

## **The most ancient trace on the commercial and civilizational relations between Mesopotamia and China**

By Dr. Bahnam Abu Al-Souf:

The ancient Iraqis needed about eight thousand years, a number of raw materials to make their tools and weapons and those materials were not available or they were rare in Mesopotamia. The children and women's needs for the make-up required bringing all kinds of valuable pearls and shells, most of which were not found in various Iraqi areas. With the progress growth of the first agricultural villages in Northern and central Iraq and with their increase in number during the 6th and 5th millennium B.C., and due to the development of the social life in those first villages and the spread of many beliefs and religious practices related to the fertility, land, birth and magic powers of certain symbols and things the Iraqis who inhabited those villages brought kinds of shells from the coast of the Mediterranean sea and the Persian gulf carnelian from the Southern parts of the Arabian peninsula and from the eastern parts of Iran. They also got lapis-lazuli from its mining areas in Badkashan in the Northern Afghanistan. They also brought copper from Oman in the Persian Gulf and gold, silver and copper from Anatolia (1) and cedar woods from the mountains of Lebanon. (2) There were two main roads to bring the materials from Anatolia. The first one came from the center and Southern parts of Asia minor, passing through town in Northern Syria, where it divided into two branches, one of them going southwards towards Palestine and then went westwards to Sinai and Egypt. The second route directed from Northern Syria to the east towards the areas of Sinjar, Tala'far and Mosul and there are places which can still be seen on this road such as Re-rash (near Sanjar), Al-Maghizal1ya and Yarden Taba (near Tala'far), Al-Tholathat and Hassouna (west of Mosul). Then the road crossed the Tigris River near the old place of Ninveh then it went through Al-Arijjiya and Tapa Nora (east of Mosul).

The second route coming from Anatolia, cut the northern areas of Iran near the edges of Wan lake and entered Iraq in the area of Qala'sdizah passing through the plain of Batwen (now the basin of the Dokan dam near Raniya) and then it went down towards the plains of Kirkuk and Arbil, where there are tens of first sites on the road such as Shamsharah, Basmosiyan, Merzah Rustam, Jarmo, Qalbanj Agha (near Arbil), Matara (near Kirkuk). The valuable cornelian and emerald and other precious stones were brought to Iraq from Iran and Afghanistan through to routes the first of which was a mountainous passage to the area of Banjawin, Halabcha, Rayat and then to the plains of Shahrazor and Sulaimaniya. The second route was more famous than the previous one and it passed through the Kanaqin area from Hamadan and Kermenshah. It was the road which was known throughout history as the royal road. (4).

The trips of the Iraqis away from their homeland to bring the materials they needed as well as their commercial activities result in direct civilizational contacts between them and the peoples of countries of their destination. Mostly the trade caravan was accompanied by skillful travelling artisans and they were specialized in the necessary industries such as clay making, building and weaving. All this had led to the spread of many industries, arts and beliefs of ancient Iraq in the places of the caravans' destinations. The Iraqi clay-making industries (Hassouna, ½ Samara'a, Halaf, Ubaid and Janda Nasr) spread in more than one of those places along with construction, artisanal and religious innovations. This is clearly seen in the sites in Southern Turkey, Northern Syria and Cyprus, as well as in certain sites in Balkan. It is also clearly seen in many sites in the Iranian plateau and in Western Iran, as well as in sites in the Arabian Peninsula coasts on the Persian Gulf and in Oman (ancient Magan) and in Bahrain (ancient Delmon) as well as in the Kuwaiti island of Failaka. They can also be seen in sites in Sind river basin (ancient Melokha) near the famous sites of Kharaba and Mohanjadar).

We also find them in the pottery of Ran-Shain area in Northern China as many samples of pottery similar to the 5th Strata of Hassouna site in Northern Iraq were found as well as

similar to pottery of the Iraqi Halaf area and all of these go back to the mid- and the end of the 6th thousand century B.C. the potteries of Yang Shaw In Ran-Shan area in Northern China, checked by X. Ray clarion (14), form a similar idea in the 6th millennium B.C. with their Iraqi similar potteries.

This similarity in making the clay decorated pottery and made during the same period cannot be a mere chance as the Chinese archaeologists stressed (5), but it happened through direct contacts between the Mesopotamia civilization in its first beginning during the last half of the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. and this had been archived through trade between the two centers of ancient civilization in West and East of Asia as the knowledge of the first region were transferred to the second one in terms of potteries, ideas and beliefs. The travelling artisans played an important role in this operation.

In the light of the available archaeological evidence, we can see that there were two commercial routes linking Eastern Asia (China) with its West (Mesopotamia, Iran, Syria and the Arab Gulf countries). The first route was along overland road whose length was estimated at 3150 miles. It was a dangerous road and it passed through central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, Mesopotamia and then Syria.

The second road was the sea route, which passed along the southern coasts of Asia passing by famous ancient sites in the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf such as Melokha in Sind river basin, Magan (Oman), Dalmouf (Bahrain) and the ports of ancient Iraq such as Ur, Eridu and Akkad on the Euphrates. Via the Euphrates River this trade continued till reaching northern Syria and Asia Minor.

Then, it was possible to follow the land route to the west of the Euphrates, after arriving at the tip of the Persian Gulf the goods were carried on land routes to cover the distance between the

Gulf and the Mediterranean across the Southern desert where there were stations of A1-Tar, Al-Akhedhar, Shafatha, Atshan, Qasr Shamoun, Sham desert and the Mediterranean.

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1 – Turus mountains were the sources of silver and the Iraqis called them the mountains of silver. They also got the obsidian (a volcanic glass stone used to make weapons)

2 – The mountains which were called by the Iraqis “the Cedar Mountains”. The Cedar woods reached the Iraqi cities after being carried across the Northern areas of Syria on overland roads.

3 – Dr. Bahnam Abdul Souf: Mesopotamia magazine, issue No. 48. 1985 P. 191-193, an article entitled: Iraq’s foreign trade in Prehistoric eras).

4 – It was called by Hetzel – Asia Gate.

5 – See Robert W.E. Enrich, editor: Chicago 1965. Chronologist in old world archaeology pp. 512-513 and fig. 1 p. 513 compare them with the jars of Samarra of circles decorated with a face of a woman from Hassouna 5<sup>th</sup> edition as well as with the potteries of Halaf.