PART VI

The Archaeology of Empire

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

The Akkadian Period: Empire, Environment, and Imagination

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1   Introduction

The Akkadian period saw a new, unified political structure in southern Mesopotamia, military expansion in all directions, and a dynasty of kings who have proved fascinating to both ancient Mesopotamians and modern scholars. Akkadian artworks are elegant and complicated, with strong ideological statements, and these too cast a spell in past and present. But the dynasty was short-lived and the archaeological record is sparse. However, the Akkadian period provides some of the most vital research questions in Mesopotamian archaeology: What should be considered an empire in this region? How should we use contemporary texts and later literary traditions? When archaeological evidence and texts disagree, which should have primacy? Does political collapse mean social collapse? Can climate change destroy a civilization?

2   Akkadian Political Activities

After the overlapping kings of the late Early Dynastic period (c.2900–2334 BC), the relative clarity of the Akkadian Dynasty and events of their rule provide a distinct contrast. The list of kings and relationships is straightforward (Table 34.1), although the positions of Rimush and Manishtushu are reversed in some texts (Steinkeller 2003) and recorded reign lengths vary. The accumulation of

Table 34.1 Akkadian kings according to the Middle Chronology

Sargon	2334–2279 BC
Rimush	2278–2270 BC
Manishtushu	2269–2255 BC
Naram-Sin	2254–2218 BC
Shar-kali-sharri	2217–2193 BC
Igigi	
Nanium	4 kings, 2192–2190 BC
Imi	
Elul-dan	
Dudu	2189–2169 BC
Shu-turul	2168–2154 BC

power and territory from Sargon through Naram-Sin was a gradual process and, although their political control decayed rapidly thereafter, the later Akkadian kings remained among the stronger rulers in the region.

Sargon is traditionally hailed as an innovator, rising from an obscure background to control Kish, then northern Babylonia, the Middle Euphrates, western Iran, and finally the known world from the Upper (Mediterranean) to the Lower (Persian Gulf) Sea. However, his overlap with, and possible "borrowing" from, Lugalzagesi of Uruk, a contemporary ruler of similar strength and scope, is an ongoing issue. If we define Akkadian rulers by their ambition to unify and control the southern plains, then Lugalzagesi (c.2340–2316 BC) might be called the first Akkadian king. Alternatively, Sargon, whose actual hegemony was of limited extent, might be considered the last Early Dynastic ruler.

One of the most noted innovations of the Akkadian kings was the change of official written language from Sumerian to Akkadian. During the late Early Dynastic period, bilingualism and mixed populations were the norm (Cooper 1973) but private and official texts were written in Sumerian. An official language shift was a clever ideological manoeuver that should have interpenetrated society, since even the illiterate would have been affected through records of their labor, taxation, and legal activities. There is even a typical Akkadian tablet shape, with deep line markings and elegant, easily read script that echoes stone reliefs (see below) in the spaces between the signs. However, the persistence of Sumerian in official and private archives (Foster 1982b; Westenholz 1999: 50) reflects significant resistance or indifference to this change. Taxation reached a new level and centralized focus under the Akkadian kings. And standardization of weights and measures, year date formulae based on royal events, and new accounting systems reinforced national ideology through repeated communal practice. However, most of these innovations were not introduced or did not become widespread until the reign of Naram-Sin.

A more dramatic change was the construction of a new capital at Agade. Although not precisely located, it was probably on or near the Tigris in northern Babylonia (Wall-Romana 1990), in contrast to the most powerful, earlier city-states that were associated with the Euphrates river. A new capital city would have symbolized the new political structure and altered the logistics of overland and water transport routes as well as the orientation of mental maps. Finally, as well as an expanded range of heroic epithets, control over increased territory was emphasized in later Akkadian kings' titles, most notably in the new claim to rule over the "four quarters" from the time of Naram-Sin. The self-conferral of divine status by Naram-Sin also represents a dramatic break in the Mesopotamian conception of royalty, although ultimately one that was short-lived.

However, other Akkadian political acts seem to have been designed to have minimal impact and to validate Early Dynastic/Sumerian religious or cultural values. Many city-state leaders were retained as local governors (e.g., Meskigal of Adab under Sargon). Both Sargon and Naram-Sin installed their daughters as priestesses in the temple of the moon god at Ur, and all kings gave offerings in the temples of Sumer, especially Enlil's Ekur at Nippur (rebuilt under Naram-Sin and Shar-kali-sharri).

3 Akkadian Kings: The Legacy

Akkadian rule over Mesopotamia resonates through past and present, the spotlight shining most clearly on Sargon and Naram-Sin, who became the ideal models for Mesopotamian kings (Cooper 1993; Liverani 1993c), beginning in the succeeding Ur III Dynasty. Two Old Assyrian kings of the early 2nd millennium BC revived the names of Sargon and Naram-Sin (the latter also used by a king of Eshnunna); and the Neo-Assyrian king Sargon II chose the name of the first Akkadian ruler to shore up his shaky claim to power. Myths of the Akkadian kings formed parts of royal libraries as far away in place and time as Amarna-period Egypt, the Hittite capital of Boğazköy, and Neo-Assyrian Nineveh.

Sargon has a generally positive reception; he is glorified in texts as the first to unify the independent city-states of southern Mesopotamia and a Moses-like birth story was later ascribed to him. Unusually for a society that embraced hereditary wealth and status, his obscure origins were celebrated. By contrast, the response to his grandson Naram-Sin is ambivalent. He was a powerful, heroic warrior who controlled the known world, but his claim to divinity incited a mixed reaction in later scribal tradition, which invests this behavior with both enviable courage and dangerous arrogance. Statues of Sargon, Manishtushu, and Naram-Sin were placed in temples in southern Mesopotamia and provided with offerings in the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods (Westenholz 1997; Hirsch 1963) and a Neo-Babylonian forger was familiar enough with Manishtushu to create the

"autobiographical" Cruciform Monument and attribute it to him (Gelb 1949; Longman 1991).

Akkadian objects, as well as texts and royal identities, had extended biographies. The Naram-Sin Victory Stele, carved c.2150 BC, was still visible in Sippar almost 1,000 years later, until it was taken to Susa when southern Mesopotamia was raided by the Elamites c.1158 BC (Ch. I.2). This is the most famous instance of monument capture, but the Elamite booty included other valued and displayed Akkadian reliefs and statues (Amiet 1976).

4   Texts and Context

Mesopotamian texts describing the actions of the Akkadian kings fall into three groups: contemporary inscriptions on artworks and votive objects, later inscription copies, and later legends, including pseudo-historical records such as the Sumerian King List. These have varying degrees of reliability according to context and audience, but the first two tend to be considered valid, though biased, sources (Tinney 1995). The copies are most commonly texts from the Old Babylonian period purporting to collect inscriptions from dedicatory statues. While we must be skeptical, their stylistic similarities to genuine Akkadian inscriptions and their occasional descriptions of the statues themselves are encouraging (see Buccellati 1993 for a reconstruction of a Rimush statue and base).

Sargon's texts focus on his military activities in the southern plains, in particular against Lugalzagesi of Uruk. Sargon was also the first to claim that the ships of Magan (Oman), Meluhha (Indus Valley), and Dilmun (Bahrain) moored at Agade, hinting that Akkadian political expansion was economically motivated. The inscriptions of Rimush follow the same pattern, recording cities destroyed, mainly in Sumer and Elam (southwestern Iran), with the added details of numbers of captives and dead and weights of booty. Manishtushu's inscriptions add kings and cities further south in the Persian Gulf; but notably, the enumeration of enemies killed and captured abruptly ceased. The apparent absence of battles within the south suggests that his control there may have consolidated, making the implied threat in body counts no longer necessary. The Manishtushu Obelisk records a large land-sale in northern Babylonia that reflects Akkadian reorganization of land ownership, creation of royal estates, and the new practice of giving land as gifts to government and military officials. Although the land was bought and not appropriated, the sale might have been coercive (Westenholz 1999: 44; Van de Mieroop 2007: 66). Government archives from Girsu, Umma, and elsewhere confirm the royal allotment of land to officials (Foster 1982a). Short inscriptions of the first three Akkadian kings appear on stone vessels and maceheads dedicated in the temples of Nippur, Sippar, and Ur, in particular. These kings are identified mainly as "king of the world" (Sumerian LUGAL.KIŠ, in which "Kish" stands for Akkadian *kiššatu*, or "totality").

Descriptions of Naram-Sin's military activities cover a wider geographical area, comprising the Khabur plains (ancient Subartu), Upper Euphrates, Amanus mountains, southeastern Anatolia, and Oman. But the "Great Revolt" of two coalitions of southern city-states meant that Naram-Sin had to reconquer areas supposedly subdued by earlier kings. His titles reflect the expanded map of Akkadian territory, with the innovation of the "king of the four quarters" (LUGAL *kibratim arba'im*) and an emphasis on his going where no king had previously gone (Frayne 1993; Westenholz 1999). His inscriptions also describe temple construction and there are further vases and mace-heads with dedicatory texts. Thereafter, a retraction of territory is visible in the texts of Shar-kali-sharri; he fought Amorites at Mount Bashar (possibly Jebel Bishri) and Elamites and Gutians along his eastern border, but had already lost lands in all directions. His titulary also contracted: he retained the epithet "mighty" (Akkadian *danum*), but was merely king of Agade, not of the four quarters or the totality.

Although many texts were written during the reigns of these kings, it is impossible to verify their claims; for instance, Sargon's destruction of city walls at Uruk, Ur, Umma, and elsewhere is not confirmed by archaeological evidence. The acquisition of materials from Oman (diorite or, more correctly, olivine gabbro) and the Indus valley (carnelian) is supported by archaeological finds, but these may have arrived through trade, booty, or gifting. Destructions at the Syrian cities of Ebla and Mari may be equally attributed to Sargon or Naram-Sin; our temporal control is not fine-grained enough to separate their equal claims.

Later literary texts reveal more about the subsequent millennia and the reception, "social memory," and exploitation of the Akkadian kings than they do about their contemporary impact. These legends compress, select, and transfer events; even texts of the same date are at variance (Tinney 1995). As Westenholz (1999) argued, attempts to extract a "historical kernel" obscure the more important fact that the writers *believed* in the legends. Later texts venerate Sargon, describing his birth, abandonment, and rescue, and his attractiveness to the goddess Ishtar. In the *King of Battle* legend, he assisted traders in Anatolia, more relevant for the Old Assyrian than the Akkadian period. But later texts both venerated and deplored the actions of Naram-Sin: the tales of his favor by Ishtar, suppression of internal rebellion, and foreign conquests (the *Great Revolt*) celebrate his success, while the Ur III and later *Curse of Agade* and *Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin* blame him for political and religious crisis, as a warning to later kings.

Aside from royal texts describing kings' actions, official archives detail the management of agricultural and pastoral land, labor, and products (Foster 1982a, 1993; Maiocchi 2009). In these archives, the same officials are often responsible for supplying the local governor's palace and city temples; and the detailed, single-event and monthly documentation of raw materials, equipment, processed products, and individuals' rights and obligations leaves no doubt that the bloated bureaucracy of the Ur III period (2100–2000 BC) inherited some systems from Akkadian scribes. Craft production and industry are less well documented,

although some administration of these is suggested by "ration" lists and records of commodities and manufactured goods (Foster 1982b, 1993). Non-royal archives indicate a thriving private economy in land sales and trade activities (Foster 1982b).

5   Architecture and Ceramics

Aside from artworks without context and grave goods, southern Mesopotamian archaeological evidence from the Akkadian period is meager. However, there are excavated Akkadian houses at Tell Asmar (Delougaz et al. 1967) and Nippur (McCown and Haines 1967; McMahon 2006) and these houses and neighborhoods match the organic arrangements of Old Babylonian Ur with their meandering streets, variable house plans that may include a courtyard, and tight packing of houses reflecting close social connections. Sub-floor graves were found beneath houses at these sites and Akkadian graves were added in the Royal Cemetery of Ur (Woolley 1934), which became less exclusive in the later 3rd millennium BC. These graves reflect general Mesopotamian traditions of treatment of the dead, containing pottery vessels for the trip to the underworld and status-dependent levels of personal ornamentation as well as seals, weaponry, and bronze vessels. The total ceramic assemblage and specific forms changed only gradually from the late Early Dynastic through the early Akkadian period (McMahon 2006). But there remains debate over the visibility and possible material culture markers of this transition and that between the early and late Akkadian periods (Gibson 1982; Gibson and McMahon 1995, 1997; Matthews 1997a; Roaf 2001; McMahon 2006). The ceramic sequence reconstructed from the Diyala excavations (Delougaz 1952) drew too sharp a distinction between Early Dynastic and Akkadian forms and the use of this sequence for dating other sites both north and south has perpetuated an artificial cultural divide. Distinctive "goddess-handled jars" persisted into the Akkadian period, while the ridged-shoulder jars often attributed to the Akkadian era appeared only late in the period and continued into Ur III times. Similarly, plano-convex bricks, once considered a hallmark of the Early Dynastic period, again on the basis of evidence from the Diyala region (Delougaz et al. 1967), persisted, particularly in domestic architecture, through the Akkadian period (McMahon 2006). Buildings traditionally dated to Early Dynastic, but which may straddle the transition from Early Dynastic to Akkadian, include Palace A and the "Plano-convex" Building at Kish.

Without the capital city of Agade, and with constructions such as the Ekur at Nippur covered by Ur III projects, architectural evidence from northern Mesopotamia is our best evidence of Akkadian architecture of power. Tell Brak (northeastern Syria) has two religious-administrative centers (Areas SS and FS; Oates et al. 2001) and a "palace" (Mallowan 1947). Mudbricks stamped with Naram-Sin's name in the latter leave no doubt it was a southern-imposed and

-commissioned construction. Its square plan, with large courtyards and symmetrical, narrow rooms, resembles a storehouse or military barracks rather than a palace. An administrative building lies adjacent to it (Oates et al. 2001: CH Level 4) and contemporary houses and a scribal school were exposed in Area ER to its east. Area SS, an extensive administrative complex, lies on the opposite side of the southern entrance to the city. At the site's northern edge, Area FS comprises a temple complex dedicated to Shakkan, a deity of steppe animals. The highly visible placement of all these buildings made a power statement both within the city and to the surrounding area. A comparable Akkadian administrative center at nearby Tell Leilan, including massive buildings, a palace, and scribal school, took over the central acropolis (Weiss et al. 2002; Ristvet et al. 2004; De Lillis-Forrest et al. 2007).

Sealings of Akkadian officials in the FS and SS complexes and Area ER houses reinforce the direct connection between southern and northern Mesopotamia (Aruz 2003: No. 156; Oates 2001a; Matthews 1997b). However, a distinctively local variant of seal style and sealing practice is seen in strung clay bullae from SS, impressed with numerical marks and seals bearing rows of frontal bull, lion and/or goat heads (Oates 2001a: 130 ff); other motifs, such as equid chariots, have also been attributed to the "Brak" style rather than being considered southern Mesopotamian (Oates 2001a: 126). Foreign rule did not eliminate local administrative traditions. Thus, the power architecture of these northern sites may also be a local hybrid not representative of southern forms.

6   Settlement Patterns

Rimush's inscriptions record deportations of thousands within the southern plains and, while the veracity of his claim is uncertain, the centralization of taxation and opportunities for new employment in the expanded state bureaucracy and industries should be visible in settlement hierarchies and locations. Exploitation of the northern plains should also have affected the size of both large sites and a number of smaller ones. However, neither a noticeable shift in site size hierarchy nor an increase in the number of smaller villages is apparent (Nissen 1993a). As Mario Liverani said: "If we didn't know from the texts that the Akkad Empire really existed, we would not be able to postulate it from the changes in settlement patterns, nor . . . from the evolution of material culture" (1993a: 7–8).

Reconstruction of the Akkadian settlement pattern of southern Mesopotamia is affected by the difficulty of separating Early Dynastic from Akkadian ceramics, the basis for most survey site dating. Based on the Diyala assemblages, Adams' work in the southern plains provided separate maps for late Early Dynastic and the Akkadian through Old Babylonian periods (for the Uruk area, see Adams and Nissen 1972) or for the late Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods (on the

central plains, see Adams 1981). But the late Early Dynastic maps must now be construed as covering not just late Early Dynastic but also the reign of Sargon and possibly his sons. Any Akkadian map covers the era of Naram-Sin, when we expect the densest, economically thriving occupation, as well as the state's decline under subsequent kings.

The problems of separating Early Dynastic from Akkadian material and identifying a distinctive, post-Akkadian assemblage exist in northern Mesopotamia too. Extensive surveys in the Upper Khabur region struggled to subdivide material from the later 3rd millennium BC (Meier 1986; Lyonnet 2000). To the east, the northern Jazirah survey subsumed the complexity between Ninevite 5/late Early Dynastic and the appearance of Khabur Ware around the time of Shamshi-Adad I into a single group (Wilkinson and Tucker 1995). A new regional "Early Jezirah" sequence has been developed, in which the relevant periods are EJ III through V (cf. late ED III through post-Akkadian or Ur III) (Pruß 2004; Koliński 2007 for recent restatements) but it is only just gaining widespread use, at the same time that a number of site-based, intensive surveys are nearing publication (e.g., the Tell Brak Sustaining Area). The continuity of types across the EJ subdivisions remains problematic for settlement pattern reconstructions from surface surveys (Ur 2010a) but the picture so far is of great, subregional variability (Wossink 2009: Fig. 5.14), which cannot wholly be explained by difficulties in establishing chronological markers.

7   Art

In contrast to the continuity seen in ceramics, the style and, to an extent, iconography of formal Akkadian artworks show a definitive change from the Early Dynastic period. Reliefs, statuary, and cylinder seals are distinctive for their elegant appearance. While sometimes characterized as realistic, they are actually highly stylized (and sometimes incorrect) in proportions and representation of hair, fur, and musculature. Mature Akkadian reliefs and seals consciously incorporated empty space that emphasized figures and their active relationships (Nadali and Verderame 2008).

Cylinder seals are dominated by two main themes: combating pairs of humans and animals, and scenes showing the introduction of human figures to deities. The animal and human combat/contest scene was a continuation from the Early Dynastic period but became increasingly heraldic and formalized and, at its best, presents extraordinarily beautiful imagery, both in the fine detail of individual figures and the balanced elegance of pairs. The contest scene became an emblem of Akkadian administration, in contrast to personal seal scenes of introduction (Zettler 1977; Gibson and McMahon 1995; Rakic 2003) which show a procession of deities leading a human figure toward a seated god. Such scenes became the model for the majority of subsequent Ur III and Old Babylonian seals.

Although the scenes were iconic and instantly recognizable, the skill of the Akkadian artists made every example unique through details of individual actors. There are smaller numbers of more complex seal scenes, such as battles among gods or hunting, which may represent myths (Frankfort 1939a; Amiet 1976; Nissen 1993a), mythical themes (Nadali and Verderame 2008), rituals (Barrelet 1970; Frankfort 1939a) or statements of ideology (Bernbeck 1996). During the Akkadian period many of the physical attributes of divinity (e.g., Ishtar's weapons and lion, the shoulder-flames, and gates of Shamash) were canonized.

Although the most skillfully executed and beautiful seals are the focus of many modern scholars, a range of quality is represented in this period, from the highlights of the seal of Shar-kali-sharri's scribe, Ibni-Sharrum, with its water buffalo and kneeling nude heroes with water jars (Aruz 2003: No. 135), through to rapid, sketchy combat scenes on seals in the Ur graves (see Woolley 1934: Pls. 205–15 for a full range). A variety of stones (and shell) was used, from simple limestone and imported lapis lazuli, already seen in the Early Dynastic period, to vibrant, high-visibility serpentine, jasper, rock crystal, and banded agates. The physicality of sealing practice also changed (Rakic 2003) to an emphasis on a centered inscription, flanked by combating pairs (Amiet 1976: 34; Nissen 1993a: 101). Beyond seals, other administrative tools such as weights are rare, although the presence of silver ingots and standard-sized coils in late Akkadian hoards at Tell Brak (Matthews 1994, 2003a; Oates et al. 2001: 45–6) imply the wide diffusion of the new weights and measures system; this is severely underrepresented in the archaeological record, however, due to the recycling of metals.

Reliefs are dominated by representations of military combat. As mentioned above, many Akkadian artworks were still on display in the temples of, e.g., Sippar and Agade in the later 2nd millennium BC and were captured by Elamite forces and removed to Susa. The Susa relief collection documents change across the first half of the Akkadian period, from fairly static, symbolic iconography in organized registers to loosely arranged narrative. The assemblage includes several diorite fragments attributed to a stele or stelae of Sargon, showing registers of marching soldiers, scenes of combat, bound naked prisoners, birds of prey, and a net full of enemies, reminiscent of the slightly more complete Early Dynastic Vulture Stele of Eannatum (Amiet 1976: Pls. 1, 5–6; Nigro 1998; Hansen 2003: Figs. 54–55). A comparison of the Sargon stele and the Vulture Stele underscores the continuity of scene between the periods while emphasizing the Akkadian period's clarity of detail, greater depth of carving, and new focus on the individual and human anatomy. For instance, Sargon has a waist, a feature denied to Eannatum. The Sargon stele has also been interpreted as a complex ideological statement of the new royal order, in that Sargon controls the net holding his enemies, whereas on the Vulture Stele it is the god Ningirsu who does this; it also promotes Ishtar to a larger role and higher status (Nigro 1998). However, the registers still present Sargon's soldiers as an overlapping pattern of figures, something only abandoned in Enheduanna's votive disc (Aruz 2003: No. 128), Rimush's stele from Telloh

(Amiet 1976: Pl. 25; Aruz 2003: No. 129) and a contemporary, green alabaster stele from Nasiriyah (McKeon 1970; Amiet 1976: Pl. 26; Aruz 2003: No. 131). In each of these, there is a new sense of space between individual figures and greater skill in showing human musculature and details of dress and weaponry.

Eventually, the incorporation of natural or landscape features and the abandonment of a horizontal ground line in favor of diagonal, upward trajectories appear on the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin (Amiet 1976: Pl. 27; Benoit 2003: Fig. 114; Winter 1999). The redundant symbolism is easily readable (the broken spear, the nakedness of captives, and the dead) and the foreignness of the enemies (the Lullubi from the Zagros mountains) is strongly indicated by their hair and clothing. Presentation of the king as a young and active warrior with a massive beard and much of his "perfect" body exposed (Winter 1996; Bahrani 2008a) echoes the new royal epithets, including "the mighty" (Akk. *danum*). However, neither the landscape nor the abandonment of registers was a consistent feature of Akkadian art, even within the reign of Naram-Sin, if one compares this with the rather stiff representation on the Pir-Hussein relief (Amiet 1976: Fig. 21; Aruz 2003: No. 130). The early Ur III stele of Ur-Nammu (c.2100 BC) saw a return to the Early Dynastic/early Akkadian register format.

Statues in the round were relatively rare. The "Bismaya head" and other non-royal votive statue fragments from Telloh, Adab, Assur, and Umma (Amiet 1976: Pls. 7–10, 28–30) reveal continuities of form and pose from the Early Dynastic period, but with more "life-like" proportions and details. They retain the Early Dynastic overemphasized eyes, which transfix deities with their devotional gaze. Royal statues are similarly uncommon. The largest number belongs to Manishtushu (Amiet 1972c) and their standardization suggests a program of placement in temples in key southern cities (Eppihimer 2010). The diorite statue, or skirt, of Manishtushu has a deceptively simple, geometric form that, upon inspection, reveals sophisticated skill in the rendering of fringes and shallow ripples in fabric (Amiet 1976: Pl. 13; Benoit 2003: Fig. 111). That the ripples are not structurally possible, a problem shared by the symmetrically clasped hands, detracts only slightly from their impressive technique. Another skirt, in limestone, and fragments of a seated statue have the same ripples and fringe, suggesting they were products of a royal workshop or even a single artist (Amiet 1976: Pls. 11, 15).

A shift in medium from the near-exclusive use of limestone in the Early Dynastic period to mixed diorite/gabbro and limestone in the Akkadian period is visible in the reliefs and statues from Susa, although the non-random nature of their preservation means it is impossible to be certain of this trend. There is a strong symbolic aspect to the "new" stone; diorite/gabbro represents the conquering of an exotic land and the capture of its resources, but also, like hematite, it is extremely hard and has paradoxical qualities of darkness and shine that may elicit complex human reactions.

Recycling means that metal statues are rarely preserved from any period in the Near East. The most famous Akkadian example is a complexly textured, copper head from a later context at Nineveh (Campbell Thompson and Hutchinson

1932; Mallowan 1936). It is attributed stylistically to the Akkadian period and by political history to either Sargon or Naram-Sin (and occasionally to Manish-tushu, who may have re-established a temple to Ishtar at Nineveh, according to Samsi-Adad). The hairstyle is similar to that shown on the Early Dynastic, Meskalamdug helmet from the Ur Royal Cemetery, reliefs of both Eannatum and Sargon, and a diorite head of Naram-Sin (Amiet 1976: Pl. 30; Hansen 2003: Cat 137). The abundance of hair and its intricate weaves and curls have been equated with royal masculinity (Hansen 2003: 194). The Bassetki statue from Naram-Sin's reign, a standard base held by a nude hero, is another important work, both for its evidence of metal-casting skill and for its inscription, which describes the deification of Naram-Sin.

All the metal statues in this period were produced through hollow-core, lost-wax techniques, finished by surface engraving (Ch. I.16). The composition of a sample of the statues shows at least 98 percent are copper with traces of minor elements such as arsenic and nickel but no tin (al-Fouadi 1976; Strommenger 1986). Contemporary copper-bronze vessels from south Mesopotamia are occasionally also entirely made of copper, although their tin and other element percentages vary widely and may exceed 10 percent (Müller-Karpe 1993; De Ryck et al. 2005). This might imply a clear separation between workshops, from smelting upwards, in the production of statues as opposed to vessels (although analyses of Akkadian bronze vessels and objects from northern Mesopotamia show a low tin and arsenic content as compared to statues; De Ryck et al. 2005). The source of copper in the Akkadian period is traditionally located in Oman. At 160 kilograms, the weight of the Bassetki statue base is testament to the strength of this Gulf connection.

8 Imperial Power?

Akkadian rule over Mesopotamia is often described as an empire (e.g., Glassner 1986; Foster 1993; Kuhrt 1995; Westenholz 1997, 999; Nissen 1998; Akkermans and Schwartz 2003; Aruz 2003; Hansen 2003; Rakic 2003). And it is tempting to use "empire," since the Uruk and Early Dynastic political arrangements were states and the Akkadian Dynasty represents something quantitatively and qualitatively different (Liverani 1993b). The argument for empire, where expressed, is based on the distinct nature of royal ideology, the unprecedented encompassing and unifying nature of Akkadian rule, and its spread by military means beyond the traditional borders of the southern Mesopotamian plains (e.g. Weiss and Courty 1993; Weiss et al. 2002). While not specifying imperialism, Z. Bahrani has argued for a new concept of kingship under Naram-Sin (2008a: 102 ff.), including a new focus in art on the king's body as physically overwhelming, representing his power over the life and death of others.

But was the Akkadian system of political power an empire? Yoffee characterized it as a "territorial state (or empire)" (1995: 290) and many questions regarding

its degree of unification and the nature of its expansion have been raised (Michalowski 1993; Liverani 2005). If it falls short of an imperial definition, what was the nature of the Akkadian kings' control, since it was greater than a city-state? We are hindered in our reconstruction of the political system by a lack of knowledge about the capital city, Agade. Without administrative archives and economic records from the center, as well as contextualized statements of ideology in monumental architecture and art, we are missing key data that could illuminate mechanisms of control over other regions and the integration or non-integration of other peoples and cultures. In addition, the historic glorification of the Akkadian kings has had an impact on our own judgment of their importance, personal charisma, and military skills. The Akkadian period may be simply an "empire of nostalgia" (Barfield 2001: 38), an imagined, glorious past, more important as a myth or memory than an actuality.

Empires should be physically massive, governmentally bureaucratic, economically complex and ethnically, culturally and often linguistically heterogenous (Sinopoli 1994; Barfield 2001; Schreiber 2001). An empire should have an active ideology, an expressed wish for limitless rule and a program of activities to achieve this (Barfield 2001; M.E. Smith 2001; Liverani 2005); empires are usually embodied by a "larger-than-life" individual. An empire should be militarily expansive, with a physical infrastructure that enables centralization and long-distance communication (Barfield 2001; Schreiber 2001; Sinopoli 1994, 2001a). The Akkadian period has the requisite core bureaucracy, ideology, charismatic kings, and military program. But several of these aspects come to us through past inflationary filters, and the extent of control and internal heterogeneity remain questions. A recent material-culture-based approach to empire proposes a set of relevant approaches and data: comparable ceramic assemblages between edge zones and imperial core, visible effect of empire on settlement patterns, "imperial administrative technology" at core and edges, and materialization of ideology through visible landscape monuments (Glatz 2009; cf. Sinopoli 1994). Connections between northern and southern Mesopotamian ceramic assemblages are present, including distinctive angular or ridged jar rim forms and combed decoration seen, e.g., both at Nippur and Tell Brak (McMahon 2006). But these represent slight overlaps rather than a complete borrowing or the import of full sets. We are not yet able to write a narrative of the Akkadian effect on settlement patterns in the north or south, but our limited data do not seem to reflect imperial meddling. There are scattered pockets of administrative artifacts (texts and sealings) at Tell Leilan and Tell Brak, and some highly visible monuments, but the spaces between these are vast. An "empire" should have more than a few, disconnected outposts and stelae, especially when texts describe internal revolts and reveal its unstable core. Is the wish for domination and the assumption of its achievement, over the reality (Liverani 2005), a sufficient trait of empires?

Akkadian internal and external control measures provide ambiguous answers to the question of imperialism. A standing army is often listed as a crucial impe-

rial criterion (e.g., Schreiber 2001). Sargon's claim to have fed 5,400 men every day (Frayne 1993) defies solid interpretation; the number is suspiciously round and these might have been laborers, administrators, and/or soldiers. But a record of 60,000 dried fish from Lagash, to provide for the army, is suggestive that in at least some seasons the army was substantial, while other official texts list troops and military officials (Foster 1993). But an army and warfare are neither sufficient for nor unique to empire. Organized warfare, including mass death, has a prehistory in the region (Late Chalcolithic graves from Tell Brak and destruction at Tell Hamoukar). Organized armies already appear on Early Dynastic artworks (the Ur Standard from the Royal Cemetery, Eannatum of Lagash's Stele of the Vultures). The Akkadian kings raised the value of warriors and war as an agent of change (Forest 2005), but neither war nor armies were new. And violence played both ways; insurrection was common and a startling number of kings met a violent death: Rimush, Manishtushu, Shar-kali-sharri, and probably some of the four obscure kings between him and Dudu.

Other internal features, such as the imposition of language change and new metrology, can be used to flatten variation and to crack city or ethnic allegiance in a nation-state and need not be imperial. Much has been made of the divine ascription of Naram-Sin and his para-mortal right to rule. But royal divinity is not typical of undoubted Mesopotamian empires, such as the Neo-Assyrian, although many kings from the Ur III period onward claimed a close association with gods.

Meanwhile, Akkadian external measures were expressed mainly as control of places but not of people. To the north, boundaries and military goals were labeled after resources (the Cedar Forest or Silver Mountain) or territories and landmarks (the Four Quarters, the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates). Peoples in these regions were viewed as enemies to kill, not subjects to command. And an empire should be about power over people as well as power to annihilate and to exploit things. The south saw more killing, although the Akkadian kings both claimed booty and directed trade from the lands of the Gulf and the Indus. But unquantifiable booty does not make an empire, and there is evidence that Akkadian access to resources was neither secure nor monopolistic. Although diorite/gabbro and exotics such as carnelian flowed in from the southeast, the amounts from southern Mesopotamia, when spread over the years of even one king's reign, are paltry. Gold beads that were solid in the Early Dynastic period are more often copper covered with gold foil in the Akkadian period, an apt analogy for Akkadian control.

The problem of selective and inflated accounts in texts is compounded by sparse archaeological evidence of the relationship between Akkadian kings and bordering lands. Empires should have political and cultural influence over a wider area than that which they directly control (M.E. Smith 2001). Empires are also often associated with reactive political developments in adjacent regions, but no external region became a state or empire because of the reach of Akkadian influence beyond its borders. Elam, in western Iran, provides useful material to test Akkadian

influence. From the reign of Sargon, year names refer to the conquest of cities within Elam, while Old Babylonian copies of statue inscriptions describe many as booty from Elamite cities (Gelb and Kienast 1990; Frayne 1993; Potts 1999: 102). Rimush campaigned against many of the same places, and finally under Naram-Sin there is clearer – albeit minimal – evidence of a more permanent Akkadian presence in Elam. Bricks stamped with his name have been found at Susa and, unlike possibly mobile statuary, provide clear evidence of a commissioned building there, possibly comparable to that at Tell Brak. The official language and seal style of Elam conform to Akkadian rules and pottery and metal object types also match Mesopotamian models (Potts 1999: 116). Superficially, the story appears to be one of raiding, booty acquisition, and finally imperial incorporation.

However, contemporary texts include a treaty between Naram-Sin and a king of Awan (possibly Hita; Westenholz 1999: 92), which indicates that some Elamite rulers remained independent allies rather than subjugated vassals. Elamite material culture includes almost as many elements of Gulf or Indus valley origin or influence as of Mesopotamian. In addition, statues, seals, and plaques of the early 3rd millennium BC from sites such as Susa were already similar to those from contemporary southern Mesopotamia; Akkadian period cultural similarity between the regions has a deep history and does not here equate with political control. Rather than imperial control, Akkadianizing material culture in Elam provides a classic example of connection and emulation between elites within a wider region that was already tightly culturally integrated. Finally, a daughter of the king of Marhashi (Elam) was married to Shar-kali-sharri or his son. Dynastic marriage connections may integrate an empire (Sinopoli 2001) but also imply equality or even mutual threat.

Northern Mesopotamia is another area to examine for imperial aspects. The acropolis buildings, sealings, and texts at Tell Leilan imply an Akkadian outpost, matched by similar features at Tell Brak. The Tell Leilan project additionally argued for intensive and directed exploitation of the north's agricultural capacity, reorganization of regional settlement pattern, and, at Leilan itself, a system of ration measurement and imposition of Akkadian bureaucracy and ideology through scribal school training (Senior and Weiss 1992; Weiss and Courty 1993; Weiss et al. 1993; Besonen and Cremaschi 2002). In support of this, at least one state-run grain shipment moved from the north via Tell Brak to Sippar (29 metric tons; Ristvet et al. 2004); but this amount is not as large as it sounds, and there is no evidence for continuous, multiple shipments. The northern Akkadian *sila*-bowl is never seen in the south. A tablet from the Naram-Sin palace at Brak lists men from Nagar (Brak), Shehna (Leilan), Urkesh (Tell Mozan), and other northern cities, suggesting an Akkadian labor levy (Catagnoti and Bonechi 1992) or soldiers (Eidem et al. 2001: 110). But again, the numbers are small and the text describes a single event. It was only under Naram-Sin that we have proof of Akkadian presence in the north (leaving aside the possibly mobile objects of Rimush and Manishtushu at Brak, Nineveh, and Assur). And collapse of the

system occurred before it reached its full potential (expressed in the Unfinished Building at Leilan).

The area of northern Mesopotamia that shows Akkadian presence or influence is a strictly bounded triangle within the eastern Upper Khabur, from the Kawkab volcano (near modern Hasseke) to Shehna (modern Tell Leilan) and north to Urkesh (modern Tell Mozan) (Catagnoti and Bonechi 1992). Only the largest sites within that triangle were implicated. Otherwise, there is no evidence of Akkadian presence in the western Upper Khabur; Nabada (modern Tell Beydar) shrank in size during the early Akkadian period, and the buildings and material culture were local in style. A gap exists on the east between Leilan and the ambiguous and minimal Akkadian materials from the upper Tigris (Nineveh, Bassetki). In addition, there are no known outposts on transport routes between this eastern Khabur triangle and southern Mesopotamia, although it must be admitted that the intensity of research in the relevant mid-Euphrates and mid-Tigris area has been relatively low. Empires need not comprise one contiguous territory, but this situation gives the impression of isolated out-stations rather than even a lightly colonized region.

Nearer to the Taurus foothill zone in the Upper Khabur, Akkadian control was minimal, as represented by an equal marriage between Naram-Sin's daughter Taram-Agade and the leader of an independent Urkesh (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2002, 2003). The massive palace currently under excavation at Mozan expresses significant local power over territory, resources, and people. As in western Iran, the similarity of sealings at Urkesh to south Mesopotamian Akkadian style (Aruz 2003: Nos. 154–155; Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2002) derives from a base layer of cultural connectivity between these regions reaching back to the mid-3rd millennium BC, with an overlay emulation between elites. Our knowledge of the Akkadian relationship with nomadic tribes, both within and beyond its territory, is also an unknown, but the autonomy of these tribes may have been significant.

Was the Akkadian system a "hegemonic state," in contrast to a city-state (Forest 2005)? Many archaeologists and historians of the ancient Near East use the terms "hegemony" and "imperial control" interchangeably. But in modern political thought, hegemony implies a significant element of consent rather than conquest, or leadership rather than oppression, and it is better used to designate political and cultural influence than imperialism. Hegemony may fit the cobwebbed and temporally variable veneer of control that the Akkadians achieved, but their ideology and expressed intent was for more absolute power over place and time.

Can the Akkadian system be called a nation-state? Unlike "hegemony," the relevance of "nation-states" to the past is generally denied. Most postmodern scholars place the innovation of the nation-state in the 18th–19th century AD and reject the application of this term to the more distant past as overly modernizing. This rejection may in part have developed through distaste at the cynical use of archaeological materials and the past have been used cynically in the

creation of some modern, oppressive, postcolonial nation-states further tarnished by "ethnic" struggle. But the term "nation-state" may be rehabilitated. Objectively, the Akkadian kings were engaged in overt "nation-building" with their internal, unifying measures, particularly language imposition. They aimed to develop a distinct "national identity" and they did create a distinct leadership identity that combined old and new elements. They had a clear idea of territory, within which variations of material culture, economy, religion, and history were tolerated but limited. They may not have had Benedict Anderson's novel and newspaper to represent and advertise an "imagined community" (1983) but their internal accounting and dating measures and the flexibility of existing Mesopotamian oral tradition were equally rapid modes of communication. Even the resistance of subsumed cities, social classes, and (possibly) nomads to unification may be a characteristic of nations.

9   Collapse

The collapse of the Akkadian political system in southern and especially northern Mesopotamia has been one of the most hotly debated topics in Mesopotamian archaeology and social history over recent decades. The most dramatic cause proposed for collapse is a drought, lasting several centuries, which affected the agricultural carrying capacity of northern Mesopotamia with a domino effect in the south (Weiss and Courty 1993; Weiss et al. 1993; Weiss 2000; deMenocal 2001; Weiss and Bradley 2001; Staubwasser and Weiss 2006). The proposed effects include the near-total abandonment of northern Mesopotamia and the mass movement of economic refugees into the cities of the south. As evidence, an aridity spike in a Gulf of Oman sediment core (Kerr 1998; Cullen et al. 2000), which shows increased aeolian dust for 300 years from c.4025 ± 125 years BP, has been cited. Similar, contemporary evidence of sharply increased aridity comes from the southern Persian Gulf (Aeolian deposits in lake sediments; Parker, Davies, & Wilkinson 2006); the eastern Arabian Sea (oxygen isotope variation in sediment cores; Staubwasser et al. 2003); the Arabian Sea off Oman (foraminifera fluctuations; Gupta et al. 2003); the northern Red Sea (salinity variations; Arz et al. 2006); Soreq Cave, Israel (O- and C-isotope variations in speleothems; Bar-Matthews et al. 2003), the Dead Sea (dropping lake levels; Enzel et al. 2003); the Jableh plain in northwest Syria (pollen core; Kaniewski et al. 2008); and even caves in central Italy (Drysdale et al. 2006) and cores in the Greenland ice sheet (Weiss 2000). Additional, far-flung evidence from the US and Europe and the approximately contemporary collapse of Old Kingdom Egypt, Early Bronze Age cultures around the Mediterranean, and Harappan cultures in the Indus form the basis for the argument that the "4.2 kya Abrupt Climate Change event," within which temporal parameters the historical collapse of the Akkadian state occurred, was a global phenomenon (e.g., Kerr 1998; Staubwasser et al. 2003; Drysdale et al. 2006; Staubwasser and Weiss 2006).

This collapse model has been widely criticized on climatic, historical, and archaeological grounds (see Wossink 2009 for a recent summary). Other climate records from the Arabian Sea indicate not a spike but a long-term, gradual aridity trend, within which an event at 4.2 kya is difficult to isolate (oxygen isotope variation in a Qunf Cave stalagmite, Oman; Fleitmann et al. 2003). The precise dating of climatic events has proven impossible and their relationship to each other and to equally slippery historical events is difficult to reconstruct. Moreover, these climatic records come from places that are far from the northern Mesopotamian plain in which the collapse most visibly occurred; and their reliability as proxies for environmental change within those plains varies greatly, depending upon the interaction of Indian/Asian monsoons, the North Atlantic Oscillation, smaller scale Mediterranean depressions, and Caspian-Black Sea westerlies (Cullen and de Menocal 2000; Gupta et al. 2003; Arz et al. 2006; Staubwasser and Weiss 2006; Magny et al. 2009). Aeolian dust has been recovered in relevant layers at Tell Leilan, sites in its vicinity, and Abu Hjeira south of Tell Beydar (Weiss et al. 1993, 2002), but these discoveries remain in a vacuum. It has also been argued that modern climate change has made "environmental determinism" models for past cultural change plausible again, after they had been written off in the 1970s as too rigid and impersonal (Coombes and Barber 2005). While the argument for total reflexivity of theoretical models may go too far, careful consideration of the enabling and limiting factors inherent in the interaction between culture and climate is needed; synchronicity does not equal causality. More specific data from within archaeological sites in northern and southern Mesopotamia are required, and their precise effects on human behavior must be analyzed before this debate can be concluded.

The archaeological evidence for collapse is mixed. Not all northern Mesopotamian settlements were abandoned: occupation continued at, e.g., Tell Brak and Chagar Bazar, although settlement size in each case was reduced. At Tell Brak, the monumental buildings in Areas SS and FS were filled and capped with ritual donkey burials and "sealing deposits," jars of precious materials and objects (Oates and Oates 1993; Oates et al. 2001: 41ff, 233–6). These sealing deposits are paralleled by hoards of precious metal and lapis objects in house contexts, buried at about the same time but probably with the intent of later retrieval (Mallowan 1947; Matthews 1994; 2003a: 203–9). This implies that the house occupants left rapidly but with the assumption that their absence would be temporary, while the occupants of the administrative buildings left more slowly and with fewer expectations. But the monumental buildings were replaced by houses, and the use (and possibly even construction) of the Naram-Sin palace persisted after this partial abandonment.

A massive administrative building was constructed in the post-Akkadian period on the highest point of Chagar Bazar (Tunca et al. 2007); a similar building was revealed at Tell Arbid (Bielinski 2002). Urkesh remained a large and thriving city (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2000, 2004). Tell Beydar, further to the southwest, contracted in size but retained a temple at its highest point (Bretschneider

et al. 2003). Like the buildings at Chagar Bazar and Arbid, its location was surely intended to achieve high visibility in a nomadized landscape. A shift of populations to increased pastoralism, relocation to smaller sites in pockets of still-viable agricultural land, and decreased hierarchical power (making settlements less archaeologically visible) are plausible alternative models to explain the reduction in size of large sites. Settlement along the Upper Euphrates in Syria and Turkey shifted to an arrangement of more villages and fewer towns (Wilkinson 1998b); but a true picture is still obscured by the abovementioned difficulty of defining northern post-Akkadian (EJ V) ceramics (Koliński 2007). Settlement patterns in the south should show an increase in site size and perhaps numbers, but the picture is murky; due to the difficulties with the menu of material culture, a purported increase in settlement (Weiss 2000: 89) may simply reflect rapid shifts of populations under Naram-Sin and/or under the powerful, early Ur III kings. Specifically collapse-related immigration, if it occurred, is invisible.

Mesopotamian texts do not record reduced rainfall or mass immigration, and their own legends, such as *The Curse of Agade*, ascribe the Akkadian downfall to the Guti, an illiterate mountain tribe (from the Zagros) sent by Enlil as punishment for Naram-Sin's transgressions, which had included, purportedly, the looting of Enlil's temple at Nippur (Cooper 1983b). However, the legend's contrast between civilized Mesopotamians and barbaric surrounding peoples is a generic aspect of the region's "historico-literary" texts that later reappeared in relation to the Amorites; the specifics are therefore questionable. The Sumerian King List does record a Gutian Dynasty with odd names and short regnal lengths; an Uruk Dynasty is listed as intervening between them and Shu-Durul. But both contemporary documentation and the necessary interpolation of the Sumerian King List imply that these Guti and Uruk dynasties overlapped with the later Akkadian period, beginning in the reign of Shar-kali-sharri. Gudea's reign at Lagash also overlaps with the final years of the Akkadian kings. The Guti held minimal control in the central alluvial plains (i.e., Adab, Umma, and Lagash), from which there are royal inscriptions, building inscriptions, and year names, but their power and reach are poorly known. Their presence must be seen as a symptom rather than a cause of collapse. Other external threats include various city-states in Elam, which nibbled at the eastern borders of the Akkadian zone – e.g., in the Nuzi area (near modern Kirkuk).

Internal problems have been less closely scrutinized and are less exciting than the climatic evidence and textual descriptions of barbaric hordes (although see, e.g., Glassner 1986; Yoffee 1995). But internal instability and "overstretch" are important considerations. Even if the Akkadian kings' claims of territorial control are exaggerated, the logistical needs of the larger army and multilayered administration of the Akkadians would have overstretched existing systems. Hyper-centralization of the economy and royal greed have also been cited by Glassner (1986) as causes of collapse. In addition, the simple possibility of social inertia is strong and the independent city-state arrangement that had persisted

from the 4th millennium BC Uruk period (if not earlier) through the end of the Early Dynastic period would not have been easily given up. The political arrangements so carefully crafted by the Akkadian kings were an added veneer to extant robust social, civic, and economic systems, and that veneer and its economic and labor demands were a cause of tension (Yoffee 1995). Under Sargon, the governors of many city-states were simply their former kings, and while this may have been intended to minimize change and reduce the chances of revolt, it had the effect of reminding the cities of their past freedom and providing a springboard for rebellion. Rebellions of various city-states occurred throughout the Akkadian period, even under the most powerful and successful kings, such as Naram-Sin.

We can even question the importance of political collapse. While the Akkadian Dynasty certainly declined and vanished, local resilience and adaptation are the opposite face of collapse (McAnany and Yoffee 2010a). And collapse is not visible in the south in quotidian material culture; for many people, the removal of the Akkadian veneer may have meant an economic improvement in their lives. Collapse did not mean disappearance: the Ur III kings inherited the ideology and national ideal of the Akkadian kings, while their seals and iconography are further material expressions of continuity. The social memory (Alcock 2001) of the Akkadian Empire was created during their reign. It evolved and was adapted and reinvented from the late 3rd millennium BC through the present day. From the wider perspective of Mesopotamian history, Akkadian political collapse was a minor blip in a long-term cycle of growth, contraction, and movements of peoples, a minor set-back greatly overwhelmed by cultural continuities.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Surveys of Akkadian political history can be found in Foster and Foster (2009: Ch. 4); Kuhrt (1995: Ch. 1c); Nissen (1988: Ch. 6); van de Mieroop (2004, Ch. 7). Texts and historiography are discussed in the various chapters in Liverani (1993a), with many suggestions for further close text reading. Royal inscriptions of the Akkadian kings are collected in Hirsch (1963), Gelb and Kienast (1990) and Frayne (1993); the later legendary texts can be found in Westenholz (1997). Collected artworks of the Akkadian period are presented in Amiet (1976) (statues, reliefs, and seals), Boehmer (1965) (seals), and Aruz (2003). The Naram-Sin stele is one of the most closely analyzed Mesopotamian artworks; the discussions by Winter (1996, 1999) are among the most intriguing. The archaeological record and settlement pattern data for southern Mesopotamia are quite scattered. The surveys of Adams (Adams and Nissen 1972; Adams 1981) are a useful start, although the dating must be used with caution. Akkermans and Schwartz (2003), Kolinski (2007), and Ur (2010a) give good summary accounts of the archaeological problems and varied evidence from northern Mesopotamia. Many of the publications of the Tell Leilan project that deal with empire, collapse, and climate change are available as PDF downloads from their website: http://leilan.yale.edu/; accessed October 2011). A text-based approach to the Akkadian collapse is presented in Glassner (1986).