

Text 12.2 Old Assyrian caravan procedures: the standard texts

1 The transport contract

‘The 30 minas of silver – its *nishatu* tax added, its *šaddu’utu* -tax paid for – which Dadaya entrusted to Kukku-lanum son of Kutaya, and which he carried to the city (Ashur) for buyings – (that) silver belongs to Enlil-bani. Goods will leave the city and cross the country in the name of Enlil-bani again. The goods will arrive at Kanesh and Enlil-bani will receive them. Witness: Baziya son of Ili-kurub; witness: Asutaya, son of Ememe; witness: Ashur-idi, son of Kurub-Ishtar.’

2 The notifying message

‘Say to Pilahaya, Irma-Ashur, Mannum-balum-Ashur, Kukkulanum, and Ashur-lamassi (the representatives of Enlil-bani in Ashur); thus (says) Enlil-bani: 30 minas of silver – its *nishatu* tax added, its *šaddu’utu* -tax paid for – with my seal and the seal of Kukkulanum, Kukkulanum is bringing to you. In the silver my hand has been laid. Here in the merchant-office, I have been noted as the warrantor of Kukkulanum and in the 30 minas of silver I have laid my hand. There, place yourselves at the side of Kukkulanum and let him buy textiles for (one) half of the silver, tin for the (other) half of the silver (in) what according to his estimate is a profitable way for him – then have it sealed and with your seals entrust it to Kukkulanum. You are my brothers – as I have laid my hand in the silver here (so) must you there in the towngate, representing me, lay your hands in the goods, and entrust them to Kukkulanum and let Kukkulanum lead the goods to me.’

3 The caravan account

‘Thus Pilahaya, Irma-Ashur, and Mannum-balum-Ashur; say to Enlil-bani and Kukkulanum: [a detailed account of the operations follows which will be presented here in the form of a graph for convenience]

silver sent: 30 minas = 1800 shekels	1800–shekels
shortage recorded at arrival: 2/3 minas = 40 shekels	40 = shekels
silver readily available : 1760 shekels	1760 shekels
expenses:	
– 114 linen cloths = 7½ minas and 4¼ shekels of silver =	454 1/4 shekels
– 2 talents 15 minas + 40 minas + 8 minas of tin for a total of 13 5/6 minas 2 5/6 shekels of silver =	832 5/6 shekels
– 6 black donkeys and fodder: 2 minas 8 shekels of silver =	128 shekels
– harness: 16 shekels of silver =	16 shekels
– expenses for the journey: 37 minas of tin = 2 5/6 minas 2 1/16 shekels of silver =	172 1/6 shekels
– working capital of 2 harnessors: 1 mina of silver =	60 shekels
– their garments: 4 shekels of silver	4 shekels
– additions to the capital of PN: 7 shekels of silver	7 shekels
– additions: 12 1/2 shekels of silver	12 1/2 shekels
– payment of the <i>sa’atu</i> : 2 1/2 shekels of silver	2 1/2 shekels
– departure toll: 15 shekels of silver	15 shekels
– payment on the account of PN ₂	6 shekels
– taken by Kukkulanum: 5/6 mina of silver =	50 shekels
Total expenditures:	1760 1/4 shekels

were all composed following the required procedure, specifying the original owner of the silver and were kept by all parties until the end of the operation.

The second type of text is the letter, written by the merchant at Kanesh to his representatives at Ashur. This letter was written for several reasons: to introduce the caravaneer to the representatives, to check that the amount of silver entrusted was correct and to specify how the money was to be invested. In case of the latter, the most popular solution was to invest half of the silver in textiles and half in tin. The goods then had to be entrusted to the same caravaneer.

The third type of text was the letter written by the representatives in Ashur to the merchant in Kanesh, entrusted to the caravaneer on his journey back to Kanesh together with the goods. The letter had the double-aim of reporting how the silver was invested and allowing the merchant to check whether all the goods had been delivered to him. This type of source provides useful evidence on the current prices of goods, delivery costs, the amount of taxes to be paid, the profits gained, and so on. The exchange of orders between merchants often took changes in prices and profit margins into consideration. There are even instructions to pay only in silver or via credit, to buy at any price or only if the price was convenient, to avoid certain types of goods or certain destinations, and so on. Apart from profits derived from trade, there were financial profits from loans and credits, providing monthly interests.

From a commercial point of view, the purpose of the Old Assyrian trade in Anatolia is very simple: the Assyrians brought fabric and tin to Anatolia, and earned silver and gold. The proceeds were normally re-invested in the same goods in order to maintain this commercial cycle. Therefore, this type of trade was not aimed at providing Assyria with goods it did not have, but to export goods for a profit. Silver was used for the accumulation of wealth and as a reference to establish the value of other goods. In other words, silver acted as the pre-monetary equivalent of money, and the Assyrians used it as a means to gain a profit that could be converted into any other good.

From an Anatolian perspective, silver was simply an exportable material. The area was rich in silver mines and therefore acted as the main provider of a metal whose value was quickly increasing in the Near East. In comparison, tin was neither mined nor sold in Assyria, but came from the Iranian plateau, probably the area between northern Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Tin reached Assyria through Shemshara, Eshnunna and Elam with Ashur acting as an intermediary centre. In this regard, it would have been useful to have as detailed evidence on the Iranian commercial network as we possess on the Anatolian one. The other metal needed for the production of bronze, copper, played a marginal role in the Old Assyrian trade. The most probable resources for this metal for Assyria, the mines of Ergani Maden, were closer to Assyria than to Kanesh, cutting out the latter's merchants from this sector of the trade.

Finally, textiles were both produced in Assyria, and imported and re-exported, especially from Babylonia. If Babylonian textiles were often of a higher quality, the majority of textiles exported were from Ashur. They were produced by the same families involved in commercial activities, with the merchants' wives managing the large number of women involved in textile production. According to prosopographic and statistical analyses, a large part of the population of Ashur was directly or indirectly involved in the commerce and production of textiles, which were mainly produced for trade, making Ashur the commercial and 'industrial' city of the period, with little agricultural activity.

Commodities were delivered via donkey-caravans. A caravaneer was generally given a few donkeys, but it is possible that several caravaneers informally joined larger caravans. However, this is not attested in the contracts and the letters. Journeys must have taken place on an annual basis. The inaccessibility of the roads on the Taurus in the winter provided barely enough time to travel from Ashur to Kanesh, to visit other minor cities along the way and return to Ashur. Itineraries had certain fixed crossing points to cross rivers and mountains, but there were alternative routes and deviations to other profitable areas for trade. The route from Ashur to Kanesh was divided into three branches. The first branch was from Ashur to Tell Leilan (Shubat-Enlil), the centre of the kingdom of Apum. This was approximately a 250 kilometre journey up the Tigris and across the Khabur basin. The second branch departed from Apum and reached Abru, and

where the Euphrates was crossed. The crossing actually took place at Hahhum (modern Lidar Hüyük, near Samsat). This journey was also 250 km long. The third branch was longer, since Kanesh was located ca. 300 km from the Euphrates, and more difficult, requiring the crossing of several mountains.

Even in the *šar tamḫāri* epic (the King of Battle Epic), merchants warned Sargon on the difficulties of this journey, which required the crossing of 'seven rivers' and 'seven mountains'. The crossing of the Euphrates itself was seen as a heroic endeavour, of which kings should be proud. From Old Babylonian itineraries, datable more or less to the same period as the Old Assyrian trade, we know that on average a caravan could cover 25 km per day, with rest days in certain areas. Therefore, the journey from Ashur to Kanesh must have taken roughly 50 days.

Donkeys carried a large load on each side of the saddle and one on top. Once they reached Anatolia, they were sold for 20 shekels each. On average, a donkey carrying tin had 65 minas of tin on each side and more tin, or four or six pieces of fabric, on the saddle, where some luxury goods were also placed. A donkey carrying fabrics had 12 pieces of fabric on each side, as well as the usual load on the saddle. All textiles were wrapped and sealed according to their owner. The total load was 180 to 190 minas (around 90 kg) per donkey, with bulkier fabric loads being kept lighter and tin loads heavier and more concentrated. The orders to invest half of the silver in tin and half in fabrics indicate that value of textiles and tin roughly followed a 1:1 ratio. However, the bulkiness and lesser value of fabrics required three times the amount of donkeys needed for tin.

Prices in Anatolia were different from the ones in Assyria, a difference that was the entire reason why the trade itself existed. Tin was bought in Assyria at 13 to 16 shekels per shekel of silver and was sold in Anatolia at 6 to 8 shekels per shekel of silver. Fabrics varied in price according to their quality, but normal fabrics cost on average between 3 and 7 shekels of silver each and were re-sold at 10 to 14 shekels. Fabrics of a higher quality cost between 8 and 17 shekels and were sold at 15 to 30 shekels of silver. Even in the case of fabrics, then, merchants tried to get a 100% profit or even more.

Naturally, there were travel expenses, an estimated 10% of the budget, although donkeys and packaging were re-sold. Moreover, there were expenses for food for the caravaneers and the donkeys, requiring 2.5% of the budget, and the many, at times unpredictable, transit taxes. In order to pay them, caravaneers had to carry a certain amount of tin on them. The main taxes were: the *niṣḫatum*, which was 5% on fabrics and 3% tin payable at arrival to the king of Kanesh; the *da'tum*, to be paid to the *kārum* and proportional to the journey travelled (10% for the entire journey from Ashur to Kanesh); and the *šaddu'atum*, to be paid at departure to the *kārum*. Overall, however, despite the expenses and taxes, which were at times avoided through smuggling, profits remained quite high.

The wealth of sources on Old Assyrian trade is unparalleled throughout the history of the Near East. However, this network was only one of the many commercial networks in the Near East. A first warning in this regard is that no archaeological reconstruction will ever be able to uncover clues on the credit systems, taxation, organisation and professionals involved in these complex systems. A second warning concerns the specialised nature of the documentation. Despite providing a large amount of information, the archives of the Old Assyrian families involved in trade only concern a small fragment of a larger system. If more evidence were available, the impression of Assyrian trade would be considerably different.

3 The Anatolian states

The Assyrian 'colonial' system in Anatolia involved around ten main *kārum* and ten minor colonies (*wabar-tum*), all linked to local cities (Figure 12.5). These settlements were mainly distributed in three areas: 1) around the Middle and Upper Euphrates, both on the eastern/ Upper Mesopotamian side (Nihriya, Badua, Zalpah) and the western/Anatolian side (Urshum, Hahhum, Mama); 2) on the Konya plain (Purushattum, Wahshushana, Wahshaniya, Shalatiwar); 3) along the bend of the river Halys (Hattusa, Karahna, Turhumit), its valley (Samuha) and river mouth (Zalpa). Due to the orographic characteristics of Anatolia, city-states were

concentrated in the valleys and plains between mountains and forests, or in the lakes and salt deserts in Central Anatolia. This concentration is confirmed by the archaeological evidence, which attests to a rise of cities at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, right after the decline of Early Bronze Age settlements. This was especially the case in Cilicia, in the Konya plain and the Central Anatolian plateau.

There were more local city-states than colonies in Anatolia, with textual evidence attesting to around thirty city-states. While there were probably more, albeit unattested, cities, the number of *kārum* known to us is probably close to their actual number. The local city-states varied in size and power and were independent from one another. However, minor cities gravitated around major centres. Each independent city had its own palace and king. The Assyrian sources call the local political authorities the 'palace' and define the king as a *ruba'um*, the Assyrian term for a ruler, or *šarrum*, a term that implies a higher role.



Figure 12.5 Central and eastern Anatolia in the Old Assyrian period, ca. 1950–1780 BC.

Another title attested only sporadically is *rubā'um rabi'um*, 'great king', implying an extended supremacy over other subordinate cities. In some areas, it is possible to locate some hegemonic cities, such as Kanesh, Wahshushana and Purushhattum. In the period belonging to Level II at Kanesh, the situation seems to have been characterised by a balance of power amongst various independent states. However, in the following phase (Level Ib), expansionistic tendencies began to appear.

Alongside kings, city-states had several important functionaries, the highest ranking one being the 'chief of the citadel' (*rabi simmiltim*). There were other officials linked to those sectors pertaining trade, such as the 'chief of the storehouse', 'chief of the market', 'chief of metals' and so on. These were all Assyrian denominations and all the titles in the local language remain unknown to us. Apart from the few attestations on this administrative organisation, we know of relatively developed palatial states. The latter were able to engage in legal and commercial agreements with the Assyrians (Figure 12.6). These relations were agreed on through treaties sealed by oaths, involving each new local king and the central *kārum* of Kanesh, or the local *kārum*. Treaties certified that the local king allowed the Assyrian colony to stay in his territory and to engage in its commercial activities. The local king also ensured the protection of the colony in his land and along trade routes. Old Assyrian trade was therefore based on a complex set of treaties with all the cities involved in the system. However, the latter was always in danger of breaking down each time there were conflicts between local states, or a new king caused some difficulties.

While a variety of states were involved in these agreements, the other contractual party (the Assyrians) was always the same, represented by the central authority of *kārum* Kanesh and Ashur. The system was relatively stable and homogeneous, with standardised transit taxes and the palace's pre-emption rights on a minor share of the imported stock. There were some disagreements, but they were considerably fewer than the several disputes among the merchants for credit issues. Smuggling itself was meant to avoid the taxes imposed by local rulers, rather than the *kārum*'s ones. However, it was forbidden and punished by the latter, rather than by the local rulers.

If the political status of local rulers was entirely independent from Assyria, it is also clear that Assyrian merchants were not helpless in their relations with the local authorities. Somehow, it is possible to see that these merchants were supported by the Assyrian state. The latter could have even provided a certain amount of military support. This type of Assyrian intervention does not seem to have been required on the other side of the Taurus, although it is well attested in Upper Mesopotamian cities, at least at the time of

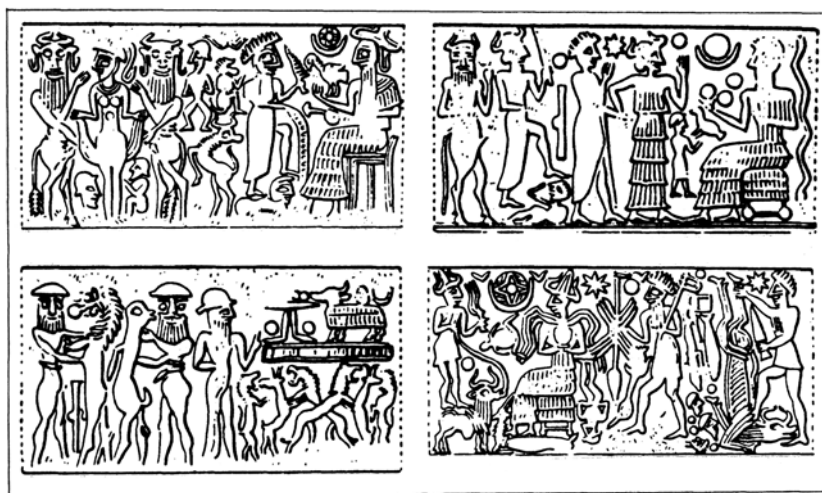


Figure 12.6 Anatolian seal impressions on Old Assyrian tablets from Cappadocia.

Shamshi-Adad. Moreover, despite Assyria's potential political and military support, the unity of the colonial system was already strong enough to support its own merchants. Both on a financial and practical level, the system was strong enough to be able to deal with the local states on an equal standing, since the colonies brought tin and textiles to Anatolia. They were also able to exercise a profitable business, which, as far as we can see, was not hindered by obstacles or threats to the caravans travelling across the Near East.

Despite the fact that Assyrians and Anatolians were separate entities, they still remained in close contact. Several mixed marriages are attested and even in terms of material culture, the houses built by the Assyrian merchants were not different from Anatolian houses. Naturally, once merchants had reached a certain age, they usually returned to Assyria, without leaving any ethno-linguistic traces in Anatolia. In this regard, the ethno-linguistic context of Anatolia of the time is only visible to us through the local names attested on the Old Assyrian texts. These personal names partly belonged to dialects somehow related to Hittite, which would begin to be attested shortly after this time. There were also large groups of Luwian names, especially in the south, Hurrian in the south-east and Hittite or pre-Hittite in Central Anatolia. Following the disruptions experienced at the end of the third millennium BC, the Anatolian population thus began to establish itself in a way that will be better attested in the mid-second millennium BC, thanks to the documentation from the Hittite capital at Boghazköi.

In its first eighty years, the Old Assyrian trade enjoyed a period of political stability. The following hiatus of the network was not due to local disruptions, but Assyrian ones, which led to the destruction of the *kārum* of Level II after its sudden abandonment. When the Assyrians returned, possibly supported by a stronger political power in Assyria, they had to deal with a much more complex political situation. This is attested in a letter of the king of Mama, Anum-Hirbi (a king whose name was Hurrian and whose kingdom was located in the south, between the Euphrates and the Taurus) to Warshama, king of nearby Kanesh. The two kings had sealed an alliance through a treaty, but were now accusing each other of plundering each other's kingdoms, either on their own, or through vassals. The latter could have acted independently, but were nonetheless under these kings' jurisdiction. This letter depicts an Anatolia marked by internal conflicts and difficult relations between neighbouring states. Anum-Hirbi must have had territorial ambitions, since he left a stele on Mount Amanus. This stele would eventually be found by Shalmaneser III almost a thousand years later. Having deciphered the name of the unknown ruler, Shalmaneser then left his own stele near Anum-Hirbi's.

If Anum-Hirbi's letter has the advantage of being a direct and authentic piece of evidence, the overall picture of the time can be confirmed considering another source as reliable. Being a later text, this other source has to be used with great caution. Initially, it was believed to be reliable, and later suspicions that it was a fake text, composed by those Hittite rulers who had kept it, now seem excessive. This text was a copy made several centuries after the original inscription of Anitta, king of Kushshara, a king also attested in the Old Assyrian texts from Kanesh (level Ib). On his inscription, Anitta celebrates his victories. He started from his own city, located along the bend of the Halys river and conquered Central and northern Anatolia, reaching Zalpa, near the Halys river mouth and Kanesh (Nesha in Hittite) in the south. The military interventions and destructions of cities were repeated in three campaigns, indicating a situation of local conflicts and the progress of Anitta's expansionistic move.

The succession of local wars similar to the ones attested in Anum-Hirbi's letter or Anitta's inscription explains why the Old Assyrian network collapsed. The network lost the essential prerequisites for this system, namely, political stability and peace, both in Anatolia and in Assyria. This severely hindered the possibility of continuing long-distance trade. However, the significance of Anitta's inscription for Hittite scribes needs to be taken into consideration. Firstly, Kushshara, capital of Anitta's kingdom, was to become the capital of the Old Hittite kingdom. Its kings could have recognised in Anitta's endeavours their own achievements. Secondly, Anitta destroyed Hattusa, the next and most important Hittite capital. He then cursed those who would eventually restore it. Therefore, this text required taking the necessary magic or ritual precautions when the seat of power was moved from a victorious city (Kushshara) to a cursed one.

13

THE MARI AGE

1 Tribes and palaces in the Middle Euphrates

The discovery of the administrative and epistolary archives in the royal palace of Mari has thrown some light on a region and period previously unknown to us. The archives cover a period of three generations in the first half of the eighteenth century BC. Mari's critical position between the Mesopotamian alluvial plain and the west, and its role as an outpost and necessary stop in the journey from Mesopotamia to northern Syria has already been mentioned in the previous chapters (Figure 13.1). In the south, the alluvial plain and its irrigation system enabled the development of an agricultural and densely populated area. In the north, rainfall levels allowed the practice of rainfed agriculture. The Middle Euphrates constituted a sort of corridor linking these two areas, locked between a fertile valley on one side and a semi-arid plateau on the other. This area was characterised by seasonal farming and nomadic settlements in the winter and the spring.

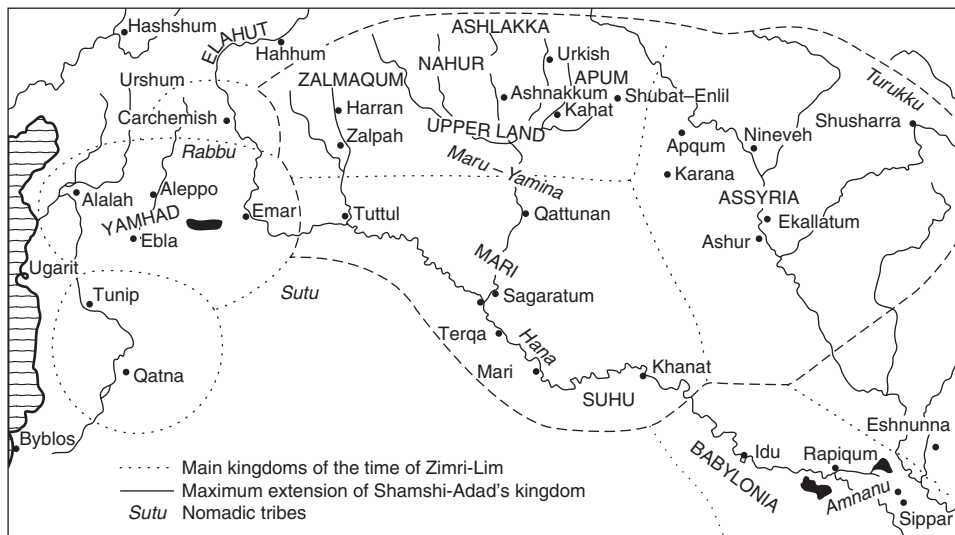


Figure 13.1 Map of Upper Mesopotamia in the Mari Age.

The region of Mari was therefore characterised by the close contact and intersection of two contrasting elements, which, for convenience, we will define as nomadic and sedentary. These represent, respectively, the political and organisational structures of the tribe and the palace. In the past, the relation between these two elements has been analysed in terms of their respective anteriority and posteriority, mobility and stability, and aggressive and defensive attitudes. These interpretations were influenced by the partiality of the available documentation, which was written by sedentary scribes, and of the scholars who unintentionally took on this biased point of view. In this way, they consolidated the stereotype of the nomads as uncivilised, aggressive and unstable groups. However, a more anthropological approach has restored the subjective nature of the points of view attested and the diversity and complementarity of these two different lifestyles.

Another misinterpretation was the idea that the presence of pastoral groups in the Middle Euphrates was one of the steps in the wider migration of Semitic people from their 'primitive seat' to their final destination in the Mesopotamian alluvial plain. Consequently, their semi-nomadic lifestyle was interpreted as an intermediary stage in their transition from nomadism to sedentariness. These misinterpretations, which varied between the drastic and naïve to more elaborate and balanced approaches, have survived for a long time. They therefore prevented a full understanding of this semi-nomadic lifestyle, with its transhumant farming and village agriculture, as a characteristic and perfectly suitable lifestyle for the area.

The view that sees mobile groups of nomads as new arrivals in the pre-existent world of the sedentary palaces is also untenable. If there was a secondary and intrusive element in the Middle Euphrates, this was certainly the palace. In reality, both these organisational and economic structures developed alongside each other and influenced one another. Moreover, although the development of palatial states is better documented, tribal groups also experienced an evolution, partly as a response to the evolution of the palaces.

On the issue of aggressiveness, the ancient and modern stereotype of the aggressive nomad has to be reconsidered. In this view, nomads were more dedicated to plundering than to a productive economy and were motivated by the desire to steal the wealth accumulated by the farming communities thus forced to defend themselves. In reality, both economies were focused on production. They both needed the 'other' element and this inevitably led to conflicts over the exploitation of the same territories. There certainly was a degree of nomadic aggression against the palaces. However, the opposite was also present, constituting an attempt to subdue pastoral groups and employ them as an additional workforce or in the military.

In terms of mobility, it is clear that the movements of pastoral groups were not an unplanned wandering in search for food. These movements were the concrete expression in space of their transhumant economy. However, there was also a mobility of the palace. From a structural point of view, palaces depended on various networks that relied on mobility, from communication, to trade and the military. From a diachronic point of view, both the construction of new palaces and political changes required painful modifications of earlier consolidated models for the utilisation of the land.

In the Middle Bronze Age, the pastoral groups of the Middle Euphrates and the Khabur Valley were predominantly Amorite. They were a relatively new presence in the area, substituting previous Eblaite and Akkadian groups. The latter lived in similar conditions and developed a similar economy, based on the farming of sheep and goats, as well as agriculture. Farming included 'horizontal' movements between summer pastures located in the fertile valleys (the *ah Purattim*, namely, the 'Euphrates Valley') and winter pastures in the semi-arid plateau (the *mātum elītum*, 'Upper Land'). Only one part of the pastoral group (*nawūm*) moved on a seasonal basis, the rest remained in the villages located in the valley to cultivate the lands. Therefore, there was a typically 'dimorphic' situation, with higher concentrations of people in the summer and lower ones in the winter. The agricultural cycle worked well with the pastoral cycle. The main crops (cereals) were cultivated in winter, allowing fields to be used as pastureland in the summer. Moreover, not all of the land was cultivated, since fields were rotated on a biennial basis. If necessary, groups could move over longer distances, especially towards the north (Upper Khabur), or the west (northern Syria).

The political organisation of these groups was centred on a kin-based structure, with several types of sub-groups, from smaller kin-based groups (the pastoral camp or migratory group) to the tribe and the tribal confederation. Until recently, it was believed that there were three tribal confederations within the kingdom of Mari: the Haneans, who were the ones most integrated with the palace, followed by the Benjaminites and the Sutians. However, Jean-Marie Durand and Dominique Charpin have shown that the term 'Haneans', which gave the name to the homonymous region (Hana), indicated nomads in general. Apart from the more mobile and detached character of the Sutians, who gravitated towards Syria, the two tribal groups of the kingdom of Mari were the Banu-Yamina (Benjaminites), 'sons of the right' (that is, the south) and the Banu-Sim'al, 'sons of the left' (that is, the north). Their names referred to their geographic position in relation to the rising sun. Since the ruling dynasty was of Sim'alite origins, the submission of the Benjaminites seems to have been a difficult task, causing several wars.

Tribes and smaller kin-based groups were normally centred in villages acting as permanent bases. They had their own leaders, whose titles were extraneous to Akkadian and its palatial structure (such as the *sugāgum* and other names). These leaders were military leaders as well as political representatives of the tribes before the palace, which considered these leaders as some sort of local functionaries. The palace provided them with a sort of investiture or formal recognition, requiring the exchange of gifts and payments. Palaces therefore constituted the other side of this complex structure (Figure 13.2). Along the Euphrates

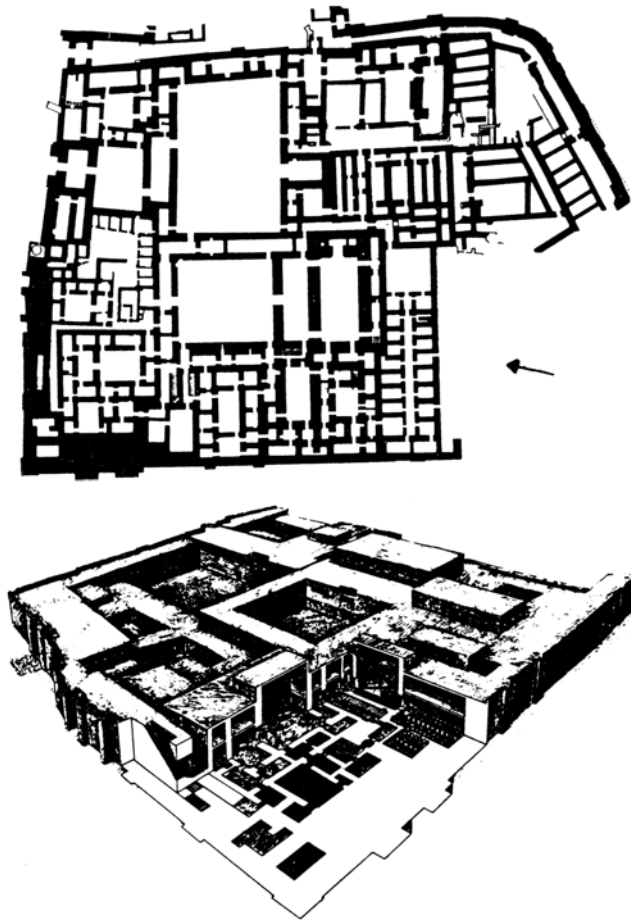


Figure 13.2 Royal palace of Mari: plan and reconstruction.

and the Khabur there was a whole network of walled cities with temples and palaces. These cities were part of a hierarchical system. Some cities had independent rulers, while others were governed by local functionaries. This hierarchy changed over time. The period attested in the Mari archives features the alternating supremacy of Mari and Shubat-Enlil (Tell Leilan). The former controlled the Middle Euphrates and the Lower Khabur region. The latter controlled Assyria and the Upper Khabur region and was chosen by Shamshi-Adad as his own residence.

Following the Mesopotamian model, royal palaces were the seat of the royal administration, with scribes acting as administrators in a variety of sectors. Functionaries appointed by the ruling kings governed the provincial palaces. These provincial palaces had a much more limited bureaucratic structure. Nonetheless, the latter included all functions needed for the correct administration of the city. In the Mari sphere of influence, there were the provincial palaces of Terqa (Tell Ashara), Saggaratum, Qattunan and Tuttul (Tell Bi'a), while in the one of Shubat-Enlil there were Shaghar Bazar and Karana (Tell Rimah). The political structure of all kingdoms belonging to the Amorite cultural sphere, which extended from Syria to Elam, was therefore based on two main components. On the one hand, there was the city with its palace and agricultural fields (*mamlakatum*). On the other, there was the tribal group with its wider presence in the region (*nawûm*). Royal titles such as 'king of Mari and Hana', or 'king of Tuttul and Amnanum' are a clear indication of this double component. The latter is also attested in the Sumerian south in the title of 'king of Uruk and Amnanum'.

The economy of the palaces was partly based on the agricultural activities in the fertile valleys. These were limited, but still able to support the small palaces. Moreover, palaces could rely on taxes on sheep farmed by the tribes and on the north-to-south and east-to-west commercial networks that had to cross this strategic region. The lands directly managed by the palace were not vast compared to their Mesopotamian counterparts. A large share of the surplus was therefore gathered through taxes levied on villages and pastoral groups. Due to its proximity to raw materials, such as wood and metal from Syria and Anatolia, the quality of craftsmanship continued to be as high as the one from Mesopotamia.

Unlike in Mesopotamia, however, life in the palaces of the region seems to have been marked by a scarcity of human, technological and economic resources. This problem is attested in the numerous letters written by royal functionaries and their colleagues in the provincial palaces. In these letters, the functionaries complain about the lack of specialised workforce. They therefore tried to organise the transfer of both specialised and non-specialised workers from one palace to the other and to cope with a wide range of needs (which were difficult to take care of in a stable manner) through the re-organisation of what was available. The situation became significantly worse at the time of Shamshi-Adad. In fact, the construction of his palace at Shubat-Enlil required large amounts of resources. Consequently, the older palaces of Mari and Ashur had to provide parts of their workforce and expertise, worsening a situation that was already unstable.

Another problem was the state of constant conflict caused by the expansionistic ambitions of several kings ruling at the time: from Yahdun-Lim of Mari to Naram-Sin of Eshnunna, Shamshi-Adad of Assyria and Hammurabi of Babylon. In order to pursue these wars, kings relied on copious numbers of tribal troops. Therefore, far from fearing the arrival of nomadic groups, as previously believed, palaces eagerly encouraged their arrival in order to form an army large enough to cope with their various offensive or defensive undertakings. Wars were fought in summer, which was the only season when roads were accessible and food resources were available from the late spring harvests. Just like there was a seasonal complementarity between transhumant farming and agriculture, so there was one between farming and wars. For both agricultural and military needs, the late arrival and reunion of pastoral groups in the valleys caused palaces a great deal of anxiety, often forcing them to resort to several constrictive measures.

The coexistence of two economic and political systems with different characteristics and needs in the same area was based on this territorial and seasonal complementarity. The strategies used by these two systems, however, remained inherently different. The tribe used a more flexible strategy, characterised by

a slow pace of development, large territories and a more traditional technical knowledge. Therefore, it produced little surplus in terms of resources, since its main asset was the ownership of herds. However, it still managed to remain safe from sudden crises. On the contrary, the strategy of the palace was much more fast-paced. The palace focused on the effective use of time and space, the over-exploitation of technical and administrative competences and the recruitment (at times even forced) of labour for urban and military endeavours. The palace was also dedicated to the accumulation of surplus to finance the production of luxury products, the maintenance of palatial culture and the exchange of prestigious gifts. In other words, palaces required as much as possible from their territories – a situation that was bearable in favourable times, but that could also cause drastic crises in difficult periods.

It is highly likely that the situation was further worsened by the palaces' introduction of summer cultivations (such as sesame). The latter effectively took away fields formerly used as pastureland. Moreover, the building programs and wars undertaken by the palaces were occasional, yet equally aggravating, initiatives. The economy of the Middle Euphrates could not bear this growing pressure. However, this situation did not affect pastoral groups, which managed to return to their former rhythms. It affected the palaces, which collapsed one after the other, for a variety of reasons. Hammurabi destroyed Mari, while Shubat-Enlil was significantly reduced after Shamshi-Adad's reign. Having kept Mari's legacy alive for a short while, even Terqa suddenly collapsed and so did Tuttul. Around 1800–1750 BC, the Middle Euphrates Valley and the Lower Khabur had been a large network of thriving palaces. However, only a century later, the area became a de-urbanised region. It began to be ruled by pastoral groups that were hindering commercial activities, but could not be conquered by the sedentary states, now located increasingly further away from this region.

2 The reign of Yahdun-Lim

Up until the end of the nineteenth century BC, Upper Mesopotamia had been a politically fragmented region. Following several expansionistic attempts led by a variety of kings, the region found itself unified, though for a short period of time, under the rule of Shamshi-Adad. These expansionistic initiatives were characterised by a certain degree of flexibility and improvisation and were clearly the work of Amorite leaders. These leaders' appreciation for large and unsettled territories was in marked contrast to the aim of Sumero-Akkadian rulers. The latter rather focused on the control of specific agricultural and administrative areas. Although the events took place in the same period, in this section the situation of the western area of the Euphrates Valley will be considered first, to be followed by the one of the eastern area of the Tigris valley.

The creation of the large and powerful kingdom of Mari happened during the reign of Yahdun-Lim, who belonged to the Banu-Sim'al tribe. His father Yaggid-Lim was possibly the king of nearby Suprum. Yaggid-Lim controlled the Middle Euphrates region and had fought for an extended period of time against Shamshi-Adad's father, Ila-kabkabi, who controlled the Middle Tigris. Yahdun-Lim reigned for around fifteen years (ca. 1810–1795 BC) and moved the capital of his reign to Mari. He therefore replaced the dynasty of *šakkanakku* previously governing the city. Yahdun-Lim significantly enlarged his kingdom, becoming 'king of Mari, Tuttul and Hana'. He constructed several canals, in particular the one linking the Khabur to the Euphrates, called Ishim-Yahdun-Lim. He also built several temples and fortification walls, especially in Mari and Terqa, which was the city of the god Dagan and the main religious centre of the region. Finally, he founded a city in the desert, Dur-Yahdun-Lim. A commemorative inscription reports his victory over 'seven kings, fathers of Hana', the leaders of the nomadic tribes located in the region of Mari and Terqa, as the defining moment in the formation of his kingdom. The inscription then continues listing the king's building program.

On a political level, in order to oppose Shamshi-Adad, Yahdun-Lim sealed alliances (through treaties and inter-dynastic marriages) with Yamhad to the west and Eshnunna to the east. Eshnunna controlled

Suhum, a region in the Euphrates Valley south of Mari, where it founded the city of Haradum. At the time, then, the kingdom of Eshnunna bordered with the one of Mari. In the same period, the Mari administration changed its former scribal tradition, inherited from the *šakkanakku*, with a new one, more Babylonian in style and imported from Eshnunna. On a military level, Mari was engaged on two fronts. In the north, the city conquered Tuttul (Tell Bi'a, near modern Raqqa) and Emar (Meskene). This area was formerly ruled by the Banu-Yamina, who rebelled against this expansion.

The foundation texts from the temple of Shamash celebrate this memorable victory against the Ben-jaminites. The latter are all listed with the name of their city and their tribe: Samanum and the Ubrabum; Tuttul and the Amnanum; Abattum and the Rabbum. These groups were supported by Sumu-epuh, king of Yamhad. The great victory was also celebrated in a year formula, and other formulas commemorated the conquest of the main rebellious centres. The celebratory inscription of Yahdun-Lim even attests his expedition to the Mediterranean. This achievement had both ideological connotations, implying that the king had reached the end of the world, and economic ones, since it allowed him to bring back cedar wood. However, this achievement also implies that Yamhad allowed the expedition to cross its territory.

Much more uncertain was the outcome of Yahdun-Lim's wars against Shamshi-Adad. The king of Mari had a stable control over the Middle Euphrates and Lower Khabur regions. He therefore enlarged his sphere of influence through alliances with Nihriya and Talhayum in the Upper Balikh and with Kurda in the Upper Khabur, reaching as far as the foothills of the Jebel Sinjar. This expansion led to his conflict with Shamshi-Adad. Initially, Yahdun-Lim's army had been quite successful, conquering Nagar (Tell Brak) and reaching Ekallatum, along the Tigris. In the long run, however, it was Shamshi-Adad who eventually succeeded, although the exact circumstances surrounding his victory are unknown to us. As a result of his defeat, Yahdun-Lim's son, Sumu-Yaman, supplanted his father and possibly sought the support of Yamhad. A few years later Sumu-Yaman was also deposed, allowing Shamshi-Adad to conquer Mari.

3 Shamshi-Adad and the 'kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia'

The western side of Upper Mesopotamia was under the supremacy of the king of Mari, the eastern side, from the Tigris Valley to the Upper Khabur, was marked by the several attempts of the kings of Eshnunna to conquer the area. The Eponym Chronicle found at Mari, and the year formulas of Ipiq-Adad of Eshnunna, attest to Ipiq-Adad's fighting in Upper Mesopotamia against the elder brother of Shamshi-Adad, Aminum, and conquering several cities in the Upper Khabur region. Ipiq-Adad's son, Naram-Sin, was previously identified with the homonymous king of the Assyrian King List. However, this hypothesis is now rejected, although the interruption of commercial activities in Cappadocia at the time of Naram-Sin of Assyria could still have been due to the threats posed by Eshnunna. The rise of Eshnunna under Ipiq-Adad and Naram-Sin did not last. The Eponym Chronicle describes the progressive supremacy of Shamshi-Adad, who took over Ekallatum, making it his temporary capital. The king removed Erishum from the throne of Ashur, bestowing upon himself the title of 'king of Assyria' and continued his wars against Eshnunna, now ruled by Dadusha.

The rise of Shamshi-Adad did not take place without opposition, both in terms of the legitimation and the organisation of his reign. On a propagandistic and scholarly level, the rise of Shamshi-Adad was justified both in the Eponym Chronicle and in the Assyrian King List. The former is the story of Shamshi-Adad's family until his definitive rise to power. In its first half, the Assyrian King List constitutes an attempt at placing this usurper and his ancestors within a dynastic sequence that did not originally belong to him.

Shamshi-Adad became king of Assyria only in a second stage. Originally, he belonged to a family of Amorite tribal chiefs. These chiefs had long fought against Yaggid-Lim of Mari and Ipiq-Adad of Eshnunna over the control of the Upper Khabur region. Shamshi-Adad himself had fled to Babylon, seeking political protection against Eshnunna, to then return to power from Ekallatum. At the time, the latter

was a historically and geographically marginal centre. Even after his conquest of Assyria, the old religious, political and commercial centre of Ashur had a secondary role in his kingdom.

When Shamshi-Adad managed to expand and consolidate his kingdom, forming what came to be defined as the 'kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia', he entrusted Assyria to his son Ishme-Dagan, who was based in Ekallatum. Shamshi-Adad then moved his residence to Shubat-Enlil (Tell Leilan), to the east of the Khabur Triangle. This was a strategic location to control the routes between Assyria and Upper Mesopotamia. Excavations at Tell Leilan have uncovered a palace and a temple from the reign of Shamshi-Adad, with several cylinder seals belonging to his functionaries. Other administrative centres of his reign that have been excavated are Shaghar Bazar, in the Khabur area, and Tell Rimah, south of the Jebel Sinjar. Alongside administrative texts, numerous buildings and temples have been found there, indicating the remarkable building programs of the Mari Age.

One of the most crucial moments in the rise of Shamshi-Adad was his conquest of Mari. This conquest forced Yahdun-Lim to flee west to Yamhad, which was Mari's enemy, though it was now increasingly concerned about Shamshi-Adad's expansion. After a few years, Shamshi-Adad appointed his own son, Yasmah-Addu, as ruler in Mari. For this reason, the second phase of Shamshi-Adad's reign is best attested in the Mari archives. Mari's administrative structure remained unchanged. However, its subordinate position to a larger kingdom had a strong impact on the city. Parts of the kingdom's resources were moved to support Shamshi-Adad's agenda: from the provision of troops for his military endeavours to the financing and provision of technical and administrative specialists for his building programmes. Relations between Shamshi-Adad and Yasmah-Addu often seem to have been tense. This was due to the Assyrian king's continuous requests, which weighed heavily on Mari's economy. Moreover, there was also Shamshi-Adad's marked intolerance for his son's poor leadership skills. Unlike his more capable elder brother Ishme-Dagan, Yasmah-Addu was considered to be incompetent and immature and in need of constant guidance.

Despite having reached a high point in his political influence, Shamshi-Adad did not want to decrease his political and military engagements, nor was he able to do so. In fact, his expansion could never be fully consolidated. The change between political fragmentation (where power was divided amongst the traditional urban centres) and his 'imperial' unification (based on the mobility and adaptability of the tribal element) had been too abrupt and ambitious to be consolidated successfully.

To the south-east, Shamshi-Adad had to face two powerful states, namely, Eshnunna and Babylon. The latter was still in the process of consolidating itself. Only after the death of Shamshi-Adad did the city become a major political and military player in the Near East under Hammurabi. In comparison, under the leadership of Dadusha, Eshnunna had begun its expansionistic rise in the Khabur and Middle Euphrates regions. At first, Shamshi-Adad managed to keep hold of Me-Turan in the Diyala, and Mankisum in the Middle Tigris. Soon after, however, Dadusha conquered these cities and moved on, conquering Rapiqum and all of the land of Suhum and directly threatening Ekallatum. At this point, Shamshi-Adad decided to sign a treaty and this peace seems to have lasted until his death.

To the north-east, having established control over Assyria with his conquest of Arrapha, Nineveh and Qabra, Shamshi-Adad had to deal with the ever-present problem of this region, which was the pressures from groups living in the Zagros, in particular the Turukku. In this regard, the city of Shusharra (Tell Shemshara) constituted the closest point of economic interaction and military containment of this threatening group. Shamshi-Adad even tried, and for a while succeeded, at restoring commercial activities with Cappadocia, with its high profits. Seals belonging to his functionaries have been found at Acemhöyük (ancient Purushanda). To the west, having conquered Mari, Shamshi-Adad had to face the powerful kingdom of Yamhad. Its ruler, Sumu-epuh, had already attacked the king on several occasions. As a response, Shamshi-Adad sealed an alliance against Yamhad with Carchemish in the north and Qatna in the south. Yasmah-Addu married a daughter of Ishi-Adad, king of Qatna, from whom Shamshi-Adad sought support on at least two occasions. This was also to boast that he had reached the Upper Sea and the Lebanese forests, just like his son Yasmah-Addu did before him.

On an ideological level, it is clear that Shamshi-Adad followed the example of the Akkadian kings, using the titles of 'strong king' and 'king of Akkad'. Even his military expedition to the Mediterranean followed the same model and so did his aspirations at universal dominion. However, they could not emulate the feat of reaching both the Upper and Lower Sea, since Lower Mesopotamia remained outside the king's reach. It is clear that Shamshi-Adad did not just consider himself king of Assyria. However, in his reign the Assyrian eponym dating system and the Assyrian calendar were implemented in all of his cities, even in those ruled by local dynasts, such as Mari. It is even possible that he substituted the authority of the god Ashur with the one of the god Enlil. His attention to the patron deity of Nippur, who had also been at the heart of Sargon's claim to legitimacy, is evident (like naming his capital after the god).

4 The reign of Zimri-Lim

In his final years, Shamshi-Adad had to face a series of emergencies. These were not particularly relevant on a supra-regional level, but were equally threatening for his state. First, there was the attack of the Turukku, who managed to reach the foothills of the Tur Abdin. Second, there was the revolt of the Zalmaqum region, located in the Upper Balikh. Following the death of Shamshi-Adad's ally Dadusha, a more ambitious ruler, Ibal-pi-El, came to power in Eshnunna. Similarly, in Aleppo the more energetic king Yarim-Lim succeeded king Sumu-epuh. Consequently, the 'kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia' found itself surrounded by threatening neighbours. The now aged Shamshi-Adad delegated more responsibilities to his sons Ishme-Dagan and Yasmah-Addu. He died shortly afterwards, and his death had an immediate impact on the kingdom. Apparently, a tribal chief of the Banu-Sim'al expelled Yasmah-Addu from Mari in favour of the heir of Yahdun-Lim, Zimri-Lim, who also had the support of Yamhad. Shortly after his enthronement, he married Shibtu, daughter of his protector Yarim-Lim.

Of the formerly great kingdom of his father, Ishme-Dagan only managed to keep Assyria, now dramatically reduced to its original size. This was essentially the Tigris Valley, from Ekallatum and Ashur to the area north of the Assyrian Triangle. The territories between Assyria and the Middle Euphrates – the Khabur and Balikh regions, as well as the Jebel Sinjar and Wadi Tharthar – broke down into a network of small independent kingdoms. The strongest contender in the area could then turn these kingdoms into vassal states. The main contest was centred on the rivalry between Zimri-Lim and Ishme-Dagan. From Mari's perspective, this intermediary region was fundamental for its economy. Its water resources, as well as its role as preferred area for seasonal activities, made the Khabur basin a crucial territory for Mari. From an Assyrian perspective, this region was important for strictly commercial reasons, allowing caravans to move from Ashur to Cappadocia.

Zimri-Lim eventually succeeded, conquering the entire Khabur Triangle and the Sinjar's foothills within the first years of his reign. In this way, he cut Ishme-Dagan out of Upper Mesopotamia and its Anatolian trade, which consequently disappeared. The kinglets of Upper Mesopotamia managed to keep the autonomy they enjoyed under Shamshi-Adad. However, the change of overlord brought in many cases a change in the local dynasties. New alliances were enforced by a series of inter-dynastic marriages between several daughters of Zimri-Lim and the kings of Ilansura, Ashlakka, Elahut, Andariq and many more. This was a *bona fide* political strategy, further cemented by the sending of his daughter 'as wife' of Shamash at Sippar, in order to establish friendly ties with Babylonia. There, the princess lived in a cloister of priestesses. The various letters sent by Zimri-Lim's daughters living in Mesopotamia to their father indicate that their situation was not as good as they expected. There were several economic and cultural difficulties, so much so that some marriages had to be annulled.

However, the contest between Mari and Ashur soon became a much wider problem, involving the old state of Eshnunna, Babylon and even Elam. Initially, scholars thought that alliances were roughly separated into two groups: the one of the Euphrates, linking Yamhad, Mari, Babylon and Larsa; and the Tigris one, linking Assyria, Eshnunna and Elam. In reality, it was a much more intricate situation. First, Ibal-pi-El of

Eshnunna attempted to conquer Upper Mesopotamia through a series of expeditions. He followed the Middle Euphrates from Rapiqum to the border of Mari, conquering Suhum. He also fostered a revolt of the Benjaminites against the Sim'alites of Zimri-Lim. He then followed the Middle Tigris reaching Ekallatum and Ashur, expelling Ishme-Dagan, who fled to Babylon. Ibal-pi-El did not stop there and also reached the Sinjar foothills and the Khabur Triangle.

This expansion, which consisted mainly of sieges rather than conflicts in the battlefield, was energetically opposed by Zimri-Lim. He found the support of Yamhad as well as Babylon, which was alarmed by the threatening rise of Eshnunna. After two or three years, Ibal-pi-El had to retreat, abandoning his conquered cities one after the other and leaving his former allies at the mercy of his enemies. After the peace with Eshnunna and the Benjaminites, Mari went through a relatively stable period for around five years. In this period, Zimri-Lim ordered a 'census' (*tēbibtum*) of the Benjaminites and travelled to Ugarit. This peaceful phase, however, was interrupted by the Elamite *sukkal-mah*, who invaded Mesopotamia. At first Mari and Babylon supported Elam in its siege of their old rival Eshnunna. However, the situation completely changed when Elam threatened Babylon and the Sinjar region. This led to the formation of a coalition between Mari and Babylon, along with their allies Larsa, Yamhad, Zalmaqum and all the kings in the Jezira. Within a few years, Elam was forced to retreat, although it still managed to plunder Eshnunna.

A few years later, Hammurabi of Babylon pursued the final expansionistic attempt of this period. Having conquered Larsa, as we will soon see, the king moved against the other surviving states of the time, former allies and enemies alike. He conquered Eshnunna, pushed back Assyria and conquered Mari in his thirty-second regnal year. Two years later, he destroyed it. Despite being a tragic event for the city's inhabitants, the violent destruction of Mari's royal palace managed to preserve an archive with crucial information on the events of the first half of the eighteenth century BC. This has provided us with an unusually detailed account for such a remote historical phase.

5 The Mari Age: wars, alliances and trade

The Mari Age is undoubtedly a period for which it is possible to reconstruct the network of political relations of the 'Amorite' world (Figure 13.3), which can be considered as a cultural and linguistic continuum that spread from Syria to Elam with an unprecedented intensity and breadth of interaction. Akkadian became the preferred language for diplomatic relations and the administration of all the palaces of the area, even where the main spoken language was Hurrian or Amorite. Messengers and ambassadors had to travel extensively to deliver information, requests and gifts, and to prepare the route for merchants or troops. Regarding the letters kings sent to each other, relations between royal houses became formalised through an imaginary sense of 'brotherhood'. This was an intrinsic aspect of the kin-based structure of Amorite society and was further cemented through inter-dynastic marriages. Gift-exchange followed the traditional rules of reciprocity and generosity. Similarly, hospitality was a typical aspect of the way diplomatic relations were established.

The wider political system of the region was divided into two levels, an aspect that will be better documented in the Late Bronze Age. The kings of Yamhad and Qatna in Syria, Mari and Assyria in Upper Mesopotamia, Babylon and Larsa in Lower Mesopotamia and Elam, with its imperial ambitions, had a series of vassal kings depending on them. These states had to swear oaths of loyalty and subordination. Even the ever-changing alliances sealed by rulers were stipulated through oaths and followed the principles of equality. These agreements are attested in their correspondence. We do not possess any of the original texts for this period, with the exception of one treaty from Tell Leilan. After all, many of them must have been formal spoken oaths. We also possess a declaration of war from a letter of Yarim-Lim to Yashub-Yahad of Der. This is a revealing source on a practice that would remain typical of the Middle and Late Bronze Age throughout the Near East.

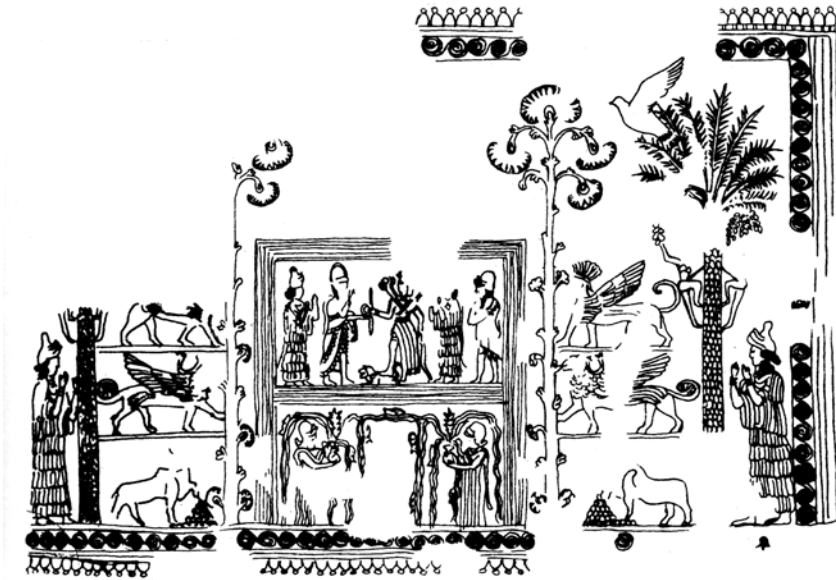


Figure 13.3 Royal palace of Mari: the fresco defined as the ‘investiture of the king’ in the throne room.

Upon initiating a war, the king would explain the reason that obliged him to take such a course of action. Normally, this reason was an alleged breach of reciprocal relations, where a friendly and respectful behaviour from one king was returned with hostility and deceitfulness. At the same time, former favours were seen as neither recognised nor returned. At this point, war was viewed as a necessary consequence and the patron deity of the offended party had to act as a judge and participant. This led to the inevitable victory of justice and the punishment of the offender. Apart from this legal and theological justification of war, this phase stands out for the impressive management of military resources. This included a vast mobilisation of troops, enlisted through *corvée* amongst one’s own subjects, through semi-nomadic groups, which were encouraged to join in view of rich booties, and through auxiliary troops provided by allies. This exchange of troops between states was a never-ending process, widening the scope of a war to include the entire network of alliances in the Near East.

The deployment of tribal troops was also an opportunity, and an effective way to place nomadic groups within the economic and political system of the kingdoms. Through the so-called ‘purification’ ritual (*tēbibtum*), the names of individuals were ceremonially inscribed on a tablet, in exchange of land allotments. The census and military deployment of tribal troops constituted a powerful means to break down tribal groups and link each family to specific plots of land. Naturally, while palaces gladly imposed the *tēbibtum* on tribal groups, tribal chiefs disliked the practice, interpreting it as a way to subordinate them to the political and economic authority of the royal palace. These chiefs preferred to keep land undivided, instead of receiving parcels from the nearby kings. In this way, states managed to create large armies of thousands of soldiers, who could travel over long distances, bringing destruction to the places where they needed to find provisions. In this case, village dwellers hid within the large walled cities, which were better prepared to resist the attacks.

The vast majority of wars were pursued through sieges. Battles were relatively rare, despite being much more effective and excellent opportunities for celebratory statements. All the Upper Mesopotamian cities of the period were protected by fortification walls made of high mounds of land on top of which walls were