

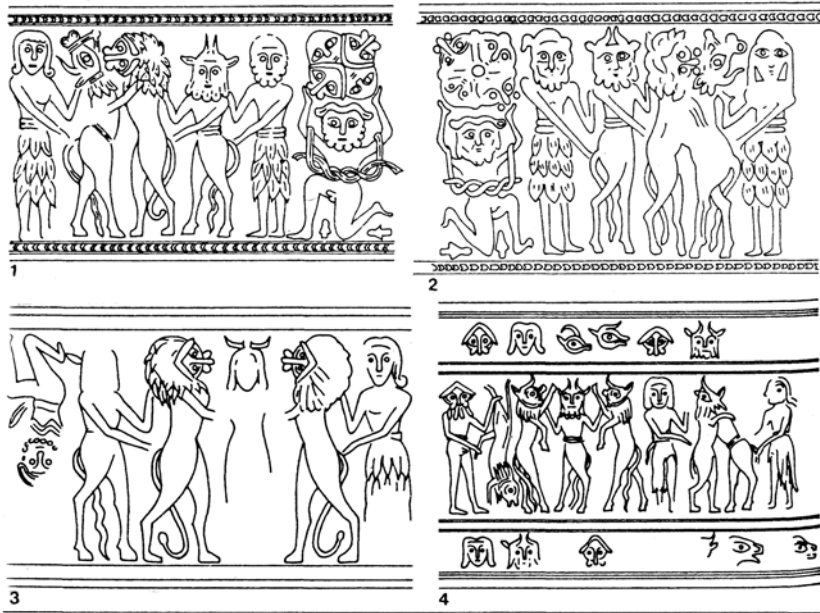


Figure 7.7 Ebla: seal impressions from the time of palace G.

This development spread from the north to the south, from the coast and the fertile valleys to the plateaus and hills, from the areas with a more favourable climate to the drier ones (which nonetheless were involved in this process).

For Palestine, the Early Bronze Age III was a phase of growth both in terms of settlements and population. The north–south direction of this process has led us to believe that this growth was due to the immigration of people from the north. However, this idea cannot be substantiated. It is true that there are distinct northern elements in the material culture of the period, such as the Khirbet Kerak pottery, originally from Transcaucasia. However, these northern elements are only one aspect of the gradual development of the area. The demographic, technological and organisational growth of the area was certainly modelled on northern examples, but had to rely on the local availability of people and resources. Just like in Syria, settlements became part of a hierarchic network featuring major centres and villages. From a socio-economic and political perspective, these settlements maintained a tribal structure. Due to the difficult climate, agricultural yields were not high, leading to a diversification of agro-pastoral activities. There were some raw materials available in the region: cedar from Lebanon, copper deposits from Arabah, and semiprecious stones, such as turquoise and carnelian, from Sinai.

The coastal area experienced the rise of important centres (possibly Ugarit), destined to play a major role in the region. One of them was certainly Byblos, whose temples, metal furnishings, votive statues and imported Egyptian artefacts indicate its significant growth and its vast interregional network. Palestine also had important centres, such as Bet Yerah (Khirbet Kerak) near Lake Tiberias, and Megiddo, in the irrigated plains. Other settlements were in fertile oases, such as Jericho, or on the hills, as in the case of Ai and Tell Far'ah. Moreover, the Early Bronze Age III also allowed the development of centres in the far south, such as Tell Areini and Tell Arad in the Negev.

These settlements were fortified, indicating that they were in competition with each other over the control of fertile lands, resources, and trade routes (Figure 7.8). The cities were also smaller than their north Syrian and Upper Mesopotamian counterparts, probably due to the more limited availability of

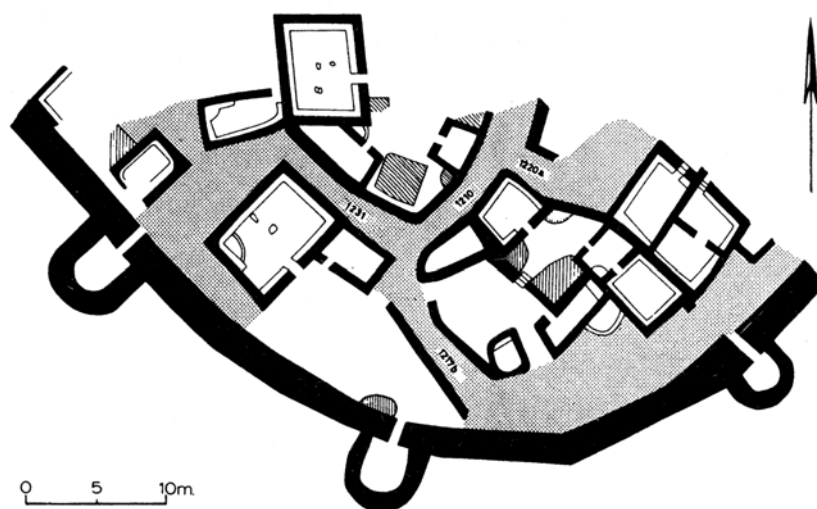


Figure 7.8 The Early Bronze Age in Palestine: Tell Arad, Area K with its fortification walls.

food. There were public buildings, such as the palace of Megiddo, or the storehouse of Khirbet Kerak. Moreover, these cities had temples, such as the complex Reshef Temple in Byblos. However, temples were generally small, one-roomed structures, with only the essential equipment for cultic activities and no political or economic function.

We do not know which cities held a hegemonic position in the various areas and periods. The Ebla tablets, as well as some Egyptian sources from the Old Kingdom, briefly inform us on the wider contacts of this region. In the north, the area south of the Byblos–Hama axis seems to have been outside the commercial network attested in the Eblaite sources. On the contrary, there seems to have been considerable political and commercial interactions with Egypt, which was beginning to have a significant influence on Palestine.

The Eblaite and Egyptian networks were naturally in contact, as attested by the vases bearing the cartouches of the Egyptian rulers of the fourth and sixth dynasty, generally found at Byblos. As mentioned above, these vases were also found at Ebla, possibly indicating that Byblos must have had an intermediary role between Egypt and Ebla. Since these objects were personalised royal gifts, it cannot be excluded that they were meant for prestigious rulers governing further away. Alternatively, it might have been customary to re-donate these prestigious (and ‘named’) gifts to third parties living elsewhere. Similarly, the lapis lazuli found in Egypt in the Old Kingdom must have arrived via the Ebla–Byblos–Palestine route, while the gold found at Ebla must have come from Egypt (specifically, Upper Egypt and Nubia). These were all highly prestigious materials, primarily exchanged between rulers.

However, the Egyptian interest in the Levant was chiefly motivated by more practical needs, namely, timber and resins from Lebanon, copper from Arabah, turquoise and carnelian from Sinai, and olive oil and wine. In case of the latter, typically Palestinian wine and oil jars have been found in several Old Kingdom necropolises (Figure 7.9). The Egyptians probably did not necessarily gain access to these resources through trade. First, they could have agreed with the local elite to exchange prestigious objects (both in terms of materials used, and in terms of value, such as magical scarabs), reserved for the local rulers, in exchange for access to Levantine resources. Second, they could have accessed these resources through military interventions, if necessary.

However, Egyptian military interventions in Sinai and Palestine were often aimed at dealing with the incursions of nomadic tribes, defined either with specific names (Shasu or ‘Amu) or more general ones (the

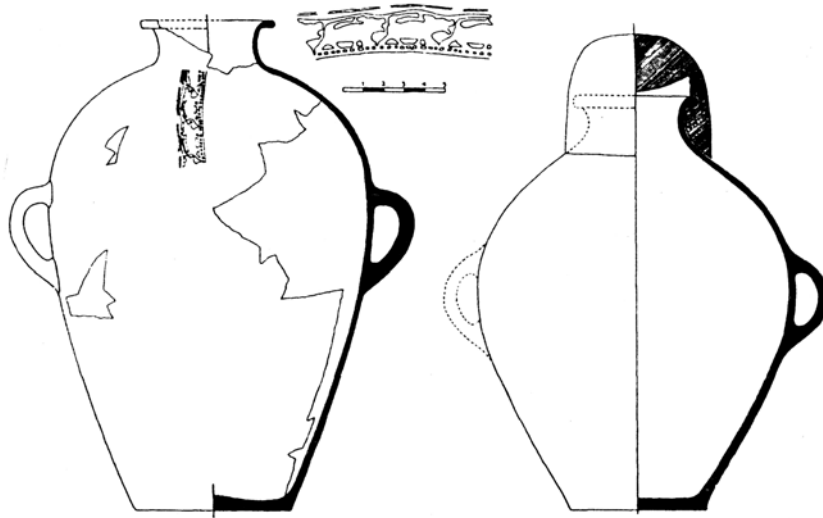


Figure 7.9 The Early Bronze Age in Palestine: Palestinian jars exported to Egypt (Giza necropolis).

‘savages’ or ‘sand-farers’). These people were seen as a cause of turbulence in the activities and interactions of the organised states, due to their mobility, aggressiveness and cultural difference. Nonetheless, Egyptian military campaigns at times targeted urbanised and cultivated areas. For instance, the campaign described in the tomb inscription of Weni took place along the coast, while a relief from Deshasha depicts the siege of a fortified Palestinian city. These were rare cases, since the Egyptian interest in the area was not yet expansionistic, but mainly commercial. Therefore, convoys sent to Palestine, Nubia, or the Wadi Hammamat were meant to access local resources, rather than establishing direct control over these areas. Through the alternation of military interventions with gift-exchange, Egypt established enough control over the area to encourage the local elite to maintain contacts.

Egyptian military interventions in the Levant were much less aggressive than the Akkadian ones from the north, and had no long-term repercussions. The crisis of the Early Bronze Age settlements in Palestine happened more for internal reasons. Their collapse was the result of an excessive exploitation of the natural and technical resources of the period, distributed among too many inhabitants for the available resources. The western corner of the Fertile Crescent was the area most exposed to crisis. Later on, the nomadic people of the area would eventually cause, and take advantage of, the collapse of the Palestinian urban settlements of the intermediate phase between the Early and Middle Bronze Age. Over a couple of centuries urbanisation had caused an unprecedented growth in the area, maybe too much to last. Therefore, this growth drastically diminished for a brief period, only to increase again shortly afterwards.

8

THE AKKADIAN EMPIRE

1 The idea of a ‘universal empire’

Sargon, king of Akkad, was a newcomer in the political scene of Mesopotamia. Later accounts would narrate the legends surrounding his obscure and unusual birth, his career as cupbearer of Ur-Zababa, king of Kish, and his rise to power as ruler of the newly founded city of Akkad. Even in his own inscriptions, the complete silence on his predecessors was compensated with statements regarding his personal achievements. The rise of a newcomer from the north facilitated the emergence of a new ideology of kingship, changing the image of the king from that of a cultic and administrative official to that of a war hero. Considerable changes also appeared in the realm of political and military interventions (with an empire that actually managed to reach the Lower and the Upper Sea), and in the rise of Semitic elements alongside Sumerian ones. However, these innovations did not appear all of a sudden. The Akkadian idea of a ‘universal empire’ included elements that had already appeared in the Proto-Imperial period. Even the commercial networks of the period followed the routes established during the proto-urban and Early Dynastic phases.

Only a few of the royal inscriptions of Sargon and his successors have survived in their original version. More often than not, we possess Old Babylonian copies (from Nippur and Ur) written as a palaeographic and historiographical exercise. These texts reproduced the inscriptions left in the Ekur, the sanctuary of Enlil at Nippur. These were inscribed on votive monuments that still survived half a millennium after the fall of the dynasty of Akkad and were left there for another 500 years. Through these sources, it becomes possible to reconstruct the formation of this empire and to examine the degree of reliability or exaggeration of later legendary accounts of this dynasty.

When Sargon dedicated his first monuments in the Ekur, he did not describe the story of his rise to power. He was already ‘king of Kish’, a city that he considered his capital, and did not yet use the title of ‘king of Akkad’. Sargon’s great expedition in the south, reaching as far as the Persian Gulf, constitutes the first phase of the empire’s expansion. During that campaign, he defeated Lugalzaggesi, king of Uruk and the other *ensi* ruling the cities of Sumer (Ur, E-ninmar and Umma). In his inscriptions, Sargon claimed that he had won thirty-four battles, subdued fifty *ensi* and washed his bloodied weapons, which now had to be repaired, in the Lower Sea. At the end of this initial phase (Figure 8.1), he already proclaimed that his rule extended from the Lower to the Upper Sea. However, the king admitted that the Akkadians only held control (that is, the *ensi* office) in the area around the Lower Sea, while Elam and Mari remained independent. Kish, which was restored and became the centre of the empire, and Nippur, which received the dedication of celebratory monuments (in exchange for its support of this new dynasty), were the only two cities to receive privileged treatment.

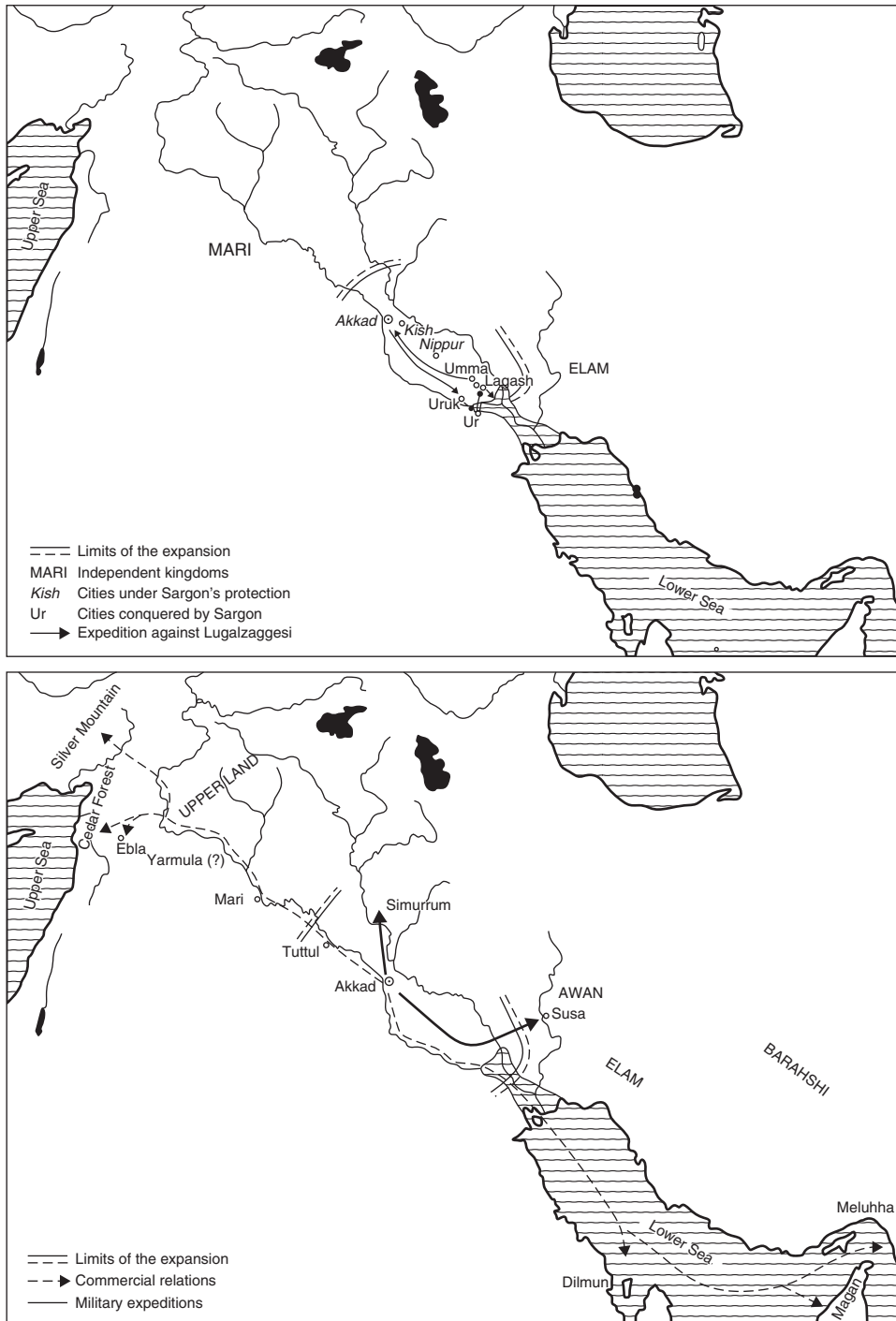


Figure 8.1 The size of the Akkadian empire under Sargon in the first phase (*above*), and the second phase (*below*).

The second phase of the empire's formation was more focused on the re-organisation of commercial routes reaching outside Mesopotamia, rather than on military campaigns. Beyond the Euphrates delta, in the Lower Sea, Dilmun (Bahrain), Magan (Oman) and Meluhha (Indus Valley) were sending their ships and their products to the river port of Akkad. Further north along the Euphrates, Sargon had to stop at Tuttul. Only the god Dagan would grant him access to resources from Mari, Yarmuta, Ebla and the Upper Euphrates region, including the 'cedar wood' and the 'mountains of silver' (the names conveniently given to the Amanus and Taurus regions). Sargon was therefore quite honest, stating that he controlled the area from Tuttul to the Persian Gulf, while his commercial network stretched from the Mediterranean to Magan and Meluhha.

The third phase of the empire's formation laid the groundwork for his successors. Sargon fought Elam and Barahshi, but they still managed to remain independent. The Akkadian expansion inevitably had to collide with Elam and its Awan dynasty. The latter ruled over an aggregation of smaller settlements spread across the Iranian plateau. In terms of size, demography and productivity, Elam was a worthy rival of the Akkadian empire. For now, despite Sargon's victorious expedition against Elam, the two powers continued to confront each other, threatening each other with military interventions in Lower Mesopotamia, as well as commercial ones around the Persian Gulf.

Shortly after, Sargon's son and successor Rimush had to curb the rebellion of several Sumerian cities (Figure 8.2). The first revolts started at Ur, Lagash, Umma and Kazallu (in the north). Rimush also had to deal with a second wave of revolts, possibly initiated and supported by Elam. Once Rimush managed to regain control in Sumer, he directly attacked the alliance Elam-Barahshi-Zahara, winning a battle fought between Susa and Awan. Despite the fact that the Elamites had not been defeated for good, Rimush proclaimed that Enlil had given him 'all the land' (that is, the Mesopotamian alluvial plain) and 'all the mountains' (that is, the periphery), from the Lower Sea to the Upper Sea.

Manishtusu, Sargon's second son, succeeded his brother Rimush and led an expedition beyond the Lower Sea, against Anshan (Fars) and Shirihum. He successfully gained access to the silver mines and the 'mountain of black stone' (diorite). This expedition shows the ability of these rulers to move beyond Susiana and the predominantly commercial interests of Akkad towards the Iranian plateau.

With Manishtusu's successor Naram-Sin, we encounter another influential individual. Like Sargon, Naram-Sin would become a model for later 'historiographical' texts, although with completely different connotations than his grandfather's. Considering the few contemporary sources that have survived, it is possible to see that with Naram-Sin the empire not only did not collapse, but experienced a new surge of expansion. If Sargon had conquered Mesopotamia, if Rimush and Manishtusu had faced Elam, Naram-Sin mainly expanded his territories to the north and north-west. He therefore managed to control an empire that actually stretched from one sea to the other. This was a feat considered to be crucial on an ideological level.

Naram-Sin also managed to consolidate his control to the east. In his inscriptions, he declared his supremacy over Elam 'up to Barahshi'. He therefore controlled the region of Elam, and not its broader confederation. The kings of Awan continued to rule, and relations between Akkad and Awan (described in the inscriptions as subjugated by Akkad) are recorded on an Elamite treaty found at Susa. The agreement was between Naram-Sin and the king of Elam, who is recognised as a political and legal representative of Elam. However, it is true that, after these last attestations, the dynasty of Awan seems to have disappeared. Susa had an Akkadian official in power and Susiana began to be significantly influenced by Akkadian culture. Naram-Sin also guided a military expedition (probably by sea) against the distant Magan. However, he did not conquer the area, but returned with a significant booty and the glory of his victory.

The north experienced two phases under Naram-Sin, documented in various later sources. First, Naram-Sin reached the Upper Mesopotamian city of Talhat and declared that he had conquered Subartu (Upper Mesopotamia), reaching the 'cedar wood' (the Amanus, or at least that whole region surrounding the Mesopotamian plain). Naram-Sin also stated that he subdued the *ensi* of Subartu and the lords

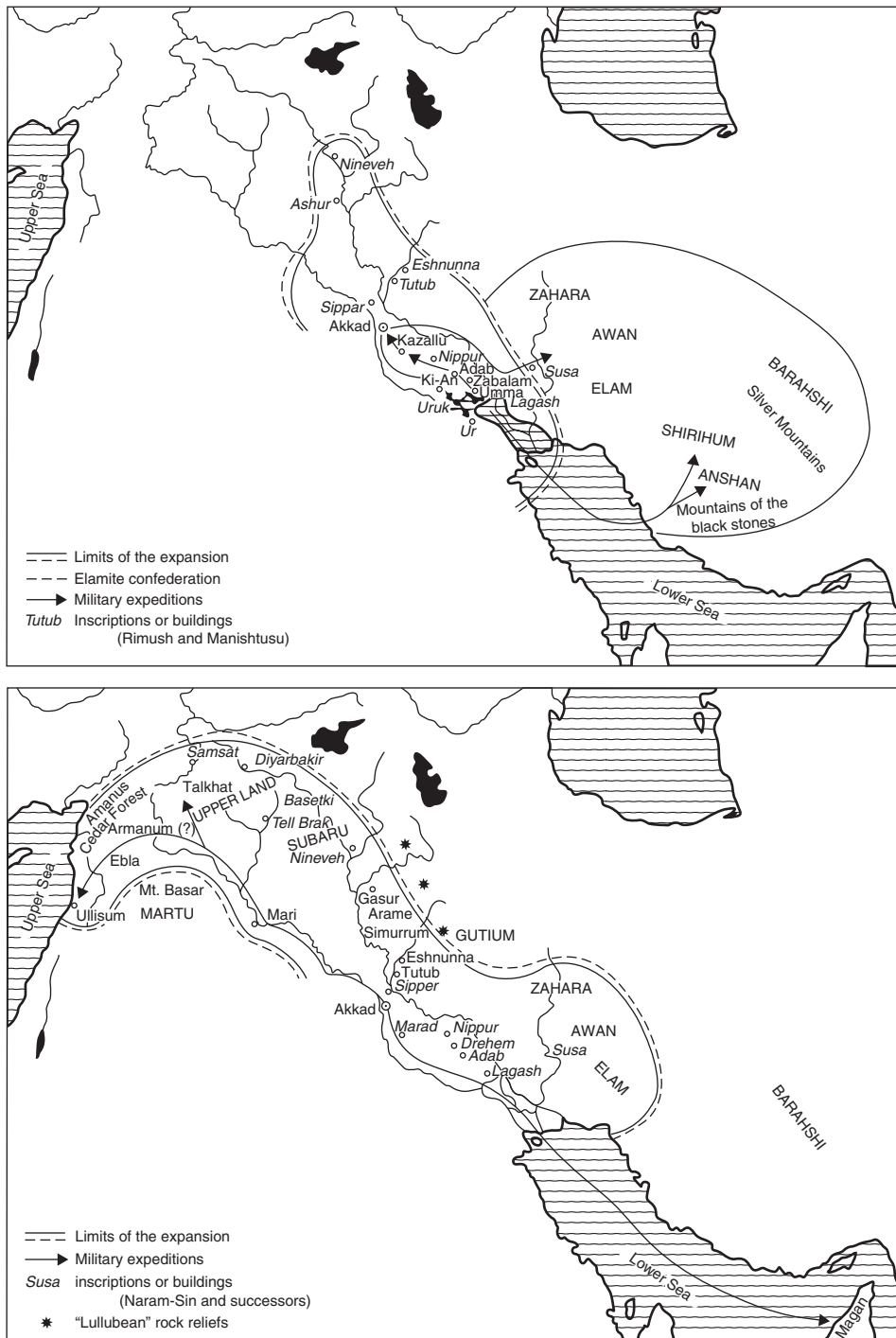


Figure 8.2 The size of the Akkadian empire under Rimush and Manishtusu (*above*), and Naram-Sin (*below*).

of the 'Upper Land'. This division was not really geographic (Subartu being Assyria and 'Upper Land' the Khabur and Middle Euphrates region), but rather socio-political. The *ensi* were local city rulers, while the 'lords' were the tribal chiefs of the steppes beyond the urbanised areas. This control over Upper Mesopotamia is confirmed by the spread of Naram-Sin's inscriptions. Some of them were left in Nineveh, Basetki (north of Assyria) and Diyarbakir. Moreover, one of Naram-Sin's palaces was excavated at Tell Brak, and we know that one of his daughters married the king of Urkish (Tell Mozan).

The second phase of Naram-Sin's expansion was his victorious campaign against Armanum and Ebla. This expedition allowed him to conquer the Amanus (the 'cedar wood') and the Upper Sea. The sources emphatically describe Ebla's destruction as an unprecedented feat. Knowing the wealth of Ebla, this celebratory tone is understandable. However, the Ebla destroyed by Naram-Sin was not the Ebla of Palace G, but the one built immediately after. Summarising Naram-Sin's conquest, he essentially managed to conquer the area from the Euphrates delta to Ullisum (maybe Ullaza, in northern Lebanon) and the Upper Sea.

After Naram-Sin, the empire managed to survive, but began to decrease in size. The date formulas of Shar-kali-sharri attest his wars against Elam, Gutium (Luristan, where one of his inscriptions was found) and the Martu (on the Bishri Mountain). The Sumerian King List places the empire's crisis after Shar-kali-sharri's reign, describing a chaotic phase in terms of rulers and control over the area ('Who was king? Who was not king?'). However, the Akkadian king Shu-Turul is attested shortly after in the Upper Euphrates region, since one of his inscriptions has been found near Samsat. The empire really ended with the arrival of the Gutians. Nonetheless, thanks to its solid structure, largely based on regional control (through strongholds) rather than territorial conquests, the empire managed to maintain a considerable extension up until its final collapse.

2 The structure and administration of the Akkadian empire

The term 'empire' may be misleading when trying to define the territories controlled by the kings of Akkad, especially when comparing it to the territorial empires of the following periods. However, Akkad's imperial ideology was already strong and consistent. The god Enlil and the other gods 'gave' the world's dominion (as far as the seas surrounding it) to the kings of Akkad. However, the actual realisation of this empire was more complicated. The Akkadian empire constituted the first attempt to exercise political control over an extended and diversified territory, with significant linguistic, political, demographic and environmental differences. The composite character of the empire caused more problems than its mere extension. This was a completely different situation than the one of contemporary Egypt. At that time, Egypt was a unified territory with a more homogeneous linguistic, cultural and environmental background.

The most important factor in the formation of the Akkadian empire was military intervention. As a result of that, the king came to be described as a strong and victorious ruler, one that 'has neither equals nor rivals'. Wars were not seen as the result of conflicts between city-gods anymore, but as concrete expressions of the heroism of the king. This aspect of kingship probably finds its roots in the north, in its Semitic background. However, it caused several ideological and religious problems for the Sumerian cities in the south, which saw this self-representation of the Akkadian kings as impious and arrogant.

This change in the ideology of kingship peaked with the deification of Naram-Sin both in his titles and his official iconography. Apart from proclaiming himself a 'strong king' (just like Sargon before him), Naram-Sin also called himself 'god of the land'. He thus became a sort of protective deity that did not replace the traditional gods, but aimed to stand alongside them. This drastic change led to a profound revolution of traditional Sumerian values. This would be attested in later sources, which describe Naram-Sin in a negative light (unlike Sargon), calling him an impious king. He was seen as a ruler who took decisions without consulting the gods, thus causing his own inevitable fall. However, the Sumerian kings would eventually implement (cultically, rather than heroically) Naram-Sin's innovative ideology of kingship for themselves. This proves that it was actually a successful strategy.

A different problem from the territorial expansion of the empire was its administration. In this regard, it is necessary to divide the empire into two parts: the centre (from the area slightly north of Akkad to the Persian Gulf) and the periphery. In the centre, Akkadian control was exercised in a compact, yet indirect way. The administration of cities was left in the hands of the local *ensi*. These were under the authority of the king of Akkad, but held a certain degree of autonomy. It is probable that some cities were ruled by an Akkadian *ensi* appointed by the king, while other cities continued to be ruled by a local *ensi*.

In both cases, local dynasties continued to exist. In fact, unlike the following Ur III period, the *ensi* were not yet governors, but were still rulers dependent on Akkadian support and approval. The difficult relations between Akkadian kings and local rulers are visible both on a technical and administrative level and on an ideological and religious one. In terms of administration, there was undoubtedly an Akkadian influence on the economy. The empire's acquisition of new territories and its control of fertile fields in the south, taking these lands away from the temples, initiated a unifying process under the king's authority. This process of unification was further supported by the use of the large number of war prisoners in activities under direct imperial control.

On a religious level, there was a marked contrast between north and south in this period. The new deification of the king and the role of the goddess of Akkad, Ishtar, characterised the north. On the contrary, the south was still centred on the authority of city-gods and of the supreme Sumerian deity, Enlil, god of Nippur. The kings of Akkad paid considerable attention to Enlil and Nippur. The god featured in a prominent position in royal titles. Moreover, the Ekur was restored and enlarged and many monuments celebrating Akkadian victories were left there. These attempts by Sargon and his successors were clearly aimed at inserting their ideology within the political and religious framework of Sumer. This allowed the establishment of a privileged relationship with the head of the Sumerian pantheon, a gesture that automatically placed the Akkadian kings above the other local deities.

The Akkadian kings also took care of their relationships with local city-gods, but in other ways. In this regard, the case of Enheduanna is important as well as symbolic. Enheduanna was Sargon's daughter. She was chosen by her father to become priestess of the city-god of Ur, Nanna-Sin. The presence of an Akkadian priestess from the royal family of Akkad in the prestigious southern city of Ur was probably mirrored by the installation of a Sumerian priestess in the temple of Ishtar in Akkad. These appointments were aimed at uniting the north and the south. However, deities could not be easily identified in other languages (such as the Sumerian Inanna and the Akkadian Ishtar). This problem led to brief periods of rejection in several cities. Nonetheless, in the long run, this strategy would eventually prove to be a winning one (though more for cultural than political reasons). It facilitated the acceptance of a syncretism between the two cultures and the development of a wide network of identifications between them.

The regions outside the centre of the empire, whose collaboration was essential for the celebration of the empire's size, required a different strategy. The periphery was not easy to control either directly or homogeneously. On a political level, it was too vast and varied, with urban centres located in the middle of steppes, mountains and other areas with limited agricultural and demographic concentrations. Therefore, Akkad's interest in the periphery was mainly commercial. This interest was secured through treaties with states too strong to be subdued (such as in the case of Elam), or through the appointment of a local *ensi* (such as the *šakanakku* of Mari). Another possibility was the creation of Akkadian strongholds in foreign territories, such as Naram-Sin's palace at Nagar (Tell Brak). This was probably not the only palace built by Akkadian rulers, and was possibly the most suitable way to keep a vast commercial network under control.

As it can be seen, the Akkadian empire was halfway between the system that supported trade in the Uruk phase, and the more compact and territorial type of organisation that will be encountered with the Third Dynasty of Ur. The Akkadian approach, however, gave the centre of the empire, especially Sumer, too many opportunities to rebel and oppose its religious innovations. Similarly, it gave too much autonomy to the states in the periphery, which should have remained subordinate to the Akkadian strongholds.

3 Demography and administration

Akkad, capital of the Akkadian empire, has never been identified (suggestions on its location vary from the area of Baghdad to the one of Samarra). It therefore remains unexcavated. This fact makes the study of the culture and organisation of the Akkadian empire very difficult. The unavailability of its archives forces us to rely on other archives found elsewhere (Umma, the Diyala region and Gasur in Assyria). Additionally, there are the few buildings attributed with certainty to the kings of Akkad, such as Naram-Sin's palace in Tell Brak. Compared to the Early Dynastic III period, the distribution of Lower Mesopotamian settlements did not undergo significant changes (Figure 8.3). Consequently, the political changes characterising the rise of this new dynasty did not correspond to significant demographic and economic changes in the area. The latter would experience more significant changes with the crisis of the empire.

In the past, Sargon of Akkad's rise was believed to have been the result of the affirmation of Semitic culture over Sumerian culture. Some scholars even suggested an invasion of Semitic people, coming from their 'primitive seat' in the middle of the Syro-Arabian desert, as the reason for Sargon's success. However, these interpretations have now been replaced by our increased knowledge of the period and a more reliable methodology. We know now that Semitic people were already present in Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic period. Therefore, they did not settle in the region after a mass immigration. Regarding conflicts between cities, it has also been convincingly argued that ethnic differences did not play a significant role. Consequently, there were no ethnic conflicts in Mesopotamia and Sargon was not an advocate of Semitic people fighting against the Sumerians.

It is true, however, that the rise to power of the northern city of Akkad, the centre of a predominantly Semitic population, radically changed the overall situation in the area. Royal inscriptions and administrative texts were now written in Akkadian, rather than (or alongside) Sumerian. The north had its own scribal traditions (the so-called 'Kish tradition'). Therefore, the use of its own language in the imperial administration contributed to the diffusion of its practices, and maybe even its scribes. Moreover, each political change was closely linked to wider trends of the period. The first one was an environmental one. The shift of the political centre to the north was linked to the desire to control water resources. As Upper Mesopotamia became more densely populated and exploited, so the areas further south experienced considerable difficulties. The second tendency was ethno-linguistic. Sumerian, which had been the most influential language for over a millennium, was an isolated linguistic group. On the contrary, Akkadian belonged to the same linguistic group as the languages spoken from Upper Mesopotamia to Syria, not to mention the Arabian Peninsula (for which, however, we do not have any written evidence for this phase). These processes of integration and diffusion, as well as the movement of people, gradually benefited those cultures that could more easily assimilate new immigrating groups. This was the case of the Akkadians, who managed to include those groups coming from the west.

In this regard, then, the rise of Akkad had a cumulative effect. Sargon's conquest of the south was followed by a process of colonisation. This led to the appointment of Akkadian officials to rule several cities and to the movement of farmers and potential tenants to Sumerian territories. The use of another language was only one aspect of the problem. There were also a wide range of customs and legal traditions brought from Akkad, especially regarding property and land management. For this reason, there are more attestations concerning family and royal properties in this period and fewer concerning temple properties (Figure 8.4). As already attested in the Early Dynastic period (also in the south, at Fara), family property was probably more established in the north. In fact, in the north, social structures were more centred on kinship and less subject to the overpowering influence of temples, whose authority was closely linked to the first urbanisation.

Regarding royal land, the Akkadian kings tried to accumulate territories to place them under direct Akkadian control. An important document in this regard is the so-called Obelisk of Manishtusu. The text was written like a typical contract of the period, with a long list of sellers, witnesses and other

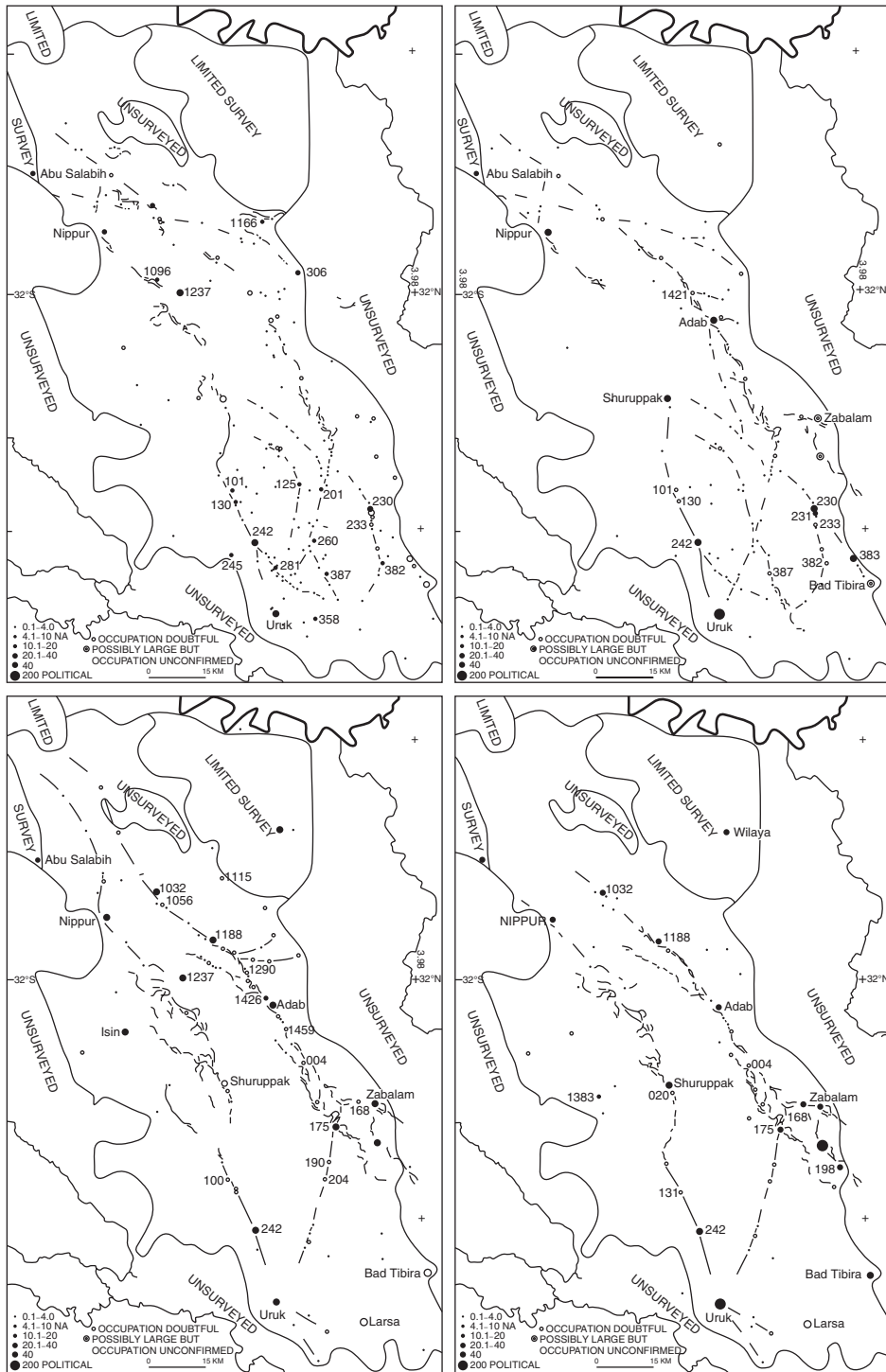


Figure 8.3 Occupation of Lower Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC. Above, left: Jemdet Nasr period; Above, right: Early Dynastic I; Below, left: Early Dynastic II and III; Below, right: Akkadian period.

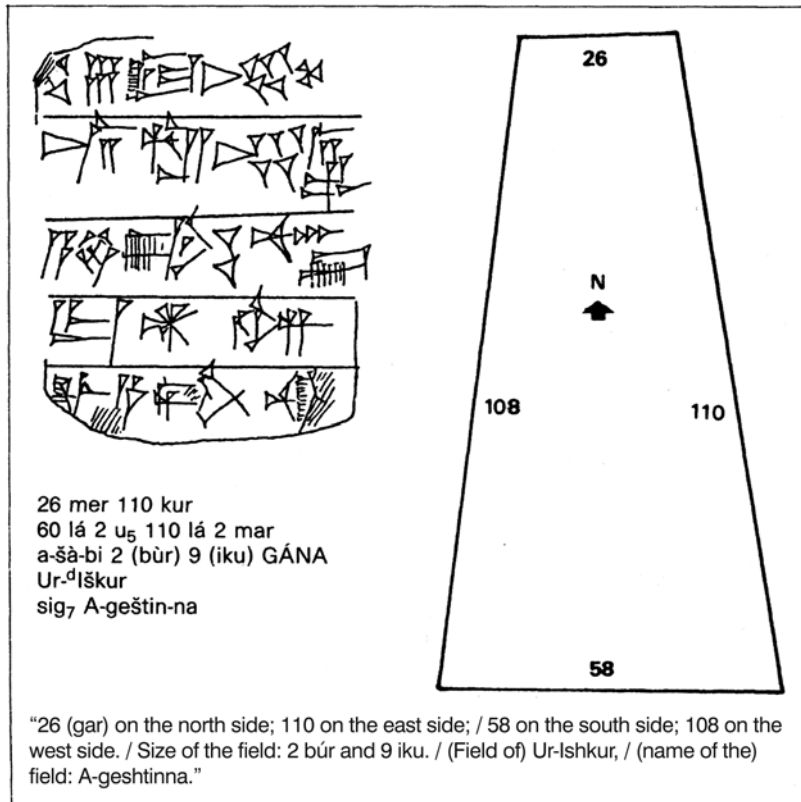


Figure 8.4 Agriculture in the Akkadian period: tablet recording the measurements of a field and its reconstruction.

people involved in the transaction. The Obelisk records the king's purchase of a large number of lands. These amounted to more than 2,300 hectares (an incredible amount for that period) in the Mesopotamian region of Marad. On top of these lands bought through private transactions, there were further lands acquired militarily, allowing the royal family to own a large amount of land outside the control of temples. However, despite being politically subordinate to the palace, the latter managed to remain autonomous.

Due to the spread of northern practices, various aspects of the administration – from the various functions within the system to the types of documents and their bureaucratic terminology – underwent considerable changes. Despite the fact that Sumerian and Semitic features coexisted, local varieties in writing and in the shape of the tablets continued to exist. However, an 'imperial' kind of writing gradually became more widespread, due to its homogeneity, elegance and accuracy. This marked the beginning of a Lower Mesopotamian scribal and administrative tradition, which would peak in the Neo-Sumerian period, as a result of another political unification of the area (the Third Dynasty of Ur).

4 Trade and the empire's periphery

In terms of conquests, Sargon personally led his army to Tuttul on one side and the Persian Gulf on the other. Similarly, Naram-Sin reached Ebla (if not even the Mediterranean) and Magan. Comparing the expansion previously achieved through conflicts between neighbouring states with that of the Akkadian

empire, it is undeniable that the latter was of a significantly larger scale. Admittedly, early trade and the commercial networks of the Sumerian cities of the Early Dynastic period were already quite far-reaching. These interactions were, however, based more on the presence of intermediary commercial junctions along trade routes. This kind of exchange took longer and was much more expensive. On the other hand, the Akkadian kings attempted to make their political and military plans coincide with their commercial interests. They therefore found a way to directly reach the areas providing raw materials, without relying too much on intermediaries.

In order to achieve this, the Akkadian kings had to take over the main commercial networks of the Near East. Apart from the Lower Mesopotamian one, there were those controlled by Mari and Ebla in the west, by Elam in the Iranian plateau and the ones in the Persian Gulf, centred on the port of Dilmun. The Akkadian military expeditions outside Mesopotamia targeted precisely these three areas. For Sargon, the conquest of Lower Mesopotamia was still mainly a political and military conquest, while commercial activities were pursued either by the Akkadians themselves (in the west), or their partners (in the east).

Manishtusu and Naram-Sin effectively changed this strategy. They managed to take over the commercial networks of Ebla, Elam and, in a less definite way, also Magan (which provided a considerable booty, but the region was left unconquered). To a certain extent, however, the Akkadian takeover of these commercial networks caused their decline. The direct access to resources through plunder and conquest could have drastically damaged commercial networks. The Mesopotamian ideal considered everything outside of it as an uncivilised and deserted source of raw materials at its disposal. This ideal, however, did not take into account the fact that these areas had their own systems to extract materials, process them and exchange them, as well as their own commercial strategies and income.

Consequently, the destruction of Ebla significantly affected the political structure of northern Syria, leading to a higher degree of fragmentation. At the same time, Akkad did not manage to fully control its commercial networks. The conquest of Susiana also altered the confederate structure of the Elamite state. This political change hindered the inflow of commodities from north-eastern Iran, in particular lapis lazuli from Afghanistan and tin from Central Asia. As a result, these materials reached Mesopotamia in smaller quantities and with more difficulties than in the Early Dynastic period.

Unfortunately, the centre of the Elamite confederation, the Awan region, from which the Elamite royal family took its name, has not yet been located. On the upside, other Elamite centres, such as Susa (which was in close contact with Mesopotamia) and Anshan (Tall-i Malyan), have been located. Overall, the Elamite state included a large part of Iran and interacted with other developed centres located further east, such as Tepe Yahya (in the land of Barahshi/Marhashi) and Shar-i Sokhta (possibly the Aratta of Sumerian myths). These were crucial commercial junctions in the network, providing tin, lapis lazuli, diorite and other semiprecious stones to the west.

Within this intricate system, Akkadian action was initially cautious, focused on Susa, and then more ambiguous, alternating military victories with treaties. It is difficult to estimate how damaging Akkadian intervention was in the area. The royal inscriptions of the kings of Akkad attest to the conquest of Elam. However, the Awan dynasty continued to rule and its kings continued to hold important titles. Even the last king of the dynasty, Puzur-Inshushinak, who ruled at the time of Shar-kali-sharri, seems to have held considerable power. During his reign, however, Awan underwent a period of crisis, which spread to the other centres of the Iranian plateau. Shahr-i-Sokhta, for instance, regressed to become a village, effectively blocking the circulation of goods from the east to the west.

The decline of Elam seems to have mirrored the collapse of Akkad. It is difficult to decide whether it was only due to internal factors, or a consequence of continuous Akkadian attacks. The populations living on the Zagros, namely, the Gutians and Lullubeans, played a significant role in this crisis. The Gutians attacked Mesopotamia as well as Elam. Therefore, Elam's decline between the Awan and the following Simash dynasty (originally from Luristan) could have been the equivalent of the Mesopotamian crisis

caused by the arrival of the Gutians. However, while Mesopotamia continued to be populated, Elam went through a phase of progressive depopulation.

In the Persian Gulf, prized by the Akkadian kings especially for the tin from Magan, the island of Dilmun seems to have been able to stay safe from violent conquests and destructions. This was precisely because of its role as a commercial junction. Dilmun, however, was a unique case. The area was unable to support itself and had to import the goods needed. The area known as Magan was influenced by the so-called Umm an-Nar culture (in Oman). Magan seems to have had frequent interactions with Mesopotamia, and for this reason Naram-Sin and his army conquered it. Meluhha, influenced by the Harappa and Mohenjo Daro cultures (from the Indus Valley), was a different case. As a source for oils, exotic animals and seashells, all commodities of minor importance, Meluhha's interaction with Mesopotamia was largely indirect. As can be seen, Anatolia, the Syrian coast, Oman, the Indus Valley, Afghanistan and Central Asia constituted a relatively integrated 'world-system'. In this regard, the more-or-less conscious strategy of the Akkadian kings to interfere with the system as a whole did not reach completion. However, considering the territories conquered and the ones that had been destroyed, the Akkadian kings managed to get quite close to their aim.

5 The artistic and literary expressions of kingship

The new image of the king as the heroic ruler naturally left a significant mark in the artistic and literary expressions of the period. The latter indicate a change towards a clearer and more conscious use of iconic and epigraphic monuments as means for propaganda and celebration of a ruler's achievements (Text 8.1). Therefore, elements already developed in the Early Dynastic period, from votive statues to victory steles,

Text 8.1 Celebrative inscriptions of the kings of Akkad

1 Inscription of Sargon (Old Babylonian copy from Nippur)

'Sargon, king of Akkad – overseer of Inanna

king of Kish – anointed of Anu

king of the land – governor of Enlil:

he defeated the city of Uruk and tore down its walls, in the battle of Uruk he won, took Lugalzaggesi king of Uruk in the course of the battle, and led him in a collar to the gate of Enlil.

Sargon, king of Akkad:

in the battle of Uruk he won, he defeated the city and destroyed its walls. He defeated E-ninmar and destroyed its walls, conquered its land from Lagash to the sea, he washed his weapons in the sea. He challenged Umma in battle, he defeated the city and destroyed its walls.

Sargon, king of the land:

Enlil gave him no rival; he gave him the Upper Sea and the Lower Sea; from the Lower Sea the sons of Akkad held the position of governors; Mari and Elam stood in front of Sargon king of the land.

Sargon, king of the land:

he restored Kish, and let them (the inhabitants) live in the city.

[Curse:] Whoever will damage this inscription: May Shamash tear out his roots and destroy his seed.

[Caption:] Inscription on the pedestal.

[Caption:] Sargon, king of the land. Lugalzaggesi king of Uruk. Month of the governor of Umma.'

2 Inscription of Rimush (Old Babylonian copy from Nippur)

‘Rimush king of Kish:

in the battle against Abalgamash king of Barahshi he won; Zahara and Elam united in battle in Barahshi, but he defeated them. He killed 16,212 men, he captured 4,216 prisoners, he captured Sidgau, governor of Barahshi, he captured Sargapi, governor of Zahara. Between Awan and Susa, in the Upper River, he heaped up a tumulus in their cities, he defeated the cities of Elam, destroyed their walls, and he uprooted the foundation of Barahshi from the people of Elam.

Rimush king of Kish:

Took over Elam according to the will of Enlil, in the third year after Enlil had granted him his kingship. Total: 9,624 men, including the fallen, including the prisoners. By Shamash and Abi I swear: I am not lying, it is true!

[Dedication:] he made this statue at the time of that battle, and dedicated it to his saviour Enlil.

[Curse:] Whoever will damage this inscription: may Enlil and Shamash tear his roots and disperse his seed.

[Caption:] Inscribed on the pedestal, on the left side.

[Curse:] Whoever will damage the name of Rimush king of Kish and will put his name on the statue of Rimush and will say “this is my statue”: may Enlil, lord of this statue, and Shamash tear out his roots, destroy his seed, refuse him a male (heir), may he not stand in front of his god.

[Dedication:] 30 minas of gold, 3600 minas of copper, 6 male slaves and (6) female slaves.

[Caption:] Inscription on a silver statue.’

3 Inscription of Naram-Sin (Old Babylonian copy from Nippur)

‘From of old, from the creation of men, no one among the kings had destroyed Armanum and Ebla. Nergal opened the way for Naram-Sin, the mighty one: he gave him Armanum and Ebla. He also gave him the Amanus, the Cedar Mountain, and the Upper Sea.

With the weapon of Dagan, the exalter of his royalty, Naram-Sin, the mighty one, defeated Armanum and Ebla, from the bank of the Euphrates to the Ullisum, the men that Dagan gave him from his hand, he smote them: they carried the basket of Abi, his god; Amanus, the Cedar Mountain, he conquered.

When Dagan judged the judgement of Naram-Sin, the mighty one, he delivered Rish-Adad, king of Armanum, into his hand and he bound him to his gate:

(then) he made a statue of diorite, and dedicated it to Enlil, (saying) thus: “Naram-Sin, the mighty one, king of the four quarters of the world, Dagan gave him Armanum and Ebla, and he captured Rish-Adad with his hand. So I dedicated a stone image to Sin.”’

4 Inscription of Naram-Sin (original, from Basekti)

‘Naram-Sin, the mighty one, king of Akkad:

when the four quarters of the world rebelled together against him, thanks to the love with which Ishtar loved him, he was victorious in nine battles in a single year, and captured the kings that had risen against him.

Since he had strengthened the roots of his city in this difficult (situation), (the inhabitants of) his city, together with Ishtar in the Eanna (Uruk), Enlil in Nippur, Dagan in Tuttul, Ninhursag in Kish, Enki in Eridu, Sin in Ur, Shamash in Sippar, Nergal in Kuta, wished him to become god of Akkad, their city, and in the middle of Akkad they built him a temple.

Whoever will damage this inscription: may Shamash, Ishtar, Nergal overseer of the king, and the totality of those gods tear out his roots, and destroy his seed.’

were remodelled as *bona fide* means of political propaganda. Many votive monuments were built not only in the Ekur of Nippur, but also in the other sanctuaries of the empire, from Sippar to Ur. Statues remained quite simple, with the king in a standing posture on a pedestal often decorated with prisoners of war or defeated enemies. The centrality of the king's image, together with the tone of his inscriptions and dedications, changed the aim of these monuments, which ceased to be the means for a ruler to worship the gods (which had been the aim of votive statues in the Early Dynastic period). Monuments therefore became a way to celebrate the victories of the king.

In victory steles, this change found even more opportunities to express the new role of the king (Figure 8.5). It may be sufficient to compare the stele of Eannatum to that of Naram-Sin to notice the shift from the centrality of the god to that of the king (with the gods only performing a symbolic role, as in Figure 8.6). Even victorious soldiers, who in the Early Dynastic period were depicted as a compact block representing the urban community, were now depicted as individuals with initiative. They were therefore similar to the king, but carved on a much smaller scale. These steles were placed in symbolic locations: either in the centre of the empire or in the main city-temples. Alternatively, they could be left on the edge of the empire, whenever the Akkadian army had reached an insurmountable natural obstacle, beyond which there was nothing left to conquer.

If royal monuments had a clear political function, smaller and more personal objects, such as the seals of Akkadian officials also reflected the new tendencies of the period. Early Dynastic seals with animal patterns (Figure 8.7) were used alongside seals decorated with the new astral deities of the Semitic north (Figure 8.8), such as Shamash and Ishtar. These deities acquired an increasingly influential role, at the expense of the former fertility and chthonic deities. The shift from decorative patterns to narrative depictions also led to the appearance of mythological scenes (which can be sometimes recognised, if they refer to attested myths). This was another innovation compared to the fixed symbolic and cultic iconography of the previous period.

A similar shift can be seen in the inscriptions left on monuments. Very few people could read these texts (namely, scribes and functionaries who were able to read), and the accessibility of the monuments themselves was precluded to the wider public. A strong feature of these texts is their propagandistic tone. However, the latter was not used as a brutal attempt at informing readers or at falsifying information, but as a means for the diffusion of the official ideology. Unfortunately, we only possess the 'tip of the iceberg' of this political propaganda, which reached the wider population in other and simpler ways (orally and ceremonially).

The inscriptions of the Akkadian kings show an increased interest in the narration of events, making the dedication of monuments a pretext for self-celebration. Some Early Dynastic texts were equally rich in narrative details (such as the stele of Eannatum). However, they were so for legal and religious reasons, namely, to explain the rightfulness of the king's actions, justifying them as a defence of the king's rights. These inscriptions were meant to become part of tradition. They portrayed the kings' actions as guaranteed and stimulated through the support of the gods, and therefore made on behalf of the god. On the contrary, Akkadian narrative inscriptions had a completely different tone. They emphasised the central role of the king as the initiator of interventions and as a strong, unrivalled and unprecedented ruler.

The repercussions of this new ideology of kingship are much more difficult to detect in literary texts. Most of these texts were written much later, and the editions that have reached us are the result of changes responding to the tendencies of the following periods. The emergence of a mythical iconography on Akkadian seals has led to the assumption of the central role of this period for the elaboration and narration of myths. This is due to the similarity between the heroic image of the Akkadian king and analogous ideas impersonated by mythical heroes such as Gilgamesh and Enmerkar. The theme of the conflict between north and south can be found in the war between Gilgamesh of Uruk and Agga of Kish. Similarly, military and commercial expeditions in distant lands are attested to in the journey of Enmerkar to Aratta and Gilgamesh to the cedar forest. Even the problem of the partial divinity and problematic mortality of the king are issues attested in these myths.