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Cultural interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros

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Introduction

The title of this thesis, “*Cultural Interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros*”, geographically covers Assyria and the Northern Zagros and historically a period from the early second millennium until the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE. It focuses on Assyrian interaction with the Northern Zagros (or vice versa), an immediate neighbour, which constituted a natural boundary against Assyrian expansion to the north and the east.

The mountainous terrain east of the Lesser Habur at the Turkish-Iraqi border is considered as a north-western extension of the Northern Zagros. Then there are the ranges northeast of Lake Urmia, southwards to the River Diz in the Kirmanshah valley inside Iran, and the ranges east of the Sirwan/Upper Diyala river inside Iraq. Among the mountains are valleys and narrow plains. The main rivers are the Lesser Habur, Upper Zab, Lesser Zab and Sirwan/Diyala with their tributaries (see sections 1.1. and 1.2).

The landscape, flora, fauna, natural resources and climate of lowland Assyria were different from those of the Zagros highlands, which led to complementary economical activity. The Northern Zagros was the nearest place for Assyria to obtain raw materials, horses, grain and manpower. Assyria often conflicted with the Northern Zagros peoples to obtain their goals. But there were also peaceful (commercial and diplomatic) negotiations between them, which led to cultural interaction of various kinds.

In this thesis, the Northern Zagros has been distinguished because it is that part of the Zagros in direct contact with Assyria, while the Central and Southern Zagros were in direct contact with Elam and Babylonia. It was an intermediary for any Assyrian contact with the Central Zagros and beyond. The author’s experience as a local archaeologist during a decade of field work and excavations in joint projects and in his own field work has shown that further investigation about the nature of cultural interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros is needed. Recent field work and excavations by foreign and local teams in the Northern Zagros, have produced new materials and new texts. Moreover, until now no comprehensive study of Assyrian cultural interaction with the Northern Zagros to include textual, visual and archaeological evidence has been made. I hope to find answers to questions about the cultural interaction and to expose as complete a view as I can of the culture of the Zagros.

As for the **material culture**, much evidence comes from results of **archaeological excavations** and **field surveys**. The first discoveries in Nineveh and the Northern Zagros were made in the early and mid-19th century and the most recent ones discussed were published in late 2015 and early 2016. These include recent excavations and surveys in the Iraqi Zagros (the mountainous area of the southern Kurdistan), and important discoveries from Iron Age sites in the Iranian Zagros. Special attention is given to the author’s own fieldwork in different areas between the Upper Zab and the Sirwan/Upper Diyala, the areas of the Iron Age territories of Musasir and Zamua. Some reports were published in local languages (Kurdish, Persian, and Arabic) in the mid-20th century onwards, most of which are not known to specialists outside Iraq and Iran.

Material culture is dealt with in Chapters III-IV, and it includes the **visual evidence** of the depictions of several victorious battles at cities in Media, Mannea, Musasir, Ukku, and Urartu on Assyrian palace reliefs. Assyrian artists accompanying the army on campaign depicted details of the architecture of cities under siege so that individual cities can be distinguished. They did not depict them as stereotypes. Towers, walls, temples, and plundered objects are shown with appropriate backgrounds. Zagrosians bringing tribute to the Assyrian court also appear on Assyrian reliefs. The visual evidence, sometimes supported with captions, often corroborates and explains written records in Assyrian annals. Visual evidence is dealt with in Chapters III-IV.

The evidence from ancient records can be described as **immaterial culture**, in contrast to archaeological finds, and is the second important source for this study. Most records are Assyrian, but there are a few local ones, from Shemshara (Šušarra), Bakrawa/Bakr-Awa, Satu Qala (ancient Idu), Rabat Tepe, and Media (in Akkadian), and the Urartian bilingual steles (in Urartian-Assyrian using cuneiform script), and the Aramaic stele of Bukan. In the Bible Media, Mannea, Scythia and the Cimmerians are briefly mentioned on different occasions, as well as peoples deported from the Levant to the Zagros. Classical sources, especially Herodotus, mention peoples from the Zagros, such as Medes and Scythians, but these records have less historical value than Assyrian ones. In them we find trustworthy details about the history, geography, beliefs, mythology, art, architecture, climate, landscape and daily life of the peoples of the Zagros. Contemporary Babylonian records also provide some historical and cultural knowledge about the Northern Zagros. For the immaterial culture see Chapters I and II, and for it explaining the material culture see Chapters III and IV.

Previous studies by archaeologists and philologists on the archaeology and culture of the Zagros date from the early nineteenth century, following the important discoveries in Nineveh and Khorsabad. Around 1820 Schulz studied the Urartian bilingual stele of Kile-Shin (between Urmia and Sidekan, in ancient Musasir). The trilingual inscription of Behistun (Bêstûn) in the Zagros was the first key for decoding cuneiform script and Akkadian. It could be argued that the beginning of Assyriology was involved on discoveries about the Zagros.

In the Northern Zagros several important sites from the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age are known, the most famous being Hasanlu. A most important study of interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros and of the intermediary role of Assyria in interaction of Hasanlu with Syria and Anatolia is Marcus, *Emblems of Identity and Prestige--The Seals and Sealings from Hasanlu* (1996). We also have Muscarella, *The Catalogue of Ivories from Hasanlu, Iran* (1982). Other works deal with broader aspects of contacts between Mesopotamia and Iran, covering the Prehistoric period, Bronze Age and Iron Age. These include Levine, Young and Cuyler, (eds.) *Mountains and lowlands: essays in the archaeology of greater Mesopotamia* (1977); Curtis and Lukonin (eds.), *Later Mesopotamia and Iran: tribes and empires, 1600-539 BC (Proceedings of a seminar in memory of Vladimir G. Lukonin)* (1995). They both report the proceedings of conferences and deal with many periods and sites and subjects, with some articles dealing with the subject of our study, if only indirectly. Continuation and change in political systems of three empires was discussed at an

International Meeting, published in Lanfranchi, Roaf and Rollinger (eds.), *Continuity of Empire(?) Assyria, Media, and Persia* (2003, Padua). These papers are an important contribution to our subject. Some deal with specific points of religion in texts from the Northern Zagros, and other issues related to archaeology and ceramics.

In Eidem and Læssøe (eds.), *The Shemshāra Archives 1: The letters* (2001) light is shed on important cultural and political links between the Zagros and the Kingdom of Shamshi-Adad I. An important contribution is the dissertation Ahmed, K., *The Beginnings of ancient Kurdistan (c. 2500-1500 BC): a historical and cultural synthesis* (2012). It covers the last part of the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age for the Zagros and its foothills, focusing on the peoples of the Zagros and North Mesopotamia and their contacts and conflicts with Sumer, Akkad, Babylonia, and the kingdom of Šamši-Adad I. It touches many cultural elements and political relationships between the peoples and kings of the Zagros with the rest of Mesopotamia. He studies the kingdom of Simmurum, the temple of their national deity Nišba and the stele of Haladini. The study of a royal inscription of Iddi(n)-Sin was presented there for the first time.

In Mallowan, M., *Nimrud and its remains* (1966) many Assyrian objects are compared with objects from Hasanlu and Ziwiye, especially the discovered ivories. In Porada, E., *Ancient Iran: the art of pre-Islamic times* (1965) light is shed on local styles and foreign influence on the art of the Northern Zagros. Recently the area has attracted more attention following the publication of Mühl, S., *Siedlungsgeschichte im mittleren Osttigrisgebiet: vom Neolithikum bis in die neuassyrische Zeit* (München, 2013). It surveys results of previous excavations and re-evaluates these results from various sites. It concentrates on the Assyrian heartland and areas between the Lower Zab and the Upper Sirwan, mainly in the so-called Trans-Tigris region, and covers all periods from the Neolithic to the Neo-Assyrian. This study is important for understanding the distribution of settlements, and the architecture and ceramics from sites covered in her study.

For ethno-linguistic studies the works of Zadok are the most important, especially his monograph *The Ethno-linguistic Character of North-western Iran and Kurdistan in the Neo-Assyrian Period* (2002). He categorises toponyms and personal names according to their location. Prosopography is covered in *NPN*, *NPA*, and the *PNA* volumes, which include names from the Northern Zagros mentioned in Assyrian records. Speiser (1928), Nashef (1982), Levine (1973, 1974), and Liverani (ed.) (1995) and many others also treat toponyms of part of the Zagros but some results of those studies are out of date. Parpola and Porter (2001) have now succeeded to identify many of these toponyms but further work is necessary. Because of the author's familiarity with the landscape and local dialects and languages of the area, what we know about these toponyms can be amplified. More recent studies include Radner, Kroll, Roaf, Muscarella, who in several papers shed light on cultural aspects of the Northern Zagros and Assyria in specific cultural and political aspects (see the bibliography).

Because no previous study has covered the area from all perspectives of cultural interaction further investigation of the relevant available immaterial and material culture from the early second millennium to the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE is needed. Archaeological excavation reports, the objects discovered and architectural elements identified are not usually

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presented in a way to appreciate cultural interaction. The material presented there will be supplemented by relevant details from my own field work.

Even Assyrian records about the Northern Zagros are not always studied from the perspective of cultural interaction. Here what is available from Assyrian royal inscriptions, administrative letters, legal documents, religious and literary texts, as well in the local records of the Zagros, will be examined with this in mind.

Several important research questions arise from this subject. While it is clear that there was cultural interaction between Assyrian and the Northern Zagros, the extent of interaction in immaterial culture and in material culture may have been different, and therefore further investigation of the relevant available immaterial and material culture is needed.

Then there is the question of what the links for cultural interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros were. When I discuss the cultural interaction of immaterial culture (Chapters I-II) and material culture (Chapters III-IV) the way these interactions were facilitated will be presented. The roles played by Assyrians, Zagrosians and others in this interaction will be dealt with in sections (1.3., 1.4. and 1.5., in 2.1., 2.4., 2.5, 2.7. and 2.8, in 3.1., and in 4.1., and in 4.11). For reasons for cultural interaction, see Chapter I and Chapter II, sections 2.7 and 2.8.2.

Some subordinate questions also arise. The extent to which military conflict and political tension affected cultural interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros (or vice versa) is dealt with in sections (2.7. and 2.8., in 3.1. and 3.2, and in 4.1). And more importantly, the extent to which peaceful contacts, or more precisely, how the commercial and diplomatic relations facilitated cultural interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros, is dealt with in sections (1.3., 2.7, 2.8, 3.5., 3.6., and 3.9).

Another question is how Assyria and the Northern Zagros acted as intermediaries in cultural interaction further afield. What is relevant here are the direct and indirect contacts of Babylonia with the Northern Zagros and with Assyria, as well as the contacts of the Hurro-Mittani culture of Nuzi, Arrapha and Hanigalbat with the Assyrian heartland and the Zagros. For discussions of these subordinate questions see sections (1.3. and 1.4), especially (2.4., 2.5., 2.7., 2.8, and also 2.4., 3.5., and 3.7). **To summarise:**

Chapter I deals with the landscape, climate, flora, and fauna of the two territories. By showing the diversity between the Assyrian heartland as lowland and the Northern Zagros as highland. I also present the peoples and groups there as the actors in these theatres, with their different political states and their limits of power. Their movements as migrants, immigrants, runaways and deportees are also discussed.

Chapter II deals with immaterial culture: languages and writing systems, literature and mythology, personal names and toponyms, religion and festivals in war and peace, social

structure, political and administrative relations, postal services, dynastic marriages, economy and trade.

Chapter III deals with certain material culture, specifically arts and ceramics, rock reliefs, reliefs, steles, seals and sealing, ivories, metalwork, mosaics, glass, pottery, glazed bricks, wall paintings, and textiles and costumes.

Chapter IV deals with other material culture, specifically the architecture of palaces, temples, cities and towns, fortifications, private houses, tombs, roads and passages, canals, dams, and ditches.

In each chapter, textual, visual and archaeological evidence is combined to find elements of interaction. Each chapter is provided with several tables, explaining many aspects of cultural interaction between Assyria and the Northern Zagros.

