

Kanesh: An Assyrian Colony in Anatolia

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ALMOST ONE HUNDRED YEARS ago, the existence of an ancient city called Kanesh (Kaniš) became an established fact. It was deduced from its frequent mention in an unfamiliar type of cuneiform tablet, written in what seemed to be the Assyrian language, which some years earlier had started to appear on the antiquities market. Information on the provenance of such tablets invariably pointed to the city of Kayseri (ancient Caesarea Mazaea), a provincial capital in central Anatolia, just south of the Kızıl İrmak, in the area formerly called Cappadocia—hence their designation as "Cappadocian tablets," still used today.

Comparative analyses of script and language indicated a date somewhere around 2000 BCE, which raised the question of how to explain the early presence of a group of "Semitics" in ancient Anatolia. About 1920, many new texts made possible a better grasp of their contents (written in a poorly understood, at times highly idiomatic Old Assyrian dialect employing a rather limited and hence less unequivocal syllabary). It soon became clear that what had been discovered was the written remains of an early Assyrian trading colony attached to the city of Kanesh.

The identification of Kanesh with the imposing, ruined city mound locally called Kültepe, eighteen kilometers (11 miles) northeast of Kayseri and long suspected as the source of the tablets, took another five years. After various investigations of the mound had failed to yield

conclusive evidence, Bedřich Hrozný, during his excavation of 1905, learned that the texts had been found in the fields at the foot of the mound, apparently the lower city, where the Assyrian traders had lived and worked. In the same year, Benno Landsberger was able to publish a preliminary synthesis of the evidence.

EXCAVATION OF KANESH

While Hrozný's excavation lasted only one season (it may have yielded a thousand tablets), the local inhabitants kept supplying the texts, an estimated four thousand in all, to private and institutional collectors. This increase of sources was as welcome as the destruction and scattering of intact merchants' archives was deplorable. It came to an end when, in 1948, systematic excavations at Kültepe were started by Tahsin Ozgoc of Ankara University, on behalf of the Turkish Historical Society and the Directorate General of Antiquities. They continue annually to this day (fig. 1).

Investigations have been carried out both on the city mound (in Turkish, *tepe*) and in the lower city, called the *korum*, or "commercial quarter," following the Assyrian parlance. The earliest occupation on the mound goes back to the Early Bronze Age and seems to cover (according to a deep sounding) all phases of that



Fig. 1. An aerial photograph of Kaneš (north is up). On the left is the city mound; on the right is the excavated area of the kárum. COURTESY OF TAYSON ÖZGÖC

period. The Middle Bronze Age (about twentieth to eighteenth centuries BC) occupies levels 10-7 and is contemporary with levels IV-1b in the kárum. Most architectural remains go back to the city of levels 8 and 7, when the center of the mound was occupied by a large palace (more than three acres in extent), of which two heavily destroyed phases are attested. In the level-7 phase some cuneiform texts were discovered, among which was a long letter addressed to King Warahama of Kaneš by the king of Mannu (northwest of Manaq).

There were other large, presumably official buildings on the mound, in one of which was found a bronze dagger with the inscription "Palace (property) of Anitta." Anitta was a famous early king, also known from the so-called Anitta Text discovered in the later Hittite capital Khat-tusha (modern Boğazköy). The text, presumably circulated because of its interesting information on political events in pre-Hittite Anatolia, mentions that Pitkhana, king of Kasseka, conquered Ne-sha (the later name of Kaneš). He made it his new residence, and his son Anitta extended

his power and prestige by subduing various rivals among them an early king of Khatti. Both kings are named in texts discovered in the kárum, and Anitta eventually assumed the title "Great Prince."

The results of the excavations in the kárum are better known, through numerous publications. The lower city—the discovery of parts of its wall shows that it was such and not an open commercial settlement outside the city gate—stretches east and northeast of the mound. Its outer limits have not yet been established, but a total area of some 80 acres (20 hectares), of which less than one-quarter has been excavated, is not impossible. Of the oldest levels IV and III (about 2000), little is known, but levels II and I (between the end of the twentieth and the middle of the eighteenth centuries), separated by a destruction layer, represent the heyday of the city and its commercial activities. Level Ia contains inscriptions indicating traces of occupation during the early Hittite period.

The discoveries consist of a great number of ritual objects along irregular streets and open

squares. The destruction that ended the occupation of levels II and I allowed the inhabitants to save themselves and their most valuable possessions, but everything else was left behind. We have complete inventories of houses (small and large) with tools underneath (many of which were plundered in antiquity). The upper stories, where people lived, are lost, but the ground floors, with kitchens, workplaces, stores, rooms, and courtyards, have been found, with their ovens, loaths, storage facilities, and great quantities of beautiful, functional, and decorative pottery of almost every imaginable kind.

The repertoire is supplemented by discoveries in the tombs, which yielded ornaments, jewelry, and metal objects (jars and weapons). Several workshops have been discovered, along with their inventories—of blacksmiths (with tools, molds, and some products), stoneworkers, and potters (or dealers in ceramics).

The houses of the traders, Assyrians, Anatolians, and others, usually contained on the ground floor a well-constructed storeroom (the Assyrians called it "sealed/guarded room"), where they kept their valuables under lock and seal: trade goods, silver and gold, precious objects, and their archives (figs. 2 and 3). Only the last were left behind, stored in jars, baskets, wooden

boxes, on shelves along the walls, or stacked on reed matting. In all, thus far some seventy archives have been found, ranging from small collections of a few dozen tablets to large holdings of more than a thousand documents. Such archives invariably consist of business letters, legal documents (promissory notes, loan contracts, judicial records), and a variety of notes, lists, and memorandums. The total number of texts excavated (including those dug up between 1948) approaches twenty thousand.

While the vast majority belonged to Assyrian traders, there are also some archives of Anatolian businessmen, clients and suppliers of the Assyrians, grain dealers and moneylenders, and traders in wool, copper, and local textiles. This shows that the lower city was not simply an Assyrian trading colony (kárum), but a real town with local inhabitants and businessmen of varied origin (including Syria, for people from Ebla are mentioned). The Assyrians, concentrated in the central part of the lower city (northeast of the mound, an area of perhaps 10 acres [4 hectares]), were organized as an association of traders, vested with administrative powers, to which the term kárum applies. Sharing the local material culture, they would have remained almost unrecognizable but for their written remains.



Fig. 2. Floor plan of a group of houses in Kaneš, which includes, in the lower center, the house shown in Fig. 3. R. SAVAN, AN ATTIKA KALESIKANI (1971)

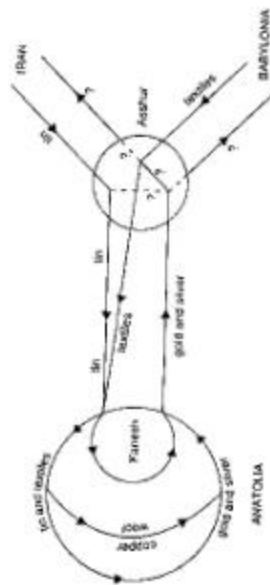


Fig. 4. Diagram outlining the pattern of Assyrian trade, Old Assyrian period. COURTESY OF KLAUS R. VEENHOF

Assyrian home industry of a more modest size supplemented these imports. (See "Mining and Metallurgy in Ancient Western Asia" in Part 7, Vol. III.)

This long-distance trade (the journey from Asshur to Kanesh by donkey caravan took some six weeks), based on the export of rather bulky goods (one donkey could carry about thirty pieces of textile or 150 pounds, or 67.5 kilograms of tin), was nonetheless profitable because of the differences between the economic landscapes and between the exchange values of the goods traded—a factor of supply and demand, determined both by economic facts and by prestige. In Anatolia tin cost at least twice as much as it cost in Asshur (in Asshur one could buy from fourteen to fifteen shekels of tin for one shekel of silver, but in Anatolia from six to seven shekels of tin could be sold for one shekel of silver); furthermore the various qualities of textile easily yielded triple their purchase price (from ten to twenty-five shekels of silver against from three to seven shekels). With two round-trips per year (in winter there was a three- to four-month hiatus in commercial traffic), a successful trader could realize a net profit of 50-100 percent per year (some credit operations actually start from the 100 percent figure). This yield allowed him to meet the substantial investment, costs, and expenses of the caravan trade, including the acquisition and maintenance of facilities in the *karum*, export, import, and transit fees and taxes, as well as occasional losses. By cooperation—

was rich in copper, and the textual evidence (archaeometallurgical results are disappointing) suggests a provenance in the north, the Pontic area. From there it reached the region south and east of the Salt Lake (which must have been the location of the important ancient cities of Burnshkanda and Durkhamit), where the copper trade, in which the Assyrians were also heavily involved, was concentrated. Tin, however, was a rare metal in antiquity. The Assyrians seem somehow to have monopolized its import into Anatolia from Mesopotamia through the institution of a well-administered, efficient caravan system, thus making themselves welcome visitors in Anatolia.

How this monopoly started is not known; the traders' archives only reflect the situation of their own time, covering at most two generations. We know that tin came to replace the more dangerous arsenic as an ingredient of bronze alloy in the course of the third millennium. Granted the eastern provenance of tin (presumably from central Afghanistan), Mesopotamia may have become Anatolia's supplier rather early. A legendary tale reports that already in the twenty-fourth century, Mesopotamian traders lived in Burnshkanda, the area of the copper trade, where the great Sargon of Akkad was summoned to their aid. Such commercial links may have continued during the Third Dynasty of Ur. And after the fall of Ur, when the city-state of Asshur became independent (circa 2000), it may have continued or revived its presumably traditional commercial role, which derived from its strategic location on the Tigris between Elam, Babylonia, and Anatolia. We know that its king Ilushuma (circa 1950) took measures to attract traders from the south (Akkad) to Asshur's market. And his successor, Erishum (circa 1900-1900), took a further step by "establishing the freedom (of taxation or circulation?) of silver, gold, copper, tin, barley, and wool." And this is the very period when the first commercial settlements in Anatolia (among which was certainly Kanesh) must have been founded, as was confirmed by the discovery of the sealed envelope of a letter of this king Erishum in level II of *karum* Kanesh. (See "Kings of Akkad: Sargon and Narām-Sin" earlier in this volume.)

The first caravans may have simply visited the old, traditional central places (such as Burnsh-

khanda and Kanesh) and returned as soon as they had sold their goods. But soon the Assyrians must have wished to acquire a more permanent foothold after their long caravan journeys, in order to avoid the risks of a "venture trade" that left them at the mercy of the momentary local situation and unable to exploit the possibilities of the various regional markets. At first, it was traveling traders who settled in Anatolia, followed by their relatives and employees, but after a generation there were married couples (Assyrian wives or Anatolian girls married locally) and real merchant colonies.

During the level-II period, the Assyrians lived and worked in *karum* Kanesh and elsewhere for at least eighty years, and at its height at least five hundred Assyrians may have stayed more or less permanently in Anatolia. About 1870 the destruction of Kanesh brought an end to this unique "colonial" period. How and why this happened is not clear (probably: it was the consequence of an intra-Anatolian power struggle); furthermore, its exact date cannot yet be determined, since the exact order of the year-epithonyms used in Assyrian datings is not yet known.

After an interval of undetermined length (perhaps only one generation or even less), commercial activity (which may even have continued in some parts of Anatolia at a lower intensity) was resumed. This occurred under the impetus of the energetic new king of Assyria, Shamshi-Adad I (traditionally circa 1815-1781, but probably rather circa 1809-1776 on the basis of data from the Mari archives), who ruled over large areas of northern Mesopotamia. This second, or "later Old Assyrian," period, of which we know much less because of the lack of Assyrian archives, may have lasted perhaps seventy years. A new destruction of Kanesh spelled the end of Assyria's colonies and their trade. (See "Shamshi-Adad and Sons: The Rise and Fall of an Upper Mesopotamian Empire" later in this volume.)

THE ANATOLIAN SCENE

The Anatolian scene of this period consisted of a fair number of city-states and small territorial

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The heyday of Old Assyrian trade, the nineteenth century BC, belongs to the Middle Bronze Age, and it was the large-scale Anatolian production of bronze, in an alloy of about 10 percent tin and 90 percent copper, for which the Assyrian imports were essential. Anatolia itself



Fig. 3. The excavated ruins of the house of an Assyrian trader in the lower city (Ašrum) of Kanesh, level II. Visible in this view are, level II from top to bottom, the kitchen, the "strongroom" (where an archive of six-hundred cuneiform texts was found), the oven room, and (in the foreground) an open-air storage area, which originally contained a ladder leading to the first-floor living quarters. The entrance was from the top left corner, from a small square or open space. Inset: Ground plan of the same house, as drawn in the excavations report. COURTESY OF S. R. VEEHOF

Almost all of the archives have been discovered in houses of level II (between about 1910 and 1830), when the Assyrians played a dominant role. Houses of the later level Ib (after a layer of destruction caused by intra-Anatolian political confrontation, about 1810–1740), equally well built and equipped, have yielded only a limited number of much smaller archives, about 250 tablets in all. This decline shows that fundamental changes had taken place and that the Assyrians, though unmistakably still present and active in many places, now played a less prominent role, one yet to be defined. They must have yielded some of their influence and a substantial share in the trade to others, both local entrepreneurs and traders from other cities of Anatolia, Syria, and northern Mesopotamia.

Discoveries elsewhere dated to this period—at Achembivik (pronounced Achembivik), ancient Purushkharda, south of the Salt Lake—reveal business connections with Mari and Kanesh on the Euphrates as well. The apparently sudden destruction of the Kanesh of levels I (city

round) and Ib (Ašrum) marks the end of a great trading city with a network of international relations. The rediscovery of its remains, in particular of the archives of its merchants, makes it possible to reconstruct Old Assyrian trade in Anatolia in such detail that it has become a landmark in ancient economic history.

THE NATURE OF THE TRADE

The basic scheme of Old Assyrian trade is clear and simple: donkey caravans equipped at Ašhur carried substantial amounts of tin and woven textiles to Anatolia, where they were sold or exchanged, directly or indirectly, for silver and gold (fig. 4). The latter were brought back to Ašhur, where, after various financial obligations had been met, they were used to equip the next caravan (through purchase of merchandise, donkeys, harness, and food; hire of persuaders; export fees and travel money). The



Assyrian goal apparently was not to supply the city's subsistence goods, essential raw materials, or finished products. The traders brought back tin, highly valued precious metal (the texts always speak of "refined silver") that was universally accepted as means of payment—the money of those times. The Assyrian expression that merchandise bought at Ašhur ultimately "was turned back into silver" and "gold for purchases in the city" reveals their point of view. Indirect sale or exchange in Anatolia served the same purpose when, depending on local patterns of supply and demand and the availability of transport facilities (caravan donkeys whose loads had been sold), tin or textiles were first sold for copper, wool, or local textile products, and ultimately converted elsewhere into more bullion.

Commercial considerations may also be responsible for the fact that what the Assyrians exported was not native products (agricultural or industrial) but merchandise imported from abroad. Tin and most of the textiles—as we know from "caravan accounts," letters that report in detail on the equipment of a caravan—were bought in Ašhur by the Anatolian traders. Tin was brought from the east, presumably ultimately from central Afghanistan, where it was mined, by caravans that do not seem to have been owned or organized by the Assyrians themselves. The majority of the textiles (mostly standard pieces of about 4 meters, or 4.5 yards square, weighing 5 pounds, or 2.25 kilograms) were imported from Babylonia, which had an old tradition of a highly developed textile industry. An

states (political entities are designated "city," *alam*, and "country/territory," *malum*), headed by "princes" (*de facto* kings, for whom the texts employ the Assyrian designation *rubā' um*). A few large cities have a "great prince," which implies that a number of smaller neighboring city-states recognized him as their "lord" (A famous letter exchanged between two "great princes" calls the vassal princes "dogs" who have to be kept in check and prevented from "talking with other princes.") During the later years of the level-II period, Anitta of Kanesh rises to the status of great prince, formerly held by the ruler of Burushkanda. The political relations between lord and vassal, and also between allied great princes, were regulated by "oaths" or treaties. The rare texts that shed some light on Anatolian politics reveal a pattern of shifting alliances and political and military rivalries, occasionally erupting into hostilities, revolts, warfare, siege, and destruction. The Assyrian traders who mention such facts are quite naturally worried by "turmoil" and absence of peace, which interferes with their commercial interests.

Political fragmentation presented both problems and advantages to these traders. The absence of a unified Anatolian economic policy vis-à-vis the Assyrians (themselves well organized under the administration of *kārum* Kanesh) made it possible for the traders to deal with separate rulers and to exploit to a certain extent their not-always-identical economic and political interests. Lacking any but economic power (trade did not in this case follow the flag), Assyrian commercial activity was only possible on the basis of agreements (called "oaths") concluded with local rulers. Since the trade covered a large area and employed quite a number of trading posts, such agreements had to be concluded with many different rulers (and renewed upon accession of new rulers) in the presence of representatives (messengers) of *kārum* Kanesh, who also became involved when problems arose later.

In the course of time, however, such agreements became standardized. Even though we do not possess the text of even a single such oath, we can confidently reconstruct their main conditions on the basis of recurrent features in texts dealing with economic contacts with the palace or ruler. The local ruler was entitled to

take $\frac{1}{2}$ (4 pounds [2 kilograms]) from each donkeyload of the tin and 5 percent of the textiles being imported and had the right to preempt (first choice, at a moderate price) another 10 percent of the textiles; merchandise belonging to the Assyrian temples was not charged. The Assyrians promised not to dodge these taxes by smuggling, on pain of imprisonment and payment of fine or ransom, and to refrain from trade in special items (such as melesoric iron). The ruler guaranteed them residence rights, protection on the roads, and compensation for merchandise lost through brigandage. The Assyrians, moreover, enjoyed extraterritorial administrative and judicial rights in their colonies, which functioned as extensions of the government in the mother city of Asshur.

THE COLONIAL SYSTEM

The Assyrians distinguished between two types of commercial settlements, *kārum* and *uabar-tum*. The latter had a subordinate position in relation to a neighboring *kārum*, though it enjoyed certain fiscal and judicial powers (we have verdicts and official letters issued by *uabar-tum*). When the new ruler of Washkhania (which had a *uabartum*) wished to renew the oath with the Assyrians, he addressed himself directly to *kārum* Washkhania, which in turn referred him to *kārum* Kanesh, "our superior." It is not clear whether size (smaller), status (vis-à-vis the local ruler), or location (the name is derived from *uabar-tum*, "guest," attested in *bit uabarim*, "guest house, caravansary"; perhaps a facility within the city?) determined its status. Although not all of the dozen or so *uabartums* were attached to minor towns, we may explain the distinction in commercial terms, reflecting the pattern of trade. In the later level-II period, a few *uabartums* reappear as *kārum*s (such as that of Washkhania), probably in consequence of shifts in the political and commercial landscape.

The core of the Assyrian colonial presence in Anatolia and northern Syria consisted of about ten *kārum*s. The term, of Mesopotamian origin, originally referred to the quay or harbor, where in Babylonia bulk goods (agricultural products and imports from abroad) arrived by boat at cities situated on rivers and canals. Some it acquired

the meaning "trading, business quarter," referring to both the facilities and the people working or living there. In particular the traders, the latter, especially if they were of foreign origin, could enjoy special status as to taxation and conscription and, organized as a kind of chamber of commerce, internal self-administration, including judicial affairs. This concept was taken over by the Assyrians and applied in Anatolia, where harbors and traffic by boat played no role. But when using the term "*kārum* Kanesh," we have to distinguish two meanings. The first identifies it with the whole of the commercial suburb, comprising Anatolian and Assyrian traders and a variety of native and foreign businessmen. The second means, with which we are concerned here, usage of the well-organized body of Assyrian traders based in Kanesh, ultimately dependent on the political authority of the city of Asshur. Babylonians might have designated this as "the *kārum* of Asshur in Kanesh" (as there was a "*kārum* of Sippar in Mari"), but the Assyrians did not, perhaps because Asshur as a trading town par excellence did not have a separate *kārum*.

Kārum Kanesh was the "capital" and administrative center of the network of commercial settlements, and its leaders were referred to by the other settlements as "our lords, fathers." Its authority concerned political, economic, and administrative matters. It was exercised by means of orders and instructions carried by messengers and contained in official letters (including some circulars "to every single *kārum* and *uabartum*"). Other settlements appealed to *kārum* Kanesh for help and instructions and seen to have sent copies of their own official correspondence and of certain judicial verdicts to Kanesh.

Political matters included agreements with the local rulers and problems caused by murder, robbery, confiscation, smuggling, ransom, non-payment, and so on. But they also included contacts with the mother city of Asshur, whose orders, demands, and verdicts usually arrived first in Kanesh, whence they were transmitted to the other colonies (for example, an order to contribute to the costs of the fortification of Asshur, and a prohibition of trade in certain Anatolian products that might harm Assyrian interests). In such cases, *kārum* Kanesh's authority was augmented by that of the "Envoys of the City," who

regularly stayed in Kanesh, traveled around, and wrote official letters together with *kārum* Kanesh.

Economic issues addressed by the *kārum* chiefly concerned the levy of certain taxes and fees, part of which accrued to the central administration. Kanesh also organized periodic general settlements of accounts. These were required by the many credit operations, both of the *kārum* itself and of its members, and by a system of deposits and transfers between the *kārum* office and the local palace. The rate of interest among Assyrians had also been standardized at 10 percent per year by "an order of the *kārum*." (The right to ask compound interest was recorded on a stele, presumably in Asshur.)

Administrative tasks included registration and in particular judicial duties, because a *kārum* also functioned as a court of law, and one could appeal decisions by other *kārum*s to *kārum* Kanesh, just as one could appeal from *kārum* Kanesh to the highest judicial authorities in Asshur—the City Assembly and the ruler. In such cases, the *kārum* used its authority (which might be backed by "tablets of the City" containing procedural instructions and provisional or partial decisions) to summon and interrogate witnesses or depositions under oath ("before the dagger-sword of Assur," the divine symbol erected in a cella, presumably within the "*kārum* house"). For this purpose messengers could be sent out and plaintiffs could be authorized—by means of letters of the *kārum* addressed to other *kārum*s, which served as their credentials—to search for evidence and to summon, on their own responsibility, their opponents or debtors.

The Government of *Kārum* Kanesh

The *kārum* could not have performed all these tasks without proper internal organization and an administrative apparatus, which must have had its seat in the *bit kārum*, "the house/office of the *kārum*," which excavators have not yet discovered. Just as in Asshur "the City" as a political body meant "the City Assembly," so "*kārum* Kanesh" may refer to an administrative body, the assembly of its members. We possess many verdicts passed by "the *kārum*, small and big," which implies bicameral structure compris-

ing a primary and a more restricted assembly. The pitiful remains of some large tablets containing the so-called Statutes of the *kārum* distinguish "big" and "small" members, but we do not know who belonged to which group or why. The system may be compared to that of ancient Athens, where the smaller, aristocratic *boulē* figured alongside the *ekklesia*. In Asshur, too, we meet the Elders alongside the City Assembly, and they may represent the senior members or heads of the main families, figuring as a kind of committee overseeing day-to-day affairs. We may assume something similar for *kārum* Kanesh, because not all Assyrians were of equal status and power, and it would have been impractical to involve too many traders in the administrative and judicial issues confronting the *kārum*.

The "big men" were probably the independent traders, heads of the Anatolian branches of the Assyrian firms, who constituted the core of the *kārum* organization, paid the substantial contributions (called *dātum*), and some of whose commercial transactions (e.g., with the local palace) were channeled through the *kārum*. These "big men" may have supplied those who in turn served as a committee handling daily matters. How they related to the so-called *hamādūms*, who also served the *kārum* and are best known as week-eponyms (attested in numerous datings), is not clear. The same is true of the *limmas*, who may represent the *kārum* in financial transactions and some of whom also figure as *hamādūms*.

The "statutes" just mentioned, as far as they are preserved, offer interesting information respecting the way the *kārum* assembly met and reached decisions. The first fragment prescribes that the big men evaluate matters brought before the *kārum*, to decide whether it should meet in plenary session. The task of convening the assembly falls to the "secretary" (scribe), who is fined if he summons it at the request of a single private individual. The matters for which he might convene the *kārum* seem to be the (periodic) settling of accounts and the rendering of decisions in cases brought before the *kārum* as court of law.

The reluctance to convene the plenary assembly fits in with the clear tendency to encourage the solution of conflicts (mostly of a commercial

nature) by private initiative. Available resources included private summons before witnesses, mediation through arbiters picked by both parties "in mutual agreement," and delegating tasks to special persons or committees, such as "those who solve a case" and "those who settle a case." The former work out a solution; the duties of the latter are perhaps to implement it on the basis of a decision reached by the *kārum*.

If a meeting of the *kārum* cannot be avoided, decisions must be reached by majority vote. The secretary is to divide certain groups (the text is broken; the group of the big men is probably meant) into three for rendering a verdict. "If they cannot solve it, the plenary assembly will meet, and the secretary will divide it into seven groups and they will solve the matter by majority vote." These interesting decision-making procedures probably owe their existence to the special nature of the colonial society. They exhibit a practical, creative approach (also observable in many economic issues) and a sense of unity, resulting in truly communal institutions, stimulated by a common fate and common interests, useful to traders living abroad in an alien society.

A COMMERCIAL SOCIETY

The Assyrians of Kanesh, notwithstanding differences in rank, power, and age, had much in common. They all originated in Asshur, where their relatives (and in many cases their wives) and superiors or principals lived. They worked together in the *kārum* and were all somehow engaged in trade, the success of which depended to a considerable extent on mutual cooperation and aid, which was institutionalized in the *kārum* organization. Their letters abound with requests for information, cooperation, and assistance, especially (but not only) among persons belonging to the same family firm, acting as each other's representatives, or engaged in official partnerships. They ask each other's help in selling goods, collecting claims, advancing money, extending credit, tracking bad debts, and passing on information, especially when they are confronted with economic or political problems, "when it is time to grant favors/to save." Moral obligations to stick to promises made, to meet

terms and requirements, and in general to "act as gentlemen" were taken seriously, though financial and other problems at times made fulfillment difficult.

Those who did not behave properly risked their "name" and credibility and could be "put to shame in the *kārum*" by "mentioning their name," which could also lead to formal lawsuits. But there are many cases in which problems were solved to mutual benefit, in order to avoid expensive, time-consuming lawsuits (for which one might ultimately have to travel to Asshur). Often, too, colleagues in distress were helped out, at times with special, highly secured loans, since bankruptcies were in no one's interest.

The big men were apparently the heads of the Anatolian branches of firms based in Asshur—well-known traders such as Pashuken, Indilum, Entil-bani, and Adad-sulili, whose extensive archives have been recovered. The firms normally were organized along family lines (the texts use the word "house," which may stand for "household" or "firm"), just like the later firms of the early Middle Ages in the Near East and Italy.

The senior members (called "father," "boss," or "principal"), normally the fathers and uncles of the people in Anatolia, lived in Asshur, and the younger ones (younger brothers, sons) settled in Anatolia. There they directed the affairs from their houses (actually at the same time warehouses and offices) in *kārum* Kanesh, where their archives were found. They had the help of a number of people: younger relatives, hired employees, and a kind of commission agent, called *tam-kārum*, who received goods on credit and paid in silver after selling them. Some of these trusted employees were settled in other strategic towns or *kārum*s in the "countryside," from which they wrote their letters to Kanesh.

Some of the needed capital was contributed by members of the family, but others could invest too. The Assyrians knew the "moneybag" (*narsuqum*), a large amount of capital brought together by rich individuals, each contributing eight Assyrian "pounds" (four kilos) of silver or a multiple, and entrusted to a trader for a substantial period. (In one case twelve years was stipulated.) The investors were guaranteed a 100-percent profit at the end, for their "shares" were rated ("looked...inscribed") for a value

of two Assyrian pounds (one kilo) of gold, which was double the normal rate of exchange. Of the remaining profit, they received one-third, as did the trader who managed the capital, while the rest (kept in reserve?) was also eventually divided. The trader to whom the capital was entrusted periodically paid "dividends" (in Assyrian, "third parts") to his shareholders, who could also sell their shares, have debts owed to them by the trader converted into additional shares ("the debt goes into the moneybag"), or withdraw their capital, but only at the nominal exchange value and without title to regular profit. This institution of *narsuqum* allowed many Assyrians to profit from the trade and no doubt gained successful traders a good reputation as well as wealth. Their wish for expensive, ostentatious houses in Asshur—again probably at the same time offices and warehouses—reflects a consciousness of status.

Acquiring one's own "moneybag" was an important event, a mark of trust and success and perhaps a condition for ranking among the big men. Gaining experience as caravan leader and agent (employed not for a wage but by being entrusted with a small amount of interest-free capital) could pave the way, in combination with good relations and affiliation with a trading family. Successful traders gradually developed a wide range of commercial activities alongside their membership in a family firm and their management of a moneybag. They could start their own transactions with their own capital or carry out transactions and commissions for other people in Assyria who wished to profit from their experience. Even some kings of Asshur did so, and the temples also entrusted large amounts of goods or capital for longer periods of time to private traders. (Such assets were called *ikribum* and were exempt from taxes.) It is often difficult to disentangle their many business relations because we have no documents from Asshur, where the administration of the moneybags was carried out.

While some traders settled almost permanently in Kanesh and became less dependent on Asshur, all of them kept in contact with their mother city, where they traveled occasionally to see their wives and relatives and to visit Asshur's temple ("to see the eye of the god Assur"), to whom they had promised votive gifts in return

