

The Colonizer, the Colonized... and the Colonists: Empire and Settlement on Assyria's Anatolian Frontier

By
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Traditionally colonial situations have been seen as the interaction between two groups: the colonizer and the colonized. Although many scholars have acknowledged that cultural influence often flows in both directions between these groups, the colonizers are usually seen as dominating a culturally and/or politically inferior indigenous population in and around their frontier settlements. Seen from the center looking toward the culturally inferior periphery, the dominating group is thought to find identity in its position as the sophisticated dominating "self" *vis a vis* the inferior dominated "other." Although this paradigm has often proven useful in classifying and describing colonial situations, its bi-dimensional approach can, in many contexts, mask the complexity of interaction created by imperial settlement in frontier zones.

By combining archaeological data from survey and excavation in the Upper Tigris River region of southeastern Anatolia with the vast textual corpus from the Neo-Assyrian Iron Age, this paper will examine how Assyrian colonization of southeastern Anatolia created a multi-dimensional contact zone along Anatolia's Tigris River corridor. It will show that the process of colonization in this volatile frontier area not only created a "middle ground" where the indigenous inhabitants interacted with imperial administrators and military personnel, but that Assyria's policy of forcibly deporting rebellious peoples to populate newly annexed regions created a triangle of interaction between three groups: the Assyrian colonizers, the indigenous colonized and the foreign colonists. It will also show that the process of colonization is manifest in the archaeological record by a unique settlement system that we might call the "geography of colonialism."

The Assyrian empire is well known from references in the Bible. The books of Isaiah and Kings describe Assyrian expansion into the eastern Mediterranean and their brutal domination of the petty kingdoms there. In fact, between about 900 and 700 B.C., the Assyrian state expanded from its humble beginnings at the city of Ashur in what is today northern Iraq, to eventually engulf the entire Middle East from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea and from the Arabian Desert to the Taurus Mountains.

An examination of the Assyrian textual record shows that southeastern Anatolia was one of the main foci of Assyrian imperial expansion throughout the Assyrian Imperial period. Because the Upper Tigris River Valley was directly connected to the Assyrian heartland by the Tigris River, transportation costs of goods with a high bulk-to-value ratio such as timber and grain were significantly reduced (Parker 2001). As early as 882 B.C. the formidable Assyrian monarch Ashurnasirpal attacked the Upper Tigris River region establishing military outposts and provincial capitals along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and eventually annexing large parts of southeastern Anatolia to the Assyrian provincial system. In subsequent years these strongholds acted not only as jumping off

points for military strikes further into the periphery, but perhaps more importantly, as bases for the economic exploitation highland Anatolia.

However, even at this early date, it is clear that Assyrian's imperial ambitions were restricted by demographics. The Assyrians were a relatively small ethnic group surrounded by a sea of other, often much larger, ethnic groups including Arameans, Hurrians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, Pheonicians and Urartians, just to name a few. Thus, from the very beginning the Assyrians relied on co-opting foreign populations to act not only as laborers, but also as administrators, governors and other high officials (Tadmor 1975: 1978). Non-Assyrians assimilated to imperial norms can be identified by their foreign names which appear in a variety of different genres of documents (Kinnier-Wilson 1972; Zadok 1989; 1995) and by the fact that by the end of the eighth century B.C. Aramaic had become the Lingua Franca of the empire (Tadmor 1978: 1991). However, nowhere is this phenomenon more clearly illustrated than in Ashurnasirpal's banquet stele which describes tens of thousands of foreign "guests" brought to the Assyrian heartland to populate the newly constructed imperial capital at Calah, modern Nimrud.

A similar policy of deportation and resettlement was implemented on Assyria's Anatolian frontier (Oded 1979). Regional archaeological reconnaissance surveys of the Upper Tigris River Valley between the modern town of Bismil and the confluence of the Tigris and Batman rivers show that during the era directly preceding Assyrian colonization of southeastern Anatolia the Upper Tigris River region was home to a flourishing indigenous culture (Parker 1997; 2001). The distribution of sites dating to the Early Iron Age illustrates that during this period the Upper Tigris River Valley was sprinkled with thirteen evenly spaced settlements. At least 69% of the Early Iron Age sites could only have been villages at the time, since nine of the total of thirteen sites dating to this period are under five hectares in total size. The remaining larger sites yielded Early Iron Age ceramics in specific morphological areas rather than across entire mounds. These data indicate that the Early Iron Age settlement size at the larger sites was probably more substantial than the village-sized sites but was nevertheless well below site maximum. Thus, the survey data suggest that sites dating to the Early Iron Age fall into two size categories. The distribution of the potentially larger sites in the Early Iron Age settlement system is noteworthy since no two of the potentially larger sites are less than 7.5 kilometers apart indicating that the potentially larger sites were the central focus of several smaller villages (Parker 2001).

During the summer of 2000 members of the Upper Tigris Archaeological Research Project or UTARP began excavations at one of these important Early Iron Age centers. This site, known to the locals as Kenan Tepe, stands on limestone outcropping commanding a beautiful view of the Tigris River as it winds its way through the Upper Tigris River Valley. Kenan Tepe is a relatively large mound measuring more than five hectares in size and twenty meters in height. Although our analysis of the first season's work at Kenan Tepe is still preliminary, the fact that well preserved Early Iron Age remains were discovered in three trenches separated by approximately fifteen meters each confirms that Kenan Tepe's Early Iron Age town was relatively large. The ceramics

unearthed in these levels include the well-known Early Iron Age Corrugated Bowls as well as several indigenous Iron Age types, but the assemblage included no Assyrian Imperial period ceramics. This combined with dramatic collapse layers discovered in two excavation units suggests that Kenan Tepe was abandoned or destroyed in the wake of Assyrian colonization of the valley.

During the 1999 field season members of UTARP conducted intensive archaeological surveys at another, this time smaller, indigenous settlement called Talavash Tepe (Parker, Creekmore and Easton 2001). By employing two different survey methodologies, we discovered that during the Early Iron Age, and probably into the beginning of the Assyrian Imperial period, Talavash Tepe was a village of about 3 hectares. The survey data also show a continuity of occupation from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age (a characteristic suspected but not yet proven at Kenan Tepe). Like Kenan Tepe, no Assyrian Imperial period ceramics were recovered at Talavash Tepe implying that occupation there ended prior to or during the process of Assyrian colonization of the valley.

The regional reconnaissance survey data from the Upper Tigris River Valley show that as Early Iron Age centers like Kenan Tepe were abandoned or destroyed, and the smaller indigenous villages like Talavash Tepe struggled to survive, the Assyrians established numerous small settlements throughout the valley (Parker 2001). In fact, the data attest to a massive increase in the number of occupied sites and the total occupied hectares in the valley between the Early Iron Age and the Assyrian Imperial period. Calculations based on the reconnaissance survey data show that during the Early Iron Age the total occupied area in the Upper Tigris River Valley did not exceed 23 hectares. In the Imperial period this number increased to at least 143 hectares. During the same period the number of occupied sites increased from 12 in the Early Iron Age to 34 in the Imperial period. Nearly all of these sites were small newly established villages located in the fertile land surrounding the Tigris River flood plain.

The textual and archaeological records indicate that Ashurnasirpal fully intended to permanently occupy parts of the Tigris basin for it was during his reign (specifically between 882 and 879 B.C.) that the Assyrians established the first in what would become a series of fortified centers along the Upper Tigris River. The most important of these strongholds was the city of Tushan which also served as the capital of a new province of the same name. Ashurnasirpal describes in some detail the construction of this city saying that he surrounded it with a city wall, constructed a palace and large storage facilities there and traversed the Tigris with a bridge of rafts to give the inhabitants ready access to the fertile farm lands on the north bank of the river (Grayson 1991:202). He followed this construction three years later by establishing two more fortified towns (Assyrian Tidu and Sinabu) at regular intervals east of the city of Tushan (Grayson 1991:257-262).

This string of fortresses is still conspicuously visible along the south bank of the Upper Tigris river. Three large mounds with extensive Assyrian occupation grace the landscape of the Tigris basin on the south bank of the river east of Diyarbakir. It is obvious from the

surface morphology of these sites that each of them contained a monumental gateway flanked by large towers strategically facing north toward the river.

Extensive research on the historical geography of southeastern Anatolia has made the direct attribution of these sites with fortresses mentioned in Assyrian texts virtually certain (Kessler 1980; Karg 1999; Liverani 1992; Parker 1998; 2000; Radner and Schachner 2001). This reconstruction strongly supports the location of the city of Tushan at the site of Ziyaret Tepe about ten kilometers east of the modern town of Bismil; the city of Tidu at the site of Uchtepe about ten kilometers west of Bismil; and the site of Sinabu at modern Murattash (previously known as Pornak) about 30 kilometers west of Bismil (Kessler 1980; Liverani 1992).

Recent archaeological surveys at Ziyaret Tepe confirm that occupation at this site vastly expanded during the Neo-Assyrian Imperial period (Algaze 1989; Algaze, Breuninger, Lightfoot and Rosenberg 1991; Matney 1998; Parker 1998). The site grew from a relatively small village of only a few hectares centered on the high mound during the Early Iron Age, to a large center of over 32 hectares, which included the high mound and a vast lower town, during the Assyrian Imperial period (Matney 1998; Parker 1998). Magnetometry surveys of portions of Ziyaret Tepe (Matney and Somers 1999) have revealed what appears to be substantial fortifications in the form of walls and towers and several other monumental structures. Surface survey also recovered several terracotta clawed fore-paws that presumably belonged to one of several monumental lions that presumably guarded each entrance to the city. Excavations at the site of Uchtepe (Assyrian Tidu) have also revealed substantial structures including fortification walls over 3 meters thick that enclosed the citadel during the Assyrian Imperial period (Koroglu 1998).

In order to augment the picture of Imperial period settlement around these frontier strongholds members of the Upper Tigris Archaeological Research Project conducted archaeological excavations at a small Imperial period site called Boztepe during the summer of 1999 (Parker, Creekmore and Easton 2001). Although Boztepe is situated only about five hundred meters south of the modern Diyarbakır to Batman highway, in antiquity its position was quite precarious. Boztepe is on the north bank of the Tigris in an unprotected plain close to, but separated from, the then formidable Tigris River by an ancient limestone outcropping. The site is also close to, but on the opposite side of the river from, the Assyrian provincial capital of Tushan. Boztepe's advantage lay in its command over the productive farmlands of the relatively limited low-lying plains surrounding the Tigris River course in southeastern Anatolia.

Intensive archaeological survey data from Boztepe showed that cultural remains there reach far out into the fields on all sides of the main mound. However, soundings placed in these fields revealed no architecture. This result, combined with the disturbed nature of archaeological contexts in the upper levels of all excavation units suggests that cultural remains at Boztepe have been severely disturbed by modern construction. We now believe that Boztepe was originally quite a bit taller than it is today and that the site was leveled sometime in the recent past, possibly to make way for the modern village. This

leveling not only mixed the archaeological material but spread it far out into the neighboring fields. Given these findings, it is very difficult to estimate the size of Boztepe during any period of its occupation. Nevertheless, the data suggest that the Iron Age village was concentrated in the center of the mound and that the actual size of the site in this period was significantly less, perhaps half, the site maximum of 3.14 hectares.

Excavations at Boztepe yielded the remains of a large house securely dated to the Imperial period by ceramics discovered in abundance in sealed contexts on the floors of several rooms and by four radiocarbon dates. It is significant that no Early Iron Age remains were discovered below this house. This, along with the fact that no indigenous ceramics were discovered at Boztepe, confirm that this was a specialized settlement established by the Assyrians as part of their colonization of the valley. The Imperial period house witnessed two main building phases. During both phases the walls of this house were constructed of mud brick without stone foundations. Remains discovered on the floors of the later more substantial structure as well as the relationship between the excavated rooms indicate that this was probably a two-story courtyard house. This house was eventually destroyed in a catastrophic fire that brought debris, probably from an upper story, crashing onto living surfaces and a kitchen on the ground floor. Whether or not the thick layer of ash documenting this disaster is indicative of a larger destruction of the site that took place as a result of hostile intrusion, or even the demise of the Assyrian empire itself, or whether it is a localized conflagration, is unclear. However, several texts written by governors of this and neighboring provinces record hostile intrusions by forces from the north. One such letter written by the governor of Tushan, a man who, judging by the etymology of his name, was probably not Assyrian, to the Assyrian king Sargon II sometime around 715 B.C. exemplifies this situation. This text reads:

"...three [enemy governors] are gathered with their pack animals opposite us...all the people are inside the fortified places; the oxen and the sheep are on this side [i.e.; the south side] of the river. We are standing by and keeping watch for [an impending attack]" (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990:18).

Although it is impossible to directly relate texts such as this to archaeological discoveries, it is certainly tempting to see the destruction of the Imperial period house at Boztepe as the result of the volatile frontier politics documented in this and other letters.

The combined evidence from the regional reconnaissance surveys and UTARP's excavations and intensive surveys point to some general conclusions regarding the nature of settlement in the Upper Tigris River region during the Mesopotamian Iron Age. In the last centuries of the second millennium B.C., and in the beginning of the first millennium B.C., the Upper Tigris River region of southeastern Anatolia was home to a flourishing indigenous culture that exhibited a unique material culture and distinctive settlement system. Although this material culture is shared among the indigenous settlements of this and the neighboring river valleys (Parker 1998; 2001), the fact that the indigenous settlement system prior to Neo-Assyrian intervention contained little or no settlement hierarchy suggests that the political centralization of this culture was not extremely complex. In other words, this area was home to several ideologically linked yet

politically autonomous chiefdoms (Earle 1987; Wright 1984. For a parallel example see Berman 1994).

After 882 B.C., these substate political formations came into direct contact with, not just a state level society, but a full-fledged territorial empire. Once the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal had constructed a fortified garrison center and provincial capital at Tushan (Ziyaret Tepe, only about seven kilometers from Boztepe and less than five kilometers from Kenan Tepe (Kessler 1980; Parker 1998), the Assyrians began the process of integrating the surrounding valley into their imperial structure. Although the archaeological data suggest that the indigenous inhabitants of the Upper Tigris River Valley were probably forced out of the valley sometime during the Imperial period, the textual data and survey data from several neighboring valleys suggest that local polities still flourished in the regions north of the Tigris River corridor. The exponential population growth taking place in the Assyrian heartland at this time meant that the Upper Tigris River Valley, which was directly linked to the Assyrian heartland by the Tigris River, was a prime location for Assyrian agricultural development. It is well known that Assyrian foreign policy included the mass deportation and resettlement of huge numbers of people to and from all corners of the empire (see especially Oded 1979). What is not generally discussed is the fact that these deported peoples were a vital part of Assyrian imperial policy since they served to colonize newly conquered regions and bring underutilized land into agricultural production.

In this context it is worth noting that the recent publication of a text from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III suggests that, after the annexation of the Upper Tigris River region to the Assyrian empire and its incorporation into the Assyrian province of Tushan, large numbers of people were deported from cities on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean and settled in the Upper Tigris River region. This text has been interpreted by Grayson as referring to people being deported from Tushan and settled in a neighboring area called Ulluba (Grayson 1991b:75-6). However, Tadmor's new collation of Tiglath-pileser's inscription in which this reference occurs reveals that this is not the case. The disputed passage begins with a list of conquered cities including Hamath *"and those which are on the seacoast of the west"* (Tadmor 1994:62-3). This passage has, presumably, been interpreted as reading *"from those same cities in the province of Tushan I settled 1,223 people in the province of Ulluba..."* However, this would leave the final *usheshib "I settled"* hanging off the end of the passage or belonging to the beginning of the next sentence. Normal Semitic word order would dictate that the verb should be the final component of the sentence which would mean that the final *usheshib "I settled"* should belong to the clause referring to Ulluba. Thus, thanks to Tadmor's reconstruction of this text, it is now clear that this passage is, in fact, two parallel clauses. The first begins in the break at the beginning of the line, which almost certainly consisted of a number, reading *"[x x x number of people] from those same cities in the province of Tushan I settled."* The second clause also begins with a number and reads *"1,223 people in the province of Ulluba I settled."* Given the above observation the entire passage is perhaps best translated *"from those same cities on the coast of the eastern Mediterranean I settled [x x x number of people] in the province of Tushan and 1,223 people in the province of Ulluba."*

The data recovered at Boztepe during the 1999 season support the theory that Boztepe was, in fact, a village established by the Assyrians as part of the process of colonization of the province of Tushan. References in the annals of the Assyrian monarch Tiglath-pileser III discussed above also suggest that the inhabitants of Boztepe were neither ethnic Assyrians nor local indigenous peoples, but were rather deportees brought into the region from the Phoenician coast. This hypothesis is supported by two archaeological discoveries. Buried within the deposit of ash and collapse documenting the destruction of the Imperial period house at Boztepe were the remains of several very unusual vessels. Sherds from these vessels are handmade of a relatively coarse fabric with burnished surfaces. They consist mainly of pedestals, bowls and clay rods. Once these sherds were cleaned and cataloged it became clear that the pedestals were connected by two rows of clay rods and supported a series of interconnected bowls (Parker, Creekmore and Easton 2001:577 and 583). This is, needless to say, an extremely unusual group of artifacts and is in fact unlike anything I have seen from Assyrian archaeological contexts. The closest parallel I know of is instead from the site of Meggido in northern Israel.

The second archaeological artifact that might lend support to the hypothesis that the colonists the Assyrians settled in the Upper Tigris River region were from the Phoenician coast was not discovered in the Upper Tigris River Valley, the Assyrian Province of Tushan, but instead comes from another survey area in what was the region of Ulluba, the second geographical referent in the inscription of Tiglath-pileser III discussed above. The artifact in question was discovered at another single-period Iron Age site whose archaeological profile is very similar to Boztepe. It consists of a faience figurine depicting the Egyptian goddess Isis with her son Horus on her lap. This figurine is undoubtedly of Egyptian or Phoenician manufacture, has been dated on art historical grounds to the Saite Dynasty (ca. 650-520 B.C. [Algaze 1989]).

The discovery of this artifact, has two important implications. First, if this figurine was brought to Ulluba by persons resettled there by the Assyrians, then it certainly adds weight to Tiglath-pileser III's claim that the deportees he settled in the Upper Tigris River region were originally from the Phoenician coast. Second, and perhaps more importantly, if this figurine held any religious or symbolic value to the inhabitants of this Assyrian colony, then it may be evidence that a process of hybridization was taking place in the frontier zones where these colonists interacted with both their Assyrian overlords and the indigenous peoples of the region. Although these colonists were certainly under considerable pressure to assimilate to Assyrian norms, a material signature of which might be reflected in the Assyrian style ceramics discovered at the site, the figurine may be evidence that these people attempted to maintain some aspects of their traditional culture through their religious practice.

There are also numerous references in the textual sources to support the hypothesis that the process of the colonization of the Upper Tigris River region created a "middle ground" where the Assyrian imperialists, the foreign colonists and the indigenous population interacted to create a unique ethno-cultural landscape. Archaeological data from the Upper Tigris River Valley indicates that Assyrian colonization was limited to the low-lying area around the Tigris flood plain. Beyond the valley there is little or no

evidence of Assyrian colonies or material culture. At the same time the textual sources reveal that the intervention in, and manipulation of, neighboring states through a sophisticated system of espionage was a constant preoccupation of provincial officials. Assyrian governors regularly sent spies deep into enemy territory to perform acts of espionage. One method of gathering intelligence was to kidnap enemy soldiers or officials and transfer them under armed escort to the capital where they would be interrogated, probably through torture.

Ideologically, the Assyrians saw the frontier as the boundary between the civilized world and its chaotic periphery, between the "inner" realm of the god Ashur and the chaotic, undefined "outer" lands of barbarians (Liverani 1979), an ideology that might be translated into modern scholarly terms as the "self" and the "other." But in reality the northern frontier of Assyria was anything but a boundary between the "civilized" and the "barbarian." The textual record demonstrates that southeastern Anatolia was, at this time, a patch-work of ethnic and linguistic groups of considerable antiquity and varying degrees of political and social sophistication. References to interpreters in Assyrian letters and the fact that one text (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990:29) reveals that one governor of Tushan knew enough of the local language, called Shubrian, to curse at the Shubrian king when he didn't cooperate with Assyrian wishes calling him "*the son-of-a-cow*," indicate that cultural interaction across the frontier was common place.

The combined evidence has several implications for the study of imperialism and colonialism in the ancient world. First, contrary to the standard picture of colonialism as interaction between two groups, the colonized and the colonizer, colonialism in the Upper Tigris River region during the Neo-Assyrian Imperial period included three groups: the colonized (indigenous peoples at sites like Kenan Tepe and Talavash Tepe), the colonizers (the Assyrians administrating the region from sites like Ziyaret Tepe, Assyrian Tushan) and the colonists (foreign populations resettled in the region at sites like Boztepe). Second, the interaction between these groups created a zone in which various aspects of each culture were probably negotiated to create a unique area of cultural hybridization. And third, Assyrian colonization of the Upper Tigris River valley changed the settlement system there in a unique and archaeological recognizable way. This colonization not only caused the large-scale abandonment of indigenous settlements, but created a settlement system dominated by one very large new center at Tushan and a large number of newly-founded villages evenly spread in and around the fertile agricultural land throughout the valley. The displacement of the indigenous population and the rapid influx of foreign colonists and Assyrian administrators into the valley and the settlement of these groups in one of these two types of sites created a settlement system with a distinct lack of intermediate sized—a characteristic that we might call "the geography of colonialism."

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