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CULTURES IN CONTACT IN THE SYRIAN LOWER MIDDLE EUPHRATES VALLEY: ASPECTS OF THE LOCAL CULTS IN THE IRON AGE II

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Résumé – Les recherches récentes dans la basse vallée du moyen Euphrate, tant en Syrie qu'en Iraq, ont contribué à modifier la manière dont on reconstruit les origines et l'évolution de la culture locale araméenne et de son organisation socio-politique à partir de l'âge du Fer I. Alors que la persistance d'au moins certains aspects des traditions de l'âge du Bronze ancien et des Amorites jusqu'au I^{er} millénaire est aujourd'hui plus perceptible et mieux établie, les relations des cultures locales araméennes avec les puissants États non-régionaux et les pouvoirs impérialistes comme l'Assyrie et la Babylonie doivent encore être évaluées. Un survol des traditions religieuses — mythes, cultes, iconographie —, de leur origine et de leur évolution documentées dans les sociétés de l'âge du Fer II dans la basse vallée du moyen Euphrate à Sirqu, Suhu-Anat et Kâr-Aššurnaşirpal, offre l'opportunité de mesurer l'importance et la direction de ces échanges, en analysant les changements en cours dans la région avant les contacts avec les Perses et le monde classique.

Abstract – Recent researches in the Lower Middle Euphrates valley, in the Syrian and in Iraqi sections, have contributed to change the way to reconstruct the origins and the evolution of the local Aramaean culture and its social/political organization since Iron I period. While the continuity of at least some aspects of the Early Bronze Age and Amorite traditions in the first millennium Middle Euphrates civilization can be now better argued and demonstrated, the relations of the local "Aramaean" cultures with non-regional strong state and imperial powers, as Assyria or Babylon, have still to be evaluated. A survey of the religious traditions —myths, cults, iconography—, and of their origins and evolution, documented in Iron II societies of the Lower Middle Euphrates —as Sirqu, Suhu-Anat and Kâr-Aššurnaṣirpal—, can offer an opportunity to realise the measure and the direction of these exchanges, analysing the changes in progress in the area, before the contacts with the Persian and classical world.

خلاصة – ساهمت الدراسات الحديثة في الجزء السفلي من الفرات الأوسط، إن في سورية أو في العراق، بتطوير طريقة إعادة بناء جذور الحضارة الآرامية المحلية وتطوّرها بالإضافة إلى تنظيماتها الإجتماعية السياسية منذ العصر الحديدي الأول. رغم استمرار بعض مظاهر عادات عصر البرونزي القديم والأموريين حتى الألف الأول من خلال دلائل أكثر ملموسة وشبه مؤكدة، يجب إعادة تقييم العلاقات بين الحضارات الآرامية المحلية والدول العظمى المحيطة والقوى الإستعمارية مثل بلاد أشور وبابل. إن دراسة العادات والشعائر الدينية بالإضافة إلى الميتولوجية والفن الإيقونوغرافي منذ نشأتهم مع دلائل عن تطورهم في مجتمعات العصر الحديدي الثاني في الجزء السفلي من وادي الفرات الأوسط، في مواقع مثل: سيرقو،سوهو –أنات وكار –أشورنازيربال تسمح بتقييم أهمية واتجاه هذه التبادلات والتأثيرات من خلال تحليل المتغيرات الحاصلة في المنطقة قبل التواصل مع الفرس والعالم الإغريقي والروماني.

THE PROBLEM AND ITS HISTORICAL SOURCES

The Middle Euphrates valley is usually considered as the original landscape where Aramaean tribes were first identified, mainly through the actually quite questionable proof of Assyrian royal inscriptions, and in the absence of direct archaeological or epigraphic evidence. The kings of the Middle Assyrian empire fought continually against Ahlamû warriors allied with the last Syrian Hurrian and Mitannian states, all over the Jazireh, in order to build a new western frontier along the Euphrates¹. After the conquest of Babylonia by Tukultî-Ninurta I and the internal crisis of the Assyrian state, Ahlamû-Aramaean presence seems to have been concentrated in the Euphrates valley. In Tiglath-pileser I's annals, at the end of the 2nd millennium, the region between Suhu and Karkemiš was mentioned as the theoretical space where Assyrians met Ahlamû-Aramaean semi-nomadic tribes, who systematically escaped capture by doing a runner through the desert, toward the Bishri mountains².

In the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, the Aramaeans, identified as an ethnic, generic unity, become the "Enemy" par excellence, a political symbol of Chaos menacing states and the empire. At the beginning of the Iron Age, their existence justifies a great part of the activity of kingship: Assyrian kings fight to restore order and security against the nomads even in countries not yet properly annexed to Assyria. In this ideological perspective, Aramaean resistance is instrumental in creating the image of a new, great power controlling exchanges and trade routes from the Euphrates, connecting northern Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant not only with Babylonia, but also with Arabian and possibly African markets³.

THE OLD MODEL OF AN ARAMAEAN BARBARIAN CULTURE

As no description of their social and political structure is offered in these contexts, nor any real, specific association with a territory, a town or a country —and, again, I must repeat, without any archaeological sites and materials clearly identified as "Aramaean", for a long time, Aramaean culture has been described in modern historical work as the manifestation of a barbarian, nomadic population of desperate migrants. This model, in my opinion, is still very powerful in modern debate⁴. The Aramaean population has often been considered as invaders from western deserts, who destroyed the last Bronze Age Amorite states, while trying to settle in Syria. When, following a natural trend, they eventually became sedentary and started founding states, tribal Aramaeans seem to have had no other choice than to appropriate and imitate social structures and cultural models of the peoples they were eventually replacing —including the Assyrians.

Since the 10th century, a new culture has been reinvented by them, finally attested to by some epigraphic, iconographic and building activities. However, Aramaean art and culture have often been severely judged as subordinate and dependent on the more prestigious Assyrian or Anatolian models, showing, if compared, a quite provincial, minor, even *kitsch* taste in their achievements⁵. Opposite, the image of the Assyrian and Babylonian Standard culture, art, religion, literature, creates the effect of a strong, "classic" tradition designed as a paradigm of perfection, always copied, but never equalled, by the newcomers.

In these conditions, the question of the relationship between Assyrian and Aramaean/Syrian cultures and religions wouldn't be worth raising, and the answer would be simple: after the great break at the end of the Late Bronze Age, there were no contacts, no exchanges possible between two different, enemy societies. Their cultural differences were too strong and obvious; "clashes" were inevitable, as attested

^{1.} Zadok 1991, Masetti-Rouault 1998, 1999, 2001a, p. 71–87; Akkermans & Schwartz 2003, p. 361–397.

^{2.} Grayson 1991, cf. for example, p. 23, p. 1.44–163; p. 34, 1. 28–29; p. 43, 1. 34–36.

^{3.} Masetti-Rouault 2007b; Liverani 1992b.

^{4.} LIVERANI 1988; MASETTI-ROUAULT 2001a, p. 25–38; see SADER 1987, DION 1997, LIPIŃSKI 2000a.

^{5.} Frankfort 1970, p. 279–282, Matthiae 1997 p. 175–225.

by the historical literature. At best, it's again the well-known case of a superior, ancient civilization colonizing and submerging primitive cultures, for their own good, for their evolution toward progress.

A RE-EVALUATION OF ARAMAEAN IDENTITY AND ITS INSERTION INTO THE AMORITE TRADITION

The study of the Amorite Mari archive, creating a new opportunity to understand the role of seminomadic, pastoral populations in the context of ancient Syrian dimorphic societies⁶, has led to a complete re-evaluation of Aramaean identity and culture during the Iron Age. Particularly, recent research has partially succeeded in dismissing the notion of the Aramaeans as foreigners, migrants in eastern Syria, the Euphrates valley and the Jazireh, acknowledging, on the contrary, their insertion into the local societies and economic system⁷. While, during Iron I, Aramaean populations could be identified with the semi-nomadic sector of these social structures, they shared the same cultural, religious identity of the sedentary and urban components, which, during Iron II, as a social class, they eventually came to control and manage, within the states they had thus founded. In any case, they can no longer be considered as "primitives", as far as their mentality, art or religion is concerned, quite the contrary: they appear now to be the most active and creative part of the society, ready to resist the Assyrian occupation.

Moreover, the discovery of Ebla, and other North Mesopotamian cultures, has also resulted in a better understanding of the forms and development of the original "Syrian" civilization, much more independent of the Mesopotamian influences than previously supposed. In this perspective, "Aramaean" culture can now be identified as the late, last echo of ancient Syrian traditions, derived by the evolution of Amorite paradigms. Admitting, obviously, crises, hiatus, ethnic movements and cultural influences, it's the continuity of the ancient Syrian traditions —since the Early Bronze Age down to the meeting with the Persian and Hellenistic world— which appears now as the most important factor characterizing their development, much more than change.

While not yet universally shared and accepted, this model of interpretation of the Aramaean culture seems to me to best explain the historical problems raised by the evidence. However, it doesn't help much in understanding the relationship of Aramaean culture with Assyrian traditions: it's evident that we are still used to looking at it as a constant conflict, an endless fight, with the unavoidable result of a progressive acculturation of the Aramaean culture, reacting to the Assyrian colonization. Well, Assyria won the wars, even if Aramaic later became the official language of the Persian empire.

But let's try to go a step further in this line of reasoning, considering how the identification of Amorite tradition as the paradigm and root of Aramaean culture can change our way of understanding its real historical position *vis-à-vis* Assyria —independently from the ideological description of their political conflicts, during Iron II.

THE CASE OF THE BASALT STELA FROM ASHARA, AND A RELIEF FROM MALATYA: A LONG CONSERVATION OF A MYTHICAL MOTIF

The basalt stele, allegedly found by accident more than 70 years ago in the tell of Ashara, located in the Syrian Lower Euphrates, was the object of two main publications, the first edition by Tournay and Saouaf, in 1952, and then my work, in 2001¹⁰. This stele is often considered as an example of the more primitive Aramaean art (**fig. 1**). With some tombs, it's the only evidence of an Iron I-II occupation of the site, identified in the inscriptions of Adad-nîrârî II, Tukultî-ninurta II and Aššurnaṣirpal II as the

- 6. Kupper 1957; Rowton 1973a and b, 1974, 1976; see also Charpin & Durand 1986.
- 7. Schwartz 1989; Masetti-Rouault 2004, and forthcoming.
- 8. Rouault & Wäfler 2000; Akkermans & Schwartz 2003.
- 9. See also Durand 1991.
- 10. Tournay & Saouaf 1952; Masetti-Rouault 2001a, p. 89–114.

city of Sirqu¹¹—a late pronunciation of the toponym Terqa, a town in the Mari territory, which became the residence of the kings of Khana during the Middle Bronze III and Late Bronze¹². After a partial

abandonment, at the beginning of the 9th century Sirqu has apparently conserved its role as centre of the Laqê Aramaean confederation, reuniting towns along the Lower Khabur and the Lower Euphrates. It also used to be the residence of a "sheikh," Mudaddu, the "man of Laqê," a local authority probably representing the confederation of "Upper and Lower Laqê," in his relationships with the Assyrian kings marching on the area¹³.

Even if the inscription is in Akkadian cuneiform, the monument is not an Assyrian work. The iconography of the stele represents a very Syrian, or even a Syro-Hittite Storm god, choking and killing a big snake in the presence of another god, (possibly Dagan, the overlord of the Euphrates valley, who had in Terqa a famous temple, unless it is an image of the local king), and of an *apkallu* priest¹⁴. However, the cuneiform inscription, added later, invites the onlooker to read the images as the portraits of

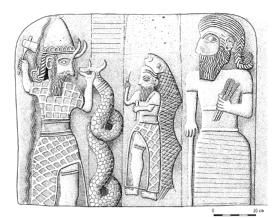


Figure 1: Stela of Ashara (10th-9th century BC) © Aleppo museum.

Tukultî-ninurta II, his father Adad-nîrârî II, previously deceased, and the local Aramaean tribes of the Laqê people, depicted here as the snake of the steppe, destroyed by the Assyrian intervention in the area. As this kind of ideological message, from an Assyrian point of view, would be very unorthodox at least during this period —with a king represented as a god, a Storm God, with his dead father, or the other way round— I have tried to explain the peculiar use of the stele with its inscription as the product of the palace of Sirqu. Diplomatically, the local urban elite presented the stele, readjusted for the occasion, to welcome the Assyrian masters, trying not only to avoid immediate destruction, but also, and even better, to exploit their military strength in their ongoing conflict with the semi-nomads, probably menacing trade through the steppe routes, as usual¹⁵.

One of the details of this quite extraordinary example of intellectual and political intelligence, is particularly impressive: the dress of the Storm god/or of the Assyrian king, which took me a long time to explain. The cut of the tunic of the god, open in front, and the structure of the material —marked by a crossing of lines, creating an evident lozenge motif— were repeated twice, as in the *apkallu* character added later to the composition. This aspect of the material, underlined by the repetition, is quite peculiar. Some partial *comparanda* could be found in later, 8th century examples in Assyrian reliefs, where the scaled armour of the Assyrian soldiers is sometimes described as a surface covered by small square plates¹⁶. However, this explanation never convinced me, considering the cut of the garment itself, unlike a suit of armour, surely not intended to protect the god in battle.

I found a better explanation for this specific iconographic aspect after the publication, by Pelio Fronzaroli in 1997, of a study devoted to the combats of the Storm god as described in Ebla incantation texts, a ritual against the deadly effects of snake venom, which he later published¹⁷, while working on the first edition by Edzard¹⁸. This text not only describes Hadda/Addu's robe as a net —corresponding

 $^{11. \;} Grayson \; 1991, p. \; 153-154, l. \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \hat{r} \hat{i} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \hat{r} \hat{i} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \hat{r} \hat{i} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \hat{r} \hat{i} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \hat{r} \hat{i} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \hat{a} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 85b-95a \; (Tukult \hat{i}-n in urta \; II). \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \; 175-176, l. \; 116-118 \; (Adad-n \hat{r} \; II; p. \;$

^{12.} ROUAULT 2001, 2004; BUCCELLATI 1988; PODANY 2002.

^{13.} Grayson 1991, p. 154, l. 118b-119a.

^{14.} Masetti-Rouault 2001a, p. 97-100; 2007a.

^{15.} Masetti-Rouault 2001a, p. 105-110.

^{16.} Ibid. p. 91-92; see, for example, PRITCHARD 1969, p. 127, fig. 365; PARROT 1961, p. 156, pl. 194; p. 157, pl. 198; for an example as a Storm god's dress, PRITCHARD 1969, p. 181, fig. 538.

^{17.} Fronzaroli 2003b.

^{18.} Edzard 1984, p. 24; see also Fronzaroli 1988.

to the representation on the Terqa stele—, but it also identifies this net as an icon, a symbol of the hail, icy rain falling like stones from the sky. Because of its frozen nature, reflecting and multiplying the light like a mirror, the hail is considered in these texts as the vector of Addu's *melammu*, his supernatural and terrifying luminosity¹⁹.

But the hail is not only the dress of the Storm god, but it's also a weapon²⁰: the incantation uses the force of hail, as a net, to bound and submit the snake, actually the snakes, the enemy with many (seven) floppy bodies, seven heads, the Hydra coming from the sea, sometimes also killed with a lance or a spear²¹. In this context, Hadda is also identified as a Bird-God, maybe a vulture coming from the sky, like Im.Dugud²².

We are confronted here with a case of an extraordinarily long conservation of a mythical motif, over more than a millennium, since the pre-sargonic Ebla archives down to an Iron II Aramaic stele, keeping the memory of a very specific notion and knowledge, the association of the "dress" of the Storm god as a net, a representation of hail, used as a favourite arm in his fight against the snakes. Apparently, this motif was not maintained in the context of the literary tradition of the Storm god's battles against the Sea, as attested to at Ugarit, as well as in the Babylonian Marduk's poem²³. Its ritual use, to cure snake bites and venom, is not evident either at the end of its transmission in the Iron Age, when only its cosmological/ideological meaning was retained.

In the Middle Euphrates Middle Bronze Amorite culture, as exemplified by the Mari archives, maybe there is a candidate to be identified as the god whose theology and functions could have resulted in the connection between Eblaite Hadda and the Storm god of the Sirgu stele. It's the quite mysterious Wer, an ancient Storm god of the Diyala region²⁴, whose name, following a suggestion made by Thureau-Dangin, could even have inspired the toponymy of Mari itself²⁵. Even if nobody believes this anymore, Wēr/Mēr was clearly an important god in the Lower Middle Euphrates area, with a personality most likely equivalent to Dagan's in Terqa. The theorym appears in the formation of the name of a Mari governor at the end of the 3rd millennium, the *šakkanakku* Nūr-Mēr²⁶. In his local epiclesis of Itūr-Mēr, he was a "political" god, divine king of Mari. He legitimized the authority of the local kings, presiding over diplomatic and legal oath ceremonies, but also, and especially, he was a healer, a healing god —as Eblaite Hadda, through incubation rites²⁷. After the destruction of Mari, his name was still quoted in a Late Bronze text from Ugarit, originating from the Middle Euphrates, after Adad and Dagan²⁸. During Iron I, it comes back, in the name of a king of Khana or Mari, Tukultî-Mēr, an enemy of the Assyrian power in the Khabur valley²⁹. Mēr/Wēr, known in Assyria as Ber, is often mentioned in association with Adad³⁰. As Ilu-Wer, he is still the dynastic god of the Aramaean king of Hamath, Zakkur, the "man from Ana/Khana"31.

- 19. CASSIN 1968.
- 20. Masetti-Rouault 2008.
- 21. Fronzaroli 1993, 2003b.
- 22. For Anzû mythology, in the Etana epic, see Seltz 1998; for the fight of Ninurta as a Storm god against Anzû, for example Foster 2005, p. 555–578; Bottéro & Kramer 1989, p. 391–410; for the iconography, see the "Stele of Vultures", Pritchard 1969, p. 94–95, fig. 298 and 301.
- 23. Lambert 1986; Bordreuil & Pardee 1993; Durand 1993; Wyatt 1998 a, 1998b; Schwemer 2001; 2007; Bottéro & Kramer 1989, p. 602–653; Foster 2005, p. 439–485.
 - 24. Lambert 1985, Bonechi 1997; Schwemer 2001, p. 200-210.
 - 25. Lambert 1985, p. 535.
- 26. Durand 1985; the god Wēr is quoted also in a private inscription of the early Assyrian period from Aššur, Grayson 1972, p. 3, and in the first part of the Assyrian King List, where it forms the name of a king, Ilu-Mēr, cf. Grayson 1972, p. 4.
 - 27. DURAND 1997.
 - 28. Lackenbacher 1984.
 - 29. Thureau-Dangin & Dhorme1924; Grayson 1991, p. 89; Masetti-Rouault 2007 b.
 - 30. Schwemer 2001, p. 208-209.
 - 31. MILLARD 1990; Lipiński 2000a, p. 254-255. p. 299–300; Masetti-Rouault 2007b, 2007c.

If this theme of the Storm god, fighting against the enemy-Snake using the hail, is surely rooted in Old Syrian and Amorite traditions, the Aramaean religion, art and ideology are not the only context where it has been conserved and developed. While the Sirqu quotation is surely the closest to the original paradigm, this specific tradition is also in evidence at Malatya, in the upper part of the Euphrates valley, at a date not much more ancient than in Sirqu. A well-known Syro-Hittite or Neo-Hittite relief actually shows the Storm god again with an attendant, fighting against a rolling snake, while stones and fire are thrown from the sky³².

THE ASSYRIAN APPLICATION: A SHARED TRADITION AND CULTURE

But Assyrian art too is also familiar with this application of the myth: a fragment of a glazed brick from Aššur shows a god, probably Aššur himself, represented with wings and feathers like a bird or a winged sun³³. The flying god takes part in the fight of a charioteer —the Assyrian king himself?— like in the Aššur-bêl-kala's time relief in the *Broken Obelisk*³⁴, drawing a bow against an enemy, maybe a subdued Aramaean —or could it be a snake?—, among grey clouds in the sky, ready to let heavy hail fall. This painting, belonging to the reign of Tukultî-ninurta II, is contemporary to the text of the Sirqu stele. Much later, Yawhe will also throw hail like stones from the sky to kill Israel's enemies in the book of Joshua³⁵. The image of an archer running and chasing a monster-snake becomes quite common in the Neo-Assyrian glyptic at the end of the 8th century, also inspired by the fight between Ninurta and the Anzû bird represented in the relief of Calah³⁶.

So, Neo-Assyrian empire art shared a common pool of mythological and iconographic traditions with their worst enemies, everyone recounting them in their own way, for their own ideological purposes. In this perspective, to explain the Aramaean–Assyrian conflicts, it's difficult to oppose the different nature of the two "civilizations", cultures and religion on a purely "ethnic" or national base, or underlying levels of institutional and social development. This kind of evolution shows that the conflicts between Aramaean states and the Assyrian empire were not obvious, predictable issues of a "natural"/national or genetic difference. Their motivations must be sought in the respective economic and political strategies of their elites in power, not allowing for any form of coexistence. Only admitting these shared tradition and culture we can explain why, a little later, in Dûr-Katlimmu/Tell Sheikh Hamed, the ancient capital of a western Assyrian province, the same icon of the Sirqu Storm god, choking a snake, was again produced, but now in a good Assyrian version³⁷.

CONCLUSION: THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL KOINÈ IN THE IRON II

In conclusion, let us present another short example of the parallel evolution in this religious and cultural *koinè* in the Iron II in the Middle Euphrates. Since the publication of the texts of Sur Glaya by Cavigneaux and Ismail³⁸, the nature and the character of the god Aphlad, still known in the 3rd century BC in Palmyra, have been better understood³⁹. Apladad, "Adad's son" is a new god, created in the 8th century

- 32. Pritchard 1969, p. 218, fig. 670.
- 33. Ibid. p. 180, fig. 536.
- 34. Ibid. p. 152, fig. 440.
- 35. Jos 10, 10-15.
- 36. Porada 1948, p. 82–83, pl. 101, n. 688e; Teissier 1984, p. 155–157, n. 173, p. 175–177. Pritchard 1969, p. 213, fig. 651; in the Lower Middle Euphrates area, cf. Poli 2004, p. 564, fig. 17.
 - 37. See Kühne 1984, p. 173.
 - 38. CAVIGNEAUX & ISMAIL 1990; FRAME 1995, p. 278-323.
 - 39. Lipiński 1976.

in the context of the court ideology of the new dynasty established in the Ana/Suhu region —currently, the Wēr/Adad region. Of Assyrian origin, this dynasty behaves as Assyrian kings do, writing royal inscriptions, chasing Aramaeans, founding towns, palaces and temples, creating irrigation canals and new agriculture. But, in contrast to the Assyrian imperial system, these lords place their own history in the prestigious past of the Amorite and Kassite Lower Middle Euphrates: they are to be called "governors of the land of Suhu and of the land of Mari" bearing a title not in use since the beginning of the second millennium⁴⁰. New people needed a new cult, if not a new religion, to identify themselves and their political strategy in a local Babylonian atmosphere.

But during the same period, the same phenomenon was well known in the Assyrian society too, with the development of the new cult of Nabû, Marduk's son, venerated as the god of knowledge, writing and cosmic administration especially by the class of civil servants, ministers and governors working for the Assyrian king⁴¹. In both situations, the image of a son-god was developed, replacing for the better, his father (or Aššur himself), probably grown too heavy, tired and old, to satisfy the needs of a new elite, aware of their own power, and actively seeking autonomy.

Between Suhu and Mari, Dûr Katlimmu and Assyria, at Tell Masaïkh, the ancient site of Kâr-Aššurnaṣirpal on the left bank of the Euphrates, in the same period, another solution was found. This third try was illustrated in a stele dedicated to Nabû excavated in the palace, residence of the local authorities, again of Assyrian origin. Nabû was venerated here not as the god of administration, as in Assyria, but he already clearly assumed the characteristics and nature of his Babylonian father, Marduk⁴². This cult, breaking with Assyrian contemporary trends, also avoids a return to the local Storm god's theology with or without monsters, which clearly was no longer adapted to the ideology of this people in power. Again, this final *bricolage*, before the crisis of the empire, reveals the importance and the weight of the common cultural and religious backgrounds of the Assyrian, Babylonian and Aramaean societies —with all the intermediary pidgin and creole situations— which should be considered attentively, evaluating their reciprocal historical relations.

^{40.} Cf. Frame 1995, p. 291, l. 1-4a.

^{41.} Dhorme 1949, p. 150-156; Pomponio 1978; Pongratz-Leisten 1994, p. 96-98.

^{42.} Masetti-Rouault 2001b, p. 634; Masetti-Rouault & Salmon forthcoming.