

quickly reasserted themselves. Zimri-Lim, an Amorite upstart, chased Yasmah-Addu from Mari, while Ishme-Dagan lost control over his father's kingdom except for Ekallatum and Assur. Northern Syria became a patchwork of small independent states, while in the south Eshnunna picked up the pieces nearby. Some of the histories of the new states can still be written because Mari kept a close watch on developments, but also because some of the local kings maintained court bureaucracies and actively communicated with one another by letter. The politically divided region was open to attacks from Eshnunna, Elam, and Babylon, whose kings could make or break local rulers. Political intrigues and military conflicts were numerous and complicated. Zimri-Lim of Mari was the most powerful ruler of the area but too geographically marginal to control everything that happened. While local dynasties existed throughout Upper Mesopotamia, some kings, such as the ruler of Andariq, exercised strong influence over their neighbors, sometimes imposing rulers on their thrones. The palaces in these cities continued to dominate the economy and maintained a centralized administration. By 1720, northern Mesopotamia became unable to sustain this lifestyle, however. Many cities were abandoned for reasons we can only suspect. Possibly a mixture of popular opposition to the court's domination and changes in rainfall patterns led to a shift to a semi-nomadic life in villages and in the steppe. With the end of the palaces, the historical record disappeared.

6.2 Hammurabi's Babylon

During the last decades of Shamshi-Adad's life, a man who would become one of the most famous kings of Mesopotamian history occupied the throne at Babylon: Hammurabi. Babylon had existed for several centuries, known from the Old Akkadian period on, and Hammurabi's predecessors had managed gradually to create a state incorporating previously independent northern cities, such as Sippar, Kish, Dilbat, and Marad. But it was hemmed in by the more prominent states of Eshnunna, Larsa, and the Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia. When Hammurabi became king in 1792, Rim-Sin had just unified the entirety of southern Babylonia while Shamshi-Adad reigned supreme in the north. Hammurabi may at first have even owed allegiance to Shamshi-Adad: a contract drawn up at Sippar in 1782 contains oaths to both kings, which points to Shamshi-Adad's authority there. Hammurabi ushered in what we now call the "Old Babylonian period," the beginning of Babylon's political dominance over southern Mesopotamia for the next 1,500 years (for a list of Old Babylonian kings, see Section 8 of the King Lists at the end of the book).

In these extremely volatile times, the young king could not avoid being drawn into regional conflicts. His early year names mention campaigns against all of his powerful neighbors, but the results of those were ambiguous. Most of Hammurabi's attention seems to have been devoted to the internal development of his state, mainly digging canals and fortifying cities. When he decided to act on a wide scale, his military movements were swift and devastating, and he used his

considerable diplomatic skills with great effect as well. At first using troops from allies such as Mari, he turned against those who earlier helped him once he was strong enough. The diplomatic correspondence from Mari shows how he first used diplomacy, then military action, to reach his goals (see document 6.1). In just five years, from 1766 to 1761, Hammurabi established his full dominance over southern Mesopotamia, after the death of Shamshi-Adad and when Rim-Sin was an old man. He defeated Elam, Larsa, Eshnunna, and Mari in quick succession, and incorporated Larsa and the Middle Euphrates area up to Mari into the Babylonian state. Eshnunna he left without a leader, while he blocked Elam's ability to exercise any influence over Mesopotamia. The only area of concern remained northern Mesopotamia, where Hammurabi campaigned twice in later years without fully establishing control. There is no doubt, however, that he was the strongest king in Mesopotamia. After these events, he could proclaim himself "the king who made the four quarters of the earth obedient."³

Document 6.1 *Letters to Zimri-Lim of Mari regarding Hammurabi and Eshnunna*

As a colleague and oftentimes ally of Hammurabi of Babylon, Zimri-Lim of Mari wanted to remain informed about the latter's interactions with other states. He knew well that alliances were ephemeral and that all leading kings of the time sought to strengthen their positions by seeking outside support. Here are two examples of letters Yarim-Addu, who was stationed in Babylon, sent to his master about Hammurabi's search for a treaty with Silli-Sin of Eshnunna, a king whom Zimri-Lim also courted for an alliance. Yarim-Addu reports that Silli-Sin was reluctant to accept Hammurabi's offer and that Hammurabi had started direct talks with Elam in a possible move against Eshnunna. We know that in the end Hammurabi succeeded in forming his alliance and that he married Silli-Sin's daughter. But soon afterwards he marched against Eshnunna and defeated it in 1762.

Tell my Lord (Zimri-Lim); Yarim-Addu, your servant, says:
I have written to my Lord about the instructions regarding the man of Eshnunna that Hammurabi issued to []. When Hammurabi was in Borsippa messengers of the man of Eshnunna came to him, but he did not see them. Only on the second day they met with him. After having them wait a night, he gave an answer to their news. He gave instructions to [Sin-], son of Kakkaruqqum and Mar[duk-mushallim, son of], and he sent them along. They took with them the small tablet (i.e., draft treaty), and they will make the man of Eshnunna accept it. [] will go and Hammurabi will accept it. After they will have accepted the small tablet, Hammurabi will send a large tablet, that is a treaty tablet, to the man of Eshnunna, and he will make him swear to it. The man of Eshnunna will send the large tablet, the treaty tablet, back to Hammurabi and they will establish an alliance. The alliance between Hammurabi and the man of Eshnunna is concluded or will be so very soon, that is certain. At this moment the answer to the diplomatic mission of Sin-[]

and Marduk-mushallim has not yet arrived from Eshnunna. I cannot report on it for my lord. After this letter I will write to my lord all the news that reaches me from Eshnunna.

The letter continues with news about Larsa and Andariq.

Translation after Charpin 1988, volume 1, part 2: 179–82.

Tell my Lord (Zimri-Lim); Yarim-Addu, your servant, says:

I have written earlier to my Lord that the words of Hammurabi were secret. Hammurabi has renewed frank conversations with the ruler of Elam as he did before. Elamite messengers who have come from the ruler of Elam to Hammurabi are staying at the entrance of his palace right now. After the ruler of Elam had given them his instructions they were escorted from Susa to Der of the god Ishtaran. The man of Der received them and has sent them under escort to Malgium, and the man of Malgium was supposed to give them an escort to Babylon. But the army of Eshnunna barred their way and they were unable to enter (the territory). Hammurabi heard that the army of Eshnunna blocked the roads. He no longer sends regular missions to Elam via Malgium and Der, as he did before. But there are open areas in the land Eshnunna and his couriers go to the ruler of Elam through these areas. The message from the ruler of Elam has not yet reached him.

The letter continues with news about Malgium and about Ishme-Dagan of the Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia.

Finally, regarding the small treaty tablet that Hammurabi previously sent to the king of Eshnunna, Silli-Sin. Silli-Sin continues to answer with a refusal and he has not concluded a treaty with Hammurabi.

Translation after Charpin 1988, volume 1, part 2: 182–4.

His inscriptions make clear, however, that the core of his state was Babylonia. Many of the earlier city-states there and their cults received the benefit of Hammurabi's rule. It is in this region that we can study his style of government: as ruler he concerned himself with the smallest detail. Due to extensive later rebuilding and the recent rise of the water table, the city of Babylon itself is virtually unknown archaeologically for this period, and only a handful of tablets from it have survived. Our information derives primarily from other cities, where royal agents represented Babylon's interests. In Larsa, for instance, these men were Sin-iddinam and Shamash-hazir, and some two hundred letters the king wrote to them are preserved. These treat matters of seemingly little importance, for example:

To Shamash-hazir say, thus speaks Hammurabi: "From the fields that belong to the palace give one that measures one hectare (2.47 acres) near the gate of Larsa, a fallow field that is of good quality and lies near water, to Sin-imguranni the seal-cutter."⁴

This concern perhaps does not fit our image of a great ruler, but well reflects the ideology of kingship at the time. The king was a shepherd and a farmer. He

had to take care of his people, providing them with fields for their sustenance and making these fields fertile through irrigation projects. The people expected such a level of concern from him.

The same ideology was expressed repeatedly in the introduction and conclusion of his most famous monument, Hammurabi's law code. He stated there:

I am indeed the shepherd who brings peace, whose scepter is just. My benevolent shade was spread over my city, I held the people of the lands of Sumer and Akkad safely on my lap.

The function of the law code itself has been much discussed, but there is now consensus that the modern designation of it is wrong: it is not a code of law but a monument presenting Hammurabi as an exemplary king of justice (see debate 6.1). The text is best known to us from a black basalt stele almost fully covered with an inscription (see figure 6.2). Framed between a prologue and epilogue are listed some three hundred statements, all structured on the same pattern: "if . . . , then . . ." For example, "If a man commits a robbery and is caught, that man will be killed" (§ 22). While dealing with many areas of life, the entries do not, by far, cover all possible crimes, and there are even some contradictions. Moreover, the many legal documents of the period, including records of law cases, never make reference to the code. Instead of a list of legal precepts, the entire monument is a vivid expression of Hammurabi as a king who provides justice in his land. He said himself:

May any wronged man who has a case come before my statue as king of justice, and may he have my inscribed stele read aloud to him. May he hear my precious words and may my stele clarify his case for him. May he examine his lawsuit and may he calm his (troubled) heart. May he say: "Hammurabi . . . provided just ways for the land."⁵

To prove his ability to guarantee justice, Hammurabi listed these three hundred or so cases, and urged future kings to study and follow his example.

Notwithstanding this, the code's contents provide insights into Babylonian society at the time. It demonstrates a social hierarchy with a tripartite structure of free man (Akkadian *awilum*), dependent (*mushkenum*), and slave (*wardum*). Punishments varied according to the status of the victim and the perpetrator of a crime: injuring a free man led to a harsher penalty than injuring a dependent. But these terms were not absolute, often defining someone's position in relationship to another. A high court official was still a "slave" to the king. The status of the intermediate group of dependents (*mushkenum*) is most difficult to define. The term could indicate a relationship to the palace or to another person, but we do not understand exactly what was the basis or degree of dependence. The structure of society had changed from the third millennium, partly through the process of "privatization" described in the previous chapter. Full-time palace dependents were rare and contract labor provided most services. Hence the dependent class of



Figure 6.2 The stele of Hammurabi. The 2.25 meter (7.2 foot) high basalt monolith is fully inscribed with a cuneiform text, except for a small scene representing the king in front of the god of justice, Shamash. The empty space on the bottom was the work of a later king who erased part of the text. The signs are carved in horizontal bands using archaizing monumental script. The stele was taken to Susa in the twelfth century where it was excavated and now it stands in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Louvre, Paris, Sb 8. Basalt. H. 2.25 m; W. 0.65 m (88.6 × 25.6 in). Credit: © RMN-Grand Palais/Franck Raux.

Hammurabi's code was often in a situation where it owed obligations to private citizens. The use of entrepreneurs to take care of palace business was a characteristic of the period, and their credit transactions led to the social disturbances described in chapter 5. Loan contracts continue to be numerous in private archives. Hammurabi and several of his successors are known to have decreed the annulment of debts several times, but the need to repeat such acts indicates their failure to rectify the situation.

By the end of his reign, Hammurabi had fundamentally altered the political landscape of Mesopotamia. Babylonia was the single great power, surrounded by weak remnants of formerly great rivals: Elam, Eshnunna, and Assur. Only in

western Syria states such as Yamkhad were unaffected by his actions. His unification of Babylonia was short-lived, however. Less than ten years after his death his son, Samsuiluna, faced major rebellions, especially in the south. There a man calling himself Rim-Sin after Larsa's last ruler was declared king of Larsa, Ur, Nippur, and other cities, while simultaneously a Rim-Anum became king at Uruk. It took Samsuiluna more than two years to defeat these and other rebels with what seem to have been ruthless military actions, although as in the past diplomacy also played a role – Rim-Anum switched sides to support Babylon. But Samsuiluna's grasp on Babylonia gradually slipped away. Texts dated with his year names disappeared from southern cities by his tenth or eleventh year. By his thirtieth year, Nippur and other middle Babylonian cities ceased to be under Babylon's control. The problems were not purely political, however. Archaeology shows that previously flourishing cities like Ur and Nippur were mostly abandoned. Segments of the population, such as the priesthood of Uruk, migrated to northern Babylonian cities. It is difficult to determine exactly what happened. Babylon's response to rebellions may have been so ferocious that the southern urban infrastructure was irreparably damaged, watercourses perhaps deflected, and agricultural fields turned into steppe. It is also possible that the policies of Hammurabi and his predecessor in the region, Rim-Sin, ultimately had a negative result. They had integrated the local economies of southern Babylonia into a system under which districts became interdependent. When the center required for the coordination of production weakened the exchanges of goods stopped, leading to an economic decline of all the regions. A vaguely known "Sealand dynasty" emerged in southern Babylonia and took over the control of several cities there, but economic and cultural activity was minimal, as far as we know, and by 1712 the region had already entered a Dark Age.

Northern Babylonia continued to flourish, however. Hammurabi had five successors who ruled uncontested for 155 years over the area that he had originally inherited as a young king, in addition to the Euphrates river valley up to Mari. Samsuiluna led military campaigns to the north and perhaps annexed the new northern state of Hana that had arisen around Terqa after Mari's end. In 1728 his troops even reached the Upper Habur and sacked Shamshi-Adad's old capital Shubat-Enlil, now again called Shehna. New opponents appeared on the scene, which indicates that the political situation was unsettled. A previously unattested group of people called Kassites became a target of Babylon's military activity. In the sixteenth century they would become rulers of Babylon.

The rapid abandonment of southern and central Babylonian cities under Samsuiluna in the mid-eighteenth century had as an unintended side effect the preservation of most of the manuscripts of Sumerian literary texts now known to us. Young men who were schooled as scribes in private houses (figure 6.3) copied these out or excerpted them, and in Ur and Nippur the remnants of their work have been excavated. Normally the tablets containing their exercises would have been recycled and their clay reused, but when scribal activity stopped, the last works were left behind. We can study the school curriculum on the basis of these exercises, including mathematics, surveying, and music. Most elaborate was the



Figure 6.3 Quiet Street at Ur. When Leonard Woolley excavated areas with private residences in Ur, he discovered a house filled with evidence of schooling in a street he named Quiet Street after a street in Bath, England. The house was very small and administrative tablets found in it reveal that priests connected to the temple of Ur resided in it. But they also taught scribal skills to neighborhood children. Credit: Courtesy of Penn Museum, image number 8838.

training in cuneiform writing and the Sumerian language. Rote learning was the norm. At first the students had to practice making single strokes with the stylus. This led to learning cuneiform signs and their readings. They memorized the signs by shape or by the sound of their pronunciation, and the order of learning was based on their increasing complexity. Then the students moved on to copying lists of Sumerian words. The lexical corpus, already known from the late Uruk period tablets, was thus a central part of the curriculum. Some major revisions occurred in this period. The lexical lists focused on the elements that made up words and the first Akkadian translations of Sumerian words started to appear. Grammar was taught similarly by repeating the paradigms of nouns and verbs in different forms.

The students learned syntax by writing out actual Sumerian compositions, chosen for their grammatical complexity. Thus the study of certain Ur III royal hymns was introduced at this time. Finally, the training culminated with the copying out of passages from the classics of Sumerian literature. A wide variety of literary genres are represented: myths, hymns, proverbs, literary letters, and others. The student exercises are often the only manuscripts we have of these texts,

whose original date of composition is unknown. The court's patronage is clear: many of the compositions were intended to glorify the living king or his distant ancestors. That message is most obvious in the royal hymns and the accounts of legendary rulers. The courts of the early second millennium continued the Ur III tradition of glorifying the king with hymnic songs. They portrayed him in superhuman terms and thus perpetuated the ideology that saw him as a divinity. Similar ideas were expressed in a cycle of stories concerning the legendary rulers of Uruk: Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgamesh. Part-human, part-divine, they were considered to be the ancestors of the Ur III kings and the creation of the tales in that court seems likely. Their popularity in the early second millennium suggests that the ideals of kingship displayed there were still alive.

Royal hymns dedicated to such early second-millennium kings as Rim-Sin demonstrate the ability of some scribes to compose intricate texts in the Sumerian language, which probably was no longer spoken at the time. It is likely that other genres of literature were also composed during these centuries, while earlier compositions were recorded in a fixed form. The intensity of scribal activity in the Sumerian language may have resulted from the fact that the language was under threat: oral preservation was no longer guaranteed, so written versions with explicit indication of all the grammatical elements were needed. The primary writers of the extant manuscripts were boys trained to compose contracts and administrative accounts made up almost entirely of stock phrases. Their education went beyond the skills they would need on a daily basis. They were trained in the private houses of learned men, who each worked with a group of boys assisted by a student helper. The teachers were probably affiliated with the temples and, when Sumerian texts needed to be composed for such occasions as a royal visit, they most likely were the authors.

Also in northern Babylonia literate people studied Sumerian literature. The majority of compositions found there are of a liturgical nature and often written out more syllabically than in the south. Scribal skills were not necessarily inferior, however. Models from Babylonia inspired the numerous letters written throughout the Near East. The courts were important patrons of scribes, and schooling may have been centralized in the palaces rather than in private houses of temple affiliates. The situation in Babylon itself is not known, as we do not have access to archaeological remains of the period. Nevertheless, literature in the Babylonian language, as well as in Sumerian, continued to be composed. Some of the royal inscriptions of Samsuiluna, including bilingual Sumerian–Akkadian examples, are of a high literary quality. This was also the first significant period of literary composition in the Akkadian language. Certain texts that have a long history in Mesopotamia, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* or the *Flood Story*, are first attested in Old Babylonian times, and many Akkadian hymns and incantations of this period are known. Their mood reflected the political situation of the times: uncertainty and violence are dominant themes. The writers of these texts were not spared the difficulties that confronted the inhabitants of the Old Babylonian state.

At this time we find the first extensive written documentation of a science for which Babylonia was famous in the ancient world: mathematics. From the

beginning of writing the administrators of Babylonia showed their mathematical abilities when measuring fields, harvests, numbers of bricks, volumes of earth, and many other things that were of importance to bureaucrats. The tools to calculate these had to be taught but, as with literature, the skills displayed in the school texts show a much higher level than was needed in daily practice. At first the students repeatedly copied out standard lists of capacity, weight, area and length, division and multiplication. Their most challenging tasks were formulated as word problems, but these were not really of great practical value even if their wording related to actual accounting tasks. For instance, the exercise provided the size of a grain pile and asked how one could calculate the contents, or it gave the circumference and the slope of a heap of grain in order to calculate its height:

A heap. The circumference is 30. In 1 cubit the slope is 0;15. What is the height? You: Double 0;15, the slope. You will see 0;30. Take the reciprocal of 0;30. You will see 2. Multiply 0;30 the circumference, by 2. You will see 1, : the height. <This is> the method.⁶

The knowledge of mathematics displayed in such texts is very sophisticated, and based on algebraic logic. For example, the Babylonians had calculated the square root of 2 accurately, and applied it in geometric calculations (see figure 6.4). They were aware of the principles underlying the Pythagorean theorem that in a right-angled triangle the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sums of the squares of the other sides. The basis of most of these calculations was information provided in tables, listing numbers in their sexagesimal notation and their reciprocals (that is, 60 divided by that number), and their creation is one of the many accomplishments of the Babylonian schools.

The political supremacy of Babylon shifted the religious focus of the region to that city. Kings Hammurabi and Samsuiluna favored Babylon's patron deity Marduk. He was integrated in the Sumerian pantheon of Nippur by making him the son of Ea, himself the god of Eridu in the extreme south. While Marduk's cult predominated only in the region surrounding Babylon at that time, a few centuries later it would become the primary cult of Babylonia. The popularity of northern Babylonian deities increased and people throughout Babylonia adopted them as their personal gods. Thus in the centuries of the Old Babylonian dynasty, many of the cultural elements characteristic of the Near East in the second half of the second millennium were developed, and the political, religious, and cultural focus of Babylonia shifted permanently to its northern part.

The end of this period is something of a mystery. Each one of Hammurabi's successors ruled for more than two decades, a situation that is usually indicative of political stability. They kept northern Babylonia unified for 155 years, longer than the entire Ur III period, for example. The written evidence from the region shows a continuation of administrative and economic practices, and there are no indications of a weakening of the Old Babylonian state. Yet it existed in a void, surrounded by sparsely inhabited regions. The only political powers equal to it were located at a great distance in northwestern Syria (Yamkhad) and in Anatolia



Figure 6.4 Old Babylonian mathematical tablet. On this round school tablet is a picture of a square with the diagonals drawn in. On one side of the square is written the number 30, along one of the diagonals is the number 1,24,51,10 and below it is 42,25,35. In the Babylonian sexagesimal system the bottom number equals 30 times the one on top. A square with sides 30 long has diagonals of the length 42,25,35. The number above it 1,24,51,10 closely approximates the square root of 2, which shows that the Babylonians were aware of the principles underlying the later Pythagorean theorem. Credit: Courtesy The Yale Babylonian Collection (YBC 7289).

(Old Hittite Kingdom). Conflict between those states ultimately affected Babylon. In 1595, King Mursili of the Hittites, after a campaign in northern Syria, led his troops down the Euphrates River, seemingly without much resistance. He sacked the city of Babylon, ending its famous dynasty, and left the region leaderless.

6.3 The Old Hittite Kingdom

Central Anatolia became a pivotal player in the history of the Near East at this time. The appearance of a Hittite army in the heartland of Mesopotamia was the result of a relatively short process of centralization of power and the creation of an entity we now call the Old Hittite Kingdom. Anatolia's earlier history is mostly shrouded in mystery: there are no written sources until the Old Kingdom period, and our information for those early centuries of the second millennium derives solely from the colonies of Assyrian merchants in the region. These sources depict a network of small kingdoms, often in conflict with one another, and with