

CHAPTER 33

 ASSYRIANS AND URARTIANS

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FROM the mid-ninth century to the seventh century B.C.E., the political landscape of eastern Anatolia was dominated, and indeed shaped, by the relations between two major states: Assyria and Urartu. At that time, the northern Mesopotamian kingdom of Assyria looked back at a documented history spanning a millennium; its heartland, excellent agricultural land with sufficient rainfalls to support a sizable population, was situated in the triangle between the ancient cities of Assur (modern Qala'at Sherqat), Nineveh (modern Mosul), and Arbela (modern Erbil), but in the course of the ninth century B.C.E. Assyria reclaimed those territories in the west which had been lost in the aftermath of the collapse of the Late Bronze Age system and had been controlled by local Aramaean kings for the past two centuries, and the Euphrates was reestablished as Assyria's western border. This phase of intensive military campaigning led the Assyrian army not just into the west but also far into central Anatolia, where a new power came to Assyria's attention. Urartu, to use the Assyrian name for the kingdom, controlled at the time of its greatest extent in the mid-eighth century B.C.E. the area between and around the three lakes of Van (in eastern Turkey), Urmiye (in northwestern Iran), and Sevan (in Armenia), as well as the valley of the Murat Su up to its confluence with the main branch of the Euphrates. These are also the most densely populated regions of Urartu, whereas the mountainous parts of the country, used for pasture farming in the summers, are impossible to inhabit during the winter months.

From the reign of the Urartian king Sarduri, son of Lutibri ("Sarduri I"), a contemporary of the Assyrian king Šalmaneser III (r. 858–824 B.C.E.), perhaps until the end of the kingdom of Urartu (but see Zimansky 1985:78–80), its political capital was the city of Turušpa (also Tušpa: modern Van), situated on the eastern shore of Lake Van. But when Šalmaneser's troops had first come into contact with Urartu, then under the rule of one Arramu, the capital was Arzaškun, an as yet unidentified city. Perhaps it is to be sought west of Lake Urmiye in what may be the original

homeland of the Urartian royal house, if its patronage of the god Haldi can indeed be seen in this light (see later discussion). Throughout its long history, Assyria's political centers were located in the Assur-Nineveh-Arbela triangle, but in the relevant period, its capital city was first Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), then Dur-Šarrukin (modern Khorsabad), and finally Nineveh.

This chapter traces the interactions between Assyria and Urartu, military and otherwise, and their impact on the neighboring Anatolian kingdoms, especially the chain of buffer states situated between Assyria's northern and Urartu's southern border.

THE SOURCES

Although archaeological and pictorial evidence is of importance for our subject, the textual sources form the backbone for any study of the relationship between Assyria and Urartu. Relevant texts are numerous but very unevenly distributed; generally speaking, the Assyrian material is not only much more numerous but also far more diverse in nature. Therefore, our reconstructions tend to be biased toward the Assyrian point of view, simply because of the relative scarcity of relevant Urartian materials (see Zimansky, chapter 24 in this volume).

How the Assyrian sources influence, and dominate, our view of Urartu is perhaps most apparent when considering that even the name used for this state today is not a local place-name, and certainly not the name given to the kingdom by its own people, but instead the Assyrian designation; "Urartu" is the conventional Mesopotamian term for Inner Anatolia, well attested already in the Assyrian sources of the late second millennium B.C.E. (Salvini 1967), long before the Iron Age state came into existence. In modern scholarship, "Urartu" is used as the conventional label for this kingdom, but its self-designation was Biainili, a name preserved to the present day as "Van"—designating both the lake in eastern Turkey and the most important settlement on its coast (see Zimansky, chapter 24 in this volume). The name Urartu also lives on in the form of "Ararat," specifying the highest mountain in the region; with an altitude of 5,165 m, this dormant volcano is situated in Turkey's easternmost corner, just 32 km south of the border with Armenia and 16 km west of the border with Iran, in what was ancient Urartu's geographical core region. Today, however, the peak is far better known as the supposed landing place of Noah's ark.

The reconstructed sequence of the Urartian kings, too, which provides the skeleton for all reconstructions of Urartian history, is based primarily on references to them in Assyrian sources (most recently compiled by Fuchs 2010). Only recently the potential of art history has been harnessed for chronological purpose; after Ursula Seidl's (2004:122–24) pioneering analysis, which connected the changing styles of depicting lions on Urartian bronze objects with the inscriptions naming kings engraved on these same objects, these considerations are now taken into account in several new attempts to reconstruct the sequence of Urartian rulers (Kroll

2010; Roaf 2010; Seidl 2010). However, for the time being, Urartian chronology must be considered with caution and as a work in progress.

The textual sources can be divided into two groups: official inscriptions and archival materials. The relevant official accounts preserved in the royal inscriptions cover the period from the mid-ninth to the seventh century B.C.E. in Assyria (from the reign of Aššurnasirpal II to Aššurbanipal) and the period from the late ninth to the seventh century B.C.E. in Urartu (beginning with the reign of Sarduri son of Luti-bri [= “Sarduri I”]; figure 33.1), but their availability reflects how active a given ruler was in constructing or renovating temples and palaces (where royal inscriptions were displayed or, in Assyria, also deposited in the building foundations) and in creating monuments (such as statues and stelai) and rock reliefs (see Zimansky, chapter 24 in this volume). Documentation for individual rulers is linked not only to the length of their reign but also to the chances of archaeological recovery. Not all kings commissioned suitable building projects during their lifetime (and as a rule, kings only report their own achievements, never those of their predecessors), and not all buildings or monuments have been discovered. The many recent discoveries of Urartian royal inscriptions in Turkey and Iran are an indication of the intensified research of recent years. Not only is there no complete sequence of *res gestae* of Assyrian and Urartian rulers available, as a rule, but the accounts in royal inscriptions, be they Assyrian (Borger 1956, 1996; Fuchs 1994; Grayson 1991, 1996; Luckenbill 1924; Tadmor 1994) or Urartian (Salvini 2008; figures 33.2, 33.3), only mention the enemy in circumstances that present the commissioner of the inscription in a favorable light, that is, normally as the victor in a military encounter or the recipient of a diplomatic mission.

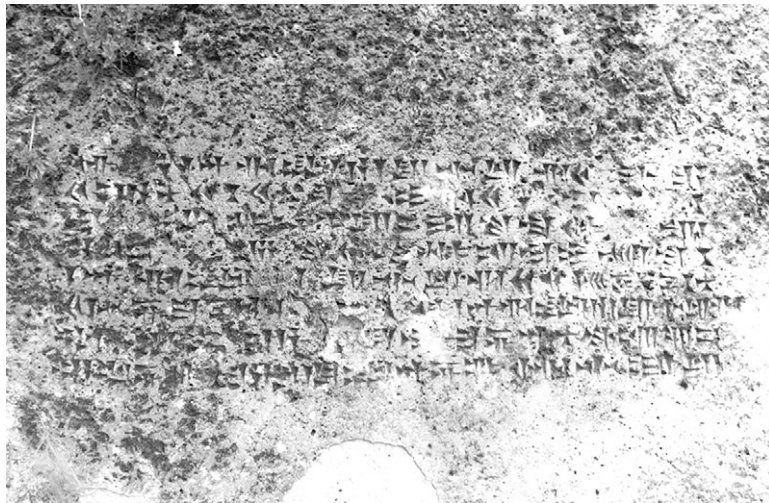


Figure 33.1. The earliest Urartian inscriptions were written under Sarduri son of Luti-bri (Sarduri I), a contemporary of the Assyrian king Šalmaneser III (r. 858–824 B.C.E.), using the Neo-Assyrian language and cuneiform script. Stone block of the so-called Fortress of Sarduri at Van Kalesi, inscription edited in Salvini (2008:I 97–99: A 1–1B) (photo by Stephan Kroll).

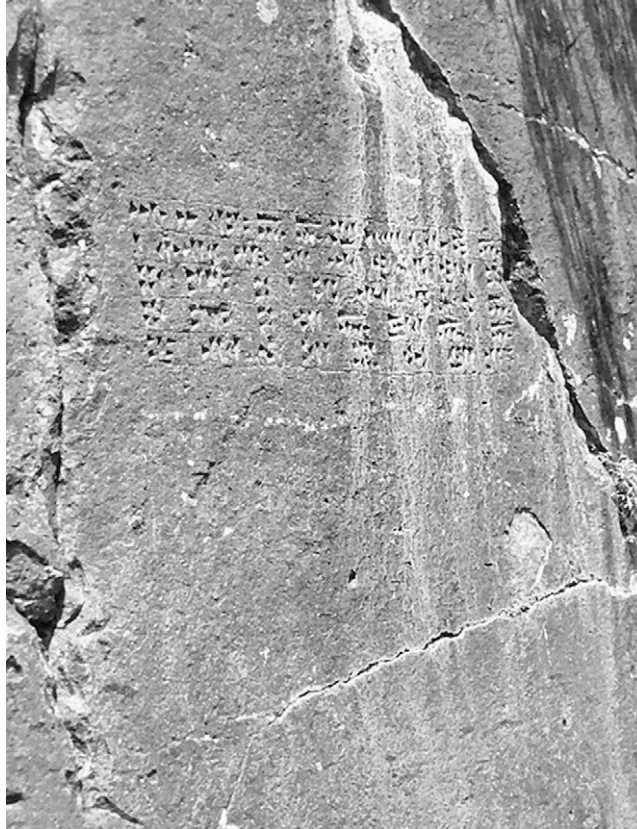


Figure 33.2. Example of an Urartian rock inscription from the vicinity of Marmashen in Armenia. It dates to the reign of Argišti son of Menua (Argišti I, early eighth century B.C.E.) and marks a victory over the local ruler Eriahi: “Thanks to the greatness of the god Ḫaldi, Argišti says: I conquered Eriahi’s country, I conquered the city of Irdaniu, (reaching) as far as the country of Išqigulu.” Text edition in Salvini (2008:I 350: A 8–10) (photo by Stephan Kroll).

Archival materials, which were not written with the intention of impressing contemporaries and future generations, are far less biased than royal inscriptions but available only for certain periods. The letters from the state correspondence of the Assyrian kings Tiglatpileser III (r. 745–727 B.C.E.) and Sargon II (r. 721–705 B.C.E.) with their top officials, excavated in the Assyrian state archives of Kalḫu (modern Nimrud) and Nineveh (Dietrich 2003; Fuchs and Parpola 2001; Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990; Parpola 1987; Saggs 2001), are by far the most important sources, supplemented by other materials, such as oracle queries (Starr 1990) and the eponym chronicles (Millard 1994). Urartian archival materials are available in very limited numbers and consist of the still poorly understood clay tablets excavated in Bastam in Iran, Karmir Blur in Armenia, and Toprakkale in Turkey (Zimansky 1985:80–83).



Figure 33.3. Example of an Urartian building inscription that decorates the façade of the temple of the god Irmušini at Çavuştepe (ancient Sardurihinili) in Turkey, built by Sarduri son of Argišti (Sarduri II, mid-eighth century B.C.E.). Text edition in Salvini (2008:I 442–443: A 9–17) (photo by Stephan Kroll).

CONTACTS IN WAR AND DIPLOMACY

Since the earliest encounters between Assyrians and Urartians in the mid-ninth century B.C.E., the relationship between the two states was generally hostile and frequently defined by open conflict, which, however, often took the form of a surrogate war. Both countries tried to gain political and commercial control over the kingdoms of northern Syria and the traffic routes providing access to the Mediterranean Sea and western Anatolia. This resulted in a series of military conflicts fought in territories in southeastern Anatolia and northwestern Iran and the successive annexation of these regions by one of the two states. However, until 709 B.C.E., when Assyria annexed the kingdom of Kummuhhu (Commagene), they did not even share a common border; while the centers Turuşpa and Nineveh were only situated at a distance of about 240 km from each other as the crow flies, they were separated by the soaring peaks of the Taurus main ridge, with altitudes in excess of 3,000 m. The mountain regions between the headwaters of the Tigris and of the Lower Zab housed a string of small kingdoms which were allowed to remain nominally independent (see later discussions).

According to the Assyrian sources, the first contacts between Assyria and Urartu date to the reign of Aššurnaširpal II (r. 884–859 B.C.E.) and are the result of Assyrian advances into Anatolia, in the region of the Tigris headwaters (Grayson

1991:A.o.101.2:13 and parallels). Open conflict is first attested in the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 B.C.E.), but when recounting his very first campaign in 859 B.C.E. into Urartian territory, ruled by king Arramu (Grayson 1996:A.o.102.2 i 14–25 and parallel), the Assyrian narrative suggests not so much a first encounter but another stage in an ongoing war. It is therefore likely that the open conflict between Assyria and Urartu had already started in the later part of Aššurnāširpal's reign, for which we are lacking accounts. It would be a mistake to see in Arramu by default the founder of the Urartian state, for the Assyrian sources suggest nothing of the sort; rather, the accounts create the impression of a firmly established, well-oiled state with an impressive war machinery at its call, which could be seen to imply that Arramu's kingdom was more than a fledgling state at the time. Over the next fifteen years, Arramu and Urartu feature prominently in Šalmaneser's inscriptions, as he raided the country three times (Radner 1998:132–33); Assyria was apparently able to counter the Urartian expansion attempts in the Murat Su region and to the west and south of Lake Urmiye. However, by 830 B.C.E., when the Assyrian army clashed again with the Urartian forces, this time under the command of king Sarduri son of Lutibri, the odds seem to have changed in Urartu's favor (Grayson 1996:A.o.102.14:141–46 and parallel). When an Assyrian army reached the regions west of Lake Urmiye a decade later in 820 B.C.E., they found them to be firmly under Urartian control (Grayson 1996:A.o.103.1 ii 16–30).

For the next four decades, we have no reports on conflicts between Assyria and Urartu; during this time, Assyria was preoccupied with consolidating the gains in territory achieved throughout the ninth century B.C.E., and we may assume a similar situation for Urartu. But between 781 and 774 B.C.E. (Grayson 1996:A.o.104.2010:10–18 and A.o.104.2011; Millard 1994:38–39), Assyria and Urartu found themselves again in a more or less permanent state of war; the theaters of war were again constituted by northwestern Iran (called “Gutium” in the Assyrian inscriptions) and “Ḫatti,” that is, the Neo-Hittite successor states on the modern Turkish–Syrian border. While neither side was able to make any territorial gains, we can safely assume that the exploits of the two armies, which lived off the land while on campaign, resulted in severe economic pressure on the local kingdoms of Carchemish, Marqasu (the region around modern Maraş), and Kummuhḫu (Commagene).

The following two decades saw Assyria absorbed by internal problems; the Eponym Chronicle mentions a series of epidemics and rebellions as the key events of years during the period, and the Assyrian army was largely occupied at home (Millard 1994:40–43). During that time, Urartu's influence in “Ḫatti” seems to have grown steadily until it reached its pinnacle under Sarduri son of Argišti (“Sarduri II”), who in 754 B.C.E. defeated the Assyrian army in a battle in the kingdom of Arpad in northern Syria (Salvini 2008:I 414, III 253: A 9–1: right side, lines 1–10; Millard 1994:43), striking a hard blow in a region that had formerly accepted the Assyrian king as overlord and arbiter in all border conflicts. Yet only a dozen years later, in 743 B.C.E., just after Tiglatpileser III (r. 744–727 B.C.E.) had taken the Assyrian throne for himself by force, he defeated the Urartian army in a second battle in Arpad and, via Kummuhḫu (Commagene), where another battle took place, pursued it [the army?]

back to Turušpa (Tadmor 1994:133–35; Summary Inscription 3:15'–26' and parallels). This was the first (and remained the only) time that Assyrian troops had ever reached that Urartian capital. Turušpa, situated on a rock high above Lake Van, proved impregnable, but the siege had high symbolic significance and marked a change in the balance of power, heralding Assyria's supremacy over the Near East. Without Urartian support troops to assist them, the northern Syrian kingdoms of Arpad, Hamath, and Unqu were invaded by the Assyrian army in the following years and annexed as provinces (Radner 2006:58–63). Some time after the Urartian campaign, one of Tiglatpileser's officials urged his king to reattempt the capture of Turušpa in order to achieve immortal fame: "When the king, my lord, ascended to Urartu before, the gods Aššur and Šamaš delivered Turušpa into the hands of the king, my lord, and (therefore) the king, my lord, may lead his campaign against Urartu. May they capture Turušpa and may the king, my lord, immortalise his name!" (Saggs 2001:136–37 [NL 45]). Tiglatpileser did not follow this suggestion and seems to have avoided any direct confrontation with Urartu for the remainder of his rule.

In the light of the ongoing Assyrian expansion in the west, the surviving kingdoms in the region, such as Que (Cilicia), are known to have sought Urartu's protection, but these attempts seem to have been unsuccessful, and in some cases, the diplomatic delegations never even reached their destination. Hence, after the annexation of Que as an Assyrian province just prior to or at the very beginning of the reign of Sargon II (r. 721–705 B.C.E.), the province's new Assyrian governor was able to report to his king that "a messenger of Mita of Muški (i.e., Midas the Phrygian) has come to me, bringing me fourteen men of Que whom (their king) Warikas had sent to Urartu as an embassy," to which the king replies: "This is extremely good! My gods Aššur, Šamaš, Bel and Nabû have now taken action, and without a battle or anything, the man of Muški has given us his word and become our ally!" (Parpola 1987:no. 1). But while Urartu was keeping quiet on the western front, it now concentrated its military presence in northwestern Iran and attempted to supplant Assyria as the overlord of its regional vassal kingdoms, such as Mannea (Fuchs 1994:447–50 s. v. Mannaja) and Zikirtu (Fuchs 1994:471). This resulted in a sustained war from 719 to 714 B.C.E., which was again fought neither on Assyrian nor on Urartian territory but instead by proxy in Mannea, Zikirtu, and finally also Mušasir (see later discussion). Though Assyria was able to gain the upper hand in this conflict, this resulted only in a shift of the theater of war back to the Turkish–Syrian border in 709 B.C.E. after Muwatalli, king of Kummuhhu (Commagene), had stopped paying tribute to the Assyrians and instead chosen to become an Urartian vassal (Fuchs 1994:413 s. v. Muttallu), after his country had been for at least a century a loyal Assyrian vassal (Radner 2009:232–33). In the light of the Assyrian annexation of the neighboring kingdoms of Carchemish in 717 B.C.E. (Radner 2006:58) and Marqasu in 711 B.C.E. (Radner 2006:61), this may have seemed the only way to preserve his country's independence, but instead it proved its death warrant. Kummuhhu was conquered and integrated into Assyria, which for the first time shared a border with Urartu. Because of this sensitive position the new province was not placed under the authority of an ordinary governor but handed over to one of the highest military

officials in the Assyrian Empire, the General of the Left (*turtānu šumēlu*) (Radner 2006:48–49), resurrecting a practice employed under Šalmaneser III, who had appointed the highest military commanders over Assyria's border marches "facing the areas where a major danger was incumbent and a major military activity was necessary" (Liverani 2004:218). During the war of 709 B.C.E., we may assume that Urartu sent at least some troops south of its border with Kummuhū, but the Assyrian sources are silent in this regard. At this time Urartu's northern border, hitherto seemingly out of harm's way, was seriously threatened by the incursions of Cimmerian riders who had entered Anatolia from the Caucasus region, as Assyrian intelligence reports relay to the king (Lanfranchi 1990), and the years of active military conflict between Assyria and Urartu ended. However, to our knowledge, no formal peace treaty was ever concluded.

The significantly changed relations between Assyria and Urartu, which can be observed some time later during the reigns of Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 B.C.E.) and Aššurbanipal (r. 668–627 B.C.E.), can be seen as the direct result of the assassination of Sennacherib (r. 704–681 B.C.E.) and his murderers' escape to Urartu after Esarhaddon's victory in the ensuing succession war (Frahm 1997:18–19). Because the killers were Sennacherib's own sons and Esarhaddon's brothers and therefore had a legitimate claim to the Assyrian throne (patricide or fratricide were not considered an obstacle to an Assyrian prince's claim to the crown), the fact that they found refuge in Urartu would have enabled Assyria's archrival to put considerable pressure on the reigning Assyrian king who could never consider his grasp of the throne absolutely secure as long as Sennacherib's sons were alive. Andreas Fuchs (2010) has argued that this may have resulted in substantial payments to Urartu to ensure that the princes were not allowed to return to Assyria, certainly a compelling hypothesis. It would explain why Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal were careful not to cross Urartian interests, even when faced with a raid onto their territory as was Aššurbanipal (Borger 1996:37, 222:Prism B § 27), and handed over Urartian fugitives, as did Esarhaddon after annexing the buffer state Šubria in 673 (see later discussion). To assume the existence of such an agreement between Assyria and Urartu would also provide a partial answer to the question of how the numerous Urartian building projects of the seventh century B.C.E. were funded. That Assyrian workers were involved in the construction of the sanctuary of Ayanis on the eastern shore of Lake Van is explicitly stated in the temple inscription (Salvini 2008:I 568, III 341–42: A 12–1: section VI, line 10) and also indicated by the finds of Assyrian pottery in some houses in the residential area, whose occupants' meat consumption (far less beef, more mutton) moreover differed significantly from that of their neighbors (Stone 2010). Craftsmen such as these may have been sent to Urartu as part of the payments to guarantee the royal killers' permanent absence from Assyria and can be connected to the fresh Assyrian impulses detectable in Urartian art at that time (Seidl 2004:207).

Aššurbanipal's careful attitude toward Urartu ended in 652 B.C.E.; this change is illustrated in his inscriptions and also in his Nineveh palace reliefs, which show him treating an Urartian diplomatic delegation with pronounced disrespect, making them witness the humiliation of some Elamite ambassadors who were made to read aloud the

letters they had delivered to the Assyrian king for the Urartians to hear, and then executed in the Urartians' presence (Borger 1996:107, 227–28:Prism C §51; Kaelin 1999:26, 28, 30–31: scenes 52, 55, 58, 60, 73–74). The message is clear: Aššurbanipal was no longer willing to make amends with Urartu. Fuchs (2010) sees this change in attitude connected with the death of the royal murderers in Urartu, and I find this a convincing argument. Unlike all his predecessors who were treated as equals, the last Urartian king, another Sarduri, attested in the Assyrian sources is presented as an Assyrian vassal (Borger 1996:71–72, 250:Prism A §86). After this, both the Assyrian and the Urartian sources are silent about their relationship. Although it is certain that when the Assyrian Empire found its end in the wars from 614 B.C.E. onward Urartu was no longer in a position to get involved, be it pro or contra Assyria, the exact circumstances and chronology of Urartu's decline and collapse are obscure (Hellwag 2010).

CULTURAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN ASSYRIA AND URARTU

So far, we have focused on Assyria's and Urartu's contacts on the battlefield, and while we have touched on the possible impact of Assyrian craftsmen working in Urartu in the seventh century B.C.E., we have not yet dealt with the issue of mutual cultural influence systematically. The ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E. saw a diplomatic ice age between the two states, so that the peaceful transfer of goods and people cannot be expected to have been the norm. However, the sanctuaries of Kumme and Muşaşir (see below), where both Urartians and Assyrians worshiped and which enjoyed the patronage of the kings of both states, would have provided an environment where the artifacts of the other, in the form of dedicatory gifts but also merchandise filtering into these cities, would have been accessible. The state letters of Sargon II contain evidence that private trade with Urartu, though strictly forbidden, was nevertheless taking place, using the buffer states as intermediaries (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990:nos. 100, 103; Parpola 1987:no. 46).

On the other hand, prisoners of war, of whom there must have been many in the course of the numerous wars between the two kingdoms, would have provided another means of cultural exchange, especially in the area of military equipment (see Born and Seidl 1995) and the arts of war. It is likely that the introduction of a cavalry branch in the Assyrian army during the reign of Šalmaneser III was influenced by the encounters with Urartian horseback riders. Most impressively, however, the capture of an Assyrian scribe in the ninth century B.C.E. provided the Urartian kings with the necessary expertise to have their own cuneiform inscriptions fashioned; the earliest inscriptions, of Sarduri son of Lutibri ("Sarduri I"), were written in the Assyrian language and modeled not on the style of Assyrian inscriptions but followed letter writing conventions (Wilhelm 1987), indicating that they were the brainchild of a scribe trained in working with archival materials rather than inscriptions, for which a

specialized language was used. While later Urartian inscriptions were composed in the Urartian language (although there are also some Assyrian-Urartian bilinguals: Salvini 2008:I 141–144, III 90–97: A 3–11 [Kelišin stela of Išpuini and Menua], I 497–503, III 295–310: A 10–3 [Movana stela of Rusa I], I 503–505, III 311–315: A 10–4 [Mergeh Karvan stela of Rusa I], I 505–508, III 316–320: A 10–5 [Topzawa stela of Rusa I]), the cuneiform signs retain their Assyrian forms.

Finally, Urartian customs, as observed by the Assyrians when campaigning through the country, may have provided models both for the rise of wine drinking culture in Assyria in the course of the eighth century B.C.E. (Stronach 1995), and the grand irrigation projects of Sargon and Sennacherib to secure water for their capital cities Dur-Šarrukin and Nineveh, respectively (Bagg 2001:314–20). Several Urartian kings, most importantly Menua, son of Išpuini, who ruled over Urartu at the turn of the ninth to the eighth century B.C.E., constructed elaborate irrigation systems (Belli 1997, 1999) to provide water for fields, fruit groves, and the very extensive vineyards of Urartu. The vine is a native plant in the region, and still today Armenia is famous for the quality of its wines. Only religious and cultural reasons prevent eastern Turkey and northwestern Iran presently from competing with products of a similar standard. Ancient Urartu, on the other hand, was not only a wine-producing nation but also a wine-consuming one, as the Assyrian accounts like to stress. According to Sargon II, Urartu housed wine supplies so vast that one could drink wine there as if it were water from a river (Mayer 1983:90–91, Sargon's Eighth Campaign, line 220), and archaeological excavations have confirmed that Urartian fortresses indeed contained huge stocks of wine, stored in enormous clay vessels with a holding capacity of almost 1,000 liters (Payne 2005). Seven of the 70 underground storerooms of the fortress of Teišebaini (modern Karmir-Blur near the Armenian capital Yerevan) were wine cellars, holding a total of 360 such containers, corresponding to about 350,000 liters of wine.

THE BUFFER STATES: ŠUBRIA, KUMME, AND MUŞAŞIR

The best documented of the buffer states situated in the mountainous region between Urartu and Assyria are Šubria and Kumme, located in the Taurus Range, and Muşaşir, located in the northern Zagros region, all rooted deeply in the ancient Hurrian culture. Though the last kingdom cannot be considered Anatolian, I nevertheless include it in the discussion because of its importance for Urartian kingship and state cult.

The territory of Šubria stretched from the Upper Tigris and its headwaters in the west to the mountains in the north and east, which bordered on Urartu; the western and southern border was the Tigris, shared with the Assyrian provinces of Amedi (Radner 2006:49–51) and Tušhan (Radner 2006:53). “Šubria” is an Assyrian name (derived from Sumerian Subir and its Akkadian counterpart Šubartu) and denotes simply a “northern country.” The Urartians called the kingdom Qulmeri (Diakonoff

and Kashkai 1981:69 s. v. *Qulmēre*) after its capital city, well attested also in Assyrian texts as *Kullimeri*; this is the most likely candidate for the country's native designation, for which there are no local sources. As the other Šubrian center is *Uppummu*, which corresponds to the site of *Fum* near the modern town of *Lice* (Kessler 1995:57) in the extreme west of the country, *Kullimeri* should be sought in the east, as the division of Šubria in 673 B.C.E. into a western and eastern Assyrian province (*Uppummu* and *Kullimeri*: Radner 2006:63–64) would otherwise make little sense. A likely candidate is the site of *Gre Migro* (Kessler 1995:57–58) on the eastern bank of the *Batman Su*, situated some twenty-five kilometers to the north of its confluence with the *Tigris*.

The kingdom preserved the ancient heritage of its Hurrian tradition into the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E., and Assyrian sources offer us some detailed information, such as that the members of the royal house all had Hurrian names; a letter from *Sargon's* correspondence even gives some Hurrian words, with translations (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990:no. 53). Šubrian scholars, some of whom worked under the patronage of Assyrian kings, specialized in the ancient Hurrian art of *agury* (Radner 2009:233–34, 237).

A long-standing Assyrian vassal, Šubrian independence ended in 673 B.C.E. when the hitherto trusted ally stood accused of harboring *Esarhaddon's* enemies, and all efforts of king *Ik-Teššub* to prove his loyalty were in vain; the situation escalated due to the fact that the murderers of *Esarhaddon's* father, *Sennacherib*, were rumored to have found refuge in the area, whose presence endangered *Esarhaddon's* rule but also any hope of a peaceful succession (see discussion above). Šubria's reputation as a haven for refugees from Assyria and *Urartu* alike is apparent not only from *Esarhaddon's* inscriptions (Borger 1956:105 *Götterbrief* II iii 28–34) but also from letters of the *Sargon* correspondence, which indicate that this was a major problem in the otherwise easy relationship between Assyria and Šubria (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990:nos. 35, 53–54); people from as far away as the *Diyala* region fled to Šubria to escape justice and could expect its king to refuse their extradition. This remarkable behavior has to be recognized as a deliberate policy, but what did Šubria stand to gain from such actions, which were directed, after all, against both powerful neighbors in equal measure? *Tamás Deszö* (2006:37) has argued that Šubria's policy was anchored in a religious tradition and proposed the existence of a refuge sanctuary at *Uppummu*; a good candidate is the nearby *Tigris Grotto*, the riverine cave system at *Birkleyn* (Schachner 2009), a holy precinct with unlimited water and shelter from the powers of nature.

The ancient city of *Kumme* also housed an important shrine, dedicated to the storm god and well attested since the early second millennium B.C.E. According to the Hittite tradition of the mid-second millennium B.C.E., the storm god of *Kumme* was the unrivaled ruler of heaven and earth, and he featured in many of the Hurrian myths and rituals preserved on the tablets from the Hittite capital *Ḫattuša* (Schwemer 2001:456–58), the most prominent being the *Song of Ullikummi*, which relates the story of the battle between the storm god and the monstrous rock creature *Ullikummi*, whose programmatic name means “Vanquish (the storm god of) *Kumme!*” (Hoffner 1990:55–65). In the first millennium B.C.E., Assyrians and *Urartians* alike frequented this sanctuary.

Kumme was located in the mountainous region on the upper reaches of the Lesser Khabur north of the Turkish–Iraqi border, perhaps at Beytüşşebap (Radner 2010). After Tiglatpileser III’s creation of the province of Birtu in 739 B.C.E. (Radner 2006:56–57), Kumme’s territory bordered directly on Assyria, while the most convenient route to Urartu led through the land of its eastern neighbor Ukku (modern Hakkari), situated on the Greater Zab (Radner 2010). During the reign of Sargon II, we see Kumme’s ruler, the “city lord” Arije, supplying the Assyrians with manpower, horses, timber, and intelligence on the other states of the region, especially Urartu, with which Kumme continued to entertain close relations, providing also men and information (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990:nos. 95, 105). But close cooperation with Assyria was ensured by the presence of an ambassador whose letters to Sargon (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990:nos. 84–100; figure 33.4) describe intelligence gathering and the organization of timber transports to Assyria: most spectacular is a report on an Urartian plan to kidnap several Assyrian governors who stayed in Kumme’s territory while their men built a fortress there (Parpola 1987:no. 29).

The collaboration with Assyria was not always easy; Kumme’s inhabitants were frequently accused of illicit trading with Urartu, which the Assyrians would not tolerate (see foregoing discussion), and the Assyrian ambassador’s presence in Kumme led to a murderous conflict with some local dignitaries (Lanfranchi 1990:nos. 106–7). How this particular feud ended is unknown, but when the new king of Urartu questioned the conspicuous absence of messengers from Kumme at his court, the answer from Kumme, according to the information conveyed back to Sargon, was this: “Since we are the slaves of Assyria . . . we cannot put our feet anywhere” (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990:no. 95). The letter was written sometime after Sargon’s desecration of Muşaşir and its Haldi temple in 714 B.C.E. (figure 33.5; see following discussion), and Kumme’s hesitation to engage with Urartu diplomatically may be the result of the fear which Sargon’s attack must have provoked in the rulers of the other buffer states. That even the presence of an ancient and famous temple would not stop the Assyrians must have been most alarming to Kumme. However, at this point our information dries up and to decide whether the Assyrians continued to respect Kumme’s autonomy is left to our imagination.

Muşaşir, finally, was situated in the area of modern Sidikan in northeastern Iraq, just west of the Zagros main ridge that marked its border with Urartu, while the Greater Zab formed its border with Assyria (Radner 2010). “Muşaşir” was the Assyrian name for the city that was locally (and also in Urartu, known under its ancient Hurrian name Ardini, simply meaning “the city.” Since the early second millennium B.C.E., it is attested as an important settlement with a major temple, dedicated to the god Haldi, whom the Urartian king Sarduri, son of Lutibri (“Sarduri I”), a contemporary of Šalmaneser III (r. 858–824 B.C.E.), proclaimed the head of Urartu’s state pantheon; he and his royal successors erected temples in Haldi’s name all over their kingdom. Why Sarduri chose to promote Haldi as the main deity of Urartu remains unclear, but it is perhaps significant that Urartu’s first capital, Arzaškun, likely to be the place of origin of the Urartian royal house, was quite probably situated not far from Muşaşir, at the eastern side of the Zagros Range. Haldi’s importance in Urartian state religion and ideology meant that the kings of Urartu were crowned or at

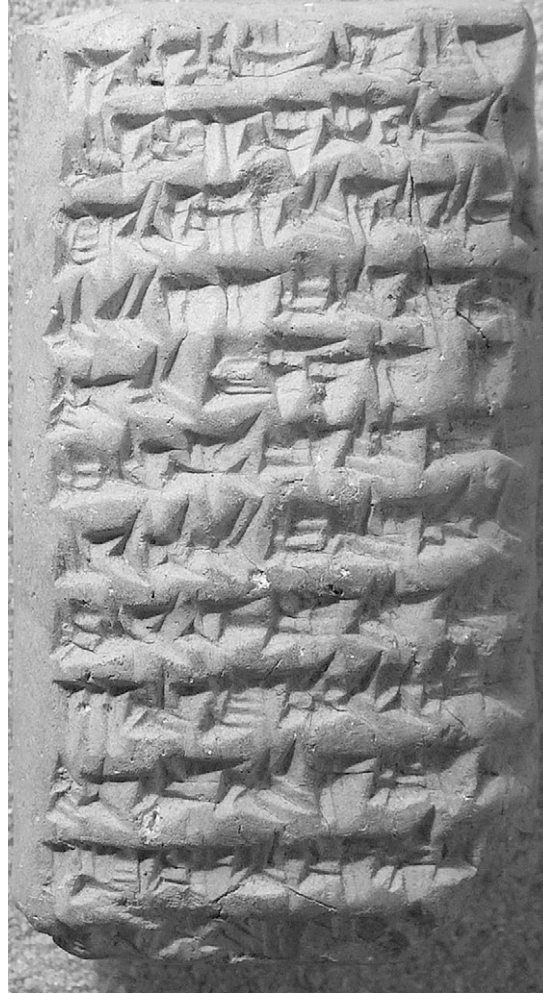


Figure 33.4. An Assyrian letter by the Assyrian ambassador at Kumme to his king Sargon II (r. 721–705 B.C.E.) providing information on recent events in Urartu. British Museum, 81-2-4, 55, edited in Lanfranchi and Parpola (1990:no. 84) (photo by Greta van Buylaere).

least confirmed in Haldi's temple at Muşaşir and that they visited the shrine regularly as part of their cultic duties, together with Urartu's élite (Salvini 1993–97:445; Zimansky 1985:5). Despite this, Muşaşir retained its independence and was ruled by its own king, with both Urartu and Assyria respecting its sovereignty.

However, during the reign of Sargon II, Urzana, king of Muşaşir, found himself increasingly under pressure to cut his ties to Urartu; a letter from the Assyrian state correspondence paints a vivid picture of the difficulties the ruler faced when the Urartian king and his nobles came for their annual pilgrimage to Haldi's temple, despite Sargon's explicit orders to hinder them from doing so (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990:no. 147). Sargon later used this as a pretext to justify his plundering of the city and its temple in 714 B.C.E., a deed that was clearly meant to hurt the archenemy

Urartu at its ideological and religious core. It was justified in a publicly read report to the god Aššur (Mayer 1983) and celebrated in Sargon's official royal inscriptions (Fuchs 1994) as well as in the decoration of two of the most important Assyrian buildings of the time. Whereas too few fragments of the multicolored glazed brick reliefs, which decorated the façade of the Aššur temple at Assur (Weidner 1926), remain to allow us to gain a coherent impression of the scenes in question, the stone reliefs from Sargon's palace in Dur-Šarrukin showing the capture of Mušašir and the looting of the temple survived intact until they were excavated in the mid-nineteenth century C.E. Although the reliefs are now lost, the drawings made during the excavations document the depiction of the city and Haldi's shrine which, with its unique roof construction and the façade decorated with shields, spears, and statues (Albenda 1986:pl. 133; Botta and Flandin 1846:pl. 141; figure 33.5), is today perhaps

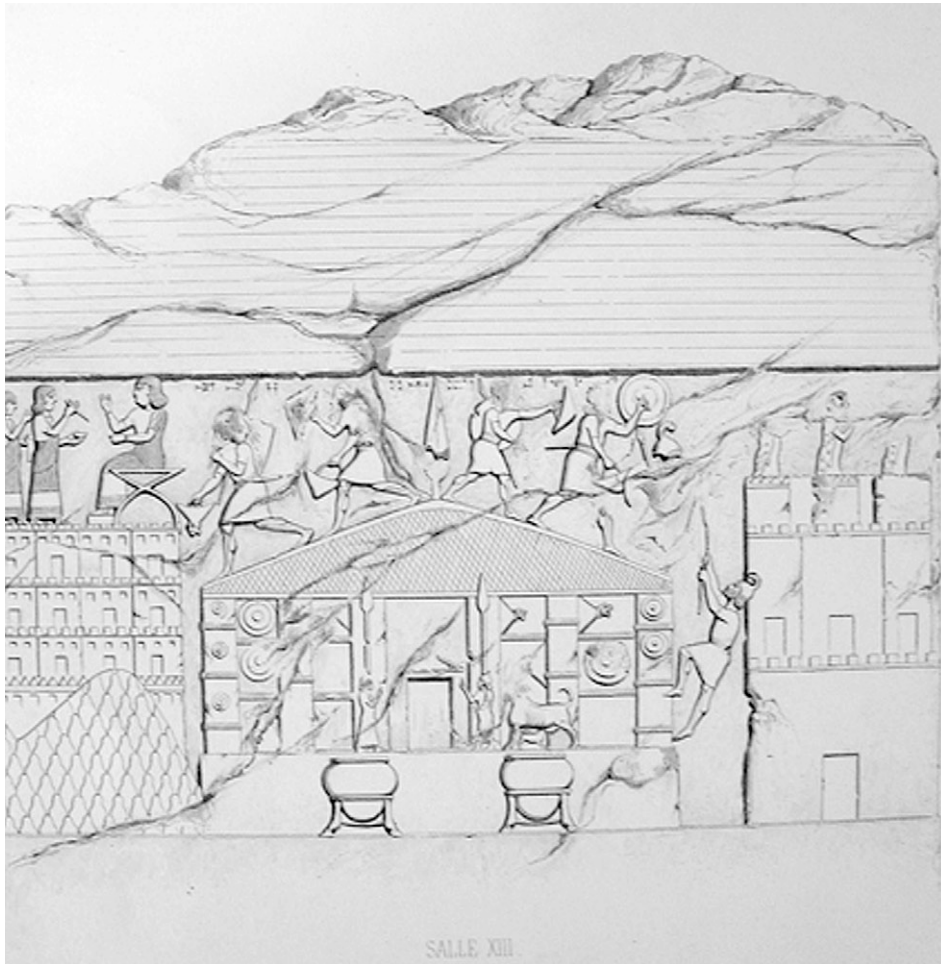


Figure 33.5. A stone relief from the palace of Sargon II (r. 721–705 B.C.E.) at Khorsabad, showing the Assyrian conquest and pillaging of the city of Mušašir and the temple of Haldi (drawing from Botta and Flandin 1846:pl. 141).

the most instantly recognizable representation of a building in Assyrian art. Yet despite the invasion, Mušašir seems to have retained its independence; Sargon apparently thought King Urzana's loyalty sufficiently guaranteed by holding his family hostage (Mayer 1983:102–3: Sargon's Eighth Campaign, line 348).

Šubria, Kumme, and Mušašir are not remote backwaters of civilization; they boast continuous human occupation for far longer than the Mesopotamian Plain, and an awareness for the antiquity of their traditions may be indicated by the great respect in which their deities and their sanctuaries were held in the entire Near East. It may not only have been their relatively inaccessible geographical situation but also the respect for their cultural heritage that succeeded in protecting these kingdoms over a long time from their aggressive neighbors Assyria and Urartu.

CONCLUSION

Our understanding of the relationship between Assyria and Urartu over the course of more than two centuries is heavily influenced by the limitations of the available source material and tends toward an overwhelmingly Assyrian view. To the Assyrian mind, Urartu was on one hand an anti-Assyria, the archenemy and eternal temptation for its vassals, and on the other hand a mirror image, a kind of Assyria in the mountains; inscriptions and archival materials alike attribute Assyrian concepts to Bianili, for example, by superimposing the Assyrian administrative structure onto the other country, referring to provinces and governors and using various specifically Assyrian titles for Urartian officials (see Zimansky 1985:89–94). This tends to promote the idea that the two kingdoms were very much alike, but the fact that climatic conditions and the economic basis of Assyria and Urartu were very different should make it clear that this assumption is implausible. The various states situated in the border region between Assyria and Urartu, too, had their own distinct identities and traditions. Yet despite periods when central governments, especially the Assyrian one, attempted to enforce noncommunication among these different countries, we have seen that there were ample opportunities for the exchange of goods, people, and ideas, which, in the period under study (the ninth to seventh centuries B.C.E.), made the region between the Caucasus, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Persian Gulf a playground of intersecting cultures.

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