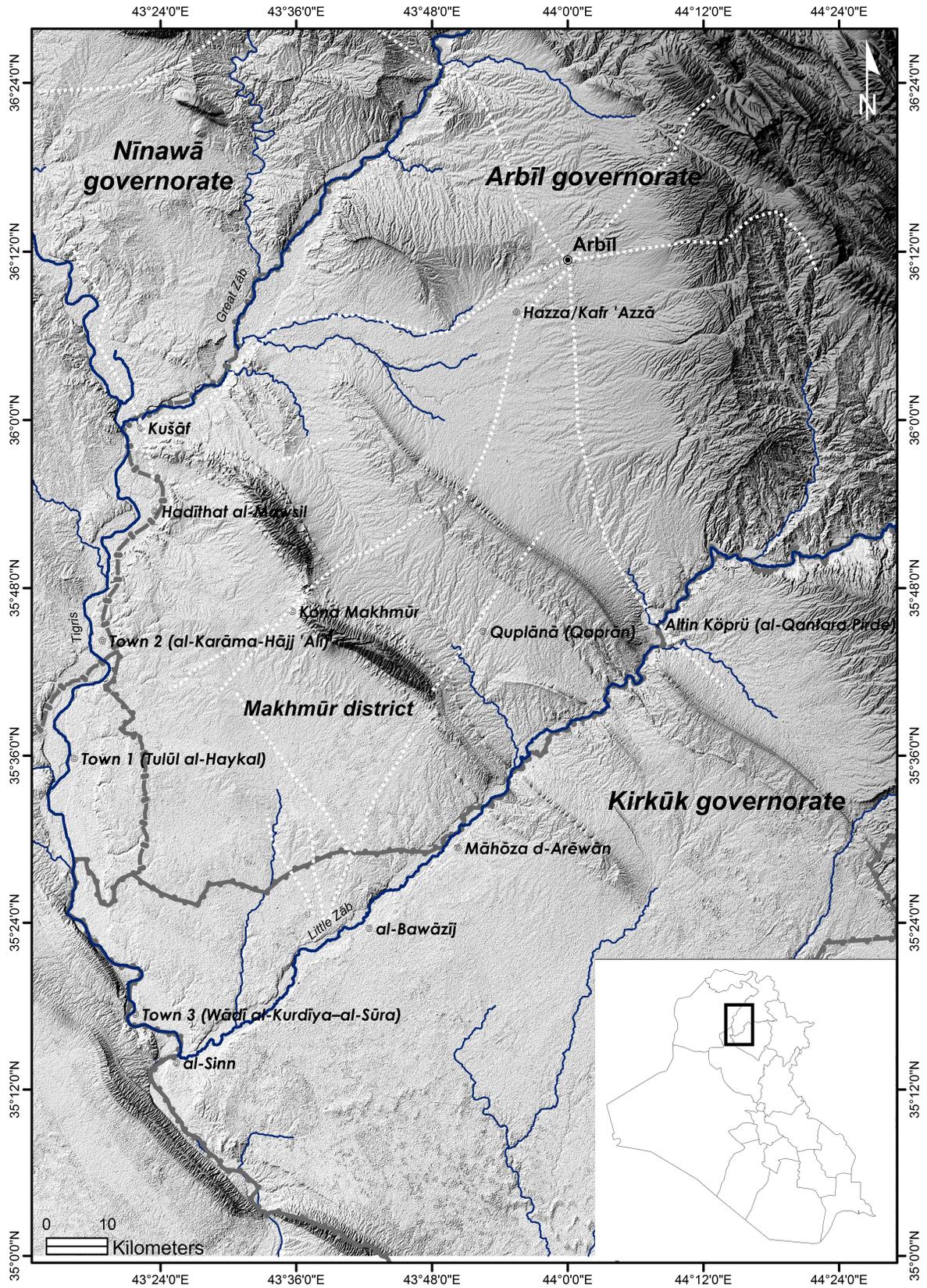


FIG. 1. THE MULINEM PROJECT AREA WITH SITES UNDER STUDY.