



A Contribution to the Historical Geography of Erbil Province in the Second Millennium BC

(Based on Evidence from the Shemshāra and Mari Archives)

Lect. Kozad M. Ahmed

Archaeology Department, College of Human Science, University of Slemani

kozad.ahmad@univsul.edu.iq

Abstract

The historical geography of the Erbil Province in the second millennium BC remains obscure, although numerous inscriptional data –compared to other periods- exist. This article is an attempt to reconstruct the geographical setting of the region in a specific short time, when king ŠamšŪ-Adad I expanded his sway to the east Tigris region in the early second millennium BC. From this time we have data from Mari and Shemshara in which many GNs have been mentioned and this has been used as a basis to locate the cities, settlements, and routes mentioned.

Keywords: Shemshara, Erbil, Kuwari, Raniya, Hurrians.

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This article is an attempt to locate some of the geographical names attested in the cuneiform texts, particularly from Mari and Shemshāra, which were within the territories of Erbil Province. The texts from those two sites mainly concern the military activities of Šamšī-Adad I and his sons in that region and, to a lesser degree the diplomatic affairs related to the polities involved. During this time, after the capture of Arrapha, Šamšī-Adad succeeded in the capture of Qabrā, Nurrugum, Šikšabbum and probably Kumme, while Utūm, the kingdom of Kuwari, offered allegiance in exchange for safety from the impending Gutian threat.

Erbil was the name of the city and also the province in which it was located. This is known from the stele of Šamšī-Adad I (known as the Mardin Stele), which states that he invaded “all the fortified cities of the land of Urbēl.”¹ The land of Erbil, modern ‘Erbil Governorate,’ is the general area located between the two Zāb rivers from north to south, the Tigris River to the west and the high mountain ranges that form the borders with Iran and Turkey to the east and northeast. These natural borders seem to have served as provincial borders in the past as well.

The oldest occurrences of Erbil in cuneiform sources come from Ebla (contemporary with the Akkadian Period).² Later, the Gutian king Erridu-Pizir (or –Wazir) captured the city, which was then under the authority of a Hurrian-named ensi called Neriš-ḫuḫa.³ In the Ur III period it was mentioned several times as target of Ur III campaigns under Šulgi and Amar-Sîn.⁴ Erbil was not mentioned again when Šū-Sîn carried out his campaign on the rebels of Simanum (ŠS 3),⁵ nor was it mentioned during the trip of Tiš-atal of Nineveh to Nippur, while the route seems probably to have passed through the territories of the land of Erbil.⁶

Concluding from the information provided by the Haladiny inscription of king Iddi(n)-Sîn of Simurru, the present author has shown that the territory on the northern bank of the Lower Zāb was divided at least into three provinces in the early second millennium BC.⁷ These provinces were, beginning from the west, Tidluḫḫum, Šikšabbum and finally Iterašwe on the eastern edge (map no. 1). The latter had three main cities which were Itu (MA Idu, modern Satu Qala), Šaumme and Ḫub/nizagu. The latter two have thus far escaped any attempt to locate them. After crossing the gorge of Dukān, one enters into the Rāniya plain, called in the early second millennium the land of Utūm (the Shemshāra archives),⁸ or Utuwe (the Hurrianized form occurred in the Haladiny inscription, l. 69).⁹

1- For the text of the stele cf. Charpin 2004, p. 162-3.

2- Cf. MacGinnis 2013, p. 46.

3- This has become known thanks to the Erridu-Pizir (or Erridu-Wazir) inscription found in Nippur and published by Kutscher 1989, p. 59 (Statue 3, col. xi, l. 6 and 11).

4- Cf. Ahmed 2012, p. 183ff.

5- Cf. Michalowski 1975, p. 716-9; Weiershäuser 2008, p. 263. For the text cf. also Frayne 1997, p. 297 (3/2.2.1.4.1, col. iii, l. 30 – 37); p. 298 (3/2.2.1.4.1, col iv, l. 4□-41).

6- The text that records this event is too short to tell such details; it consists of 9 lines in total. For the text cf. Zettler 2006, p. 504-5. Assuming that the trip route must have passed through Erbil region is based on the fact that the main route from south to north was the one located in the east Tigris region, coming from Hamrin to the north, either the branch going along the Sirwān River to Darband-i-Khān and Shahrazūr or the other going from Hamrin to Kirkuk and thence further to the north to Erbil and Nineveh. This route was in use for the same purpose until the Ottoman period. For more details cf. Postgate 1979, p. 592-3. Cf. also the map in: Postgate 1981, p. 150.

7- Ahmed 2013, p. 221-3.

8- Cf. Shemshāra letters 19: 9; 35: 35; 63: 42, 49 and 50; 64: 25 in: Eidem and Læssøe 2001.

9- For the transcription, transliteration and translation of the inscription with commentary cf. Ahmed 2012, p. 255-273.



The inscription dates back to the late Ur III to Isin-Larsa period,¹⁰ the period during which the Amorite tribes were on the move and trying to penetrate the plains to the east of the Tigris. They were halted in Simurru by king Iddi(n)-Sīn (cf. the Haladiny inscription l. 75-85). But they seem to have been more successful on the Lesser Zāb axis; for slightly later we encounter there with the Amorite-named Yašūb-Addu at the head of a polity called Aḥazum who made the old city of Šikšabbum his capital.¹¹ This is a clear allusion to an Amorite infiltration to this region, where no organized power such as that of Simurru existed there to stop them.

This new ethnic element in the region resulted in toponymic changes. The name Aḥazum was not mentioned before in the texts and seems to have been one of such new toponyms.¹² According to the data collected from texts of the early OB period, especially Mari and Shemshāra letters, Aḥazum was located on the northern bank of the Lesser Zāb and included at least two of the provinces existed there in the time of Iddi(n)-Sīn of Simurru: Šikšabbum¹³ and Iterašwe (Map no. 2). Šikšabbum, the capital of Aḥazum, is very probably to be identified with modern Taqtaq or close to it.¹⁴ However, other towns and villages have been mentioned as belonging to Aḥazum, such as Ikkalnum downstream (=west) from Šikšabbum; probably Ḥanbat and Zappan (?) and even Šuruthum (SH 925+942 = no. 41).¹⁵

From two letters sent by Etellum to Kuwari (SH 913 = no. 39 and SH 925 + 942 = no. 41) we may understand that Ikkalnum was a city within a district called Tarum. In the first letter Etellum stated that he is staying on the border of Tarum, in the second he says that the country has become hostile to him, so he is going to enter the city of Ikkalnum and leave a garrison there before leaving for Arraphum.¹⁶ In the letter ARM 1, 69 + M. 7538¹⁷ sent by Šamšī-Adad to his son Yasmaḥ-Addu about the troops gathered in Qabrā for the capture of Šikšabbum, Šamšī-Adad says that the Aḥazians hastened to Ikkalnum to do battle with his troops when they heard of this. This means that the Aḥazians, departing from Šikšabbum, tried to keep the troops of Šamšī-Adad (which were under his son Išme-Dagan) at bay, before they reach Šikšabbum. This, in turn, puts Ikkalnum between Šikšabbum and Qabrā (from which Išme-Dagan marched towards Šikšabbum), i. e. between modern Taqtaq and Pirdē (see the map). When Etellum, the general of Šamšī-Adad, decided to leave his camp on the border of Tarum and enter Ikkalnum, the rulers of two places (towns?) went there to meet him (SH 877 = no. 40).¹⁸ These places were Ḥanbat and Zappan and were most probably in the vicinity of Ikkalnum. The problem arises here is that this same letter indicates that Ikkalnum was one night's march from Zaslum, while Zaslum was in the southern part of the Rāniya Plain, downstream from Šušarrā and Ikkalnum in the western part of Aḥazum, downstream from Šikšabbum. So how could Kuwari reach Ikkalnum from Zaslum within one night and cross the hostile territory of Aḥazum? This is because the letter was written at a time when Aḥazum was not yet captured by Šamšī-Adad and was between the two GNs mentioned. The only solution is to suppose the existence of either a route via the Kōya Plain, to the north of Aḥazian orbit of influence, now partly under Etellum's control, or a route going by boats/ferries via the Zāb in secrecy in the night (Map no. 2). A land route via the southern bank of the Zāb was not possible because it was in the firm hands of the Gutians, close allies of Šikšabbum and arch-enemies of Kuwari in this time. Further, we learn from the letter SH 859+881 = 42 that Etellum had already conquered at least four walled towns in the land of Aḥazum, apart from those already mentioned.¹⁹

17- For this letter cf. Dossin 1950, p. 130-1; Wu Yuhong 1994, p. 207-8; restorations and combination with M.7538 by Charpin and Durand 1985, p. 313 and 314, note 96; also Durand 1998, p. 24-6.



Since Qabrā was already conquered and only Aḥazum was remained, the news that the lord of the city of Šuruthum has turned to the side of Šamsī-Adad as stated by Etellum in his letter to Kuwari, could very probably mean that this place belonged to Aḥazum. Šuruthum was a city mentioned in Ur III texts and in the Haladiny Inscription (Šaridaḥum) as one of the cities conquered by him on the Lower Zāb axis.²⁰ It seems very probable that it was at the gorge of Dukān as the occurrence of ni-ri-pu-ni Šu-ru-tu-ḥa “The pass of Šurutuḥa” in the inscription of Šilḥak-Inšušinak of Elam indicates.²¹

Another Amorite polity in the region was Ya'ilānum, and perhaps even Qabrā (its king was Bunu-Ištar). Qabrā was a city and an extensive territory in the Erbil plain as implied by the occurrence of ālum ša Qa-ba-ra-a† “The city of Qabrā” (ARM 4, 49: 6) and māt Qa-ab-ra-a “The land of Qabrā” (ARM 1, 135: 16; ARM 4, 25: 21; ShT 57, 15). The exact location of the city of Qabrā is not yet established, but it was in the general area of Pirdē (= Altun Kopri), certainly on the northern bank of the Zāb or perhaps on the island in the middle of the river.²² We know from the stele of Daduša of Ešnunna that the towns of Ḥatkum, Ḥurāra and Kerḥum which cannot be identified, belonged to the land of Qabrā.²³

At least three other towns are mentioned in the Mari letters as belonging to this land; ARM 1, 121 mentions A'innum and Zamiyātum on the Lesser Zāb,²⁴ and ARM 4, 49 mentions Sarrima²⁵ (Map no. 3). The former letter explicitly states “the king took A'innum and Zamiyātum which stand on the bank of the Zāb and which are towns of Qabrā.”²⁶ The letter ARM 4, 49 gives also a hint about the approximate location of Sarrima when it reports that the inhabitants of this city have fled to Qabrā when the troops of Šamsī-Adad drew near and took the city.²⁷ Taking into account that the territories of Qabrā located to the west of Aḥazum and Aḥazum was not yet conquered by Šamsī-Adad, we may assume that the troops of Šamsī-Adad drew near from the west, north or northwest of Sarrima. So the inhabitants must have fled eastwards or southwards to reach Qabrā. Sarrima could have been located to the west or north of Qabrā. We keep the possibility that the town was located to the north of Qabrā because the letter did not mention its location on the bank of the Zāb as it did with A'innum and Zamiyātum. A Neo-Assyrian text (ABL 192) indicates that the city of Sare was separated from Arzuḥina by a river²⁸ and since the latter was located just south of the Lesser Zāb, the river mentioned in the text must have been that same river and Sare is in all probability Sarrima under discussion here.

20- For this cf. Ahmed, Idu until the end of...., p. 222-3.

21- The inscription dates to the 12th century BC. For the inscription cf. König 1965, p. 132, note 54a, § 3.

22- For the different localizations cf. Ahmed 2012, p. 346 and footnotes.

23- 5) a-la-ni-šu ra-ap-šu-tim 6) Tu-ta-ar-raki a-at-kumki 7) u-ra-ra-aki Ki-ir-u-umki “Its main cities Tutarra, ḥatkum, ḥurārā, Kirum,” cf. Ismail 2003, col. VII, l. 5-7.

24- Dossin 1950, 121, l. 5-6; Wu Yuhong 1994, p. 184.

25- 5) LUGAL a-n[a S]a-ar-ri-maki 6) a-lim ša Qa-ab-ra-aki ..., Dossin 1951, 49, l. 5-6.

26- 5) LUGAL A-i-in-na-amki 6) à Za-mi-ia-tamki 7) ša i-na a-a IDZa-i-bi-im ša-ak-nu 8) ša Qa-ab-[r]a-aki LUGAL i-ba-as-sú-nu-[t]i, Dossin, ARM I, 121, Wu Yuhong 1994, p. 184.

27- 5) LUGAL a-n[a S]a-ar-ri-maki 6) a-lim ša Qa-ab-ra-aki 7) qa-du-um ka-bi-it-ti a-bi-[i]m 8) [i]-[e]-ma a-lum Sa-ar-ri-ma[ki] 9) [a-n]a pa-an LUGAL 10) [in-na]-di-ma a-na Qa-ab-ra-aki 11) [i-te-er-r]u-ub à LUGAL 12) [i-na] Sa-ar-ri-maki 13) [w]a-ši-ib, Dossin 1951, 49; the breaks in lines 10 and 11 are partly restored by Durand 1998, p. 122; cf. also Wu Yuhong 1994, p. 184.

28- Levine 1989, p. 85. Referring to Fadhil, A., Studien zur Topographie und Prosopographie der Provinzstädte des Königsreiches Arraphe, Mainz am Rhein, 1983, p. 77 who noted this indication.



A letter from Shemshāra (SH 809 = no. 1), sent by Šamšī-Adad to Kuwari, the governor of Utūm, states that Yašūb-Addu of Aḥazum swore a loyalty oath to Šamšī-Adad for the second time in A'innum,²⁹ after the capture of Qabrā. Yašūb-Addu seems to have had some hope that Qabrā would withstand the army of Šamšī-Adad and his own kingdom, Aḥazum, would be safe. But, we assume, that after the fall of Qabrā his hope was ruined and he found it necessary to go to the triumphant king and swear the loyalty oath once again in A'innum, close to the town of Qabrā on the bank of the Zāb. It is reasonable to imagine that Šamšī-Adad marched further east and northeast along the Zāb to take the rest of the land of Qabrā, including the cities A'innum and Zamiyātum. On the other hand, one cannot imagine that he had retreated back to the west and southwest, downstream from Qabrā. It was his proximity to the territories of Aḥazum that made its king Yašūb-Addu frightened and willing to swear an oath to him. We may conclude from this that Qabrā was followed first by Zamiyātum then by A'innum, upstream from Qabrā itself. A suitable site to be identified with A'innum could be Qalay Sartke on the bank of the Zāb, directly to the east of Shargha tributary (see the map). Zamiyātum could be likewise identified with the tell close to Sari Cham upstream from Pirdē. The suggestion of Durand that A'innum may have been a dialectical variant of inum meaning “the city of the source”³⁰ makes it tempting to think of the modern large village of cAwēne عهوینه in the Erbil plain, but its location far from the bank of the Zāb is not in favour of this identification.

After Qabrā, which was the main power in the area, it was easy to conquer another polity on the same axis, perhaps to the west or southwest of Qabrā: Ya'ilānum. The letter ARM 1, 92 sent by Šamšī-Adad to his son Yasmaḥ-Addu states: “After I defeated the ruler of Qabrā, just five days later I defeated Wilanum (var. Ya'ilānum). I have taken the city ›imarā.”³¹ The city of Tutarrā seems to have been the capital of this polity but was captured during the campaign of Qabrā according to the stele of Daduša.³² However, it was mentioned again in the letter ARM 4, 33 as the main place for gathering the troops of this polity and that it was decisively conquered.³³ This data indicates that Tutarrā was close to the territories of Qabrā, not in the inner parts of Ya'ilānum (map no. 3). If Qabrā itself was in all probability in or close to Pirdē, and was bordered from the east – northeast by Aḥazum; Ya'ilānum, then, it must have been to the west – southwest of Qabrā, with Tutarrā on its eastern fringe, closer to Qabrā. The city of Ḥimara was another city of Ya'ilānum (see above) and was ruled by the son of the king/sheikh of Ya'ilānum, about the location of which we cannot say anything for now. It was possibly identical with the city known as Dūr-Ya'ilānum as the letter of Tarim-šakim indicates.³⁴ But why is it that Šamšī-Adad could guarantee the neutrality of Ya'ilānum on his rear while campaigning on Qabrā? The answer lies in the letter ARM 1, 8. The letter states that a number of (notable?) Ya'ilānians were kept as hostages by Išme-Dagan, the son of Šamšī-Adad. When the latter decided to wage war on which, he

29- Eidem and Læssøe 2001, p. 70-1.

30- Durand 1998, p. 122.

31- 5) wa-ar-ki da-aw-de-e-em 6) ša LÚ Qa-ab-ra-aki 7) ša ad-du-ku 8) UD.5.KAM i-ma-a-□-□i 9) da-aw-da-
<am> ša Wi-i-la-nim 10) a-du-uk 11) ù a-lam □i-ma-ra-aki 12) a□-ša-ba-at, Dossin 1950, 92: 5-10; Wu Yuhong
1994, p. 193.

32- “Its main cities (i. e. Qabrā), Tutarra, ›atkum, ›urārā, Kir□um and its large settlements I conquered with my
mighty weapons within a twinkle,” 5) a-la-ni-šu ra-ap-šu-tim 6) Tu-ta-ar-raki □a-at-kumki 7) □u-ra-ra-aki Ki-ir-
□u-umki 8) ù na-ma-aš-ši-šu ra-ap-šu-tim 9) i-na ka-ak-ki-ia da-an-nim 10) ur-ru-□i-iš a□-ba-at-ma, Cf. Ismail
2003, p. 142-3, col. vii, l. 5-10.

33- “The troops of Wilanum completely gathered around Mār-Adad/Bina-Addu in order to do battle and we did
battle in Tutarw,” 5) □a-ab Wi-i-la-nim 6) qa-du-um ga-ma-ar-ti-šu 7) it-ti [DJ]UMU. diM 8) a-na ka-ak-ki e-pé-
ši-im 9) ip-□u-ra-am-ma 10) i-na Tu-tar-⟨⟨x⟩⟩-wi-⟨⟨x⟩⟩ki, Wu Yuhong 1994, p. 193; Dossin 1951, 33: 5-20;
restorations and corrections of l. 10 and 19-20 following Durand 1998, p. 122-3.

34- Wu Yuhong 1994, p. 191.



gave orders to his son to kill all those hostages in the night and bury them without rite, wake or grief.³⁵

From the same period, a letter from Šamšī-Adad to Kuwari (SH 809 = no. 1) gives instructions to send back a messenger to Šubat-Enlil via an alternative route, to avoid passing through the territories of hostile Aḥazum. Since Aḥazum controlled the northern bank of the Lesser Zāb, directly next to the gorge of Dukān, it seems very probably that KŌya Plain was also included in its territories, through which a messenger coming from the Rāniya Plain could travel further north to the plains of Nineveh and beyond to the Habur region, where Šubat-Enlil was located. The alternative route went through the mountains and this is why Šamšī-Adad asked Kuwari to send the messenger soon, before the mountains got snowbound (map no. 4). According to the instructions, the route went first to Zaslum, a town in the southern end of Rāniya Plain, downstream from Šušarrā and close to the Aḥazian territory, because another letter from Shemshāra (SH 915 = no. 7) mentions the transport of siege engines by water way for the siege of Šikšabbum.³⁶ In another letter (SH 859+881 = no. 42) from Etellum who was sent to conquer Šikšabbum, the sender asks Kuwari to “come” with his troops to Zaslum and take position against Šikšabbum,³⁷ a clear indication that Zaslum was between Šušarrā and Šikšabbum. After Zaslum, the route turned sharply to the north or northwest to the mountains: “from Zaslum to Šegibbu; from Šegibbu to Zikum; from Zikum to Ura’u; from Ura’u to Lutpiš; from Lutpiš to the land of aburātum.”³⁸

Šegibbu was mentioned in other Shemshāra texts and seems to have been within the local sphere of the Shemshāra texts. The otherwise unknown Lutpiš is mentioned as the station before Ḥaburātum in the vicinity of the Eastern Habur (= Pēšḥabur) river on the Iraq-Turkey border.³⁹ This makes it quite probable to locate it somewhere across the Greater Zāb, out of Erbil Province. Ura’u was identified by Astour at somewhere close to Šibaniba, modern Tell Billa, basing himself on data from Ur III, Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods.⁴⁰ There remains Zikum in the Erbil Province that needs identification. Since the route suggested to Kuwari went through mountainous terrain, parallel to the plains route,⁴¹ one must seek these locations in the mountains. The best fitting route is the one following partly the river Basalam, a tributary of the Lesser Zāb, and then passed through the valley between MakŌk-HarĪr and SafĪn Ranges up to Shaqlāwa, from Shaqlāwa, a tributary of the Greater Zāb leads to the plains east of the region of Nineveh, south of cAqra and west of Jebel Maqlūb. Both Zikum and Šegibbum must have been located between Zaslum and south of cAqra on the Greater Zāb. Shaqlāwa could well be Zikum.

After the capture of Aḥazum the way was opened towards the rest of Erbil Plain for the troops of Kuwari to proceed. This is why he was asked by Šamšī-Adad to send 1000 troops to Kaštappum, NA Kasappa, which is identified with modern Tell Kaššāf, directly south of Nimrud (Kalḥu).⁴²

35- Dossin 1950, 8; Wu Yuhong 1994, p. 192.

36- 15) ù GIŠdi-ma-ti 16) a-na Za-as-li-imki 17) lu-ú šu-ru-du, Eidem and Læssøe 2001, p. 78. The name of the modern village of Žažl□ looks morphologically very like Zaslum if we omit the Akkadian mimation and pronounce the z and s sounds as Hurrian ž. The only problem is that the modern village is not located on a river.

37- Eidem and Læssøe 2001, p.111-3.

38- 54) iš-tu Za-as-likki 55) a-na Še-gi-ib-buki iš-tu Še-gi-ib-buki 56) a-na Zi-kumki iš-tu Zi-kumki 57) a-na Ū-□ra□-úki iš-ti Ū-ra-úki 58) a-na Lu-ut-pi-iški iš-tu Lu-ut-pi-iški 59) a-na ma-a-□at□ □a-bu-ra-timki, Eidem and Læssøe 2001, p. 70-1 (SH 809 = no. 1).

39- Joannès and Ziegler 1995, p. 17.

40- Astour 1987, p. 45.

41- Both Astour (Astour 1987, p. 46) and Eidem and Læssøe (Eidem and Læssøe 2001, p. 72) proposed that the route was going via the Kōy Sanjaq Plain. However, another alternative route has been proposed and discussed by the present author, for details cf.: Ahmed 2012, p. 400.

42- Postgate 1976-1980, p. 460.



پوخته:

جوگرافیای میژووویی ناوچهی ههولێر له ههزارهی دووهمی پ.ز. دا به نهزانراوی ماوهتهوه، ههچهنده زانیاری نووسراوی زۆریش - بهراورد به سهردهمانی تر - له بهر دهست ههن. ئەم توێژینهوهیه ههولێکه بۆ دووباره پیکهوه نانهوهی وینای جوگرافیای ناوچه که له ماوهیهکی دیاریکراوی کورتدا، کاتیک شهمش-ئهددهدی یه کهم دهسته لاتی بۆ ناوچهکانی رۆژهه لاتی دیجله کیشا له سه ره تاکانی ههزارهی دووهمی پ.ز. دا. له مه سهردهمهوه زانیارپان له ماری و له شمشارهوه ده که وێته بهر دهست که تیاپاندا چه ندين ناوی جوگرافی تۆمار کراون و وهک بناغهیهک بۆ دیاریکردنی شوێنی ئەم شار و ئاوه دانی و پینگایانهی ناوبراون، به کار هاتوون.

کلێله وشه: شمشاره، ههولێر، کو واری، رانیه، خوررییهکان.

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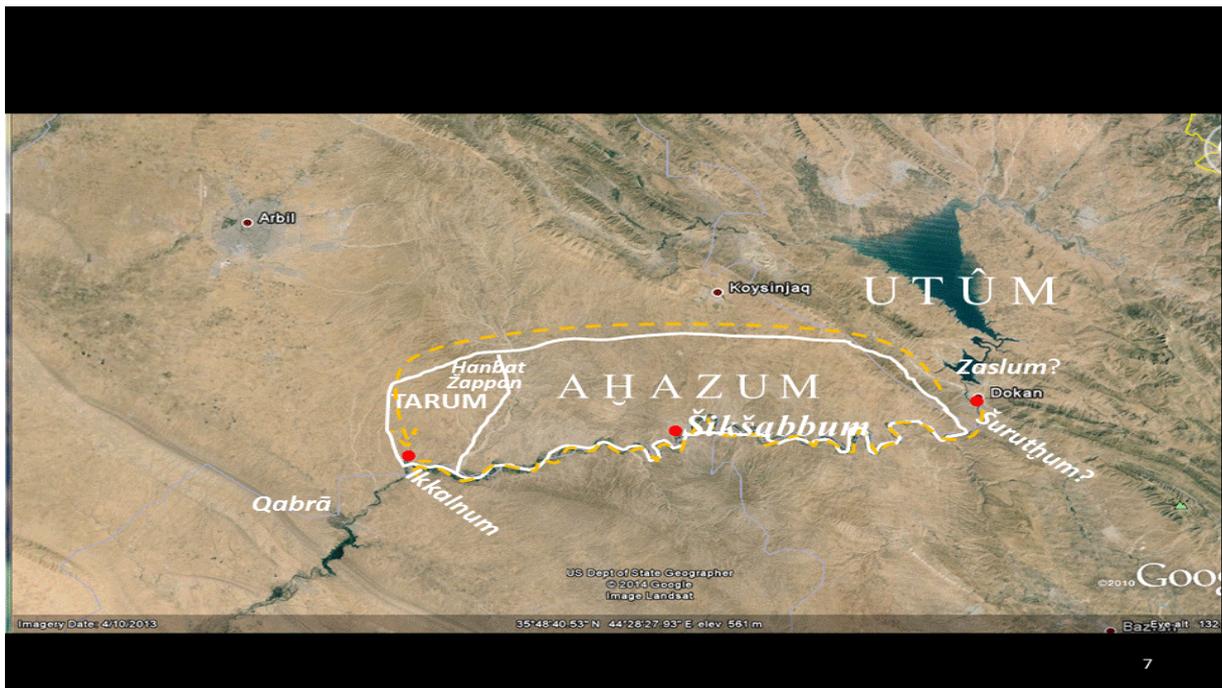
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Map no. 1: The provinces of the northern bank of the Lower Zāb according to the Haladiny inscription.

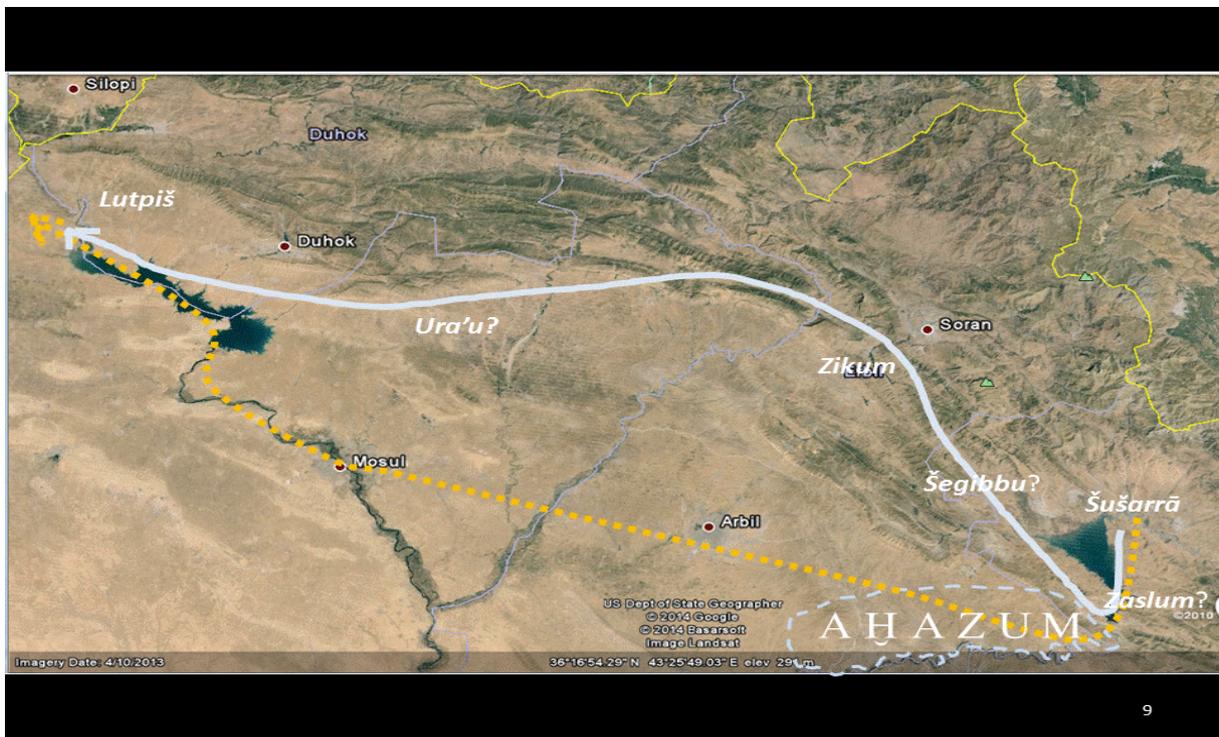




Map no. 2: The kingdom of Aḥazum and its cities. The dotted line is the proposed route of the one-night march from Zaslum to Ikkalnum.



Map no. 3: Qabrā and Ya'ilānum. The three GNs in the upper left corner could not be located.



Map no. 4: The route described by the Shemshāra letter as proposed by Astour and Eidem & Læssøe (dotted line) and the alternative suggested by the author.