# The Syrian and the Anatolian: Cultural and political frontiers in the post-Hittite Eastern Mediterranean (ca. 1200-700 BCE)

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[Throughout the Bronze Age, Anatolia and Syria had been deeply connected by an intense cultural and political exchange channeled by the Taurus mountains. However, after the collapse of the Hittite empire and the beginning of the Iron Age, regions on the two sides of the Taurus developed independent socio-cultural networks with limited interaction. This broad separation is generally overlooked in past research because obscured by the common cultural background that Iron Age Syro-Anatolian polities mostly inherited from the Hittite period. Warning against conceptualizations of Iron Age Syro-Anatolia as a coherent cultural complex, this paper intends to show that a "Taurus divide" affected various spheres of interaction, ranging from the cultural and linguistic landscapes to the worldviews shaping political practices of Syro-Anatolian polities. I will also argue that this divide found expression in the Assyrian "mental maps" of the area.]

## 1. *Introduction*

Throughout the Bronze Age, Anatolia and Syria were deeply connected by an intense cultural and political exchange. In the 3rd and early 2nd millennium BCE, continuous interactions between the two regions were made possible by an economic interest on crossing the barrier interposed by the impervious Taurus mountains, driven by the access to natural resources, chiefly metals, available in the Anatolian peninsula and/or by new market opportunities. Later on, during the Late Bronze Age (1650-1190 BCE), the Hittites became the first power able to establish their rule on both sides of this mountain chain. Multiple interactions working in many directions were thus triggered, to begin with the (re-)introduction in Anatolia of Syro-Mesopotamian scribal practices –the use of cuneiform– and the penetration in Syria of several Hittite / Anatolian traditions, from the use of Anatolian Hieroglyphic to administrative practices and ceramics.[1] By the 16th-15th century BCE, regions south of the Taurus, and Cilicia in particular, were also part of a sociolinguistic continuum with inland Anatolia, signaled by the diffusion of the Luwian language.[2]

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1. For cross-Tauric connectivity during the Late Bronze Age, see Matessi 2021, with further literature therein. For previous phases of the Bronze Age, see, among others, Massa and Palmisano 2018 and Giusfredi and Matessi 2021.

2. Matessi 2023a: 150-157; Yakubovich 2023.

The demise of the Hittite state at the turn of the 12th century BCE brought to the dissolution of the political convergence previously embracing both sides of the Taurus, opening the Iron Age phase of Eastern Mediterranean history. The first two centuries of this period, corresponding to the Early Iron Age, are mostly known thanks to archaeological records, while related historical events are not well documented due to the dearth of written sources and the controversial interpretation of the few remaining ones. During the better documented Middle Iron Age, from the 10th/9th through the 8th century BCE, we encounter in Syria and Anatolia a fragmented political scenario, radically different from the broad unitary picture of the Hittite imperial period (Fig. 1). On one hand, a new socio-cultural horizon associated with the Phrygians emerged at Gordion and neighboring regions of north-western inner Anatolia, and determined in many respects a rupture with previous traditions in the area (Payne 2023). On the other hand, in the area roughly comprised between the upper Kızılırmak river, Cilicia, the northern Levant and the Euphrates, a constellation of small principalities resumed and reinterpreted in new regional styles Hittite cultural traits, especially reflected in iconographic and monumental standards and the use of Anatolian Hieroglyphic script and Luwian language (Bryce 2012).
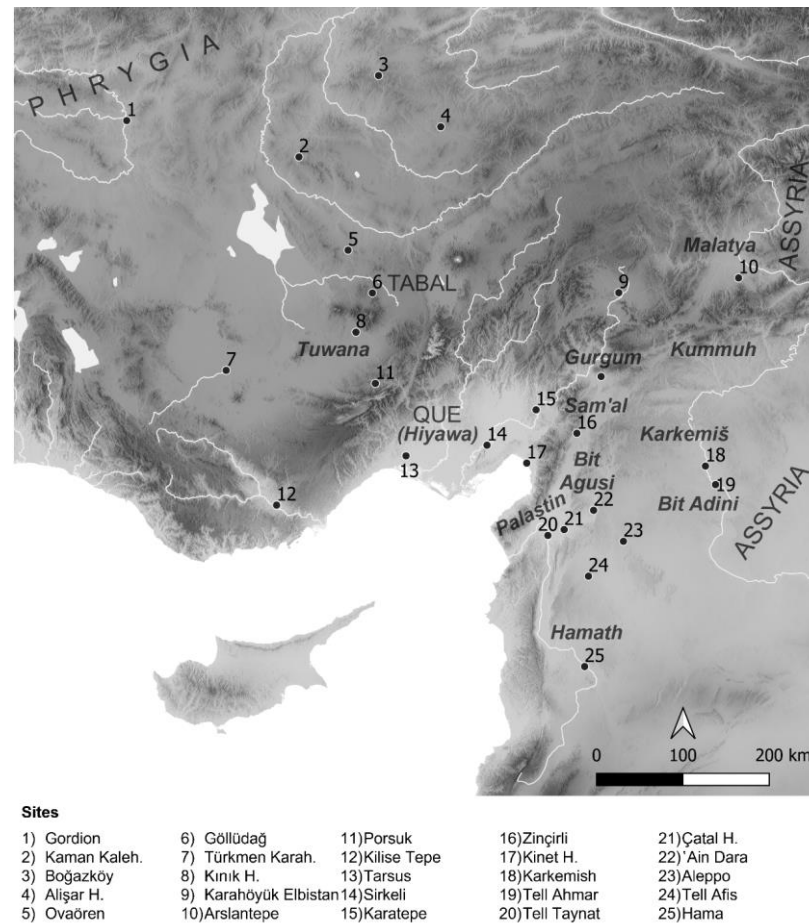


| Sites | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Gordion | 6) Göllüdağ | 11) Porsuk | 16) Zinçirli | 21) Çatal H. |
| 2) Kaman Kaleh. | 7) Türkmen Karah. | 12) Kilise Tepe | 17) Kinet H. | 22) `Ain Dara |
| 3) Boğazköy | 8) Kınık H. | 13) Tarsus | 18) Karkemish | 23) Aleppo |
| 4) Alişar H. | 9) Karahöyük Elbistan | 14) Sirkeli | 19) Tell Ahmar | 24) Tell Afis |
| 5) Ovaören | 10) Arslantepe | 15) Karatepe | 20) Tell Taynat | 25) Hama |

Fig. 1. Syro-Anatolia and neighboring regions during the Iron Age. (Map by Alvise Matessi – PALaC project. Available at https://zenodo.org/record/2602874)

The westernmost representative of this post-Hittite complex, known from coeval Assyrian sources as Tabal, was in truth a cluster of small kingdoms occupying a region roughly corresponding to Classical Cappadocia, between the modern Kayseri province and the Taurus mountains (d'Alfonso 2012; Giusfredi, Pisaniello and Rizza 2021). The eastern stretches of Cappadocia, towards the Upper Euphrates, were occupied by the kingdom of Malatya (Anatolian Hieroglyphic: $MA_x$-$LI_x$-$ZI_x$), based on the eponymous ancient city situated in the site of Arslantepe. The political landscape south of the Taurus was home to another constellation of canton states, among which the most prominent are the kingdoms of Karkemiš, on the Middle Euphrates, and Hiyawa, in Cilicia. Assyrian sources call the latter Que, while for Karkemiš and other south-Tauric polities on the west side of the Euphrates they often employ the term Hatti, thus transferring to Syria the toponym previously indicating the Hittite kingdom and empire based in Anatolia.

Several overarching definitions are employed in scholarship as shorthand for the above group of polities, most of which variably emphasize their Hittite cultural legacy, e.g. "Neo-Hittite", "Syro-Hittite" etc. In a recent book, James Osborne (2021) embedded a critique of this terminology in a more encompassing model called "Syro-Anatolian Cultural Complex" (SACC), stressing the local strands of cultural hybridity out of which the Iron Age landscape of the North-East Mediterranean emerged. As Osborne argues, Hittite legacy was only one aspect of the SACC cultural make-up, although a particularly meaningful one insofar as it produced a number of shared traits in a continuum of diverging horizons. However, the representation of the SACC as a heterogeneous cultural continuum may obfuscate stark departures or, on the contrary, trajectories of contact that might have been more meaningful than others in shaping the Syro-Anatolian world.[3] Most importantly, the notion of Syria and Anatolia as parts of a broadly coherent cultural phenomenon during the Iron Age risks to perpetuate the impression that interactions between the two regions remained stable and largely unchanged after the end of the Bronze Age. On the contrary, here I will argue that post-Hittite polities of Syria and Cilicia on one hand, and Anatolia on the other formed two broadly independent socio-cultural networks. The Taurus chain was thus no longer crossed by intense contacts, but became a more imposing divide between northern and southern frameworks, only punctuated by isolated zonal interfaces.

## 2. *The "Taurus divide" in the linguistic landscape and other cultural interactions*

Linguistic interactions in Iron Age Syria and Anatolia are most revealing of this broad separation between frameworks north and south of the Taurus, on the foreground of a shared Luwian legacy.[4] Regions south of the Taurus belt were characterized by an admixture between Luwian and West Semitic languages that did not make their way to the north. Here, non-Luwian native inscriptions up to the 6th century attest only Phrygian, with the single exception of the still unpublished Phoenician inscription in the monument of İvriz 2 (Dinçol 1994; Hawkins 2000: 526). Viceversa, Phrygian did not reach the south, bar the incision of a single personal name on an orthostat at Karkemiš (HP-01; see Obrador-Cursach 2020: 16).

Pottery also displays a similar polarized pattern. On one hand, the main non-synchronic proxies defining Iron Age ceramic networks in Central Anatolia, especially the Alişar IV, Black

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3. See the remarks in Giusfredi and Matessi in press.

4. For more detailed overviews, see Matessi and Lovejoy in press, and Matessi and Giusfredi in press.

Ware, painted Buff Wares and "Phrygian" figurative wares, are virtually absent or very rare in Syria and Cilicia.[5] Evidence seems so far limited to some cinerary urns reproducing Alişar IV-style decorations and a couple of Central Anatolian painted goblets form the Yunus necropolis at Karkemish (Woolley 1939: 16-19, with Pl. XIIb-c; 1952: Pl. 68b). No secure Central Anatolian Iron Age ceramic import predating the 6th century BCE is identified at Tarsus (Goldman 1963: 141). Conversely, ceramic classes most typical of southern frameworks, chiefly Red Slip and Cypro-Cilician wares, did not make their way to the north if not only sporadically. In Central Anatolia, examples of these wares are only found at Boğazköy—two Cypriot(-style) White-Painted jug fragments, and a few other possible imports with vaguer Syro-Cilician parallels—and Tumulus P at Gordion—a Cypriot(-style) Black-on-Red I (III) juglet and a faïence version of the same shape.[6] More substantial Cypriot(-style) findings significantly occur much closer to the Taurus belt, in the Malatya area, specifically at Arslantepe, Değirmentepe and Köşkerbaba. The same region was also findspot of small quantities of Iron Age Central Anatolian painted wares (Manuelli 2010: 79, and figs. 7-8; Manuelli 2013). As we shall see in a moment, these findings, together with other evidence, would configure the Malatya area as the only clear gateway of contacts between south- and north-Tauric cultural frameworks.

Due to their ubiquitous use in association to a variety of daily activities, from food preparation and consumption to storage, artisanal work, toiletry, and funerary equipment, ceramics are powerful catalysts of socio-cultural and economic meanings. The low intensity of ceramic exchange between Anatolia and Syro-Cilicia during the Iron Age, in the form of either individual objects (imports) or stylistic/ technological transfers, may suggest that the two areas had distinct cultural codes and habits. The observed potential use of different measuring systems north and south of the Taurus (Giusfredi 2010: 180-183) would add-up to this picture, further accentuating the socio-economic divide between the two areas.

To be sure, we should not conclude from this negative evaluation that Central Anatolia was completely isolated from cultural developments occurring in Syro-Cilicia or viceversa. Several studies, for example, emphasize (South-)Eastern stylistic influences on Gordion artistic traditions (Sams 1993; Vassileva 2019; Gunter 2022). In particular, Syrian or "Syrianizing" ivories, glass objects and seals with clear southern connections may attest to an upper level exchange among elites during the 9th and 8th century (Sams 2012), not dissimilar from the circulation of diplomatic gifts characterizing the Amarna age of the mid-2nd millennium. Other influences, identified for example in the Early Phrygian ortosthates at Gordion (9th BCE; Sams 1989), may be indicative of a widespread circulation of iconographic motifs. On a similar vein, the architectural layout and sculpted decoration of the mountain sanctuary (?) of Göllüdağ, in Cappadocia, have been compared with south-Tauric artistic conventions of the Iron Age (Osborne 2021: 218-219; Massa and Osborne, in press). Also the circulation in Central Anatolia of some religious motifs might owe to an influx of southern traditions (Lovejoy and Matessi 2023; Matessi and Lovejoy, in press).

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5. On Iron Age ceramic frameworks in Central Anatolian, see Kealhofer and Grave 2011. On specific geographic distributions, see Summers 1994; d'Alfonso et al. 2022.

6. See Bossert 2000: 146-147, nos. 1341-1344; Young 1981: 31, 36-37, with Pls. 14D, E and 17H. Sabina Calderone (PhD, University of Florence) kindly informed me of the presence of a few possible Cilician imports in Middle Iron Age assemblages from Uşaklı H., in northern Cappadocia, which she is going to examine in a forthcoming article (e-mail communication, June 7th, 2022).

A major problem connected with the issue of trans-Tauric contacts concerns the spatio-temporal distribution and diffusion of Anatolian Hieroglyphic script during the Iron Age. In North Syria and southeast Anatolia, a true continuity of Anatolian Hieroglyphic after the dissolution of the Hittite empire is certainly attested, chiefly at Karkemiš, Aleppo and Malatya. By contrast, in Tabal the earliest post-Hittite hieroglyphic inscriptions are attested after a hiatus of several centuries, and no prior than the late 9th or, according to some recent re-evaluations, late 10th century BCE (Balatti 2012; d'Alfonso 2019).[7] Therefore, it is unclear as whether a hieroglyphic scribal school continued through the Early Iron Age in some undetected form (e.g. on perishable materials), or resumed later after secondary contacts with Syria (Summers 2017). Even more intricate is the question of the adaptation of West Semitic abjads into the Phrygian alphabet, especially considering the vexed debate about the role played in this context by the Greeks (Sass 2005: 133-156).

We might notice that most traces of contact identifiable between Central Anatolia and the south focus on the late 10th and 9th centuries BCE. The orthostates of Gordion date to the 9th century BCE based on the new chronology of the site (Sams 2011: 60), and the Phrygian alphabet was introduced by the end of the same century (Obrador-Cursach 2020: 27). The precise chronology of Göllüdağ is not easy to establish due to the paucity of clear diagnostics and the lack of absolute determinations. However, the site yielded a few sherds of Alişar IV ware, that according to some recent evaluations would provide an *ad quem* date for the site's foundation in the late 10th–9th century (d'Alfonso et al. 2022). A possible chronological focus of some cross-Tauric contacts between the late 10th and 9th centuries also ties well with the proposed chronology for the reemergence of Anatolian Hieroglyphic in Tabal, assuming that this phenomenon was triggered by south(eastern) influences. At any rate, the connectivity patterns that channeled such cultural transfers were likely very complex and hardly conducible solely to cross-Tauric contacts.

In summary, notwithstanding the broad cultural continuum characterizing the Syro-Anatolian complex, in large part owing to traits inherited from the Hittite period or conducible to some degree of elite exchange during a limited timeframe, patterns of cross-Tauric interactions during the Iron Age were nothing similar to the multi-tiered continuous flow of cultural, economic and political contacts that shaped the same area throughout the Bronze Age. In the following sections, I am going to explore how this "Taurus divide" was pervasive also in Syro-Anatolian political narratives and monumentality, as well as in contemporary geographic perceptions. On the other hand, I will also stress some positive evidence that may suggest the whereabouts of trajectories of overland contact between northern and southern cultural frameworks, locating them in the Malatya area and the upper Euphrates. For the sake of clarity, I maintain here the term "Neo-Hittite" as a cultural label, indicating those individual features and contexts of the Iron Age involving evident aspects of cultural inheritance from the Hittite period. The definition "Syro-Anatolian" will be instead used in a broad geographic sense, to include the area involved by the diffusion of Neo-Hittite features.

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7. A group of display inscriptions authored by Hartapu, Great King, son of Muršili, scattered between the eastern Konya province and the Aksaray region, was traditionally dated to the very late 13th or very early 12th century BCE (Hawkins 2000: 433-442). This dating, however, has recently come into question after the discovery of another (K/)Hartapu inscription at Türkmenkarahöyük, which the editors attribute to the 8th century BCE (Goedegebuure et al. 2020), with an ensuing debate (Adiego 2021; Hawkins and Weeden 2021; Massa and Osborne 2022).

3. *Syro-Anatolian narratives of power: southern versus northern traditions*

D'Alfonso recently argued that communities south and north of the Taurus employed different strategies to re-define local social identities in the aftermath of the Hittite empire (d'Alfonso 2023). This reasoning starts from the observation that urban monumentality in Central Anatolian citadels of the 12th-8th centuries BCE is nearly absent, with the prominent exceptions, significantly concentrated in the 9th century, of Gordion and Göllüdağ (see above).[8] By contrast, countless figurative orthostats and statues embellished the buildings and urban gates of the main Syro-Anatolian centers south of the Taurus, such as Karkemiš, Sam'al (mod. Zincirli), Aleppo and Azatiwataya (mod. Karatepe). Monuments in Iron Age Syria and Cilicia were indeed mostly embedded in the urban layout and choreographically arranged into large complexes serving as stages to public ceremonies (Gilibert 2011).

The relative state of investigations north and south of the Taurus must be borne in mind whenever attempting comparative evaluations of the respective urban frameworks: whereas only few Iron Age sites in Tabal have been excavated in extent and adequately published, a large amount of data is available for Syria and Cilicia. This quantitative gap may nonetheless be counterbalanced by qualitative observations, focusing for example on the site of Ovaören-Yassıhöyük (Nevşehir province). This site, sizing about 17ha, is relatively large for Central Anatolian standards, presents substantial Iron Age occupations excavated in extent and is located at the core of Tabal, very close to the Neo-Hittite monuments of Göstesin, Suvasa and Topada, dedicated by the local king Wasusarma and his servants. It presents, therefore, the locational and dimensional parameters of an important regional center of an Anatolian Iron Age polity, akin to many sites yielding urban monumentality in Syria and Cilicia. Yet, the excavations on the Middle Iron Age strata at Ovaören (9th-8th centuries) have so far exposed simple architectural features reminiscent, if anything, of the megaron structures of Early and Middle Phrygian Gordion, but nothing comparable to coeval Syrian and Cilician traditions in terms of statuary or figurative reliefs (Şenyurt, Akçay and Aklan 2023).

While disregarding urban centers, Tabalian rulers seemingly preferred to concentrate their artistic investments and associated performances in extra-urban areas, through monuments erected in the open countryside (d'Alfonso 2023). In this way, also through the use of motifs of Hittite derivation, they perpetuated the Hittite imperial tradition of "landscape monuments", enshrining claims of power legitimacy in rural places charged with symbolic meanings and thus foci of ritual reverence by local communities.[9]

A particular type of landscape monuments, both imperial Hittite and Neo-Hittite, involved visual and/or epigraphic commemorations on natural rock surfaces, often found in connection with springs, rivers or other water bodies. Rock-cut reliefs are particularly effective means of ideological communication, as they perpetuate claims of political appropriation of the natural landscape and its resources (Harmanşah 2014). Alongside Neo-Hittite traditions, prominent examples of Anatolian rock-cut monumentality are also found in Phrygian contexts (Berndt-Ersöz 2006). Outside Anatolia, political commemorations on natural rock surfaces were already known

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8. For other isolated examples of orthostates from Tabal, see Aro 1998: 173-177.

9. On imperial Hittite landscape monuments, see Glatz and Plourde 2011; Seeher 2012.

from the 3rd millennium BCE, but the practice peaked dramatically in the Iron Age, becoming a hallmark of Assyrian, Urartian, and, later, Achaemenid power narratives (Harmanşah 2019).
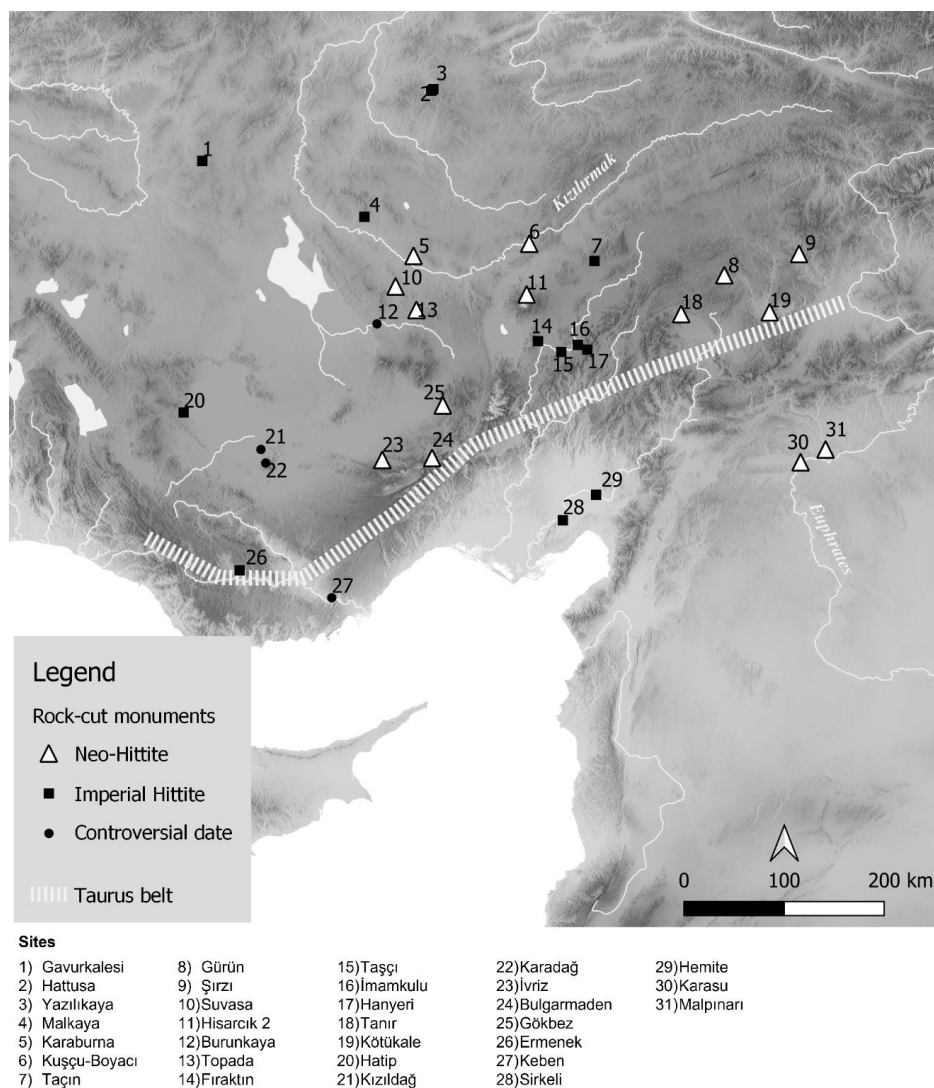


Fig. 2. Distribution of Imperial Hittite and Neo-Hittite rock-cut monuments in the target area. (Map by Alvise Matessi)

In light of the currency of rock-cut reliefs in Iron Age Anatolia and their general coeval diffusion elsewhere in Western Asia, it is quite surprising that monuments of this type were almost never promoted by local rulers south of the Taurus (Fig. 2). Neo-Hittite rock-cut reliefs are entirely absent in plain Cilicia, where, by contrast, imperial Hittite monuments of this kind occur not far from the site of Sirkeli, continuously inhabited through the Bronze and Iron Ages. The Iron Age absence of rock-cut monuments sponsored by native dynasts in Cilicia and nearby Amuq gains more significance when contrasted with coeval Assyrian examples found there, specifically

Uzunoğlantepe and Karabur (Taşyürek, 1975). The only two known examples of Neo-Hittite rock-cut reliefs south of the Taurus are the contiguous monuments of Malpınarı and Karasu in the Euphrates valley, about 100 km south of Malatya.

In the Hittite imperial period, the diffusion of landscape monuments was part of a larger process of territorial integration as it projected in the open country symbols of power circulating in other forms among urban elite networks (Matessi 2023b). D'Alfonso (2023) independently adopts a similar perspective in a synchronic evaluation of Iron Age interactions, arguing that the nearly exclusive use of landscape monuments in Anatolian Neo-Hittite art signals a diffusive territorial scope of local political narratives, aiming at negotiating power relationships between urban and rural environments. This strategy would contrast with the stark urban focus of Neo-Hittite monumentality prevalent in Syro-Cilicia.

A similar contrast of urban-based vs. territorial political claims south and north of the Taurus clearly emerges also when looking at the content of the inscriptions annexed to the monuments. Most Syro-Anatolian epichoric texts are stone inscriptions commemorating royal deeds, involving the construction of monuments or the dedication of specific places to the local divine patrons. The ideal goal of these commemorations, often explicitly stated, is to exalt the prosperity granted by the dedicating rulers to their kingdom. As part of this ideological endeavor, a heterogeneous group of Syro-Anatolian inscriptions emphasized the settlement policies of local dynasts, that could be attained through the (re)foundation of entire settlements and/or large scale demographic plans meant to repopulate depleted towns and lands (Table 1).[10] In the orthostat inscription KARKEMIŠ A11b+c, Katuwa claims to have rebuilt his capital city in the aftermath of dynastic struggles with a rival line of succession (Hawkins and Weeden 2016: 12). Conversely, the Sam'alite ruler Panamuwa I mentions the restoration of his land and the (re)building of villages in the context of a smooth transition from the reign of his father, Qarli (Tropper 1993:54-97; Younger 2003). Claims of fortresses foundation usually occur in the frame of frontier consolidation plans or narratives of military operations. The best known fortress in the Syro-Anatolian area is Azatiwadaya, modern Karatepe, whose construction is commemorated on the spot by its founder and eponym Azatiwada in a lengthy bilingual Luwo-Phoenician inscription.[11] Here, the main foundative event is set into a wider framework combining several motifs related to urbanizing activities, including repopulation programs and the construction of other fortresses "from east to west".

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10. On new foundations in Syro-Anatolia, see Mazzoni 1994. On Assyrian foundations and their typological analogies with coeval Syrian parallels, see Liverani 2012.

11. Note, however, that the site is called a "fortress" only in the Luwian version (*harniss*(*a*)-), whereas it is consistently referred to as a "city" in Phoenician (*qrt*). See the comments on this alternation by Yakubovich 2015: 47, who considers the Phoenician version to be the primary text. For another perspective on Phoenicio-Luwian language interactions in Cilicia, see Melchert 2021.

| Inscription | Regions | Dating | Capital | Other town(s) | Fortress/es | Repopulation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KARKEMIŠ A11b+c | Karkemiš | 10th-9th | ✓ | | | |
| CEKKE | | 8th | | ✓* | | |
| TELL AHMAR 3 | Tell Ahmar | 10th-9th | ✓(?) | | | |
| BOROWSKI 3 | | 10th-9th | | ✓ | | |
| ARSLANTAŞ | | 8th | | ✓ | | |
| MARAŞ 1 | Maraş | 9th | | | | ✓ |
| ARSUZ 1-2 | Amuq | 10th | | | | ✓ |
| HINES | Hama | 9th | | ✓ | | |
| HAMA 6-7 | | 9th | | | ✓ | |
| Zakkur (*KAI* 202) | | 9th-8th | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| KARATEPE | Que | 8th | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| ÇİNEKÖY | | 8th | | | ✓ | |
| Panamuwa I (*KAI* 214) | Sam'al | 8th | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Barrākib (*KAI* 215) | | 8th | | | | ✓ |
| KARAHÖYÜK | Malatya-Elbistan | 12th | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| GÜRÜN | | 11th-10th | | | | ✓ |
| DARENDE | | 11th-10th | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| IZGIN | | 11th-10th | | | | ✓ |
| KIZILDAĞ 3 | Tabal (west) | 9th/8th? | | ✓ | | |
| KARABURUN | Tabal (north) | 8th | | | ✓ | |

Table 1. Syro-Anatolian native inscriptions celebrating the settlement policies of local dynasts

The Iron Age stele of CEKKE, dedicated in the mid-8th century BCE by a servant of the Karkemišean king, is an unicum among attested Syro-Anatolian interventions in the urban landscape (Hawkins 2000: 143-151; Giusfredi 2010: 252-259). The stele reports a refoundation charter of the city of Kamana consecutive to its purchase for the price of 600 mules. The sellers, collectively identified as the inhabitants of the otherwise unknown city of Kanapuwa, are listed in §§ 8-13 together with individual payments in silver eventually adding up to the general price. The text concludes with a long list of witnesses (§17), identified by their names and patronymics, and curse formulas addressed to anyone who shall infringe on the terms of the sale contract or damage the inscription (§§18-28).

The topos of new foundations as an aspect of the civilizing mission of the rulers was well rooted in Mesopotamian and Syrian royal ideologies throughout the Bronze Age, and appears in Hittite Anatolia as well (Novák 1999; Grandpierre 2005; Mielke 2017). Transactions akin to those reported in CEKKE, also involving entire settlements and transmitted in formally similar charters, were common practices of political and economic negotiation in the Amorite kingdoms of Syro-Mesopotamia, and are especially well attested in the 18th and 17th century BCE at Alalah. Interpreting this evidence, Lauinger (2015) maintains that Amorite rulers of the early 2nd millennium were not much concerned with the territorial contiguity of their domains, but actually

conceived their political landscape as a network of discontinuous nodes, represented by settlements and other landholdings. Building upon the analogy with 2nd millennium practices, Osborne (2021: 173-174) argues that the same discontinuous territoriality applied to the political landscape of Iron Age Syria.

Territorial claims in Central Anatolia might have been somewhat different. Compared with the Syro-Cilician area, settlement policies played a lesser role in Tabalian ideologies of kingship (Table 1; Figs. 3-4): while several Tabalian inscriptions are dedications of individual buildings or monuments, only two of them turn out to explicitly commemorate settlement policies, KIZILDAĞ 3 and KARABURUN (Hawkins 2000: 438, 480-483).[12] This state of affairs contrasts with the higher number of settlement policy claims identifiable in Syro-Cilician inscriptions across various regions. In other words, while the rulers of Iron Age Syro-Cilicia revisited political narratives of their 2nd millennium predecessors, placing the urban landscape and its expansion at the center of their civilizing action, less so did their colleagues in Central Anatolia. This general lack of interest for an active settlement policy, or for the commemoration thereof, nicely resonates with the abovementioned near absence of urban monumentality in Central Anatolia (Table 2).
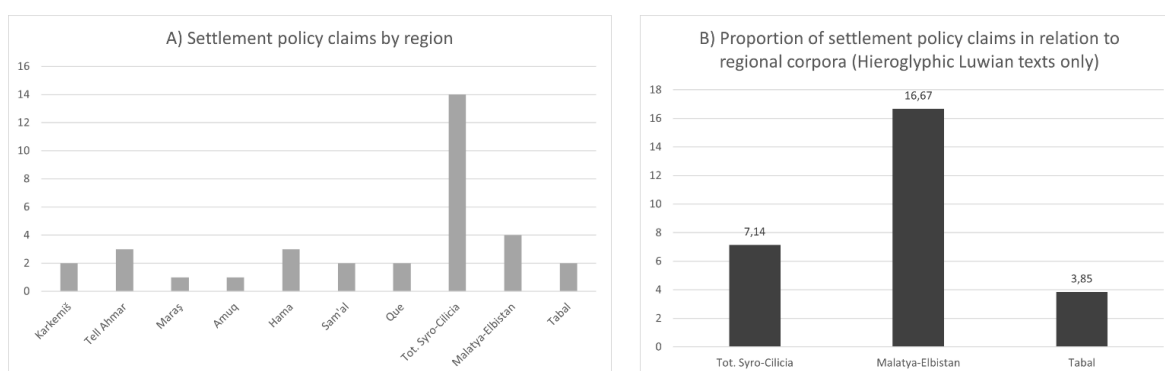


Fig. 3. Settlement policy claims in Syro-Anatolian inscriptions: quantitative data. Data source: Yakubovich, Annotated Corpus of Luwian Texts (http://luwian.web-corpora.net/)

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12. On the dating of KIZILDAĞ 3 and the related "Hartapu's group", see Goedegebuure et. Al 2020; Hawkins and Weeden 2021; Massa and Osborne 2022.
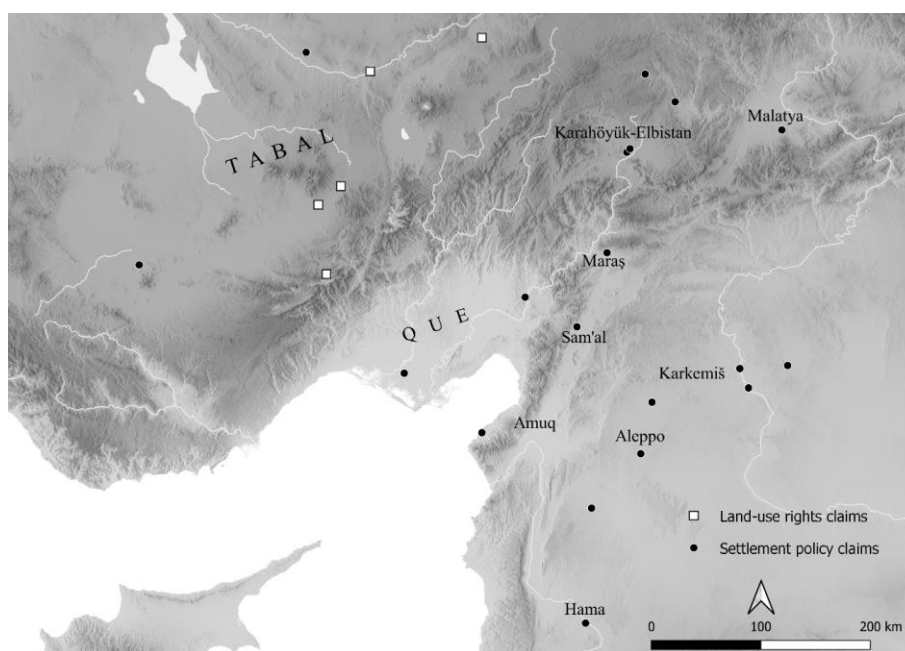
Fig. 4. Comparative geographic distribution of Syro-Anatolian inscriptions commemorating settlement policies vs land-use rights. (Map by Alvise Matessi)

By contrast, a large number of texts within the Tabal corpus bear claims over rural areas and natural resources, raised by royal patrons or their servants and sanctioned through divine protection. Particularly prominent in this respect are dedications of vineyards to protective gods (SULTANHANI and BOR 1; see Hawkins 2000: 463-472, 518-521), and various allotments of exclusive land-use rights for hunting (BOHÇA; Hawkins 2000: 478-480), horse pasturing (ANDAVAL; Hawkins 2000: 514-516; Balatti 2012) or mining (BULGARMADEN; Hawkins 2000: 521-525). Significantly, this genre of rural inscriptions finds no counterpart whatsoever in the coeval Syro-Cilician corpus. The occurrence of inscribed land-use claims, in concert with the frequency of rock-cut landscape monuments, may suggest that power narratives in Tabal tended to be more territorially diffusive across the countryside than in the Syro-Cilician area, where discourses focused on the urban space were instead prevalent (Table 2).

Judging from Table 2, the Malatya-Elbistan area would again emerge as a third cultural region within Syro-Anatolia, sharing features with both Tabal and Syro-Cilicia. On one hand, the excavated ruins of Malatya / Arslantepe bear witness to a rich urban monumental program dating between the 12th-10th centuries BCE with clear parallels at Karkemiš, including orthostates, all-round statues and portal lions (Manuelli and Mori 2016). On the other hand, in the same period, narratives of new urban foundations and colonization akin to those found in Syro-Cilicia figure prominently in inscriptions from Malatya-Elbistan (Table 1; Figs. 3-4). The inscription of KARAHÖYÜK, generally dated to the 12th century BCE, records the visit to the unknown land of POCULUM.PES by a Great King Ir-Teššub, who is commemorated for his restoration of the country after no better specified devastations (Hawkins 2000: 288-295). The GÜRÜN, DARENDE and IZGIN inscriptions were erected by the Country Lords of Malatya, respectively Runtiyas, Arnuwantis and Taras, ruling during the 11th century and early 10th BCE (Hawkins 2000: 295-

299, 304-305, 314-318). On the other hand, many Malatyan monuments, including the GÜRÜN inscription, are carved on natural rock surfaces, a feature that, as mentioned above, is most typical of Central Anatolian monumental traditions.

| | Nucleated / urban | | Diffusive / territorial | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Area** | Urban monumentality | (Claims of) active settlement policies | Rock-cut monuments | Inscribed land-use rights claims |
| Syro-Cilicia | ███ | ███ | ▓▓▓ | |
| Tabal | ▓▓▓ | ▓▓▓ | ███ | ███ |
| Malatya-Elbistan | ███ | ███ | ███ | |

Table 2. Diffusive/territorial vs. nucleated/urban narratives of power in the Syro-Anatolian area

It is worth stressing that in the early phase of the timespan covered by these inscriptions, the Malatya-Elbistan area ranged within the political influence of Karkemiš, albeit through mechanisms that are still largely obscure (Giusfredi 2010: 42-43; Weeden 2013: 8). The Great King Ir-Teššub celebrated in KARAHÖYÜK has often, but not universally, been identified with Ini-Teššub, a king of Karkemiš attested in Assyrian royal inscriptions of the early 11th century (Giusfredi 2010: 42, with further references). The Malatyan rulers Runtiyas and Arnuwantis, on the other hand, claimed descent from Great King Kuzi-Teššub, the first post-Hittite ruler seating on the throne of Karkemiš. The archaeological evidence proves that during the Iron Age Malatya was subject to converging cultural influences from Anatolia and Syria. Ceramic horizons from Level III of Arslantepe, dating to the Early Iron Age, show strong ties with the Middle Euphrates area, including Karkemiš. Contacts further expanded during the later Level II (Middle Iron Age), when the site and the nearby region was reached by ceramic styles imported from Urartu, Central Anatolia, Cypro-Phoenicia and Syria (Manuelli 2013). Archaeological and historical evidence would thus concur to position Malatya at a cultural and political interface between Syria and Anatolia. The patterns produced by this situation may well explain the hybridity encountered in political ideologies expressed in monumentality and narratives of power.

In summary, the distinctive distribution of specific literary and visual rhetorics of power matches the general "Taurus divide" drawn by linguistic and material cultural evidence. This divide, however, was not absolute, as it had a permeable hotspot of contacts in the Malatya-Elbistan area. As we shall see in the next section, the same broad picture also emerges from available information about the geopolitical scenario of the the Syro-Anatolian area during the Iron Age, as arguable mostly through the lens of Assyrian sources.

4. *The "Taurus divide" in Iron Age political interactions*

The narratives of Assyrian engagements west of the Euphrates provide a host of historical and geographical information about Syro-Anatolian polities that, cross-checked with native epigrahic evidence, contribute to define an approximate geopolitical map. Šalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) was the first Assyrian ruler to provide detailed accounts of his extensive western campaigns, which spanned a vast area from Central Anatolia to the Lebanese coast. His celebrative inscriptions are rich in geographic information, including descriptions of the itineraries trodden by the Assyrian armies (Yamada 2000). This provides a significant body of evidence upon which to gauge trajectories of contact in the Taurus area during the early 1st millennium BCE.

It is commonplace that Cilicia was a main gateway for connections between Central Anatolia and the Syro-Mesopotamian regions. Yet, up to the reign of Sargon II there is no incontrovertible proof that Assyrian armies ever used this trajectory en route to Central Anatolia and Tabal or viceversa. Šalmaneser III regularly entered Tabal and affiliated polities from the east, that is from Malatya, Melid in Assyrian, and the Elbistan area (d'Alfonso 2012). Giusfredi et al. (2021) propose that the toponym Tabal derived from Assyrian *tābalu*, convincingly reinterpreted to mean "river bank".[13] If so, Tabal might have originally indicated the southeastern shores of the Kızılırmak River, thus suggesting that this area and not the Taurus was the most recurrent interface between the Assyrian empire and Central Anatolia. Not surprisingly, this trajectory is akin to the itineraries followed a millennium earlier by the Old Assyrian merchants, who reached Kaneš, on the eastern Kızılırmak, after crossing the upper Euphrates at Hahhum, but ignored Cilicia (Barjamovic 2011).

Since the times of Tiglath-Pileser I (late 11th century BCE) Malatya was most typically approached by the Assyrians after fording the Euphrates, but on some occasions a southern route is also attested, running along the Euphrates from the Karkemiš area and then crossing the eastern Taurus (Di Filippo and Mori 2018). This latter trajectory also worked in a north-south direction, as Malatya typically represented a strategic intermediate target for Urartian expansionist ambitions in Syria (Hawkins 1995: 90).

The typical route taken by the Assyrians to reach Cilicia, i.e. Que, when explicitly mentioned, ran through the Amanus mountains.[14] For the whole period preceding Sargon II, the only known document where Que and Tabal are juxtaposed in a way that may suggest their location along the same itinerary is the inscription of Šalmaneser III on the "Assur Statue" (RIMA 3 A.0.102.40, III 5b-8). This inscription is a summary account conflating without a clear chronological order campaigns that are presented independently from one another in the more detailed annals of Šalmaneser III, chiefly the "Black Obelisk" (RIMA 3 A.0.102.14) and the "Kalhu Statue" (RIMA 3 A.0.102.16).[15] According to Lanfranchi (2002), the conflated occurrence of Tabal and Que in the "Assur Statue" would explain discrepancies in the counting of *palû* ("regnal years") encountered in the annals and in the later "Eponym Chronicle" relative to the years 839 and 833-831 BCE (SAAS 2: 29-30). In his discussion, Lanfranchi argues that Šalmaneser III transited from Tabal to Que on his way back to Kalhu during the 22nd *palû* campaign, eventually omitting the reference to Que in

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13. Cf. CAD T, 21, s.v. *tābalu*: "dry land", from the verb *abālu* (CAD A, 29, s.v. *abālu* B), "to dry up, to dry out."

14. Cf. the campaigns of the 20th, 25th and 26th *palû*: Yamada 2000: 197-205, 218-221. On Assyrian interactions with Que, see Bing 1969; Jasink 1991; Gabrieli 2022: 333-338.

15. See discussion in Yamada 2000: 45-46 and 203.

all related annalistic accounts. If so, this would be the only crossing of the Taurus between Central Anatolia and Cilicia argued from Assyrian inscriptions up to the late 8th century BCE.

Scholars do not exclude other viable explanations for the the above mentioned discrepancies, without necessarily bringing into the picture an otherwise unproven transit of Šalmaneser III from Tabal to Que (e.g. Yamada 2000: 218). Based on the collation of various fragmentary accounts, we understand that, at the close of his 22nd *palû* campaign to Tabal (836 BCE), Šalmaneser III reached the city of Hubušna and climbed the mountains Tunni and Muli (Yamada 2000: 209-214). Thanks to comparisons with geographic information drawn from 2nd millennium Hittite sources and epichoric Iron Age Luwian inscriptions, we know that the area indicated by these toponyms must have more or less corresponded to the western reaches of the Bolkar Dağ, north of the Cilician Gates (Hawkins 2000: 426-427, 432). There is no record of Šalmaneser's return march to Assyria after this campaign, but there is no firm indication that he made his way across the Bolkar Dağ to reach Que.[16] The verbs used in this context in relation to the mountains are *elû*, "to ascend, climb" (RIMA 3 A.0.102.16, 171'-172', 178'-179'; RIMA 3 A.0.102.40, III 2b-3) and a less specific *alāku*, "to go, march (to)" (RIMA 3 A.0.102.14, 106-107), while the expected verb for "to cross" (*nabalkatu*) is not attested. It is unlikely that Šalmaneser III, generally so keen on exalting his pioneering ventures, would have missed the opportunity to celebrate a transit to Cilicia across the Taurus in a more exhaustive fashion.[17]

After Šalmaneser III, geographic information about interactions in the Taurus region becomes more rarefied. Yet, the same broad separation between northern and southern frameworks reflected in military routes of the 9th century BCE would later find a counterpart in clusters of interpolity interaction arguable within the Syro-Anatolian world from both native and Assyrian sources. On several occasions, Assyrian inscriptions of the early/mid-8th century mention coalitions seeing the participation of multiple canton states west of the Euphrates. In these contexts, neither Tabal nor any other known Central Anatolian locale ever appears as a partner of Que or other south-Tauric principalities. In 743 BCE, a number of polities joined Urartu and Mati'el of Arpad in a coalition defeated by Tiglath-Pileser III in the battle of Kištan (Bagg 2011: 213-226). Significantly, Malatya was the only north-Tauric participant to this anti-Assyrian front, whereas the other members, Gurgum and Kummuh, lay on the southern Taurus foothills. This interference of Malatya with south-Tauric affairs was not novel. In fact, according to the Zakkur stele (*KAI* 202), in 796 BCE this polity had already joined a group of Syro-Cilician kingdoms, including Que, in an alliance with Bar-Hadad of Damascus-Aram against Zakkur of Hamath (Younger 2016: 476-486).

The accession of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BCE) inaugurated a new phase of Assyrian involvement in the west. Following the battle of Kištan, various Levantine canton states ranging from Arpad to Megiddo were annexed to the empire as provinces, whereas other polities were subjected to tribute although remaining formally independent. As of 738 BCE, also Tabalian polities started to regularly appear among Assyrian clients in lengthy tribute lists detailed by Tiglath-Pileser III in his royal inscriptions. As noted by Tadmor (1994: 265-268), these lists are

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16. Such route is only postulated by Hawkins (e.g. 1995: 99) on the commonplace assumption about Cilicia as a main node in connections to and from Central Anatolia. See also Yamada 2000: 214, based on Hawkins' reconstruction.

17. Cf., by contrast, the references to the Amanus crossing towards Cilicia in the 20th, 25th and 26th *palû* accounts, built upon the formula "in my # regnal year I crossed (*attabalkat*) the Amanus range and went down to the cities of Katte the Quean".

organized into groupings of polities appearing according to a broadly regular order. Que always features together with Levantine polities in groups generally opening the lists, forming a coherent cluster with the Phoenician city-states of Tyre and Byblos. The Tabalian constellation, on the other hand, always appears as a group on its own, generally listed several positions away from Que, formed by Tabal itself, (A)tuna, Ištunda, Tuwana (spelled Tuhana), and Hubušna. Finally, Malatya does not seem to belong to any coherent cluster, but is significantly interposed between Tabal and the Syrian group, featuring Karkemish, Sam'al, Hamath and Gurgum. The only exception to these patterns is represented by the "Iran Stele" (RINAP 1, no. 35), where Malatya separates the groups of Que and Tabal. On account of these regularities, Tadmor (1994: 266) suggests that these groupings were not random geographic subdivisions but the products of actual "mental maps" derived from political and economic relationships, perhaps even coalitions, between the polities composing the groups. If so, this interpretation would provide another context for separating Central Anatolia and regions south of the Taurus, as components of two distinct areal networks. At the same time, the medial position of Malatya between Syro-Cilician groupings and Tabal in the tribute lists resonates well with the status of this polity as a sort of gateway between northern and southern frameworks, reflected by other independent evidence.

Another case worth stressing is Que. As we have seen, Šalmaneser III's records depicted this region as relatively isolated from the rest of the Anatolian peninsula but well connected towards Syria and the Levant, the regular transit areas for Šalmaneser III's army en route to Que. Available data for the 8th century up to the reign of Sargon II conform well to this picture, as Que is never attested in alliances or other political interactions involving Central Anatolian polities. By contrast, as mentioned, Que appears in the Zakkur stele among the allies of Bar-Hadad, whereas the tribute lists of Tiglath-Pileser III regularly group this region together with Phoenician city-states and other Levantine polities. Consonant with this evidence, the Phoenician version of the İNCİRLİ stele (Kaufmann 2007; Swartz Dodd 2012), reporting territorial rearrangements issued by Tiglath-Pileser III following the battle of Kištan, attributes to the Quean ruler Warika formal sovereignty over the Hatti-lands: significantly, in the Neo Assyrian "mental map" this designation mostly referred to Syria and the northern Levant (Bagg 2011: 19-31; d'Alfonso 2012: 176).

With the advent of Sargon II (722-705 BCE) Assyrian expansion in Syro-Anatolia reached its apex, leading to the final annexation of most remaining local post-Hittite polities and the cessation of native documentation in Anatolian Hieroglyphic. In the meantime, Phrygia, based in north-west inner Anatolia, had become a major interregional power under the lead of the famous king Midas (Mita in Assyrian), threatening Assyrian attempts to control Tabal. Interestingly, in this context, Que became an important mediator of Assyro-Phrygian interactions and, turned into an Assyrian province, the main power base of Sargon II's engagement in Central Anatolia. The Assyrian king repulsed a Phrygian invasion of Que in 715 BCE. Again in 709 BCE, the governor of Que informed Sargon II about the positive outcome of his raids against Midas. In the famous letter SAA 1.1, probably composed shortly after this event, Sargon expressed his satisfaction on Mita's collaboration on the seizure and delivery of an embassy sent by the king of Que to Urartu, probably in the intent to build an anti-Assyrian coalition. From the same letter we also learn that the Assyrian governor of Que had received a messenger from Urballu / Warpalawa, the king of the polity of Tuwana, located on the northern foothill of the Taurus. These are the earliest documents in the Iron Age attesting beyond doubts direct contacts between Que and Central Anatolian polities. These sparse references, therefore, would suggest that in the late 8th century Cilicia might have

resumed its earlier role as a gateway and intermediary in relationships between Central Anatolia and the rest of the Near East.

## 5. *Conclusions*

This paper explored how contacts across the Taurus mountains broke off after the end of the Bronze Age, framing Central Anatolia and Syro-Cilicia as two largely independent cultural and political spheres of interaction. In particular, I have identified three interrelated contexts in which the two regions diverged. The use of different languages and distinct pottery styles suggests that the two areas had separate cultural codes and habits. Diverging strategies of monumentalization and royal propaganda may indicate that relationships between rulers and their subjects mapped onto different conceptions of the political space. Finally, these cultural and political differences resulted in—or were a consequence of—distinct clusters of political and economic interaction, well reflected in native and Assyrian geographic perceptions of the Syro-Anatolian area. Significantly, however, in all these three contexts, the upper Euphrates area and, more specifically, Malatya shows elements in common with both southern and northern frameworks, thus emerging as a possible corridor of transmission between the two socio-cultural spheres.

In this light, the so-called "Syro-Anatolian cultural complex" should not be conceptualized as a unitary phenomenon, nor just a heterogeneous cultural continuum, rather as a clustered—or even polarized—network of cultural and political interaction. It is against this picture that complex cultural transfers such as the (re)emergence of Anatolian Hieroglyphic in Central Anatolia or the northwestward spread of West Semitic alphabets may perhaps be more proficiently analyzed by future scholarship.

## 6. *Acknowledgements*

## 7. *Bibliography*

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