



Sovereignty and territoriality in the city–state: A case study from the Amuq Valley, Turkey



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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the relationship of state authority and territory in the city–state, using the Iron Age Syro-Anatolian culture of the ancient Near East as a case-study. Although more sophisticated spatial modeling of political authority has appeared in the past decade, archaeologists are still prone to assume that territoriality in ancient city–states operated according to a “container model” principle in which, like the modern state, political power is evenly distributed across the landscape within clear boundary divisions. The present work examines both the historical record from the Iron Age on the one hand, and regional settlement pattern data on the other, to evaluate the appropriateness of this conception of territory and power in the Syro-Anatolian city–state of Patina, located in southern Turkey. Textual accounts and gravity modeling of settlement distributions point toward a pattern of territoriality in which power was present inconsistently across the geographical extent of the city–state, and in which borderlines as conventionally drawn did not apply. I refer to this flexible relationship of authority and space as malleable territoriality.

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Introduction

The Syro-Anatolian city–states of the Near Eastern Iron Age (ca. 1200–700 BC) were clustered around the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea (Fig. 1). They arose out of the political turmoil that followed the collapse of the Late Bronze Age palace economy and the downfall of the Hittite Empire around 1200 BC (Bryce, 1998; Glatz, 2009; Ward and Joukowsky, 1992). These polities then existed as independent entities in the early first millennium until their piecemeal annexation into the imperial apparatus of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the mid- to late-8th century BC (Hawkins, 1982; Lipiński, 2000). In a process of state formation that is still only dimly understood, former provinces of the Hittite Empire and sedentarizing nomadic pastoralists from inland Syria amalgamated in the 12th and 11th centuries BC to create the Syro-Anatolian kingdoms (Bonatz, 2000a,b; Bunnens, 1995; Gilibert, 2011; Giusfredi, 2010; Hawkins, 1982; Lipiński, 2000; Malamet, 1973; Mazzoni, 1994; Pucci, 2008; Sader, 2000; Schniedewind, 2002; Thuesen, 2002; Ussishkin, 1971).

Their roots in the Hittite Empire and subsequent interaction with the Assyrian Empire render these states “secondary” in neo-evolutionary typologies (Esse, 1989; Fried, 1967: 240–2; Joffe, 2002; Knauf, 1992; Marcus, 2004; Parkinson and Galaty, 2007; Price, 1978). However, it may be more appropriate to consider

the Syro-Anatolian kingdoms as “city–states” (Thuesen, 2002), defined here as independent polities characterized by their small scale, by having a single city center that dominated the rest of the settlement pattern economically and politically, and by their participation in a regional political system that involved multiple neighboring polities of the same basic composition (Charlton and Nichols, 1997: 1; Griffith and Thomas, 1981; cf. Hansen, 2000a,b; Nichols and Charlton, 1997; Trigger, 2003: 94–103), despite the objections of some scholars to this term (e.g., Cowgill, 2004: 527; Feinman and Marcus, 1998: 8; Marcus and Sabloff, 2008: 23).

Embedded within traditional definitions of the city–state is the assumption that this political structure necessarily derived political authority and legitimacy from a territorial strategy that involved the ownership and control of continuous stretches of land distinguished by clear boundaries and borders (e.g., Charlton and Nichols, 1997: 1; Hansen, 2000b: 16; Trigger, 2003: 94). In this paper I question this assumption by assessing archaeological and historical sources for territoriality in the Syro-Anatolian city–state of Patina. By using both material and textual sources as evidence, I tack between objective and subjective frameworks, operating under the assumption that both sources of knowledge can be used to complement and supplement the other with judicious treatment.

After brief theoretical discussions regarding the combination of texts and archaeological data on the one hand, and sovereignty and territoriality on the other, this paper then evaluates historical and empirical data that shed light on the relationship of political

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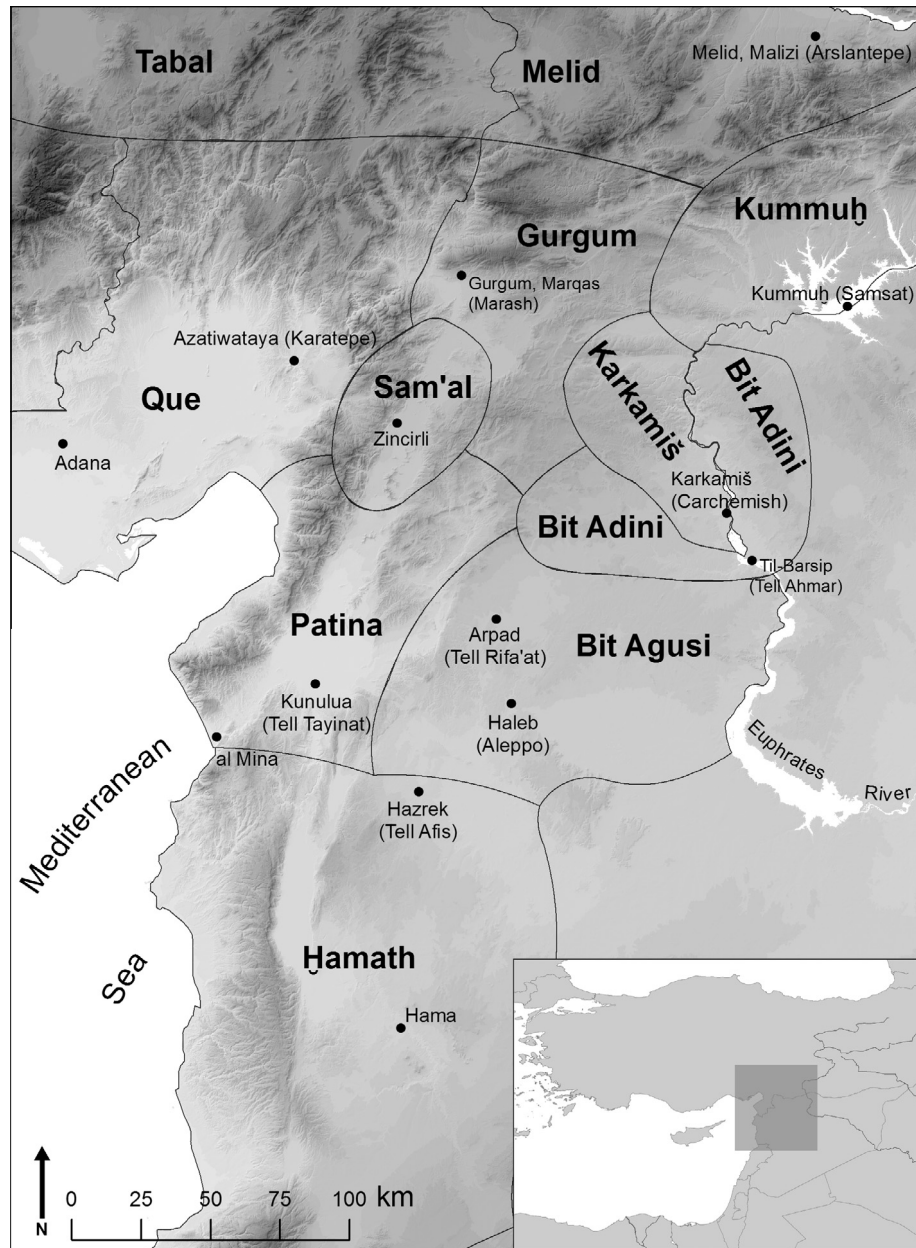


Fig. 1. Conventional map of the Syro-Anatolian city-states, with regional key in the bottom right. Adapted by the author from the Tübinger Bibelatlas, B IV 14.

authority and territory in an early complex society. In both cases the evidence shows a complicated scenario, one in which territory and sovereignty do not necessarily have the same straightforward relationship as they have had (or are assumed to have had) in contemporary history. In contrast to the generally assumed model of evenly distributed territorial authority, power was expressed and experienced as a patchy and highly variegated phenomenon across the landscape of the Syro-Anatolian city-state. This type of territorial sovereignty may have been a common feature of secondary and city-states cross-culturally, and I refer to it as malleable territoriality.

Toward a dialectical approach

The study of complex society in the ancient Near East has an idiosyncratic disciplinary heritage in anthropology. On the one hand, the ancient Near East has featured prominently in the major anthropological debates of prehistoric archaeology, especially the

origins of agriculture, urbanism, and the rise of state-level society (Algaze, 2005; Rothman, 2001; Stein, 1999). On the other, the Bronze and Iron Ages of the ancient Near East from the third millennium to the mid-first millennium BC, millennia that cumulatively provide hundreds of thousands of historical documents, feature considerably less prominently in the literature of anthropological archaeology, though significant exceptions do exist (e.g., Cooper, 2011; Glatz, 2009; Parker, 2001, 2003; Stone and Zimansky, 2004; Ur, 2003). This contradictory intellectual history can be reconciled by an appeal to a dialectical approach to archaeological problems of the historical Bronze and Iron Ages – not dialectical in the Marxian, materialist sense of the term, but in the sense advocated by Alison Wylie (1989), who follows Geertz (1979) and others to propose tacking between “experience-near” and “experience-distant” operating frameworks, an approach that combines subjective/emic and objective/etic sources respectively.

This paper subjects the data pertinent to questions of political territoriality in the city-state to two primary modes of analysis.

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