

Eastern Mountains: Central Zagros Perspective on the Akkadian Glyptics

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Abstract: The Mesopotamian cities in the Early Bronze Age were centers of technological innovation and had lasting influence on the history of mankind. A decisive factor in the urban culture of Mesopotamia was the trade network for the imports of metals and stones. The outstanding importance of the Central Zagros as a passway between the Central Asia and the Mesopotamian lowlands through which the regional leading east-west route, the Great Khorasan Road, proceeds west across the Zagros Mountains into the Qasr-e Shirin Plain and Iraq is widely acknowledged. The Mesopotamian archaeological finds (metals, stones) and the rich textual evidence in cuneiform bear testimony to this. Despite its significance, particularly with respect of its archaeology and historical geography, it has been the subject of relatively little study. In view of the position of the area in the Near Eastern archaeology in virtue of its strategic location between two major cultural realms, namely Central Asia and Mesopotamia, the present paper draws on written and glyptic evidence to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the region in the period contemporary with the Akkadian Mesopotamia. The astonishing upsurge in the Mesopotamian texts in this period, which underpin our study, has furnished important information on the status of the area in question. Results of the present study suggest that a number of Akkadian glyptic designs probably represent the eastern mountain of Mesopotamia.

Keywords: Central Zagros, Mesopotamia, Khorasan High Road, Akkadian Glyptics

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the first stable state institutions based on cooperation, contacts and exchanges first emerged in Early Bronze Age Mesopotamia during the third millennium BCE. This development gave rise to various periods, including the so-called City-states Period (3100-2550 BCE), Kingdoms Period (2550-2350 BCE), and Empires Period (2350-1750 BCE) (Benati and Guerriero 2020, 1). The geographical scale of the third millennium commercial contacts and exchanges was quite astounding since they extended from the Indus Valley to the shores of the Mediterranean and deep into Anatolia and from Central Asia to Egypt. The position of Iran and the Central Zagros in this picture was of exceptional importance, not only because of the mineral resources of Iran, but also because of the role they played in that vast trade network. It can be argued that the second aspect was potentially more significant, as the Iranian plateau and Central Zagros served as a pivotal intersection for some of the most important trade routes in Western Asia (Steinkeller 2016, 127).

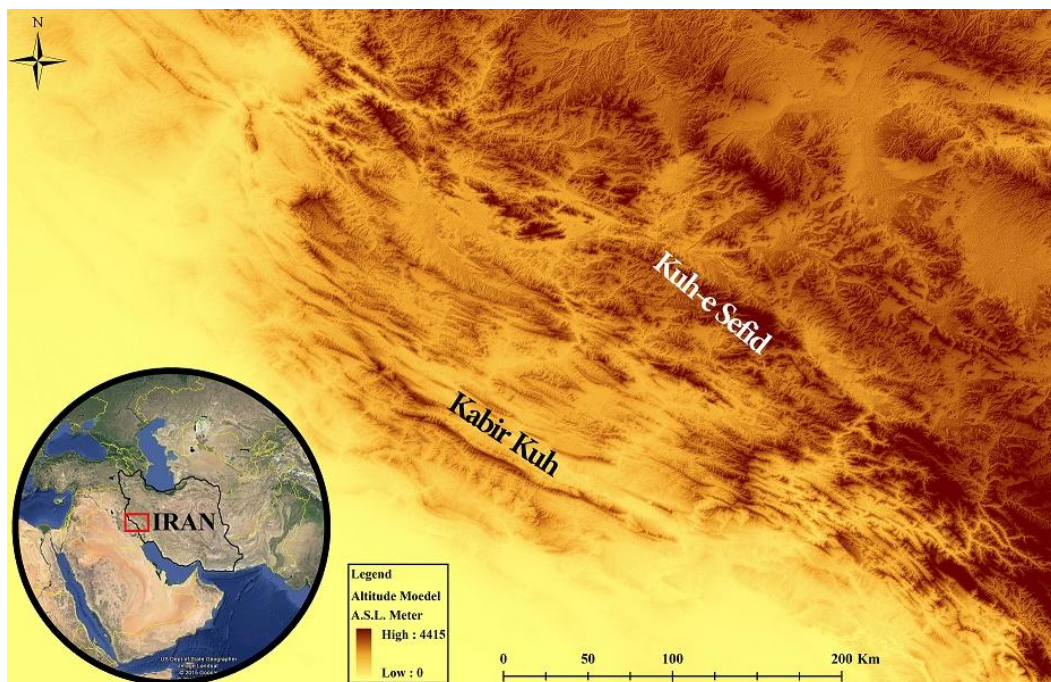


FIGURE 1. Central Zagros as eastern mountain of Mesopotamia (© author)

The Zagros Mountains and their foothills were continuously regarded by the inhabitants of Mesopotamia's alluvial plains as a vital resource hub. As a result, gaining access to these resources was a recurring preoccupation throughout the region's ancient history (Potts 2020; Alibaigi et al. 2020; Alibaigi and MacGinnis 2023). The attempts to gain access were characterized by a combination of peaceful interaction and aggressive hostility strategies (Sax et al. 1993; Potts 1993). For example; according to the inscriptions

of Gudea of Lagaš, Kimaš or, more precisely, its mountain range Abullat was, during Gudea's reign, a source of copper: *abullat(KÁ.GAL)-at^{ki} hur-sag Ki-maš-ka urudu mu-ni-ba-al*, “in Abullat, the mountain range of Kimaš, he (i.e., Gudea) mined copper” (Gudea Statue B vi 21-23); *hur-sag urudu-ke₄ Ki-maš^{ki}-ta ní-bi mu-na-ab-pàd urudu-bi gi-si-a-ba mu-ni-ba-al*, “the mountain range of copper made itself known to him (lit.: found itself for him) from Kimaš; from there he (i.e., Gudea) excavated its copper in the baskets” (Gudea Cylinder A xvi 15-17; translations after Steinkeller 2013, 308; see also Ghobadizadeh and Sallaberger 2023; Renette 2023, 300).

This place-name is attested in yet another Ur III tablet. Significantly, the source in question, which comes from Susa, links Abullat with a Zagros principality called Zidanum. A Susa tablet dating to year Amar-Suen 5 names a Ra-si, who almost certainly is the same person as the ruler of Zidanum of that name (Steinkeller 2018, 199; Steinkeller 2013, 309). The proposition that Abullat is an ancient designation of the “Zagros Gates” is a very enticing one. It is tempting to consider that this key Zagros pass is described as *ig gal Elam-a*, “the great door of Elam,” in one of Ur-Namma's inscriptions: *ig gal Elam-a-ta zag Šušin^{ki}-na-šè*, “from the great door of Elam to the border of Susa” (Frayne 1997, 66-68, Ur-Namma 30 ii' 1'-6'; see also Steinkeller 2013, 310n109). Alternatively, the place in question could be Urua/Arawa, which is described as the “lock of Elam” in a hymn to Išbi-Erra (Steinkeller 1982, 240, 244-246).

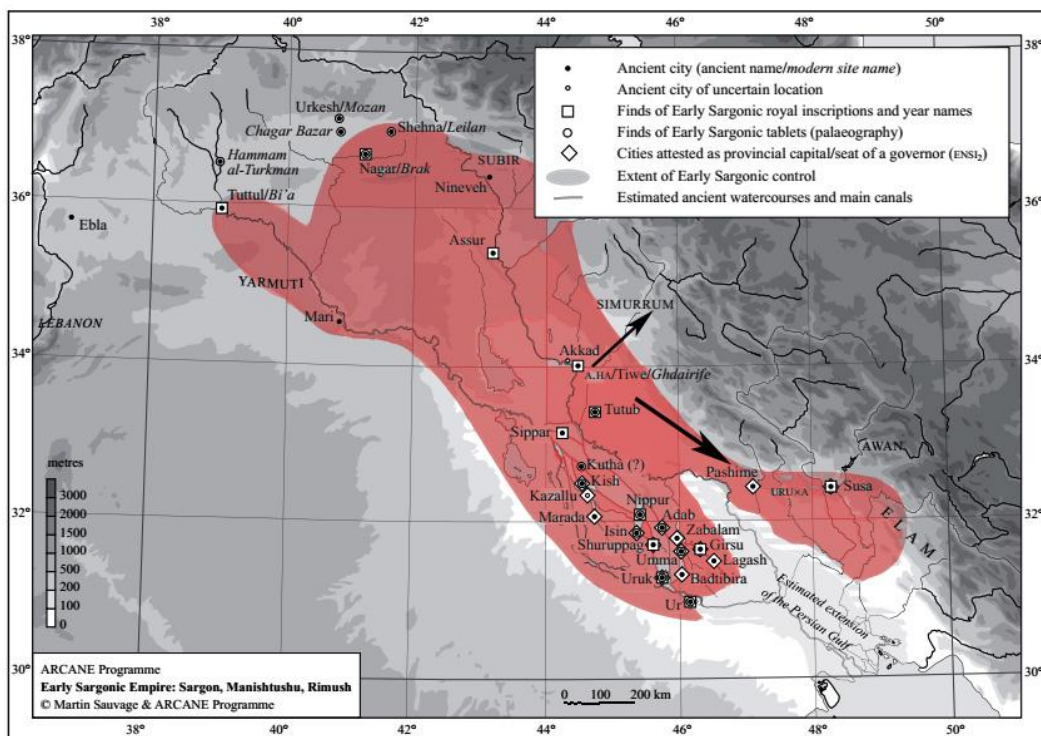


FIGURE 2. Sargonic Empire: military campaigns of Sargon (adapted from Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015, 111)

Based on literary written sources, the mountainous region might be seen as the residence of barbaric plunderers who pillaged the Mesopotamian plains. A close examination of Mesopotamian texts and mythology discloses the significance of the Central Zagros as the eastern highlands of Mesopotamia. In the Mesopotamian literary tradition, the Zagros Mountains were connected with concepts such as the land of the dead, a mysterious and dark territory, and the home of legendary devils (Collins 2016, 73). It was a common practice to depict legends as well as the eastern highlands in different forms on various objects, in particular seals and stelae (Kantor 1966; Cooper 1990, 40). The information in the texts bears primarily on the southern reaches of this zone, i.e. on relations between Mesopotamia and Elam, with limited evidence regarding the central and northern parts of Zagros. In the Early Dynastic III period, the continuation of trade links is indicated by, for example, the widespread occurrence of chlorite bowls at Mesopotamian sites (Steinkeller 2018, 180-185), but at the same time there are also indications of raids carried out by Mesopotamian polities into the Zagros (Ahmed 2012, 231-232). By the Early Dynastic III period, the interests of the emerging states had resulted in further conflict, manifested in hostilities between Lagaš and Elam. This, in turn, must nevertheless be set in the context of a flourishing trade between the two powers, much of it carried out by sea, with grain and textiles from Sumer exported in return for slaves, livestock, timber, and spices. Under the Akkadian empire, Sargon's subjugation of Elam and Susiana led to operations in the Central Zagros carried out by all the major kings of the dynasty (Ahmed 2012, 235-236; Fig. 2). Together, these conquests paved the way for a domination in southwestern Iran and contacts to the borders of Makkan and Marhaši which was maintained until the reign of Šarkališarri, reaching its apogee under Naram-Suen (Sallaberger and Westenholz 1999, 90-93; Steinkeller 2018, 185-190; Fig. 3).

Following the retraction and then collapse of the Akkadian empire, its former dominions in Iran fragmented into a patchwork of petty kingdoms. It did not take long before these were united once more by Puzur-Inšušinak, whose kingdom encompassed territories in both the Zagros and the Iranian highlands, as well as portions of Babylonia (Steinkeller 2013, 293-295; Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015, 122-126; Steinkeller 2020, 54). After establishing himself at Susa and bringing under his control significant portions of the Zagros, Puzur-Inšušinak invaded and then occupied the Diyala region and large sections of northern Babylonia. Puzur-Inšušinak's conquests which, in view of their scale, might even be considered imperial, altered the balance of power in Babylonia, in that they might have weakened the position of the Gutians in the Zagros, where the original Gutian homeland was situated (Steinkeller 2015, 54). The cycle continued with the defeat of Puzur-Inšušinak and the partition of the Babylonian part of his empire between Lagaš, Ur, and Šimaški. With the rise of the Third Dynasty, the kings of Ur incorporated Susiana and then a stretch of the western Zagros foothills as far north as Erbil within the empire, with alliances with Marhaši, Anšan, and Šimanum (Frayne 1999, 146; Frayne 2008, 38; Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015, 131). Finally, in the late third millennium BC, Šulgi

managed to gain control of the Tigridian town Der, which allowed direct access to the Zagros Mountains and the Eastern regions (Sallaberger 2012, 272). Foreign policy included dynastic marriages of Šulgi's daughters to foreign rulers, some of which were included in the year dates (Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015, 51). While the archaeological footprint of this rule is, to date, almost invisible, there is a certain amount of information from textual sources; particularly year-names commemorate campaigns in the Zagros and administrative documents record the deliveries of booty, tribute, and taxes from the peripheral areas. When the Ur III kingdom in its turn began to weaken, the peripheral states one by one seized their chances to break away. This included both well-known polities such as Ešnunna, Lullubum, Simurrum, and a host of other states for which we have only the most fragmentary indication of their existence (or none at all). It did not take long for these newly emerged states to come into conflict. The penetration of cuneiform literacy into the Western Zagros in the early second millennium was extensive.

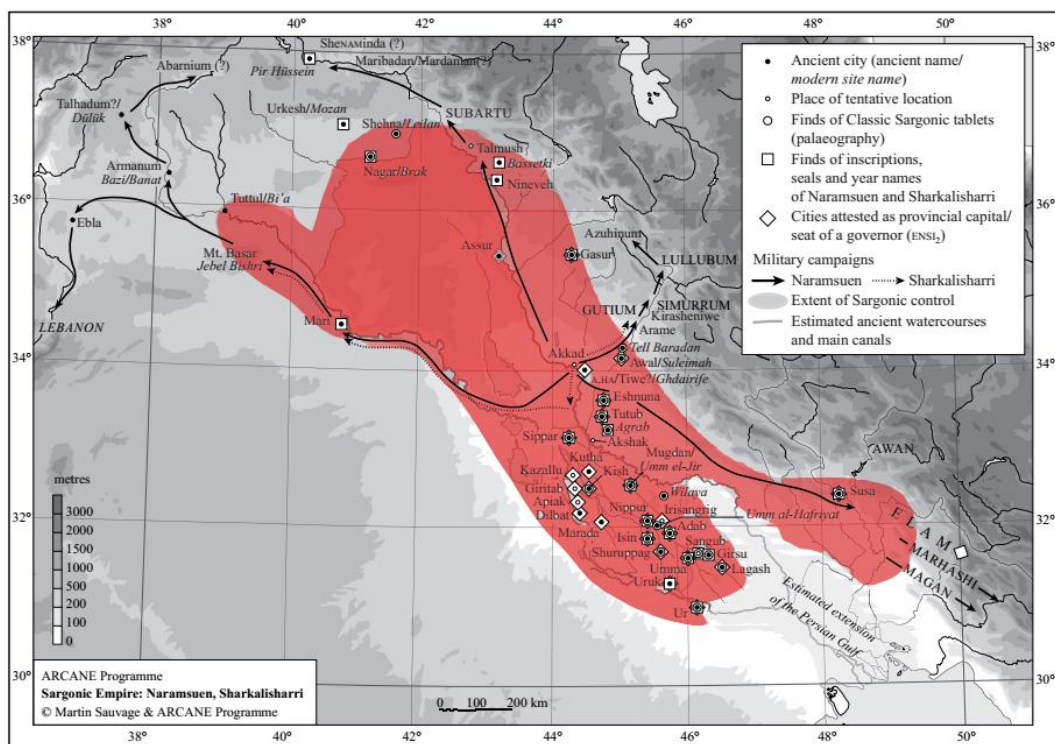


FIGURE 3. Akkadian Empire: military campaigns of Nārām-Sîn, Šarkališarri (after Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015, 111)

One discovery in particular highlights this fact. The cuneiform archive from Choga Gavaneh (in today's Islamabad), approximately 60 km west of Kermanshah, discovered in 1970, testifies to a functioning bureaucracy executed in Old Babylonian on the Central Zagros (Abdi and Beckman 2007).

This is a picture we acquire from the Mesopotamian texts of the 3rd-2nd millennium BCE. In fact, the trade routes and the settlements, cultures, peoples and societies in the Zagros Mountains could only be seen from the perspective of Mesopotamia.

Eastern Highlands in the Akkadian Period

A review of Mesopotamian texts and mythology discloses the significance of the central Zagros as the eastern highlands of Mesopotamia. In the Mesopotamian mythology, in a passage from the Sumerian creation myth, Inanna saves the Huluppu tree from the evils of wind and brings it to Uruk. Once it grows thick, a serpent and the mythical bird Imdugud (probably a bird akin to eagle since related myths speak of eagles) occupy the tree, as a result of which Inanna is no longer able to approach it. In helping Inanna, the legendary Mesopotamian hero, Gilgameš, kills the serpent, and Imdugud flees to the eastern highlands with his young. Another story, Epic of Gilgameš, which is probably the most famous Mesopotamian myth, relates the defeat of Huwawa, the mysterious devil living in the eastern mountains, by Gilgameš and Etana (Collon 1987, 180; Vidale 2015, 32). The Zagros Mountains were conceived of by the Mesopotamians as the land of the dead, a mysterious and dark territory, and the home for legendary devils (Collins 2016, 73). It was a common practice to depict legends as well as the eastern highlands in different forms on objects, in particular seals, and the Akkadian period witnesses an unparalleled increase in such depictions on the glyptic (Cooper 1990, 40; Kantor 1966).

As regards linguistics, in both Sumerian and Akkadian the concepts “foreign” and “the foreigner” were expressed with the terms “east” and “mountainous lands,” respectively. In the Sumerian, the term “mountain” denoted a foreign land and “mountain dweller” denoted a foreigner. In the Akkadian, the term “east” evolved gradually to mean a foreigner (Steinkeller 1980). This mountainous landscape is first and foremost known as a target for military and political actions to procure raw materials and tribute (Potts 1993). In other words, the mentioned sources describe the region as the residence of barbarian plunderers who particularly pillaged the Mesopotamian plains. This is a picture we have acquired from the Mesopotamian texts, and we must be very cautious with regard to it. However, the first consistent accounts in the Mesopotamian texts on the eastern territories are found in the Akkadian period (Stolper 1984, 37). Stone inscriptions and annals shed some light on the diplomatic and political endeavors and military actions in the highlands (Carter 1986), though the magnitude of these actions might have been somehow exaggerated. Also, generally speaking, references to a battle somewhere between Awan and Elam in the Akkadian inscriptions throughout the kingdom probably reflect the insinuation that the inhabitants of the eastern highlands were their foremost enemy, and these allusive references evince the Akkadians battles with the eastern highlands (Central Zagros) rather than with the Elamites (Stolper 1984); for example, early in his reign, Sargon led a campaign along the Diyala River and Alvand to Simurum in the eastern

mountains (Potts 2016; Fig. 2). Narām-Sîn and Šārkalīšarrī took the same route in their raids to Lulubum and Simurum to win control of the Great Khorasan Road (Fig. 3).

The Geography of Central Zagros

The present study does not consider central Zagros as a simple geographic unit. Successive mountain ranges in northwest/southeast direction and numerous intermountain enclosed and individual valleys are the main characteristics of Zagros Mountains (Rothman 2011). There are three main mountain ranges in this region. The westernmost is Kabir Mountain which separates the Mesopotamian lowlands, foothills and Posht Kuh from the highland valleys of west Lorestan (Pishkuh). Sefid Kuh is part of this mountain range which divides Pishkuh into two eastern and western sections and passes through Lorestan. This mountain range is a great barrier between the eastern and western Zagros. Despite its small size, Garin Kuh on the east is also a significant barrier and the eastern borderline of Pishkuh. Alvand mountain range on the eastern Kangavar and Nahavand plain shapes the eastern frontier of cultural Pishkuh, with Hamedan plain on the other side (Oberlander 1965). These geographical structures create limitations in interactions among the intermountain valleys and access to surrounding regions. Although moving alongside the mountain (northwest-southeast) is easier than passing them, very few north-to-south natural accesses exist connecting the Susiana lowlands to highlands and mountains. Narrow and steep valleys, rugged pathways and bottlenecks on the western parts make it difficult to even move alongside the mountains. North to south movement on the eastern side is easier on the foothills of Garin Mountain (Oberlander 1965). In fact, it can be perceived that the Central Zagros folding structures consist of abundant but separated valleys and intermountain plains, which are different in terms of area, altitude and consequently of rainfall and average annual temperature. The homogeneous and widespread Godin III Culture was formed and developed in this geographical context. Due to this complicated geographical situation, some researchers believe that the cultural integration among the intermountain valleys of Zagros had taken several decades (Stolper 1984, *passim*). The main question is how this important event, cultural homogeneity and expansion, occurred in such a specific geographical condition (Fig. 1).

Depictions of Eastern Highlands on Akkadian Glyptics

The subject-matter of Akkadian glyptic material ranges from the relatively rare depictions of daily activities to ritual scenes of offering or presentation to deities; from numerous, and frequently very agitated, mythological representations unparalleled in other periods of Mesopotamian art to animal contests and surely-patterned heraldic compositions of heroes and animals. One significant category of motifs, those commemorating the political power and achievements of the kings, is missing from the seals but represented by complete or fragmentary stelae whose purpose was very conscious - as witnessed by an inscription

citing the making of a gold statue of Narām-Sîn “for eternity with representation of the power and battles of the king” (Hirsch 1963, Naram-Sin b 8). However, instead of the woody tree normal to this habitat, both in reality and on seals, waving reeds appear in compliment to the watery world of the buffalo. Landscape elements closely linked to the central figures provide standard and vivid characterizations of the gods. Divine barks, unsupported by water on Early Dynastic seals, can now appear on continuous rivulets of water. The sun-god steps up between imbricated mountain peaks, sometimes with a tree on one side (Fig. 4) in representations reminiscent of the sun-disk rising over the Zagros peaks on the eastern peripheries of the Mesopotamian and Khuzestan plains (Kantor 1966, 147).

The eastern mountains assumed such status that, apart from multiple textual references, the Akkadians frequently made use of mountain landscapes in designs of their seals; unlike the preceding periods where human-faced bulls would safeguard the mountain, now the sun god Šamaš took on the guardian role (Collins 2016, 80). While other Akkadian representations show Ninurta or the water deity Ea in the eastern mountains, in these instances we see Šamaš between two mountains as he combatively ascends them (Frankfort 1934, 4). It is thus possible to find mountain scenes in the Akkadian glyptic associated with the Akkadian deities. Predominating among these are such motifs as a deity in the mountain, the combat of a deity next to a mountain, Ea standing in a mountainous scenery, a bird being hunted in a similar setting, and the judgment and punishment of a bird-man by Ea (bird-man symbolizes mountain peoples) (Frankfort 1934; 1939, 102). The contemporary seals frequently show a mountain landscape which apparently represents the eastern highlands of the Akkadians, i.e. the Central Zagros. Šamaš is often seen fighting between two mountains. He is recurrently depicted in the eastern mountains (Frankfort 1955, 40), occasionally with very abstract gates before him opening into the same mountains with viziers or legendry heroes as their porters (Ward 1910, 87). The stylistic shift in the Akkadian seals and the use of such scenes occurred in the reign of Sargon’s daughter Enheduanna. This change can be observed on the Adda seal, one of the most prominent Akkadian artifacts, which belonged to Adda, a servant of Enheduanna (Reade 1991). This greenstone seal is 3.9 cm high and 2.55 cm in diameter. In general, figures depicted in the Akkadian seals are identified by their headgears and other divine characteristics. On the seal, Ištar wears a horned headgear, assuming the guise of a hunter. Šamaš typically has a notched sword, but should also mention that some people think it is a key (to open the doors of the east) or a saw (to saw through the mountain ranges). He was a favorite theme for the Akkadian glyptic artisans (Collins 2016, 80). Even the seals of Ur III, both in terms of motifs and quality, have many differences with Akkadian seals (Dittmann 1994, 75). The Sumerian Enki or the Akkadian Ea is the deity of war and flowing waters. Enki is also the god of wisdom, farming, witchery, crafts, and plains. He has been identified on the basis of a motif where he is surrounded by streams of water (Foster 2005, 151). Enki, Enlil, and An are among the major Mesopotamian deities depicted with their viziers or stewards. The way in which

Enki places his foot on the mountain in the Adda seal is unattested in his earlier representations (Frankfort 1934, 27). On the same seal, Ea handles the eagle she has at her hand to control its attack on Šamaš. In other words, here eagle symbolizes a hostile force against Šamaš harnessed by Ea (Brisch 2016). A bull lies beneath Ea's feet. The bovine probably represents the mountain guardian as in other Mesopotamian seals human-faced, horned bulls are interpreted as the guardians of eastern mountains (Collins 2016, 74). The same theme occurs on other Mesopotamian seals. In particular, on a seal in the British Museum, Ninurta is aiming his bow at a bull which stands on the mountain facing Ninurta (Fig. 4a).

In the Adda seal there is an inscription above the lion in which Adda is described as a person of high status. The double-face figure is Ea's attendant Usimu. Ištar is known as the deity of fertility and is identified by date bunches. The sun god is represented with rays from his shoulders and a serrated sword at the center while his lower body is masked by the mountains (Collon 1987, 35). The archer standing to the left of Ištar is yet to be accurately identified but most probably represents a deity similar to Ninurta, i.e. Nusku (Collon 1987, 165). In Ninurta's descriptions in the mythology, he is said to have descended the mountain four times (Frankfort 1934, 25; Brisch 2016; Fig. 4b).

In an unprovenanced seal found in 1908 and now at the British Museum (BM 102500), Šamaš stands between eastern mountains and has placed his both hands against them, and his attendants open a gate for him (Collon 1987, 35). The three figures all wear beards and flounced skirts (Collon 1982, 177, pl. XXV; Fig. 4c). Another seal found in 1929 (BM 120969) shows Šamaš in a mountain scene. This dark brown seal is 3.5 cm high and 2.3 cm in diameter. Here Šamaš ascends the mountain with an open gate before him flanked by porters. Again, the three figures all are bearded and wear similar skirts (Collon 1982, 173 and pl. XXV; Fig. 4d).

In a seal from the royal necropolis of Ur (BM 120540), Šamaš is between mountains but here there is a single porter at the gate, and Šamaš faces the god of flowing waters who attends him. The latter deity is characteristically depicted with rivers flowing from his shoulders. Next to Šamaš to the right stands the mediator god and behind him a figure brings an animal probably as offering (Woolley 1934, pl. 215, no. 363; Boehmer, 1965; Collon 1982, 169, pl. XXIV; Fig. 4e).

A seal impression from Telu (Girsu) shows Šamaš climbing the Akkadian eastern mountains. The inscription on the impression, pertaining to the reign of Šarkališarri, reads: Šarkališarri, king of Akkad, competent, Lugal Ušumgal is your servant (Collon 1987, 125; Fig. 4f).

On a seal in the Morgan Collection, Šamaš is fighting between the eastern mountains. Here again porters open a gate for him. The impression of this seal shows Šamaš rising at dawn between the eastern mountains. He thrusts his saw upward with his right hand and places his right foot on a mountain. At either side, a divine attendant opens the wings of the gates of heaven to reveal Šamaš in majesty. At the far left, a god, carrying

a mace that is visible behind his body, observes the proceedings. In some versions of this scene, lions occupy the top and bottom of the gate wings, perhaps to add the concept of sound to that of movement, their roar meant to suggest the thunder in heaven made by the opening of the massive portal (Hansen 2003, 214; Fig. 4g).

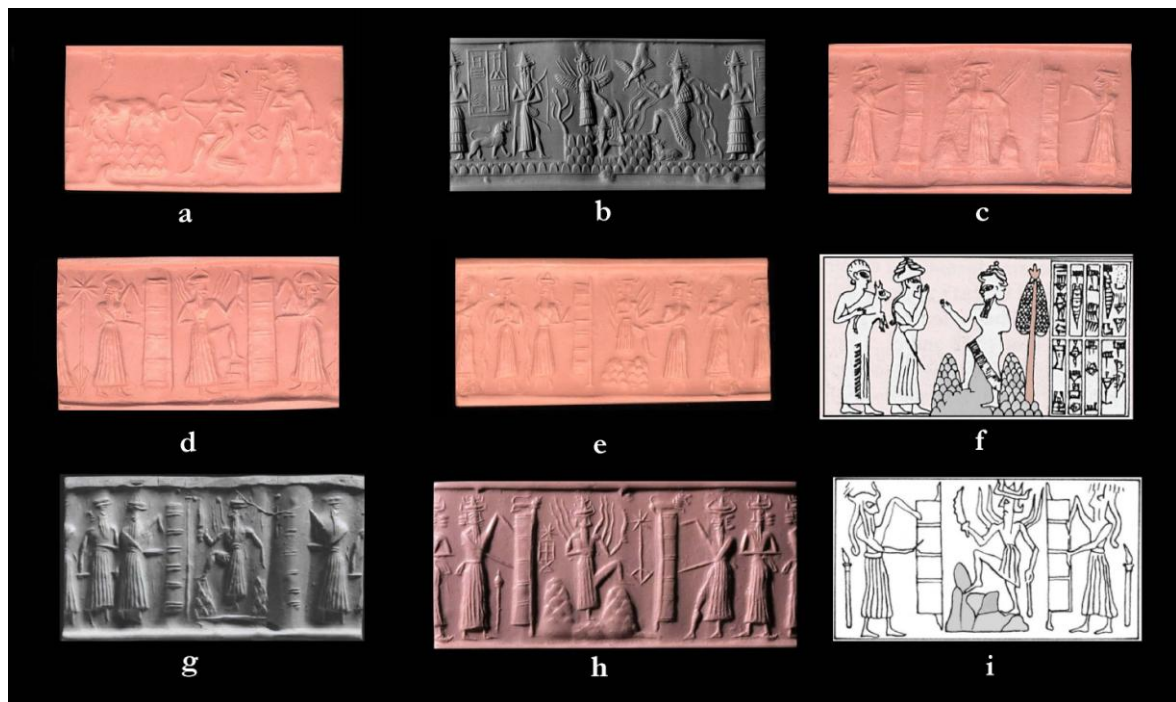


FIGURE 4. *a*: A bull passing towards right on an eastern mountain, with an arrow between its horns (BM 89074 © The Trustees of the British Museum); *b*: Cylinder seal of Adda: showing the goddess Ištar (full face) carrying weapons on her back, standing on the eastern mountains (BM 89115 © The Trustees of the British Museum; Frankfort 1934, 28 Pl. d); *c*: The sun-god with rays is rising between two mountains on which he rests his hands (BM 102500 © The Trustees of the British Museum); *d*: The bearded sun-god with rays placed his left foot on a three-tiered mountain and holds a knife in his left hand (BM 120969 © The Trustees of the British Museum); *e*: The sun-god, with his right hand raised, is rising between eastern mountains (BM 120540 © The Trustees of the British Museum); *f*: The sun-god is rising between eastern mountains (Collon 1987, 126, fig. 537); *g*: The sun-god is rising between eastern mountains (Boehmer 1965, Pl. 35, no. 420.); *h*: The sun-god is rising between eastern mountains (BM 89110 © The Trustees of the British Museum; Collon 1982, pl. XXV); *i*: The bearded sun-god with rays places his left foot on the eastern mountains and holds a knife in his left hand (Frankfort 1955, pl. 56:591).

Šamaš is represented between mountains in another seal impression. Here he has his right leg on the mountain as he ascends it. A gate is flanked on both sides by porters next to the leaves of the gate. Over the right leaf seats a female lion and over the left one seats a male lion. The fact that in Mesopotamia the sun rises from east, from above the Zagros Mountains (Collon 1982, 172; 1987, 35, fig. 103; Fig. 4h), has inspired the scholars in

interpreting the designs of these seals. From Tel Asmer building IVB (Locus K19,19) comes a seal impression with the typical representation of Šamaš ascending a mountain, with two porters opening a gate for him. Unlike the other representations, the female and male lions over of the gate are absent here (Frankfort 1955, pl. 56, 591; Fig. 4i).

Discussion and Conclusions

The neighboring mountain peoples were apparently of particular importance for the Akkadian court as the communication between Mesopotamia and the lands in central and eastern Iranian plateau relied on the central Zagros, and clashes with its residents had impeded to great extent their access to such vital raw materials as copper, tin, and silver (Sax et al. 1993; Liverani 2014). So Sargon and his successors staged frequent campaigns against the eastern mountains because of their important role in maintaining the security on the trade routes that linked Mesopotamia to the Central Zagros and the regions beyond it (Walker 1985).

If we accept that the Akkadian capital, Akkad, lay at the confluence of the Tigris and Diyala rivers, a point exactly overlooking and close to the Zagros and the Sarpol-e Zahab region (Collins 2016, 79), then the eastern mountains will even grow in importance. The Akkadian period witnessed an unprecedented popularity of a particular group of representations on glyptic wherein Šamaš is either ascending from the eastern mountains or fighting in them. He may be alone or accompanied by other deities. Occasionally, mythical heroes serve as porters for him. Were the popularity of such representations on the Akkadian seals accidental and merely an upshot of an artistic trend? What is the plausible interpretation for such depictions?

At first sight, the fact that Šamaš is known as the sun god and was a highly venerated deity among the Mesopotamians might prompt us to the presumption that the Akkadians have portrayed the rising of sun from the east (Collins 2016, 80). The sun begins to appear from behind the mountain crest and from between the Zagros valleys to the Mesopotamian peoples, and such a scene might have been used by the Akkadian artisans on their seals. This could be a somehow realistic interpretation, but better interpretations appear credible when one takes into consideration such indications as the presence of gates, Šamaš's unsheathed swords, and the like.

In the present paper we outlined the significance of the Great Khorasan Road and the Central Zagros for the Mesopotamian empires and showed that how the region was important and strategic for the Akkadians thanks to its location. Recent archaeological data also corroborates this observation. Recent surveys in the region have brought to light numerous sites in Central Zagros plains (Sarpol-e Zahab, Kuhdasht, Islamabad, Mahidasht, etc.) dating to the same chronological horizon. Textual evidence from Ur III Period also reflects the importance of the region to such extent that Ur III kings such as Šulgi raided the region almost ten times in their attempts to restore their control over the region in the

wake of the fall of the Akkadian dynasty (Frayne 1999; Ghobadizadeh and Sallaberger 2023, 17). Therefore, archaeological evidence, on the one hand, and historical texts and the geographical setting, on the other, testify to the importance of the Great Khorasan Road and the opening point of this main road in western Zagros (as an ancient border; see Alibaigi and MacGinnis 2023) for the Mesopotamian empires. The representations on the Akkadian seals probably deal with the controlling of this main road, whose beginning points in its west-east direction are Sarpol-e Zahab as Zagros Gate, the mountain pass therein and also central areas of Zagros Mountain. On these seals, Šamaš fights in a mountain at a pass; gates are opened for him, and in one case, the Adda seal, he is seen on top of a mountain with Ištar to his right. Ištar is the same deity who in the Anubanini rock relief confers the diadem to the Lullubi king, Anobanini. Though in the rock relief of the Simurum king, Iddin-Sin, in Srapol-e Zahab, the symbol of Ištar is in front of Iddin-Sin, in the rock relief of the same king in Jerusalem, similar to Anubanini, he receives the diadem from Ištar. The reliefs in question were carved in the Nawkal gorge wherein sits the present-day city of Sarpol-e Zahab. Depiction of Šamaš between mountains and a gate and the presence of Ištar and other indications cited above all combine to imply that the Akkadians perhaps represented the Great Khorasan Road and Central Zagros that is protected by Šamaš.

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