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Cultural interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros

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General Conclusions

After discussing cultural interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros in the light of the available material and immaterial culture it has become clear that there was intensive cultural interaction between them. From the available records we learn that there was a broad cultural interaction in immaterial culture. However, comparatively few texts come from the Northern Zagros. There the people spoke different local languages and dialects, almost none of them Semitic, but they used Akkadian (Assyrian in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian period) and cuneiform script for their records. There are a few bilingual records from Urartians, and Aramaic script and language was used on the Mannean stele of Bukan (see, 2.1., 2.2., 2.3., and 3.1).

Many Assyrian records concern the Zagros: annals, administrative and legal documents, and ritual and literary texts, so for the moment these can fill the gap in local Zagrosian records. **Personal names** and **toponyms** are the only elements of local spoken languages in the Zagros to have survived. Otherwise we know only of Hurrian and Urartian, at least for the moment. Among Zagrosian personal names we find Semitic elements, including Akkadian and Aramaic, and in the Assyrian heartland we find Zagrosian, Urartian and Iranian names. Whether these names mark ethnicity or reflect cultural interaction is unclear, some recorded local personal names it may have been pronounced differently (see, 1.1.3, 1.2.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3).

Several Zagrosian **cities were renamed** with Assyrian names prefixed with Akkadian Bīt, Dūr or Kār and incorporate the names of Assyrian deities or kings. In Assyrian records many **toponyms** are **Assyrianized** by transcribing a local name as if it were pronounced like an Assyrian one, perhaps adding an Assyrian suffix or phonetic modification (see, 2.3).

From a **religious** prospective we note that the Assyrians erected images of Assur in some Median cities, and **deported** many **divine statues** to Assyria. According to their political agenda, any revolt against Assyria is a revolt against Assur. Defeating an enemy people meant their deities had been defeated by Assur (and the other Assyrian gods), to be symbolised by deporting their divine statues with the people. Zagrosian statues of deities were distributed among Assyrian temples in Ashur, Nineveh, Kilizi and Nimrud. Some were returned, such as the statues of Haldi and his wife Bagbartu to Musasir. Urzana the ruler of Musasir supplied the Assyrian king with reports on the Urartian, Cimmerian, and Scythian movements to gain compensation (see, 2.5).

Assyrian **priests** accompanied the Assyrian army in the Northern Zagros and Zagrosian priests served in the temple of Ishtar of Arbail. The second generation of the Hundurean family, after being deported from Media to Ashur, held office in the temple of Assur in Ashur. Zagrosians participated in rituals in the Assyrian heartland, and Assyrian kings performed rituals and made sacrifices in the Northern Zagros (see, 2.5.12 – 2.5.15).

Mesopotamian **literature** and **mythology** were known widely among the peoples of the Near East during the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. *Gilgamesh*, the *Creation Epic*, *Anzu*, and *Etana* epics were transferred textually and iconographically. Some elements are linked in Assyrian records with the landscape and the peoples of the Zagros. Assyrian kings in their annals sometimes allude to ancient literary and mythological motifs to portray themselves as gods punishing the peoples of the Zagros with evil and destruction. The Northern Zagros was

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an important location in Assyrian mythology and literature, for it was on a mountain there that the Ark had landed. It is identified in *Gilgamesh* as Mount *Niṣir/Nimuš* in the land of Lullubi/Guti. Many events in *Anzu* and *Imdugud* relate to the Northern Zagros, and several Assyrian and Mesopotamian deities dwelled in the Zagros mountains, where their roots reached down to the Netherworld. Shalmaneser III considers himself as the god *Erra*, and the Urartians as Qutu/Guti and storm and cloud (see 2.4.).

There is significant cultural interaction in **material culture**, **Assyrian rock reliefs** and **steles** in the Zagros with accompanying texts, confirm that the Assyrians reached these areas as stated in royal inscriptions. The inscriptions on those rock reliefs and steles commemorate Assyrian victories there and or Assyrian irrigation projects in the Zagros. They function as propaganda, symbolising their occupation of the territory. They never wrote in a Zagrosian language, but ensured their message was read in Akkadian. The images of Assyrian kings drove the local rulers to submit. Several Urartian steles in the Northern Zagros between the Urmia basin and Musasir have bilingual inscriptions, in Akkadian and Urartian. Assyrians would have needed local interpreters in the Zagros, and one of them is identified as a “*master of language*.” (see, 2.1., 3.1., and 4.10).

In Assyria, **palace reliefs** functioned as a formal means of communication, glorifying military success and the punishment of non-submissive enemies in Zagrosian landscapes, sieges of Zagrosian cities, and many architectural details. (see 3.2).

The interaction in material culture also involved styles and motifs on objects and ceramics acquired through commercial contact, military occupation, migration, deportation, travelling artisans, the exchange of gifts between elite persons. **Seals** and **ivory** objects could easily be transported from one place to another. Assyrian and Syrian influence on the ivories and seals of Hasanlu is clearly visible (see 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6).

The only known seal from the Northern Zagros is of the ruler Urzana. It has an Akkadian inscription and the iconography is purely Assyrian. This local ruler using an Assyrian style of seal reflects political influence from Assyria. A local ruler whose territory was under Assyrian control, with him acting as the Assyrian governor happened at Musasir and Idu (Satu Qala). The Medes did not use their own seal to validate the vassal treaty with Esarhaddon, perhaps because the Assyrian king did not see them as equals. They were vassals, and Esarhaddon did not use his own seal but the seals of earlier Assyrian kings (see, 3.5).

There is very little Assyrian **ceramic** in the Northern Zagros, especially not in Iran. This may indicate that the Assyrian penetration into the Zagros was not a process of migration, but involved official personnel, the army, merchants, deputies and delegations. The small fine glazed decorated jars found in tombs in the Northern Zagros and in its foothills may have come directly from Assyria or may have been manufactured locally for elite persons (see 3.10).

Glazed bricks made for Assyrian palaces and temples were also works of art which influenced the glazed bricks made locally in the Zagros. The glazed bricks from Satu Qala and Hasanlu seem purely Assyrian. Assyrian records state that glazed bricks were made in Zamua and Media under the supervision of Sargon II and his governors. Those from Rabat Tepe and Tepe Qalaichi are local with some Assyrian elements borrowed (see 3.4).

From Assyrian texts and sculpture we know that there was much looting and enforced tributes of decorative objects in metal, ivory and stone. Although the Assyrians plundered

much ivory from Musasir, none of this was discovered when Assyrian capital cities were excavated. The number of objects plundered from the Zagros or accepted as tribute may have been exaggerated as Assyrian propaganda. **Metal** objects may have been melted down and reused, or they may have been recaptured at the fall of Assyria in 614-612 BCE (see, 3.5, 3.6, 3.8, and 2.4.2).

The interaction in **architecture** is mainly seen in public architecture. In the Northern Zagros the Assyrians built and rebuilt several fortresses, fortifications, forts, cities, city walls. Similarly the Zagrosians themselves built forts, strongholds, city walls, moats, and blocked the passes with walls to protect their lands, their provinces, and their cities from Assyrian aggression. The Assyrian campaigns recorded details of these fortifications in the Northern Zagros. From a personal analysis of the visual and epigraphic evidence a clearer view of the architectural interaction emerges (see Chapter IV). The discovery of Assyrian or Assyrian style glazed bricks, reliefs and rock reliefs indicate that official Assyrian architects, artists and scribes followed the Assyrian king and commanders on their campaigns in the Zagros and made these artistic objects in the Zagros (see 3.1., 3.4., 3.5., and 3.6.).

My fieldwork in the area of the modern village of Sidekan-Mdjeser involved examining several Urartian column bases and statues. They were found by accident, having been re-used by villagers in Mdjeser. They probably came from a ruined public building of Iron Age Musasir, perhaps the temple of Haldi. They are comparable to the column bases of the Ayanis temple, Altintepe and other column bases at Urartu. This has enabled me to make a probable location for the temple of Haldi of Musasir somewhere under the houses and or orchards of the village of Mdjeser (see 4.2., 4.3., and 4.3.2).

From my study of the architecture and building techniques of modern houses in the villages of the Zagros a mistake in the description of houses on the relief of Khorsabad can be corrected. Those houses have previously been described as towers or structures with several stories. But in fact the sculptor depicted them as built on a mountain slope. This applies similarly to the houses of the city Ukku to the west of Musasir. Houses here had to be built on a mountain slope because there was not enough flat ground in the deep valleys. It gave protection from the flash floods of winter and spring and left the valley floor free for agriculture. Assyrian artists who accompanied the Assyrian campaigns observed architectural details, and depicted the cities of the Zagros on Assyrian palace reliefs accurately (see 4.1.2, 4.7).

One of the **reasons for cultural interaction** between Assyria and the Northern Zagros was economical. Assyrian campaigns against the Zagros were motivated by a desire to control the territories and to plunder their cities to obtain tribute of treasure, cattle, sheep, goats, horses and Bactrian camels (with two-humps). Assyria needed these goods in the interests of expanding its empire. Horses and metals (copper, tin, and iron) fuelled the engine of ancient wars, and both were available from the Northern Zagros (see 1.1., 1.2., and 2.8). Assyria could also benefit from Northern Zagrosian manpower deported to Assyria, to work in *corvées* in construction work in the Assyrian capital cities and in digging canals in Kalhu, Nineveh and Kilizi. Some needs were filled from beyond the Zagros (see 1.4, and 4.10).

The mountains were an obstacle to interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros. They afforded no easy access, so the Assyrians according to the annals, made **roads** through the **mountain passes and passages** in difficult terrain. Kings claim to have opened up routes

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in inaccessible places to link the Northern Zagros with Assyria. These routes enabled the Assyrian army to invade and encouraged trade and migration. **Rivers transport** was used for shipping: offerings to the temple of Assur in Ashur from Idu on the Lower Zab; grain on *kalaks* from Hiptunu to Kalhu, and wooden beams from Ukku and Kumme to Assyria on the Upper Zab (see 4.11).

As a result of **military conflict** and political tension cultural interaction developed. There were more travelers and commercial contacts affected material and immaterial culture. **Migration, immigration, deportation, and runaway prisoners** also played a part. The Assyrians adopted various policies against their enemies. After occupation there was annexation. A people could be punished by having the crown prince taken as hostage and or by deporting the royal family. Some peoples were deported with their king and their deities (see 1.4., 2.7). The Assyrians installed images of Assur in some Median cities, and built *kārums* in or near these Median cities. The goods traded by caravans encouraged cultural contact. Securing the Zagros with trade roads and *kārums* was important, to prevent the Zagros as an immediate neighbour becoming a threat. Continually campaigns made the Zagrosians submit, and enabled Assyria to benefit economically. **Military campaigning and trade** are the two main factors encouraging interaction in both immaterial and material culture (see 2.8).

That the Assyrians dominated the cultural interaction and had a deep influence on Zagrosian culture is perhaps related to the fact that **there was no central state in the Northern Zagros**. The deep valleys, narrow plains and high mountains separated population groups into small political units with their own languages and dialects. **This made the Zagros stay on the periphery of Mesopotamia and Assyria** (see 1.1, 1.2., 2.1, and 2.7).

Both Assyria and the Zagros were **intermediaries for cultural interaction**. Elements of **Syro-Palestinian** art on seals and ivories reached Hasanlu in the Northern Zagros through Assyria. Lapis lazuli, antimony, silver, gold, and precious stones in caravans from beyond the Zagros found their way to Assyria and beyond through the Zagros. There would have been a high level of state commerce and diplomatic exchanges, and private commerce enabled artists and craftsmen to make contacts and travel from one area to another. The Assyrians built several *kārums* at Median cities for **trade along the Khorasan Road**. Another *karum* in Kar-Sippar was in the territory of Musasir on the route through the passes to the Urmia basin, Urartu and Trans-Caucasia which facilitated geographic (horizontal) interaction (see 2.7, 2.8, and 4.11).

Assyria and the Northern Zagros took over some cultural elements from an outside source. We know that there were **Babylonian-Assyrian contacts** with Šušarra (Shemshara) in the Rania plain and Bakr-Awa (Bakrawa) in the Sharezur plain in the Northern Zagros during the Middle Bronze Age. In the Late Bronze Age, the Hurro-Mittani kingdoms of **Arrapha and Nuzi** maintained contact with the Northern Zagros and were intermediaries for Mesopotamian culture. From the east Arrapha (especially its immediate neighbor Nullu/Lullu) was in direct contact with the Northern Zagros through trade in goods and slaves, according to Nuzi records. Mittanni seals from Bakr-Awa and other material in Hasanlu and Marlik prove such contact. In Nuzi and Hanigalbat Hurrians and Mittanians adopted motifs from Mesopotamia which appear in literature, religion, and on their seals. Later the Kassites were in direct contact with the Northern Zagros, as we see from Kassite artistic elements in Hasanlu and the

stone bowl inscribed with the name of the Kassite king Kadashman-Enlil. Some elements are best described as generally Mesopotamian. Epics and myths related to the Bronze Age were known before any Assyrian contact, so Akkadian elements in toponyms and personal names in the Zagros does not necessarily show Assyrian influence. Babylonia had had an influence since the Middle Bronze Age, which continued during the Iron Age, especially to the east of the Diyala in the areas of Namri, Media and Ellipi. The peoples of the Zagros were also subject to Aramaic influence, directly or indirectly through Assyria. Also, the Lullubi families (merchants) from Zamua and Arzuhina travelled to Sippar (see 2.1., 2.2., 2.3., 2.4, and 2.8).

Esarhaddon may have relied on support from the peoples of the Zagros to ease the progress of his chosen successor. He made **vassal treaties** with the Medes, Zamua and the western provinces and kingdoms of the Assyrian empire indicating that his young son Ashurnasirpal was to be the crown prince. **Royal dynastic marriages** were made by most ancient Near Eastern potentates to confirm an alliance, and the Assyrians practised this in the Zagros, to preserve the peace and to discourage revolt or any threat from elsewhere. These were all factors in the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE, and Zagrosians, especially the Medes, were familiar with Assyria's weak points (see, 2.7).

The Assyrians deported thousands of people to different areas of the Near East, including **peoples from the Zagros**. Some of the deportees may have been craftsmen and artists, who worked in exile in Assyria. In the 7th century BCE, there were many artists and craftsmen working in the Assyrian court and in workshops in the Assyrian capitals. After the fall of Nineveh, perhaps some architects and artists from the Assyrian capitals went as prisoners to the Zagros. They had experience of building several Assyrian administrative palaces in the Northern Zagros during 9th-7th centuries BCE, and it would explain how Assyrian artistic and architectural elements and motifs reached the Zagros. Later they appear in the Achaemenid palaces in Persia, (see 1.3, 1.4, ,and 4.1.).

Dozens of important cities of the Northern Zagros are mentioned in Assyrian records (see tables 1.2.-1-4), but only a few of them have been excavated. This severely limits the information we need. The important Bronze Age city of Shemshara and the Iron Age cities at Tepe Qalaichi (Izirtu), Rabat Tepe (Arzizi) and Satu Qala (Idu) have only been excavated for a few seasons (see 4.1., and 4.2). Future excavations may fill the gaps, for in recent years the Northern Zagros has attracted several archaeological missions. They have moved their attention there following unrest elsewhere. From them we hope to learn more about cultural interaction between the Northern Zagros and Assyria, as well as between the Northern Zagros and Babylonia, Urartu, Trans-Caucasia, Elam, and with the Persia.