

AIMS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE "RÉPERTOIRE GÉOGRAPHIQUE DES TEXTES CUNÉIFORMES" AND HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

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Place and time are the two coordinates between which the history of a people, or [for that matter] the history of all peoples, takes place. All historical writing – whether religious history, social history, literary history, economic history or whatever – has as an inescapable precondition that these two coordinates be properly determined. This is easier to achieve in the case of time, i. e. chronology, than of place. Nevertheless everyone recognizes that geographically determined features influence history. Mountains form boundaries. Likewise rivers are often insurmountable barriers, though at the same time they connect valleys and plains. It goes without saying that it is important to know in what places settlements lay and how they were connected to their environment – or perhaps separated from it. But it is the knowledge of the settlements themselves and the localization of toponyms known from texts which is especially important in this regard. This is all the more true for those eras which are far removed from our own, as is the case in our discipline.

Hence it is obvious that all historical work and thus all work on historical texts must be accompanied by simultaneous study of historical geography. For this reason Assyriologists from the very earliest days up to the present have recognized historical topography as an important field of study, although the emphasis given to this special area has shifted about from time to time.

It is not my intention to recapitulate here the history of Assyriology with special reference to geographical studies. Nevertheless, a few names should be called to mind.

Friedrich Delitzsch's small volume, "Wo lag das Paradies", a compilation of geographical knowledge from the early days of Assyriology, can be profitably consulted even now. It contains virtually all the toponymic material known at the time of its publication in 1881, and this included practically all the important localities in Mesopotamia. Delitzsch was followed at the beginning of the present century by Maximilian Streck, who published several detailed studies concentrating on Assyria and the neighbouring Zagros Mountains.

These were for the most part simply collections of material, which did not lead to any clear localizations, but this is understandable in view of the difficulty of the material.

In 1921 Emil Forrer attempted to put the historical geography of northern Mesopotamia and Syria on a sound footing with his "Die Provinzeinteilung des assyrischen Reiches". That he was not entirely successful is certainly no reproach to him, for archaeological investigation of the area was still in an incipient stage, so that many of his suggested identifications could not be tested. On the other hand later Assyriologists cannot so easily escape reproach, for they have in the intervening decades taken over the often hypothetical suggestions of Forrer as secure results and transmitted them uncritically in the literature.

Another book from this period, which was also limited in scope and time – span, is the 1911 work of Sina Schiffer "Die Aramäer". This was likewise an attempt at historical geography based on analysis of the cuneiform material available at the time. Then there was the "Ethnologie und Geographie des Alten Orients" by Fritz Hommel published in 1924. This, however, was based on much earlier research and did little to advance our knowledge despite, or perhaps because of, its surfeit of material. Finally we might mention René Dussaud's 1927 work, "Topographie historique de la Syrie Antique". Unfortunately it is only of limited worth to us due to the writer's lack of competence in evaluating the cuneiform material.

With the subsequent significant increase of material from excavations – Ugarit, Mari, Nuzi, the Diyala Region etc. to name but a few – the collection of material and presentation of larger geographical syntheses came to a standstill. Although limited studies were carried out during the following years and decades, no further attempt was made at providing a complete historical geography of Mesopotamia and the adjacent areas. This is understandable if one takes into consideration the enormous increase in textual material in those

few years, which amounted to several times that which had been published up to the twenties of this century. Despite this however, the *Realexikon der Assyriologie* continues to try to cover the entire stock of place names.

The Second World War interrupted virtually all work in the field of Assyriology, but when in 1951 Assyriologists met in Paris for the second *Rencontre*, W. F. Leemans suggested team-work production and publication of a "geographical lexicon". In 1952 this idea was developed further, and a committee which included J. R. Kupper and Jean Nougayrol was formed under the direction of Leemans. Numerous — Assyriologists promised their cooperation at the time, and several of them prepared geographical card files for their specialty areas in the following years.

In order to produce a manageable reference only a few volumes were planned, the exact composition of which, however, had not been determined. Only the attestations of the place name were to be given without any extensive discussion of reading, context or localization. For reasons, the details of which are unknown to me, the collection of material did not proceed at an even pace. Card catalogues existed for some areas, while for others there was only preliminary work in varying stages of completeness. The project seems to have been dropped due to the many other commitments of the committee members.

The years subsequent to the 1952 *Rencontre* saw a considerable increase in Assyriological source material. Surveys, excavations and the publication of earlier excavations were pursued simultaneously, and for the first time there seemed to be a real promise of close interaction between archaeologists and philologists. Work in historical topography, however, remained confined to special studies, since each Assyriologist who wished to work in the area of historical topography was obliged to extract all his own material from the texts. This meant a considerable expenditure of labour in each instance, and the danger remained that an essential reference might be overlooked.

In 1968, however, an opportunity for systematic study of the problems of historical geography presented itself within a project for a comprehensive atlas of the Near East at the University of Tübingen, later to be called the *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients*. Hence I formed a plan to take up once more the work on the geographical lexicon and at least to see to the publication of material already collected. Prof. Leemans and his colleagues Kupper and Nougayrol agreed readily to the plan and very kindly placed the entire material — insofar as it had been collected and was available to them — at my disposal for the edition. The title was to remain "*Repertoire Géographique*", which was by then well established in the discipline as a working title and which expressed the origins of the idea in the *Groupe Thureau-Dangin / Rencontre Assyriologique*.

Although in the years after 1952 a part of the material had been collected and placed on cards, no final conception had been developed as to how these cards were to be trans-

formed into a publication. At the inception only general principles for the work had been elaborated, which had to be modified in practice. Also it was quickly evident that, in view of the fact that c. 20 years had elapsed since the first initiatives of various scholars on the project, a thorough control, supplementation and correction of the material had to be undertaken prior to publication. This required much more work than I had originally estimated. On the other hand it provided an opportunity to expand and edit the material according to unified principles.

The principles according to which the material is prepared and published are roughly as follows:

1) Its character as a repertoire should remain. Completeness, therefore, is the guiding principle in the collecting and presentation of the material. Embedding the material in context and text-critical studies, however, must be dispensed with.

2) The selection of lemmata should not be based on purely formal criteria, so that, for example, all place names with determinatives are entered while those without are not. Inside the lemma, however, the arrangement of material should be according to formal aspects, i. e. according to writing, with the most frequent writings being placed at the head and the less frequent ones at the end of the lemma.

3) The only division maintained is between toponyms and hydronyms. The category toponyms also includes such features as mountains and lands etc., while hydronyms comprise canals, rivers and seas.

4) Discussion of localization is confined in general to a brief report of previous proposals for localization. Those which are certain are placed at the beginning of the discussion and are accompanied by geographical coordinates. Identifications which are not certain are given with the name of the individual who proposed it. These are sometimes criticized in the discussion. Giving original proposals for localization is not the aim of the *Repertoire Géographique*. Nevertheless original suggestions will sometimes find their way into the *Repertoire* since intensive work on the material sometimes leads to new results. In principle, however, the *Repertoire* is intended to be a vehicle for placing the material at the disposal of the scholarly world and provoking new discussions, and is not meant to provide final pronouncements on all geographical matters.

5) Each volume is to be provided with an extensive bibliography and various indices in order to make it as useful and usable as possible. Moreover, a general map is provided at the end of the volume as a means of orientation. A detailed topographical presentation is not possible on these maps, however, if for no other reason than the inadequate scale of the maps.

In contrast to the original plan the *Repertoire Géographique* has now grown to a size which seems alarming even to its editor. From the beginning, however, there were only two alternatives. The first was to produce a lexicon which recorded the occurrences of place names from all periods in

strict alphabetical order. This alternative, however, presupposed that all the material had been collected and was available, but in taking over the material assembled by Prof. Leemans, it soon became evident that there were still large gaps to be filled. Above all there were no collections of material from the later periods, that is from the Neo-Assyrian and Neo- and Late Babylonian periods. Nor had the material from the literary texts been extracted. In the course of intensive work with the collections at hand it also became clear that some of these were quite incomplete. Hence it would have meant about a decade of collecting and checking before the preparation of the first fascicule could have been contemplated.

The Assyriological world, however, is very interested in the speedy appearance of the Répertoire. Furthermore the various toponymic corpora are often specific to various periods or places and this information would be lost in such a lexicon or at least would be very difficult to recover. This lexicon or at least would be very difficult to recover. This brings us to the second alternative, which was to produce a series of volumes for the various periods and areas, and this in the end seemed the better solution.

The five volumes which have appeared to date have followed this conception. Thus the scholar who is interested especially in the Ur III period now has at hand a geographical compendium of the material from that period. The same holds true for the earlier periods, the Old Babylonian period and for the Hittite texts

The present state of planning is the following:

- Vol. 1: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Pre-Sargonic and Sargonic Periods" (by D. O. Edzard and G. Farber, has appeared).
- Vol. 2: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Ur III period" (by D. O. Edzard and G. Farber, has appeared).
- Vol. 3: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Old Babylonian Period" (by B. Gronberg, has appeared).
- Vol. 4: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Old Assyrian Texts" (to be prepared by Khaled Nashef).
- Vol. 5: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian Periods" (by Khaled Nashef, in press).
- Vol. 6: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Hittite Texts" (by D. F. del Monte, has appeared).
- Vol. 7: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Neo-Assyrian Period" (K. Kessler, being prepared).
- Vol. 8: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Neo- and Late Babylonian Texts" (R. Zadok, being prepared).
- Vol. 9: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Urartian Texts" (I. M. Diakonoff and S. M. Kashkay, is appearing immediately).
- Vol. 10: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Nuzi Texts" (Khaled Nashef, being prepared).
- Vol. 11: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Texts from Elam" (H. Koch and collaborator, in preparation).
- Vol. 12: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Texts from Syria-Palestine" (W. Röllig, being prepared).
- Vol. 13: "The Toponyms and Hydronyms of the Literary Texts" (G. McEwan, being prepared).
- Vol. 14: "Addenda and Indices".

This final volume should contain all the material from the previous volumes including the individual lemmata, modern place names, ideograms etc. In this way the disadvantage

of editing the material in separate volumes, namely that an overview of the complete material is missing, can be compensated for.

Some problems have been noted in the course of work on the volumes which have appeared up to now. A few of these problems are:

1) Delimitation of individual volumes from one another is not always easy. For example, it is difficult to determine what constitutes "literary texts". School texts fall naturally into this category, within which we might include lists of all kinds, myths and epics, hymns and incantations and in addition scientific material such as omens, astronomical texts etc. On the other hand, although royal inscriptions are also frequently literary in nature they are not included with the literary texts, but rather are incorporated in the volumes for the relevant periods. The same holds true for chronicles and literary letters. Such problems of delimitation are unavoidable, and if occasionally decisions are made with which individual users might disagree or if the same occurrence is recorded in different volumes, this is scarcely to be wondered at given the mass of material.

2) The various divisions, partly regional and partly chronological, also present problems. This is also true within individual volumes. Thus the first volume which contains texts overwhelmingly from southern Mesopotamia and the Diyala region was subdivided between Old Sumerian texts Sargonic texts. An appropriate temporal siglum was placed before each group of attestations. In the volume concerned with Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian material on the other hand, the division is made geographically, that is according to whether the texts come from Babylonia or Assyria. But if we consider – to use but one example – the well-known fact that there are Middle Assyrian texts which come from Nippur, then some of the dilemmas of classification become of Assyriology. Nevertheless, even in the case of sites which have been identified for some time it is often difficult to determine their exact location by latitude and longitude since the maps available to us often show appreciable divergences. The same is true of the writing of modern place names, which exhibit a colourful diversity. Thus it is difficult to establish the correct form in each case and give it in the Répertoire. Since we use the transcription system of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft for all oriental languages, it is often important to go back to the Arabic form of the name should one exist. This is often difficult in such cases as Kurdish names for example. Thus if we cite suggested localizations, which were often made by scholars without any knowledge of the area solely on the basis of maps which are often not available to us, it is quite often impossible to determine the correct form of the name. A good topographical basis for the work is lacking, and this has been made more difficult by the frequent renaming of localities in recent times.

We may add to this the fact that many identifications remain problematic. An apparently certain piece of evidence such as an inscribed brick found on the site may easily lead one astray when no supporting evidence is available. For

we all know that bricks and even stone inscriptions may be transported a considerable distance. Only discovery during a systematic excavation using modern techniques can in the end allow us to make attributions with any certainty .

My co-workers and I hope that the appearance of the Répertoire Géographique will give new life to the study of historical geography and that it will form the urgently needed basis for historical work of all sorts. Several years will elapse before we see the end of our undertaking , during which historical and archaeological maps of the ancient Near East will also be produced. In order to make this historical-topographical work easier it would be most helpful if several principles could be adhered to / when publishing archaeological results or new cuneiform texts. I am referring here primarily to rescus archaeology, which is of course carried out in areas where later control of results is not possible .

1) The exact form of the modern place name should be registered in a prominent place. The official rather than the dialect form should be used here .

2) An exact description of the location should be given

including latitude and longitude and the relationship of the site to neighbouring water courses and ridges . The total area of the site should also be given .

3) Geographical investigations should not be confined simply to topography, but rather they must necessarily take the complete situation of the site into consideration. Thus no publication should be without a map . This map should contain, in as large a scale as possible, information about bodies of water and mountains, vegetation and soil conditions and the relationship of the immediate geographical setting to its larger surroundings .

4) Finally, all features which might be useful for historical geographical classification should be recorded with the greatest possible accuracy and shown on detailed maps. Examples of this are inscribed bricks or stone door sockets, foundation deposits in temples , rock inscriptions or reliefs with inscriptions etc. For it is only by weaving a tight net of reference points, consisting of places localized with certainty, that we can come in the end to a complete geographical picture, which of course must be the goal of our efforts .

