

# Frontier land and rural settlement in the upper Tigris river valley (south-eastern Turkey) from Roman to Byzantine age (second-sixth centuries AD)

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## *ABSTRACT*

Southeastern Anatolia was one of the regions in which the Roman and Eastern empires fought for centuries for supremacy. In the fourth century CE, the Roman/Sasanian border shifted from the Euphrates River to the Tigris River: the upper Tigris River valley was thus embedded in the Eastern Roman frontier between the Roman and Sasanian empires. Changes in settlement patterns during the Late Antique period seem to confirm the limit of Roman control to the area West of the Batman River, one of the tributaries of the Tigris River in its upper course. The integration of new and legacy archaeological data available for this borderland may help in better understanding of local rural landscape and enable an analysis of the relationship between imperialism and the organization of borderlands.

## *KEYWORDS*

Upper Tigris River valley, Landscape archaeology, Frontier studies, Legacy data, Settlement patterns

## 1. Introduction

This article focuses on the Roman landscape of the upper Tigris River valley, the area located in Southeastern Turkey between the modern town of Bismil and the Cizre-Silopi plain: in the first half of the first millennium the region was a contested frontier zone between the Roman and eastern (Arsacids then Sasanian) empires. Focusing on the changes in settlement patterns may contribute to describing the dynamic between the presence of the Roman army in the borderlands and its effects on the local landscapes. The upper Tigris river region lies at a crucial intersection between Anatolia and Mesopotamia. Located between the Caucasus, the Syrian-Iraqi border, south-eastern Anatolia and western Iran, the region was affected by the relations between many North-South and East-West focused political forces throughout the millennia.<sup>1</sup> Due to its position, at the end of the first millennium BC Roman influence in the region was pervasive and expanding toward the East; throughout the first half of the first millennium AD the landscape in the upper Tigris river valley was intensively shaped by its nature as borderland, to go by historical sources and archaeological data.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Legacy data for new landscapes research in Eastern Turkey

To examine these issues the range of legacy data from published archaeological projects available for the region was analyzed.<sup>3</sup> The term legacy data «essentially means that these data are not already

digitised and geo-referenced, but must be prepared, and often manipulated, before they can be used in a digital environment».<sup>4</sup> Their use for new landscape archaeological research has been widely considered in Mediterranean archaeology<sup>5</sup> in the last few decades and recently in Near Eastern as well.<sup>6</sup> When evaluating the current state of evidence for the upper Tigris River valley, clear difficulties connected both to the research methods and the quality of the documentation have to be confronted: the surveys and excavations in question were undertaken in different periods, using different investigative methodologies for varying objectives. This heterogeneous data was harmonized and managed through the creation of a geodatabase. The legacy data digitization was carried out with a diachronic perspective on the basis that changing landscapes can be clearly understood only through the *longue durée* perspective. The resulting dataset provided a vivid image of settlement patterns in the valley especially for the transition from third to fourth centuries.

Legacy data for the region consists of survey and excavation results of projects carried out in the region throughout the twentieth century (fig. 1). Archaeological research in the region started at a relatively late date – in 1963 with a joint study by Istanbul University and the University of Chicago under the directorship of H. Çambel and R.J. Braidwood.<sup>7</sup>

In 1989, with the construction of a series of dams on the Turkish upper course of the Tigris, G. Algaze became involved in the reconnaissance of the Ilisu dam inundation zone. The survey areas

<sup>1</sup> MARRO 2004, pp. 91-92: throughout millennia, the region has been the stage of «ceaseless struggle between western-focused and eastern-focused political entities since at least the foundation of the Seleucid Kingdom in 312 BC. Occasionally, it has also been the stage of fierce conflict between southern-focused and northern focused polities, whether it be at the beginning of the first millennium BC, between the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Urartu Kingdom, or at the end of the first millennium AD between Byzantium and the Arab Caliphate».

<sup>2</sup> All dates AD unless otherwise specified.

<sup>3</sup> For a reassessment of legacy data for the upper Tigris region see BRANCATO 2017. See also BRANCATO 2016, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> ALLISON 2008, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> WITCHER 2008; WITCHER, CRAVEN 2012.

<sup>6</sup> For northern Mesopotamia, see FOIETTA 2018 on Hatra and its territory; PALERMO 2019 for the region during the Roman period.

<sup>7</sup> BENEDICT 1980. For earlier descriptions see TAYLOR 1865; MAUNSELL 1901; BELL 1924; in his third volume of *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey* (1989) T.A. Sinclair provided a valuable knowledge of the upper Tigris region and its roads, bridges, fortifications and other architecture dated to the first millennium AD; his detailed description of the numerous Roman and Late Roman cities, monuments and buildings established a basis for further topographical research, especially for the Medieval and Ottoman period.

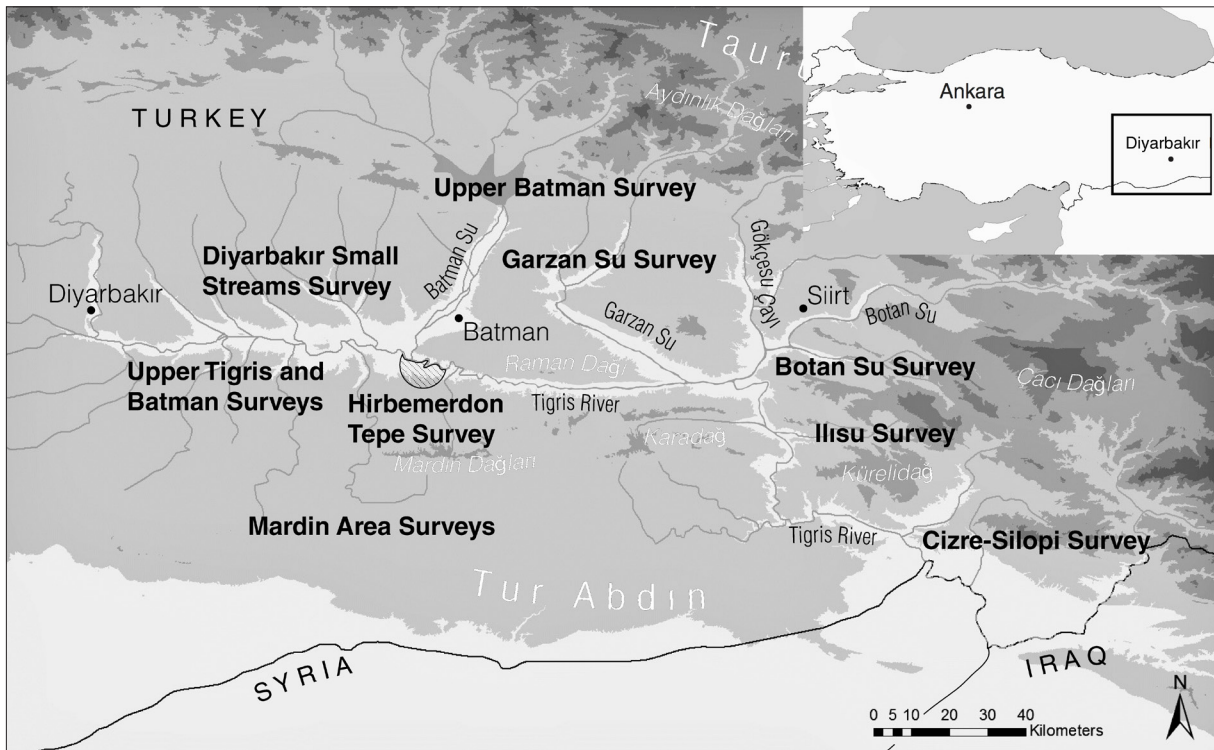


FIGURE 1  
Turkey, survey projects carried out in the upper Tigris River valley

covered the lands running between the town of Bismil, located at the confluence of the Batman River to the Tigris, and the Cizre Silopi plain, encompassing the Garzan and the Botan River basins.<sup>8</sup> Algaze's team traced numerous Roman sites, some of which were rightly interpreted as elements of the Late Roman defences along the Tigris River.<sup>9</sup>

Archaeological research in the upper Tigris area resumed in 1997, coordinated by the Middle East Technical University of Ankara (METU-TAÇDAM). The Ilisu Dam Project's aim was to record each archaeological site that would be submerged by the reservoir.<sup>10</sup> In the thirty years since, more than 700 archaeological sites have been recorded,<sup>11</sup> from which thirty were selected to be

excavated by Turkish and foreign teams.<sup>12</sup> Difficulties have arisen in evaluating the current state of the archaeological evidence for the upper Tigris region: the survey data on Roman, Late Roman and Byzantine sites was amassed by a plethora of distinct survey projects undertaken in different periods, employing different methodologies and still not fully published. However, as D. Kennedy highlighted in 1996 «surveys have well-known limitations, some of which can be diminished by selective excavation»<sup>13</sup>. With all this in mind, the desirability of connecting the vast amount of legacy with historical sources and excavation data in order to get a better understanding of the local landscape in the first half of the first millennium was clear.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> ALGAZE 1989; ALGAZE, ROSENBERG 1991; ALGAZE ET AL. 1991; ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012.

<sup>9</sup> ALGAZE ET AL. 1991, p. 191.

<sup>10</sup> TUNA 2011, p. 309. For the *Ilisu Dam Project* see TUNA, DOONAN 2011 and related references.

<sup>11</sup> AY 2001; BARIN, AKIN, SAHIN 2004; BENEDICT 1980; ERIM-ÖZDOĞAN, SARIALTUN 2011; LANERI,

SCHWARTZ, UR 2008; ÖKSE, GÖRMÜŞ, ATAY 2011; ÖKSE 2013a, 2013b; PARKER, CREEKMORE 2002; UR, HAMMER 2009; VELIBEYOĞLU ET AL. 2002.

<sup>12</sup> TUNA 2011, p. 304.

<sup>13</sup> KENNEDY 1996.

<sup>14</sup> After J.B. WARD-PERKINS (1966), research on the Eastern Roman frontiers became highly developed: see LUTTWAK

### 3. The historical context

The shifting of the Roman frontiers east to the Euphrates was a result of the campaigns led by the emperor Septimius Severus.<sup>15</sup> His Parthian Wars (195-198) resulted in the institution of the new provinces of Osroene and Mesopotamia, as well as the creation of two new legions to garrison them.<sup>16</sup> The province of Mesopotamia marched to the North with Sophanene and Arzanene, at the time counted among the Trans-Tigritane Provinces.<sup>17</sup> Located in the upper Tigris River valley, their territories were divided by the *Nymphius* river, the Roman name of the Batman.<sup>18</sup>

In the third century, after the overthrow of Arsacid power, the Roman Empire had to deal with the Sasanian dynasty.<sup>19</sup> After a long phase of hostilities, the peace treaty of 298-299 was very unfavourable to the Sasanians: the Romans assumed complete sway over Mesopotamia, Armenia and Iberia.<sup>20</sup> Rome had lost its influence in Armenia in

1976; FRENCH, LIGHTFOOT 1989; ISAAC 1992; HANSON 1989, pp. 55-63; BRUN, VAN DER LEEUW, WHITTAKER 1994, KENNEDY 1996; FERRIL 1991; WHEELER 1993; MILLAR 1996. For an overview on the Byzantine ancient sources see GREATREX, LIEU 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Cass. Dio, 60, 16. Regarding the military policy of Septimius Severus, see SMITH 1972. For an overview of frontier studies of the Roman Empire see MAZZA 2005. For the Euphrates River as border between Roman and Eastern empires see MITFORD 2018; see also CHAPOT 1907; MAZZA 2005; EDWELL 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Cass. Dio, 60, 24; SMITH 1972, pp. 485-487.

<sup>17</sup> The Trans-Tigritane Provinces were political entities lying on the bank of the Tigris River, Arzanene, Intelene, Sophene, Sophanene, Carduene and Zabdicene: Sophanene and Arzanene played an important role in the history of the border dispute between Rome and Persia and experienced regular interaction with both sides over the course of events; although Sophanene is always considered under the Roman hegemony, it is not completely clear that the Roman boundary was ever on the eastern edge of Arzanene because it was given up to the Persians after the border arrangements in 363 AD; for more see WILLIAMS 1829, 276-280; LIGHTFOOT 1982; SINCLAIR 1989, p. 366; NICHOLSON 2018b, p. 140; for Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene see MARCIAK 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Procop., *Aed.* 3, 1.

<sup>19</sup> The hostile attitude of Ardašir I to Rome was based on a claim for all territories that had once belonged to his Achaemenid ancestors; see EDWELL 2012, p. 1; DIGNAS, WINTER 2007, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> DRIJVER 2008, pp. 446-447; EDWELL 2012, p. 3.

244, when the young emperor Gordian III (238-244) died in northern Mesopotamia, and his successor Philip the Arab (244-249) concluded a shameful peace with Šapur I (240-272).<sup>21</sup> In 296-298, Galerius inflicted a crushing defeat on the Sasanian army led by King Narseh.<sup>22</sup>

The resulting treaty between Romans and Sasanians was based on Diocletian and Galerius's desire to repair the territorial losses, which they not only succeeded in doing, but also (re)gained some further territories:<sup>23</sup> the Romans gained control of the Sophanene, which at the time encompassed Amida/ Diyarbakır, Nisibis, Singara and Bezabde, and the Ingilene.<sup>24</sup> Sasanians and Romans agreed that the Trans-Tigritane provinces were to be held by the Romans and that the River Tigris would be the boundary.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Diocletian planned new fortifications at Amida and started the construction of roads within the region.<sup>26</sup>

In the fourth century, the upper Tigris River valley region was part of the Roman empire:<sup>27</sup> Constantius II (337-361) built or restored several fortresses in the region – namely Amida, Tille, Cepha and Bezabde – in order to ensure the permanence of the frontier and to minimize the chances of a successful Sasanian attack.<sup>28</sup> Ammianus says Amida was a very small city before Constantius' works in 348.<sup>29</sup> After

<sup>21</sup> *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, 3-4. Roman sources ignored the Battle of Misiche (Fallujah, Iraq), and indicate that Gordian III died at Zaitha (modern Qalat es Salihyah); Eutr., 9, 2; Amm. Marc., 23, 5, 7-8; Zos., 3, 14, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Lactant., *De mort. pers.*, 9, 5-8.

<sup>23</sup> *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, 3-4; DIGNAS, WINTER 2007, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> YORULMAZ 2014, p. 32; KAÇAR 2008, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Amm., 25, 7, 9. WINTER 1989, p. 555; BLOCKLEY 1992, pp. 5-6; MAZZA 2005, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> MILLAR 1993, p. 180; MARCIAK 2014a, n. 174; Hellenistic and Roman sources do not mention the city until Constantine, and Ptolemy does not mention it at all: for the ancient topography of Amida see ASSÉNAT, PEREZ 2012; ASSÉNAT, PEREZ 2016. For the *Strata Diocletiana* see DIGNAS, WINTER 2007, pp. 31-32.

<sup>27</sup> SINCLAIR 1989, p. 365.

<sup>28</sup> BUTCHER 2003, p. 62; LIGHTFOOT 1986, pp. 509-521; DIGNAS, WINTER 2007, p. 33. For more on the identification of Bezabde, see ALGAZE ET AL. 2012, pp. 42-45; LIGHTFOOT 1983, and references.

<sup>29</sup> Amm. Marc., 18.9.1: «*civitas perquam brevis*». As argued by M. MARCIAK (2014a, n. 174), it follows that Amida

its destruction in 359-360<sup>30</sup> and the conquest of Bezabde,<sup>31</sup> Julian (360-363) moved against Šapur II in 363. With Julian's death,<sup>32</sup> the campaign ended in total defeat: his successor Jovian had no choice but to agree to the shameful peace terms dictated by Šapur II (309-370), surrendering the conquests made by Diocletian, giving up the strategic fortresses of Nisibis and Singara and withdrawing from Armenia.<sup>33</sup> After their loss by the Romans, Amida must have profited from the influx of population from Nisibis and Singara.<sup>34</sup> As observed by M. Mazza, the lands West of the confluence of the *Nymphius* remained under the Roman control, while the Sasanians acquired the regions East and South of the Tigris.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the eastern portion of the Roman province of Mesopotamia established by Galerius and Diocletian was lost,<sup>36</sup> and South of the Tigris only the fortress of *Castra Maurorum*, east of Nisibis, remained in Roman hands.<sup>37</sup> After the Sasanian acquisition of Nisibis, the new provincial capital became Amida.<sup>38</sup>

The boundary between the Romans and Sasanians established in 363 did not change significantly until the end of the fifth century. For approximately three centuries, relations between the empires were characterized by a long series of hostilities of lower and higher intensity usually labelled as the Roman-Sasanian wars (363-638).<sup>39</sup>

must have been refounded by Constantius II, as Hellenistic and Roman sources do not mention the city before him, and Ptolemy does not mention it at all. For the ancient topography of Amida see ASSÉNAT, PEREZ 2012; ASSÉNAT, PEREZ 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Amm. Marc., 19.7.

<sup>31</sup> Amm. Marc., 20.7.1. BUTCHER 2003, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Amm. Marc., 25.3.1-23.

<sup>33</sup> Amm. Marc., 25.7.9. For more on the treaty between Jovian and Šapur II, see MAZZA 2005, pp. 132-138, with references. Tille/Çattepe was one of the fifteen fortresses ceded by the Romans, see LIGHTFOOT 1986, p. 521. The importance of Nisibis – *orientis firmissimum claustrum* – was not only strategic but also economic. See MAZZA 2005, p. 48, n. 48. For Nisibis see PALERMO 2014, with references.

<sup>34</sup> MARCIAK 2014a, pp. 35-36.

<sup>35</sup> MAZZA 2005, p. 136.

<sup>36</sup> SOUTHERN 2001, p. 279.

<sup>37</sup> Amm. Marc., 25.7-9; for the identification of *Castra Maurorum* with Rhabdion, see DILLEMAN 1962, pp. 213-214.

<sup>38</sup> COMFORT 2008, p. 272.

<sup>39</sup> On the Anastasian wars, see GREATREX, LIEU 2002. For a discussion about the role of diplomacy between Byzantine and Sasanian empires, see MAZZA 2005 and references.

The eastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire was consolidated under Anastasius I (491-518), as a consequence of the siege of Amida (502-503),<sup>40</sup> when the inhabitants themselves repelled Persian assaults for three months before they were finally beaten without the assistance of imperial troops.<sup>41</sup> The last reorganisation of the Eastern frontier from Armenia to Syria belongs to the age of Justinian (527-565).<sup>42</sup> In order to strengthen the military organisation of the region, Justinian created a *magister militum per Armeniam*: «[...] having examined these matters, [he] immediately removed the name of 'satraps' from the region and stationed two duces, as they are called, in these provinces. He joined to them many units of Roman soldiers so that they might guard together with them the Roman borders». <sup>43</sup> The militarization of the border undertaken at the time of Justinian unavoidably affected the upper Tigris region as well, as it was densely covered with a network of Roman forts in the sixth century AD.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4. Military installations and settlement in the upper Tigris River valley between the first-fourth centuries AD

In the upper Tigris river valley forty-one sites date between the first century BC and third century AD, a 29% decrease in comparison to the number of sites dated to the Hellenistic period (fig. 2).<sup>45</sup> Survey site attributions for post-Hellenistic occupation are difficult. Indeed, Parthian ceramic assemblages are

<sup>40</sup> GREATREX, LIEU 2002, p. 74; DIGNAS, WINTER 2007, pp. 37-38; LEWIN 2008, pp. 82-108.

<sup>41</sup> Procop., *Pers.* 1.7.5-35; Mal., 1234, 51, 147-150. See GREATREX, LIEU 2001, p. 62. Before the siege of Amida, the Sasanian Kavadh stopped in the upper Tigris River valley, and Theodore, satrap of Martyropolis, offered him over two years' worth of taxes from the satrapy of Sophanene see Procop., *Aed.* 3, 2, 4-8.

<sup>42</sup> GRAY 1973, pp. 35-36; GREATREX, LIEU 2002, p. 83.

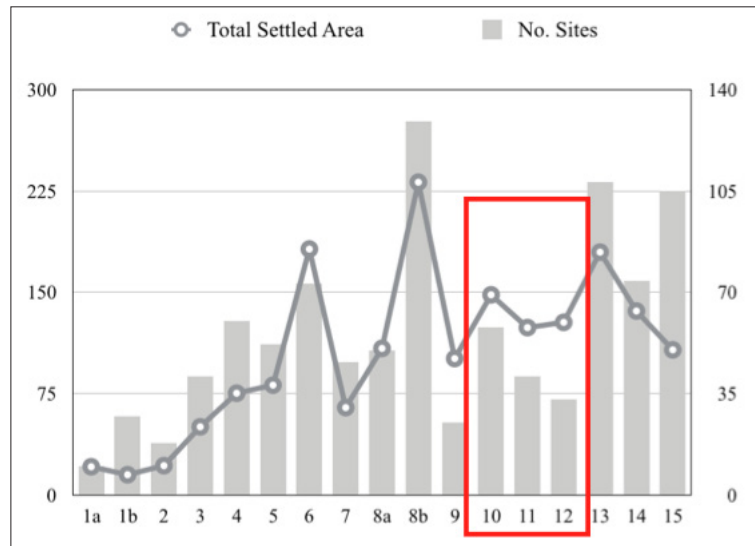
<sup>43</sup> Procop., *Aed.* 3.1, pp. 27-29.

<sup>44</sup> MARCIAK 2014a, p. 38; PIZZOCCHERI, BROILO 2015, p. 84.

<sup>45</sup> BRANCATO 2017, pp. 74-75. As proposed by M. MARCIAK (2014a, p. 15), the Hellenistic period in the upper Tigris river valley ends in 64 BC, when Tigranes the Great lost Sophene because of his intervention in the Third Mithridatic War between Rome and Mithridates VI, king of Pontus.

FIGURE 2  
Turkey, upper Tigris River valley,  
histogram of the settlements  
recovered in survey projects  
carried out in the region:

- 1a: Aceramic Neolithic;
- 1b: Ceramic Neolithic; 2: Halaf;
- 3: Ubaid; 4: Late Chalcolithic;
- 5: EBA; 6: MBA; 7: LBA;
- 8a: EIA; 8b: MIA; 9: LIA;
- 10: Hellenistic; 11: Parthian/Roman;
- 12: Late Roman/Early Byzantine;
- 13: Early Islamic; 14: Middle Islamic;
- 15: Ottoman



characterized by a clear continuity of Hellenistic ceramics, and local Roman coarse wares for the period are still not clearly known from stratigraphic contexts.<sup>46</sup>

Between the second and third centuries the upper Tigris was occupied by the Roman army<sup>47</sup> as a result of Trajan’s Parthian War (115-117) when both Armenia and Northern Mesopotamia were occupied by the Romans, and again in the Severan period (197), when the new province of Mesopotamia was created.<sup>48</sup> Ilisu Höyük was identified within the rescue project led by T. Ökse in the Ilisu Dam area.<sup>49</sup> The site is located near the modern village of Ilisu, precisely where the large Ilisu dam has been built. A Roman phase at Ilisu Höyük was located north of the mound and consisted of regular planned buildings with square and rectangular rooms with stone foundation walls enclosed by walls including round towers (fig. 3).<sup>50</sup> The settlement was recognized as a Roman *castrum*, abandoned after a fire as the reddish earth color and

burnt mudbrick traces in some of the buildings may attest. The most remarkable finds from Ilisu Höyük are two parade masks – one iron, one bronze – dated to the late second or third centuries.<sup>51</sup>

In 1988, a white limestone altar was recovered from Çattepe on the west side of the site (fig. 4).<sup>52</sup> Located in a strategic position, Çattepe/Tille stands on a natural peninsula at the confluence of the Botan and Tigris rivers called by locals *Tilli* or *Til*.<sup>53</sup> The altar was erected for Zeus Olympius by the veteran *Antonius Domittianus*, bearing a bilingual Aramaic-Greek dedication, one of the rare inscriptions from this period in the region: «I, Antonius Domittianus, a veteran, set up to Zeus Olympius, Lord of the Gods, in accordance with my vow».<sup>54</sup> As noted by Healey and Lightfoot on paleographic grounds, both the Greek and the Aramaic inscriptions seem to point to a date in the late second or early third centuries, immediately after Severus’ Parthian Wars.<sup>55</sup> As R.E. Smith first

<sup>46</sup> WILKINSON, TUCKER 1995, p. 104; ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012, pp. 39-40; PALERMO 2016, pp. 286-289.

<sup>47</sup> ÖKSE, GÖRMÜŞ 2013, p. 143.

<sup>48</sup> Cass. Dio, 68.18-33; 60.16.

<sup>49</sup> ÖKSE 2013b, p. 148.

<sup>50</sup> ÖKSE ET AL. 2009, p. 74.

<sup>51</sup> For the final report see ÖKSE 2017.

<sup>52</sup> ALGAZE 1988, p. 254, fig. 14; HEALEY, LIGHTFOOT 1991, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> ALGAZE 1989, fig. 33; ALGAZE ET AL. 1991, fig. 11: 20; ALGAZE 1992, p. 431, fig. 7; SAĞLAMTIMUR 2015; SAĞLAMTIMUR, TÜRKER 2012.

<sup>54</sup> According to HEALEY, LIGHTFOOT 1991, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> The use of Greek as a private language in the Roman army in religious dedications is attested at Dura Europos

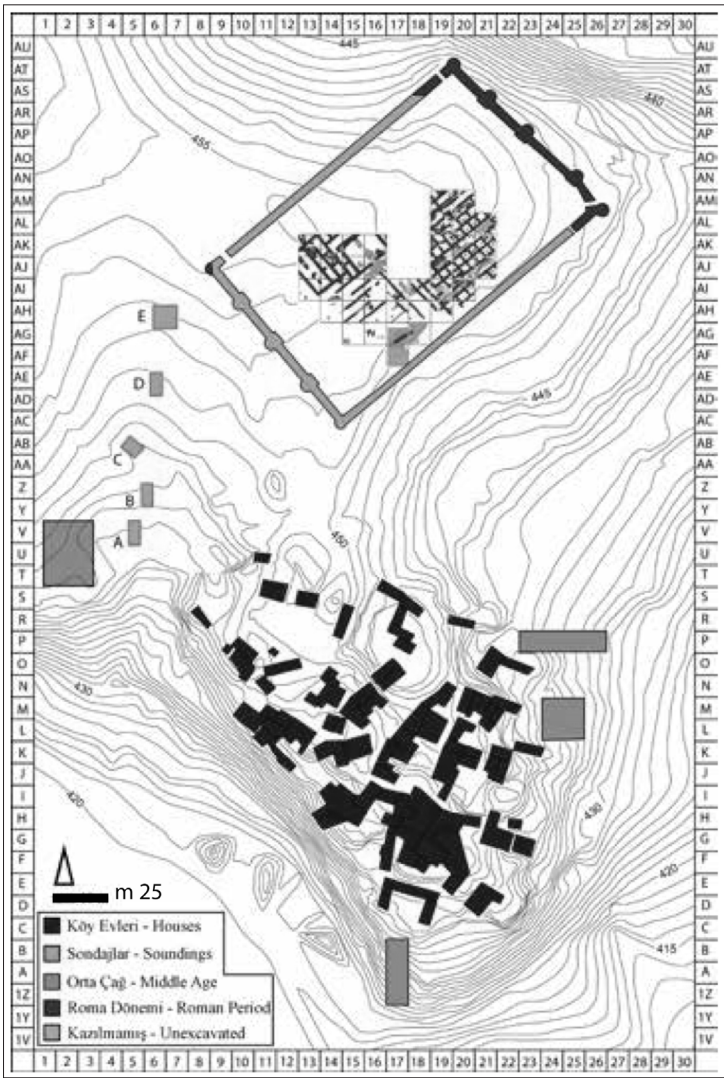


FIGURE 3  
Turkey, upper Tigris River valley,  
the Roman *castrum* in the Ilisu Höyük  
archaeological site  
(after ÖKSE 2017)

FIGURE 4  
Turkey, upper Tigris River valley,  
the altar from Çattepe  
(after HEALEY, LIGHTFOOT 1991)



suggested, the *legiones I-III Parthicae* recruited by Septimius Severus in Syria included non-citizen recruits: this may explain the Aramaic version of the dedication.<sup>56</sup> The presence of the altar near to the site of Çattepe in the early third century may relate to a veteran settlement located near to a Severian *castrum*, as elsewhere attested in the East.<sup>57</sup>

### 5. The Late Roman-Early Byzantine period (fourth-sixth Centuries)

In the surveyed areas of the upper Tigris River valley, thirty-three sites are assignable to the Late Roman period, identified by the presence of cooking pot ware and amphorae handles with three characteristic grooves (fig. 5).<sup>58</sup> The majority of the Late Roman sites identified within the surveys were small rural settlements and related *necropoleis* located in the Batman district: Late Roman sites were mainly located along the edge of the plateau or high terraces bordering the western bank of the Batman River, their location obviously due to defensive purposes.<sup>59</sup> East of the Batman river, in the Botan river basin and in the Cizre Silopi plain there was a different pattern of occupation: Roman sites are few in number, although a number of Roman bridges were likely in use at the time.<sup>60</sup>

(BAUR, ROSTOVITZ 1929, pp. 90-91, H3; 4: 68-71 no. 168; 9. BAUR, ROSTOVITZ, BELLINGER 1932, pp. 110-111 n. 971). For the use of the Latin language see POLLARD 1996, pp. 217-218.

<sup>56</sup> SMITH 1972, p. 486, n. 28; HEALEY, LIGHTFOOT 1991, pp. 6-7.

<sup>57</sup> POLLARD 1996, p. 220. Regarding the life of the veterans at Dura Europos, N. POLLARD (1996, 220-221) suggested that they were likely involved in the local community as prominent individuals.

<sup>58</sup> ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012, p. 40. The absence of Roman ceramics in the preliminary reports of surveys and excavations does not allow a description of the local material culture at the beginning of the first millennium CE to be made.

<sup>59</sup> ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012, pp. 42-46; fig. 28, nn. 3-16. In 1991 G. ALGAZE (1991, p. 184) recognized the Late Roman period as being one of the most intensive in terms of use of the area and he believed that the Middle Bronze Age Red Brown Washed Ware was a locally made Late Roman pottery.

<sup>60</sup> For routes and roads networks in southeastern Anatolia see MARRO 2004. For Roman bridges and roads in upper Mesopotamia see COMFORT 2007.

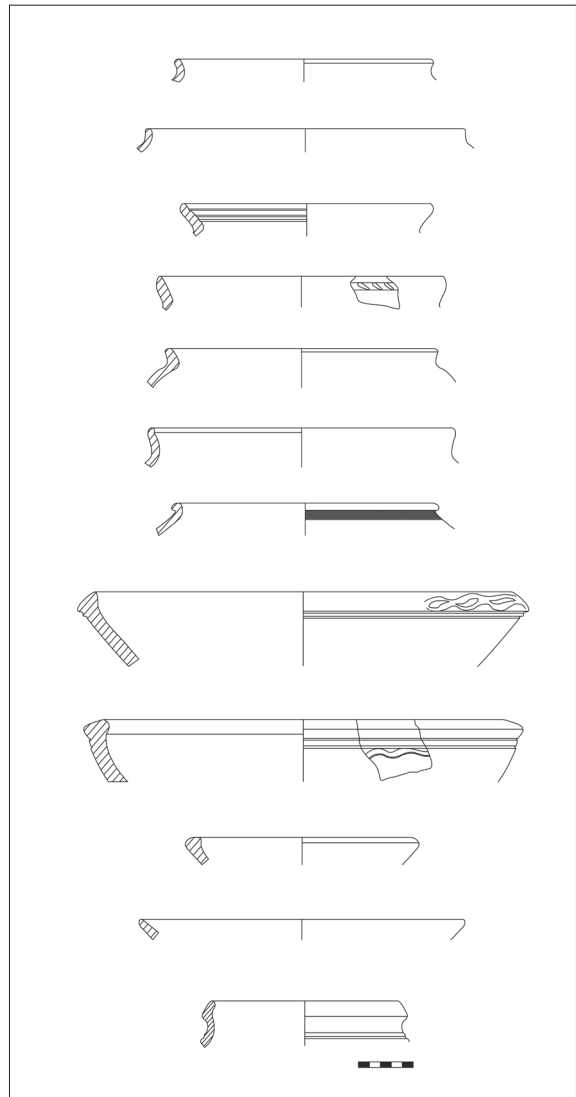


FIGURE 5  
Turkey, upper Tigris River valley, Late Roman/Early Byzantine pottery from survey projects

In 363, *Cepha* – modern Hasankeyf – became the base of the prefect of the *Legio II Parthica*:<sup>61</sup> the Late Roman phase consisted of monumental structures belonging to a Roman garrison building.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> COMFORT 2008, p. 42. E. HONIGMANN (1935) proposed for Hasankeyf the identification with *Σλου/Σιταε* toponym occurring in Ptolemy (V, 12, 10) as well as in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (p. XIII, fragm. XI). For the identification of Arzen as Tigranocerta see MARCIAK 2014b, and related bibliography.

<sup>62</sup> ULUÇAM 2008, pp. 15-17.

FIGURE 6  
Turkey, upper Tigris River valley,  
Çattepe in a satellite image  
(after BING MAPS)



FIGURE 7  
Turkey, upper Tigris River valley,  
Çattepe, northern view of the walls  
(after SAĞLAMTIMUR 2015)



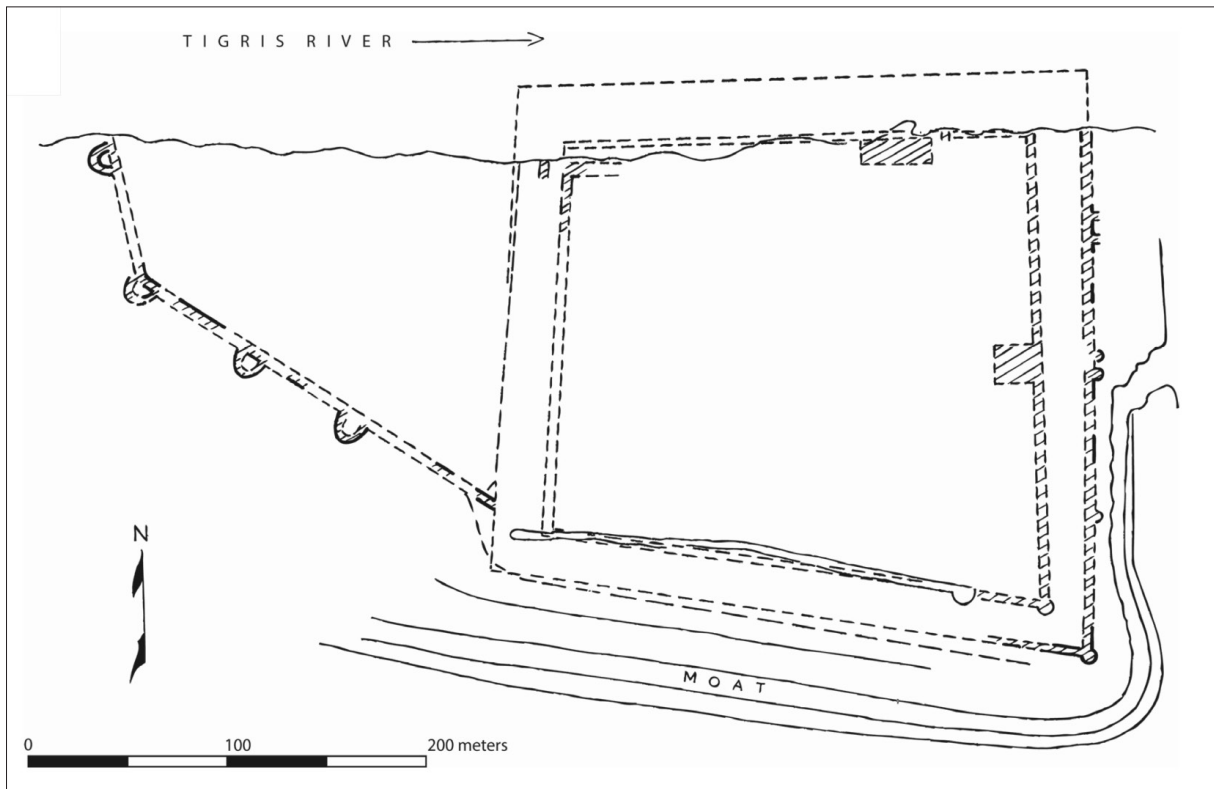


FIGURE 8  
Plan of Hendek in the Cizre Silopi Plain (after ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012)

fortifications were planned and built by the emperor Constantius II (337-361).<sup>63</sup> There are some slight remains of the Late Roman fortification on the citadel at the far end of the plateau, which is cut off from the rest of the town by a deep artificial ditch.<sup>64</sup> South of the Medieval bridge, remains of a Roman building interpreted as a city gate were uncovered in 2005: the structure has four corner blocks of cut stone made with an overlay on bedrock.<sup>65</sup>

The most relevant Late Roman fortress in the valley is Çattepe: the fortress was built over a pre-existing settlement dating to the Roman period (fig. 6):<sup>66</sup> the western walls – mainly made of black basalt and restored in different periods – were visible at the time of the survey and were well

preserved (fig. 7).<sup>67</sup> Roman ceramics found on the surface on the northern side of Çattepe suggested that the site probably also extended to the north of the visible Late Roman fortified site,<sup>68</sup> but it is not possible to date the hypothesized outer town to the Roman or Late Roman period on the basis of the available data. The excavations brought to light the stunning circular tower and the solid rectangular towers embedded in the walls. On the basis of his analysis of the *Notitia Dignitatum*,<sup>69</sup> C. Lightfoot identified Çattepe/Tilli as the fort where the *Equites Pafenses* were allocated.<sup>70</sup> Roman coins discovered during the excavations mostly date to the reign of Constantius II (337-361),

<sup>63</sup> HONIGMANN 1935.

<sup>64</sup> COMFORT 2008, p. 289.

<sup>65</sup> ULUÇAM 2013, pp. 404-405, fig. 3.

<sup>66</sup> SAĞLAMTIMUR 2015, p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> ALGAZE 1989, p. 254; ALGAZE ET AL. 1991, p. 192; SAĞLAMTIMUR 2015, figs. 2-4.

<sup>68</sup> VELIBEYOĞLU ET AL. 2002, p. 794.

<sup>69</sup> *Not. Dign.*, 36, 26.

<sup>70</sup> LIGHTFOOT 1986, p. 518.

and Gallus (351-354).<sup>71</sup> If we use them as a *terminus ante quem* for the Roman presence in the site, we might infer that the fort was handed over by Jovian to the Sasanians in 363 together with the other 15 fortresses of the ‘Transtigritane provinces’.<sup>72</sup>

Two Late Roman military installations were identified in the Silopi plain, located on the banks of the Tigris and Kızıl Su rivers north of the modern town of Cizre.<sup>73</sup> Fenik is located on the eastern side of the river, near the modern village of Damlarya: the remains of a Late Roman fortress were founded directly over an earlier Hellenistic/Parthian fortification identified as *Pinaka*.<sup>74</sup> By the Late Roman period, the remains of the old Hellenistic-Parthian fortress were incorporated into the large Roman military complex that likely extended to the opposite bank of the river as well, where Eski Hendek is located.<sup>75</sup> Eski Hendek was identified at the end of the 1980s for the first time.<sup>76</sup> Oriented to the cardinal points, located on a natural rise overlooking the west bank of the river, the site consists of a large, square *castellum* built with a double enclosure wall and rounded corner towers (fig. 8).<sup>77</sup> On the basis of the construction technique, this complex appeared to G. Algaze to be similar to other Late Roman castles attested elsewhere along the Roman frontier in western Asia.<sup>78</sup> Coins collected in the fields surrounding the fortress date to the time span 312-360.<sup>79</sup> The Eski Hendek ruins were identified by C.S. Lightfoot as those of the long-lost Roman fortress city of Bezabde,<sup>80</sup> which fell to the armies of the Sasanian king Shapur II in 360.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>71</sup> SAĞLAMTIMUR 2015, p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Amm. Marc., 25, 7, 9; COMFORT 2008, 327; MARCIAK 2017; CROW 2018.

<sup>73</sup> ALGAZE, ROSENBERG 1991, fig. 8, 2.

<sup>74</sup> For the identification of Fenik with *Pinaka* (Strabo, 16.1.24) see ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012, p. 42, fig. 9; Fenik 14; ALGAZE 1989, fig. 24.

<sup>75</sup> ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> ALGAZE 1989.

<sup>77</sup> ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012, figs. 12a-b.

<sup>78</sup> For the Late Roman fortifications see LANDER 1984; GREGORY 1996.

<sup>79</sup> SÖYLEMEZ, LIGHTFOOT 1991.

<sup>80</sup> LIGHTFOOT 1986; ALGAZE 1989; SÖYLEMEZ, LIGHTFOOT 1991; COMFORT 2008; ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012. For a view on earlier attempts to locate Bezabde/Phaenicha, see LIGHTFOOT 1983.

<sup>81</sup> Amm. Marc., 20.7.1.

The fortification of Semrah Tepe likely dates to the time of Justinian’s military reorganization of the valley recorded by Prokopius. Identified by G. Algaze and his team, the site is located on top of a natural ridge of conglomerate overlooking the northern reach of the Batman near the crossing point at Malabadi.<sup>82</sup> The site may consist of an Early Byzantine fortified settlement with traces of curtain walls studded with towers at intervals: a coin found by locals at the site dates to the time of Phocas (602-610).<sup>83</sup> In his analysis of the Byzantine landscape of Sophene, M. Marciak suggests the identification of Semrah Tepe with the ancient *Samocharta*.<sup>84</sup>

## 6. Settlement patterns and rural landscape in a frontierland

The use of the Batman and Tigris rivers as border between the Roman and Sasanian empires influenced the local settlement patterns and population density. Sophanene and Arzanene, located in the upper Tigris valley, played an important role in the history of the border dispute between Rome and Persia and experienced regular interaction with both sides.<sup>85</sup> In the Late Roman-Early Byzantine period the major cities were Amida (modern Diyarbakır),<sup>86</sup> Martyropolis (modern Silvan), Tigranokerta<sup>87</sup> and Cepha (modern Hasankeyf), whose surrounding landscape was characterized by a dispersed pattern of small to medium villages (fig. 9). On the basis of the last decades of surveys and excavations carried out in the area, it seems that between fourth and sixth centuries the Bismil-Batman area was sparsely inhabited, although due to its position it was one of the most contested borderlands of the Eastern

<sup>82</sup> ALGAZE, ROSENBERG 1991, Fig. 2b: 123.

<sup>83</sup> ALGAZE, ROSENBERG 1991, p. 141.

<sup>84</sup> MARCIAK 2014a, p. 38.

<sup>85</sup> See also SINCLAIR 1989, p. 366; for a new analysis of North Mesopotamia during the Roman age see PALERMO 2019.

<sup>86</sup> For the ancient topography of Amida see ASSÈNAT, PEREZ 2016. On Amida’s walls see DIYARBAKIR SYMPOSIUM 2012. For previous research see SINCLAIR 1989, and references.

<sup>87</sup> MARCIAK 2014b.

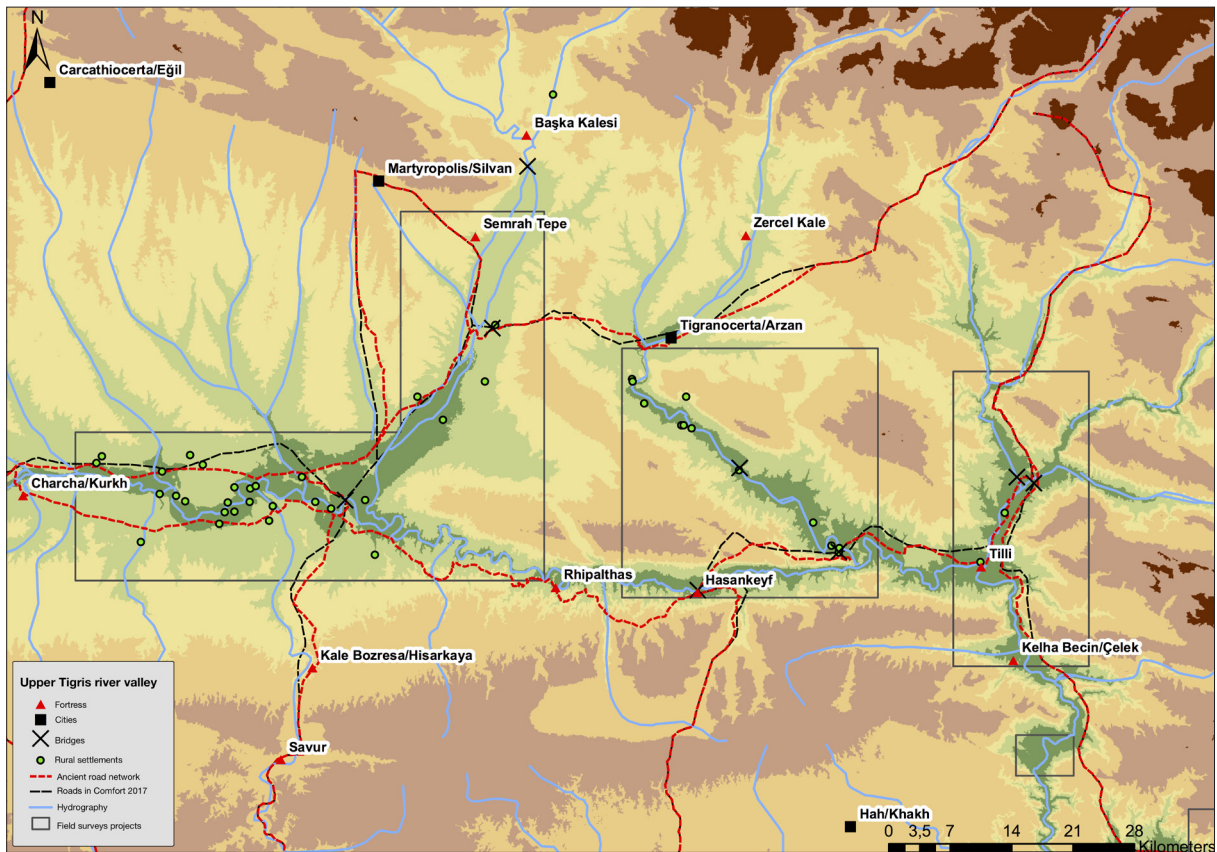


FIGURE 9  
The upper Tigris River valley, the Eastern Roman Frontier between the Roman and Sasanian empires from 363 CE to seventh century

Roman empire. Late Roman-Early Byzantine sites are concentrated in the Batman river basin, *i.e.* the southern hinterland of Martyropolis.<sup>88</sup> Due to the reforms of Justinian I (527-565), the city was fortified and named the capital of the province of Fourth Armenia.<sup>89</sup> The Byzantine textual evidence portrays the valley as a flourishing region, an image that seems confirmed by the archaeological data which shows an intensification of settlement and

land use.<sup>90</sup> Through the fortification program of the cities witnessed by Procopius, the Byzantines made efforts to secure the farmlands and to protect the crossing points that might serve as routes of trade and invasion.<sup>91</sup>

In the Late Roman period a significant number of rural settlements is recorded in the Batman River basin, likely related to the available land resources: the local pattern of landscape comprises small to medium rural villages whose agrarian product emerges from the archaeobotanical evidence from the Late Roman levels of Ziyaret Tepe and Salat Tepe (fig. 10).<sup>92</sup> Further East, within the

<sup>88</sup> Martyropolis was founded by the bishop Maruthas (383-420) who obtained the authority of Yezdegird I (399-421) to bring a large number of relics of Christian martyrs back from Christian cities located in the Sasanian empire: for more see SINCLAIR 1989, p. 287; GREATREX 2018, with references; for an early description of Martyropolis' city walls, see GABRIEL 1940, pp. 213-220. On the Bishop Maruthas see DRIJVERS 2008, p. 445.

<sup>89</sup> Procop., *Aed.*, 3.2.

<sup>90</sup> Procop., *Aed.* 2.14-18.

<sup>91</sup> DECKER 2007, p. 223.

<sup>92</sup> On Salat Tepe see ÖKSE, ALP 2011, pp. 800-801; for the Roman phases at Ziyaret Tepe see MATNEY ET AL. 2015, pp. 163-165.

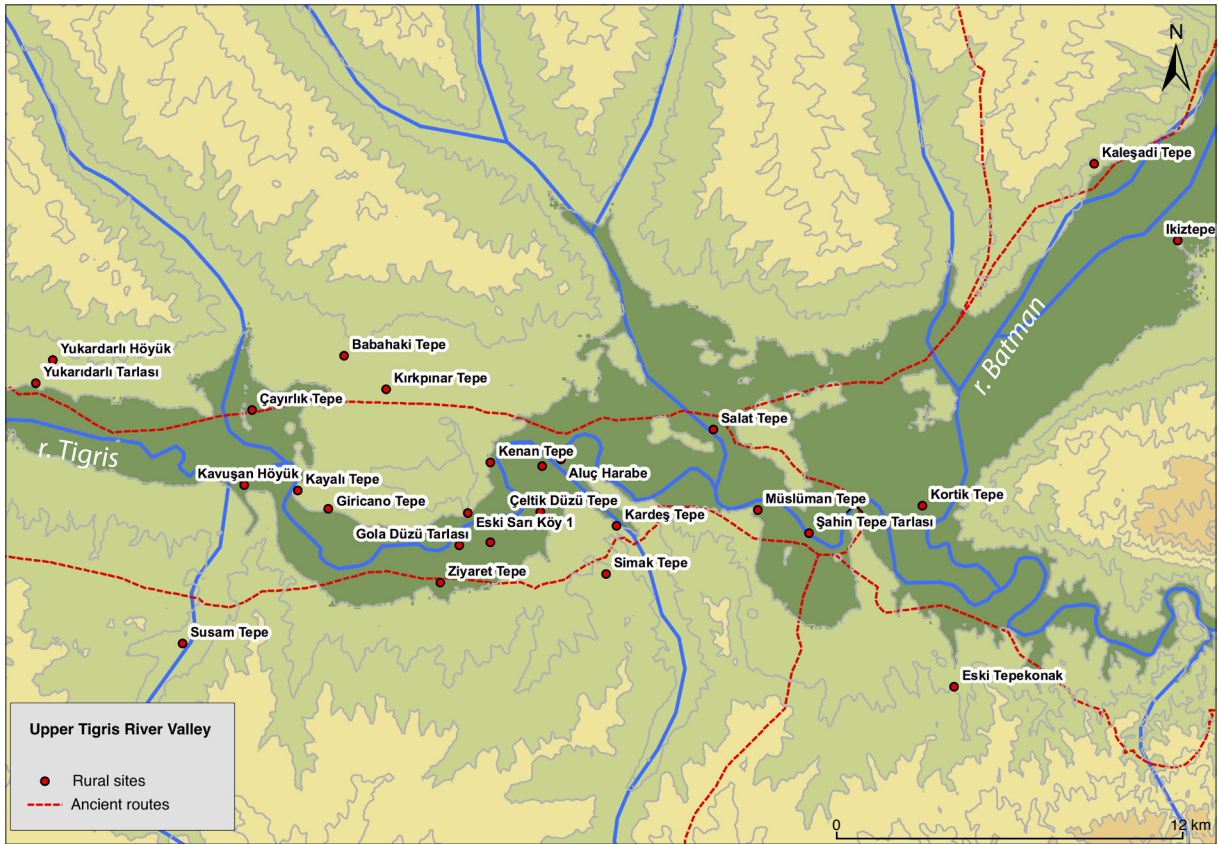


FIGURE 10  
Late Roman-Early Byzantine sites in the Bismil-Batman area

Garzan and Botan river basins, rural settlements are sparsely recorded. In the Cizre-Silopi plain there is less evidence of settlements, probably because the region eastwards to the Botan river had become a contested no man's land between the warring parties at this time.<sup>93</sup> A similar demographic decline is reported for the Sasanian period in Iraqi northern Jazira: T. Wilkinson and D. Tucker observed how «there is clear evidence of settlement decline with the abandonment of certain areas»,<sup>94</sup> a trend observable also in the Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project area.<sup>95</sup>

## 7. Conclusions

The data so far analysed describes the upper Tigris River valley in the Late Roman/Early Byzantine period not as a whole garrisoned frontier but as a complex borderland district. The layout of the Roman/Sasanian border is a long-debated issue of the ancient topography of the region, and research on the local stretch of the *limes* has traditionally been based on the identification of Late Roman military installations.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012, pp. 42-46; fig. 28, nn. 3-16; DECKER 2007, p. 249.

<sup>94</sup> WILKINSON, TUCKER 1995, p. 70.

<sup>95</sup> PALERMO 2016, pp. 289-291.

<sup>96</sup> TALBERT 2000, TKY, 89 E3; as underlined by B. Isaac (1988, pp. 125-126), until the third century AD the term *limes* was not used by Romans to indicate formal military and administrative organization, as is usually assumed in the modern literature. For an overview on frontier studies see KENNEDY 1996, pp. 9-24. In fact, in ancient sources the term was always used in the sense of 'military road': when «*limes*» usually mean boundary, «none of the sources discussed speaks

Indeed, since the end of fourth century, the upper Tigris River valley was on the fringe of the Roman and Sasanian empires, likely divided by a line running along the Batman River until its confluence with the Tigris after which it followed its course as far as Hendek/Bezabde, located in the Cizre-Silopi plain.<sup>97</sup> The Bismil-Batman area was crossed by a major road, the one depicted in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* connecting Amida to Isumbo:<sup>98</sup> going through the valley in a West/North-East direction, its ancient route can be inferred on the basis of the ancient Roman bridges identified in the valley.<sup>99</sup> The rural Late Roman/Early Byzantine sites seem to depend on this road, which is also represented in H. Kiepert's map.<sup>100</sup> In addition, the Tigris and its tributaries were probably part of the communications network through which people and local agricultural production could converge on

Amida and Cepha<sup>101</sup>. Indeed, the local settlement system in the upper Tigris valley must be considered in the light of the impact of the foundation of Martyropolis in 410, where peasants probably took refuge in time of crisis.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, the local landscape changed thanks to developing rural exploitation of the fertile fluvial terraces: the new settlement system did not significantly change thereafter until the Islamic conquest in 638.<sup>103</sup> We should therefore explain the strenuous efforts by the Byzantine Empire to preserve this portion of the eastern frontier not only in defensive but economic policy as well. In fact, the upper Tigris valley ensured control of the Euphrates commercial route and, because of the fertility of its terraces, it was probably a strategic granary for the Eastern frontier.<sup>104</sup>

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of it as something constructed or laid out». The change in the meaning of *limes* is dated to the late third and early fourth century AD. In its evolution, the term encompassed also the use of rivers as borders, as recently observed by P. Edwell (2013, p. 206; see also BRAUND 1996).

<sup>97</sup> MAZZA 2005, pp. 136-137; ALGAZE, HAMMER, PARKER 2012, pp. 42-45.

<sup>98</sup> P. XIII, f. XI; Amida and Tigranokerta are identified with *Ad tigrem e Triganocarten*, see. MILLER 1916, c. 748.

<sup>99</sup> COMFORT 2017.

<sup>100</sup> KIEPERT 1855, 1910. For the general overview on Roman routes network in the region see TALBERT 2000, TKY, 89 E3.

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<sup>101</sup> SAĞLAMTIMUR, OZAN 2018, pp. 25-30; WHITING 2017, pp. 127-138.

<sup>102</sup> Men., f. 23, 1, 16-43, 23, 6; Joh. Eph., HE, 6, 14, 27; Th. Sim., 3, 15, 11-12.

<sup>103</sup> DRIJVERS 2008, pp. 441-454, 448.

<sup>104</sup> ISAAC 1992, pp. 250-260; MAZZA 2005, p. 29; DECKER 2009; GREGORATTI 2013.

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