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Greek Contact with the Levant and Mesopotamia in the First Half of the First Millennium BC: A View from the East

Amélie Kuhrt

Introduction

The aim of a series of seminars held in Cambridge was to gain a clearer grasp of Greek interaction with areas to the north and the Near East. I shall concentrate in this paper on the period from the 8th to the 6th centuries. The conventional periodisations of Greek history that parallel this are not especially meaningful in the context of the *longue durée* of Near Eastern history, where we are dealing with a great spectrum of diverse and highly developed cities and states (see, most recently, Sasson *et al.* 1995; Kuhrt 1995). This is a feature that I may seem to be overemphasising at times, but should be constantly kept before us. Between *ca.* 900 and 500 BC Greek communities were, by comparison with the Near East, poor, and their socio-political structures relatively underdeveloped (see Osborne 1996). Momentous changes were, of course, taking place and accelerating late in the period, but if we look at some of the contemporary large states and rich cities of the Near East, such as the Neo-Assyrian and Babylonian empires, Egypt, Urartu, the Phoenician cities, the small Syro-Palestinian kingdoms, the comparative backwardness and poverty of Greece is obvious. In many respects it might be fair to regard developments in Greece as dependent on what was happening in the Near East, and in that sense it could even be helpful to regard it as a marginal, or frontier, zone. First and foremost, the large states of the Near East offered a living to Greeks, primarily and most importantly through their need for manpower, especially in the military sphere - this could take the form of a limited period of service or the incorporation of recruits into Near Eastern armies together with grants of heritable land plots sufficient to support a family (see Lloyd 1983, 279-348; Wallinga 1991, 179-97; 1993, 89-92). In this respect, the Near East was a crucially important source of employment for members of Greek communities. There were also other ways in which Greek-Near Eastern relations could be formulated: eastern kings occasionally extend their patronage to Greek craftsmen, their courts attract Greek philosophers, learned men and experts of various kinds, such as doctors.¹ Greek interaction with the Near East is further signalled by stories about 'Phoenician' merchants in the Aegean,² the finds of Near

Eastern artefacts in Greek territory (for recent surveys, see Curtis 1996; Hoffman 1997), the 'orientalising' phase in Greek art,³ the influence of Near Eastern literary types on aspects of Greek writing and, of course, the adoption of the Phoenician alphabet.⁴ What is unclear and continues to be debated is precisely how these relations are to be visualised, how intense they were and where exactly contact took place.

When searching for answers to these questions, two further points need to be kept in mind. First, the term 'the ancient Near East' does not refer to a single, monolithic entity. It embraces a region that is marked by immense variety in terms of cultures, physical environments, languages, writing systems, religious, social and political structures, historical, literary and artistic traditions. To speak about Greece and the Near East as two contrasting units confronting each other is a nonsense, certainly in the period before the development of the Achaemenid empire. Therefore, contacts between Greek communities and various parts of this enormously variegated region are likely to have taken a mass of different forms. The second point is the span of time involved: several groups in the ancient Near East could, at the beginning of the first millennium, look back on a traceable, *memorialized* history that stretched back over 2000 years. Within that long period immense transformations had taken place; they may not always be clear to us but are, nevertheless, a fact. Further, in the period with which I am concerned here (i.e. the time between 1000 and 500 BC), we can identify a number of critical changes:

- a) **Egypt** underwent a whole series of profound political upheavals from a country consisting of largely Libyan-dominated principalities to subjection by Nubia, Assyrian domination and finally independence and reunification under another Libyan dynasty (dynasty 26, the Saïtes) (Kitchen 1986; Lloyd 1983; Kuhrt 1995, ch. 12).
- b) **Assyria** in the same period expanded, in a series of conquests, from a small kingdom confined to North Iraq to become an empire embracing the whole of the Fertile Crescent from *ca.* 700 BC until its final collapse in *ca.* 610 (*CAH* III parts 1 and 2, chs. 6-7, 21-25; Kuhrt 1995, cap. 9).
- c) The **Babylonian state** experienced periods of

¹ The main attestations are, in Herodotus, for Lydia; Greek doctors are, as far as I am aware, only attested at the Persian court (the best-known being Democedes of Croton (Hdt. 3. 129-137, to be read in conjunction with Griffiths 1987, 37-51) and, of course, Ctesias of Knidos), see the list in Miller 1997, 100; for the long history of foreign artisans, scholars and doctors residing at courts in the ancient Near East, see Zaccagnini 1983, 245.

² See, for example, Carpenter 1958, 35-53 (a conspectus on classical sources relating to Phoenician expansion); also Bunnens 1979; Latacz

1990 (Homer); Powell 1938, *s.v.* *Phoinix* (Herodotus).

³ For a broad assessment, see Gunter 1990; and see the stimulating study by Morris 1992.

⁴ The classic study is Burkert 1992; see now the detailed analysis by West 1997.

extreme political turmoil, generated by difficult internal conditions and exacerbated by incorporation into the Assyrian empire, whence it emerged between 626 and 605 BC as the successor state to the Assyrians (Brinkman 1968; 1984; Frame 1992; Kuhrt 1995, ch. 11).

These examples are used simply to illustrate how important it is to be aware of change over time within Near Eastern lands; it does not even touch on the complexities of developments in Anatolia, among the small polities of the Levant and western Iran, which all formed part of this political and cultural mosaic. But the implications of the point I am making should be obvious: any Greek contacts within this period will have been affected and modified by these upheavals - just as they will also have differed from region to region.

After these preliminaries, I shall now focus on two particular points in order to clarify the picture of Greek contacts with 'the east', which may serve as an example of the kinds of problems of understanding and shifts in the dynamics of relationship of which we need to be aware. Because of the particular rôle in the debate that has been played by possible Greek settlements in the Levant, at sites such as Al Mina, Ras-el-Basit and Tell Sukas, I shall ignore Egypt and concentrate on Assyria and Babylonia as the two largest Near Eastern empires preceding the Achaemenid realm. I shall discuss, first, the textual evidence for Greek contacts with them,⁵ how precise it is and what the implications are. Secondly, since the picture of Greek interaction with the Near East is dominated by the image of mercantile links and settlements, I shall consider briefly the trading mechanisms of the successive states of Assyria and Babylonia to provide a clearer idea of what kind of commercial patterns Greeks might have encountered and to which they had to accommodate themselves.

Assyrian sources

The Neo-Assyrian evidence is not extensive, but has at times been made much of, particularly by Braun (1982); it requires correction and clarification before conclusions can be drawn.

a) Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC)

1. NL 69 (H.W.F. Saggs, *Iraq* 25 (1963)) 1.3

This is a letter from Qurdi-Aššur-lamur, active in the region of Tyre, Mount Lebanon, Sidon and Kašpuna (identified as Al Mina by Parpola),⁶ after the expansion of Assyrian power there between 735 and 727 BC, to the Assyrian king. It is occasionally dated to the reign of

Sargon II, but is more likely to date to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III:

The 'Ionians' (kur *ia-u-na-a-a*) have come. They have fought in the cities of Sams[imuruna], Harisu and [...]

The points to note are:

(i) there is no earlier reference to Ionians in the Assyrian texts;
(ii) contra Braun (1982, 15), this passage tells us nothing more than that the 'Ionians' are a hostile force, active along the Lebanese coast;
(iii) the references to 'in his ships' and 'in the midst of the sea' which occur 5 lines further on in a broken context cannot be linked directly to the Ionians, nor are we told what exactly the Ionians were doing here. Braun's recreation of piratical Greeks from Cilicia Aspera is pure speculation; it is certainly possible, but not testified to by this text.

2. It has been suggested by Parpola (1970, 186-7) that NL 12 (H.W.F. Saggs, *Iraq* 17 (1955)), 11.40-44, an important letter to which I return below, contains a reference to Ionians. It, too, was written by Qurdi-Aššur-lamur:

I appointed a eunuch as fortcommander over them, and sent in 30 [...] *ia-na-a-a* (Parpola emends: [KUR *ija-ú-na-a-a*] troops to keep guard, (and) 30 (other) troops willl relieve them. With regard to the king's instruction, that I should send 10 KUR *ia-su-ba-a-a* (Parpola emends: KUR *ia-ú-na-a-a*) into Kašpuna ...

As Brinkman (1989, 55) has pointed out, Parpola's proposed emendations do not fit the traces as preserved in the original publication. Moreover, Postgate in his treatment of this text (Postgate 1974, 392) restored and read it quite differently. According to him, the reference at the relevant points is to troops from Shianaia, a place in the area of the Levant and member of the coalition formed against Shalmaneser III in 853 BC (Grayson 1996, Shalmaneser III A.O. 102.2 ii94). Yasuba, troops of which are referred to in the last line, is north-east of Babylonia; but this need not be an objection to Postgate's interpretation as the reference here could well be to deported families from there settled in the vicinity of Tyre.

The results from this are meagre: there is one reference to an Ionian raid on western coastal centres; but the Ionians are not otherwise located (even vaguely), so their base of operations is unknown. The aim, size and nature of the attack remains unclear; there is no hint of any kind of commercial relationship between Ionians and the Levant.

⁵ For a collection of the relevant passages and discussion on philological problems, see Brinkman 1989.

⁶ See the map at the end of Parpola 1987.

b) Sargon II (721-705 BC):

3. H. Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons* 1889, I 148: 34-5:

(Sargon) ... who caught 'Ionians' (kur *ia-am-na-a-a*) of the midst of the sea like fish

4. F.H. Weissbach, *ZDMG* 72 (1918) 178: 15-6:

I ... caught 'Ionians] of the midst of the sea of the setting sun like fish and [dep]orted (?) them

5. C.J. Gadd, *Iraq* 16 (1954) 199: 1.19:

(Sargon) ... who in the midst of the sea caught 'Ionians' as a fowler does fish

6. D.G. Lyon, *Keilschrifttexte Sargons, Königs von Assyrien (722-705 v.Chr.)* 1883, 4: 21:

(Sargon) ... who in the midst of the sea caught 'Ionians' as a fowler does fish

All four passages are in the nature of summary statements linked to sweeping surveys of the empire and the king's achievements in the later part of Sargon's reign. In all cases the Ionians are associated with the Mediterranean, but any further precision is lacking: they appear as a distant and hostile group, used to define the most distant western lands of Assyrian power.

c) Directly comparable to the Sargon passages is a solitary one by Esarhaddon (680-669 BC), which is also the latest Neo-Assyrian reference to Ionians:

7. R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien* 1956, 86/AsBbE: 10-11:

All kings from the midst of the sea, from the land of Cyprus (kur *ia-da-na-na*), the land of 'Ionia' (kur *ia-man*) to the land of Tarsisi, bowed at my feet. I received their heavy tribute.

This again gives us a bird's eye view of the Assyrian empire, casting the net as wide as possible in the direction of all the points of the compass. Again, any direct contact, war or conquest of any kind is not indicated, aside from the generalized statement of gifts acknowledging the Assyrian king's power. If, as often argued, Tarsisi here really does mean Tartessos (Braun 1982, 20; Lipinski 1992, 440-2, *s.v.* Tarshish) that point is obvious. Localisation and identity, aside from the Mediterranean, remain vague in the extreme - perhaps an east to west sweep of Phoenician trade contacts is being envisaged, *i.e.* Cyprus-Aegean-Spain.

d) One reference, adduced by Braun (1982, 19), which must be separated from Assyrian mentions of Ionians, occurs in Sennacherib's *Annals* (8 below), recording an Assyrian river and sea-borne attack on Elam in 694 BC:

8. D.D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* 1924, 73: 58-61:

Mighty ships, the workmanship of their land, they built dexterously. Tyrian, Sidonian (and) Cypriot (kur *ia-ad-na-na-a-a*) sailors, prisoners of my hand, I ordered (to descend) the Tigris with them ...

The word which Braun has interpreted as a reference to Ionians/Greeks, is in fact well attested by other Assyrian references to Cyprus = *Yadnana*. It is definitively identified as such on Sargon's Cyprus stele and the word is quite distinct from the Akkadian rendering of 'Ionian' = *Yam/wan*.⁷ What Braun suggested was that this reference to supposed Ionian sailors being set to work in the Assyrian heartland and sent through Babylonia to the Persian Gulf in 694 BC should be connected to a campaign fought by Sennacherib's generals in Cilicia in 698 (Luckenbill 1924, 61-2). Unfortunately, as he admits, the Assyrian account of the campaign makes no reference to any encounter with Greeks/Ionians; but because, as he would argue, Greeks were settled in Cilicia, they must have been involved in the revolt put down by Sennacherib's commanders. So, after the Assyrian victory, they would have been deported and, as expert sailors, used to build and man the Assyrian fleet constructed a few years later for the war in the Gulf. To underpin this argument, he points to two passages preserved in the very much later Armenian version of Eusebius' *Chronicon*:

9.

a) Berossus ap. Eusebius *Arm. Chron.* (FGrH 680 F7):

When report came to him (Sennacherib) that Greeks had entered the land of the Cilicians to make war, he hastened against them. He set up front against front. After many of his own troops had been cut down by the enemy he won the battle. As a memorial of victory, he left his image erected on the spot ...

b) Abydenus ap. Eusebius *Arm. Chron.* (FGrH 685 F5):

... Sennacherib ... on the seacoast of the Cilician land defeated the warships of the Ionians and drove them to flight. And he also built the temple of the Athenians, erected bronze pillars, and in inscriptions indeed, so he says, he had engraved his great deeds.

These two passages are not, in fact, separate accounts of the same event, but (as many have argued) the Abydenus passage is dependent on Berossus, itself preserved only at third hand through Alexander Polyhistor. In other words, we have only one account of this particular event taken by

⁷ For the details, see Brinkman 1989, 54; for a translation of the Cyprus stele, see Luckenbill 1927, paras. 180-189.

Eusebius from different excerpts of Berossus.⁸ Precisely how we are to understand the appearance of Ionians/Greeks here is uncertain. One thing that will become clear a little later, is that the term 'Ionian' before the Achaemenid period did not necessarily always designate 'Greek'. It is, therefore, possible that Berossus could have interpreted the 'Ionians' of his sources as 'Greeks' in this instance because the word had acquired that meaning *by the time he was writing* (early 3rd century BC) (Helm 1980, 194). It is also conceivable, as Momigliano (1934, 412-6) suggested long ago, that the inclusion of Greeks in this battle was an addition by Berossus to make his history more interesting to his intended audience. These are both, of course, only hypotheses and must, in the nature of things, remain so. However, what is certain is:

(i) Sennacherib made no mention, in his fairly detailed account of the campaign, of an Ionian presence in Cilicia;

(ii) *if* Berossus had access to another account that *did* mention Ionians here, it would imply that Ionians should be placed in Cilicia by 698 BC; but the equation 'Ionian' = 'Greek' in the early 7th century is uncertain;

(iii) the preserved Berossus passage is very late and has gone through a highly complex process of transmission; its reliability and original purpose remains opaque.

Finally, there is one broader observation to be made about the Neo-Assyrian attestations of Ionians: in the reign of Sargon II, we hear of a ruler of Ashdod called Yamani, and there are occasional references in legal documents found in the Assyrian heartland during the 7th century to individuals called Yamanu. It has been argued from time to time that this is a personal name derived from an ethnic label and denotes Ionians/Greeks,⁹ who would thus be participating in the day-to-day life of the Assyrian empire. However, as Brinkman has shown (for example, Braun 1982, 16-7, 21), philologically 'Yamanu' is incompatible with the clear adjectival designation 'Yamnaya', i.e. 'Yawnaya', which definitely does mean Ionian. The two terms need to be carefully separated - the surface similarity should not mislead. Braun's assumption that Yamani/u indicates Greeks, however much he tries to hedge it, cannot stand.

To sum up the deductions to be drawn from this survey of the very restricted Neo-Assyrian textual material:

1) Beyond a general association of Ionians with the Mediterranean, the references do not tell us where Ionia is nor where Ionians were located.

2) Assyrian contact with the country and people is indirect

and distant; in this respect, Ionia is perceived as a place that is more remote to the Assyrians than Bahrain or Cyprus.

3) The one exception to this is the mention of Ionians raiding the Levant coast.

I am not a specialist on the archaeological evidence and I know that people hold divergent views about the intensity and date of a Greek presence at sites such as Al Mina, Tell Sukas and Ras-el-Basit. My own impression, working from the Neo-Assyrian written sources, is that the minimalist view,¹⁰ according to which there was no significant Greek settlement or trading presence in the Levant before the late 7th/early 6th century BC, and that these sites fit into a common Cypro-Levantine cultural domain, accords well with the vague and slender Assyrian evidence, which suggests that direct Greek links with this great empire were slight.

The Neo-Babylonian evidence

I shall now look at the Assyrian successor state, Babylonia (626-539 BC), with respect to Ionia and the Ionians:

a) 10. YOS 17, 253: 1-6; dated 29.4.601:

4.5 minas of purple wool of 'Ionia' (KUR *ia-a-ma-nu*) for [making x garments], at the disposal of Kudurru, son of Be-nasir, and Nanaya-iddin, son of Nabu-ušallim, the weavers

The text dates to 601 BC, and specifies a coloured wool connected with Ionia and being used in Uruk. In itself it is unclear what this means: it could simply describe a type of fabric or yarn equivalent to terms in use now, such as 'tweed', rather than indicating that the wool was imported from Ionia. If the wool actually came from Ionia, it still does not divulge anything about what trading mechanism was in operation, nor what routes were being used: e.g., the wool could have come via Cyprus or been imported by Phoenicians. Greek traders bringing the wool to Babylonia, or even to the Levant, do not have to be assumed.

b) Quite different are the ration texts from Nebuchadnezzar's citadel in Babylon, dating to 592/1 BC, because they certainly refer to groups of Ionians among the palace workforce:

11. E.F. Weidner, *Mélanges Dussaud* 2, 1939: 923-35:

i) 8 '[onian]' (lú *i[a-man-na-a-a]*) carpenters

ii) LABBunu, the LÚ.EDIN-*ú* of the land of the 'Ionians' (kur *ia-man-na-a-a*)

iii) Kunzumpiya the LÚ.EDIN-[*ú*] of the land of 'Ionia'

⁸ Burstein 1978, 24; Kuhrt 1987; Verbrugge and Wickersham 1996 omit this fragment altogether.

⁹ For example, *ADD* 76 1.11; 233 11.29, 32; 214 11.4, 10.

¹⁰ Represented, for example, by Graham 1986; Helm 1980.

- (kur *ia-man-na*)
- iv) 8 'I<o>nian carpenters (lú *ia-<man>-na-a-a*)
- v) Aziyak the 'Ionian' carpenter (lú *ia-man-na-a-a*)
- vi) 8 of the same (sc. carpenters), 'Ionians' (lú *ia-a-man-a-[a]*)
- vii) 7 of the same (sc. carpenters), 'Ionians' (*ia-man-a-a*)
- viii) [x] 'Ionian' carpenters (lú *ia-man-a-a*)

Two of the professional terms here (ii and iii) are unclear: the possible emendations, yielding the sense of 'smith' or 'potter' have been suggested, but remain uncertain. The most frequent professional designation is that of carpenter. Two other points are worth noting:

i) The Ionians appear scattered through a long list of people, several of whom are also carpenters; they include Jews, Phoenicians, Philistines, Elamites, Medes, Persians, Egyptians and Lydians. In other words, we get a picture of the Babylonian court employing a great number of artisans, coming both from subject territories and from neighbouring states; Ionians form only a part of this workforce.

ii) In the two cases where personal names are fully preserved and can be linguistically analysed (Kunzumpiya, Aziyak - iii and v), they are certainly not Greek, although the individuals are described as Ionian.

c) That fairly strong links with the region called Ionia by the Babylonians existed in this period is shown by the massive quantities of bronze¹¹ and iron that were imported into Uruk between 552 and 550 BC, as shown by the next two texts (12 and 13). As with 10, the organisers of this trade are unknown. Given the source of other items, such as Egypt and Lebanon, Phoenician/Levantine merchants seem likely, especially if it is remembered that the name of the chief official in charge of mercantile activities at Nebuchadnezzar's court had a Phoenician name.¹²

12. *TCL* 12: 84; dated 14.10.551 (cf. A.L. Oppenheim *JCS* 21 (1967))

- 295 minas of bronze from Iamana
 55 minas of lapis lazuli
 153 minas of *tumanu*-fibres
 233 minas of alum from Egypt with their
 containers
 130 minas of iron from Iamana
 257 minas of iron from Lebanon

- 37 minas of tin
 8 boxes (?) of bronze, whose contents have not
 been established
 11 minas 20 shekels of blue-purple wool together
 with two dyed fabrics
 3 jars with *huratu*-dye
 126 minas of [...]
 2 *šamallu*-jars with *inzahuretu*-dye

The two linen fabrics dyed blue-purple are the income of Nadin-ahi. All this is the consignment of Nadin-ahi, son of Innin-aha-usur. VII/5/5, Nabonidus, king of Babylon.

13. *YOS* 6: 168; dated 15.10.550 (cf. A.L. Oppenheim *JCS* 21 (1967))

- 600 minas of bronze from Iamana at 3 minas 20 shekels of silver
 80 minas 20 shekels of *i*-dye at 2 minas 2 shekels
 37 minas of tin at 55.5 shekels of silver
 16 minas 15 shekels of blue-purple wool at 2 minas 40 shekels
 all this: (blank) of Samaš-zera-ibni son of Nana-iddin

-
- 295 minas of bronze from Iamana ... at 1 mina 38.3 shekels
 55 minas of lapis lazuli at 36.6 shekels
 153 minas of *tumanu*-fibres at 1 mina 42 shekels
 233 minas of alum from Egypt at 1 mina 17.6 shekels
 32 minas 20 shekels of *i*-dye..... at 48.5 shekels
 130 minas of iron from Iamana at 32.5 shekels
 257 minas of iron from Lebanon at 42.6 shekels
 132 litres of assorted honey at 26 shekels
 20 jars of white wine at 1 mina
 120 minas of *huratu*-dye at 30 shekels
 40 minas of *hashaltu*-spice (?) at 2 shekels
 1 *kurru*-measure of *taturru*-spice (?) at 10 shekels
 1 *kurru*-measure of juniper resin at 3 shekels
 all this: (blank) of Nadin-ahi.

Date: VII/7/6, Nabonidus, king of Babylon. 3 minas 10 shekels of the blue-purple wool are the tithe of Nadin-ahi; 5 minas of the blue-purple wool and 40 minas of the iron are the tithe of Samaš-zera-ibni.

The conclusions to be drawn from this material are, first, that the tentacles of the Neo-Babylonian trade network certainly reached as far as Ionia and, secondly, that Ionians formed part of the skilled workforce of the Babylonian kings. Relations between Ionia and Babylonia thus seem more intimate and direct than in the preceding Neo-Assyrian period. However, there is still no clear indication of precisely what is meant by Ionia/Ionians - the onomastic evidence suggests Anatolia generally; nor is there any suggestion that Ionians themselves were actively engaged in organising the trade between Babylonia and the Aegean.

¹¹ The problems of distinguishing 'copper' and 'bronze' in Akkadian are treated by Brinkman 1988.

¹² Hanunu, chief of the king's merchants, Unger 1931, 285, 290 col. IV 19.

d) One thing we do know for certain is that the Babylonian rulers employed Greek soldiers - Alkaios' poem welcoming his brother home is definitive proof of this (Diehl 1924-25). When this Babylonian recruitment began and under what circumstances is unknown. It is quite possible that, as in Egypt, it was first mediated through the Lydian kings, with whom (judging by the story of the Battle on the Halys in 585 BC, Hdt. 1. 74), relations were good. Certainly, Babylonian territory in the north-west abutted Lydian controlled land. But, direct links with Greek communities, such as are known to have existed between Greek cities and Egypt, are not attested. Nor is there any hint in the Babylonian material of an awareness of Ionia in particular as a source for soldiers, against Braun's assertion (Braun 1982, 23), based on text 14.

14. BM 33041 obv.13-rev.3:

obv.

[...] MU 37 KAM Nabu-kudurri-ušur LUGAL KÁ.DINGIR [.....]

[.....] mi-šir a-na e-peš MÈ il-[lik]

rev.

[...]a-su LUGAL KUR mi-šir um[.....]

[...]ku-úša URU pu-tu-ia-a-man [.....]

[...]na-gi-i ni-su-tú ša qe-reb tam-tim[.....]

translation:

obv.

[...] Year 37, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babyl[on] (i.e. 568 BC)

[.....] Egypt to do battle ca[me]

rev.

[..Am]asis, King of Egypt, ar[my]

[...] ? of/from 'Libya of the Ionians' [.....]

[...] distant regions of/from the midst of the sea [.....]

As Edel (1978, 13-20) argued, very convincingly, 'Libya of the Ionians' almost certainly describes the Greek colony of Cyrene with whom Amasis made an alliance (cemented by a dynastic marriage) in order to strengthen his hand against Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to reinstate the deposed Egyptian ruler, Apries. So this particular text has to be taken out of the discussion for Babylonian-Greek, as well as Egyptian-Greek relations - it makes no reference to mercenaries from the Aegean area: its focus is Cyrene.

In terms of the archaeological evidence from this period, the picture is unclear: a site such as Mesad Hashavyahu, generally accepted to have been a Greek settlement, must (certainly by the 580s BC) have come under Babylonian control. Tell Sukas, too, will have formed part of Babylonian territory, so that any Greeks living in this Phoenician town will have been subject to the king of Babylon. Al Mina seems to have been abandoned for about 80 years at the end of the 7th century; it looks as though this break coincided with the collapse of Assyria and the whole period of Babylonian power. Ras-el-Basit shows no

signs of Greek settlement, although Attic pottery increases substantially and dominates the ceramic assemblage in the 6th century. Hints in the archaeological picture, which suggests an intensification of Levant-Aegean links in the Neo-Babylonian period, match the image derived from textual sources, although we are far from grasping the details of that interaction with clarity.

Trade and empires

To gain understanding of how Greeks might have been drawn into commercial dealings in the Near East, we need to look more closely at how mercantile centres of the Levant, especially the Phoenicians, were affected by successive Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian control (recent discussion by Elat 1992, 21-35; Diakonoff 1992, 168-93).¹³

The Neo-Assyrian empire did not penetrate the world of the Levant profoundly until the middle of the 8th century BC, when Tiglath-pileser III began his great wars of expansion, many of which were directed at securing and widening the Assyrian hold on the west. This process, begun in 738, was completed by 705 by Sargon II. In the space of just over 30 years, the Assyrian kings established their dominance, directly and indirectly, over the entire Mediterranean coast, Cilicia and southern Anatolia. Trading and diplomatic agreements were set up regulating communications with Egypt, Phrygia and Urartu,¹⁴ commercial and political links with small adjacent kingdoms such as Bahrain and those in Cyprus had been formed;¹⁵ similar links with the small but prosperous trading centres of Western Iran and the caravan cities of the Arabian desert, whose existence and wealth depended on being able to operate within, and in relation to, the Assyrian empire, were in force.¹⁶ Into this network we need to slot the Phoenician cities, who were certainly subject to the Assyrians, but whose expertise in bulk transport and the acquisition of metals was also needed by their political masters (Frankenstein 1978, 263-94). The care with which the Assyrians controlled and harnessed their activities emerges from two well-known documents:

15. NL 12 (*Iraq* 17 (1955)); between 735 and 727 BC:

With regard to the ruler of Tyre, of whom the king said that I was to speak kindly to him - all the quays are open to him, (and) his subjects enter and leave the quay-houses (*bit-karani*) as they wish,

¹³ The basic article on overland trade is Oppenheim 1967.

¹⁴ Sargon II opened the 'sealed harbour' of Egypt 'to make Egyptians and Assyrians trade with each other', Tadmor 1958, 34. Assyrian-Phrygian links, Parpola 1987, no. 1 (Sargon II). Urartian-Assyrian relations, Borger 1956, para. 68 (Esarhaddon).

¹⁵ Cyprus and Bahrain: Luckenbill 1927, para 70 (Sargon II); for Assyria's links with the Gulf, see Potts 1990, 333-38.

¹⁶ Assyria and West Iran: Brown 1986. Arabs and Assyria: Eph'al 1982, chs. IV and V.

(and) sell and buy. Mount Lebanon is at his disposal, and they go up and down as they wish, and bring down the wood.

I levy taxes (*mikse*) on anyone who brings down wood, and I have appointed tax-collectors over the quays (*karani*) of all Mount Lebanon, and they keep a watch on ...

I appointed a tax-collector (*lu makisu*) over those who come down to the quays which are in Sidon, but the Sidonians chased him off. Then I sent the Itu'aeans into Mount Lebanon, and they made the people grovel. Afterwards, they sent to me, and they brought the tax-collector (back) into Sidon.

I made a statement to them, that they might bring down the wood and do their work with it (but) that they were not to sell it to the Egyptians or to the Palestinians, or I would not allow them to go up to the mountains.

What we see here of how the Assyrians managed their relations with the Phoenicians is fairly clear: every aspect of commerce, especially the timber trade, while being encouraged, is closely overseen and taxed by Assyrian officials in Tyre and Sidon; selling the valuable wood straight to the Egyptians and Palestinians (not under Assyrian control at this point, at least, not directly) is completely prohibited, because the Assyrians want the trade to move through the centres and along the routes they have established further south, presumably in order to cream off more dues.

Continued very close Assyrian supervision and intervention in the mercantile activities of the Phoenician cities is attested about 60 years later by the treaty between Esarhaddon and the ruler of Tyre:

16. R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien*, 107ff. (cf. *SAA II*, no. 5):

[The treat]y (*adê*) of Esarhad[don, king] of Assyria, son of [Sennacherib, likewise king of Assyria, with Baa], king of Tyre, with [... *his son, and his other sons and grandsons*, with a]ll [Tyrians], young and old [...]

(Several very broken sections)

[If the royal deputy (*qepu*) whom] I have appointed over you [...] anything in [...] the elders (*lu paršamute*) of your country [*convene to take*] council (*milku*) the royal deputy [will] with them [...] of the ships [...]

BREAK

[You may not ... any ship ...] which comes to you; [if ...], do not listen to him, [do not ...] without the

royal deputy; nor must you open a letter which I send you without the royal deputy. If the royal deputy is absent, wait for him and then open it, or [...] the messenger.

If there is a ship of Baal or the people of Tyre that is shipwrecked off the land of the Philistines or within Assyrian territory, everything that is on the ship belongs to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria; however, one must not do any harm to any person on board the ship but one must return them all to their country.

These are the ports of trade (*karanu*) and the trade routes (*hulu*) which Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, [entrusted] to his servant Baal: to Akko, Dor, to the entire district of the Philistines, and to all the cities within Assyrian territory on the seacoast, and to Byblos, the Lebanon, all the cities in the mountains, all (these) being cities of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria.

(Followed by regulations about the levying of tolls 'as in the past').

The occasion for the treaty was probably the devastation of Sidon in 676 BC and the building of a new Assyrian trading post on the coast opposite the old Phoenician city. As a result the commercial circuits were affected: Tyre's territory was augmented at the expense of Sidon, while additional payments to the Assyrian king were imposed on the Tyrian king. All this necessitated a redefining of the Assyrian-Phoenician relationship. While the Tyrian ruler was permitted access to the network of trade-routes and trade-centres within Assyrian territory, the continued levying of dues was affirmed, his contacts and communications with outsiders were overseen by an Assyrian inspector resident at his court, and the goods of any Tyrian shipwrecks outside the immediate territory of Tyre were claimed as the property of the Assyrian king.

It is probably these increasingly strict regulations, coupled with Assyrian demands for metals and tax payments, which stimulated Phoenician commercial and colonial activities in the western Mediterranean, as so well argued by Frankenstein (1978). In all of this, any direct Greek participation is unlikely and certainly not documented. And this is the pattern which then dominated the eastern Mediterranean littoral until the 630s when, with the crumbling of Assyrian power, the picture changed. At this point the Levant came under repeated pressure from Egyptians and Babylonians for whom this was an area of imperial competition. Disruption (political, economic and social) was extensive and affected a place such as Tyre profoundly, as it lost out to its neighbour and rival Sidon. The situation of armed conflict fought out between the two

powers on the soil of the Levant was not resolved until after 570 BC when Babylonia and Egypt reached a concordat, with the Levant passing effectively into Babylonian hands. From this point on, increasing numbers of documents in Babylonia show active trade between individual merchants,¹⁷ acting privately and on behalf of temples and importing bulk quantities of materials from the west. The agents acquiring goods for the Babylonians from abroad (places such as Cyprus, Lebanon, Egypt and Ionia) are almost certainly Phoenicians. This pattern seems, as far as we can tell, to persist and develop, with relatively little disruption, into the Persian period.¹⁸

Conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from this rather sceptical look at the evidence between *ca.* 750 and 500 BC?

a) Ionia/Ionians is, in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods, an imprecise geographical term - not a clear ethnic label denoting Greeks. While it is pretty certain that 'Ionian' was used to designate Greeks in the Achaemenid period, this is not necessarily always the meaning it had earlier.

b) As far as the evidence goes, Ionians scarcely figure in the Near East before the Neo-Babylonian period, and even then their number is limited. A reason why they became more prominent in the late 7th and 6th centuries may be connected with imperial manpower needs in the changed circumstances of the post-Assyrian period: Media, then Persia, Lydia, Babylonia and Egypt were linked in territorial rivalry and an armed uneasy balance of power. This was very different from the situation of the Assyrian empire which had effectively been the militarily dominant force until the 630s.

c) All the evidence at our disposal suggests that, at all times, it was the 'Phoenicians' who were the prime organisers of trade for the empires.

d) Some fluctuations in commercial patterns can be charted in this period: there was an open trade network in the Levant, in which the Phoenicians were prominent, until about 730 BC. Then we find the Phoenicians having to accept a steady tightening of, and impositions of controls on, their trading mechanisms from the Assyrians, which led to an intensification of their mercantile activities in the west between 730 and 630 BC. That pattern was disrupted between 630 and 570 BC as Babylonia and Egypt struggled for control of the Levant. The situation then stabilized and commerce became again more active from the 560s on, as shown by Babylonian documents and reflected, perhaps in

settlements such as al-Mina and Tell Sukas.

e) As John Curtis has shown (1996; also Hoffman 1997), Mesopotamian objects found in the Aegean are few; they probably reflect occasional dedications by Greeks (such as Antimenidas) returning home from Babylonia with the odd precious prize for a military exploit. It is also possible that another reason for the scantiness of Mesopotamian material was that Lydia acted as the mediating agency supplying Babylonia with soldiers, so that there was perhaps no direct contact between the Babylonian kings and Greek tyrants on the model of Amasis and Polycrates.

In other words, direct contact between Greece and the Mesopotamian empires was slight in this period. Greek trade goods for most of the period were probably largely imported by Phoenicians who dominated commerce. The main attested Mesopotamian-Greek links date to the Neo-Babylonian period only and appear to be at the level of supplying manpower needs in the realms of palace production and the army.

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(Abbreviations can be found in Kuhrt 1995).

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¹⁷ See texts 12 and 13, and the important discussion by Oppenheim 1967.

¹⁸ For a discussion of shifts in the main trade circuits in the eastern Mediterranean, see Salles 1991; 1994.

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