

ZAGROS STUDIES

Proceedings of the NINO Jubilee Conference and Other Research on the Zagros Region

edited by

J. Eidem



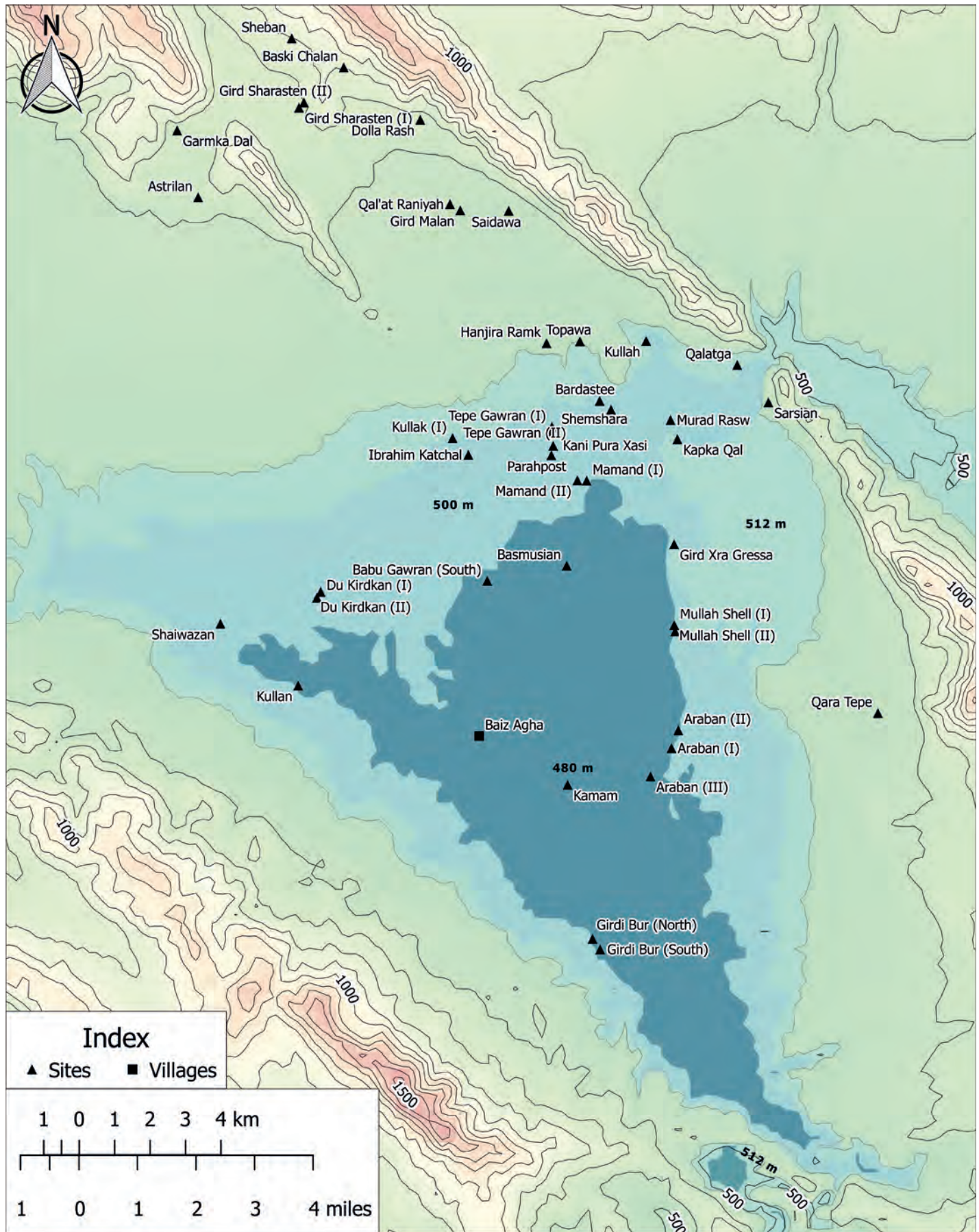
NEDERLANDS INSTITUUT VOOR HET NABIJE OOSTEN
LEIDEN

PEETERS
LEUVEN

2020

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Map 1. The Rania Plain with sites visited by the NINO Project 2012-2015 (drawn by M. Uildriks).

INTRODUCTION

“At last we saw Shemshara, a grass-covered tell, whose flat summit rose some 115 feet above the surrounding countryside. It was like having one’s dream come true. On the steep sides and on the summit of the tell it was possible to pick up sherds of prehistoric pottery. Here lay the centre of operations of the Dokan expedition.”

The year was 1957, and the place was the Rania plain in northeastern Iraq. At the south edge of the plain, at Dokan, a hydro-electric dam was under construction, and this would flood much of the plain and inundate some 40 ancient sites. Iraqi archaeologists were already busy conducting salvage excavations, and they were joined by a single foreign expedition from Denmark. This expedition was organised by the assyriologist Jørgen Læssøe (1924-93), and funded by the Danish state and the Carlsberg Foundation. Læssøe and the field director, Harald Ingholt (1896-1985) had chosen to excavate Tell Shemshara, located close to the strategic pass at Darband-i Ramkan, leading into the mountains on the border between Iraq and Iran.

Læssøe continues his account:

“... on that same day – 18 May – we pitched camp. During the night the rain lashed the tents and the thunder rumbled among the mountains. The howl of wolves was heard such a short distance away that on the next day we engaged two Kurds from Boskin armed with rifles to maintain a night-watch in the camp.”

Thus began the adventure. During the next three months the expedition endured scorching heat, scorpions, giant spiders, clouds of sandflies, and weeks on end with strong winds while uncovering the ruins of ancient settlements at Shemshara, but there were compensations:

“And yet there was something majestic about this countryside. Eagles swooped down over Shemshara. The full moons we experienced caused the mountain ridges to stand out sharply silhouetted against a silvery night sky; the Zab wound its glittering way south towards the Tigris. To the east one could see flashes of lightning among the mountains beyond the Persian frontier. We were in a world of our own. Who were the people whose buildings and tombs we discovered at Shemshara?”

Towards the end of their field season the Danes found rather sensational, if partial, answers to these questions, when they recovered a nearly 4000 year old archive of cuneiform texts – but more about this elsewhere in this volume.

The above¹ surely serves to convey some of the excitement and adventure which accompany archaeological exploration in remote, unchartered territory, and the north-eastern Kurdish corner of Iraq, until recently, certainly qualified as such. Max Mallowan’s pioneering work at Nineveh and Arpachiyah may justly be said to have opened up research into the “Pre-Assyrian” past of Northern Mesopotamia, and he was quickly followed by American scholars who conducted extensive excavations at now classic sites like Tell Billa, Tepe Gawra, and Yorghana Tepe (ancient Nuzi). Later post-WW2 work by the Braidwoods and Solecki in the Zagros, in the 1950s, deepened perspectives on the ancient history of the region. This was a defining period: projected dams in the Zagros foothills, at Dokan, Darband-i Ramkan, and Rowanduz, called for salvage projects, which also served to broaden research agendas, but these efforts were soon stunted by political unrest, and a subsequent long hiatus in archaeological exploration of this corner of Ancient Mesopotamia. The recent resurgence of archaeological work in Iraq has happily included the northeastern Kurdish area, and many projects are now ongoing there – a series of regional surveys – and excavations of sites representing virtually a universal chronological range, from new investigations in Shanidar Cave to Ottoman archaeology on the Erbil Citadel. Several compendious volumes introducing these projects have already been published.² The present volume adds modestly to this output.

The first part of this volume presents papers delivered at the NINO Jubilee meeting ZAGROS in December 2014, one of the events organised to celebrate the 75th anniversary of The Netherlands Institute for the Near East (Leiden). The one-day conference was organised in cooperation with the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities (RMO), and took place in its elegant Leemans-zaal. Among the small group of invited scholars we were particularly pleased to welcome Kamal Rashid Rahim, head of the Sulaymania Directorate of Antiquities, and his

¹ The quotes are from J. Læssøe, *People of Ancient Assyria*, London 1963.

² See K. Kopanias and J. MacGinnis (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Adjacent Regions*, Oxford: Archaeopress 2016 – and in general bibliographical references appended each article in the present volume.

assistant, Amanj Amin Rahim, both of whom we owe a great deal for their support of our work in Iraq. We are grateful to the Leiden Museum and its staff for all their help. The NINO secretary, C. van Zoest, as usual provided invaluable organisational assistance, and has prepared formatting of the present volume.

Not all contributions to the conference are presented here, but we are pleased to include articles on the three important projects at Bestansur (Matthews *et al.*, 5-18), Kunara (Kepinski, 55-66), and Bakr Awa (Bürger, 67-92). Closer to our “own” turf are the articles by Nieuwenhuys and Robert (19-33), discussing classification of the Neolithic ceramics from Shemshara/Shimshara, and reflections on the Uruk “expansion”, accruing from new investigations of Chalcolithic sites in the Rania Plain (Skuldbøl and Colantoni, 35-54).

The second part of the volume collects a number of studies reporting results of the NINO archaeological project on the Rania Plain, new investigations on the Shemshara Hills, and other sites on the plain, severely and continuously damaged by the shifting contours of Lake Dokan. The articles here include studies on the old and new surveys of these sites (Eidem, 99-130), and an attempt to quantify and describe, for the first time, the actual flood damage done to archaeological heritage in dam projects (Uildriks, 131-155). Another contribution summarises the new investigations of the Bronze Age occupations on Tell Shemshara (Eidem, 157-195). Finally D. Marf (93-97) presents an exciting, hitherto unpublished terracotta “tower”, found by Iraqi archaeologists at Tell Basmusian, probably in 1958.

For the authors of the second part of the volume it is a pleasure to record our gratitude for the gracious permission and warm support of our work on the Rania Plain extended by Abubakir O. Zaidanin, Director-General of Museums and Heritage of the Kurdish Regional Government (Erbil), and the Directorate of Antiquities of Sulaymanya Governorate. Our special thanks go to the director of the latter institution, Kamal Rashid Rahim, and his staff, who has guided and aided us at every step, and contributed significantly to the successful results of our work. Our representatives, Rawa Karim Salih (2012) and Amanj Amin Rahim (2013-15), shared our daily work as efficient, helpful and friendly colleagues. Special thanks are owed to the executive staff of the Dokan Dam for information on former and current water levels of Lake Dokan, and access

to photographic records and statistics from the Dam archives. Kozad Ahmed (University of Sulaymanya) offered important help and advice, and we are especially grateful to him for providing us with a copy of the study by Abbas and Abdullah (1986-87; see article by Eidem, 157-195). Local drivers, workmen, and many others in Iraq helped us in numerous ways, always in a friendly and positive spirit. Last, but not least we must mention the successive teams of Forest Police officers, camped on Bardastee and Shemshara in springs of 2013-14 to monitor fishing in Lake Dokan, for all their kind help with guarding sites and equipment.

Finally and not to be forgotten are the anonymous peer-reviewers who carefully read the contributions presented here and offered many helpful remarks. They are most warmly thanked.

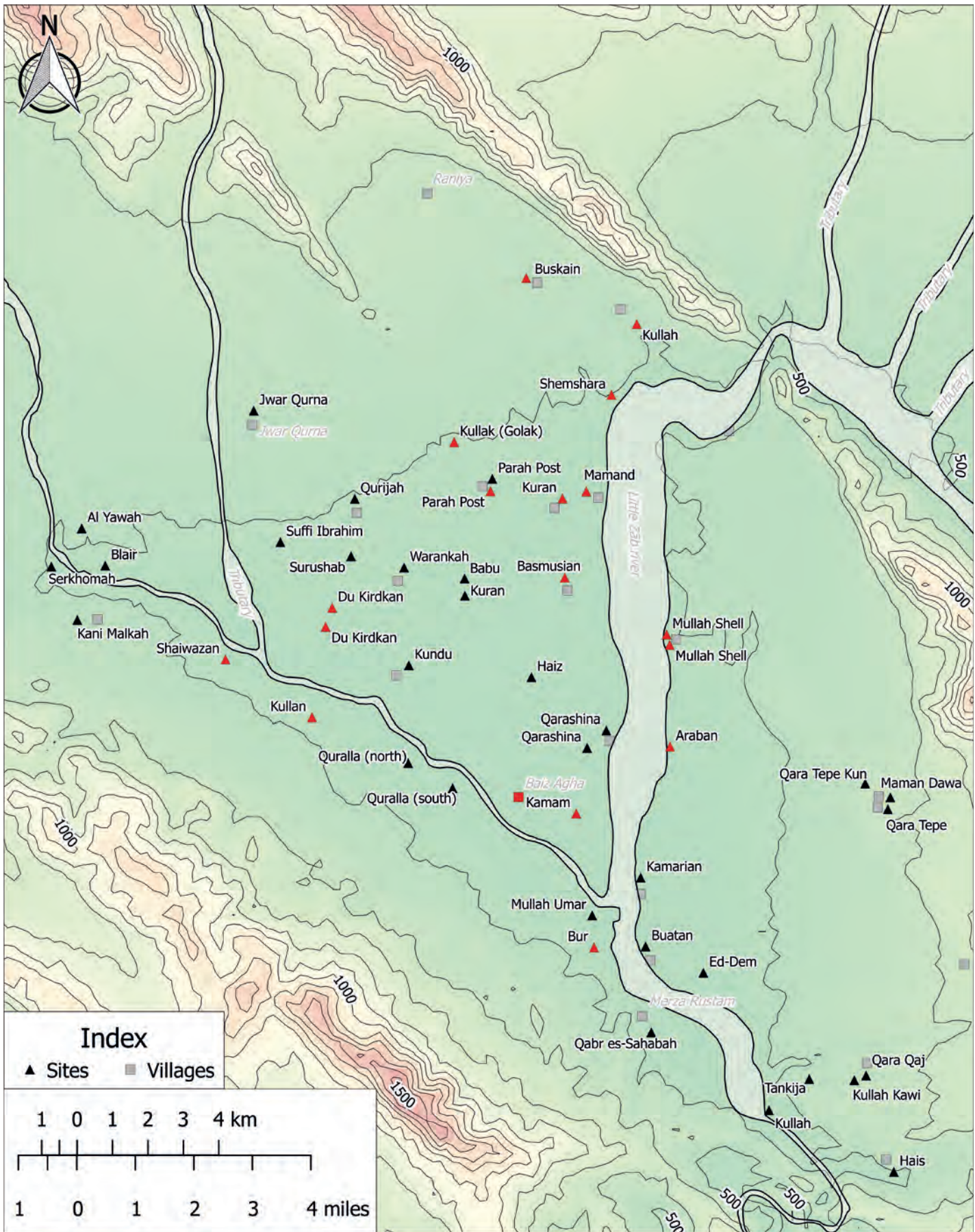
A special problem, also pointed out by some reviews, is the coordination of geographical names, including those of archaeological sites, in a context where several local languages and various systems of transcription have been used. We have refrained from trying to impose a consistent and necessarily artificial system, but left the forms chosen by the authors, and hope this will cause only minimal confusion. As archaeological surveys cover most of Iraq a new standard is likely to emerge and eventually be applied also to the sites studied in this volume.

The NINO teams 2012-15: J. Eidem (director); R. Andersen, G. Bjerre Thaarup, P. Vertuani (illustration, registration); G. van Veen, M. Uildriks, G. Carpentiero, E. Mariotti, J. Orbons (surveying, geophysics); H. Strehle (conservation); R. Cappers (palaeobotany); I. Kisjes (UAV photography, surveying); D. Giannessi, J. Alassad, M. Merlino, L. van de Peut, E. Schouten, D. Socci, V. Tuma, K. Verhagen, K. Zevenhek (archaeologists).

The work reported here was sponsored chiefly by NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) and NINO (Netherlands Institute for the Near East).

We are fully aware the contents of this volume are somewhat kaleidoscopic, but think that this realistically reflects both the present budding development of modern Zagros archaeology – and the adventure of discovery eloquently evoked by Jørgen Læssøe in the quotes above.

J. EIDEM, Leiden in July 2017



Map 2. The Rania Plain with sites visited by the Iraqi survey 1955 (drawn by M. Uildriks based on the map in as-Sooif, *Sumer* 26 (1970)).