

# **CURRENT ISSUES AND THE STUDY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST**

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**Publications of the  
Association of  
Ancient Historians 8**

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**Gonzalo Rubio  
Steven J. Garfinkle  
Gary Beckman  
Daniel C. Snell**

**edited by  
Mark W. Chavalas**



# Current Issues in the History of the Ancient Near East

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## PREFACE

Carol Thomas approached me in 2003 with the prospect of organizing a volume concerning the ancient Near East for the PAAH series, with the goal of providing an overview of the current state of scholarship, intended for other ancient scholars who have little or no knowledge of the subject. It was decided that, like other volumes in PAAH, it was best to divide the work among several contributors. Thus, we decided to divide the work into four very general areas: Hittites, Assyrians, Mesopotamia (i.e., Babylonia), and Syria/Palestine. Some of the contributors were able to present preliminary results of their work at the annual meeting of the Association of Ancient Historians, 7 May, 2005, at Columbia, MO. The session was as follows:

*Recent Historical Research in Ancient Near Eastern Studies*

Chair, Mark W. Chavalas, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Gary Beckman, University of Michigan, "From Hattusa to Carchemish: The Latest on Hittite History."

Steven Garfinkle, Western Washington University, "The Assyrians: A New Look at an Ancient Power."

Daniel Snell, University of Oklahoma, "Syria-Palestine in Recent Research."

The study of the ancient Near East poses very particular problems for the historian. First of all, the decipherment of the cuneiform writing system, as well as the study of the dead languages which were written in the script, was an

enormous undertaking that took decades. Moreover, the scholar is confronted with the enormous time span of three thousand years of Near Eastern history, much of which occurred before any Classical period writings. However, these periods are not all equally understood. The best one can do is to take numerous bits of information from cuneiform sources, or 'snapshots' as one Mesopotamian historian has called them (see A.H. Podany, *The Land of Hana: Kings, Chronology, and Scribal Tradition*. Bethesda: CDL Press, 2002, p. 2) and attempt to place them in an orderly historical perspective and chronological order. Unlike their Classical counterparts who have the blessing (or perhaps curse in some cases!) of a manuscript tradition, historians of the ancient Near East are confronted with sources that have been buried for millennia. In other words, there is no 'Babylonian' Herodotus to provide structure to the thousands of cuneiform inscriptions that have been uncovered since the mid-nineteenth century.

Gonzalo Rubio tackles the enormous source material for southern Mesopotamia and provides insight on topics such as language and ethnicity, land tenure, literature, and the nature of law collections. Moreover, he offers a historical overview of southern Mesopotamia (or Babylonia) in the historically complicated first half of the first millennium.

In his essay, Steven Garfinkle adeptly provides an overview of the Assyrians of Northern Mesopotamia. Not only does he contribute a synopsis of Assyrian history, he evaluates the source material for this people group, critiques traditional views of the Assyrians, and poses perspectives on future research on Assyria.

Not only does Gary Beckman in his contribution provide a survey of the history of Hittite studies, he outlines a number of the challenges concerning the study of the Hittite royal archives, including the difficulty of piecing fragments of tablets back together, assigning dates to undated tablets, determining the paleography of the documents, struggling with issues concerning

Hittite geography and vocabulary, and wrestling with the problems inherent in the decipherment of the so-called Hittite hieroglyphs.

Daniel Snell admirably takes on the task of writing about inland Syria (or 'Northern' Mesopotamia), providing an up-to-date survey of the most recent developments in Syrian archaeology and their impact on ancient Near Eastern historical research. Moreover, Snell also confronts the unenviable task of making sense of Palestinian history, providing a framework for describing the relationship of the Bible and historical studies.

I also want to thank the College of Liberal Studies, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse for a Faculty Development Project Grant in support of this volume.

Mark W. Chavalas

La Crosse, WI

May, 2006.



# I

## FROM SUMER TO BABYLONIA TOPICS IN THE HISTORY OF SOUTHERN MESOPOTAMIA<sup>1</sup>

*Gonzalo Rubio*

Pennsylvania State University

### I. LANGUAGE AND ETHNICITY IN EARLY MESOPOTAMIA

For the Greeks, Mesopotamia was the land between the two rivers; for modern scholars, Ancient Mesopotamia is also the land of two languages: Sumerian and Akkadian. Around this apparent linguistic dichotomy gravitate some essential questions, which are closely intertwined: the so-called "Sumerian problem"; the identification of the language of the archaic or

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<sup>1</sup> This series of short essays is not intended as a chronological narrative of the history of southern Mesopotamia. The only exception is the final section (7) on the Neo-Babylonian period, since Babylonia in the first millennium is a subject of particular interest to ancient historians in general. For the political history of earlier periods, the reader is recommended to turn to the pertinent chapters in Kuhrt 1995, as well as Sallaberger and Westenholz 1999, and Charpin, Edzard, and Stol 2004. The essays here otherwise address specific issues, which were chosen either because of their general relevance, or because they lie in the center of ongoing scholarly debates. Due to editorial constraints, the bibliographical references have been kept to a minimum. The chronological tables do not always list all the kings in a dynasty or period, but rather those for whom we have more information; the gaps are marked with three asterisks.

proto-cuneiform texts; and the relation between language and ethnicity.

Sumerian was a language spoken in southern Mesopotamia and is most likely first attested in the archaic texts from Uruk and Jemdet Našr (from the mid-late fourth millennium to the early third millennium B.C.E.). By the end of the third millennium (Ur III period), Sumerian had died out for the most part as a spoken language. However, it was still used in a wide variety of literary, scholarly, and religious genres, and was preserved in writing until the practical disappearance of the Mesopotamian civilization in the Parthian period. Sumerian is an isolate, i.e., it is not related to any other language or language family. Thus, our knowledge of Sumerian grammar and lexicon is mostly based on a large number of bilingual texts (in Sumerian and Akkadian), as well as a stream of scribal and scholastic traditions materialized in a corpus of lexical lists and grammatical texts.

Some scholars believe that Sumerian and its speakers would have not entered southern Mesopotamia until shortly before the Early Dynastic I (around 2900 B.C.E.). In fact, it has been argued that the first textual evidence of the Sumerian language appears in the archaic texts from Ur (2700-2600), but that such evidence is absent in the earlier, archaic texts from Uruk—i.e., phases Uruk IV (3500-3200) and, more importantly, Uruk III (3200-2900). Therefore, some believe that the language of the archaic texts from the Late Uruk period was probably not Sumerian.<sup>2</sup> However, an important factor is that there are some instances of phonetic writing in Late Uruk texts, which point to Sumerian as the language of these texts: phonetic indicators (e.g., ŠE in ŠEG<sub>9</sub>+ŠE+BAR = ŠEGBAR = šeg<sub>9</sub>-bar "fallow deer"); some phonetic spellings, especially in the case of Semitic loanwords, such as MAŠ+GAN<sub>2</sub> (< *maškanu* "threshing floor, empty lot"), etc. Only in Sumerian would those logograms correspond to words

<sup>2</sup> See Englund 1998: 81. But see also Rubio 2005: 321-23.

with that specific phonetic shape, which would allow the use of these signs exclusively according to their phonetic reading.

The murky waters of the early linguistic and ethnic history of Mesopotamia have elicited diverse theories. Landsberger's (1974 = 1944) hypothetical pre-Sumerian substratum has been quite influential. This alleged lexical substratum would constitute the only remains of a hypothetical human group that would have inhabited southern Mesopotamia before the speakers of Sumerian. The core of this substratum included designations for occupations and trades (such as *ašgab* "cobbler, leather worker"; *azlag* "launderer"; *bahar<sub>2</sub>* "potter"). The criteria for the identification of non-Sumerian words were mostly phonotactic (i.e., related to the word structure): they are polysyllabic, while Sumerian seems to prefer monosyllabism; they have similar endings and medial consonantal clusters; and they had no Sumerian etymologies. After a close examination of the lexical items singled out by Landsberger and others, one has to conclude that most of these items happen to be Semitic loanwords, Hurrian, *Arealwörter* (words occurring in many languages within a specific, albeit frequently large, geographical area) or *Wanderwörter* (words that travel with the objects or techniques they name), or properly Sumerian terms (Rubio 1999).

In sum, there was no identifiable single substratum that would have left, in a sort of primeval age, its vestiges in the Sumerian lexicon. In fact, to ask where the Sumerians came from, to ask who was there before them, is rather self-deceiving. If one were to ask where Americans (i.e., US citizens) came from, the answer would be simple: from nowhere. They became Americans because they came to America. In the case of Sumerian, the problem is compounded by the fact that "Sumerian" is not exactly a straightforward ethnonym, and all discussions of the so-called "Sumerian question" will always venture into the treacherous waters of linking language (and anthroponyms) to ethnicity,

however the latter concept may be construed.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, it is important to notice the presence of Semitic names among the scribes mentioned in colophons of Sumerian texts from the Early Dynastic III period. Nonetheless, neither did the bearing of a Semitic name necessarily mean that the bearer spoke Semitic, nor did the presence of a Sumerian name point to anything other than social and religious context. In light of the difficulties of drawing any ethno-linguistic picture of early Mesopotamia, the old Sumerian/Akkadian dichotomy has sometimes been substituted with another allegedly more subtle: North (i.e., Semitic) versus South (i.e., Sumerian). Such a north-south polarity is mostly based on their seemingly different land tenure systems, but it ultimately recycles the traditional ethnic divide. Nevertheless, in spite of the presence of two different and well-attested languages, Sumerian and Akkadian, Mesopotamian history and culture has to be understood as one single but rich tapestry, whose variegated threads extended throughout a period of over three millennia and a diverse geography, both of which were continuously punctuated by interaction with other areas (Syria, Iran, Anatolia).

The death of Sumerian as a spoken language has also been debated. Nowadays, it is commonly accepted that Sumerian died out sometime during the Ur III period.<sup>4</sup> Sumerian became then a dead language—i.e., nobody's mother tongue anymore. This does not preclude that Sumerian was probably still spoken in the circles of scribes and scholars within the social and cultural institution known as *e<sub>2</sub>-dub-ba* ("school," literally "house of tablets"), the same way that Latin was spoken in many Medieval *scriptoria*. Nonetheless, Sumerian remained in use for another two millennia, as a literary, scholarly, and liturgical language. The vast majority of Sumerian texts date to the long period between the death of Sumerian as a native tongue and the final disappearance of cuneiform writing and the Mesopotamian

<sup>3</sup> For references, see Rubio 2005: 330-31.

<sup>4</sup> For different approaches to the issue of the death of Sumerian as a spoken language, see Michałowski 2006; Woods 2006; Rubio 2006: 49-50; 2006a.

languages (Sumerian and Akkadian), probably during the first centuries of the Christian era.

On the other hand, Akkadian does not present any particular enigma. It is a member of the Semitic language family. The first Akkadian texts date to the mid-third millennium and the last to the end of the Mesopotamian civilization in the Parthian period. During the third millennium, Akkadian can be divided into clearly differentiated dialects: Early Dynastic Akkadian, Sargonic Akkadian, and Ur III Akkadian. Early Dynastic Akkadian (*ca.* 2500-2350) is part of the Early East Semitic dialect continuum, which included corpora attested outside Mesopotamia, such as the archives from Ebla (Tell Mardīḥ in northern Syria). Sargonic Akkadian (*ca.* 2350-2150) is the language of the inscriptions of the kings of the dynasty centered in Akkad and a few literary texts. Ur III Akkadian is an early form of Old Babylonian, attested

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Old Assyrian (O Ass)	<i>ca.</i> 2000-1500	Old Babylonian (OB)
Middle Assyrian (M Ass)	<i>ca.</i> 1500-1000	Middle Babylonian (MBab)
Neo-Assyrian (N Ass)	<i>ca.</i> 1000-600	Neo-Babylonian (NBab)
	<i>ca.</i> 600 B.C.E.-100 C.E.	Late Babylonian (LBab)

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almost exclusively in personal names and Akkadian words in Sumerian texts. During the second and first millennia, Akkadian is essentially a cover term for the diachronic avatars of two main dialectal bundles: Assyrian in the North and Babylonian in the South.

Nonetheless, even before the increasing cosmopolitanism of Babylonia in the first millennium, other languages besides Sumerian and Akkadian are attested in personal names and isolated lexical items throughout Mesopotamian history. Amorite (a West Semitic language) is well represented in anthroponyms, especially in the Old Babylonian period. The language of the Kassites, who ruled Babylon during the Middle Babylonian period, is poorly known, but some Kassite words appear in a

bilingual lexical list and in various anthroponyms. One of the most international languages of the Ancient Near East, Hurrian, is much better attested outside Mesopotamia, with its large and diverse corpus of texts from Syria, Anatolia, and Egypt. Other languages are covered in a cloud of mystery. We have only a small number of personal names from the language of the Gutí or Guteans, whom some sources blame for the collapse of the Sargonic dynasty, although their presence may well have been a consequence of that collapse rather than its cause. The evidence concerning the Lullubi or Lullubeans (southeast of Lake Urmia) is practically limited to their very name and perhaps a few anthroponyms. This ethnonym is probably related to Hurro-Urartian *lulu/lullu* "foreign(er)," which would have undergone the same semantic shift Hittite *lulahhi/lulahi* (a generic term for 'uncivilized' inhabitants of the mountains) underwent when borrowed into Greek as *Λέλεγες* (*Iliad* 11:429; 20:96; 21:86; Herodotus 1.171) to refer to the Carians. Equally nebulous in origin, the label Subartean (or Subir, Subar) was generically

TABLE I  
MESOPOTAMIA DURING  
THE THIRD MILLENNIUM  
(See Kuhrt 1995: 27, 45-46, 63)

ARCHAIC PERIOD		
4000-3500	Early Uruk	Numerical tablets
3500-3200	Late Uruk (Uruk IV)	Archaic texts (Uruk)
3200-2900	Late Uruk (Uruk III, Jemdet Naşr)	
2900-2700	Early Dynastic I	Mythical kings (Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh)
2700-2600	Early Dynastic II	Archaic texts from Ur

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**EARLY DYNASTIC III (CA. 2600-2340)**

2600	Early Dynastic IIIa (2600-2500) Fāra (Shuruppak), Abū Ṣalābiḥ, Telloh (Girsu)	Enmebaragesi of Kish Mesalim (king of Kish) DYNASTY OF LAGASH	
2500	Early Dynastic IIIb (2500-2340)  Ebla (Tell Mardīḥ) in Syria (2450- 2350)	Ur-Nanshe Akurgal Eannatum Enannatum I	2500  2450
2400		Enmetena Enannatum II Enentarzi Lugalanda	2400
	Lugalzagesi of Umma and Uruk	Urukagina	2350

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**SARGONIC PERIOD (Old Akkadian)**

2350	SARGONIC DYNASTY (AKKAD) Sargon (2340-2284) Rimush (2284-2275) Manishtushu (2275-2260) Naram-Sin (2260-2223) Sharkalisharri (2223-2198) * * *	URUK Lugalzagesi * * *	LAGASH     * * * Gudea
2150	Gutians	* * * Utu-hegal	* * *

---

**UR III**

		Utu-hegal (2119-2113)	
2100	3RD DYNASTY OF UR Ur-Namma (2112-2095) Shulgi (2094-2047) Amar-Sin (2046-2038) Shu-Sin (2037-2027) Ibbi-Sin (2026-2004)		

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used for peoples living to the east of the Tigris and north of the Lullubi—as well as for their languages—without indicating necessarily that they were Hurrian. Many of these poorly-attested languages are doomed to remain as enigmatic as enticing (Rubio 2005: 316).

## 2. LAND TENURE AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES

The system of land tenure in Early Mesopotamia has been widely discussed in Assyriological scholarship. The debate gravitates around the question of whether land tenure was institutional or private. It all started with the old model of "temple economy" and an entity known as the "temple city" (*die sumerische Tempelstadt, le cité temple sumérienne*), a model that was put forward by Anna Schneider (1920) and by Anton Deimel (1931), and subsequently accepted, refined, and perpetuated by many Assyriologists (e.g., Adam Falkenstein).<sup>5</sup> Deimel noticed that the archives of Girsu (modern Telloh), dating to the end of the Early Dynastic III (*ca.* 2430-2340), listed property and estates of the goddess Baba (consort of Ningirsu, literally "the lord of Girsu"), which led him to believe that temples owned and managed most if not all the land. In the documents from this period, the land that had been identified as  $e_2$  *munus* ("household of the woman," *sc.* the ruler's wife) during the reigns of Enentarzi and Lugalanda, became  $e_2$  *ba-ba*<sub>6</sub> ("household of Baba") during the reign of Urukagina.<sup>6</sup> In fact, in the inscriptional text known as the "Reforms of Urukagina," this king allocates land to the temples of Ningirsu and Baba. In its more developed expressions, this model of temple city or temple state system implies that temples also controlled labor and trading—the latter would have been essentially a redistributive system.<sup>7</sup> By the late 1950's,

<sup>5</sup> For references, see Foster 1981: 226.

<sup>6</sup> This name can be read Urukagina, Irikagina, Uru'inimgina, Iri'inimgina, and even simply UruKAgina.

<sup>7</sup> In a recent attempt to articulate a theory of the genesis of Mesopotamian law within the context of planned economy and constrained property rights, Selz (1999-2000) still relies on the temple-city model and the assumption that private property in Early Mesopotamia was limited to objects and tools for personal use. For a critique, see

however, some Soviet scholars (Struve, Diakonoff, Tyumenev) had formulated a serious critique of the temple economy model (Diakonoff 1969). This critique was based particularly on the contents of the so-called ancient *kudurru*'s or land-sale documents, which bear witness to the existence of land owned by family groups or households.<sup>8</sup>

The critique of Deimel's model by Soviet scholars spurred interest in this subject among many scholars in the West. This reinvigorated endeavor started an ongoing debate that, in one way or another, has shaped the modern approach to Mesopotamian economic and administrative texts from all periods. Gelb (1991) followed Diakonoff's analysis for the most part and viewed the "ancient *kudurru*'s" as documents pertaining to land that was privately owned. This kind of private ownership is not so much private in the modern economic sense, as it most likely was held by institutional households—Gelb himself used the Greek term *oikos* for these households. Moreover, it is possible that some "ancient *kudurru*'s" may correspond to rental agreements rather than sales, and even to specific instances of prebendary transfer and reallocation. In fact, most of the transactions in question involve small plots of land, which may have been enough for the subsistence of a handful of individuals (perhaps a couple of families). With Foster (1994: 445) and Renger (1995: 276), one may wonder whether these texts are actual sale documents instead of simply land grants. In fact, the documents frequently list multiple sellers but a single buyer, which would be consistent with the idea of institutional ownership of the land within a

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Wilcke 2003: 11-17.

<sup>8</sup> Employing the term *kudurru* for these Early Dynastic documents is rather anachronistic. Modern scholars use the term *kudurru* (originally meaning "boundary," "boundary stone") to refer to any *narû* (stela) recording a land grant made by a Babylonian king to an individual during the Kassite or Middle Babylonian period (second half of the second millennium); see Slanski 2003; Brinkman 2006. Although these public monuments were once thought to be boundary stones, their state of preservation and their usual find spots (normally temples) seem to rule out that they were ever left outside at the mercy of the elements. Moreover, the so-called "ancient *kudurru*'s" were Early Dynastic *Sammelurkunden* recording the acquisition or transfer of land; see Gelb *et al.* 1991.

system of land grants from these institutions to individuals. However, the existence of multiple sellers may simply point to the particular social ritual of alienating property. The clay tablets from Early Dynastic Fāra (ancient Shuruppak) record not only the alienation of fields (as the stones or *kudurru*'s do), but also that of houses (but not orchards). These Fāra tablets mention a single seller, and the buyer is specifically identified by name, which is quite different from the stones. It is possible that, as Renger (1995: 278) argues, both the stones and the tablets are a "reflection of land consolidation in the hands of members of the ruling elite or of the institutional households for which they most likely acted." This somehow smooths the opposition between public and private sector, which is frequently overemphasized as if both realms were always mutually exclusive.

Steinkeller builds on Falkenstein's and Gelb's approaches to early Mesopotamian economy and ethnicity, and articulates a model of regional variation predicated on a north-south dichotomy. According to Steinkeller (1999: 290), in southern Mesopotamia, "virtually all the economic resources available in a given city-state, in particular, its holdings in arable land, were considered the outright property of the local pantheon." Within this system, the gods had nominal ownership of the land and the temples managed it; basic subsistence fields would have been allocated to the inhabitants of a city state in relation to their status. For the most part, Steinkeller seems to endorse the old model of the temple city as put forward by Schneider and Deimel. Nevertheless, he argues that the picture is sharply different in northern Babylonia. Steinkeller (1999: 299) believes that in the north (i.e., the north of Babylonia) the palace and the elites—although not the temple, at least not in a significant manner—controlled the majority of the arable land, but that there was some land owned by individuals as well. Moreover, the most important contrast lies in the alienation of land, which would have been allowed in the north but not really in the

south. Steinkeller (1999: 301-308) argues that the differences are the result of economic, ecological, socio-political, cultural, and religious variables. In the (mostly Sumerian) south, city states would have been organized around temples, without a fully developed social stratification, and with an insignificant element of privately owned land. In the (Akkadian, i.e., Semitic) north, there were actual territorial states (such as Kish) characterized by an oligarchy of elders, which displayed a well stratified social system and whose temples played a marginal role in economic matters. For the most part, Renger (1995) dwells on the same alleged differences between north and south. Renger (1995: 283) stresses the religious and cultural differences, with the Sumerian south characterized by the theological discourse of city-gods and the Semitic north marked by its nomadic past and its astral deities. Moreover, the need for irrigation systems would have led to state control of land that used to be communal property, a phenomenon that would have triggered the development of institutional households and the articulation of temple estates. Later on, the Sargonic rulers seemingly stripped many of these traditional institutions of their lands and placed these estates under direct state control. However, in the Ur III period, this land was returned to the temples.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, throughout the whole third millennium, Renger and Steinkeller, as Falkenstein had done before them, argue for strong institutional economic structures and very limited individual ownership.

In some essential aspects, this approach is a rephrasing of the old-fashioned ethnic oppositions between Sumerians and Akkadians, now put in terms of south versus north. However, there are many problems with this generalized contrast. For instance, there are city states also in the north (Akshak, Mari), and the archaic texts (Uruk III period) from the north (Jemdet Naşr, Tell Uqair) and the south (Uruk) are almost identical, as Foster (1994) notices. In regard to Kish, the city was most certainly very prominent during this period, both as a center of

<sup>9</sup> For this model of evolution from Early Dynastic to Ur III, see Renger 1995: 272-288.

learning (scribes from Kish show up in Early Dynastic texts from Ebla, in northern Syria) and as a political entity (the title "king of Kish" had become iconic, though not symbolic, by the time of Mesalim).<sup>10</sup> However, very few Early Dynastic texts have been found at Kish (Gelb. *et al.* 1991:64-66), so it is difficult to paint any coherent picture of this city during this period. In fact, to date there are substantially more texts from the Early Dynastic period in the southernmost part of Mesopotamia (Sumer) than in the center or the north. Moreover, the evidence pertains to very different contexts: southern texts come from temple archives, while the north has yielded mainly royal and private archives.

Whereas there may be some differences between the social and economic institutions of the north and the south, it is difficult to extract any firm conclusions, as this is mostly an uneven comparison.<sup>11</sup> The problems with this approach, based on an alleged north-south dichotomy, do not stop there, as its very foundations are somewhat shaky. Diakonoff (1969) noticed that the total area of land controlled by Girsu during the Early Dynastic period was probably ten times larger than the area Deimel had estimated as the total of the estates of the temples. This means that a sizable portion of the land—most of it—must have been outside the control of the temples. Thus, Diakonoff argued that royal and private estates must have existed along with the temple estates both in the south and in the north. Furthermore, it is entirely possible that the assignment of land to the temples of Ningirsu and Baba mentioned in the so-called "Reforms of Urukagina" was a theo-political device of little or no administrative consequence (Foster 1981). Although it is quite likely that the temples played a role in the land tenure system of early Mesopotamia, there is sufficient evidence pointing to parallel structures of land ownership within the realms of the

<sup>10</sup> There is no evidence to support the common assumption that the title 'king of Kish' held by Mesalim was essentially symbolic, referring to a *primus inter pares* whose power was limited to mediation between other rulers (Cooper 1999: 65; 2001: 136-37).

<sup>11</sup> Further historically-grounded criticisms of Steinkeller's north/south divide can be found in Cooper 1999: 62-63 n. 3.

temple, the palace, and private individuals and households. This is a scenario of economic diversity that seems predominant throughout Mesopotamian history.

One can still argue that this perceived dichotomy north versus south survived during the Old Babylonian period (first half of the second millennium). In the south, private ownership of arable land seems to have played no significant role, while in the north there are plenty of sale documents concerning fields sold by private individuals to other private individuals. Moreover, in the south, houses, orchards, and even persons were pledged to secure a loan, but never fields. Regarding the apparent taboo concerning the alienation of land in some periods of Mesopotamian history, a clue may lie in the restrictions on the sale of houses in Old Babylonian texts from Ur and Kutalla (modern Tell Sifr). Contracts from both sites list among the witnesses an official, who seems to have represented vested interests of the city as a corporate entity or simply verify the application of the constraints that had to be observed in any transaction pertaining to the sale of a house. As Renger (1995: 298-99) points out, the reason for such restrictions may be linked to the fact that, in places like Ur, the burials of ancestors were placed underneath most private houses. Even in the south, however, with all its apparent restrictions concerning estate property, arable land was cultivated both by institutional households (such as the palace) and by holders of sustenance or tenancy fields. In the north of Babylonia, during the Old Babylonian period as well, there are many sale documents concerning fields sold by one private individual to another. Still, these private individuals had to pay the state for taking care of the irrigation system (Renger 1995: 302)—this does not imply state control over the land in the north, but simply a common state tax on services provided to private individuals and non-institutional households. Nonetheless, during the Kassite or Middle Babylonian period (second half of the second millennium), the famous *kudurru*'s (see footnote 8) contain plenty of evidence

of both private and institutional or corporate ownership. With the first millennium, the realm of non-institutional households seems to have expanded enough as to accommodate some wealthy families of entrepreneurs, such as the Egibi family in Babylon (bankers of sorts, from the late seventh to the late sixth centuries) and, under Achaemenid rule, the Murashû family in Nippur—the latter leased and managed land grants bestowed upon soldiers, as well as land belonging to the royal family.

The public versus private dichotomy seems to oversimplify the complex nature of economic institutions, in which both realms are frequently intertwined. As Garfinkle (2005) points out, for Ancient Mesopotamia it is more accurate to distinguish between institutional and non-institutional households, a distinction that is substantially different from that established between public and private realms. The same individual could be a member of an institutional and a non-institutional household, blurring so the boundaries between public and private. Furthermore, during the same period, different economic sectors may have been under the control of one or another kind of household. For instance, there seems to be no single sale document or court procedure pertaining to a field in the whole Ur III period. Thus, Gelb and Steinkeller reasonably assume that the transfer of arable land was forbidden or simply avoided during this period. Nevertheless, during Ur III there is ample evidence of entrepreneurial activities and non-institutional trade, for which credit was instrumental. Garfinkle (2004:1) argues that, "despite the overwhelming scale of the institutional economies, there was significant room for non-institutional households to pursue economic gains through money-lending."

### 3. EARLY INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

**TABLE 2: MESOPOTAMIA DURING THE SECOND MILLENNIUM (see Kuhrt 1995: 79, 99, 336)**

OLD ASSYRIAN (1950-1750)	ISIN-LARSA & OLD BABYLONIAN (2000-1600)			
	ISIN	LARSA	BABYLON	MARI
Kanesb (Kül Tepe), 1900-1830	2000	Ishbi-Erra (2017-1985) Shu-ilishu (1984-1975) Iddin-Dagan (1974-1954) Ishme-Dagan (1953-1935) Lipit-Eshtar (1034-1924)		
	1900	Ur-Ninurta (1923-1896) *** Sumu-el (1894-1865) Nur-Adad (1865-1850) Sin-iddinam (1849-1843) ***		
	***	Erra-imitti (1868-1837) Enlil-bani (1860-1837) ***		
	Shamshi-Adad (1813-1781) (= Samsi-Addu)		Warad-Sin (1834-1823) Rim-Sin I (1822-1763) ***	Yaggid-Lim (1820-1811) Yahdun-Lim (1810-1795) ***
			Sin-muballit (1812-1793) Hammurabi (1792-1750) Samsu-iluna (1749-1712) Abi-eshuh (1711-1684) Ammi-ditana (1683-1648) Ammi-saduqa (1647-1626) Samsu-ditana (1625-1595)	Yasmah-Addu 90-1776) Zimri-Lim (1775)
		—1595 Hittite sack of Babylon (Mursili I)		
MIDDLE ASSYRIAN (1500-1000) Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208)		MIDDLE BABYLONIAN / KASSITE (1600-1000)		
		Kassite dynasty	Kurigalzu I; Kadashman-Enlil (← Amenophis III in Egypt); Burnaburiash II (← Akhenaten)	
		Nebuchadnezzar I (1126-1105)		

From the fourth millennium all the way to the twilight of its history in the first, Mesopotamia engaged in international contacts and trade with other areas: Syria, Anatolia, Iran, Arabia, the Arabian Gulf, the Levant, and Egypt.<sup>12</sup> Besides the earlier phenomenon of widespread cultural networks, such as the "Ubaid period (fifth millennium) and the so-called Uruk expansion (fourth millennium), one of the most interesting cases of cultural contact in Early Mesopotamia is what Gelb (1992) called the "Kish civilization." The Kish civilization would have covered a large area from Ebla in northern Syria (or even further to the west) to Kish in Mesopotamia, and probably also some areas to the east of Kish (Abū Ṣalābīḥ and the Diyāla region, perhaps up to Assyria). This constitutes a mid-third-millennium cultural continuum extending from northern Syria to southern Mesopotamia. "Kishite" is used also as a cover term for the Pre-Sargonic linguistic continuum, some of whose features would survive in Sargonic Akkadian and in the *šakkanakku* texts from Mari (before the Lim dynasty). The principal features of this continuum are shared either completely or in part by all the textual corpora proceeding from this large area from the mid-third millennium on: (1) a set of scribal conventions; (2) actual scribal schools (and sometimes the scribes themselves);<sup>13</sup> (3) language; (4) the decimal system (versus the sexagesimal one); (5) the systems of measurements; (6) the calendar of twelve months with Semitic names; (7) the year dates at Abū Ṣalābīḥ and Mari; and (8) Semitic anthroponyms, theonyms, and toponyms.

Throughout Mesopotamian history, there are three regions that are abundantly mentioned in texts and which eventually became part of a mental map, frequently inhabited by the collective dreams of exotic faraway lands from which all sorts

<sup>12</sup> A detailed study of the relations between Early Mesopotamia and Iran, for instance, can be found in T. Potts 1994.

<sup>13</sup> The contact between scribes or scribal traditions and schools from Ebla and Mesopotamia was linked to the transmission and adoption of Mesopotamian cuneiform and its written tradition in Ebla, as attested by the duplicates of the same lexical and literary texts found at Ebla and Abū Ṣalābīḥ. Ebla texts sometimes refer to scribes from Mari (in northern Mesopotamia) and from Kish.

of wealth came: Dilmun, Magan, and Meluhha. Along with a wide variety of texts, it is particularly illustrative that these three toponyms are mentioned together in the section of the procurement of raw materials for the rebuilding of the Eninnu temple at Lagash in cylinder A of Gudea (columns XV-XVI), the ruler of Lagash.<sup>14</sup>

Dilmun is most likely the island nowadays known as Baḥrain and the adjacent mainland of the Arabian peninsula. In Baḥrain, the site of Ra's al-Qal'at seems to have been inhabited already during the 24<sup>th</sup> century; the temple of Barbar dates to about 2200, and even a Mesopotamian Ur III tablet has been found on this island. It is possible that by the Old Babylonian period the name Dilmun might have begun to designate the island of Failaka (in modern Kuwait). Throughout the Kassite period (second half of the second millennium), Dilmun was probably under Babylonian rule. During the first millennium B.C.E., Dilmun is attested both in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian sources. Of the Mesopotamian perception of Dilmun some interesting aspects are known, including its pantheon. Inzak or Inzag (Ninzaga in Sumerian) is the god of Dilmun and as such appears mentioned in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Elamite texts. In inscriptions of Early Dynastic Lagash (Ur-Nanshe, Urukagina), there are references to boats going to or coming from Dilmun. Additionally, many references to Dilmun can be found in texts from Ebla, Sargonic Babylonia, Lagash during Gudea's reign, Ur III, and several early-second-millennium corpora (Isin, Ur, Mari). From Dilmun a variety of desirable goods came: wood, precious stones, and metals, especially copper. The goddess of Dilmun and the wife of Insak was Meskilak (Ninsikila in Sumerian).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Gudea's Cylinders A and B together constitute a long hymn concerning the rebuilding and dedication of the Eninnu temple complex at Lagash. This is the longest literary composition from third-millennium Mesopotamia and one of the masterpieces of Sumerian literature.

<sup>15</sup> After the third millennium, the gender of Inzak's wife is sometimes confused; Meskilak appears as male in some texts and at least one seal. Such gender misconstructions are not unknown, especially with uncommon divinities, such as Ninmu and Lisi, and foreign ones. Moreover, in the Sumerian literary composition known as *Enki and Ninhursag*, Ninsikila occurs as a by-name of Ninhursag. In the final doxology of this

Magan and Meluhha are frequently mentioned together, and often associated with Dilmun. Magan and Meluhha were sources of sought-after materials, especially copper and wood. Whereas Magan was praised for its stones, Meluhha was particularly appreciated for its silver and carnelian. It is quite safe to say that Magan refers to Oman. Unlike Dilmun, Magan is not mentioned in Pre-Sargonic texts, whereas it is fairly common in Sargonic and Ur III inscriptions and economic documents. Magan is mentioned as a source of diorite (<sup>na</sup><sub>4</sub>esi) in several Gudea statues. With a different determinative, the term in question, /esi/, occurs also as the name of a tree and its wood. The Sumerian term <sup>gi</sup>esi (Akkadian *uṣû*) designates a kind of tree originating in Meluhha, Dilmun and the Sealand (the marshy region in southeastern Lower Mesopotamia) in the third millennium, whereas in the Kassite and later periods this wood seems to come from Egypt. This *uṣû*-tree may be identified with ebony—a dark wood, as diorite is a dark stone. Nevertheless, as in the case of toponyms, natural terminology may have undergone shifts and adaptations. For instance, in the Amarna letters (the corpus of international diplomatic correspondence dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty in Egypt), Akkadian *eṣû* or *uṣû* seems to refer to Egyptian *hbny*, which was most probably the name of the African blackwood (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*) rather than ebony, even if this Egyptian term is the ultimate origin of our word *ebony*.<sup>16</sup> Farther to the east, Meluhha refers probably to some area in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent (perhaps the peninsula of Gujarat, or the Indus Valley), and even a Dravidian etymology for this toponym has been proposed. In Gudea Cylinder A (xvi 22), Meluhha is mentioned as a source of "bright carnelian" (*gug gi-rin-e*). In the Sumerian composition *Enki and Ninhursag* (B II 3), Meluhha occurs

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composition, however, the same name, Ninsikila, seems to be given to a deity from Magan, who appears to be the masculine double of Ninsikila of Dilmun: "Ninsikila shall become lord of Magan" (271: <sup>d</sup>nin-siki-la en ma<sub>2</sub>-gan-na he<sub>2</sub>-a).

<sup>16</sup> On the provenance and identification of diverse materials and staples, see, for instance, D. Potts 1997.

also as a source of carnelian.<sup>17</sup> In an literary composition attested in two Ur III manuscripts from Nippur, there is a mention to shipments of wood from Magan and Meluhha. Along with commodities, the contacts with Meluhha involved some level of cultural relations, as is implied by the mention of an interpreter from Meluhha on a Sargonic seal (Rubio 2006a: 170).

In spite of these concrete identifications, Magan and Meluhha carried also more non-specific and evocative connotations of far away places within the mental mapping of a metaphorical geography.<sup>18</sup> Such metaphorical displacement led to reassignments of these toponyms in later periods, when Magan referred to Egypt and Meluhha to Nubia in, for instance, Assyrian royal inscriptions.<sup>19</sup> Such a shift resembles the Greek use of *Erythra thalatta* ("Red Sea") alternatively for the Arabian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea.

#### 4. LITERATURE AND HISTORY

In dealing with Mesopotamian literary, mythological, and religious compositions, many modern scholars try to search for a historical kernel. This historicistic approach to non-historical and a-historical genres is conspicuous in some Assyriological research.<sup>20</sup> Entire modern scholarly myths have been built on reading

<sup>17</sup> Carnelian was, throughout Mesopotamian history, one of the most popular ornamental stones, together with agate and lapis lazuli. There is evidence for the use of carnelian in the manufacture of ornaments already around 6000 B.C.E. in Anatolia. In the Hassuna period (6000-5000), carnelian beads have been found in Yarim Tepe I (northern Iraq). Furthermore, long barrel-cylinder beads of carnelian have been found in the Royal Cemetery at Ur, at Early Dynastic Kish, and in Sargonic graves at Ur. Similar carnelian beads have been found at Harappan sites (e.g., Chanchu-Daro in Pakistan). See D. Potts 1997: 265-267.

<sup>18</sup> On mental maps and metaphorical geographies in Mesopotamia, see Michałowski 1999.

<sup>19</sup> This identification has been challenged by Michaux-Colombot (2001: 332-33), who believes that, in later texts, Meluhha corresponded to the area between the Nile, the Red Sea, Suez, and Berenice, whereas Magan was the Sinai-Midian area around Maqna. For a discussion of the evidence concerning Magan and Meluhha in earlier periods, see Michaux-Colombot 2001.

<sup>20</sup> For references and a critique, see Cooper 2001.

literature as if it were ultimately a historiographic palimpsest. For instance, mythological compositions are frequently interpreted as *romans à clef*, whose protagonists (deities) stand for specific cities or regions, enacting a mythical translation of historical events. If a Sumerian god (Enki, Enlil) appears in opposition to Inanna/Ishtar (goddess of Akkade), a conflict between two cities is immediately postulated, against the usual background of ethnic fallacies (Inanna/Ishtar personifying "the Semitic"). To any modestly sophisticated reader, these interpretations of myths seem uncouth. Nonetheless, other instances of the same exegetical method may seem less simplistic. A glaring example is the alleged resentment against the Sargonic dynasty that would constitute the core and *raison d'être* of a composition known as the *Curse of Akkade*, attested already in Ur III tablets. This represents an important element in the ethnicity debate, whose supposed tensions would have materialized in the transition from the Sargonic to the Ur III period (see section 5 below). Another particular commonplace in this exegetical tradition pertains to the theory of early assemblies. It has been postulated that there was a Pre-Sargonic assembly (Sumerian *ukkin* or *unken*, Akkadian *puhrum*) of city rulers. Likewise, early cities would have had their own city assemblies, whose hypothetical existence yields the intellectual construct of "primitive democracy" in Early Mesopotamia. In spite of repeated suppositions, there is no historical trace of a Pre-Sargonic assembly of rulers from different cities, which would have met at Nippur and would have been shaped on the mold of the divine assembly over which Anu and Enlil presided (Cooper 2001: 136).

The terminology of Mesopotamian kingship is well-known, although not always sufficiently understood. The archaic texts from Uruk often mention an *en*, a word that simply means "lord" but which later on became also the name of the office of high priest. In Ur III and Old Babylonian Sumerian literary compositions about early legendary kings, Enmerkar is called

"en of Uruk," and Gilgamesh "en of Kullaba" (Uruk was the result of the merger of two settlements: Eanna and Kullaba). In Early Dynastic texts, one finds two Sumerian offices, **lugal** ("king") and **ensi<sub>2</sub>** ("prince, governor," generally translated as "ruler" in early texts). During the third millennium, the title **ensi<sub>2</sub>** does not always indicate a secondary ruler, subject to a king (**lugal**), but rather the theo-political device of the ruler's subordination to a god. For example, Gudea is the **ensi<sub>2</sub>** of Lagash because he exercises vicarious sovereignty on behalf of the god Ningirsu, god of Girsu and patron of Lagash, as an Assyrian king would call himself the *iššaku* (Akkadian translation of Sumerian **ensi<sub>2</sub>**) of the god Assur. Nevertheless, already in Sargonic and Ur III texts, the term **ensi<sub>2</sub>** often refers to a civilian governor of a province or region subject to the kings of Akkad or Ur. However, as stated above, there is not a single trace of any sort of supranational assembly of rulers in Early Mesopotamia, as many have postulated.

The issue of city assemblies and "primitive democracy" is also predicated on reading literature as a charter for historical and political reconstruction. One of the poems of the Sumerian Gilgamesh cycle, *Gilgamesh and Agga*, is frequently adduced as an example of an assembly system holding decisive power in early Mesopotamia. It is emblematic of this approach that, along with this composition, one can find a deeply anachronistic analysis of the *Babylonian story of creation* (*Enūma eliš*) as enveloping an earlier tradition of political assembly. In the specific case of *Gilgamesh and Agga*, readings tend to gravitate around the existence of an alleged historical kernel hidden in the narrative. At the beginning of the poem, Gilgamesh speaks before the elders (**ab-ba**) of his city and then before the able-bodied men (**guruš**) of his city. Based on this episode, several scholars have argued that Uruk had a sort of bicameral system, consisting of an assembly of elders and an assembly of guruš.<sup>21</sup> However, this composition exhibits a

<sup>21</sup> For references, see Katz 1993: 21-30. According to Katz (1993: 27), this poem consists of two layers: the compositional material concerning the **guruš** (the story's reality) would reflect an early tale adopted as the basis of the poem, and the other material (the plot's reality) would belong to a later recensional level corresponding to the image of Gilgamesh current at the time of the final composition. Katz (1993: 31) goes

binary structure, contrasting *ab-ba* with *guruš*, which fits in the parallelistic structure of the poem. The "bicameral" scenario is a metonymic reflection of the structure of the poem, a literary trope rather than the literary reflection of a historical institution.

When a historicistic approach to literary texts—as if they had to possess a historical kernel—hinges on a construct of political alternation and conflict between ethnic groups, this reading enables the perpetuation of reductionist ideological discourses on ethnicity, culture, and politics.<sup>22</sup> Of such constructs, the only instance for which actual historical evidence could be adduced is the ethnic alternation supposedly involved in the transition from the Sargonic to the Ur III period. This historical sequence would have been the materialization of an ethnic conflict embodied in the alleged resentment expressed in the *Curse of Akkade*; but other, more tangible pieces of evidence have been put forward.

## 5. FROM THE SARGONIC PERIOD TO UR III: BACK TO THE SUMERIANS?

The study of Ancient Mesopotamia has been marred by a succession of ethnic fallacies gravitating around an allegedly clear ethnic divide between Sumerians and Akkadians. Section 1 ("Language and ethnicity") analyzed the inconsistency of this ethnic fallacy when applied to the so-called Sumerian problem. Section 2 ("Land tenure") addressed the recycling of this ethnic model now redressed as a geographic opposition between a "Semitic" north and a "Sumerian" south. Section 4 ("Literature and history") has pointed out the dangerous intellectual naivete

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further and argues that the early tale must antedate 'the idea of Sumer as a united political entity' and so precede 'Utuhegal's victory inscription'—so it would date to 'some point in time prior to Utuhegal's war against the Gutians' (see Table 1). The late story would be dated to 'some time after Utuhegal's war or in the early Ur III period.' However, these alleged two compositional levels are not clear at all, and, even if they were to be accepted, the dating seems rather arbitrary.

<sup>22</sup> For examples and critiques, see Cooper 1999: 62-63.

involved in the assumption that literary and mythological texts can be read as possessing a historical kernel drenched in pseudo-Romantic *Volksgeist*. Nonetheless, these exegetical, and ultimately hermeneutic, fallacies find their ultimate embodiment in the only piece of alleged historical evidence for this ethnic dichotomy: the transition from the Sargonic to the Ur III period.<sup>23</sup>

The traditionally alleged conflict between Sumerians and Akkadians was challenged by Thorkild Jacobsen (1939) in a seminal article. Since 1939, the discussion has been polarized between an approach that attempts to distinguish, politically and historically, between two different ethnicities in Mesopotamia (*Zwei-Völker-Geschichte*), and a historical framework that regards the Mesopotamian ethnic scenario as a cultural *continuum* (*Ein-Volk-Geschichte*).<sup>24</sup> In this context, the Ur III period was traditionally regarded as a resurgence (a "renaissance") of the Sumerians, which would have been somehow subjugated during the Sargonic period (the Akkadian period).

The idea of a "Sumerian Renaissance" was predicated on the aforementioned discourse of ethnic dialectics. As Becker (1985) points out, a renaissance should be regarded both as a reaction (against the previous Akkadian period) and as a restoration (of a lost Sumerian domain and splendor). Elements and symptoms of such reaction and restoration should be expected in iconography, in the political ideology reflected in royal inscriptions, and perhaps also in some scribal compositions devoted to the theopolitical exaltation of the rulers (e.g., the many Shulgi hymns). One has to find, therefore, distinctive elements in the iconographic representation of the ruler and programmatic statements in his inscriptions, both of which should refer to early models, those of the (Sumerian) Early Dynastic period.

Regarding the iconography, Becker focuses on three highly representative art pieces of the Early Dynastic, the Sargonic, and

<sup>23</sup> For this discussion, see Becker 1985.

<sup>24</sup> For discussion and references, see, for instance, Kraus 1970; Cooper 1999; Rubio 2005.

the Ur III periods respectively: the Stela of the Vultures (from the reign of Eannatum of Lagash); the Stela of Naram-Sin; and the Stela of Ur-Namma.

The Stela of the Vultures commemorates the military conflict between Lagash and Umma (Cooper 1983). On its mythological side (the obverse), the Stela of the Vultures shows Ningirsu holding a net filled with enemy soldiers from Umma. This reminds us of the battle-nets of the gods that appear in oaths that dominate much of the text on the stela. On the historical side (the reverse), one can distinguish three scenes:

- (1) on the top, Eannatum on foot leads a phalanx of soldiers of Lagash;
- (2) in the central register, the king is on a chariot, heading a detachment of spearmen;
- (3) on the lower register, a fragment shows the construction of a burial mound, illustrating the phrase often found in the ED inscriptions, that "the victorious ruler made burial mounds of the enemy soldiers."

The Stela of Naram-Sin celebrates this king's conquest of the Lullubi in the Zagros mountains. As Collon (1995: 75) describes it, "the king stands on a mountain pass between astral symbols, wearing the divine horned helmet; his fringed garment, knotted over one hip, became for centuries that of the warrior king. He holds a bow and arrow and towers over dead and wounded Lullubians, some with broken weapons in a row along the right edge of the stele. Akkadian soldiers with spears and standards climb the wounded slopes."

The obverse of the Stela of Ur-Namma is divided into four registers.<sup>25</sup> The two lower ones show scenes of workers with ladders and baskets, probably building either a temple or a ziggurat, and the king appears as the master builder, accompanied by a divinity. The upper register presents Nanna (the Sumerian name of the Moon-god) transferring the staff and the guide-

<sup>25</sup> See Becker 1985: 291-292.

rope, while the king (Ur-Namma) makes libations in honor of Ningal and Nanna.<sup>26</sup> In the curved area, on the top of that side, Enlil determines the destinies at Nippur. The fragmentary state of conservation of the reverse does not allow us to describe any scene with detail, although all the registers seem to show cultic and sacrificial scenes.

One might say that the two "Sumerian" stelae, Eannatum's and Ur-Namma's, are good examples of alleged Sumerian religious piety, love of order, and severity, as the role played by divinities and the strict division in register seems to show. If we reject, however, the simplicity of the labels "Sumerian" and "Akkadian," it is possible to distinguish three different iconographic genres of stelae.<sup>27</sup> The first is that of the cultic-narrative stelae (*die kultisch-erzählenden Stelen*, e.g., Gudea's and Ur-Namma's). A second group of stelae is characterized by the presence of the triumph motif; Naram-Sin's is a good example, but also the obverse of the Stela of the Vultures, with Ningirsu holding the net filled with enemies. The third group is a synthesis of the other two, whose best example is the Stela of the Vultures, since the obverse belongs to the triumph motif group and the reverse to the cultic-narrative one. In sum, what would seem an ethnically-based difference in iconography ends up being a matter of artistic genres attested throughout different periods.

The problem of royal titulary poses a different set of questions. Ur-Namma's customary titulary presents the Early Dynastic twofold title, **en** of Uruk and **lugal** of Ur. This double title points to an effort to legitimate Ur-Namma's rule. By using this titulary and with further associations to Uruk, Ur-Namma wants to link himself to the preceding dynasty of Utu-hegal of Uruk. In fact, Ur-Namma probably started his career as the governor of

<sup>26</sup> In one of the hymns of Ur-Namma's son, Shulgi (Shulgi X 139), there is a reference to the goddess Ningal as well. Regarding Nanna, it is enough to recall that three kings of the Ur III dynasty bear theophoric names containing the theonym of the Moon-god *Sîn* or *Su<sup>2</sup>en*, the Akkadian equivalent of Sumerian Nanna (see Table 1).

<sup>27</sup> See Becker 1985: 295-297.

Ur appointed by the king of Uruk, Utu-hegal. Moreover, Shulgi adds two titles to his father's (Ur-Namma's) titulary: "king of the four quarters" (*lugal an-ubda-limmu-ba*) and *dingir* "god."<sup>28</sup> Shulgi abandoned the title "en of Uruk," probably because he did not feel the need to legitimate his position anymore. Naram-Sin is the only previous king who adopts the same titulary (at least the three titles *lugal an-ubda-limmu/limmu<sub>2</sub>-ba*, *dingir*, and *nita-kala-ga*).<sup>29</sup>

During the Sargonic and Ur III periods, the first king in each dynasty is still embedded in the tradition of the preceding period. Thus, he needed to find some legitimation as the new king. For his successors, this had ceased to be a concern. In this context, the difference between Ur-Namma and Shulgi resembles the contrast one can find between Sargon and Naram-Sin. The apparent shift in titulary is not between Sargonic (Akkadian) and Ur III (Sumerian) conventions, but rather between founders and successors in both dynasties. Furthermore, it is impossible not to question the ethnic model when, after Shulgi, the other three kings of the Ur III dynasty all have good Akkadian names (Amar-Sin, Shu-Sin, Ib-bi-Sin).

The Sumerian literary composition known as the *Curse of Akkade* blames Naram-Sin's *hubris* for the destruction of the city of Akkad (Cooper 1983a). This is in itself an a-historical and merely theo-political construct: the Sargonic dynasty survived quite well for many years after Naram-Sin's death, so nothing he did could have caused its ultimate demise. Nevertheless, several scholars have regarded this work as an expression of resentment against the Sargonic kings during the Ur III period, the time of its composition.<sup>30</sup> Naram-Sin's *hubris* does not lie in his boasting

<sup>28</sup> This title 'king of the four quarters/regions' (of the known world) became customary in Akkadian as well: *šar kibratim arba'im*.

<sup>29</sup> Shulgi's customary titulary is as follows: 'king of Ur, king of the four quarters, king of Sumer and Akkad, the mighty male, the god' (*lugal uri<sub>2</sub>-ma / lugal an-ubda-limmu-ba / lugal ki-en-gi ki-uri / nita-kala-ga / dingir*).

<sup>30</sup> For references and a critical discussion of this composition, see Cooper 2001: 138-142.

about his accomplishments, his restoration of the Ekur (Enlil's temple at Nippur), or his self-divinization—as some believe—but rather in his refusal to accept the judgment of the gods (Cooper 2001: 142). Mesopotamian political discourse does not usually explain alternations in dynasties and shifts in hegemony by asserting blame on specific rulers. On the contrary, the *Sumerian king list* reflects a historical approach to political change on the basis of a rotation or turn (Sumerian *bala* "spindle whirl; rotational device or institution") of the institution of kingship (*nam-lugal*).<sup>31</sup> Thus, neither the supposedly hard evidence (iconography, royal titulary), nor the postulated historical reading of literary texts such as the *Curse of Akkade*, bear witness to a phenomenon of ethnic dichotomy as an explanatory device in Mesopotamian history. That ethnicity existed in Mesopotamia is a given. However, it is virtually impossible to reconstruct its definitions and boundaries. Arguing, therefore, that ethnic identities played a significant role in Mesopotamian history is in essence a modern scholarly construct.

## 6. THE MESOPOTAMIAN LAW COLLECTIONS: WERE THEY REALLY LEGAL CODES?

Even those who have never heard of Shulgi or Naram-Sin do recognize immediately the name Hammurabi, a name forever associated with the Old Babylonian law collection inscribed on a diorite stela found in Susa—where the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte I took it in the twelfth century B.C.E.—and now housed in the Louvre Museum in Paris. However, this is not the earliest Mesopotamian law collection. The earliest one dates to the Ur III dynasty and is known as the "Code" of Ur-Namma, although it may well have been composed during the reign of Shulgi. The code of Lipit-Eshtar dates to the time of the Isin dynasty (ca. 1930), in the early Old Babylonian period (see Table 2). Both "codes" are in Sumerian. The first law collection in Akkadian is

<sup>31</sup> For the *Sumerian king list*, see Glassner 2004: 117-127.

that from Eshnunna (modern Tell Asmar), which dates to the Old Babylonian period (ca. 1770) as well and precedes the "code" of Hammurabi by a couple of decades. The Middle Assyrian laws and the fragmentary Neo-Babylonian laws belong to the same tradition of law collections. The Middle Assyrian palace and harem decrees are substantially different, as they constitute internal regulations rather than legal corpora.

The reader must have noticed by now the use of inverted commas to write the word code in this context.<sup>32</sup> This is because one can question whether these law collections were ever true legal codes, i.e., authoritative sources of laws applied in court cases. Landsberger (1939: 220-22) pointed out that the "code" of Hammurabi is never explicitly cited in judgments, as one would expect from an authoritative source of law. In fact, the "code" itself does not state that judges will have to make their decisions according to its "laws." Kraus (1960: 290-92) used the omen collections as a parallel and argued that the "codes" belonged to a particular type of Mesopotamian scientific literature. A year later, Finkelstein (1961: 101) regarded these "codes" as a part of an apologetical literary genre, the so-called *narû*-literature, also known as poetic autobiography, pseudo-autobiography, or fictional autobiography. In the 1950's, Speiser (1967: 313-323, 534-555) had already used the term "code," in inverted commas, because he regarded the authorities responsible for these collections as drafters rather than as codifiers. In this, Speiser was following Driver and Miles (1952-55: 41-53), who argued that Hammurabi's law collection was not a legal code or digest, but simply a series of amendments and specifications to pre-existing Babylonian common law. Furthermore, in the last couple of decades, Westbrook (2003: 12-21) has reassessed the debate and placed these law collections in their original scholarly

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<sup>32</sup> In general, the following discussion follows Westbrook's approach to the subject; for this and for the history of the research, see Westbrook 2003. English translations of these law collections, along with transliterations of the Sumerian and Akkadian originals, can be found in Roth 1997.

setting, as academic treatises on the law, rather than authoritative sources of law. In this respect, these law collections need to be understood in the Mesopotamian context of the production of scholarly and scientific discourse.

Mesopotamian scientific knowledge was not empirical in nature and induction was not its method of choice. A close study of the scientific corpus shows that the endeavors of Mesopotamian scholars were predicated on the hypothetico-deductive method. In fact, lists of astronomical and teratogenic omens, which would seem necessarily based on observation, include many phenomena that cannot occur in actuality<sup>33</sup>. For instance, the series of astronomical omens known as *Enūma Anu Enlil* ("When Anu and Enlil" = EAE) refers to the observation of Venus in the middle of the sky at night (EAE 59 II 15). However, Venus can never be so high above the horizon at night. The scribes most likely shaped this entry in relation to the Jupiter omens. In another omen, there seems to be a reference to both the heliacal rising and setting of Venus within one month (EAE 59 II 160), which is impossible—the period of visibility of Venus, as either morning or evening star, is usually over eight months. Similar impossibilities or *adūnata* are registered in other fields of Mesopotamian scholarship. In the series of abnormal births (*šumma izbu* "if an abnormal foetus"), some teratogenic phenomena listed do not seem to occur in nature (e.g., giving birth to a foot). What may be even more telling is the fact that the majority of abnormal births included in that series are very rare, whereas one of the most common birth defects (cheiloschisis, cleft lip) is never mentioned. As in the case of these lists of omens, the so-called "legal codes" were not the result of empirical observation, but rather the collection and matching of protases and apodoses on the part of the scholars. The series themselves seem serially generated.

In sum, the so-called "legal codes" in Mesopotamia were not compiled as authoritative sources of law (true legal codes),

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<sup>33</sup> On Mesopotamian astronomy and its epistemological nature, see Brown 2000 and Rochberg 2004.

but rather as academic tractates on law used for the training of scribes who would practice as judges and legal experts. In the Old Babylonian period, the sporadic occurrences of the Akkadian expression *kīma šimdat šarrim* ("in accordance with the king's decree") does not refer to any "laws," but it alludes to a concrete kind of royal decree, the *šimdat šarrim* or *awat šarrim* ("royal decree"). These decrees were different from the famous *mišarum* ("equity") edicts, issued normally to release people from certain financial obligations for a limited time, as in the case of the edict of the Old Babylonian king of the Amorite dynasty Ammi-Šaduqa (ca. 1640). These royal decrees concerned matters in which conflicts and breaches of contract were foreseeable (such as the hiring of workers, the buying of slaves, and vindications and claims).<sup>34</sup>

## 7. BABYLONIA DURING THE FIRST MILLENNIUM B.C.E.<sup>35</sup>

Only in the second half of the second millennium, during the Kassite period, can one use properly the term Babylonia, which refers to the territory of southern Mesopotamia—as opposed to the name of the city, Babylon, and the name of the southernmost area of Mesopotamia, Sumer. However, although we use the term Babylonia for southern Iraq since the mid-second millennium, the Babylonians preferred to identify themselves by their individual cities, especially Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon, cities that saw themselves as having a special status in regard to royal privileges (*kidinnu* or *kidinnūtu*, a set of city-rights, a charter of autonomy).

During the Kassite period, Babylonia became a more or less politically unified territory under the central authority of the

<sup>34</sup> See Veenhof 1997-2000; Westbrook 2003: 362-64, 406-407. There is a clear distinction between two basic legal concepts in Akkadian as well: *kittu* as 'traditional law' (a feminine verbal adjective from the root of the verb *kānu* 'to be firm, true, well established') and *mišaru* as 'equity,' 'fairness,' and sometimes 'social justice' (from the root of the verb *ēšēru* 'to be well, to prosper').

<sup>35</sup> This section relies mostly on Brinkman 1968, 1984; Frame 1992; and Kuhrt 1995: 374-381, 573-622. For reasons of space, this section stops with the fall of Babylon and the beginning of the Achaemenid empire. On Babylonia during the Achaemenid period, see Briant 2002 *passim*; and Boiy 2004. On Seleucid Babylonia, see Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993; and Boiy 2004.

**TABLE 3: MESOPOTAMIA DURING THE FIRST  
MILLENNIUM** (see Kuhrt 1995: 576, 592)

NEO-ASSYRIAN (1000-600)	NEO-BABYLONIAN (1000- )
Assur-Dan II (934-912)	
Adad-nirari II (911-891)	
Tukulti-Ninurta II (890-884)	* * *
Assurnasirpal II (883-859)	Nabu-apla-iddina (ca. 870-854)
Shalmaneser III (858-824)	* * *
Shamshi-Adad V (823-811)	
Adad-nirari III (810-783)	Baba-aha-iddina (812)
[no regency of Shammuramat/ Semiramis]	* * *
Shalmaneser IV (782-783)	
Assur-dan III (772-755)	Eriba-Marduk (ca. 770)
Adad-nirari IV (754-745)	* * *
Assur-nirari V (754-745)	
Tiglath-pileser III (744-727)	Nabu-nasir (747-734)
	* * *
	Nabu-mukin-zeri (731-729)
	—Tiglath-pileser III (728-727)
	—Shalmaneser V (726-722)
Shalmaneser V (726-722)	Marduk-apla-iddina II (721-719)
Sargon II (721-705)	* * *
Sennacherib (704-681)	
Esarhaddon (680-669)	
Assurbanipal (668-631/627?)	Shamash-shum-ukin (Assurbanipal's brother)
	Nabopolassar (626-605)
Assur-etel-ilani (630/636?-623?)	
Assur-uballit (611-609)	Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562)— Jerusalem (587)
—612 Medes and Babylonians conquer Assyria	Amel-Marduk (561-560)
	Neriglissar (559-556)
	Labashi-Marduk (556)
	Nabonidus (555-539)
	—539 Cyrus II (Persian) conquers Babylon

king in Babylon (Karduniash in Kassite). This period of economic prosperity and international influence began to wither under the development of Assyria as a large power and the conquest of Babylon by Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria (1244-1208), but its end was precipitated by the Elamite attacks. In the late thirteenth century, the Elamite king Kiden-Hutran had already attacked several Babylonian kings, who were client-kings appointed by Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria. With the entrance of a new ruling family in Elam—beginning with Shutruk-Nahhunte I (1185-1155)—the situation became even more critical. In the mid-twelfth century, Shutruk-Nahhunte I invaded Babylonia, overthrew the thirty-fifth Kassite king (Zababa-shuma-iddina), and gave the Babylonian throne to his son, Kutir-Nahhunte. Shutruk-Nahhunte's great-grandfather (Kiden-Hutran) had married the daughter of a Kassite prince.<sup>36</sup> Thus, his grandfather (Napriša-Untash), his father (Hutelutush-Inshushinak) and Shutruk-Nahhunte himself, were all descendants of a Kassite royal mother. Moreover, Shutruk-Nahhunte had married the eldest daughter of the thirty-third Kassite king (Meli-Shihu). In a literary letter preserved in a Neo-Babylonian copy of a twelfth-century missive from an Elamite king (almost certainly Shutruk-Nahhunte) and addressed to the Kassite court in Babylonia (Goldberg 2004), the sender clearly thought that both heritage and marriage gave him the right to sit on the Babylonian throne. In a way, this Elamite king was not so much conquering and taking plunder from Babylon—a plunder that most likely included the diorite stela inscribed with Hammurabi's "code" eventually found at Susa—as he was reclaiming his own ancestry and somehow collecting his political inheritance, which he quickly passed on to his son.

During the reign of Tiglath-pileser I of Assyria (1114-1076), a Babylonian king of the second dynasty of Isin, Nebuchadnezzar

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<sup>36</sup> The genealogy of the Elamite kings is particularly complicated because of the recurrent use of the same names for different people. The genealogy here follows Goldberg's (2004) reconstruction in his study of the so-called Berlin letter (VAS 24: 91).

I (1126-1105), was able to attack Elam and defeat the Assyrians, to the point that he captured Ekallate near Assur. However, Tiglath-pileser I was eventually able to take over northern Babylonia, including Babylon itself and Dur Kurigalzu (modern Aqar Quf, founded by Kurigalzu I in the early fourteenth century). Sandwiched between the Assyrians and the Elamites, Babylonia became the target of continuous incursions and raids by Aramaean tribes and other groups (especially the Suteans). As a result of that, southern Mesopotamia probably went through a period of dramatic instability from about 1050 until the end of the tenth century. During this dark period, for which documentation is quite limited, Babylonia was ruled rather precariously by a series of short-lived dynasties: the second dynasty of Isin (1155-1027); the second dynasty of the Sealand (1026-1006); the house of Bazi (1005-986); an Elamite king (Mar-biti-apla-usur, 985-980); and finally the dynasty of E (since 979). By the beginning of the ninth century, Babylonia began to recover and there is again enough documentation to reconstruct its political history in detail.

The period from the ninth century to Cyrus' invasion in 539 can be divided into four segments: the ninth century itself, characterized by recovery, newly gained stability, and cooperation with Assyria; the late ninth to eighth centuries, marred by political disturbances and the Assyrian invasion; the seventh century, during which Babylonia is dominated by Assyria until the raise of Nabopolassar (626); and most of the sixth century (605-539), when the Babylonian empire was articulated, until Nabonidus was defeated by Cyrus. The sources are sufficient and become particularly abundant after 745/744 (with the beginning of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria). Historians have access to quite a number of written sources concerning Babylonia during this period: royal inscriptions, the *Babylonian Chronicle*, the *Synchronistic history*, Assyrian annals, and the Hebrew Bible.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, there is a real wealth of economic and administrative documents. This includes private documents (the archives of the

<sup>37</sup> For the chronicles, see now Glassner 2004: 193-239.

Egibi family, from the late seventh to the late sixth century), as well as temples archives, especially from the Eanna (Ishtar's temple) in Uruk and the Shamash temple in Sippar (sixth century).<sup>38</sup> During the first millennium, the population of Babylonia became increasingly multicultural, including Chaldaean and Aramaean tribes. Babylon itself eventually became home to communities of Greeks, Iranians, Egyptians, and Jews.

Nabu-apla-iddina (ca. 870-854) was able to reach a certain level of stability, as is reflected in his foundation text at Sippar. In 851, Shalmaneser III of Assyria made a pact with Babylonia in order to protect the Babylonian dynastic line and to resist the raids of Aramaean and Chaldaean tribes. Conversely, Babylonia helped the son of Shalmaneser III, Shamshi-Adad V, to secure the throne of Assyria. However, by the late ninth century, Babylonia was in trouble and Shamshi-Adad V moved to help, as stipulated in the pact endorsed by his father. However, the Assyrian king failed to secure the situation, and ended up regarding Babylonia as a hostile land and capturing its king (Baba-aha-iddina) in 812. The intervention by Shamshi-Adad V triggered a period of chaos in Babylonia, and the Assyrian monarch went as far as to claim the title "king of Sumer and Akkad." His successor on the Assyrian throne, Adad-nirari III, tried to stabilize Babylonia and returned deportees back to their land (reversing what Shamshi-Adad V had done). Nevertheless, Adad-nirari III still kept Babylonia under direct Assyrian control and sovereignty. After the death of Adad-nirari III, a Chaldaean (Eriba-Marduk) was able to regain autonomy for Babylonia (including the Diyāla region) in ca. 770.

The descendants of the Babylonian king Nabu-nasir (dead by 734) had to confront revolts and assassinations, until a Chaldaean chief (Nabu-mukin-zeri) seized the Babylonian throne in 731. Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (744-727) first took back the Diyāla and the Tigris regions—some Aramaean tribes were actually

<sup>38</sup> On the different corpora of economic and administrative documents, see Jursa 2005.

incorporated into Arrapha—then moved south into Babylonia, and forced the Chaldaean tribes to pay tribute to him (729). Tiglath-pileser III used the title "king of Sumer and Akkad," but in a mostly symbolic fashion; for two years (729-27), he called himself "king of Babylonia" (a claim of dual monarchy), and celebrated the New Year festival (*akītu*) in Babylon. In Babylonian sources and in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., 2 Kings 15:19), this Assyrian king is called Pul(u), which may be a hypocoristic of his name. Shalmaneser V of Assyria (726-722) continued his father's dual monarchy; he is called Ululayu in Babylonian sources. After the usurpation of the Assyrian throne by Sargon II, a Chaldaean, Marduk-apla-iddina II (721-710), known as Merodach-baladan in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 20:12), was able to gain control over Babylonia with Elamite aid. Seemingly this did not entail any acrimony between Assyria and Babylonia, as proved by the commercial relations between Assyria and Bit Yakin (the Chaldaean tribe of Marduk-apla-iddina in southern Babylonia, the Sealand). As a Chaldaean outsider, Marduk-apla-iddina tried to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Babylonians, for which he protected and restored traditional privileges and land grants, as stated in the famous *kudurru* pertaining to a land grant to the district governor (*šākin tēmi*) of Babylon, Bel-ahhe-iddina (photo in Kuhrt 1995: 81). From the beginning of Marduk-apla-iddina's reign, Sargon II of Assyria (721-705) tried to recover Babylonia, but an Elamite army defeated him at Der (720). The Assyria king finally reconquered Babylonia after 710 and Marduk-apla-iddina went into exile in Elam. Nonetheless, Sargon II had to fight opposition in the south (Dur-Yakin, the tribal center of Bit-Yakin), but he was still able to use the title "king of Babylonia" and even participated in the *akītu* festival. The importance of Babylonia during this period cannot be overestimated: it was fundamental for trade, because of the caravan routes from south Arabia and the Iranian plateau, as well as the contacts with the Gulf, which dated to millennia earlier (see section 3).

In order to secure Assyrian control over the whole territory of Babylonia, Sennacherib of Assyria (704-681) targeted most of his military campaigns against Babylonia and Elam. He did not resort to dual kingship, as previous Assyrian kings. Instead, he appointed Assyrian nominees as Babylonian kings, but not as simple governors. It took Sennacherib fifteen years of brutal campaigning and repression to settle the Babylonian conflict. At the beginning of Sennacherib's reign, in 703 Marduk-apla-iddina came back from exile and reestablished himself in Bit Yakin with troops from Ur and Uruk. Sennacherib defeated Marduk-apla-iddina at Kish and forced him to flee again. Afterwards, Sennacherib appointed a Babylonian educated in Assyria (Bel-ibni), who was not accepted by the locals, which triggered rebellions and made it possible for Marduk-apla-iddina to come back again (700) and retake parts of southern Babylonia (including Ur). Sennacherib was finally able to repress some of these rebellions and installed his crown-prince (Assur-nadin-shumi) as king of Babylonia. In 694, Sennacherib undertook a large campaign to attack Marduk-apla-iddina, who was still living in southern Babylonia. The Elamites took advantage of this and attacked northern Babylonia; they seized Sippar, captured the Assyrian crown-prince (by then king of Babylonia), and took him to Elam, where he died. Subsequently, an Elamite appointee was installed as king in Babylon. The Assyrians were first defeated by the Elamites, but, in a predictable turn of fortune, the Assyrians finally crushed the Elamites and captured the Elamite appointee in Babylon. In fact, Sennacherib pursued the Elamites well into Elam but left the Babylonian throne vacant, a conjuncture of which a Chaldaean ruler (Mushezib-Marduk) of Bit Dakkuri took advantage in order to seize the Babylonian throne (693). A large battle took place in Halule (near Samarra) in 691/690: Elamites and various Babylonian armies formed a common front against the Assyrians; but there was no decisive outcome. In 689, Babylon finally fell under Sennacherib's control (as celebrated in the famous Bavian inscription of this Assyrian king). After

so much military back-and-forth, a period of devastation and hardship seems to have naturally ensued.

Esarhaddon of Assyria (680-669) provided some much needed stability to Babylonia, and he engaged in rebuilding and restoration activities in Babylon. The alliance of friends of Babylonia—or rather enemies of Assyria—fell apart. It is symptomatic of the period that, when the son of Marduk-apla-iddina II fled to Elam, he was killed there; his brother fled to Assyria (his father's enemy) in search of asylum, and the Assyrians made him ruler of Bit-Yakin (his father's tribal realm). Assurbanipal of Assyria (668-631/627?) engaged in a variety of symbolic policies in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Babylonians: he returned the statue of Marduk to his temple, and did the same with other deities at Der, Larsa, Uruk, and Sippar. He also restored temples (e.g., at Borsippa) and made offerings to various Babylonian temples (e.g., Uruk). The importance of these symbolic acts was paramount to the theo-political discourse of kingship. Kings from all periods rebuilt and renovated pre-existing temples and landmarks as an essential part of their duties. For instance, the famous ziggurat of Marduk in Babylon, the Etemenanki, was restored successively by the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, and by the Babylonian rulers Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II. Although the Etemenanki is not mentioned until the Bavian inscription of Sennacherib, which describes his sack of Babylon and his destruction of this famous ziggurat (OIP 2 p. 84, 51-52), its construction probably dates to the Kassite period. It is true that Sennacherib had destroyed (or at least seriously damaged) this ziggurat right before Esarhaddon's reign, but it is nonetheless intriguing that, after this destruction, there were four consecutive restorations within a century or so. One may wonder whether, after Sennacherib's vandalism, the Etemenanki was left in a perennial state of fragility and decrepitude. However, there is no particular reason to think this building was in need of so many reconstructions. On the contrary, those four rulers were

quite eager to restore the Etemenanki, over and over again, in an attempt to make up for Sennacherib's destruction and, therefore, to link themselves to the Babylonian chain of kingship, as well as ingratiate themselves with the local elites and commoners alike.

Shamash-shum-ukin, Assurbanipal's brother, was appointed by their father (Esarhaddon) as king of Babylonia in 672. Surprisingly or not, he rose against Assyria with the aid of Chaldeans, Aramaeans, Elamites, and Arabs (652-648). Assurbanipal crushed his brother, chased the Elamites into Elam, and ravaged Susa, signaling the end of Elam as an international entity. Several texts mention Kandalanu as king of Babylonia (648-627), which some have regarded as another name for Assurbanipal. Nevertheless, Kandalanu was most likely a different person, a Babylonian ruler subject to the Assyrians (Frame 1992: 193-213).

Towards the end of Assurbanipal's reign, Nabopolassar (626-605), probably a Chaldean from the marshy area of Bit Yakin, was able to conquer several Assyrian provinces (especially Suhu) and eventually reached the confluence of the Euphrates and the Balīḥ, and penetrated Arrapha on the Tigris. The Median king Cyaxares and Nabopolassar established a treaty to fight the Assyrians together. After Nabopolassar put down a rebellion in Suhu, Medians and Babylonians took Nineveh (an event that went down in history as "the fall of Nineveh"), conquered Assyria, and ended the Assyrian empire (612). Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562), Nabopolassar's son, continued his father's policies. After Nabopolassar had already defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish (605) and Hamath, Nebuchadnezzar II devoted eight out of the nine campaigns in the first ten years of his long reign to target and stop the aspirations of Egypt in Syria. He even reached all the way to the Egyptian frontier in the south (601). As part of the struggle between Babylonia and Egypt over the Levant, Nebuchadnezzar II seized Jerusalem (598/97) and deported

its king (Jehoiachin). Afterwards, the Babylonian appointee (Zedekiah) on the throne of Jerusalem rebelled against his master and was blinded and also deported (587); a local (Gedaliah) was then installed as Babylonian governor of Judah. By contrast, in his first 10 years, the Babylonian king embarked on only one eastern campaign, targeting Elam (596). After 594, all chronicles of Nebuchadnezzar's reign are lost, but the frantic military activities of his first ten years, along with his intense building and restoring activities in various Babylonian cities, stress to which extent he was able to articulate a Babylonian empire, which came to replace the Assyrian empire and foreshadowed the Achaemenid empire.

After a half century of military expansion and political accomplishments, the successors of Nebuchadnezzar II were all short-lived monarchs, weakened by all sorts of palace intrigues. Amel-Marduk (561-560), mentioned as Evil-Merodach in the Hebrew Bible, reigned for 2 years before being assassinated by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar (559-556). After Neriglissar's death, his young son, Labashi-Marduk (556) reigned for barely a month before Nabonidus (555-539) seized the throne. Although very little is known about the last Babylonian king, there is no doubt that, when crowned king, he was already a middle-aged man with an adult son (Bel-sharra-usur = biblical Belshazzar).

Few personalities within Mesopotamian history are more fascinating than Nabonidus himself.<sup>39</sup> He was the last king of Babylon, and, as most crepuscular characters, he appears shrouded in legend. The legend is particularly thickened by the fact that, during his reign, Nabonidus increasingly sponsored the cult of the Moon-god, Sîn, in an almost henotheistic fashion, to the point that he probably incurred the rage of the influential priests of Marduk, the god of Babylon. Nonetheless, the god Sîn for whom he rebuilt his temple in Harrân (in southeastern Turkey), the deity whom he called "the lord of the gods" (*bēlu ša*

<sup>39</sup> On Nabonidus, see Beaulieu 1989.

*ilāni*) and "the king of the gods" (*šar ilāni*), exhibited attributes and cultic features that depart from those of the traditional cult of Sîn. Nabonidus' version of the Moon-god was probably more Aramaean than Mesopotamian, as was the case of the worship of the Moon-god of Ḥarrān. Perhaps a symptom of the tension between his religious innovation and the weight of tradition may be the fact that he appointed his daughter chief priestess (*entu*) of Sîn at Ur, a much more traditional place of cult for the Moon-god to which, however, no priestess had been appointed for six centuries. At least in one composition concerning Nabonidus—the *Verse account*, composed after Nabonidus' death, during Cyrus' reign—the Moon-god Sîn is referred to as *Ilteri*, which should be understood as an Aramaic form meaning simply "Moon." Under this name (to be read *Šahr*), the Moon-god was worshiped both by Aramaean tribes in the Syro-Mesopotamian region and by inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula in pre-Islamic times. Moreover, the Aramaean and, in general, West or Central Semitic context is clear. One should not forget that even Nabonidus' father (Nabu-balassu-iqbi) was most likely the chief of an Aramaean tribe.

Sometime between the third and sixth years of his reign, Nabonidus went to Teimā<sup>2</sup> (Taymā<sup>2</sup>) in Arabia, conquered several Arabian towns in the Ḥijāz—including Yatribu (*Yathrib*), modern al-Madīna/Medina—and stayed in Teimā<sup>2</sup> for ten years. The choice of Teimā<sup>2</sup> is less unusual than it may seem. Thanks to the correspondence of Ninurta-kudurri-usur, governor of Sūḥu and Mari in the eighth century, we now know of a camel caravan managed by Temanites and Sabaeans. In fact, this Arabian town constituted a natural rest stop in the ancient caravan routes of frankincense trade, which extended from Yemen and other places in the south of the Arabian peninsula all the way to the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. Moreover, tribes from Teimā<sup>2</sup> are mentioned already in inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III. While in Teimā<sup>2</sup>, Nabonidus installed his son Belshazzar as regent

in Babylon. It would seem easy to explain Nabonidus' Arabian interlude as a long military campaign. However, the length of his stay and the royal rhetoric associated with it point in a different direction. The king himself explained it as the result of the impiety of the inhabitants of Babylon, Borsippa, Nippur, Ur, Uruk, and Larsa (Ḫarrān stela i 14-27). Moreover, plenty of Freudian innuendo could be read into Nabonidus' relation with his mother (*Adad-guppi*<sup>27</sup>), whose unusual name may be Aramaic as well. She died during her son's self-imposed exile in Arabia, but she left an inscription devoted to the god Sîn in Ḫarrān, which has led some to believe she influenced Nabonidus in his seemingly gradual conversion to henotheism or monolatry.

Nabonidus rebuilt and restored temples all over Babylonia: the Ebabbar temple of Shamash, its ziggurat, the temple of Bunene, and the temple of Anunitum, all of them in Sippar; another Ebabbar temple in Larsa; the Egipar and Enunmah temples, as well as its ziggurat, in Ur; and the Ehulhul temple of Sîn in Ḫarrān. There is inscriptional documentation for all these building activities. Furthermore, Nabonidus was an antiquarian and collector. As other Babylonian rulers had done before (Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar II), he engaged in what one can call actual field expeditions in search of architectural remains, as well as ancient texts and artifacts. This last moment of splendor in Babylonian history ended when Cyrus II conquered Babylon in 539. The Achaemenid king claimed to be taking over after Assurbanipal and after Nebuchadnezzar II, and commissioned compositions vilifying Nabonidus. Nevertheless, there was no noticeable change in the social and economic life of Babylonia after Cyrus' conquest.

In terms of the economic and social structure of the Neo-Babylonian empire articulated by Nebuchadnezzar II, there are no state administrative, economic, or legal documents from Babylon itself; they all come from Uruk and Sippar. The documents from Babylon pertain to family archives and private economic activities

(especially the Egibi family). The Uruk and Sippar documents come from temple archives, and as such they only reflect the temple's daily business. Moreover, there are no documents concerning the imperial rule of Babylonia over its provinces, unlike the Assyrian empire earlier. Thus, too much must be based on the general assumption that the organization of the Babylonian empire mirrored that of the Assyrian and the former took over the pre-existing structure. We do know that tribal Chaldaean and Aramaean districts had their traditional local leaders under Babylonian control. Many sources testify to the impressive wealth of the Babylonian empire. Nevertheless, a commonplace in antiquity, Nebuchadnezzar II's "hanging gardens of Babylon," stems from a misunderstanding. The gardens in question were probably those of Sennacherib in Nineveh (Dalley 1994). Still, Babylon became a reference denoting luxury and cosmopolitan culture, a place demonized in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., *Genesis* 11) and the New Testament (*Revelation*), although some prophets had a much more sympathetic take (*Isaiah* 47:1).

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## II

# THE ASSYRIANS

## A NEW LOOK AT AN ANCIENT POWER

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### INTRODUCTION

The rediscovery of ancient Mesopotamia began in earnest in the 1840s and 50s with the excavation of the major Neo-Assyrian capitals of Nineveh, Nimrud, and Khorsabad, ancient Dur Sharrukin. The significance of these discoveries is highlighted in the discipline that still bears their name, Assyriology. The decision to uncover these ancient mounds was also influenced by the centrality of the Assyrians in the imagination of the Biblically inspired Europeans who set out to explore their own past in the ruins of Mesopotamia.

The Assyrians were the ancient residents of northern Mesopotamia. They take their name from Ashur, the patron god of both their original capital city of Ashur and of the land surrounding it. In particular, their cities grew up along the banks of the Tigris river in the dry farming zone north of the irrigated core of Mesopotamia (see Map 1). Assyria was a land of agricultural villages, but its cities were at the center of its identity and political development. The heartland of Assyria was a triangle formed by the cities of Ashur, Nineveh, and Urbilum/Arbela. The latter was located on the plain between the Upper and Lower Zab rivers, at the modern site of Erbil. As H.W.F. Saggs noted,

Assyria proper was a very fertile area no larger in size than the state of Connecticut.<sup>1</sup>

The land of Ashur occupied a crucial place within the geography of ancient western Asia. The Assyrians, who became quite adept at hydraulic projects relatively late in their history, did not have to practice extensive irrigation in order to wrest subsistence from the land. The plains of Assyria extended away from the foothills of the Taurus and Zagros mountains, and were delimited to the south and east by the limits of the rainfall zone. This region of fertile farmland,<sup>2</sup> in the north of modern Iraq, was also a crossroads in antiquity. Assyria, which lacked the protection of fixed topographic borders, was open to contact with three distinct regions: Babylonia to the south along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers down to the Persian Gulf, the Levantine coastline and Anatolia to the west, and the mountainous regions of the Zagros to the north and east.

The Assyrians spoke a dialect of the ancient Akkadian language. Akkadian is first attested in southern Mesopotamia and became prominent with the rise of Sargon of Akkad in the 24<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The two most significant dialects of Akkadian were Babylonian and Assyrian, the languages of southern and northern Mesopotamia respectively. The linguistic relationship between these two regions is indicative of a whole host of commonalities in custom and tradition as well. The Assyrians and Babylonians worshipped a common pantheon of gods and exhibited very similar material cultures. The political and social relationship between Babylonia and Assyria, which spanned parts of three millennia, was quite complex. For the Assyrians, the Babylonians represented an older and dominant tradition. The reverence of the Assyrians for Babylonian customs is best demonstrated by the fact that Babylonian was the literary dialect of Assyria. When Ashurbanipal was assembling his famous library in the

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<sup>1</sup> H.W.F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984): 2.

<sup>2</sup> The fertility of Assyria was famous enough in later antiquity to be noted by Herodotus (I, 193).

7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., most of the texts were collected in Babylonia, and they were written in the language of the south.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, these factors would complicate Assyrian relations with Babylonia during the era of Assyria's dominance of the Near East in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.



Map 1: Sites in ancient Mesopotamia

The Assyrians, of course, are best known from their later history as imperialists, and it is on this subject that I will focus much of my attention. Most of this chapter is devoted to a brief survey of the history of the Assyrians, along with an examination

<sup>3</sup> The library of Ashurbanipal is justly famous as the first of its kind. Ashurbanipal's efforts to collect the entire literary output of his culture has provided modern scholars with their best preserved examples of the masterworks of Akkadian literature, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh. The letters and administrative texts of the great Assyrian kings may have been written in their own dialect, but their libraries were built out of Babylonian compositions.

of the history of the Assyrians in western scholarship on antiquity. These sections will be preceded by a discussion of the sources that survive for the study of the Assyrians, and then followed by some indication of avenues for future research.

### SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF THE ASSYRIANS

The sources for the study of the Assyrians are especially rich. Just as significantly, these sources are becoming increasingly available to audiences beyond Assyriology. First, we have the results of archaeological excavations, chiefly the vast remains of the grand palaces of the Assyrian kings, including the extensive reliefs and statues with which those palaces were decorated. Second, the abundant textual record includes the administrative and archival tablets found in the palaces, along with collections of literary, religious, and medical texts such as those from the famous library of Ashurbanipal. The Assyrians also kept extensive king lists and eponym lists. In addition, we have the historical texts that survive inscribed on the walls of the palaces and written on clay prisms and cylinders. These records, primarily the annals of the kings and the details of their construction projects, are mirrored in the texts of surrounding societies, which often recorded a similar range of events.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the records that have survived are only a small percentage of the number originally preserved by the Assyrians. The Assyrian empire at the height of its power was a bilingual society in which a considerable percentage of the population spoke Aramaic. There is strong evidence that records were kept in both Akkadian and Aramaic, though records in the latter language have generally not survived. Most of what survives is written on clay and stone, but we know that the Assyrians

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<sup>4</sup> Obvious examples would be the records of Assyrian conquest preserved in the Biblical narrative, along with the Synchronistic History and Chronicles, which documented the long history of relations and conflict between the Babylonians and Assyrians.

of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. also wrote on wax writing boards, as well as on papyrus and leather. And yet, in spite of what has been destroyed, or what is left to be unearthed, I am not familiar with another imperial society in antiquity for which we have as diverse a textual record as that which survives of the Assyrians.

The nature of our sources compels me to add another note of caution. Our histories of Assyria are histories from above. The surviving records overwhelmingly document the activities of the king and his elite at court. We do not have a variety of sources from non-elite levels within the Assyrian Empire.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, this is largely the history of a male elite. There are rare exceptions, such as Esarhaddon's mother Queen Naqi'a/ Zakutu,<sup>6</sup> but for the most part the women of the Assyrian court are not prominently attested in the historical record.<sup>7</sup>

The various sources allow us first of all to provide a chronological framework for Assyrian imperialism: from the reign of Ashur-Uballit in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the destruction of Nineveh by the Medes and the Babylonians in 612 B.C. Many of these sources for the Assyrians, such as the Amarna Letters, are broadly familiar to ancient historians, but the full dimension of these varied corpora is only now being realized, along with their growing accessibility to audiences outside of Assyriology. Several projects have been underway for the past two decades that present much of the textual record from Assyria in well edited critical English translations. Two ventures are of significant note: The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia project

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of this topic, and of the problems and opportunities associated with Assyrian royal inscriptions, see M. Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History* (New York: Routledge, 1999): 40-59.

<sup>6</sup> See S. C. Melville, *The Role of Naqia / Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*. (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> The art historical record is a richer source of evidence on this subject. See, for example, the discussion of women in Assyrian narrative art in Z. Bahrani, *Women of Babylon* (New York: Routledge, 2001): 121-30.

at the University of Toronto, and the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus (State Archives of Assyria) project at the University of Helsinki. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia will eventually devote nine volumes to the Assyrian rulers, and the first three of these have already appeared.<sup>8</sup> The Assyrian royal inscriptions can already be found in English translation in two volumes by Daniel David Luckenbill, but the Toronto publications include recent editions of these texts in copy, transliteration and translation. The State Archives of Assyria will eventually publish all of the archival texts discovered in the excavations of Nineveh. This project has already presented 18 volumes of correspondence and administrative texts on topics ranging from military administration to letters to Assyrian and Babylonian scholars. A second series, presenting studies based on the text publications, offers 16 volumes on topics as diverse as judicial procedures, state administration, and religious ideology.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ASSYRIANS<sup>10</sup>

The ancient history of the Assyrians has been "periodized" in the traditional manner by modern scholars. A glance at any textbook on the ancient Near East will show index entries on the Old, Middle, and Neo-Assyrian periods. This tripartite division parallels the discussion of other ancient societies,

<sup>8</sup> For a list of the available publications, see: [www.utoronto.ca/nmc/rim/index.html](http://www.utoronto.ca/nmc/rim/index.html).

<sup>9</sup> For a complete list of the available publications in these series, see: [www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/cna.html](http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/cna.html).

<sup>10</sup> My intent here is not to provide a full chronicle of the Assyrians and their kings, but rather to offer a survey of the general trends in the history of Assyria as we currently understand them. In this chapter, I am following the Middle Chronology for Mesopotamian history, according to which, for example, Hammurabi ruled in Babylon from 1792-1750 B.C. General studies of the Assyrians can be found in recent textbooks, such as M. Van De Mieroop's *A History of the Ancient Near East* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004). Saggs 1984 remains the most comprehensive treatment of ancient Assyria, but it is now somewhat dated. For an excellent recent consideration of the Assyrians in the context of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. imperialism, see F. Joannès, *The Age of Empires, Mesopotamia in the First millennium B.C.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

and is ultimately derived from the technological schemes of archaeological scholarship, but it is an especially artificial imposition on the history of Assyria. The "periods" are in fact windows onto the Assyrian world that often capture no more than two or three centuries in the history of a society that spanned parts of three millennia.<sup>11</sup> The Old Assyrian period (c. 2000-c. 1800 B.C.), the Middle Assyrian period (c. 1400-c.1100) and the Neo-Assyrian period (c. 900-c. 600) are obviously the eras for which the modern scholar possesses the greatest abundance of documentary evidence. The margins of these periods are then blurred and stretched to create a continuous narrative of Assyrian history. There are certain continuities in language, culture, practice, and belief that appear to run through the millennia of Assyrian history, but, as we will see below, such a continuous narrative is not possible for ancient Assyria.

More recently, historians of the ancient Near East have focused less directly on the political histories of dynasties that made possible the formulation of our traditional periodization schemes. Looking instead at forms of political association, these historians and anthropologists have created a general view of Mesopotamian political development in which the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. was characterized by City-States, the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. largely by the growth of Territorial States, and the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. by the appearance of Empires.<sup>12</sup> This is a useful way of modeling the growth of societies in the ancient Near East, and the history of Assyria parallels the rest of the region in this respect. The danger in this scheme is that it may encourage the casual modern observer to assume a natural evolutionary process at work in the ancient Near East.

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<sup>11</sup> In this chapter, I am suggesting that the designations Old, Middle and Neo-Assyrian period are often of dubious historical value; however, these terms do have other significance within Assyriology as they denote separate dialects of the Assyrian language that are linguistically distinct.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Van De Mieroop 2004.

For some scholars, the division of Assyrian history is even simpler. A. Leo Oppenheim divided Assyrian history broadly into two phases: pre-imperialist and imperialist.<sup>13</sup> In his essay on Assyrian history, Oppenheim noted as a distinguishing feature the overwhelming militarization of society that was characteristic of the latter phase. At the same time, he pointed out certain obvious continuities in Assyrian history, among them language, kingship, and the cult of Ashur. The principle element of continuity in the development of Assyria was the city of Ashur itself. Though the city would be replaced at various times as the seat of kingship, Ashur remained the religious center of Assyrian society and the burial ground for its kings right down to the end.

The Assyrians themselves used two methods to organize and keep track of their own history, the Assyrian King List and the Eponym lists. The Assyrian King List, copies of which are extant from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C., provided the Assyrians with a record of their kings going back to the founding of the kingdom at Ashur in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.<sup>14</sup> The Assyrians also had a unique system for keeping track of the passage of years. Unlike their neighbors in southern Mesopotamia, where years were named for important events, such as the accession of a king or the building of a temple, the Assyrians named their years after an official, called *limmu* in Akkadian. Lists of these eponymous officials were maintained and became crucial administrative tools for the Assyrians.

The Assyrian King List presents modern scholars with insight into the manner in which the Assyrians regarded their own history. The list is by its nature a linear account of kingship in Assyria. Each king is given his claim to the throne as a result of his connection to predecessors on the list. This gave rise to

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<sup>13</sup> See A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia, Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1977): 163-70. This 'Essay on Assyrian History' is an excellent short introduction.

<sup>14</sup> For a list of the Assyrian Kings, see the appendix to Oppenheim 1977, or Van De Mieroop 2004: 294-6.

necessary fictions. For example, Shamshi-Adad was a conqueror from a neighboring region who seized power at Ashur in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (see below). He and his son Ishme-Dagan were incorporated into the Assyrian king list and given genealogies that directly connected them to the founding dynasty at Ashur.

The first evidence for the system of dating using year name officials comes from Karum-Kanesh in Anatolia during the Old Assyrian period (discussed below). At that time, the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C., the eponym officials appear to have been involved administratively in the overland commercial activities of the city. The eponym lists are best attested in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C., during the height of Assyrian power. In that later era, the eponym official occupied a more ceremonial role and there appears to have been a hierarchical rotation of eponym officials with the king being the eponym for his first year of reign.

### THE EARLY HISTORY OF ASSYRIA

Archaeological evidence indicates that cities such as Nineveh were inhabited already in the Neolithic period. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C., Assyria was presumably home to numerous agricultural villages. The prominent cities of Ashur, Nineveh and Arbela were firmly established well before 2500 B.C., including monumental public architecture. These cities make only occasional appearances in the historical record during the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C., largely as a result of the incursions of southern conquerors. The kingdom of Akkad, founded in southern Mesopotamia by Sargon in the 24<sup>th</sup> century, considered upper Mesopotamia to fall within its sphere of influence. The region of Assyria came under the sway of the Akkadians in their march to fulfill Sargon's ambition of washing his weapons in the upper and lower seas (the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf). Certainly, by the reign of the third ruler of the dynasty, Manishtushu (2269-2255 B.C.), both Nineveh and Ashur had

significant contact with the kingdom of Akkad, and the region may have been ruled directly by the southern conquerors.<sup>15</sup>

The collapse of the kingdom of Akkad took place early in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., and it was precipitated both by rebellion in the south of Mesopotamia, the area of the traditional Sumerian city-states, and by the invasion of the Gutians from the Zagros mountains. What impact this may have had on Assyria is largely unknown, as the period immediately after the fall of the kingdom of Akkad is poorly understood by modern scholars. What seems clear is that the former system of small independent city-states returned to Mesopotamia, and this was probably true for the Assyrian cities as well.

Within a century the whole of southern Mesopotamia was once again reunited, this time under a dynasty from the city of Ur. The era of the Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III period, 2112-2004 B.C.), provides some details for the early history of the Assyrians. The kings of Ur were perennially concerned about their frontiers, including Assyria. Many of the year names of the kings of Ur record their military victories. Twice, the Assyrian city of Urbilum (Erbil) appears in the year names as an object of conquest.<sup>16</sup>

The Ur III kings forged a kingdom that exercised dominion over most of Mesopotamia. They ruled directly over the lands of Sumer and Akkad in southern Mesopotamia, and they controlled a broader territory that included much of Assyria, the Diyala region, and parts of the Iranian plateau adjacent to Mesopotamia. The kings of Ur are famous among Assyriologists for the complexity of their administration and its record-keeping apparatus. This apparatus has left an enormous body of texts documenting their rule. The control of Sumer and Akkad was effected through the

<sup>15</sup> A copper spear point bearing a dedicatory inscription of a servant of Manishtushu was found at Ashur. See D. R. Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334-2113 B.C.)*, RIME Vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993): 82. There is also evidence from later inscriptions that Manishtushu built a temple dedicated to Ishtar at Nineveh.

<sup>16</sup> The 45<sup>th</sup> year of Shulgi's reign, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Amar-Suen's reign, were named for the destruction of Urbilum.

office of local governors (ensiks) who governed on behalf of the king. The peripheral lands were managed less directly through a military administration aimed at collecting tribute and ensuring loyalty.<sup>17</sup> Ashur and Urbilum were among the cities ruled in this way, though the latter clearly chafed under the rule of Ur. There are also several texts referring to a governor (ensik) of Ashur, and this may indicate that at one point Ashur was more fully incorporated into the political body of the state.

The historical record therefore indicates that the Assyrians fell under the hegemony of southern Mesopotamia during their early history. This early political domination may be a forerunner of the apparent cultural hegemony of southern Mesopotamia that characterizes much of the later history of the Assyrians. Only after the collapse of the Ur III state, at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C., do we begin to have access to significant amounts of historical evidence from Assyria. Not surprisingly, this is the moment that we also enter what is known as the Old Assyrian period. The latter stages of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. also witnessed the arrival in northern Mesopotamia of large groups of people speaking the Hurrian language. The Hurrians would later come to dominate Assyrian history for much of the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.

### THE OLD ASSYRIAN PERIOD

The Assyrians first make a noticeable impression in the historical record at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. with the extensive records of Assyrian trading colonies in Anatolia. At that time, the Near East was a patchwork of city-states and small kingdoms, some of which would develop into the larger territorial states that characterized the subsequent history of the region. For these small political entities, access to trade routes was a decisive

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<sup>17</sup> For a description of this system, see P. Steinkeller, "Administrative and Economic Organization of the Ur III State," in *The Organization of Power, Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East*, edited by McG. Gibson and R. Biggs, 15-33 (Chicago, IL: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1991).

factor in their growth. Strategic materials, such as copper and tin, had to be imported from outside of Mesopotamia, as did the precious metals that were often used to pay for them. In exchange, the Mesopotamians were able to provide processed goods, such as textiles and reed products, and occasionally livestock. Because of the vast distances involved in this exchange, the bulk agricultural goods that the Mesopotamians could produce in abundance were not practical commodities as trade goods.

The records from Anatolia bear witness to the commercial ventures of the Assyrians and their broad international connections. The city of Ashur itself was a transit point in a trading system that connected the areas to the east of Mesopotamia with both the Levant and Asia Minor. Our evidence for this trade comes primarily from the discovery of roughly 20,000 cuneiform tablets at the central Anatolian site of Karum-Kanesh (modern Kültepe).<sup>18</sup> These tablets document the trading activities of a colony of Assyrians. We are poorly informed about the social and political conditions in Anatolia at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C., but the texts indicate that the cities of Anatolia were ruled by native dynasties that actively promoted trade with Mesopotamia. This trade was largely in the hands of consortia of Assyrian traders. These consortia were often based on kinship groups that maintained a presence both in the Anatolia and at the city of Ashur. In addition to Karum-Kanesh, which appears to have been the largest of the trading colonies, the Assyrians maintained approximately 35 colonies and trading centers in Anatolia. Karum-Kanesh was the administrative and judicial center of this network of sites.

Excavations at Kültepe began in 1948, but the site was already known from the texts that had begun to appear on the antiquities market in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century AD. The texts were found in the lower city at Kültepe and come from two

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<sup>18</sup> For a general overview, see K. R. Veenhof, 'Kanesh: An Assyrian Colony in Anatolia,' in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol II, edited by J. Sasson, 859-71. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995).

distinct archaeological levels (Level II and Level IB) at the site. The majority of the texts come from Level II and cover a period of just over 100 years, from c. 1945 to c. 1835 B.C.<sup>19</sup> The smaller group of texts from Level IB date from c. 1810 to c. 1740 B.C., and is roughly contemporary with the dynasty established in Assyria by Shamshi-Adad (see below) and with Hammurabi's Babylon.

Karum-Kanesh was reached by donkey caravans from Ashur, roughly 1,000 kilometers away. The donkeys set out from Ashur loaded with tin and textiles. A donkey load usually consisted of roughly 65 kg of tin along with 10 kg of textiles. The loads carried by the donkeys were standardized and merchants could own a fractional share of a donkey-load.<sup>20</sup> The lengthy journey to Anatolia took six weeks and it was possible for the caravans to go through the passes in the Taurus mountains for much of the year. At the journey's end, both the goods and the donkeys would be sold in exchange for gold and silver. There were considerable risks involved in this trade, along with the need to pay taxes and duty on the goods in both Ashur and Anatolia as well as points in between, but the merchants who undertook these ventures could expect enormous profits, often exceeding 100 percent.<sup>21</sup> The Assyrian merchants formed partnerships for trading purposes, often for single journeys or for specific transactions. The texts from Karum-Kanesh allude to the complicated legal relationships that such partnerships involved. The partners shared the risks and rewards of the overland trading ventures. Each merchant

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<sup>19</sup> For a recent discussion of the texts from Karum-Kanesh in their archival context, see K. R. Veenhof "Archives of Old Assyrian Traders," in *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions, Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World*, edited by M. Brosius, 78-123. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> J. G. Dercksen *Old Assyrian Institutions* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabje Oosten, 2004): 278.

<sup>21</sup> The wealth of information contained in the texts from Karum-Kanesh has allowed scholars to reconstruct many of the technical details of the trade. See for example, the following studies: M. T. Larsen, *The Old-Assyrian City State and Its Colonies* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1976); M. T. Larsen, *The Assur-nada Archive* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabje Oosten, 2002); J. G. Dercksen, *The Old Assyrian Copper Trade in Anatolia* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabje Oosten, 1996); and Dercksen 2004.

acted on his own behalf and for the benefit of his family. The officials in both Ashur and Karum-Kanesh, however, exercised some authority over the merchants and their transactions. Disputes among the merchants were often resolved at Karum-Kanesh according to Assyrian law, and frequently based on rulings from Ashur.<sup>22</sup>

The archives of the Assyrian community at Karum-Kanesh document not only their commercial activities, but also their family lives. The merchants frequently wrote home to Ashur, and their correspondents were often wives who had been left behind. In fact, wives were partly responsible for the commercial success of their households. In addition to managing the household in the absence of their husbands, the wives of Assyrian merchants were sometimes responsible for producing and/ or collecting the textiles that were necessary for trade.<sup>23</sup>

During the Old Assyrian period, Ashur was ruled by a king. The king, along with various other officials of the city and the city assembly, was directly involved in the dealings of the merchants. Letters survive in which the king of Ashur communicates the verdict of the city assembly to the merchant community in Karum-Kanesh. We know less about the other affairs of both the city and the king during the 19<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The rich material from Kültepe has focused modern attention on the remarkable overland trade managed by the Old Assyrian merchants, and far less is known of the early political history of Assyria. We know that the focus of the Assyrians was not exclusively on the west. The tin that was loaded on the donkeys at Ashur came from the east and we can presume that an extensive network of trading partners existed across the Zagros mountains. To the south lay the traditional heartland of cities, and the rich cities of southern Mesopotamia were certainly a source of textiles.<sup>24</sup> For a time then,

<sup>22</sup> Veenhof 2003: 80-1.

<sup>23</sup> For some examples, see Van De Mieroop 2004: 92-3.

<sup>24</sup> Ilu-shuma, an early Assyrian king of the 19<sup>th</sup> century B.C., asserted that he had established freedom for the Akkadians (of southern Mesopotamia) from Ashur to the

the Assyrians were able to maintain trade and contact with a vast area of the ancient world in spite of the fact that the city of Ashur itself was relatively small and had no history of military success. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the situation would change as cities across the Near East began to contest for power over their neighbors. This era of conflict also coincides with the Level IB texts from Karum-Kanesh, and the smaller Assyrian archives of this period may indicate that they now played a more modest role in trade in Anatolia.<sup>25</sup>

Politically, we are best informed for this era about the reign of Shamshi-Adad (c. 1808-1776 B.C.) and his sons Ishme-Dagan and Yasmah-Adad. Much of our information comes from letters that survived in the palace archives at the city of Mari on the upper Euphrates. Mari was an important trading center in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. until its destruction by Hammurabi in the 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Shamshi-Adad was the king of Ekallatum, a city near Ashur. At the beginning of the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century B.C., he seized the throne of Ashur and began a period of conquest that left him in control of most of upper Mesopotamia, including Assyria and the cities of the upper Euphrates. To rule this new kingdom, Shamshi-Adad established his capital at Shubat-Enlil, in the northern Habur valley. He placed his sons in charge of different parts of the kingdom, with the elder Ishme-Dagan controlling Assyria from Ekallatum and the younger Yasmah-Adad governing Mari and its surroundings. The letters discovered at Mari document these arrangements, along with details of the administration of the kingdom, military expeditions, and the often difficult relations among the brothers and their father.<sup>26</sup> In a frequently cited letter, Shamshi-Adad took his younger son to task:

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Persian Gulf. This is almost certainly a reference to trading rights. For a translation and discussion of Ilu-shuma's inscription, see A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 B.C., Volume I* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 87.

<sup>25</sup> Veenhof 2003: 83.

<sup>26</sup> The letters that survive are those received by Yasmah-Adad at Mari, and they are richly detailed. We read, for example, of Ishme-Dagan's gratitude to his brother for

And yourself, how long shall we govern you? Are you truly a child? Are you not an adult? Is there no beard on your chin? How long will you neglect the administration of your house? Don't you see that your brother is leading vast armies? So, as for you, lead your palace and your house!<sup>27</sup>

Military control was essential to the success the kingdom, and both Shamshi-Adad and Ishme-Dagan boasted of their military successes in letters to Yasmah-Adad. Records of diplomacy, which are so abundant for southern Mesopotamia in the Old Babylonian period, also appear in the correspondence.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the growth of territorial states throughout the Near East ultimately surrounded upper Mesopotamia with a ring of competing kingdoms. To the south the kingdoms of Eshnunna, Babylon and Larsa battled for control of southern Mesopotamia. To the East, the kingdom of Elam renewed its interest in Mesopotamian affairs; and to the west were the wealthy kingdoms of coastal Syria, Qatna and Yamkhad. The strategic situation is best summed up in a famous letter from Mari that dates to shortly after the reign of Shamshi-Adad:

No king is truly powerful just on his own. Ten to fifteen kings follow Hammurabi of Babylon, Rim-Sin of Larsa, Ibal-pi-el of Eshnunna, or Amut-pi-el of Qatna; but twenty kings follow Yarim-Lim of Yamkhad.<sup>28</sup>

The success of Shamshi-Adad's kingdom relied heavily on his own charismatic rule and military success. Late in his life he appears to have been attacked by rival states from both the south and the west,<sup>29</sup> and his death around 1776 B.C. precipitated

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sending a physician. In another text, the king of Carchemish offers to send ice and wine to Yasmah-Adad at Mari. See A. Leo Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967): 108-9.

<sup>27</sup> P. Villard, "Shamshi-Adad and Sons," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol II, edited by J. Sasson, 881. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> J. Sasson, "King Hammurabi of Babylon," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol II, edited by J. Sasson, 906. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> A victory relief from this period notes a raid by Shamshi-Adad into the neighboring region of Arbela, indicating perhaps weakness and not strength. See M. Van De Mieroop, *Hammurabi of Babylon* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005): 8.

the collapse of his kingdom. Local dynasties quickly returned to power in cities like Mari, and Ishme-Dagan was able to maintain control only over Ekallatum and Ashur. At this point, Assyria again became prey to the struggles of outside powers, a situation that would persist for several centuries.

The long period between the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. is something of an Assyrian "Dark Age." As with similar designations elsewhere in antiquity, this "Dark Age" is largely a modern scholarly acknowledgement that we lack sufficient sources to write a history of Assyria in this era. The Assyrian King List, as noted above, offers no break in the continuous line of Assyrian rulers. The city of Ashur and its environs survived, possibly as an independent city-state, but the area fell under the influence of outsiders. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Assyria had lost its independence to the Mittani kingdom. The Mittani were a people of Hurrian descent who had established a powerful military state in northern Syria. The Mittani kingdom was contemporary with the Old Kingdom of the Hittites. The second king of the Hittite dynasty, Mursili I, had carried out a raid on Babylon at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. that ended the rule of Hammurabi's successors. The incursion of the Hittites into Mesopotamia must also have impacted the Assyrians, but our sources are silent on this matter.

The Late Bronze Age in the Near East, the beginning of which corresponds with the Assyrian "Dark Age", witnessed the appearance of large imperial states and the development of what scholars have called an "international age." Our characterization of this era is informed by the evidence from the Amarna Letters. These letters, found at Akhenaton's capital in middle Egypt, are records of the correspondence between the Egyptian pharaohs and both their vassals and allies in the Near East.<sup>30</sup> By 1500 B.C., four states controlled most of the territory of the Near East: Egypt, the Hittites, the Mittani, and Babylon under the Kassite dynasty. The

<sup>30</sup> See W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

international system recognized the rulers of these states as great kings. The great kings achieved their status, in part, because of the network of kings of smaller states whom they held in vassalage. The Assyrians were vassals of the Mittani for much of this period, perhaps down to the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. when the military successes of the Hittites under Suppiluliuma weakened the Mittani and allowed the Assyrians to regain their independence and a measure of control over upper Mesopotamia.

### THE MIDDLE ASSYRIAN PERIOD

The Middle Assyrian period, from perhaps the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C., marks the beginning of the imperial history of Assyria. The patterns for the remainder of the history of Assyria were established during this time at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. From this point onwards, the Assyrian king was a significant figure in the Near East. In fact, the division between the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods is the result largely of a brief period at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. when the Assyrians lost control of most of the territory in northern Mesopotamia outside of the heartland of their state.

The historical sources for the Middle Assyrian period are numerous and include royal inscriptions, administrative and economic records, and a set of laws.<sup>31</sup> Geographically, the Middle Assyrian kings forged what we call the heartland of Assyria by fully incorporating the fertile agricultural lands between Ashur, Nineveh, and Arbela into their state. This region would remain in the hands of the Assyrian kings down to the fall of Assyria in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The Middle Assyrian kings also conquered

<sup>31</sup> For a recent discussion of the Middle Assyrian archives, see J. N. Postgate, 'Documents in Government under the Middle Assyrian Kingdom,' in *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions, Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World*, edited by M. Brosius, 124-38. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 124-38. For the Middle Assyrian Laws and palace decrees, see M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, Second Edition* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1997): 153-209.

vast territories to the west, extending the boundaries of their state as far as Carchemish on the great bend of the Euphrates river;<sup>32</sup> and they intervened directly in the affairs of Kassite Babylonia to the south. At the same time, the ideology of Assyrian kingship based on campaigns and conquests was formed. The royal inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian kings already portray the kind of muscular kingship with which we are familiar from the later Assyrians of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.

The suddenness of the rise of Assyria at this time is something of a mystery.<sup>33</sup> The first king for whom we have an abundance of information is Ashur-uballit I (1363-1328 B.C.), and he is given much of the credit for these achievements by modern scholars. The explanation can be found in the strategic situation of the broader Near East, in the circumstances of Mittani domination of Assyria, and also in the decisive actions taken by Ashur-uballit and his successors. His kingship coincided with the collapse of the Mittani kingdom, and this clearly gave him greater freedom to act decisively in expanding Assyria. The conquests of the Hittite king Suppiluliuma led to the division of formerly Mittani lands in north Syria between the Hittites and the Assyrians. Ashur-uballit chose this moment to open correspondence with the Egyptian pharaoh, and his intent was clearly to join the circle of great kings.

Say to the king of Egypt: Thus Ashur-Uballit, the king of Assyria. For you, your household, for your country, for your chariots and your troops, may all go well. I send my messenger to visit you and to visit your country. Up to now, my predecessors have not written; today, I write to you. I send you a beautiful chariot, 2 horses, and 1 date-stone of genuine lapis-lazuli, as your greeting gift. Do not delay the messenger whom I send to you for a visit. He should visit and then leave for

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<sup>32</sup> These conquests in the 14<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. would form the basis for later Assyrian claims to western territories in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

<sup>33</sup> Of course, the abrupt rise of Assyria is also a product of our sources. Both the treaties between the Hittites and the Mittani and the later Babylonian Chronicles give some indications that earlier Assyrian kings may have already contested their subordinate status.

here. He should see what you are like, and what your country is like, and then leave for here. (EA 15)<sup>34</sup>

The ascendancy of the Assyrians went hand in hand with the decline of the Mittani, but it was the Babylonians who complained most vociferously about the presumption of the Assyrian king.

Now, as for my Assyrian vassals, I was not the one who sent them to you. Why on their own authority have they come to your country? If you love me, they will conduct no business whatsoever. Send them off to me empty-handed. (EA 9)<sup>35</sup>

This exchange of letters highlights two of the enduring characteristics of imperial Assyrian history: the centrality of the relationship with the Babylonians, along with the fierce political and military independence of the Assyrians. By the end of his reign Ashur-uballit had not only concluded a treaty with the Babylonians on equal terms, but he had also marched on Babylon to overthrow a usurper and install Kurigalzu II (a descendent of his daughter who had married the Kassite king) on the throne.<sup>36</sup>

The conquests of the Middle Assyrian kings had no immediate antecedent in Assyrian history. With the exception of the short-lived kingdom created by Shamshi-Adad, the Assyrians had no record of military endeavors. The notion of kingship including a divine right to conquest and rule over other people was an idea more at home in southern Mesopotamia where its pedigree stretched back to Sargon in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. This changed with the rule of Ashur-uballit, and this change was equally a product of the times. A catalyst for the expansion of Assyria can be found in the circumstances of their vassalage to the Mittani. Assyria had certainly been under foreign dominion in earlier times, notably going all the way back to dynasty of Sargon, but

<sup>34</sup> Moran 1992: 38.

<sup>35</sup> Moran 1992: 18.

<sup>36</sup> These events are recorded in later Babylonian chronicles. See A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000): 158-9; 171-2.

the Mittani appear in the records more as plunderers than rulers.<sup>37</sup> This is made clear in a treaty that was made between Shattiwaza of Mittani and the Hittite king Suppiluliuma. The treaty was prepared at a time when Mittani power had already waned, and it lamented that the Assyrians no longer paid tribute to the Mittani king, but it also recalled an earlier more glorious era.

Thus says Shattiwaza, son of Tushratta: The door of silver and gold which Saushtatar, my (great-)great-grandfather, took by force from the land of Assyria as a token of his glory and set up in his palace in the city of Washukanni—to his shame Shuttarna has now returned to the land of Assyria.<sup>38</sup>

What greater motivation did the Assyrian kings need for their conquests than to ensure that such actions would not be repeated? We can see in the Assyrian drive to the west, in the extension of their power as far as the Euphrates, an attempt to create a secure boundary for their state against the interference of outsiders. In the wake of the fall of the Mittani, the Assyrians moved to counteract the strength of the Hittites. To the north and east, the Assyrians expanded the heartland of their state and made Ashur more secure from the depredations of people coming down out of the mountains. Therefore, we can view the militarism of the Middle Assyrian kings as a form of defensive imperialism that will be familiar to scholars of ancient Rome. This militarism though was also a direct outgrowth of the Assyrian king's relationship with divine authority. The king, first and foremost, was the priest of Ashur and the royal inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian kings placed a heavy emphasis on demonstrations of piety. The most common royal inscriptions of this era recorded pious building activity.

Tukulti-Ninurta, king of the universe, strong king, king  
of Assyria, chosen of Ashur, vice-regent of Ashur, faithful

<sup>37</sup> We can contrast, for example, the efforts of foreign rulers such as Manishtushu and even Shamshi-Adad who built and restored temples at Ashur with the actions of the Mittani who took booty from that city.

<sup>38</sup> G. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts, Second Edition* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999): 49.

shepherd, loved one of the goddess of Ishtar, subduer of the land of the Qutu in their entirety...At that time the temple of the Assyrian Ishtar, my mistress, which Ilu-shumma, my forefather, vice-regent of Ashur, a king who had preceded me, had previously built—720 years had passed (and) that temple had become dilapidated and old....I cleared away its debris down to the bottom of the foundation pit....I made them more outstanding than before and made (the temple) as beautiful as a heavenly dwelling.<sup>39</sup>

The desire to create these records was in itself an act of piety, as the Assyrian kings sought to ensure recognition from the gods of their efforts. Indeed, the annals describing the military activities of the Assyrian kings, which are so prominent among the inscriptions of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C., had their origins in the temple building texts of this earlier time.<sup>40</sup> The two themes of conquest and pious building were intimately related. The building of the state by the king, and its protection, were therefore pious acts. The divine mandate associated with the king's religious function put a burden on the monarch to ensure the sanctity of Assyrian territory. This system placed great emphasis on the individual abilities of the king as leader and as warrior. A weak king ultimately posed a threat to the stability of the state. This danger was a recurring theme throughout the imperial history of Assyria. The 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C., though, was characterized by a series of energetic and successful kings who left behind extensive records of their activities. Adad-nirari I (1305-1274 B.C.), Shalmaneser I (1273-1244 B.C.), and Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207 B.C.) built on the achievements of Ashur-uballit and established the regional dominance of Assyria. During this century, the Assyrians became genuinely imperialistic in the

<sup>39</sup> A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia B.C. (to 1115 B.C.)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987): 254. This inscription continues, as was customary, with warnings to future rulers. 'May a later prince, when that temple becomes old and dilapidated, restore (it) .... (Then) the goddess Ishtar will listen to his prayers. As for one who removes my inscription and my name: May the goddess Ishtar, my mistress, break his weapon (and) hand him over to his enemies.'

<sup>40</sup> See Grayson 1987: 180 and his discussion of the inscriptions of Shalmaneser I.

sense that they expanded their conquests to include dominion over foreign peoples. At this time we also have the first evidence for encounters with the Urartians. These northern peoples from the area around Lake Van would be an ongoing source of concern and a growing threat to the Assyrian heartland. The policy of deporting subjects from one part of the state to another, a characteristic feature of later Assyrian imperial administration, apparently had its origins in the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. as well.<sup>41</sup>

One of the most striking events of this period, which was also echoed in the later history of the Assyrian empire, was the building of a new capital city by Tukulti-Ninurta I. Late in his reign, following successful campaigns against Babylonia, he built a new capital near Ashur but on the opposite bank of the Tigris. This city, Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, was to have been the new administrative center of the kingdom. He built a palace and a ziggurat dedicated to Ashur, but he was besieged there by a rebellious son and killed in his new palace. Support for the rebellion apparently came from the traditional Assyrian elite centered in the city of Ashur. Though he asserted, as we would expect, that he built his city at the command of Ashur, it is unclear exactly why Tukulti-Ninurta relocated to his new capital city. The move was possibly precipitated by tension between the king and the urban population at Ashur.<sup>42</sup>

The international era exemplified in the Amarna Letters was abruptly curtailed at the end of the Late Bronze Age. The collapse of the Hittite kingdom and the arrival of the "sea peoples" along the shores of the Levant were contemporary with this period of disruption beginning around 1200 B.C. This coincided roughly

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<sup>41</sup> Shalmaneser I noted that he had defeated the Urartians, who had rebelled against Ashur and the great gods, in their mountain strongholds. He also claimed to have taken 14,400 Hittites as captives. See Grayson 1987: 183-84. Tukulti-Ninurta claimed to have carried off 28,800 Hittites, see Grayson 1987: 272.

<sup>42</sup> Such tension was also a factor in the later imperial history of Assyria. The growing privileges that the urban population at the center of the empire extracted from the king, in exemptions from taxation and/ or service, created conflicts between the authority of the king and that of his citizens.

with the end of the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I and a time of unrest began in Assyria as well. The line of Assyrian kings remained unbroken, however, and it is clear that Mesopotamia was spared the direct impact of the crises that affected the broader Near East. The territory controlled by the kings of Assyria shrank, and our sources from Assyria in the early Iron Age become scarcer, but the region enjoyed greater political continuity and stability than most of its neighbors. This stability, coupled with the ideological role of kingship in their society, provided the platform for Assyrian success in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.

### THE NEO-ASSYRIAN PERIOD

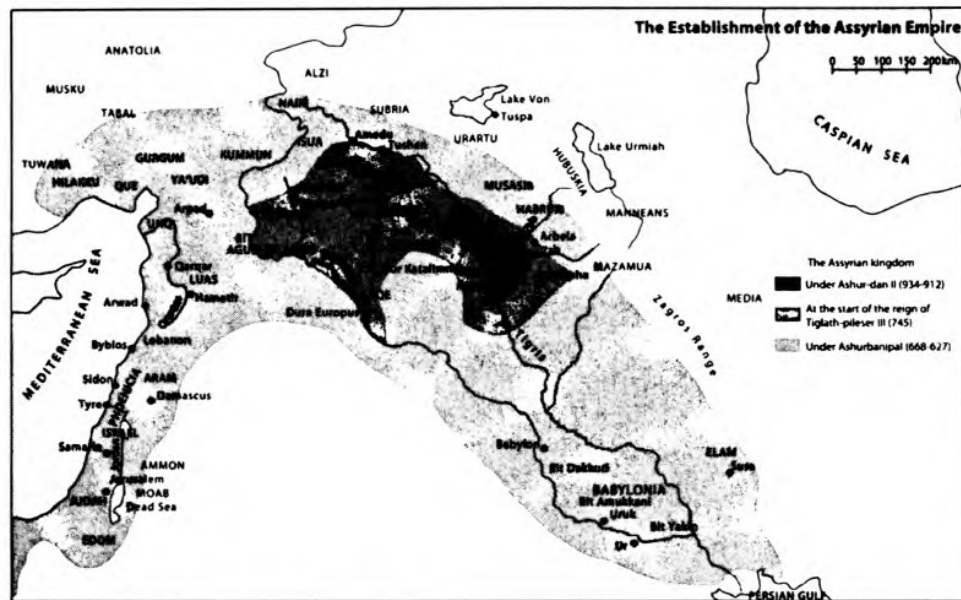
Marc Van De Mieroop has noted, "During the centuries from 1500 to 1200 the Near East became fully integrated in an international system that involved the entire region from western Iran to the Aegean sea, from Anatolia to Nubia."<sup>43</sup> As we have seen, by the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Assyria was very much a part of this international community. In the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C., the Assyrians became masters of this system. I have stressed the continuities between the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, but the tremendous expansion of the kingdom in the 9<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. created an imperial system on an entirely new scale.<sup>44</sup>

Initially, the Assyrian kings of the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. acted on the model of their 13<sup>th</sup> century predecessors. Renewed military campaigning began in earnest at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C. during the reign of Adad-nirari II (911-891 B.C.). He restored Assyria's dominant position in upper Mesopotamia by defeating the Babylonians and conquering large territories in northern Syria.<sup>45</sup> Adad-nirari II and his son Tukulti-Ninurta II

<sup>43</sup> Van De Mieroop 2004: 121.

<sup>44</sup> We should also note the singularity of each phase of Assyrian imperialism. The renewed militarism of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. may have resulted from the pressure created by Aramaean invasions, see Joannès 2004: 25-6.

<sup>45</sup> From this point onwards, we are fortunate that the custom of writing annals of



Map 2: Phases of Assyrian Imperial Territorial Expansion

(from Francis Joannès, *The Age of Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004): 28)  
 Permission to use this map was generously granted by the Edinburgh University Press, [www.uep.ed.ac.uk](http://www.uep.ed.ac.uk).

(890-884 B.C.) left behind records of the extensive tribute that they exacted from defeated territories. The systematic economic exploitation of their conquests, for which the Assyrians were renowned, began in earnest at this time. The wealth of the kings led to increasingly grandiose projects at the center of the empire. The need to project power into the periphery therefore acquired a material component in addition to its ideological rationale. This in turn led to the institution of the annual campaign of the Assyrian kings. These campaigns, which were lavishly recorded in the annals, were the lynchpin of Assyrian imperialism. During the summer season, after the harvest had been brought in, the king would raise a levy of troops from throughout the Assyrian countryside. He would then lead the army out against the enemies of Assyria. These campaigns served a number of purposes. First, they established both the martial prowess and the individual piety the campaigns of the king became the norm for the Assyrians. These annals were both carved in stone on reliefs, slabs, and stelae, and inscribed on clay, and they were frequently buried in foundation deposits.

of the king. His ability to triumph over outside forces and extract booty from them reinforced the success of his kingship. Second, the annual appearance of the Assyrian army reminded peripheral kingdoms of the power of the Assyrians and gave them an incentive to pay tribute. As the empire grew, the pattern of the campaigns had to be adjusted because the main army could not campaign in all directions at once. The energy of the annual campaigns often came to be focused against rebellious vassals.<sup>46</sup>

During the early phase of Neo-Assyrian imperialism, these trends culminated in the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) and Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.). From this time forward, the Assyrian kings claimed dominion over the known world. A clear sense of this can be gained from the beginning of Ashurnasirpal II's "Standard Inscription," which was inscribed across all of the walls of the public rooms of his palace.

The palace of Ashurnasirpal, vice-regent of Ashur, chosen of the gods Enlil and Ninurta, beloved of the gods Anu and Dagan, destructive weapon of the great gods, strong king, king of the universe, king of Assyria...valiant man who acts with the support of Ashur, his lord, and has no rival among princes of the four quarters, marvelous shepherd, fearless in battle, mighty flood-tide which has no opponent, the king who subdues those insubordinate to him, he who rules all peoples, strong male who treads on the necks of his foes, trampler of all enemies, he who breaks up the forces of the rebellious, the king who acts with the support of the great gods, his lords, and has conquered all lands, gained dominion over all the highlands and received their tribute, capturer of hostages, he who is victorious over all countries.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> The accounts of the campaigns against rebellious vassals included graphic descriptions of the brutality for which the Assyrians are renowned. The punishments inflicted on vanquished rebel leaders were frequently gruesome, featuring disfigurement and dismemberment. Additionally, the accounts of sieges are full of references to the impalement and decapitation of enemy soldiers (actions also visibly represented on Assyrian reliefs). At the same time, we must locate these actions within the general practices of warfare at that time, and in the desire of the Assyrians to use terror as a means of avoiding additional costly and bloody campaigning.

<sup>47</sup> A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First millennium B.C. I (1114-859 B.C.)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991): 275.

As his titles imply, Ashurnasirpal campaigned in all directions, carrying Assyrian arms as far as the Mediterranean sea, in which he claims to have washed his weapons after the fashion of the ancient kings of Mesopotamia. He asserted authority over an enormous area of the Near East. In practice, this often meant that conquered regions offered their submission and vassalage to the Assyrian king but retained a great degree of autonomy. Assyrian "rule" of conquered territory in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. has received frequent scholarly attention,<sup>48</sup> and it generally proceeded in regular stages. An initial defeat or submission to the Assyrian king resulted in a state of vassalage. The local ruler would remain in power with some autonomy as long as loyalty and tribute to Assyria were maintained. Any failure to honor the conditions of vassalage would result in a visit from the army at which point the Assyrian king would install a new ruler of whose loyalty he was more certain. Any subsequent revolt would end with the institution of direct Assyrian rule over the conquered territory as a province of the empire.<sup>49</sup>

The advantages of empire were enjoyed primarily by the Assyrian king and his elite. Ashurnasirpal II used the wealth and power that he amassed at the center of this system to construct a new capital north of Ashur at the Assyrian city of Kalhu (alt. Calah, modern Nimrud). He remade and enlarged the city and he built the Northwest Palace. The building of the palace was extensively recorded not only in the Standard Inscription that adorned its walls, but also in the famous "Banquet Stele," which detailed the celebration of its completion. The city was built on a grand scale and Ashurnasirpal endowed it with a full complement of temples. To complete the work and populate the region, he

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, A. K. Grayson, "Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Western Asia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol II, edited by J. Sasson, 959-68. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995). See also the section on the Neo-Assyrian Empire in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, edited by M. T. Larsen, 193-343 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979).

<sup>49</sup> This last stage is best attested during the later era of Assyrian imperialism from 745-612 B.C. For a brief discussion of this system, see Van De Mieroop 2004: 235, and Joannès 2004: 32.

resettled conquered people in Kalhu. The palace and its gardens were also filled with imported materials from the breadth of the kingdom. The extent of the palace may be judged from the size of its opening party.

When I consecrated the palace of Calah, 47,074 men (and) women who were invited from every part of my land, 5,000 dignitaries (and) envoys of the people of the lands Suhu, Hindanu, Patinu, Hatti, Tyre, Sidon, Gurgumu, Malidu, Hubusku, Gilzani, Kumm, (and) Musasiru, 16,000 people of Calah, (and) 1,500 *zariqu* of my palace, all of them—altogether 69,574 (including) those summoned from all lands and the people of Calah—for ten days I gave them food, I gave them drink, I had them bathed, I had them anointed. (thus) did I honor them (and) send them back to their lands in peace and joy.<sup>50</sup>

The awed guests and envoys presumably left the party with a healthy respect for the might and grandeur of Ashurnasirpal II's court and kingdom.

Ashurnasirpal II's successor, Shalmaneser III, was also a vigorous campaigner and he sought to shore up Assyria's territorial and economic position in the Near East. Shalmaneser III's "Black Obelisk," offers testimony in both text and images to his success.<sup>51</sup> The obelisk is carved with five scenes of tribute being delivered to Shalmaneser. The scenes depict all manner of goods being brought to the Assyrian king, including elephants, monkeys and camels from the rulers of lands stretching from Iran to Egypt. The captions identify the origin of the tribute and virtually the "four quarters" referred to in Assyrian inscriptions are represented. Famously, the obelisk includes tribute from Jehu, king of Israel, who bows in submission before the king. The power of the Assyrians was not uncontested. Shalmaneser III's annals show that the beginning of his reign was occupied with struggles against a coalition of Syrian and Levantine kings.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Grayson 1991: 293.

<sup>51</sup> The Black Obelisk is part of the British Museum's ancient Near Eastern collection and can be found in their online database at [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass).

<sup>52</sup> In repeated campaigns, the Assyrians dealt blows to these smaller kingdom, culminating in the battle of Qarqar, at which Shalmaneser III claimed to have defeated

Throughout the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Assyrians maintained strong relations with Babylonia. Adad-nirari II had fixed the boundary between the two kingdoms, and they became allies. The Babylonian king Marduk-zakir-shumi was compelled to call upon Shalmaneser III in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century to quell a rebellion led by his younger brother. Shalmaneser III successfully intervened and also campaigned in the far south against Chaldean tribesmen. It is unclear whether these events solidified an alliance with the Babylonian king or established the Assyrians as the dominant partner. A throne base found at Shalmaneser III's palace at Kalhu depicts the two kings shaking or slapping hands, apparently as equals. This object is remarkable among Assyrian reliefs and sculptures in its departure from the presentation of the king as the superior to all who surround him. In view of Shalmaneser III's apparent military superiority, we may see here a vestige of the profound respect that the Assyrians had toward their southern neighbors.

Shalmaneser III may also have been responsible for the establishment of the standing army. During his reign, he constructed the first *ekal masharti* (review palace) at Kalhu. This building was a combination arsenal, barracks and training ground. Additionally, it served as the headquarters of the standing army. The last few years of Shalmaneser III's reign were characterized by a rebellion that continued after his death. The rebellion was probably ignited by conflicts among Shalmaneser III's family and by the growing power of elite officials at the Assyrian court. The revolt involved most of the urban centers of Assyria. A notable exception to this pattern of revolt was the royal citadel of Kalhu. This steadfast loyalty should be ascribed to the presence of the standing army.

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an enemy force numbering over 60,000. This included the army of Ahab, king of Israel, a predecessor of Jehu. The claims made by the Assyrian kings must always be treated with some skepticism, and, in spite of this victory, Shalmaneser III was still facing opposition in Syria until late in his reign.

For roughly three generations, from the death of Shalmaneser III (824 B.C.) to the accession of Tiglath-pileser III (744 B.C.), Assyria was ruled by a succession of weak kings.<sup>53</sup> At this time several provinces were lost to the Assyrians and the rule of these provinces was usurped by the hereditary governors who had originally been appointed by the king. This period of collapse was halted by Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 B.C.), who is considered by some to have been the founder of the Neo-Assyrian empire with which modern biblical scholars are familiar. Undoubtedly, he carried Assyrian arms farther than they had ever been before (see Map 2 above). He also instituted many of the military and civil reforms that enabled the empire to remain on a stable footing for the next 120 years. Chief among his innovations were the abolition of hereditary governorships and the separation of military and economic responsibilities within provincial administration. The standing army was vastly improved with the creation of the permanent royal army, *kitsir sharruti*. This unit formed a part of the larger permanent army but was a distinct segment of the whole that was immediately responsible to the king and was headquartered at his court. A principal accomplishment of Tiglath-pileser III was his complete subjugation of the Ituaean. The Ituaean was an Aramaic tribe that had harried the empire from an area to the south of Ashur. Following their capitulation they were absorbed into the empire but maintained as a distinct military unit. The Ituaean is often described as military policeman, but they clearly constituted a highly mobile and versatile branch of the standing army. Their services were required as military escorts throughout the empire and they were sent to areas of unrest to restore order.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> It was during this era that Sammuramat (Semiramis to the Greeks, see, for example, Herodotus I, 185), the mother of Adad-nirari III, ruled briefly while her son was still a minor.

<sup>54</sup> The use of these Aramaean units also allowed for flexibility in Assyrian control of conquered territory. Generally, the Assyrians had success in controlling subject territories through the conquest of urban centers and the subordination of urban elites. The Assyrians had the greatest difficulty in controlling areas that lacked prominent urban centers. Good examples can be found in the southern Mesopotamia, where the Assyrians struggled for generations to subdue Chaldean tribes.

For the fulfillment of his military goals, the Assyrian king had massive resources at his disposal. For a grand campaign a general levy might be mustered. This created an army in excess of 100,000 men. The most important troops, from the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. onwards, were the growing number of professional soldiers of the standing army. The increasing need of the army for personnel grew out of the mounting imperial pressures on the manpower of the military. The territorial expansion of the empire brought with it new responsibilities that had to be satisfied by the army. The garrisons of the frontier outposts and provincial centers had to be maintained on a permanent basis. Foreign conscripts saw the bulk of their service in such outposts since they could be diffused throughout the empire, exchanging their former territorial loyalties for allegiance to the larger imperial community. Moreover, the increased practice of large scale deportations required large military escorts to ensure that the deportees reached the chosen destination.

The standing army continued to grow and adapt to the changing imperial needs of the Assyrian kings. The permanent units of the army, both royal and provincial, had their own craftsmen, scribes and administrative personnel. Among the provincial units, the supply of the troops was the responsibility of the local governors and this became one of their main concerns. As we would expect, the royal elite dominated the upper echelons of the imperial army. Control of the Neo-Assyrian military establishment was centered around an officer corps made up of high court officials. The reforms of Tiglath-pileser III removed much of the authority that had gathered around provincial offices. These appointments were no longer hereditary, but passed to trusted members of the military and civil hierarchies.

The creation of the large standing army in response to growing imperial requirements changed the nature of Assyrian social organization. Though the military had always played a prominent role in Assyrian society, the potential for social advancement through a career in the army reached new heights following the

reign of Tiglath-pileser III. Moreover, the widespread inclusion of foreign conscripts and recruits changed the ethnic constitution of the army entirely. Most foreigners in the Assyrian army did not serve in national groups but were spread throughout the garrisons and barracks of the standing army; however, some units were allowed to remain intact.<sup>55</sup>

During his reign, Tiglath-pileser III had himself crowned king of Babylon, and this practice was continued by his successor, Shalmaneser V (726 - 722 B.C.). Though the relationship between Assyria and Babylonia was always more complicated than Assyria's relationship with other areas, this change was also indicative of a new direction of Assyrian imperialism. Under Tiglath-pileser III and his successors, Assyria enjoyed tremendous territorial expansion and adopted more direct forms of rule over that territory. The fifty years following the accession of Tiglath-pileser III witnessed the subjugation of the numerous Syrian, Phoenician, Philistine, and Israelite states in the west, the majority of which would ultimately become incorporated into the empire as provinces. This era also saw the beginning of large scale deportations.<sup>56</sup>

The death of Shalmaneser V brought Sargon II (721-705 B.C.) to the Assyrian throne under circumstances that are not clear to modern scholars. Sargon, as his name implies, was not the

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<sup>55</sup> For example, Urartian cavalry units and Samarian chariotry units served undivided in the Assyrian army, probably as a result of their professional competence. The Samarian officers even served in the royal standing army and some held prominent court appointments, including horse-trainer for the Crown Prince. See S. Dalley, "Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry in the Armies of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 41.

<sup>56</sup> The practice of deportation reached its height in the era between 745-610 B.C. Joannès 2004: 59 provides a good summary: "Sources document 157 deportations between the ninth and seventh centuries, with a total of some 1,320,000 people, but it may be estimated that in reality the number was nearer 4,500,000. If the kings of the early eighth century deported by tens of thousands, except under Shalmaneser III when more than 160,000 people were victims, the figure rose to nearly 400,000 during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, and almost 470,000 under Sennacherib." On this topic, see, B. Oded, *Mass Deportation and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979.)

legitimate heir to the throne, but his military prowess made him a natural successor to the empire created by Tiglath-pileser III.<sup>57</sup> By the beginning of the reign of Sargon II, Assyria had achieved dominion over much of the Near East by successfully conquering the network of smaller kingdoms to the West, and by subjugating many of the tribal groups along her borders. At this point, the political concerns of the Assyrians were focused more directly on the other powerful kingdoms of the Near East that might pose a threat to continued expansion, in particular Urartu, Babylonia, Egypt, and Elam.

The effective deployment of the Assyrian military machine reached its height during the reign of Sargon II. Under his command the army established firm control of the Near East from the Persian Gulf to the borders of Egypt. Sargon's Eighth Campaign resulted in the massive defeat of Assyria's chief rivals, the Urartians, and following this victory the northern frontier of Assyria was never again seriously threatened. Under Sargon II's leadership the imperial road system flourished, and the greatest number of royal letters have survived from his reign. The remainder of the Neo-Assyrian period is known as the Sargonid era, after Sargon and his successors; and this era saw the peak of the territorial and commercial achievements of Assyrian militarism.<sup>58</sup> Sargon II also followed the model of his predecessors in lavish building projects. Like Tukulti-Ninurta I and Ashurnasirpal II, he constructed a new imperial capital. Dur Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad), the fortress of Sargon, was built to the north of Nimrud over a period of 10 years. As had happened with Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, though, the city was abandoned shortly after the death of its founder, who was killed on the battlefield.

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<sup>57</sup> Sargon, Sharru-kenu, or the "true king" in Akkadian, was a name adopted by usurpers.

<sup>58</sup> The Sargonid kings (Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal) have also left us the most complete records of their reigns.

Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.) succeeded his father and we have detailed accounts of his campaigns in the annals that he left behind and in the reliefs that adorned his new palace at Nineveh. Perhaps seeking to avoid his father's fate, Sennacherib abandoned Dur Sharrukin and established his capital at the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh.<sup>59</sup> He was also occupied in maintaining the state that he had inherited. In his early campaigns, Sennacherib dealt successfully with rebellion in the west, though these actions included an unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem. More significantly, his attention was focused on Babylonia. Throughout his reign, Sennacherib was compelled to deal with unrest in southern Mesopotamia. The Chaldean tribes, often in alliance with the Elamite king, succeeded in stirring up the countryside against the Assyrians, who enjoyed considerable support in the traditional urban centers of Babylonia.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, in a series of bloody campaigns, Sennacherib vanquished all of his rivals in the south. Instead of imposing a new ruler on Babylon, he opted to destroy the city.<sup>61</sup> His annals record that he diverted the water of the canals into the city to wash away even the foundations of the buildings. Sennacherib's death at the hands of his sons was thus celebrated as divine justice by sources as disparate as the Hebrew Bible and the Babylonian Chronicles.

In spite of the assassination of his father and the resulting unrest, Sennacherib's chosen heir, Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.) succeeded his father. The military successes of Esarhaddon's reign included the conquest of Egypt in 671 B.C., which culminated in the capture of the city of Memphis. He rebuilt the city of Babylon, and his solution to both the Babylonian problem and to problems

<sup>59</sup> Sennacherib labeled his new construction the 'palace without rival,' and of course he claimed divine sanction for his actions. Nineveh remained the capital until the fall of Assyria.

<sup>60</sup> Sennacherib's chief rival was the Chaldean Marduk-apla-iddina II, who appears in the Bible as Merodach-baladan.

<sup>61</sup> Sennacherib's eldest son, Ashur-nadin-shumi, who had earlier been appointed king of Babylon, had been taken as a captive from Babylon by the Elamites in 694 B.C. Some have suggested this as an additional impetus for Sennacherib's destruction of the city.

of succession within the Assyrian royal family was to declare that one of his sons would succeed him on the two different thrones. Ashurbanipal was named crown prince of Assyria, and his brother Shamash-shuma-ukin was declared crown prince of Babylon.

Esarhaddon's reputation among modern observers is that of a superstitious and illness prone monarch. Indeed, his rebuilding of Babylon is most often characterized as an effort to atone for the apparent sins of his father. The extent to which the fortunes of the monarch were considered to be subject to divine authority is demonstrated by the institution of the substitute king.<sup>62</sup> The use of substitute kings had a long history in Mesopotamia; however, substitute kings were employed with unprecedented frequency during the reign of Esarhaddon. The Assyrians, along with their Babylonian neighbors, practiced numerous forms of divination and omen reading.<sup>63</sup> Forecasts based on astronomical events were understood to be of particular importance to the king, and certain events, especially eclipses, could portend danger for the monarch. When the death of the king was predicted by the court astrologers, the solution was to enthrone a substitute king for a period of time to absorb the danger in lieu of the real king. The substitute king would then be killed, thus bringing the predicted ill omen to fruition. During his relatively brief period on the throne, Esarhaddon employed a substitute king six times (and two further instances were recorded during the reign of his son Ashurbanipal). The astrologers were part of a select group of highly literate individuals at the Assyrian court whose role was to gather information for the king from both the natural and the divine worlds.

The careful records kept by the experts at court, and the extensive correspondence of scholars throughout the urban

<sup>62</sup> For a general introduction, see the chapter, "The Substitute King and His Fate," in J. Bottéro, *Mesopotamia, Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 138-55.

<sup>63</sup> Virtually no actions were undertaken by the Assyrian kings, from building to campaigning, without consulting the court diviners and astrologers to confirm that the proposed activity had the sanction of the gods.

centers of the empire, indicate that we have evidence for something more than a superstitious archaic practice. What we witness in these documents, along with the blending of the divine and the quotidian, is nothing less than a rigorous attempt by Babylonian and Assyrian intellectuals to better understand and explain the world around them. This drive reached its culmination under the patronage of Esarhaddon's successor Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.). Ashurbanipal was a king and conqueror on par with his ancestors, but his most notable achievement from a modern historical perspective was the assembly of his famous library. He sent his representatives into temples and homes in Babylonia in search of the collected knowledge of his society. The tablets assembled in the library included the literary texts and epics with which we are familiar, along with lexical lists, omen series, medical texts, rituals and incantations, and bilingual texts in Akkadian and Sumerian. Ashurbanipal noted with pride that he had mastered the scribal arts, no mean claim in an era that was characterized by widespread illiteracy among the elite.<sup>64</sup> The concern for preserving the traditions of the past that is evident in Ashurbanipal's library had a long history among the kings of Mesopotamia. The rebuilding of temples, for which we have so much evidence in royal inscriptions, was accompanied by efforts to discover the history of the building and to pay appropriate homage to earlier builders and restorers.

Esarhaddon's scheme of dividing the kingship of Assyria and Babylonia between his sons was initially successful. At the outset of his reign, Ashurbanipal was occupied with the reconquest of Egypt, and the Assyrians once again succeeded in taking Memphis.<sup>65</sup> In 652 B.C., Shamash-shuma-ukin went to war against his younger brother with the support of the Elamite

<sup>64</sup> Ashurbanipal's assertion echoed that of Shulgi of Ur (2094-2047 B.C.), who claimed to possess similar knowledge of the learning and scholarship of the cuneiform tradition.

<sup>65</sup> A second campaign in Egypt resulted in the sack of Thebes by the Assyrians, but Ashurbanipal removed his forces from Egypt, content to rely on the loyalty of Egyptian vassals in Lower Egypt.

king. A civil war raged in Mesopotamia for four years before Ashurbanipal, after repeated campaigns, was able to subdue Babylon in a siege that took the life of his brother and rival. After his successes in the south, Ashurbanipal turned his attention to his brother's ally to the east. Two campaigns ensued against Elam, which resulted in the sack of Susa by the Assyrians.

The death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C. upset the balance between Assyria and Babylonia. After 40 years of strong rule, Assyria fell prey to weak kings and civil war. Two sons of Ashurbanipal succeeded him on the throne, Ashur-etel-ilani (627-623 B.C.) and Sin-shar-ishkun (622-612 B.C.). This coincided with the rise of a strong ruler in Babylon, Nabopolassar, who founded the Neo-Babylonian dynasty. At the same time, in the east, the Medes expanded their influence in the wake of the defeat of the Elamites. The Babylonians and the Medes established an alliance following separate attempts to conquer the heartland of Assyria.<sup>66</sup> In 612 B.C., the city of Nineveh fell to this alliance and was completely destroyed. The last king of Assyria, Ashur-uballit II fled to the Syrian city of Harran, but Assyrian resistance there had died out by 609 B.C.

The sudden collapse of the empire was complete, and the Assyrians appear to have been victims of their own tremendous success. The wealth that the Assyrians had extracted from their vast empire had led to the construction of their elaborate cities, but the traditional citizenry of Assyria had also acquired numerous privileges at the expense of the king. The increasing reliance of the kings on non-Assyrians may then have weakened the resiliency of their power.

Assyrian militarism, and the expansionist ideological imperatives behind it, forced the Assyrians into a perpetual quest to expand their empire. This created enormous logistical problems. Moreover, conquered peoples may have entered the

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<sup>66</sup> In 615 B.C., the Babylonians had unsuccessfully besieged Ashur, and that city had fallen the following year to the Medes.

army, but ultimately they had little real access to power. In spite of their incorporation into the army and the military elite, the defeated were not treated as Assyrians.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, they did not develop any real loyalties to the empire. Additionally, their conquests had destroyed so many of their traditional foes that the Assyrians had created space for the arrival of a new power in the Medes. Perhaps most significantly, the Assyrians were prey to the re-emergence of strong kingship in Babylon. The end of Assyria was abrupt rather than indistinct. The region of Assyria was not entirely abandoned after the fall of Nineveh, but the urban centers were destroyed and the culture and language of the Assyrians passed into memory.

### THE ASSYRIANS AND THE WEST, TWO VIEWS

The traditional view of the Assyrians, both among ancient historians and Biblical scholars, has been influenced by the portrayal of Assyrian imperialism in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>68</sup> A good example can be found in 2 Kings 19.17-19:

Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have hurled their gods into the fire, though they were no gods but the work of human hands—wood and stone—and so they were destroyed. So now, O Lord our God, save us, I pray, from his hand, so that all kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.

Perhaps the most enduring literary image of the Assyrians comes from Lord Byron's poem, *The Destruction of Sennacherib*, which begins with the famous lines:

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold

<sup>67</sup> The notions of divinely inspired dominion that lay at the heart of Assyrian royal ideology could hardly have allowed the conquered people to enjoy the same rights as the conquerors.

<sup>68</sup> We can see the continued influence of the Bible in the very names of the Assyrian kings. The most prominent of the Assyrian kings are known to us not by their Akkadian names, but rather by the Biblical interpretation of those names. Thus, Sin-ahhe-eriba remains Sennacherib, and Shulmanu-ashared remains Shalmaneser, etc.

Even today, one of the most frequently used Western Civ college textbooks begins its discussion of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. imperialism with the following statement, "...in the ninth century, they [the Assyrians] would extend their power and influence by means of a terrible, brutal, long-lasting, and systematic victimization of their neighbors."<sup>69</sup> The authors go on to say, however, that "Its terrors notwithstanding, their aggression helped to shape the religious and political traditions of their neighbors, spreading Near Eastern culture to the Aegean basin, synthesizing a new type of imperial organization, and imparting important lessons about what did and did not make for successful governance of a far-flung empire."<sup>70</sup> This same source notes of the vanguard of the Assyrian army that they were "storm troopers."<sup>71</sup>

Certainly, the brutality of the Assyrians was very real, as was their apparent ability to take pride in actions that we regard as cruel and barbarous. In countless inscriptions and reliefs, the Assyrians describe and depict the torture and slaughter of their enemies in frightening detail.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, our focus on this topic obscures our ability to view Assyrian imperialism in the broader context of the history of the ancient Near East. Moreover, concentrating on the stereotype of the vicious Assyrian prevents us from making better use of the historical data they have left behind. The Assyrian empire was more than just a cautionary tale about political violence, it was a dynamic socio-economic system that had a tremendous impact on world history.

The Assyrians have also fit into traditional scholarly notions of the eastern as "other." Alongside the biblical depiction of the

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<sup>69</sup> Coffin et al, *Western Civilizations, Volume 1* (New York: Norton, 2002): 92-3.

<sup>70</sup> Coffin et al 2002: 92-3.

<sup>71</sup> Coffin et al 2002: 97.

<sup>72</sup> In a paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the AHA in January 2004, the Assyriologist Eckart Frahm noted that the Assyrians may have been unique in antiquity in that the majority of their literary output was devoted to celebrating military activity. He went on to suggest that the Assyrian rhetoric of war may have shaped the manner in which they fought.

Assyrians as cruel and barbarous, the scholarship of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries presented an Orientalist view of the Assyrians and their court.<sup>73</sup> According to this vision, the Assyrians presented a static and despotic alternative to the more dynamic civilizations that arose in the Mediterranean.<sup>74</sup> The Orientalist view of the east was buttressed by Marxist interpretations of the ancient world that relied on the presentation of an "Asiatic Mode of Production."<sup>75</sup> By definition, this interpretation of the past required that the "great" civilizations of the ancient Near East relied on institutions that were fundamentally different from those of the west. In particular, the system was assumed to rely on the absolute authority of the king and on his abuse of that authority. Certainly, we have demonstrated the extent to which Assyrian society relied on loyalty to, and identification with, the figure of the king; but this was not the irrational and decadent world often imagined by western observers.

Let me be clear, my purpose is not to rehabilitate the Assyrians, in the fashion of H.W.F. Saggs, but to highlight the ways in which we can go beyond traditional views. Both modern studies and biblical lore have tended to regard the warlike Assyrians with a

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<sup>73</sup> Among Classical sources we also encounter familiar presentations of the eastern monarchies as decadent, sensuous, and dangerous. This was especially true for the Greek view of the Persians, but it is apparent that the Assyrians were regarded as an earlier template for Persian behavior. The tendency to regard the east as monolithic, and thus to make few distinctions among Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians undoubtedly influenced modern views of the ancient Near East.

<sup>74</sup> See M. T. Larsen, "Orientalism and Near Eastern Archaeology," in *Domination and Resistance*, edited by D. Miller, M. Rowlands, and C. Tilley, 229-39 (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989). On page 233, Larsen notes, "Another metaphor has been the torch of civilization, lit originally in the ancient Near East, and passed from hand to hand until it ended in Greece and Europe. However, there was a built in ambiguity, since the great civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt were seen both as the origins of Western cultural, social and religious traditions, and as the greatest contrast to the West—monolithic, despotic states compared with the individualism, democracy and entrepreneurial spirit of Europe."

<sup>75</sup> Karl Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) has been perhaps the most persuasive elaboration of these ideas. Though the system described by Wittfogel, with its dependence on the king's control of hydraulic resources, is more at home in southern Mesopotamia, the idea of the oriental despot adheres to the kings of Assyria.

wary eye, while recognizing that the Neo-Assyrian empire of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. presents a model that was emulated in later eras of antiquity by numerous imperial societies. Fortunately, recent scholarship on the Assyrians is allowing us to produce a more complete picture of the ancient inhabitants of northern Mesopotamia.

### AVENUES FOR RESEARCH ON THE ASSYRIANS

Current trends in the study of the Assyrians are making possible a broad range of opportunities for future research. The side by side efforts to make the primary source material widely available in good critical editions as well as to present detailed monographic treatments of this material illustrates the current vibrancy of Assyriology. As the discipline matures, a deeper, more critical, and more theoretical approach to the history of the ancient Near East is becoming the norm. The variety of subjects treated in the State Archives of Assyria Studies series is a good illustration of the potential for new work.<sup>76</sup> Recently, the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* devoted its annual meeting to the subject of Nineveh, and this continues a trend of scholarly meetings and symposia on Assyrian topics.<sup>77</sup> The tendency among scholars is to focus on the imperial political and administrative history of Assyria (and this chapter does not represent a departure from this norm), but the varied corpora of material from Assyria are allowing for a more extensive exploration of Assyrian society. The literary texts, and the fragments of texts, from the library of Ashurbanipal have made possible the recent definitive publication of the Epic of Gilgamesh.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the scholarly, medical, and religious

<sup>76</sup> The list of SAAS publications is available at [www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/saas.html](http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/saas.html).

<sup>77</sup> The conference proceedings appear in *Nineveh: Papers of the XLIXe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, London 7-11 July 2003* edited by D. Collon and A. R. George (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2005). See also, *Ritual and Politics in Ancient Mesopotamia*, edited by B. N. Porter (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2005), and *Assyria 1995*, edited by S. Parpola and R. Whiting (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997).

<sup>78</sup> A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

traditions of ancient Mesopotamia are well represented in the late Assyrian texts and are garnering increased attention not only from cuneiform specialists.

The opportunity to engage in comparative studies with other regions in antiquity is among the more exciting trends in current work. The unique position of the Assyrians as early imperialists with a rich historical and archaeological record should allow for an ongoing reassessment of their position in the history of the Near East, as well as their broader presence in world history. Specifically, studies focusing on comparative imperialism, the economic bases and catalysts for imperialism, and the ideology of imperialism in antiquity should engage the Assyrian evidence in detail.

If we take the example of ideology, the sources cited in the previous sections illustrate the central importance of the figure of the king in the ideology of the Assyrian empire. Within Assyria, the king was not only a secular military leader, he was also the chief priest of the gods, and his was a responsibility for the whole of society. This was a society that personified its imperial values in the figure of the king. His abilities to lead annual campaigns, to extract booty from the periphery, and to maintain society's relationship with the gods, were the keys to Assyria's success. Clearly, the language of domination was part of the presentation of Assyrian kingship, and it highlights an ideology predicated on Assyrian control of the lands surrounding their heartland, the four quarters to which the inscriptions refer. This language had a long history in Mesopotamia, going back to the reign of the original Sargon of Akkad in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. However, the Assyrians were able to translate this language into real domination on a grander scale than had previously been seen.

Critical to this domination was the projection or depiction of the king's power over the four quarters, over the "outside world," within the heartland of Assyria. The physical manifestations of this power were the cities, palaces, and parks erected by the kings. The palaces of the kings, decorated with their famous reliefs, were

symbols of the grandeur of empire. As such, they came to reflect the empire. Ashurnasirpal II, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C., recorded the extensive efforts made to build his palace. These efforts included decorating the palace with products from the periphery of the empire. Work on his palace took 15 years, and it was lavishly recorded in royal inscriptions. Within the palace, text and image were combined to demonstrate the king's control of his extensive empire. The message was clear: the king of Assyria held sway over the environment in and around Assyria.<sup>79</sup>

Adjacent to their palaces, the Assyrians built extensive canals and gardens. The kings spared no effort in setting these amenities alongside their grandiose palaces. Sennacherib went to enormous lengths to transform the very topography of parts of Nineveh in order to construct his palace and then to water his gardens. He built his "Palace without Rival" and then, "A great park, like unto Mount Amanus, wherein were set out all kinds of herbs and fruit trees, such as grow on the mountains and in Chaldea, I planted by its side."<sup>80</sup> These parks became botanical and zoological maps of the empire, in which the Assyrian kings made clear their control of the periphery by bringing it to the center. Of course, as we would expect from the Assyrians, this control was also shown in less subtle ways. In an image of Ashurbanipal at rest in his garden, we can see the head of a defeated Elamite king hanging in a tree on the left side of the scene. And yet, if we focus only on the brutality of the Assyrians, then we ignore both the various means by which they sought to effect their control of a vast empire as well as the ideology behind the desire for that control.

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<sup>79</sup> The British Museum website ([www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass)) provides a wonderful online collection of Neo-Assyrian reliefs that is searchable through their Compass database program. Images of the full range of royal activities, including warfare, hunting, and building, are available online. In particular, reliefs showing Ashurnasirpal receiving tribute and Ashurbanipal reclining in his garden illustrate the points I am making in this section.

<sup>80</sup> Luckenbill 1927, volume II: 162.

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### III

## FROM ḪATTUŠA TO CARCHEMISH THE LATEST ON HITTITE HISTORY

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Unlike the people of ancient Israel, whose reported triumphs and tribulations have formed a constituent element of Western ideology for the past two millennia, and the Mesopotamian Assyrians and Babylonians, glimpsed if only dimly through the works of Biblical and Classical writers, the Hittites who in the second millennium B.C.E. established an empire in ancient Anatolia and Syria that rivaled that of contemporary Egypt had almost no presence in the historical traditions of the Greeks, the Romans, or any other later civilization. Aside from a few obscure references in the Hebrew Bible<sup>1</sup> and a very inaccurate description of a rock monument and its patron in Herodotus' *Histories*,<sup>2</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> For a thorough review of the relationship of the Hittite empire and its texts to the Hebrew Bible, see H. A. Hoffner, "Ancient Israel's Literary Heritage Compared with Hittite Textual Data," in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. J. K. Hoffmeier and A. Millard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 176-92. J. van Seters, "The Terms 'Amorite' and 'Hittite' in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972): 64-81, discusses the several meanings of the ethnonym "Hittite" in the Biblical texts.

<sup>2</sup> The rock relief at Karabel, which Herodotus identifies as the legendary Egyptian pharaoh Sesostris (ii 106), is now known to represent a thirteenth-century king of Mira; see J. D. Hawkins, "Tarkasnawa, King of Mira, 'Tarkondemos,' Boğazköy Sealings and Karabel," *Anatolian Studies* 48 (1998): 4-10. In addition, Pausanias mentions the enthroned "Niobe" at Sipylus (Akpınar), attributing its construction to "Broteas, son of Tantalus" (iii 22). In reality, the Hieroglyphic Luwian inscription

Hittites had vanished from historical consciousness, awaiting their recovery beginning in the nineteenth century C.E.<sup>3</sup>

Commencing with Jakob Ludwig Burckhardt in 1812, European travelers in Turkey and northern Syria took notice of peculiar pictographic inscriptions on rock faces and building blocks scattered widely throughout the region, and in 1876 the Reverend Archibald Henry Sayce attributed these to the Biblical Hittites. In 1893-94, the French *savant* Ernst Chantre uncovered several fragmentary and at the time unintelligible clay tablets from ruins near the village of Boğazköy in what is today central Turkey. At the time little notice was taken of these fragments or of the site, but a decade later, German Orientalists, in league with the Kaiser's diplomats seeking a cultural and political foothold in Ottoman lands, secured from Sultan Abdülhamid a permit to explore the impressive building remains at Boğazköy.<sup>4</sup>

When Hugo Winckler opened excavations there in 1906—on a grand scale if methodologically primitive by today's

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accompanying the figure, which presumably gives the name of the ruler responsible for its carving, reads EXERCITUS-*mu-wa*; see H. Th. Bossert, "Das hethitische Felsrelief bei Hanyeri (Gezbeli)," *Orientalia* NS 23 (1954): 144-47. This name should now be read Kuwalanamuwa; see M. Poetto, "Ancora sulla parola per 'esercito' in Luvio," *Kadmos* 21 (1982): 101-03.

<sup>3</sup> The popular narrative of the beginnings of Hittitology provided by C. W. Ceram, *The Secret of the Hittites* (New York: Schocken, 1955), 1-115, is still useful, but far more comprehensive is F. Canpolat, ed., *From Boğazköy to Karatepe: Hittitology and the Discovery of the Hittite World* (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2001). For a summary of more recent work, see E. Neu, "Hethitologie heute," in *Akten des IV. Internationalen Kongresses für Hethitologie, Würzburg 4.-8. Oktober 1999*, ed. G. Wilhelm (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001), 1-11. H. G. Güterbock, "Resurrecting the Hittites," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson (New York: Scribners, 1995), 2765-2777, is a charming personal account by one of the pioneers.

<sup>4</sup> See S. Alaura, "La prima trattativa diplomatica dei 'Musei reali di Berlino' per una concessione di scavo a Boğazköy," in *Anatolia Antica. Studi in memoria di Fiorella Imparati*, ed. S. de Martino and F. Pecchioli Daddi (Florence: LoGisma editore, 2002), 23-46; and V. Haas, "1906-1912: Hattuscha (Boğazköy): Die Hauptstadt der Hethiter," in *Zwischen Tigris und Nil: 100 Jahre Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft in Vorderasien und Ägypten*, ed. G. Wilhelm (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998), 92-99.

standards<sup>5</sup>—his workmen almost immediately began to recover thousands of cuneiform tablets and fragments that had once comprised a number of large archives. Since some of this material was written in the Akkadian language of Mesopotamia, in use during the second millennium for diplomatic correspondence and prestige purposes even by those cultures in Western Asia whose populations did not speak it,<sup>6</sup> Professor Winckler was soon able to confirm that he was indeed digging, as he had hoped, at the ancient Hittite capital, Hattuša. It was even possible for him to compose a rough sketch of the history of the Hittite state (or Hatti) on the basis of these Akkadian sources.<sup>7</sup>

For the moment, the bulk of the archives, composed as we now know in the Hittite language (called Nesite by the ancients), could not be understood. But since the tablets concerned were inscribed in a cuneiform system differing but little from that employed in Babylonia at the time, they could be transliterated. That is, the situation confronting those who would “decipher” Hittite was similar to that I would face if presented with a Vietnamese text written, as is customary, in the Latin script. While I could not begin to comprehend its contents, I could nonetheless render something (very) roughly approximating the phonological sequence therein recorded.

Despite an abortive attempt by the Danish scholar J. A. Knudtzon, the credit for solving the Hittite riddle must be given to the Czech Bedřich Hrozný, who announced his feat at a meeting of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft in 1915.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See H. Winckler, *Nach Boghazköi!* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913), 26-32; and cf. H. Klengel, “Hugo Winkler’s Tagebücher,” *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 43 (1993): 511-16.

<sup>6</sup> Assyriologists employ “Peripheral Akkadian” (PA) as a cover term for the numerous “dialects” or “idiolects” found in this material, which displays various degrees of influence from the native languages of the writers. See S. Izre’el, *Amurru Akkadian: A Linguistic Study* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 355-68.

<sup>7</sup> H. Winckler, *Vorderasien im zweiten Jahrtausend auf Grund archivalischen Studien* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913).

<sup>8</sup> F. Hrozný, “Die Lösung des hethitischen Problems,” *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 56 (Dec. 1915): 17-50.

Since Hittite was a member of the well-studied Indo-European language family, progress in distilling its grammar from the texts and in assimilating their contents was relatively rapid.<sup>9</sup> By the early 1930's most of the principal historical sources had been edited in studies that are still usable today.<sup>10</sup> This situation stands in sharp contrast to that of early work on the languages of Mesopotamia: Discussions of Akkadian and Sumerian texts written during the first twenty years after the decipherment of cuneiform in the mid-nineteenth century are completely antiquated and of interest only to those researching the history of Assyriology.

But even after the recovery of the basics of the state language, the study of the Hittite royal archives has presented a number of significant challenges. Here I will briefly describe five of these sources of difficulty and discuss how work accomplished in the past three or four decades has contributed to their amelioration.

The destruction of the Hittite capital, like that of most ancient sites, was largely the work of incendiaries. Since the architectural style of Hattuša was primarily *Fachwerk* or half-timber,<sup>11</sup> the resultant fires were often intense and brought about the bursting of many tablets into multiple fragments. It did not help matters that many records had apparently been stored on the second stories of public buildings and came crashing down to ground level upon their collapse. Further damage was done to the tablets in the first millennium B.C.E. when Phrygian builders leveled portions of the site to establish secure footing for their own structures. Earth, debris, and tablet fragments were removed from where they

<sup>9</sup> On the solving of the "Hittite riddle," see G. Beckman, "The Hittite Language and its Decipherment," *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 31 (1996): 23-30.

<sup>10</sup> For example, J. Friedrich, *Staatsverträge des Hatti-Reiches I-II* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1926, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> See R. Naumann, *Architektur Kleinasiens* (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth, 1971), 88-104.

were unwanted and used as fill elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence, excavators have recovered pieces of a single tablet from widely separated locations within the enormous grounds of Boğazköy.

This means that one of the skills cultivated by every Hittitologist must be that of the jigsaw puzzler, and the word “Join” has entered the German language. Over the course of decades the epigraphers of the Boğazköy Expedition in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin<sup>13</sup> and later in Marburg and Mainz under the direction of Professor Heinrich Otten have compiled enormous *Zettelkasten* in which each fragment is transliterated and filed according to the lexemes it contains. For generations of Hittitologists this tool has served as the basis for the reconstruction of the Hittite tablets and archives. But the cybernetic revolution has not passed us by: Today many specialists have created computerized data bases of texts and/or vocabulary, and researchers at the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Mainz are currently engaged in a systematic effort to identify each piece and are making their results as well as photos of the material available to the scholarly community at large on the Hethiter-Net.<sup>14</sup>

But excavation at the Hittite capital continues, making the German Boğazköy Expedition one of the longest-running archaeological projects in history,<sup>15</sup> and it seems that for every text fragment joined, another is found, leaving the total at around 20,000.<sup>16</sup> The most significant finds of recent

<sup>12</sup> See S. Alaura, “Archive und Bibliotheken in Hattuša,” in *Akten des IV. Internationalen Kongresses für Hethitologie, Würzburg 4.-8. Oktober 1999*, ed. G. Wilhelm (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001), 12-26, esp. 22.

<sup>13</sup> See H. G. Güterbock, “Hans Ehelolf und das Berliner Boğazköy-Archiv,” *Das Altertum* 33 (1987): 114-20.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.hethiter.net/>.

<sup>15</sup> Preliminary reports appear regularly in the *Archäologischer Anzeiger* of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI). The most recent is “Die Ausgrabungen in Boğazköy-Hattuša 2002,” *AA* 2003, 1-24.

<sup>16</sup> K. Bittel, *Hattusha: The Capital of the Hittites* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 14. On the tablet collections—“archives” or “libraries”?—see H. Otten, “Ar-

years include a tablet of bronze containing the text of a treaty between the king of Ḫatti and his cousin ruling in a subsidiary kingdom,<sup>17</sup> a Hurrian-Hittite bilingual wisdom composition whose contents have accelerated work on the recovery of the Hurrian language,<sup>18</sup> and a deposit of hundreds of clay bullae bearing the impressions of the seals of kings and other high personages and mostly featuring inscriptions in the hieroglyphic script.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, epigraphic material has started to turn up in locations other than the Hittite capital itself. Excavations at the central Anatolian sites of Maşat Höyük (ancient Tapikka),<sup>20</sup> Ortaköy (Šapinuwa),<sup>21</sup> and Kuşaklı (Šarišša)<sup>22</sup> are yielding records pertinent to the functioning of provincial administrations, including those of local cults. In the south, tablets recovered at Meskene (ancient Emar)<sup>23</sup> and Tall Munbāqa (Ekalte)<sup>24</sup> on the middle course of the Euphrates allow us to glimpse something of life in Syria under Hittite rule. Finally, continuing work at Ugarit on the Syrian coast, chive und Bibliotheken in Ḫattuša,” in *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries. Papers Read at the 30<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale Leiden, 4-8 July 1983*, ed. K. R. Veenhof (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-archaeologisch Instituut, 1986), 184-90; and most recently S. Alaura, “Archive und Bibliotheken in Ḫattuša” (n. 12 above).

<sup>17</sup> See H. Otten, *Die Bronzetafel aus Boğazköy: Ein Staatsvertrag Tuthalijas IV.* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> See E. Neu, *Das hurritische Epos der Freilassung I. Untersuchungen zu einem hurritisch-hethitischen Textensemble aus Ḫattuša* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> See S. Herboldt, *Die Prinzen- und Beamtensiegel der hethitischen Großreichszeit auf Tonbullen aus dem Nişantepe-Archiv in Ḫattuša* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> See S. Alp, *Hethitische Briefe aus Maşat-Höyük* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> This material has not yet been published. For a cursory description of the finds, see A. Süel and O. Soysal, “A Practical Vocabulary from Ortaköy,” in *Hittite Studies in Honor of Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. G. Beckman, R. Beal, and G. McMahon (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 349-50.

<sup>22</sup> See G. Wilhelm, *Keilschrifttexte aus Gebäude A. Kuşaklı-Sarissa I/1* (Rahden, Westfalen: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> For an overview of this extensive body of material, see G. Beckman, “Emar and its Archives,” in *Emar: The History, Religion, and Culture of a Syrian Town in the Late Bronze Age*, ed. M. W. Chavalas (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1996), 1-12.

<sup>24</sup> See W. Mayer, *Tall Munbāqa-Ekalte II. Die Texte* (Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 2001).

an important vassal of Hatti, has deepened our knowledge of diplomatic discourse in the Late Bronze Age.<sup>25</sup> All of this new material must now be integrated into our reconstruction of Hittite history.

A second source of headaches for the Hittitologist has been the failure of the Hittite scribes to employ a dating system in their records, which made it very problematic for early researchers to assign documents to their proper period within the four-hundred-year existence of the archives of Hattuša.<sup>26</sup> At first there was no alternative to placing a text at that point within the gradually developing outline of Hittite history appropriate to the individuals mentioned and the events described therein. Thus a composition alluding to the Hittite raid on Babylon must be earlier than one treating the war against the Egyptians in Syria. But Hittite monarchs had the unfortunate tendency to choose a throne name from among a limited repertoire, and many documents, especially the innumerable rituals, mention no individuals at all. This practice also takes no account of the possibility that a tablet might be a later copy of an earlier composition, and thus have introduced elements—orthographic, grammatical, or substantial—not present in the original text.

Discovery in 1952 at Boğazköy in an early archaeological level of a fragment displaying what was immediately recognized as a distinctive Old Hittite style of handwriting made possible the determination of the paleography of Hittite documents. First, all available epigraphic items with this early ductus were painstakingly gathered, and the characteristic features of the Old Script identified.

<sup>25</sup> See the material published in P. Bordreuil, ed., *Une bibliothèque au sud de la ville*, Ras Shamra-Ugarit, vol. 7 (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1991). For a selection of treaties and diplomatic correspondence from the Late Bronze Age, see G. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, second edition (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> On this problem, see G. Beckman, "Hittite Chronology," *Akkadica* 119-20 (2000): 19-32.

From this corpus scholars then proceeded to extract the spelling and grammatical characteristics proper to the older stages of the language, known as Old Hittite and Middle Hittite.<sup>27</sup> In this way it has become possible to follow the development of Hittite through the centuries, and conversely, to judge the approximate date of both composition and inscription of a text, provided it is of sufficient size. A major consequence of this work has been the re-dating of a number of important historical compositions from the very end of Hittite history in the late twelfth century to the time just before the establishment of the Empire in the early fourteenth.<sup>28</sup>

From what we have already seen, it should also be obvious that the Hittite sources do not provide the information necessary for the construction of an absolute chronology. Rather, for the temporal ordering of Hatti's history we are dependent upon a handful of rather loose synchronisms between Hittite kings and rulers of Egypt and Mesopotamia.<sup>29</sup> Recent adjustments to the chronologies of Egypt and Assyria/Babylonia proposed by experts in those cultures have therefore had direct consequences for our understanding of Hittite history.<sup>30</sup> Egyptologists have lowered the accession date of Pharaoh Ramses II from 1290 to 1279,<sup>31</sup> moving his Hittite contemporaries Muwattalli II,

<sup>27</sup> See S. Kořak, "Dating of Hittite Texts: A Test," *Anatolian Studies* 30 (1980): 31-39, with extensive bibliography; and A. Archi, "Middle Hittite—'Middle Kingdom,'" in *Hittite Studies in Honor of Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. G. Beckman, R. Beal, and G. McMahon (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003): 1-12.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see E. Neu, "Zum mittelhethitischen Alter der Tuthaliya-Annalen (CTH 142)," in *Im Bannkreis des Alten Orients: Studien zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte des Alten Orients und seines Ausstrahlungsraumes Karl Oberhuber zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet* (Innsbruck: Sprachwissenschaftliches Institut der Universität Innsbruck, 1986), 181-92.

<sup>29</sup> For a list of these synchronisms, see G. Beckman, "Hittite Chronology," 28 (n. 26 above).

<sup>30</sup> See G. Wilhelm, "Generation Count in Hittite Chronology," in *Mesopotamian Dark Age Revisited*, ed. H. Hunger and R. Pruzsinszky (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 71-79.

<sup>31</sup> See the references gathered by J. Boese, "Burnaburias, Meliřipak und die mittel-

Muršili III, and Hattušili III down in time accordingly. More significantly, it has become increasingly evident that the reigns of a number of the early rulers of the Kassite dynasty in Babylonia overlapped with those of the last members of the line founded by Hammurapi, rather than following upon them; it may therefore be necessary to bring down dates of the mid-second millennium and earlier by almost a century from those of the customary Middle Chronology.<sup>32</sup> How the early history of Hatti can be reconciled with this drastic change remains to be worked out.<sup>33</sup>

The third challenge to students of the Hittites has been simple ignorance of the meaning of much of the vocabulary appearing in the sources, for—particularly in the realm of religious ceremonial—a significant number of Hittite words are not of Indo-European origin but have been borrowed from other languages, such as the Hattic tongue spoken by the pre-Hittite inhabitants of Hatti<sup>34</sup> and the Hurrian<sup>35</sup> dominant in much of northern Mesopotamia and eastern Anatolia.<sup>36</sup> Of course, even the realizations of Indo-European roots in Hittite are not always immediately recognizable, nor their semantics transparent. We are fortunate that several dictionary projects underway since the 1970s have made substantial progress. The revision of Johannes Friedrich's path-breaking *Hethitisches Wörterbuch* (1957) being produced in Munich<sup>37</sup> has reached the early portion of the *h*-

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babylonische Chronologie," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 14 (1982): 16.

<sup>32</sup> See H. Gasche, et al., *Dating the Fall of Babylon: A Reappraisal of Second-Millennium Chronology* (Ghent: University of Ghent, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. my essay cited in n. 26 above.

<sup>34</sup> O. Soysal, *Hattischer Wortschatz in hethitischer Textüberlieferung* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> I. Wegner, *Hurritisch: Eine Einführung* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> On the various constituents of Hittite vocabulary, see E. Neu, "Zum Wortschatz des Hethitischen aus synchroner und diachroner Sicht," in *Studien zum indogermanischen Wortschatz*, ed. W. Meid (Innsbruck: Sprachwissenschaftliches Institut der Universität Innsbruck, 1987), 167-88.

<sup>37</sup> J. Friedrich, A. Kammenhuber, and I. Hoffmann, *Hethitisches Wörterbuch*, second edition (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1975- ). The latest fascicle (2004) ends with *haššu-*.

words, Jaan Puhvel recently (2004) published the M-volume of his one-man *Hittite Etymological Dictionary*,<sup>38</sup> while the staff of *The Chicago Hittite Dictionary*,<sup>39</sup> having begun with I, is currently putting the finishing touches on the fascicle ending in ši-.

A fourth problematic area has been Hittite geography.<sup>40</sup> Although hundreds of toponyms appear in Hittite texts,<sup>41</sup> until recently very few had been convincingly identified on the ground. This was not for want of effort by numerous scholars, but the nearly total absence of continuity in place names in central Anatolia from the Hittite period to Classical times made the task extremely difficult. We may hope that information from the archives of the newly-discovered provincial cities mentioned earlier will help us to develop a clearer picture of this region. In the south and west of the peninsula, however, the situation has always been much better, it being generally accepted, for example, that Hittite Millawanda is the precursor of Miletus, Apaša of Ephesus, Wiluša of (W)ilios/Ilion, Malitiya of Malatya, Tarša of Tarsus, Adaniya of Adana, etc. New epigraphic discoveries and the reinterpretation of the long-known inscription at Karabel near Izmir<sup>42</sup> have now allowed Hittitologists to sort out convincingly the approximate location of the various polities of the Arzawa confederation of western Asia Minor. Perhaps the most important result of this research has been the conclusion that there is simply no place on the Anatolian

<sup>38</sup> *Hittite Etymological Dictionary* (Berlin: Mouton/de Gruyter, 1984- ).

<sup>39</sup> H. G. Güterbock, H. A. Hoffner, and Th. van den Hout, eds., *The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1980- ).

<sup>40</sup> For an overview by the leading authority, see O. R. Gurney, "Hittite Geography: Thirty Years On," in *Hittite and Other Anatolian and Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Sedat Alp*, ed. H. Otten, E. Akurgal, H. Ertem, and A. Süel (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1992), 213-21.

<sup>41</sup> The toponyms have been collected by G. del Monte and J. Tischler, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der hethitischen Texte* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1978), and G. del Monte, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der hethitischen Texte; Supplement* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> See J. D. Hawkins, "Tarkasnawa, King of Mira" (n. 2 above).

mainland for Ahhiyawa (Achaeans to Classicists), which must therefore be identified exclusively with the Mycenaean kingdoms of the Aegean islands and the Greek mainland.<sup>43</sup>

The final impediment to writing Hittite history that I will mention here has been the challenge of deciphering the so-called "Hittite hieroglyphs," the pictographic script that first caught the attention of Westerners. I must stress that this writing system is a native Anatolian invention owing nothing to the Egyptian script whose designation was extended to it by modern scholars.<sup>44</sup> All that the two types of writing have in common is that their constituent signs remain recognizable images of common objects. From the late fifteenth century on the Hittites employed their hieroglyphs on seals, on monuments, and probably on wooden tablets<sup>45</sup> that have, of course, all disappeared. The minor successor states to the Hittite empire that flourished in northern Syria and southern Anatolia from the twelfth through the seventh centuries (often referred to as the "Neo-Hittites") also made extensive use of the hieroglyphs, primarily for monumental inscriptions.

Attempts to crack this script began well before the discovery of the Hittite cuneiform records; however, a number of early erroneous but nonetheless widely accepted readings of common signs handicapped succeeding efforts well into the second half of the twentieth century. The discovery in 1947 of a Phoenician-Hieroglyphic bilingual at Karatepe in Cilicia<sup>46</sup> rekindled interest in the Anatolian

<sup>43</sup> The literature on the "Ahhiyawa Question" is extensive; see H. G. Güterbock, "Troy in Hittite Texts? Wilusa, Ahhiyawa, and Hittite History," in *Troy and the Trojan War*, ed. M. Mellink (Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Bryn Mawr College, 1986), 33-44 for a judicious consideration of the problem.

<sup>44</sup> See J. D. Hawkins, "Writing in Anatolia: Imported and Indigenous Systems," *World Archaeology* 17 (1986): 363-76.

<sup>45</sup> See M. Marazzi, "Ma gli Hittiti scrivevano veramente su 'legno,'" in *Miscellanea di studi linguistici in onore di Walter Belardi*, ed. P. Cipriano, P. Di Giovine, and M. Mancini (Rome: Il Calamo, 1994), vol. I, 131-60.

<sup>46</sup> For the definitive edition of this group of texts, see H. Çambel, *Corpus of Hiero-*

writing system, but it was not until the 1970s that several scholars independently recognized and corrected the earlier mistakes,<sup>47</sup> removing this impediment to progress. And progress has indeed been swift, so that two grammars of the language of the hieroglyphic texts, which turns out to be not Hittite itself but a dialect of the closely-related Luwian, are now available.<sup>48</sup> Even more significantly, several years ago J. D. Hawkins produced his magnificent complete edition of the hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions from the first millennium.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, our better understanding of the hieroglyphic system and its language has enabled us to make good use of several important newly-recovered inscriptions dating to the Empire period, including those of the Südburg funerary monument at Boğazköy,<sup>50</sup> the sacred pool at Yalburt,<sup>51</sup> the Emirgazi altars,<sup>52</sup> and the rock face at Hatip.<sup>53</sup> In particular, the interpretation of these sources has allowed us to see the final century of Hittite history in a new light.

Because of limits of space, I will now touch but briefly upon some of the more significant advances in our understanding of

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glyphic Luwian Inscriptions II: Karatepe-Aslantaş (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999).

<sup>47</sup> For a full discussion, see J. D. Hawkins, A. Morpurgo-Davies, and G. Neumann, *Hittite Hieroglyphs and Luwian: New Evidence for the Connection* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974).

<sup>48</sup> R. Werner, *Kleine Einführung ins Hieroglyphen-Luwische* (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1991); A. Payne, *Hieroglyphic Luwian* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions I: Inscriptions of the Iron Age* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> J. D. Hawkins, *The Hieroglyphic Inscription of the Sacred Pool Complex at Hattusa (SÜDBURG)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> M. Poetto, *L'iscrizione luvio-geroglifica di Yalburt: Nuove acquisizioni relative alla geografia dell'Anatolia sud-occidentale* (Pavia: Gianni Luculano Editore, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Th. van den Hout, "Tuthaliya IV. und die Ikonographie hethitischer Großkönige des 13. Jhs.," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 52 (1995): 561-63; cf. E. Masson, "Les inscriptions louvites hiéroglyphiques d'Emirgazi," *Journal des Savants* 1979 (Jan.-Mars): 3-49.

<sup>53</sup> A. Dinçol, "Die Entdeckung des Felsmonuments in Hatip und ihre Auswirkungen über die historischen und geographischen Fragen," *Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi Arkeoloji Dergisi* 1 (1998): 27-35.

Hittite history that have occurred since the publication of the late Oliver Gurney's classic *The Hittites*<sup>54</sup> and the third edition of *The Cambridge Ancient History* (early 1970s), because these are the secondary sources most commonly consulted by those whose expertise lies outside the field of Hittitology.

A number of new names have been added to the roster of Hittite rulers: Huzziya at the beginning of the royal line,<sup>55</sup> Taḫurwaili<sup>56</sup> and Muwattalli I<sup>57</sup> in the Old Kingdom, and Kurunta<sup>58</sup> in the thirteenth century. Little beyond their names is known about these figures at the present time. On the other hand, it has become increasingly apparent that Hattusili II, once placed among the immediate predecessors of Šuppiluliuma I, did not exist.<sup>59</sup> In a closely-related development, we may now identify Tudḫaliya II *tuḫukanti* as the father of the great Šuppiluliuma I.<sup>60</sup>

The origins of the Old Kingdom and the process of its consolidation remain obscure to us, but it may now be recognized that Luwian and Hurrian influence was already

<sup>54</sup> (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1952). There have been several revisions.

<sup>55</sup> See A. Dinçol, B. Dinçol, and J. D. Hawkins, "The 'Cruciform Seal' from Boğazköy-Hattuša," *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 43 (1994): 105-6.

<sup>56</sup> See H. Otten, "Das Siegel des hethitischen Großkönigs Tahurwaili," *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 103 (1971): 59-68.

<sup>57</sup> See H. Otten, "Das hethitische Königshaus im 15. Jahrhundert v. Chr.: Zum Neufund einiger Landschenkungen in Boğazköy," *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 123/2 (1987): 28-34.

<sup>58</sup> See Th. van den Hout, *Der Ulmi-Tešub-Vertrag: Eine prosopographische Untersuchung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), 82-96.

<sup>59</sup> Not all scholars have accepted his relegation to the status of "non-person"; see J. Klinger, "Synchronismen in der Epoche vor Šuppiluliuma I.—einige Anmerkungen zur Chronologie der mittelhethitischen Geschichte," in *Il Congresso Internazionale di Hittitologia*, ed. O. Carruba, M. Giorgieri, and C. Mora (Pavia: Gianni Luculano Editore, 1995), 243, with n. 28 for a summary of the question and bibliography.

<sup>60</sup> S. Alp, *Hethitische Briefe aus Mašat-Höyük*, 48-52 (n. 20 above), lays out the evidence that Šuppiluliuma's father was named Tudḫaliya, and O. R. Gurney, "The Hittite Title TUHKANTI-," *Anatolian Studies* 33 (1983): 99-100, shows that this was the same Tudḫaliya who bore the epithet *tuḫukanti*, "crown prince." The discrepancy between the numbers assigned to this ruler by Alp ("Tudḫaliya III") and by myself ("Tudḫaliya II") is due to differing opinions about the makeup of the Hittite royal line yet a generation or two earlier.

present to a significant degree in the early Hittite state.<sup>61</sup> We must therefore abandon any remnants of the view that a pristine Indo-European culture was gradually “Orientalized” in early Anatolia.<sup>62</sup> At least during the period covered by the available texts, Hatti was always a multicultural civilization.

It is also now obvious that there was no coherent Middle Kingdom period of Hittite history,<sup>63</sup> nor an abrupt transition to the Empire. Rather, a single royal family—or perhaps clan—ruled Hatti from start to finish. What had appeared to historians as caesurae were rather simply epochs for which we have only spotty documentation. This is not to deny that the Hittite state experienced significant fluctuations of fortune, having faced collapse, for example, in the decades immediately preceding the major expansion to the south engineered by Šuppiluliuma I.

The imperium established by Šuppiluliuma in Syria now stands revealed in the archives from the middle Euphrates and Ugarit as a symbiosis of Anatolian, Hurrian, and Semitic elements.<sup>64</sup> The Hittite conquerors constituted but a thin governing elite in the region, joined in administration by Syrian natives. This, at least, is the conclusion to be drawn from a perusal of the proper names of high provincial officials.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> See H. C. Melchert, “Introduction,” in *The Luwians*, ed. H. C. Melchert (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 11-14; and S. de Martino, “I rapporti tra Ittiti e Hurriti durante il regno di Muršili I,” *Hethitica* 11 (1992): 19-37.

<sup>62</sup> The idea that Hittite culture can be studied most effectively through comparison with that of other societies speaking Indo-European languages has been most influential in regard to the reconstruction of the conceptions behind succession to the Hittite throne. On this problem see G. Beckman, “The Hittite Assembly,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102 (1982): 435-42.

<sup>63</sup> See A. Archi, “Middle Hittite—‘Middle Kingdom,’” 1-12 (n. 27 above).

<sup>64</sup> C. Mora, “Artistes, artisans et scribes entre Kargamiš et Hatti au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien*, ed. D. Charpin and F. Joannès (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1992), 241-49, demonstrates that the seals characteristic of the period of Hittite domination of northern Syria (fourteenth and thirteenth centuries), although inscribed in Luwian hieroglyphs, were the product of local workshops.

<sup>65</sup> G. Beckman, “Hittite Provincial Administration in Anatolia and Syria: The View

The Hittite empire was always a fragile structure, tending to disintegration whenever the power of Hattuša weakened. What is most remarkable is just how long this polity resisted the centrifugal forces affecting it. In newly-accessible sources we may see how a prolonged civil war between the descendants of Hattušili III in Hattuša and the line of Muwattalli II reigning in the southern Anatolian city of Tarhuntašša exacerbated this situation and contributed to the ultimate demise of Hatti.<sup>66</sup> Recent excavations at Boğazköy have shown that the capital was not destroyed in a single conflagration, but was gradually abandoned over the course of the early decades of the twelfth century.<sup>67</sup> This suggests that the fall of the Hittites was not a cataclysmic event, as often portrayed, but rather a process in which peripheral areas responded to division and debility at the center by breaking away, leading to a progressive decline in the wealth and military might available to the capital and its rulers. After a certain point, recovery would have become impossible.

Indeed, the outlines of the transition to the political constellation of the early Iron Age in Anatolia and northern Syria are beginning to emerge, and for Hatti we may discern fragmentation rather than destruction visited by external enemies, although the depredations of the “Peoples of the Sea”<sup>68</sup> were certainly a contributing factor. While the dominion of Hattuša vanished forever, the kings of Tarhuntašša (Kurunta-Mursili-Hartappu)<sup>69</sup> maintained their position well

from Mašat and Emar,” in *II Congresso Internazionale di Hittitologia*, ed. O. Carruba, M. Giorgieri, and C. Mora (Pavia: Gianni Luculano Editore, 1995), 30.

<sup>66</sup> See H. A. Hoffner, “The Last Days of Khattusha,” in *The Crisis Years*, ed. W. A. Ward and M. S. Joukowski (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1992), 46-52.

<sup>67</sup> See J. Seeher, “Die Zerstörung der Stadt Hattuša,” in *Akten des IV. Internationalen Kongresses für Hethitologie, Würzburg 4.-8. Oktober 1999*, ed. G. Wilhelm (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001), 623-34.

<sup>68</sup> See I. Singer, “New Evidence on the End of the Hittite Empire,” in *The Sea Peoples and their World: A Reassessment*, ed. E. D. Oren (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 2000), 21-33.

<sup>69</sup> See J. D. Hawkins, “Kuzi-Tešub and the ‘Great Kings’ of Karkamiš,” *Anatolian Studies* 38 (1988): 99-108; and H. G. Güterbock, “Survival of the Hittite Dynasty,”

into the twelfth century, and the cadet line established by Šuppiluliuma I at Carchemish as Hittite viceroys in Syria continued uninterrupted into the “Neo-Hittite” period.<sup>70</sup>

In closing, I would like to recommend several recent works on Hittite history that take account of many of the advances I have discussed here: H. Klengel’s *Geschichte des Hethitischen Reiches*<sup>71</sup> is a thorough presentation of the topic with explicit reference to the textual basis for his conclusions. More accessible to the non-specialist are T. R. Bryce’s *The Kingdom of the Hittites*,<sup>72</sup> which treats political events, and *Life and Society in the Hittite World*,<sup>73</sup> a social history.

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in *The Crisis Years*, ed. W. A. Ward and M. S. Joukowski (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1992), 53-55.

<sup>70</sup> J. D. Hawkins, “‘Great Kings’ and ‘Country Lords’ at Malatya and Karkamiš,” in *Studia Historiae Ardens: Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Philo H. J. Houwink ten Cate on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. Th. van den Hout and J. de Roos (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1995), 73-85.

<sup>71</sup> (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

<sup>72</sup> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). See now the new edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>73</sup> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

## IV

# SYRIA-PALESTINE IN RECENT RESEARCH

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We have pictures of Syria-Palestine in antiquity that are constantly changing as research progresses, and I think we can say that two rather different groups of scholars are adding to our knowledge, or at least changing it. These are the Syrian archaeologists and their accompanying epigraphers on the one hand, and Biblical scholars on the other.

The archaeological picture of Syria-Palestine is getting clearer as we go on, and the area has come to be seen as more at the center of Mesopotamian cultural developments, especially since the discovery of Ebla/Tell Mardikh as a center of writing culture in 1975. Also with the techniques of surface survey coupled with work on the imposing archaeological tells of the Jazira, the eastern region of the modern country of Syria, we begin to see a long history of vibrant interaction between peasants and rulers contesting the still-glorious output of that rainfall agriculture region.

## SYRIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE CONCEPT OF MESOPOTAMIA

We now understand Mesopotamia as more influenced, affected, and intertwined with its western reaches, mostly the

modern state of Syria. And we also think of Syria as more fully Mesopotamian than we did before.<sup>1</sup>

Mesopotamia is now perceived as more western because of discoveries at Ebla and continuing investigation of other sites, especially Mari on the Middle Euphrates. Ebla was an outpost of north Mesopotamian learning when Mesopotamian learning was just beginning, in the late Early Dynastic Period, around 2500-2400 BCE. We have from there an extensive archive of tablets from an administration which manipulated surpluses from the surrounding area, particularly in textiles.

And Syria appears more Mesopotamian because from that very early period we can learn about the extent and form of the cultural legacy practiced there at a time when the cuneiform remains for literary texts are actually minimal and difficult to understand. Syria's key role is obvious from the third millennium, but it is true that in the second millennium we learn things from Syria which we do not know from southern Iraq.

Our newer idea of Mesopotamia was foreshadowed in Jack Finkelstein's seminal article in which he showed that the Mesopotamians themselves defined *Eber Nāri* in Akkadian and *Abr Nahrain* in Aramaic not as across the river(s), but between the rivers, that is, within the great bend of the Euphrates that sweeps through Turkey and central Syria.<sup>2</sup> This was of course the first area those terminology-coining Greeks hit, and they translated what the locals told them with "between-river," our Mesopotamia. I might add that peasants now living on the Euphrates see their world as divided in two: *juwwa ash-Sham* "inside Damascus or Syria" is the western bank and everything beyond it, while *juwwa al-Jazira* "inside the island" is the eastern bank and everything that lies beyond it, the Jazira of the north Mesopotamian plain.

<sup>1</sup> M. Chavalas in M. Chavalas and J. Hayes, eds., *New Horizons in the Study of Ancient Syria*, (Malibu: Undena, 1992), 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> J. J. Finkelstein, "Mesopotamia", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21 (1962): 73-92.

The new book by Peter Akkermans and Glenn Schwartz helpfully summarizes the last thirty years of archaeological work in the modern state of Syria. Some of this progress has been due to the fact that Iraq and Iran have been closed to western archaeologists because of modern politics, and so researchers have concentrated on Syria, and all of the progress has depended on the continuing hospitality of the Syrian authorities and the Syrian people toward foreign researchers. This volume is a mine of bibliographic information but also an attempt to tell a synthetic story about how the Neolithic transformation actually worked and how cities arose and thrived in roughly the same areas. But the story told by Akkermans and Schwartz is not one to keep anyone awake at night; in fact, perhaps the reverse will be the fate of this book, except among graduate students who will have to study it.<sup>3</sup>

Major archaeological issues in Syrian archaeology include when and why the domestication of plants and animals took place. It is clear that the native habitat of many of our modern domesticates was in the Near East, and Syria is the best place to look for the answers to the questions about domestication.

Archaeological research shows that humans manipulated plants and animals from early times, but people in the Near East did not depend on manipulated species until sometime after 9000 BCE. Some argued that a perceived population pressure was a source of the impetus to domesticate more systematically, but this is very hard to document. Recent thought tends toward the idea that people began to feel that the manipulatable species were better and more reliable than things they had to hunt and gather, though hunting and gathering continued along with agriculture for a very long time albeit in an increasingly marginal economic role. Current analyses of why the domestication happened favors an emphasis on environmental change as the ice age ended, but

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<sup>3</sup> P. Akkermans and G. Schwartz, *The Archaeology of Syria*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

one must see the participants as active in their decisions and resolutions, not just reacting to their changed environment. These explanations are not likely to satisfy everyone, and more research will throw up more hypotheses. And explanations that work at one site may not make sense at others.<sup>4</sup>

The change was gradual, but it was most importantly a change in the way people thought about how they got food and how they lived. There was probably a feeling of territoriality before full domestication, but domestication certainly increased that feeling, and it was linked with people burying their dead and building dwellings in ways that implied permanence. People built dwellings, but their arrangements fell apart eventually and left remains, and it is hard to study the archaeology of non-sedentary people because they left little trace. Some aspects of the changes brought by domestication were not good for human health, especially the monotony of the diet and the limiting of investment of time and effort in fewer plants and animals. But it also seems that sedentarism led to fewer miscarriages and so slowly to population growth. Overall agriculture took more of the people's time and may have lowered life expectancy. So you had more babies and fewer oldsters. But the eventual widespread use of pottery reduced wear on teeth in the all-gruel diet.<sup>5</sup>

Even in the Neolithic period, the first period of widespread domestication, there was use of seals and sealings, and that implies a more formal concept of property than earlier, not necessarily exactly private property as people would come later to understand it. Seals appear in big and small sites, but in only a small number of rooms at each site, meaning they had a specific function in indicating ownership and directing distribution.<sup>6</sup>

Sites in Syria and in Iran show clear foreign influence in the Uruk period, 3500-3000 BCE, of southern Mesopotamia, but there seem to be two kinds of influence at work. In the clearer

<sup>4</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 68-70.

<sup>5</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 68-70, 78, 134.

<sup>6</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 140-1.

examples it looks as if all elements of material culture really were imported by a southern Mesopotamian population that settled in new parts of the Mesopotamian periphery. Other sites show some Mesopotamian artistic influence without really changing the way towns, houses, or pots were built and used. It has been suggested that this was an imperialistic expansion for the purpose of getting access to local resources, or at least the trade routes that brought resources from farther afield, and that the all-Mesopotamian sites constituted trade outposts in a diaspora to which southerners might move, sometimes for generations, to take advantage of resources. The sites suddenly were abandoned, and we do not know what local or centralized impulse may have led to such decisions, or if all the abandonments were contemporaneous.

Much energy has focused on the question of whether the Uruk expansion can be seen as a world-system, using the terms and analogy to later imperial systems which were perhaps more self-conscious about their need to exploit resources. But clearly the Uruk culture in Syria was settled in for a long haul. We find there the bevel-rimmed bowl, widely found in southern Uruk sites, and it probably had some sort of administrative function, though it is not clear that it was a standard-sized container.<sup>7</sup> One could imagine that the settlements' collapse derived from antagonisms on the part of the locals, but even that is not clear, and obviously there were some sites which were eager to imitate at least some of the southerners' practices and gadgets.

In the third millennium there was a rebirth of cities in Syria, and cities were much larger and more autonomous in cultural style than the Uruk outposts had been. The thriving of urban concentrations mirrored similar developments in the contemporaneous Early Dynastic Period in Mesopotamia, but they may also have been independent creations. It remains to

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<sup>7</sup> G. Algaze, *The Uruk World System*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 194, 197; for other suggestions on the uses of bevelled-rim bowls see D. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 19 and note 32.

be explained why suddenly at this time the resources of the dry-farming region of the Jazirah and the west should have been concentrated in ways to enrich city elites and to allow them to manipulate the countryside. Walls were built around Šeḫna/Šubat-Enlil in the northeast, and the southern writing system was used by the bureaucracy at Ebla in the west. A mystery remains why some sites thrived where they did, especially Mari on the Middle Euphrates, which demanded extensive irrigation to be agriculturally productive. Old Akkadian material culture did not make much impact on the Syrian scene, in contrast to Elam, modern Iran, where there was more influence.<sup>8</sup>

There was status differentiation within these Syrian sites. This probably derived from some people's having more grain and being able to use it to get other people to do what they wanted. How this worked is not known, but graves definitely show a difference between elites and common people, the elites buried with many grave goods and sometimes even with crowns.<sup>9</sup>

Akkermans and Schwartz suggest three possibilities to explain the Early Bronze Syrian cities: 1) Perhaps the cities grew on their own as a result of increasing social stratification, or 2) perhaps long-distance trade with demand from a growing population in southern Mesopotamia and supplies coming from the Turkish highlands stimulated the growth of the cities, or 3) southern rulers actually began to interfere in Syrian politics, and this prompted the local elites to organize themselves. Akkermans and Schwartz see the last as least likely, but believe that social stratification and the stimulation of trade led to growth of cities in various ways in different places. These cities faded or were actually destroyed when the Old Akkadian Empire fell, and several of them like Tell Brak in the Jazira may have been parts

<sup>8</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 263-7, 282; H. Weiss, ed., *The Origins of Cities in Dry-Farming Syria and Mesopotamia in the Third Millennium B.C.*, (Guilford, Connecticut: Four Quarters, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 231-2, 252-3.

of that empire, forcibly annexed probably by the founder around 2330 BCE.

The fall of Akkad itself is a major problem in the south, and climate change, from earthquakes to mild desiccations, has been looked to for explanations, though obviously social changes may have played a role.<sup>10</sup> Others suggest that intensified agriculture including manuring may have depleted fields more than the traditional alternate year fallowing, and deforestation and aridity may have made sustaining dry farming harder over time.<sup>11</sup>

A key question of the next period is how and why urban life revived from 2000-1600 BCE. Urkesh and Brak persisted, but other sites were founded anew. The leaders of the new cities had Amorite names, perhaps indicating a close relation between sedentary people and nomads, which may be studied in the Mari archives. The period corresponds to the scrappy Middle Bronze I period in Palestine, and in Syria too it seems there were smaller populations than in the earlier period. Still, in western Syria this is a period when Ebla expanded and built its 22-meter-high rampart. And Šeḫna was reestablished as Šubat-Enlil “dwelling of Enlil” the new capital of Šamši-Adad, seen by later rulers as an Assyrian king, who put together a coalition of north Mesopotamians in the 1800s. The Hittites from modern Turkey destroyed the Old Babylonian kingdom and also Yamkhad, a kingdom centered in western Syria, around 1600 BCE, beginning a time of general political weakness, but sites in the Jazirah seem to have continued.<sup>12</sup>

In the next period, the Late Bronze, 1600-1200 BCE, central Syria had a new and important state called Mitanni, apparently a collection of local dynasts including Hurrian speakers but with rulers bearing Indo-European names. This state, whose capital, Washshukkani, is still unidentified, was a rival of Egypt for control of the Syrian and Lebanese coast, and it may have

<sup>10</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 277, 267.

<sup>11</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 282, 284.

<sup>12</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 208, 284-5, 288-90, 294-5, 311, 326.

resembled the Egyptian Empire as a loose coalition of states.<sup>13</sup> It was replaced in the mid- 1300s by the Hittites as the dominant power in Syria, but the archaeological transition between Mitannian and Hittite overlordship is not clear, and there is a gradual and smooth development from Middle Bronze to Late Bronze pottery.

There may be a decline in the number of sites occupied in the Late Bronze, and some would see that as an instance of peasants voting with their feet and becoming either outright nomads or troublesome *Habiru* peoples. These *Habiru* were dissenting former urban dwellers about whom the elites of the period complained. They worked for city-dwellers as mercenaries but also harassed rulers of small kingdoms and seem to have constituted a consistently unruly social class.<sup>14</sup> The political instability of the times may perhaps be seen in the fact that some sites on the Middle Euphrates have texts showing kings did not rule there, but there were associations of "brothers" who held sway.<sup>15</sup>

Things changed radically in the Near East after 1200 with the collapse associated by the Egyptians with the Sea Peoples. In Syria desiccation may have caused central authorities to be unable to distribute grain and so retain their clients as they had before. This is also the transition to the Iron Age, meaning that that metal, which had been experimented with earlier, became more common. It turned out to be more "democratic" in that it did not require elaborate installations to work and eventually was made stronger than bronze. Also it did not depend upon long-distance trade to get the tin that made bronze possible. The spread also of

<sup>13</sup> For Washshukkani see K. Nashef, *Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes*, Band 5, (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1982), 277-8.

<sup>14</sup> J. Bottéro, "*Habiru*," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 4 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972-75): 14-27.

<sup>15</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 327, 329, 341, 331, 333, 342-3; for the *Habiru* see Snell, *Life*, 68 and references cited there; for an etymology from a Hurrian word for "one likely to be moving about" see V. Haas and I. Wegner, "Betrachtungen zu den *Habiru*," in B. Böck, E. Cancik-Kirschbaum, and T. Richter, eds., *Munuscula mesopotamica*, *Festschrift für Johannes Renger*, (Münster: Ugarit, 1999), 198-200.

the simpler, more alphabetic script which apparently developed on the Syrian coast, may have had a tendency to disenfranchise the small group of scribes who could write in cuneiform. And the growth of a camel-borne trade meant that the deserts could be crossed with spices and other light and costly items, and formerly nomadic peoples could be brought in to share the cities' prosperity, though as ever they might threaten the cities too. There is archaeological continuity through this transition from Bronze to Iron at several sites, however, so we cannot say that everywhere there was a radical break.<sup>16</sup>

The large empires that arose in the Iron Age were apparently much more interested in close control of resources than earlier empires had been. The Assyrians wanted to assure that the grain of the Jazirah would reach them in northern Iraq and probably built a road system to assure that it would.<sup>17</sup> Their demands for tribute may have stimulated or at least encouraged coastal peoples, later known to the Greeks as Phoenicians, to step up their trading with the islands and may even have driven them to send out colonies into the west, where the oppressive overlord might not reach.<sup>18</sup>

The Persian Empire presented itself as more benign, and there are indications that people exiled under the Assyrians and the Neo-Babylonians could in fact return to their ancestral lands. Though the Persian control may have been intentionally light, the archaeological record for it is too, partly because pottery shows great continuity through it.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 358-61; for the Sea Peoples see A. Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 249-63; on the camel see R. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> T. J. Wilkinson, "Water and Human Settlement in the Balikh Valley, Syria: Investigations from 1992-1995," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 25 (1998): 63-87, 75, following "hollow ways," ancient traces of roads.

<sup>18</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 383, 386; for the Assyrian view see F. M. Fales, *L'Impero assiro*, (Rome: Laterza, 2001), 15, 236-8; on Phoenicians see M. Heinz, *Altsyrien und Libanon*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), 225-57.

<sup>19</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 389-94; for propaganda see P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002, French 1996), 40-9.

Akkermans and Schwartz stress that we have tended to be fascinated by collapse, but it is really more interesting to worry about how cultures regenerate themselves and reform themselves after disaster; though there have been several collapses in Syrian history, the culture has mostly regenerated itself. The authors also complain that though in theory archaeology should be able to correct the perspective of the written texts and study non-elite and non-urban situations, it frequently has focused on the big, flashy, and literate centers.<sup>20</sup>

### SITES AND PEOPLE

From recent archaeological work we have been able to learn more about how the small and large polities of three millennia worked administratively. In some cases we have found what we regard as literary texts that allow us into the life of the mind of the literate few. But most interestingly we have been able to reconstruct the countryside around city sites and to begin to attack the question of how the city related to the country.

Let us consider in more detail the results from several sites which have become famous or really ought to become famous, though we should confess that the ones we have chosen were big and literate. We will proceed roughly in the chronological order of the finds so far. There are many other sites that have yielded important information and that might become important for reasons not yet clear; here we are merely skimming the surface of the information from the selected sites. A comprehensive and ongoing survey of recent developments is to be found in the reports every couple of years in the Austrian journal *Archiv für Orientforschung*.<sup>21</sup> In cuneiform studies the continuing bibliography is the Keilschriftbibliographie published in the journal *Orientalia* from the Pontifical Biblical Institute.

<sup>20</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 399, 401-2; N. Yoffee and G. Cowgill, eds., *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988), and popularly, J. Diamond, *Collapse*, (New York: Viking, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien.

## Ebla

This huge site in Western Syria south of Aleppo has a long archaeological history, but the interest focuses on the period 2400-2300 BCE, when the site was an administrative center of a small kingdom that generated several archives of administrative texts. The site was destroyed apparently by Sargon of Akkad from southern Mesopotamia and probably mostly abandoned after a Hittite incursion around 1600. The archive covers only about 50 years and has 1,727 tablets. Three kings succeeded each other father to son, and their viziers did too. A dynastic list puts the founders of the dynasty back in the twenty-seventh century BCE. Inscriptional material shows that the Egyptian king Pepi I (about 2200 BCE) was in contact with Ebla, as was King Iblul-Il of Mari. The Egyptian contact was probably broken when the archives ended, but it was reasserted later in Middle Bronze II tombs probably around 1770 to 1760 BCE by the 13th dynasty Egyptian Hyksos king Hetepibre, here possibly given the epithet "the Asiatic," who had sent a club to a ruler of Ebla as a gift.<sup>22</sup>

The institutions of temple and palace were closely connected, both physically and personally, and the gods worshiped were mostly local gods. The rulers saw themselves in local terms too and were not trying to imitate those of the distant south. And yet for us the great boon from these ancients is that they were writing in the same cuneiform system used in the south, at least as far as the shape of the signs goes, though not necessarily using exactly the same values for the signs. There is evidence that there was diplomatic contact with the south, and perhaps visiting professors of cuneiform who made the trek to teach Syrians more about the writing and literature.

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<sup>22</sup> P. Matthiae, "Ebla," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2: 180-3; A. Archi, "Ebla Texts," in Meyers, 2: 184-6; and G. Scandone Matthiae, "Les rapports entre Ebla et L'Egypte," in Z. Hawass, ed., *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century*, (Cairo, New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 2: 487-93, 488-9.

Ebla studies have blossomed since 1975 in two major text publication series. Gradually the cuneiform tablets contemporary with the early Old Akkadian Period in southern Mesopotamia are becoming available in forms accessible to scholars. I cannot say that they have entered the canon of translations, though, and that is probably because the overwhelming majority of them are archival texts listing deliveries to the palace from the rich hinterland controlled by or at least owing tribute to the Eblaite king. These, like most archival texts, are best understood in mass and not individually. The picture they give is of unrivaled riches in textiles garnered from hundreds of thousands of sheep grazing on those verdant hills that still surround the site.<sup>23</sup>

Another kind of Eblaite text has generated more discussion but somehow less light: the texts that appear to be treaties, letters, or perhaps of a literary nature. These are prone to various interpretations to a large extent because of the many readings of signs in the cuneiform writing system. So in some cases we can say that Eblaite texts are understood but not fully deciphered, and depending on scribal practice, they are not likely to be fully understood in the way that other cuneiform systems are known. The language in which the texts were written was a form of the Semitic language group known in the area later, but the gap between Eblaite and later languages is so great that those who classify the Semitic languages see it as quite different and probably more related to Akkadian, or East Semitic, than to Aramaic, Ugaritic, or Hebrew.<sup>24</sup>

The apparently literary texts include forty lexical lists with several copies of a Sumerian-to-Eblaite dictionary, which is the world's oldest bilingual dictionary. There is a Sumerian hymn

<sup>23</sup> The series are *Archivi reali di Ebla. Testi* (Rome: Missione archeologica italiana in Siria), and *Materiali epigrafici di Ebla* (Naples: Istituto universitario orientale); Archi, "Ebla Texts," 2:185.

<sup>24</sup> Archi, "Ebla Texts;" for one translated letter see W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, *The Context of Scripture*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 3: 235-6.

known from elsewhere, and eighteen incantations in Sumerian. Also there is a long ritual for the enthronement of the Eblaite king and queen without parallels in the south of Mesopotamia.<sup>25</sup>

### Šeḥna/Šubat-Enlil

This large site in the Jazira was important in two periods and then completely abandoned until the twentieth century CE. It started beside a seasonal stream and grew in Uruk times to be a major site, attaining its full 90 hectare area sometime in the late Early Dynastic period around 2400 BCE. Its name then was Šeḥna, and it was part of what the southerners called Subir, “the north”; its modern name is Leilan. In Old Akkadian times a wall was built around the acropolis, and later around the entire settlement. It may have suffered the same catastrophic abandonment that led to the decline of the Old Akkadian Empire, of which it may have been a peripheral part, around 2200, and its people moved off, some perhaps to nomadism.

In the May 2, 2005, *New Yorker*, Harvey Weiss, an archaeologist of Syria, discussed his ideas on why this happened in an article on climate change. His argument is that the abandonment of Šeḥna/Šubat-Enlil was due to rapid dessication, climate change so quick and decisive that people moved away, into the wetter mountains, and off into the desert. Weiss for some time has been pushing the idea of radical environmental change, sometimes from volcanoes, earthquakes, or just global warming. The *New Yorker* focuses on the issue because of our current concern for the environment. Discontinuities, that is, disasters, are more sweeping explanations than gradual decay is, and so may be more satisfying.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps alluding to catastrophic explanations, Akkermans and Schwartz write at the conclusion of their book, “While the

<sup>25</sup> Archi, “Ebla Texts,” 184-5.

<sup>26</sup> E. Kolbert, “The Climate of Man-II. The Curse of Akkad,” *The New Yorker*, May 2, 2005, 64-73; H. Weiss, et al., “The Genesis and Collapse of Third Millennium North Mesopotamian Civilization,” *Science* 261 (1993): 995-1004.

field has been concerned with the explanation of major social transformations..., few explanatory models have received general acceptance...[and] definitive explanations of such major changes in human societies remain elusive. Presumably this state of affairs exists because of the complexity of the phenomena under consideration and the incomplete nature of our data, but one might also wonder whether a single overarching explanation can ever be successfully advanced for such large-scale events."<sup>27</sup>

In the next few hundred years Šeḫna/Šubat-Enlil regained some of its old population and became one of the nodes of the kingdom of Northern Mesopotamia put together by Šamši-Adad and other Amorite leaders. He gave the site the name Šubat-Enlil "Seat of Enlil," invoking the leading southern Mesopotamian god. In this time, around 1800 BCE, there were several archives of cuneiform tablets showing that the central administration had tremendous resources available especially of wine. The texts include royal archives, letters and treaties, and even a fragment of the Sumerian King List. During the Old Babylonian period there were many villages within its area, which must have been dependent on and controlled by leaders in the city. The state was destroyed by the Babylonian king Samsuiluna around 1728. The site has become important as a correlative of the Old Babylonian archives from Mari as well as an element in the arguments about environmental determinism bringing down large political structures.<sup>28</sup>

### Mari

Mari is the single best-documented Old Babylonian site not in literary texts but in archival documents that show how the royal court functioned, where it actually was—that is, mostly on the move in order not to stretch local resources in any one place for too long—and even how kings operated and made

<sup>27</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 402.

<sup>28</sup> H. Weiss, "Leilan, Tell," In E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 3: 341-7.

decisions and related to their sometimes influential queens and their frequently complaining daughters.<sup>29</sup> The French have been digging at this large site on the Syrian-Iraqi border since the 1930s, and they have found a flourishing Early Dynastic government as well as the 20,000 letters and other archival texts that document the Old Babylonian period. These latter let us see many of the details of Ancient Near Eastern politics that have not been clear elsewhere.

Most famously there are letters that refer to prophets and seers who wanted their messages brought to the attention of the Mari king. These letters were frequently of a fairly narrow and self-serving nature: the god wanted the king to visit his shrine, and then he would give his blessing. Or the god wanted a temple rebuilt or a ceremony held which had not been held for a long time. Comparisons with the prophecy known in Ancient Israel have shown some of the same rhetoric, but inevitably the Biblical record will seem more nuanced to moderns.<sup>30</sup>

The site may have arisen as a control point for river and caravan traffic, and the excavator has recently suggested that it was a center for metallurgy since tin from Iran and copper from Turkey could come together on the middle Euphrates for metallurgical experimentation, development, and export. But Mari needed irrigation for agriculture and may always have been dependent on trade. There was a third-millennium BCE palace, and its rulers, called *shakkanakkus* or "military governors," may have started as officials appointed by the Old Akkadian kings. The Amorites were rulers here from 2000, and they built the huge palace covering 2.5 hectares or 6 acres, including a throne

<sup>29</sup> P. Villard, "Le déplacement des trésors royaux d'après les archives royales de Mari," in D. Charpin and F. Joannès, *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le proche-orient ancien*, (Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1992), 195-205, and N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm*, (Paris: Société pour l'Étude du Proche-Orient ancien, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> J. Vanderkam, "Prophecy and Apocalypics in the Ancient Near East," J. Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, (New York: Scribneris, MacMillan, 1995), 2083-94; for Mari examples in translation see W. Moran in J. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 623-6, 629-32.

room, and a separate women's quarter. For unknown reasons Hammurapi of Babylon attacked and took Mari in 1761; he occupied it for a few months, looted and burned it. It was not reoccupied in antiquity.<sup>31</sup>

The archives show great detail about the activities of the officials of the kingdom, which was called *Aḫ Purattim* "The Banks of the Euphrates." The archives reveal more detail about daily life and administration than any other period in antiquity. The only literary text is an otherwise unknown epic about the Mari king Zimri-Lim. Recent developments in the excavations and in the study of texts appear in the occasional publication *Mari: Annales de Recherches interdisciplinaires*.<sup>32</sup>

### Hazor

This is the largest site in Israel, not far from the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee and situated on an ancient north-south trade route; it was probably the most important city of the region. It is known from the Egyptian texts of the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries where rulers cursed their enemies calling the site Hasara, and the Mari texts too mention it as a trade depot for tin. The upper city of the site was settled in the Early Bronze age around 3000 BCE, but the lower part only in the second millennium. Already in Middle Bronze I about 2000 BCE it was significant, but the site got much bigger with Middle Bronze II after 1800. Like more northern sites, it had a smattering of cuneiform remains including a clay liver model and a Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual,

<sup>31</sup> J.-C. Margueron, "Mari," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3: 413-17; "French archaeologist solves mystery of ancient Mesopotamian city," *AFP (Agence France Presse) Features* March 2, 2005; M. Van de Mieroop, *King Hammurabi of Babylon*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 64-71.

<sup>32</sup> (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations); M. Guichard, "Mari Texts," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3: 419-21; J. Silva Castillo, "Nomadism Through the Ages," in D. Snell, ed., *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 126-40.

but no archives were found. The period lasted till around 1600 and ended with destruction for Hazor.<sup>33</sup>

The Late Bronze city was smaller, but it had interesting small religious reliefs including one of the moon god and a crouching lion. A temple lined with orthostats, that is, smooth worked stones, had a tripartite arrangement similar to that described for the later temple at Jerusalem. The Amarna letters from Egypt show the king of Hazor, spelled there Ḫašura, claimed his city was loyal to the Egyptians. This period also ended violently, with cult objects mutilated. The excavator thought this meant that iconoclastic Israelites came in around 1100, as in the Biblical description in Joshua 11:1-10. But the question of who destroyed the site then should probably be left open in view of the contradictory ideas in Judges 4 and 5, where Hazor seems to be still quite powerful.<sup>34</sup>

The rebuilding in Iron I, when Israelites probably did occupy the site, had a high place, an open-air religious structure on which to sacrifice animals to the god, with incense stands; the high place is of interest because Israelite thinkers condemned such things, as in Psalm 78:58, "For they provoked [God] to anger with their high places..." A water system was dug to groundwater, perhaps under the Israelite King Ahab (about 872-851 BCE). After a destruction coinciding with Tiglath-Pileser III's campaign in 732, there was an Assyrian palace built here.<sup>35</sup>

### Emar

(cuneiform: Imār)

This rambling site on the middle Euphrates in Syria is of interest for its Middle Babylonian archives (1400-1200 BCE)

<sup>33</sup> A. Ben-Tor, "Hazor," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3: 1-5, 1-2.

<sup>34</sup> Ben-Tor, "Hazor," 2-4; W. Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992, French 1987), 227 and 228 from Hazor, but 148:41 and 364:18 from other places say the king of Hazor was disloyal.

<sup>35</sup> Ben-Tor, "Hazor," 4-5.

that show many details about religious observance in a town dominated by people with West Semitic names but having the occasional Hurrian resident and presumably usually under Hittite domination. A great deal can be said about the periodicity and nature of religious festivals and the flow of goods that they involved. Emar controlled traffic on the Euphrates, and this control was a goal of later states, and so this site continued to be occupied into Byzantine times.

Earlier references to Emar in the Ebla and Mari texts, dating to the 2300s to 1800s BCE, were apparently to a slightly different location since the excavated site had nothing earlier than Late Bronze remains and may have been built by the Hittites as an outpost in the 1300s if not by the Mitannians earlier. Thirty houses were uncovered including one with a library belonging to a priest that included both his own private texts and some that reflected royal concerns. There was a palace for the governor which was the earliest of the *bīt ḫilani* design, that is, a building with a columned portico and long rooms behind it. Temples were found, one dedicated to Baal, the rain god, and one to Astarte, a Venus figure. The site was destroyed in 1187 and only gradually reoccupied.<sup>36</sup>

The texts include economic texts and contracts along with letters, but there are also Southern Mesopotamian lexical texts and omens. There are few literary texts, but there are two fragments of the Gilgamesh poem and a Sumerian dispute poem along with a wisdom text known from Ugarit on the Syrian coast and the Hittite capital in central Turkey. Two hundred ritual texts for the local cult give in amazing detail what you have to do in the local religion to install a priestess and to carry out a commemoration ceremony. These texts get us closer to ancient religion than most other religious records, but of course they also conduct us into a different world with assumptions we

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<sup>36</sup> J.-C. Margueron and M. Sigrist, "Emar," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2: 236-9.

would not have predicted. Regrettably the Emar pottery has not been sufficiently published to allow study of the transition from Mitannian domination to the period when the Hittites controlled the site, if the transition even shows up in ceramics.<sup>37</sup>

### Ugarit

(in the Ugaritic writing system: 'ugrt)

Ugarit was a small kingdom on the Syrian coast near modern Latakia involved with seaborne trade and also the manipulation of agricultural surpluses from its countryside. Occupied from the Neolithic to the Early Bronze, the site was abandoned around 2000 for a century or even two. Amorites coming in afterwards may have rebuilt the city and constructed a surrounding wall. The key period is between 1400 and 1200, when the royal palace had archives, and houses did too. First under Egyptian dominion, the city was folded into the area of control of the Hittite emperor Suppiluliuma (1344-1322 BCE).

An extensive archive in Akkadian shows the local king involved in land deals, usually sanctioning purchases made by other worthies. The royals apparently controlled most of the wealth. A temple of Baal, with a stela showing the weather god in action and an Egyptian votive to Baal, had a tower perhaps 18 m tall. Votive anchors imply sailors could probably see it from the sea and prayed to its god. Within the city the rich and the poor lived cheek by jowl. Though there were no clearly identifiable schools, there were literate people, and religious sites were scattered throughout the city. Musical instruments including a horn, symbols, and ivory rattles show that the religious activity was not conducted in silence.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> J. Huehnergard, "Emar Texts," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2: 239-40; for Gilgamesh see A. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, (London: Penguin, 1999), 135-8, relating to the Standard Edition's Tablets V and VI; D. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar*, (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 293; Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 341.

<sup>38</sup> M. Yon, "Ugarit," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5: 255-262, 260-1.

But most interestingly a set of texts was found in a simple cuneiform writing system that was quickly deciphered in the 1930s as an early form of West Semitic, the language group that included Aramaic and Hebrew. Archival texts and letters exist in that script too, but most important have been the poetic texts that speak of the adventures of the local gods and heroes in formulaic language with parallel uses of synonymous words that are sometimes exactly the same as ones attested in poetry in the Hebrew Bible. An example is Psalm 145: 13: "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations," a parallelism also found in an Ugaritic poem as "You shall take Your eternal kingdom, Your everlasting dominion." We do not know how the texts were used in ceremonies, if they were. But it is clear that there was cultural continuity of a sort between the scribes of those texts and some later Hebrews. About eighty texts of a religious nature in Ugaritic offer a pathway into Ugaritic thought. It is not so clear that Ugarit really embodied "Canaanite" religion, and in fact Ugarit was not in the lowlands presumably referred to by the term Canaan. Still, there are important links that continue to fascinate and sometimes to elucidate Biblical passages.<sup>39</sup>

### Megiddo

Though occupied much earlier, Megiddo developed into a city in the Early Bronze Age after the 3000s BCE, and the lower town was built to an area of 50 hectares in that period. There was a massive wall; Megiddo (Mktj in hieroglyphs) was not destroyed by the New Kingdom Egyptian kings but was conquered in 1479 in Thutmose III's first Asiatic campaign, as recorded at the Egyptian shrine at Karnak. There were six Amarna letters written

<sup>39</sup> D. Pardee, "Ugaritic Inscriptions," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5: 264-6, 265; for the Ugaritic text see H. Ginzberg, "Ugaritic Texts," in J. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 131, III AB A line 10; L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 485, for Canaan.

from Megiddo in the 1350s, and a fragment of the Gilgamesh Epic was found in a discard pile. The tablet contained parts of Tablet VII in the later epic. There is also the largest collection of carved ivory in the Near East, found in a room of a temple. A three-chambered gate dated from the Late Bronze Age, and was probably linked to the earlier glacis, or sloped wall, which protected the site. The destruction around 1130 may have been due to the end of Egyptian rule in the area.<sup>40</sup>

Whether there were remains built by King Solomon of Israel (about 970-931 BCE) is still uncertain, and another big city gate was built later, in the period of the Divided Monarchy.<sup>41</sup> At Megiddo there was a stela of the Egyptian king Sheshonq, Shishak in the Bible, who invaded in 925, so he probably did not destroy it but preferred to use it as an Egyptian stronghold; the stela was found in the dump of the excavation, though, so its exact use cannot be pinpointed. There was found a Hebrew seal referring to a king Jereboam, but whether the first (928-07) or the second of that name (787-47) is unclear. Structures interpreted as stables could house 150 horses and their grain.<sup>42</sup>

Tiglath-pileser III annexed Megiddo in 732 and made it the capital of an Assyrian province that he called Magiddu. The

<sup>40</sup> B. Halpern in I. Finkelstein, D. Ussishkin, and B. Halpern, eds., *Megiddo III. The 1992-1996 Seasons*, (Jerusalem: Tel Aviv University, 2000), 536; D. Ussishkin, "Megiddo," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3: 460-9; W. Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, French 1987), letters 242-4, 246, 248, and 365; J. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 123-9; the Megiddo fragment is related to the Standard Editionis Tablet VII, A. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, (London: Penguin, 1999), 138-9.

<sup>41</sup> Halpern, 558, and Finkelstein and Ussishkin, in their *Megiddo*, 600.

<sup>42</sup> Ussishkin, "Megiddo," 465-7; on the findspot of the Sheshonq stela, see G. Barkay, in A. Ben-Tor, ed., *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 307; for the stela see S. Horn and P. K. McCarter, Jr., "The Divided Monarchy," in H. Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*, (Washington and Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Biblical Archaeology Society and Prentice-Hall, 1999), 131-2. "Sheshonq's stela," published in C. Fisher, *The Excavation of Armageddon*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), 12-13, shows the son of Ra name (*mrj Imn Š3Š3nq*) and the throne name (*Hd-Hpr-R<sup>c</sup> [Stp-n]-R<sup>c</sup>*) but not much else; for the seal see J. Renz and W. Röllig, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), II/2, 21.58, p. 398, arguing that the design shows it related to the later king.

site was abandoned in the fourth century maybe in connection with Alexander the Great's invasion of 332. A Roman legion was stationed at a village here, and the word *legio* lives on in the nearby place name Lejjun.<sup>43</sup>

### Dūr-Katlimmu

This site on a stretch of the lower Khabur River near the modern town of Hassekeh in eastern Syria was occupied from Early Bronze times and had a Middle Bronze citadel contemporary with the Mesopotamian Old Babylonian period. In the Middle Assyrian period (1300s-1200s BCE) the north Mesopotamian leaders branched out into the Jazirah and established an administrative center there, which they called Dūr-Katlimmu, "Katlimmu's Fort." An irrigation system allowed the local farmers to supply the town with food. And there we find an administrative palace and an archive of 500 cuneiform tablets documenting a nosey administration itself occasionally inspected by higher officials from the Assyrian capital of Assur. River and donkey transport helped the Assyrians shift some of the wealth of this area to northern Iraq for their presumably growing population.<sup>44</sup>

Dūr-Katlimmu revived in the Neo-Assyrian period and became a large site of 110-120 hectares dominated by official buildings. Most interestingly, the settlement continued under the Neo-Babylonian kings. Although texts continued to use an Assyrian administrative vocabulary, they were dated to the years of the Babylonian kings after 605. This concretely illustrates the truism that the Neo-Babylonians really did want to continue

<sup>43</sup> J. Peersman in Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern, *Megiddo*, 524-534; Halpern in Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern, *Megiddo*, 570; Ussishkin, "Megiddo," 467-9.

<sup>44</sup> H. Kühne, "Sheikh Hamad, Tell," in E. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5:25-6; Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 348-9; note the western interest in F. M. Fales, "River Transport in Neo-Assyrian Letters," in J. Zabłocka and S. Zawadzki, eds., *Šulmu IV*, (Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 1993), 79-92.

the practices and structures of the Assyrian Empire, but under their control.<sup>45</sup>

### Surface Survey

Surface survey is the tactic of archaeologists' walking over ruin mounds and picking up pottery; if you have a firm pottery chronology for your region, as we do in Palestine and increasingly in Syria, you can approximately date occupation of the tell by studying the distinctive pottery you pick up. Teams of archaeologists search blocks of landscape systematically collecting artifacts, usually potsherds, on the surface of the land. They record the locations of finds to date the occupations of areas surveyed. Increasingly this sort of survey is accompanied by taking aerial photographs and magnetic explorations of features below the present surface of the land.

Surface survey is cheap and efficient, but it does not give as good an idea of what sites were occupied in what periods as actual excavation does. One reason is that some sites are hard to find since they were one-period occupations with little debris; such sites may erode away or otherwise be obscured. Another reason is that researchers may not be systematic in their efforts to identify sites. Also the pick-up may not be systematic, and it probably will be skewed toward the kinds of pottery most familiar to the collectors and from later periods of occupation.<sup>46</sup>

Most interesting are the surface survey results which may indicate an explosive growth in the population of the hill country of the central West Bank of the Jordan around 1200 BCE, just as the Israelite polity may have been coalescing. Before then the uplands of Canaan were only sparsely occupied; they became the core areas of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, tribes later attested, but of course only in the Biblical text.

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<sup>45</sup> Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology*, 79-81, 389.

<sup>46</sup> See D. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 2 and n. 2 and 192 and n. 36 for some of the problems and results.

It is true that those surface surveys, some of them executed quickly after the 1967 war, when it was believed by most Israelis that the West Bank would soon be returned to Jordanian control, may have been flawed.<sup>47</sup> And the Palestinian Authority's fledgling Archaeological Service has apparently at least for the present been abandoned. When peace breaks out, we may know lots more about this area.

The meaning of these developments to a large extent depends on the models one chooses of state development. It is clear something odd and transformative was happening as the Late Bronze system of city states collapsed.<sup>48</sup> We can say that the effort to correlate archaeology with Biblical observations here continues to be popular, but the results are not definitive. And the fact that the Biblical text has gone through years of development may have affected its reflection of the events it narrates. Archaeology does not prove or disprove the Bible, but it does occasionally raise very difficult problems, as may be seen even in the contrast between the conquest stories of Joshua and the first chapter of Judges.<sup>49</sup>

## THE BIBLE AND HISTORY

Breakthroughs in understanding from archaeology are not, I think it is fair to say, echoed in the ongoing struggle to understand the history of Ancient Israel. And I do not believe that this lack of progress has directly to do with the political divisions that still rip the area apart.

In the consideration of the Bible we face unique problems, not all of our own making as scholars. As a revered text of major religions, the Bible is assumed to be true in some sense

<sup>47</sup> A. Mazar, "The Iron Age I," in A. Ben-Tor, ed., *Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 258-301, 285-6.

<sup>48</sup> See in general B. Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> J. Callaway and J. Maxwell Miller, "The Settlement in Canaan: The Period of the Judges," in H. Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*, (Washington, DC, and Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall and Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999), 55-89.

beyond the theological, that is, what it says about God. But it comes to us through what is clearly a very human process of textual transmission, where admittedly well-intentioned scribes misunderstood, miscopied, and misused old texts which they were desperately trying to hand down to us intact. The tradition of the text is actually fairly good between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Aleppo Codex, that is, from 70 C.E. to about 925 C.E.<sup>50</sup> That does not mean that we have the original good texts from very much earlier periods, but it does mean that the canonical sense, the idea that one ought faithfully to copy old texts, was there in an incipient way from the beginning to the end of that crucial millennium of textual traditing.

Morton Smith a generation ago surveyed the study of the Old Testament and found it dominated by what he called "pseudorthodoxy" which sought when possible to credit what the text said about archaeological and historical facts. He wrote that the desire to credit the Bible came from the fears of chaos engendered by the wild events of the twentieth century among the European and North American middle classes since "OT scholarship is a middle class activity." The potential for chaos in the new century seems even greater than two World Wars and the Holocaust. Smith was particularly appalled at the lack of textual criticism and the lack of a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible. Though some progress has been made in that area, it still has not covered the entire corpus. Smith actually called for a separation between archaeologists and philologists so that religious feelings would not be so important in archaeology.<sup>51</sup>

Our problems do not stop with textual criticism, though. Maybe we have a pretty good text, but does it adequately reflect its time, that is, the events depicted? To this two opposite

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<sup>50</sup> J. Sanders, "Masoretic Text," in B. Metzger and M. Coogan, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 501.

<sup>51</sup> M. Smith, "The Present State of Old Testament Studies," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 19-35, 22, 34; E. J. Sanders, "The Hebrew University Bible and Biblia Hebraica Quinta," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 (1999): 518-26.

answers have been given, each of which has some merit in logic and evidence.

First and most traditionally the maximalists argue for the maximal use of the Bible as history. They see the Bible as essentially historical as is. Their basic assumption is that pious people pass down true things. And one can see why. It would have been the pious who heard and remembered the screeds of prophets and the details of lawgivers, and they would have been obsessed with getting it right. True, recent comparative evidence from Africa indicates that detailed, for example, genealogical, memory only lasts orally for three generations. But access to writing may have intervened earlier than that to save what were clearly for some people deeply important texts. And the proto-Israelites had access to the marvelous Phoenician alphabetical contraption that we are still using.<sup>52</sup>

The task of the maximalists is to shore up the stories we have and to try to fit them into the archaeology discovered. These are heirs of William Foxwell Albright and his school of Biblical Archaeology, who see the parallels to things Mesopotamian and Egyptian as underpinning the faithfulness of the text's transmission. And of course such scholars will tend not to want to seek a history of religious developments or even social and economic developments, since the star of the show is the God of Israel, whom we should still be trying to understand. There are those who would still like to see traditional ascriptions of books taken literally, and others who admit that a human process may well have distorted transmission in various ways, but who still wish to see conquest stories as representing a partial vision of social upheaval or who would merely like to have undatable stories pushed back in time to the earliest conceivable date. There are, that is, a wide variety of ways of being more or less a Biblical Archaeologist, and most are aware of the impinging comparative material on the Biblical world.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> J. Tushnet, *The Pursuit of History*, (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 202-10.

<sup>53</sup> P. Machinist, "William Foxwell Albright: The Man and His Work," in J. Cooper and

A pressing of the maximalist view is the Egyptologist K. Kitchen's *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. In every instance Kitchen suggests ways of dating Biblical elements as early as possible. Just one example: Kitchen suggests Second Isaiah's references to Cyrus, presumably the Persian king reigning 559-30 BCE (44: 28-45: 1-3), may actually show the first Isaiah's awareness that earlier Persian kings named Cyrus might intervene in Ancient Near Eastern affairs in the late 700s BCE. Possible, I suppose, but mostly one can see that there is a market for this sort of thing. I must admit I have not studied Kitchen's book as closely as others because it clearly has a polemical purpose; let us, he suggests, give those modern critics a run for their money.<sup>54</sup>

The Assyriologist Hallo writes, "a maximalist is one who accepts all historical statements in the Bible (or, in the case of cuneiform, by evidence contemporaneous with the events describes); a minimalist is one who rejects all such statements until and unless confirmed by extra-Biblical sources (respectively sources contemporaneous with the events they describe)." Hallo finds neither position acceptable.<sup>55</sup>

I take this to mean that someone who credits the internal references in the Bible and thinks that cuneiform texts from similar times must refer to the same events assumes that human affairs were very simple, and events that are memorable to us were clear and important to all contemporaries. But someone who in principle rejects the possibility that events that seem important to us were also of interest to people living at the time rejects the possibility that tradition is sometimes vindicated and does manage to convey early concerns to later times.

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G. Schwartz, eds., *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century*, (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 385-403.

<sup>54</sup> K. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 380; see the review by N. Lemche, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124 (2004): 375-7.

<sup>55</sup> W. Hallo in R. Hendel, W. Hallo and K. Kitchen, "The Kitchen Debate," *Biblical Archaeology Review* July/August 2005, 48-53, 50.

The minimalists look to the evidence from outside the canonical text and find it only slightly connecting with the text. No royal inscriptions from those Israelite kings have been found, nothing much in the way of monumental architecture early either. The memorable massive cookie-cutter gates are certainly the product of something, but probably from later kings of the divided kingdoms, if in fact there were even such rulers.<sup>56</sup>

Many kinds of studies are progressing in the consideration of the canonical evidence. For a number of years the traditional disciplines of so-called literary criticism and form criticism have been supplemented by what has been called rhetorical and narrative criticism, by social science criticism, and by canonical criticism. Let me summarize what I understand by these terms and the kind of results I foresee, as one researcher among many others, each with a feistily held opinion.

### Literary or Source Criticism

In Biblical studies this term does not mean what it does elsewhere but only the attempt to trace the sources of texts felt to be composite. This effort tries to explain apparent contradictions within narrative texts especially and succeeds in highlighting those conflicts but not always in explaining why the conflicts came into existence in the first place. In fact this search for sources underlying narratives also works for legal and poetic texts on occasion and contributes to the impression that the text before us is a pastiche from various ages with various motives. But such efforts are felt to carve up the stories without due concern for how they were understood in their early or later contexts, and perhaps these divisions serve only as a basis for mostly speculative discussions of the motives of individual compositors. A recent example is a study of the Elohist, one of the more elusive of the sources of the first five books of the Bible. Since Tigay demonstrated the empirical basis for sources

<sup>56</sup> I. Finkelstein and J. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, (New York: Free Press, 2001).

criticism, the method has, I believe, been proven to be useful, but the question has always been how far the recognition of such subdivisions really gets us.<sup>57</sup>

### Form Criticism

The search for ancient genres arose in German Biblical scholarship before World War I as an effort to get beyond mere literary division-making. The idea was to try to understand what the ancient literary categories might have been and to try to group texts together that fit into those categories. In a sense this kind of form criticism had been going on for a long time when poetic books were brought together and narrative books grouped together as they were in the order of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. But this modern form criticism focused on smaller units than whole books and tried to find small literary compositions that seemed to represent ancient genres. This effort began in the Psalms, where we seem to have actual genre designations, and several kinds were identified.<sup>58</sup>

The next stage in this direction was to try to figure out what the original or early use of the genre might have been, who might have been interested in memorizing and later in writing down such a thing, and in what social context a particular genre may have been kept and elaborated. In a way this tendency in scholarship seems a very modern one in that it is concerned with how and why people read and preserve and "receive" texts. And in general I think we can say that the identification of genres

<sup>57</sup> J. Barton, "Source Criticism (OT)," in D. Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6: 162-5; A. Graupner, *Der Elohist. Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002); J. Tigay, ed., *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

<sup>58</sup> J. Barton, "Form Criticism [OT]," in D. Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2: 838-41; on the Septuagint order see G. Anderson, "Canonical and Non-Canonical," in P. Ackroyd and C. Evans, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), volume 1, 135-42; on Psalms see G. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, (Chico, California: Scholars, 1985), 155-73.

has won wide acceptance, but the effort to find a sociological situation in life for particular genres has not, usually because it remains speculative.

And yet form criticism does, I think correctly, see that texts did once have at least one situation in the life of a group, and it encourages us to think about that. A good example of a success in form criticism is Alt's classic analysis of legal material between the case-type ("When you buy a Hebrew slave..." Exodus 21:2) and the command-type ("You shall not boil a kid..." Exodus 23:19b), though again his effort to find a social place in the history of Israel for each has not found universal assent. A recent example is an effort to see Psalm 3 as set in a ritual for inducing dreams with a divine message, relying on 3:5 (Hebrew 3:6) "I lie down and sleep; I wake, for the Lord sustains me."<sup>59</sup>

### Rhetorical and Narrative Criticism

The Bible has long been studied as literature, but recent efforts have been to understand the units identified in form criticism as literary units using devices of language to shape and emphasize messages. So Biblical texts, especially poetic compositions, are seen as ideological texts, and the effort must be made to place them in a tradition of argument within the Ancient Near Eastern world. This has been seen as a supplement to form criticism and as pushing scholars' considerations to look at the broadest possible social context for particular passages, looking for ideologies that constituted the assumptions of the speakers and hearers of the texts first pronounced.

Other scholars have studied narrative itself as a way of understanding the ideology and motivations behind texts. A

<sup>59</sup> A. Alt, "The Origins of Israelite Law," in his *Old Testament History and Religion*, (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1966; German 1934), 103-171; for critiques of Alt see R. Sonsino, "Forms of Biblical Law," in D. Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4: 252-4; R. Fidler, "A Touch of Support: Ps 3, 6 and the Psalmist's Experience," *Biblica* 86 (2005): 197-212.

recent example examines the story about Judah in Genesis 38 as it contributes to the Joseph story.<sup>60</sup>

### Social Science Criticism

This tendency has focused especially on the early stages of the formation of Israel and has sought to use insights from anthropology, economics, and sociology in interpreting texts about the early periods. While it is clear that tribal societies studied elsewhere, as at Mari, have many features that may illuminate Israel's tribal structure, it is not so obvious that the tribal structure shows through in texts cherished over many generations. Insights from the history of economics do help explain the concerns of the prophets as their society was becoming more debt-ridden and less closely knit by earlier values. A recent study has focused on understanding the ideal woman as depicted in Proverbs 31 in social and economic context.<sup>61</sup>

### Canonical Criticism

The effort of scholars within this tendency has been to look at how Biblical books and passages have been understood down the ages, presupposing that the other methods noted above have elucidated what they could of the original contexts of life in Israel. But since the successes of such studies are limited, canonical critics have tried to see what the texts meant in the lives of subsequent communities, returning especially to Biblical commentators of the pre-critical past as well as those since the

<sup>60</sup> T. Dozeman, "OT Rhetorical Criticism," and D. Fewell and D. Gunn, "Narrative, Hebrew," in D. Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York, Doubleday, 1992), 5: 712-15, 4: 1023-27; A. Wénin, "L'Aventure de Juda en Genèse 38 et l'Histoire de Joseph," *Revue Biblique* 111 (2004): 5-27.

<sup>61</sup> N. Gottwald, "Sociology (Ancient Israel)," in D. Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York, Doubleday, 1992), 6: 79-89; J. Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets*, (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988); on tribes as a problem rather than a solution, see B. Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 90-2; C. Yoder, "The Woman of Substance (אִשָּׁת־חַיִּל): A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003): 427-47.

Reformation. Attention has also been paid to the ways in which concepts were commented on within the Biblical text even before the Bible was widely seen as canonical, while others have sought to see both the continuities in interpretation and the changes that have come over time. A recent example explores the depiction of angels in Daniel and Deuteronomy with a similar depiction in the New Testament Book of Revelations.<sup>62</sup>

Combinations of the above approaches are not uncommon. And some scholars seek to put questions about the Bible in a self-consciously modern context.<sup>63</sup> Always we are confronted with the consideration expressed by a Classical epigrapher that “Inscriptions seldom respond directly to the questions we want to ask of them, and the information they provide is invariably filtered through the medium by which it is transmitted.” The task is to distinguish between what is conventional in the genre and the realities that may be reflected; and “even if the bias cannot be corrected, it can be recognized and can itself become an object of study.”<sup>64</sup>

In spite of the body of scholarship which these approaches have generated, I think it is fair to say that the distance between those who study Biblical texts and those who study archaeological remains is greater than in Syria itself. This is understandable since the texts being studied are not being found in archaeological context. And this distance between text people

<sup>62</sup> G. Sheppard, “Canonical Criticism,” in D. Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York, Doubleday, 1992), 1: 861-6; classic on inner-Biblical exegesis is M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); the method of trying to reflect the readings of later Jewish and Christian, though not Muslim, communities is exemplified by B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); E. McGarry, “The Ambidexterous Angel (Daniel 12:7 and Deuteronomy 32:40): Inner-biblical Exegesis and Textual Criticism in Counterpoint,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 211-28.

<sup>63</sup> See the journal *The Bible and Critical Theory*, (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Monash University Press), and its mission to raise “questions about the Bible concerning race and ethnicity, indigeneity, gender and sexual difference, class and ideology, hegemony and subversion, the nature of history, texts and readers, and so on.”

<sup>64</sup> J. Bodel, *Epigraphic Evidence. Ancient History from Inscriptions*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 46.

and archaeologists is in line with Smith's earlier call, but it may not in fact now be healthy. Both archaeologists and text scholars face the problem of living in cultures that have already answered some questions about our work. It will always be an effort to keep those questions open, but it is wise to do so if scholarship is ever to approach explanations that will be acceptable regardless of one's religious background.<sup>65</sup>

### Recent Historical Approaches

We cannot be sure of the historicity, so we look to studying traditions as a possible way of approaching the text. Who kept the stories, and what do they argue for? They can be seen as folklore only, not descriptions of historical events.

Perhaps the most continuous arguments in this direction have come from Italy, most memorably in Giovanni Garbini's *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*, revising a series of articles published in Italian over several years before. Because of an early work of Mario Liverani, in which he explained the impossibility of writing a history of the origins of Israel, I assumed that his new book would be equally devoted to the proposition that one cannot write a history of Israel. But his book belies that supposition, and I think its skepticism and sensibleness offer insights into the problems of the process of discussing how Israelite history unfolded, given the state of the evidence.<sup>66</sup>

Liverani's title is "Beyond the Bible. Ancient History of Israel." As one might expect, Liverani pays a great deal of attention to the

<sup>65</sup> The basic bibliography is the ongoing *Elenchus of Biblica* published yearly by the Pontifical Biblical Institute; sketches of purely Israelite archaeology include Y. Aharoni, *The Archaeology of the Land of Israel*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982, Hebrew 1978); V. Fritz, *Einführung in die biblische Archäologie*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985); A. Ben-Tor, ed., *Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and A. Mazar and E. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 2 volumes, (New York: Doubleday, 1990, 2001).

<sup>66</sup> G. Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*, (New York: Crossroad, 1988); M. Liverani, "Le 'Origini' di Israele, Progetto irrealizzabile di ricerca etnogenetica," *Rivista Biblica* 28 (1980): 9-31.

environmental history of the region and to the political history as it is clarified from the Amarna letters. These letters were found in Egypt and covering the period between about 1390 and 1336 BCE, and Liverani is an expert on them; he is the translator of a new edition into Italian. Liverani studies not just statements and concerns of kings but tries to pick up the hints about how the villages under them worked and did not work, since he sees the period as one of increasing crisis, in which the old palace-centered economies were falling apart.<sup>67</sup>

For Liverani the crisis around 1200 was a culmination of that collapse, but of course there were also effects from beyond the scope of Syria-Palestine, as the Sea Peoples destabilized the coastal area and the Aramaeans may have played a similar role inland. When the dust cleared, though, and we come to focus on what aspects of society we can read in the Iron Age, we have from Liverani what turns out to be a pretty traditional mixture of archaeological insights (presumably Israelite highland villages lack pig bones, but lowland Canaanite centers have them),<sup>68</sup> along with statements that show that Liverani, for all his devotion to external evidence, could not have a history of Israel without relying on the much later canonical sources with their possible accretions from later times. He writes, "It is however not difficult to remove these later incrustations and to reconstruct the reign of Saul on the basis of only factual notices:..." And he then proceeds to try to do so, but really without a detailed analysis of 1 Samuel.<sup>69</sup>

He has many interesting insights into how you build an Ancient Near Eastern kingdom from scratch. He throws up telling suggestions about how later Jehu's coup about 841 BCE shows he was a vassal of Damascus, accepting the restorations in the

<sup>67</sup> M. Liverani, *Oltre la Bibbia. Storia antica di Israele*, (Rome: Laterza, 2003); M. Liverani, *Le lettere di el-Amarna*, (Brescia: Paideia, 1998-9), 2 volumes. An English translation of *Oltre* is apparently being planned since translation rights have been sold.

<sup>68</sup> Liverani, *Oltre*, 64.

<sup>69</sup> Liverani, *Oltre*, 100, "Non è difficile però rimuovere queste incrostazioni posteriori e ricostruire il regno di Saul sulla base delle sole notizie fattuali:..."

Tel Dan inscription as describing the double assassinations in 2 Kings. This is the suggestion of the original publishers of the text, but the restorations may not be correct. Liverani does not dwell on this as a historical problem. In fact he slogs dutifully through the periods in the usual history of Israel.<sup>70</sup>

His innovation comes in the second part, entitled “An invented story,” or, since *storia* in Italian also means history, “an invented history.” There he explains the idea that the patriarchal stories might be connected with the returned exiles and their limited self-government under the Persians after 539 BCE. He sees the judges’ stories, set around the years after 1100 BCE, as deriving from the trials of living under those Persians, including asserting a twelve-tribe system. Stories about the united monarchy he would place in a time when messianic hopes were needed, and he puts the founding of the temple when the priests became dominant in the post-exilic community. He suggests law and covenant were expressions of concerns with ethnic intermixture and religious purity of such late communities, as seen in the Book of Ezra.<sup>71</sup>

These sections of Liverani’s book are sometimes surprising and always inventive, but in many cases he has used the same texts earlier to trace a more traditional history, and he may not be entirely clear on what he thinks was happening. Were these stories invented after the exile, or was older material “encrusted,” as Liverani suggested, with new concerns? This later encrustation and reuse of older material is, I think, widely admitted to have occurred, though some fundamentalists might resist the idea. But the process ends up being not so radical as it seemed to begin with. And a major continuing problem is deciding what is more original and what is more encrustation. It has not been, at least in my experience and reading, a simple matter.

In theory anyway the archaeologists are doing the same sort of thing everywhere, and they are finding they need larger

<sup>70</sup> Liverani, *Oltre*, 127; A. Biran and J. Naveh, “The Tell Dan Inscription: A New Fragment,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 45 (1995): 1-18.

<sup>71</sup> Liverani, *Oltre*, 275-407.

teams of specialists to help them interpret data gathered with increasingly meticulous methods. But it may be useful here to compare the methods used by the text-people dealing with Bible and cuneiform. The cuneiformists do not usually need to pay attention to the composite nature of texts found in the ground, but in fact all major literary texts lend themselves to such analysis, perhaps most clearly in texts that have a long and varied history, like *Gilgamesh*. And form criticism too might be felt to be dispensable since many texts have genre designations; but in fact the genres seem sometimes to be impossibly large, and smaller divisions may help better isolate situations in which the texts were used. It is frequently a challenge to find the social situation of texts copied more than once; archival texts may almost directly reveal their social uses if found *in situ*, but even that may be the tip of a social iceberg. The study of rhetoric and narrative has been attempted in individual works of cuneiform material too, but the results have not been generalized in accessible ways. Social science study of the material is among the most obvious one might undertake, but as in Biblical studies, one finds that basic assumptions of the modern researcher have a great deal to do with how the texts are understood. The study of canon is a major undertaking for anyone interested in literary texts preserved in more than one copy, although the idea of canon in a flexible and changing scribal tradition as an analogy to later feelings about the Bible has been challenged. But anyone who thinks the Biblical canon in the first centuries of our era was canonical in the sense later understood has not been paying attention.

### SUMMATION

We may get better surface surveys and more meticulous excavations, and one may hope for more and older texts, against the fervent activity of the forgers, who have recently been so

successful at getting some people to buy into a royal inscription or two and Jesus' brother's grave inscription. Perhaps we will be jaded when the real thing comes along, if it does. From our experience with Mesopotamian texts we may find new and unexpected kings making aBiblical claims the nature of which we cannot foretell. Imagine the study of Hebrew poetry before Ugarit was found with its own writing tradition, or the Early Dynastic Period of Mesopotamia before Ebla.

But let us be frank; ancient studies have always been a part of the cultures in which they lived. Fundamentalists will not go away, and neither will critical thinkers. The study of ancient Syria and Palestine has experienced amazingly productive years of discovery; there is no reason to think, in spite of modern political divisions, that future years will be any less revolutionary.



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