

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

The Ur III, Old Babylonian, and Kassite Empires

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1 Introduction

One common aspect characterizes Babylonia throughout 900 years of historical, political, economic, and cultural history and thus forms a kind of unifying continuity. This is a certain form of political organization, namely an imperial structure. Three different terms indicate the local origins of the major historical phases between c.2100 and 1200 BC, each of which had its geographical starting point in Babylonia. The term “Ur III” designates an intra-urban political development in the city of Ur itself which was the third dynasty that arose there in antiquity. The term “Old-Babylonian” refers to a chronological and regional development in Babylonia as well as a stage in the development of the Babylonian language. The expression “Kassite” refers above all to a group of people that had migrated from the Zagros region in modern-day Iran into Babylonia. Despite all their differences, these chronological periods and cultural phenomena all share an imperial structure that served as a unifying theme throughout this long period in Babylonian history.

2 The Empire: Characteristics and Implications

The existence of empires illustrates the power as well as the necessity of a ruling elite to secure dominance via supra-regional expansion. The main spatial characteristic of an empire is its supra-regional geographical extent – i.e., its spatial

extension beyond a local center or core region in which a ruling elite exercised power. Politically speaking, the empire is expressed through the domination by one political elite of other ruling elites, whether near or far. The forms and scales of domination and control, as well as the degree of political autonomy amongst local elites within dominated areas, varied considerably in this process of empire formation. Above and beyond the establishment of a local and regional rulership, the building of an empire necessitated strong political and ideological signs that made the legitimacy of the ruling order obvious to all concerned – the people who identified with the dynasty as well as, if not even more so, those of the “other” – i.e., the dominated social and cultural entities. Economically, an empire aimed at controlling the resources of the areas and societies that it dominated. Socially and culturally, the creation of an empire thus entailed contact and/or confrontation with people belonging to the “other,” and thus to different traditions of social life, political organization, political leadership, religion, value systems, and self- and world-views.

3 Ur III: How the Empire Came Into Being, Developed, Functioned, and Collapsed

The founder of the new Dynasty of Ur and the person who laid the foundations for the Ur III empire was Ur-Nammu. A man of high military rank, Ur-Nammu was installed as governor of Ur by his brother, Utu-hegal, general as well as king of the neighboring city of Uruk and of the land of Sumer. From this military position, Ur-Nammu succeeded in becoming king of Ur. Many of the details of his career are unknown, but it is clear that the rise of Ur-Nammu meant at the same time the disempowerment of his brother at Uruk. Ur-Nammu seems to have had a well-functioning army at his disposal. According to his own inscriptions, Ur-Nammu succeeded in taking over not just Ur and Uruk but also northern Babylonia, particularly the area around Nippur and as far north as the Diyala region, thus assuming rulership over Sumer and Akkad (southern and northern Babylonia) and its eastern neighbor Elam. He extended his rule far beyond the area that his brother, as “king of Uruk and Sumer,” had governed, and created a supra-regional sphere of influence beyond the core area of Ur and Uruk, a fact reflected in his title “king of Sumer and Akkad.” Notwithstanding the extension of this polity, the most important centers remained in the south, the core of Ur-Nammu’s kingdom. Ur became the capital and at the same time one of the major religious centers in Sumer, just as important as Nippur in northern Babylonia. The new king kept close ties with Uruk, even calling himself “brother of Gilgamesh,” the legendary king of Uruk.

Unsurprisingly for a dynasty, Ur-Nammu’s successor was his son Shulgi. Shulgi’s foreign policy built on the aims of his father by enlarging the sphere of Ur’s political influence. Campaigns led Shulgi to the north and northwest of his

father's territory as far as northern Iraq and western Iran. The advantage of controlling these territories was obvious – these were the areas where the Mesopotamian south, poor in natural resources, could satisfy its needs and safeguard its long-distance trade with adjacent regions. Shulgi's enlargement of the Ur III sphere of influence is reflected in his titles. Whereas his father called himself "king of Sumer and Akkad," Shulgi used both this title and "king of the four quarters (of the world)," signifying that his power extended to Assyria in the north, Mari in the west, and Tell Brak and the Khabur-region to the northwest of Mesopotamia. Shulgi's son Amar-Suena and Amar-Suena's son Shu-Suen preserved the territorial achievements of their fathers and forefathers, but did not expand the territory of the dynasty. The last king of the Ur III Dynasty, Ibbi-Suen, also tried to preserve the empire, unfortunately enjoying less success than his predecessors. A severe economic crisis during his reign seems to have accelerated a process of decay that eventually led to the demise of the Ur III Dynasty and empire, roughly a century after Ur-Nammu, Ibbi-Suen's great-great-grandfather, had founded it.

When a king established himself by breaking local tradition and acting against the local ruling order – and when he created a new geopolitical order and an empire by breaking the local, regional, and supra-regional traditions of political, religious, and spatial order – he had to think carefully about how to gain acceptance for his (usually militarily-enforced) political acts. How does a king, ruling against the rules, so to speak, represent himself in order to gain the acceptance and authority necessary to establish and stabilize his power at a local, regional, and supra-regional level? Ideally, he must succeed in representing himself as the one who secures the prosperity of the communities affected, creating the image of a king who obeys the gods in taking care of their requests and upholding local traditions, despite the fact he was the one who broke with them. Should the king present himself as the one obedient to the gods and thus conceal the fact that, by changing the local political order, he has, in many ways, interfered in the competences of the local gods? One way around this dilemma is for the king who breaks with local traditions to present himself as the one, who, by expelling the existing king, is re-establishing the "real" local traditions, thus creating the image of a defender, not a destroyer, of local customs. At the same time, a king aiming at creating an empire should offer all those societies under his power the chance to develop an identity that rises above the local "we." To secure its authority throughout the empire, the ruling elite had to do everything in its power to prove to the local populations that their rulers took full responsibility for local, regional, and supra-regional affairs.

When Ur-Nammu developed his rulership and expanded the territory of his power, he paid careful attention to the spatial and political organization of his newly gained territories. Internal frontiers ran along rivers and channels and formed clearly marked administrative districts. These were ruled by administrators under the control of Ur-Nammu and, at the same time, were seen as being protected by local gods. The political advantage of this organization was a clear

division of authority, which made it easy to control his subordinates. Moreover, in this way Ur-Nammu recalled the past when the city god was responsible for the territory of an entire city-state, something that no longer applied in an empire.

Ur-Nammu developed and maintained the canal system, thereby securing the water supply for the fields and at the same time enhancing transport routes. He thus built up a local, regional, and supra-regional infrastructure, necessary both for inter-city and long-distance trade, and for securing and maintaining political control throughout the empire. Thus, investment in and maintenance of the canal system went beyond economic needs and was a clever political and ideological ploy. The new political order secured the prosperity of a large part of the population, enabling Ur-Nammu and his successors to control far more than just the economy the empire.

Ur-Nammu created something new while at the same time exploiting ancient local traditions. At Ur, Nippur, Uruk, and Eridu he created the *ziggurat* – an unprecedented, stepped tower of brick on which the temples of the highest gods were erected. At Eridu he looked after the needs of Enki, god of wisdom and sweet water, and thus one of the most important gods for the existence of mankind. Ur-Nammu's concern at Uruk was, in part, connected to his family history. The *ziggurat* of Uruk was dedicated to the city goddess Inanna. At Nippur, among others, cultic buildings set up by Ur-Nammu – the *ziggurat* and another temple – were dedicated to Enlil, who was the city god and also the highest god in the Sumerian pantheon. Unsurprisingly, Ur, the seat of Ur-Nammu's Dynasty, received the greatest attention. The local *ziggurat* had been dedicated to the city god Nanna, the moon-god. Built within a huge courtyard and abutted by a second courtyard, the temple also contained the house of the **en**-priestesses and the cultic building for the goddess Ningal, Nanna's spouse. The religious buildings were surrounded by secular ones. A storage magazine as well as the palace of Ur-Nammu and his successors were part of this architectural ensemble. Nearby stood three buildings, built for the royal funerals.

Ur-Nammu thus made it clear to the public that he and his new administration served the essential needs of the gods and thus of the populace. At the same time, he enhanced his own rule with a comprehensive local, regional, and supra-regional building program. Throughout the empire, architecture and spatial design symbolized the worldview of Ur-Nammu, who developed a visible master plan – a type of religious architecture as a sign and symbol of the new order – that applied everywhere. Standardization characterized the new signature of power – the *ziggurat* – which was placed beside and combined with local architectural monuments and may have served to create a common identity amongst disparate local cultures within the empire. The monumentality of the buildings, the effort behind the building program, the demonstration of power – encompassing the control of resources of all kinds: manpower, time, space, the religious world – and the creation of the new and at the same time the respect for the old: all reveal the astute political thinking of Ur-Nammu. The new ruler projected a

view of himself as a religious man, upholding and respecting the old traditions and, at the same time, leaving nobody in doubt that his power and the new order were absolute, without alternative. The new and the old stood side by side, but the new did not threaten the old. Ur-Nammu insured this through his clever placement of new cultic monuments and by according due respect to the gods of each local tradition. Even where local gods were worshipped in new temples, the effort put into building them demonstrated Ur-Nammu's high regard for them. The imperial building program thus contained two messages: the new was both powerful and obviously accepted by the local gods. At the same time, it served as an invitation to local populations to identify with it, as well as an admonition to be aware that there was no alternative.

At Ur, yet another message might be seen in the spatial arrangement of the major monuments there. The gods and the ruler lived side by side. That they belonged together and formed a unit was thus clearly visible to all. The gods were housed in the most monumental building and were accorded the highest esteem. The rulers lived next to them in more modest buildings. At the same time, the life of the living elite and the life of the dead were inextricably intertwined. After death the dead still shared the same space with the living members of the society – as well as with the place of worship created for the gods – clearly shown by the location of the funeral houses.

Standardization was not only used to express the new by means of spatial design. It was also employed to create a visual image of the new order. Royal cylinder seals depicted the kings of the empire in the role in which they obviously wanted to be seen and remembered throughout the empire. Thus, the most important aspect of their rulership as well as the characteristic of the new consisted of the motif of the king as a religious man – not as a warrior, not as a fighter, and rarely as a builder. Ur-Nammu and his successors did not choose a local, traditional story or scenario to represent themselves but, rather, a subject that could be understood widely without presuming a knowledge of local history or tradition. The king was portrayed as a servant of god, introduced to the god by a goddess who led the king to the god. This focus on one subject might be explained by the nature of those who both saw and used the seals. While monumental architecture was visible to many, and this could hardly be controlled – no one could be excluded from seeing a *ziggurat* – images on royal seals were addressed to a different audience. Royal seals served as an instrument of official administration. As such, they were seen and used only in elite circles and by powerful administrators where alternatives to the ruling order would have been considered undesirable. The higher administration had to be loyal to the new order, the success of which depended heavily upon such loyalty. Politically and ideologically, it seems to have been expedient to emphasize this to the administrative elite and thus exclude any alternative to the status quo. It was not so much the subject that was very new, as the exclusion of the variety of subject matter that had previously circulated on cylinder seals.

Another theme that illustrates the overarching authority of Ur-Nammu as the ruler of the empire was his image as a builder. This role was not a result of his own doing, but rather of his Nanna, city god of Ur, who had selected him for this purpose. Ur-Nammu was the architect, simultaneously, of the built environment, the new political order, and the empire. Ur-Nammu was the first ruler to use this image of himself as a means of visualizing his political deeds as founder of the empire.

Ur-Nammu's responsibility for a territory larger than that of a city-state was also expressed in the compilation, and thus the standardization, of laws which were valid for everyone in the empire. The collection of laws known as the Codex Ur-Nammu regulated, among many other things, daily affairs and guaranteed legal uniformity throughout "Sumer and Akkad." This was not the written codification of local traditions but rather the consolidation of an instrument of supra-regional order, and must have been a top priority of the founder of the Ur III empire.

Architecture, pictorial representation, and the codification of laws were all measures to guarantee the success of the new order and its representatives throughout the empire. Mechanisms to enforce each visible act of the king were an important ideological tool in memorializing the good government of the Ur III kings. To do this, Ur-Nammu created a new vehicle, also used by his successors: the royal hymn. In it the royal character and accomplishments in the service of the empire and on behalf of those affected by the new political order were all praised.

How did the successors of Ur-Nammu fare? Shulgi followed on from his father and introduced several organizational innovations. Whereas his father standardized the law, Shulgi added the homogenization of Sumerian cuneiform and weights and measures. The empire encompassed about 40 administrative districts, ruled, as was the case under Ur-Nammu, by civil and military administrators controlled by Shulgi. Marriages between male members of the royal court of Ur and female members of elite families throughout the empire became increasingly important and served to stabilize it. The need for stability was great. The MAR.TU/Amurru nomads (see below) were considered a threat to the political, economical, and cultural achievements of the empire. To keep them out of the heartland and away from cultivated areas, Shulgi began to build a massive wall in the Diyala region (northeastern Iraq). The greatest innovation in Shulgi's lifetime, however, was his deification. Shulgi became not only the ruler of the empire, but its god. He thus positioned himself at the very top of the community, emulating Naram-Sin, the Akkadian king, who was the first Mesopotamian ruler to be deified (Ch. II.34). Deification raises a number of questions. Was this a sign of the king's power? Was it a demonstration that the king's rule was unsailable? Deification was against the tradition throughout the empire and it must have required enormous power to create a new tradition in a domain as conservative and sensitive as religion.

Subsequent rulers of the Ur III Dynasty adopted the custom of deification and at the same time worshipped their predecessor, the late king, as a god. In addition to pursuing a building program and a standardized visual program in the arts, Shu-Suen commissioned statues of himself and had them distributed throughout the empire. God and king were thus united, and this was typified by his drive to build temples for his own worship all over the empire. The best-preserved example is the Shu-Suen temple at Tell Asmar (ancient Eshnunna). The form of the temple type followed accepted tradition, but the dedication of a building to a living, deified king was paralleled only in the Akkadian period, when a temple was built for the worship of the god/king Naram-Sin.

How did the empire collapse? The Ur III Dynasty lost control of its territory mainly due to economic problems that adversely affected a number of cities. More and more cities rose up in rebellion and freed themselves from the grip of Ur. Contact was lost between Ibbi-Suen, the last king, and his administrators in the periphery. A dramatic report survives that informs us about the end of Ur. The gods had left the people of Ur defenseless. As a result, the city was destroyed and Ibbi-Suen was taken away as a captive to Elam (modern southwest Iran).

The economic crisis allowed a high-ranking military officer, Ishbi-Erra of Mari, to extract political concessions from Ibbi-Suen. Promising to neutralize the threat of the MAR.TU nomads in the west, Ishbi-Erra blackmailed Ibbi-Suen into appointing him king of Isin. Once in this position, he proved disloyal, cooperating with other kings against Ur and establishing a powerful position that made him the head of the core territory of the former empire. One decisive move was Ishbi-Erra's support of the Nippur priesthood, some of the empire's most powerful religious elites. For Ibbi-Suen, the loss of Nippur, the spiritual center of Sumer, and, by extension, the loss of the support of Enlil – the god who was alone empowered to bestow kingship – was a disaster. The final blow for Ibbi-Suen came when the army of Elam raided Sumer and destroyed Ur – an event commemorated in the *Lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur*.

In terms of both territory and organization, the reign of Ishbi-Erra can be seen as a continuation of the Ur III empire. The decisive change was the end of the dynasty, as power passed from the domination of the Ur-family to the unrelated Ishbi-Erra at Isin. Ishbi-Erra did not enjoy this position for long, however. Although he tried to continue the imperial traditions of Ur, more and more city-states gained their political independence and he progressively lost control of the empire and its resources. Uruk, Babylon, Larsa, Eshnunna, Assur, and Mari – to name only those that stand out in the historical record – became powerful enemies of Isin, but of these it was neighboring Larsa that was most problematic. As it had been between Lagash and Umma in the 3rd millennium, water became a cause of political rivalry and ultimately war. The imperial structure disintegrated, and city-state-based, decentralized polities prevailed for the next two centuries in Babylonia.

4 The Role of the Amorites

The influence of the so-called Amorite tribes, semi-nomads who migrated from the Syrian desert west into Babylonia, became increasingly significant in the post-Ur III period. This was a process that had already begun in the 3rd millennium BC. Like all migrations, that of the Amorites (Sumerian MAR.TU; Akkadian *Amurru*) brought new traditions to Babylonia in terms of lifestyle, world-view, values, economic organization, political habits, and religious views. Increasingly, the ruling elites of the bigger cities had an Amorite background, a sign of successful integration and acculturation on the part of the Amorites and of the fact that the local residents and societies tolerated the new migrants. It is not yet clear how and why nomadic and tribal chiefs decided to abandon their mobile lifestyle and settle permanently in one place, and how they gained their positions and status as urban kings.

5 The Old Babylonian Empire

The founder of the First Dynasty of Babylon, Sumuabum, was an Amorite. It was Hammurabi, however, the sixth king of this dynasty, who first succeeded in extending the power of Babylon, subduing the elites of the neighboring cities and establishing a sphere of influence that resembled, territorially speaking, the empire of the Ur III Dynasty. When Hammurabi came to power, his predecessors had already extended their power beyond the immediate area of Babylon. Unlike Ur-Nammu, however, Hammurabi did not act against the local political tradition in order to obtain his position. Through his own conquests he extended his area of political control from central Babylonia to the north as well as to the Mesopotamian south. He defeated Sippar, Eshnunna, and the Diyala region, conquered Elam in the southeast, and headed south, where he took control of Ur, then the most important Persian Gulf trading station. Hammurabi was not only a successful military officer, he was also capable of forging advantageous alliances with contemporary kings for the purpose of joint military campaigns, using them to build up and solidify the Old Babylonian, or rather the “Hammurabi” Empire (an organization that political science would call a “one-man empire.” In the 30th year of his reign, he assumed the title “king of Sumer and Akkad.” In reality, however, as we know from his royal inscriptions and from the prologue of his law code, the Codex Hammurabi, he governed a much larger area, stretching from Mari in the west to Elam in the southeast, and from Assur and Nineveh in the north to Ur in the south – in other words, an area roughly the size of the former Ur III empire.

Hammurabi had a strong army and he was a clever strategist. The army worked efficiently under his command and, consequently, Hammurabi represented

himself as the conqueror of the world and the pre-eminent military ruler of his time. He drew attention to the fact that it was he who had brought and guaranteed the prosperity of all countries under his power. To emphasize this role as caretaker and protector, he fostered an image as the good shepherd of his subjects – an image that placed Hammurabi squarely in the tradition of Mesopotamian rulers who had used this title since the 3rd millennium BC. Propaganda and the transmission of the ruling ideology were thus manipulated and maintained by an already ancient strategy. Hammurabi enforced the new global political and economical order by waging war, depriving local elites of their power, and legitimating the new order with references to the traditions and values of the past. And in order to assert his entitlement to being seen as the world's ruler and to make his position completely invulnerable, he claimed that Enlil, the god of the world who alone bestowed kingship on men, had given him the title “king of the four quarters (of the world)” and thus legitimated his political deeds.

Nevertheless, in spite of such assertions, there might well have been a gap between his propaganda and the reality of his reign. That this was not the case is due to the fact that the internal administration of the empire was organized under his watchful eye. In every occupied city Hammurabi deployed an administration which stood under his supervision and was decidedly not of local origin. Acts of disloyalty by the conquered cities also obviously occurred. That Hammurabi was not one to hesitate in destroying such rebels is made clear by his use of water, alternately flooding opponent cities or cutting off their supply as the situation demanded.

According to the written tradition, the shaping of the material world followed the clever propagandistic strategy of legitimating the new with the traditional. Hammurabi visibly demonstrated his role as caretaker by looking after temples and irrigation works and by protecting the conquered cities under his rule. According to his own texts of self-praise, he thus took over the duties that in former times had devolved upon local kings. The material evidence of these building activities, however, remains largely undiscovered. At his capital Babylon, for example, buildings from Hammurabi's own time lie buried beneath meters of debris from his later successors, in some cases below the modern water table. Thus, any signs of how Hammurabi may have presented his new world order in architectural terms – in the sense that Ur-Nammu identified himself and his empire with the *ziggurat* – are missing.

Hammurabi's assertion that it was he who took care of the irrigation works throughout the country, created flourishing landscapes and built to the honor the gods, was an important measure in legitimizing the new political order on a local, regional, and supra-regional level. These actions met the material as well as spiritual requirements of people throughout the empire, regardless of their origin or place of residence. Moreover, according to his own political propaganda, Hammurabi controlled the nodal points that guaranteed long-distance trade with the Persian Gulf, the Indus Valley, the Levant, Cyprus, and the Mediterranean.

The building of such trade relationships and communication routes necessarily implies that Hammurabi controlled everything in his empire. His pronouncements to the effect that all his actions served the best interests of the people were also governed by the principle that these actions served first and foremost to secure and expand his power. The guarantee of imports is evidence of this statement. Imports were used to secure royal power, for, as a rule, luxury goods were distributed to the members of the power elite, thus serving mainly as a political tool to keep them loyal to the king.

The royal inscriptions, self-image, and hymns praising Hammurabi give the impression that continuity, not change, characterized his reign – even though the political context had changed considerably. One visible representation that can be attributed directly to Hammurabi is the scene carved on the stele on which the Codex Hammurabi is inscribed. The seated sun god Shamash hands the rope and rod, surveyor's tools that represented kingship as well, to the standing Hammurabi. This is an expression of his mandate to act as the builder – both of houses and of empire. Ur-Nammu was the first to use such imagery to illustrate his political deeds as the founder of an empire. Thus, Hammurabi did not create a new image of kingship but, instead, followed traditional and well-known conceptions of how a king should be seen and remembered. Once again, propaganda and ideology functioned according to the time-honored convention of placing the new beside the old, thus concealing the potentially threatening aspect inherent in all signs of change.

Seals and themes that can be associated directly with Hammurabi and his persona as a “one-man empire” are lacking in the archaeological record. In general, the presentation scene was adopted and modified, according to the needs of the users. In contrast to the Ur III period, however, warrior scenes occurred as well as the depiction of the king as warrior. The representation of Hammurabi as warrior suited both his ideology and his propaganda. The prologue of the Codex Hammurabi explains this imagery. It was the wars, successfully led by Hammurabi, that had brought peace to the empire and justice for all – and it had been the most important gods of this empire who had supported him in his campaigns. The extension of the political influence of cities was, as a rule, connected with the expansion of the influence and competence of the city-gods. With the reign of Hammurabi and his foundation of the empire, the prominence, characteristics, and functions of Marduk, until then only the city god of Babylon, multiplied and began to serve the needs of a supra-regional power in demonstrating and legitimating its world domination.

The territorial achievements of Hammurabi were not of long duration. The so-called Old Babylonian Empire was more a “Hammurabi empire” than the empire of the First Dynasty of Babylon. Hammurabi's son, Samsu-iluna, could not hold on to the territory conquered by his father and, after the reign of four more successors and continual wars, economic and social tensions, the city and Dynasty of Babylon not only lost its leading position among the powers of

the south but were conquered by the Hittite king Murshili I in the early 16th century BC.

6 The Kassites: How the Empire Came Into Being, Developed, Functioned, and Collapsed

The Kassites migrated during the 2nd millennium BC from the Zagros region of western Iran into Babylonia. Texts from the reign of Samsu-iluna mention conflicts between Kassites and the Babylonian army. Kassites were called “foreign” and “strangers” in Babylonia and at the same time they are attested in economic texts as farm workers and soldiers in the Babylonian army, where they sometimes gained high rank. It is thought that their knowledge of horse-breeding and chariotry earned them high positions at the Babylonian court. How the jump from such high military positions to absolute political power took place is not yet known in detail. The written sources suggest that the Hittite defeat of the First Dynasty of Babylon and the subsequent withdrawal of the victorious Hittite army in the early 16th century BC created an opportunity for Kassite elites to take control of the city. This implies that the Kassite “strangers” were by then a community within Babylonia that was powerful and well organized, both politically and militarily. By this time, a Kassite kingdom already existed along the Euphrates with its center at the city of Terqa (modern Tell Ashara). Details about the founder of the first Kassite Dynasty and about the installation of this dynasty in Babylon are not yet known. Nevertheless, it is obvious that in a relatively short period of time the Kassites were able to expand their political power to such a degree that we can speak of a Kassite empire.

The Babylonian kinglist mentions 36 Kassite kings, organized according to the dynastic system. Of these Agum (II), whose dates are uncertain, is the first who can be historically verified. Agum II called himself king of Babylon, and claimed to rule at the behest of all of the relevant Babylonian gods – An, Enlil, Ea, Marduk, Sin, and Shamash. At the same time, he emphasized that he was the biological son of Shuqamuna, one of the two Kassite gods having the authority to install kings. Thus, not being a member of a traditional, aristocratic Babylonian family was actually emphasized – a remarkable step for a community that not too long before had been considered “strangers.” Besides the honors and legitimate right to be king of Babylon given to him by the local gods, Agum II called himself king of the Kassites and the Akkadians, king of Alman and Padan (located in northeastern Babylonia), and king of Gutium (an area east of the Diyala-region in Iran, presumably stretching as far as Lake Urmia). The Mesopotamian south obviously did not (yet) belong to the Kassites. That the empire was established without war seems unlikely, if we recall the history of early Mesopotamian empire formation. Yet Kassite propaganda emphasized, among other things, that Agum II had brought back the statue of Marduk,

deported during a previous period of unrest. The re-establishment of the livelihood of the Babylonians was, according to his propaganda, Agum's outstanding success.

The Kassite Empire continued to develop under a further 26 kings. Ulamburiash, fourth king in the Kassite Dynasty, conquered southernmost Babylonia, proclaimed himself king of the Sealand, and became king of Babylonia as well. For the first time, Kassite rule included the Mesopotamian south and within Mesopotamia extended as far north as Assyria. In the 15th century BC, Karaindash I, who called himself king of the city of Babylon, of Sumer and Akkad, king of the Kassites and the land Karduniash (the name of the Kassite Empire at the time), was the first Babylonian king to meet an Egyptian pharaoh, Thutmose III. The expansion of Kassite political influence was consolidated with the rule of Kurigalzu I. He strengthened the alliance with Egypt through interdynastic marriages, sending his daughter to Egypt to be married to the Egyptian pharaoh. Kurigalzu I called himself "king of the four quarters" and, for the first time since the Ur III period, had himself deified, a logical step for a ruler who strove for world domination and needed maximum legitimacy. While he pretended to have had the support of all the gods within his empire, he still considered the Kassite gods Shuqamuna and Shumaliya to be his personal deities.

In the mid-14th century BC major problems with the Assyrians for the first time threatened the existence of the Kassite Empire. The accession of Karahardash (1333 BC), grandson of the Assyrian king Assuruballit I (1363–1328 BC), and son of the Kassite king Burnaburiash II (1359–1333 BC) by his Assyrian wife Muballitat-Sherua (a daughter of Assuruballit I), provoked a Kassite revolt. The Kassite elite killed him and enthroned their own favorite, Nazi-Bugash (1333 BC). Assuruballit took revenge for the death of his grandson, attacking Babylon, killing Nazi-Bugash, and installing another Kassite on the Babylonian throne who came to be called Kurigalzu II (1332–1308 BC) (Brinkman 1976: 166). This was not a randomly chosen name, but one that harkened back to that of the first global player among the Kassite kings, Kurigalzu I.

Although supported by Assyria, times were tough for the Kassite Empire. After the death of Assuruballit I, wars against Elam and problems with Assyria ensued. Kadashman-Enlil II (1263–1255 BC), however, exploited the rivalries of his enemies. He forged alliances with both the Hittites and the Egyptians, a constellation that constituted a major threat to the growing power of Assyria. For roughly 40 years this alliance protected the Kassite Empire from its northern neighbor. Under the reign of the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BC), however, the situation changed, this time for the worse. According to his royal inscriptions, Tukulti-Ninurta I conquered all of Babylonia and brought the Kassite king Kashtiliashu IV (1232–1225 BC) to Assur as a prisoner. Additionally, he tore down the city wall and fortifications of Babylon, thus stripping the city of protection and any sign of political autonomy. The statue of the god Marduk was again captured and taken to Assyria, the final blow for Babylon and

its inhabitants. The city was vandalized, its people killed, but still the Kassite elite were able to rebel against this Assyrian violence.

In effect, “history repeated itself” as the Assyrians again nominated a vice-king to be the local leader, while the Kassite nobles nominated their own Kassite king, Adad-shuma-usur (1216–1187 BC), the son of Kashtiliashu IV. Although details of his rule are unclear, Adad-shuma-usur’s 30 years on the throne constitute the longest reign of any Kassite king (Brinkman 1976: 89). Interdynastic marriages with Elam are attested, but when the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte’s claim to the Kassite throne, based on the fact that his mother was Kassite, was rejected, he invaded Babylonia, conquering and plundering its cities from the Diyala region to the Persian Gulf. An enormous amount of booty was taken back to Susa, where French archaeologists at the beginning of the 20th century found such objects as the Codex Hammurabi and the victory stele of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin.

Shutruk-Nahhunte’s son, Kudur-Nahhunte, became governor of Babylon and Babylonia and the Kassite Empire continued to decline. Renewed Kassite rebellions and repeated attempts to nominate Enlil-naddin-ahhi (1157–1155 BC) as their own king led Kudur-nahhunte to destroy Babylon. Enlil-naddin-ahhi was captured and carried off to Elam, along with the cult statue of Marduk, who became a prisoner of the new Elamite superpower. After nearly 400 years of supremacy over Babylonia and the neighboring regions, the Kassite Empire finally and definitively came to an end.

One of the most important ventures of the Kassite rulers was their self-representation as kings, installed and legitimized by the relevant Mesopotamian gods. Kassite kings thus wanted to be remembered as being obedient to the traditional local gods. The claim that the return of Marduk from captivity happened under Kassite rule must have been an extremely effective piece of propaganda. Kassite adherence to Babylonian religion found its material expression in the care of extant Babylonian temples as well as in the building of new ones, such as the Ishtar temple at Uruk (see below). This temple presented a specific aspect of Kassite acculturation. Like the rulers of earlier empires, Kassite kings understood the importance of connecting the traditional cultural traits with new ones, concealing the fact that they had created a new geopolitical order and thus in reality broken with local traditions. Nominally, the Kassite kings ruled in the name of the Babylonian gods, but the gods who protected and guided them remained Kassite ones. Similarly, the titles of the Kassite kings followed Babylonian norms, but their personal names remained Kassite. Finally, the Kassites cleverly exploited language – Sumerian for building inscriptions and Akkadian for international and political correspondence – in keeping with ancient usage.

Land grants became an important tool of Kassite political patronage. As formerly influential elites lost their power, a new group of landowners developed, one on whom the Kassite kings bestowed their largesse in return for political support. The classical Kassite monument, the so-called *kudurrus* (see below), is a physical embodiment of this phenomenon.

The Kassites established a comprehensive network of control all over the empire. From city to region, administrators stood under the control of the Kassite kings. Economically, the palace dominated the temple, although the temples and priesthood of Nippur, the traditional religious center of Mesopotamia, were taken care of and provided with everything they needed. The Kassites knew how to avoid religiously based upheavals. Enlil, rather than Marduk, became the most important politico-religious authority in the country, the kingmaker and the one who conferred rule over the world. The god with the highest and most extensive authority thus became the most highly esteemed Mesopotamian god under the Kassites. International acceptance of the new world order was demonstrated by the economic and political alliances with the Hittites and especially with the Egyptians, the global power in the Near East.

The principle of combining the old with the new became particularly visible in the built environment. The political propaganda of the Kassite kings announced the caretaking of the traditional temples and reverence for the Babylonian gods. However, this did not deter the Kassites from introducing new elements in Babylonian religion. King Karaindash conducted divine services for Ishtar at Uruk. The temple built for her, its form and especially its external façade decoration – male and female gods placed in niches around the temple – was unparalleled. The temple type as well as its isolated position in the city were likewise unparalleled. Thus, the modification of tradition seems not to have been a problem for the Kassites.

Kurigalzu I took the great step of not only changing but breaking with tradition when he left the religious and political center of Babylon and built Dur-Kurigalzu (modern Aqar Quf), the first and only purely Kassite center of the empire about 200 kilometers north of Babylon. Leaving Babylon, a city with a centuries-old tradition as a cultural center, was an unmistakable sign, but what did it really mean? Were the Kassites expressing their own view of the world and the world order they had created with the building of Dur-Kurigalzu? Certainly, they did not hide the fact that they were not fully acculturated in the Babylonian tradition, but unequivocally emphasized it. While Agum II distinguished himself by returning the cult image of Marduk to Babylon, it was Kurigalzu I who, in his propaganda, explicitly transcended the Babylonian sphere and presented himself as the “king of the four quarters.” At the same time, Enlil, the ancestral figure among the Babylonian gods, became increasingly important, while the prominence of Marduk receded. The new world order got a new world center – Dur Kurigalzu – and at the same time the world-view changed and with it the meaning of Babylonian traditions. But as always when a government changes the seat of government, one must ask, was this an expression of power or a sign of weakness? Kurigalzu I demonstrated power in having the manpower and economic resources necessary to build a new city. At the same time, it is possible that the long-established local elites of Babylon might have been obstructing the political and religious goals of the global ruler Kurigalzu I.

The new and most characteristic image-bearer of Kassite culture is the so-called *kudurru*. *Kudurru* is the Kassite term for “border” or “boundary.” The term is also used by archaeologists to designate carved stone boulders, up to 1 meter high, that display a variety of divine symbols, objects, architecture, stars, and animal hybrids as well as text that informs us about the distribution and ownership of land. With the *kudurrus*, the Kassites developed their own visual language. A specific form and system of communication became visible, without the illustration of action that could be easily read and understood. Divine symbols had been used for centuries, but the Kassites were the first to canonize their forms. The reading and understanding of these symbols presupposed some knowledge of their meaning, but whether this knowledge was widespread in Kassite society, representing a kind of standardized shorthand, or whether only a specific group of educated people knew the meaning of the symbols, is unknown. The *kudurrus* were sources of information about land ownership. As noted above, Kassite kings granted land to new owners who thereby become a powerful group of supporters, while old landowners, who lost land, threatened to become a danger for the Kassite kings.

Cylinder seals of the period reflect much more of the religious world than their Ur III and Old Babylonian predecessors. The Kassites used the well-known presentation scene, with some modifications. They truncated the story, so to speak, by depicting a seated god and a prayer (i.e., a prayer incised in cuneiform on the seal itself), a human male or the intercessory goddess, thus a *pars pro toto* of what would earlier have been a scene depicting an intercessory goddess leading a human being to a seating god. The pictorial area was also filled with symbols and other beings, such as dogs, flies, and grasshoppers. As on the *kudurrus*, the text of a prayer, addressing the god, incised on Kassite cylinder seals assumed great importance.

The decline of the Kassite Empire became obvious when the Assyrians began to intervene in domestic affairs. Instability grew and the attacks by the Elamites army increased political problems in Babylonia. International alliances temporarily eased matters, but could not ultimately halt the erosion and decline of the empire. Marduk was again captured and taken away, this time to Assyria. A war had to be waged on two fronts, against both the Assyrians and the Elamites. In the end the Elamites were successful. After 400 years of Kassite political rule, the empire collapsed and that collapse brought about the end of the Kassites as a political force in Babylonia.

7 Conclusion: 900 Years of Empire and Struggle for Supra-Regional Supremacy

In conclusion, a few aspects seem to have characterized imperial politics between 2100 and 1200 BC. Strong propaganda was necessary to convince the subject

social groups that each of the established political orders was *de facto* the best and only order to secure the prosperity of all affected by imperial conquest. Control in both the religious and economical domains and a strong and loyal army were essential to each empire's success. The propaganda deployed, and the messages used to create a common "we" and to foster the acceptance of the new, differed in each case. Yet in each empire a sensitivity was shown to earlier cultural habits and traditions which were mobilized to confer legitimacy upon the new world order of the Ur III, Old Babylonian, and Kassite kings.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

On the subject of "empire" generally, see Pomper (2005). For a series of studies concerning empire and change in political orders in times of crisis, see Heinz and Feldman (2007). For theoretical studies related to migration in the ancient world, see Lucassen (2010).