

the other. He therefore had to be sure that the administration was able to keep the system under control (both efficiently and justly) in view of the common interest, represented by the city-god. While the temple did not require an ideology justifying its existence, the king, whose role could have been performed (or at least coveted) by many other candidates, clearly had to express his qualities, emphasising his strength, justice and ability to rule.

The earliest royal inscriptions were found on temple offerings (stone or metal vases, weapons, statues depicting rulers), or buried under the foundations of buildings founded by kings (temples, canals and so on). They were aimed precisely at advertising the productivity and power of the king, as well as his close dependence on the city-god. These objects, however, due to their small size and their location (buried under a building's foundations), could not have been intended to spread this propagandistic message to the population, but rather for imaginary recipients (the gods and the following rulers). However, the sheer existence and formulation of these inscriptions responded to a concrete royal need, which must have been pursued through other means to reach the population. This period saw the rapid rise of celebrative monuments (victory steles and royal statues). Therefore, their monumentality, location (in the temple), and representations could have been means for propaganda, communicated alongside the implicit message of power delivered by their construction.

Therefore, the performance of rituals and the construction of monuments kick-started the development of the celebratory aspects of kingship. These would further flourish later on, but already had a considerable impact in this period. For instance, the burial of considerable wealth and a large number of individuals in the Royal Cemetery of Ur was the result of the community's acceptance of the role of the king as the legitimate and necessary intermediary between the community itself and that supernatural sphere deciding its fate and survival.

5 The divine foundations of kingship

The Neolithic revolution produced a religiosity centred on fertility issues and animal and vegetal reproduction. The Urban Revolution produced a polytheistic pantheon with deities supervising various aspects of urban life. Therefore, the rise and development of states also necessitated a solid ideological justification of power. In this regard, the earliest religious texts reveal the fundamental characteristics and structure of a fully developed Mesopotamian religion, supported by a complex set of rituals and myths. The texts of the Early Dynastic period already provide a complex picture of Mesopotamian religion. Moreover, many elements found in later texts originated in this period, when Mesopotamian culture acquired those aspects that would characterise it for the following three millennia. Lists of gods, descriptions of temples and hymns reveal the religious heritage of the Sumerian city-states. The historical and religious aspects of Sumerian culture will not be considered here. We will only consider those elements that are important for the understanding of the political and socio-economic phenomena of the time.

It has already been noted how the city-god played a fundamental role in the ideological justification of kingship, ensuring consensus and the collaboration of the population. Moreover, the divine sphere served as a means to explain the world in cultic and mythical terms. This cultic explanation was linked to the system of offerings (food, but also luxury goods). These were provided to the temples on a daily basis, or during festivals and other special occasions. The inequality of the redistributive system was therefore expressed in its fullest form and justified through the system of temple offerings. Redistribution was now too unbalanced to be a mere centralisation of reciprocal relations (such as the exchange of gifts and services). Therefore, it was conceptualised as an investment of present commodities for a future return (which is also the main aim of offerings and sacrifices to the gods). The community, believing that it was supporting the gods to its own advantage, then applied the same ideology to support the ruling elite.

Equally important was the mythical explanation of the world in its current form. The origins of each physical and cultural trait of one's environment were attributed to the intervention of the divine or a hero

in a more or less distant past. Similarly, the overall structure of the world was attributed to a creation god acting in a mythical past. Within this view, specific deities created more concrete aspects of daily life, eventually becoming the patrons of that particular sector. Consequently, there were gods protecting animals, cereals, writing and so on. There were also semi-divine characters, mostly idealised as ancient rulers. These figures created the main socio-political aspects of communal life, brought innovative technologies, or simply revolutionised the urban landscape. In this regard, the ruling king was able to provide his own contribution (building a temple or introducing a new festival), thus adding his name to the long and prestigious list of gods or kings who created something important for the community.

The boundary between the contribution of gods and heroes remains an unclear issue. One would expect that, while gods created aspects of life connected with nature, heroes brought more human innovations, mostly related to social institutions. However, it may be worth reconsidering the difference between nature and culture, in order to understand that the separation between gods and heroes was voluntarily blurred. In fact, the mythical foundations of kingship and power inevitably needed the support of the divine sphere. In this regard, certain deities (from Dumuzi to Gilgamesh), who were included in the Sumerian King List, are still considered by some as having a human and historical origin.

Naturally, all foundation myths were subject to a process of reinterpretation and revision for each period, thus reflecting historical and political changes. Therefore, the problems tackled by myths are problems that can be dated, though not with precision. Not all foundation myths were created in the Early Dynastic period, since some of them were developed to provide a background to later situations. Consequently, the issue of the immortality of the king, which is at the heart of the Epic of Gilgamesh, can be contextualised in the deification of the king (whose presumed immortality was disproved by his mortality, and therefore required an explanation), a practice that only appeared in the dynasty of Akkad. On the contrary, a myth such as the one of Adapa, despite having survived only in later texts, could have been a very ancient foundation myth. In fact, it is centred on an ancient problem, namely, that of reassuring the population that priests did not eat the food offered to the god, and were not gods themselves (despite living in the god's house).

The current belief that the heroes of the foundation myths were all created in the Early Dynastic period is therefore inaccurate. Only at the beginning of the second millennium BC, Mesopotamian scholars decided to place these heroes in the dynastic sequences of Uruk and Kish. However, this contextualisation is not historically accurate: it only shows how these mythical kings were placed before kings that were actually attested in the written evidence. The latter is first found (in the form of royal inscriptions and dated archives) at the beginning of the Early Dynastic period IIIa (or at the end of the Early Dynastic II). Consequently, a source such as the Sumerian King List logically placed the mythical kings in the Early Dynastic II period and the flood myth in the Early Dynastic I.

Despite their foundational purpose and their relevance to the problems of their respective contexts, these myths can still inform us on the earliest developments of Mesopotamian society. Since they are attested in later versions, they obviously reveal more (and more reliable details) on these later periods. For instance, the problem of the relations between farmers and shepherds (attested in the myth of Lahar and Ashnan), and of the provision of raw materials from distant lands (attested in the myth of Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta, and of Gilgamesh and Huwawa) were constant issues in Mesopotamian history. However, the presence of certain geographic and technological details indicates that they could have been developed in the Early Dynastic period, and later re-elaborated in their traditional Neo-Sumerian versions.

6 Competition and supremacy

The relative chronology of the Early Dynastic period is based on an analysis of stratigraphic data (the only data available for the Early Dynastic I and II) together with written sources from the Early Dynastic IIIa, and especially IIIb. However, the range of evidence varies greatly from centre to centre. From the settlements in the Diyala (the Oval Temple, and the temples of Anu, Sin, and Nintu at Khafajah; the temple of Abu at

Tell Asmar; the temple of Shara at Tell Agrab) and Nippur (temple of Inanna) we have the longest and more reliable stratigraphic sequences. From Ur we have the monumental complexes (such as the Royal Cemetery), while from Shuruppak and Abu Salabih we have the first administrative archives (Early Dynastic IIIa). Lagash provides a large amount of historical inscriptions and a rich administrative archive (Early Dynastic IIIb), but very little archaeological context, virtually lost during the earliest excavations.

The analysis of this wide range of data coming from a number of centres is not an easy task. Moreover, the chronological reconstruction of this period owes greatly to a later text, namely, the Sumerian King List. This text has provided a rough sequence of rulers. However, it constantly necessitates corrections and integrations. This is due to the unreliability of the dynasties listed before the First Dynasty of Ur, the placement of contemporary dynasties in a chronological sequence, and the lack of dynasties for some important centres (Lagash, Umma and Eshnunna).

Despite the presence of the earliest royal inscriptions (Enmebaragesi of Kish) (Table 6.1), the Early Dynastic II period is mainly attested archaeologically (Table 6.2), with characteristic objects of this period and distinctive styles (such as the Fara-style glyptic; the statues of the temple of Abu at Tell Asmar; the archaic tablets of Ur, and so on). Similarly, the Early Dynastic IIIa period also had distinctive styles and types of objects (the naturalistic sculptures from the temple of Abu, the Imdugud-Sukkurru and Meskalamdug glyptic art, inlaid objects linked with the ones from the Royal Cemetery of Ur, votive plaques linked with those from Inanna VII in Nippur, and so on). This phase saw the emergence of the administrative archives at Fara and Abu Salabih, and the dedicatory inscriptions from the Royal Cemetery at Ur (belonging to the ‘*Kalam*’ dynasty, ignored by the Sumerian King List). Only with the IIIb period there is a convergence between the Sumerian King List (which is fairly reliable from this point onwards, but still biased in its selection), and archival evidence (Lagash), royal inscriptions (mainly from Lagash and Ur, and some poorly attested kings of Kish and Uruk), stratigraphic data from temples, and the developments in glyptic art and sculpture.

The Sumerian King List provides a unified, yet selective, sequence of dynasties following and replacing one another. However, the monuments and inscriptions of the time provide a much more complex picture

Table 6.1 Early Dynastic Mesopotamia: chronology of royal inscriptions

	Kish	Adab	Ur	Uruk	Umma	Lagash
2600	Mebaraggesi(+)*					
2500	Uhub Mesilim ab*	Ninkisalsi b				Enhegal Lugalshagengur a
2450	Lugaltarzi*	Merduba Lugaldalu	Meskalamdug° Akalamdug°			Ur-Nanshe
2400	Enbi-Ishtar(+)*	Eiginimpae	Mesannepadda(+)*° Aannepadda° Meskiagnunna (+)*° Elili (+)*°	Enshakushanna (-)*° Lugalkinishedudu (+) f*° Lugalkisalsi (+)*°	Ush Enakale c Urukumma d Ila g Gishakidu	Akurgal Eannarum c Enannatum I d Entemena fg
2350					Wawa	Enannatum II Enetarzi Lugalanda
				Lugalzaggesi (+)h*	Lugalzaggesi h	Urukagina h

Notes ° “king of Ur”; * “king of Kish”; • “king of Sumer”; (+) king attested in the Sumerian King List; a-a= attested contemporaneity.

Table 6.2 Early Dynastic Mesopotamia: archaeological chronology

Sin	Khafajah Nintu	Oval	Tell Asmar Abu	Nippur Inanna	Architecture	Craftsmanship	Texts	Mari	North Assyria
I									
II			archaic	XIV	Uruk Eanna III	Seals: Jemdet Nasr style Pottery: last bevelled rim bowls	Jemdet Nasr tablets		Nineveh 4 Gawra 8
III	I		sanctuary	XIII	Riemchen				
IV	II		I	XII	Jemdet Nasr “palace”				
V			II	XI		Seals: “brocade” style Scarlet Ware			
VI	III		III	X				Ishtar E	Nineveh 5 Gawra 7 Ashur: Ish- tar H
VII			IV	IX	first appearance of plano-convex bricks				
	IV		square temple	VIII			Archaic texts of Ur	Ishtar D	Nineveh 5 Gawra 7 Ashur: Ishtar H
VIII		I	I			Seals: Fara style “Abstract” sculpture			
	V		II				Ennebaragesi		
IX			III						
	VI		individual sanctuary	VII	Eridu palace Palace A of Kish Royal Cemetery of Ur	Seals: Indugud- Sukuru phase “Naturalistic” sculpture Seals: Meskalamdug phase	Mesilim Texts from Fara and Abu Salabih	Ishtar C	Nineveh 5 Gawra 7 Ashur: Ishtar G
	VII			VI				Ishtar B	
X		II	I						
		III	II	V	End of plano-convex bricks Temple Oval of Ubaid	Seals: Mesannepadda- Lugalanda phase	Lagash texts (from Ur- Nanshe to Lugalanda)	Ishtar A Pre- sargonic palace	Nineveh 5 Gawra 7 Ashur: Ishtar G
			III						
			IV				Urukagina Lugalzagesi		

Jemdet Nasr
(3000–2900 bc)

Early Dynastic I
(2900–2750 bc)

Early Dynastic II
(2750–2600 bc)

Early Dynastic IIIa
(2600–2450 bc)

Early Dynastic IIIb
(2450–2350 bc)

Proto-Imperial
(2350–2300 bc)

of co-existing dynasties competing with each other. The latter case is best attested at Lagash, and in particular in its long competition with Umma for control over the Gu-Edinna region, rich in fields and pasturelands. The inscriptions left by the kings of Lagash (mostly celebratory in nature) provide details on the contest between the two from their earliest skirmishes and the intervention of the king of Kish (Mesilim) as mediator between the two, to the later episodes. Naturally, Umma is always described as an aggressive, unjust and dishonest enemy, in stark contrast with Lagash, the just city, which was attacked, but emerged victorious. Unfortunately, nothing has survived of the Umma records on this conflict.

One of the most important moments of this dispute took place under Eannatum. It was recorded in his famous Stele of the Vultures. The inscription is further enriched by the eloquent depiction of the victorious side and the defeated one, as well as the link between human actions and divine intervention. Another important moment took place under Entemena, who left a more complete retrospective account of the conflict. Given the frequency of references to this episode at Lagash, it must have been a dispute with important political and economic implications. It is clear that conflicts such as the one over the Gu-Edinna region were not uncommon in the Early Dynastic period. Therefore, the conflict between Lagash and Umma is only one attested example of the difficulties arising between city-states: disputes over intermediary regions (when these were not mere empty spaces); their ideological interpretation as conflicts between city-gods; and the parallelism between an active military plan and a juridical justification of this plan.

The Lagash material also attests to other kinds of wars, such as incursions, at times without permanent consequences, into distant cities (from Susiana to Central Mesopotamia) in order to gain, or keep, a superior position among the other city-states. The city-state rising above all others would have been the one able to acquire more prestigious titles, such as the one of *lugal*. While support from Nippur was important on an ideological level, the titles *en Uruk* and *lugal Kiš* indicate the supremacy of two main political centres of Lower Mesopotamia: Uruk and Kish. A number of kings, presumably from these two cities, are attested in several inscriptions left in other cities (Nippur in particular). However, these kings could have been local rulers who managed to acquire these prestigious titles after their victories.

The ambition for supremacy soon became an ambition for universal rule. This idea was supported by two concepts. First, there was the idea that the world coincided with Mesopotamia, which was a densely populated, highly productive land surrounded by empty lands. Second, there was the idea of the spread of Sumerian cities, or cities linked to Sumerian culture, in various directions, from Susa, to Mari and Ashur. Through these ramifications, it was deemed possible to reach the edges of the world, identified as the Upper Sea (the Mediterranean) and the Lower Sea (the Persian Gulf). There is a gradual increase in the presence of a universal concept of supremacy. This idea started at the time of Mesilim, king of Kish, who mediated the conflict between Lagash and Umma (Early Dynastic IIIa). The idea survived under the various rulers of the Early Dynastic IIIb (from Eannatum of Lagash, to Lugalkiginnedudu, Lugaltarsi and Lugalkisalsi of Uruk), who combined the titles of king of Kish and of Ur. Finally, the ambition for supremacy peaked at the end of the Early Dynastic IIIb period, which is thus called 'Proto-Imperial'.

There are two significant episodes for this period. First, the king of Adab, Lugalannemundu, appears on the Sumerian King List as the only king of the only dynasty of Adab. An inscription from the Old Babylonian period records the extensive rule of this king, extending across the entire Mesopotamian periphery (Elam, Marhashi, Gutium, Subartu, Martu, Sutium), from Iran to Syria. Obvious anachronisms, however, prove that this is a fake Old Babylonian tablet, but the choice of Lugalannemundu must have been motivated by the supposed greatness of some of his achievements.

The second case, the one of Lugalzaggesi of Uruk, is better attested. We know from his own inscriptions that he defeated and conquered Ur, Larsa, Umma, Nippur and Lagash, thus gaining control over the whole of Lower Mesopotamia. Although his conquests were far from universal, even by Sumerian standards (the Diyala Valley, Central Mesopotamia, Susiana, the Middle Euphrates and Middle Tigris were not under his control), Lugalzaggesi claimed that his rule reached the Lower Sea and the Upper Sea. These statements could have been predictions of future political moves. In fact, they could not have been entirely invented, since

that would have caused the king's loss of credibility in front of that part of the audience who knew the truth. It is possible that Lugalzaggesi reached the Mediterranean either in person or through envoys. Alternatively, he could have established military or commercial alliances with other powers (such as Kish, Nagar, Mari and Ebla, which were never conquered by him), although these alternatives were ideologically considered to be secondary. Therefore, the ideology of universal dominion did not need to explain the actual forms of its realisation: imagination not only preceded reality, but was also a powerful stimulus for it.

7 Internal crisis and reform edicts

Before becoming the only king of the Third Dynasty of Uruk, the founder of the first 'empire', Lugalzaggesi, had been king of Umma. Therefore, he inherited the traditional rivalry with Lagash. Unlike his predecessors, Lugalzaggesi managed to solve this rivalry through considerable military contingencies. While there are no records of his achievements from the other conquered cities, Lagash provides its own version of this phase, allowing us to evaluate the real nature of Lugalzaggesi's empire. Even after Uruk's victory, the *ensi* of Lagash, Urukagina, was still able to issue inscriptions, indicating that he must have kept his role in the city. Moreover, in his inscriptions, Urukagina was still able to describe Uruk's victory as a case of abuse of power, pointing out the accountability of the god of Lugalzaggesi against his own god, and hoping in an eventual punishment.

Apart from his clash with Lugalzaggesi, Urukagina is also known for a reform edict informing us of the social problems of the time (Text 6.3). Urukagina was a usurper, and as such he emphasised his difference from his predecessors in two ways. First, these predecessors were portrayed as closely linked to the temple, while Urukagina presents himself as a more 'secular' ruler. Second, Urukagina blamed his predecessors for allowing abuses of power by the priestly elite and administrators at the expense of the population, while the new king was a protector of his people. The legal side of his edict consists in a series of measures aimed at eliminating

Text 6.3 The reforms of Urukagina

'Since time immemorial, since life began, in those days, the head boatman appropriated boats, the livestock official appropriated asses, the livestock official appropriated sheep, and the fisheries inspector appropriated . . . and the *guda*-priests paid grain taxes to the town of Ambar. The shepherds of wool sheep paid (a duty) in silver on account of white sheep, and the surveyor, chief lamentation-singer, supervisor, brewer and foreman paid (a duty) in silver on account of young lambs.

The oxen of the gods ploughed the garlic plot of the ruler and the best fields of the gods became the garlic and cucumber plots of the ruler. Teams of asses and spirited oxen were yoked for the temple administrators, but the grain of the temple administrators was distributed by the personnel of the ruler.

When a corpse was brought for burial, the *uhmuš* took his seven jugs of beer, his 240 loaves of bread, 2 *ul* of *hazi*-grain, one woollen garment and one bed; and the *umum* took one *ul* of barley. When a man was brought for the "reed of Enki", then the *uhmuš* took his seven jugs of beer, his 420 loaves of bread, 2 *ul* of barley, one woollen garment, one bed, and a chair; and the *umum* took one *ul* of barley . . .

The ruler's estate and the ruler's fields, the estate of the "woman's organisation" and fields of the "woman's organisation", and the children's estate and the children's fields all abutted one another. The bureaucracy was operating from the boundary of Ningirsu to the sea.

When the *šublugal* would build a well on the narrow edge of his field, the *iginudu* was appropriated (for the work), and the *iginudu* was also appropriated for (work on) the irrigation channels which were in the field.

These were the conventions of former times!

When Ningirsu, warrior of Enlil, granted the kingship of Lagash to Urukagina, selecting him from among the myriad of people, he replaced the customs of former times, carrying out the commands that Ningirsu, his

master, had given him. He removed the head boatman from (control over) the boats, he removed the livestock official from (control over) asses and sheep, he removed the fisheries inspector from (control over) . . . , he removed the silo supervisor from (control over) the grain taxes of the *guda*-priests, he removed the bureaucrat (responsible) for the paying (of duties) in silver on account of white sheep and young lambs, and he removed the bureaucrat (responsible) for the delivery of duties by the temple to the palace.

He installed Ningirsu as proprietor over the ruler's estate and the ruler's fields; he installed Ba'u as proprietor of the estate of the "woman's organisation" and fields of the "woman's organisation"; and he installed Šulšagana as proprietor of the children's estate. From the boundary of Ningirsu to the sea, the bureaucracy ceased operations.'

abuses, bringing back previously lost rights and reinstating the correct relation between the state organisation (and the temple administration) and its subjects. Naturally, this self-legitimizing tone was quite evident to the population. Similarly, Urukagina's disassociation from previous governments was equally clear, despite the fact that their dysfunctions and measures were a reaction to the socio-economic crisis of the time.

For now, however, it is inaccurate to speak of reforms, since this would lead to the assumption of an effective change in the juridical or administrative system of the time. The aim of the edict was to re-establish order through a return to the past, idealised (as usual in archaic societies) as a perfect world, characterised by optimal institutions, which were far better at the time of their (divine or kingly) foundation, than later on. In practical terms, the reforms were mainly focused on a reduction of tributes and the abolition of abuses of power. Urukagina was not the first ruler to implement these kinds of measures. At Lagash itself, Entemena proclaimed that 'he caused the son to return to the mother, he caused the mother to return to the son', since he remitted interests on debts, and that he 'established freedom' not just in Lagash, but in Uruk, Larsa, and Bad-tibira (maybe taking advantage of his momentary conquest of these cities).

Apart from the propagandistic aim, these measures reveal the fact that a certain stratum of society was forced to go into debt and sell its property and children to repay interests to a creditor. This downward spiral eventually brought to the disappearance of small family estates and the rise of debt slavery in case of a missing repayment. Debt slavery was considered a serious damage to social order, since it damaged the 'free' portion of the population. Consequently, the solution was to 're-establish freedom'. The ruler issuing a reform edict therefore became a liberator, rejecting the accusation of being accountable for this social deterioration. In the case of Entemena, the causes for slavery are not explained. Urukagina, on the other hand, blamed the crisis (in order to set himself above his predecessors) on the individual abuses of power and the occasional malfunction of the system, rather than the structure of the system. Despite his statement, it is quite clear that this increasing debt of free farmers was a structural problem, linked to the overall tendencies of the period. These led to the disappearance of small family estates and the enrichment of temple and palace estates, as well as their administrators. These problems were actually caused by the rulers' government, forcing rulers to release edicts as a way to keep matters under control and avoid rebellions, without changing too much of the system. The return to the past therefore became a means to mask the profound social changes that were taking place at the time.

These changes led to an unbearable tribute system (in terms of taxes and services) for free inhabitants, and maybe a marginalisation of their lands compared to the areas of development administered by the temple or the palace. It became increasingly difficult for free individuals to maintain this fast pace of contribution and production. A couple of bad years could have destroyed families, irreversibly starting the downward spiral of debt and debt slavery. Members of the highest echelons of society benefited the most from this situation (as lenders), also due to their contacts with the administration, responsible for the accumulation of grains and other products. Blaming priests and administrators for this crisis was aimed at pleasing that part of the population suffering the most from it. The crisis was largely due to the consolidation of large economic organisations, the enrichment of the elite, and the progressive decline of village communities and their farmers. Therefore, aside from individual responsibilities, the crisis remained unstoppable.

7

THE RISE OF EBLA

1 Upper Mesopotamia and the second urbanisation

In the mid-third millennium BC, Upper Mesopotamia, whose urban centres had suffered from the decline of Uruk culture, began to experience a more stable and widespread urbanisation process. This revival took place during the Early Dynastic II and peaked in the Early Dynastic III period. It is worth noting, that the three phases of the Early Dynastic period of Lower Mesopotamia roughly correspond to the three archaeological phases of the Early Bronze Age (whose third phase, however, also includes the Akkadian period). Moreover, a new chronological division has recently come into use, known as Jezira I, II and III.

As previously mentioned, the first urbanisation was characterised by a marked contraposition between settlements closely linked to Uruk culture, from Sumer up along the Tigris and Euphrates, and local settlements influenced by the technical and organisational progress of the south. The latter, however, were still autonomous on a cultural, political and economic level. This distinction disappeared during the second urbanisation. Sumerian influence is only evident in two important centres: Mari, in the Middle Euphrates region, and Ashur, in the Middle Tigris. Their temples and palaces display two types of cultures clearly derived from a Sumerian prototype. However, these two centres were now included in a network of urban settlements extending from Upper Syria and the Balikh and Khabur Valleys to Assyria. This area had higher rainfall levels than the south, leading to more productive rainfed agriculture and farming (mainly goats and sheep).

Excavations and surveys indicate that in the Early Bronze Age II and III both urban settlements and villages grew throughout this area. Moreover, pottery evidence proves that this development was internal. Metallic and Plain Simple Ware substituted the 'Nineveh 5' pottery of eastern Jezira and the Reserved Slip Ware from central and western Jezira. This development led to the formation of a cultural unity embracing a wide area, namely, from the foothills of the eastern Taurus to the northern Zagros. Written evidence would later attest that Hurrian people inhabited these foothills, while Semitic people occupied the rest of the region.

This increase in settlements during the third millennium BC probably benefited from favourable climatic conditions, allowing a better cultivation of the land. However, this area would eventually experience a decline in rainfall. This decline made the local agricultural production levels inadequate for large urban settlements, but more suited to support smaller settlements and less intensive agro-pastoral activities. From a Lower Mesopotamian perspective, this region was defined as the 'high land'. This was due to its location above the Mesopotamian alluvial plain and the plateau, separating irrigated and non-irrigated areas.

Through excavations and surveys, it has been possible to locate areas with high levels of urban concentration. One of these areas was located south of Jebel Sinjar, where rainwater (levels of rainfall being higher

in the nearby mountains, which were covered in vegetation) penetrated the foothills, creating aquifers that seasonally brought water to the surface along the Wadi Tharthar. The major centre of the area was Tell Taya (level 9), the largest city of the period (100 hectares). However, there probably were other large centres that still have to be excavated. The second area of high urban concentration was Assyria, not around Ashur, which remains a unique centre in terms of location and culture, but in the agricultural 'triangle' between the Upper Zab and the Tigris. Unfortunately, its centres (from Nineveh to Arbela) have not been excavated for this period.

The Khabur Valley and its tributaries (the so-called 'Khabur triangle') became the main emerging area of Upper Mesopotamia, with several large settlements datable to the Early Bronze Age II and III. The largest one was Tell Brak, ancient Nagar (according to written sources from Ebla), an influential city throughout Upper Mesopotamia (Figure 7.1). Another important centre was Tell Chuera, located along



Figure 7.1. Satellite view of Tell Brak, in the Syrian Jezira (Google Earth).

the western edge of the 'triangle'. There, excavations have uncovered a large city of the Early Dynastic II and III period with obvious Sumerian influences (especially in sculpture) on an equally recognisable local culture, and temples with stone foundations and a non-Sumerian layout. Tell Mozan (ancient Urkish) provides evidence for a Hurrian culture still heavily influenced by the south, but at the same time unique in its characteristics.

One of the main innovations brought from Lower Mesopotamia was writing and everything else that came with it on an administrative level. This is attested in the archives from Tell Beydar, a settlement with an impressive architectural complex. The contemporary texts from Ebla provide a large amount of information on many centres of the Jezira region. For instance, there were Armium (possibly located in the Middle or Upper Euphrates region), Abarsal (around Urfa, possibly identified as Kazane Tepe), and which stipulated a treaty with Ebla to establish commercial boundaries, Urshum, Harran, Irrite, Qattunan and many others.

Of the two most developed centres influenced by Lower Mesopotamian culture, Ashur has not been excavated for the levels dating to the third millennium BC. However, the limited data available leads us to believe that it was a large urban centre. The earliest layers (H and G) of the temple of Ishtar reveal a classic Sumerian-style sanctuary. Its votive statues were similar to the ones found in the Diyala and other centres in the south in the same period.

Much more evidence is available for Mari, where excavations have revealed a large portion of the royal palace (defined by the excavators as 'Pre-Sargonic'). The palace was built in the Early Dynastic IIIa period, and was definitely used throughout the IIIb period (Figure 7.2). Apart from the palace, several temples have been excavated: the temples of Ishtar (with six overlapping layers), Ishtarat, Ninni-Zaza, Shamash and Ninhursag. As in the case of Ashur, the city appears to be just like a Sumerian centre. However, royal votive statues and epigraphic material (further supported by the indirect attestations from Ebla) found at Mari demonstrate that on a linguistic level the city was not a colony of Sumerian immigrants. Mari's personal names were Semitic, as is the language used in its administrative texts. However, it was not Old Akkadian, but the same language found in Ebla, namely, a Western Semitic language used from the Middle Euphrates to the Mediterranean.

Sumerian influences are visible not only on a cultural level (architecture, sculpture and writing), but also through a hoard of precious objects sent from Mesannepadda, king of Ur (known from the Sumerian King List and some attestations from Ur as the first ruler of the First Dynasty of Ur), to king Gansud of Mari. The latter was probably Ansud, founder of the only Mari dynasty attested on the Sumerian King List, and contemporary to the First Dynasty of Ur. This Mari dynasty would then continue with kings attested both in their votive statues (found at Mari) and the Eblaite documentation. However, there are some discrepancies in the titles used by these kings. At Ebla, the king was an *en*, while a *lugal* was a high-ranking royal official, subordinate to the king, or a representative of the Eblaite king outside Ebla. On the contrary, following the Lower Mesopotamian tradition, the king of Mari was a *lugal*.

The Eblaite documentation reveals that Early Dynastic Mari reached its peak of influence on two occasions. The first one was with kings Iblul-Il and Enna-Dagan, who ruled over the whole Middle and Upper Euphrates region. A letter from Enna-Dagan reports a long list of his victories as well as the ones of his predecessors across the entire valley, from Emar to Hashuwa, and with Ebla in a tributary position (Text 7.1). The second moment of Mari supremacy (after a brief period in which Ebla held a hegemonic position in the area) brought to the destruction of Ebla itself. However, Mari would in turn be destroyed under Sargon of Akkad shortly after.

The conflict between Ebla and Mari was rooted in their respective position in the commercial network of the area. Mari was a crucial commercial junction between Lower Mesopotamia and Syria. Ebla controlled those territories that would have allowed the expansion of Mari's commercial network further west. Ebla's position prevented the rise of Mari as a political and economic power in western Syria. Mari was therefore significantly hindered by Ebla, a fact that may be reflected in its alternation of two strategies.

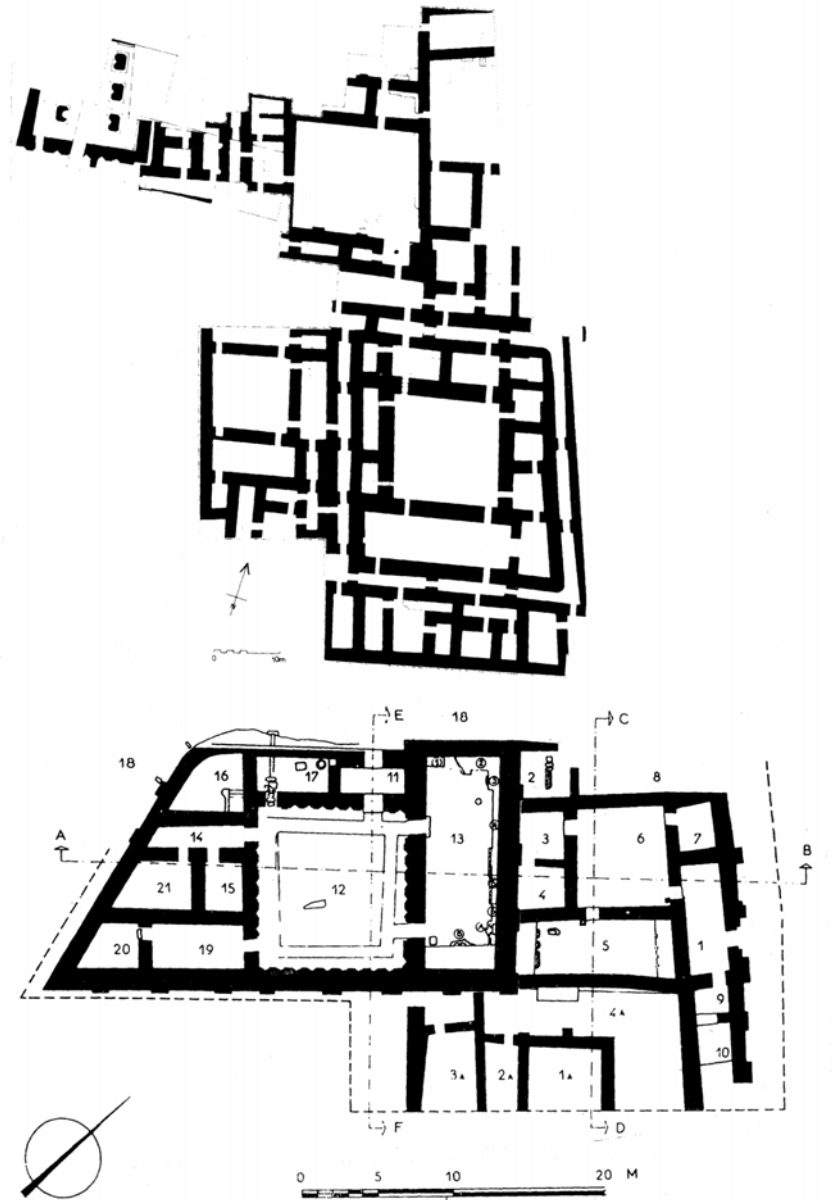


Figure 7.2 Presargonic Mari. Above: The palace; Below: The temple of Ishtar and Ninni-Zaza.

The first one was a military strategy against Ebla, aimed at stopping its commercial supremacy in western Syria. The second one was a diplomatic one, aimed at exercising an influential position on the south-eastern trade routes. However, Ebla and Mari were not the only centres in the Upper Mesopotamian regional system: there were also Nagar (Tell Brak), located in the Khabur basin, Armi in the Upper Euphrates, and Kish, a hegemonic power in Middle Mesopotamia at the time. Ebla's alliance with Nagar and Kish against Mari and Armi at the time of the final conflict between the two cities clearly indicates this

Text 7.1 A political and military text from Ebla: the letter of Enna-Dagan, king of Mari, to the king of Ebla

‘Thus (says) Enna-Dagan, ruler of Mari, to the ruler of Ebla. The cities Aburu and Ilgi, lands of Belan, Sa’umu the ruler of Mari defeated: tells and ruins in the mountains of Labanan he left.

The cities of Tibat and Ilwani, Sa’umu the ruler of Mari defeated: in the mountain terrain of Angai he left tells and ruins.

The lands of Ra’ak and Nirum, Ashaldu and Badul, Sa’umu the ruler of Mari defeated, in the borders of [. . .], near Nahal, he left tells and ruins.

And the cities of Emar and Lalanium and the *ganum* of Ebla, Ishtup-shar, the king of Mari, defeated: in Emar and Lalanium he left tells and ruins.

And the city of Galalaneni [and the city of . . .] the liberated *ganum* of x (?), Iblul-II, the ruler of Mari and Abarsal, defeated: in Zahiran he left also seven tells and ruins.

(Regarding) Iblul-II, the ruler of Mari, Iblul-II then defeated the city of Shadab, Addalini, and Arisum, in the land of Burman (of the land) of Sugurum and he left tells and ruins.

Then Iblul-il, the king of Mari, defeated the city of Sharan and Dammium: he left two tells and ruins.

Iblul-II, the king of Mari, came out of the city of Nerat and the fortress (?) of Hazuwan and in the city of Mane received the tribute of Ebla; then he . . . Emar (and) left tells and ruins.

(Regarding) Iblul-II, the king of Mari, he then defeated the cities of Nahal, Nubat, Shahab, of the land of Gasur (?): in (the land of) Ganane he left also seven tells and ruins.

(Regarding) Iblul-II, the king of Mari, he defeated the city of Barama – for the second time (?) – Aburu and Tibat, the lands of Belan: then Enna-Dagan, the king of Mari, left [tells and ruins].

He took (?) . . . the oil of the land. [. . .] Iblul-II, the king of Mari [. . .].’

political and commercial situation (nearby cities being enemies of each other, and forming alliances with cities located around their enemies).

Sargon eventually destroyed ‘Pre-Sargonic’ Mari around ten years after Ebla’s destruction and the end of its archives. With the rise of Naram-Sin, Mari experienced a dynasty of *šakkanakku*. These were rulers who were politically subordinated to the kings of Akkad, and then to the Neo-Sumerian kings of Ur. On an archaeological level, there was a visible decrease in monumental architecture compared to previous periods. Despite being aimed at gaining control on the commercial network of the area, the brutal intervention of Sargon of Akkad actually caused its crisis, allowing the rise of nomadic groups that would eventually bring the whole system to collapse.

2 The kingdom of Ebla: size and structure

Just like in Upper Mesopotamia, the second urbanisation peaked in Syria around the mid-third millennium BC. This period saw the rise of cities and villages across the entire semi-arid plain, as well as in the few irrigated areas and on the coast. This urban growth was already known through some excavations (from Amuq in the north, to Hama in the south, and the coastal centres of Ugarit and Byblos) and the discovery of several necropolises. However, the ‘caliciform’ ware found there led to the assumption of the existence of standardised palace workshops producing valuable pottery.

In this regard, excavations at Ebla have provided a more detailed picture of the culture and development of the area (Figure 7.3). The archaeological data from third millennium Ebla is quite limited (especially compared to the Middle Bronze Age data), but crucial. This is because the evidence mainly comes from a

part of the royal palace (G) that had an Audience Court and administrative quarter (Figure 7.4). Among the many finds, the most important ones are the large archive storing several thousands of tablets, as well as the Rock Temple in the lower city. Despite the lack of private households, the texts and other finds from the palace provide a detailed picture of the cultural, political and economic (in particular, commercial) features of a Syrian state in the Early Dynastic period.

At the peak of its development, Ebla extended over more than 50 hectares (as did Mari and Ashur). The archival material reveals the sheer size and administrative complexity of the city, which must have developed over a relatively long period of time (in fact, under Palace G there are the remains of an earlier palace). Traces of the first urbanisation are not very visible in the area west of the Euphrates. This is because Proto-Syrian culture only took shape later, with a relatively modest Mesopotamian influence (writing aside) and entirely unique features. As shown by the thousands of personal names (not just from Ebla, but from a variety of other localities) found in the administrative texts, the local population was almost entirely Semitic. Both at Ebla and the majority of cities in contact with it, namely, central and western Syria and western Upper Mesopotamia, the population seems to have been relatively homogeneous. In fact, all the names attested are in the same language as the one used in the Eblaite sources.

This homogeneity was not due to Ebla's supremacy, but to the diffusion of this linguistic stratum, namely, 'Eblaite' (whose name is due to its attestation in the Ebla archives). The latter became the main spoken, administrative, and epistolary language of the Syrian and Upper Mesopotamian areas. The Eblaite linguistic stratum was also closely related to Hurrian along the foothills and to Old Akkadian in Central Mesopotamia. Internally, Syria experienced the rise of the Martu, a group bearing strong pastoral connotations, which would have a significant impact in the area in the following period.



Figure 7.3 Aerial view of Tell Mardikh, ancient Ebla (Courtesy: the Italian Archaeological Mission in Syria, Ebla).

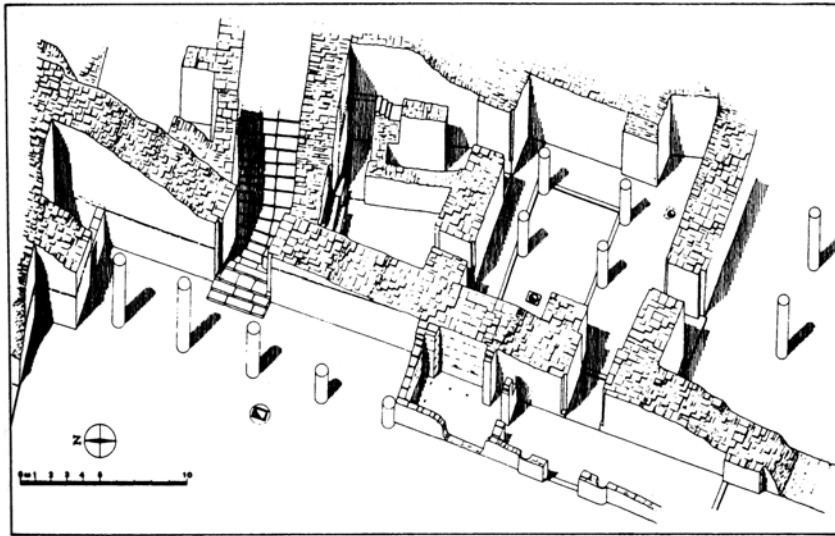


Figure 7.4 Ebla: axonometric view of palace G, ca. 2400 BC.

The kingdom of Ebla extended over a wide area, embracing a large section of northern Syria. The city was able to rely on the fields concentrated in the Matkh Valley and the lands in the surrounding plateau and hills, more suitable for farming, a limited amount of agriculture, and the cultivation of trees. In terms of demography, the data recovered from archival material is incompatible with the archaeological data. Ebla probably had around 15,000 or 20,000 inhabitants at most. The kingdom as a whole (with about a hundred villages with their own administrative functions) probably barely reached 100,000 people. However, the texts attest 11,700 employees working for the central administration, as well as a population of seasonal workers (presumably under *corvée*). The latter were divided into 16 ‘gates’ (that is, districts), with 2,000 ‘houses’ each, amounting to a total of between 130,000 and 150,000 people. Considering the fact that even the number of animals and metals recorded seem extremely high, it may be necessary to examine the way in which the administration determined these numbers.

The kingdom did not reach the Mediterranean coast, ruled by several independent kingdoms such as Byblos, which must have been the most influential one. Similarly, the Eblaite kingdom did not control the Euphrates Valley, where there were several autonomous states, from Carchemish to Emar, Tuttul and Mari. In the south, Ebla did not extend beyond Hama, and bordered with the kingdom of Ibal (near Qatna). Even in the north, the kingdom did not extend beyond Aleppo, where there were other independent states.

Therefore, the kingdom of Ebla was more a large state than a regional one. However, its territory was larger than the one of contemporary Mesopotamian states and with a population of a similar size. However, the lower density of population effectively compensated for the larger size of the Eblaite kingdom. Ebla was a hegemonic centre in the area, and it controlled several of the surrounding states, both politically and economically. Nevertheless, the supremacy of Ebla in the area experienced several fluctuations. At the peak of its expansion, Ebla controlled the Euphrates Valley (from Carchemish to Emar), the Balikh Valley (with the Harran and Irrite kingdoms), and the Taurus foothills (with the Urshum and Hashshum kingdoms, near Gaziantep). The wider commercial network controlled by Ebla will be considered later on, but it reached far beyond the direct political control of the kingdom.

The political structure of the kingdom was also different from the Mesopotamian model, due to the kin-based structure of its society. In fact, since that first urbanisation centred on the rise of temple

complexes did not leave a strong mark in Syria, temples did not have the influential political and economic role they had in Mesopotamia (nor would they ever have such a role throughout the Bronze Age or later on). Even the role of cities as promoters of agricultural colonisation, which in Mesopotamia was linked to irrigation and the centralised accumulation of harvests, never appeared in Syria. Consequently, political control seems to have been less centralised, promoting the development of many centres, as well as an agro-pastoral kind of society with a strong kin-based structure (though different from the Mesopotamian one). These aspects would characterise the area for at least two millennia.

Naturally, there was a king, whose title was written with the Sumerogram for 'lord', *en*, read in Eblaite as *malikum* ('king' in Western Semitic), and a queen (*maliktum*). The latter kept her role (as mother of the king) even after her husband's death, and had an important cultic role. After their death, kings were celebrated in funerary cults, and their images and descendance were preserved. Kings were supported by a group of elders (*abba*), clearly representing the most powerful families in the city. The elders resided in the palace as important guests of the king, and were allotted rations and provisions. Their role was strictly political, but they acted more like an assembly, rather than a set of functionaries supervising certain tasks or administrative sectors.

Alongside the king and the elders, there was another institution, fully administrative in character, headed by a vizier. The latter probably held the title of 'head of the administration' (*lugal sa-za*). The vizier had a very important role, so much so that in the earliest studies on Ebla these men were thought to have been kings (the actual kings rarely appear in the administrative texts). The viziers were in charge of the kingdom's administration, trade, and the army in case of war. The supervisors and governors of smaller cities all held the title of *lugal*, placing them at the same level as the elders and the representatives of the Eblaite kingdom in distant commercial centres or in other kingdoms. These governors were all under the vizier's rule (there were 14 districts, 12 in the kingdom and two at Ebla).

Based on the redistribution of food, the king (as well as the queen), the vizier and the elders seem to have resided in the palace. Therefore, the palace became the home of a series of assembly-type groups. This fact was a reflection of the former decentralisation of power in Syria, as well as its structure as a conglomeration of different settlements. The latter were united under a main city, which was still central, but had to constantly take into account this composite structure. Consequently, the nature of the relation between the elders, the districts and the kin-based structure of the kingdom remains difficult to define. The term 'elders' itself, however, indicates a social structure still centred on the supremacy of powerful families.

3 The kingdom of Ebla: political agenda and war

The archive from Ebla's Palace G covers around 50 years of history and terminates ca. ten years before Sargon's destruction of Mari (ca. 1350 BC). The royal dynasty of Ebla includes the two short reigns of Igrish-Halab and Irkab-Damu, and the long reign (ca. 30 years) of Ishar-Damu. Previous rulers are attested in a list regarding the cult of around ten ancestral rulers, covering a period of roughly a century, thus covering the whole of the Early Dynastic IIIb. Another list mentions further 26 kings, although it is not entirely reliable.

Alongside the last kings of Ebla, the archive records a sequence of viziers. At the time of Igrish-Halab, the office was probably not yet established, but a couple of individuals (Darmiya and Tir) emerged as the most influential in the Eblaite administration. Arrukum was a vizier under Irkab-Damu, while during the reign of Ishar-Damu, Ibrium stayed in office for around 20 years. His son Ibbi-Zikir and grandson Dubbuh-Adda succeeded him. However, Ibrium remained the most influential figure in this period for his reforms and the establishment of his own dynasty parallel to the royal family of Ebla.

Despite the lack of 'historical' sources (celebratory or narrative), the administrative records provide a considerable amount of information on Ebla's commercial and military activities. The evidence indicates that initially Ebla was under the supremacy of Mari. In fact, following the victorious campaigns of Iblul-Il,

the king gained control over the Euphrates Valley and Ebla itself, which had to pay substantial tributes. The situation dramatically changed under Ibrium. He led several campaigns against rebellious vassal-rulers, and more demanding campaigns against Abarsal (at the time of Arrukum), Halsum, Kakmum, and the powerful Armi (on the Upper Euphrates).

Apart from continuing campaigns in the north, Ibrium's son and successor Ibbi-Zikir led some military expeditions to the south (against Ibal). He also fought against Mari through an alliance with Nagar and Kish (which sent their own military contingencies). The war ended with a battle near Terqa, where Mari was defeated and its supremacy removed. Alongside the military and territorial expansion of Ebla, Ibrium and Ibbi-Zikir also increased the kingdom's commercial activities, with a ten-fold increase in investments compared to previous periods. The Eblaite kings expanded their policy of inter-dynastic marriages, first with allies and vassals, and then with the great powers of Nagar and Kish (but never with Mari and Armi).

Having defeated Mari, Ebla never sought to destroy it, and preferred to seal an alliance. This decision was possibly made for commercial reasons, since Ebla was not able to control commercial relations with the east on its own. Moreover, Mari was in a crucial position to control Kish, whose rise under Sargon initiated that expansionistic policy which would characterise the dynasty of Akkad. However, due to a series of events unknown to us, Mari managed to recover from the defeat and to attack Ebla, conquering it and sacking its palace.

This is the most probable hypothesis for the destruction of Ebla. Another suggestion is that Sargon destroyed Ebla, but this seems less plausible. First of all, Sargon himself, celebrating his conquests in the Middle Euphrates, declared that he stopped at Tuttul, while the god Dagan granted him access to the west (Ebla above all). Therefore, Sargon only gained access to the commercial networks of the west. After all, the destruction of a wealthy city such as Ebla would have been celebrated in an entirely different way. Moreover, when, a couple of decades later, Naram-Sin declared his destruction of Ebla (evidently the city that was rebuilt after the time of the Palace G archives), he would state that the achievement was unprecedented, something that he could not have said if Sargon had destroyed the city first. Finally, we know that Sargon conquered and destroyed Mari only a decade after the fall of Ebla, making its destruction militarily impossible with a still powerful Mari in the way.

Be that as it may, after the destruction of the Ebla of Palace G, the city and its entire territory experienced a period of crisis. Therefore, the final phase of the Early Bronze Age (IV, that is, 2300–2000 BC), between the destruction of the palace and the arrival of the Amorites, is relatively unknown. However, following the splendour and power of the Ebla of Palace G and its commercial network, changes in the architecture and organisation of the settlement indicate a visible recession.

4 The economy of Ebla

Unlike other states of the period, at Ebla the redistributive system worked in a slightly different way. It was more ceremonial and personal. The palace provided food rations to a large number (ca. 800 people as well as the king, the royal family and the elders) of *guruš*, 'male attendants', and *dam*, 'female attendants' (responsible for domestic work: cereal grinding, weaving and cooking). Moreover, there were groups of people who received rations without being permanent workers of the palace. For instance, there were the 'villages' (*é-duru^{ki}*), which were teams of workers of 10 to 20 people (supervised by an official) recruited from the villages of the kingdom. The size of this redistributive system based on the direct provision of rations can be estimated through the annual record of cereals reaching the palace. However, sometimes these totals included more than one year. Among the numbers found, the estimate of 90,000 people contributing to this system seems excessive, whereas the 40,000 estimate seems more plausible.

A particular aspect of the Eblaite system is its connection with religious festivals, which became important occasions for the distribution of food to the wider population, and not just the palace attendants and seasonal workers. If in Syria temples were not meant for the accumulation of surplus, they were places for

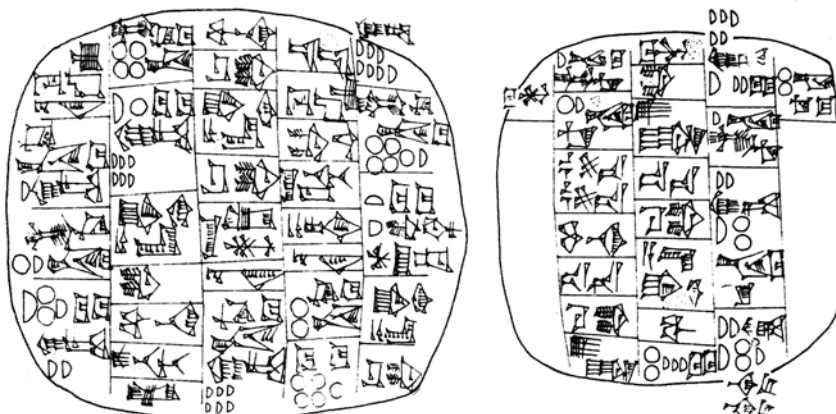
ceremonial redistribution and periodic fairs. Another aspect of the redistributive system was gift-exchange, which further underlines the personal and ceremonial aspects of the transfer of goods in Eblaite economy. However, the system never evolved from the distribution of rations to the allotment of lands (which in Mesopotamia is linked to the development of temple complexes). At Ebla, land allotments were given as a personal gift from the king and remained rather limited, just like the amount of land belonging to the palace. Therefore, lands mainly remained in the hands of villages, which paid a fixed quota to the Eblaite administration.

The base of Eblaite economy was mainly agro-pastoral. Its difference from Mesopotamian economy was largely due to their respective environments. Agriculture in Syria could only rely on rainfall and a few fertile patches available in the area. The yields, which can be deduced comparing the quantity of seeds sown and harvests, were between 1 to 3 and 1 to 5. These are normal rates for this type of agriculture, but still far from the Lower Mesopotamian yields. Due to the fluctuations in rainfall from year to year, the accumulation of surplus to sustain the palace was therefore more difficult and unpredictable. In order to integrate the cultivation of grains and use the lands on the hills, cultivations of typically Mediterranean plants such as vine and olive-trees, as well as several fruit trees, were quite widespread. This separated the Syrian diet from the Mesopotamian one (wine instead of beer, olive oil instead of sesame oil).

The palace managed the large scale farming of sheep and goats. While sheep's wool was used in textile production, stimulating the textile trade, goats were used in agricultural activities (Figure 7.5). Livestock was mainly owned by the *en*, the elders, and other public institutions, as well as the villages. A part of the livestock was directly sent to the central authorities, mainly on the occasion of festivals. The latter required more provisions than the usual distribution of rations (mostly grains). The total number of sheep, goats and cattle farmed is difficult to calculate. Some estimates that have been suggested in the past are physically impossible (400,000 cows and 2,500,000 sheep and goats), since they are similar to the number of livestock of modern Syria. More reasonable estimates still show the presence of a considerable amount of livestock: 9,000 cows and 140,000 sheep and goats.

If agro-pastoral production ensured the survival of the kingdom, the real wealth of Ebla was mainly derived from craftsmanship and trade. The artefacts recovered in Palace G attest to the high quality of craftsmanship in the city: from woodcarvings to inlaid objects, statuettes, ornaments, metal objects and so on. The textual evidence adds detailed information about technical processes (for instant metal alloys), types of products (especially clothes, categorised by shape and quality), and numbers of workers employed. The large number of female servants employed for processing grains and weaving was similar to that of the rest of the Near East. On the contrary, the large number of woodworkers (between 140 and 260) and metalworkers (between 460 and 600) attested is rather extraordinary. Trade remains the best-attested sector of Eblaite economy. This is partially due to the kinds of texts kept in the Palace G archive (other archives might have kept other kinds of sources). The latter was mainly concerned with trade, rather than the management of agro-pastoral activities. Despite this bias in the evidence, trade seems to have held a crucial role at Ebla, as indicated by the particular development of the palace and the spread of Eblaite presence outside its boundaries. Trade had formed a *bona fide* commercial network, with fixed commercial junctions in the cities located along the trade routes. Each of them had a *karum*, a 'port' (namely, a commercial centre), headed by an Eblaite representative (*lugal*) and with a financial and legal organisation meant to support trading activities. Ebla's commercial network was certainly not the only one of the period. There were the ones attested in nearby Abarsal, as well as other similar networks controlled by Ashur in Anatolia, Susa in Iran, and Dilmun around the Persian Gulf.

Relations between commercial networks were difficult to maintain, since each network was striving to grow at the expense of the others, and more than one centre was competing for the control of the same network. The first case is attested in the above-mentioned treaty between Ebla and Abarsal. This treaty lists the *karū* controlled by the Eblaite king, and regulated the way in which merchants from Abarsal were to take advantage of the Eblaite *karū*. There must have been a version of the treaty listing the *karū* belonging



recto

- I 2 *mi-at* 81 túg-túg
11 íb + III-TÚG-sa₆-GÙN
1 *mi-at* íb + III-TÚG-GÙN
lú íb-rí-um
- II taka₄
áš-ti
wa-na
in
a-la-ga^{ki}
6 *mi-at* 70 túg-túg
40 íb + III-sa₆-GÙN-TÚG
- III 6 *mi-at* íb + III-GÙN-TÚG
lú
šu mu-taka₄
si-in
a-la-ga^{ki}
si-in
wa-na
- IV 50 túg-túg
20 íb + III-GÙN-TÚG
lú
a-šum
šu ba₄-ti
in u₄
ib-rí-um
du-du
- V si-in
a-la-ga^{ki}

AN.ŠE.GÚ 1 *li-im* 1 túg-túg
51 íb + III-TÚG-sa₆-GÙN
7 *mi-at*

verso

- I 20 íb + III-GÙN-TÚG
(anep.)
- II 5 *mi-at* 62 túg-túg
1 íb + III-TÚG-sa₆-GÙN
20 *mi-at* 80 íb + III-TÚG-GÙN
2 *mi-at* 81 na-se₁₁-na-se₁₁
- III túg-mu
in
SA.ZA_x^{ki}
du-du
si-in
a-la-ga^{ki}
wa
23 túg-túg
- IV 1 íb + III-TÚG-sa₆-GÙN
11 íb + III-TÚB-GÙN
maškim maškim
wa-na
du-du
si-in
SA.ZA_x^{ki}
- V túg-mu
(anep.)

Figure 7.5 Administrative texts from Ebla: a record of textile allotments.

Recto 'I] 281 garments, 11 high quality coloured belts, 100 coloured belts: what Ibrum [II] has received from Wana in the locality of Alaga. 670 garments, 40 high quality coloured belts, [III] 600 coloured belts: what has been given in return to the locality of Alaga and to Wana. [IV] 50 garments, 20 coloured belts: what Ashum received when Ibrum went [V] to Alaga. Total: 1001 garments, 51 high quality coloured belts, *Verso* [I] 720 coloured belts. [II] 562 garments, 1 high quality coloured belt, 280 coloured belts for 281 persons: [III] textile allotment (made) in the Treasury (of Ebla) for those who went to Alaga. [IV] Moreover, 23 garments, 1 high quality coloured belt, 11 coloured belts have received as textile allotments the representatives of Wana who went to the Treasury (of Ebla).'

to the king of Abarsal, and the specific clauses for Eblaite merchants using these *karū*. The second case, the one leading to conflicts over the same network, is the one of Ebla and Mari.

Trade was mainly centred on the exchange of textiles and metals. However, the available sources only inform us on the products exported, leaving a substantial gap on the types of products brought to Ebla. Since the area was not rich in minerals, metals must have been both imported and exported. The approach implemented by trade administrators was certainly aimed at making a profit and re-investing it. This approach was therefore very different to the one found in Mesopotamia, aimed at the acquisition of those materials that could not be found in the area. This divergence can be explained. Ebla and other centres located around Mesopotamia monitored the export of processed products and the import of raw materials. They therefore were crucial commercial junctions between Mesopotamia and its periphery. They could count on a wide range of resources and were not cut off from access to raw materials. Consequently, the problem of the acquisition of materials was not as pressing as in Mesopotamia, making the management and control of commercial networks a profitable activity. Certain metals (mainly gold and silver) were used to calculate values and for the accumulation of wealth, while copper and tin were used in the local bronze production.

Even though the palace looked after the commercial network and convoys, and coordinated the commodities brought to Ebla both through official and private agents, trade was not exactly a 'state' activity. In fact, the king, vizier and 'governors' all contributed to the accumulation of commodities alongside private individuals. The commodities (*mu-DU*) given to the convoys departing from Ebla (which were not 'taxes' that the king was, rather absurdly, paying to himself, as previously suggested) were recorded and channelled into the commercial network. They were expected to return with a profit (or a set of goods acquired) to be distributed among its investors.

The texts mainly inform us on the northern (Syrian) and western (Mesopotamian) side of the commercial network (within a radius of 200–250 km), where Eblaite goods (fabrics, clothes and bronze objects) could be sold more profitably, and raw materials (Anatolian metals) were easier to obtain. However, it is clear that the network reached much further than that, as far as Egypt. The latter sent a set of vases with the cartouches of Khefren (ca. 2590–2570 BC), proving that they were kept at Ebla as antique relics) and Pepi I (ca. 2450–2400 BC) as gifts. The network even reached Afghanistan, the main provider of large quantities of lapis lazuli (perhaps after several intermediary commercial exchanges) shaped into small semi-worked blocks.

Eblaite trade with Mesopotamia constituted a considerable problem, due to the presence of two obstacles. The first one was Mari, which controlled the transit over the Middle Euphrates Valley. If we picture the commercial network in the area as shaped like a funnel, Ebla was located at the wider end, while Mari was at the centre of the narrow end. Therefore, Ebla controlled the wider network, but Mari held a key position in allowing the transition of goods to Mesopotamia. This situation naturally caused difficult relations between the two cities, which fluctuated between treaties and conflicts, as mentioned above.

The second obstacle was constituted by Kish throughout the Pre-Sargonic period, and then Akkad from Sargon's reign onwards. Despite the continuity from the supremacy of Kish to the one of Akkad (Sargon continued to call himself 'king of Kish'), considerable changes took place on a political level. The kings of Kish had accepted being one of the many centres contributing to the wider commercial network in the region. On the contrary, the kings of Akkad pursued a far more aggressive strategy. This strategy was first focused on the intermediary areas (Ur on one side and Mari on the other), and then moved on to the main commercial centres located further away (Elam on one side and Ebla on the other).

5 The rise of Proto-Syrian culture

The open character of Eblaite society, less centred on the great organisations (the temple and the palace) than its Mesopotamian contemporaries, and closer to its kin-based structure, is also visible in its architecture,

at least judging from its palace. The type of Mesopotamian palace found at Eridu, Kish and Mari was like a fortress. It had narrow entrances and limited access from the outside, and open courtyards inside. On the contrary, the Eblaite palace was designed around its courtyard, the so-called 'Audience Court'. On one side, this courtyard opened up towards the city, and on the other, it provided access to the inside of the palace. This open architecture was both ceremonial, as indicated by the set of stairs reserved for the king's descent towards the external throne, and functional, since the commercial archives were located between the courtyard and the administrative quarter.

Therefore, despite having evolved from an earlier Mesopotamian model in terms of function and architecture, the Eblaite palace was innovative in terms of layout and ideology. This emphasises the more approachable nature of the Eblaite administration. Temple architecture is not well attested for this period, and some information can be gathered from sources describing rituals as well as later architectural developments. It is probable that there were many temples, as many as the deities worshipped in the state cult. However, they were relatively small in size. Therefore, they seem to have been devoid of those economic and administrative structures (storehouses and workshops) that made Mesopotamian temples stand out (also in terms of size and height) as political and economic centres. For instance, the Rock Temple at Ebla was a monumental and visible construction, but lacked those economic buildings characteristic of Mesopotamian temples.

Syrian temples simply were the gods' houses and the focal point of a type of cult that was mainly pursued outdoors. Sacrifices and festivals were not private cults managed by priests, but important redistributive occasions involving the population as a whole. Among the many deities worshipped at Ebla, the most important one for the city and its royal family was the god Kura, a deity exclusively attested in Ebla. He received more offerings than any other deity and his temple was located on the highest point of the city, where royal rituals and important political oaths were performed. Ebla also worshipped popular gods such as Dagan (a typical deity in the Middle Euphrates region), Ishtar/Ishara, Adad (main deity of Aleppo), Shamash, Rashap and Kamish. Other deities were more typical of Eblaite religion, such as the enigmatic Nidabal, who would eventually disappear. Each of these gods had its own temple and cult statue, and regularly received offerings and votive statues. Among the many rituals attested in Ebla, the most important one for the official cult was the enthronement or marriage ritual (attested in many versions, one for each king). This ritual required the king and queen to travel to the shrines of the kingdom.

While Eblaite cults were predominantly local in character, its scribal culture displays a marked Mesopotamian influence. This must have been an obvious consequence of the use of cuneiform writing, with its Sumerian syllabary and logography. Eblaite writing was similar to the cuneiform of the Early Dynastic IIIa period (attested in Fara and Abu Salabih), also found in Pre-Sargonic Mari. This indicates that writing had been in use at Ebla before the construction of Palace G (whose preceding version has only been detected through surveys), possibly in connection with the rise of the Eblaite dynasty (ca. 2500 BC). The Mesopotamian origin of the script was still considered a vital aspect, leading to the training of young scribes at Mari with teachers coming from Kish. Ebla was part of the scribal tradition coming from Central Mesopotamia. This is the tradition defined by Ignace Jay Gelb as the 'Kish tradition', which used the Sumerian system to express the local language.

Scribal training and the need to adapt it to the local languages led to the appearance of lexical texts. These ranged from sign-lists and word-lists (of birds, fish, professions, as well as toponyms), also found in Fara and Abu Salabih, to bilingual lists. The latter were an Eblaite innovation, listing an ideogram with its Sumerian and Eblaite reading (Text 7.2). Due to the standardisation of scribal resources and their transmission through time, the lexical lists of Ebla belong to a tradition dating back to the Late Uruk period. However, these texts had to respond to new needs. Apart from a wider linguistic variety, there was the need to record various systems of numeration and measurement. In fact, Sumerian ideograms could often be used to indicate very different local systems of measurement, making the conversion of an Eblaite measurement into the Mesopotamian system rather inaccurate. Therefore, it was necessary to assign a set of signs to the local systems of measurement, thus separating signifier from signified.

Text 7.2 Bilingual vocabularies (Sumerian–Eblaite) from Ebla; some exemplary entries, in alphabetical order

Text		Interpretation	
Sumerian	Eblaite	Reconstruction	Meaning
á-zi	a-me-núm	yaminum	‘right’
	a-me-tum	yammittum	»
	ì-me-tum	yimmittum	
baḥar	wa-zi-lu-um	wāširum	‘potter’
bar-ús	ù-tum	‘udum	‘stick’
DI	a-a-ga-túm	halāktum	‘journey’
	‘a _x -ga-du-um	»	»
	a-la-ag-tum	»	»
eme-bal	a-ba-lu-um	‘appālum	‘interpreter’
	a-bí-lu-um	‘āpīlum	»
gaba-ru	ma-ḥa-lu-um	maḥārum	‘to receive’
	ma-ḥa-lum	»	»
maḥ-muš	ba-ša-mu-um	baṣnum	‘snake’
nam-ra-ag	ša-la-tum	ṭallatum	‘booty’
ninda-ad ₆	‘à-mi-zu-um	hamisum	‘sour bread’
	‘à-mi-zu	»	»
	‘à-me-zu	»	»
nin-nì	a-ḥa-tum	‘aḥatum	‘sister’
nìn-péš	ba-ra-tum	pa‘ratum	‘mouse’
nì-du ₁₀	du-bù-a-tum	ṭūbuwatum	‘kindness’
	du-bù-a(?)-túm	»	»
še-àr-àr	da-‘à-nu-um	ṭaḥanum	‘to grind’
	da-‘à-núm	»	»
šeš-mu	a-ḥu-um	‘aḥum	‘brother’
šu-kus	ba-da-gi i-tim	badāgu yidim	‘to cut by hand’
	bí-da-gi i-tim	»	»
ti _g -mušen	a-bar-tum	‘abartum	‘eagle’
uru-bar	ì-rí-a-tum	‘īriyatum	‘outside the city’

Apart from lexical texts, there were divination texts of Mesopotamian origin, and literary texts, also after a Mesopotamian model, but re-elaborated to accommodate local cosmologies and myths. However, writing remained a crucial aspect of the administration, requiring scribes to develop more efficient and clearer ways to record information. In this regard, the Eblaite archive constitutes an important step. It shows a clear desire to store tablets (placed on shelves along the walls, carried in baskets or on trays), to establish clear and consistent types of texts, and to develop a clear way to keep track of accounting records, especially those covering one or more years (Figure 7.6).

However, it has to be said that not everything was yet clear and established. After all, the development of defined and unambiguous types of documents would be the result of later improvements. Nonetheless, Ebla was already on the right path, but its documentation did not manage to reach the exemplary clarity

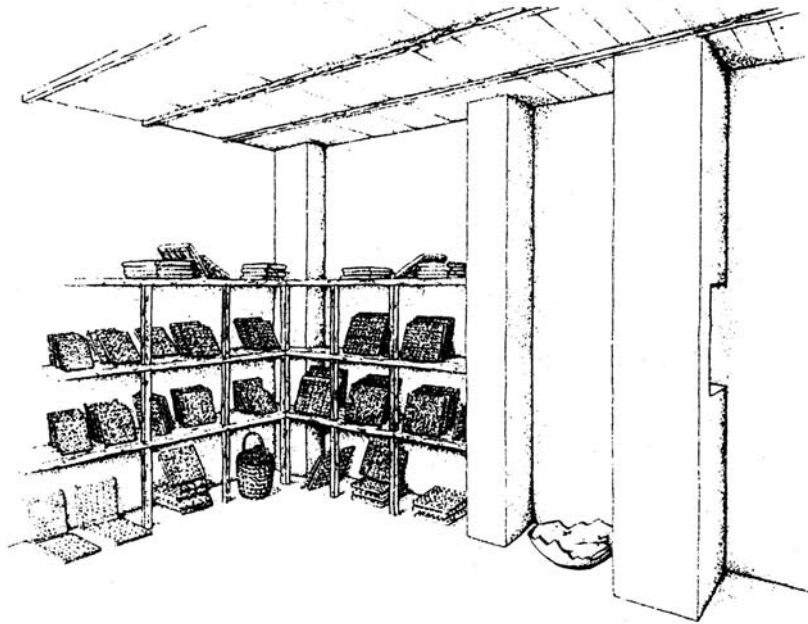


Figure 7.6 Ebla, palace G: reconstruction of one of the rooms of the archive.

that would arise in the Neo-Sumerian period. For instance, in terms of dating systems, the correctness of the calculations, the clarity of the recorded actions, their aim, and the use of a technical terminology only appear through the analysis of several texts. However, these aspects should have been clear after the analysis of only one text, yet they are not.

Even in terms of iconography, Ebla owes greatly to Mesopotamia, and its wealth and refinement was equal to the most important Sumerian centres. Despite having been sacked once it was destroyed, the palace's remains still give us an idea of Ebla's wealth. For instance, there were small sculptures made from a combination of precious materials, from gold to black stone and lapis lazuli. Large sculptures have not been found, probably due to the desire of Eblaite rulers to avoid obvious forms of self-celebration. In terms of material culture, the shell or stone inlays follow Mesopotamian examples, while woodcarvings were typically Syrian and were the forerunners of ivory carvings. Seals were generally similar to the ones of the Early Dynastic II–III, but were filled with local mythological and iconographic motifs (*Figure 7.7*). Therefore, the city experienced a vivacious intellectual and technical development. This would form the basis for high-quality Syrian craftsmanship, thanks to the use of precious materials from distant lands and earlier Mesopotamian models. Even pottery combined two of the typical features of palace workshops, namely, elegance and standardisation.

6 The second urbanisation in Lebanon and Palestine

As mentioned earlier, the first urbanisation had barely influenced the Palestinian area, but with some iconographic elements even reaching Egypt, although perhaps for other reasons. By the end of the Chalcolithic period, the region only experienced few attempts at urbanisation (such as the one at Jawa). However, these attempts were strategically different from the ones attested in Mesopotamia. Only in the third millennium BC, starting from the Early Bronze Age I and II and peaking in the Early Bronze Age III (thus at the same time as Ebla), had urbanisation begun to have a visible impact on the Syro-Lebanese coast and in Palestine.