THE GEOGRAPHY OF TRADE
ASSYRIAN COLONIES IN ANATOLIA c. 1975 – 1725 BC AND THE STUDY OF EARLY INTERREGIONAL NETWORKS OF EXCHANGE*

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In an attempt to explain how the human mind works up the raw materials of sensation into the finished product of thought, Immanuel Kant distinguished two separate stages in the cognitive process. First, he claimed, sensation needs to be coordinated according to our underlying perception of space and time. Only thereafter, the input based on our senses can be synchronized and applied to conception. Accordingly, all primary data must be oriented in space as well as in time to reach the level of coordinated deliberation, and so on the level of academic discourse. Kant maintained that history has no meaning without regard to its spatial component, geography.

In recent years, the study of "historical" and "human" geography has forcefully re-introduced the importance of spatiality and landscape into our analysis of society, emphasising, among other things, the interplay between physical surroundings and the individual's perception of his environment.[1] Plainly, in dealing with topics such as trade and colonial encounters in the ancient world, an understanding of the fundamental geographical framework of the system of exchange lies at the very heart of analysis. Two essential questions underlie the interpretation, namely: "where ?", in order to find out how things are arranged in space, and: "why there ?", in order to appreciate the arrangement found.[2] Firstly, the study of distribution is of fundamental importance because it reveals the variation between one place and the next. Most things are not scattered over an area at random but show definite arrangement in space – a geographical pattern. Secondly, an in-depth analysis of each local pattern, as well as the comparison between such patterns, serves to bring out the characteristic features of each place and establishes its individuality and geographical unity.

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[1] For a comprehensive introduction to the field of historical geography, its current theories, and perspectives, see Baker 2003.

[2] See the programmatic statements made by Mitchell 1954: 5-7, in her classic work on the subject.

Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period, pp. 87-100
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In this paper, I hope to demonstrate how an underlying geography – evidenced through a group of texts written by a community of Assyrian traders in Anatolia 4000 years ago – can be approached, explored, and employed to gain some fundamental insights into the general character of ancient long-distance trade and cultural exchange. In other words, to show how a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental geographical reality into which the trade was embedded can lead us to appreciate, at a much deeper level, the passive mechanisms and active processes underlying the way in which trade and contact was organised and played out.

The system of Assyrian trade in Anatolia during the early Middle Bronze Age is exceptional in the greater perspective of interregional exchange. Not because the merchants from Assur (located in modern-day Iraq) were unique in sending regular caravans of men and donkeys with large amounts of tin and woollen textiles to a network of resident agents in extraterritorial colonies in Central Anatolia several thousand kilometres away. Other traders plied similar routes at other times and in other places. Rather, the activities of this particular group of merchants happens to be very well attested owing to the exceptional conditions of preservation, excavation and publication of the evidence of an Assyrian merchant settlement located at the site of Kültepe. In fact, the material from Kültepe is so detailed that it permits a level of reflection and analysis that is difficult to undertake elsewhere, and it allows us even to suggest some of the principles that may have regulated interregional exchange in pre-modern societies on a more general level.

The political geography of Anatolia in the Old Assyrian Colony Period was characterized by a number of small states, each focussed upon a single urban centre and ruled by a royal couple. The main enterprise of the Assyrian traders was to manoeuvre in this complex political landscape of mutually competing local polities in the search of profit on marketed goods. For this purpose each Assyrian company relied upon a network of agents and business associates spread out among the main cities of Anatolia, and for the most part, our written sources consist of the correspondence exchanged between the various members of such firms. On a local level the sources allow us to study the physical and social organisation of the Assyrian trading houses as well as that of their Anatolian consumers. Families and household structures, the legal and judicial system, the structure and finance of the trade, bureaucracies, political institutions, and the spiritual and material reality of life, are all topics that are currently being investigated by historians and archaeologists.

However, the entire geographical backdrop of the trade – the physical topography and the infrastructure – has so far only been poorly understood. To appreciate the way in which trade was organised, the impact the Assyrian merchants had upon local Anatolian society, and the sheer volume and range of Assyrian dealings in Anatolia, we require a thorough understanding of its geography. Over the years a number of scholars have engaged with the problem of reconstructing a historical geography of the period. But although one might easily think that traders' archives, full of business letters, accounts and memoranda, constitute an excellent tool for the reconstruction of the active geographical horizon of those merchants, the material only hands over such information in a very ungenerous way. Letters exchanged between agents and financers, along with private notes and judicial records, all presume a common knowledge of the geography,

markets and resources that is now lost to us, and the actual degree of detail in the available documentation varies enormously.

In recent years the formation of the Old Assyrian Text Project has meant that a vast amount of hitherto unpublished sources have been made available for study inside the group, effectively quadrupling the total number of texts available in relation to what was there just a few years ago. In addition, a growing number of Hittite texts have been edited and made available to scholars outside the discipline, and the past two decades or so have seen a number of detailed archaeological and archeometallurgical surveys of large areas in Central Turkey that had formerly been almost entirely unknown to us. Works by scholars such as Bahar, Bilgi, Dönmez, Kaptan, Omura, Ökse, Özbal, Özsait and Yener add crucial information and much needed data about settlement patterns and population density during the period in question, and the total increase in source material plainly has to affect what we know about the ancient geography of Anatolia. As such, it forms the empirical underpinning for the following observations.

In addition to lack of sources, a major obstacle for dealing with the historical geography has been the need for a suitable method of how to approach the actual analysis of available data. A fundamental aim in my work on the historical geography of Anatolia in the Assyrian Colony Period has therefore been to suggest a consistent approach to extracting the required information from the written record, and to attempt to relate this data to the available archaeological evidence and the physical topography of Central Turkey.[3] Until now the approach to the study of the historical geography of Anatolia has often been somewhat disjointed. In general, it has dealt with particular regions rather than the big picture, and often it has focussed on a specific historical period instead of taking the broader record into account. Yet, plainly the geographical system forms an inseparable whole in which all elements are interdependent, and so the failure to consider the system in its entirety can easily lead to faulty conclusions. All pertinent information should first be identified and registered, and only then the connections between toponyms can be evaluated and analysed.

One accepted way of approaching historical geography has been to isolate a given toponym in an ancient text, and then to identify it with a modern place-name that sounds similar, or for which one may reconstruct a feasible linguistic evolution from the ancient to the modern form. By this procedure, one would identify a number of fixed points on the map, and then relate such points to connected toponyms in various available itineraries. In areas where the toponymy has remained relatively unchanged through time, for instance in certain parts of Syria and Iraq, this approach has in fact produced relatively good results. However, Anatolian history contains several significant breaks in political and cultural continuity, and thus the linguistic approach to reconstructing the geography has proven less useful. With surprisingly few exceptions, even the largest Hittite cities have never been securely identified, and with literally thousands of toponyms to choose from in any given region of Turkey, there is always bound to be a place-name similar to the one sought for. It therefore proves very difficult to know

[3] Barjamovic 2005.

whether a suggested match is genuine, or whether it derives from an ancient homonym, a common root, or even simple coincidence. I would argue that the linguistic approach is notoriously unreliable when it is not heavily supported by other data, and the method easily deteriorates into what Landsberger termed as *Gleichklangspielerei*.

Adding insult to injury, several cities bore identical, or near-identical names, which naturally leads scholars into extensive debates about likely interpretations of a particular set of data, and whether it might relate to one or several localities. On the one hand, we may have an intuitive reluctance towards assuming the existence of two homonymous settlements each time a reference does not fit a given geographical model. On the other hand, homonyms in Anatolia would have been as common as everywhere else, and when we try to conflate information that in fact relates to two identically named locations we often end up creating even more confusion.

Instead of relying upon linguistic matches between ancient and modern toponyms, my attempt has been to outline a broader statistical approach in which recurring strings or clusters of place-names are identified in order to gain a basic notion about the physical proximity between various places. Thereupon, the commercial bias of each source is taken into account. As one might suppose, two cities may regularly appear side by side in the sources, not because of their geographical proximity, but due to their terminal positions on a trade route. In order to compensate for the statistical anomalies it is therefore necessary also to consider each and every relevant text and its *Sitz im Leben*. For various reasons, some sources simply list "panoramas" that fail to record the toponyms according to any known geographical principle, while several others only bother to mention the main stations visited during a business trip. Such sources must be identified and analysed to exclude a bewildering number of "false" connections. Only then can the sources become part of a meaningful statistical analysis that arranges statistical clusters into geographical grids.

In addition to the statistical analysis one should obviously take the local topography into account – not only as a guideline but at the very root of the model. Already in the 19th century, the British classicist Sir William M. Ramsay asserted that a key to understanding Anatolian geography was the fact that there have always been only a rather limited number of routes crossing the country.[4] He therefore advanced the theory that local centres of trade and political power could shift through time, but that they were invariably tied to one such route. The topography decided the position of such "lines" in the landscape, and only the population density would fluctuate along them. At places where the main routes intersected, cities invariably grew to facilitate and protect trade and traffic in a "road knot". Such "road-knots", Ramsay predicted, would invariably have fostered a dominant city, and where one could identify them, this would also be the place to look for a major ancient settlement.

The approach of combining statistics, a detailed philological analysis, and relevant data from various archaeological, archaeometallurgical and topographic surveys produced a map (Map 1) that turned out to be quite different from its predecessors. If one begins by

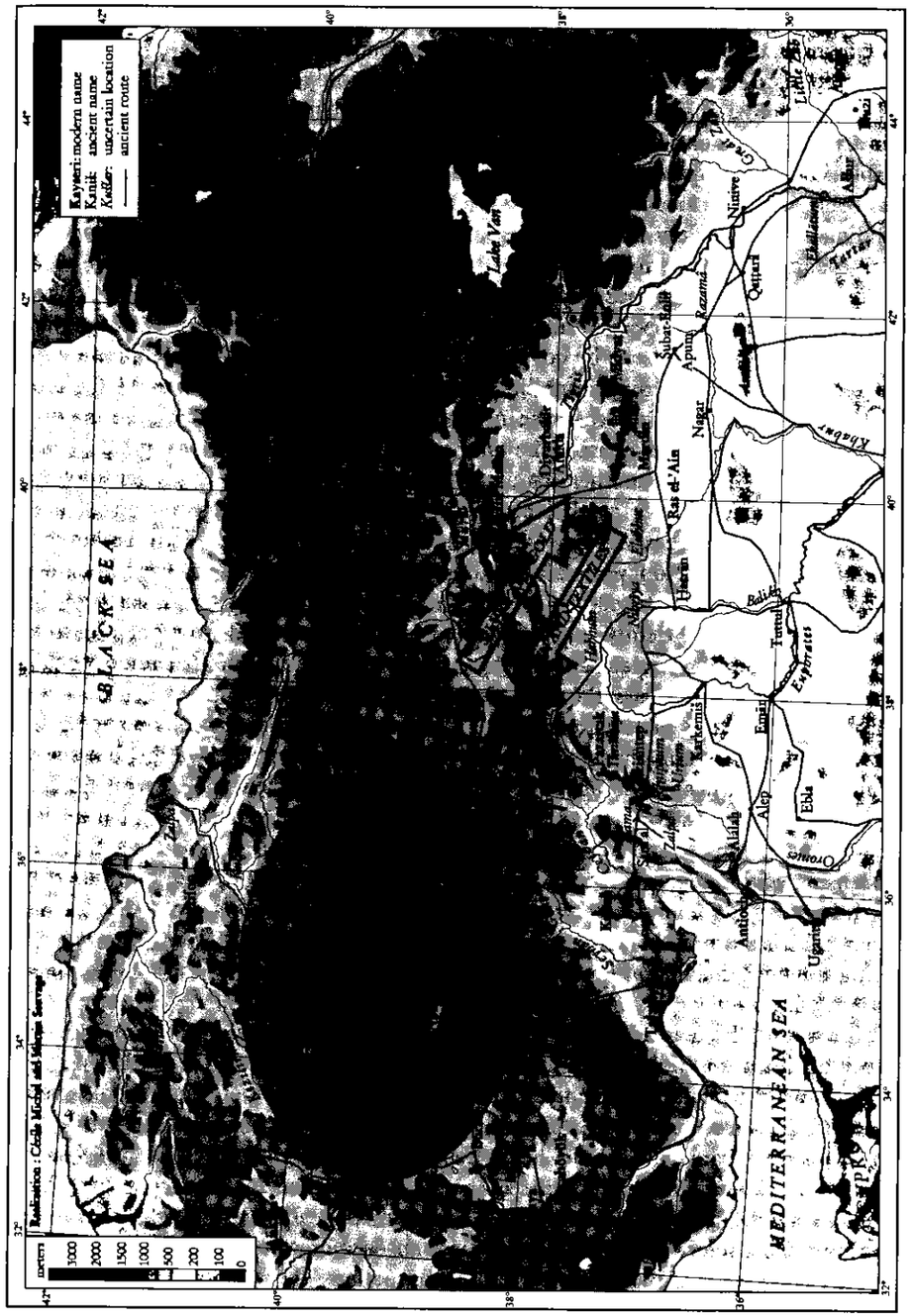
[4] Ramsay 1890.

looking at the way the historical geography of Anatolia in the Middle Bronze Age has been reconstructed so far, a striking feature is the apparent concentration of all the main Assyrian centres of trade inside a relatively small area only some 200 km across. The overall impression one gets of the range, the impact, and the purpose of the Assyrian trade in Central Anatolia is related to this dense cluster of consumer cities in which the merchants would distribute substantial quantities of imported tin and textiles for the benefit of a wealthy local elite. The system exists in relative isolation from the surrounding areas, and any wider interregional systems of exchange seem beyond the Assyrian capacity of interaction.

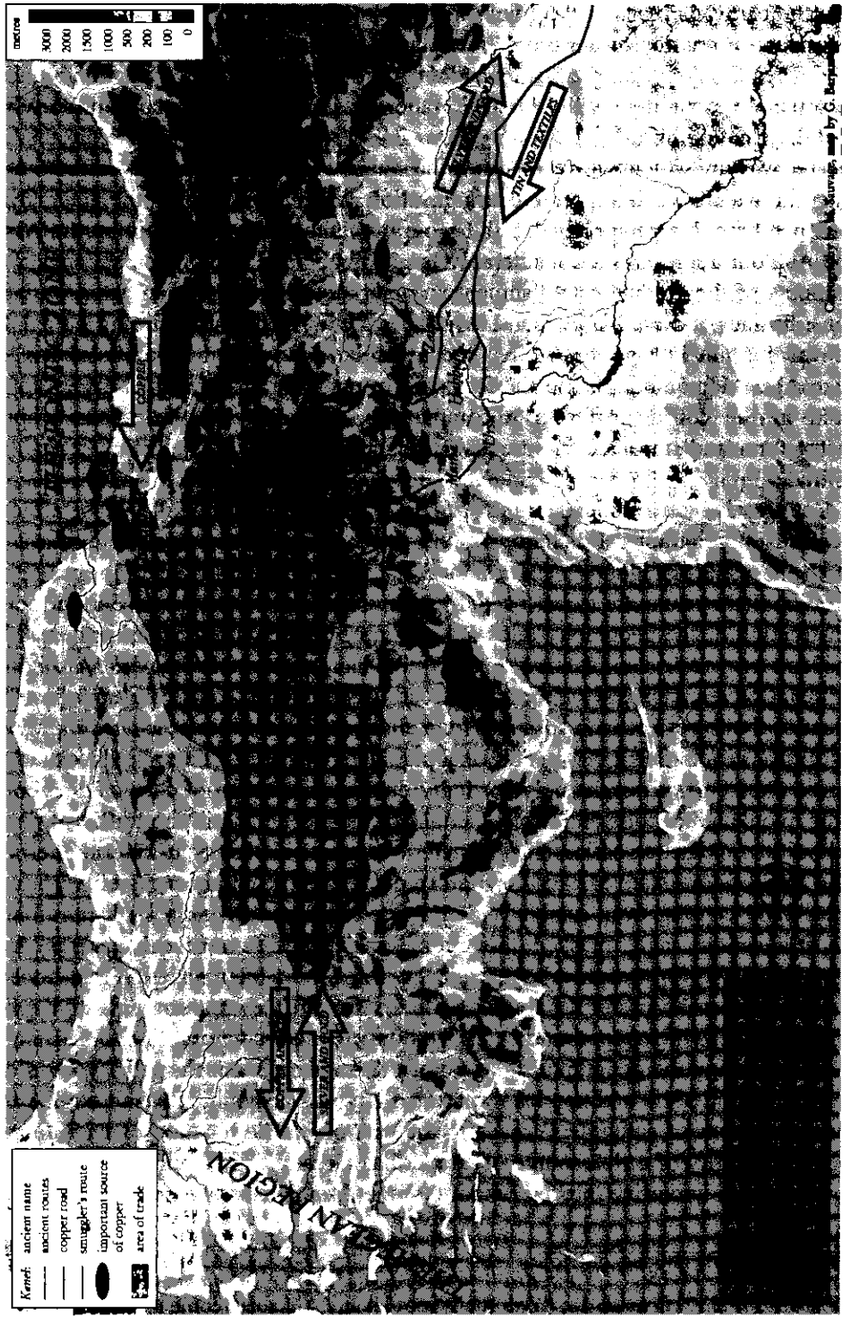
Likewise, the voluminous local trade in copper and wool that the Assyrian merchants conducted as a supplement to their trade in imported goods would have stretched across an area that can be covered in less than five days of travel. On the basis of this reconstruction, the main ambition of the traders from Assur would therefore appear to have been simply to reach the Anatolian highlands, to distribute the imported tin and textiles, sometimes increasing the turnover by trading in some local goods, before returning to Assyria for another circuit. The dense group of Assyrian colonial communities is located inside a relatively restricted area, and the general impact of the exchange conducted by the Assyrian traders upon the territory of modern Turkey as a whole seems limited. The key ports of trade, Durḫumit and Purušḫattum, were thought to have been situated at a distance of 120 km, or only about three days travel from one another, and in spite of the truly vast amounts of copper transported from one city to the other, the market forces were assumed to have been strong enough to generate a demand and a price gap that would make the Assyrian endeavour worthwhile.

If one compares this picture to the result of my own analysis (Map 2), one notes how the perspective on Anatolia changes – not only in simple geographical terms, but also as an economic and political landscape. The area covered by the exchange system is seen to have been significantly larger, and ultimately to extend from the foothills of the Black Sea region to the westernmost parts of Lycaonia. The situation is no longer that of a small, densely settled region with an enormous appetite for consumption, but rather one in which the Assyrian traders marketed their imports across a wide horizon of economic zones, connecting different environmental and cultural systems from the copper-producing Pontic Zone around the city of Durḫumit to the gateway of the Mediterranean at Purušḫattum.

Furthermore, the map emphasises the fact that there were regions, which appear to have been off limits to the Assyrian traders even if they formed lucrative markets in their own right. Most conspicuous is the total absence of Cilicia in the merchant records. Being on one of the possible routes from Assur to Anatolia, one might easily find good reasons why the Assyrian caravans should have frequented the region, yet the fact that no mention of any Cilician toponym occurs in the sources suggests that the region may have belonged to another – perhaps competing – system of trade and somehow excluded Assyrian presence. In comparison, one may note absence of Assyrian trade in the North-Syrian area *en route* to Turkey. A few minor transactions are witnessed in the sources, being mostly a trade in trinkets, yet the traders never opened the sealed shipments of tin and textiles before the Euphrates had been passed and no significant trade took place



Map 1: Map by C. Michel with overlay: zone of interaction and the model of M. T. Larsen.



Map 2: The map of the author with overlay of routes and resources.

before the caravans reached Ḫaḫḫum on the Anatolian side of the river. One may judge this conduct in relation to the protectionist agenda voiced in a recently published treaty-text between the Assyrian merchants and an Anatolian ruler. One stipulation requires the local prince to extradite any "Akkadian" trader passing through his land to the Assyrians so that they may kill him.[5]

The way in which we reconstruct the ancient geography greatly affects also the manner in which we interpret the organisation and the impact of the trade itself. In accordance with this perspective on the geography, the trade carried out by the Assyrians inside Anatolia represents a considerably larger financial and logistic challenge. Plainly, the process of the gradual establishment and permanent upkeep of an extensive network of inns, bridges and well-kept roads, which we know marked the turning point of early medieval trade in Europe, must have had a similar precursor in Anatolia in the Middle Bronze Age. Memoranda listing the fees paid by Assyrian merchants at bridges and inns abound in the corpus, offering a compelling impression of the extensive physical infrastructure and intricate political landscape needed to support a trade of this magnitude.

Conversely, our understanding of the mechanisms of trade also affects our perceptions of geography. It is hard to envisage a trading system based upon profit gained from the transport of goods between markets with wildly fluctuating prices if all the markets in that system are to be located inside a small physical space. Furthermore, this reconstruction of the geography allows us to appreciate how the routes preferred by the individual Assyrian merchants were determined on the basis of a variety of different priorities. Convenience and safety on the road was obviously of great importance for the conduct of trade, yet both are susceptible to change through infrastructural improvements and political development. Two additional parameters have proven to be important for the Assyrian choice of routes, namely the individual specialization of each trading company and the avoidance of tolls and taxes. Certain firms specialized in the traffic of particular commodities, and set up offices and agencies along specific routes to cater to their precise needs. The previous state of Old Assyrian studies, with the main corpus of texts available for our study coming from jumbled up archives excavated illegally by local villagers at Kültepe a century ago, masked this regional specialization of the various Assyrian companies and its topographical consequences. Likewise, the realization that tax evasion led certain traders to prefer a network of less secure routes running east of Kaneš, and leading directly to the copper markets in the Pontic zones, is new.

By analysing the geographical scope of the trade, one can show that a considerable part of the imported tin and textiles went to the city of Durḫumit, either through Kaneš, or the via a network of smugglers' roads to the east of it. The location of Durḫumit in the immediate vicinity of a rich source of copper has already been emphasized by Dercksen, who was first to underline the key function of the Assyrians in the inter-Anatolian copper

[5] Kt n/k 794, 11-15: [11] *... a-ki-di-i* [12] *lá tù-šé-lá-ni / šu-ma* [13] *a-na ma-tí-kà / e-tí-qú-nim* [14] *lu ta-du-nu-ni-a-tí-ma* [15] *lu ni-du-ku*, "You should not let any Akkadian come up to you – if he comes to pass your land, you are to hand him over to us so that we may kill him". The text is published and discussed in Çeçen and Hecker 1995.

trade.[6] However, the role of Durḫumit as a regional market for the trade in copper, rather than at a centre of metal production and distribution, has not previously been suggested. Partially at least, this was due to the previous location of Durḫumit only a few days travel from Kaneš and Purušḫattum. As it turns out, Durḫumit probably was not located in the immediate vicinity of the copper ores, and rather, it appears that the importance of the city in relation to the Assyrian trade was due to its strategic position as a central marketplace for the exchange of copper deriving from several areas of extraction.

In Durḫumit, the Assyrian merchants would sell their imported tin and textiles and buy copper with the proceeds. Metal bars were then laden onto donkeys, and after passing across the River Kızılırmak, taken by wagons for a long trek to the town Purušḫattum 600 km to the west. In Purušḫattum the copper was sold and payment was received in silver, this being the standard currency for exchange in Anatolia as well as in Mesopotamia. Earlier attempts to look for Purušḫattum in a region controlling an important source of silver falls besides the point, and instead of being an unusually wealthy centre of silver extraction eager to consume vast amounts of copper in a relatively short time-span, Purušḫattum, like Durḫumit, appears rather to have been a central marketplace oriented toward a region into which the Assyrians had no access. With the suggestion that Purušḫattum is to be located much further to the west than one had previously thought, and that it was located on the main route between Central Anatolia and the Mediterranean coast, it now seems highly tempting to interpret this as strong circumstantial evidence for a commercial link into the regional systems further west.

One may back up the notion that the Assyrian trade formed a link to the regions further to the west with several further observations. First, one may argue on the basis of the revised chronology of the *limmu*-dates recently published and discussed by Veenhof,[7] and take into account the apparent developments in the Assyrian trade in a diachronic perspective, which allows us to suggest its general stages of expansion and contraction:

1) Before 1975 BC,[8] the king Ilušuma of Assur declared the city of Assur a free-trade zone for copper coming from the south. His son, Erišum I, extended this to include all marketed goods, including silver, gold, copper, tin, barley and wool and everything else down to ... and "chaff".[9]
2) In 1974 BC Erišum I instituted the system of annual *limmu*-officials, who acted as eponyms for the year and held a central position in the city-state bureaucracy, in particular in relation to the organisation and support of the city traders.[10]
3) The Assyrian merchants, presumably on the basis of an earlier system of venture trade, began establishing a network of permanent agencies in the cities of Northern

[6] For the Assyrian trade in copper, see Dercksen 1996.

[7] Veenhof 2003.

[8] For the sake of convenience, all dates in the following section follow the middle chronology.

[9] For a discussion of this important passage, see Larsen 1976: 63-80.

[10] Veenhof 2003, and Dercksen 2004.

Syria and extending it as far as the city of Ḫaḫḫum on the Euphrates. This appears to have been the terminus of the Assyrian merchants some two generations prior to the dawn of the main period of trade attested in our sources.[11]

4) In the years prior to 1900 the Assyrians established themselves in Kaneš on the Anatolian plateau and obtained exclusive rights over the trade of tin and textiles.
5) In a generation or two the Assyrians came to dominate not only the import of tin and textiles, but also the regional exchange in copper and wool in Central Anatolia, extending their agencies from Durḫumit in the northeast to Purušḫattum in the west. This is the heyday of the trade, and the best attested period in the texts.
6) Some time before 1820 the system suffered a partial collapse. Kaneš was destroyed during a time of general political upheaval in Anatolia.
7) Around 1800 the Assyrians resettle at Kaneš. Trade appears to have been organised slightly differently. There is a much smaller number of sources available for this period, and the texts date mainly to its very end. Importantly, the entire western section of the trade appears to have fallen out of the Assyrian orbit.[12]
8) Around 1725 the system collapses completely.[13]

Of particular importance for the present discussion of interregional networks, the fine-grained chronology of the Assyrian sources now allows us to observe how the overall system of exchange in Anatolia never remained stable. Rather, it underwent constant and swift shifts in its political, economic and geographical scope. Specifically, the fact that the western extension of the trade fell away during the later stages of the trade becomes crucial when coupled with the revised image of the historical geography. If a key objective of the Assyrian merchants was to connect the copper markets of north-eastern Anatolia to a western circuit of consumers, then the later shift in geographical priorities may reflect a change of economic rather than political nature.

The fact that the western city of Purušḫattum carried on for centuries after the last Assyrian trader left Anatolia, and that it continued to be a powerful player in the following formative period of the Hittite Kingdom, excludes any simplistic historical solution to the problem. Rather, I believe one might feasibly link the apparent collapse of the Assyrian trade in Pontic ores with a development in the forces of market and price. As pointed out by David Warburton in his recent book on ancient economy, it is hardly a coincidence that the last mention of import of copper from Oman in a Babylonian context coincides with the first appearances of Cypriote copper on the markets in Syria between 1785 and 1765 BC.[14] As Warburton emphasized, the access to written documentation

[11] An impression gained particularly on the basis of the detailed evidence found in the texts of the archive of Šalim-Aššur, which is currently being prepared for publication by M. T. Larsen. The first volume, which details the early history of the family, is set to appear in 2008.

[12] On the geography of trade in the Ib period, see Dercksen 2001. Note now the unpublished text 01/k 219 mentioning Šalatuwar in Günbattı 2005: 445-451.

[13] See Günbattı 2005: 449-450, for the date of the collapse as based upon the unpublished *limmu*-list *KEL* G = 01/k 287.

[14] Warburton 2003: 59-62.

allows us to appreciate how this change happened inside a much shorter time-frame than we are accustomed to consider when dealing with the archaeological evidence alone.

Numerous recent works have reasserted the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region as a single zone with permeable frontiers of interaction already in the Early Bronze Age.[15] However, physical evidence is still lacking for actual corroboration of the claim that Pontic Ores found their way as far west as the texts might indicate. Archaeometallurgical surveys and ore sampling are still in their infancy given the vast size of Central Anatolia, and although the number of published analyses of bronze implements is steadily growing, much remains to be done. One compelling piece of evidence is found in the presence of Anatolian obsidian on Crete in the proto-palatial period, which Tristan Carter recently linked in a convincing manner to the Anatolian copper trade on the basis of an assemblage recovered at the Minoan settlement at Malia.[16] This dovetails nicely with the isotope-analysis of objects excavated at the site, which shows that a surprising number of the bronze artefacts contain isotope-ratios of an unusually high proportion of Pb^{208}/Pb^{206}. This particular profile does not fit with the known copper mines of the Aegean and Western Anatolia, but goes very well with the recently analysed sources of native copper recovered in the Çorum-Merzifon area.[17]

To sum up, the reinterpretation of the historical geography in Anatolia takes our focus away from core resource producing areas and consumer cities – at least as the driving force behind the Assyrian trade. Metal, textiles and wool were not simply transported and sold inside an isolated system of cities for the benefit of local consumption. Rather, a characteristic feature of the Assyrian trade appears to have been its capacity to act as a link between several Anatolian networks in a much larger interregional system of exchange. How the Assyrians managed to secure this role remains unclear, but one might speculate that the combination of a strong commercial technology, coupled with the neutral role of the foreign merchants in a politically fragmented and potentially volatile region, gave the foreign traders an exceptional position in Anatolian community.

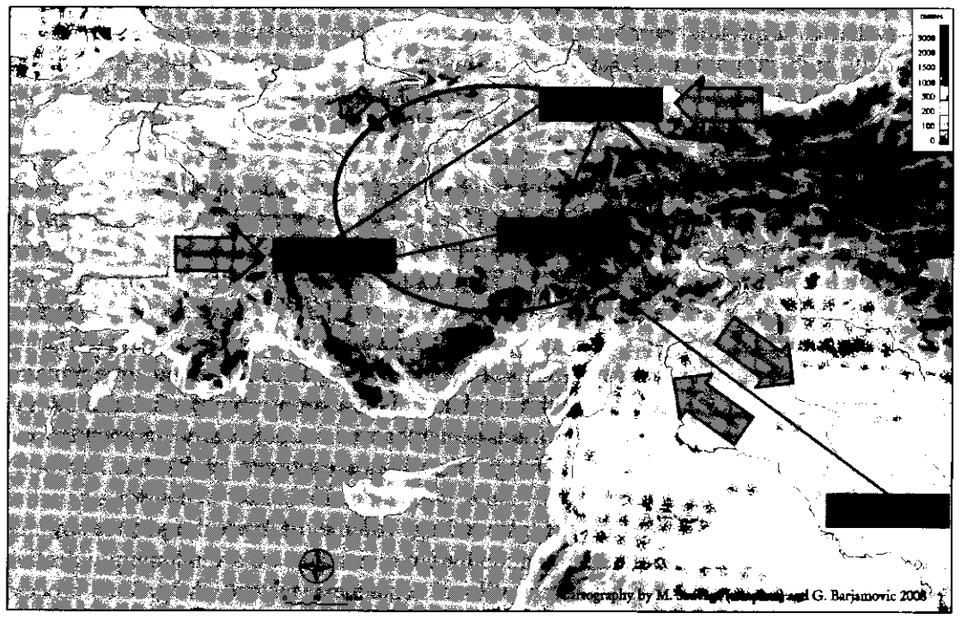
The growing awareness of the astounding volume of trade conducted by the Assyrian merchants supports this notion, and emphasizes that we are not simply dealing with vendors catering to a narrow circle of local consumers. Instead, the gradual process leading to an establishment of regional markets in medieval France and the Flanders that sparked early medieval trade may represent a much more attractive line of interpretation for our understanding of what went on in Anatolia at the time when the Assyrians arrived. The Assyrian trade in bulk was usually destined for a limited number of large markets, mainly Kaneš, Durḫumit and Purušḫattum, linking the three regional economic and ecological systems rather than forming a system in itself. None of these three main ports

[15] Three important recent contributions are: Leštakov 2002, Şahoğlu 2005, Rahmstorf 2006.

[16] See Carter and Kilikoglou 2007.

[17] Poursat and Loubet 2005: pl. XVa, and compare to the samples listed in: E. V. Sayre *et al.* 2001: 107, nos. 26-30.

are located in the centre of the network, but lie at their periphery. If we follow the same line of thought back along the likely route by which the tin reached Anatolia from its probable sources in the Turan,[18] it hardly comes as a surprise to note that the community which organised the part of the trade *we* are in a position to follow, namely Assur, also held the geographical position as a mediator situated on the margins of a larger area of production and consumption. If the organisation of the tin-trade on the road from Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan to Assur was anything like the Assyrian part of system, we may suggest that a whole string of polities, each holding monopoly on a certain part of the route and interconnecting comparable regional systems of exchange, formed the link that ultimately carried the tin to Anatolia and bronze further on into the Aegean and the Balkans.



Map 3: The Old Assyrian trade network.

On a wider level, a reassessment of the historical geography of Anatolia during the Assyrian Colony Period adds to the growing pressure on the already dubious hypothesis of an autochthonous Aegean culture and the creation of a specific European identity four millennia ago. During the past few decades scholars from a range of disciplines continue to challenge this basic premise of a divide between Anatolia and the Balkans, particularly

[18] Parzinger and Boroffka 2003.

along the modern national borders of Greece and Turkey. A growing understanding of the Assyrian metal trade, its geography, social structures, institutions and economic premises may add to this critique with its evidence for the existence of an extensive interregional exchange in tin between Central Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Moreover, if the Assyrian model of trade can in any way be taken as a general example of Bronze Age exchange, then the entire notion of simple bi-polar *world-systems* with corresponding centres and peripheries seems unwarranted. Commodities can travel very far and undergo various transformations (tin and copper into bronze, and wool into textiles), and our definition of a centre and periphery depends entirely upon perspective, production, and whom you define as the final consumer. By 1800 BC we are able to follow a system of exchange that had its origin in Turan close to the Chinese frontier, and which crossed Iran and Iraq into Turkey, presumably to fan out into the Aegean and the Balkans via the bronze trade. A complex interface of suppliers and consumers, production and demand, which interacted with social mechanisms and political institutions across vast distances to generate and maintain a flow of goods, wealth, and people is reflected in a small but significant case, by the texts written by the Assyrian merchants four millennia ago.

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