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THE TRADITION OF EMPIRE IN MESOPOTAMIA

1. A Bird's-eye-view of Mesopotamian history

Starting out only a short time after Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden and ending with the conquest of Babylon by the Persian armies in 539 B.C., a crash course in Mesopotamian history of about ten pages must necessarily be somewhat superficial and meant strictly for beginners. In this the first part of my paper I shall attempt to provide such a brief presentation of Mesopotamian history with a special emphasis on the imperial phases. The second half of my paper will be based on this introduction, and I shall there try to isolate some features of general relevance and discuss a few basic problems relating to definitions and to explanatory models.

Traditional historical interpretations apply the term empire to at least six phases of Mesopotamian history, beginning with

I The Akkadian empire, from about 2350 to 2200 B.C.; this will be discussed in the contributions by Steiner, Westenholz, and Nissen.

II The Ur III empire, ca. 2100-2000 B.C.

III The Old Babylonian empires of Shamshi-Adad I in the north and of Hammurapi of Babylon in the south, one-man empires of the 18th century B.C.

IV The Middle Assyrian empire, ca. 1350-1200 B.C., the main Mesopotamian partner in the pattern of competing empires which existed in the entire Near East around the middle of the second millennium; the Egyptian and Hittite empires will here be discussed by Frandsen and Gurney.

V The Neo Assyrian empire which is the subject of most of the Assyriological papers in this book; it had two sub-phases, the first one covering most of the 9th century B.C., and the classic, fully developed empire between 745 and 609 B.C.

VI The Neo Babylonian empire, to some extent the direct heir of the preceding empire, which was destroyed by the Persians in 539 B.C.

The term Mesopotamia as used here designates approximately the area of present-day Iraq. This is not a unified ecological zone, but consists rather of a series of sub-zones which are vastly different from each other. The alluvial plain of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris stretches from the Arabian Gulf to around Samarra, 100 kms north of Baghdad. This plain is potentially very fertile but agriculture is dependent upon irrigation. Large-scale use of the land therefore demands extensive water regulation by way of canals, reservoirs, etc. The Euphrates river is split up into a number of smaller arms on the plain, and throughout history the land has suffered from repeated dramatic shifts in the course of both rivers (Adams and Nissen 1972, Gibson 1972). The southernmost part, which is known as Sumer in the third millennium B.C., is also characterized by the existence of vast swamps and marshes; the area where these marshes are concentrated was known as the Sealand. The northern part of the alluvium was known as the land Akkad during the last centuries of the third millennium, called after the city Akkade which has not yet been located; from around 2000 B.C. we may most conveniently refer to the entire alluvial plain as Babylonia, after the city of Babylon 100 kms south of Baghdad.

Northern Mesopotamia consists of the lands along the river Tigris; to the east we find a stretch of fertile land stretching to the foothills of the Zagros chain, and to the west we have the huge plain known as Jezira, "the Island", namely the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates. These areas lie partly within the rainfall zone where agriculture without irrigation is possible, and a number of very important old settlements are located here (Oates 1968). The political unification of the areas along and to the east of the Tigris happened very late, in the second millennium, and this led to the creation of the state known as Assyria, again called after a city, namely Assur on the Tigris.

Mesopotamia, and in particular the alluvial zone, had very limited natural resources. Obviously, the plain lacked stone and metals, but also wood fit for building purposes was largely absent. These basic commodities had to be imported together with the luxury items which were needed by the ruling elites. In fact, the commodities which were essential for the maintenance of the basic elements in civilized life had to be fetched from far away – for the building of temples and palaces, for the tilling of the earth, and for wars and fighting. Consequently, commercial relations with even very distant areas are abundantly attested from the earliest periods (Leemans 1960, Pettinato 1972).

The following brief essay will show that the southern and northern zones in many ways, both obvious and subtle, developed different political, cultural and economic systems. North and south to a very large extent shared a common tradition which transcended every aspect of their

civilization, but it is essential also to be aware of the differences and contrasts.

The earliest historical evidence belongs to the southern alluvium where the people known as the Sumerians during the fourth and third millennia B.C. created an advanced urbanized civilization which may be said to constitute the basis for the later Mesopotamian traditions. In the Sumerian cities we find the first formulation of the essential features of Mesopotamian culture, in the system of writing, in the basic socio-economic and political institutions, in religion, literature, art, architecture, etc.

Sumer in the third millennium B.C. consisted of a pattern of city-states, each comprising one or more urban centers plus their agricultural hinterland. The so-called "Early Dynastic" system which lasted down to around 2300 B.C. was one where these city-states appear to have been linked to each other in a kind of league, which certainly had a religious and cultic dimension, but whose political realities are somewhat difficult to describe with any precision (Jacobsen 1957, Hallo 1960). Being part of a common religious, linguistic and cultural continuum, the individual city-states, which were often located quite near to each other, claimed a politically independent status. There is no really convincing evidence pointing to decisive attempts to create a centralized government which would encompass all or even a large part of the Sumerian area – in contrast with for instance Egypt where the unification of the entire area took place at a very early date. Obviously, no simple explanation can be given for this difference, but it is at least interesting to note that Mesopotamia was never a closed, relatively self-contained unit like Egypt, but that it had numerous contacts with the surrounding areas through many different points of entry and exit. This would certainly tend to strengthen local or regional units and impede the trend towards unification. However, we do have evidence to show that various city-states at different times held a superior position within the league. We also find that inter-city warfare became relatively common, and although this is clearly linked to the pattern of a *primus inter pares* in the league, a real political control of Sumer as such or of peripheral lands was apparently not attempted (contra: Moorey 1978).

The Sumerians were not the only people in southern Mesopotamia. The northern part of the alluvium was from an early time in the third millennium to a large extent controlled by Semitic-speaking groups who were in close contact with the Sumerians. Semites were as individuals and as groups directly involved in both cultural and political aspects of the Sumerian civilization, but a more precise understanding of these intimate contacts cannot yet be reached.

Around 2350 B.C. the entire Sumerian area was conquered by the

Semites under kings who are said to come from the hitherto practically unknown city of Akkade. The people, their land and their language were named after this city, which has not yet been found, and the state they created is known as the Akkadian empire, the first Mesopotamian empire.

Even though little can be said with certainty about crucial aspects of this state or empire, it is clear that its creation is of basic importance for our theme. We may tend to over-emphasize the importance of the break in political and cultural traditions which accompanied the creation of the Akkadian empire, but it remains true that very real changes were in fact introduced – maybe not as abruptly as the Mesopotamian historical traditions may lead us to believe.

The political system which was gradually imposed upon the Sumerian city-states represented a radical departure from the Early Dynastic pattern. It introduced a centralized government directed from the city of Akkade, the capital of the empire, even though indirect rule was made use of to some extent so that old rulers could retain their positions locally. A new administrative system was introduced where the Akkadian royal officials often made use of their own language to the exclusion of Sumerian.

Some of the fundamental ideological features of the Akkadian period are directly connected with imperialist aspirations – the claim to universal rule or world domination, a very strong emphasis on the individual strength and dynamism of the king, and a new set of titles expressing these concepts. The Akkadian empire came to have a lasting effect on the Mesopotamian civilization, and this is reflected in the later historical traditions as expressed in chronicles, legends, omens, etc. These were preoccupied with the two major figures in the Akkadian dynasty: Sargon who founded the empire and who was praised extravagantly, and Naram-Sin, probably the most successful king, who was condemned as an "Unheilsherrscher", doomed by his *hybris* to defeat and destruction. It is probable that the really significant political and cultural changes were introduced by this ruler, which may partly explain why his reputation was destroyed by outraged traditionalists. The example set by him was in fact emulated by a line of later kings.

The extent and structure of the Akkadian empire remains to a large extent unknown. The control exercised over the peripheral areas appears to have been relatively loose, based on a system of forts and garrisons which were strategically located to control the major routes and perhaps protect areas where vital commodities originated. In a communication presented to the XXV Rencontre assyriologique in Berlin in 1978 Rowton described this system as an "incipient empire". Bottéro (1965, 107-109) has called it a "commercial empire", and although this term is somewhat unfortunate, Bottéro's analysis appears convincing to me. The imperial

system resulted in a flow of tribute from the periphery to the center and secured a constant supply of essential raw materials. The contemporary sources describe the Akkadian conquests as aimed primarily at areas which produced these raw materials: "the Silver Mountains" and "the Cedar Forest". A legendary text claims that the king Sargon led his army all the way to central Anatolia where Akkadian merchants were being harrassed by the king of a local state. It is uncertain whether this determined defence of Akkadian commercial interests a thousand kilometers from Akkade ever did take place, but other texts describe in glowing terms the wealth of the capital city of Akkade and stress the constant flow of goods from all corners of the known world – for instance that ships from Magan and Meluhha, i.e. as far away as the Indus delta, anchored in Akkade's harbour where they unloaded their exotic goods.

In line with the Early Dynastic traditions this empire was seen as the expansion of a single city-state. It is difficult to determine the historical reality behind this sudden expansion and also whether the Akkadian state had its main basis in a tribal structure, rather than in a fully urban one. The recent finds from the ancient city of Ebla in Syria (Matthiae 1977) appear to indicate that very important political centers existed there and in other places outside the Mesopotamian alluvium, and the relations between these powers and the Akkadians will hopefully become clearer when the material from Ebla is published.

The unification of the Sumerian area under one centralized administration was imposed by conquest. There is reason to believe that this led to serious conflicts which affected the relationship between south and north in the alluvium, as described by Westenholz in his paper. After the collapse of the Akkadian empire a new centralized state did emerge in Sumer, by us named after a city and this time it was Ur in the extreme south. It is not Ur's control over the Sumerian area, but its conquest of peripheral regions in the north and the east which leads us to describe this state as an empire. It seems fair to say that Sumer, not the city-state Ur, was now the center of the empire, but it is also true that the collapse of the empire was accompanied by a "Balkanization" and a return to the city-state pattern, at least for a period.

The administration of the Ur III empire is reflected in a staggering number of administrative documents. We observe that a number of the old city-states became sub-centers which were led by royally appointed governors who could be moved from post to post. A bureaucracy of truly vast proportions, using the Sumerian language, was created, and the economy of the entire area was strictly regulated. In fact, the administrative reforms introduced by the king Shulgi aimed at an integration of all the cities and provinces in a centrally directed economic structure.

Whereas the main target for the Akkadian expansion seems to have been the Syrian area, the Ur III empire directed its efforts towards the mountainous lands east of Mesopotamia. In particular, we hear of repeated campaigns directed against the northeast, and it is not unlikely that the interest in this area may partly have been of a commercial nature. In this period Syria was dominated by Amorite tribes who were in a process of expansion and settlement and who exerted a heavy pressure on the Ur III state itself. Defensive walls designed to keep them at bay were erected quite close to the Sumerian core areas. Contact with Syria was certainly not broken off, but we do not know how the commercial relations along the Euphrates route and beyond were regulated. On the other hand, we know that the trade over the Arabian Gulf was very much in operation, bringing vast quantities of copper to the ports of the Ur empire in the extreme south.

The collapse of the Ur III empire was a gradual one. A "feudalization" is characteristic of the last phase of the period, where governors in outlying provinces asserted a growing independence from the central administration in the capital. At the very end new dynasts set up virtually independent regimes in old cities, and whereas the final collapse of the government in Ur itself was caused by an invasion from Elam, the gradual weakening of the central authority was clearly caused by a combination of factors which affected the internal structure (Jacobsen 1953, Wilcke 1970).

The following period, which may conveniently be called "Old Babylonian", lasted down to ca. 1600 B.C. For a variety of reasons this is a crucial period in Mesopotamian history, when a synthesis of the Sumerian, Akkadian and Amorite traditions resulted in the creation of the classic "Mesopotamian" civilization. Politically it was in fact not a time of great achievements in terms of conquests, or even in terms of internal stability, but in cultural and economic terms it was characterized by a furious activity.

Two ephemeral empires, which both were born and died with one king, belong to this period. A ruler of Amorite descent set up a state which encompassed practically all of northern Mesopotamia, from the Euphrates to deep into the Zagros valleys around 1800 B.C. This king, Shamshi-Adad I, established his headquarters in an as yet unlocated city called Shubat-Enlil somewhere in the Syrian area, and his two sons were appointed as viceroys in Mari on the Euphrates and in Ekallate on the Tigris. The city of Assur which was located a short distance south of Ekallate played a unique, but at the moment rather obscure role in this realm, and Shamshi-Adad and his line were in fact accepted as part of the local traditions of Assur and thus became linked to the history of the later Assyrian empires.

The other one-man empire was created by the partly contemporary ruler of Babylon, Hammurapi (Klengel 1976). He managed to reunite the entire southern plain under one centralized government after a period of Balkanization and disunity. It is difficult to gauge the extent of Hammurapi's domain, but he claims to have ruled a fairly vast area, including the northern cities of Assur and Niniveh. However, it seems likely that these claims should be understood as based on a very loose system of dependence where local rulers at least in the areas outside the alluvial plain continued to exercise power, although accepting some degree of subordination.

Shamshi-Adad's empire died with him, and Hammurapi's did not long survive its founder, but his successors continued to rule a territorial state which we may call Babylonia and which at least comprised the northern part of the alluvium. The conditions in the north are difficult to determine, but it seems that the area continued to be divided up into a number of city-states and very small territorial units, of which the city-state of Assur was one.

This city is known as early as the Early Dynastic III period in the middle of the third millennium. It seems to have been a kind of satellite of the main cultural and political centers in the south and its relations to the main northern centers such as Niniveh and Arbela are not known. Assur was repeatedly under the direct domination of rulers from the south, and the documentation, both in the archaeological and in the textual evidence, for the earliest phases of the city's history is very scanty. However, from a short period in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries B.C. we have a very rich documentation which directly concerns Assur, even though it was not found there. In central Anatolia there existed a number of commercial colonies which were directed from Assur, and one of these has been excavated and yielded an enormous number of texts which throw light upon the trade directed from Assur and of course upon the conditions existing in the city. Assur was clearly located at a strategically important place where a number of routes met, and it is very likely that it was in fact a port of trade from its earliest beginnings. The unpublished material from Ebla in Syria seems to indicate that Assur had developed strong commercial ties with the Anatolian area as early as 2300 B.C., and certainly in the Old Assyrian period this city controlled a vast network of trading stations and must have dominated the commercial life of northern Mesopotamia (Garelli 1963, Orlin 1970).

The governmental structure of this early city-state included a king who combined the position as head of the leading lineage and thus leader of the city assembly with cultic functions, and who shared his power to a large extent with the assembly which was of course dominated by the leading families (Larsen 1976). This city-state in time became the center

of a territorial state known as *mat Assur,* "Assur-land", or "Assyria", and of the vast empires of the late second and early first millennia B.C. Obviously, very basic changes in the political structure accompanied these developments.

During the 15. century B.C. the international political scene in the Near East was dominated by Egypt and by the state known as Mitanni, a kind of federation of Hurrian states which controlled all of northern Mesopotamia. It had its core area around the river Habur in Syria and extended its power from the Mediterranean to the Zagros. Babylonia was under Kassite domination in this period and developed into a strong centralized state with links to the east. Assur was – together with the rest of the north – under Hurrian or Mitannian domination, but it could retain its basic political institutions under an unbroken line of kings.

Around the middle of the 14. century B.C. the Hittite kingdom in Anatolia started a concerted drive into Syria which eventually led to the collapse of the Mitannian federation. While the Hittites secured control of the greater part of Syria, including the important coastal cities of the Levant as well as the strategic cities inland, first of all Aleppo and Carchemish, Assur began its own expansion in the east. The concept *mat Assur,* "Assyria", is first attested at this time and it must mean that the rulers in Assur laid claim to the entire northern area, including the two ancient and prestigious centers Niniveh and Arbela. The local political and historical traditions of these cities were entirely suppressed so that nothing is known about their independent history from before their incorporation into "Assur-land". They certainly retained their economic and cultural importance, and Niniveh in time came to usurp the position as the political capital of Assyria.

This unification of the northern region under one government cannot be described due to a lack of sources, but it is worth noting that it followed upon a long period of domination from an outside power – a pattern which is known already from the Sumerian south. The further expansion towards the west in an apparent attempt to gain control of the larger part of the Mitannian realm is equally poorly illuminated by our sources. The Assyrians came to control the Jezira, the plain which stretches all the way to the Euphrates, and in that way became one of the great powers in the Near East.

The texts from Amarna in Egypt and from the Hittite capital in Asia Minor illuminate the political system of the 13. century B.C. The international order was built upon a structure which encompassed a small number of equal Great Powers – Egypt, the Hittite empire, Assyria, and also Kassite Babylonia to some extent – whose interrelations were regulated by way of treaties. Each of the rulers of these powers ac-

knowledged a status as "Great King" for the others, and the treaties were accompanied by dynastic marriages. They settled territorial disputes and pledged the kings to an alliance including the active defense of their ally's interests.

The Hittite system is known better than any other due to the discovery of the extensive royal archives in Hattusa. It was basically simple: the dominion of the Great King was based on sworn treaties with vassals and clients of varying status, all of them referred to as "Kings". They had to acknowledge a number of duties towards the Great King, both of a military and an economic nature, and they could not have independent diplomatic contacts with other kings. This amounts to an intricate system of indirect rule which covered all of the Hittite area.

The Assyrian empire apparently did not have this structure. We may observe a system of provinces covering most of the Jezira, and Postgate (1977) has suggested that it was the group of old families in Assur who benefited directly from this structure, since they dominated the government of the provinces. They appear to have administered them as profit-making concerns, and the special relationship is illustrated by the fact that the governorates could be inherited from father to son. The socio-political system in the Middle Assyrian empire can hardly be described adequately at this time; I shall briefly return to the crucial question of the relationship between king and nobility in Assyria.

These empires of the 13. century B.C. collapsed around 1200 when a series of violent events took place, beginning in the west. The Hittite state disappeared and new groups invaded the area, setting up new centers all the way down to the Egyptian border where they were decisively stopped. Following this we observe that the Arameans, a Semitic-speaking group, took power in most of the Syro-Palestinian region and set up a number of small states. Also the Middle Assyrian empire was brought down, and Arameans pushed down the Euphrates route towards Babylonia where the Kassite state was destroyed. The invading Arameans settled heavily in the south, as far as we can see nearly exclusively in the rural areas, whereas their penetration of the cities was quite limited (Dietrich 1970). The resulting political system in Babylonia was a very complex one where dynasties of rather obscure origin claimed control of at least a large part of the land (Brinkman 1968). The newcomers created a number of small territorial states which in part had their basis in tribal groupings, and these came to function as cultural and political counterparts to the old cities. When the area came under direct Assyrian control in the first millennium these attempted to profit from these diversities and play upon the differences between the millennia-old cities with their prestigious cults and the Chaldean princes in the Sealands. Some cities appear to have preferred

an alliance with the Assyrians to the end, but the final union between the two forces in the land, which created a new nation state in the seventh century B.C., marked the beginning of a new age of political and economic strength and the end of Assyrian domination.

Also Assyria came under heavy pressure from the Arameans but a real invasion did not take place as in the south. In fact, Assyria retained a remarkable cohesion and around 1100 B.C. we even find a short burst of expansion again when Tiglath-pilesar I's army marched all the way to the Mediterranean coast. This was a unique event which did not stop the Arameans from establishing their power in the Syrian area.

A rather obscure, but obviously important and formative period followed, and it was only in the ninth century B.C. that Assyria once again began a burst of expansion directed towards the west. The aim appears clearly to have been the establishment of a firm control over the Jezira all the way to the Euphrates, and this area in fact came to be the Assyrian heartland in the course of the following centuries. After a period of constant warfare against the Aramean states in Syria and Palestine a further expansion into the areas beyond the Euphrates took place. The Levantine coast with its important cities was conquered, and this western empire was maintained until the end of the seventh century B.C. despite some setbacks and brief periods of decline. A number of the papers dealing with Mesopotamian subjects in this volume are concerned with aspects of this state.

I shall not recount the story of the Assyrian empire but refer to the maps for a schematic presentation of the development in the political pattern. It is clear that a significant change in the structure of the empire took place in the reign of the king Tiglath-pilesar III in the eighth century B.C. The area which was under direct rule, i.e. incorporated in the provincial administration, was expanded far beyond the traditional Euphrates border which had in fact been inherited from the second millennium. Further conquests were added by some of the later rulers, but most of the newly conquered territories were placed under indirect rule. The Nile Delta was conquered by Esarhaddon in the seventh century, and his son Assurbanipal added Elam – giving up control over Egypt however. In the east the Assyrians pushed far into the Iranian plateau but also here they mostly used indirect rule. It seems as if the constant threat from Iran continued to be a worry for the Assyrians during the entire period, and they apparently never found a way in which to cope with this in a decisive way. The final collapse of the Assyrian empire was caused by invasions from Iran in conjunction with the growing aspirations of Babylonia.

North of the Assyrian core area, shielded from it by the impenetrable

Armenian mountain massif, lay the area known as Urartu with its center round Lake Van. In the early eighth century Urartu posed a serious threat to Assyrian interests by expanding both into the Syrian area in the west and into the valleys around Lake Urmia in the east. Vital sources of raw materials and important trading routes were threatened in Syria and southern Turkey, and the necessary supply of horses from the mountain valleys in the east could be cut off by this Urartian activity. A series of campaigns reduced Urartu to relative insignificance in the course of the eighth century.

In the south the Assyrians had to contend with the old Babylonian cities, the Aramean chiefdoms in the Sealands, and with the constant ally of the Arameans and Chaldeans, the old state of Elam in the Zagros. The extremely complex bonds of a cultural and religious nature which linked Assyria to the ancient Babylonian cities created a peculiar and difficult relationship (Oppenheim 1964). The imperialist ideology which formed the basis for Assyria's relations with the world could not simply be applied in the case of Babylonia. Many of the cities had in their midst millennia-old sanctuaries for gods who were worshiped by the Assyrians, and they preferred to view themselves as protectors of the cities rather than as conquerors. This dilemma resulted in a number of unusual political solutions, some of which appear to have been quite successful for a time. The Assyrians tried indirect rule with a Babylonian noble on the throne in Babylon; we also find a personal union where the Assyrian king took over the title and at least some of the cultic functions of the king of Babylon; Sennacherib's attempt to place his own son on the throne there failed, but when Esarhaddon placed one son on the Assyrian throne and another as king in Babylon it took sixteen years before a civil war broke out. Sennacherib had at that time already tried the desperate solution to impose outright domination, destroy Babylon, and remove its main gods and their cults to Assyria (Brinkman 1964).

The reforms of Tiglath-pilesar III which have already been referred to, when the drastic extension of the area under direct rule took place in the eighth century, appear to have been in some way connected with certain fundamental social conflicts in Assyria. These may go back to the time of the Middle Assyrian empire in the second millennium and reflect a struggle between the king and the nobility. The wave of conquests which took place in the ninth century B.C. was followed by a period of crisis or unrest, beginning openly with a general revolt by large parts of the nobility which broke out in 827 B.C. at the end of the extremely long reign of the successful king Shalmaneser III. We do not know of the precise background for this revolt which was mastered after a great deal of fighting, but unrest seems to have continued in Assyria until the middle

of the eighth century B.C. when Tiglath-pilesar III usurped the royal throne. This preceding period was characterized by a weakening of central control, and some governors assumed extensive powers and loosened their ties to the monarch. It is difficult to determine how widespread these phenomena were, or how far they developed, but the reversal of the trend by Tiglath-pilesar was obviously a turning point which should be considered carefully.

The common explanation given for these events is based on the apparent conflict between the interests of the nobility and of the king (Olmstead 1923, Goossens 1965). The centralized bureaucracy necessary for the smooth operation of the empire was the natural power base for the king, and the concentration of powers in his hands necessarily led to conflicts with the nobility. The king needed totally loyal and committed men who had no independent power base in traditional aristocratic lineages or great private landholdings. Such a conflict has in fact been observed time and again throughout history (Dandamaev 1976).

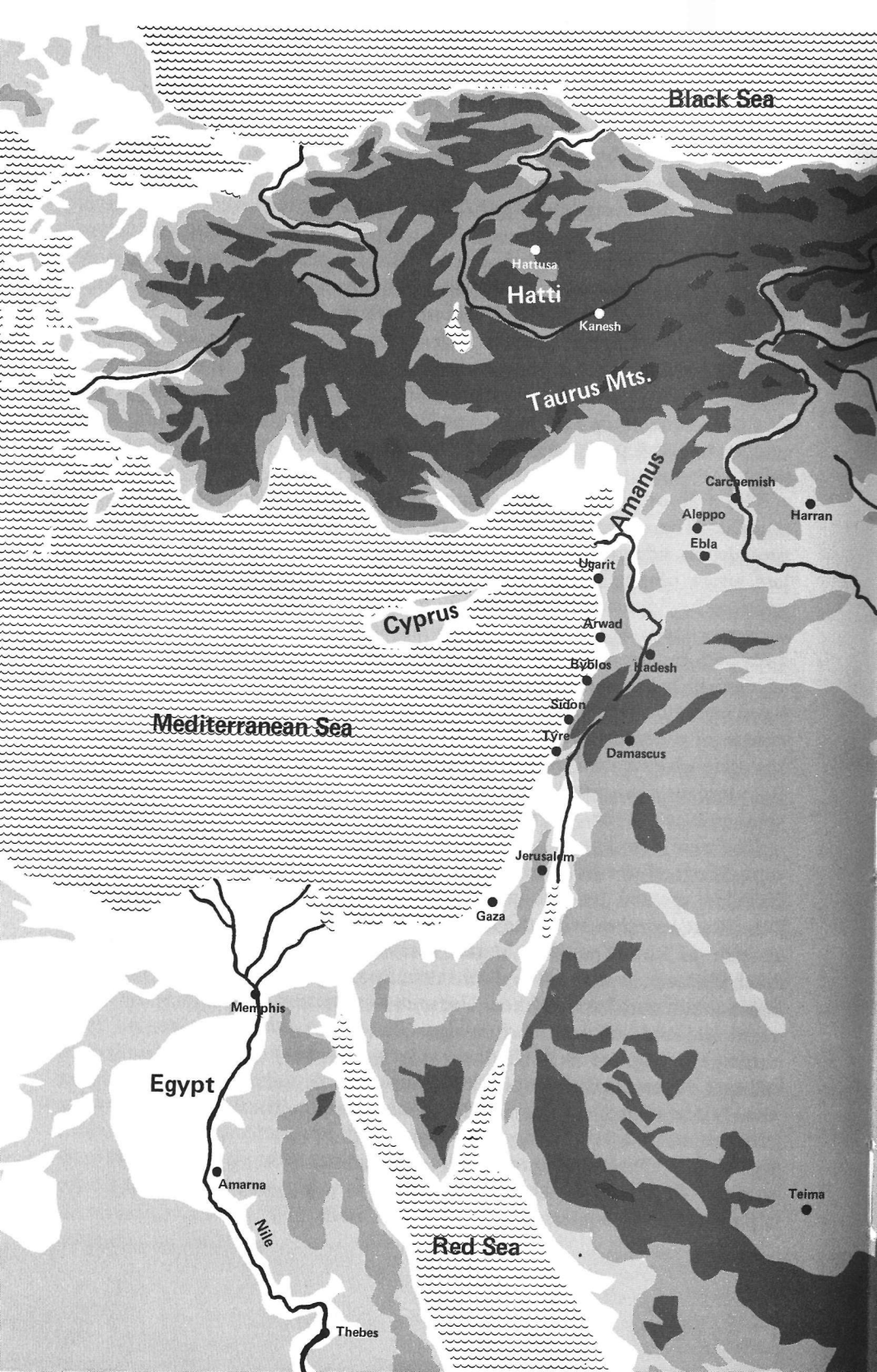
This interpretation of Tiglath-pilesar's reforms operates with three main elements: 1) the old provincial system was reorganized so that previously existing very large provinces were divided into smaller units – to lessen the danger of revolts from "overvigorous" governors, as Olmstead (1923) put it; 2) the central bureaucracy of the king was strengthened by way of a reform of the army and the administrative system; and 3) the area under direct, provincial rule was expanded so that a number of new provinces were created in lands situated beyond the traditional borders of the empire.

Such measures would obviously lead to a drastic strengthening of the power of the king. He would have a stronger administrative apparatus and the many new provinces would permit him to appoint several new men, at the same time as the smaller size of provinces in general would weaken the potential threat from the nobility. We could therefore conclude that the old nobles had lost much of their power *vis-à-vis* the king, who had forged an alliance with groups of "new men". However, serious doubts about the validity of this reconstruction have been voiced by Garelli (1974). He makes it very plain that in his view the Assyrian nobility was not a class of great landowners and traditional aristocrats, but that we find only what he calls a "noblesse de fonction". I doubt whether this is really a valid view and it seems to me that we need further research into the socio-political structure of the Assyrian state, before and after Tiglath-pilesar III, before we can determine the extent of change. Moreover, Garelli's criticism of the traditional interpretation of the three points in Tiglath-pilesar's reforms needs to be further discussed. He claims that only the third element, the expansion of the provincial system, can be accepted as proven, and does link this to an attempt to reinforce the authority of the king.

This debate raises important questions concerning the development of the Assyrian social and political system. Another area of conflict which has been studied by a number of scholars and which is also touched by Garelli in this volume, was the royal succession. At several times we find bitter crises following the death of a king, not only revolts in provinces and among vassals, but civil wars in Assyria. Some of the most important rulers such as Sargon, Tiglath-pilesar III, and perhaps Esarhaddon were usurpers, and Sennacherib was killed by his sons in connection with struggles over the succession. This indicates the existence of factions and cliques at the Assyrian court. It has been suggested that some of the struggles had their basis in disagreements over policy questions, first of all the Babylonian question (Garelli 1973), and it may be suggested that also some very significant conflicts of interest relating to the social system and the power and position of the nobility played an important role.

The fall of the Assyrian empire has been described as a historical scandal. The collapse can hardly be explained, in fact it is difficult to provide an adequate description of the sequence of events during the last years of the empire (von Soden 1967, Reade 1970). During the apparently immensely successful reign of Assurbanipal our sources suddenly stop, at a time when the empire seems to have been powerful and well-functioning. After the death of this ruler struggles over the succession broke out and a general weakening of the central power must have been the result. Our scanty sources indicate that Babylonia in the course of a decade was able to assert its independence and then to go on the offensive against Assyria. Together with the Medes from Iran the Babylonians conquered the old capital cities in the north and caused the total collapse of the Assyrian empire.

The new Babylonian power was based on an alliance between the Chaldean Kings of the Sealand and the old cities, and the Chaldean dynasty of Babylon created by Nabopolassar became the new major power in the Near East together with the Medes. We do not know very much about the empire of the Neo Babylonian kings, whose main architect was Nebuchadnezzar, but the Babylonian armies controlled vast areas, including Syria and part of Asia Minor. The area of direct rule was apparently quite restricted and the annual campaigns directed against Palestine and Syria during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar served the basic purpose of collecting tribute. A remarkable economic expansion took place and continued after the Persians had conquered Babylonia. The political history is rather obscure and marked by repeated revolts and usurpations. The reign of the last king, Nabonidus, represents one of the strangest episodes in Mesopotamian history, and our inability to explain his seemingly quixotic be-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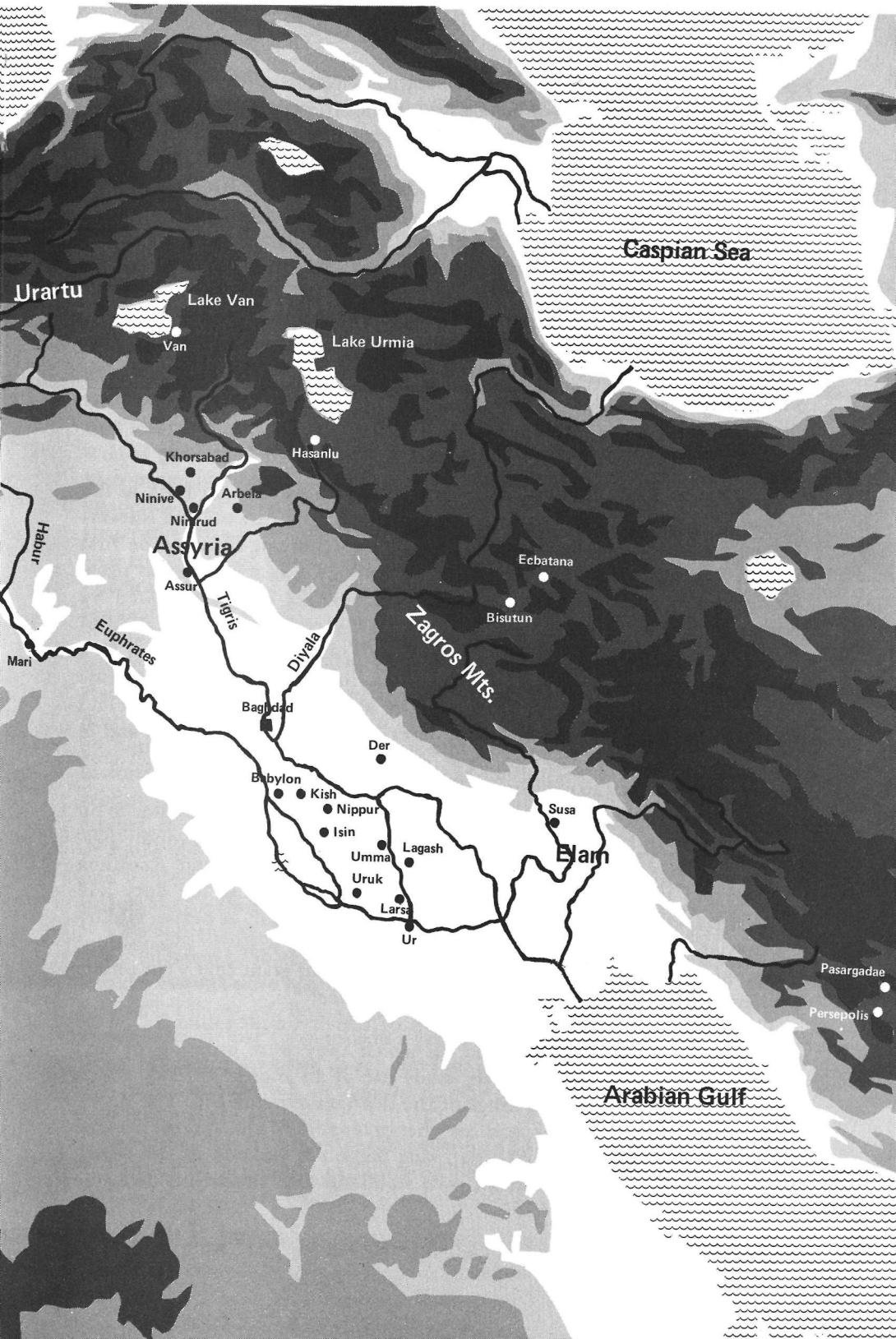
Teima
Thebes


Caspian Sea
Urartu
Lake Van
Van
Lake Urmia
Hasanlu
Khorsabad
Ninive
Arbela
Nimrud
Assyria
Habur
Assur
Tigris
Ecbatana
Bisutun
Zagros Mts.
Euphrates
Mari
Diyala
Baghdad
Der
Babylon
Kish
Nippur
Isin
Susa
Elam
Umma
Lagash
Uruk
Larsa
Ur
Pasargadae
Persepolis
Arabian Gulf

haviour underscores our ignorance of essential aspects of the political and economic life of the period. Nabonidus spent ten years of his reign in the desert oasis Teima in Arabia, while his son ruled in his stead in Babylon. He came back to the capital when the Persian attack on Babylonia began, but could not prevent the conquest in 539 B.C. This event brought an end to the political independence of the area which now became a province in an empire of unprecedented proportions. It is doubtful what this apparent drastic break meant for Mesopotamian life. The Persians not only left much in peace as it was, they were very heavily influenced by the prestigious old civilizations which they had conquered.

2. Definitions, interpretations and explanations

Defining "empire".

The Mesopotamian imperial traditions can be followed as far back as the Akkadian period, around 2300 B.C., when Sargon of Akkade and Naram-Sin entered the scene as towering, nearly superhuman figures. The first known formulation of the imperialistic ideology was expressed in royal inscriptions, in monumental art, and in a new set of titles created by Naram-Sin. This ruler, who also introduced the concept of deification of the king, used the title "King of the Four Quarters", laying claim to a cosmic significance of his rule. This title, together with the later one "King of Totality", clearly expressed the idea of world domination and they were adopted by a long line of later kings both in Babylonia and in Assyria (Seux 1967). Most of these rulers, if not all, were in fact concerned with military expansion and conquest of peripheral areas.

The expansionist ideology received a special and crucial acceptance by the Assyrians in the second millennium. A number of kings proudly proclaim that they have "expanded the frontiers of Assyria", and according to Assyrian ideas they are hereby simply acknowledging the duty laid upon them as representatives of the national god Assur. A prayer said by a priest at the coronation of the Assyrian king ends with the admonition: "Expand the land by your just sceptre! May Assur grant that your orders are heard and obeyed, and grant justice and peace!"

There is no doubt that the Assyrians of the first millennium B.C. were quite aware of the long tradition on which they were building, or that they consciously and deliberately made use of an ancient titulary which went back to the Akkadian kings of the third millennium B.C. The Akkadian empire-builder Sargon and his phenomenal luck and success became the model after which the Assyrian king Sargon at the end of the eighth century, 1500 years later, set his own standards and viewed his own role

in the world. Obviously, the immense span of time dividing them had transformed the real world of the Akkadian kings. As already mentioned, Sargon of Akkade and Naram-Sin had a shocking effect on their contemporaries, and their astonishing successes and terrible failures became favourite topics in later historical writings. Here we find a harshly clashing picture, extremes of strength and weakness, wisdom and folly, good and evil, vibrating life and ignominious death. The reality of the Akkadian world lies buried under these pictures which followed a traditional pattern of thought; although it is probably impossible at present to grasp that reality, it is at least quite clear that this first Mesopotamian empire was very different from the Neo Assyrian empire of the later Sargon. Not surprisingly, some scholars maintain that the term "empire" should not be used about them both, but should be restricted to the late empire of the first millennium B.C.

It is quite true that the word has been used rather freely in writings on Mesopotamian history, and we have no serious attempts to establish a proper definition of "empire", or to relate the Mesopotamian political structures to similar ones from other places and periods. The one extensive treatment of our concept by S.N. Eisenstadt, the book called "The Political Systems of Empires" (1969), does not make use of the Mesopotamian material at all.

The Mesopotamians themselves had no word for "empire" and consequently did not distinguish such a structure from a territorial nation-state. They speak of "countries" or "lands". However, "if the Romans invented the concept of empire, they did not invent its reality", as pointed out by Lichtheim. When imposing this concept on Mesopotamian history we usually have a common-sense definition in mind which centers around expansion, domination, and exploitation. This then means that empire is a relationship between a ruling and controlling power and one or more subjugated and dominated peoples. I would suggest that an empire be defined as a supernational system of political control, and such a system may have either a city-state or a territorial state as its center.

This somewhat simpleminded approach does not address itself to the terminological problems connected with more specific usages, such as the Marxist definition which relates imperialism to capitalism; or the "structuralist" theory of imperialism offered by Galtung (1971), who sees imperialism as just "a species in a genus of dominance and power relationships." It seems doubtful to me whether it is fruitful or reasonable to limit the terms imperialism or empire to one particular form of domination over conquered peoples.

My definition is a purely political one and I am uncertain as to whether the aspect of economic exploitation belongs as a necessary element in a

proper definition of empire. Lichtheim claims that an empire may come into being "not as an exploitative power, but rather as a defensive reaction." As an example he mentions the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation which he says was established in the face of a threat from Islam. Quite similar ideas have been expressed with regard to the rise of the Assyrian empire (Garelli 1974, 61), which is seen as a reaction to a threat posed by the powers in Syria and Palestine – the eternal quest for "secure and viable frontiers." "Defensive imperialism" is discussed with reference to Rome in Garnsey and Whittaker 1978, 2-6. This concept appears inadequate as a full explanation of the expansion, where economic and commercial considerations in general carry greater conviction as decisive factors. However, this is not to deny the validity of the observation as such, and it must also be maintained that we know of different types of empires, and that "widely different conditions can obtain at different places .. within a unitary empire", as pointed out by Adams. The definition of empire suggested by Wallerstein (1974): "a mechanism for collecting tribute", is accordingly too narrow, even through I agree with him that in general "political empires are a primitive means of economic domination."

I do not think that it is justified to include in a definition further elements which concern the structure of such a system. The three typical features of the fully developed Assyrian empire in the first millennium were: 1) a methodical and permanent occupation of conquered territory, 2) implantation of military garrisons, and 3) a division of the territory into provinces governed by officials closely submitted to the authority of a central government. These features do not, however, constitute elements of only the Neo Assyrian empire since they are attested earlier, nor should they be accepted as necessary for the proper definition of the concept empire. Since the difference between the late Assyrian empire and its Mesopotamian predecessors in one of degree (surely a poor basis for a terminological differentiation), it would be highly inconvenient and unjustified to set up a strict dividing line in the first millennium and claim that the Neo Assyrian state represented the first "real" empire.

Center and Periphery.

The reference to the concept "nation" in my definition may be deemed unfortunate; it is surely a complex matter how to define this term in the ancient world, and one may prefer to speak of "states" or "societies" instead. The three basic political structures in the Mesopotamian traditions, city-state, territorial state ("country"), and empire, are related to each other in a dynamic system where the operative element is territorial expansion. It is typical of the Mesopotamian world that major territorial

units and empires are named after a city, an observation which by itself indicates the fundamental role played by the city-state. Mesopotamian history cannot be understood in terms of a unilinear development, but seen against a background of recurrent breakdowns we do seem to find a clear trend towards more complex organizations. With regard to the empires this growing complexity is accompanied by a move towards larger units and a stronger centralization so that more extensive areas come under direct rule. The ragged line of development, showing breaks and ups and downs, runs from a system of city-states and loosely organised empires of the third millennium, to the territorial states and "federal" empires of the second, and to the imperial systems of the first millennium B.C. which covered the entire Near East. This expansion clearly demanded considerable advances in communications, in military logistics, and in administrative techniques. The logistics involved in the movement of large armies over stretches of several hundreds of kilometers, and the transportation and communication apparatus necessary for an effective system of taxation and economic control were apparently first mastered by the Assyrians. The political system of the second millennium B.C. was characterized by a number of large territorial units – which we may certainly call "empires" – that in most cases bordered directly on each other with no or very little space left open in between them. In the third millennium we may have had large bands of land where nomads surrounded the main agricultural settlement areas.

The three main powers of the mid-second millennium, Egypt, the Hittite empire, and Assyria, met in direct collision in the Syro-Palestinian area. Looking at the Near East as a larger system one is of course struck by the pivotal position held by this area.

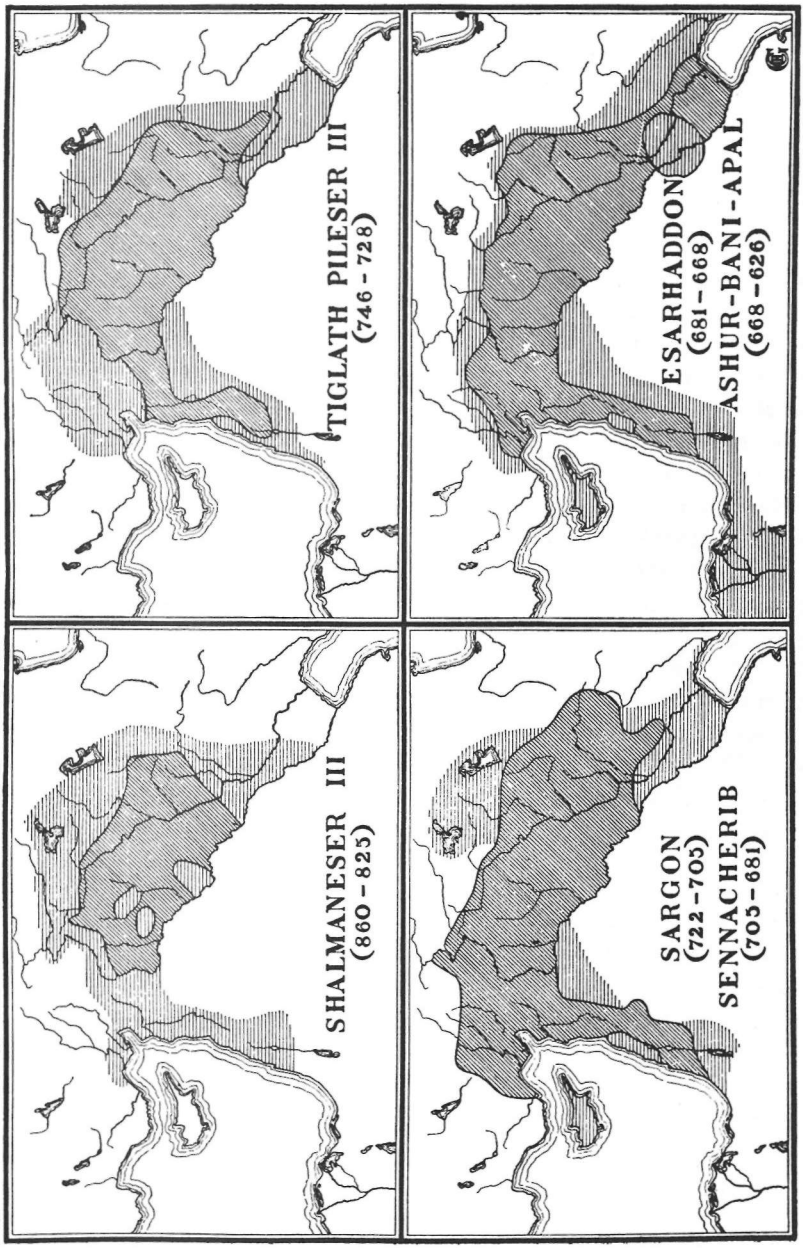
The commercial networks of the third and second millennia – and probably also of the first – were not directly linked to the political structure. They encompassed a vast area and contacts linked the city-states in Mesopotamia with both the Mediterranean world and the Indus culture. These networks appear to have consisted of a system of interlocking circuits in an intricate and constantly shifting pattern. No single political unit monopolized more than one circuit, but Mesopotamia clearly held a central position in the sense that it constituted the single largest production and consumption area.

Defining center or core in relation to periphery is not a simple matter. Unless we can make use of a legalistic device, as is possible for instance in the case of the Roman empire where a formalised concept of citizenship existed, we can hardly expect to be able to draw precise lines on a map. This should not, however, persuade us to discard these concepts. One complicating factor is the dynamic nature of the concept empire, for the expansion is not just a feature of the initial "conquest" phase, it continues

in a different way during the "imperial phase". The process of expansion is in fact the same whether we have a city-state developing into a territorial state, or whether we have any one of these units developing into an empire. It may be maintained that the end result in the long run logically is a territorial state in both cases. During the imperial phase we find a kind of "internal" expansion of the center, where ever more of the periphery becomes integrated into the center.

Finley 1978 (paper read at the symposium) has in fact made the point that when Roman citizenship was extended to all free men and women in the Roman empire, the empire no longer existed – it had become a territorial state. I find this approach rather extreme, but the expansion of the center is certainly an important feature in the Mesopotamian empires as well. Assyria provides us with an excellent illustration of this point. The old Assyrian "core area" to the east of the Tigris clearly remained the center of the Assyrian empire to the very end, but it is significant that the last Assyrian capital was the city of Harran which lay in Syria, some 400 kms away from the old capitals. It is true that it was only the last desperate resistance to the invading Medes and Babylonians which was organized around Harran in the far west, but there can hardly be any doubt that the city should at this late time be seen as an Assyrian city. Babylonia had already established its independence several years before the final defence of Harran; that ominous signs of Assyrian weakness did not however lead to large-scale defections in the long-held Jezira. We must presumably regard that area as an integrated part of Assyria by the end of the seventh century B.C.

Problems of a different nature make it equally difficult to describe the periphery in very precise terms, as anyone looking at the maps in our histories will see. One basic problem is the inadequacy of our sources and the complexity of the political geography in areas where only a tiny number of the locations referred to in the texts have been definitively identified on the ground. Another problem is the lack of very precise concepts used by the modern historians when drawing up their maps: the lines are often placed on the basis of such vague concepts as "sphere of influence". It is certainly not surprising that there should be much disagreement over the correct evaluation of information which is contained in such diverse sources as contemporary historical inscriptions, later legends and epics, administrative texts, or isolated rock reliefs. Some histories show all of central Asia Minor included in the "sphere of influence" of the Akkadian empire; this must be based on the much later legendary text which tells of Sargon's march to Pursahanda in central Asia Minor. Others will include the Phoenician city of Byblos in the sphere of influence of the Ur III empire because a ruler of that city is mentioned



Maps showing the development of the Assyrian empire, from Olmstead 1923, giving an attempt to differentiate between areas under direct and indirect rule.

on an administrative text from Mesopotamia; however, no Ur III ruler ever claimed control of the Syrian area or even campaigned there. Still other historians have used the rock reliefs found in the mountainous peripheral regions as the basis for lines on their maps – in spite of the fact that such evidence really is in the nature of grand *graffiti:* "Kilroy was here!" Neither rock reliefs nor isolated references to military victories in distant lands, for instance contained in a year-date provide us with much information about the nature of the power relations involved. Rock reliefs appear to have been set up in many cases to mark the ends of the world as seen from the viewpoint of the civilized Mesopotamians.

A major question with regard to the periphery is distinguishing the sphere of direct rule from that of indirect rule, a point which is of relevance for the establishment of categories for the different empires found in the ancient world. The directly ruled zone will be characterized by the three points mentioned earlier: a permanent occupation of territory, military presence in garrisons, and a tightly controlled provincial government. Our empires usually had a further peripheral zone where the internal power structure was left relatively intact to function under the supervision of the center, and this outer zone should certainly be seen as part of the imperial structure.

In some cases these two zones in their interrelationship represent stages in a developmental process, but this does not have to be the case. The empires of the second millennium B.C. may be said to resemble confederacies, based to a considerable extent on a system of vassalage and clientship. The fully developed Assyrian empire of the first millennium had a very large provincial zone and was a strongly centralized, bureaucratic one. The two types of zones co-existed, and we may say that the "feudalization" process at the end of the Ur III empire or in the first half of the eighth century in Assyria, where the governors loosened their ties to the central authority, is a matter of a shift in the dividing line between the two zones. It is obviously very difficult to establish the precise extent of these zones for the early empires. For the Akkadian empire in the third millennium B.C. we must assume that the normal practice at least in the beginning was indirect rule, in spite of the claim made in a text that the Akkadian kings placed their own men in charge of all the conquered areas. Under the Ur III empire we find a considerable zone of direct rule in a provincial system of some kind.

The economic relationship between center and periphery may be based on different models. In my view, the model which has relevance for most periods in the Near East is one in which the center functions as a parasite on the economy, drawing wealth from the periphery in the form of tribute and taxes. It should be stressed once again, however, that each

system may contain elements from more than one conceptual model, and it is quite obvious that various areas within one imperial structure may have played different roles and had different status. Some of the earlier imperial systems may to some extent have represented another model in which the center engages in production and exchange with the periphery, and where the political control is used to enforce a favourable and dominant position for the center. Aspects of such a system may also be found in the empires of the first millennium B.C.

Looking at the two zones outlined above, we can observe some basic differences. In the zone of direct rule the economic system was based on taxation, but also on a high degree of involvement in the production of the area. The rich people and the political elite from the center may own large areas in the provinces and also control other means of production. We know that Assyrian officials had vast estates in the provinces, for instance in the land around Harran (Postgate 1974, 28-39).

In the zone with indirect rule the political system was based on the loyalty of a local man who was under constant surveillance by Assyrian officials placed at his court. The economic relations were based on a system of tribute. Production and trade were basically left untouched, although they may have been regulated in some way in decrees or in special rules contained in the treaties set up between the emperor and the client king. The means of production thus remained in the hands of the local population.

The economic contributions flowing from periphery to center in the form of either taxes or tribute may not have varied greatly in the two zones. The main difference lies in the degree of freedom of choice which was given to the client state. Tribute was paid as a lump sum by the vassal to his overlord, a sum which could come from any imaginable source. On the other hand, taxation implied a direct contact between the Assyrian authorities and the economic basis of the area. No doubt the tribute usually came from taxes imposed on the producers, but this system nevertheless allowed the local state a degree of freedom of action which could be essential for certain kinds of activities. A community which was to a large extent dependent on foreign trade, for instance the Phoenician coastal towns, could function as a kind of port of trade in relation to the empire and be allowed to retain a degree of freedom.

Explanatory Models.

It is customary to view Mesopotamian history in terms of expansion and contraction, and the brief résumé of Mesopotamian history provided above indicates that such a model, however crude, has some merit. Con-

quest of foreign lands, military and cultural expansion, even claims to world domination are features which are linked to the periods when Mesopotamia exhibited internal political stability, strength, and a flourishing cultural life. Conversely, in between these glorious episodes we find periods of gloomy passivity, invasions from the desert or from the mountains, political fragmentation, economic stagnation, and cultural decline. The demerits of this – admittedly somewhat overdrawn – picture are obvious: there is clearly no definite correlation between for instance internal political fragmentation and economic or cultural decline, as can be seen by anyone who studies the so-called "dark ages". The masterpieces of Sumerian art and literature from Gudea's Lagash belong to a period which is traditionally described as a time of invasions and political impotence in Sumer. The politically unstable centuries following the fall or the Ur III empire were clearly a time of great economic and cultural activity. Such simple observations therefore tend to discredit the picture given above, but it is especially the explanations of the apparent movement of ebb and flood in Mesopotamia's relations with the outside world which should be tackled. The normal explanations given are based nearly exclusively on assumptions relating to the inner strength or weakness of the Mesopotamian political system.

Some modern ethologists (Tiger and Fox 1972) have in fact described Man as an "imperial animal" who has an inbuilt need for expansion. In this way we do not have to explain the expansion of political systems beyond the statement that they were strong enough to be able to expand. Expansion is simply the result of the existence of a strong and stable rule, or a strong and dynamic ruler. Our task is then to explain how this internal stability and strength was created, and that is certainly a most respectable area of research. I freely accept the partial validity of these views, but I am convinced that we must at the same time concentrate our attention on Mesopotamia's role as a part of a much larger system. The expansionist phases should also be seen in the light of an analysis of this wider system of interaction, and we have to accept that military conquest and empire is only one of several possible types of relationship linking Mesopotamia with the larger system.

Of necessity, my remarks on this subject must be in the nature of a plea, for I cannot present a developed theory or an exhaustive reinterpretation. In the most tentative way I would like to point out some elements in an explanatory model which is based on Mesopotamia's economic relations with the world around it, and I will allow myself to begin with a fact that has been repeated so many times that it may seem trivial: Mesopotamia has practically no natural resources and consequently must import such basic commodities as metals, stone, and timber, apart, of course,

from luxury items of all kinds. Moreover, it is an open land with numerous lines of communication linking it with the surrounding world. In the ancient world these contacts were clearly organized in different ways at various times, and I suggest that we may see the imperial phases as a special ways of organizing external contacts, a system which appeared in certain periods only.

As pointed out above, the commercial system of the third and second millennia appears to have been based on an intricate system of interlocking commercial circuits. Oppenheim's suggestion that southern Mesopotamia was surrounded by a *corona* of cities and marketplaces which functioned as transit centers for the trade between Mesopotamia and the more distant areas, may be combined with this system. Such places as Assur, Mari, Der, Susa, or Dilmun in the Arabian Gulf functioned at various times as markets or *emporia.* Such a system is directly illuminated by the mass of evidence which refers to the city of Assur shortly after 2000 B.C.

It is easy to see that a system of this nature is highly vulnerable, and there is reason to believe that whereas the overall structure continued to exist for a very long time, there were many changes in the way in which it functioned. Disturbances in areas peripheral to southern Mesopotamia might cause partial or even complete breakdowns in the system, resulting in an interruption of the supply of important commodities. The response to such a situation could be either to find other sources, or to suffer a shortage and then probably a recession, or finally a direct intervention could be undertaken. Such an attempt to regulate the supplies by direct interference in the affairs of the peripheral areas could be designed to gain control over the broken network or even over the source of the needed commodities. We would thus have a military expansion and maybe an empire.

Obviously, such an extremely simplified model has a limited applicability to specific historical situations, but I suggest that it may have some relevance for our understanding of the Akkadian empire, which was in fact called a "commercial" empire by Bottéro. The conquests of the Akkadian kings are often in their texts expressed as meant to secure control over the sources of various important commodities such as metals and wood. The analysis given for this imperial structure indicates that it was based on a system of strongholds guarding vital routes and protecting trade, so that a combination of tribute and control over important commercial routes guaranteed a constant flow of goods to the center. It is even possible that the Akkadian expansion should be seen as a reaction to the growing power of the kingdom of Ebla in Syria, which could mean that one major reason behind the Akkadian campaign towards Syria was a competition for control over the trade routes.

The Ur III kings appear to have found the Syrian area blocked by the

Amorite nomads who must have controlled the Euphrates route. The concerted drive against the east and the northeast may have a connection with these Syrian realities. It is indeed vitally important to note the crucial role played in many periods by the Syrian area. Here a number of great routes met and crossed, land routes being connected with the maritime routes to Egypt, Cyprus, Crete and beyond. The political and economic situation in Syria had direct repercussions for both Babylonia and Assyria. Chaos in the Syrian area, as at the end of the Ur III empire, around 1600 B.C., or around 1200 B.C., brought recession to Mesopotamia. At other times a strong Syrian power could threaten the Mesopotamian interests, and the response might be attacks designed to secure control of the area.

These observations lead us directly to the question of the nature and background of the Assyrian expansion towards the west, an absorbing subject which cannot be properly tackled in this context. However, many scholars have pointed to the desire to secure control over trade routes and sources of raw materials as an important element in this process. The fully developed Assyrian empire may somewhat flippantly be described as a vacuum cleaner, a huge military and administrative apparatus designed to secure a constant flow of goods from periphery to center. The Assyrian traders of the early second millennium, who controlled a large part of the international commercial network of northern Mesopotamia, were replaced by imperial officials and tax collectors. At the same time we must assume that a thriving trade existed in the Assyrian empire (Oppenheim 1965). This is, however, a highly complicated matter, and I shall only touch upon one aspect, the role played by the Phoenician cities.

We do not have adequate information concerning the identity of the traders who exploited the international commerce in this period. The very fact that we have so few Assyrian texts which refer directly to trade invites the belief that the administrative apparatus was only marginally involved in the commercial procedures, and consequently that the trade was in the hands of private *entrepreneurs*. One of the extremely rare royal references to trade comes from a Sargon-text where the king boasts that he has reopened trade with Egypt and settled Assyrians in a special settlement called a *karu*. Elat (1978) has suggested that such *karu* were commercial centers which were established in "places whose economies could not be exploited through regular administrative means." In fact, such settlements existed in many different parts of the empire, and in this context it is of special interest that we know of a *karu* established in the Phoenician city of Arwad. Elat sees it as a "quay in the harbour where the king of Assyria and his merchants were accorded special trading privileges." This would bring us very close to the system of Italian colonies in the very same harbours on the Levantine coast when the Crusaders had conquered the land.

However, it seems quite uncertain whether the people who carried out the trade were Assyrians, not to speak of "royal merchants". Elat himself points to the important role played by the Arabs in the trade of the Assyrian empire; these tribesmen were experts in overland transportation across the vast deserts. Similarly, the Phoenicians had a virtual monopoly on maritime trade because of their unrivaled expertise on the sea. Oppenheim (1967) has suggested that the Phoenicians were the commercial specialists of the following Neo Babylonian period, and I would suggest that the same is true of the time of the Assyrian empire. We would thus have a nice parallel, on a vastly expanded scale, to the old pattern of middlemen in ports of trade located at the edge of the controlled area.

The Phoenician expansion in the Mediterranean area coincided with the flowering of the Assyrian empire, and it seems obvious that there is a connection here. The coastal cities received special treatment at the hands of the Assyrian conquerors who mostly refrained from a direct incorporation of the main Phoenician cities in the provincial zone of the empire. Cities such as Byblos, Tyre, and Arwad were allowed to lie as isolated enclaves within Assyrian provinces and to retain a degree of independence. In the case of Tyre the usual explanation is that the city, located on an island off the coast, simply could not be conquered, it took an Alexander to accomplish that feat. However, this does not explain why Byblos was not made a province, and it seems an inescapable conclusion that the Assyrians deliberately abstained from this. Some control was certainly imposed on these cities, including Tyre where an Assyrian representative was placed at the court. It seems that the Phoenician cities had a special role to play in the empire and that they were left free to define and implement their own economic strategies within the limits set by the treaties. This enabled them to retain close contacts with their colonies in the Mediterranean world and with Egypt. It is interesting that the tribute sent from the Phoenician cities to a significant degree consisted of goods coming from Egypt. In this way the grand Assyrian vacuum cleaner was assisted in its task of governing the world by the gnomes of Byblos (see Winter 1973).

One final observation concerns the special status accorded to a number of cities in the empire, first of all in Babylonia, which gave them certain economic privileges such as exemption from taxation. The motivation for these privileges seems in many cases to have been mixed, with religious considerations playing a role. Babylonia appears to have profited to a significant degree from the stability provided by the Assyrian empire, developing both its productive and its commercial potential. Part of this development may be the privileges given to the cities, but we can see that the Chaldeans in the Sealands profited substantially from their control over the trade routes in that area. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest

that the Assyrian empire, by developing consumption and only a limited production in the center, gave to some of its peripheral areas a chance to take economic advantage of the imperial structure, eventually developing into dangerous rival centers.

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