

The History of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Overview

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HISTORIANS WHO ATTEMPT a synthetic survey of the history of Sumer and Akkad encounter, first of all, the problem of how to divide that history into periods. There is a certain consensus on organizing into periods the three millennia that separate the appearance of writing in Sumer from the arrival of the Greeks with Alexander, and this consensus will be followed here. Its validity, however, has sometimes been questioned. Some have noted that it privileges periods for which abundant written sources are available, separating them by "dark ages" that often last more than a century. Such a representation of history as a sequence of brilliant periods interrupted by invasions of barbarian hordes—Akkadians, Amorites, Kassites, Aramaeans—has often provided an easy target for criticism.

To be sure, the people of these so-called dark ages did have a history, although it is less accessible to the historian because of the lack of documents. Also, written sources for the history of Sumer and Akkad are provided largely through archaeology, for there is no uninterrupted historiographic tradition such as the one that brought us biblical writings or the Greek and Latin classics, via medieval copyists. Some recent dis-

coveries, such as those of Ebla (modern Tell Mardikh), have shown that entire cultures can suddenly come to light and considerably alter the representation proposed by historians of a particular period or region. More discoveries are to be expected, especially regarding the earlier periods. Nevertheless, the large number of excavations conducted in Iraq since the nineteenth century and the conditions under which written documents have survived indicate that on the whole the abundance of epigraphic sources for a particular period can be considered meaningful.

Regarding ancient historiography, historians of Sumer and Akkad find themselves in a situation radically different from that of colleagues studying the "classical" world, in that they have no historical narratives at their disposal. With the exception perhaps of Berossus, there is no equivalent of Herodotus or Thucydides and no description of ancient institutions comparable with Aristotle's writings. Writers of Mesopotamian history must therefore reconstruct the past on the basis of primary, unmediated sources, a task that generates excitement but also creates difficulties. (See also "Ancient Mesopotamia in Classical Greek and Hellenistic Thought" in Part 1, Vol. I.)

From a certain point of view, Assyriologists are in a situation comparable with that of Egyptologists, who still depend on Manetho's division of Egyptian history into dynasties. Our knowledge of Mesopotamian history is derived from kinglists, dynastic chronicles, "year formulas," annals, and especially commemorative royal inscriptions. This type of source is not impartial. To accept their contents blindly may lead to an erroneous representation of a period. These data must be checked and supplemented with the abundant information provided by archival texts (letters, contracts, economic and administrative documents). Also, account must be taken of possible incongruity when applying the same term (Old Assyrian/Babylonian, Middle Assyrian/Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian/Babylonian) in linguistic and in historical contexts. Thus, "Neo-Babylonian" designates both the Babylonian dialect of the first millennium and, as a political term, the much shorter period of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626–539).

The importance of the protohistoric heritage is undeniable. Some archaeologists claim that by the year 3000 most technical breakthroughs had already taken place. This disregards such major innovations as the spread of the light, horse-drawn chariot in the mid second millennium and the increase in the use of iron technology at the beginning of the first millennium. These scholars unconsciously repeat the opinion, prevalent in Mesopotamia, that at the dawn of time all elements of civilization were brought to mankind by the mythical being Oannes, half man and half fish, after which "nothing new was invented." This ideology of a golden age, totally alien to the notion of progress, pervades the Mesopotamian mentality: everything must tend to restore an ideal, primitive order that has deteriorated. In spite of this belief, however, people never ceased to innovate, devising new forms of political and economic organization. It would be misguided to represent the history of Sumer and Akkad as three millennia of stagnation. Doubtless the major technical progress of the historical periods is the ever-increasing use of writing, an incomparable instrument of environmental, as well as social, control. (See also "The Use of Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia" in Part 8, Vol. III.)

THE EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD (2900–2350)

The period from 2900 to 2350 has long been called "Pre-Sargonic," referring to Sargon of Akkad (Agade), who ascended the throne in 2350. The term "Early Dynastic" is now preferred, and archaeologists have subdivided it into phases I, II, and III. While writing emerged around 3200 BCE, more than six centuries elapsed before the appearance of the earliest "historical," or more accurately "commemorative," inscriptions—dedicatory texts on bricks and door-hinge sockets, figurines buried in foundations, and votive inscriptions on vases, decorative plaques, mace heads, and the like. These

TABLE 1
Sumer and Akkad in the Third Millennium

Early Dynastic I (ca. 2900–2700)
Early Dynastic II (ca. 2700–2600)
Early Dynastic III (ca. 2600–2350)
 First Dynasty of Lagash
Ur-Nanshe (ca. 2500)
Eannatum <i>Stele of the Vultures</i> (ca. 2450)
Uru-inimgina (Urukagina)
 Empire of Akkad (Agade) (ca. 2350–2193)
Sargon (2334–2279)
Rimush (2278–2270)
Manishtushu (2269–2255)
Naram-Sin (2254–2218)
Shar-kali-sharri (2217–2193)
<i>Gutian invasions</i>
 Second Dynasty of Lagash
Gudea (ca. 2100?)
 Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III) (2112–2004)
Ur-Nammu (2112–2095)
Shulgi (2094–2047)
Amar-Sin (2046–2038)
Shu-Sin (2037–2029)
Ibbi-Sin (2028–2004)
<i>Amorite and LÚ.SU invasions</i>

In bold, the principal periods; in *italics*, some of the key events or artifacts; dates are for complete regnal years

inscriptions are often laconic, and the Sumerian dialect in which they are written remains obscure. Nevertheless, they indicate that Sumer, in present-day southern Iraq, was divided between some thirty city-states, each with a patron deity and a ruler generally called *ENSI*: Ur (modern Tell al-Muqayyar) and Uruk (modern Warka, biblical Erech) in the south, Umma (Tell Jokha) farther north, and Lagash (Tell al-Hiba) in the east are well documented. In the north of Sumer, Kish (modern Tell Uhaimir, Tell Ingharra) has yielded some inscriptions, as has Mari (Tell Hari-ri) in the northwest. No lasting authority could be imposed on these principalities, which jealously guarded their independence, as is indicated by the erection around 2700 of fortification walls around cities. The history of this period is still poorly known, and the use by some historians of later literary narratives concerning legendary rulers of that period, such as Gilgamesh, who allegedly reigned in Uruk around 2600 BCE, is questionable. Likewise, historians long have misguidedly relied on the Sumerian Kinglist, whose partisan character is well established. It offers a warped vision of history, enumerating the cities where kingship "resided" after it "came down from heaven."

By 2500 the city of Kish seems to have established some kind of hegemony over Sumer. Its ruler took the title *lugal*, which consecrated this preeminence. Thereafter, the title "king of Kish" was borne by sovereigns of various cities eager to see their supremacy acknowledged. Thus, Mesalim, the king of Kish, arbitrated the century-old quarrel between Lagash and its neighbor Umma over their border. Possession of land and, even more important, control of irrigation canals, essential to agricultural prosperity, seem to have been the most frequent causes of conflicts. The famous Stela of the Vultures commemorates one of the victories won by Lagash, which also experienced less glorious episodes. International relations are sparsely documented: a few inscriptions allude to alliances and coalitions, presupposing diplomatic exchanges. Long-distance trade is also attested, such as the chartering, by Ur-Nanshe of Lagash, of cargo ships sent to Dilmun (Bahrain) to bring wood to Sumer.

In spite of the political fragmentation, the Su-

merian city-states may have formed a kind of league. They shared a set of religious beliefs that recognized the supremacy of the patron deity of Nippur, Enlil, over the pantheon. Through accidents of discovery, Lagash is the best-known of these city-states. Its sovereigns are documented over six generations, covering about a century and a half (circa 2500–2350), from Ur-Nanshe to Uru-inimgina (Urukagina); their capital was located at Girsu (Tello). In addition to commemorative inscriptions, sixteen hundred administrative texts have survived, such as ration lists and assignments of fields. The reconstruction proposed by historians on the basis of these texts has varied. For a long time, prevailing opinion was that the city-states were "temple states" in which the gods were the sole landowners. A recent reexamination of the sources has shown that the economy of Lagash was in fact controlled by the king through the intermediary of large domains connected with the temples of the city's prominent deities. Sometimes conflicts erupted between the royal family and the *SANGA*, who were responsible for the management of temple land. It is probably in this context that the "reforms" of Uru-inimgina, the last Early Dynastic ruler of Lagash, occurred; his was the earliest case of royal intervention in the law. (See also "Social and Economic Organization of Ancient Mesopotamian Temples" in Part 4, Vol. I.)

Writing was not confined to administrative bookkeeping or to celebrating royal deeds and gifts. There are also literary remains from these early periods, thanks mostly to the discoveries at Shuruppakh (Fara) and especially at Tell Abu Salabikh. These consist essentially of school tablets, on which are preserved not only lexical lists but also hymns and "wisdom" literature. Although the greater part of Sumerian literature is known from eighteenth-century manuscripts, it now appears that this corpus was established mostly in the Early Dynastic Period.

THE EMPIRE OF AKKAD AND ITS FALL (2350–2193)

At the end of the Early Dynastic Period the king of Umma, Lugalzagesi, seized Uruk, established

domination over Lagash, and then became LUGAL over all the rulers of Sumer. His triumph was short, however, and he was defeated and replaced by an Akkadian named Sargon, whose rise ushered in a new phase of Mesopotamian history that saw for the first time the political unification of Sumer and Akkad. The Akkadian language (called, for this period, Old Akkadian) was now used in both royal inscriptions and archival documents. The momentous character of this period was felt by the ancients themselves: the figures of Sargon and his grandson Naram-Sin soon became legendary and inspired reflections on the meaning of history well into the first millennium BCE.

The internal organization of Sargon's realm is poorly known. Little by little, the local ENSI, deprived of their independence, were replaced with Akkadian governors devoted to the advancement of their monarch. Moreover, Sargon launched an ambitious program of territorial expansion to the northwest. Marching up the Euphrates, he received kingship over this region of Syria from the god Dagan of Tuttul (Tell Bila) at the mouth of the Balikh River. But this campaign to the Mediterranean was nothing more than a military raid. His son Rimush, who succeeded him, faced a general rebellion in Sumer; its suppression caused the death of thousands.

Naram-Sin, the grandson of Sargon, profoundly transformed the realm he inherited, creating a true empire. Here one must raise a question long debated among specialists: Is it justified to speak of an "empire" of Akkad? To be sure, there is no term in the Akkadian language corresponding to our notion of empire, which was inherited from Rome. But this does not preclude the existence of the phenomenon itself. The definition proposed by the medievalist Georges Duby states two criteria: "The concept of empire is tied in a complex cosmogonic system which presupposes universal dominion, at least of the universe 'which has some value.' There is also one even more essential characteristic, which is the sacral character of the emperor, who becomes a hypostatic incarnation of the deity." During the Akkad period these two criteria can be observed for the first time in Mesopotamian history. The monarch now bore the title "king of the four shores," indicating that his do-

minion extended (theoretically) to the limits of the inhabited world. This universalist claim was accompanied by a new phenomenon, the deification of the ruler, symbolized by the iconographic representation of the king wearing the horned tiara, previously an exclusive attribute of gods. Scribes now preceded the name of the monarch with a specific sign, called a determinative, normally found before names of deities. Horned tiara and divine determinative symbolized, in the respective domains of figurative art and writing, the new dimension acquired by the ruler. He was no longer only a chief, a *primus inter pares*, but a being with a different essence, called to world dominion.

Reality did not conform to this new worldview. The administrative structure of the empire of Akkad was loose, and imperial control did not extend as far as it theoretically might have. Nevertheless, a political structure of independent city-states was replaced with a unified and centralized entity administered from the capital, a new city called Agade (Akkad) located in the environs of modern Baghdad. A reform of the writing system favored the standardization of accounting procedures and allowed control of local administrators by delegates of the monarch. Old Akkadian archives have been found at Susa (biblical Shushan, modern Shush), Gasur (later Nuzi, modern Yorghun Tepe), and as far north as Tell Brak, in the triangle formed by the Khabur's confluence with the Euphrates. But more important, a new vision of sovereignty was being created that inspired the ideology of all subsequent Mesopotamian monarchies, regardless of their origins. This first political unification of Babylonia occurred notably late, compared with Egypt, but no doubt geographical determinism was a factor.

Ethnolinguistic diversity is one of the criteria often employed in defining empire. An empire includes diverse people under a unified political structure. It would be anachronistic to speak of nations in the ancient Near East. According to Mogens T. Larsen, "An empire can be defined as a supranational system of political control, whether its center is a city-state or a territorial state." This aspect of the problem surely presents considerable difficulties to historians. The only criterion of analysis in this case is personal names. However, onomastics—the study of how

names are formed—requires careful handling. This period was long characterized as dominated by the conflict between southern and northern Babylonia, peopled with non-Semitic Sumerians and Semitic Akkadians, respectively. The rise of Babylonia to political power is said to have occurred under Sargon of Akkad. However, historians have realized that a century earlier, around 2500, half of the scribes of Abu Salabikh in southern Babylonia bore Semitic names. Accordingly, it has been suggested that Sumerian might have been a dead language by the middle of the third millennium, a hypothesis that mutes the problem of an alleged conflict between Sumerians and Akkadians. A recent study has reinstated a more traditional view. Based on a systematic onomastic survey, this study reaffirms the correlation between onomastics and ethnolinguistic appurtenance, and states that 80 percent of the inhabitants of Sumer bore Sumerian names. In Akkad in the north, the number of Sumerian names is dramatically smaller. Moreover, these onomastics were still creative and new names appeared, indicating that the language was still alive. Generally, bearers of Sumerian names must have spoken Sumerian, which was no longer the case in the early second millennium. Consequently, the ethnolinguistic factor may have played a nonnegligible role in the internal rebellions that punctuated the consolidation of the empire of Akkad.

This would explain the persistent opposition to the ruler of Akkad. Indeed, by the time of Naram-Sin, no one alive had known the regime of the independent Pre-Sargonic city-states. Sumer had long lived in peace, the borders were well guarded, commerce was thriving. And yet Naram-Sin had to face numerous rebellions, some of which perhaps were caused by the allegedly sacrilegious works he undertook in destroying part of the great temple of Nippur (Nuffar). These events may be reflected in the famous composition entitled the *Curse of Agade*. (See "Kings of Akkad: Sargon and Naram-Sin" later in this volume.)

His successor, Shar-kali-sharri, had more modest ambitions. Giving up the title "king of the four shores," he kept only "king of Akkad." Successive defeats limited his realm to the region of the capital, and the dynasty survived forty more years in obscurity. The instrumental

role of the Gutian tribes in the fall of Akkad is uncertain. It seems more likely that they filled the vacuum created by the decay of the empire.

THE THIRD DYNASTY OF UR (2112–2004)

Ancient historiography ascribed to Utu-khegal, brother of Ur-Nammu, the founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur, the role of liberating Sumer from the Gutian hordes. At first, however, the kingdom of Ur was probably overshadowed by Lagash. Indeed, prosopographic data from a homogeneous group of Lagash texts indicates that the dynasty of Gudea (Second Dynasty of Lagash) partly overlaps the reign of Ur-Nammu. The achievements of Sumerian culture under Gudea need not be stressed, as evidenced by artistic and literary developments (notably the statuary [see "Reliefs, Statuary, and Monumental Paintings in Ancient Mesopotamia" in Part 10, Vol. IV] and the famous cylinders of Gudea). In order to rebuild the main temple of his capital, Girsu (Tello), Gudea imported materials from distant lands: relations with the Persian Gulf and the Amanus are attested. The period encompassing the Second Dynasty of Lagash and the Third Dynasty of Ur is sometimes designated as Neo-Sumerian. Sumerian once again became the dominant written language, but the significance of this fact must not be overestimated.

The real rise of Ur occurred under Shulgi (2094–2047), Ur-Nammu's successor. His reign (treated in a separate chapter) was half a century long, half the duration of the entire dynasty. It was marked by a swift territorial expansion, mostly east of the Tigris and into southwestern Iran, where important areas were annexed. The administration of the realm was based on the distinction between core and periphery. The core, which included northern and southern Babylonia and the Lower Diyala basin, was divided into some twenty provinces corresponding to the territories of the former city-states. Each province was ruled by a governor (ENSÍ) appointed by the king and chosen from a prominent local family. His power was counterpoised by that of the military governor (ŠAGINA), who depended

entirely on the central administration. The periphery was entirely under the authority of military governors who depended on the chancellor (SUKKAL.MAH). He was second only to the king and was entrusted with enormous responsibilities in terms of administration, justice, foreign relations, and the military. The figure of the king was the cornerstone of the entire system. Considered a god, he was revered during his lifetime in temples dedicated to his cult in each important city. Besides hymns addressed to deities, imploring them to fill the king with happiness, other hymns praised the king in all his activities, and some were even narrated in the first person. Unfortunately, we do not know the context in which they were used. The royal family is, however, better known. One notes the existence of diplomatic marriages, such as the one that united Ur-Nammu to a daughter of Apil-kin, a dynast of Mari, whose independent rulers in that period bore the title of *shakkanakku*.

Shulgi launched a series of political, administrative, and economic reforms that transformed the kingdom of Ur into a centralized bureaucratic state. He reorganized temple management, set up a permanent military force, and created at Puzrish-Dagan (Drehem) a storage and supply center for state revenues. This work of unification also touched metrology, the calendar, roads, and the postal system. It relied on a huge bureaucratic organization: scribes now received a uniform training that included new accounting procedures and new formats for archival texts. Such a degree of centralization was never achieved again, and ultimately the experiment failed.

Why did this empire collapse? Traditionally historians have insisted on such external factors as invasions. This was certainly the opinion of the Mesopotamians; barbarian hordes pouring down from the mountains can appear as instruments of divine retribution in some theological explanations of history. The reality of such invasions cannot be denied, and it is clear that the migrations of the Amorites toward the end of the Third Dynasty of Ur played a role in the collapse of the empire. The wall erected by Shu-Sin (2037–2029) and explicitly intended to prevent the penetration of Amorite nomads from Syria testifies to the danger of these invasions and to the inability of the central administration to

contain them. Yet, some historians have rightly pointed to evidence of growing internal decay in the period before the invaders destroyed this political entity. Rising prices, a sure cause and symptom of a deep economic crisis, are a good indication. This sclerosis can be attributed in part to bureaucratic centralization: resource management became increasingly intricate, and the number of functionaries grew out of proportion. Some claim that the end of the Third Dynasty of Ur was caused as much by the implosion of the bureaucratic system as by the onslaught of the Amorites from Syria and the LÚ.SU from Iran.

THE AGE OF THE AMORITES (2003–1595)

The four centuries that followed the collapse of the empire of Ur were one of the most remarkable periods in near eastern history and probably the one about which our knowledge has been renewed the most in recent years. It was characterized by a great cohesion, in spite of the absence of political unity: the vast political constructions of Shamshi-Adad and Hammurabi did not survive their creators. In all capital cities of the period—Qatna, Aleppo (ancient Halab, later Beroea), Mari, Babylon, Eshnunna (Eshnunak, modern Tell Asmar), Larsa—the throne was occupied by an Amorite dynasty. The most remarkable phenomenon was the emergence of a new cultural koine. Truly Sumerian culture left a deeper imprint in the eastern kingdoms, but there were also scribes at Mari who could write in Sumerian. However, this koine was also steeped in the Amorite heritage and in the new international language of the period, Akkadian, written at Hazor in Palestine as well as in Kanesh (Nesha, modern Kültepe) in the middle of present-day Turkey and Susa in southwestern Iran. The constant travels of diviners, scribes, physicians, musicians, and merchants partly explains the emergence of this community. Young princes also traveled from one court to another. Nevertheless, armed confrontations were not infrequent.

Reconstructing the political and military history of this period is an arduous task because of the complete absence of narratives, even partial

ones. One must therefore rely on primary data, fortunately very abundant, and piece together the numerous details they offer into a general picture that still remains incomplete. The sources are royal inscriptions, "year names," and epistolary material. Letters did not include their date or place of composition, and reconstructing events on their basis is therefore a delicate task, as exemplified by the thousands of letters found in the palace chancery at Mari. The first phase, extending from 2004 to 1763, is characterized by the fragmentation of the empire of Ur into a multitude of small principalities that progressively fell under the sway of two rival powers, Isin (Isin Bahriyat) and Larsa.

The kings of Isin claimed the political inheritance of Ur, and the scribes of their administration emulated the previous tradition. Ur, even though stripped of its political predominance, still played an important economic role: its merchants carried on a lucrative maritime commerce with Dilmun. Ur also preserved its status as a religious metropolis where Sumerian traditions were piously maintained. At first part of the kingdom of Isin, it was conquered in 1925 by the king of Larsa, Gungunum. The kings of Larsa installed there one of their daughters as high priestess (*entum*) of the god Sin, thus continuing a tradition going back to the period of Akkad. In the private houses surrounding the main temple of Larsa, archaeologists have found the archives of some members of the local clergy. But the city that emerges as the leading center of Sumerian literature in that period is Nippur. There, not only did apprentice scribes copy the "classics" but the masters also created new compositions, chiefly hymns in honor of the king of Isin or Larsa, who was then recognized as "king of Sumer and Akkad." (See also "Sumerian Literature: An Overview" in Part 9, Vol. IV.)

In 1894 a new dynasty assumed power in Babylon. Though destined for a glorious fate, its beginnings were modest, but Sumu-la-el (1880–1845) succeeded in annexing Sippar (modern Tell Abu Habba), Dilbat, and Kish, all previously controlled by local dynasties. Thereafter, despite occasional and successful raids on Larsa territory, the kingdom of Babylon did not significantly expand its territory until the middle of Hammurabi's reign (also discussed in this section).

The bureaucratic centralism of the Ur III Period gave way to an economy more conducive to private initiative. Some dynasties of merchants amassed considerable wealth, a phenomenon documented by the numerous family archives found in Babylonian cities. Their financial success was often symbolized by the building of a beautiful private residence, and the city of Larsa thus literally experienced a real estate boom around 1800.

The history of northern Mesopotamia at the outset of the Old Babylonian Period is still poorly known, and sources are scarce for the first century and a half. We know that Naram-Sin, a king of Eshnunna, captured Asshur (modern Qalat Sharqat) (around 1830^P) and then, after having crossed the Jebel Sinjar, conquered the foothills of the Taurus Mountains up to the source of the Khabur. Eshnunna also extended its dominion over the middle Euphrates region up to the immediate vicinity of Mari. The local ruler, Yakhdun-Lim, then vassal of the king of Aleppo, had to recognize the suzerainty of the king of Eshnunna. This political entity lasted only for a short while, but its cultural imprint on these regions was considerable because it favored the spread of the Babylonian dialect, whereas Asshur retained the old Akkadian tradition and developed its own dialect, Assyrian.

Here, one must mention Shamshi-Adad I (circa 1830–1776), an interesting figure in ancient near eastern historiography. He was long considered to have been king of Assyria because first-millennium scribes included his name in the Assyrian Kinglist. However, Assyria as a territorial state had not yet emerged at that time. Asshur was a city-state characterized by religious importance and commercial activities. It did not control a large territory, although it had established trading posts as far away as central Anatolia, the most important being Kanesh, near present-day Kayseri. Its merchants benefited from some kind of extraterritoriality and could travel through countries not dominated by the Assyrians but with which mutual agreements had been made.

Shamshi-Adad I (also profiled in a separate chapter in this volume) was originally a king of Ekallatum who had progressively extended his territory, annexing not only the holy city of Asshur but also distant kingdoms such as Mari

TABLE 2
Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian Periods

<i>Isin</i>	<i>Larsa</i>	<i>Babylon</i>	<i>Eshnunna</i>	<i>Ekallatum</i>	<i>Asshur</i>
Ishbi-Irra (2017–1985)	Naplanum (2025–2005)		Shu-iliya		
Shu-ilishu (1984–1975)	Emisum (2004–1977)		Nurakhum		
Iddin-Dagan (1974–1954)			Kirikiri		
Ishme-Dagan (1953–1935)	Samium (1976–1942)		Bilalama		
			Ishar-ramashu		
	Zabaya (1941–1933)		Uşur-awassu		
			Azuzum		
			Ur-Ninmar		
			Ur-Ningizzida		
Lipit-Ishtar (1934–1924)	Gungunum (1932–1906)		Ipiq-Adad I		Puzur-Assur I
Ur-Ninurta (1923–1896)	Abi-sare (1905–1895)		Sharriya		Shalim-akhum
Bur-Sin (1895–1874)	Sumu-el (1894–1866)	Sumu-abum (1894–1881)	Warassa		Ilushuma
Lipit-Enlil (1873–1869)		Sumu-la-el (1880–1845)	Belakum	Ila-kabkabu	Erishum I
Irra-imitti (1868–1861)	Nur-Adad (1865–1850)		Ibal-pi-el I	Aminum	Ikunum
Enlil-bani (1860–1837)	Sin-iddinam (1849–1843)	Sabium (1844–1831)	Ipiq-Adad II	Shamshi-Adad (ca. 1830–1776)	Sargon I
	Sin-eribam (1842–1841)				Puzur-Assur II
	Sin-iqisham (1840–1836)				
Zambiya (1836–1834)	Silli-Adad (1835)		Naram-Sin		(Naram-Sin of Eshnunna)

Iter-pisha (1833–1831) Urdukuğa (1830–1828)	Warad-Sin (1834–1823)	Apil-Sin (1830–1813)			Erishum II <i>about 1808, Shamshi-Adad conquers Asshur</i>
Sin-magir (1827–1817) Damiq-ilishu (1816–1794) <i>1793 Larsa annexes Isin</i>	Rim-Sin (1822–1763)	Sin-muballit (1812–1793) Hammurabi (1792–1750)	Dannum-takhaz Dadusha (?–1780)		<i>Yasmakh-Addu at Mari (ca. 1796–1776)</i>
			Ibal-pi-el II (1779–1765),		Ishme-Dagan (1775–?)
	<i>1763 Babylon annexes Larsa</i>	<i>1761 Hammurabi defeats Zimri- Lim of Mari Samsu-iluna (1749–1712) 1738 Babylon loses southern Sumerian city- states 1720 Babylon loses Nippur and Isin Abi-eshuh (1711–1684) Ammi-ditana (1683–1647) Ammi-šaduqa (1646–1626) Samsu-ditana (1625–1595) 1595 Hittites raid Babylon</i>	<i>1766 Babylon Mari, and Elam capture Eshnunna</i>		
			Iluni		
			Akhushina		

(1796). With these conquests he carved out a continuous territorial entity covering all of Upper Mesopotamia, from the Zagros hills in the east to the Euphrates in the west, and from the Taurus in the north to Rapiqum in the south. His armies even reached Lebanon, where he sent them to aid the king of Qatna, and Kurdistan, where he campaigned to subdue the turbulent mountaineers who threatened the eastern frontier of the kingdom. In his old age Shamshi-Adad decided to divide his empire between his two sons: the eldest, Ishme-Dagan, occupied the ancestral throne of Ekallatum, while the younger, Yasmakh-Adad, was installed at Mari. Shamshi-Adad elected to reside in Shubat-Enlil and continued to campaign in person wherever a serious threat arose. After some twenty years this ambitious arrangement vanished with its creator. His sons failed to neutralize the centrifugal pull that threatened its cohesion, and all the kingdoms absorbed by Shamshi-Adad regained their independence with the help of neighboring powers such as Aleppo and Eshnunna.

The years that followed were a golden age of diplomatic relations. A famous letter of a high official of Mari vividly describes the new international equilibrium: "There is no king who, just by himself, is truly powerful. Ten or fifteen kings follow Hammurabi, lord of Babylon, as many do Rim-Sin, lord of Larsa, as many Ibal-pi-el, lord of Eshnunna, as many Amut-pi-el, lord of Qatna. Twenty kings follow Yarim-Lim, the lord of Yamkhad [Aleppo]."

Zimri-Lim, who occupied the throne of Mari between 1776 and 1761, aspired to a leading role among these kings but experienced difficulties in being thus acknowledged. Because of its geographical position, Mari was torn between east and west. Forced to choose, immediately upon his accession, between the support of the king of Aleppo and the protection of the king of Eshnunna, Zimri-Lim chose the former. But first he had to settle tribal conflicts. A member of the Bensimal tribe, he had to establish sovereignty over the Benjamin tribe, the other major tribal power in the region. The latter called on the king of Eshnunna, who in 1771 conducted a vast military campaign along the Euphrates and in the Jebel Sinjar. Fears arose that he might rebuild the kingdom of upper Mesopotamia, but his enterprise failed. Zimri-Lim then gained freedom of action to establish regional hegemony,

as well as his suzerainty over the petty rulers of the Jebel Sinjar and the Khabur triangle.

Zimri-Lim frequently arranged matrimonial alliances, giving his many daughters in marriage to his vassals, as was customary in those days. Very often rulers anxious to reinforce their diplomatic alliance resorted to "political" marriages: a daughter of Sumu-la-el of Babylon had married a king of Uruk, the king of Qatna had given his daughter in marriage to the son of Shamshi-Adad, and Zimri-Lim himself had married a daughter of his powerful neighbor and protector, the king of Aleppo. What makes the case of the daughters of Zimri-Lim unique is the fact that some of the letters they wrote to their father after their wedding have come down to us. Their fate was apparently not enviable, for they were often relegated to a subordinate position in the harems of their royal consorts.

The kingdom of Mari under Zimri-Lim, although a middle-rank power, is nonetheless the best-known in the Near East of that period. Life in the royal palace is documented by thousands of administrative texts, allowing us to reconstruct the hierarchy within the harem, worship inside the palace, the reception of foreign ambassadors, and the exchange of gifts with rulers. Abundant data on material culture is thus available, notably in areas that are not normally illuminated by archaeological remains (clothing, jewelry, and the like). (See "Mari: A Portrait in Art of a Mesopotamian City-State" later in this volume.)

The richest aspect of the Mari archives, however, is the correspondence. Numerous letters were addressed to, and sent by, the king of Mari. In the former category is the correspondence sent by foreign rulers, by provincial governors or functionaries sent abroad on official duty, and by functionaries residing in the capital when the king was traveling; it appears that letters received by the king when on a trip were meticulously filed after his return to the palace. The letters sent by the king during his travels were generally addressed to administrators in the capital or to members of the royal family. Thus it is possible to develop an intimate knowledge of life in that kingdom, as well as in the Near East in general, albeit over a limited period of time.

The ruler of Elam emerged as mediator of the equilibrium that followed the collapse of the kingdom of upper Mesopotamia: he derived his

power from the vast resources of the Iranian plateau, and his leadership was accepted by all near eastern monarchs—and all the more easily because it was a remote one. Soon, however, the Elamites showed a growing interest in their western frontier. First they captured Eshnunna in 1766 with the help of Babylon and Mari. Anxious to exploit their advantage, they immediately confronted their former allies. An Elamite army occupied Shubat-Enlil for a few months, but they were soon forced to retreat, abandoning even Eshnunna.

At this juncture, Hammurabi felt that his time had come. Buoyed by his success against Elam, he turned against his southern neighbor Larsa, then a considerable kingdom. Its ruler Rim-Sin had indeed annexed the neighboring kingdoms of Uruk (1801) and Isin (1793). Thus, when Hammurabi conquered the kingdom of Larsa in 1763, he in effect established his control over all of Sumer, truly deserving to bear the title of “king of Sumer and Akkad.” One may ask if the term “empire” is really appropriate in this case. During the first phase of its establishment, Hammurabi’s kingdom had more the character of a dual monarchy, with the kingship over Sumer and Akkad in the hands of the same ruler. But with the pursuit of conquests in the north and the northeast (especially the conquest of Mari in 1761 and its destruction in 1759), Hammurabi built a true empire, stretching from upper to lower Mesopotamia, an empire that did not survive him. Fragility characterizes all imperialist constructions of the third and second millennia: the few that outlived their creators lasted no longer than two generations. (See also “King Hammurabi of Babylon” later in this volume.)

Both internal decay and the pressure of foreign invasions played a role in the decline of the Old Babylonian Empire. Its territory progressively dwindled, especially with the desertion of Sumerian cities in the south (Larsa, Ur, and Uruk in 1738, Nippur and Isin in 1720) and the migration of their refugee populations to the north (the inhabitants of Uruk to cities such as Kish). State revenues diminished correspondingly and the economic situation worsened. The issuing of “restoration” edicts (*mišārum*) was not new: they consisted of a remission, by royal decree, of arrears for state agents and of non-commercial debts contracted between private parties. But their frequency seems to have then

increased, suggesting an inability to cope with a deteriorating social and economic situation. At the same time, bureaucracy swelled; administrative documents are abundant for the seventeenth century, and the hierarchy of functionaries became more complex, with new titles and positions. Offices tended more and more to become hereditary, jeopardizing the decisional capacity of the central authority. Finally, the king, bereft of resources, was compelled to accept payments in silver in lieu of the military service (*ilku*) owed by tenants of royal land. This moribund state was dealt the final blow when Murshili I and his Hittite troops raided Babylon in 1595.

THE DARK AGES AND KASSITE BABYLONIA (1595–1158)

We have virtually no contemporary sources for the century and a half extending from the beginning of the sixteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century. We know that in Babylonia power fell into the hands of the Kassites. This people, which originated in a mountain region (perhaps the Zagros), constitutes an enigma for historians: they became so well assimilated in Babylonia that their language is practically unknown. (The Kassites are treated in a separate article below.) The Kassites were not complete newcomers: they had threatened Babylonia in 1731 and 1708, and their presence in the country, mostly as mercenaries and agricultural laborers, was pervasive under the last rulers of the First Dynasty of Babylon. At that time some rulers of Terqa (modern Tell 'Ashara) on the middle Euphrates bore Kassite names. Some Kassite troops directly threatened Sippar in the fifteenth year of Ammisaduqa, and it is therefore not surprising that they filled the vacuum created by the Hittite raid on Babylon. They controlled Babylonia, renamed Karduniash, for more than four centuries (1595–1158). For about a hundred years southern Babylonia remained independent under the rule of an obscure dynasty called the “Dynasty of the Sealand.” The entirety of Babylonia came under Kassite control between 1490 and 1465.

The Kassite kings strove to restore temples, which had considerably deteriorated: remains

TABLE 3
Babylonia and Assyria

FROM THE KASSITES TO THE END OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN EMPIRE (1595–539)		
<i>Babylon</i>	<i>Achaemenid Dynasty</i>	<i>Assyria</i>
Kassite Dynasty (1595–1158)		
Kadashman-Enlil I (?–1376)		Assur-uballit I (1366–1330)
Burna-Buriash II (1375–1347)		Adad-nirari I (1307–1275)
		<i>1287 battle of Qadesh</i>
		Shalmaneser I (1274–1245)
Kashtiliash IV (1242–1235)		Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208)
<i>1158 Elamite raid on Babylonia</i>		<i>1235 Assyrian raid on Babylonia</i>
Second Dynasty of Isin (1158–1027)		
Nebuchadnezzar I (1126–1105)		Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1077)
<i>Aramaean invasions</i>		Adad-nirari II (911–891)
Nabu-apla-iddina (888–855)		Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884)
Marduk-zakir-shumi I (854–?)		Assurnasirpal II (883–859)
		Shalmaneser III (858–823)
		<i>853 battle of Qarqar</i>
		Shamshi-Adad V (823–811)
		Adad-nirari III (810–783)
		Neo-Assyrian Empire (744–612)
		Tiglath-pileser III (744–727)
		Shalmaneser V (726–722)
		<i>721 fall of Samaria</i>
Merodach-Baladan II (721–710)		Sargon II (721–705)
		<i>714 eighth campaign (against Urartu)</i>
Assur-nadin-shumi (699–694)		Sennacherib (704–681)
		<i>701 siege of Lachish</i>
<i>689 destruction of Babylon</i>		
		Esarhaddon (680–669)
		<i>673–671 conquest of Egypt</i>
		Assurbanipal (669–627)
		<i>664 capture of Memphis and Thebes</i>
		<i>664 victory over Elam</i>
<i>652–648 civil war between Shamash-shum-ukin and Assurbanipal</i>		
Chaldean Dynasty (625–539)		<i>646 Assyrians sack Susa</i>
Nabopolassar (625–605)		<i>612 fall of Nineveh</i>

The History of Ancient Mesopotamia

TABLE 3 (Continued)

FROM THE KASSITES TO THE END OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN EMPIRE (1595-539)		
Babylon	Achaemenid Dynasty	Assyria
Neo-Babylonian Empire (612-539)		
Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562)		
597 capture of Jerusalem		
Evil-Merodach (561-560)		
Neriglissar (559-556)		
Labashi-Marduk (556)		
Nabonidus (555-539)		
539 Cyrus enters Babylon		
Persian Domination (Achaemenids) (538-331)		
Cyrus II (538-530)		
Cambyses II (529-522)		
Bardia (522)		
Darius I (521-486)		
Xerxes I (485-465)		
Artaxerxes I (464-424)		
Xerxes II (424)		
Sogdianus (424)		
Darius II (423-405)		
Artaxerxes II (404-359)		
Artaxerxes III (358-338)		
Arses (337-336)		
Darius III (335-331)		
330 Alexander enters Babylon		

of their works can be seen in all the prominent sanctuaries of Babylonia, such as Ur, Larsa, Uruk, and Nippur. They built an enormous palace in their new capital, Dur-Kurigalzu (modern 'Aqar Quf, near Baghdad). The most typical records of this period are *kudurru*, stone monuments carved with divine symbols and bearing inscriptions that place royal pledges of land grants and tax exemptions under divine protection.

THE AMARNA PERIOD

A new international equilibrium emerged in the fifteenth century, characterized by the hegemony of four great powers: Egypt, the Hittite

Empire in Anatolia, Mitanni in upper Mesopotamia, and Babylonia. The final phase of this age is documented by the archives of Amarna (Akhetaten) in Egypt. They consist of the international correspondence from the chancery of pharaohs Amenhotep (Amenophis) III and Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) and cover a period of thirty years (circa 1385-1355). These letters, written for the most part in Akkadian, the international language of the period, were sent by the rulers of Mitanni, Babylonia, Hittite Anatolia, and Assyria. A larger group originated in the small principalities of the Levant under Egyptian tutelage.

Mitanni is the least-known of the four major states. It was founded by rulers bearing Indo-European names but was peopled essentially by Hurrians: its center was in the Upper Khabur region. Mitannian kings often resided at Was-

shukkani, a still-unidentified site. Another important center, perhaps even the capital, according to some scholars, was Taidu, located in the area of Tell Brak. The rulers of Mitanni progressively extended their authority over the numerous neighboring kingdoms, reaching Arapkha (modern Kirkuk) in the east, and the northern Syrian city of Qadesh (Tell Nabi Mend) in the west. Mitanni reached its apex at the end of the sixteenth century, at the time of King Barrattarna (Parattarna). Life in the kingdom is known essentially from archives discovered in two peripheral towns: Nuzi in the east and Alalakh (Tell 'Atchana; level IV) in the west. (See articles below on Nuzi and Mitanni for further discussion.)

The structure of the Mitannian state was loose, and dynastic quarrels gradually brought about its dissolution. This prompted at first a series of Hittite interventions, and King Shuppiluliuma I succeeded, during three successive wars, in establishing his authority over northern Syria, after which he installed his son as king of Carchemish (Karkamish). During this period, diplomatic relations increased in sophistication, intensity, and geographic range. The "Great Kings" exchanged letters and presents carried by messengers who sometimes were virtually ambassadors. Their alliances were sealed by treaties, some of which have been preserved, and reinforced by matrimonial unions. Thus, the sister of the Kassite king Kadashman-Enlil I was given in marriage to Amenhotep III, and the third (and last) wife of the Hittite king Shuppiluliuma was a Babylonian princess. Kassite sovereigns were all the more willing to send presents, such as horses, chariots, and lapis lazuli, to the Egyptian pharaohs because they expected to receive in return the gold they needed to pay for their ambitious building program: from the end of the fifteenth century on, messengers traveled regularly between the two courts, and Babylonian merchants traded with Canaan, then under Egyptian control.

Assyria emerged on the international scene under Assur-uballit I (1366–1330). Family archives indicate that within Assyria a process of concentration of land and formation of large estates took place, especially in the region of Tharthar. For the first time Asshur abandoned its status of city-state and became a territorial

state. Assur-uballit, boasting of the titles "great king" and "king of the totality," strove to be recognized as an equal of the pharaoh and the Hittite king, to the resentment of the Kassite king Burna-Buriash II (1359–1333). The Assyrians conquered portions of Mitanni, which was gradually partitioned between Hittites and Assyrians, while its eastern part survived longer under the name of Khanigalbat.

During the reign of Shalmaneser I (1274–1245), when upper Mesopotamia fell entirely under Assyria, which now controlled fertile agricultural land as well as the trade routes to Syria and Anatolia, the Hittites were considerably alarmed. Clearly, the rise of Assyria was one of the leading reasons that prompted the Hittites to cease their hostilities with the Egyptians: in 1271, sixteen years after the battle of Qadesh, the Hittite king Muwattalli II and Pharaoh Ramesses II concluded an alliance. One of the leading figures in Assyria at that time, the chancellor Babu-aha-iddina, is well known to us: soundings conducted by the German archaeologists in the lower city of Asshur have unveiled his residence and his richly equipped burial, and his personal archives have shed a fascinating light on the management of his household. The exploitation of the Khabur basin by the Assyrians is documented by the archives of the family of Urad-Sherua, of which two members were governors of Nakhur: these texts reveal the process by which newly conquered provinces were entrusted by the king to a "house" (i.e., a prominent family) within which the responsibilities of local government were transmitted by inheritance.

The archives discovered at Tell Sheikh Hamad should eventually give us a deeper understanding of the process of agricultural colonization, although one must be careful not to evaluate this data exclusively in the light of the realities prevailing under the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Several hundred tablets were found in the palace of the local governor, covering a time range of fifty years during the reigns of Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I. They are chiefly administrative documents that will illuminate the management of the lower Khabur Valley during the first period of Assyrian expansion. This expansion culminated with Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208). Attacked in 1235 by the

Kassite king Kashtiliash IV, the Assyrian king captured him and severely retaliated against Babylon. Among the Babylonians deported to Assyria were scribes. The victory of Tukulti-Ninurta was celebrated by a grandiose epic, and he was the first Assyrian ruler to adopt the prestigious title of "king of the four shores," that is to say, "king of the universe." He launched the construction of a new capital, Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, located on the Tigris facing Asshur, assigning deportees to the task. Since Tukulti-Ninurta was assassinated, one may posit that his innovations alienated some people, and the following decades were marked by a weakening of royal authority.

In 1158 an Elamite raid on Babylon put an end to the Kassite dynasty. Numerous monuments were carried off to Susa, where excavations turned them up at the beginning of the twentieth century. Among them was the *Code of Hammurabi* (shown in "King Hammurabi" later in this volume). Thereafter, Babylonia fell under the control of a Second Dynasty of Isin for more than a century (1158–1027). Its most brilliant representative was Nebuchadnezzar I (Nebuchadnezzar) (1124–1103). A *kudurru* (boundary stone) describes the decisive victory he won over Elam, which enabled the statue of the god Marduk, which also had been carried off by the Elamites, to return to Babylon. This may have provided the occasion for the composition of the famous *Enuma Elish*, improperly called in modern times the "Babylonian Creation Epic." It is in fact a hymn that glorifies Marduk by depicting the acceptance of his leadership by the other gods, thus perhaps also reflecting in heaven the sovereignty of Babylon that has occurred on earth. (See "Myth and Mythmaking in Sumer and Akkad" in Part 8, Vol. III.)

THE ARAMAEAN INVASIONS

Beginning in the early twelfth century, important migratory movements caused profound changes in the entire Near East. Those affecting the Mediterranean coast are commonly called the "invasions of the Sea Peoples," which brutally ended the brilliant Late Bronze Age civilization of such coastal cities as Ugarit. Inland,

Aramaeans started their migration a few decades later, and their movement reached such an extent that they are referred to as the "Aramaeans." The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1077) declared, "Twenty-eight times I have crossed the Euphrates to chase the Aramaeans"; but he failed to contain them and the Aramaeans went on with their raids, reaching the walls of Nineveh. Groups of nomads also laid waste the main sanctuaries of Babylonia, which sank into chaos at the end of the eleventh century. Only then did the Aramaeans turn against northern Syria: they raided the Khabur triangle and the bend of the Euphrates between 1013 and 973, and around 950 Til Barsip (modern Tell Ahmar) became the capital of the Aramaean state of Bit-Adini. (See "Aramaeans Tribes and Nations of First-Millennium Western Asia" later in this volume and "Pastoral Nomadism in Ancient Western Asia" in Part 3, Vol. I.)

These invasions favored the emergence of a new cultural koine. However, in sharp contrast to what happened after the Amorite invasions a millennium earlier, this unification is, for two reasons, less visible to us. The first derives from the nature of epigraphic sources: Aramaic was generally written with ink on papyrus or parchment. In the Mesopotamian climate, these media did not survive the ordeal of time. Moreover, lapidary inscriptions are rare: the statue discovered at Tell al-Fakhariya (ancient Sikan) and inscribed in Aramaic and Assyrian is a notable exception. Consequently, the only sources that have survived are those in cuneiform, which was still written on clay; clearly, the resulting picture is warped, dominated by the false impression of a continuity with the preceding tradition. In addition, the imperial power that prevailed in Assyria, and then in Babylonia, throughout the first half of the first millennium insisted on the pursuance of this tradition: in response to a governor asking permission to write in Aramaic, the king replied that he must use cuneiform. Hence, we are left with the impression of an east-west antagonism, which was a reality at the political level, although it obscures the existence of a cultural unity with roots deeper than we might suspect: the large-scale deportations carried out by the Neo-Assyrian kings accelerated the "aramaization" of Assyria.

The main historiographic sources for first-

millennium Assyria are royal annals. Narrated in the first person, their goal is to commemorate the deeds of the ruler, and it is therefore futile to seek in them an objective representation of reality. With their rhetorical refinements, they rank as authentic literary masterpieces and are fascinating objects of study. The events in Babylonia are known from chronicles that use a terser style and present a less distorted picture of reality. (See also "The Deeds of Ancient Mesopotamian Kings" in Part 9, Vol. IV.)

THE ASSYRIAN RECONQUEST (911–823)

The Assyrian reconquest started slowly at the end of the tenth and especially the beginning of the ninth century during the reigns of Adad-nirari II (911–891) and Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884), and then gained momentum with Assurnasirpal II (883–859) and Shalmaneser III (858–823). Their goal was not so much regaining lost territories as creating a system of control over vital trade routes in order to ensure the safe movement of goods. The resulting ambiguity of the political landscape is reflected in the titulary of local potentates, as evidenced by the statue at Tell al-Fakhariya: they could claim the Aramaic title *mlk* (king) but at the same time be considered *shaknu* (governors) dependent on Assyrian central authorities.

In 883, Assurnasirpal II seated himself on the throne. He was an outstanding personality whose reign was crucial for the future of Assyria. Every year, he led his armies to the battlefield, suppressing rebellions with the utmost brutality and founding new Assyrian centers in order to reinforce the existing control system. This cruelty, probably to be attributed to the trauma caused by the Aramaean invasions, gradually became an essential component of the Assyrian style of government: the reputation of the Assyrians was such that many preferred to submit at the mere news of their approach, deferring emancipation attempts until more favorable circumstances arose. These military campaigns were generally conducted in the west: Assurnasirpal reached the Mediterranean, extracting tribute from the Phoenician cities on his way. These

campaigns, accompanied by pillage and deportations, provoked a sudden increase in the economic potential of Assyria, and soon a regular income was ensured through the payment of an annual tribute by vanquished principalities.

Assyrian power reemerged in Assurnasirpal's construction of a new capital at Kalkhu (modern Nimrud). Starting in 879, a wall seven kilometers (about 4 miles) long was erected, enclosing thirty-six hectares (90 acres). Calculations have established that this wall alone necessitated a work force of seven thousand during three years. Assurnasirpal also built, inside the two-hectare (5-acre) citadel dominating the site, a grandiose palace and several temples. These works, not interrupted by his death in 859, were completed by his son and successor, Shalmaneser III. For the first time in Assyria, a vast metropolis had been erected in which a large part of the human and material resources of the kingdom were concentrated; this was not an isolated case, for Khor-sabad and then Nineveh fulfilled the same role in the late eighth and early seventh centuries. These successive Assyrian capitals functioned literally as siphons, and their disproportionate character was surely one of the factors that led to the collapse of the empire.

In the middle of the ninth century, however, Assyria was buoyed by its success. Shalmaneser III concentrated his efforts mainly on the west: northern Syria, southern Anatolia, and Cilicia. Local states in these areas were mostly governed by Aramaean and Neo-Hittite rulers who were wealthy but militarily weak and thus could not oppose the formidable war machine of the Assyrians. In 856, after several campaigns, Bit-Adini was defeated and turned into a province and its capital Til Barsip was renamed Kar-Shalmaneser. Assyria now controlled the bend of the Euphrates. Campaigns were conducted beyond that region, but with no resulting territorial gains. The confrontation with Syrian and Palestinian states culminated in the battle of Qarqar on the Orontes (853): in the face of the Assyrian threat twelve kingdoms of the area set aside their rivalries and united under the leadership of Damascus, Hamath, and Israel. Shalmaneser claimed to have emerged victorious, but the situation was apparently far from settled, for the Assyrian armies campaigned in the region at least five more times.

Shalmaneser also showed an interest in Babylonia, which had experienced a real renaissance during the reign of Nabu-apla-iddina (888–855). The country was then freed of the nomadic tribes who ransacked it, and the cult of the local gods was reestablished in the great sanctuaries of Babylon, Borsippa, Sippar, and Uruk. The country also experienced a literary and scientific renaissance, illustrated by the composition of the magnificent *Epic of Irra (Erra)*. When Marduk-zakir-shumi I assumed kingship in 854, he had to call upon the Assyrians to suppress a rebellion led by his brother. After having defeated the rebel in 850, Shalmaneser made his devotions in the temples of Kutha, Babylon, and Borsippa, as a sign of veneration for these holy cities. He also led a campaign against the Chaldean population in the south, who controlled important trade routes, and went back to Assyria with much booty.

THE CRISIS (823–745)

The long reigns of these two very powerful rulers were followed by a period of trouble, which had already begun by the end of Shalmaneser's reign. He had to face a rebellion led by one of his sons, and the situation did not stabilize until the reign of his successor, Shamshi-Adad V (823–811). Weakened by seven years of troubles, Assyria had to conclude a treaty with the Babylonian king Marduk-zakir-shumi I in which it agreed to humiliating concessions, but four years later Shamshi-Adad V took his revenge, conducting four campaigns in Babylonia (814–811).

Under his successor, Adad-nirari III (810–783), Assyria sank even further into obscurity. This is suggested by the lack of sources, but also precludes a precise assessment of the situation. The decline of royal authority is manifest, but this does not mean that a corresponding depression prevailed in all the kingdom. Governors recognized the sovereign only nominally and acted locally as real monarchs. To ensure their loyalty, the king was compelled to grant concessions of land that further weakened his position. His mother, Semiramis, wielded considerable power, a situation that gave rise to the Greek legend of Semiramis.

The most remarkable figure of the period is that of Shamshi-ilu, the supreme military commander who was de facto ruler in the western part of the kingdom. Residing at Til Barsip as in a true capital city, he conducted a campaign against Damascus and mediated various border disputes between the Neo-Hittite and Aramaean kingdoms of southeastern Anatolia and northern Syria. Between 782 and 745 three kings with no real authority occupied the throne, and Urartu, a newcomer on the international scene, was seriously threatening the northern border of Assyria. Six campaigns were led, mostly by Shamshi-ilu, between 781 and 774. An inscription of the Urartian king Sarduri II, commemorating a victory over the Assyrians, has survived. Finally, a series of sporadic rebellions broke out, as well as two epidemics of plague in 765 and 759, affecting most of the large cities. (See "The Kingdom of Urartu in Eastern Anatolia" later in this volume.)

THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE (744–612)

It can be argued that the real founder of the Neo-Assyrian Empire was Tiglath-pileser III. Indeed, only starting with his reign may one truly speak of an empire, and this time, in contrast with the empire of Akkad, the extent of territorial control was enormous—from Susa in Iran to Thebes in Egypt. During most of that period the throne was occupied by the Sargonid Dynasty, comprising Sargon II (721–705) and his successors Sennacherib (704–681), Esarhaddon (680–669), and Assurbanipal (669–627).

By contrast with the preceding decades, the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727) was marked by a brilliant military policy: a victory over Urartu in 743 and the submission of Syrian kingdoms, concluding in the fall of Damascus in 732. This time the conquered regions were turned into Assyrian provinces, a change from the previous policy of military raids ensuring only the collection of tribute. War became a war of permanent conquest. One of the corollaries of this mutation was the policy of mass deportations: the inhabitants of the new provinces were displaced in favor of populations brought from other regions. This was surely not a novelty, but

the scale on which this policy was implemented transformed the problem radically: thus, as early as 743, eighty thousand people were displaced. Tiglath-pileser also conducted a real Mediterranean policy: all Phoenician cities, with the exception of Tyre, were incorporated into a new province and forbidden to trade with Egypt. In the south, as the result of several military interventions, Tiglath-pileser assumed the throne of Babylonia in 729. His solution of a dual monarchy rather than simple reduction to the status of province had the advantage of sparing local sensibilities.

Shalmaneser V succeeded his father Tiglath-pileser III in 725 and reigned only five years. He is best known for his two-year-long siege of Samaria (modern Sabastiyah/Sebaste), which finally fell in 721 while the usurper Sargon II was seizing power in Assyria. The great event of Sargon's reign was the fight against Urartu. It culminated with the famous "Eighth Campaign" in 714, narrated in a detailed account couched in the form of a letter addressed by the king to the god Assur in which he justifies his pillaging of the sanctuaries of Urartu. In Babylonia the Chaldean Merodach-Baladan II seized the throne left vacant by the death of Tiglath-pileser, ushering in three decades of continuous struggle between Assyrians and Chaldeans for the control of the Babylonian throne.

The Chaldeans possessed one strategic advantage; they could retreat into the southern marshes in case of military inferiority or to the territory of the Elamites, whose support they could easily buy with their wealth. But most Babylonian cities were hostile to them, and Sargon skillfully exploited this antagonism. Merodach-Baladan, entrenched in his capital Dur-Yakin, was defeated in 707. More than one hundred thousand Aramaeans and Chaldeans were deported to Harran, Cilicia, and Samaria, and people from Commagene (Kummukhu) were moved there to replace them. For five years Babylonia was the theater of a vast work of reconstruction and agricultural development. The numerous documents found in the arsenal at Nimrud ("Fort Shalmaneser"), dating from the reign of Sargon, allow a detailed reconstruction of the organization of the army, in particular the cavalry and the chariotry, the two decisive factors of Assyrian military dominance. Then Sargon decided to abandon Kalkhu to build a new

capital, named Dur-Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad) in his honor. When Sargon died in battle in the Taurus region, its construction had not yet been completed.

Sennacherib, the son and successor of Sargon, reigned for almost a quarter of a century. He had already taken part in the affairs of government during his father's lifetime and is the Assyrian crown prince whose activities are the best known. His reign, however, is less well documented than those of the other three Sargonid monarchs because his correspondence seems to have been deliberately destroyed after his death. He left Dur-Sharrukin and established his capital at the ancient and prestigious city of Nineveh, where between 703 and 694 he built a huge palace called the "palace without rival." The construction of this palace is particularly well documented, both by commemorative inscriptions and by the reliefs on its walls, some of which illustrate its construction (e.g., the transportation of huge statues of winged bulls). Those which illustrate the siege of the Palestinian city of Lachish (modern Tell al-Duwayr) in 701 are famous.

Babylonia was Sennacherib's main concern. Several solutions of the problem were put forward, none of which yielded a satisfactory result. Sennacherib, in the hope of imposing peace, installed his heir, Assur-nadin-shumi, on the Babylonian throne in 699; but five years later the Babylonians handed him over to the Elamites. Sennacherib then launched a merciless war against the Elamites that is documented by the reliefs of his palace. In addition, he decided to punish the inhabitants of Babylon, which fell in the early winter of 689 after a siege of fifteen months. The city was the object of a systematic and brutal destruction that left lasting scars. The elimination of Assur-nadin-shumi also raised the problem of the succession. Arad-mullissu, the king's eldest surviving son, was the logical choice as crown prince, but Sennacherib decided in favor of a younger brother, Esarhaddon. This choice was to have tragic consequences. Esarhaddon went into exile under obscure circumstances, and a conspiracy led by Arad-mullissu resulted in the assassination of Sennacherib. After six weeks of civil war, Esarhaddon emerged victorious, and the conspirators fled to the north.

Esarhaddon reigned only twelve years, and

his poor health explains some of the idiosyncrasies of his rule. He suffered from a chronic inflammatory disease that often forced him into seclusion and had serious effects on his character. We have hundreds of letters from, among others, astrologers, exorcists, and incantation priests, in which these specialists reassure the king on his health, or instruct him on how to avoid the dire consequences of sinister omens. They afford a glimpse of life at the court, with its maze of intrigues and denunciations. Babylonia experienced a renaissance: after years of Assyrian intervention and political instability (ten kings in thirty years), order was reestablished, Babylon was restored, and a new era of prosperity began. (See "Esarhaddon, King of Assyria" later in this volume.)

Between 690 and 665, relations with Elam were cordial. The Median tribes were not yet united, which reduced the threat on the Iranian border and allowed the Assyrians to concentrate their military efforts on the west. The situation in the northwest, where the Cimmerians and the Scythians were threatening Assyrian vassals in Cilicia, was resolved by means of a military campaign, followed by diplomacy. In the southwest, Sidon was reduced to a new Assyrian province after its rebel king was beheaded and its inhabitants deported. The king of Tyre was compelled to sign a treaty placing Phoenician trade under Assyrian control. But the great event of the reign was the conquest of Egypt from 679 and especially from 673 on. The Assyrians claimed to be the "liberators" of Egypt, then ruled by a dynasty of Nubian origin, the Twenty-fifth. But King Taharqa, who fled after being defeated at his capital of Memphis in 671, recaptured the city two years later. On his way to Egypt, Esarhaddon died at Harran in 669 from an attack of his disease. His succession had been meticulously planned as early as 672: an oath of loyalty (*adā*) to Assurbanipal, heir to the throne of Assyria, and to his twin brother, Shamash-shum-ukin, heir to the throne of Babylonia, had been imposed on the population.

The forty-year reign of Assurbanipal was by far the longest in Assyrian history and may be regarded as the apex of the empire. It can be divided into three phases, even though the chronological sequence of events is not yet firmly established. From 669 to 653, Assyrian military forces were concentrated in Egypt. Memphis

was recaptured, and Thebes sacked, in 664. Assurbanipal boasted of these victories, but it is far from certain that he personally campaigned there. Relations between Assyria and Elam had stayed cordial between 690 and 665, but a sudden change took place in 664. The best-known episode of the ferocious war that followed is the famous "banquet scene under the vine," which depicts Assurbanipal and his consort relaxing in a garden where, from a tree, dangles the head of the Elamite ruler Te'umman.

Psamtik (Psammetichus) I, taking advantage of this war, revolted in 653 and expelled the Assyrians from Egypt. The country was definitively lost to the Assyrians, who found themselves incapable of launching a counterattack. This episode marks the limits of Assyrian imperialism; it was unrealistic to incorporate into the empire such a distant and profoundly different country as Egypt. Immediately after the (temporary) conclusion of the Elamite war, the revolt of Shamash-shum-ukin broke out in Babylonia, lasting from 652 to 648. Babylon fell after a protracted war and siege of two years, but the suppression of the rebellion exhausted Assyria militarily. A certain Kandalanu was installed on the throne of Babylon by Assurbanipal, who also punished the Elamites and the Arabs who had sided with his brother. Numerous tablets were confiscated from Babylonian scholars to stock the famous library of Nineveh. The last phase of Assurbanipal's reign is poorly known because we have no inscriptions dated after 639.

The swift collapse of a giant like the Assyrian Empire poses a considerable problem to historians. A partial explanation is the continuous state of warfare from 627 to 612, and the capture of Nineveh by the Medes and the Babylonians in 612 probably only dealt the last blow to an already moribund state. Assurbanipal had twin sons, Assur-etel-ilani and Sin-shar-ishkun, and they battled for the throne during the five years following their father's death. After the elimination of his brother in 623, Sin-shar-ishkun emerged as sole ruler, but he had to face serious external threats.

Since 626 the Chaldean Nabopolassar had gradually extended his influence over the south, and Babylon had fallen under his control. In the west, Egypt, recovering its traditional position, posed a growing challenge to Assyria, less and less capable of maintaining its authority in Syria

and Palestine. But the most serious threat came from the east. In 625, Cyaxares united the Medes and the Persians under his authority. In 615, Arbā'il was threatened; as early as 614, Asshur was captured and Nineveh was the target of an attack. Nabopolassar and Cyaxares, now allied, laid siege to Nineveh in 612, and the city fell three months later. A final Assyrian attempt at recovery was organized by Assur-uballit II at Harran, but it was crushed in 610 by the Medians and the Babylonians. Now Palestine, Phoenicia, and Syria came under Egyptian influence, and Nabopolassar established his sovereignty over the entire Jazira.

THE NEO-BABYLONIAN EMPIRE (612–539)

The Neo-Babylonian Empire lasted only about sixty years, two-thirds of them covered by a single reign. Nebuchadnezzar II, who succeeded his father Nabopolassar in 604, reigned for forty-two years, the same duration as his distant predecessor Hammurabi. Such political longevity was, in antiquity, a sure guarantee of success and prosperity because of the frequent problems arising with the succession. Nebuchadnezzar launched a spectacular building program, particularly in the capital, Babylon: the famous processional way leading to the Ishtar Gate is one of his many architectural projects. At least to us, Nebuchadnezzar's public image seems much more attractive than that of any Assyrian monarch, since he never boasts of massacres in his inscriptions. Neo-Babylonian commemorative inscriptions essentially record the restoration of sanctuaries. They sometimes portray the king as an archaeologist clearing the ruins of temples in search of their original layout so that he could duplicate them.

Modern excavations have confirmed the accuracy of such reports. But Neo-Babylonian rulers were not only restorers of buildings; they also resurrected institutions long forgotten. Nabonidus (555–539), reviving a tradition going back to the time of Sargon of Akkad, installed his daughter as high priestess of the god Sin at Ur. From that period of the Neo-Babylonian Empire has survived abundant documentation illustrating

the economic and administrative structure of temples, particularly at Uruk, where the find of thousands of tablets has allowed us to reconstruct in detail the management of temple affairs. The system of land concessions for the exploitation of date orchards is especially well known. It is in this period that the old institution of temple prebends is the best documented. Prebends involved the urban elite in the economic utilization of temple resources, mostly in gaining portions of temple offerings in return for duties—baking, brewing, and the like—performed in the sanctuary.

In the absence of narratives similar to the Neo-Assyrian royal annals, chronicles provide most of the information on historical and military events of the period. Sometimes these chronicles can be correlated with non-Babylonian sources. The capture of Jerusalem in 597 and the subsequent deportations of 587 and 582, for instance, occupy in modern historiography a position that is not reflected in Babylonian sources, in which these events are indistinguishable from other wars of conquest. Nabonidus, the last Neo-Babylonian monarch, is an enigmatic and controversial figure. He was resented by the priesthood of the capital because he tried to impose the cult of the moon-god Sin to the detriment of that of Marduk. He spent some ten years in the northern Arabian oasis of Taima (Teima), leaving power in the hands of his son Belshazzar. His seventeen-year reign concluded with the capture of Babylon by the Persian leader Cyrus. (See "King Nabonidus and the Neo-Babylonian Empire" later in this volume.)

MESOPOTAMIA UNDER ACHAEMENID RULE (539–333)

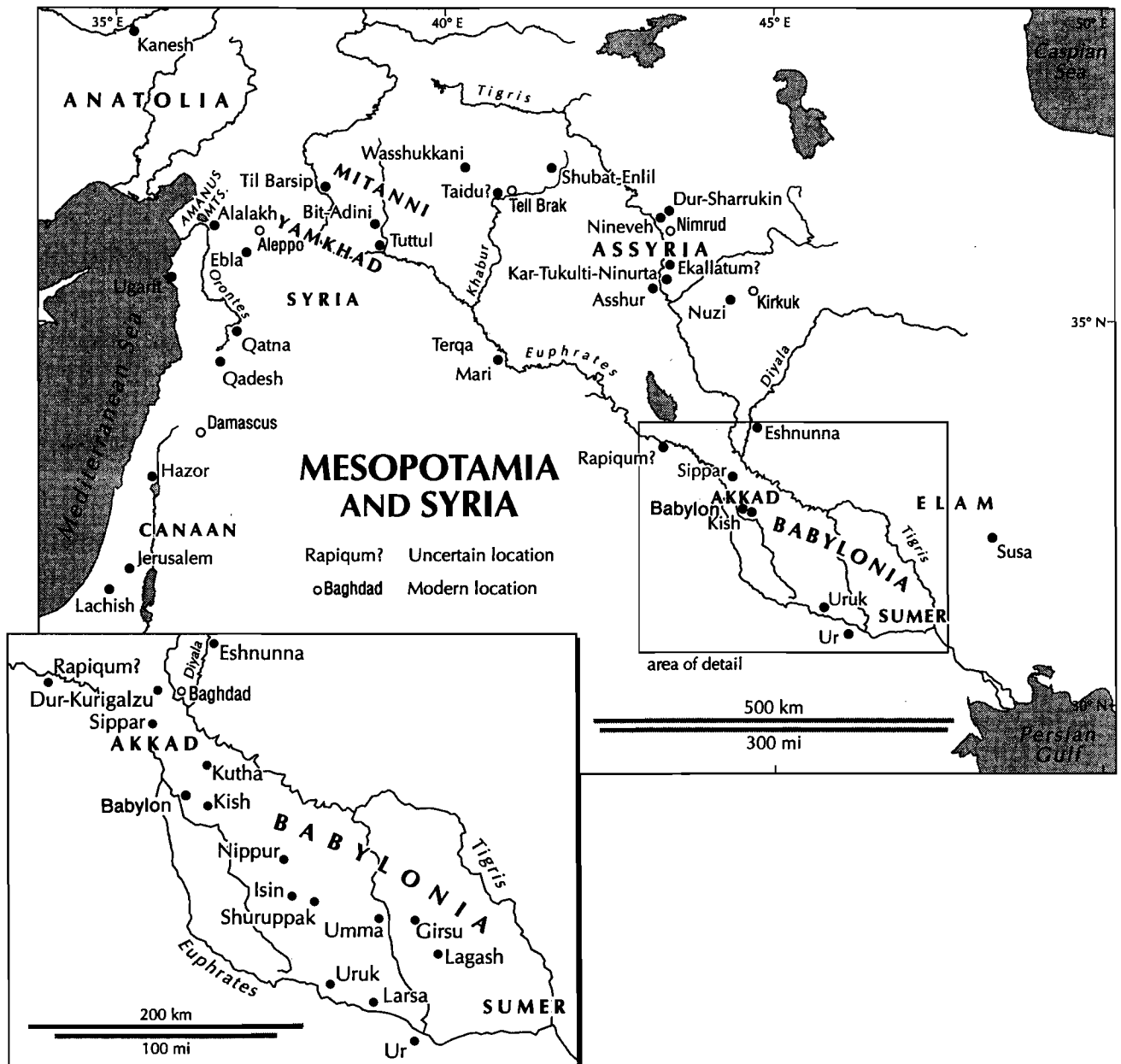
Babylonia then lost its political independence forever, falling under Achaemenid Persian rule for two centuries and, then, under the domination of Alexander and his successors. However, life in Babylonia did not experience a dramatic disruption in 539: there is no interruption of family archives, which attest to very few changes. Cyrus created in 535 a vast administrative unit called the province of Babylon and *eber nāri*: it included Babylonia, the Syrian coast, and Pales-

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tine, as well as the adjoining regions of northern Mesopotamia and Syria. Its governors were Iranians—Gobryas (between 535 and 525 and probably until 521) and Ushtanu (from 521 until at least 516)—but local officials were chosen from among the Babylonians. Babylonia was then considered the “breadbasket” of the Persian Empire. Its resources were exploited through traditional institutions like the temple, with the help of families belonging to the urban elite, such as the Egibi family. (See also “Private Commerce

and Banking in Achaemenid Babylon” in Part 6, Vol. III.)

Darius I (521–486) fostered the creation of a system of military land tenure; the most frequently encountered is the “bow land” (*bit qašti*), settled by families obligated to equip one archer each for the imperial forces. Similar tenures were granted as “chariot land” and “horse land.” These domains were administered through entities called *hatru*, which functioned as fiscal districts, as units of agricultural exploita-



tion, and as military reserves. All tenants were obligated to perform military service, but were rarely called upon to do so; instead, they often paid their rent in silver.

Because of the foreign character of the ruling house, a new phenomenon can be observed in the various "national" revolts that occurred at the death of Cambyses and at the beginning of the reign of Xerxes. Several usurpers then seized the throne (Nebuchadnezzar III and IV in 522–521, Bel-shimanni and Shamash-eriba in 482), but they never stayed in power more than a few months. The extent of Xerxes's repression has been the subject of much debate. However, the separation of the satrapies of Babylonia and *eber-nāri*, which occurred during his reign, apparently was not dictated by a repressive policy, although Zopyros, the satrap of Babylonia, had been executed by the Babylonian rebels. Temples and urban constituencies, on the other hand, lost their administrative powers, which explains the sudden interruption of written documentation at many sites at that time. A profound administrative reform was then implemented, whereby land-tenure exploitation and tax collection were entrusted to agents of the crown.

Thereafter, Babylonia was shaken twice by the dynastic crises that punctuated the course of Achaemenid history—during the accession of Darius II (423) and at the time of the rebellion of Cyrus the Younger (401). These rebellions were instigated by Persians who used Babylonia as a base, and they can hardly be compared with the "national" uprisings of the preceding century. Upon the accession of Darius II military tenants were compelled to furnish an exceptional financial contribution that exceeded the resources of many. This is documented by the archives of the Murashu family at Nippur, which acted as intermediary between the royal administration and the tenants, who contracted for numerous loans from the firm headed by the family.

Sources become increasingly scarce throughout the fourth century: while the eight years of Cambyses are documented by more than a thousand texts, the reign of Artaxerxes II (404–359), though four times longer, has produced one-tenth the documents. This must be attributed to the decrease in the use of cuneiform. That writing system was infinitely more cumber-

some than Aramaic, and clay tablets were less easily handled than papyrus or parchment. Some published archives document the activities of a family of scholars at Nippur during the reign of Artaxerxes II. Another archive is that of the Kasr at Babylon, dated to the reigns of Artaxerxes I (464–424), Darius II (423–405), and Artaxerxes II (404–359), which bears a strong resemblance to the Murashu archive, but its geographical context is northern Babylonia.

When Alexander entered Babylon in 330, the cuneiform tradition was still alive. Under the Seleucid and the Arsacid dynasties it survived mostly in restricted circles of scholars who maintained the old cults at Babylon and Uruk. These families copied and transmitted traditional texts from generation to generation until the last scribe wrote the last cuneiform tablet around the year 70 CE, thus bringing to a close a tradition more than three millennia old.

Translated from the French by Paul-Alain Beaulieu

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