



McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

The Evolution of Fragility: Setting the Terms

Edited by Norman Yoffee



The Evolution
of Fragility:
Setting the Terms



McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

The Evolution of Fragility: Setting the Terms

Edited by Norman Yoffee

with contributions from

Tom D. Dillehay, Li Min, Patricia A. McAnany, Ellen Morris,
Timothy R. Pauketat, Cameron A. Petrie, Peter Robertshaw,
Andrea Seri, Miriam T. Stark, Steven A. Wernke & Norman Yoffee

Published by:
McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research
University of Cambridge
Downing Street
Cambridge, UK
CB2 3ER
(0)(1223) 339327
eaj31@cam.ac.uk
www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk



McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2019

© 2019 McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.
The Evolution of Fragility: Setting the Terms is made available
under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-
NoDerivatives 4.0 (International) Licence:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

ISBN: 978-1-902937-88-5

Cover design by Dora Kemp and Ben Plumridge.
Typesetting and layout by Ben Plumridge.

Cover image: Ta Prohm temple, Angkor. Photo: Dr Charlotte Minh Ha Pham. Used by permission.

Edited for the Institute by James Barrett (*Series Editor*).

CONTENTS

Contributors	vii
Figures	viii
Tables	ix
Acknowledgements	x
<i>Chapter 1</i> Introducing the Conference: There Are No Innocent Terms	1
NORMAN YOFFEE	
Mapping the chapters	3
The challenges of fragility	6
<i>Chapter 2</i> Fragility of Vulnerable Social Institutions in Andean States	9
TOM D. DILLEHAY & STEVEN A. WERNKE	
Vulnerability and the fragile state	12
Mediated political orders: succession and partition	13
The mediated state	19
Conclusions	20
<i>Chapter 3</i> Why Early Cities Failed: Fragility and Resilience in Bronze Age China	25
LI MIN	
The first quarter of the second millennium BC: collapse of the great Longshan centres	25
The second quarter of the second millennium BC: the emergence and decline of Erlitou	28
The third quarter of the second millennium BC: the rise and decline of Zhengzhou	33
The fourth quarter of the second millennium BC: the rise and decline of Anyang	35
The first quarter of the first millennium BC: addressing fragility and resilience in the Zhou political order	38
Conclusion	42
<i>Chapter 4</i> Fragile Authority in Monumental Time: Political Experimentation in the Classic Maya Lowlands	47
PATRICIA A. McANANY	
Political experimentation	47
Large 'anomalous' aggregations	48
Preclassic Maya lowlands: E-Groups and patron deity shrines	50
Authority and hereditary rulership hybridized: southern lowland Maya experiment	52
Northern ambivalence to monumental time	54
Fragility in its many guises or how political experiments end	56
Final considerations and conclusions	57
<i>Chapter 5</i> Ancient Egyptian Exceptionalism: Fragility, Flexibility and the Art of Not Collapsing	61
ELLEN MORRIS	
Dangers skirted, bullets dodged	61
Politicide, state effects and near death experiences	64
Resiliency	75
An autopsy report on Egypt's first failed state	76
The case for re-considering the role of a climate hostile to the state	79
<i>Chapter 6</i> Fragile Cahokian and Chacoan Orders and Infrastructures	89
TIMOTHY R. PAUKETAT	
Cahokian social and material history (AD 950 to 1250)	89
Chacoan social and material history (AD 800s to 1130)	96
Discussion	102

<i>Chapter 7</i>	Diversity, variability, adaptation and ‘fragility’ in the Indus Civilization	109
	CAMERON A. PETRIE	
	Fragile and/or robust? (Re-)Introducing the Indus Civilization	109
	Indus settlements: from village to city (and back?)	110
	Diversity, variability and adaptation in the Indus context	116
	Mediation of politics and power <i>within</i> Indus settlements: hierarchy, heterarchy and collective action	119
	Mediation of politics and power <i>between</i> Indus settlements: the Indus state debate	121
	‘Crisis, what crisis?’; the 4.2 kya event and the Indus	122
	Urban ‘stability and fragility’ and rural ‘resilience’	125
<i>Chapter 8</i>	Fragile States in Sub-Saharan Africa	135
	PETER ROBERTSHAW	
	Three African states	137
	State formation	141
	Fragile African states	148
	Conclusion	154
<i>Chapter 9</i>	Universal Rule and Precarious Empire: Power and Fragility in the Angkorian State	161
	MIRIAM T. STARK	
	Universal rule and the Angkorian state	162
	Context: place, structure and scale	164
	The structure of sovereignty: Angkorian landscapes	167
	The structure of sovereignty: Angkorian power and patronage	168
	Collapse, resilience and patronage	173
	Fragility, resilience and regeneration	173
<i>Chapter 10</i>	Negotiating Fragility in Ancient Mesopotamia: Arenas of Contestation and Institutions of Resistance	183
	NORMAN YOFFEE & ANDREA SERI	
	A history of academic resistance to views of the totalitarian nature of political and economic power in Mesopotamia	184
	Fragility in literature	186
	Historical examples of fragility and resistance	187
	Contestation, resistance and fragilities in early Mesopotamian states	193
	Coda	194

CONTRIBUTORS

TOM D. DILLEHAY

Department of Anthropology, Vanderbilt
University, Nashville, TN 37325, USA
Email: tom.d.dillehay@Vanderbilt.edu

LI MIN

Department of Anthropology, A210 Fowler
Building/Box 951510, 308 Charles E. Young Dr.
North, University of California, Los Angeles, CA
90095, USA.
Email: limin@humnet.ucla.edu

PATRICIA A. McANANY

Department of Anthropology, University of North
Carolina, Chapel Hill, 301 Alumni Bldg., Campus
Box 3115, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3115, USA.
Email: mcanany@email.unc.edu

ELLEN MORRIS

Department of Classics & Ancient Studies, Barnard
College, Columbia University, 3009 Broadway, New
York, NY 10027, USA
Email: emorris@Barnard.edu

TIMOTHY R. PAUKETAT

Illinois State Archaeological Survey, 209 Nuclear
Physics Bldg., MC-571, University of Illinois, 23 E.
Stadium Drive, Champaign, IL 61820, USA
Email: pauketat@illinois.edu

CAMERON A. PETRIE

Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge,
Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3DZ, UK
Email: cap59@cam.ac.uk

PETER ROBERTSHAW

Department of Anthropology, California State
University, San Bernardino, 5500 University
Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407, USA
Email: proberts@csusb.edu

ANDREA SERI

History Department, Universidad Nacional de
Córdoba, Pabellón España, Ciudad Universitaria,
5000 Córdoba, Argentina
Email: andrea.r.seri@gmail.com

MIRIAM T. STARK

Department of Anthropology, University of Hawai'i
at Mānoa, 346 Saunders Hall, 2424 Maile Way,
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822, USA
Email: miriams@Hawaii.edu

STEVEN A. WERNKE

Department of Anthropology, Vanderbilt University,
Nashville, TN 37325, USA
Email: steven.a.wernke@vanderbilt.edu

NORMAN YOFFEE

Departments of Near Eastern Studies and
Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor,
MI 48109, USA (emeritus)
Email: nyoffee@gmail.com

Figures

2.1	<i>Location map of Chimor state.</i>	10
2.2	<i>Location map of Inka empire.</i>	11
2.3	<i>The Inka ruler addresses the huacas.</i>	16
2.4	<i>Schematic of Andean political organization.</i>	17
3.1	<i>Map of major sites mentioned.</i>	26
3.2	<i>The archaeological landscape of the Luoyang Basin.</i>	29
3.3	<i>Turquoise inlaid objects from Erlitou elite burials.</i>	30
3.4	<i>The distribution of archaeological sites associated with Xiaqiyuan material culture.</i>	31
3.5	<i>The routes of campaigns of pre-dynastic Zhou kings.</i>	36
3.6	<i>The mortuary context and the distinctive double-niche construction of Fu Hao's tomb.</i>	37
3.7	<i>The political landscape of early China from the perspective of Zhouyuan at the turn of the first millennium BC.</i>	39
3.8	<i>The archaeological landscape of the Quwo Basin in Jinnan.</i>	41
4.1	<i>Plan of Preclassic E Group at Cenote, Belize.</i>	50
4.2	<i>The 33 m-tall Preclassic deity pyramid at Lamanai.</i>	51
4.3	<i>Late Classic funerary pyramid of Tikal ruler, Jasaw Cahn K'awiil.</i>	52
4.4	<i>Part of inscription from Stela C, Quirigua.</i>	53
4.5	<i>Stela D, Copan.</i>	54
4.6	<i>Entrance to burial chamber of Ukit Kan Le'k Tok' behind ornate white stucco façade on the Acropolis of Ek' Balam.</i>	55
5.1	<i>Map of Egypt showing sites mentioned in the text.</i>	62
5.2	<i>First dynasty Abydos.</i>	65
5.3	<i>Steles belonging to the sacrificed retainers of Djer.</i>	65
5.4	<i>Tomb of Qa'a; stele of Qa'a's sacrificed retainer Sabef.</i>	66
5.5	<i>Major monuments of Saqqara and Abusir until the end of the Old Kingdom.</i>	67
5.6	<i>The body count of slain northerners depicted on Khasekhem's limestone statue; Horus dominating the personification of the north from the Narmer palette.</i>	68
5.7	<i>Probable early representations of Seth from Nagada and its environs.</i>	69
5.8	<i>Scorpion macehead, dedicated to the Horus temple at Hierakonpolis.</i>	70
5.9	<i>Seth makes an appearance in the Cairo Annals.</i>	71
5.10	<i>Peribsen with Seth atop his serekh; inscription of a vase dedicated by Horus Khasekhem; Horus-Seth Khasekhemwy.</i>	72
5.11	<i>Some of the millions of multi-ton blocks that make up Khufu's pyramid.</i>	74
5.12	<i>Starving Bedouin from the causeways of Sahure.</i>	80
6.1	<i>Location of the Greater Cahokia and Chaco regions.</i>	90
6.2	<i>The physiography of the Greater Cahokia region.</i>	91
6.3	<i>The city of Greater Cahokia, showing its primary precincts.</i>	93
6.4	<i>LiDAR plan map of Cahokia, highlighting monumental features that date to the Lohmann phase.</i>	95
6.5	<i>San Juan Basin physiography and the location of Chaco.</i>	97
6.6	<i>Schematic view of Chaco Canyon's great house locations.</i>	98
6.7	<i>Aerial view of Pueblo Bonito.</i>	99
6.8	<i>Schematic map of original Chetro Ketl field system.</i>	100
6.9	<i>Aerial view of Peñasco Blanco.</i>	101
7.1	<i>Plans of Indus cities and smaller settlements.</i>	111
7.2	<i>Plan of Mohenjo-daro and expanded views of the Mound of the Great Bath, the DK-Area, and the HR-Area.</i>	113
7.3	<i>Plan of the 'Great Hall' at Mohenjo-daro and isometric view of the 'Great Hall' at Harappa.</i>	114
7.4	<i>Maps of the Indus River basin showing the distribution of modern winter and summer rainfall in relation to the distribution of urban period settlements and urban centres.</i>	117
7.5	<i>Maps of the Indus River basin showing the distribution of modern winter and summer rainfall in relation to the distribution of post-urban period settlements.</i>	117

8.1	<i>A sampling of the precolonial states of sub-Saharan Africa, together with archaeological sites mentioned in the text.</i>	136
8.2	<i>The Great Enclosure and adjacent stone walling at Great Zimbabwe.</i>	138
8.3	<i>Khami – restored elite stone walling.</i>	139
8.4	<i>Danangombe – a later Rozvi capital.</i>	139
8.5	<i>Kilwa – audience court of the Husuni Kubwa palace.</i>	140
8.6	<i>Mapungubwe Hill.</i>	143
8.7	<i>Kilwa – the Great Mosque.</i>	146
8.8	<i>Great Zimbabwe – the Great Enclosure viewed from a royal residence area on the hilltop formerly known as the ‘Acropolis’.</i>	149
8.9	<i>Gedi on the Kenyan coast.</i>	151
9.1	<i>One view of twelfth-century Angkor in its broader Southeast Asian World.</i>	162
9.2	<i>Greater Angkor region (NW Cambodia).</i>	164
9.3	<i>Mapped roads in the Angkorian network.</i>	165
9.4	<i>Angkorian-period inscriptional data: royal vs non-royal.</i>	166
9.5	<i>Banteay Srei inscription, a tenth-century temple constructed by the guru of Prince Jayavarman V.</i>	169
9.6	<i>Angkorian hierarchy, derived from epigraphic sources.</i>	170
9.7	<i>Image of Jayavarman II from South gallery of Angkor Wat.</i>	171
9.8	<i>Oath-swearing to Sūryavarman II on Mount Sivapada, southern gallery of Angkor Wat.</i>	172
9.9	<i>Control as ‘communication corridor’.</i>	175
9.10	<i>Total area under Angkorian ‘control’ from c. 802–1308.</i>	176
10.1	<i>Map of major sites mentioned in the text.</i>	184
10.2	<i>Uruk levels V and IV.</i>	187
10.3	<i>Uruk Eanna level III.</i>	188

Table

6.1	<i>A comparison of Cahokian and Chacoan histories.</i>	92
-----	--	----

Acknowledgements

I thank Tim Potts, Director of the Getty Museum, for the grant that funded my residency at the Getty in autumn 2017, and for funding the ‘fragility’ conference. Thanks also to Cyprian Broodbank, director of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge, for providing funding for the conference. Lisa Guzzetta, senior public programmes specialist at the Getty Museum at the Getty Villa, along with her staff, organized the logistics for the conference. I could not wish for a more efficient and graceful colleague.

I also want to thank Alexa Sekyra, Sabine Schlosser and their staff in the Getty Research Institute for their support during my stay at the Getty Center. Finally, I thank Ben Plumridge for his skill and patience in producing this volume and Emma Jarman for supervising the process. James Barrett accepted the volume, after two reviews, on behalf of the McDonald Institute as an online, open-source and hence easily accessible publication.

Norman Yoffee, 2019

Chapter 10

Negotiating Fragility in Ancient Mesopotamia: Arenas of Contestation and Institutions of Resistance

Norman Yoffee & Andrea Seri

Ancient states – or at least many ancient states – were ironies. That is, many ancient states weren't states at all, at least not as we think of states as territorial entities that included much land, many cities, towns, villages, farmsteads, agricultural fields and orchards. Mesopotamia, for example was a land of city-states (Fig. 10.1). There was no Mesopotamian territorial state, and those cities and their rulers who conquered other cities and controlled much land and access to water didn't last long. There was no Mesopotamia, in effect, in the political sense of the term. What made Mesopotamia Mesopotamia was an overarching cultural web: a shared belief in the same gods, a school curriculum in which the same literature was learned, even a common ideology that there should be a territorial Mesopotamian state.

Furthermore, the most brutal and most successful warrior kings who were celebrated by their scribes as favoured by the gods and who declared they were providing justice for the cities they conquered and the people they ruled set the stage for their own (often rapid) demise.

How do we explain the resistance to forming a long-lasting territorial state in Mesopotamia (especially in early Mesopotamia, the era of the formation of Mesopotamian cities, social and economic differentiation and stratification, and cultural achievements in literature and ritual)? How can we explain why dynasts and dynasties were regularly toppled? And how do we account for the resilience of certain cultural institutions, those things that continued to make Mesopotamia Mesopotamia?

In a recent and glorious essay, Piotr Michalowski (forthcoming) writes how kings who picked up the shreds of fallen or defeated rulers and established new dynasties were 'domesticated' in native historiographic tradition. Michalowski notes despairingly that 'Mesopotamian history [is] the history of kings,

of their unusual deeds and of anecdotal information about them.' He compares this situation in Mesopotamia to historiographic traditions in Europe before the work of the 'Annales group' that wrote history of the world outside of royalty. Disconcertingly, perhaps, Michalowski's essay is then devoted to kings: how Mesopotamian kings were strangers in their own land, and how this advantaged their achievements in seizing power.

In another excellent essay, the archaeologist, Marcella Frangipane (2017), contrasts state formation in three regions of Mesopotamia. She discusses different forms of 'integration' in the first cities in the south, in northern Syria, and southern Turkey, 'control and coordination' of urban economies, and how rulers and their bureaucracies 'resolved conflicts'. Her eloquent analysis, however, doesn't extend to how political systems in all the cities in these areas teetered, why districts were burned or abandoned, and how the politics and the economy changed in their various geo-political circumstances. Frangipane writes of an '*amalgamation* (our italics) of social groups' in cities and early states but refrains from identifying those groups and their likely different social and political orientations. She quotes Richard Blanton that in states there was a 'monopoly of control of power by a supreme authority' (following Weber's dictum).

This essay ventures another perspective on the nature of Mesopotamian cities and states. By citing two recent papers, both of which critically analyse available data on the nature of kings and early states in valuable ways, we establish a point of entry into the biases of many historians and archaeologists. For example, most written tablets from Mesopotamia are not about kings and their heroic deeds. They are economic texts, ritual texts, letters, legal documents, and other non-literary materials. Most archaeological projects have quite naturally concentrated on magnificent

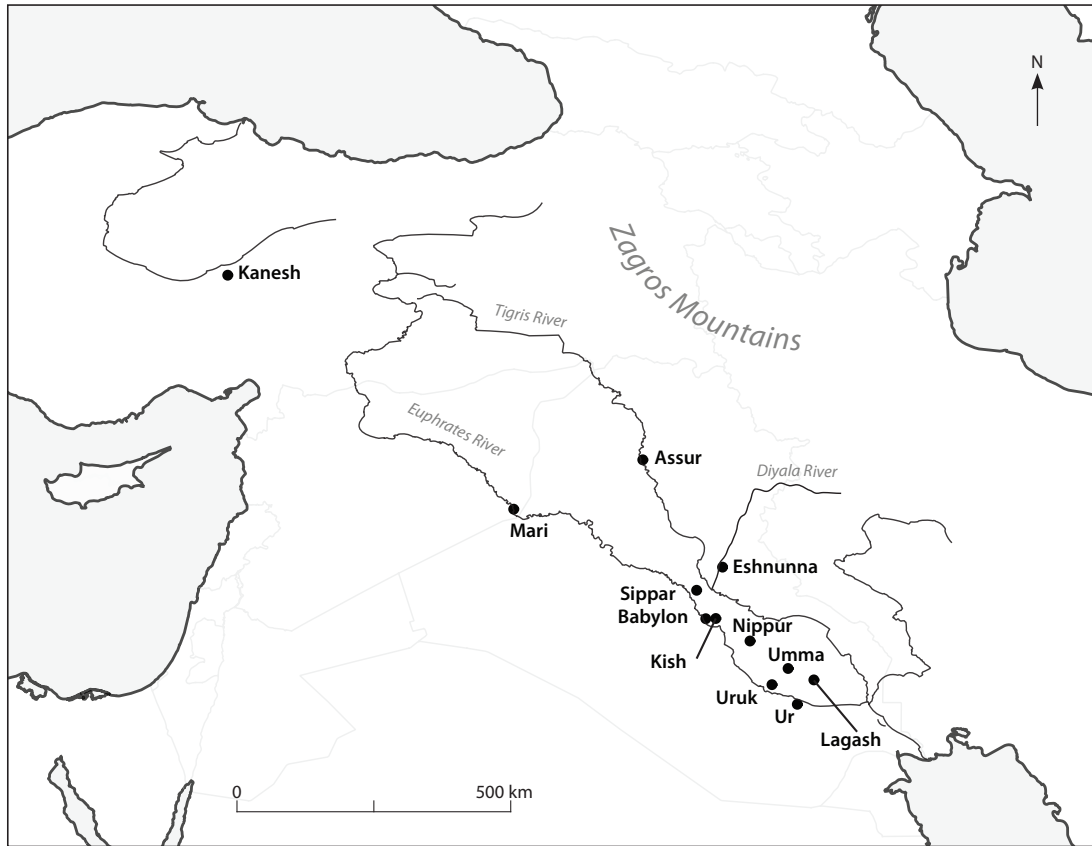


Figure 10.1. *Major sites mentioned in the text.*

buildings, temples and palaces. Domestic quarters have been excavated in a few but significant examples, and settlement pattern studies have identified smaller sites that were connected to very much larger ones, and so reconstructed the network of regional sites. Less attention has been paid to the destruction levels in these sites.

In this essay we do not simply point to the obvious biases in documentation in the Mesopotamian textual and archaeological record. Also, we do not claim that we have discovered new information from tablets or from material culture that complement or supplement or alter the understanding of Mesopotamian politics and economies and societies. Rather, we attempt to delineate, on the basis of disparate sources, and to synthesize these sources (by way of selected examples), how societies were organized beneath the level of rulers and how social systems interacted with the ruling stratum. Indeed, we question some analyses that are predicated on the distinction between the political system and those groups and individuals who were not bound within that system but were also critical actors in the implementation of the ruler's policies.

Are there patterns of resistance to the goals of rulers in Mesopotamia? How do these instances of contestation and resistance play out? Where do the institutions of resistance come from? We examine whether ancient cities and states in Mesopotamia were 'integrated', as many authors put it, and whether there is there a monopoly of legal authority in cities and states that provides 'benefits' (Frangipane, p. 14).

A history of academic resistance to views of the totalitarian nature of political and economic power in Mesopotamia

The understanding of Mesopotamian states as politically centralized, totalitarian, and administering redistributive/command economies with a monopoly on law has pervaded the archaeological and sociological literature on early states in general. This analysis of Mesopotamian states was formed in the early part of the twentieth century as Assyriologists considered the earliest Mesopotamian states in the late fourth and early third millenniums to be, first, temple-states and then palace-states. The first states were regarded as

temple/theocratic organizations, and the first rulers held priestly ranks. 'Palace-states' was the term used to describe the absolutist royal power of the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III) at the end of the third millennium (which followed the first territorial state of Sargon of Akkade – see below). We present here a digest of the critique of these views by Mesopotamian scholars. We then return to our main subject of how the organization of society cannot be confined to the centralizing and 'integrating' function of rulers (whose great power and wealth we certainly do not contest).

In 1960 A.L. Oppenheim wrote in the first volume of the new journal, *Current Anthropology*, an essay titled 'Assyriology – Why and How'. It was reprinted in his book, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (1964). Oppenheim concluded his essay with a famous and provocative call: 'If the new directions here surveyed mean that Assyriology will eventually move away from the humanities and nearer to cultural anthropology, I shall shed no tear.' By 'new directions' Oppenheim meant many things, signalled by his sections on 'why a "Mesopotamian" religion should not be written' and 'historical sources or literature?' For him, the humanistic approach to religion and history, at least by Assyriologists (and Mesopotamian archaeologists – see the fantastic illustration from an eighteenth-century German bible of a Mesopotamian city on the cover of his book – were fantasies of Western scholars who were 'never successful in treating alien civilizations with that tender care and deep respect' that anthropologists were trained to provide. Oppenheim's book still reads as a vademecum to the structure of Mesopotamian society. It interweaves studies on geography, ecology, zoology, ethno-linguistic identity, agriculture, wealth, ownership of structures and land, cities and their parts, markets, and much else. We are content, for the purposes of this essay, only to note that Oppenheim considered that 'Mesopotamian kings were anything but Oriental despots' and that the Great Organizations (as he termed them) of temples and palaces were each internal 'circulation systems'.

A foremost by-product of Oppenheim's perspective (in our view) was his sponsorship of a young scholar at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Rivkah Harris, who with the critical support of Robert McCormick Adams (who held positions both in the OI and in the Department of Anthropology in the University of Chicago) undertook to study the city of Sippar in the Old Babylonian period (1894–1595 BC). She (and her sponsors) chose this city because it was not the seat of any powerful king and because several thousand private documents (that is, non-administrative texts) had been recovered from the site (mostly from illegal excavations). This project began in the early

1960s, and her book, completed by 1971, was eventually published in 1975. Harris provided information on the city, the city elders, the mayor, the assembly, the merchants, judges, craftsmen, and especially the *naditu* women who lived in a 'cloister' and were active in the real-estate market.

In 1969 and 1971 articles appeared that, in retrospect, marked a change in how Mesopotamianists conceived of the study of Mesopotamian history. These studies, by I.M. D'jakonov (Diakonoff) and I.J. Gelb, inspired graduate students to think they could write Mesopotamian history as the history of social groups and social institutions and that political and economic change could be studied, indeed had to be studied, as result of interactions in society. Temples and palaces were part of the story, but they were not the whole story and might even be minor chapters in the story. The two articles are related since D'jakonov visited Chicago in 1962–3 and was interested to learn how American scholars were studying Mesopotamian economy and society. I.J. Gelb, who previously had not concerned himself with such questions, at least as a major part of his research, began studying social organizations, and these studies dominated the rest of his career.

D'jakonov's article, appearing in a book of essays by Soviet scholars, was actually written in 1956 or 1957 and was also drawn from his book of 1959 (according to the confused dates at the start of his essay). In 'The Rise of the Despotic State in Ancient Mesopotamia,' he forcefully refuted the entrenched notion (of Deimel 1931, Schneider 1920, Falkenstein 1954, and others) that held that 'temple estates ... encompass[ed] practically the whole of Sumerian society [which was] a theocratic polity.' By Sumerian society he meant the earliest city-states in Mesopotamia. He mainly referred to the city-state of Lagash in the period before Sargon of Akkade, that is, before about 2334 BC. He calculated that the land held by temples in Lagash was far less than the total amount of land in Lagash, and more importantly cited references to communal land that was sold to kings and notables (which Gelb, Steinkeller, and Whiting later documented fully), to patriarchal extended communities, and to councils of elders. He also discussed popular 'elections' of leaders, coups, and rebellions. The effect of this article was to galvanize scholars to re-think the structure of Mesopotamian society and the course of history.

I.J. Gelb, who wrote in 1967, 'Approaches to the Study of Ancient Society', contributed (in an obscure Festschrift) an article that was widely circulated, 'On the Alleged Temple and State Economies in Ancient Mesopotamia' in 1971 (written in 1965, as Gelb notes). What Gelb argued, in essence and convincingly, was that historians had committed a sampling error.

Temples and palaces, what Oppenheim had called 'Great Households', employed scribes to document in detail activities of these organizations. The data that led to conclusions of an all-inclusive temple-economy came from one temple in one city-state, Lagash. However, there were other documents, land-sale documents from a variety of cities, also discussed by D'jakonov, in which 'private' sellers, heads of kinship groups, alienated land to kings and notables. Witnesses in these documents received token amounts of silver as acknowledgements of their membership in the land-owning group. Presumably, the sellers never moved from their land, which was ultimately owned by the purchaser, but worked the land and paid 'taxes' to the new owner. Although these documents were few, it was an error to assume that the quantity of the documentation – thousands of texts from the temple bureaucracy – should lead to the conclusion that the temples owned all land in early city-states.

Gelb also argued that there was a sampling error in the view that there was 'state socialism' (what Landsberger 1943 called 'Stadtstaatentum') in the Ur III period, c. 2100–2000 BC. Such a conclusion was based on the tens of thousands of texts that came from the clearly massive bureaucracy that administered taxes and tribute in the sites of Drehem and Umma. However, Gelb noted that in Nippur there were significant numbers of texts that attested private landholdings. In recent research on legal cases in the Ur III period, Laura Culbertson (2009 and 2015) shows that decisions of the courts were made by local authorities, not state judicial officers, even though the decisions were collected by the state's bureaucrats. In fact, the army of bureaucrats, officials and scribes, as well as the military machine of the Ur III kings, was resisted by subject cities and territories and lasted less than a century, its effective control less than 50 years.

Aside from the specific analyses of D'jakonov and Gelb, the major contribution of the articles was methodological. In order to study social history, one must collect dozens or hundreds of documents that formed real or artificial archives (that is, archives of tablets that were not found together but reported on similar activities, ideally with the same persons mentioned in the texts). The goal was to delineate the history of officials or of sales or of legal proceedings (or other activities) and so to understand how people interacted with one another in order to collect, circulate, or otherwise manipulate goods and services. Some senior Assyriologists just didn't get it (Kraus 1977) and severely criticized young scholars who were – under the inspiration of Gelb and D'jakonov – attempting to study aspects of social organization and by so doing inferring the nature of social change. The tide of historical research, however, moved

from the study of royal inscriptions and the specious claims of kings, to work on the fundamentals of how land was cultivated, houses were built, rented, sold, and how legal disputes were resolved. These studies resumed some work on these matters that scholars in the early twentieth century had undertaken, mainly as philological enterprises. However, the goal now was to relate the study of economic and legal documents to questions of the legitimacy and governance of cities and states and especially why and how rulers and dynasties came and went and how new rulers and dynasties came to power after the times of collapse. Some historians still wrote in the traditional way: they judged rulers as successful or not, often based on their personal qualities, by amount of territory they conquered, and they attributed collapse to invaders putting an end to weak kings and their dynasties. One Mesopotamian historian denied that any early states (such as that of the Hittites or Persians) were 'ramshackle' (as she put it) (Kuhrt 1995, 281, 701). In the next sections we shall show that the most 'successful' kings sowed the seeds of dynastic failure. We shall also point to the fault lines and cleavage planes that made early Mesopotamian states fragile.

Fragility in literature

A literary text from the seventeenth century BC known as the Atra-hasis ('The exceedingly wise man') Epic explains in detail how a mob of minor deities, protesting their work for the elite gods, took up their spades and torches and marched to the palace of Enlil, the traditional head of the third millennium pantheon (Lambert 1969, Foster 2005, 227–80). Afraid of the possible outcome of the rebellion, Enlil follows the advice of Enki, god of wisdom, and ordered the goddess Belet-ili to create humankind to do labour for the gods, thus relieving the labour of the minor gods. The uprising was successful.

Human insurgents struggled against their overlords with mixed results. Copies of a literary text narrate revolts against king Naram-Sin of Akkade (grandson of Sargon) who ruled in the twenty-fourth century. In this case not only did the ruler smash the rebels but, according to another inscription found at Bassetki in Kurdistan, he was further declared a god against whom rebels were insolent and powerless. In Mesopotamian official histories (as well as histories elsewhere) winners get the privilege of immortalizing their victories in writing. Because the mutiny in the Atra-hasis epic occurred in an imaginary world, rebels could be successful in a way in which, in the literary-historical tradition, kings would steadfastly deny. In the 'lamentations' over the destruction of cities (Agade

and Ur), the gods decide on the collapse of cities for reasons of their own.

In the historical examples that follow, we shall explore the ways in which the fragility of strong regimes can be perceived through the actions of resistance by various local and regional powers (see Van De Mieroop 2015 for a history of Mesopotamia). Resistance takes a variety of forms. It can appear as palace and priestly opposition within city-states (as in the time of Urukagina, just before the time of Sargon), or in the well-attested court intrigues; it can break out as revolts led by nobles or elites from subjugated cities or kingdoms seeking power and independence; and it can also surface as the less noticeable but nevertheless effective behaviour of community institutions (such as councils and assemblies) seeking to maintain their local authority. Naturally, these oppositional strategies are not mutually exclusive. Their co-occurrence can be disastrous for the central government when economic crisis or the incursions of ethnic groups join the picture.

Historical examples of fragility and resistance

The earliest city-states

The first city in Mesopotamia that we know much about is Uruk in the southern part of the land. Its history in the fourth millennium BC is known from German excavations in two areas, the Eanna precinct, home of temples to Inanna (and in the last stages, levels V, IV a, b, and c ceremonial plazas and a hypothetical administrative building) and the so-called Anu Ziggurat. In the last stages of level IV (Fig. 10.2) the first tablets were found, first pictographic and then cuneiform, cylinder seals, sculptures, and ration bowls in their thousands. There was a city administration, known from tables of officials on cuneiform tablets found in the Eanna precinct, and municipal leaders, as well as a clear division of labour from elites to unfree workers and slaves (which can be inferred from the material record as well as from the titles on tablets) (Green and Nissen 1987, Civil 2013). The area of the city is

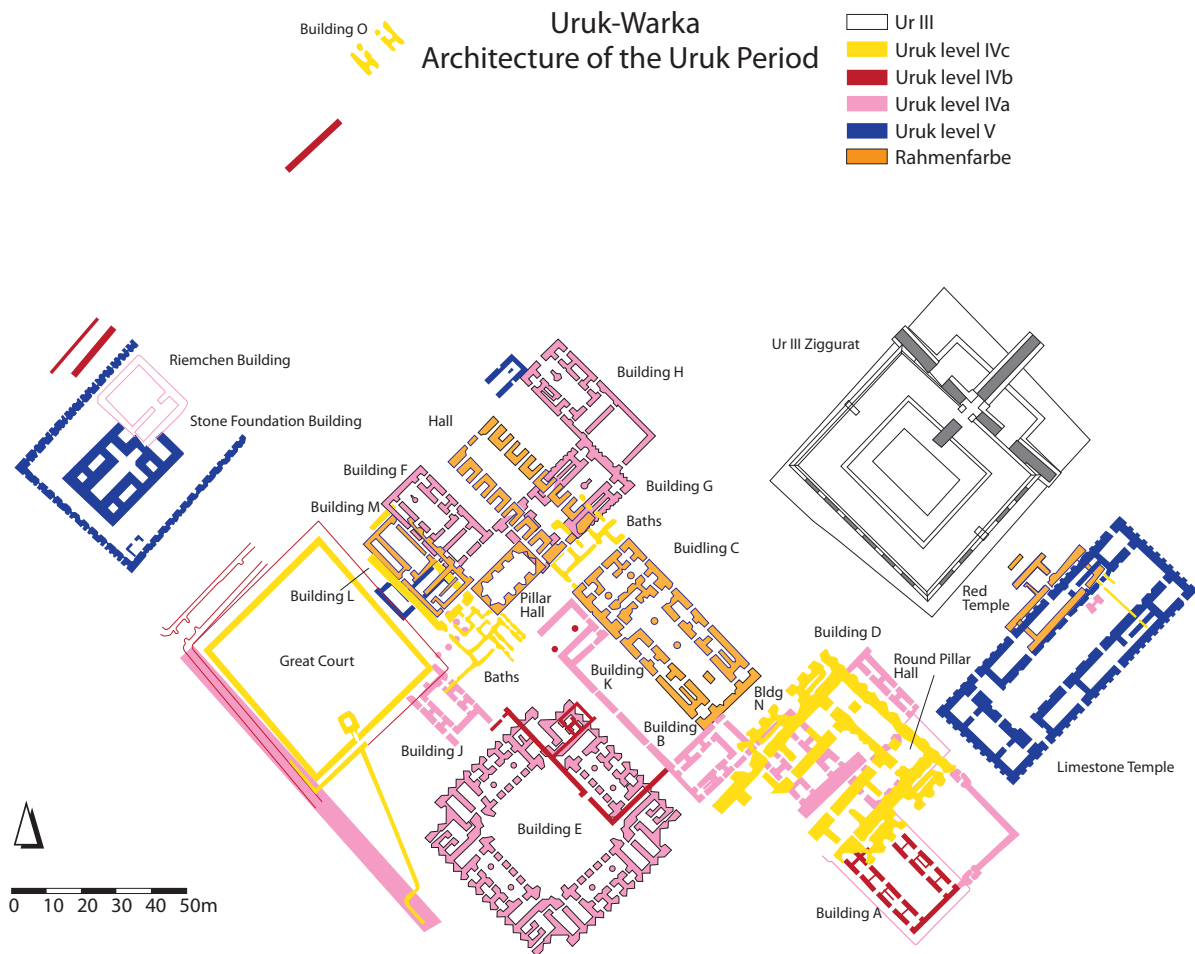


Figure 10.2. Uruk levels V and IV.

estimated at 250 hectares (over 600 acres; the Eanna precinct alone covers 9 hectares, over 22 acres), and the population of the city has been thought to be in the tens of thousands. The city of Uruk developed from a time of humble villages, since only villages (around 10 hectares or less) in Mesopotamia are known before 4000 BC. Thus, the evolution of Uruk was not gradual, but explosive. Demographic change resulted from the depopulation of the countryside, which trend accelerated in the first half of the third millennium BC. Writing, seals, monumental structures, and high art, and statecraft itself were inventions in the new urban setting with its rulers and subjects (Nissen 1988).

It is the rapid and transformative evolution of the city of Uruk that archaeologists and historians have focused on explaining. Uruk was the first city and the first city-state. However, what happened to the Eanna temples and ceremonial structures and the first state in Mesopotamia? (There are also urban developments as early or earlier than Uruk in Northern Mesopotamia, but these are less well known). The Eanna level III (Fig. 10.3) precinct was systematically levelled, and various fire installations were installed (Barrelet 1974), presumably commemorating the *collapse* of the Uruk IV state.

It is possible, as one archaeologist has thought, that refugees from Uruk IV established new 'Urukian' outposts in Syria and Iran (where Urukian traits are found that looks just like those in Uruk) (Johnson 1988-89).

In any case, Uruk, the city did not disappear with the destruction of Eanna. Uruk was a major player in city-state rivalries in the early third millennium, and, indeed, Uruk flourished through the Hellenistic period, roughly 3000 years after its urban foundation. Perhaps we can compare the destruction of the Uruk temple complex in Uruk level IV with the fiery destruction of the ceremonial precinct of the city of Teotihuacan in about AD 550. Teotihuacan was the colossus of Mesoamerica from about 200 BC to the massive conflagration. Rene Millon (1988) noted that there was no rival of Teotihuacan that could have successfully attacked it. Furthermore, *only* the central ceremonial district of Teotihuacan was torched. The neighbourhoods of Teotihuacan were untouched, and in fact there is a population centre at Teotihuacan today.

In any case, although Uruk and some other Mesopotamian cities survived hundreds of years, their forms of government and social relations changed greatly as did their relation to other cities and ephemeral

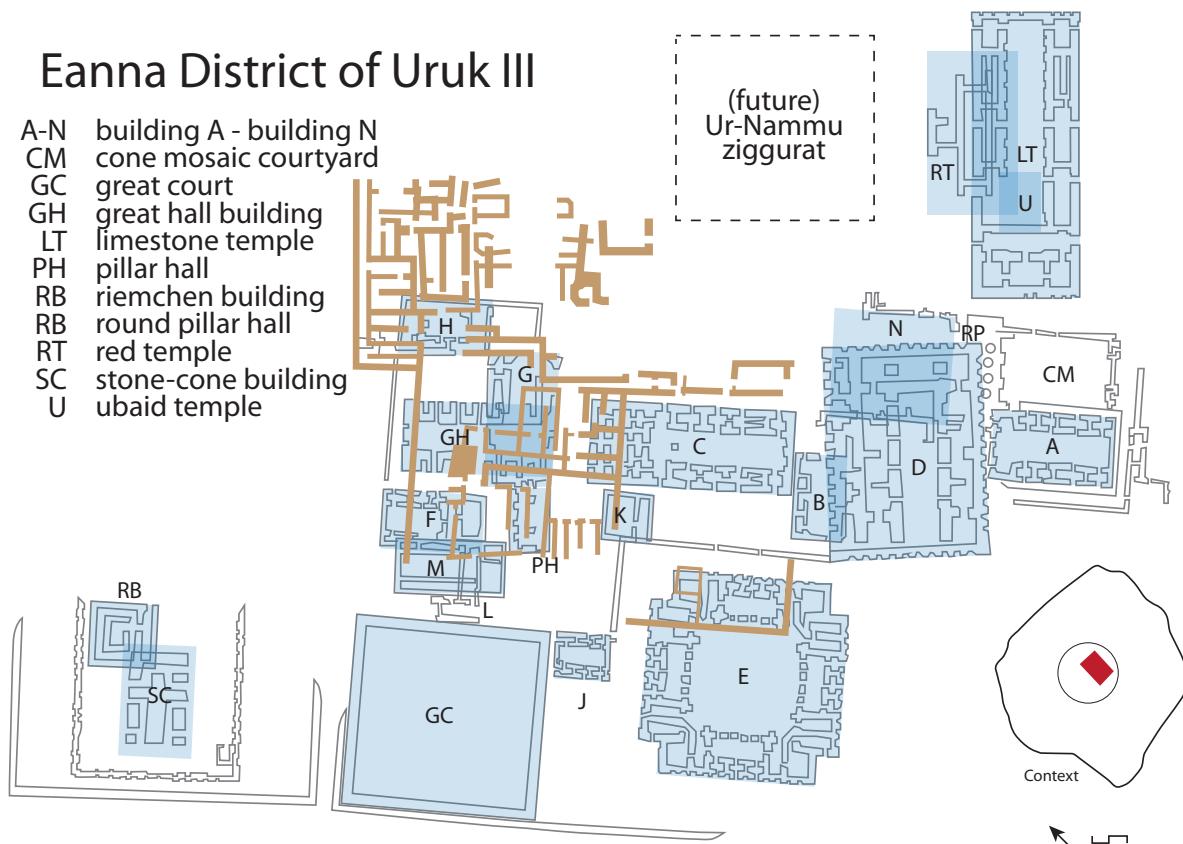


Figure 10.3. Uruk Eanna level III.

territorial states, as did the ethno-linguistic composition of the cities. Nevertheless, cities in Mesopotamia, from the earliest dates onward, usually asserted their own desire for independence against other cities, contained forms of community authority, and were scenes of various forms of struggle for power and wealth within city walls (as we have noted above and see below).

We don't know the circumstances of the destruction of the Eanna precinct, but we can easily think that the massive bureaucratic structure of the first state in Mesopotamia was resisted by the dissident population of Uruk. The presence of thousands of ration-bowls, presumably for the workers who constructed the massive temples in the Eanna precinct, ends after the destruction of Eanna.

In the first half of the third millennium BC Mesopotamian city-states fought each other constantly. In the best known of the petty wars, the neighbouring city-states of Lagash and Umma battled each other over the fertile land between them. The internecine conflicts lasted more than a century as recorded in inscriptions found at Lagash. These texts invariably report on victories by Lagash rulers as well as the kings' boastful claims of divine support (Van De Mieroop 2015). But, as fortune would have it, a Lugalzagesi of Umma conquered Lagash and several other southern city-states as well. His territorial control was short-lived, however, when a new king from Kish, Sargon, defeated him and so took over his conquests.

The Akkadian state (c. 2334–2200 BC)

Sargon of Akkade (or Agade, c. 2334–2279 BC) brought all warring city-states of southern Mesopotamia under his control. He conquered territories from the Diyala River down to the Gulf, the core of his kingdom, and then moved into more distant regions. It is difficult to ascertain how effective his rule was over cities in Iran (e.g., Susa) and farther up the Euphrates (e.g., Mari and Ebla). Sargon and his successors managed to hold power for about 150 years, though unevenly. The succession of five kings from the same dynasty and their dominion over a considerable extension of land was unprecedented and signalled quantitative and qualitative transformations in the socio-economic and political structure of power. The builder of the Akkadian territorial state (or 'empire') was a usurper in the court of the city of Kish. He established his own royal residence in a new city, Akkade and conquered local opposition, ending the struggle among middle and southern city-states in Mesopotamia (in the Early Dynastic period, c. 2900–2350). It is plausible that the *Sumerian King List*, a composition devised to promote the idea that one city at a time ruled all over the land thus creating a cultural unity, was conceived during the

Akkadian dynasty (most recently Marchesi 2010, 233, Foster 2016).

Undertakings of the Akkadian kings confronted the fragility of their realm. All of them, from Sargon to his great-grandson Shar-kali-sharri, carried out numerous military campaigns. They monitored previously conquered territories and attempted to incorporate new ones in the Akkadian state. Important administrative measures were implemented to maintain the cohesion of the reign, from Sargon's establishment of Akkadian governors throughout the kingdom to his grandson, Naram-Sin's regulation of accounting and record-keeping techniques and bureaucratic reforms. Loyal followers and their support were secured through grants of land. A famous monument, known as the obelisk of Manishtushu, records the purchase of 3450 hectares of arable land. The king *bought* the ancestral fields of several hundred men, so enlarging the royal domains and rewarding his own men. To secure divine favour, temples were built and war booty offered to the gods. In an unprecedented act intended to link their dynasty with ancient sanctuaries, Sargon designated his daughter as a priestess of the moon-god at Ur, and Naram-Sin appointed three of his daughters as priestesses at Nippur, Ur, and Sippar.

None of these strategies, however, was enough to secure the kingdom and overcome fragilities. Although no incident is reported from the 56 years of Sargon's reign, problems emerged under his successors. It is possible that both sons and successors of Sargon, Rimush and Manishtushu, met with violent deaths in palace conspiracies (Foster 2016, 8, 10). Rebellions broke out in Sumer and Akkad (southern and middle Mesopotamia) under Rimush's and Naram-Sin's rule. The revolts against Naram-Sin, recorded in literary texts and other inscriptions, have been characterized as the most dramatic events of his reign. Uprisings occurred in the core of the kingdom, with a new leader from nearby Kish allied with other leaders. Another rebel from Uruk allied with other southern cities. All these revolts were crushed and Naram-Sin's son, Shar-kali-sharri, whose name ironically means 'king of all kings', ruled for 25 years before the Akkadian state finally collapsed under his short-lived successors. A military officer seized power in Lagash, another man ruled over Susa, and Gutu people from the Zagros Mountain area (bordering Iraq and Iran) plundered some cities. At this point, the *Sumerian King List*, which monotonously records one king after another, asks 'who was king, who was not king?' (Jacobsen 1943)

Southern and central Mesopotamia (c. 2000–1155 BC)

During most of the second millennium territorial states were few and didn't last long. Until its collapse

in around 2000 BC, the Ur III state had controlled and imposed tribute over a vast territory, from Assyria down to the Gulf, including also regions east of the Tigris River. After the fall of Ur, a constellation of independent kingdoms, whose fortunes were inextricably intertwined, emerged. Political fragmentation and territorial disputes characterized the next two centuries. Ishbi-Erra, a general in the army of Ur, seized power in the city of Isin, expelled the Elamites from Ur, established a dynasty, and dominated much of the region. Further south, the city of Larsa became influential when in 1897 king Abi-sare attacked Isin thus challenging its supremacy. Larsa, however, experienced a period of political instability with rulers from different lineages; then a family, possibly of Elamite ancestry, gained power and ruled for about seven decades. Rim-Sin, the second and most prominent monarch of this newly established dynasty, put an end to the Isin-Larsa rivalry when he captured Isin in 1793. His victory was deemed so important that he dated the remaining thirty years of his reign after this event ('the first year after the king defeated Isin', 'the second year after the king defeated Isin', and so forth).

In central Mesopotamia, in the Diyala valley, Eshnuna had detached itself from Ur and conquered previously independent cities of the area, such as Ner-ehtum, Shaduppum, and Dur-Rimush, becoming one of the powerful states of the early eighteenth century. North-west of Eshnuna, in Assur, after the fall of Ur, local rulers took the title 'governors of the god Assur' (see below on Old Assyrian politics and economics). In the nearby city of Ekallatum, Shamshi-Adad inherited the throne of his father and conquered Assur. He later established his royal seat in Shubat-Enlil, and installed his elder son on the throne of Ekallatum and his younger on the throne of Mari. By the time of his death in 1776, Shamshi-Adad controlled the entire region north of Babylonia, although his Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia disintegrated soon after his demise. On the banks of the Euphrates in Syria, Mari had not been under the direct control of the Ur III kings, although the two cities were in diplomatic contact. Yahdun-Lim, who by the mid-nineteenth century had begun a new dynasty, was assassinated in a palace conspiracy and his son did not long survive him. Shamshi-Adad then established his control of the area and appointed his offspring as king of Mari. Following the fall of the 'Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia', Zimri-Lim, a relative of Yahdun-Lim, became the new king of Mari and one of the powerful contenders in the political arena. In Babylon, a local dynasty, ruled from the early nineteenth century, and about a century later, in 1792, Hammurabi succeeded to the throne. Other cities such as Uruk, Kish, and Sippar had their own dynasties

during the time before Hammurabi. The kingdom of Elam in today's Iran and the kingdom of Yamhad in Syria also contended for power in this time.

The political interactions among the various independent cities in the period before Hammurabi were complex. There were diplomatic arrangements and spying, royal marriages, court intrigues, and assassinations. Amorite chieftains, who led separate lineages, allied with and betrayed one another in their successful attempts to seize power within venerable cities in a bewildering kaleidoscope of shifting powers in cities and in the countryside. Traditional and new urban elites alike resisted the domination of neighbouring kingdoms, even though many of them, individually or in concert with ambitious allies, were seeking to impose their own superiority over their neighbours. Thus, for instance, Yamhad and Eshnuna simultaneously attacked Samshi-Adad before he died in 1776. In the next decade, Hammurabi of Babylon rose to prominence. In 1766 Elam, in allegiance with Babylon, Mari and possibly also Larsa, attacked Eshnuna. Then Eshnuna helped Hammurabi of Babylon when in 1764, together with Mari and Aleppo, he defeated Elam. In 1763 Hammurabi overthrew Rim-Sin of Larsa, sacked Eshnuna in 1762, and finally turned against his ally Zimri-Lim of Mari and conquered that city in 1761. Thus, in about five years Hammurabi managed to bring all of central and southern Mesopotamia under his rule in Babylon. His only opponent was the kingdom of Yamhad (modern Aleppo), located too far away in Syria to be a direct threat.

Hammurabi's victories were duly mentioned in the prologue of his famous 'Law Code', written towards the end of his reign (Roth 1995). The prologue of his code exhibits a list of some 25 cities, the crown jewels, that the sovereign ruled, all of them in Babylonia, except for Mari, Tuttul to the northwest and Ashur and Nineveh to the north. Hammurabi's victories, he declares, were endorsed by the respective tutelary deities of the conquered cities. Although one of the epithets of king Hammurabi, 'the queller of rebellions', eloquently summarizes the king's conquests, his authority over his domain did not last long.

Revolts broke out within the first decade of the reign of Samsu-iluna, Hammurabi's son and successor. In the ninth year-name, the king claims to have defeated the army of the Kassites, an ethno-linguistic group first attested in archival records around the eighteenth century. Contradicting this claim of defeating them, Kassites were employed as mercenaries of Old Babylonian kings and also established their own armed encampments in the Babylonian countryside (Richardson 2005). In the tenth year-name of Samsu-iluna, the king mentions his victory over Idamaras

(variant has the army of Eshnuna), Emutbal, Uruk, and Isin. The statement suggests that insurgencies had taken place more or less simultaneously all over the kingdom. In one of his royal inscriptions (Frayne 1990, 384–8, RIM IV E4.3.7.7), the king also claims to have killed and buried Rim-Sin II (a rebel from Larsa), to have executed 26 rebels, and defeated Iluni of Eshnuna and cut his throat. Of the 28 rebels that the king mentions in his royal inscription, administrative records document the following leaders: Rim-Sin II (Larsa), Rim-Anum (Uruk), Daganma-ilum (Kazalu/Muti-abal), Ilima-ilum (Nippur), Iluni and Munaw-wirum (Eshnuna) (Seri 2013). The revolts were put down, but the fragility of the state sprouted. There were signs of economic, institutional, military, and environmental difficulties, and southern and central cities were abandoned (for a time). The last kings of the dynasty of Hammurabi of Babylon, however, ruled until 1595, albeit with reduced hegemony, basically in the countryside around Babylon.

Besides court intrigues and revolts, the forms of resistance traditionally attested, tablets from the first half of the second millennium BC allows us to trace, for the first time in Mesopotamian history, the activities of community institutions whose authority could overlap with and limit royal power. Cities and villages included a network of local authorities, such as the chief of the city, the elders, the city, the port authority, the city ward, and the assembly (Yoffee 2000, Seri 2005). These institutions were involved in the settlements of various disputes and litigations, in the management of labour force, in the distribution and sometimes also in the sale of real estate, and in the collection of taxes, among others things. They acted as hinges that articulated the crown and society. They further show collaboration between the state and local powers as well as tensions over the control of local resources. Unlike the straightforward military opposition of rebellious leaders and their armies, the dealings of local authorities display a complex array of everyday-life resistances.

In traditional histories, kings of the First Dynasty of Babylon ruled for 155 years after Hammurabi. The collapse of the state is much debated and poorly known. The final blow allegedly came from a Hittite incursion. In 1595 Babylon was sacked, and the 'weak' king Samsu-ditana was defeated. Many people abandoned their cities.

The ensuing vacuum of power was filled by Kassite leaders (of several allied lineages) who established a dynasty in Babylon. The beginning of this new period in Babylonian history is uncertain. In 1475 king Ulamburiash overthrew a Sealand dynasty in the very southern-most, marshy part of Babylonia whose leaders

were in power there since the eighteenth century. They later styled themselves 'king of the Sealand' (Dalley 2010; Boivin 2018; Shepperson 2018). These southern territories were defeated by Kassite rulers who, by the fourteenth century, controlled all of Babylonia. They were regarded, in the Amarna correspondence, as one of the members of the 'Great Powers Club' together with Assyria, Mitanni, the Hittites and Egypt (Liverani 2000).

Certain incidents occurred between Babylonia and Assyria after the assassination of the Kassite king Kara-hardash in a rebellion. Assur-uballit of Assyria, the builder of the 'Middle Assyrian' state (see below), the grandfather of the deceased ruler, invaded Babylonia and installed a puppet king on the throne of Babylon (c. 1332). About a century later, another Assyrian monarch, Tukulti-Ninurta I, invaded Babylon and overthrew Kashtiliashu IV (c. 1225). Tukulti-Ninurta I (see below) ruled Babylonia briefly through puppet rulers, until a revolt in Assyria deposed him. The Kassites attempted a return to power, but Elamite raids finally put an end to the Kassite dynasty in 1155.

Assyrian Councils, Nobles, Economy: Decentralized States, The Changing Roles of Kings in Northern Mesopotamia (c. 2000–1200 BC)

Before Shamshi-Adad (Samsi-Addu) founded his 'Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia', including Assyria, in the early eighteenth century, a native Assyrian dynasty ruled the city of Assur and nearby territory on the eastern bank of the Tigris River for about 200 years. Except for a few building inscriptions recovered from a temple, almost all of the documentation from this period comes from the archives of traders found in the city of Kanesh in central Anatolia (Asiatic Turkey). We summarize the economic affairs of the traders (see Larsen 2015) but in particular emphasize the nature of authority in Kanesh and Assur.

The Old Assyrian commercial system (c. 1920–1750 BC) can be reconstructed from the survival of about 23,000 merchant records written on clay tablets of about 500 Assyrian traders. Most of the Assyrian traders lived in the Lower Town of the city of Kanesh (modern Kültepe) alongside 'native' Anatolians (of various ethno-linguistic groups). The karum of Kanesh was not itself the Lower Town, but the institutional association of the Assyrian traders. The palace of the Anatolian ruler of Kanesh was located in the citadel of Kanesh. The Assyrian merchants were politically subservient to the Anatolian prince to whom they paid taxes.

The Assyrian traders moved tons of tin and high-value fabrics from Assur to Kanesh. They traded these goods in Anatolian markets (through about a dozen smaller Assyrian enclaves) for silver and gold, which

were relatively plentiful in Anatolia. The Assyrian texts allow a picture to be drawn of enterprise based on private initiatives, risk-based and profit-seeking behaviour, free-floating capital, bearer's checks, and similar 'modern' features (Yoffee & Barjamovic 2018). This picture utterly refutes previously held notions (by Polanyi 1957, Finley 1973, and others) of state-organized trade, fixed prices, and merchants who were agents of the state.

There is only a single mention of a 'palace' at Assur, the home-base of the merchants, who travelled over 1000 km to Kanesh, established residences, married Anatolian women (having left their Assyrian wives in Assur), and lived for three generations in Anatolia. The Assyrian trading system was based on communities of private agents who maintained legal and financial institutions independent from the society in which they settled. In Assur itself, which was much smaller in size than Kanesh, the government consisted in an oligarchy that was linked to the city's specialization in trade. Rulers styled themselves as 'stewards' of the state deity. Both at Assur and Kanesh, there are assemblies of 'big and small men' who decided legal issues, especially among merchants quarrelling over deliveries of goods and long-term partnerships combining financial resources (Barjamovic 2011).

The profits made from the long-distance trade were enormous, but the trade depended on the fragmented nature of the political scene during this period. The rise of centralized states in the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries BC effectively put an end to the trade that depended on the movement of goods, the payment of bribes to local chieftains along the routes, and taxes owed to the palace in Kanesh. It is important to note that the privately organized trade required a level of state intervention and support. The state, however, was itself a kind of collective government in which the traders played roles. The state facilitated transport through the building and maintenance of roads, bridges, harbours, and inns and through the negotiation of treaties with local potentates.

The small size of a polity like Assur effectively meant that the same group of individuals shared roles as agents, financiers, and legislators. All actors were closely related in terms of kinship, which meant that the system could be built on mutual trust instead of competition. The entire city-state of Assur can be seen as a corporate entity in external competition with a number of similarly organized political units. The governing institutions, whose members were for a large part involved in the trade, left the actual running of the business to private enterprise, family firms.

It will not escape the reader of Mesopotamian histories that this picture of city-state governance is

not what one reads in economic histories in which merchants were thought to be state agents, and cities were not centres of production, export, and import. Now, it is true that Assur in the Old Assyrian period may not have been typical of other Mesopotamian states, or so some have said. However, the biased sample of documents allows a certain scepticism of those sceptics. In Old Assyria our tablet-sources come almost entirely from the private archives of merchants. We know little about the working of the palace or the temples in the city of Assur. Compare this sample to the tablet-sources from third millennium cities, which are overwhelmingly from temple or palace archives. In those cities we have occasional references to assemblies and councils and traders, and we have clear archaeological finds of distant goods. Who were the traders? How did they trade? How important was trade to third millennium cities? New studies are piecing together the disparate evidence for mixed economies and dispensing with the older ideas that one must choose between either public or private control of trade.

After the Old Assyrian period, from c. 1700–1356 BC, there was a consolidation of territorial states in Mesopotamia and then the collapse of those states, resulting in a proliferation of smaller states with varying amounts of royal authority and military tactics. In 1356, Assur-uballit of Assyria (see above) consolidated a new Assyrian state (in the time called the 'Middle Assyrian' period), successfully warded off local powers and undertook adventures to the south in Kassite Babylonia. Such adventures of succeeding kings culminated in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta (1233–1197). The king, as depicted in an epic poem, decided to defeat the Babylonian (Kassite) king who, as he claims, violated treaty obligations. The gods, he claims further, supported his campaign, and he sacked Babylon, carried off the statue of Marduk, chief god of Babylon, to Assyria (Machinist 1976, 1978).

Tukulti-Ninurta, however, faced local opposition which consisted of the nobles of Assur and his own sons. His desecration of Babylon was regarded as impious, as was his behaviour to the gods of Babylon. Furthermore, Tukulti-Ninurta decided to move his government to a new city, 3 km north of Assur, to build a new palace complex, establish a new religious precinct, and construct a new irrigation system to support the new capital. The vicious and callous behaviour towards Babylon, a seat of traditional Mesopotamian religion and scholarship, was a grievous sin to the old-line nobility ('great men'), who were also being disenfranchised by a new administration. They assassinated Tukulti-Ninurta. This was not the first royal assassination known in Mesopotamian history, since Rimush, son of Sargon of Akkade (and perhaps his

brother, too), was also killed in a court intrigue. After several centuries of central weakness in Assyria and also a time of collapse and decentralization of other states in Mesopotamia and throughout the Near East, a new Assyrian state arose with militaristic kings who attempted to bring the entire region under their control.

Contestation, resistance and fragilities in early Mesopotamian states

Piotr Michalowski (2011, 84) writes that 'traditionally the study of [Mesopotamian] history has focused on a succession of "peoples:" Sumerians, Akkadians, Amorites, Kassites, Arameans' and others. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, such views were racially charged: Semitic Akkadians debased the heroic Sumerian culture. As we noted earlier, another, rather Whiggish view, was that of a progression from temple (theocratic)-states to 'despotic states' controlled by a totalitarian royal palace bureaucracy (in the Ur III period, c. 2100–2000 BC). The collapse of the Ur III state (c. 2000 BC), in which the militaristic monarchy lost control of regions near the capital and all its foreign conquests, was followed (in the traditional histories) by an 'Amorite' ethnic-group invasion and the installation of various dynasties led by kings with Amorite names. In an Old Babylonian document, the population of the time consisted of 'Akkadians and Amorites'. Michalowski, however, has refuted the ideas of an Amorite threat to the royal house of Ur and an invasion of nomadic Amorites who bested local dynasties in city-states. Amorites, who in Ur III times were military guardsmen of the royal house and also officials in various cities, seized power in the cities through the interplay of struggles with both local elites and leaders of (named) Amorite lineages, of which there were many. Amorites were certainly not a horde of foreigners who swooped down on Mesopotamia.

The picture of political change in early Mesopotamia is one of resistance to the control of any king or city-state. Although the 'Sumerian King List' may portray an ideal of one city ruling over Mesopotamia, the facts on the ground were of armed rebellion against any ruler who attempted to establish hegemony over neighbouring city-states. This much is clear. In the domestic arena in cities, certain forms of contestation are apparent, but an overall picture is elusive. No extant text from an archive records a social revolt similar to the uprising of the primeval 'proletarian' gods of the Atra-hasis Epic. But resistance to power in the actions of local authorities and local elites (as we have mentioned, and see below) is occurred.

In the Old Babylonian period, there is a veritable perfect storm of resistance to power. After the collapse

of Hammurabi's 'empire', which lasted for only the last 5 years of his reign and the early years of his successor's, the following scenario can be reconstructed. First, there was a traditional revolt of the city-states that Hammurabi had conquered. In the eighth year of Samsu-iluna, son of Hammurabi, a king named Rim-Sin (the second Rim-Sin), from Larsa martialled troops against the king from Babylon. An archive from the city of Uruk, dealing with the house of prisoners of war, shows that revolts against Samsu-iluna involved local leaders from all Babylonia trying to achieve independence from the central government.

A subsequent uprising was led by a 'Sealand' dynasty, that is, a local dynasty that emerged in the marshy southmost part of the land. Rulers from this dynasty were able to fight a kind of guerilla war against the diminished power of the kings in Babylon. In central Mesopotamia, not far from the former capital, Babylon, armed groups of Kassites established camps in the countryside. In Babylon and the nearby cities still under its control, the Crown's funds, from tribute and taxes of conquered territories, were failing. Agricultural labourers on royal estates could no longer be permanent employees but were hired for seasonal work (Yoffee 1977). However, the palace required the permission of the local 'head-man' (or mayor) to requisition community members for the work (Stol 1976). Urban temples in this period were similarly desperate for funds. They created a series of loans in which the 'debtor' borrowed money from the temple and promised to return the loan with interest when they were 'healed' through the intercession of the gods. Finally, the nearly powerless royal house in Babylon was attacked by an expeditionary force of Hittites from Anatolia. The Hittite army had launched a campaign in northern Syria, which was a vital corridor for communication with the south, east, and west. Finding no opposition, the army proceeded to Babylon, sacked the city and carried off the sacred statue of the patron god of Babylon, Marduk.

Whereas some Mesopotamian history textbooks report that the Hittites came down 'like a bolt from the blue' (Postgate 1977, 100, Oates 1979, 84), in fact this was not a case of a stable and integrated Babylonian state that was defeated by a superior armed force. Babylon fell from a variety of factors – local city-state resistance to territorial state created by Hammurabi, several ethno-linguistic 'tribes' (as Kassites are sometimes described) who had been attracted to Babylonia by its riches and possibilities of serving Babylonian rulers as mercenaries, and not least resistance within city-states by the locally constituted/community authorities who acted against the rulers of their cities.

How typical of contestation and resistance to the goals of rulers in other times and places in

Mesopotamia was this Old Babylonian scenario? We hold that whereas there were of course specific differences in means and tactics of resistance, the inherent fragility of governance in early Mesopotamian history make the Old Babylonian patterns of behaviour far from anomalous. Stability is a kind of historical fiction, as is the uncontested power of the strongest of Mesopotamian kings. Although rulers were certainly powerful and were brutal tyrants who built enormous palaces and furnished magnificent temples and led mighty expeditionary forces, the irony of such power is that it led to systematic and successful resistance.

The incidence of warfare in Mesopotamia that we have described (for the Early Dynastic period in the early third millennium and in the Old Babylonian period in the early and mid-second millennium) was itself a critical component in the fragility of political systems on both the territorial and local (urban) level. The need to enlist soldiers, mainly as *corvée* labourers (Steinkeller & Hudson 2015), and for the construction of palaces, temples, and city-walls, on a more or less constant basis, posed a problem for the maintenance of agricultural activities and irrigation. We don't know a lot about how soldiers were requisitioned. There are documents about the hiring of 'substitutes', as wealthy men could pay for others to work and fight for them. We know little about how these soldiers were fed (Landsberger 1955, Wilcke 1983).

In late periods (in the late second and first millennia BC), which we have not incorporated in this essay, the Assyrian army defeated territories that didn't pay tribute and deported tens of thousands of people into the Assyrian heartland (Oded 1979, Wunsch 2013). These deportees worked in the latifundia of Assyrian nobles (often army generals) and in new capitals as builders and craftsmen.

The enormous amount of military actions in Mesopotamia, in which there was seldom an absence of war, destabilized states and empowered those in the countryside to take power in fragile Mesopotamian cities.

Coda

We argue in this essay that early Mesopotamian cities and states were inherently 'fragile'. The fragility of territorial states is clear: they didn't last long. Cities were constituted in various social and economic groups in cities which had their own leadership structures, and the cities were embedded in a countryside in which villages and territory were characterized by farmers, pastoralists. Cities were in a sense resilient, providing the main identity for citizens, above and beyond other social identities. In both cities and the countryside,

there were members of distinct ethno-linguistic groups (such as Amorites and Kassites, that is, people whose ancestral languages were not Akkadian or Sumerian) who interacted with each other in the complexity of kinship relations and with other residents of cities. Cities were originally formed (in the last part of the fourth millennium BC) as people in the countryside migrated into what became cities. The countryside became depopulated in this process, which lasted nearly a millennium, then became repopulated as new villages were established, some in relation to the new cities, others as self-sufficient communities inhabited by urban refugees. Fragility has an evolutionary logic that led to a variety of cracks, fissures, and resistances to the political order.

This picture of stratified and differentiated Mesopotamian societies is at variance with the fetish of Oriental despotism (which one Classical archaeologist calls 'Occidentalism'). We have discussed the history of the demolition of this fetish in the first part of our essay.

We have also discussed certain patterns of resistance in Mesopotamia as a whole and in the city-states in particular. Most visible is the resistance to hegemonic control by the city-states. The formation of the first territorial state in Mesopotamia by Sargon of Akkade was followed quickly by armed rebellions against the rulers. At the end of the Ur III period, cities – one after the other – stopped paying tribute to the last king of the short-lived dynasty creating an economic crisis in the capital and leaving Ur vulnerable to its foreign and domestic enemies.

In the succeeding Old Babylonian period we have noted a variety of resistances to power, including in the cities themselves which was led by community leaders. Indeed, in the preceding, highly centralized territorial state in Ur III times we have noted that legal decisions were made by community leaders, even as the official records were part of the state's archival system. In the Old Babylonian period, the famous 'Code of Hammurabi' was not used in the judicial system which was maintained by local judges, elders, assemblies.

In this essay, we haven't dwelled at length on the various textual curtains that have veiled the fragilities of Mesopotamian societies. We have noted that scholarly reliance – mainly but not only in previous generations – on royal inscriptions which simply glorify the accomplishments of kings. This has led to the 'report-card' version of history: successful kings conquered many places because of their personal abilities; unsuccessful kings were weak-minded and lost territories built up by their abler predecessors.

Finally, we admit that we haven't written about the continuities in Mesopotamian culture that made possible the 'regeneration' of Mesopotamian political

systems of dynastic rule and ambitions to create a territorial state, a Mesopotamia in the political sense of the word. Dynasties of Amorite and Kassite kings, whose languages we know entirely from their personal names, did not have their scribes write in their own languages. Rather, these rulers were intent on becoming Mesopotamians. Under their rule (and then later in Mesopotamian history in the first millennium bc, which we haven't considered in this essay), scribes copied Sumerian and Akkadian texts, which were used in schools all over the land, and worshipped Mesopotamian gods. Among other things, these literary and school texts promoted the normative picture of kings as absolute rulers of stable and integrated cities, favoured by the gods, and instructed to conquer their neighbours.

As we have elaborated in this essay, this was an impossible dream.

References

- Barjamovic, Gojko. 2011. *A Historical Geography of Anatolia in the Old Assyrian Colony Period*. Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies: Museum Tusculanum.
- Barrelet, Marie-Thérèse. 1974. Dispositifs à feu et cuisson des aliments à Ur, Nippur, Uruk. *Paléorient* 2: 243–300.
- Boivin, Odette. 2018. *The First Dynasty of the Sealand in Mesopotamia*. (Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 20). Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter
- Civil, Miguel. 2013. Remarks on AD-GI₄ (A.K.A. "Archaic Word List C" or "Tribute". *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 65: 13–67.
- Culbertson, Laura. 2009. Dispute Resolution in the Provincial Courts of the Third Dynasty of Ur. PhD Dissertation. Department of Near Eastern Studies. The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Culbertson, Laura. 2015. Local Courts in Centralizing States: The Case of Ur III Mesopotamia. In *Social Theory in Archaeology and Ancient History. The Present and Future of Counternarratives*, ed. G. Emberling. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 185–202.
- Dalley, Stephanie. 2010. Administration in Texts from the First Sealand Dynasty. In *City Administration in the Ancient Near East*. Proceedings of the 53e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, v. 2, eds. L. Kogan et al. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- D'jakonov, Igor M. 1959. Obshchestvennyĭ i gosudarstvennyĭ stroĭ drevnego Dvurech'ia. Koska Izd-vo vostochnoi lit-ry: Moscow.
- D'jakonov, Igor M. 1969. The Rise of the Despotism in Ancient Mesopotamia. In *Ancient Mesopotamia, Socio Economic History: A Collection of Studies by Soviet Scholars*, ed. I. M. D'jakonov. Moscow: Nauka. Pp. 173–203.
- Deimel, Anton. 1931. *Šumerische Tempelwirtschaft zur Zeit Urukaginas und seiner Vorgänger: Abschluss der Einzelstudien und Zusammenfassung der Hauptresultate*. Roma: Pontificio Instituto Biblico.
- Falkenstein, Adam. 1954. *La cité-temple sumérienne*. Paris: Librairie de Méridiens.
- Frangipane, Marcella. 2017. Different Trajectories in State Formation in Greater Mesopotamia: A View from Arslantepe (Turkey). *Journal of Archaeological Research* 2: 1–61.
- Frayne, Douglas. 1990. *The Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 bc)*. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Early Periods. vol. 4. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Finley, Moses I. 1973. *The Ancient Economy*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Foster, Benjamin. 2005. *Before the Muses. An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press.
- Foster, Benjamin. 2016. *The Age of Agade: Inventing Empire in Ancient Mesopotamia*. New York: Routledge.
- Gelb, Ignace. 1967. Approaches to the Study of Ancient Society. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87: 1–8.
- Gelb, Ignace. 1971. On the Alleged Temple and State Economies in Ancient Mesopotamia. In *Studi in onore di Edoardo Volterra*, vol. 6. Milan: A. Giuffrè. Pp. 138–54.
- Gelb, Ignace, Steinkeller, Piotr. and Whiting, Robert. 1989. *Earliest Land Tenure Systems in the Near East: Ancient Kudurrus*. Plates and Texts. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- Green, Margaret and Nissen, Hans. 1987. *Zeichenliste der Archaischen Texte aus Uruk*. Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Uruk-Warka. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag.
- Harris, Rivkah. 1975. *Ancient Sippar: A Demographic Study of an Old Babylonian City (1894–1595)*. PIHANS XXXVI. Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten.
- Jacobsen, Thorkild. 1939. *The Sumerian King List*. Assyriological Studies 11. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, Gregory. 1988–89. Late Uruk in Greater Mesopotamia: Expansion or Collapse? *Origini* 14: 595–613.
- Kraus, Fritz R. 1977. Facetten landwirtschaftlicher Organisation in Altmesopotamien. *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 34: 147–53.
- Kuhrt, Amélie. 1995. *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 bc*. 2 vols. London: Routledge.
- Lambert, Wilfred G., Millard, Alan and Civil, Miguel. 1969. *Atra-ḫasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Landsberger, Benno. 1943. Die Anfänge der Zivilisation in Mesopotamien. *Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Dergisi* 1: 97–102.
- Landsberger, Benno. 1955. Remarks on the Archive of the Soldier Ubarum. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 9: 121–31.
- Larsen, Mogens T. 2015. *Ancient Kanesh: A Merchant Colony in Bronze Age Anatolia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Liverani, Mario. 2000. The Great Powers' Club. In *Amarna Diplomacy. The Beginning of International Relations*, eds. R. Cohen and R. Westbrook. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. Pp. 15–27.
- Machinist, Peter. 1976. Literature as Politics: the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic and the Bible. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35: 445–82.
- Machinist, Peter. 1978. *The Epic of Tukulti Ninurta I: A Study in Middle Assyrian Literature*. PhD Dissertation. Yale University, New Haven.

- Marchesi, Gianni. 2010. The Sumerian King List and the Early History of Mesopotamia. In *ana turri gimilli*. Studi dedicati al Padre Werner R. Mayer, S. J. da amici e allievi, eds. M. G. Viga and M. Liverani. Roma: Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza". Pp. 231–48.
- Michalowski, Piotr. (forthcoming 2019). The Domestication of Stranger Kings: Making History by List in Ancient Mesopotamia. In *Historical Consciousness and the Use of the Past in the Ancient World*, edited by John Baines, Henriette van der Blom, Tim Rood, and Yi Samuel Chen. Sheffield: Equinox.
- Michalowski, Piotr. 2011. *The Correspondence of the Kings of Ur: An Epistolary History of an Ancient Mesopotamian Kingdom*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Millon, René. 1988. The Last Years of Teotihuacan Dominance. In *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations*, eds. N. Yoffee and G. L. Cowgill. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. Pp. 102–64.
- Nissen, Hans. 1988. *The Early History of the Ancient Near East, 9000–2000 BC*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Oates, Joan. 1979. *Babylon*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Oded, Bustenay. 1979. *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- Oppenheim, A. Leo. 1960. Assyriology – Why and How? *Current Anthropology* v. 1 n. 5/6: 409–23.
- Oppenheim, A. Leo. 1964. *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Polanyi, Karl. 1957. Marketless Trading in Hammurabi's Time. In *Trade and Market in Early Empires*, eds. C. Arensberg and H. Pearson. Chicago: Free Press. Pp. 12–26.
- Postgate, J. Nicholas. 1977. *The First Empires*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Richardson, Seth. 2005. Trouble in the Countryside *ana tarši Samsuditana*. In *Ethnicity in Ancient Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the 48th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Leiden, 1–4 July, 2002*, ed. W. H. van Soldt. Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten. Pp. 273–89.
- Roth, Martha. 1995. *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*. Writings from the Ancient World 6. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press.
- Schneider, Anna. 1920. *Die Anfänge der Kulturwirtschaft. Die sumerische Tempelstadt*. Essen: G. D. Bädcker.
- Shepperson, Mary. 2018. Tell Khaiber and the Castle of the Sealand Kings. <http://www.asor.org/anetoday/2018/04/Tell-Khaiber-Castle-Sealand-Kings>
- Steinkeller, Piotr and Hudson, Michael. (eds.). 2015. *Labor in the Ancient World: A Colloquium Held at Hirschbach (Saxony), April 2005*. Dresden: ISLET.
- Seri, Andrea. 2005. *Local Power in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia*. London: Equinox.
- Seri, Andrea. 2013. *The House of Prisoners. Slavery and State in Uruk during the Revolt against Samsu-iluna*. SANER 2. Boston/Berlin: W. de Gruyter.
- Stol, Marten. 1976. *Studies in Old Babylonian History*. Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul.
- Van De Mieroop, Marc. 2015. *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323 BC*. 3rd edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wilcke, Claus. 1983. Ein Vertrag über Personenmiete, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 73: 54–6.
- Wunsch, Cornelia. 2013. Glimpses on the Lives of Deportees in Rural Babylonia. In *Arameans, Chaldeans, and Arabs in Babylonia and Palestine in the First Millennium BC*, eds. A. Berlejung and M. Streck. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. Pp. 247–60.
- Yoffee, Norman. 1977. *The Economic Role of the Crown in the Old Babylonian Period*. Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 5. Malibu: Undena Publications.
- Yoffee, Norman. 2000. Law Courts and the Mediation of Social Conflict in Ancient Mesopotamia. In *Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient States*, eds. J. Richards and M. Van Buren. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 46–63.
- Yoffee, Norman and Barjamovic, Gojko. 2018. Old Assyrian Trade and Economic History. In *Grenzüberschreitungen. Studien zur Kulturgeschichte des Alten Orients. Festschrift für Hans Neumann anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages am 9. Mai 2018*, eds. S. Paulus, K. Kleber and G. Neumann. Zaphon: Muenster, 815–24.