

A THEORETICAL MODEL FOR POLITICAL ECONOMY AND SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE OLD ASSYRIAN COLONIES OF ANATOLIA ¹

ANADOLU'DA ESKİ ASUR KOLONİ DÖNEMİNDE SİYASİ EKONOMİK VE TOPLUMSAL KİMLİK ÜZERİNE KURAMSAL BİR MODEL ¹

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Keywords: Culture contact, trade, colonies, trade diasporas, Old Assyrian trading colonies, Kültepe-Kanesh, political economy, social identity.

Anahtar sözcükler: Kültür ilişkisi, ticaret, koloniler, gurbetçi tüccarlar, Eski Asur ticaret kolonisi, Kültepe-Kaneş, siyasi ekonomi, toplumsal kimlik.

Anadolu'da MÖ 2. binyılın başlarındaki Eski Asur ticaret koloni dönemine ait kazılar, yazılı belgelerin arkeolojik verilerle birlikte ele alındığında bize eski bir koloni ağını ve onun bölgesel ticaret ortaklarıyla olan etkileşimini görmemizi sağlayan ender bir fırsat sunmaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra Anadolu'nun kendine özgü 'karum' döneminde yaşanan süreçle ilgili bir kuram geliştirilebilmesi için, kültürel ilişkiler ile onun kolonyal yapısının bütünsel bir anlayış içinde ele alınarak karşılaştırılması gerekmektedir. Bu yazı, sosyal antropolojide eski sistemlerin bölgeler arası ilişkilerinde kullanılan ana kuram modellerini tartışmaktadır. Orta Tunç Çağı'nda Anadolu'yu doğru bir şekilde anlayıp yorumlayabilmemiz için, eldeki veriler ana kuramsal kurgu olarak görülen dünya sistemleri ve kültürel yozlaşma seçenekleri kapsamında ele alındığında bazı uyumsuzluklar ortaya çıkmaktadır. Ben, karşılıklı kültür ticaretinin etnografik ve tarihsel araştırmalarından kaynaklanan 'gurbetçi tüccarlar' modeli yerine 'karum' sistemini ve onun yerel Anadolu'lu ev sahibi toplumlarını anlamaya yönelik bir çerçeve oluşturmayı daha doğru bir yaklaşım olarak görmekteyim. Süreç bu yaklaşımla ele alındığında, gerek siyasi ekonominin yapısal sorunları, gerekse karşılıklı kültürel iletişimin ayrılmaz bir parçası olan toplumsal kimlik, etnik köken gibi girdilerin ne gibi bir etkisi olduğu soruları da anlamamıza katkıda bulunacaktır. Bu bağlamda sonuç olarak, 2. binyılın başlangıcında Anadolu'da Eski Asur gurbetçi tüccarlar ile gelişen kent devletlerinin yönetim modeli arasındaki çıkar çatışmalarının anlaşılmasında arkeolojik verilerle yazılı belgelerin bir arada ele alınmasının getireceği kazanım, yeni araştırma konularını, yeni soruları ortaya çıkartmaktadır; burada bu konular üzerinde de kısaca durulmaktadır.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last 15 years, archaeologists have come to recognize that interregional interaction or culture contact played a significant (but not always determinative) role in the structure and developmental pathways of many chiefdoms, states, and empires. Interregional interaction can take a variety of different forms such as exchange, emulation, colonization, and outright conquest. This paper focuses on colonial encounters between foreign settlements and local polities as a specific form of inter-regional interaction.¹

The early second millennium BC Old Assyrian trading colonies of central Anatolia form one of the most important and earliest examples of an ancient colonial encounter for which we have available both textual and archaeological data (for overviews see Larsen 1974; Özgüç 1963, 1988; Veenhof 1995). Although Old Assyrian *karums* (trading colonies) or *wabartums* (smaller way stations or caravanserays) are known from Boğazköy, Kaman, Alişar and Acemhöyük, the preponderance of our data derive from long term, extensive excavations at the site of Kültepe/Kaneş (e.g. Emre 1963; Kulakoglu 1996; Özgüç 1888; Özgüç 1986, 1999; Porada 1980). Located in the lower town of the powerful Anatolian city-state of Kaneş or Nesa, *karum-Kanesh* was the primary Old Assyrian colony in a system of approximately 30 enclaves (Fig. 1). The integration of both textual and artifactual data is especially important for understanding these colonies –how they were organized, how they interacted with the local societies of early second millennium Anatolia, and how this interaction affected later social, economic, and political developments in the region. At present, the rich textual record of the Kültepe tablets (e.g. Balkan 1967; Dercksen 1996; Garelli 1963; Larsen 1976; Orlin 1970; Veenhof 1972) has overshadowed the archaeological record in posing the key research questions, and in framing the perspectives we use to understand social, economic, and political developments in early second millennium central Anatolia. If we are to

succeed at integrating these two data sources to form a new synthesis in our understanding of the *karum* period, then we must also look closely at the theoretical models that we use –either explicitly or implicitly– to interpret our historical and archaeological evidence.

In looking at the political economy of interaction, it is very important that we move away from an overly simplistic view that sees only two monolithic groups –the colonizers and the colonized. Instead we have to see colonial encounters as involving at least three nodes: a) homelands, b) colonies, and c) local societies (Fig. 2). We also must recognize that each of these nodes is not a monolithic block, but is instead quite diverse or heterogeneous. In other words, homelands, colonies, and local societies are all composed of multiple competing groups, defined by differences in gender, social class, and ethnicity. This diversity within a single colony is very clear when we look at the texts from *karum Kaneş/Kültepe*. We know that the inhabitants of the *karum* were not just Assyrians, but local people of Kanesh, and merchants from other polities such as Ebla. We also know that *karum Kanesh* had a clear socio-economic hierarchy, so that the wealthier merchants –“big men” or “men of account” had more rights and privileges than those with fewer resources and family connections (Larsen 1976: 283; Veenhof 1977: 117). The local rulers, local elites, and commoners at Kanesh may all have had very different goals and strategies for dealing with a colonizing group such as the Assyrian merchants. Certainly, the royal families of the Anatolian city states such as Kanesh, Purushattum, and other polities enjoyed privileged access to the goods and profits from trade with the Assyrians. The structure of interaction almost differed markedly for men versus women, as can be seen in the marriage patterns and practices of the merchants in the *karum* (Michel 2006). In short –even within one single “node” of the colonial encounter, that of the

colony itself— we can see tremendous diversity that we would miss if we simply treated all its inhabitants as if they were all identical “Assyrians”. This diversity becomes tremendously important when we look at the actual processes of interaction at the points of contact between the three different nodes of the colonial encounter —homelands, colonies, and local societies.

We cannot reconstruct colonial interactions between Assyrians and Anatolians in the early second millennium BC unless we develop a better understanding of the different forms of social identities of the people involved in these colonial encounters. We also have to recognize that these social identities do not remain static; instead they can change over time in many different ways. For example, local people may start to emulate colonizing groups. Conversely, colonizing groups may become assimilated into the indigenous population. Entirely new creolized identities (Hannerz 1987) may develop through the interaction and fusion of multiple ethnic groups involved in a colonial encounter. By looking at these different identities and whether or not they change, we can see how the interaction system worked from the perspective of the individuals and small groups in the communities that were in contact.

Of course these different identities, and the social groups they define, existed within a larger scale framework of cities and states. We need to understand the political landscape of both the local societies and the colonial homeland (Stein 2005). For example, the entire structure of the Old Assyrian trading colony system can only be understood as part of a fragmented political landscape composed of many rival city-states or small polities of varying power on the Anatolian plateau (Veenhof 1982). Similarly, the strategic motivations of the Assyrian traders can only be understood with reference to the political structure of the city-state of Assur, and its own rivalries within Mesopotamia. In short, we need to be able to look at the Old Assyrian colonial

encounter with Anatolia from both the large scale of regional political economy and also from the smaller scale perspective of the social groups and communities who lived in each polity.

MACRO-LEVEL POLITICAL ECONOMY AND UNIDIRECTIONAL MODELS OF INTER-REGIONAL INTERACTION

The two theoretical frameworks most commonly used to understand the political economy of inter-regional interaction are World-system models and acculturation models (Fig. 3). These approaches are sometimes used explicitly (e.g. Algaze 1993; Allen 1992), but more often their assumptions and mechanisms are implicitly employed. Both models rely on assumptions of hierarchy or power inequalities between colonizers and local societies. They both assume a one-way flow of economic and cultural influences from the colonizers to local societies. Both models are grounded in the European expansion of the 16th-19th centuries, with its colonization of the Americas, Africa, and much of Asia. As a result, we have no reason to assume that these models automatically apply to non-western, pre-capitalist cultures and political economies.

The World Systems Model

The world systems model (Wallerstein 1974) suggests that the economic growth of complex societies can best be understood by looking at large scale interregional exchange networks composed of multiple competing polities. As a world system expands, it becomes differentiated into two distinct zones —the “core” and the “periphery”. The core is highly developed, with diverse economies that specialize in the manufacture of high value finished products for home consumption and export to the periphery. The periphery provides raw materials and is either directly or indirectly controlled by the core.

In its “classic” and still most widely used form, the world systems model relies on three main

assumptions –that

- 1) cores exercise economic dominance over peripheries,
- 2) cores control an asymmetric or unequal exchange system, and
- 3) long-distance trade plays the key role in structuring the political economy of the periphery. These highly questionable assumptions eliminate or minimize the roles of polities or groups in the “periphery”, local production and local exchange, local agency, and internal dynamics of developmental change (Stein 2002). More recent attempts to modify Wallerstein’s model by relaxing most of its main assumptions (e.g. Chase-Dunn, Hall 1993; Hall 1999) remain problematic for several reasons. First, the construct becomes so broad and amorphous that it loses any kind of analytical power except as a generalized philosophical outlook. Second, even in its modified form, the world system construct still views the external dynamics of interregional interaction as the main structuring element at both the local and macro-regional levels. As a result, the modified world systems perspective continues to minimize the roles of agency and internal dynamics in peripheries since the cause of change is always located somewhere on the outside.

Mitchell Allen (Allen 1992) has attempted to apply the world systems model to explain the relations between the Old Assyrian trading colonies and the local polities of Anatolia. His reconstruction of relations is problematical precisely because it relies on the assumptions of core dominance over asymmetric trade, while minimizing or even excluding the role of local agency by the rulers and elites of the local Anatolian polities such as Kaneş. The last two decades of text-based research have effectively repudiated the key elements of the world system model by showing definitively that the local Anatolian polities played an extremely important role in shaping the character and operation of the Old Assyrian trading system.

The Acculturation Model

The second widely used framework for the

study of interregional interaction is the acculturation concept. The term “acculturation” describes a process in which smaller, less powerful groups, so-called “recipient cultures”, gradually become more like the larger, powerful “donor societies” that control them (Cusick 1998, Hershkovits 1938). The model assumes that the “traditional” recipient societies have a natural desire to adopt the foreign material culture and other aspects of the donor societies. The acculturation process is seen as taking place through the borrowing of discrete cultural traits, and ultimately leads to the disappearance of the smaller group as it is absorbed into the broader culture. Archaeologists working within this framework have traditionally used the presence of artifacts from the more powerful donor culture in assemblages of the less powerful recipient culture as direct measures of acculturation; this perspective has been particularly apparent in studies of Hellenization and Romanization in Europe and the Mediterranean world.

The acculturation model does not apply in the case of the Old Assyrian trading colonies and their interaction with their Anatolian host polities in the early second millennium BC. The Anatolian city-states of this period seem to have been highly selective in their appropriation of Assyrian ideologies, material culture, and organizational forms. If anything, the cultural influences would seem to have gone the other way, so that the homes of the Assyrian merchants were filled with items and styles of Anatolian material culture. This is highly significant, because it reflects, at least in part, the lack of Assyrian political or economic dominance over the communities in which they resided.

Overall, the world system and acculturation models share three theoretical flaws that severely limit their utility. First, they assume that the economic, political, military, and ideological domination of the core states or donor cultures is absolute, extending across all social and cultural arenas. Second, the two models assume a unidirectional flow of influences from core or

donor states to peripheral or recipient cultures. Implicit in this is the notion of the irresistible allure of donor cultures such as those of Greek colonists spreading Hellenism in the Mediterranean (Dietler 2005; Whitehouse, Wilkins 1989). Finally, the most important problem shared by the world system and acculturation models is that both view peripheries or recipient cultures as passive groups, lacking in agency or the capacity to act in pursuit of their own goals or interests.

NON-HIERARCHICAL MODELS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INTERACTION

Ancient culture contact was much more complex than the world systems and acculturation models would have us believe. There is a wide range of patterned variability in the power relations of the societies in an interaction network. Under some conditions, more developed "cores" can control less developed "peripheries" on the lines of world-systems/models. In many other cases, however, interaction can take place on a more equal footing. Some of the major factors that can affect the interregional balance of power are: (1) distance and transportation economics; (2) technology (especially military and transportation technologies); (3) population size and composition (especially in the primary zone of culture contact); (4) disease; (5) military organization; and (6) the degree of social complexity in each polity.

Although the world system and acculturation models may apply to a small number of historically specific cases, they are neither accurate nor adequate as general comparative frameworks for the analysis of all episodes of culture contact. This recognition has transformed our views about the processes that take place when colonies and indigenous societies interact. We now understand that local power structures, and local cultural schemes repeatedly modified and even subverted colonial agendas, so that the outcome was in almost every case composite,

contingent, and negotiated rather than pre-determined by global structures of political economy.

The problems associated with the world systems and acculturation models make it clear that one cannot assume *a priori* that all inter-regional interaction systems are inherently hierarchical, and organized to the advantage of the foreign colonizing group. Instead, a number of factors can influence both the degree and direction of hierarchy in culture contact situations. All political economies exist within the context of culture and society. For that reason, it is important to focus on social identity of the different groups that make up the interaction system; this perspective then complements and helps to explain the broader workings of the political economy. Two particularly useful conceptual frameworks for understanding social identity in culture contact situations are

"HYBRIDITY" AND THE "TRADE DIASPORA" MODEL

Hybridity and Related Models of Composite Identities in Culture-Contact

Peter van Dommelen (Van Dommelen 2005) has argued for the utility of the hybridity concept for our understanding of social identity in the study of ancient colonial encounters. In colonial contact situations the interaction of local and colonizing peoples can lead to the emergence of unique new composite or mixed communities that are characterised by what the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha has termed 'hybrid' identities (Bhabha 1992: 173-183). Bhabha uses the concept of cultural hybridity to describe the combination of differences and similarities that relates the local and colonizing groups without equating them entirely with either. These mixtures of local traditions and foreign cultural norms essentially form a new colonial culture. The hybridity concept thus relates closely to the linguistically based blending process of creolization (Hannerz 1987) or the

model of ethnogenesis in socio-cultural anthropology (Cusick 1998, Deagan 1998). These models of identity transformation differ from the acculturation model in three important ways: First, the hybridity and creolization concepts recognize the formation of a new and different social identity, rather than simply seeing the local people as abandoning their old ways and adopting a foreign colonizing culture. Second, the new hybrid or creolized identity draws on both local and foreign cultural schemes, rather than just the foreign influences; Finally, the models of identity transformation see local people as active agents who are selectively shaping and redefining a new social identity, instead of being the passive recipients of “influences” from a foreign “donor” culture.

Researchers have applied the hybridity or hybridization model to a number of different archaeological cases. Van Dommelen argues for the utility of these concepts for our understanding of ancient interaction and the development of new colonial identities in the western Mediterranean (Van Dommelen 1998, 2002, 2005). Through a comparative analysis of the first millennium BC Phoenician and Punic colonization, van Dommelen suggests that new colonial identities developed on Sardinia through a hybridization process (Bhabha 1992) in which the indigenous groups showed great selectivity in their appropriation and transformation of Punic material culture. Similarly, Helwing (1999) uses ceramic analyses of the 4th millennium BC site of Hassek Höyük to argue for a process of hybridization in the interaction between Uruk Mesopotamia and the Local Late Chalcolithic culture of southeast Anatolia (Helwing 1999).

Trade Diasporas and Inter-Regional Exchange

The related concepts of hybridity, creolization, and ethnogenesis, focus on the ways that colonial encounters can transform identities. Overall, the formation of new, composite social identities seems to have a sound historical basis – at least

in the case of the European expansion from the 16th=19th centuries AD. These transformations are best documented in situations of true colonial dominance or hierarchy, where the foreign group actually exercises political, economic, and military control over local peoples. However, it is important to recognize that in many cases of culture contact, the broader influences of political economy can push for the preservation and even emphasis of cultural differences between groups, instead of their transformation. This cultural politics of distinction seems to develop very often in the context of cross-cultural trade.

Trade across cultural boundaries is risky business, requiring highly specialized skills, and the ability to function within the value systems of two distinct cultures (Yambert 1981: 174). As the network of interacting societies grows in scale and complexity, exchange increasingly becomes the domain of specialized intermediaries who travel between regions or take up residence in the foreign community with whom they trade. One of the most useful ways to understand these communities is the concept of the ‘trade diaspora’ (Cohen, 1969, 1971; Curtin 1984). Trade diasporas are “*inter-regional exchange networks composed of spatially dispersed specialized merchant groups that are culturally distinct, organizationally cohesive, and socially independent from their host communities while maintaining a high level of economic and social ties with related communities who define themselves in terms of the same general cultural identity*” (Cohen 1971: 266-7).

Trade diasporas arise in situations where culturally distinct groups are engaged in exchange under conditions where communication and transportation are difficult, and where centralized state institutions are not effective in providing either physical or economic security to participants in long distance trade. One strategy through which these difficulties can be overcome is for traders from one cohesive ethnic group to control all or most of the stages of trade in specific commodities. To do so effectively, the

group must organize itself as a corporate entity that can deal with their host community or trading partners, ensure unified group action for common causes, and establish channels of communication with members of the same group in other parts of the exchange network.

How does a trade diaspora work? Members of the trading group move into new areas, settle down in market or transport centers along major trade routes, and specialize in exchange while maintaining a separate cultural identity from their host community. The foreigners attempt to maintain a monopoly of their particular trade specialization; this allows them to function as intermediaries or cross-cultural brokers between their host community and the outside world. The shared identity among different diaspora communities provides the framework for the communication, credit, and reliability necessary for the orderly long term functioning of the exchange system. The group has its own political organization that maintains order within the group and coordinates with other diaspora groups to protect their identity and economic niche in dealing with the local host communities. Often, the maintenance of this distinct political organization requires some level of judicial autonomy as well.

Trade diasporas also strongly emphasize their distinctive cultural identity, defining themselves as a moral community that acts as a group to enforce the conformity of individual members of the group to shared values. An ideology of this type is necessary to maintain the cohesion of the diaspora as a trade network despite competition from host communities.

Being different is the essence of a trade diaspora. The diaspora group defines its membership by emphasizing that its identity is different from its local host community. This deliberate separation is necessary to strengthen the diaspora as a community while preventing outsiders from breaking their trade monopoly. Although most commonly defined through an ideology of

shared descent or origin, diaspora identity can also be expressed through linguistic, religious, or other cultural criteria.

Why do the local host communities allow diasporas to settle and maintain an autonomous identity? Diaspora communities are useful to local rulers for several reasons. In many agrarian or pastoral societies, exchange is viewed as a suspicious activity that is best left to outsiders or socially inferior groups within the polity (Azarya 1980). Sponsoring and taxing trade diasporas provides an easy way for rulers in the host community to increase their own wealth and power without having to go through the conflict inherent in re-structuring power relationships within their own community (Yambert 1981). Because the strangers of the trade diaspora lack strong social ties with the majority of the host community, they are forced to be dependent on and therefore loyal to the local rulers. The key point to note here is that the social position of the diaspora is closely tied to local politics—specifically the degree of socio-political complexity, and the nature of factionalism or competition in the host community.

A trade diaspora can have a wide range of possible relationships with other diaspora nodes, with its homeland, and especially with its host community. The three most important points along the continuum of diaspora-host relations are: a) marginal status, b) social autonomy, c) in the extreme case, the diaspora dominance.

1) Diaspora Marginality: In some cases, the rulers of the host community treat the trade diaspora as a marginal or pariah group to be exploited at will. The foreign enclave's presence is only tolerated because of its usefulness to the host community. In these cases, the host community emphasizes the social separation and marginality of the diaspora group (Curtin 1984: 5).

2) Diaspora Autonomy: The second form of diaspora status is that of protected autonomy within the host community. This can be gained either through the explicit granting of

autonomous political status by the local rulers, as in the case of the Chinese trade diaspora in southeast Asia. The Chinese trade diaspora was able to gain a high degree of autonomy in its various southeast Asian host communities by being financially useful to local ruling elites. The Chinese had been long distance traders throughout southeast Asia for centuries, trading Chinese porcelain, cotton goods and silk in return for pepper, nutmeg, and cinnamon. Ties to the homeland played an important role in establishing the autonomy of the overseas Chinese. The maritime experience of Chinese long distance merchants and their monopoly on access to Chinese ports and goods were powerful incentives to local elites in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines to extend them numerous trading monopolies, tax concessions, and exemptions from *corvée* labor. The Chinese traders occupied special neighborhoods set aside for them by the local rulers. In return, the Chinese diaspora provided local rulers with exotic prestige goods and other economic benefits of exchange such as customs taxes and loans when needed (Yambert 1981: 180). Chinese diaspora groups forged close alliances with the local rulers, and played key roles in the financial and administrative hierarchies of their host polities as tax farmers or other state officials. This client-community status benefited the Chinese, who were able to occupy a profitable, protected socio-economic niche. At the same time, the local rulers gained new sources of income and a group of subordinates whose dependence insured their loyalty (Yambert 1981: 181). The Chinese gained political autonomy through the commercial advantages derived from their close ties to the mainland, coupled with a strategy of political alliances with powerful local patrons.

3) Diaspora Dominance: At the extreme end of the range of variation in the organization of inter-regional exchange is the fairly unusual situation where the trade diaspora actually controls its host community. The classic examples of this are the European trading post empires in Africa and Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries (Curtin 1984: 5).

Trade diasporas can change markedly over time. One of the most striking characteristics of trade diasporas is their tendency to work themselves out of business. Diasporas come into being because the differences between cultures in an inter-regional exchange network require the services of mediators. However, these middlemen become victims of their own success; extended periods of mediation can reduce cross-cultural differences and hence the need for cross-cultural brokers (Curtin 1984: 3). When this happens, the diaspora loses its distinctive status as members of the local host community take over the foreigners' position in the exchange network. This is probably the explanation for the end of the Assyrian presence in Anatolia after the karum period Ib.

Overall, the trade diaspora concept is a theoretical model of colonial identity and political economy that allows for a tremendous range of variation in the organization of inter-regional interaction, in the strategies pursued by foreign trading enclaves and host elites, and in the developmental trajectories of these networks. From the examples discussed above, different forms of power configurations—within and between homelands, colonies, and local polities—have a marked influence on the relationship between a trade diaspora and its host community.

The military, political, and economic power of the trade diaspora or its homeland plays a key role in structuring inter-regional reaction. This is, of course, most clearly evident in the dominance of the militarized European trade diasporas over their Asian and African host communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By contrast, when the homeland polity is either weak (as in the case of many Greek colonies) or unable to project military power because of its distance from its colonies, then there is far more room for negotiation between hosts and diasporas in the organization of interaction within the network. A relatively weak trade diaspora would only have been able to survive and func-

tion through alliance with its host community, since it would not have been able to dominate it by force. This was almost certainly the case in relations between the Assyrian merchants and the city states of second millennium Anatolia.

The military, political, or economic power of the local polities in the "periphery" also plays a vital role in the configuration of the diaspora community and its broader role in the inter-regional exchange network. Powerful centralized local polities can dictate the degree of autonomy of the trade diaspora. In relatively weak polities, local elites wishing to bolster their own power may grant a high degree of autonomy to trading diasporas in order to build up their own wealth while gaining a loyal, dependent client group outside the traditional local social order as a counterbalance to potential local rivals.

A final critical aspect of power relationships in trade diasporas concerns control over routes of movement and communication, access to trade goods and thus the terms of trade. As noted earlier, diasporas often attempt to gain a 'vertical monopoly' over as many different stages as possible in the movement of trade goods between regions. They are able to do this most effectively when communication and transportation between polities are unreliable or dangerous. Under these conditions, the culturally-defined economic linkages between different diaspora nodes give the foreign traders a competitive advantage in dealing with the local polities.

Overall, then, we can see two different models of what happens to the social identities of the different groups involved in colonial encounters. Depending on the overarching conditions of broad scale political economy, we can expect to see two very different kinds of social process. In cases of strong colonial domination, we often see the formation of new hybridized or creolized identities, drawing on both local and foreign cultural schemes. However, in more fragmented and less hierarchical political land-

scapes, the foreign groups most closely involved in exchange will often form trade diasporas whose members actively maintain a social identity very different from that of their local host communities. The latter case seems to apply best to early second millennium Anatolia.

THE OLD ASSYRIAN KARUM SYSTEM AS A TRADE DIASPORA

I suggest that the trade diaspora model is an extremely useful framework for archaeologists and textual researchers to understand the Old Assyrian trading colonies. Of the four theoretical models I have discussed above, only the trade diaspora model is able to explicitly link 1) political structure, 2) economic organization, and 3) social identity into a single coherent framework. A second advantage is that the trade diaspora model avoids the three problematic assumptions of the world systems model – core dominance, unequal exchange, and inter-regional trade as the prime cause of social change. Finally, the trade diaspora model is flexible, so that it allows for a broad range of different power relationships between the foreign groups and the local communities.

The Old Assyrian colonies conform exactly to Abner Cohen's definition of trade diasporas as spatially dispersed specialized merchant groups who are culturally distinct, organizationally cohesive, and socially independent from their host communities while maintaining a high level of economic and social ties with related communities who share the same social identity (Cohen 1971: 266-7). Of the three main types of possible relationships with the local host communities, the Assyrian traders seem to most closely match the idea of diaspora autonomy. In close parallel to the Chinese traders of southeast Asia, the Assyrians were able to negotiate economic privileges and explicit recognition of their autonomous political status because they were so financially useful to the rulers of the local Anatolian city states in which they had settled.

The key Assyrian role in the internal copper trade in Anatolia (Dercksen 1996) is some of the best evidence for the applicability of the trade diaspora model, in opposition to the world system construct. The copper trade had nothing to do with “core” control over the supply of foreign finished goods to Anatolia in an asymmetric trade system. Instead, the Assyrians were able to trade copper so effectively because of their own cohesiveness as a community, their ability to forge formal relations with local rulers, their capacity to extend credit to merchants across political boundaries, and their widespread network of connections in all the major local Anatolian copper consuming centers. These are precisely the characteristics of a trade diaspora.

One possible objection that might be raised against the applicability of the diaspora model involves the question of social differences between the Assyrians and the local Anatolian communities. The active maintenance of social differences from the host community forms one of the most important characteristics of a trade diaspora, and is, in fact, the main reason why they are able to function effectively. How distinctive were the Assyrians? Tahsin Özgüç commented that were it not for the discovery of the archives of the karum, the Assyrian households would have been indistinguishable from the houses of the local inhabitants of Kanesh (Özgüç 1963). It is certainly true that the most visible preserved items of durable material culture such as architecture and ceramics in the karum were local Anatolian in style. However, this may simply reflect pragmatic considerations on the part of the Old Assyrian merchants. The Assyrian community seems to have been comprised almost entirely of traders, with only a handful of people identified in the texts as craft specialists (Dercksen 1996: 71). Given the extremely high transportation costs involved in the donkey caravan trade between Assur and Anatolia, there was little reason to import bulky, fragile items such as utilitarian ceramics, when these could be obtained easily and inexpensive-

ly from local Anatolian merchants. In addition, since relatively few Assyrian women were physically present in the karum (see, e.g. Michel 2006), we would not expect to see Assyrian styles of those craft items that were normally made by women in the household. Under such circumstances, we would not expect to see Assyrian styles of ceramics and other items in the colonies.

Although the durable artifacts of everyday life are clearly Anatolian in style, food preferences can show clear ethnic distinctions, and these should be well reflected in the animal bones recovered from household refuse (Stein 1999). I suggest that a close comparative analysis of the animal bone remains from Anatolian versus Assyrian households at Kanesh and other karum sites would show clear differences in food preferences and preparation techniques between the two groups.

Beyond the zooarchaeological evidence, we must recognize that the Assyrians may well have signalled their distinctive social identity in ways that are difficult or impossible to recover from the archaeological record. Clothing is one of the most common ways to assert social identity (Weiner, Schneider 1989). The materials and style of dress can convey clear messages about one's tribal or village affiliation, one's social status as elite or commoner, or one's ethnicity (e.g. Rodman 1992). Since the Assyrians were heavily invested in importing textiles, it stands to reason that they would have also worn distinctively Assyrian styles of dress. Finally, the use of Assyrian spoken language would have instantly identified the merchants as a distinct group. Despite the many forms of Anatolian material culture adopted by the Assyrians, their language shows almost no loanwords or other linguistic borrowings from the local culture (Veenhof 1977: 111). This strongly suggests that the conscious use of language played a crucial role in distinguishing the Assyrian merchants from their Anatolian neighbors. In sum, the Assyrians probably did emphasize their distinctive dias-

poric identity, and at least some of these differences are potentially recoverable in the archaeological record.

CAN THE TRADE DIASPORA MODEL HELP TO DEFINE USEFUL QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE FIELDWORK?

I have argued that the Assyrian trading colonies are best characterized as an early example of the ethnographically well documented phenomenon of trade diasporas. However, the truest test of the trade diaspora model's value is to see if it helps us to define new areas for research. I suggest that we can do this by seeing if the three linked domains of politics, economics, and social identity all function and change over time in the ways postulated by the trade diaspora model. We can do this through diachronic analyses that examine the political economy of the Anatolian plateau before, during, and after the karum period.

We need to know much more about the political, economic, and social landscape of late third millennium Anatolia in order to have a real baseline for understanding the developments that took place with the establishment of the Assyrian trading colonies. Specifically, how urbanized was the plateau? How powerful were local rulers? How was the local economy organized? What kinds of trading networks existed in the late third millennium? What commodities were traded, and to what extent was trade controlled by centralized authorities? A diachronic comparison of late 3rd and early 2nd millennium regional trade should show signs of a major expansion in a) the volume of exchange, b) the range of goods traded, and c) the degree of regional economic integration. At the same time, if the Assyrians were gaining protected autonomy as a trade diaspora by enriching local rulers, this should be visible as well; we would expect to see the local kings becoming significantly richer and more powerful in the early second millennium. This should be reflected in the archaeological record of the palaces of

Anatolian kings (e.g. Özgüç 1999). We can only determine this by developing a better understanding of political leadership in the preceding late third millennium. At the same time, we need to better understand the social organization of the local Anatolian polities in the early second millennium.

Our most urgent need is to better understand the actual archaeology of interaction between the Anatolian merchants and the local polities. At present, the excavations at Kültepe the only archaeological project that allows us to do this, although hopefully excavations at other Anatolian sites with karums or *wabartums* can help as well. I suggest that we need to conduct detailed work in household archaeology, comparing everyday life in the karum households with that in the local community at Kaneş as away to understand how the two groups interacted. If the diaspora model is correct, then close grained analyses of foodways and everyday household practices in colonial households should show systematic ethnic differences in male gendered social domains, while showing overall similarities in female gendered domains since we would expect local Anatolian women to predominate in both Anatolian and Assyrian households.

Finally, we need to look closely at the question of how and why the Assyrian karum system ended. Was it sudden or gradual? The trade diaspora model suggests that successful diaspora groups work themselves out of business, Assyrian economic activities enriched local rulers and created stronger economic connections across a broad area. As economic ties strengthened between regions, we would expect to see local merchants assuming a greater role, cutting into the earlier Assyrian dominance of exchange. At the same time, their whole *raison d'être* was as middlemen in a fragmented political landscape of warring city states. As the states consolidated power and absorbed their rivals, the Assyrian karum system lost its economic niche. Once the broader context of

political economy changed, the organization of the Assyrian trade diaspora can be expected to have changed as well. This reconstruction would be consistent with the evidence we see for the impoverishment of the karum Kanesh from level II to level Ib.

CONCLUSIONS

Research on the Old Assyrian trading colonies in Anatolia is entering an exciting new phase. As we integrate textual and archaeological data

within the context of clearly defined theoretical questions, we can design programs for survey, excavation, and text based research that explicitly focus on testing models of social interaction and change. One of the best ways we can do this is to agree on common research questions, and carry out field projects that address complementary aspects of the karum system. At the same time we can greatly enhance our more specific understanding of the development of complex societies in Anatolia, and of the web of connections that linked them to their neighbors.

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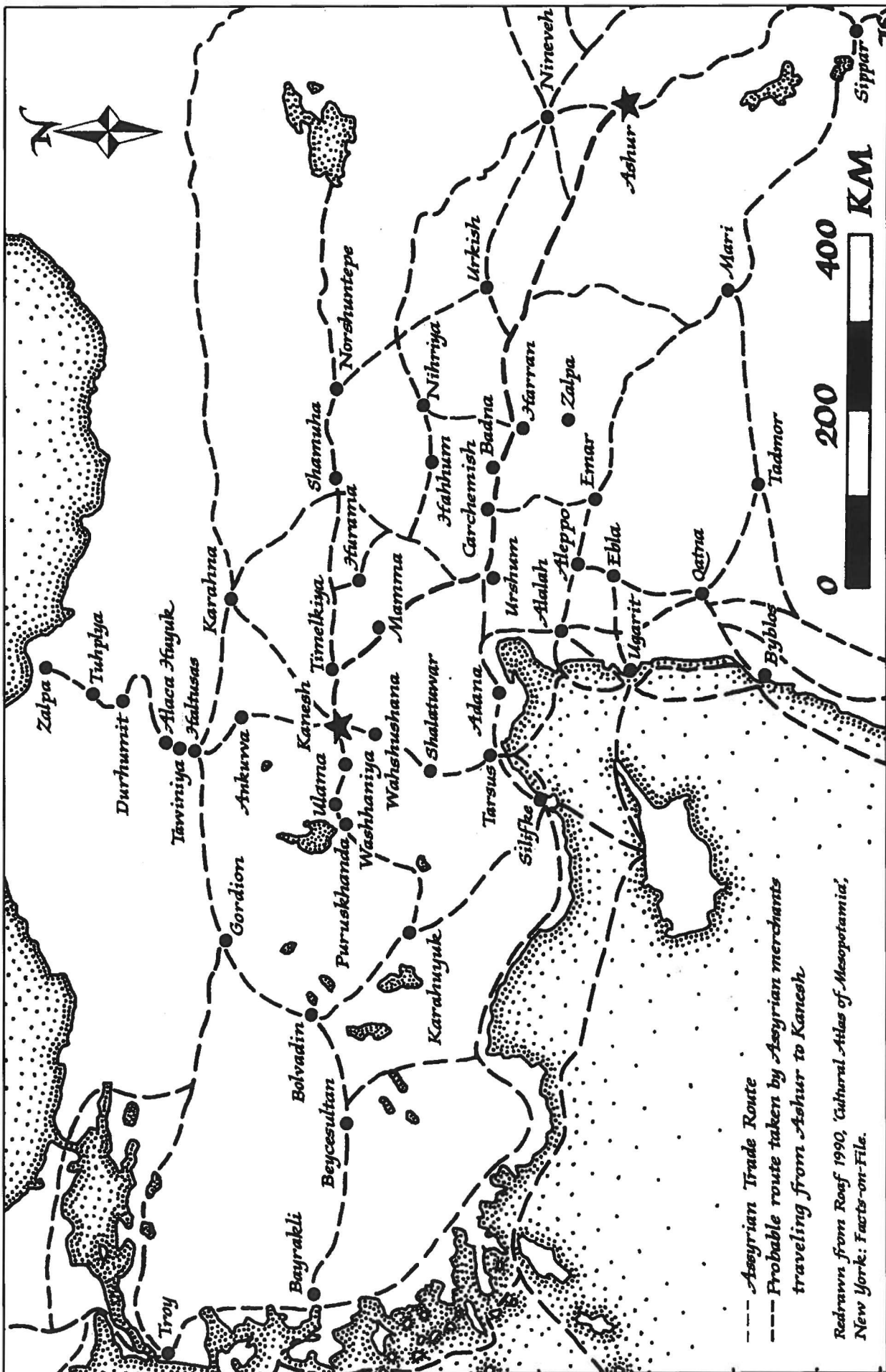


Fig. 1: Assyrian trade route in Anotolia.

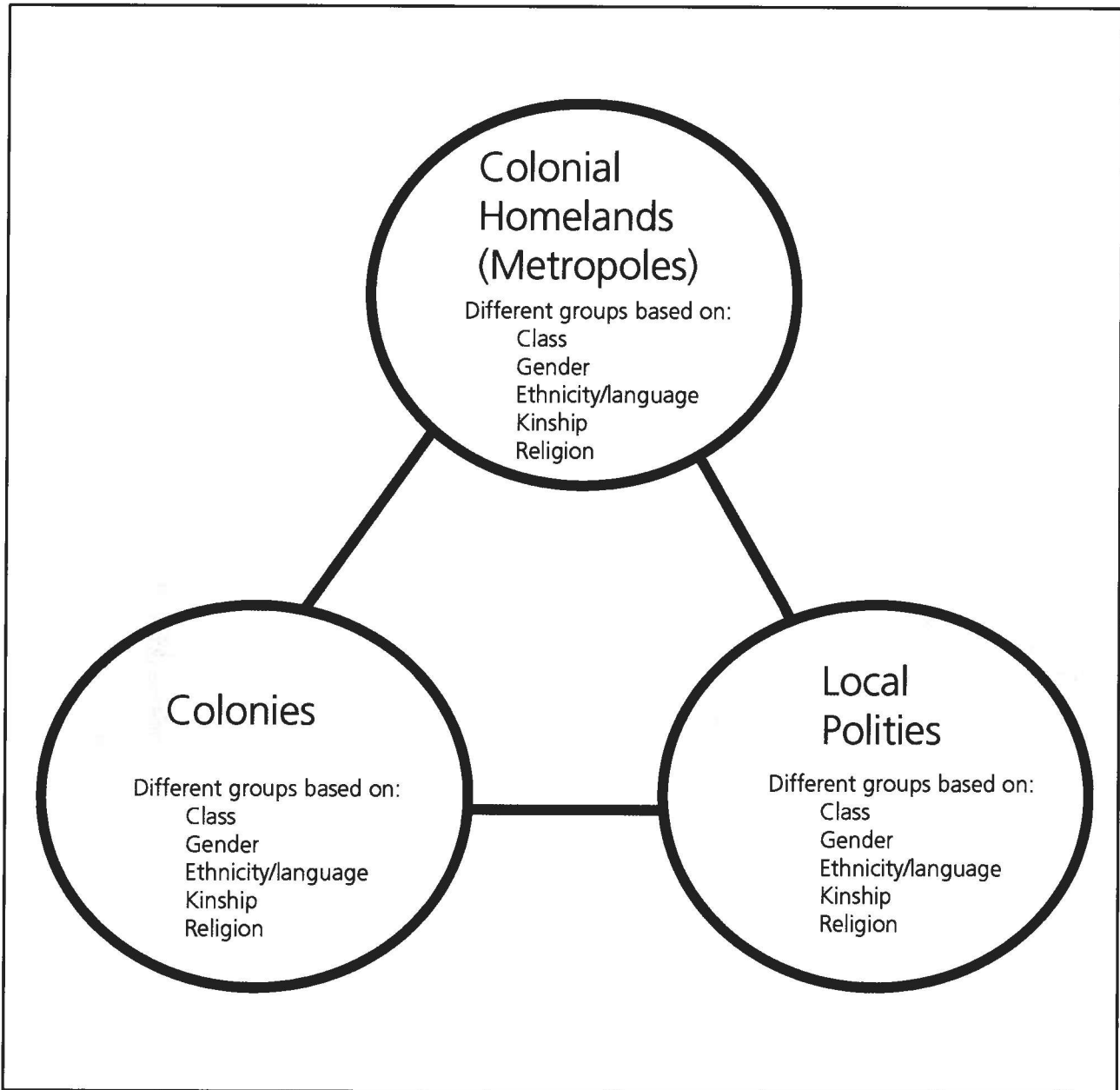


Fig. 2: The Three nodes of colonial encounters.

1) Hierarchical models

a. World systems

- “Cores” and “Peripheries”
- “Core” dominates “periphery” politically and economically through unequal terms of trade
- International trade is the prime mover for social change
- minimizes agency or inability of local polities in the “periphery” to influence events
- Minimizes importance of internal processes in the local polities

b. Acculturation

- “Donor” cultures dominate “Recipient” cultures
- one-way flow of cultural influences from “donor” to “recipient”
- assumes irresistible allure of “Donor” culture for local groups
- “Recipient” culture eventually merges into “Donor” culture and disappears

2) Non-hierarchical models

a. New “mixed” or “composite” Identities

- form in either the foreign group or the combined community of foreigners and local peoples
- new identity combines elements of both cultures into a distinctive synthesis of “colonial culture”
- does not assume dominance of either the foreign or the local culture
- 3 main related models of composite cultural identity:
 - hybridity*
 - ethnogenesis*
 - creolization*

b. Trade Diasporas

- exist in fragmented political landscapes of competing polities
- foreign traders negotiate role as “middlemen” in trade
- foreigners maintain separate cultural identity from local host communities by emphasizing differences in one or more domains such as: ethnicity, language, religion, diet, clothing, etc.
- can have a wide range of relationships with local polities
 - diaspora marginality* - local polities dominate foreigners
 - diaspora autonomy* – diaspora negotiates autonomy with local rulers
 - diaspora dominance* – diaspora controls local polity

Fig. 3: Models of political economy and social identity in culture contact.