

## **Countries and peoples at the north-eastern border of Assyria**

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With changing fortunes and impact, Assyria constituted a major power in the Near East from the late 14th cent. BC. In the 9th to the 7th cent. BC the Assyrian kingdom attained the dimensions and structure of an imperial organization that extended from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean coast, from Iran to Anatolia and Egypt. It encompassed and integrated countries and peoples, moved masses of deportees, and progressively submitted regions and their inhabitants to the provincial system of government, or exercised control on bordering tributary countries by means of the stipulation of binding alliance treaties. In this scenario, minorities in the centre and at the margins of the empire experienced various changes, ranging from being subjected to harsh exploitation to finding new opportunities connected with the imperial institutions, economy and circulation.<sup>2</sup>

The area to the east of Assyria, where the eastern Taurus and Zagros chains border the Assyro-Babylonian plain, constituted an extended frontier and contact line of contact with different environmental zones and changing political entities over time. Considering circumstances over the long term, it may be observed that pacific and hostile relationships between the powers of the plain and the mountain valleys, especially where important routes were located, caused effects at different levels. In the early centuries of the first millennium BC, four major polities intervened there with varying energy and effects: Assyria, Urartu, Babylonia and Elam. Minor countries at their borders were often the target of violent actions that caused substantial changes in local societies. Their upper classes were at times deported or physically eliminated, but often old or new elites of the country were entrusted with military and administrative responsibilities by the major states, such as taxation and conscription, which might have offered them opportunities for personal prestige and induced the implementation of foreign models and practices of government and hierarchical structuration. Moreover, peripheral areas and the people living there were connected to a wide-ranging system of contacts and circulation, which caused the development of a cultural koiné; overall, these situations have been labelled as “convergence towards the empire”. Assyrian reliance on foreign military contingents determined the higher status of local officials and leaders and opened the way to agreements and alliances, as attested by the reference to a possible marriage of a daughter of Esarhaddon with

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the king of the Iskuzu, Bartatua.<sup>3</sup> Urartu had also an important role in these dynamics, especially since it fostered the connection between Transcaucasia and the Zagros regions. With regard to military matters, this meant the standardization of weaponry and techniques and a stimulus to production in external areas, i.e. the diffusion of tools, models and motifs from the Near East to Transcaucasia and southern Russia.<sup>4</sup>

Economic demands by the imperial states, as well as the use of military itineraries – with their logistic needs – enhanced circulation through the mountains. The north-south connection through the Zagros seems particularly important, also in relation to later developments that are beyond the scope of the present discussion.

Less documented in the official records, but also important in the boundary areas, were the activities and movement of smugglers, spies, interpreters, fugitives and refugees, who followed marginal paths and forms of relationship.

These general dynamics are documented in the sources with varying degrees of detail. In the present paper the area of the upper courses of the Lower Zab and Tanjero rivers, including the plains of Raniya and Shahrizor and neighbouring valleys in the Zagros, have been chosen as a case-study, especially because the written sources, i.e. mainly Assyrian royal inscriptions and correspondence, can be compared with the results of recent archaeological projects. This region was occupied by local polities which were interposed between Assyria, Urartu, Mannea and the Medes, and were clearly at the margins of major states, but certainly not marginal to the communication and control systems.

## **The geographical scenario**

Recent archaeological research has been concentrated in the eastern area of Iraqi Kurdistan and the bordering area of western Iran. The work considered here concerns in particular the connected areas of the northern part of the Lower Zab valley, with the plain of Peshdar, and the sites of Gird-i Bazar and Qalat-i Dinka – which were part of a single extended site, the Raniya Plain, and, proceeding downstream in the area south of Koya (in the province of Erbil), the site of Satu Qala; to the east, the region of Sardasht, with the site of Rabat, across the main Zagros chain; in the Tanjero valley the adjacent region and the plain of Shahrizor. This mountain area shares some climatic characteristics – although with variations in temperatures and rainfall, due to altitude and position – that make these territories generally suitable for cultivation and animal husbandry, also practised through transhumance. The entire area can be considered as a whole, since the topography is characterized by valleys interconnected through passes which constitute the routes between the Mesopotamian plain and the highlands. The

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<sup>3</sup> See the oracular query SAA 4 20.

<sup>4</sup> Lanfranchi, 1990: 164 summarizes the outcome of the Urartian expansion especially in Transcaucasia and Mannea: large scale deportations, the mixing of people from different areas and their enrolment in the imperial army, possibilities for enrichment. These elements determined the involvement of the local ruling classes in the imperial structure.

separation of valleys by mountain ranges at the same time determined political fragmentation.

Its position made this region of interests from the beginning of the expansion of the Mesopotamian states and cultural contacts are therefore a *longue-durée* phenomenon, that in the first millennium BC took on specific characteristics due to the growth of conflicting empires.

The Peshdar plain is surrounded by the high mountain range of the Qandil and the *chaîne magistrale* of the Zagros, from which tributaries of the Zab flow, and is separated from the Raniya plain, where the Dokan artificial lake now occupies a large part of the territory, by other mountain ranges (Kewa Rash and Assos) through which the Lower Zab flows (Darband-i Raniya Pass), and where the site of Usu Aska is currently being investigated.<sup>5</sup> Mountain passes such as the Kanirash connect the Peshdar plain with the region of Sardasht, with Rabat, which is located across the Zagros main chain and now across the border with Iran, and is a point of transit toward the area of Lake Urmia and the Iranian plateau.<sup>6</sup>

The valley of the Lower Zab, where Tell of Satu Qala is located, is a hilly region downstream from Lake Dokan that is traversed by the tributaries of the main river.<sup>7</sup> To the east, the region is separated from the Raniya Plain by a mountain range (Haibat-Sultan), whereas the terrain gradually becomes lower toward the plain in the western direction.

The plain of Shahrizor is the southernmost of the regions considered here, situated between mountain ranges which run parallel to the Mesopotamian lowland, and bordered to the west by the Qara Dagħ, to the north-east by the Pir-a Magrun and to the east by the ranges of Azmar and Hewrman/Avroman. The main river of the valley is the Tanjero, which receives the water of other streams and flows into the Sirwan, i.e. the Upper Diyala.<sup>8</sup> The latter region is nowadays largely occupied by the artificial lake of Darband-i Khan. The Diyala valley, which can be reached through the Paikuli pass, is a fundamental communication route for this region. Another line of communication runs from Suleymanya to the northwest, through the passes of Tasluja and Baziyan to Kirkuk and, further to the north, the Lower Zab valley.<sup>9</sup> To the east it is possible to reach Lake Zeribar and the interior of the Zagros region through the Penjwin pass. In the southern part of the plain the site of Bakr Awa is on the way to Kermanshah and the Great Khorasan Road.<sup>10</sup>

## Mesopotamian sources and local sources

Mesopotamian, and for the first millennium BC especially Assyrian, documents represent the main sources for reconstructing the historical developments in the region and have often been discussed for this purpose, although with awareness

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<sup>5</sup> MacGinnis et al., 2020: 169–175 esp.

<sup>6</sup> Reade / Finkel, 2014: 582 and Afifi / Heidari, 2010: 152f.

<sup>7</sup> Van Soldt et al., 2013: 199f.

<sup>8</sup> Altaweel / Palmisano / Mühl, 2016: 346.

<sup>9</sup> Altaweel et al., 2012: 2f.

<sup>10</sup> Miglus / Bürger / Heil / Stepniowski, 2011; see also Potts, 2020 for further bibliography.

of the partiality of their perspective. On the other hand, archaeological research illustrates this area's importance and stimulates the connection of these documents with local sources.

#### *Evidence pre-dating the Neo-Assyrian period*

As a general outline, the region considered here may be described as an area of contact between Mesopotamian and Iranian cultures, the target of Mesopotamian efforts towards expansion and extended control of communication routes, and at various phases stage of the rivalry between Babylonia, Assyria and, later, Urartu, that also interfered with local rivalries.

The discoveries made by archaeological surveys in the plain of Shahrizor – which show the presence of numerous sites and Ubaid and Uruk pottery – attest to contacts between the Iranian regions and Mesopotamia, that were fostered by the presence of the fundamental communication route of the Diyala,<sup>11</sup> since the remote past. Akkadian and Ur III documents refer to the countries of Simurru and Lullubum; local monuments erected by the kings of Simurru add significant evidence concerning the relations and extension of their kingdom, and tablets of the Akkadian period come from Kunara, in the Tanjero valley.<sup>12</sup> The armies of the Ur III kings also reached the Ranyia plain, which later on was attacked by the king of Simurru, Iddin-Sin, in his attempt to submit the kingdom of Utuwe (Utûm).<sup>13</sup> It is mostly the archive from Shemshara (now in the area of Lake Dokan), dating to the 18th cent. BC, that illustrates the position of the kingdom of Shushara in the political relations that involved the Zagros polities and the Mesopotamian ones.<sup>14</sup>

In the Middle Babylonian period, in the plain of Shahrizor there is evidence of cultural relations with the Hurrian milieu and of influence from the west and Babylonia especially, as also attested by the findings from Bakr Awa.<sup>15</sup> This is also the period of hostility with Assyria. The efforts of the Middle Assyrian kingdom to expand its control in the east and along the Lower Zab are unevenly attested. J. Llop notes that if the royal inscriptions from Tell Farḥa<sup>16</sup> have been correctly dated to the reign of Puzur-Aššur III (c. 1500 BC), the Assyrian dominion should have reached as far as the Lower Zab, which became “the natural boundary of Assyria in the south during most of the Middle Assyrian period.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Altaweel et al., 2012: 10f. with bibliography.

<sup>12</sup> Kepinsky/Tenu, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> MacGinnis / Skuldbøl / Colantoni, 2020: 91; Pappi, 2018: 99.

<sup>14</sup> Eidem / Læssøe, 2001; MacGinnis / Skuldbøl / Colantoni, 2020: 92.

<sup>15</sup> Miglus / Bürger / Heil / Stepniowski, 2011. For Kassite policy in the area to the east of the Tigris and relationships with the Mittannian kingdom of Arraphe and Assyria see also Fuchs, 2011: 234–241.

<sup>16</sup> Located six km to the east of the Tigris, on the bank of the Lower Zab (Llop, 2011: 602).

<sup>17</sup> According to Fuchs, 2011: 246f. and 253 the entries of the Synchronistic History for the following period allow us to hypothesize that the boundary between Assyria and Karduniash corresponded to a line from the Tigris to Lullume, to which the region of Mount Kullar belonged. The treaty of Adad-nirari I (1305–1274 BC), according to Altaweel et al., 2012: 12, therefore assigned the plain of Shahrizor to the Babylonians.

The valley of the Lower Zab and the region where Satu Qala lies has a particularly tight link with Assyria. The site has been identified with the ancient Idu mentioned in Middle Assyrian sources as a centre of the provincial administration, that might already have been part of the Assyrian kingdom at the end of the 14th cent. BC.<sup>18</sup> The archaeological remains and in particular the pottery appear to be chronologically concordant with Middle Assyrian administrative texts relating to the contribution of *ginā'u* offerings delivered to Assur, during the reigns of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BC) and his successors, until Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BC), when it was under provincial governorship.<sup>19</sup> What appears most important to stress is that this region was already integrated into the Assyrian provincial system in this period, also as far as economic production is concerned, especially through the exploitation of cultivated lands belonging to the administration.<sup>20</sup>

In the plain east of Satu Qala, during the Middle Assyrian period settlements were seemingly distributed along a main road to Raniya.<sup>21</sup> However, due to the dearth of written sources, which become a little bit more informative only in the 13<sup>th</sup> cent. BC – although still insufficient at the time of Shalmaneser I (1273–1244 BC) – it is difficult to locate Assyrian expansion and its extent, which was affected by the confrontation with Babylonia and probably unstable. Assyrian action appears to have also been undertaken in the context of the operations against Uruatri/Urartu, thus predating following interventions in this area, as is suggested by the recurrence of some toponyms – probably central points in the topography or organization of the territory – in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I and Aššur-bel-kala, although their identification remains uncertain.<sup>22</sup>

New evidence is provided in a recent report on discoveries from the area of the Dokan salvage surveys on the basis of comparison with later attestations, despite the impossibility of defining a chronology in the area. For the site of Tell

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<sup>18</sup> Van Soldt et al., 2013: 217f.; Pappi, 2018: 99–101.

<sup>19</sup> Pappi, 2018: 101f. On the expansion in the Lower Zab area during the reign of Shalmaneser I see Van Soldt et al., 2013: 216. Llop, 2012: 104 considers the designation of Idu as a province (*pāhutu*) in administrative documents of the 12th century BC as a clue for dating the kings of Idu either to before the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I or after the reign of Tiglath-pileser I.

<sup>20</sup> Pappi, 2018: 104.

<sup>21</sup> Further research is needed to define the settlement pattern (Pappi, 2018: 103).

<sup>22</sup> Toponyms which recur in the inscriptions of various kings are: Maš/Bargun (Shalmaneser I, RIMA 1 0.77.1; Tiglath-pileser I, RIMA 1 0.87.1; Aššur-bel-kala, RIMA 2 0.89.2: i 19–36), Mount Iatqun/Uatqun (Shalmaneser I, RIMA 1 0.77.1; Aššur-bel-kala, RIMA 2 89.2), Himme (Shalmaneser I, RIMA 1 0.77.1; Aššur-bel-kala, RIMA 2 0.89.2), city of Arinu (Shalmaneser I, RIMA 1 0.77.1; Tiglath-pileser I, 87.1; Aššur-bel-kala, RIMA 2 0.89.2: i 19–36). The major urban centre, with 51 settlements in its environs, is the city of Arinu, which is mentioned in Tiglath-pileser I's inscriptions in a passage which describes the attack on Mušri, said to be the last defence of the enemies at the foot of Mount Aisa (RIMA 2 0.87.1: v 67–81). Arinu has been tentatively compared with Urinu and Arunu in Assurnasirpal II's inscriptions and Tammu is considered a candidate for the name of the province itself (MacGinnis / Skuldbøl / Colantoni, 2020: 104f. for a discussion on the possible name of the province in Middle-Assyrian time).

Bazmusiyan, the identification with the fortress of Pakute has been proposed. In a building inscription that has been recognized as coming from the site,<sup>23</sup> Tiglath-pileser I describes the reconstruction of an Assyrian fortified settlement in the region – with a wall in bricks, a ditch and a palace – and can be compared with archaeological data, also from sites in the vicinity, as far as architectural details are concerned. Similar fortifications in other sites likely predate Tiglath-pileser I's reign and were put in place during a previous phase of expansion into the region, perhaps during Shalmaneser I's reign,<sup>24</sup> when they probably substituted for the local fortifications. Tiglath-pileser describes the conquered area of Muṣri as urbanized and defended by fortresses, such as that of Hunusu which he destroyed, knocking down its “three walls which were constructed with baked brick”. He also records his success on bronze inscriptions, which forbade the fortification's reconstruction, and placed them in a purpose-made building (RIMA 2 0.87.1: vi 10–21).

The summary of his campaigns shows that, in the general description of Assyrian power, the Lower Zab was a kind of frontier line the overcoming of which had an important ideological meaning: “I conquered 42 lands and their rulers from the other side of the Lower Zab in distant mountainous regions to the other side of the Euphrates, people of Hatti, and the Upper Sea in the west (...)” (RIMA 2 0.87.1). As far as the difficult localization of the toponyms allows us to reconstruct the itineraries, it appears that he proceeded both towards northern enclaves – across the Lower Zab and to Murattaš, Saradauš and, through the mountains, against 23 kings of Nairi – and along a southern line that includes the region between the Tigris and Lubdu, and, proceeding across the Radanu (modern Tauq Çai), reaches the cities at the foot of mounts Kamulla and Kaštilla,<sup>25</sup> thus reaching the area located to the north of the Tanjero-Sirwan valley. The campaign reversed the situation documented by the Synchronistic History which records the siege of Zaqqu and Idu by Nebukadnezer I at the time of the Assyrian king Aššur-reša-iši, likely as the debouchment of the Babylonian pressure on the line running from the Diyala to the Zab, although it is uncertain whether the Assyrians obtained effective territorial control.

Despite these accounts of military successes, for the period of around a century between Tukulti-Ninurta I and Tiglath-pileser I the relations with the eastern regions are still largely in the dark, as is the actual control the latter king was able to impose, since he led campaigns against targets already struck by his predecessors.

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<sup>23</sup> CUSAS 17 no. 68.; Eidem, 2018. See also Tenu, 2009: 170f, for archaeological data concerning the sites in the area and previous hypotheses of identification for Bazmusiyan, in the region submerged by the artificial lake. The description of the fortification includes a reference to a *É a-sa-ia-a-te*<sup>MES</sup>, which has been interpreted as a “towered building”.

<sup>24</sup> MacGinnis / Skuldbøl / Colantoni, 2020: 104.

<sup>25</sup> RIMA 2 0.87.4: 37–40, etc. See also Tenu, 2009: 174.

*From the end of the second millennium to the early Neo-Assyrian period*

After this period Assyrian and Babylonian capacity for intervention appears to have been greatly reduced, although the effects of previous contacts and cultural imprinting are still visible. In the region of Satu Qala the 11th and 10th centuries BC coincided with the recovery of autonomy from Assyrian control. Idu presumably became an independent kingdom from late in the reign of Tiglath-pileser I, or soon afterwards, and was ruled by a local dynasty until its reconquest by Adad-nirari II (893 BC), as attested by the local inscriptions, in Middle Assyrian ductus,<sup>26</sup> and some glazed tiles that have parallels both in Assyria and elsewhere. During this period the town was seemingly the seat of a palace with administrative functions; the heritage of the Assyrian administrative culture combined with local characters that are manifest in the decorative system.<sup>27</sup>

These data can be compared with those coming from areas located at the margins of the main line of Assyrian expansion during the previous phase, such as the Raniya plain and the Peshdar plain. In the Raniya plain various settlements have been located.

The Peshdar plain is situated to the east-north-east of the Raniya plain, where most recent archaeological investigations have been carried out. The Peshdar Plain archaeological project<sup>28</sup> has concentrated on the sites of Bazar and Dinka in the Bora plain (the lowest-lying part of this area), where survey and following excavations have revealed that these two sites constitute two parts of the same complex covering c. 60 ha with a citadel of 10 ha, including areas of differing settlement density and type.<sup>29</sup> The urbanized complex of the Lower Town,<sup>30</sup> includes residential and productive structures and areas. The presence of fortifications on the citadel of Qalat-i Dinka, in accordance with its position and morphology, qualifies the site as a fort overlooking the plain and the river, where

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<sup>26</sup> Van Soldt et al., 2013: 215 who also note that the language can be identified as the Middle Assyrian dialect; p. 219 for the Assyrian reconquest.

<sup>27</sup> Van Soldt et al., 2013: 210–215 for the epigraphical finds regarding the earlier and later groups of kings. Pappi, 2018: 111 for reconstructing local dynasties and an overview of their epigraphical and figurative memories. The chronology of the changing situation in the area, as revealed by administrative documents, can be schematically described as follows: rule of a local dynasty; tributary status under Tukulti-ninurta I (1243–1207 BC); Assyrian *pāhutu* during the reign of Enlil-kudurri-ušur (1196–1192 BC) and Ninurta-apil-Ekur (1191–1179 BC); listed as a province around Tiglath-pileser I's accession year (1114 BC) and around his 20th year (1094 BC); rule of a local dynasty (see also Llop, 2012: 104).

<sup>28</sup> See 4P1.

<sup>29</sup> Fassbinder / Asăndulesei / Scheiblecher, in 4P2 (2017) for geomagnetic survey. The settlement was seemingly traversed by a stream, that explains the presence of non-built-up areas, s. Radner / Squitieri, in 4P2 (2017): 177f. and Altaweel / Eckmeier / Geiger, in 4P4 (2019): 26–30 for details and the possible location of the Zab in antiquity.

<sup>30</sup> Radner / Kreppner / Squitieri, in 4P3 (2018): 185. The lower town does not show evidence of walls, as would be expected in an urban settlement.

an elite resided, although it is difficult to decide who was responsible for the foundation of the fortified site.<sup>31</sup>

An additional element of defence protecting the route leading to Iran was located in the site of Gawr Miran,<sup>32</sup> which has been recognized as part of the defensive and observation system of the Peshdar plain, that would have played a crucial role in the geography of the itineraries.<sup>33</sup> Compared with the evidence at Usu Aska on the Darband-i Ranyia pass, it could be considered part of a more extended system of protection of the itinerary through the Zab valley.

Among the most important evidence is a series of C14 dates from samples from different areas of the settlement complex. Early dates have been recorded for the area of Gird-i Bazar: they span from 1215–1055 to 906–816 cal BC.<sup>34</sup> A charcoal sample from the same area has yielded a *post quem* date of 937–829 cal BC.<sup>35</sup> Samples of cereals from the Dinka Lower town – from an area where three very large buildings, certainly of central importance, were located – are dated to 1012–894 and 930–824 cal BC in one sector, and 830–789 cal BC in another.<sup>36</sup> On the western slope of the citadel dates spanning from 1234 to 1117 (from human remains in disturbed contexts) to 1043–893 cal BC (*post quem* date) were obtained.<sup>37</sup>

The archaeologists propose therefore that the settlement of Gird-i Bazar was founded in the Early Iron Age, when the occurrence of productive activities can be identified, and also that the Dinka Lower Town predates the Assyrian conquest.<sup>38</sup> The study of the pottery production conducted in different parts of the settlement complex in successive years has yielded results that have been progressively defined and interpreted in the course of successive archaeological campaigns. As far as the manufacturing technology of the ceramic types found in the buildings of Gird-i Bazar – which were contemporaneously occupied – is concerned, the findings show a local tradition in which marked similarities with those of Western Iran are evident.<sup>39</sup> Confrontation with finds from various sectors of the settlement has induced the archaeologists to recognize a specialized system of production that

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<sup>31</sup> Radner, 2019: 67. For the evidence of a monumental building (Building P), which, although more elaborate and imposing, shares the architectural characteristics of those of the Lower town, and probably of local tradition, and where fragments of luxury objects comparable with those from Hasanlu were unearthed, see § D3. A comprehensive evaluation of the evidence suggests the hypothesis that the Assyrians reused pre-existing structures (Squitieri 2020: 122f).

<sup>32</sup> Radner / Kreppner / Squitieri, in 4P1 (2016): 35.

<sup>33</sup> Squitieri, 2020: 127–129.

<sup>34</sup> See the table in Kreppner / Radner, in 4P3 (2018): 56 (with exclusion of a later human bone, which may however belong to the 8th cent. BC, see *ibid.*; Downey in 4P3 (2018): 98; Rohde / Downey, in 4P4 (2019).

<sup>35</sup> Kreppner / Squitieri, in 4P2 (2017): 60.

<sup>36</sup> Kreppner / Squitieri, in 4P3 (2018) and Kreppner / Radner, in 4P3 (2018): 52.

<sup>37</sup> Another much later date is not considered here, see Radner, 2019: 17 for an overview of the data positioned on a map of the site.

<sup>38</sup> Radner / Kreppner / Squitieri, in 4P3 (2018): 186.

<sup>39</sup> Radner / Kreppner / Squitieri, in 4P1 (2016): 81 and 99.



involved the whole settlement, perhaps organized into several workshops.<sup>40</sup> The most relevant conclusion seems to be that it is not possible to associate pottery types, those found in the citadel included, with Assyrian administration.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, comparison of the pottery data with the C14 dates reveals that the pottery covers a long time span (end of 2nd mill. – early 8th cent. BC) without significant changes.<sup>42</sup> It is also notable that some ceramic types, as well as some luxury items – for instance the fragments of ivory or bone found in building P on the slope of the citadel –<sup>43</sup> have parallels from a broad geographical area.<sup>44</sup>

This area includes the site of Rabat in the region of Sardasht, which was part of the kingdom of, or located at the margins of Hubuškia and the Mannean territory.<sup>45</sup> The site has yielded potsherds of Iron Age I-III and glazed bricks, tiles, wall plaques, etc., that were found redeposited and whose date is therefore difficult to establish. The glazed bricks and tiles with geometric and figurative motifs and inscriptions discovered in this site can be viewed in the light of the Iranian architectural tradition, besides the parallels in Mesopotamia and the west, and can be compared with finds from Satu Qala (which are dated to the late 10th–early of the 9th century BC on the basis of style)<sup>46</sup> and Qalaichi/Bukan,<sup>47</sup> as well as from Hasanlu, although both the manufacturing date and relation with a possibly long term tradition are debatable.<sup>48</sup> On the basis of the archaeological evidence J. Reade has put forward the proposal that the glazed bricks belong to a

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<sup>40</sup> Herr / Othman / Salih, in 4P3 (2018): 127, who pose the question as to whether the pottery workshop of Gird-i Bazar supplied the whole settlement. Two important facts are stressed by the archaeologists: the specialized production of specific vessel forms and the lack in these of evidence of wheel-throwing (Herr, in 4P2 [2017]: 127). The same chronological span as the findings of Gird-i Bazar is attributed to the pottery from Qalat-i Dinka Lower Town; the lack of Assyrian Palace Ware in Qalat-i Dinka is of note. Continuation of the research in another sector of the area has confirmed the assumptions concerning the production technique and suggests the presence of a storage building at the fringe of the settlement, perhaps in analogy with the position of storage facilities in Assyrian capital cities, but also in Hasanlu, etc. The presence of the so-called “Groovy Pottery” – which was also found at Gird-i Bazar – “links the Dinka Settlement Complex material to a broader pottery tradition which encompasses regions in the foothills of both flanks of the Taurus and Zagros mountain ranges in the early first millennium BC, generally thought to predate Assyrian control” (Herr / Othman / Salih, in 4P3 (2018): 127, and Amicone, in 4P3 (2018): 139).

<sup>41</sup> Radner / Kreppner / Squitieri, in 4P3 (2018): 187.

<sup>42</sup> Herr, in 4P4 (2019): 100.

<sup>43</sup> Squitieri, in 4P4 (2019): 126-128 and Radner / Kreppner, in 4P4 (2019): 156.

<sup>44</sup> Herr, in 4P4 (2019): 103 and esp. 120f for parallels.

<sup>45</sup> On the identification of Hubuškia with the Sardasht plain see Lanfranchi, 1995: 136–137, and, more recently, Radner, in 4P1 (2016): 21, with bibliography.

<sup>46</sup> Pappi, 2018: 112.

<sup>47</sup> Hassanzadeh & Mollasalehi, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> A possible tiny hint regarding the date of the Rabat pictorial representations is the presence of a naked female figure, which, according to the authors, would be unusual in an Assyrianized context, see Reade / Finkel, 2014: 588.

platform or altar approached by a flight of steps on one side, for which (or parts of which), various parallels are considered possible.<sup>49</sup>

Widespread contacts are confirmed by the discovery in Hasanlu of a dedicatory inscription of Ba'uri, belonging to the "second group" of kings of Idu, whose name is attested on two glazed bricks from Satu Qala. On the basis of the ductus these inscriptions are classified as early Neo-Assyrian.<sup>50</sup> The similarities with the finds from Rabat and possible chronological concordances suggest that these enclaves should be considered together, especially to note a similar exposure to Mesopotamian and Assyrian influence and participation in an artistic koiné that reached further north, at least as far as Hasanlu, for which M. Marcus coined the label "Provincial Assyrian Style". On the other hand, the recent reconsideration of the data from Hasanlu has revealed that Level IVb of the site, dated to 1050–800 BC and tentatively associated with the area of Gilzanu or Mannea mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions, shows limited Assyrian influence, mostly restricted to the temple area of the citadel, whereas grave goods show a marked social differentiation, dominated by a militarized elite, which had strong connections with Transcaucasian populations and culture.<sup>51</sup> This cultural koiné is likely the result of the Urartian expansion into Transcaucasia and the Zagros in the 9th–8th cent. BC that involved large movements of people.<sup>52</sup> The destruction of this level of the town is a long-debated question for which action by the Urartians –whose expansionist interests were especially directed towards the Mannean area – or enemies sharing the culture and habits of the town's local elite have been hypothesised. This would add an important piece of evidence concerning the role of military elites in the Taurus-Zagros regions, comparable to – if not identifiable with– that of Cimmerians or Iškuza, as already thoroughly discussed in Lanfranchi 1990.

In this general framework it should also be remarked that the first known examples of Urartian inscriptions, engraved by king Sarduri I, a contemporary of Shalmaneser III, on the walls of the so-called *Sardursburg* at Van, were composed in Assyrian script and language, thus attesting to the various adaptations of Assyrian models even in areas outside of (or strongly opposed to) Assyrian dominion.

Further possible contacts should be explored in other directions too, as suggested by the evidence from Rabat. Reade suggests that the monochromatic pebble mosaic with a pattern of concentric circles, found in the site and seemingly built when the platform with glazed bricks was already in place, is fruit of western influence, where mosaics were made using pebbles of contrasting colours.<sup>53</sup> This hypothesis would be in accordance with the function of commercial hub that can

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<sup>49</sup> See discussion in Reade / Finkel, 2014: 589-592.

<sup>50</sup> Van Soldt et al., 2013: 212–215.

<sup>51</sup> Cifarelli, 2018. On the overestimation of Assyrian influence see Cifarelli, 2019: 213; the author also stresses the continuity and importance of the Bronze Age substratum (p. 224f).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. fn. 4 above.

<sup>53</sup> Reade / Finkel, 2014: 582 with previous bibliography.

be attributed to the site for its position.<sup>54</sup> Though very fragmentary, a passage of Assurnasirpal II's account concerning the campaign against (Ma)zamu, which also reached Ata, king of Arzizu, in the area of Mount Nispi (perhaps the northern part of the Azmar range) has suggested the reading [LUGAL(?) URU *ár-z*]i?-z[u(?)] for the traces of a very fragmentary inscription on a glazed brick. This concordance, that could allow us to better define the northern part of Assurnasirpal's itinerary, is however based on too fragile a foundation and, as the authors admit, a later contextualization of the inscription could also be proposed.<sup>55</sup> Although the available data are not homogeneously distributed, it can be hypothesized that at the very end of the second and in the early centuries of the first millennium BC the Zagros region was organized in urban-based polities, that interrelated with each other and constituted a zone of cultural and economic interaction. This included relations with the Mesopotamian kingdoms and Assyria especially, that are reflected in the diffusion of prestige items, but also the expression of distinctive characters of a local tradition, and developments of previous cultural elements, that emerge from styles and techniques of production.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, these polities were rather active agents of the spread of styles and models, among which the Assyrian writing system and pattern of inscriptions had a special place. A general circulation can therefore be hypothesized in phases of Assyria's relative weakness, as well as its growing prestige, phases during which various dynamics were operating, and other powers, such as Urartu, were increasingly active.

#### *Evidence dating from the period of the Neo-Assyrian conquest*

At the beginning of the 9th century BC, after quite a long hiatus, Assyria resumed the role of an important and progressively determinant interlocutor on the political scene. In Adad-nirari II's inscriptions the Lower Zab appears as a boundary to be overcome and it is perhaps significant that this perspective is the same that was already expressed in Tukulti-Ninurta I's inscriptions,<sup>57</sup> i.e. the starting point for

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<sup>54</sup> A contact with Assur is hypothesized on the basis of the presence in this town of a similar mosaic in a private house that Reade tentatively attributes to a merchant family (Reade / Finkel, 2014: 584). Most interesting is moreover the possible link with a letter from Sargon's time (SAA 5 175), dealing with people travelling from Carchemish, where Reade proposes to integrate a toponym (*Ar-[zi-zi]*) that may be attested at Rabat itself, thus contributing a suggestive, though far from certain, piece of evidence of west-east trade connections.

<sup>55</sup> Reade / Finkel 2014: 592–593.

<sup>56</sup> A comprehensive view of some results of these archaeological explorations suggests: “that it is characteristic of the ceramic repertoire of the sites along the upper valley of the Lesser Zab and in the Shahrizor Plain in the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq, to draw both on Northern Mesopotamian and the Western and Northwestern Iranian pottery traditions.” Herr in 4P1(2016): 99. On previous participation in interregional networks that represents a substratum for later expressions, see Cifarelli, 2019: 227f.

<sup>57</sup> For this king, compare with the following example: *ištu Tulšina KUR.Lašqi berit URU.Šasila u URU.Mašhat-šarri eberti Zābe šupāli ištu KUR.Suquški KUR.Lallar šiddi*

further expansion: “The hero who marched (...) from the other side of the Lower Zab, the district of the Lullumu, the lands Habhu, Zamua as far as the passes of Namri and subdued at his feet the extensive land of the Qumanu as far as Mehru, Salua and Uraṭru, who became lord over the entire Katmuhu and brought (it) into the boundaries of his land (*ana mišir mātišu uterru*) (...)” (RIMA 2 0.99.2: 23-26). In this renewed edition of the Assyrian mental map of the neighboring regions – which are significantly designated by traditional, archaicizing ethnonyms – the Lower Zab is the line of penetration into the itineraries to the south-east (through Zamua and Namri) and to the north-east (through the mountain regions towards Uraṭru).

This is the phase of the re-annexation of Idu into the Assyrian system (Adad-nirari II, 893 BC), as part of the Assyrian *reconquista*,<sup>58</sup> with a memory of previous occupation probably still alive.

In the following years, Assyrian attack intensified and bridgeheads and fortresses were established in the territory as well as administrative structures. At Idu a palace of Assurnasirpal II is recorded in a fragmentary inscription on a glazed plaque,<sup>59</sup> and the remains from the site show the reception of stylistic innovations characteristic of the period, although peculiarities still persist that can be interpreted as connected to the Zagros circulation context.<sup>60</sup>

For the phase of Assyrian penetration into the region of Shahrizor – where Assyrian and Babylonian pottery has been found, including Assyrian Palace Ware<sup>61</sup> – comparison of the archaeological data with the evidence of Assyrian royal inscriptions can help defining some topographical and political details.<sup>62</sup> Assurnasirpal II narrates his intervention against Nūr-Adad *nāsiku* of Dagara (RIMA 2 0.101.1: ii 23-30) who, seemingly at the head of all (Ma)zamua, had blocked the Babite pass by the construction of a wall.<sup>63</sup> The country of Dagara is identified with the area which extends from Babite to Mount Nimuš, i.e. probably the area between the Bazian Dagh (with the Bazian pass), the Baranand Dagh (with the Tasluja pass), and the Pir-a-Magrun. It blocked a main access to the Zagros area and, further on, the Iranian plateau, preventing circulation along the main axis of the valley and its connections. The blocking of traffic along this route had a strong impact on relations with the Mesopotamian plain.<sup>64</sup> Another important enclave was the city of Bāra (ll. ii 31-32), which was also attacked

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KUR.*Qutí rapšūti sihirti* KUR.*Lulumi u* KUR.*Paphi adi* KUR.*Katmuhi* (Tukulti-Ninurta I, RIMA 1 0.78.1).

<sup>58</sup> Pappi, 2018: 115.

<sup>59</sup> Van Soldt et al., 2013: 213f.

<sup>60</sup> Pappi, 2018: 114.

<sup>61</sup> Altaweel et al., 2012: 26.

<sup>62</sup> See Ponchia, 2004: 164–174; Yamada 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Nur-Adad, the *nāsiku* of Dagara, bears an Aramaic name and title. Another document often discussed as attestation of a wider system of relations is the Aramaic stela found at Bukan, in the Mannean area. It could be related not only with a western horizon (see Fales, 2003, Liverani, 2008), but also with a Zagric one, as suggested by the role of Dagara. On Arameans in the Zagros see also Marf 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Greco, 2003: 70 considers the possibility that the blockade was motivated by local interests based on transhumance and that the main aim was to control pastoral movements.

during a second Assyrian onslaught (ll. ii 33-48), after attacks were launched against various targets starting from Mount Nimuš, and compelled the kings of (Ma)zamuā to surrender (ll. 46f).

The blockade against which the Assyrians reacted might reveal an intention to redirect commercial routes, perhaps in the context of political maneuvers that might have involved the support of other polities, such as Babylonia (although the sources do not document this). Its goal was to cut off the communication route through the plain of Suleymaniyah, seemingly as a resolution of the (Ma)zamuā leaders to take full control of movement through the major transit passes. In any case, it shows that in this phase these mountain polities were still able to interrelate between themselves and to confront the powers of the plain as active protagonists and that a state formation policy was inaugurated, through the coalition of smaller entities, perhaps under the stimulus of the Assyrian attacks.

Assyrian inscriptions show that this strategy of its enemies made it necessary for the Assyrian army to attack from various points in order to gain control of the main valleys which run roughly parallel to the Mesopotamian plain. It was also necessary to take control of the passes that allowed entrance into these parallel valleys, the largest of which is the plain of Shahrizor, where many towns and villages were located. These probably functioned not only as agricultural settlements, but also as the summer or winter quarters of transhumant shepherds and markets for herds and husbandry products,<sup>65</sup> besides their function as stages along the communication routes.

An Assyrian outpost which functioned as a bridgehead in the region was placed at Tukulti-Aššur-ašbat (ii 48) – whose local name Arrakdu (ii 77) shows that it was a pre-existing town transformed into an Assyrian fortress<sup>66</sup> – whence the Assyrians attacked Mount Nispi and then, through the valley between Mount Gamru and Mount Etinu,<sup>67</sup> reached the city of Berutu. A third campaign again proceeded from the Lower Zab route, across the River Turnat (Diyala), to Ammali, situated in the southern part of the Shahrizor plain (ii 54), and then to Zamru, Mount Lara, to reach again the region of Mount Nispi and go down to Tukulti-Aššur-ašbat (ii 72–77).<sup>68</sup> The Assyrian strategy might have consisted of an encircling maneuver or contemporaneous attacks from different points, which fragmented the enemy front and might also have severely harmed the husbandry cycles of transhumance, thus contributing to the surrendering of the local population.<sup>69</sup> The general goal was to keep open the whole system of itineraries through the plain and access to the passes that allowed entrance into the region of

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<sup>65</sup> Greco, 2003: 73–75.

<sup>66</sup> Radner, 2017: 427f with previous bibliography discusses the possible location of the toponym, which should in any case be looked for in (the vicinity of) Suleymaniyah.

<sup>67</sup> The country of Etinu is mentioned in the letter SAA 19 72 and very probably in SAA 5 55 + 61 (Van Buylaere, 2007). Its location and the identification of the toponym referred to here have been debated (Liverani, 1992: 19, and most recently MacGinnis / Skuldbøl / Colantoni, 2020: 104). In my opinion, the land of Etinu mentioned in the letters should be looked for in the Upper Zab area and kept distinct from the Mount Etinu dealt with here.

<sup>68</sup> Ponchia, 2004: 168f. with previous bibliography.

<sup>69</sup> Greco, 2003.

Suleymanyah and further east, crossing over the Azmar Dagħ, as detailed in the long account of a following campaign (ii 48–85). This probably reached as far as the eastern side of Mount Nispi, where the cities of Arzizu and Arsindu were located (ii 73),<sup>70</sup> thus opening an eastern itinerary running roughly parallel to the Tanjero-Shahrizor valley, control of which was later consolidated. (Ma)zamua became an area of collection of tribute that also came from further afield, including Gilzanu, which seemingly meant that the Assyrians succeeded in controlling the flow of resources and circulation through the area and subtracting it, at least in part, from local leaders, thus completely reversing the strategy of the blockade inaugurated by Nur-Adad of Dagara. This control was completed by the re-foundation of the ancient Babylonian stronghold of Atlila, now named Dur-Aššur, which became a point of storage and collection of taxes from the whole region.<sup>71</sup>

The effectiveness of this strategy is attested by the account in Shalmaneser III's inscriptions, which narrate the penetration into (Ma)zamua *ša bitāni*, thus seemingly beyond the Azmar Dagħ, during the king's 4th *palū*, likely reaching Lake Zeribor, across the modern Iraq-Iran border.<sup>72</sup> The consolidation of these positions opened the use and probably the direct control of the Khorasan Road, with intervention in the areas of Namri, the reception of tribute from Ellipi at the Zagros Gates in the 16th *palū*, and further interventions in the 24th.<sup>73</sup> Later, in the 30th and 31st *palū*, the Assyrians chose the eastern itinerary – beyond the Azmar Dagħ, along the valleys of the south-eastern affluents of the Lower Zab – to reach Hubuškia from (Ma)zamua. Thus the tributary status of Hubuškia was confirmed, as well as its role of bridgehead to reach Mannea, Gilzanu and Urartū.<sup>74</sup> The organization of the narrative stresses the fact that the Assyrians were able to control both ways, to the north and south (as far as Parsua).

The military presence of the Assyrians in the area is confirmed by Šamši-Adad V's accounts; he seems to have been particularly active along the itineraries leading southwards, also probably to block the Urartian advance that was quite energetic and successful in this phase.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> For a hypothetical identification of Arzizu with Rabat see Reade / Finkel, 2014: 593.

<sup>71</sup> RIMA 2 101.1: ii 84–86; 101.17: iii 136'f. On the possibility of identifying it with Yasin tepe see Nishiyama, 2020: 48f, with previous bibliography.

<sup>72</sup> The enemies seek refuge by boat (*ina GIŠ.MĀ.MEŠ GIŠ ni-a-ri ir-ka-bu ina tam-di ú-ri-du*), but are chased and defeated (RIMA 3 0.102.6 ii 10–15).

<sup>73</sup> For a synthesis see Ponchia, 2006: 215–218, with previous bibliography and most recently Yamada 2020.

<sup>74</sup> In his accession year Shalmaneser III had already marched against Hubuškia along a northern itinerary seemingly starting from Arbela and crossing the Habruri pass, proceeding to the Urartian territories around the sea of Nairi and, coming back, to Gilzanu (RIMA 3 102.1). The return march from Gilzanu to Hubuškia is also described in 102.2: ii 60–66 and partly duplicate 102.3, etc. (Ponchia, 2006: 195f). The fragmentary inscription on statue from Tell 'Ağāğa, tentatively attributed by Frahm to the field marshal Dayyan-Aššur, seems to connect Hubuškia with the itinerary toward Habruri and Arbela and toward Babite, i.e. (Ma)Zamua (Frahm 2015).

<sup>75</sup> For a recent summary see Lanfranchi / Ponchia, 2019: 13f.

## Provincialization

Archaeological data show that the organization and to a certain extent the settlement topography of the regions which were the targets of Assyrian conquest were altered in order to maintain the control of strategic routes and establish Assyrian rule. The site of Idu (Satu Qala) was seemingly involved in administrative restructuring already under Salmanassar III and lost its economic importance,<sup>76</sup> although it is still unknown if this was due, for instance, to a shifting of the key centres further upstream in the Lower Zab valley. In the Ranya plain surveys and excavations in the area afterwards submerged by Lake Dokan show the organization of a defensive system and the presence of numerous settlements that are attributed to the Neo-Assyrian period.<sup>77</sup> In this phase, the remains of the impressive fortress at Usu Aska have been interpreted as control point inside Assyrian territory, once more becoming a frontier bulwark when Assyrian dominion declined.<sup>78</sup>

As mentioned above, some C14 dates from the settlement complex of Dinka in the Peshdar plain go back to this chronological span, in particular: 906–816 cal BC<sup>79</sup> and 937–829 cal BC<sup>80</sup> from the area of Gird-i Bazar, 930–824 cal BC, and 830–789 cal BC<sup>81</sup> from two sectors of the Dinka lower town.

These dates, and especially the most recent ones, have been considered in the framework of two different scenarios. In the first, they are connected especially with the discovery of traces of a *qanat* system. This is interpreted as a direct consequence of the Assyrian occupation that would have led to the implementation of this system of irrigation as happened elsewhere.<sup>82</sup> The interpretation of buildings as used for stockpiling has been connected with the creation of storage infrastructures according to the Assyrian system.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, an inscription fragment on brick has been tentatively interpreted as a piece of a royal inscription attributable to Shalmaneser III.<sup>84</sup> This would support the hypothesis of the region's inclusion into the province of the *nāgir ekalli* (as far as we know, first attested during Tiglath-pileser III's reign).

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<sup>76</sup> On changes in the importance of the itineraries due to the moving of the Assyrian capital to Kalhu see van Soldt et al., 2013: 221; Pappi, 2018: 118f.

<sup>77</sup> MacGinnis / Skuldbøl / Colantoni, 2020: 93.

<sup>78</sup> MacGinnis et al., 2020: 175.

<sup>79</sup> See table in Kreppner / Radner in 4P3 (2018): 56 (with exclusion of a later human bone, which may however date to the 8th cent. BC, see *ibid.*; and fn. 34 above).

<sup>80</sup> Kreppner / Squitieri in 4P2 (2017): 60.

<sup>81</sup> Kreppner / Squitieri in 4P3 (2018) and Kreppner / Radner in 4P3 (2018): 52.

<sup>82</sup> Radner / Kreppner / Squitieri in 4P1 (2016): 22 and Radner / Kreppner / Squitieri 2018, in 4P3 (2018): 187, who observe that some of the C14 dates “provides clear evidence for that part of the Dinka Settlement Complex's occupation during the Assyrian domination.”

<sup>83</sup> Radner, in 4P3 (2018): 33.

<sup>84</sup> Radner, in 4P4 (2019): 137–139, the assumptions are made on the basis of the only preserved sign, a “relatively intact” K1Š.

In a second scenario, this hypothesis is confronted with the lack of clear indicators associated with Assyrian administration,<sup>85</sup> and with the possibility that the area of Gird-i Bazar “flourished during the first part of the first millennium BC and was destroyed when the region was brought under Assyrian control during the reign of Shalmaneser III”, although, on the basis of the data collected, it “is presently unclear whether or how the buildings at Gird-i Bazar were still in use during the Assyrian occupation”.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, the research on the slopes of Qalat-i Dinka has revealed that, although some luxury items of ‘international’ circulation are present, there is a lack of significant markers of Assyrian influence.<sup>87</sup> These data should obviously be interpreted in the light of the comparison with those from other sites, and in particular those which were probably central towns in the province, such as Anisu.<sup>88</sup>

All in all, the early Neo-Assyrian period appears to be a phase of considerable political transformation of the area, as a fundamental result of the military campaigns and the process of creation of the boundary provinces of (Ma)zamia and of the *nāgir ekalli*.<sup>89</sup>

The process developed during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, whose royal inscriptions record military expeditions – the targets of which were Media, Parsua, Bit-Hamban and in general to prevent Urartian control of the Zagros system<sup>90</sup> – as well as efforts concerning the organization of the provincial administration. It included the deportation of people from other conquered or pacified territories: 10.000 to the province of the *nāgir ekalli*, 5000 to the province of (Ma)zamia, etc. (RINAP 1 5: 10). People from the Zagros were deported elsewhere. One of the roles of deportees was perhaps furnishing the manpower needed by Assyrian fortresses in the area, through the creation of new fields, manning the terrains and activities abandoned by the local inhabitants deported elsewhere, and organizing an ad hoc system of provisioning. The impact of this praxis is extremely difficult to assess, but, together with the punctual registration of toponyms and itineraries, attests to the implementation of a program of administrative Assyrianization.

The social consequences of this program are documented, although insufficiently, by recently discovered epigraphical evidence from Gird-i Gulak,<sup>91</sup> Tell Sitak,<sup>92</sup> and Dinka.<sup>93</sup> From these sites come three fragmentary legal texts

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<sup>85</sup> Radner / Kreppner / Squitieri, in 4P3 (2018): 187–198, where the similarities that point to the use of local expertise are also noted.

<sup>86</sup> Radner / Kreppner / Squitieri in 4P3 (2018): 56 and 58.

<sup>87</sup> Radner / Kreppner, in 4P4 (2019): 158 “Thus, whatever form processes of “Assyrianisation” might have taken at the Dinka Settlement Complex clearly differed from scenarios as they have been reconstructed for example for the Upper Tigris region”.

<sup>88</sup> On the possible identification with Qaladze see Lanfranchi, 1995 and Radner, in 4P1 (2016): 18.

<sup>89</sup> Radner, in 4P1 (2016).

<sup>90</sup> See also Ponchia, 2016: 15–17, with bibliography.

<sup>91</sup> MacGinnis / Skuldbøl / Colantoni, 2020.

<sup>92</sup> Radner, 2017.

<sup>93</sup> Radner, 2015: the cuneiform tablet, dated to 725 BC, records among the witnesses a servant of the Palace Herald, thus confirming the appurtenance of the site to this administrative unit. MacGinnis / Skuldbøl / Colantoni, 2020: 107, object that the province



from which it is possible to infer the implementation of practices connected with Assyrian administration. These involved people with names of various linguistic affiliations, whose appurtenance to the administrative ranks is attested by their titles or can be deduced from the context, as in the cases of joint ownership of sold fields (Gird-i Gulak and Tell Sitak), that may be connected with the sellers' service in the army or administration.

All these data can be considered in the light of the function of these areas as terminals for contacts with, and military expeditions to countries beyond the provincial system.

Sargon II pursued an energetic policy of intervention into the Zagros sector, as attested in particular by the account of the Annals and the Grosse Prunkschrift, which, by means of a geographically ordered narrative, draws the map of the empire. The offensive of the 6th–9th *palû* (716–713 BC) was directed primarily against Urartu and to consolidate control of the tributary enclaves of Hubuškia and Mannea, and Media and Ellipi southwards. To be able to intervene in the latter area and directly control the Great Khorasan Road, the new provinces of Kišesim and Harhar were created; thus the area of (Ma)zamura, with its fortresses and road stations, clearly functioned as an intermediate communication section towards these more distant areas and as the connection with the Khorasan Road running along the Nartu valley to Media, and the central crossroads represented by Ellipi.<sup>94</sup>

Regarding local organization, some details are provided by letters that illustrate the role of (Ma)zamura as base for the operations in Mannea and Allabria, or the oft-quoted reports on the review of troops stationed in the province, SAA 5 215, and 234.<sup>95</sup> Especially interesting is SAA 5 203 in which the governor Šarrumuranni deals with “city lords”, though it is not specified if they were based within or outside the province itself. SAA 19 195 refers to problems concerning people who had entered the Assyrian ranks in (Ma)zamura, first the Gurrayu and then other local leaders, including a man named Wayaniara appointed as eunuch and to whom cities were entrusted.<sup>96</sup> These documents – whose value as evidence of the general situation is however uncertain – suggest that both locally levied contingents and specific corps, such as the Gurrayu and Itu'ayu, were employed as instruments of an intensified militarization of the area, which constituted the rear zone of the Assyrian front of expansion and confrontation with Urartu and Elam.

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which included the distant Mušasir and rugged mountainous territory, would have been too difficult to keep under control.

<sup>94</sup> For the relations with the “inner” province of Arzuhina see the so-called “Zamura itinerary”, describing the itinerary from the province of Ar/Ahizuhina to Lake Zeribor (Levine 1989 and Radner in 4P1 (2016) and the letters of Šamaš-bel-ušur, governor of that province.

<sup>95</sup> See SAA 5, xxvii.

<sup>96</sup> It may be questioned whether this name could be assimilated to those ending in *-d/tiara* attested in inscriptions referring to the area and in a document from Tell Sitak, see Radner, 2017: 426.

Interestingly enough, as seen above, archaeological data show traces of discontinuity in the function and distribution of settlements which can be chronologically connected with the beginning of Assyrianization. To evaluate if and how much these cases are representative of a general development and how the situation evolved over time more data are necessary. Nevertheless, for the following decades the sources at our disposal illustrate some important aspects of Assyrian strategy. The aim of Esarhaddon's campaign in Mannea was to keep that region within the imperial sphere of control through tributary and alliance links. As documented by letters and oracular queries, Assyrian troops maintained control of some key positions such as the passes between Hubuškia and Mannea and evaluated their enemies' situation to exploit the best opportunity for launching an attack into their country.<sup>97</sup> In this situation, the role of Cimmerian troops appears to have been crucial for strategic decisions, since the Manneans were considered vulnerable when they lacked Cimmerian support. The case of the Cimmerians, exhaustively analyzed in Lanfranchi 1990, clearly exemplifies the position of troops that also served as contingents within the Assyrian army, but whose loyalty might falter.<sup>98</sup> On the southern front the hostilities concerned the province of Harhar and Namri and the kingdom of Ellipi, and the Assyrians had to intervene in the area against the Mede Kaštaritu. Cimmerians and Iškuzu were present in this sector too and, although their hostility is not attested by known sources, in the oracular queries referring to events that are likely dated to 670 BC, they are seen as potentially dangerous, together with the Manneans and the Medes.<sup>99</sup>

This threat seems to have become real during the reign of Ashurbanipal, who narrates his victorious campaigns against these foes. Despite the triumphalist tone of Assyrian inscriptions, the reference to the siting of the Assyrian encampment at Dur-Aššur – especially if its identification with Tell Yasin proves correct – to stop Mannean penetration into Assyrian territory suggests that this penetration had reached key enclaves in (Ma)zamura, perhaps via an itinerary descending east of the Azmar range.<sup>100</sup>

It is possible that Mannea's role of buffer state during the protracted conflict between Assyria and Urartu induced the strong militarization of this country and the formation of a class of highly professional soldiers at the service of the hegemonic states, as is also attested by the Mannean intervention to support the resistance of Assyria in her last days.

The role of military aristocracies, such as the Cimmerians, that variously interrelated also with other kingdoms such as Phrygia and Urartu, indicates that the expansion of rival empires fostered the employment of organized and trained

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<sup>97</sup> See in particular SAA 10 111 (ABL 1237) and commentary in Lanfranchi, 1990: 70–75.

<sup>98</sup> For a detailed analysis of the sources and events of the period from Sennacherib's death to 670 BC, see Lanfranchi, 1990: 43–108.

<sup>99</sup> Lanfranchi, 1990: 107.

<sup>100</sup> This narrative is preserved in the earlier accounts (e.g. RINAP 5 3 iii 16–79), whereas in the later redaction of Prism A (= RINAP 5 11) these geographical details are omitted and the focus of the narrative is on the punishment of the rebels.

auxiliary troops. It seems that, although Assyria still controlled a vast area and strove to keep under surveillance strategic routes and passes at the boundaries of provinces and tributary lands, this control was largely entrusted to military contingents fighting within the Assyrian army or as Assyrian allies. The fact that these forces acquired a crucial role in the protection of the empire's boundaries certainly impacted on the life of the peripheral regions and the attestation of the presence of city rulers in (Ma)zamuā during the reigns of Sargon and Esarhaddon might be considered from this perspective. Therefore, the image of a periphery subtracted from Assyrian control by repeated incursions of Scythian raiders needs to be corrected,<sup>101</sup> to that of an empire that due to structural developments, was progressively placing greater reliance on military elites that kept their own organization while at the orders of the Assyrians. During the Babylonian war of Šamaš-šumu-ukin, (Ma)zamuā, together with the provinces of Arrapha and Lahiru, sent troops to fill the ranks of Ashurbanipal's army, thus showing that the system of military organization, with provinces providing troops, was still working. It can be hypothesized, however, that movements of troops from the eastern provinces further weakened control of them and opened new margins of maneuver and initiative for the Manneans and especially the Medes and, at the end, opened the way to assaulting the Assyrian heartland.

## Conclusion

Recent archaeological research has widened our perspective on the empires' peripheries and allows us to better understand their roles in various phases and relations with the centres. The data stemming from the Zagros sector which is considered here illustrate the continuous contacts with Mesopotamian polities and cultures, and a variety of interrelations in which this area had an active role.

The early centuries of the first millennium BC were a phase of widespread development with enhanced relations throughout the Near East that facilitated the flowering of various kingdoms, and of Assyria and Urartu among them. The Zagros sector was involved in these dynamics, although the particular nature of the territory favoured political fragmentation.

The Assyrian conquest and subordination to the new order and new demands of the growing empire included the Zagros area in an international scenario, thus seemingly modifying the system of relations and triggering off new dynamics at the social and economic levels. Provincialization induced important changes in the management of the territory, and archaeological evidence of discontinuity is an important indicator that makes problematic the notion of a linear progression in the management of Assyrian provinces and allows us to reconsider this crucial

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<sup>101</sup> But cf. Radner / Squitieri in 4P2 (2017): 180: "as the oracle queries of Esarhaddon of Assyria (r. 680–669 BC) indicate a highly volatile political situation in the 670s BC, with Scythian raiders repeatedly crossing over the mountain border separating the Assyrian territory from the neighbouring kingdom of Ḫubuškia, and as there is very little information about the region available in later 7th century BC sources, it is entirely possible that the Empire lost control over the Peshdar Plain long before the Median forces took possession of Arrapha (modern Kirkuk) in 615 BC".

question on the basis of fresh data. The needs deriving from the management of an extended frontier area determined changes in the military organization and roles local and foreign elites played; it seems that they progressively gained margins of autonomy while remaining inside the empire. As in other cases, in the dynamics of change induced at the edge of empires it is possible to find answers to the questions concerning their ascending and descending trajectories.

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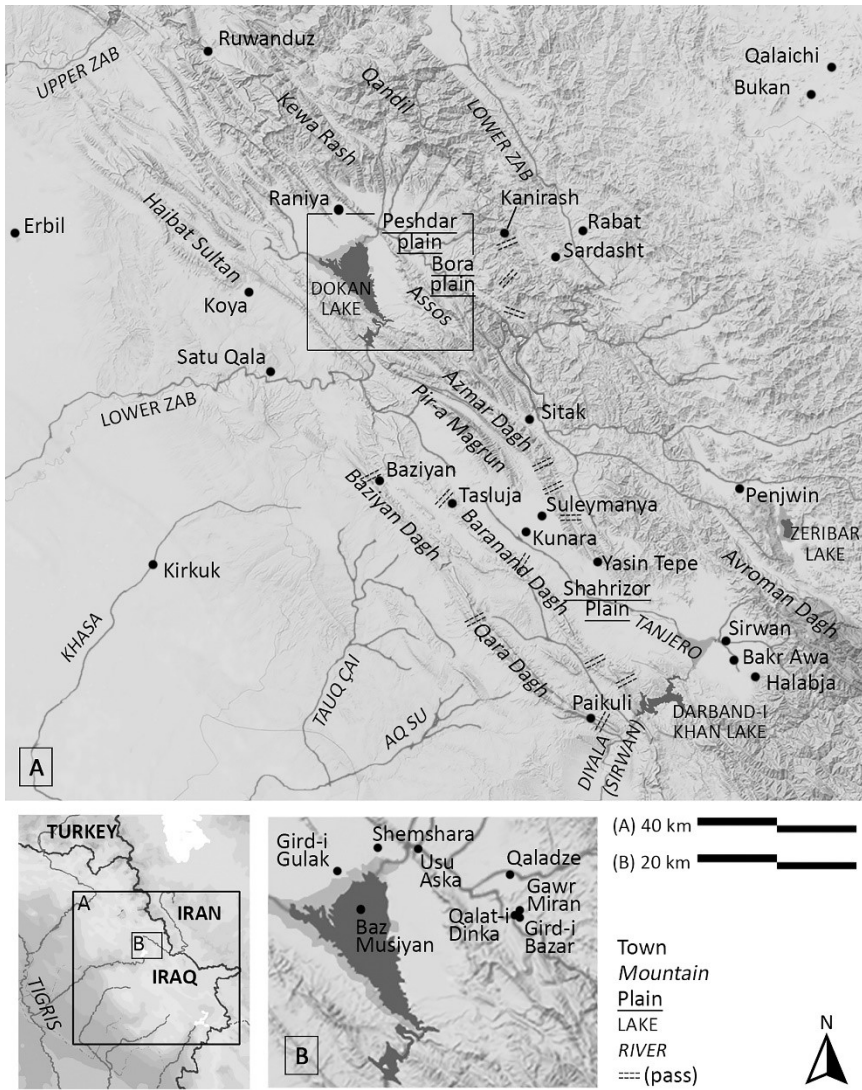


Fig. 1: Map drawn by Luigi Turri on a terrain provided by Stamen Open Source Tools (<https://stamen.com/open-source/>)