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# At the edge of empire: conceptualizing Assyria's Anatolian Frontier ca. 700 BC

Bradley J. Parker

*Department of History, The University of Utah, 380 S 1400 E Rm 211, Salt Lake City, UT 84112-0311, USA*

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## Introduction

Frontier studies have long been the focus of considerable debate in various fields and sub-disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. As early as 1893, Fredrick Jackson Turner brought frontier studies to the forefront of research in American History by arguing that the political, economic and cultural underpinnings of American society were not the result of European influence, but were rather the product of the American frontier experience. Expansion into the vast "empty" wilderness of the American west insulated American pioneers from the European world while the rugged frontier lifestyle induced the uniquely American qualities of individualism and democracy. Although it has since been discredited on various grounds including, among other things, its ethnocentrism and linearity, Turner's thesis sparked a debate that even today continues to inform approaches to frontiers in many fields (Adelman and Aron, 1999; Cayton and Teute, 1998; Faragher, 1994; Jacobs, 1994; White, 1991). Frontiers are also, of course, fundamental to geographers who took up their own discussion of the topic early in the twentieth century (Curzon, 1907; Fawcett, 1918; Ratzel, 1897). In fact, their definition of concepts such as maritime and aerial borders as well as their discussion of political and ethnic boundaries was instru-

mental in shaping the physicality of modern nation states (Baty, 1928; Boggs, 1930, 1937, 1940; Crocker, 1919; Fawcett, 1918; Fischer, 1949; Holdich, 1916). The fields of Classics and Ancient History also have a long "history" of frontier studies, with some of the major works in especially Roman studies focused on the frontiers of the empire (Dyson, 1985; Elton, 1996; Isaac, 1990; Luttwak, 1976; Whittaker, 1994 for example). Frontier studies reached the fields of social science and anthropology first through the study of the process of acculturation (Broom et al., 1954; Spencer, 1961; Redfield et al., 1936) and more recently through the development and application of Wallerstein's "World Systems Theory" (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980). In recent years world systems theory has helped to direct frontier studies in these disciplines by giving researchers a framework within which to turn their focus from core polities to peripheral regions (Chase-Dunn, 1988; Chase-Dunn and Hall, 1991, 1992). This debate soon spread to archaeology as scholars attempted to adapt the basic tenets of this model to the ancient world (Algaze, 1989b, 1993; Blanton and Feinman, 1984; Champion, 1989; Chase-Dunn and Hall, 1991; Kohl, 1987; Rowlands et al., 1987; Stein, 1999).

Despite nearly a century of research in these and other fields, however, there is still very little consensus about classifications and comparative frameworks within which to consider an interdisciplinary study of frontiers. Prudence Rice recently concluded that her review of various

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*E-mail address:* [bradley.j.parker@utah.edu](mailto:bradley.j.parker@utah.edu).

approaches to the study of frontiers, borders, and boundaries "has revealed the extent of disagreement—and often outright contradiction—concerning the nature of these phenomena..." (Rice, 1998, p. 59). This statement illustrates that although many scholars are involved, in one way or another, in frontier studies, we have barely begun to make systematic comparisons across time and space or to develop overarching paradigms.

One reason such a consensus has yet to be reached highlights the very nature of frontiers while simultaneously underlining their appeal to scholars of so many different disciplines: Frontier situations are by definition dynamic. Lying at the edge or between cultural spheres, frontiers encompass the ecological and geographic space within which culture contact takes place. Frontiers are, therefore, constantly changing through both space and time, and thus different geographical or chronological views of a single frontier, not to mention comparative views between frontiers, can give sharply contrasting pictures. Considering the potential for extreme variability within and between frontiers, it is not surprising that each discipline has developed its own set of theories and models for the study of frontier situations.

Given this diversity both within and between frontiers and within and between approaches and analytic models in frontier studies, it is perhaps best to begin by clarifying the basic goals that the study of frontiers should aim to address. First, it is imperative that we define the terminology with which to classify the various manifestations of frontiers. Second, using a unified terminology to aid in cross-frontier comparison, we should define and categorize specific frontier situations. Third, in studying specific frontiers we should focus on defining the mechanisms behind and/or the factors contributing to, frontier dynamics. Fourth, we should attempt to understand how these dynamics affected both the core area and regions beyond the frontier zone. And fifth, through the comparison of various specific frontier situations, we should begin to build models within which to characterize and analyze common themes in frontier studies.

The object of this paper is to address the first of these problems through an in-depth examination of a specific frontier zone at a particular period in history. I will approach the question of terminology by discussing some previous attempts at categorization and by proposing a working terminology based on definitions commonly utilized by geographers. Then, by combining

archaeological data with textual sources from the Neo-Assyrian Iron Age (ca. 700 BC), I will characterize a particular frontier region on the edge of an imperialistic state. It is my hope that this analysis will help bring this important frontier zone into focus and eventually lead to further studies that will illuminate the mechanisms contributing to the dynamics of this and other frontier regions.

### A question of definitions

Traditionally the borders of the ancient polities have been illustrated on maps in much the same way the boundaries of modern states are: either as a solid line or by the intersection of two contrasting colors. Indeed, as anyone who has attempted to cross a contentious border knows, these "lines," more often than not, do act as barriers inhibiting the free flow of people and goods between two or more polities. Even where modern borders either fail miserably, or are not intended to stop such cross-border flow, they can, nevertheless, be called upon to act as filters, or at least obstacles, between regions. However, the idea of a "preclusive border" is a modern concept associated with the administrative and political boundaries of the modern nation state and, even in the modern world, does not regulate all facets of life. Political borders are particularly inept at governing linguistic boundaries, as the latest controversy over the English language in France has shown. Religion is another aspect of life that, regardless of the recent efforts of states such as Russia and China, has proven to be difficult for political forces to constrain.

In spite of the fact that these and other aspects of modern society are not always confined by the political boundaries of modern nation states, the mental framework embodied by the concept of the modern preclusive border is often the bias that scholars bring to their study of the ancient world. Luttwak, for example, in his pivotal study *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* described the frontiers of the Roman Empire during the reign of Hadrian as "scientific," saying that "the limits of empire were by then demarcated very precisely, on the ground, so that all could tell exactly what was Roman and what was not" (Luttwak, 1976, p. 60). Although the assumption that the Roman frontier was a clearly defined line of separation has been vehemently contested by various classical scholars (see especially Isaac, 1990, pp. 394–401 and

more recently Whittaker, 1994, pp. 62–70 and Elton, 1996), the fact that much of the debate at a recent conference entitled "Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity" focused on whether or not linear borders existed in antiquity shows that this issue is by no means settled (Mathisen and Sivan, 1996).

Another concept that imposes modern linear stereotypes on ancient frontiers is the so-called "natural" boundary, an idea conceived by the geographer Ratzel in 1895 and later developed by Curzon (1907) and Holdich (1916). The concept of natural boundaries, which envisions the limits of ancient states and empires to be set by geographic constraints such as rivers or mountain ranges (Fischer, 1949; Pounds, 1951; Prescott, 1987), has also proven to be elusive in the archaeological and historical records. Strabo makes a revealing comment about the role of the Euphrates river as the frontier between the Roman and Parthian empires when he says: "The boundary of Parthian power with the country opposite (i.e., the Roman Empire) is the Euphrates river. But parts within [Parthian territory] are held by the Romans and the phylarchs of the Arabs as far as Babylonia; some of them adhere more to the Parthians and others more to the Romans who are their neighbors" (Strabo 16.1.28). This is one of many oft-quoted examples from the Roman period used to illustrate that rivers served not as "natural" boundaries but as corridors of transportation and communication.

Similar arguments regarding the incompatibility of modern concepts of borders, either "scientific," "natural" or otherwise, can also be made in reference to the Assyrian frontier. We shall see, for example, that neither the Zagros nor the Taurus mountains acted as "natural" borders during the Assyrian Iron Age, and that the Tigris river was to the Assyrians, just as the Euphrates and other rivers like the Danube and the Rhine were to the Romans, a transportation corridor rather than a boundary. In fact, in light of the archaeological and textual evidence discussed below, the entire concept of the linear preclusive border must be abandoned as a modern stereotype contrary to the nature of boundaries in the premodern world.

It is for this reason that I have chosen to distinguish between the terms "boundary," "border," and "frontier." Boundary is a general expression for a divide between geographic, political, or cultural entities and therefore encom-

passes the more distinct terms "border" and "frontier." "Border" and "frontier" are contrasting terms. A "border" is a linear dividing line fixed in a particular space, which, according to geographers, is meant to mark the division between political and/or administrative units (Prescott, 1987, p. 12). A "frontier" on the other hand, is a much more loosely defined area or transition zone that lies between two political, administrative or cultural units of varying degrees of complexity or between one such unit and a hinterland either where no such polities exist, or where such polities do not come into direct physical contact (Prescott, 1987, p. 36ff).

Some scholars have further defined frontiers in terms of demographic shifts, arguing that a frontier is itself characterized by the influx of settlers or pioneers to a sparsely populated hinterland (Lamar and Thompson, 1981; Wynman and Kroeber, 1957). In my opinion, using demographic shift, especially one that is unidirectional, as a defining feature creates a core-centered view of frontier situations that is far too rigid. Instead, I believe that demographic shifts can and often do play an important role in frontier dynamics, but this is not necessarily so. Furthermore, the character of such demographic shifts can take many forms. The archaeological and textual data presented below will show that the Northern frontier of Assyria did not serve as a hinterland to which colonists voluntarily migrated, as was the case, for example, in the North American and South African frontiers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Instead, demographic shifts took the form of forced resettlement into the frontier by foreign populations and flight from the frontier by indigenous peoples.

Turner (1920) and Lattimore (1962) both argued that frontiers are areas where pioneers have opportunities to exploit vast reserves of natural resources. Scholars have since argued that the North American frontier, for example, was inextricably linked to the European system of merchant capitalism through the fur trade (Berkhoffer, 1981; Cook, 1981; Hickerson, 1973), while the discovery of gold and diamonds is said to have done the same for Southern Africa (Lamar and Thompson, 1981). Other scholars have seen economic frontiers in, for example, the divide between sedentary agrarian and nomadic pastoral subsistence systems in India (Eaton, 1993) and elsewhere. Although the exploitation of natural resources was certainly an important factor contributing to frontier dynamics, and in many cases

helped shape change in both the frontier and the core polity, I do not see the extraction of wealth as the singular defining feature of frontier situations. Nor do I see the economic boundary between different subsistence economies as a dominant frontier characteristic. Like demography, economics are one part of the multi-faceted layering contributing to the makeup of frontiers.

Borders and frontiers have traditionally been seen as belts of separation between one or more polities or between a polity and a sparsely inhabited hinterland. However, recent trends in the study of globalization and culture theory have sharpened our focus on how culture contact is interpreted and negotiated by both local and expansionist groups (Appadurai, 1996; Clifford, 1997). Instead of conceptualizing contact areas as zones of separation and distinction, scholars are beginning to see such areas as zones of interaction and hybridization (van Dommelen, 1997, 1998; White, 1991). Richard White's theory of the "middle ground" takes this idea one step further by demonstrating that frontiers between previously distinct peoples often act as interaction zones that, under the right circumstances, can produce a hybrid area or "middle ground" composed of an outgrowth of various aspects of each previously distinct culture (White, 1991). Also see van Dommelen, 1997, 1998). Doyle has argued that it is often interaction taking place outside the core polity, in the frontier, that influences and often precipitates change in the center (Doyle, 1986). A similar stand has been taken by Chase-Dunn and Hall who see the formation of complexity in regions peripheral to core polities to be the most likely location for the formation of new core polities (Chase-Dunn and Hall, 1991, 1993).

Although divisions between political entities are by far the most commonly discussed manifestation of borders and frontiers, Hugh Elton's book *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* reminds us that frontiers differ from borders not only because they are zones rather than lines, but also because they include various categories of boundaries beyond the political and administrative. Elton emphasizes cultural boundaries in the realms of religion, ethnicity, linguistics, and material culture, demonstrating that political boundaries often do not correspond to cultural divisions. With this in mind, Elton ultimately defines frontiers as overlapping zones of political, cultural and economic boundaries (Elton, 1996, pp. 3–9).

If we consider the term "boundary" to describe all categories of limits or divides, then this discussion has highlighted the fact that there is considerable variation among various types of boundaries. Some of this variation can be categorized by more precisely defining the terms "border" and "frontier." If we follow geographer's definition of "border" as a linear dividing line, and "frontier" as a transitional zone (Prescott, 1987), then the above discussion demonstrates that, in their most extreme manifestations, these terms can be considered opposites. Thus we might envision the various types of boundaries as appearing on a continuum between the static linear border on one end and the dynamic fluid frontier on the other. For the sake of discussion let us call this continuum the "Continuum of Boundary Dynamics" (Fig. 1). If we agree that the Continuum of Boundary Dynamics is meant to characterize the diversity of boundary situations then we should envision the continuum starting with the most extreme variation of the static border on the far left. This type of boundary is a closed, static, spatially restricted border or line of separation. As we move from left to right the boundary becomes more dynamic. At the far right of the continuum is the most extreme variation of the fluid frontier. This type of boundary is an open, dynamic, spatially expansive frontier or zone of interaction. For ease of discussion I have broken the continuum down into four stages from left to right: static, restrictive, porous, and fluid. These terms are meant to aid us in our description of frontier situations and thus describe various regions along, rather than points on, the continuum.

Beside highlighting the diversity of different boundary situations, the above discussion has also shown that boundaries are, in fact, multi-dimensional. A complete analysis of any particular boundary must therefore include various catego-

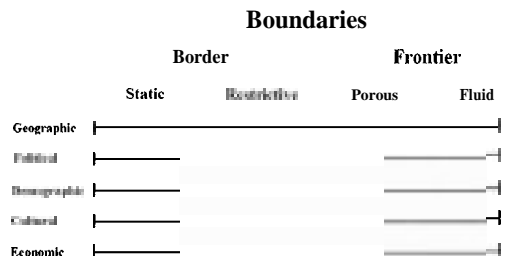


Fig. 1. The continuum of boundary dynamics.

ries of data. We have thus far considered political, administrative, geographic, demographic, and economic boundaries and in doing so it has become clear, not only that there are many layers or categories that might contribute to boundary situations, but also that each of these categories might potentially be broken down into more nuanced sub-categories. For this reason I have included five major categories of data to be considered and evaluated on the Continuum of Boundary Dynamics: geographic, political, demographic, cultural, and economic (Fig. 1). My hope is that most more nuanced sub-types of data will fall within one of these overarching categories.

In light of the above discussion, the frontier is transformed from a static line of exclusion to a dynamic zone of interaction where various categories of geographic, political, and cultural boundaries intersect and interact to form a unique matrix capable of changing, or at least influencing, society, politics, and culture on both sides of the boundary. Furthermore, in using the Continuum of Boundary Dynamics it will hopefully be easier to categorize, describe and compare various types of boundaries. For example, Luttwak's "scientific" boundary of the Roman empire might be characterized as politically static and

geographically restrictive but culturally and economically porous. Furthermore, a "natural" boundary might be classified as geographically static or restrictive but politically, culturally, and demographically fluid. It is from this point of reference and with these distinctions in mind that we will take the next step into the frontier, so to speak, in an attempt to characterize the nature of Assyria's Anatolian frontier at the end of the eighth century BC.

### Defining the data set

During the Mesopotamian Iron Age, from about 1000 to 600 BC, the Assyrian empire was the greatest power the world had yet known. For much of this period Assyria dominated the entire Near East from the Zagros mountains in modern Iran to the Eastern Mediterranean, and from the Taurus mountains in Southern Turkey to the Persian Gulf (Fig. 2). The Assyrian empire is well known from references in the Bible. Perhaps the most famous of these references is to the Assyrian king Sennacherib who attacked Judah and besieged Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah in 701 BC (Isaiah 36; 37. Also see Ussishkin, 1982 and Machinist, 1983).

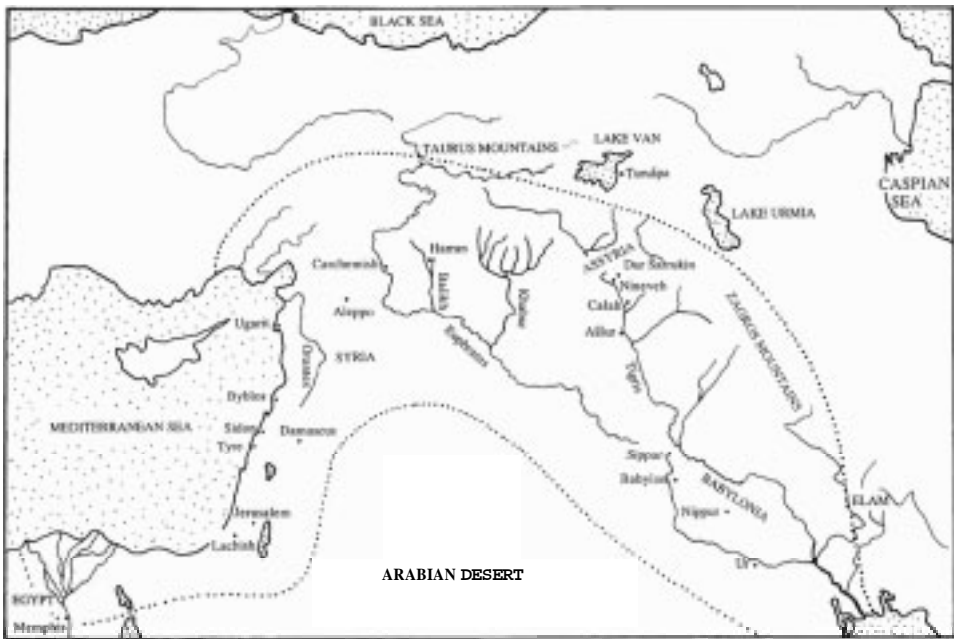


Fig. 2. Map of the Assyrian empire at its maximum extent (ca. 680 BC).

However, the historical significance of the Neo-Assyrian empire lies neither in the modern perceptions of Assyria nor in the influence the Assyrians imposed on the creation of the early Judeo-Christian world. Rather, Assyria's importance in world history lies in the fact that the Assyrian state that emerged during the Mesopotamian Iron Age represented an entirely new level of political development in the ancient world. The Assyrians were the first true empire builders, and it was upon their legacy that later empires, such as those of the Persians and Romans, were built.

Despite Assyria's importance in ancient history, many gaps still remain in our current understanding of this once great empire. Several of the major excavations carried out in the Near East over the past 150 years focused on Assyrian cities such as Ashur, Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Nineveh. Beside bringing to light the grandeur of the Assyrian palaces and other material remains of the Assyrian empire, these excavations uncovered the majority of the written evidence pertaining to the Mesopotamian Iron Age,<sup>1</sup> including much of the royal correspondence and many of the annalistic texts. Since then, smaller, but much more scientific excavations and surveys have continued to augment the steadily increasing corpus of data regarding this important period. Nevertheless, research on the Assyrian empire has thus far concentrated on the Assyrian heartland and some of the Western provinces. Until recently, few archaeologists and historians have focused their attention on the peripheral regions of the empire. The nature of the written sources, which are inherently biased toward the center, and the scarcity of archaeological information from outside the Assyrian heartland, has meant that little research has focused on the frontier zones where imperial expansion and the interaction between the empire and the periphery actually took place.

The historical record indicates that before the era of Neo-Assyrian imperialism from about 930 to 610 BC, the arch of mountainous terrain formed by the Iranian Zagros mountains north-

east of central Assyria, and the Taurus Mountains of southeastern Turkey to its north and northwest, was a patchwork of polities of varying degrees of political centralization. It contained large, highly centralized states like Hanigalbat whose influence stretched from their heartland in the Khabur plains of north Syria well into southeastern Anatolia, Bit Zamani around modern Diyarbakir, Shubria northeast of Diyarbakir and Kumme north of modern Zakhō. The Northern highlands, known to the Assyrians as the lands of Nairi and Habhu, also contained a wealth of other less-centralized societies such as the Early Iron Age polities of the Upper Tigris River Valley and the towns and villages of Dirru, in the Bohtan and Garzan river drainages, and the Kashiari mountains, the modern Tur Abdin (Fig. 3).

Neo-Assyrian imperial expansion irrevocably altered this geo-political configuration. Only the heartland of Kumme would survive, although it was reduced to an Assyrian vassal and much of its former holdings were annexed to the province of the Mashennu. Early in the Neo-Assyrian Imperial period, Hanigalbat was completely destroyed, making way for Assyrian invasion of the entire Upper Tigris River region. Bit Zamani and the Upper Tigris River Valley were made into the provinces of Amedi and Tushan, while Shubria was eventually divided into the provinces of Uppummu and Kulimmi. The lesser societies of Nairi and Habhu were either destroyed, used as buffer areas or forced to unite against the Assyrian threat, coalescing into the empire of Urartu (Fig. 4). The kingdom of Urartu eventually expanded into an empire that engulfed the entire Eastern half of Anatolia, the area of Lake Sevan (the modern republic of Armenia) and the northwestern corner of Iran around Lake Urmia. Urartu also held sway over many of the city-states of north Syria and the Levant forming a political system that rivaled even Assyria in its magnitude (Salvini, 1995; Zimansky, 1985, 1998). This general outline of the progress of Neo-Assyrian imperial penetration into its Northern frontier shows that southeastern Anatolia was indeed on the cutting edge of Neo-Assyrian expansion.

This study focuses on three discrete areas along the Tigris river in southeastern Anatolia. Although the archaeological components of this study are based on surveys conducted in the Upper Tigris River region between 1988 and 1992 (Algaze, 1989a; Algaze et al., 1991), my analysis of the archaeological and especially the textual record is not limited to the specific survey areas, but

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper I will refer to the Mesopotamian Iron Age as three roughly divided sub-periods. The Early Iron Age, from approximately 1100–900 BC, is the period directly prior to the expansion of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrian Imperial period begins just before 900 BC and lasts until the fall of the empire at the end of the seventh century. The Late Iron Age, or Post-Assyrian period refers to the several hundred year period after the fall of the empire.

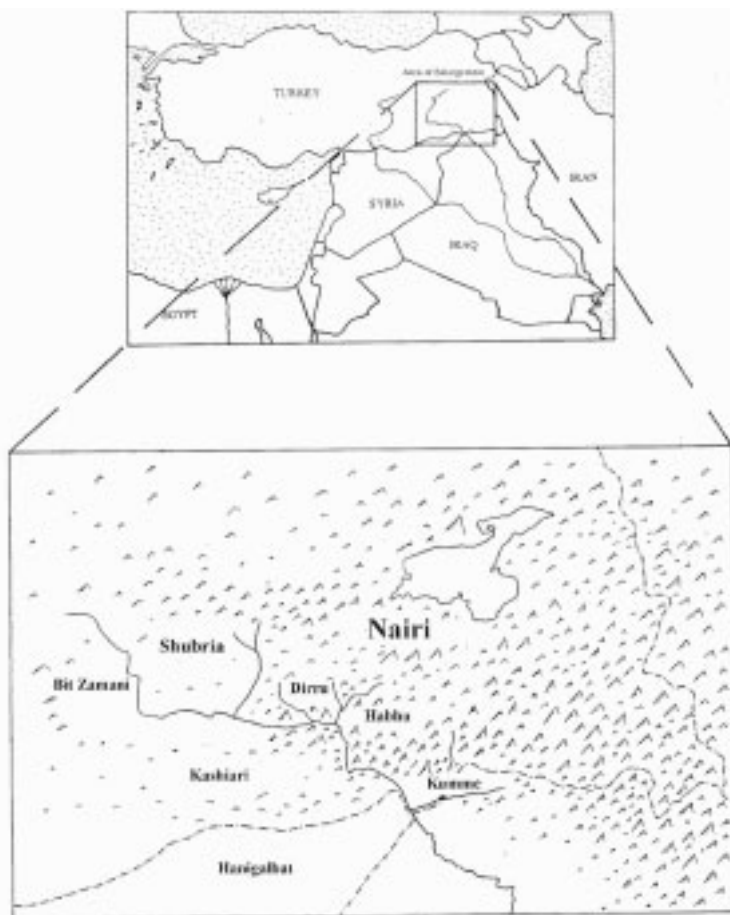


Fig. 3. Map of southeastern Anatolia before Assyrian annexation.

instead focuses on the wider geographic region within which they originally belonged.<sup>2</sup> The first study area is located in and around the Cizre

<sup>2</sup> The archaeological surveys analyzed in this paper were directed by Professor Guillermo Algaze to whom I owe a great debt for allowing access to the data and for his help in the classification and analysis of the ceramics. Preliminary reports of the surveys here discussed are published in Algaze (1989a) and Algaze et al. (1991). For a more complete discussion of the Iron Age in the Upper Tigris River region see also Parker (1997a, 2001). The textual data discussed in this paper was extracted from the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project's database at Helsinki University in Finland. I wish to thank Professor Simo Parpola and Dr. Robert Whiting not only for allowing me access to the project's database, but also for many hours of consultation regarding the translation and interpretation of the texts analyzed here. For up-to-date translations and transliterations of most of the documents here discussed see Parpola (1987) and Lanfranchi and Parpola (1990).

plain, in the vicinity of the modern border between Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. The second study area consists of two adjacent areas in the valleys of the Bohtan and Garzan rivers; the third includes the Upper Tigris River Valley between the modern town of Bismil and the Tigris–Batman confluence, and the Batman river valley between the upper Batman dam and the Tigris (Fig. 5).

### The nature of Assyria's Anatolian frontier

#### *Geographic boundaries*

The physical geography of southeastern Anatolia contrasts sharply with that of the Assyrian heartland in what is today Northern Iraq. The Assyrian heartland is characterized by steppe and rolling hills, while Eastern Anatolia is dominated by the Taurus mountains that, for all intents and

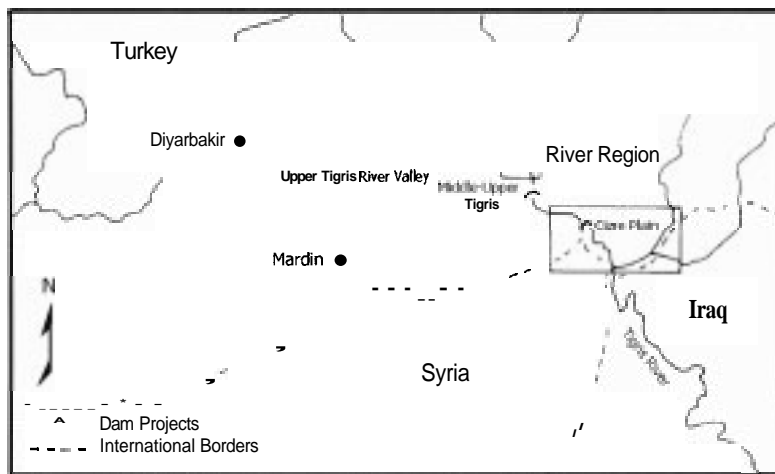


Fig. 5. Map showing the location of the survey areas analyzed in this paper (cf. Algaze, 1989a; Algaze et al., 1991).

Assyria is traversed by a number of rivers including not only the Tigris but also the Kosr and Zab rivers, its steppeland topography meant that intensive irrigation agriculture was limited to a few areas directly around the rivers or where ancient irrigation schemes could bring water to the surrounding fields (Jacobsen and Lloyd, 1935; Reade, 1978). Extensive dry farming agriculture in the plains of north Syria and Northern Iraq thus produced dispersed rural settlement across nearly the entire steppeland north of the 200 mm isohyate (Weiss, 1986; Wilkinson and Tucker, 1995; Wilkinson and Barbanes, 2000). Adequate precipitation to support rain-fed agriculture is much less reliable in the Southern Assyria and south-central Syria.

In spite of the higher levels of precipitation in the Anatolian foothills, the lack large tracts of arable land that characterize lowland Mesopotamia, meant that highland economies emphasized animal husbandry rather than extensive agriculture. Topography and the lack of adequate topsoil, as well as the short growing season, all played a role in making large parts of Eastern Anatolia unsuitable for cultivation (Zimansky, 1985).

The elevation differential and its corresponding climate and precipitation rates, combined with the extremely rugged character of the Taurus foothills, obviously means that the Taurus range formed a formidable geographic boundary between these two regions. However, the Taurus range was not only a topographic boundary between Assyria and its Anatolian periphery, it was also the frontier between the resource-poor Mesopotamian lowlands and the resource-rich

Anatolian highlands. Despite the potential for extensive agriculture in the plains of north Mesopotamia, this region had few other natural resources to offer. The opposite is true of the Anatolian highlands where timber, metals, and semiprecious stones were abundant.<sup>3</sup> Even today some of the richest copper mines in the Near East are located in the area of the Ergani Maden in central Anatolia. Anatolia also contains large deposits of iron and was one of the main sources of iron for the Assyrian empire (Maxwell-Hyslop, 1974; Oppenheim, 1967). Maxwell-Hyslop has pointed out that the mere existence of ore sources solved only part of the problem faced by ancient metal workers. Since it takes over 8 tons of charcoal to smelt one ton of iron ore, only ore sources located in thickly wooded regions, like the Taurus mountains, would have made mining and smelting ore viable (Maxwell-Hyslop, 1974, p. 143). The Assyrian dependence on this area for their supply of metals and other raw materials absent from the Mesopotamian lowlands is exemplified by the Assyrian booty and tribute lists which describe large quantities of copper, iron, and other valued commodities extracted from enemies and vassal states on the Northern periphery of the empire.

The above discussion shows that within the category of "geographic boundaries" there are several sub-categories that contribute to the geographic make-up of Assyria's Anatolian frontier. In a sense, the geography of Northern Mesopota-

<sup>3</sup> Yener has shown that although much of this area is currently devoid of trees, this deforestation is a relatively recent phenomenon (Yener, 1982).



mia and southeastern Anatolia fits well with geographer's definition of a "natural" boundary (Fischer, 1949; Pounds, 1951; Prescott, 1987). This region is marked by an extreme variation in topography, a topography that surely restricted movement into and within this frontier zone. However, two aspects of natural boundaries that are often not considered by geographers are also revealed by this discussion. One of these divided the two regions and another brought them together. To begin with, the variation in precipitation and land type meant that there was a stark difference in the subsistence patterns between Northern Mesopotamia and southeastern Anatolia. Although we can assume that this difference in subsistence strategies led to cultural differences in terms of foodways and domestic production, this assumption is difficult to test with the available data. The distribution of natural resources is the second sub-category that surely affected the nature of Assyria's Anatolian frontier. The fact that resources such as timber and metals that were not obtainable in Northern Mesopotamia were readily available in southeastern Anatolia played an important role in Assyria's foreign policy (see below).

Although the physical geography of Assyria's Anatolian frontier must be considered to have been very restrictive, other aspects of the geography of this region certainly contributed to both centrifugal and centripetal forces shaping this frontier region during the Mesopotamian Iron Age.

#### *Political boundaries*

Assyria's intervention in the Upper Tigris River region of southeastern Anatolia can be broken down into three main phases: the annexation of Nirdun (the Upper Tigris River Valley) and its conversion into the province of Tushan during the reign of Ashurnasirpal (883–859 BC); the conquest of Ulluba (the Cizre plain and surrounding area) and its conversion into the province of the Mashennu during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC); and the subjugation of Shubria (the Taurus foothills south of the Murat river) and its division into the provinces of Upummu and Kullumeri during the reign of Esharhaddon (680–669 BC, see Figs. 3 and 4). Since nearly all of the royal correspondence originating in, or pertaining to, the Upper Tigris River region dates to the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) and Sargon II [721–705 BC (Parpola, 1981)], this study focuses primarily on

the last half of the eighth century BC during and slightly after the second phase of Assyrian intervention in the Upper Tigris River region.

Assyria's first major campaign aimed at the annexation of portions of southeastern Anatolia took place in 882 BC. It was in this year that the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal, responding to what Assyrian scribes referred to as a "rebellion" that threatened Assyria's allies at the city of Damammusa, took military control of large parts of the Upper Tigris River region (Parker, 2001). The textual and archaeological records indicate that Ashurnasirpal fully intended to permanently occupy parts of the Tigris basin, for it was at this time 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 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 farmland on the north bank of the river (Grayson, 1991a, p. 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, 1991a, pp. 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 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 (Karg, 1999; Kessler, 1980; Liverani, 1992; Parker, 1998, 2001). This reconstruction strongly supports the location of the city of Tushan at the site of Ziyaret Tepe about 10 km east of the modern town of Bismil; the city of Tidu at the site of *Üçtepe* about 10 km west of Bismil; and the site of Sinabu at modern Murattaş (previously known as Pornak) about 30 km west of Bismil (Kessler, 1980; Liverani, 1992; Parker, 1998, 2001). The modern city of Diyarbakir is located atop the ancient town of Amedi (Fig. 6).

Recent archaeological surveys at Ziyaret Tepe confirm that occupation at this site vastly

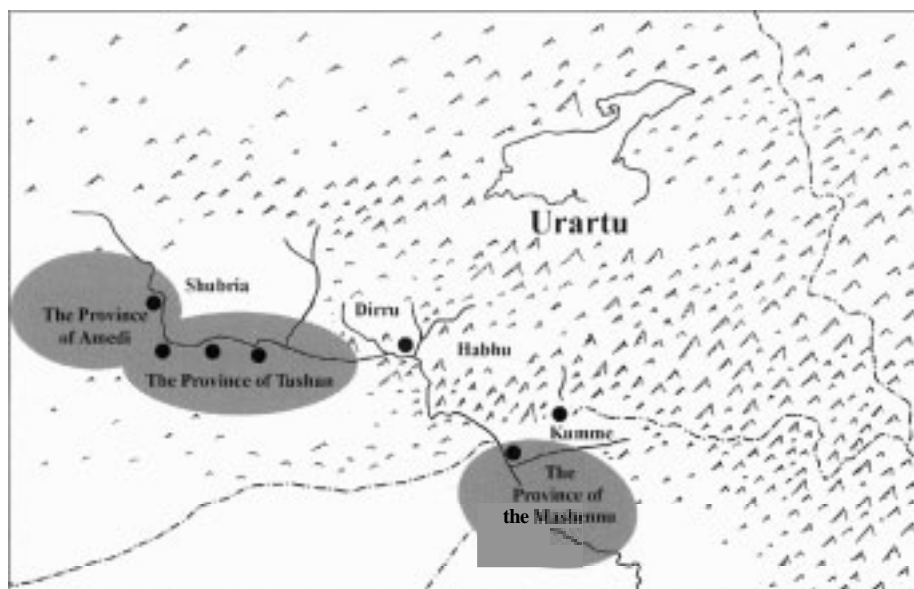


Fig. 6. Map of southeastern Anatolia with three of Assyria's key eighth century frontier provinces highlighted. The dots show the location of known Assyrian frontier fortifications. From left to right the fortifications in the province of Tushan are: Sinabu, Tidu and Tushan. The fortification at the Tigris–Bohtan confluence (between Dirru and Habhu) is inferred from Assyrian letter NL 67 (see Parker, 1997b, 2001). The ancient name of this site is unknown. The fortified center on the Tigris in the province of the Mašennu was known to the Assyrians as Šabirešu. The name of the fort in Kumme is unknown.

expanded during the Neo-Assyrian Imperial period (Algaze, 1989a; Algaze et al., 1991; Matney, 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 ha, which included the high mound and a vast lower town, during the Assyrian Imperial period (Matney, 1998; Parker, 1998). Magnetometry surveys of portions of the lower town at Ziyaret Tepe (Matney and Somers, 1999) have revealed what appear to be substantial fortifications in the form of walls and towers and several other monumental structures. Surface survey also recovered several terracotta clawed forepaws that presumably belonged to monumental lions that guarded each entrance to the city (Fig. 7). Excavations at the site of Üçtepe (Assyrian Tidu) have also revealed substantial structures including fortification walls over 3 m thick that enclosed the citadel during the Assyrian Imperial period (Köroğlu, 1998).

Ashurnasirpal was also the first Assyrian king to venture into the second study area: the Garzan and Bohtan river valleys. After consecrating his new palace at the city of Tushan in 879 BC, Ashurnasirpal selected an elite force of heavy

chariots, cavalry, and specially trained troops for a swift strike to the east. This elite force reached the valley of the Garzan river (Assyrian *Dirru*) within a day and over the course of the next several days ravaged the villages and towns of this and the neighboring Bohtan River Valley [Assyrian Habhu, Fig. 6 (Parker, 2001; contra Radner and Schachner, 2001)]. In contrast to his efforts to consolidate his military gains in the Upper Tigris River Valley, Ashurnasirpal made no attempt to



Fig. 7. Terracotta lion forepaw discovered in surface survey at Ziyaret Tepe (Assyrian Tushan [photo courtesy of Matney]).

establish a permanent Assyrian presence in the Garzan and Bohtan valleys. The reasons behind the apparent neglect of this area by the Assyrians remain elusive, although a review of the history and archaeology brings several possible explanations to mind. First and foremost among them is the geo-political configuration of this region during the Assyrian Imperial period. Both of these valleys were in close proximity to the Southern provinces of Assyria's fiercest rival; the kingdom of Urartu. The rough mountain terrain surrounding these valleys and insulating them from the Assyrian provinces to the west and southeast meant that it would have been logistically difficult for the Assyrians to maintain a permanent presence there. Moreover, colonizing the valleys north of the Tigris river might have provoked Urartian retribution. After Ashurnasirpal's initial foray into the Bohtan and Garzan river valleys, it became apparent to Assyrian officials that the polities there constituted no real threat to Assyrian sovereignty in the adjacent provinces. Furthermore, if the list of booty taken during Ashurnasirpal's campaign there is any indicator, the Assyrians may have judged the possible economic benefits of annexation to be well below the cost of the colonization, maintenance, and defense of a new province in these isolated valleys.

Tiglath-pileser III's reign marks the beginning of direct Assyrian intervention in the area of the Cizre plain and the construction of one or more fortresses along the Middle-Upper Tigris. For the first 200 years or so of the Imperial period, the Assyrian authorities were content to leave the Cizre region to one of their most trusted vassals, the state of Kumme. But during the first half of the eighth century BC the Urartians made significant inroads into the mountainous region north of the Cizre and, by the accession of Tiglath-pileser III (in 744 BC), were in a position to directly threaten Assyria's control over this region (Parker, 2001). The Urartians had, by this time, allied themselves with the Aramean tribes that inhabited the mountains north of the Cizre and, during the confusion that accompanied Tiglath-pileser III's accession, persuaded them to rebel against Kumme. In a series of battles that took place in the year 738 BC, Tiglath-pileser III successfully defeated the Arameans and, we must assume, their Urartian allies, and annexed the area to the province of the Mashennu.

Tiglath-pileser took several steps to consolidate his gains in the Cizre region not least of which was to construct several fortified centers in and around

the Cizre plain. Survey data from the Cizre plain show that three sites grew into large centers during the Assyrian Imperial period. These sites were not only distributed evenly through the center of the plain, but each site dominated a series of small rural settlements (Algaze, 1989a; Algaze et al., 1991; Parker, 1998, 2001).

An interesting if complicated letter from the Nimrud corpus (NL 67) describes Tiglath-pileser III's efforts to construct a fortress on the Middle-Upper Tigris probably at the confluence of the Tigris and the Bohtan rivers [Parker, 1997b, 2001 (Fig. 6)]. Unlike his constructions in the Cizre plain, this fortress was not centered in a rich agricultural plain, but instead was located in the rough terrain surrounding the middle reaches of the Upper Tigris river where it could control and protect river traffic.

This brief summary of the political history of the study area confirms that although southeastern Anatolia's physical geography may have inhibited Assyria's annexation of the Upper Tigris River region, drawing the process out for over 100 years, it did not stop Assyria's eventual colonization of much of the Tigris river corridor. By the end of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, the province of Tushan in the Upper Tigris River Valley and the province of the Mashennu in the Cizre plain served as the farthest outposts of Assyrian provincial and military administration.

What remains of the royal correspondence suggests that provinces such as these were administered by a hierarchy of officials overseen by the provincial governor (Grayson, 1991b). There is a rather large corpus of letters dating to the last half of the eighth century BC that were written from the governors of both the province of Tushan and the province of the Mashennu to the Assyrian king. Not only do these texts throw a vast amount of light on the military and economic concerns of these individuals, but in many cases even reflect aspects of their personalities that would otherwise be completely lost to us.<sup>6</sup>

The second most important official in the provincial administration was probably the deputy since his title (*šaniu*) literally means "second." The sources are much less clear about the makeup and structure of the middle ranks of the

<sup>6</sup> An in-depth discussion of these individual governors is beyond the scope of the present paper. Readers interested in this aspect of Assyrian history should see Radner (1998, 1999), Parker (2001), and Baker (2000, 2001) where complete biographies of these and other Assyrian officials are now available.

provincial administration although such officials as scribes, *corvée* officers, and cohort commanders must certainly have played an important role. Local control was achieved through the widespread deployment of low-ranking administrators in rural villages throughout the empire. This bottom rank of the provincial administration consisted of "village managers" (*rab alani*). These officials were, as the name implies, in charge of monitoring affairs in very small areas.

Beyond the reach of the Assyrian provincial administration, Assyrian control diminished considerably. This aspect of the Assyrian frontier is particularly clear in the case of the region just north and east of the province of the *Mashennu* (the Cizre Plain) where Assyrian influence was conditioned by its relationship with neighboring states which could be in the form of vassal or buffer state alliances. To ensure that vassal states lived up to their obligations to Assyria, "royal delegates" (Assyrian *qepu*) were assigned to monitor activities and protect Assyrian interests in peripheral regions. These delegates came equipped with a cavalry unit. Beside ensuring the cooperation of Assyrian vassals, one of the most important jobs of the royal delegate was to gather intelligence about political and military activities taking place beyond the frontier. To this end royal delegates and provincial governors had networks of spies or informants called *šarriku*. Letters from Assyrian spies in the Anatolian frontier report on enemy battles, troop movements and the internal politics of neighboring states (see for example Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, pp. 84, 86, 87, 88, 91, and 93). The Assyrian system of espionage was extremely efficient as even events taking place in the Urartian capital were quickly relayed to the Assyrian king (Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, pp. 91 and 93). However, we learn in two letters, one from a governor of Tushan (Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, p. 55) and another from a governor of Amedi (Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, p. 12), that this was not solely an Assyrian activity. Not only did the Urartians have spies infiltrating the Assyrian provinces, but they often tried to persuade, through negotiation or threat, Assyrian vassals to change alliances.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Lanfranchi and Parpola (1990, p. XVIII) have noted that the king of *Hušuškia* was apparently forced to juggle his alliances between Assyria and Urartu depending upon the political climate: he paid tribute to Sargon in 715, then later marched with the Urartian king Rusa, after which he again paid tribute to Sargon of Assyria.

The invasive nature of Assyrian provincial administration meant that Assyria's Anatolian frontier was, from a political and administrative standpoint, very restrictive. Once the Assyrians had established hegemony over this frontier region, tentacles of the Assyrian provincial administration reached to the lowest levels of frontier society. Furthermore, for much of the Assyrian Imperial period Assyrian political authority was rarely seriously challenged making this one of the most firmly controlled of Assyria's frontier regions.

#### Demographic boundaries

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). However, 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 patchwork of ethnic and linguistic groups of considerable antiquity and varying degrees of political and social complexity (Zadok, 1989, 1995). As many as 60 kings are mentioned by Tiglath-pileser I as inhabiting the "lands of Nairi" before the turn of the millennium. Aramean tribes are known to have been peacefully infiltrating the fringes of Assyria during the second half of the second millennium BC (Wiseman, 1975, p. 457; Grayson, 1982, p. 248). By the end of the millennium the Arameans were able to launch organized invasions of Northern Mesopotamia. Although Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BC) defeated a large force of *Ahlamu* Arameans in the Jebel Bishri (in Syria) during his fifth campaign, this victory had limited effect as he was forced to cross the Euphrates in pursuit of the Arameans no fewer than 28 times during his reign (Grayson, 1991a).

The annals of the early Assyrian kings show that Kummeans lived in the southeastern corner of Anatolia well before Assyria's rise to power. As early as 895 BC the Assyrian king Adad-nerari II sent his forces to the assistance of the king of Kumme, which, at this time was a well-established state. The textual record also indicates that various other groups including Ukkeans and the chiefly societies of the Bohtan and Garzan river valleys "whose people roam the mountains like wild goats" inhabited the highlands north of the Cizre plain and the Middle-Upper Tigris.

The situation in the Upper Tigris River region is equally complex. The state of Bit Zamani was perhaps the most powerful indigenous state in this region prior to the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire. An initial Assyrian strike against Bit Zamani is recorded during the reign of Tukulti-ninurta II in 886 BC but after the city's brief stint as an Assyrian vassal, Ashurnasirpal was forced to attack again in 879 BC when the regime friendly to the Assyrians was overthrown in a rebellion. The tribute gathered by Ashurnasirpal after this attack is impressive for the sheer abundance of wealth it describes. The standard products of the land are mentioned such as sheep, goat, and oxen, but the list also describes large amounts of metals including gold, silver, bronze, iron, and tin (Grayson, 1991a, p. 211). The wealth accumulated by the rulers of Bit Zamani not only attests to this state's ability to accumulate vast surpluses, but, since many of the products mentioned in this list are not native to southeastern Anatolia, it also demonstrates that Bit Zamani was an integral part of the regional trade network of the ancient Near East in the decades prior to the Assyrian invasion.

The textual sources also speak of many other ethnic groups, some of whom exhibited even more complex political systems. The Shubrians, for example, who were probably of Hurrian descent, controlled a vast area north of the Upper Tigris River Valley. The Assyrians were extremely interested in the state of Shubria because of the resources, especially timber but probably also metals, that were obtainable there. During the reign of Sargon (721–705 BC), Shubria was ruled by a certain Hu-Tešub. This and other Shubrian names, which are of certain Hurrian etymology (Gelb, 1944),<sup>9</sup> has led some scholars to the conclusion that this state consisted mainly of a Hurrian population and may represent the final holdout, or even the original homeland, of the Hurrian civilization that dominated much of north Syria and Northern Mesopotamia during the Late Bronze Age (Wilhelm, 1989, p. 41; Kessler, 1995, p. 55). However, beyond Hu-Tešub there are two other individuals who are specifically named in the correspondence of Sargon as being from Shubria, and in both cases their names

are Aramean rather than Hurrian.<sup>9</sup> Although this is hardly sufficient data from which to draw any firm conclusions, the available evidence suggests that Shubrian society was multiethnic being made up of Hurrians, Arameans and probably Urartians, not to mention Assyrians and others."

A serious point of contention between the Assyrians and the Shubrians was Shubria's policy of harboring fugitives. As a means of defiance and "neutrality" between the imperial powers to its north (Urartu) and south (Assyria), the state of Shubria offered asylum to fugitives fleeing the imperial authorities, a state of affairs perhaps best exemplified by an Assyrian letter from Tushan (Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, p. 52) that reads; "the men who now escape the king's work and go there (i.e., to Shubria) and he (i.e., the Shubrian king) gives them fields, gardens and houses, settles them in his country, and there they stay." In several cases, the Assyrian authorities pursued fugitives to Shubria only to find that the Shubrians had hidden them or allowed them to escape.

Certainly the most complex polity in the region at this time was the kingdom of Urartu. Centered on Lake Van in the highlands of Eastern Anatolia, Urartu was the force beyond the frontier zone discussed here. Since Urartu began as a loose coalition of the various mountain tribes that inhabited the highlands of Eastern Anatolia, Urartian society was undoubtedly multi-ethnic. Although Urartu never occupied the Upper Tigris River region, the Assyrian correspondence shows that the Assyrian authorities were extremely concerned about the Urartian military threat. As mentioned above, the Assyrians maintained a vast intelligence network regularly sending spies deep into Urartian territory to gather information and perform acts of espionage.

This discussion shows that southeastern Anatolia was home to a large number of indigenous ethnic groups. However, by the end of the Assyrian Imperial period, several exogenous ethnic groups also came to inhabit the Upper Tigris River region. In fact, the Assyrians themselves were responsible for what amounts to one of the most intense periods of forced migrations in Mesopotamian

<sup>9</sup> Note that the ruler of Shubria during the reign of Esarhaddon, Inip-Tešub, also had a Hurrian name. Gelb argues that at least one of the only partially preserved names of Inip-Tešub's sons must also be Hurrian (Gelb, 1944, pp. 82–83).

<sup>9</sup> These names are Yata (<sup>u</sup>ia-ta-a) and Abi-yaqa (<sup>u</sup>u-a-ia-ta-a). Both occur in Lanfranchi and Parpola (1990, p. 52).

<sup>10</sup> For Assyrian deserters in Shubria see Parker (2001). Also note Ashurnasirpal's reference to Assyrians who "because of hunger (and) famine, had gone up to other lands, to the land of Shubria" (Grayson, 1991a, p. 202).

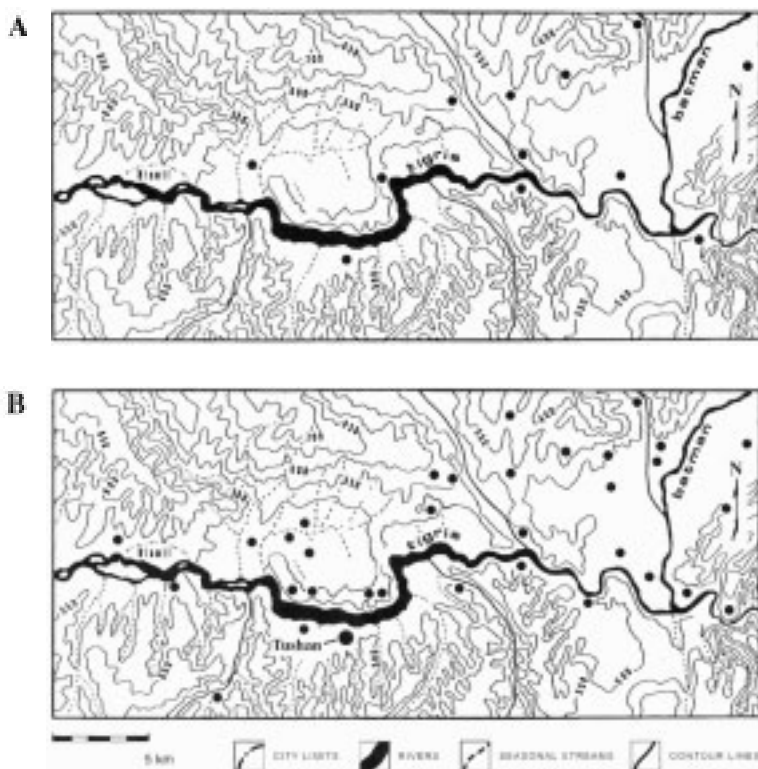


Fig. 8. Maps illustrating the change in settlement patterns in the Upper Tigris River Valley between the Early Iron Age (map A) and the Assyrian Imperial period (map B).

history. Several documents from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) refer to the forced deportation and resettlement of thousands of people, who probably originated on the Eastern Mediterranean seaboard in what is today Lebanon and Northern Israel, in and around both the Cizre plain and the Upper Tigris River Valley (Tadmor, 1994, pp. 62–63). Like Ashurnasirpal's construction of the provincial capital at Ziyaret Tepe, this reference is strongly supported by archaeological data. Although the lack of precision in the ceramic chronology of the region makes it difficult to differentiate subphases within the Iron Age, it is clear that there was a massive increase in the total number of sites and the total occupied hectares in the Upper Tigris River Valley between the Tigris–Batman confluence and the town of Bismil during or directly after the construction of the provincial capital at Tushan (Parker, 1998). Preliminary estimates based on survey data suggest that occupation in this area increased from about 22ha during the Early Iron Age to as much as 144 ha during the Assyrian Imperial period (Parker, 1998,

p. 306). This increase is also visible in the total number of sites scattered across the archaeological landscape when the total number of archaeological sites increases from 12 in the Early Iron Age to 35 during the Assyrian Imperial period (Fig. 8). Furthermore, most of these newly established settlements are small villages located in and around the areas of the valley best suited for agricultural production.

The archaeological record also testifies to a substantial increase in the number of occupied sites and the total occupied hectares in the Cizre plain between the Late Bronze Age and the Assyrian Imperial period. The Cizre survey data reveal that three, or possibly four, evenly spaced but centrally located sites grew into large fortified centers between the Late Bronze and Iron ages. These sites Nerwan Hoyiik, Takyan Hoyiik, Basorin Hoyiik, and Silope Hoyiik (Fig. 9b), probably represent towns taken over by the Assyrians to serve as garrison centers in the course of the annexation of this region to the province of the Mashennu. The survey data show that there was a

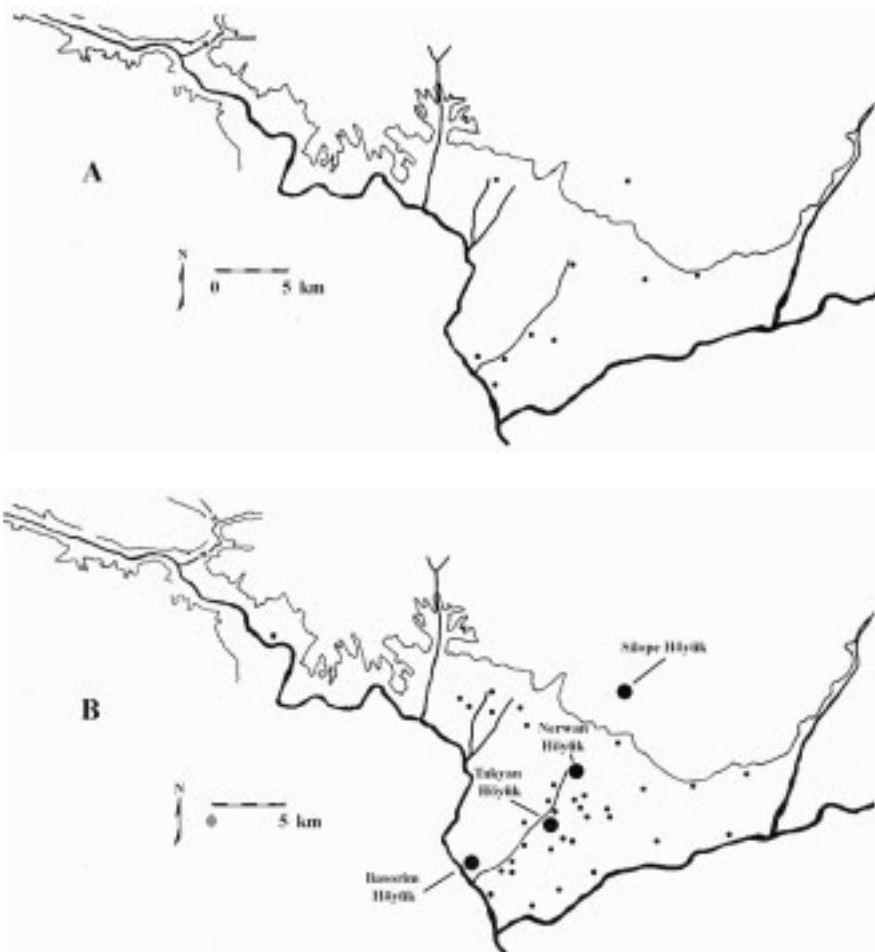


Fig. 9. Maps illustrating the change in settlement patterns in the Cizre plain between the Late Bronze Age (map A) and the Assyrian Imperial period (map B).

sharp expansion in the total number of occupied sites in the surveyed portion of the plain between the Late Bronze Age, when a maximum of 10 sites were in use, and the Iron Age, when that number increases to 38 (Fig. 9).<sup>11</sup> The Cizre survey data not only show that there was a huge increase in the total number of small agricultural villages in the plain between the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, but also that the resulting settlement pattern included no intermediate sized sites. This "unnatural" settlement system is, I believe, indicative of an

Assyrian policy of "agricultural colonization" that saw the forced re-location of large numbers of people to newly annexed regions for the purpose of agricultural production.

Thus the combined evidence shows that the Northern frontier of Assyria constituted a wide zone of merging ethnic boundaries where various indigenous groups met and merged with ethnic Assyrians and their subjects. Furthermore, each of the groups mentioned above had their own, often completely unrelated, language. Although both Assyrian and Aramaic are of the Semitic family, Aramaic is of the West Semitic branch while Assyrian is of the East Semitic branch. Urartian and Shubrian probably belong to the Hurrian family. One can only guess at the linguistic affiliation of such groups as the Kummeans or Ukkeans, and the variety of languages and

<sup>11</sup> Note a similar increase in the number of settlements in the north Jazira discussed in Wilkinson and Tucker (1995, pp. 6042) (also see Wilkinson and Barbanes, 2000). These authors conclude that a similar policy of resettlement may have been responsible for the increase in the number of settlements in the north Jazira.

dialects spoken in the polities of the Middle-Upper Tigris. References to interpreters in Assyrian letters and the fact that one text (Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, p. 35) reveals that the governor of Tushan knew enough Shubrian to curse at the Shubrian king when he did not cooperate with Assyrian wishes calling him "the son-of-an-Urartian-cow," indicate that this region was not only a multi-faceted ethnic frontier, but that linguistic boundaries probably overlapped with ethnic divisions in this area.

The above discussion demonstrates that in spite of the fact that the Upper Tigris River region was politically and administratively restrictive, demographically, this was not the case. Not only was this region ethnically and linguistically diverse, but the very forces that caused it to be a restrictive political and administrative boundary probably contributed to its ethnic and linguistic fluidity. Assyrian imperial penetration into the region brought both inward and outward migration and in doing so provided unprecedented opportunities for interaction between very diverse peoples in a region that can only be considered a demographically porous frontier zone.

### *Cultural boundaries*

Cultural boundaries can be broken down into several sub-categories including among other things, religion and material culture. Religious frontiers are perhaps the most difficult to define in the Upper Tigris River region. We possess a few

references to religious ceremonies and the construction of temples, but on the whole the data are very scanty. We do know that during Adad-narari II's initial invasion of the Cizre region in the tenth century BC, the Assyrians made sacrifices to the traditional Mesopotamian god Adad in the capital of Kumme. We must also assume that cities like Amedi, from which the Assyrians carried off large stores of booty, certainly contained many temples. Other towns and cities like Damdam-musa, Upummu, and Kullimeri must also have had religious sanctuaries.

Another clue to the religious boundaries in this region can be seen in the names of individuals mentioned in the textual sources. Assyrian officials often had names such as Ashur-dur-paniya, meaning "Ashur is the wall in front of me" or Tab-shar-Ashur, meaning "the breath of Ashur is good." These and other names obviously display overt religious overtones by expressing some attribute of the empire's chief god Ashur. Similarly, the names of the kings of Shubria were made up of compounds involving the god Tešup, a traditionally Hurrian deity.

A faience figurine depicting the Egyptian goddess Isis with her son Horus was discovered during archaeological surveys at the site of Kopic Höyük in the Cizre Plain [Fig. 10 (Algaze, 1989a; Algaze et al., 1991)]. Although this statuette has been dated on art historical grounds to between 650 and 520 BC, and may therefore be slightly later than the Assyrian Imperial period, its presence in this area is indeed remarkable considering

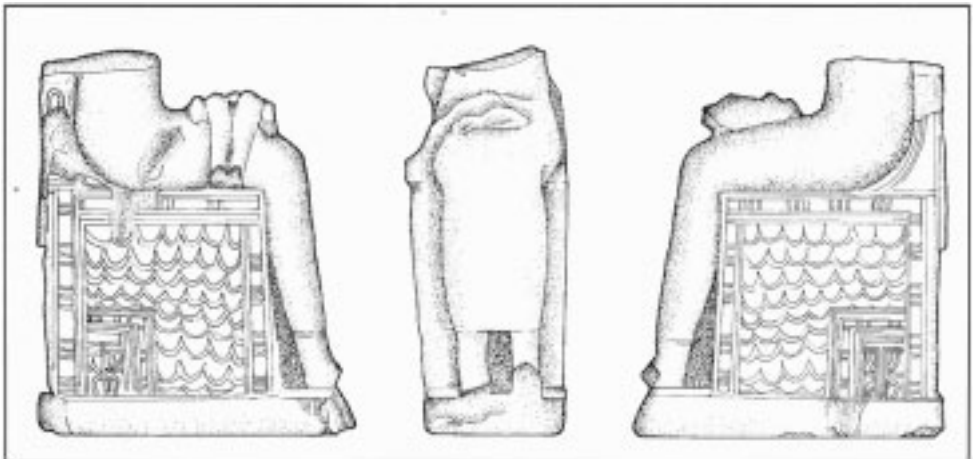


Fig. 10. Faience figurine depicting the Egyptian goddess Isis with her son Horus. This figurine was discovered by Algaze during archaeological surveys at the site of Kopic Hoyiik in the Cizre plain (drawing courtesy of Algaze cf. Algaze et al., 1991, p. 198).



that the object is thought to be of Egyptian manufacture (Algaze et al., 1991, p. 198). In spite of the fact that this artifact does not come from a reliable archaeological context, its presence nevertheless testifies to the cosmopolitan nature of religious life during the Iron Age in the ancient Near East. Although the data are limited, the discovery of this figurine combined with the textual evidence mentioned above, suggests that the Upper Tigris River region was a porous frontier area where the religious beliefs and practices of the Assyrians and their subjects met and even overlapped with those of the indigenous populations of southeastern Anatolia.

Two contrasting ceramic assemblages were discovered in the Upper Tigris survey data (Parker, 1997a). These data not only show that the Upper Tigris river region was a boundary between to very different ceramic assemblages, but also suggest that this region marked the divide between two divergent modes of production. The Cizre region almost exclusively contained ceramics from the Neo-Assyrian assemblage native to Northern Iraq. Neo-Assyrian ceramics are usually made of fine clay with evenly ground and dispersed fine grit temper. They were thrown on fast wheels making symmetrical shapes that fit uniformly into a limited number of size and shape categories. Nearly all of the pieces were well fired. These characteristics suggest that Neo-Assyrian ceramics were made by professionals who probably mass produced their wares in large industrial facilities. The factories in which these ceramics were produced were state of the art. They had sophisticated fast-turning pottery wheels and well-engineered kilns that distributed heat evenly and were supplied with enough fuel to produce consistently well-fired ceramics. The craftsmen who produced these ceramics were not constrained by the quality or quantity of raw materials. Ceramic production in the Assyrian empire was, therefore, not only labor and capital intensive, but also rigidly regulated (Rice, 1987, pp. 180–191).

The indigenous ceramics identified in the Bohtan, Garzan, and Batman river valleys are very different. To begin with, although there are distinct categories of vessels in this assemblage, variation within each category is much wider than is the case with the Assyrian ceramics. The clay and clay treatment is also much more crude than the Assyrian types. Indigenous ceramics were often made of coarsely filtered clay containing large grit and/or chaff inclusions. Many vessels were not completely symmetrical, indicating that they were made on

crude wheels, while others have numerous chaff impressions on their exterior surfaces suggesting that construction by hand, probably in earthen molds, was an important component of production. Perhaps the most striking difference between the indigenous and the Assyrian ceramics is firing. The indigenous types were, more often than not, underfired. Ceramic cores are usually much darker than their surfaces, and the fabric itself is often soft or even fugitive. All of these characteristics suggest that, unlike the situation in the nearby Assyrian provinces, ceramic production in the indigenous towns and villages of southeastern Anatolia was in the hands of village potters.

The distribution of the Neo-Assyrian and the indigenous assemblages indicates that the Upper Tigris River region of southeastern Turkey was the boundary between two distinct assemblages of material culture (Parker, 1997a, pp. 234–235). In contrasting the ceramics recovered in the Cizre plain with those discovered in the Bohtan and the Garzan river valleys, it is clear that each of these areas lay on opposite sides of a material cultural boundary. However, the boundary between these material culture assemblages was not a static border but a fluid frontier. The distribution of the Assyrian and indigenous ceramics shows that there was a wide zone encompassing the Upper Tigris and Batman river valleys where these two assemblages overlap.

### *Economic boundaries*

Economic boundaries have, in part, been discussed above in Section 4.1, where I argued that the geography of this frontier region affected local subsistence strategies, and in Section 4.3, where I theorized that this region marked the divide between different modes of production. I also argued in Section 4.1 that the distribution of natural resources helped shape Assyrian imperial policy in southeastern Anatolia. This theory is supported by an overwhelming number of texts in the correspondence from the Upper Tigris River region that are concerned with the acquisition and transportation of timber (see for example Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, pp. 25, 26, 32, 33, 34, 39, and 43). Timber was extracted by gangs of workmen consisting of loggers who would fell the trees and haulers who would drag the logs to the nearest river bank. There the logs would wait until the day of the log drive. Log drives were possible only when there was sufficient water in the rivers, thus limiting the log driving season to spring when

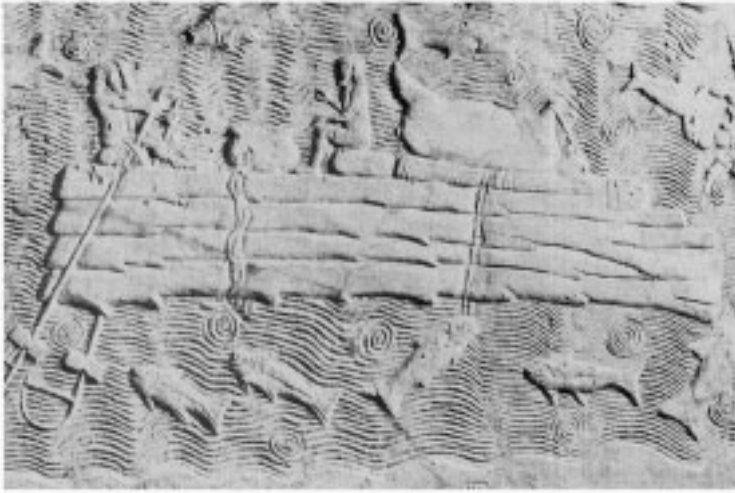


Fig. II. Log drivers on the Tigris (ca. 700 BC).

melting snow in the high mountains provided ample water for a successful drive.<sup>12</sup> Once the logs reached Assyrian territory they were presumably reorganized into flotillas for the long trip down the Tigris to Assyria. Several relief carvings from the reign of Sennacherib show groups of large logs tied together into rafts guided down the river by oarsmen (Fig. 11). These reliefs also show that the barges were equipped with supplies and cooking facilities.

The extraction of timber from the Upper Tigris took place on a grand scale indeed. Several letters from Amedi illustrate just how large Assyrian log drives were. One reports that 1200 door beams and 1200 roof beams have been floated down the Tigris, while a second letter referring to a different log drive documents 2000 door beams and 500 roof beams (Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, pp. 6 and 7, respectively). Similar numbers are recorded in letters from Tushan. For example, one fragmentary text mentions 3000 door beams while two others record 500 roof beams each (Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, pp. 33 and 34, respectively).

Although pollen samples from near Urfa in southeastern Turkey indicate that "an undisturbed forest consisting of oak and pistachio covered the higher grounds in this area until 1900 BC" (Yener, 1982, p. 59), it appears from the

correspondence of officials in the Upper Tigris that much of the old-growth forest in the provinces of Tushan and Amedi had been depleted before the Neo-Assyrian Imperial period. However, good logs could still be obtained in the mountains to the north. This point is exemplified particularly well in a letter from Tushan in which the governor tells the king, "all my men are in the mountains felling trees in groves where there are (still?) (trunks suitable for) door beams and roof beams." (Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990, p. 25). The insatiable need for wood in Assyria combined with the fact that any woodlands that had existed along the Upper Tigris had, by this time, been completely depleted, led to a direct conflict between Assyria and its Northern neighbors. Several letters document the on-going dispute between Assyria, Shubria, and Urartu over logging rights not only highlight Shubria's precarious position between these two powers, but also illustrate the discontinuity between political and economic boundaries in this resource-rich zone.

Although the royal correspondence reveals that lumber was a very important commodity procured in and beyond the Northern frontier, references to the acquisition of metals are conspicuously absent. Whether the metals trade was in the hands of private merchants or whether the production of metal weapons and tools took place in the provincial capitals, thus elevating the need for raw metals to be exported to the Assyrian heartland, must remain a matter of speculation. There are a few letters concerning private merchants who "smuggled" luxury goods across the

<sup>12</sup> See for example Lanfranchi and Parpola (1990, p. 26), where 3000 door beams lie waiting on the riverbank due to insufficient water levels. Other letters on this topic include, for example, Lanfranchi and Parpola (1990, pp. 6, 7, 39, and 117).



apper to be more fluid. Since this study focuses on the end of the eighth century BC the following discussion will consider the political dynamics of this period only.

At the end of the eighth century BC, the Upper Tigris River region had been under Assyrian influence for nearly 150 years. The Assyrian authorities imposed strict control over the local population, even in rural villages (many of which had, in fact, been founded through the Assyrian policy of forced resettlement) through a highly organized provincial government whose primary goal was to keep careful track of taxable revenues. Corvée labor officers recorded time owed and time served (Parker, 1998), village managers reported on the state of the harvest and cohort commanders filled construction and logging quotas (Parker, 2001). Even in areas that were not part of the Assyrian provincial system, Assyrian "royal delegates" monitored, influenced and in some cases controlled affairs in vassal states, and Assyria's spies reported on enemy troop movements, the whereabouts of certain officials and even occurrences in the palaces of enemy states. Thus, during the period under discussion the Upper Tigris River region can, at least in political and administrative terms, be considered to have been either static or at least very restrictive (Fig. 12).

The Northern frontier of the Assyrian empire is not characterized by the influx of large numbers of voluntarily migrating "pioneers" that is so emblematic of, for example, the American or South African frontiers (Lamar and Thompson, 1981; Wynman and Kroeber, 1957). Nor can we visualize the Assyrian frontier as a sparsely populated hinterland that might attract the attention of potential migrants. On the contrary, we saw above that numerous ethnic and linguistic groups of varying degrees of political and social complexity inhabited this region long before the Assyrian imperial period. This is not to say that demographic shifts did not take place, but instead, that demographic shifts were not the sole defining characteristic of the Assyrian frontier experience. Furthermore, the demographic shifts that did take place were very different from those characteristic of the American and South African examples. The archaeological record indicates that there was indeed a huge increase in both the number and size of archaeological sites, and therefore population, between the period immediately prior to Assyrian involvement in the Anatolian frontier and the height of Assyrian occupation of the region. However, the textual record indicates that most of the "foreign" popu-

lation of the Upper Tigris River region during the Assyrian Imperial period came to the area as a result of Assyria's policy of forced deportation and resettlement. By moving vanquished peoples into a volatile frontier region where the local languages and customs were surely foreign to the new colonists, and where there was an ever-present threat of attack from the Northern mountains, the Assyrian authorities with their "strong-walled" fortresses became the protectors, rather than the oppressors of these unfortunate souls. This rather awkward frontier situation was an ingenious method of acculturating these colonists.

There is also archaeological evidence for the movement of the indigenous inhabitants out of the river valley immediately prior to or during the Assyrian Imperial period. Recent archaeological excavations and surveys carried out at three sites in the region by members of the Upper Tigris Archaeological Research Project (UTARP) not only suggest that prosperous villages at sites like Kenan Tepe were abandoned as a result of Assyrian penetration into the region, but also that sites like Boztepe probably represent agricultural colonies established by the Assyrians in their place (Parker et al., 2001). References to fugitives fleeing the Assyrian authorities and taking refuge in the Shubrian mountains north of the Upper Tigris River Valley are further evidence of the outward migration of the valley's inhabitants. Demographically then, the Northern frontier of the Assyrian empire was certainly a porous zone that saw considerable, albeit involuntary, shifts in population in a relatively short time.

Although the Upper Tigris River region was both geographically and politically a restrictive border, the archaeological and textual records indicate that Assyria's Anatolian frontier was not only demographically but also culturally porous. The distribution of ceramic type fossils, especially in the Upper Tigris River Valley, shows a considerable overlap while the textual record suggests that this area was very cosmopolitan in terms of language and religion. In spite of Assyria's strict administrative control, these and probably many other cultural characteristics of the Assyrians, their subjects and the indigenous inhabitants probably intermingled in this culturally porous frontier zone (Fig. 12).

I have argued elsewhere that economics were a large component in the motivation behind Assyrian colonization in the Cizre plain and the Upper Tigris River Valley (Parker, 2001). Since these two regions were directly connected with the Assyrian

heartland by the Tigris river, transportation costs of goods with a high bulk-to-value ratio were significantly reduced. Through a policy of agricultural colonization, both the Cizre plain and the Upper Tigris River Valley became important agricultural supply zones that supported the burgeoning urban populations in the metropolises of central Assyria. In fact, the archaeological and textual data suggest that large parts of two Assyrian provinces were created in areas that had previously been beyond the imperial frontier for the express purpose of increasing the empire's agricultural output. Raw materials were also gathered in areas outside the limits of the Assyrian provincial system. Letters from provincial officials show, for example, that timber was an important commodity exploited by the Assyrians in the region north of the provinces of Tushan and Amedi. And we must assume that other products such as metals, precious stones, salt and wine were also procured from this area for export to central Assyria. The textual evidence also indicates that local merchants took advantage of the political situation to profit from illicit cross-frontier trade. Although I would not consider Assyria's Anatolian frontier to be economically fluid, it would also be incorrect to say it was at all restrictive. Thus Assyria's Anatolian frontier must be considered to have been economically very porous (Fig. 12).

## Conclusion

Having discussed the various types of boundaries that existed in the Upper Tigris River region of southeastern Turkey during the Iron Age, we are perhaps now in a better position to conceptualize the nature of the Assyrian frontier. The Upper Tigris River region of southeastern Turkey was not a border line that separated the Neo-Assyrian empire from its neighbors on the Northern periphery, but rather, it was a wide frontier zone of culture contact and interaction between the Assyrian empire and its subjects on the one hand and the diverse cultures of the Anatolian highlands on the other. Furthermore, it is clear from the above discussion of the various categories of information evident in the archaeological and textual data from the Upper Tigris River region that this was a multifaceted frontier zone. In fact, it was not just one frontier zone, it was instead a series of overlapping frontier zones (Elton, 1996). The Upper Tigris River region was an area in which the geographic, political, demo-

graphic cultural and economic boundaries between the Assyrian empire and the southeastern Anatolian polities overlapped. The degree of rigidity of these boundaries varied. While this was a geographically and politically restrictive zone, it was demographically, culturally, and economically porous (Fig. 12). Furthermore, the variation between the types of boundaries, and the rigidity of those boundaries, is what determined the character of Assyria's Anatolian frontier.

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