



Landscapes of Warfare in the Ancient Near East: A View from Assyria and Urartu

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In Tony Wilkinson's influential *Archaeological Landscapes of the Ancient Near East* (2003), he employs signature landscapes as an organizing principle of his study, and as a way to mobilize comparative investigations. According to his formulation, certain kinds of landscapes, composed of particular combinations of elements, recur throughout the long expanse of the histories of the region and across its geographical zones. Most of the categories that he describes are inspired by natural features or human-environment interaction such as Landscapes of the Highlands or Landscapes of Irrigation. By contrast, the proposed signature landscape, that of warfare, is almost entirely culturally produced and socially-constructed.

This paper argues that systematic warfare altered the form and experience of places in the ancient Near East. I will focus on the case study of the Assyrian and Urartian empires of the 9th to 7th centuries BCE, presenting relevant archaeological data, integrating it with historical evidence from the Sargonid epistolary corpora. I propose that the states in question created landscapes of warfare, which were transformed by increasingly elaborate methods of fortification and militarization, as well as the inexorable experience of human calamity. In this context, landscapes of warfare are proposed as a signature landscape of the ancient Near East, a concept which may prove useful for comparative studies of warfare pertaining to other places and times.