Between the Rivers:
The History of Ancient Mesopotamia

Part I: The Rise of Civilization

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Between the Rivers:
The History of Ancient Mesopotamia

Scope:

Six thousand years ago, in the land bordered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the first cities arose, ruled by kings who created complex bureaucracies that fostered the invention of writing and other technological advances. The Greeks coined the term *Mesopotamia*, "the land between the rivers," for this region, a name that the Romans later applied when they conquered the territory. In this course, we will explore Mesopotamian societies from the Neolithic era (c. 9,000 B.C.) to the defeat of the great Persian Empire at Gaugamela by Alexander the Great (331 B.C.). Our study will take us from the world of international diplomacy with powerful neighbors in Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia to the mundane issues of daily life, such as providing food for the family, curing disease, and settling legal disputes. We will examine archaeological discoveries, historical documents, and literary texts to explore how these lands between the rivers created a civilization that has contributed to the development of our own. A recurring theme of the course will be the creation of an urban lifestyle, which becomes increasingly sophisticated and complex as cultures expand.

This introduction to the history and culture of Mesopotamia is divided into three parts. We will begin by looking at the region in which we see the development of agriculture, settlements, and the rise of cities. What do these early cities look like? What can we say about the people who lived in them? How were they organized and in what professions did the populace engage? Temples were the earliest public architecture and required thousands of laborers to erect the structures; the organization of this labor force results in an early form of bureaucracy. Because much of the evidence for this era derives from archaeological remains, we will explore the methods used to reconstruct history from artifacts ranging from broken pieces of pottery to city walls.

In the second part of the course, we will study how the early city-states grew in size and complexity. Rulers promoted building projects, encouraged trade, and protected their people from harm. The ideal ruler was hailed as the shepherd of his people who had the favor of the gods. Literature and art celebrate the king in these roles, and we see energetic leaders digging irrigation canals and dedicating temples to the gods. During this era, we will meet historical figures, such as Hammurabi, the king of Babylon in the 18th century B.C. Hammurabi is most famous for his law code, in which the ruler legislates a wide range of punishments for theft, property disputes, and familial quarrels. Sentences are levied based on one's social standing; these laws reveal a strictly hierarchical society in which the wealthy man pays fines, while the poor man suffers more extreme physical punishment.

International contacts with other areas of the Near East flourish at this time. We will examine diplomatic correspondence between the great cities in Mesopotamia and the powerful states of Egypt and Syria, as well as the influence visible in the art and architecture of the era. Society grew ever more complex and cultured. Developments in such fields as medicine and astronomy reveal the Mesopotamian interest in understanding and ordering the world.

The last section of the course will explore the rise of empires, specifically, the great Assyrian and Persian empires. A strongly militaristic society, the Assyrians dominated much of the Near East and effected enormous cultural changes for the peoples of this region through their practice of mass transfers of population. Enormous palaces displayed images of their kings engaged in lion hunts and at the head of the mighty Assyrian army, reinforcing the strength of the state. Such a disciplined society required the smooth transfer of power from ruler to ruler to oversee the complicated bureaucracy necessary to control an empire of such great size. When palace intrigues weakened the throne, the neighboring Medes and Persians quickly seized power and established themselves at the head of the empire.

The interaction between the East and the West is the focus of the last six lectures of the course. During this time, the small and distant country of Greece was able to fend off two invasions led by the Persian king Darius and his son Xerxes in the early 5th century B.C. Although these defeats had little impact on the Persian Empire, which flourished for another century and a half, they were significant for the Greeks. The Greek historian Herodotus recorded these events from the side of the victors, and his account had enormous influence on the way that later generations of scholars understood the peoples of Mesopotamia. Despite the image that Herodotus and other Greek authors drew of a weak and corrupt Persian state, it remained a wealthy and vital empire that fell only as a result of the military brilliance of Alexander the Great. Alexander's victory allowed him to rule briefly at the head of the largest empire then known, reaching from Greece to western India, but after his death in Babylon in 323 B.C., no

single ruler was able to control these lands again. Many of the great cities of Mesopotamia were abandoned, known only as legends until archaeologists uncovered them 2,000 years later.

Lecture One
The Iraq Museum

Scope: When the Iraq Museum in Baghdad was looted in April 2003, the world was reminded of the culture that contributed the earliest cities, complex economies, the first writing system, and the first empires to human civilization. Some of the most famous artifacts housed in the museum have been recovered, such as the 5,000-year-old Uruk Vase, sculpted in relief. This vessel stands as the oldest known depiction of gods, humans, and the natural environment, and it represents the earliest representation of religious ritual. As of a few years after the looting of the museum, many artifacts remain missing, including thousands of cuneiform tablets that reveal early forms of writing. We will examine some of these masterpieces from the Iraq Museum in order to begin our study of the long history and rich culture of ancient Mesopotamia.

Outline

I. The looting of the Iraq Museum and the loss of many great archaeological finds received worldwide attention because of the rich heritage of the world's oldest civilization.

A. The objects in the museum represent the development of agriculture, the rise of cities, and the introduction of writing, laws, and monumental architecture. These features of Mesopotamian culture became the foundation of urban cultures around the world, and the opportunity to explore how they emerged can give us meaningful insights into our own society.

1. Known by many names, such as the Fertile Crescent or Mesopotamia—"the land between the rivers" in Greek—the area of modern Iraq was the site of the earliest cities in world history, arising in 5000 B.C. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are the two essential sources of water for the region, which is bounded by the Arabian Desert to the west and framed by the Zagros Mountains to the east and the Taurus Mountains to the north.

2. The rise of cities in this region encouraged individuals to practice diverse professions: Artisans and craftsmen produced the stuff of daily life, such as pottery, tools, or clothing; traders brought both essential and exotic goods from outside the city; priests created a religious community; and scribes recorded aspects of city life in all these areas. Because these aspects of urban life leave traces in the archaeological record, we will see that archaeology is an essential part of our study of Mesopotamian history.

3. Cities required that humans use technology and engineering, such as irrigation canals, to water the agricultural fields in order to support large populations gathered in urban centers.

4. Temples were a central feature of every city, and religion placed an important role in the social order of the city and Mesopotamian life in general.

B. One of the masterpieces from the Iraq Museum is the Uruk Vase.

1. The vase has four registers, or rows, carved with figures that represent the social hierarchy of ancient Iraq.

2. The lowest register shows a river flowing around the bottom of the vase; in fact, the river provided the resources necessary for all the images we see on the upper registers.

3. The second register from the bottom shows a procession of domesticated animals—sheep and goats. The wool and hair of these animals was woven into textiles, a major commodity in the economy of the region.

4. In the third register, we see a row of nude male figures carrying baskets and jars of food that they have, presumably, cultivated and harvested.

5. The purpose of these gifts of food is seen in the top register, where there are more offerings, brought to a seated female figure, probably the patron goddess of Uruk, Inanna.

C. The changing role and representations of rulers will be essential elements of our study of Mesopotamia.

1. Kings can be represented as shepherds who care for their people, warriors who protect them, or judges who ensure that wealthy and poor alike receive fair (although not equal) treatment.

2. An early king, Sargon of Akkad (r. c. 2334–2279 B.C.), was remembered by generations for his extensive military campaigns; a portrait of an Akkadian king represents the strength of such powerful rulers.

D. Writing was developed in Mesopotamia in the late 4th millennium B.C., and the range of texts that survives from these civilizations—simple receipts, letters between kings, long lists of laws, and love poems—brings them to life.

1. Mesopotamian scribes used small, portable tablets of clay as their primary writing material, large numbers of which have survived. These texts inform us about the political, religious, economic, and cultural activities of the civilizations that we will study. Much of our attention in this course will be focused on how to interpret these written sources.

2. As we will see, official documents rarely describe a ruler or city losing a war. Kings often claim to devastate a rebelling city, giving the impression that they've completely obliterated a revolt, but sometimes texts record that the same ruler had to return within a year or so to quell the region again. As historians and archaeologists, we are left to piece together the reality of the situation from other evidence.

3. We will also look at letters, both private and royal, and we will see that their interpretation can vary according to where they were found or other factors.

4. Texts show the essential cultural continuity of Mesopotamia, with myths and legends celebrating the same gods and heroes throughout the period that we will cover. Political upheaval and changes among the ruling elite generally have little effect on the lives of the ordinary farmer or city-dweller in Mesopotamia.

II. The extensive empires that dominate the history of the 1st millennium B.C. left impressive monuments celebrating their triumphs.

A. The Assyrians are known for their enormous empire, which reached from Iran to the eastern Mediterranean in Syria, and for the monuments they built. Huge palaces were decorated with stone reliefs depicting kings hunting animals and humans. These images reflect the terror that the great army of the Assyrians inspired and help to explain the Assyrians' 300-year dominance of much of the Near East.

1. One of the most common images found at Assyrian palaces is a half-human, half-bull creature called a *lamassu*. This creature protected the doorways to palaces and served as a reminder that the king was protected by the gods.

2. The Assyrians were also interested in depicting actual historical events in both the art of their palaces and in their texts. We find that we can identify specific ethnic groups and campaigns in such finds.

B. In the second half of the 1st millennium B.C., the Persians rose to power. An Iranian ethnic group, the Persians filled the gap left by the collapse of the Assyrian Empire and, eventually, crossed the Hellespont into Europe to invade Greece in the 5th century B.C. The Greek historians who wrote about these encounters created many of the ideas about the ancient Near East that have persisted into the modern era.

1. The Persians adopted imagery that had long been used in Mesopotamia, partly as a way to legitimize their own rule.

2. The Persian governance of its empire is displayed in its art and gives us a sense of what made the Persians distinct from other cultures. Rather than showing the complete dominance of one group over another, as the Assyrians had done, the Persians preferred to emphasize the benefits of their rule.

C. Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.) claimed that he was exacting revenge on the Persians for their attacks on Greece when he arrived in Asia in the late 4th century B.C. Macedonian military tactics and Alexander's own strategic brilliance helped him to defeat the last Persian king, Darius III (r. 336–330 B.C.), and to create, at least for a few years, the largest empire of all.

III. As these artifacts so effectively demonstrate, much of the early history of Mesopotamia has been recovered through years of excavation in Iraq and neighboring countries.

A. We will come to realize that archaeology is essential to learning about both the history and the material culture of Mesopotamia.

B. The shattered objects and destruction seen in the Iraq Museum remind us of the widespread effects of war on cultures throughout human history.

IV. In this course, we will discuss many "firsts" with respect to Mesopotamia: the first cities, the first system of writing, the first epics, and the first empires. The study of these critical concepts allows us to better understand how they developed and how they have changed over the millennia—and how we still use them today.

Essential Reading:

Milbry Polk and Angela M. H. Shuster, eds., *Looting of the Baghdad Museum: The Lost Legacy of Ancient Mesopotamia*.

Matthew Bogdanos and William Patrick, *Thieves of Baghdad*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What elements of Mesopotamian civilization are represented by artifacts from the Iraq Museum?
2. Art and monuments often suffer in times of war from deliberate and accidental destruction; what is the goal of those who deliberately damage cultural icons?

Note: The professor would like to both credit and thank Hilary Gopnik, who originally used the looting of the Iraq Museum as a metaphor/illustration of the history of Mesopotamia in a course at Franklin & Marshall in the fall of 2003.

Lecture Two
Geography and Environment

Scope: The geography and environment of Mesopotamia hold an especially significant place in our study of the region and its history. Mesopotamia is located at the intersection of the Arabian plate and the Asiatic plate; this geography determines both the mountain ranges that border the territory and the depressions through which the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers flow. Topographical boundaries are numerous—mountains, seas, and deserts—and the ease or difficulty with which they were passed has important historical ramifications. We will see, for example, that the highest concentration of settlements formed in the more accessible plain regions. The climate in the lowlands tends toward long, extremely hot summers, with insufficient rainfall to support crop cultivation without the use of irrigation. These factors combined to create the environment necessary for the development of agriculture. As we explore these geographical features, we will begin to consider the requirements for an urban lifestyle and study the connections between Mesopotamia and its neighbors.

Outline

I. Any study of the history of Mesopotamia must begin with a detailed survey of the geography and climate of the region, because the physical environment was a crucial factor in the development of agriculture and settled life in this land between the rivers.

- **A.** The geography of the region is quite diverse, with mountain ranges, deserts, fertile plains, and marshlands.
- **B.** Central and southern Mesopotamia consists of the fertile plain that lies between and to the west of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This low-lying area was formed when the Arabian tectonic plate moved under the Iranian plate. Northern Mesopotamia is hillier, with rolling plains that lead up to the mountains around them.
- **C.** The Zagros Mountain range, one of the key geographical features of the region, runs for more than 900 miles from the northwest to the southeast, forming the eastern border of Iran. This mountain range was created when the Eurasian and the Arabian tectonic plates collided.
  - **1.** On the other side of the Zagros Mountains is the great Iranian plateau, to which we'll return when we discuss the Persians.
  - **2.** The Zagros Mountains were home to groups of semi-nomadic peoples who often invaded Mesopotamia.
- **D.** The Zagros Mountains join with the Taurus Mountains to the north, forming the northern border of Mesopotamia. Beyond this border was Anatolia (the term for ancient Turkey), an important trading region.
- **E.** To the west of the Euphrates River are deserts; these arid regions separated Mesopotamia from the Levantine coast. Until the 1st millennium, when camels came into use, the deserts were an effective and safe border for Mesopotamia.
- **F.** Marshlands covered the southernmost region of Mesopotamia. Here, the rivers emptied into the mouth of the Persian Gulf. We have some evidence of settled life in this region: People lived in reed huts built on islands and engaged in fishing. We also know that these people had significant contact with the rest of Mesopotamia.
- **G.** These geographical features created a rich alluvial plain that could support large cities surrounded by agricultural fields, especially in southern Mesopotamia. This combination of urban and agricultural ways of life promoted a consistent Mesopotamian culture that endured numerous changes in political leadership.

II. One of the important distinctions among regions of Mesopotamia was the ease or difficulty of access to water.

- **A.** In the northeast, rainfall usually supports enough agriculture to allow communities to supply themselves with food.
- **B.** Further south, in central and southern Mesopotamia, artificial water supplies, that is, irrigation canals, were necessary, to draw water from the Tigris River and, especially, the Euphrates.
  - **1.** These rivers begin in Armenia and flow through the Taurus Mountains to the north, running down to the Persian Gulf.

2. The Tigris is about 1,150 miles long; of the two, it is the faster and straighter river, with a deeper riverbed that made it much more difficult to exploit with irrigation canals.
3. The Euphrates is about 1,700 miles long and slower, with a much gentler gradient and numerous turns. Its lower bank means that it is much easier to cut into for irrigation ditches and canals.
4. Both of these rivers tend to flood, which threatened agriculture during the period that we will discuss.

C. The Tigris and Euphrates are closest together in the flat plains of central and southern Mesopotamia, the area where cities arose earliest. Cities were most often founded to the east of the Euphrates River to provide access to irrigation canals leading from the river.

1. Maps of ancient Mesopotamia show that cities were actually some distance from the current location of the Euphrates.
2. The river has experienced significant shifts in its course, caused by artificial changes, such as ancient irrigation canals and modern-day dams, as well as the natural movement of silt.

D. The practical necessity of irrigation systems in the south tells us about important social developments, such as the need for large-scale organization to create and maintain the systems.

E. The high water table of southern Mesopotamia also meant that the soil had a high level of salt, reducing its fertility drastically. This over-salinization of the soil may be one of the causes of some of the famines that surviving texts record.

III. What kind of resources did this environment provide?

A. Away from the region, Mesopotamia can be classified as a sub-desert, an ecological zone that would provide enough sustenance for herds of sheep and goats.

B. This region also supported other animals that were used for meat—jackals, lions, gazelles, onagers, and hyenas—many of which have been hunted into extinction.

C. The marshes in the low-lying areas supported an even greater variety of wildlife, including several species of birds, as well as fish and other water creatures.

D. The marshlands also served as a refuge for political rebels or criminals, a practice that continued until the early 1990s, when Saddam Hussein ordered the marshes drained to force out the Marsh Arabs who opposed his rule. Only about 10–20 percent of the marshes remain today.

E. Some debate continues about the location of the mouth of the Persian Gulf. It used to be assumed that the southern coastline was farther inland, but in the mid-20th century, this idea was challenged, and geologists accepted that the ancient coastline was about the same as it is today. The issue remains unsettled.

F. We will see that large cities grew where there was easy access to natural resources. In Mesopotamia, the plains near rivers were the great cultural centers. In contrast, mountain ranges fostered smaller, more isolated, and often more independent groups.

IV. Certain additional features of the region help to refine our understanding of where people chose to settle.

A. Southern Mesopotamia receives only about 10 inches of rainfall a year, but the soil in this region is quite fertile, offering up to a 1-to-20 yield of seed to harvest per year. The tradeoff for a high yield rate is that a community would have to expend a significant amount of labor to create an artificial water source.

B. As population density in this area increased, neighboring cities began to compete for access to prime farmland. One of the earliest historical conflicts recorded is the 150-year war (which occurred sometime between 2500–2350 B.C.) between the southern cities of Umma and Lagash, prompted by conflicts over borders and farmland.

C. Northern Mesopotamia benefits from more abundant rainfall that offsets the need for irrigation. The land in the area could be used for grazing flocks or for agriculture, and in general, there seemed to be somewhat less pressure for land in the north than in the south.

V. Two resources that were especially desirable were metal and timber, but these were not widely available in Mesopotamia itself and had to be imported from the east and west.

A. These luxury goods were considered essential by rulers for use in the enormous building projects that enhanced their prestige.

B. Control of trade routes was one of the primary motivations—apart from land—for disputes between cities.

VI. Historians apply different names to this territory, depending on the particular historical era under review.

- **A.** Some of the names that will become familiar throughout our course are Sumeria, Akkad, Babylonia, Assyria, and Persia. These all reflect the dominant culture that had political control at certain times.
- **B.** In the first part of the course (covering the 3rd and 2nd millennia B.C.), we will refer to central and southern Mesopotamia as Sumer or Sumeria. Sumerian is the language used in these regions, but the term does not represent a specific ethnic group.
- **C.** In the same period, northern Mesopotamia is called Akkad, also a name derived from the predominant language. These two cultures were equally important and independent, until they were unified by Sargon of Akkad in the 23rd century B.C.
- **D.** In the 2nd millennium, the region of southern and central Mesopotamia is called Babylonia, after the city of Babylon. The term is applied to the rise of Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 B.C.), the 18th-century law-giver and king of Babylon who, like Sargon, unified the north and south. The political control that Hammurabi established did not last long after his death, but the cultural unity continued for several centuries.
- **E.** Assyria lies above Babylonia in northern Mesopotamia and was the leading state of Mesopotamia in the late 2nd and early 1st millennia B.C. Assyria grew from the city of Ashur, a trading post with connections to Anatolia that would expand westward to the coast of Syria-Palestine (the Levant) and even reach Egypt.
- **F.** By the 6th century B.C., Assyria was defeated by the Persians from southwest Iran. They controlled Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, Egypt, and Anatolia and reached the Mediterranean. The Persian Empire would continue until Alexander the Great's invasion in the late 4th century B.C.

VII. This lecture has touched on a great variety in the environments and geography of Mesopotamia and the social and historical ramifications of these natural resources.

- **A.** The rivers, especially the Euphrates, mitigated the lack of rainfall in southern Mesopotamia.
- **B.** In the north, mountains served as barriers and the source of some timber.
- **C.** The deserts to the west, like the mountains, provided a natural defense and were the home to semi-nomadic tribes.
- **D.** The marshlands in the south saw the emergence of communities that were independent of larger cities.

VIII. In the next two lectures, we will examine the history of archaeology in Mesopotamia and the methods that archaeologists have used to inform us about how different groups took advantage of and enhanced their surroundings to create a rich cultural life.

Essential Reading:

J. Nicholas Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History*, pp. 3–21.

Christopher J. Eyre, "The Agricultural Cycle, Farming and Water Management in the Ancient Near East," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (hereafter referred to as *CANE*), edited by Jack Sasson, vol. I, pp. 175–190.

Supplementary Reading:

Carlos E. Cordova, "The Degradation of the Ancient Near Eastern Environment," in Daniel C. Snell, ed., *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, pp. 109–125.

Questions to Consider:

1. Consider the many different ecological zones that we have discussed in this lecture. What effects do you think the environment might have on the cultures that lived there?
2. What are some of the difficulties with which early farmers would have struggled?

Lecture Three
Discovering Mesopotamia

Scope: In this lecture we will consider the early history of exploration and archaeology to learn how excavations in Iraq shaped European and American ideas concerning ancient Mesopotamia. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the typical explorer of the region was a European adventurer intrigued by the lands of the Bible. As knowledge of Near Eastern cultures increased, large teams from European and American museums and universities conducted research in the region. Such excavations yielded significant discoveries, but they required that a team be tied to a site for decades and were quite expensive to sponsor. In the late 20th century, smaller teams of archaeologists ranged over larger territories, asking different research questions that could be addressed without extensive excavation. Thus, as we review the history of archaeology, we will look at how Mesopotamian culture has been reconstructed and how ideas about the culture have changed over time.

Outline

I. Why is archaeology so important to Mesopotamia?

- **A.** The texts of ancient Greece or Rome, such as the *Iliad*, survived and were accessible to scholars throughout most of modern European history. In contrast, Mesopotamian texts were not known until they were discovered by archaeologists.
- **B.** The cultures of Mesopotamia were described in the Old Testament and by Greek and Roman authors. These sources viewed Mesopotamia as the home of wealthy, cruel tyrants, often with many wives.
- **C.** The Old Testament recorded historical invasions of Assyrian and Persian rulers into the land of Israel. The kings were portrayed as immoral and sacrilegious, deserving of the divine retribution visited on them in the form of plagues or loss in battle.
- **D.** Greek authors were both impressed and appalled by the luxury, tyranny, and polygamy of Persian kings. Many of their descriptions promoted their own way of life as superior to that of the Persians. Three examples illustrate how Greek authors exaggerated the extravagance of their eastern neighbors.
  1. Ctesias, a 4th-century-B.C. Greek historian, created a fictional account of a ruler called Sardanapalus, perhaps modeled on one of the 7th-century B.C. Assyrian rulers, whose empire collapsed because of his self-indulgence. The story inspired a painting by Eugene Delacroix in 1827 (*The Death of Sardanapalus*) and a tragedy by Byron about a decade later (*Sardanapalus*).
  2. In the 1st century B.C., the Greek historian Diodorus wrote of Semiramis, a queen who supposedly ruled Assyria for 42 years, built the city of Babylon, and had a new lover every night, whom she killed the next day. This account has no basis in fact, but Voltaire's 18th-century tragedy popularized the story for a wider European audience.
  3. Diodorus was also one of the authors who described the lush Hanging Gardens of Babylon; no archaeological evidence of the gardens has ever been discovered.
- **E.** These stereotypes reflect more about Greek and Roman ideas of foreigners and gender roles than any aspect of Mesopotamian culture or history, but they are important in understanding the mindset of early explorers of ancient Mesopotamia.

II. As early as the 13th and 14th centuries, travelers had noted impressive mounds and discovered artifacts from early civilizations that piqued the interest of later explorers. But Ottoman control of the region, combined with its wild and remote terrain, made exploration difficult.

- **A.** One of the great figures in early Mesopotamian archaeology was the British explorer Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817–1894), who discovered the Assyrian city of Nineveh.
  1. Layard's discoveries of the remains of the great stone palace at Nineveh brought these unknown eastern lands to the attention of the West.
  2. Colossal sculptures of half-animal, half-human figures were displayed in the British Museum in 1847. Thousands of visitors were intrigued by the strange figures, which seemed so foreign in comparison to familiar Greek and Roman sculpture.

3. Layard himself promoted the study of Mesopotamia and helped to popularize it with his illustrated publication of his excavations.

B. The language of these lost cultures was deciphered at about the same time. Major Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810–1895) spent several years copying a large 5th-century B.C. trilingual inscription of Darius I carved into a mountainside at Behistun/Besitun in Iran.

C. Once cuneiform was deciphered, it was possible to read the small clay tablets that recorded myths and historical events.

1. Some stories, such as that referring to a universal flood that destroyed humanity, seemed to confirm the historicity of the Old Testament and generated even more enthusiasm for the study of these ancient cultures.
2. Once cuneiform texts were found, illegal looting and targeted excavations began in earnest, despite Ottoman attempts to prevent export of these artifacts. Many of the texts that we will explore in this course were looted during this early period of exploration; the fact that no archaeological context survives leaves us with many unanswerable questions about the date, purpose, author, and original location of the texts.

III. German teams began excavating at the city of Babylon, revealing the city of Hammurabi's time (6th century B.C.). The Germans also exported many artifacts, including the Ishtar Gate, now in Berlin.

A. In the early 20th century, the German archaeologist Walter Andrae (1875–1956) began to employ a more scientific method of stratigraphical excavation and recording at Ashur.

B. This scientific method, in conjunction with the ceramic typology developed by Sir Flinders Petrie (1853–1942), the discoverer of King Tutankhamen's tomb in Egypt, allowed archaeologists to begin to organize their finds and establish chronologies.

C. This era also represents a time when European museums competed to assemble impressive collections; museums sponsored expeditions and exported many objects from their original sites. This practice would change in the period between the two World Wars.

IV. After the modern nation of Iraq was created in 1921, a period of intense excavation occurred that stands as one of the most exciting phases in Mesopotamian archaeology. Many of the largest and most spectacular discoveries of cities, temples, and palaces date to this era.

A. British teams excavated at several key sites, including the city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia. A joint excavation by British and American archaeologists uncovered large tombs filled with gold jewelry and vessels, musical instruments, and indications of mass human sacrifice.

B. Max Mallowan (1904–1978), the assistant of Sir Leonard Woolley (1880–1960) at the Ur excavations, explored some of the great Assyrian palaces at Nineveh in northern Mesopotamia.

C. French archaeologists investigated Susa in modern Iran and discovered a remarkable cache of Akkadian and Babylonian monuments that had been taken from their original location by a victorious Elamite king a millennium after they had originally been erected.

D. Gertrude Bell (1868–1926), a British traveler and writer who became fascinated by Mesopotamia, was another important figure in the early history of archaeology in Iraq.

1. Bell lived in Iraq from 1917 to 1926, serving as an advisor to Britain and the emerging Arab government.
2. Bell's perspective marks a shift in thinking in Mesopotamian archaeology away from the framework of a biblical point of view. Instead, she focused on using archaeology both to discover the culture of Mesopotamia and as a means to provide the new nation of Iraq with a visible heritage of its past.

V. During the second half of the 20th century, the large, expensive excavations of earlier decades were no longer possible. At the same time, new research questions fostered different archaeological methods and opened exciting avenues of inquiry.

A. In the 1950s, archaeologists began to apply methods and techniques learned from American anthropological investigations to ancient Mesopotamian cultures.

B. Rather than exploring a single site or cemetery for several years, archaeologists became interested in global questions that required comparisons of many sites and focused less on kings and empires and more on ordinary citizens.

C. At the same time, archaeologists began to think about why settlements occurred in certain areas and at certain historical periods; such questions led to widespread implementation of *surface survey*, an approach in which teams of archaeologists map the physical presence of settlements over an entire region.

D. Archaeologists shifted their focus from large public buildings, such as palaces and temples, to domestic architecture and artisan quarters.

E. One of the important reasons that we look at the history of excavation is to see the biases of earlier generations and to be aware of biases that we ourselves may harbor.

1. As we saw, the earliest excavators were interested in uncovering evidence to support biblical or Greek texts.

2. The later generations of archaeologists focused on single sites to discover how particular cities changed over the course of time. This approach gives us a wealth of detailed information but does not allow archaeologists to form a broader concept of the culture as a whole.

3. The late 20th-century shift to surface survey was prompted by an interest in comparing cultures and asking global questions. The tradeoff with this approach is the loss of rich detail offered by long-term excavation at one particular site.

F. Given the current state of Iraq, archaeological research there is on hold.

Essential Reading:

Amélie Kuhrt, "Ancient Mesopotamia in Classical Greek and Hellenistic Thought," in *CANE*, vol. I, pp. 55–66.

Seton Lloyd, "Excavating the Land Between the Two Rivers," in *CANE*, vol. IV, pp. 2729–2741.

Supplementary Reading:

Agatha Christie, *Murder in Mesopotamia*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What popular images or ideas come to mind when you think of Mesopotamia?

2. Do you recognize any of these as influenced by the 19th- and 20th-century concepts that we have discussed?

Lecture Four
Archaeological Methods

Scope: In the last lecture, we discussed the history of excavation in Mesopotamia and noted changes in the ways that archaeologists approached excavation and interpreted the artifacts they found. In the early years of archaeology, explorers were focused on how kings ruled their lands; later, toward the end of the 20th century, archaeologists became much more interested in the lives of ordinary citizens. In this lecture, we will analyze the methods that archaeologists use and look at the types of objects they discover. This archaeological framework is necessary because it allows us to understand both how we know and what we cannot learn about the ancient world.

Outline

I. Excavation is necessarily destructive because archaeologists must dig through layers of human history to understand past cultures.

- **A.** Early archaeologists had little training and were looking for the oldest types of evidence they could find. Thus, evidence from the later dates of a site was of little interest to them.
- **B.** Looters, of course, have no interest in anything other than high-value goods.
- **C.** The scientific method that archaeologists use today to analyze the occupation of a site is called *stratigraphy*, the study of different layers, or *strata*, that indicate a period of occupation. The strata that lie closest to the surface are the most recent.

II. How do archaeologists note changes in occupation or strata?

- **A.** Sometimes, the indications of significant changes leave obvious traces, such as a wall that has been burned or bodies that show signs of violent death.
- **B.** More often, however, archaeologists must look for more subtle indications of changes in occupation. For example, the soil color might vary between different layers, or structures might show additions over time.
- **C.** As archaeologists dig through the strata, they are able to establish a relative chronology for the site. The Germans were the first to apply this method in Mesopotamia in the early 20th century.

III. Mesopotamia is somewhat unique in the study of ancient cultures because instead of digging down from the surface, archaeologists investigate mounds, or *tells*, that are created by millennia of occupation.

- **A.** It is not unusual for tells in the region of our interest to be 60 feet high and 200 feet in diameter. Such tells are impractical to excavate completely; thus, we can usually discuss evidence from only one portion of a village or city.
- **B.** The fact that tells were representative of cities was recognized early on, and early archaeologists discovered where to excavate to locate temples or palaces. As a result, we are relatively well informed about the houses of gods and kings.
- **C.** The questions that interest us today focus on daily life, such as how sections of a city were organized. The answers to these types of question must be pieced together from scattered evidence.

IV. Clay is the most common artifact type that archaeologists recover. Although clay objects are easily broken, fired and baked clay is difficult to destroy completely.

- **A.** Pottery is the clay artifact that is found most regularly in excavations. Archaeologists study pottery in a variety of ways to better understand a society. For example, similar pottery decorations suggest a shared or common culture, especially when found in a relatively confined region. Specific shapes of pottery can also be seen as indicators of trade or other contact between regions.
- **B.** Because pottery is found so frequently, it is often used by archaeologists to indicate a historical period or region.
  - **1.** At the site of Tell Halaf, near the border of Turkey, a distinctive type of pottery called Halaf ware has been found. This pottery is crafted from a salmon-colored clay, painted in red and black with geometric and animal designs.

2. The pottery dates from the 6th millennium B.C., the prehistoric period, but it has been found in a large portion of northern Mesopotamia, moving far west into Syria and reaching southern Iraq by the mid-6th millennium.
3. The spread of this pottery type reveals how various cultures made contact and interacted.

C. Even in the historic period, when texts exist, pottery can inform archaeologists about topics that did not necessarily concern the authors of written sources.
1. Certain pottery shapes were useful for storing and transporting specific commodities and, thus, can be important to studies in economics.
2. Chemical trace analysis can be applied to the inside of pottery vessels. Such analysis tells us, for example, that wine was available to the upper classes probably by about 3100 B.C., several centuries before wine is mentioned in texts.

D. Other types of trace analysis can show us the history of domestication of crops, such as wheat, barley, and emmer wheat.
1. For example, a bakery has been discovered in northern Mesopotamia, dating to about the 4th millennium B.C. We know that this was a communal bakery because it contains a number of storage jars that held different types of wheat, as well as a storeroom containing molds for baking.
2. It is significant to find a facility, such as this bakery, that provided food for more than 10 or 20 people so early in the history of Mesopotamia.

E. Because pottery is found so frequently, it is an extremely useful tool for establishing a relative chronology for other artifacts found in the same stratigraphic layer. Pottery found with cuneiform tablets, for example, aids in dating this early writing.

V. All of these characteristics of pottery are generally applied to archaeology around the world, but Mesopotamia has a few specific uses of clay that are unique to its culture.

A. Clay tablets were used as the primary writing material. When these tablets hardened, they left a permanent record of what was written. Unfortunately, broken tablets and fragments are frustratingly common.
1. The study of the context in which clay tablets are recovered can be significant.
2. For example, a tablet might record the transfer of land, but it can also tell us something about the nature of such transactions.

B. Clay was also an important building material. Because stone was not widely available in Mesopotamia, mudbrick, a mixture of clay and straw, was routinely used for both large and small building projects.
1. The bricks were dried in the early summer and set on stone foundations in the late summer. The mudbrick would be plastered to prevent water damage. When properly maintained, a mudbrick building could last for many years.
2. It is estimated that 2.5 laborers would be required to make 3 feet of mudbrick.
3. One difficulty for archaeologists in Iraq is the challenge of identifying different chronological strata because buildings of mudbrick could be easily torn down and replaced.
4. The shape of mudbricks is also revealing. In the early 4th millennium, the bricks were rectangular; in the 3rd millennium, a different style of mudbrick was used that was slightly convex. This shape made building a straight wall difficult, but it was easier for unskilled laborers to work with and may stand as evidence for an ancient building boom.

VI. Stone, although not abundant in the region, is another important artifact for archaeological interpretation.

A. Because stone was not routinely used, the discovery of large-scale stone buildings or sculptures immediately conveys the idea that these monuments were expensive and intended to impress. Such structures represent the control of exotic resources by the state or ruler.

B. In the 1st millennium B.C., when the Assyrians began to build palaces entirely out of stone, the impression conveyed was one of the permanence and strength of their empire.

C. Some limestone was available in Mesopotamia, mostly in the north, but much of it was imported from the east (Iran or Afghanistan) or from the northwest.

D. Stone sculptures are much more common than stone buildings and were generally associated with rulers. We see an example in the many statues of Gudea, the ruler of Lagash, which are made of diorite.

VII. In recent decades, archaeologists have applied other scientific methods to the material culture that survives.

A. One of the most important techniques is forensic examination of anatomical evidence, both animal and human.
   1. When bones survive, specialists in forensic anthropology are able to determine gender and age and look for signs of disease.
   2. Animal bones contribute to our understanding of diet, as well as the history of domestication.

B. Finally, satellite photography and GIS (geographical information systems) are especially relevant to research concerning settlement patterns.

Essential Reading:

Paul C. Bahn, *Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction*.

Roger Matthews, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia: Theory and Approaches*.

Supplementary Reading:

Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck, eds., *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do different research questions result in different archeological techniques?
2. What type of evidence does not survive for archaeologists, and how does this hamper our understanding of the past?

Lecture Five
Farming and Early Settlements

Scope: This lecture covers an enormous span of time, from the Neolithic to the Ubaid period, about 9000 B.C. to 4000 B.C., and it ends with the development of villages that are the precursors to cities. As we look at this period, we will ask a number of intriguing questions, such as: Why did humans choose to make the shift from a life of hunting and gathering to an agricultural life? What sort of food and animals had to be domesticated for this shift to take place? Who was living in Mesopotamia during this period, and why does scholarly debate over this seemingly simple question continue? Finally, we'll look at where and why the earliest settlements and villages appeared in Mesopotamia and start to discuss evidence of social complexity in these communities.

Outline

I. Although other early cultures are known—in Egypt, China, and the Indus Valley, for example—the surviving archaeological evidence is best preserved and most thoroughly studied in the Near East, both in Mesopotamia and in the area of Syria and Anatolia. Thus, Mesopotamia is our best known laboratory for studying how humans created complex societies.

II. Before we start looking at early villages, we need to think about why humans chose to settle down, rather than to continue a nomadic lifestyle.

- **A.** Hunter-gatherers led a much easier and far more predictable way of life than those who would settle down into agricultural communities.
  - **1.** Our earliest evidence for human occupation in southern Mesopotamia comes from the Paleolithic period.
  - **2.** Recall that the environmental diversity we discussed earlier offered an enormous food supply, despite the fact that the environment was not agriculturally exploited.
  - **3.** Hunter-gatherers were somewhat nomadic, but they did create long-term, seasonal camps. They also engaged in small-scale farming, which could be supported without the use of irrigation systems.
- **B.** In contrast to hunting and gathering, agriculture is a less dependable method of collecting food and does not necessarily offer more abundance. Further, farming requires significant time and labor to produce a harvest and storage facilities for food after the harvest.
- **C.** Despite these disadvantages, one of the key reasons that settled life began was probably the health benefits offered by this lifestyle, especially lowered infant mortality rates. In a settled community, however, disease travels quickly and can be devastating to villages.

III. A few critical evolutionary developments seem to have been necessary before humans adopted a settled lifestyle.

- **A.** Language would have been a vital tool for early experiments in agriculture and domestication of plants and animals.
- **B.** Particular tool shapes, types, and materials that were discovered in the Stone Age could aid in constructing houses and digging ditches.

IV. Once groups decided to settle down, the domestication of plants and animals occurred relatively quickly.

- **A.** Two types of domesticated wheat, emmer wheat and barley wheat, could be cultivated to make them much easier to harvest. These would be the typical grains used in bread and beer, the staples of the Mesopotamian diet for millennia.
- **B.** Strains of emmer and einkorn wheat were slowly domesticated to result in sturdier ears of wheat that could be collected more easily. Domesticated grains also have softer husks, which makes processing them less labor-intensive.
- **C.** Evidence for animal domestication is more elusive; it may simply not survive in the archaeological record. We know, however, that sheep and goats were domesticated, and herding practices were developed to make the animals hardier.

D. We should note the importance of sheep and goats in the Mesopotamian economy.

1. Surviving records routinely note what flocks yielded with respect to wool and textile production.

2. The significance of sheep and goats to Mesopotamian life and its economy cannot be overstated, although they were not often used for meat.

3. Cattle were used for plowing fields and, again, rarely for meat.

E. This focus on herding complements agriculture because flocks can graze on land that is left fallow.

V. Archaeologists are able to identify the first villages and small towns that use similar types of architecture and pottery from the 5th and early 4th millennia.

A. Traces of human settlements in Mesopotamia can be identified as early as the 7th millennium, but these are very small—less than 2.5 acres—and leave few significant remains. Such settlements are usually found in the northern part of central Mesopotamia.

1. These communities continued to hunt, although they also practiced rain-fed agriculture and had domesticated sheep.

2. Evidence that the wool and hides of animals were used may indicate a specialization of professions in these early settlements.

3. The houses in these settlements were round, about 10 to 15 feet in diameter, just large enough to house a small family.

B. The Halaf pottery that we discussed earlier, found in the north and west and dating to the 6th millennium, offers us some insights about the development of early professions, as well as technology and social hierarchy.

1. Because the clay used to make this pottery is so fine and its decoration is so artistic, we believe that the pottery was used by the elite, although we do not know exactly who comprised the elite.

2. The identity of the potters eludes us, but we do know that others in the community were willing to provide necessities to the potters in exchange for their wares.

3. The late Halaf period (c. 5400 B.C.) shows increasing economic specialization, along with a critical development in the technology of pottery-making, the use of a *tournette*, or a pivoted working surface. The circular movement of the tournette encourages a corresponding shift from animal designs to geometric decorations.

4. This technological development shows a desire to make the craft easier, perhaps to increase production or to open the profession to less skilled craftsmen.

5. Halaf pottery covers most of northern Mesopotamia, then in the mid-6th millennium, begins to stretch down into southern Mesopotamia, where the earliest cities will develop.

VI. Who were the people who built the early cities in southern Mesopotamia? This seemingly simple question is known as the *Sumerian question*, and how scholars try to answer it shows the challenge of interpreting prehistoric evidence.

A. Early scholars looked for an answer in the Sumerian language, which developed much later and is not related to any of the neighboring languages identified around Iraq. Some of the names of the oldest cities in southern Mesopotamia, such as Uruk and Nippur, were not Sumerian, which indicates that the people who lived in these cities may have been of a different ethnic group.

B. Archaeological evidence shows, essentially, a continuity from the 5th millennium in the south through the Uruk period, but this is the limit of our knowledge. Thus, we may not be able to answer the Sumerian question.

C. We may more easily answer the question of why humans settled in southern Mesopotamia, and the answer, as we might imagine, returns us to the importance of geography and the richness of the ecological zones. Hunting would have been very easy in this area, and any new arrivals in southern Mesopotamia would have been guaranteed access to a fairly rich diet. This fact in itself may have attracted settlers to the region.

VII. The period of southern Mesopotamian history that is best understood is the Ubaid period (c. 6000–4000 B.C.), which is the first era in which we can trace settlements large enough to be termed villages.

A. The Ubaid period is named after a pottery style discovered at the site of Tell al-Ubaid, near the city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia.

B. Ubaid pottery differs significantly from Halaf pottery because it shows evidence of the use of a true potter's wheel. This evidence is found in the overwhelming use of concentric circles to decorate the outside of pottery.

C. Our best evidence for the Ubaid period comes from the city of Eridu, one of the southernmost cities; this site encompasses about 40 feet of Ubaid occupation.

1. Shared pottery types, house architecture, and perhaps most important, temple plans have been found throughout southern and up through northern Mesopotamia.

2. The houses of the Ubaid period are much different, about 300 to 600 feet and square, indicating that larger families lived together. The larger house types might have attracted more people to villages, which eventually grew into cities.

3. Temples can also be identified for the first time in the Ubaid period. They resemble houses but are larger and built on raised platforms.

4. Also during this period, we find the first evidence of irrigation canals, which required an organized labor force.

D. These Ubaid settlements are best understood as small villages that were the precursors of cities and established much of the fundamental organization needed to allow cities to flourish.

E. Although we see evidence for a common Ubaid culture throughout Mesopotamia, we lack the details to understand the relationship among settlements. One of the institutions we focus on in trying to understand these relationships is the temple.

1. Because there are no identifiable palaces, temples stand as the largest and most important structures in Ubaid settlements and must have played a significant role in social organization.

2. The large size of the temples allowed them to be used as storage and distribution facilities for surplus goods.

3. As we will see in later lectures, the temple served both a religious function and as a locus for civic identity.

VIII. In our next lecture, we will look at how these villages took the next step to become cities.

Essential Reading:

Michael Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East*, pp. 25–56.

Hans J. Nissen, "Ancient Western Asia Before the Age of Empires," in *CANE*, vol. I, pp. 791–806.

Supplementary Reading:

Hans J. Nissen, *The Early History of the Ancient Near East: 9000–2000 BC*, pp. 15–38.

Questions to Consider:

1. What technological advances seem to be most important for a sedentary lifestyle?

2. What are the key components of early villages? What elements of full urban life are missing?

Lecture Six
The Uruk Phenomenon

Scope: In this lecture, we will examine the early cities, which developed in their fullest form about 5,000 years ago; specifically, we will look at the city of Uruk, the earliest and largest city in southern Mesopotamia. Several key features of urban life are represented in the remains of Uruk, including a very high population density. This density required an outside supply of food and other necessities, which led to greater specialization and a wider range of professions. These features of urban life have been discovered at the 4th-millennium B.C. site of Uruk, and this site has come to represent the rise of the city.

Outline

I. At the end of the Ubaid period, village settlements were beginning to cluster together more closely. This change may have resulted from a climatic shift in the mid-4th millennium B.C. that stemmed the floods of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

- **A.** The land that was newly reclaimed as a result of this climate shift was especially fertile and productive.
- **B.** An increased number of water sources may have been another factor that encouraged settlements to move further south and to cluster together.
- **C.** The technology and experience that people had acquired in the Ubaid period could be applied to this new land immediately.

II. Uruk is about 140 miles south of Baghdad and was excavated by German teams before World War I. Both stratigraphic methods and surface surveys have been used in the area.

- **A.** By the late Uruk period (c. 3100 B.C.), the Uruk site was approximately 200 hectares in size; by 2500 B.C., it was about 400 hectares. In comparison, the villages of the Ubaid period were about 10 hectares. Several cities developed in southern Mesopotamia shortly after Uruk was established that were comparable in size or even larger.
- **B.** Although it is extremely difficult for archaeologists to reconstruct ancient population figures, it is estimated that a city the size of Uruk could support anywhere from 20,000 to 50,000 people. Obviously, with such a dense population, Uruk society must have been much more complex than a fishing village of a few hundred people.
- **C.** Around 3000 B.C., a wall was built around Uruk that enclosed 3.5 square miles. Evidence from surface surveys suggests that smaller settlements in the surrounding area may have been abandoned as their residents were attracted to this enormous city.
- **D.** A city of this size could not be self-sustaining but would have had to import food and other necessities from the surrounding territory. It is estimated that a radius of about 4 miles of land around Uruk would have been required to provide sufficient food for the city. In return, cities would provide protection for the suburban population in times of crisis, as well as access to a wide range of goods and services.

III. Just as the size of the settlement expanded significantly from the Ubaid to the Uruk period, so too does architecture expand on an equally large scale.

- **A.** Two temples have been excavated at Uruk, one to the patron goddess Inanna (later known as Ishtar) and one to Anu, the god of the sky. These excavations reveal that the temple was part of a complex, separated from the larger city.
- **B.** During a later phase of development, the temple precinct was set apart by a wall, indicating that the temple was the central focus of the city's attention.
- **C.** The temple of Anu had a platform that was almost 30 feet high and was plastered with white gypsum. Estimates suggest that 2,000 laborers would have been required over the course of 50 days to construct this temple.

D. The earliest surviving literature tells us that temples were believed to be the dwellings of gods or goddesses, and cities themselves belonged to particular deities. In the minds of the citizens of Uruk, their patron goddess Inanna would protect them and live with them.

E. No palace structure has been identified in the Uruk-era settlements, and in fact, we will not find any structures that can be securely identified as palaces until the 3rd millennium B.C.

1. Managers or organizers of the city may have been associated with the temple.

2. A number of key ideas for bureaucracy seem to emerge from the temple, including writing, which is necessary to keep records of the goods and services associated with a city.

IV. Around 4000 to 3300 B.C., before the time when it became a major city, Uruk was still a significant settlement, about 40 hectares in size.

A. Between 3300 and 3000 B.C., Uruk had grown to 200 hectares and was surrounded by four settlements of about 40 hectares, the earlier size of the city.

B. The map of settlement in southern Mesopotamia looks much different in general than that of other regions. It is dotted with many larger tells, indicating a greater number of larger cities and very few small villages.

C. Excavating all these tells would be impossible; thus, we must rely on surface survey methods, which can give us quite a bit of information about settlement patterns in the region.

V. Artifacts and structures similar to those found in Uruk have been discovered to the north, in Syria, and to the east, in southern Iran. This spread of artifacts shows that the Uruk culture and, perhaps, ideas extended throughout Mesopotamia. Indeed, many scholars believe that these outposts of Uruk culture were trading colonies.

A. Pottery is the most common type of artifact discovered at these sites, specifically, a beveled-rim bowl, the function of which we will explore in a future lecture.

B. Even more significant, archaeologists have discovered, to the north and east of Uruk, a specific type of temple decoration, the cone mosaic, that was used widely in Uruk settlements.

1. Cone mosaics are composed of individual cones, about four to six inches in size, made of colored clay, and set into the exterior walls of temples to create decorative patterns.

2. Cone mosaics were not used long after the Uruk period; thus, their presence helps to identify Uruk culture.

C. In northern Mesopotamia, a small city in modern Syria, Habuba Kabira, has many of the same artifacts and features that we find in Uruk. One important difference is that this northern city was surrounded by a defensive wall.

1. Defensive walls may suggest that such outposts were not trading colonies but administrative centers, established after military incursions.

2. This theory gained some credence with an announcement in 2005 by an archaeological team from the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. This team has discovered evidence for the violent destruction of a site near Habuba Kabira called Hamoukar. This site may provide our earliest evidence for large-scale warfare in Mesopotamia.

3. This discovery in Syria may cause our knowledge of Uruk to undergo a fundamental reanalysis. If Hamoukar was destroyed by an army from southern Mesopotamia, we must reevaluate our ideas of social and political order in Uruk. For example, the fact that we have not found in palaces in the Ubaid or Uruk periods may indicate that the leadership was military, not political.

4. This discovery reveals that our reconstructions of the past are based on a partial picture that can be changed by new excavations and interpretations.

VI. As we have seen, the Uruk period provides essential evidence for the development of complex social groups and hierarchy.

A. It is possible to identify diverse professions, crafts, and long-distance trade in this period.

B. The cities of southern Mesopotamia had dense populations that probably lured newcomers to the region.

C. The temple seems to have been the central force for bureaucracy in the city, collecting and distributing resources.

D. All of these features of urban life can first be identified at Uruk.

Essential Reading:

Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 BC*, pp. 19–27.

Marc Van De Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, chapter 2.

Supplementary Reading:

Hans J. Nissen, *The Early History of the Ancient Near East: 9000–2000 BC*, pp. 39–65.

Questions to Consider:

1. What urban institutions appear first in the Uruk period?
2. How important is writing in the development of urbanization?

Lecture Seven
Writing

Scope: One of the features of urban life that we touched on briefly in the last lecture was the development of writing. Writing and cities are linked together closely, because the surplus goods produced in cities call for accounting methods for record-keeping and distribution. This lecture traces early forms of record-keeping and how they were used in different periods. We will consider whether these methods contributed to the development of writing, and we will examine the technology of writing, the development of cuneiform script, and the modern-day translation of cuneiform.

Outline

I. Around the late 4th millennium B.C., a writing system was invented, which was identified by archaeologists at the city of Uruk.

- **A.** The earliest known examples of writing that have been found appear to be already well developed, which leads scholars to debate how such systems emerged.
- **B.** We do know that other record-keeping technologies were in use long before writing. Studying these methods for record-keeping tells us something about how bureaucracies developed and what systems of authority were in place.

II. The earliest forms of nonverbal communication, dating to the Neolithic era (c. 8000 B.C.), involve the use of tokens that may have been an important precursor to writing. The token system was in use for accounting purposes for 5,000 years.

- **A.** Tokens are handmade shapes of clay or, sometimes, stones that represent quantity. They come in many different forms, such as cones, cylinders, or spheres; the various shapes may represent different quantities of goods or different commodities, but their meaning is lost to us. The fact that the same types of tokens are found widely indicates that their meanings were commonly understood by their users.
- **B.** More complex tokens have also been found, sometimes mimicking the shapes of tools or specific foods, sometimes with engraved markings. These tokens are easier for us to identify and would have conveyed specific information to their users.
- **C.** Both types of tokens were used at the same time, and evidence of the token system has been found throughout the Near East. Again, this suggests that the meaning of the tokens was widely understood and indicates a shared economy and, perhaps, culture. Tokens prompt archaeologists to think about the cognitive development of ancient people.
- **D.** Hollow clay envelopes to hold tokens, called *bullae* (singular: *bulla*), appeared around 3500 B.C. Presumably, the *bulla* served as a way to guarantee that the quantity of goods sent in a transaction was the same as that received. Oddly, many *bullae* are found intact, which suggests that they were opened only if a discrepancy was found. Some *bullae* have the number of tokens enclosed stamped on the exterior of the surface.
- **E.** How did the use of tokens encourage the development of writing?
  1. The use of an abstract counting method means that the objects being accounted for, such as sheep or goats, do not have to be physically counted by all the individuals involved in a transaction.
  2. Further, tokens present numbers as facts, enabling information to be transmitted in an unbiased, nonverbal form.
  3. Finally, the representation of numbers with other objects (that is, counting tokens instead of sheep or goats) allows for an exchange of information that does not rely on memory.
- **F.** Stamping the number of tokens on the exterior of a *bulla* is the first example of the transfer of information from a three-dimensional form to a two-dimensional surface. For this reason, many scholars believe that tokens are essential in the development of writing.

G. Soon after the *bullae* came into use, numerical tablets appeared as the next stage in the development of accounting and writing systems. These tablets are a few inches long, made of clay, and have signs impressed on them that usually resemble tokens.

III. Other artifacts also play a role in the development of writing. These artifacts do not incorporate numbers, but they do identify a specific authority.

A. Seals, usually small pyramidal or cylindrical stones with engraved designs, were used widely in Mesopotamia to convey an individual's authority. Because these seals carry distinctive symbols, they could be identified with a particular person, similar to a signature today.

B. Stamp seals were in use from the 7th millennium, and cylinder seals followed soon after. Cylinder seals were rolled over a clay or wax surface to leave a unique imprint.

C. Seals have been retrieved in large quantities from across Mesopotamia, as have *sealings*, the strips of clay over which the seals were rolled. Sealings were used anywhere a sign of authority was needed, such as on a storeroom door or across a jar.

D. Seals show many different designs, and seal imagery is studied to explore the idea of levels of authority. This is especially productive when a number of different seals or sealings are found at a specific site. More complex designs on seals are used more often and may indicate higher levels of authority.

E. Seal designs were generally hand-carved on semiprecious stones. Themes of the designs include gods and goddesses, heroes, animal combat, and banqueting. Eventually, cuneiform inscriptions were added to the carved designs on the seals.

IV. By the end of the late Uruk period, an early form of writing appeared and replaced the longstanding token system.

A. Proto-cuneiform uses a mnemonic system of writing, or an ideographic script, in which the signs often resemble actual objects. Not all the signs are easily interpreted, however.

B. The materials for proto-cuneiform were clay for tablets and a reed to be used as a stylus. The images drawn with this stylus are more curvilinear than true cuneiform signs.

C. About 5,000 proto-cuneiform tablets have been found in Uruk, most of which involve records of commodities.

1. On these tablets, we see proto-cuneiform symbols for a head and for rations, combined with some numbers.

2. These may be receipts provided to individuals who received food in exchange for working on a temple.

D. No uniform system of numbers is seen on these proto-cuneiform tablets, which indicates that this was a period of experimentation.

E. Proto-cuneiform script does not represent a written language, because it has no syntax.

V. By the mid-3rd millennium B.C., the system of cuneiform signs had developed into a mature writing system.

A. The stylus used to draw on the clay tablets was sharper and blunter, resulting in the wedge-shaped lines that give the writing system its name (*cuneiform* is Latin for "nail-shaped" or "wedge-shaped").

B. Scribes shifted the orientation of the tablet and divided it into zones so that the signs were more legible.

C. Cuneiform uses a syllabic script, rather than a pictographic system. Each sign represents a syllable instead of a letter (i.e., a sign might represent a simple syllable or an entire word), which reduces the number of signs in the system.

D. Cuneiform is a script, not a language, and could be applied to various languages. For example, it was used to represent Sumerian and Akkadian simultaneously.

E. By this time, writing was not used just for accounting records but also for myths, hymns, and a much wider range of literature.

VI. As we think about writing systems, we must also consider who was reading these texts.

A. Cuneiform was a difficult script to learn, requiring years of study. Most people, even rulers, were probably illiterate.

B. At the same time, many monuments bear inscriptions, although these may have been interpreted for contemporary visitors by "tour guides."

C. Whether or not literacy was widespread, it is clear that writing as a concept was important in Mesopotamia. Writing conveyed information to the gods and to future generations.

D. Estimates for literacy rates range from 2 percent to 10 percent; literacy would have been higher in cities.

VII. Henry Creswicke Rawlinson was one of the early discoverers of writing in the 19th century, and he is credited with deciphering cuneiform.

A. Rawlinson was one of several scholars working on the translation of cuneiform, along with the German Georg Grotefend and Edward Hincks, an Irish parson.

B. By 1857, a translation contest sponsored by the Royal Academy confirmed the translation of cuneiform script.

Essential Reading:

Susan Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden That Never Was*, pp. 149–172.

Marc Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History*, especially pp. 1–32.

Supplementary Reading:

C. B. F. Walker, *Cuneiform*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What different types of written communication do you use on a daily basis?

2. How do you think that archaeologists will interpret these forms of communication in several millennia?

Lecture Eight
Temples

Scope: In this lecture, we move from small, handheld objects, such as the cuneiform tablets we looked at last time, to monumental structures, that is, temples. We will maintain our focus, however, on the "big ideas" of Mesopotamian culture. This lecture looks at how and why temples were built, how they met their religious purposes, and what their economic function was within an urban setting. We will also study some interpretations of the temple and urban economy to understand how the religious aspect of a Mesopotamian city contributed to life overall. Finally, we will consider how temples and rulers fulfilled each other's needs and justified their respective roles in the city.

Outline

I. As we have discussed, one god or goddess was designated as the patron deity of a Mesopotamian city, although several deities might be worshipped within the city.

A. Temples were the largest and most highly decorated structures in a city, making them especially noticeable to archaeologists.

1. Temples were set on raised platforms; in later generations, these platforms were stepped, creating the *ziggurat* temple form. This elevation was believed to bring the earthly home of the gods closer to their true heavenly home. It also had the effect of raising the gods above the plain on which mortals lived and struggled.

2. Thus, in its visible presentation, the temple creates a sense of social hierarchy: The fact that temples were raised puts humans beneath them, which may lead to a justification for other hierarchical structures. As we will see, kings became the closest of all humans to the gods and had a special relationship with them.

3. The ruler Ur-Nammu (r. c. 2112–2094 B.C.) built the best preserved ziggurat temple at Ur in the early Ur III period (22nd century B.C.). This architectural form likely inspired the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, a stepped structure that reached to the sky.

B. Although one specific god or goddess was worshipped as the patron deity, many other deities were also worshipped and required temples of their own.

1. Different cities could claim the same god as their patron deity without conflict.

2. When cities fell or were captured, texts explain that the patron deity abandoned or punished the city, often because of the impiety of the ruler.

C. Kings sponsored the construction or repair of temples as a way to represent their piety and close relationship with the gods.

1. Rulers are always described in texts as being chosen and approved by the gods. We will come back to this idea when we discuss the development of kingship.

2. Building projects were costly and brought honor and prestige to the ruler; only he could control the resources necessary to construct elaborate structures or dedicate expensive objects to the gods.

3. Rulers routinely listed their work on a temple and their dedications in the official records of their reigns. For example, records often relate that the king brought the first bricks to a temple project.

4. Rulers were especially proud of expensive building materials, such as gold and imported cedar, used in temple construction.

D. The belief that the gods chose a city as their home and that the king served as their representative there connects religion and urbanization quite closely. This connection may help to explain why urbanization developed and spread more quickly in Mesopotamia than anywhere else in the world.

II. Sumerian deities required the same necessities of life that humans did—houses, clothing, and food—but on a larger scale.

A. The deity was believed to be present in the temple in the form of a cult statue, probably made of precious metals; none of these statues has survived. A great deal of attention was paid to the cult statues. They received new clothes and jewelry for major festivals and were taken out of the temple to be paraded through the streets.

B. Temples were called the *é*, or "house," of the god. The lavish decoration of temples prompts us to wonder who would see these materials.

1. The exterior of the temple would probably be visible throughout most of the city. We do not know how open or closed the interior of the temple was to the population of the city or to individual worshippers.

2. Admittance to the sanctuary was probably restricted to priests and temple officials. Temples may have been open to visitors on certain days.

3. For the most part, the interior decoration of the temple was intended to please the god or goddess who dwelled there.

C. We have records of many workers who were involved in the temple, both priests who cared for the cult statue and performed ritual acts and numerous others who contributed to the daily functioning of the temple.

1. We can most easily understand a temple as a household on a colossal scale.

2. Meals were placed before the cult statue twice a day and likely consisted of the typical breads, cakes, fruits, beer, and wine that mortals consumed.

3. The quantities of food offered to the cult statue were sufficiently large to serve most members of the temple household—3,000 people or more. Temple workers would receive this food after it had been presented to the god or goddess.

III. Temples owned large tracts of land that could be used either for agriculture or for grazing herds of sheep, cattle, or goats. The great wealth of the temple came from these fields.

A. Workers from the surrounding community tended the temple lands. Performing service for the god during the harvest may have been a standard part of religious practice.

B. This type of voluntary or mass labor is called *corvée* labor, that is, the practice of gathering large numbers of workers for a specific project.

C. One artifact that may tell us something about *corvée* labor in Mesopotamia is the beveled-rim bowl, a piece of pottery commonly found in the Uruk period.

1. The beveled-rim bowl has a narrow bottom and flares out at the top; such bowls were made in large quantities from molds. The fact that so many of these bowls have been found suggests that they were considered disposable.

2. Archaeologists have a number of different interpretations of these bowls. Some scholars suggest that they were used to make bread; others, that they held offerings of food. One popular theory is that they were ration containers for grain or other commodities.

3. Through the use of these containers, the temple could control a number of resources, particularly service to the god in the form of construction or agricultural labor.

D. We also know that temples controlled large herds of animals to be used both as sacrificial victims and as sources of wool for textiles.

1. In the Ur III period, texts report that up to 6,000 women were employed as textile workers in the temple.

2. The completed textiles were valuable and represented an important source of income for the temple.

IV. The image that we see of the temple's role in the economy is quite extensive. Indeed, earlier generations of scholars proposed that temples were the sole property owners during the Uruk period and the centuries immediately following it.

A. This so-called *temple-state theory* proposed that only temples could own land; there was no private ownership by individuals or rulers. This theory was based on a limited number of records from the site of Lagash in southern Mesopotamia, and it is no longer considered valid.

B. Nonetheless, temples were major property holders in communities, and we know from other contemporary sources that they could own several hundred acres. In the 3rd millennium B.C., the holdings of temple estates would become a source of continuing tension between temples and rulers.

V. We close this lecture by looking at the relationship between rulers and religion in Nippur and Babylon.

A. The patron deity of Nippur was Enlil, who was the king of the gods and the heavens. Myths described Nippur as the place where Enlil would call together other gods in assemblies.

1. Ironically, as mortal kingship rotated among different Mesopotamian cities, Nippur never had a dynasty of its own, although it proved to be essential to support royal ideology elsewhere.

2. As early as the 25th century B.C., the priests of Enlil at Nippur had the power to grant authority to a ruler to claim legitimate control over Sumer and Akkad.

3. Not surprisingly, kings paid a great deal of attention to the temple of Enlil at Nippur. Some rulers even compelled the areas they governed to provide tribute for its priests.

B. The significance of Nippur lasted until the 2nd millennium, when the city of Babylon and its patron deity, Marduk, became the new focus of royal patronage and legitimacy. This first occurred when Babylon, under Hammurabi in the 18th century, controlled both north and south Mesopotamia, and it continued even after Babylon lost its political predominance.

1. The position of Marduk paralleled that of the city of Babylon; myths were rewritten to describe him as the new king of the gods.

2. The ritual that best illustrates the rise of Babylon and Marduk is the week-long New Year's festival, which required the king of Mesopotamia to travel to Babylon and participate.

3. This festival was important enough that it continued long after Babylon lost its political significance. Indeed, Alexander the Great participated in the festival in the 4th century B.C.

C. Thus, we see that the king had a very close relationship to the dominant religious center in Mesopotamia at the time of his rule.

Essential Reading:

J. Nicholas Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History*, pp. 109–136.

John F. Robertson, "The Social and Economic Organization of Ancient Mesopotamian Temples," in *CANE*, vol. I, pp. 443–454.

Supplementary Reading:

Susan Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden That Never Was*, pp. 186–195.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do Mesopotamian temples differ from religious structures in other cultures that you know, and what implications about religions can you draw from these differences?

2. What features of the temple seem to require advanced urbanization?

Lecture Nine
Mesopotamian Deities

Scope: As we began to see in our survey of temples, Mesopotamian religious feelings were not based on a concept of faith but on reverence and a belief in the power of ritual. Temples provided a location for these rituals. In this lecture, we will meet some of the gods who were honored in temples; we will discuss their powers, their relationships with each other and with their human worshippers, and the rituals necessary to encourage the favor of the gods. The basic personalities of these gods remain the same over time, but their names may change. We will use Sumerian names to refer to the gods of Mesopotamia.

Outline

I. Worshippers in Mesopotamia respected and even feared their gods but rarely felt a sense of love or support from them.

- **A.** Mesopotamian gods and goddesses were powerful, mercurial creatures who demanded complete submission from their human worshippers. There was no desire on the part of mortals to approach or have contact with the gods, who were capable of violence against each other and against mortals.
- **B.** Even though Mesopotamians envisioned their gods as having human emotions and human form, the natural world was the source of their power. All aspects of the natural world were believed to have some innate divine power. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes or floods, were the expression of the anger of the gods.

II. There are hundreds of deities in the pantheon of Mesopotamian gods, but four were especially powerful and held lofty positions in the social hierarchy.

- **A.** An or Anu was the god of the highest part of the sky and, thus, was the sovereign, the father of all the gods. An rarely paid attention to humans and was considered a somewhat remote figure.
- **B.** As mentioned in the last lecture, Enlil was the patron deity of Nippur and was important as the king of the gods and the one who chose and legitimized the rulers of Akkad and Sumer. Enlil was the master of humanity, but he had a contentious relationship with his worshippers. In literature, he is often characterized as a storm or a wild bull.
- **C.** Enki, the son of An, was a complex figure. He had many roles and was the god who had the closest connection to the mortal world. Enki was also the god of fresh water and the patron god of Eridu, one of the earliest cities in southern Mesopotamia.
  - **1.** Images of Enki show him with streams of water falling from his shoulders and fish swimming in the streams.
  - **2.** Enki was also the inventor of all crafts and sciences and the god of intelligence.
- **D.** The most powerful goddess was Inanna or Ishtar, the goddess of war and carnal love. She had no spouse but enjoyed many lovers; the Greeks knew her as Aphrodite and the Romans as Venus.

III. An important fertility ritual centered on a myth that involved Ishtar and one of her lovers, Dumuzi.

- **A.** Dumuzi was a mortal ruler who attracted the attention of Ishtar; the two married, but the alliance was not a peaceful one. Dumuzi offended Ishtar, and she decreed that he would spend half of the year—the hottest, least fertile months—in the underworld. His return from the underworld marked the return of spring and fertility, and Dumuzi became closely associated with abundance.
- **B.** This myth was recreated by mortal kings in a sacred marriage ceremony that ensured the continuing fertility of the land. We have records of this reenactment between the ruler and the priestess of Ishtar from as late as the 5th century B.C. The best evidence for this ritual comes from the city of Ur.

IV. One of the most famous Mesopotamian myths concerns a worldwide flood sent by the gods to destroy humans.

- **A.** Enlil had ordered the gods to work to ensure the fertility of the land of Mesopotamia, but the gods rebelled. At an assembly of the gods, Enki came up with a plan to create humans to do the work assigned to the gods.

B. The gods were pleased to have humans to do their work, but after about 1,200 years, the human population had become too large. Their continual noise irritated Enlil, who tried to reduce the noise by sending a plague to devastate humanity; unfortunately, humans proved to be resistant to the disease.

C. Enlil next sent a great famine to humanity, which in its seventh year, forced humans to turn to cannibalism. The famine had undermined the social structure and morals of humanity. Still, humans would not die out, partly because Enki had been helping them.

D. When Enlil discovered that Enki had helped the humans, he again called an assembly of the gods. Enlil forbade the gods to assist humans in surviving the next form of destruction he would send to them—a universal flood.

E. Despite warnings that none of the gods should protect humans, Enki warned Utanapishtim (also called Atrahasis), a human liaison to the gods and the flood survivor whom we will meet in Lecture Ten. Utanapishtim built a large boat, collected animals from the surrounding area, and survived the flood.

F. After the flood began, the other gods realized the value of humans and regretted their decision to destroy humanity. Thus, when they discovered that Utanapishtim had survived, the gods were able to stave off the wrath of Enlil at Enki's betrayal.

G. In this story, we see that the gods work together, and that, even though Enlil is the ruler of the gods, his authority could be challenged.

H. The parallels between this flood story and that recorded in the Old Testament are quite noticeable. The earliest surviving text we have for the Mesopotamian flood story dates to the 17th century B.C., although it was probably known long before that.

1. About 30 examples of flood stories are known in cultures from around the world. Usually, the flood is prompted by the annoying behavior of humans, not their impiety.

2. In all the flood stories, there are always survivors, which allows humanity to continue.

V. The story of the flood shows how moody and capricious the gods could be in Mesopotamia. One way to try to lessen the wrath of the gods was through prayer, gifts, and daily worship.

A. The surviving prayers we have focus on preventing punishment from the gods and asking for protection from evil. In these prayers, humans acknowledge that they are completely powerless in comparison to the gods.

B. Prayers also requested protection from harm. For example, a prayer to the messenger of the gods, Nuski, to prevent a nightmare from coming true illustrates the importance of dreams, which were thought to foretell the future.

C. The concept of human evil, or sin, is somewhat difficult to understand in Mesopotamia.

1. We know that both intentional and unintentional mistakes could be punished equally severely by the gods; thus, mortals had to be constantly vigilant and pious.

2. In Mesopotamian prayers, we see an acknowledgment of how little control humans had over their lives.

3. Certain poems discuss the idea of suffering in great detail, and usually the speaker admits that he deserves his fate because he has somehow offended the gods. The extensive description of an individual's pain, however, tends to prompt the sympathy of the reader.

4. The concept of suffering inflicted by the gods for unintentional actions is used to explain a number of events, particularly the destruction of a city brought on by the impiety of its ruler.

D. Another way to please the gods or to thank them was to give them gifts. Archaeologists have found many such votive offerings in the form of statuettes of worshippers, made of stone or gypsum. We see both male and female figures in these statuettes, in reverential poses and a wide range of sizes.

1. The men wear fleecy, shaggy skirts that fall from the waist to the feet. The figures are bearded and most are bald, although we also see short hair and long hair.

2. Female figures wear dresses of the same shaggy material as the men's skirts. These dresses are pinned at one shoulder with a sleeve falling over one arm; the other shoulder is bare. The women, too, have a wide range of hairstyles.

3. The figurines are shown seated or standing, usually clasping their hands across their chests; some hold offerings, such as cups.
4. The most vivid feature of these statuettes is the eyes, which are large and often painted or inlaid with colored stone. The eyes are wide and staring—completely out of proportion to the rest of the face.
5. Why are the eyes given such emphasis in these statuettes? One theory holds that the expression conveys piety, innocence, or pleading. Another theory is that the eyes were believed to be the most important feature in representations of humans in Mesopotamian art. The larger the eye was, the more lifelike a sculpture seemed; thus, the eyes could have been deliberately exaggerated to imply that a sculpture had life in it for its viewer—the god.
6. These statuettes make up the single largest group of sculpture we have that was not sponsored by a king.
7. We do not know exactly how the statuettes were presented to the gods because all these offerings have been found in pits, probably swept aside in a ritual disposal of offerings. It is hard not to imagine, however, that the statuettes were lined up in rows, facing a cult statue in a temple.
8. A large group of these votives was found at the temple of Inanna in Nippur, and several examples are housed in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

VI. Mesopotamian heroes, such as Gilgamesh, the subject of the next lecture, had closer interactions with the gods than ordinary mortals. No mortal, however, had a particularly beneficial relationship with the gods; the religion was focused on preventing danger, evil, disease, and destruction from being inflicted on worshippers and their families.

Essential Reading:

Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*.

Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*.

Supplementary Reading:

Benjamin R. Foster, *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 9–163, 221–270.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the hierarchy of Mesopotamian gods reflect that of humans?
2. Why do you think that flood myths are such a common theme in world mythology?

Lecture Ten
Gilgamesh—Hero and King

Scope: In the last lecture, we focused on the world of the gods and saw that most often, their interactions with humans were characterized by anger. In this lecture, we will look at semi-divine individuals, specifically heroes, as represented in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the world's first epic description of a hero and his adventures. This epic explores many themes that appear in epics from other cultures and have become familiar to us over the millennia: a thriving urban life, the abundance and beauty of the wilderness, the dangers that threaten humankind, and the role of the gods in ordering human life and fate. In addition to the legends that surround Gilgamesh, historical sources also mention his name as a king of Uruk.

Outline

I. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the hero is a young, powerful ruler of Uruk, but his people fear his excessive energy.

A. Gilgamesh has many positive attributes; he "surpasses all kings" in his beauty and strength. His athletic strength is an important asset, but he takes his prowess too far by demanding that all the young men in Uruk compete with him. In addition, he demands conjugal rights to all new brides.

B. The people of Uruk pray for relief from the demands of Gilgamesh to the sky god, Anu, who orders that a companion be created for Gilgamesh.

C. The gods create Enkidu as a friend for Gilgamesh. His creation offers an opportunity to compare the life of the rural dweller with the urban sophisticate. A major theme of the first part of the epic is this tension between civilization and life in the wild.

1. Enkidu is made out of clay and lives in the steppe, far from the city. He has befriended wild animals, freeing them from hunters' traps.

2. Enkidu lives like an animal himself, until he encounters a hunter whose work he has undermined. The hunter brings a prostitute to seduce Enkidu and, in this way, to civilize him, to draw him away from the animals.

3. The prostitute, Shamhat, tells Enkidu about the benefits of the city of Uruk and about its king, Gilgamesh.

4. Enkidu is intrigued by Shamhat's description of Uruk and agrees to travel there. He is first taken to a shepherds' hut, where the shepherds teach him to drink beer rather than water and to eat bread rather than grass.

5. Enkidu then makes his way to Uruk, where he and Gilgamesh quickly become close friends.

D. Gilgamesh and Enkidu embark on many adventures, the first of which is to face a monster named Humbaba, who guards a forest of cedar trees. Gilgamesh desires the cedar to make a door for the temple of Enlil in Nippur.

1. Gilgamesh and Enkidu are outfitted with huge axes and daggers created by craftsmen in Uruk.

2. The goal of the trip is for Gilgamesh to perform a heroic deed that will make his name known to posterity, although he is advised against this endeavor by a council of elders.

3. Gilgamesh and Enkidu meet up with Humbaba and subdue him. Humbaba begs for his life, but Gilgamesh kills him, and he and Enkidu cut down the cedar trees and float them down the Euphrates to Nippur.

4. Keep in mind that Humbaba had been ordered by the gods to protect this particular forest of cedar trees; the actions of Gilgamesh and Enkidu flout that order.

E. As he and Enkidu are returning from this adventure, Gilgamesh attracts the attention of Ishtar. Gilgamesh rudely rejects Ishtar, who then requests and receives permission to send the wild bull of heaven to harm the two heroes. Gilgamesh and Enkidu are able to kill the bull, but in doing so, they have again offended the gods.

1. The gods decree that Enkidu must die as punishment for the sacrilege of the pair.

2. The emotions expressed by Enkidu as he learns of his fate are moving and relevant even today. He blames the hunter and the prostitute for leading him to civilization; had he stayed on the steppe, he would still be living happily and at peace with the animals.

3. Shamash, the sun god, speaks to Enkidu in a dream, telling him that he should not curse the hunter and the prostitute because their actions brought him together in friendship with Gilgamesh. Shamash further tells Enkidu that Gilgamesh will find a "perfect resting place" for him and that all of Uruk will mourn him. After Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh will become wild and roam the steppe.
4. Enkidu accepts his fate and dies after an illness lasting about 12 days. Gilgamesh's grief at his friend's death is overwhelming, sending him into the wilderness, where he becomes as uncivilized as Enkidu had been and begins to fear his own death.

F. Gilgamesh roams the steppe to escape his responsibilities as king and to begin a heroic quest to find the secret of immortality.

1. Gilgamesh learns of a man, Utanapishtim, who survived a universal flood sent by the gods. Gilgamesh sets off to find this man so that he can learn how to become immortal.
2. Gilgamesh's travels take him further and further from civilization, but he comes upon a tavern with a female tavern-keeper, Siduri. She tells him that he will not find the eternal life he is seeking and encourages him to return to his city and take up his duties as king.
3. Gilgamesh refuses to listen to Siduri, so she sends him on his way, guiding him toward Utanapishtim.
4. When Gilgamesh finds Utanapishtim, he is again advised to accept his fate, and again, Gilgamesh refuses to do so. Utanapishtim then sets him a challenge: to stay awake for seven days. Gilgamesh, exhausted from his travels, quickly falls asleep; when he wakes, he realizes, finally, that he will die.

G. At the end of the epic, Gilgamesh returns to Uruk and takes up his position as king, having gained the wisdom necessary to be a good ruler.

II. The Epic of Gilgamesh is well known, but other stories about this king have also survived. Although these other stories do not themselves create another epic, they are important for helping us understand Mesopotamian heroes, as well as other aspects of Mesopotamian life.

A. These stories usually emphasize physical strength, but a few fragments also illuminate important political matters. For example, we learn from one of the stories that Gilgamesh defended Uruk from a siege by the king of Kish. This story describes debates between assemblies of elders and younger men, giving us some sense of how political issues were discussed.

B. The theme of death continues in other stories of Gilgamesh, in particular, one in which he and Enkidu visit the underworld and a final story describing the death of Gilgamesh himself.

1. Gilgamesh's burial, both the tomb structure and the mourning by the city, is a valuable description of an elite internment. The tomb is made of stone, with roof beams cast in gold. Gilgamesh is accompanied in his tomb by members of his family and his courtiers.
2. The account of the underworld demonstrates that the living were responsible for continuing to provide for their relatives after death. These attentions come in the form of food and drink set by the grave.
3. There is also a lack of society in the underworld. Individuals there wander perpetually, missing their families and friends. There is no relief after death to the suffering one experiences in life.

III. The story of Gilgamesh offers many themes to explore.

A. We see a vivid description of city life, as represented by Uruk.

1. Details focus on the size of the walls and the temples to Anu and Ishtar, which as we have speculated, must have been the defining characteristics of cities.
2. The poem tells us that the city of Uruk encompassed one square mile, with another square mile for gardens and another for clay pits. Ishtar's dwelling is one-half square mile.
3. Enkidu's introduction to the city and civilized life demonstrates the dichotomy between rural and urban life. This tension between those who lived in cities and those who didn't continues throughout Mesopotamian history.

B. The Gilgamesh story also gives us a sense of the interaction between rulers and their subjects.

1. At the beginning of the story, Gilgamesh is completely out of control, and the city is not being ruled properly.
2. The gods intercede on behalf of the people of Uruk, illustrating the connection between gods and kings.
3. The existence of assemblies implies that the king had some advisors among his subjects.

C. The wilderness, where Enkidu first lives and where both Enkidu and Gilgamesh travel, is mysterious and dangerous but also teeming with abundance. As Enkidu and Gilgamesh travel through the steppe, they are surrounded by numerous types of animals, providing us with some evidence of the resources and rich environment present in Mesopotamia.

D. Probably the most memorable aspects of the Gilgamesh epic are the descriptions of friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu and the human struggle with the issue of mortality. Friendship transforms Gilgamesh into a better ruler, and his struggle to come to terms with his own mortality gives him the wisdom that he lacks at the beginning of the poem.

IV. Gilgamesh is known best as a hero, but his name also appears in historical records as a king of Uruk.

A. The Sumerian king list, a list of the early rulers of Mesopotamia compiled in the 19th century B.C., named Gilgamesh as one of the legendary rulers of Uruk.

B. We have no other historical text to confirm the existence of Gilgamesh, but there are references to historical figures, such as Mebaragesi, in other stories about this legendary hero.

C. The earliest written versions of the Gilgamesh story date to the 19th century B.C. No single complete copy of the poem has been preserved, and the work that we read today has been pieced together from fragments of tablets in many different languages, including versions in Hurrian and Hittite, the languages of the people of Anatolia.

V. The leadership qualities, physical prowess, daring, and concern for his people that Gilgamesh displays in the legend will appear for centuries as ideals for rulers to follow. In the next lecture, we will begin to explore the earliest kings for which we have historical records.

Essential Reading:

Benjamin Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation, Analogues, Criticism*.

John Maier, ed., *Gilgamesh: A Reader*.

Supplementary Reading:

Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*.

Brian Schmidt, "Flood Narratives of Ancient Western Asia," in *CANE*, vol. IV, pp. 2337–2352.

Questions to Consider:

1. What role does the city play in the Epic of Gilgamesh?

2. How would you evaluate Gilgamesh as a ruler? Positively or negatively?

3. Why would it be important for a king to have a close friend, such as Enkidu?

4. Why would it be important for a ruler to grapple with his own mortality?

Lecture Eleven
The Early Dynastic Period

Scope: When we last looked at southern Mesopotamia, in the late Uruk period, we saw the rise of cities. These were large settlements, where writing developed and where bureaucracies and thriving economies emerged. The idea of the city moved quickly up the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers; by 2900 B.C., we see a string of cities coming out of the south and reaching up to central Mesopotamia. Each city was likely self-sustaining in food production, while trade and exchange were conducted for other commodities. In this lecture, we will examine contemporary historical texts for the first time to see the emergence of political structures and rulers in these cities and examine their relationships with regions outside of Mesopotamia.

Outline

I. In the Early Dynastic period (c. 2900–2350 B.C.), contemporary texts help to inform us about the political and economic organization of Mesopotamia.

- **A.** Until the 3rd millennium B.C., written sources record mainly economic or administrative transactions. Beginning around 2500 B.C., however, historical events, especially the deeds of rulers, are memorialized in writing.
- **B.** These early texts consist of royal inscriptions that mark the dedication of offerings by a ruler. We have two such inscriptions that tell us the name of a ruler, Mebaragesi of Kish, dating to around 2700 B.C.
- **C.** A variant of the type of inscription that marks an offering by a ruler describes a king as the sponsor of a building project, such as a temple. Although brief, these references help scholars create a framework for the political history of a region.
- **D.** Near the end of the Early Dynastic period, kings also began to note their military successes in inscriptions. Because this is the first time that military expeditions are recorded, scholars have proposed that leaders began to be chosen for their skill in war, rather than for their talents in administration or as intermediaries to the gods. We must take care, however, in adopting any theory that is, in essence, an argument from silence.

II. In addition to contemporary texts, we also have copies of later texts that purport to be from the Early Dynastic period; these describe the heroic deeds of kings, such as Gilgamesh.

- **A.** Many of these early texts include names that we know from other evidence; thus, we start to see a correlation between legend and history. Although these later texts are neither contemporary nor strictly historical, they provide insight into how later cultures viewed this era.
- **B.** One of the most important texts we have that fits into this category is the Sumerian king list, which dates to about 1800 B.C. It is a list of the names and regnal years of rulers, beginning with the mythical lowering of kingship from the heavens at the city of Kish.
- **C.** The main goal of the Sumerian king list is to present a peaceful and uninterrupted transfer of power from one ruler to the next as a way to legitimize the authority of the office and the status of the king.
  - **1.** To meet this goal, the king list credits some rulers with impossibly long reigns, such as the eight rulers who were said to have governed Mesopotamia for 241,000 years, as a way to fill in the gaps in the early records.
  - **2.** The king list also excludes rulers who are known from other sources, again, to meet its goal of showing that only one city ruled the region at a time.
- **D.** The king list includes some information that we don't have from other sources, such as territories conquered by a particular ruler. Thus, the king list contains valuable information, but historians must use this resource with the understanding that its ideological function was more important to its authors than historical truth.
- **E.** Other texts that purport to date from the Early Dynastic period include the stories of heroes, such as Gilgamesh, Enmerkar, and Lugalbanda, all kings of Uruk in the Early Dynastic period, according to the king list.

III. The city-state was the main political structure of the Early Dynastic period. This organization reinforces the importance of the city as the focus of political, religious, and military activity.

A. The city-state consisted of one or more relatively large cities, such as Babylon or Lagash, and the surrounding lands that supported it. We have the names of about 15 cities in Sumeria and another 10 for Akkad in the Early Dynastic period. These names probably reflect cities that were relatively large.

B. Cities were located very close to—sometimes even within sight of—each other. The land surrounding the city was used for agriculture and grazing. This territory would be a buffer between settlements but also a source of contention as city-states grew.

C. To convey some idea of the size of these settlements, the city of Lagash had more than 600 acres of land associated with its temples; private land was not regularly recorded at this time. It is estimated that temples owned about one third of the total property of the city-state.

D. The city-state was governed by a ruler, called a *lugal* ("big man") or an *en*/*ensi* ("governor"). The origin of kingship and the specific duties of these early kings cannot be determined from the surviving evidence.

1. The titles *lugal* and *en*/*ensi* are not used consistently, but certain records seem to indicate that some *lugals* had the allegiance of one or more *ensis*, which suggests some difference in status.

2. The ruler was believed to be chosen by the gods and was responsible to the gods for the safety and prosperity of his people. There is no historical evidence that explains how leaders or kings were actually chosen at this time.

3. One theory, proposed by the scholar Thorkild Jacobsen, reconstructs a primitive Mesopotamian democracy, in which a civic assembly would approve the selection of a king. Jacobsen's theory draws on the legend of Gilgamesh and other stories, in which the king consulted an assembly of elders and younger men, as well as stories of assemblies of the gods. This theory is no longer considered valid.

4. Later sources described the ruler as the shepherd of his people, a metaphor that emphasizes his protective qualities but gives little information about his specific duties.

E. The ruler and his family lived in an *e-gal*, or "big house"; such dwellings have been discovered in 3rd-millennium B.C. archaeological contexts. They have a central courtyard with rooms on three sides and a long, open room on the fourth side that was probably a reception hall. Three examples of such palaces are known, one in Eridu, one in Kish, and one in Mari in northern Mesopotamia.

1. The household of the king provided employment for many workers. We also have evidence from the Early Dynastic period of a woman's household, overseen by the wife of the ruler.

2. Women would be hired by the royal household as weavers and millers. Texts from the end of the 3rd millennium document the fact that female workers had to meet quotas for both weaving and milling.

3. Work at the palace provided support for some of the city's poorest subjects, such as orphans or widows.

F. Rulers were responsible for overseeing sacred rituals and maintaining temples.

1. In addition to the inscriptions mentioned earlier, visual evidence documents this role of a king. A limestone plaque in the Louvre shows a ruler of Lagash, Ur-Nanshe (r. c. 2480 B.C.), bringing a basket of mudbricks for a building project.

2. Ur-Nanshe stands in the upper right part of the plaque with his family behind him. He is also shown on the lower part of the plaque, seated, with his sons facing him.

3. The inscription on the plaque identifies the king, the building project (a temple), and the goods donated to the temple.

G. Another ruler, Uru'inimgina of Lagash (r. c. 2400 B.C.), records how he established order in his city. This inscription takes us beyond the usual information that we have about kings.

1. The list of abuses that this ruler put an end to is quite long and includes taxes levied on burials and weddings, bureaucratic corruption, and use of temple lands for private gain.

2. Uru'inimgina reduced taxes and restored order to the city, freeing his people from theft, assault, and hunger. These actions may have been a way for the king to redistribute property and power.

3. This inscription also gives us our earliest example of how rulers protected the weak in society, as well as an early indication of the ruler's position as judge and lawgiver.

IV. If we look beyond the position of the king, we see a common culture in southern Mesopotamia, illustrated by the importance of Nippur as a religious center. This common culture enabled the city-states in southern Mesopotamia to begin to develop a shared sense of identity.

A. In addition to the role of Nippur as the chief religious center, another institution that suggests a common culture is the kingship of Kish. The title *King of Kish* conveys leadership of a military coalition, in which cities joined behind one ruler in a common cause.

B. The title was used for many centuries after the Early Dynastic period and became an honorific title to signify the legitimacy of a ruler.

V. We have a good deal of evidence for rulers in the Early Dynastic period, although it is not particularly specific.

A. We also have evidence for the wives of rulers and their households, which tells us that the institution of kingship expanded and became well established in the city.

B. The Early Dynastic period established the parameters of the political institutions of king and city-state that would be a hallmark of Mesopotamian history for the next millennium.

Essential Reading:

Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, c. 3000–323 BC*, "Competing City-States: The Early Dynastic Period," pp. 38–58.
Hans J. Nissen, "Ancient Western Asia Before the Age of Empires," in *CANE*, vol. II, pp. 791–806.

Questions to Consider:

1. From this earliest evidence for kings, how would you describe the role of the ruler?

2. How do kings involve themselves in religion?

Lecture Twelve
Warfare and Diplomacy

Scope: As we discussed in the previous lecture, documents recording contemporary events are preserved for the Early Dynastic period, moving us into the historical era. In this lecture, we turn specifically to the subject of warfare to see how disputes were represented in both written sources and images. By this time, cities had been established in southern Mesopotamia for several hundred years; they were large and ever-expanding, with an increasing need for food to feed their populations. Inevitably, cities would require more territory, leading to border disputes with other cities. The most complete evidence we have for such a dispute is between the cities of Umma and Lagash, although much of the evidence that survives from this conflict comes from Lagash alone. We have seen that cities belonged to patron deities, and this dispute is portrayed as a battle between the god of Lagash, Ningirsu, and Shara, the god of Umma.

Outline

I. Most of the evidence we have for the conflict between Umma and Lagash dates to the reign of Eannatum of Lagash (r. c. 2450–2425 B.C.), near the end of the war. One of the earliest surviving depictions of any war in Mesopotamian art is the Stele of the Vultures (c. 2400 B.C.), which depicts part of this conflict.

- **A.** The name of the stele comes from a fragment that shows vultures feeding on the dead. Another fragment shows the patron deity of Lagash carrying a battle net filled with defeated enemies.
- **B.** Heavily armed infantrymen are shown, equipped with axes and spears. The troops are protected with helmets and large rectangular shields that were probably made of leather and strengthened with metal studs. The infantrymen are arranged in rows, giving the impression of a vast number of soldiers.
- **C.** At the head of this phalanx is the king, who is shown as much larger than the other men. He is dressed in a long, textured garment; his hair is pulled back and up; and he wears no helmet. His large size and lack of helmet or shield reinforce his image of strength and vigor as a warrior.
- **D.** The way in which the king is rendered contrasts with the anonymity of the soldiers who follow him. There is no room in this imagery for heroes other than the king. This distinction between one man—the king—and everyone else reinforces the social and political hierarchy that was well established in Mesopotamia at this time.
- **E.** The military force of the king and his troops is highly effective. In one scene, the army of Lagash marches over the prostrate bodies of the enemy. Another fragment shows a mound of naked bodies piled up, presumably for burial. The nudity of the enemy contrasts with the detailed rendering of the weaponry and clothing of the victors.
- **F.** The scenes on the Stele of the Vultures are carved in registers, indicating that the story shows a progression. As a whole, the stele illustrates three important themes in Early Dynastic art that will recur in later representations of battle.
  1. First, the king is personally involved in battle as the leader of the city and the army. He is the servant of the patron deity of the city and is specifically chosen by the gods.
  2. Second, the army that the king leads is powerful; it thoroughly dominates the enemy.
  3. Third, the enemies are depicted in a state of complete degradation. Their corpses are stripped and, often, crushed beneath the feet of the victorious army or ruler.

II. Written descriptions of warfare, such as an inscription documenting the 150-year war between Umma and Lagash, also stress certain key themes.

- **A.** The details of the inscription don't necessarily agree with or reinforce the visual image on the Stele of the Vultures. We should keep in mind that the written text would have been for posterity and, perhaps, the gods, while the visual image would have been readily understood by anyone who saw it.
- **B.** According to the inscription, Enlil himself set the border between Ningirsu and Shara, the patron deities of the two cities. At some point, the king of Umma violated this sacred border, and thus, the blame for starting the war lies with him.

C. The king of Kish, perhaps the leader of a military coalition, played the role of an outside negotiator to establish a new border between the two cities. Although the description is often confusing, we can see that whenever the king of Lagash felt strong, he attempted to expand his territory into Umma. Presumably, the same situation occurred with the ruler of Umma.

D. The text of the inscription describes the border lands, including the irrigation canals that came under dispute.

E. The inscription also attempts to portray the king of Lagash as just. He is willing to honor Shara, the patron deity of Umma, emphasizing the fact that piety is one of the ruler's most critical duties.

F. The description of the enemy in the written source characterizes the king of Umma as "the one who steals fields." The ruler of Lagash, in contrast, is "loved by the gods."

G. Both the inscription and the Stele of the Vultures make the king of Lagash appear completely victorious. As we know, however, the war was a long-lasting conflict; the skirmishes were not decisive, and cities were probably about equally supplied and evenly matched.

III. Warfare occurred repeatedly in Mesopotamia, but for the most part, it consisted of short campaigns in nearby territories.

A. Military expeditions were conducted only at certain times of the year, when labor was not needed for sowing or harvesting.

B. We do not know how armies were created in the Early Dynastic period or how large they were. Kings may have used religious justification to bring men into service. In the 2nd millennium B.C., texts record that some men were given grants of land in return for military service. Standing armies were not customary at this time.

C. The goal of most wars was not necessarily to establish political control in a certain region but to raid and sack a neighboring city, capture its loot, and perhaps, to compel tribute.

IV. Looking beyond warfare to diplomacy, we note a wide range of contacts between Mesopotamia and the wider Near Eastern world.

A. Diplomatic contacts are attested in written sources, and we also see evidence for the exchange of luxury goods as gifts between rulers of different parts of Mesopotamia and the Near East.

B. In the city of Mari on the northern Euphrates (in modern Syria), archaeologists have discovered a hoard of luxury goods in an Early Dynastic palace. One of the objects in the hoard is a lapis lazuli bead inscribed with the name Mesanepada, a ruler of Ur. This bead provides evidence of links between royals of southern and northern Mesopotamia.

C. A reference to the role of royal women survives in an inscription of the ruler of Lagash, whose wife sent a gift to her counterpart in a nearby city. Later on, the practice of gift exchange between rulers assisted in securing diplomatic alliances and facilitating trade between regions.

D. Trade in metal was likely the most common element of exchange between regions in the Near East. Our earliest evidence for the specifics of trade dates to the 2nd millennium, but it seems to represent longstanding trade patterns and customs.

1. Although the exact sources of some goods, such as tin, are not positively identified at this time, we are able to identify some trade routes that carried tin and lapis lazuli through the land of Elam in southwest Iran.

2. Traders would transport goods by a land route and, presumably, travel up and down the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The cities that built up along the rivers, especially the Tigris, would benefit from the taxes collected on goods that traveled through their lands. Mari is one of the best known of these cities, and Ashur, later the home city of the Assyrian empire, would have gained much wealth through taxes.

E. At Ebla (modern-day Tell Mardikh in western Syria), archaeologists have discovered a site that was occupied from the 4th millennium B.C. to the 7th millennium A.D., and one of its richest periods came during the Early Dynastic era. Ebla is similar to Mari in that it shows critical links with Mesopotamia.

1. A palace there, dating from about 2500–2000 B.C., included a cache of 20,000 tablets, an archive of economic texts, law cases, and diplomatic letters that provides an unparalleled degree of information about royal exchange and trade in northern Mesopotamia.
2. These texts are recorded in a local Eblaite language using a cuneiform script. This similarity of script shows very strong links with southern Mesopotamia and a close cultural unity between the two regions.
3. The texts show that timber, probably from Lebanon, was a major commodity for the palace at Ebla, as were textiles. The evidence for a thriving textile industry is not surprising, given that the king of Ebla owned about 80,000 sheep, and the city as a whole could probably count 200,000 sheep, goats, and cattle.
4. Gifts of luxury goods, such as those seen at Mari, are also found at Ebla and reveal exchanges among nations. For example, an alabaster jar carved with the name of an Egyptian pharaoh reveals contact with Egypt.
5. An inlaid fragment from a piece of furniture found in the palace shows similar iconography to that used in Sumeria. Ebla may have been involved in the manufacture of furniture and its export to southern Mesopotamia.

V. The end of the Early Dynastic period shows several conflicts between cities, a significant shift from the earlier peaceful, agricultural lifestyle in Mesopotamia.

A. We have examined one of these conflicts in detail, the war between Umma and Lagash, and we have seen the victory monuments of Lagash. We will close this lecture by looking at the destruction of Lagash by Lugalzagesi (r. c. 2375–2350 B.C.), the ruler of Umma.

B. Lugalzagesi defeated Uru'inimgina, the ruler of Lagash who had claimed that he instituted widespread reforms for his people. Lugalzagesi also captured the city of Uruk. In thanks for his success as a military leader, this ruler made numerous dedications at Nippur.

C. Lugalzagesi's power would not last long. Soon after he took the city of Uruk, an even stronger ruler would come from the north, Sargon of Akkad, who would capture Uruk and take Lugalzagesi as prisoner. Sargon would also introduce a new era of political and military leadership.

VI. The past few lectures have given us a much clearer idea of the characteristics and role of a ruler in Mesopotamia.

A. He had a number of responsibilities, both as a military leader and a diplomat. Further, a king had to be a pious worshipper and a protector of his people.

B. Increasing evidence also shows us that Mesopotamia was well connected with the wider Near East. As we look at evidence from northern sites, we find major economic exchange between the north and south.

Essential Reading:

Joan Aruz, ed., *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus*, "The Treasure of Ur from Mari," pp. 139–163.

Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC*, pp. 43–56.

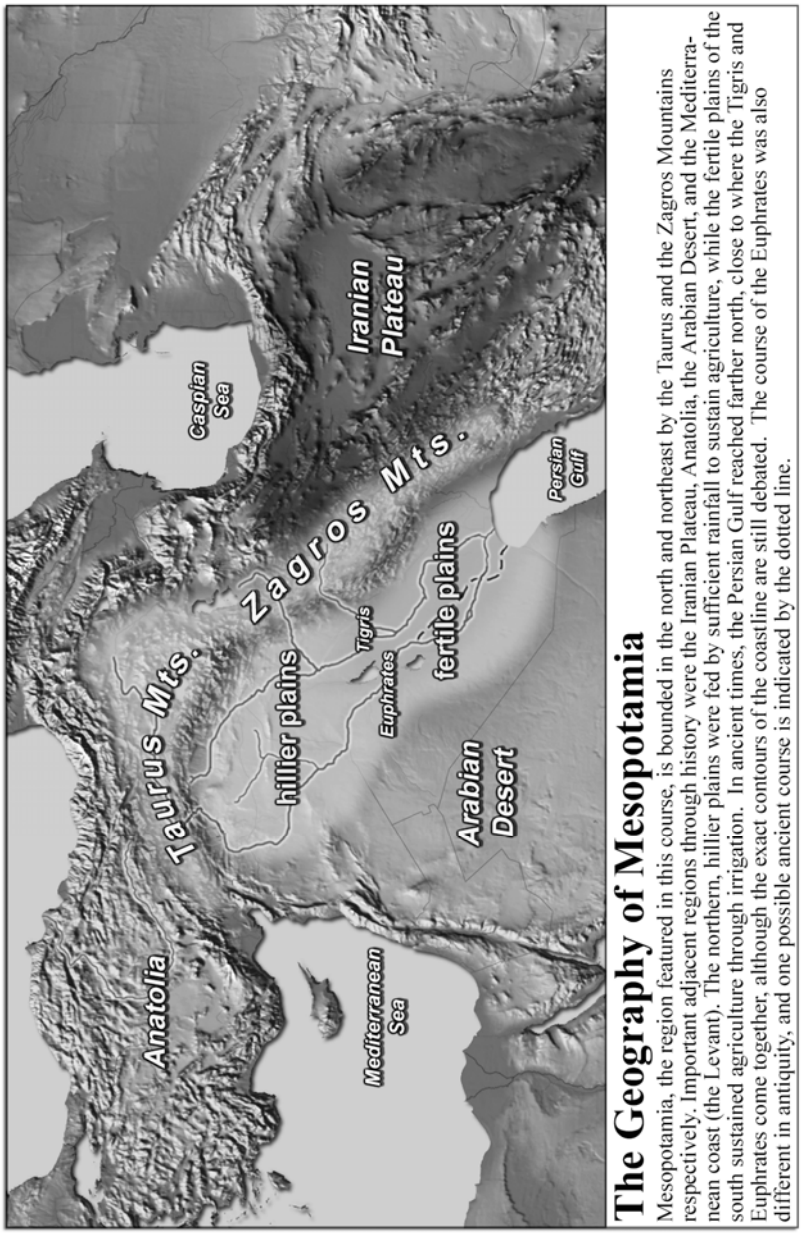
Supplementary Reading:

Michelle I. Marcus, "Art and Ideology in Ancient Western Asia," in *CANE*, vol. IV, pp. 2487–2506.

Questions to Consider:

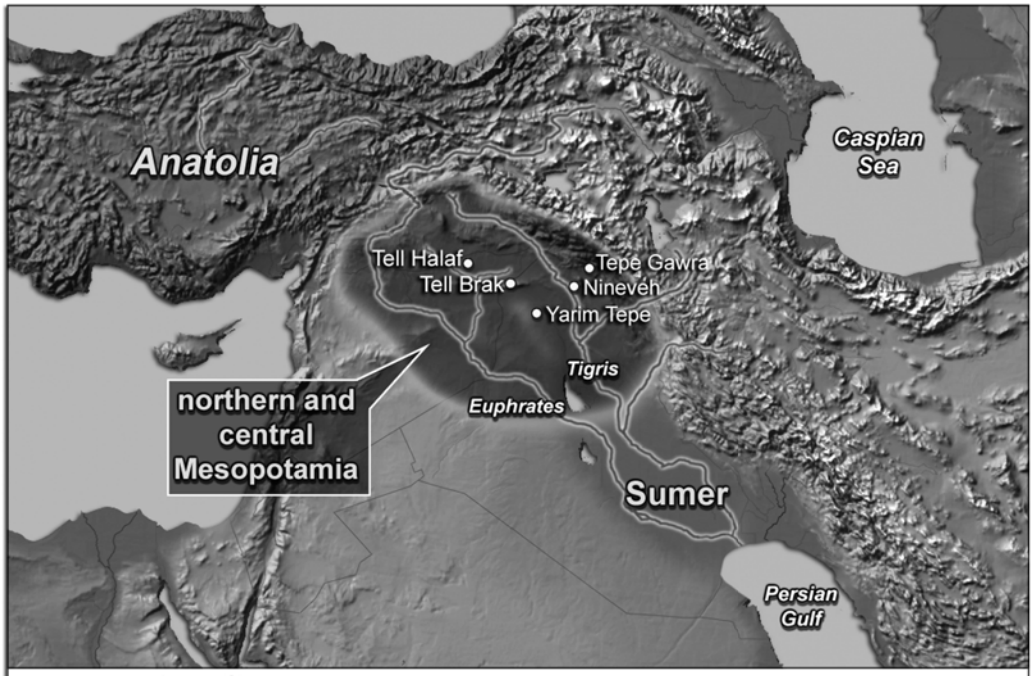
1. What do rulers gain when they describe their military expeditions as justified by the gods?
2. How do luxury gifts help to reinforce diplomatic ties?

Maps



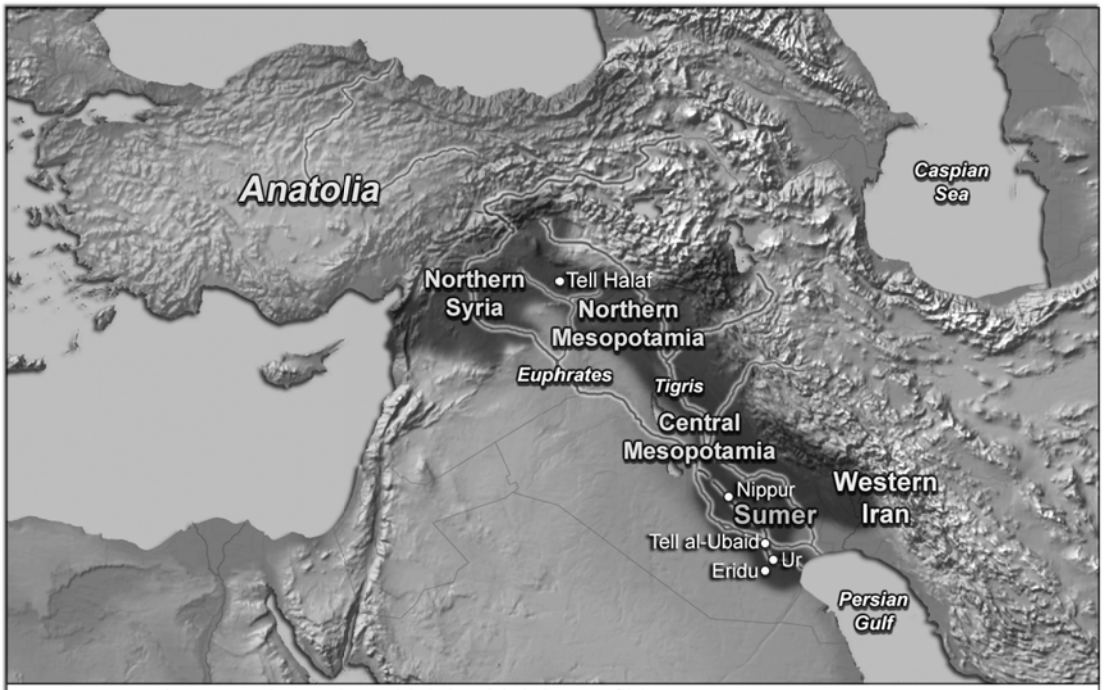
The Geography of Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia, the region featured in this course, is bounded in the north and northeast by the Taurus and the Zagros Mountains respectively. Important adjacent regions through history were the Iranian Plateau, Anatolia, the Arabian Desert, and the Mediterranean coast (the Levant). The northern, hillier plains were fed by sufficient rainfall to sustain agriculture, while the fertile plains of the south sustained agriculture through irrigation. In ancient times, the Persian Gulf reached farther north, close to where the Tigris and Euphrates come together, although the exact contours of the coastline are still debated. The course of the Euphrates was also different in antiquity, and one possible ancient course is indicated by the dotted line.



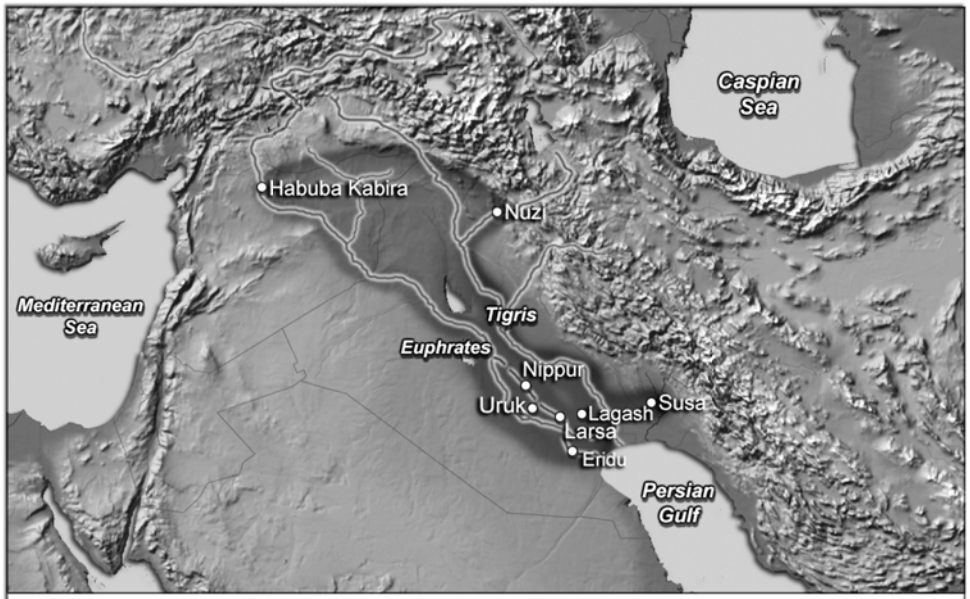
The Earliest Settlements

The earliest settlements that we can detect emerged in the 7th millennium B.C. in the north. Some common physical culture emerged, such as Halaf-style pottery, so named after the site of Tell Halaf. Halaf culture was confined to the northeast at 6000 B.C. but had spread southwest to the northern edge of Sumer by 5400 B.C.



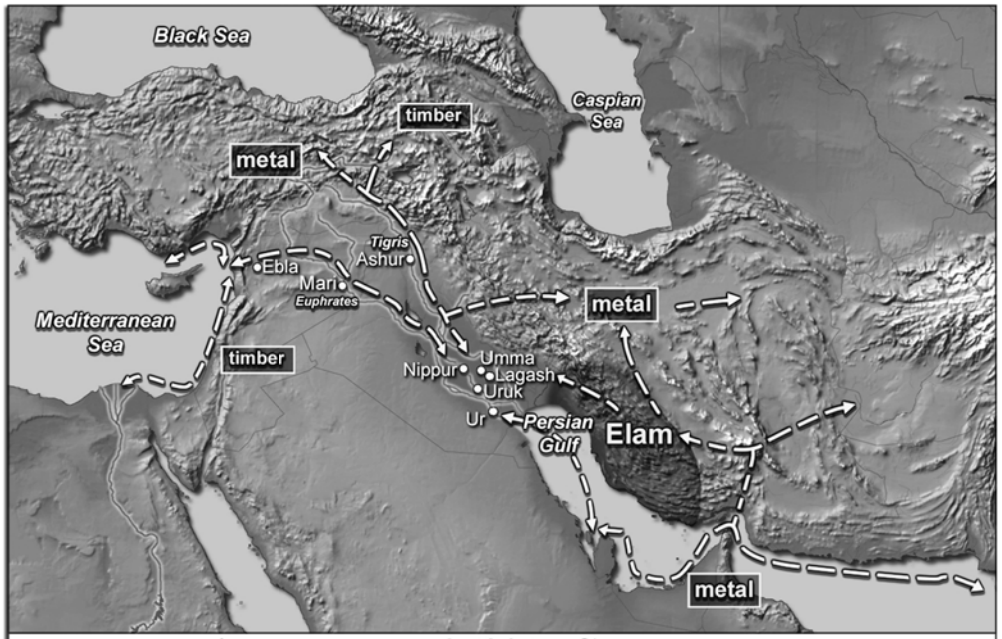
The Ubaid Period (c. 6000-4000 B.C.)

The Ubaid period, named after a pottery style found at Tell al-Ubaid, is the first era in which we can trace settlements large enough to be termed villages. By 4000 B.C., Ubaid culture had spread into Syria, northern Mesopotamia, central Mesopotamia, and even western Iran, as indicated by the dark shaded areas of this map.



The Uruk Phenomenon: 3000 B.C.

Already a major settlement by 4000 B.C., Uruk on the Euphrates became a full-fledged city by 3100 B.C., and by 3000 B.C. it had reached its peak, with its walls encompassing 3.5 square miles. A mid-4th millennium climatic shift that stemmed the floods of the Tigris and Euphrates, allowing extraordinarily fertile land to be reclaimed, probably contributed to Uruk's development, and around 3000 B.C., many other cities of similar size sprang up in southern Mesopotamia. The shaded portion of the map shows the spread of artifacts particular to Uruk culture north and northwest. These northern outposts may have been trading colonies, but other evidence suggests they were administrative centers, established after military incursions.



Mesopotamian Trade, c. 2500 B.C.

Around 2500 B.C., in the heart of the Early Dynastic period (c. 2900-2350 B.C.), cities were in close proximity to each other, sometime even in sight of each other. Competition over resources led to conflicts between cities, such as the 150-year war between Umma and Lagash. The need for resources not plentiful in Mesopotamia, such as metal and timber, often used in prestige goods and building programs, fostered trade routes stretching from the Mediterranean to modern Iran and Afghanistan in the east.

Timeline

c. 9000 B.C. ..... Neolithic period begins

c. 6000–5400 ..... Halaf period

c. 6000–4000 ..... Ubaid period

c. 3500–3000 ..... Uruk period

c. 2900–2350 ..... Early Dynastic period

c. 2500 ..... Royal Cemetery at Ur

r. c. 2450–2425 ..... Eannatum

c. 2334–2190 ..... Akkadian/Sargonic period

r. c. 2334–2279 ..... Sargon of Akkad

r. c. 2254–2218 ..... Naram-Sin

r. c. 2100 ..... Gudea of Lagash

c. 2112–2004 ..... Ur III

r. c. 2094–2047 ..... Shulgi

c. 2004–1595 ..... Old Babylonian era

c. 1910–1740 ..... Karum Kanesh levels II and Ib

c. 1800–1762 ..... Mari archives

r. 1792–1750 ..... Hammurabi

c. 1595–1375 ..... Dark Age

c. 1800–1155 ..... Kassite/Middle Babylonian/Middle Assyrian

c. 1365–1335 ..... Amarna archive

c. 1200 ..... "Sea Peoples"

c. 1155–626 ..... Neo-Assyrian Empire

r. c. 721–705 ..... Sargon II

625–539 ..... Neo-Babylonian era

539–332 ..... Persian Empire

333 ..... Battle of Issus

331–143 ..... Alexander and successors (Alexander became king of Persia in 331)

c. 312–63 ..... Seleucids

c. 250 B.C.–A.D. 224 ..... Parthians

c. A.D. 224–651 ..... Sassanians

c. A.D. 651–present ..... Arabs

Note: The primary sources for dating are Michael Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East*, and Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, c. 3000–323 BC*. Professor Castor uses the middle chronology for the most part. Dating is inherently problematic for Mesopotamian history, however, and the majority of dates are approximate.

Glossary

Adad: Rain god.

Akkad: Region of northern Mesopotamia; rose to power under Sargon in the 23rd century B.C.

Akkadian: One of the two main languages used in Mesopotamian literature.

Amorite: Nomadic tribes from the western desert who occupied Babylonia in the 20th century B.C.

An/Anu: God of the sky.

Anatolia: Term for modern Turkey (together with Asia Minor); usually used for the inland regions of Turkey, especially above the Taurus Mountains.

Apsu/Abzu: God who personifies sweet water that runs beneath the Earth.

Aramaic: Semitic language that became widespread in the Near East during the 12th century B.C.; it used an alphabetic, rather than cuneiform, script.

Ashipu: A priest or diviner, consulted to determine the supernatural cause of an illness and to cast spells against it.

Ashur: Capital of the Assyrian Empire and the name of the national god of the Assyrians.

Asia Minor: Ancient name for the area of modern Turkey, especially the western coast.

Asu: A physician who treated the physical (as opposed to the supernatural) aspects of a malady.

Babylon: Capital city of Babylonia.

Babylonia: Region of southern and the lower part of northern Mesopotamia (the lands of the 3rd-millennium B.C. states of Sumer and Akkad).

Bala: System of tax and redistribution established in the Ur III period.

Behistun Decree: Trilingual inscription of Darius I in modern Iran that was the key to the decipherment of cuneiform by Henry Rawlinson. Sometimes spelled Besitun.

Bulla: Round, hollow clay lump that either contains tokens or is stamped with a number of tokens. Plural: *bullae*.

City-state: Political unit centered on one or, perhaps, more than one city and the surrounding territory. This was the dominant form of political control in the 3rd and early 2nd millennia B.C.

Corvée labor: The practice of gathering large numbers of workers for a specific project.

Cuneiform: A syllabic script used to write Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian languages.

Cylinder seal: Engraved cylinder, often of semiprecious stone, that was rolled over clay as a mark of an authority.

Dagan: Akkadian god of grain.

Dumuzi: Spouse of Ishtar; Dumuzi is the god of vegetation and spends half of the year in the netherworld.

É: Temple, house of the god.

Edubba: A scribal school.

Elam: State that controlled southwestern Iran.

En/ensi: Sumerian word for governor or king.

Enki: Sumerian god of water; also of intelligence, science, and crafts.

Enkidu: Hero created by the gods who lived in the steppe until he came to Uruk and became the friend of Gilgamesh.

Enlil: Patron deity of Nippur, god of kingship, king of the gods and heavens.

Enuma Elish: Epic poem that described the creation of the world.

Gilgamesh: Hero of the first epic; ruler of Uruk, who had many adventures and attempted, unsuccessfully, to learn the secret of immortality.

Gutians: Nomadic tribe from the Zagros Mountains that was blamed for the end of the Akkadian Dynasty.

Hittites: Civilization centered in Anatolia and flourishing from about the 18th to the 12th centuries B.C.

Inanna/Ishtar: Goddess of carnal love and war; the patron goddess of Uruk.

Isin: City in southern Mesopotamia.

Karum: Akkadian word for a colony, trading post, or marketplace established by Old Assyrian era merchants.

Kassites: Nomadic tribespeople who moved into Babylonia after about the 18th century B.C. After the Hittites sacked Babylon in 1595 B.C., the Kassites slowly took control and ruled until the 12th century B.C.

Lagash: City in southern Mesopotamia.

Lapis lazuli: A semiprecious blue stone available only through trade with the eastern regions in modern Afghanistan; lapis was prized as a luxury object.

Larsa: City in southern Mesopotamia.

Law code: Collection of laws published by a king or gathered in an archive.

Lugal: Sumerian word for big man, used for kings.

Marduk: Patron deity of Babylon.

Mari: Ancient Mesopotamian city, located along the northern Euphrates River in modern Syria.

Medes: An Iranian group who helped to overthrow the Assyrians in the 7th century B.C. and ruled Mesopotamia with the Persians.

Merodoch-baladan II: King of Babylonia in the 8th century B.C. who rebelled against the Assyrian rulers Sargon and Sennacherib.

Misharum: A dispensation given by a king that allowed taxes to revert back to a previous rate. It was customary for a king to enact a *misharum* in his first year of rule.

Naditum: A priestess who spent her life in service to the temple of a god or goddess.

Nanna: Patron deity of Ur.

Nimrud: Assyrian capital that flourished in the reign of Ashurnasirpal II in the 9th century B.C.; home of Ashurnasirpal's library.

Nineveh: An Assyrian city with a large palace built by the 8th-century ruler Sennacherib.

Ningirsu: God of Lagash.

Ninkasi: Patron goddess of brewers.

Ninurta: Mesopotamian war god.

Nippur: Religious capital of Mesopotamia; home of the patron deity Enlil.

Persepolis: A Persian capital city in Iran founded by Darius I around 518 B.C. The best preserved of all the Persian capital cities.

Persians: An Iranian group who came to prominence in the 6th century B.C. under the leadership of Cyrus and governed all of the Near East until defeated by Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C.

Proskynesis: Ritual prostration.

Protome: Head or forepart of a human or animal body.

Royal Cemetery: Group of large, lavish Early Dynastic burials of the ruling elite of the city of Ur, c. 2500 B.C.

Satrapy: Persian term for a province; these regions were governed by *satraps*.

Sealings: The strips of clay over which stamp seals were rolled to indicate that a sign of authority was needed.

Shagina: Military governor of a province during the Ur III period (2112–2004 B.C.)

Shamash: The sun god and god of justice; the patron deity of Sippar.

Shara: God of Umma.

Sin: The Sumerian moon god; this deity became especially prominent during the reign of Nabonidus in the 6th century B.C.

Stratigraphy: The study of different layers, or strata, that indicate a period of occupation. The strata closest to the surface are the most recent.

Sumer: Southern Mesopotamia and the homeland of the Sumerian language.

Sumerian: Together with Akkadian, the other major written language used in Mesopotamian literature.

Sumerian king list: List created in the 2nd millennium B.C. that describes mythical and historical rulers in Mesopotamia. The main purpose of the list is to show an uninterrupted transfer of power from one king to another.

Susa: Capital city of the Elamites of western Iran.

Temple-state theory: The now-outdated theory that only temples could own land.

Tiamat: A goddess who personifies saltwater; her body was split in two to create the Earth.

Tell: Mound of earth that marks the site of an abandoned ancient city.

Token: A small clay marker used to record quantities of a specific object.

Ubaid: Culture (4000–3500 B.C.) named after the pottery found at Tell al-Ubaid in southern Mesopotamia.

Ur: City in southern Mesopotamia, near the ancient mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Uruk phenomenon: Describes the 4th-millennium development of urbanization in southern Mesopotamia centered at the city of Uruk.

Ziggurat: A form of temple that stands atop a stepped platform; ziggurats are likely the source of the biblical Tower of Babel.

Between the Rivers:
The History of Ancient Mesopotamia

Part II: The Great City-States

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Between the Rivers:
The History of Ancient Mesopotamia

Scope:

Six thousand years ago, in the land bordered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the first cities arose, ruled by kings who created complex bureaucracies that fostered the invention of writing and other technological advances. The Greeks coined the term *Mesopotamia*, "the land between the rivers," for this region, a name that the Romans later applied when they conquered the territory. In this course, we will explore Mesopotamian societies from the Neolithic era (c. 9,000 B.C.) to the defeat of the great Persian Empire at Gaugamela by Alexander the Great (331 B.C.). Our study will take us from the world of international diplomacy with powerful neighbors in Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia to the mundane issues of daily life, such as providing food for the family, curing disease, and settling legal disputes. We will examine archaeological discoveries, historical documents, and literary texts to explore how these lands between the rivers created a civilization that has contributed to the development of our own. A recurring theme of the course will be the creation of an urban lifestyle, which becomes increasingly sophisticated and complex as cultures expand.

This introduction to the history and culture of Mesopotamia is divided into three parts. We will begin by looking at the region in which we see the development of agriculture, settlements, and the rise of cities. What do these early cities look like? What can we say about the people who lived in them? How were they organized and in what professions did the populace engage? Temples were the earliest public architecture and required thousands of laborers to erect the structures; the organization of this labor force results in an early form of bureaucracy. Because much of the evidence for this era derives from archaeological remains, we will explore the methods archaeologists use to reconstruct history from artifacts ranging from broken pieces of pottery to city walls.

In the second part of the course, we will study how the early city-states grew in size and complexity. Rulers promoted building projects, encouraged trade, and protected their people from harm. The ideal ruler was hailed as the shepherd of his people who had the favor of the gods. Literature and art celebrate the king in these roles, and we see energetic leaders digging irrigation canals and dedicating temples to the gods. During this era, we will meet historical figures such as Hammurabi, the king of Babylon in the 18th century B.C. Hammurabi is most famous for his law code, in which the ruler himself legislates a wide range of punishments for theft, property disputes, and familial quarrels. Sentences are levied based on one's social standing; these laws reveal a strictly hierarchical society in which the wealthy man pays fines, while the poor man suffers more extreme physical punishment.

International contacts with other areas of the Near East flourish at this time. We will examine diplomatic correspondence between the great cities in Mesopotamia and the powerful states of Egypt and Syria, as well as the foreign influences visible in the art and architecture of the era. Society grew ever more complex and cultured. Developments in such fields as medicine and astronomy reveal the Mesopotamian interest in understanding and ordering the world.

The last section of the course will explore the rise of empires, specifically, the great Assyrian and Persian empires. A strongly militaristic society, the Assyrians dominated much of the Near East and effected enormous cultural changes for the peoples of this region through their practice of mass transfers of population. Enormous palaces displayed images of their kings engaged in lion hunts and at the head of the mighty Assyrian army, reinforcing the strength of the state. Such a disciplined society required the smooth transfer of power from ruler to ruler to oversee the complicated bureaucracy necessary to control an empire of such great size. When palace intrigues weakened the throne, the neighboring Medes and Persians quickly seized power and established themselves at the head of ever-larger empires.

The interaction between the East and the West is the focus of the last six lectures of the course. During this time, the small and distant country of Greece was able to fend off two invasions led by the Persian king Darius and his son Xerxes in the early 5th century B.C. Although these defeats had little impact on the Persian Empire, which flourished for another century and a half, they were highly significant for the Greeks. The Greek historian Herodotus recorded these events from the side of the victors, and his account had enormous influence on the way that later generations of scholars understood the peoples of Mesopotamia. Despite the image that Herodotus and other Greek authors drew of a weak and corrupt Persian state, it remained a wealthy and vital empire that fell only as a result of the military brilliance of Alexander the Great. Alexander's victory allowed him to rule briefly at the

head of the largest empire then known, reaching from Greece to western India, but after his death in Babylon in 323 B.C., no single ruler was able to control these lands again. Many of the great cities of Mesopotamia were abandoned, known only as legends until archaeologists uncovered them 2,000 years later.

Lecture Thirteen
The Royal Cemetery at Ur

Scope: In this lecture, we will continue to see the power of the ruler displayed to his subjects, in this case, on the occasion of his burial. As noted in Lecture Three, a spectacular and widely publicized archaeological discovery was the Royal Cemetery at Ur, excavated in the late 1920s by Sir Leonard Woolley. This extensive burial ground included grave gifts of gold, silver, imported alabaster, lapis lazuli, and carnelian. Some graves were constructed with multiple chambers. These larger burials contained a wealth of exotic goods to comfort the dead in the afterlife: musical instruments, chariots, jewelry, and even ritually slaughtered human attendants. Although many questions concerning the meaning of these extraordinary tombs remain unanswered, they reveal much about the funerary customs for members of the political, religious, or social elite.

Outline

I. Ur had been known for many years because of the large ziggurat mound that dominated the site. Visitors to the region had described the site in the 17th century A.D., and initial excavations began in the mid-19th century.

- **A.** After World War I, Sir Leonard Woolley led a joint expedition at Ur, sponsored by the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania.
- **B.** Woolley cleared the ziggurat and explored the temple of Nanna, patron deity of Ur, including portions of the temple that had been restored and expanded by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.
- **C.** In the sixth year of excavation, the team began to uncover a large group of graves that lay below the foundation of these later structures.
  - **1.** Almost 2,000 graves were discovered, but 16 of these were so spectacular that newspapers reported their excavation in detail.
  - **2.** These "royal graves," as they were quickly termed, contained lavish quantities of gold, silver, and semiprecious stones, but the most surprising feature of the burials was the suggestion that they provided evidence of human sacrifice.

II. The Standard of Ur, now housed in the British Museum, is a wooden box, about a foot long, covered with lapis lazuli, white shell, and red limestone. It has three rows of scenes on both long sides.

- **A.** The longest side shows a battle. In the top center, a large figure, probably a ruler, faces a row of captives; behind the ruler are arrayed soldiers carrying spears, and behind them is a chariot with donkeys.
- **B.** On the opposite side, we move from the battle to a banquet.
  - **1.** Again, on the top is the largest figure; here, the king is seated, wearing a fleecy skirt, holding a cup, and facing a row of seated males who wear plain skirts with fringe and also hold cups. Behind them is a standing male who holds a lyre with a ram head protome.
  - **2.** The lower two registers show men leading animals and bringing food, recalling the Uruk Vase we discussed earlier.
  - **3.** The distinctions in dress and animal species reveal that these men and animals come from different regions in Mesopotamia. This is the first time that we see specificity in dress indicating a regional style, which will become a typical feature of later art.
- **C.** The Standard of Ur was probably attached to a pole and carried; it would be an effective symbol of kingship, illustrating two of the ruler's most important functions.

III. Musical instruments also figure among the unusual artifacts from Ur. Examples of these are in the Iraq Museum, the British Museum, and the University of Pennsylvania Museum.

- **A.** Lyres were large instruments, about 4 to 5 feet high, held with straps around the shoulders.
  - **1.** The lyres are wooden with metal and stone overlay. In his excavations, Woolley preserved and consolidated these artifacts by pouring plaster over them so that the pieces would cling together.

2. The lyres are decorated with sculptures of animal heads, particularly bulls, and decorative inlays. The bulls are sheathed in gold on the head and horns, with lapis used for tufts of hair, at the tips of the horns, and to create a long, curly beard.
3. The front of one lyre was decorated with a panel of carved shell showing animals and mythical creatures. At the top, a hero clasps two bulls with human heads; the meaning of this image is unclear, but it may refer to some story about the underworld.
4. The three lower registers show animals involved in a funeral banquet and a small animal band. A donkey is playing a lyre just like the instrument we are describing; a bear stands in front of the lyre; and a fox is seated before it.
5. The bottom row represents a mythical half-human, half-scorpion figure and a gazelle standing upright and holding beakers.

B. Stringed instruments of different sizes are common at Ur and show that music was an important part of the funeral ritual.

IV. Most Mesopotamian graves were simple pits dug into the ground; the royal graves, however, consisted of larger chambers made of brick or stone. This more elaborate construction would require additional labor, which we may interpret as a sign of the ruler's prestige.

A. The graves are vaulted, rectangular chambers situated at the bottom of a ramp. Inside the graves, Woolley found bodies surrounded by many grave goods and, in some graves, a sled that presumably brought the corpses inside.

B. Numerous other bodies were found in the chambers or, more often, lying outside of them; these were probably attendants.

C. Several royal tombs were built next to each other; presumably, the first tomb was built and successors were then buried nearby.

D. Within these 16 royal graves, there is great variation in the size of the tombs and the number of bodies of both sexes buried in them.

E. The grave of one male is a chamber built of stone and brick, about 12 by 6 feet. This grave was robbed in antiquity, but outside it, what Woolley termed the "death pit" was intact.

1. The bodies of 60 individuals, mostly women, were found on the ramp. Six soldiers, who carried spears and wore helmets, were outside the chamber, as were six oxen, drawing two wagons, and a groom and a driver.
2. The women were lined up in a row along a wall; they were very richly adorned and likely carried the lyres found nearby.

F. Very near the death pit was the grave of a woman named Pu-Abi; her name was inscribed on a cylinder seal with the title *nin*, which means "queen." She was about 40 and buried in a chamber tomb of about 12 by 6 feet.

1. Pu-Abi's burial costume was quite elaborate. She wore a headdress made of strips of sheet gold woven together to create a cap of shimmering leaves and flowers, a comb worn at the back of her head, and a gold wreath.
2. In addition, this queen wore a cape made of gold, silver, lapis, carnelian, and agate beads; long strings of these colorful beads hung from her shoulders to her waist.
3. Beneath the cape was a belt of horizontal beads, mostly lapis with alternating rows of gold and carnelian, as well as a rich array of other jewelry.
4. Three other bodies were found in Pu-Abi's chamber tomb, including a male and a female who were probably attendants.
5. Other goods buried with the queen included numerous gold and silver cups, stone bowls, furniture inlays, and cosmetic boxes.

V. Woolley identified a death pit associated with Pu-Abi's burial, but subsequent reexamination questioned that conclusion.

A. On the ramp leading to the burial chamber of Pu-Abi were the bodies of several attendants, both male and female. Ten women were placed in two rows facing one another, holding harps and lyres.

B. These women wore costumes similar to that of Pu-Abi but much less elaborate. The bodies of the men in this death pit were also adorned with jewelry, and each carried a dagger and a whetstone.

C. In addition to the humans found in the grave, the bones of two oxen were identified.

VI. These two graves offer definite evidence for human sacrifice accompanying the burial of a man and a woman of high status, probably a ruler and his wife. The amount of gold and other expensive goods buried in the chambers gives us an idea of the objects royals used and suggests that they possessed enormous wealth.

A. These burials also let us imagine early funeral rituals. We can't know if the elaborate costume of Pu-Abi was something she wore only for special occasions, but we can see how her dress would set her apart from others who were dressed more simply.

B. The musical instruments may have been used to play a dirge or hymn, followed by death for the musicians. Woolley suggested that they may have drunk poison. This would have been the ultimate symbol of a ruler's power.

C. The ritual suicide could well have been voluntary. The attendants may have desired to keep working for their rulers in the afterlife, or perhaps, the rulers needed servants in the afterlife and compelled their attendants to join them in death.

VII. Scholars continue to puzzle over the significance of these tombs, especially given that they remain unique discoveries.

A. Only one of the artifacts, a gold vessel, is inscribed with the name of a known ruler, Meskalamdug.

B. The other inscribed artifacts, such as the seal with Pu-Abi's name, were found in the area of the grave but not in the chamber with the main tomb occupant.

C. The biggest puzzle revolves around the practice of ritual murder or suicide. Why was this act considered necessary at this time?

1. There are no known comparable examples of ritual murder accompanying a burial in Mesopotamia at this time.

2. The story of the death of Gilgamesh records, however, that he was buried with the female members of his family and courtiers.

3. Outside of Mesopotamia, there are examples of ritual murder in other cultures.

VIII. The wealth of the graves at the Royal Cemetery is overwhelming; add to that the evidence for mass suicide upon the death of the ruler, and we get a real sense of the power of a king and queen.

Essential Reading:

Richard Zettler and Lee Horne, eds., *Treasures from the Royal Tombs at Ur*.

Susan Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden That Never Was*, pp. 196–217.

Supplementary Reading:

Joan Aruz, ed., *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus*, pp. 93–132.

Sir Leonard Woolley, *Digging up the Past*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the archaeological evidence found at Ur supplement our understanding of Early Dynastic rulers?

2. What do you think these graves suggest about Mesopotamian understanding of the afterlife?

Lecture Fourteen
The Akkadians

Scope: In this lecture, we move from the kings of cities to the first ruler who could legitimately claim his mastery over northern and southern Mesopotamia. The rise of Sargon of Akkad (r. c. 2334–2279 B.C.) shows the dominance of northern Mesopotamia, or Akkad, over Sumer in the south and the beginning of a new dynasty. Although we have some contemporary sources for Sargon's rule, the majority of our texts were written much later, when he had become a legendary figure worthy of emulation. These sources claim to be copies of original texts inscribed on Akkadian monuments, but it is likely that later rulers embellished the accounts to serve their own purposes. It is a challenge to sort out the facts of Sargon's rule from these anachronistic sources, but they attest to the lingering influence of this era in Mesopotamian history.

Outline

I. One of the most striking stories about Sargon's early life is his birth legend, which is reported in an 8th-century B.C. Neo-Assyrian source.

- **A.** The legend reports that Sargon was the son of a priestess and an unknown father. His mother placed him in a basket and set him afloat on a river, which brought Sargon to Aqqi, the "drawer of water."
- **B.** The Sumerian king list records Sargon's birth as well, describing him in different versions as the son of a gardener or as the cupbearer of the king of Kish, Ur-Zababa. Sargon overthrew, and likely assassinated, Ur-Zababa to take the throne of Kish and expand his rule.
- **C.** Sargon's story, even if it was recorded later, would have preceded the Old Testament story of Moses, and it attests to the importance of rivers in Mesopotamia and Egypt.
- **D.** Other stories about Sargon relate a dream that he had while still in the service of Ur-Zababa; according to the story, Sargon dreamed that Inanna killed Ur-Zababa, and this divine sign could justify his assassination of the king.
- **E.** Sargon's Akkadian name, Sharru-ken, means the "true" or "legitimate" king, an overstatement that suggests that he had no real claim to the throne.
  1. After taking the throne of Kish, Sargon quickly attacked and defeated the king of Uruk, Lugalzagesi.
  2. This king had noted in an inscription on a silver vessel that he controlled the land to the west and east, indicating a change in military objective from the small-scale border conflicts we have seen, such as that between Umma and Lagash.

II. Sargon's main accomplishments stemmed from his military achievements, which took him east to Iran, apparently as far west as Lebanon, north into Anatolia, and to the south of Mesopotamia.

- **A.** Inscriptions contemporary to Sargon's reign note that the god Dagan (the god of grain) gave him the upper Euphrates regions, including Ebla and Mari, trading cities in Syria, and that he controlled the lands west to the Cedar Mountains (of Lebanon).
- **B.** Later stories about Sargon offer more detailed descriptions of his campaigns, but these may not be especially reliable.
  1. A partially preserved epic poem about Sargon reports his skill and ambition in battle.
  2. When Sargon arrives and successfully besieges the city, his enemy concedes to him, saying, "Your opponents' hearts are seared; they are terrified and left paralyzed with fear." The mere presence of later Assyrian rulers was believed to cause an opponent's city or army to immediately surrender.
  3. As always, divine support was necessary for victory; Sargon claimed both divine support and a close relationship with Inanna.
  4. Sargon's most memorable claim is that he washed his spear in the sea of the Persian Gulf. Later rulers, including his Assyrian namesake, Sargon II, emulated this act in direct imitation.
  5. One of the most intriguing contemporary texts refers to Sargon eating bread with 5,400 men every day. This could be a reference to a standing army; if so, this is the first recorded army in history.

III. Scholars debate whether Sargon's Akkad was the first known empire; the issue revolves around modern definitions of *empire* and does not relate to ancient conceptions of kingship or political power.

A. Modern scholars identify an empire based on a combination of certain characteristics:

1. A deliberate policy of territorial expansion.

2. A coherent system of governance.

3. The visible expression and extent of a ruler's power.

B. Some scholars agree with the idea that Sargon's Akkad fits this definition, while others believe that the concept is not fulfilled until the Assyrians create an empire in the 1st millennium B.C.

C. The obstacle to identifying Sargon's kingship as the first empire is that written sources do not convey a deliberate plan to expand the territory or to provide a coherent system of governance.

IV. The emphasis on military success in the surviving texts relating to Sargon complicates our study of the bureaucracy that controlled the Akkadian territories.

A. Sargon founded a new capital, Akkad or Agade, from which to rule his lands. This capital, as yet undiscovered, is thought to be near or beneath Baghdad.

B. The founding of a new city is contrary to what we have come to expect in Mesopotamia, where the old cities have such a rich history. What would be the benefits of a new capital city?

1. As an illegitimate ruler, Sargon could use a new city to invoke a new era, surrounding himself with temples and art that would celebrate his rule without awkward references to earlier rulers that he overthrew. Later rulers will also set up new capital cities; such foundations are always important events described in the texts.

2. We have little Akkadian architecture and cannot evaluate any changes that this new dynasty may have represented in its public architecture. Sargon may have used traditional forms of architecture to show his connection to the past.

3. Akkadian was made the official language of the royal bureaucracy. This shift in language could be interpreted as a way for Sargon to govern his lands in a consistent manner.

4. We know that he sent *ensis* (governors), some of them his sons, others presumably his trusted officials, to oversee cities.

5. Sargon established a uniform system of weights and measurements that was especially useful for levying tribute or paying other obligations to the state.

V. One of the most significant decisions that Sargon made to consolidate his power was to install his daughter as a priestess.

A. Enheduanna was the high priestess of the moon god Nanna at Ur, which would give her control over the temple lands and other property controlled by this powerful cult in southern Mesopotamia.

B. She may also have served in some priestly function at Uruk, which would represent a unification of these powerful religious centers.

C. While serving as priestess, Enheduanna composed hymns to the goddess Inanna and many other deities, which makes her the first known author in history. The songs extol Inanna's strength and wisdom, placing her as a critical member of the assemblies of the gods.

D. An alabaster disk found at Ur, now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum, shows Enheduanna making a sacrifice to Inanna.

E. After Sargon, it became traditional for a ruler who claimed allegiance of more than one city to also place a daughter in this cultic position. This would give a ruler important religious justification for his claims to control southern Mesopotamia and the lucrative temple estates at Ur.

VI. Sargon ruled for 55 years; the length of his reign undoubtedly contributed to its success because it allowed him to ensure succession after establishing his control.

A. Despite Sargon's success, a later source notes that all the lands revolted against him late in life; he was besieged in Akkad, but he defeated his opponents. There would be another revolt immediately after Sargon's death, and we will see that the period of succession was often difficult.

B. Rimush (r. 2278–2270 B.C.), Sargon's son and successor, ruled for only nine years before he was assassinated. The sources claim that his servants "killed him with their tablets."

C. His brother, Manishtushu (r. 2269–2255 B.C.), took the throne, ruled for another 14 years, and seems to have been an active campaigner, crossing the Persian Gulf to gain control of silver mines. While he was away, Akkadian dominance of northern Mesopotamia (Ebla and Mari) weakened, and Akkadian access to the metal trading routes was cut off.

D. Sargon and his successors seem to have desired control of these trade routes more so than agricultural lands. When these routes were cut off, the kings often had to return to the region and reestablish their control. This fact suggests that the Akkadians lacked a strong governance and that local movements may have been intensely independent.

VII. Sargon was the first ruler to unite northern and southern Mesopotamia, setting a precedent for his successors to establish regional control, rather than control over one or two cities and their lands.

A. He further reinforced his power by placing his daughter in the position of high priestess at Ur, which gave him critical support in southern Mesopotamia and religious validation for his rule.

B. At the end of his rule, and during the reign of his immediate successors, indications of rebellion and unrest show the difficulty of any larger entity in maintaining leadership over these fiercely independent city-states.

C. In the next lecture, we will examine how Sargon's grandson, Naram-Sin, attempted a different form of political and social control in Mesopotamia that focused on religion.

Essential Reading:

Sabina Franke, "Kings of Akkad: Sargon and Naram-Sin," in *CANE*, vol. II, pp. 831–842.

Benjamin R. Foster, *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 165–170.

Supplementary Reading:

Jean-Daniel Forest, "The State: The Process of State Formation as Seen from Mesopotamia," in Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck, eds., *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*, pp. 184–206.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think that Sargon established an empire? How would you define an empire?
2. Why do you think that later rulers were so enraptured by Sargon?

Lecture Fifteen
Ideology of Kingship—Naram-Sin and Gudea

Scope: The reign of Naram-Sin marks the high point of Akkadian rule, with the boundaries of the empire reaching their greatest extent. With Naram-Sin, for the first time, we see a ruler worshipped as divine during his lifetime, a radical change in the conception of kingship. The art of the era shows important developments in the Mesopotamian representation of the king and in depictions of the human figure. The success of Naram-Sin's reign did not last, and later writers represent him as suffering from personal pride that brought disaster to himself and the collapse of Akkadian rule. Once the Akkadians were removed from power, city-states again became politically important, as they had been in the Early Dynastic era. In Lagash, in southern Mesopotamia, a new ruler arose, Gudea, who was the first of a dynasty that would govern during an exceptionally wealthy and peaceful era. The portraits of Gudea rejected the new way in which Naram-Sin had represented himself and returned to a more traditional style.

Outline

I. The rule of Naram-Sin (c. 2254–2218 B.C.), the grandson of Sargon, became as notorious for its supposed failure in later generations as his predecessor's rule was praised. But a closer look shows that the later sources that condemned Naram-Sin exaggerate the historical situation; he was, in fact, a strong leader who expanded the borders of Akkadian control.

II. As we begin to look in detail at rulers in the ancient Near East, we need to briefly discuss the chronology of the region, which is quite unsettled.

- **A.** We have a good idea of the sequence of rulers; that is, we know who ruled and in what order, but specific dates come from various sources (astrological texts, political texts from other countries) and are by no means consistent.
- **B.** Assyrian documents record a solar eclipse that occurred on June 15, 763 B.C.. From that confirmed date we get very close dates for 1st-millennium B.C. history, but the 3rd and 2nd millennia are much more uncertain.
- **C.** Three different chronologies have been established for Mesopotamian history—a high, middle, and low chronology. We have used the middle chronology in this course, but questions remain about all three systems.

III. Naram-Sin succeeded his father, Manishtushu, and ruled for 46 years, during which time he faced revolts in Mesopotamia and challenges on its borders, often repeating campaigns that Sargon had originally undertaken.

- **A.** During Naram-Sin's rule, the Akkadians controlled the area of Elam in southwest Iran, Sumer, Akkad, and part of northern Syria. Most of the evidence for these borders comes from dedications with inscriptions recording campaigns or boundary markers set up in these regions.
- **B.** Naram-Sin's expeditions were focused on controlling trade routes, for example, to ensure access to the Indus Valley and to northern Syria. In Syria, at Tell Brak, bricks from a monumental building are stamped with Naram-Sin's name, showing his sponsorship and indicating that the Akkadians intended to settle there.
- **C.** At some point in his reign, Naram-Sin adopted a new title, "King of the Four Quarters of the World," which essentially defined him as ruler of the known world.
- **D.** One of the most significant revolts against Akkadian rule came from an unusually strong alliance of southern city-states, which Naram-Sin shattered. After this revolt, Naram-Sin chose to deify himself, introducing a new concept of rulership.
- **E.** For the latter part of his reign, the sign for a deity was placed before his name in all written sources. This was an unprecedented act for a Mesopotamian ruler, and it may explain the later hostility toward him, but the immediate reaction of his subjects remains unclear.

IV. Naram-Sin also portrayed himself in a new and radical way in the visual arts. A limestone relief sculpture called the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, now in the Louvre, shows the king as victor over a mountain tribe, the Lullubi in Elam.

A. Some aspects of the image are familiar to us: Naram-Sin is larger than any other figures on the stele and the focus of attention; he is shown in battle, leading his troops as a good king was required to do.

B. The stele also shows several innovations. For example, instead of the usual registers that frame a scene, the entire background of this sculpture is employed.

1. Naram-Sin has defeated a mountain tribe and is shown climbing up a mountain, with his army behind him.

2. The usual motif of the victor crushing his enemies beneath his feet is retained, although these opponents are not nude but wear short skirts. To the viewer, this might convey the idea that the battle is ongoing.

3. The most important change in this representation is that Naram-Sin is shown wearing the horned helmet that was reserved for the gods. His divinity is underscored by the fact that no other gods are shown on the stele, although they are represented symbolically by stars.

4. The rendering of Naram-Sin's body also reveals his divinity. He wears a short skirt that falls between his legs; his right arm is bare and quite muscular. The image emphasizes his strength and resembles typical artistic depictions of gods and heroes.

C. One theory explains Naram-Sin's self-deification as an attempt by the Akkadian king to break down or divert the population's strong identification with individual cities and their own ruling elite and gods.

V. We don't know how successful Naram-Sin's strategy was, and later written sources express clear discomfort with his claim of divinity. His arrogance and impiety were used to explain the collapse of Akkadian rule.

A. A text called "The Curse of Akkad" describes the fall of the Akkadians, blaming Naram-Sin and his impiety for the collapse. This inscription is supposedly copied from a stele set up by Naram-Sin.

B. According to this source, Enlil sent Naram-Sin a dream, in which the god revealed a terrifying future for Akkad; Naram-Sin refused to share the dream with anyone but, instead, hid in his palace for seven years. He then attacked the temple of Enlil at Nippur.

C. Enlil's rage was intense, and he sent a mountain tribe, the Gutians, to retaliate. The motif of foreign tribes acting as agents of the gods was a common explanation for a change in power in Mesopotamian literature.

D. These tribes are often from the mountains or deserts, where development of cities would not be possible. As we discussed in an earlier lecture, the geography of some parts of Mesopotamia would have promoted smaller, more independent communities.

E. Texts characterize these mountain tribes as uncivilized, with an animal-like appearance. All the phrases used to describe the Gutians separate them from normal daily life. In this way, the texts dehumanize the invaders, just as visual representations show the complete subjugation of the enemy through nudity.

VI. The Akkadian Empire would last for at least another 20 years after the death of Naram-Sin, belying the image of swift divine retribution against the ruler. Little archaeological evidence of destruction or major disruptions in this period has been found that would confirm "The Curse of Akkad"; we must be satisfied with suggestions of rebellion.

A. Sharkali-Sharri (r. c. 2217–2193), the king of Akkad who succeeded Naram-Sin, gave up the title of "King of the Four Quarters" during his reign; this change in nomenclature seems to indicate a general withdrawal of the kingdom of Akkad to the north.

B. The Gutians returned and were more successful, briefly controlling southern Mesopotamia. Sharkali-Sharri's reign seems to have been largely concerned with defense against internal and external threats.

C. After Sharkali-Sharri's reign came a period in which there was no leader. The Sumerian king list for this period reads: "Who was king? Who was not king?" Considering that the king list was focused on supporting the office of kingship, this concession to the chaos of the era is significant.

D. In Mesopotamia, city-states regained their autonomy from Akkadian control; no single power controlled multiple cities in the region.

E. After the fall of the Akkadians, we refer to southern and central Mesopotamia as Babylonia. This name reflects the existence of a consistent political unit (the city-state), as well as religious, linguistic, and cultural accord. Babylonia will continue as an identifiable and distinct region almost until the end of the period we are studying.

VII. The city-state of Lagash in Sumer benefited from the disruption at the end of the Akkadian period and was one of the states that reestablished self-rule by the late 3rd millennium B.C.

A. Gudea, the second ruler of the dynasty that took control of Lagash after the fall of Akkad, is not an especially noteworthy ruler, but the chance discovery of several statues of the king have made him one of the most recognizable rulers in Mesopotamian history.

B. The statues of Gudea emphasize the ruler's piety and humility before the gods. He clasps his hands in an attitude familiar from earlier Mesopotamian votive sculpture, in opposition to Naram-Sin's representations of himself.

C. In contrast to his bearded, long-haired Akkadian predecessors, Gudea is smooth-shaven, and his hair is short or tucked beneath a cap in a style similar to that worn by priests. Nonetheless, the statues retain the focus on his physical strength.

D. Relief sculptures depict Gudea engaged in building temples, and one even shows an architectural plan of a temple that he sponsored.

E. These images reinforce Gudea's concern for the traditional role of the king. In an era marked by political and economic fragmentation and change, a king who focused his attention on local needs would be appreciated.

F. The sculpted portraits that we have discussed illustrate the different ways that these two rulers presented themselves, reflected their broader message to their people, and served as visual bookends for the history of this period. Naram-Sin's self-divination, although perhaps radical at the time, will be adopted by the next great dynasty that we will meet, the Ur III rulers.

Essential Reading:

Joan Aruz, ed., *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus*, pp. 417–433.

Benjamin R. Foster, *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 171–177.

Supplementary Reading:

Irene Winter, "Sex, Rhetoric and the Public Monument: The Alluring Body of Naram-Sin of Agade," in N. B. Kampen and B. Bergmann, eds., *Sexuality in Ancient Art*, pp. 11–26.

Questions to Consider:

1. What political benefits would Naram-Sin gain by presenting himself as a god?
2. How does Gudea present himself differently?

Lecture Sixteen
The Ur III Dynasty

Scope: In the last lecture, we discussed the end of Akkadian control of northern and southern Mesopotamia. Later authors excoriated Naram-Sin, the grandson of Sargon of Akkad, for his supposed impiety, which they blamed for the fall of Akkad. Contemporary sources for Naram-Sin's rule reveal a different story: He ruled for more than 30 years, and it was not until the reign of his successors that the city-states of Mesopotamia revolted against Akkadian control. One of those newly independent city-states was Ur, which soon dominated Babylonia. During their hegemony, the rulers of the Ur III dynasty (c. 2112–2004 B.C.) organized a much more centralized government that effectively controlled the region for more than 100 years. In this lecture, we meet the ruler Shulgi, whose reign represents a high point in the prosperity and art of the Ur III period. He established a system of taxation and is credited as the author of the oldest surviving law code. For Shulgi's successors, the prosperity of the Ur III era came to a sudden halt with a period of economic instability and attacks from foreign invaders, the Amorites from the west and the Elamites from the east.

Outline

I. A hallmark of the Ur III period is the overwhelming number of texts that document its political and economic history. More than 40,000 texts have been translated, and thousands more remain to be published and analyzed.

- **A.** These texts are largely economic, primarily official state records and receipts; few private trade or other transactions are noted.
- **B.** Further, historical records or accounts of military campaigns are rare, which means that details not relating to civil government can be difficult to sort out.

II. The era we are discussing is called the Ur III period or dynasty because, according to the Sumerian king list, it encompasses the third group of rulers from Ur to hold kingship.

- **A.** Ur-Nammu (r. c. 2112–2094 B.C.) was the first of five kings of the Ur III dynasty. He took the title "King of Sumer and Akkad," indicating that he held regional control. Ur-Nammu ruled over Babylonia and the lands to the east along the Zagros Mountains.
- **B.** Ur-Nammu promoted the traditional religious preeminence of Ur through numerous building projects, including ziggurats at Ur, Uruk, Nippur, and Eridu. His name is inscribed on the mudbricks used to build these structures.
  1. The ziggurat at Ur is one of the best preserved of this type of structure. It was placed in a walled-off precinct that itself was raised on a platform. Two of three stories of the ziggurat are preserved; they now stand about 60 feet high, on a foundation measuring 200 by 150 feet.
  2. Three long stairways on the northeast side, one in the center and one on each side, provide access to a landing between the first and second levels; the central staircase would have continued to the top level.
- **C.** Written and archaeological evidence for Ur-Nammu's reign describes his attention to rebuilding and restoring temples and his work reopening trade. Given his religious activities, it comes as something of a surprise to learn that Ur-Nammu died in battle, which was quite rare for a king.

III. The most complete evidence we have for the Ur III period comes from the long reign of Ur-Nammu's son, Shulgi (r. c. 2094–2047 B.C.).

- **A.** A number of sources testify to Shulgi's success and allow us to trace major events in his reign.
- **B.** The earliest collection of royal laws is attributed to either Shulgi or to his father, Ur-Nammu. The laws show the involvement of the king in ensuring justice for his people, a concept that we will discuss in more detail in connection with Hammurabi in Lecture Twenty-One.
- **C.** Diplomatic negotiations, specifically marriage with the families of powerful neighboring states, increased the size and prosperity of the Ur III kingdom. Shulgi himself had nine wives, including a princess from Mari, the wealthy trading center on the northern Euphrates River.

D. One of the most important domestic reforms enacted by Shulgi was the creation of an elaborate unified bureaucracy that joined southern and northern Babylonia. This bureaucracy is known from the extensive record-keeping that preserves a standardized system of weights and measures, a new calendar, and the administrative and military hierarchy of the court.

1. Shulgi was active in restructuring the administration of his kingdom. In the heartland of the Ur III kingdom, he created about 20 provinces, each governed by an *ensi* who usually belonged to the local elite.

2. The palace also sent a military commander, or *shagina*, to the provinces, who reported directly to the palace. A *shagina* was often related to the royal family and, presumably, was more loyal to the king than a local *ensi* might be.

E. Shulgi established two new systems for taxing his kingdom, both drawing on the concept of the *bala* tax. *Bala* is the Sumerian word for "exchange."

1. Cities closest to Ur were required to provide local goods to the palace.

2. Provinces located farther away from Ur were compelled to send cattle or sheep as tribute. These would be sent to a collection center at Puzrish-Dagan, near Nippur, then distributed to feed the palace, as sacrifices in the temples, or to other provinces.

3. One annual report records that 350,000 sheep and 28,000 cattle passed through Puzrish-Dagan during that year.

F. This state bureaucracy required a detailed system of accounting, and during this time, scribal schools adopted a new curriculum that taught the accounting system and new methods of writing on tablets.

1. Shulgi's extensive bureaucracy also supplies us with our earliest information about the education of scribes.

2. Both private and official scribal schools, called *edubba*, or "tablet houses," existed.

3. A scribe would begin his or her education at a young age, perhaps as early as seven years old. It would have taken many years to learn the vast number of signs necessary to gain employment as a scribe.

4. In addition to the cuneiform signs, scribes would also need to be familiar with methods of accounting for rations, labor, and other necessities in order to document the economic aspects of the palace or temple or private transactions.

5. Scribes were compensated with rations, textiles, beer, or land. We see evidence for scribes at all economic levels, some very wealthy, others earning a more modest living.

IV. Shulgi made himself a god about halfway through his reign and set a precedent for his successors in the Ur III dynasty to be worshipped as gods.

A. As we saw with the Akkadian king Naram-Sin, this self-deification may have been an attempt to weaken ties to the city-state and strengthen the connection to the central government.

B. *Praise poems*, often called hymns by modern translators, describe the prowess of the king in every aspect of his rule. These are written in the first person from the point of view of the king himself.

1. Shulgi's praise poems celebrate his preeminence among rulers, as well as his divine heritage, with long descriptions of his strength and intellectual qualities. Shulgi is also described as one of the few literate rulers.

2. Kings often relied on priests or diviners to reveal the meaning of signs in dreams or animal organs, but in his praise poems, Shulgi performed this difficult task for his diviner.

3. Praise poems also report the duties of the king, indicating that a king had to demonstrate his skills and interest in the well-being of his people and had to make his mastery of the land explicit.

V. Shulgi's reign was the high point of the Ur III period.

A. A combination of internal economic disruption and threats from the borders led to the end of the Ur III era during the reign of the last member of the dynasty, Ibbi-Sin (r. c. 2028–2004 B.C.).

B. Shulgi's son Shu-Sin (r. c. 2037–2029 B.C.) built a defensive wall along the northern border of his land, but this proved ineffective protection against incursions from the Amorites.

C. Other pressures from Elam further weakened the state and placed demands on its limited resources.

1. One of the important domestic problems was the end of the *bala* tax system and the failure of the central government to collect tribute.

2. Collection of the *bala* tax stopped in the ninth year of Ibbi-Sin's rule, which suggests that provincial ties to the throne were weakening. Texts also report a famine and an increase in grain prices at about this time.

D. One of Ibbi-Sin's former generals, Ishbi-Erra, took control of the city of Isin and set up a rival dynasty there.

1. Texts, as usual, blame foreigners, in this case, the Amorites from the western desert, for disrupting the rule of the Ur III kings.
2. As most of the cities in his kingdom defected to local rulers or other leaders, Ibbi-Sin retreated to Ur. After a long siege, the Elamites captured Ibbi-Sin and destroyed the city of Ur.

E. Although later kings rarely mention the Ur III rulers, the large number of surviving texts allows us to the see the brief prosperity of this era.

F. With the end of the Ur III dynasty about 2000 B.C., we enter a period in which city-states reemerge as independent from central control.

Essential Reading:

Jacob Klein, "Shulgi of Ur: King of a Neo-Sumerian Empire," in *CANE*, vol. II, pp. 843–858.

Graham Cunningham, et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, pp. 304–307.

Supplementary Reading:

Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC*, pp. 69–79.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is it possible to identify any aspects of Akkadian rule adopted in the Ur III dynasty?
2. How does the praise poem of Shulgi celebrate his achievements?

Lecture Seventeen
Life in a Mesopotamian City

Scope: In this lecture, we will return to one of the themes of our course, urbanism, to trace the developments that have occurred since the Uruk era. We know the importance of the major public institutions, particularly temples, in cities, and we know that palaces supported large workforces. What can we reconstruct about the rest of the city? Keep in mind that the archaeological evidence is richest for temples and palaces, so that what survives for the rest of the city is quite scattered. We will extrapolate from several centuries and many different sites to create a picture of urban life. As we will see, texts fill in some important gaps, but many questions remain. We will begin on a small scale, with an average house and its occupants, then move on to local government, although this is an especially vague aspect of urban life. We will also discuss different professions, then close with two studies of specific cities, Sippar and Nuzi.

Outline

I. Cities can be understood as large versions of individual households; thus, any study of individual houses, both the occupants and the structure itself, is important for our understanding of the city as a whole.

A. Fathers were the undisputed heads of the household and were surrounded by their families. Parents, sons, their wives and children, and any unmarried daughters lived together in a house.

B. Fathers arranged the marriages of both sons and daughters. Women married in their late teens; men, in their late 20s.

1. The groom's family would give a gift to the family of the bride; in the Early Dynastic era, this consisted of quantities of food, but later, by the 18th century B.C., the gift was silver in an amount equal to the dowry given to the groom by the bride's father.

2. The dowry was to meant support the wife and, in the case of divorce, would be returned to the bride's family.

3. It was customary to take only one wife, unless she was unable to have children, in which case, the husband could take a second wife, although he could also adopt a child, perhaps a relative.

C. Slaves were an accepted part of Mesopotamian life; they were acquired in many ways, as prisoners of war, for example, or as infants bought from parents in periods of financial crisis.

1. Most of those who entered the condition of slavery did so to pay off a debt for themselves or a family member.

2. Theoretically, this debt slavery could be temporary, but it was difficult to earn one's freedom.

D. This multigenerational household resulted in flexible house plans, with rooms added when necessary or affordable.

E. Houses were built around open courtyards, which would provide light and air. The purpose of rooms, whether they were used for living or storage, cannot usually be identified because houses were cleared out when they were sold or rebuilt. Two exceptions to this general rule are rooms used for weaving and kitchens.

1. Weaving usually occurred in the courtyard of the house, where archaeologists often find evidence for textile manufacture in the form of loom weights and other tools necessary for weaving.

2. The location of the kitchen in a house can usually be determined because the earth there is blackened by fire.

F. Houses could be owned or rented. A surviving rental agreement of the 5th century B.C. notes that the tenant is also a builder; he receives a reduced rent in exchange for repairs made to the building.

II. Turning to local government, we find that the titles of many different local officials are preserved, but it can be challenging to understand their specific responsibilities.

A. The mayor was the leader of the court and often appeared as a witness in lawsuits. He is frequently listed as responsible for prosecuting theft.

1. One text states that the mayor was a middleman, collecting taxes from his people and sending them to some other authority.

2. The mayor would also have delivered the manpower necessary for building projects or military service required by the king.
3. The story of a poor man from Nippur reports an interaction between a mayor and one of his less prosperous citizens; the mayor comes off poorly in this tale, as politicians often do in satirical literature.
4. Mayors should probably be thought of as the representatives of the city to the palace and vice versa.

B. In addition to a mayor, each city had one or more assemblies. The chief responsibility of the leader of the assembly was to imprison people.

C. Scattered sources reveal that cities were divided into quarters or neighborhoods; at this level, leaders probably also oversaw the more mundane needs of the city.

D. The many recorded titles of officials lead us to believe that thriving urban bureaucracies were in place, but these titles don't clarify how a city actually ran.

III. Texts record a multitude of professions in urban settings.

A. Some of these ways of making a living were seasonal.

B. The food industry required bakers, butchers, gardeners, brewers, tavern-keepers, and servers.

C. Architects, draftsmen, masons, and carpenters built homes and other structures; wreckers tore down old structures to make way for new ones.

D. Boat-makers created river-craft; sailors helped merchants ply their trade; and foresters and wood collectors supplied timber for vessels.

E. Gate-keepers controlled access to the city, temple, or palace.

F. Artisans, such as basket-makers, leatherworkers, furniture-makers, or seal-cutters, produced crafts for private citizens or the palace.

1. Certain quarters of the city devoted to craft production can be identified in the archaeological record.
2. Crafts that were especially disruptive, such as tanning, or had specific technical requirements, such as kilns to fire pottery, could be placed outside the city walls or in restricted sections of the city.

G. One profession that we would expect to leave physical evidence is that of a scribe. At Nippur, a home has been identified that seems to have been the site of a small scribal school.

H. Centralized craft production is best known from the Ur III period, when the administrative documents are plentiful.

1. In this period, 13,200 weavers were employed by the palace at Ur, most of whom were women who would bring their children to the palace while they worked.
2. Weaving was a time-consuming process, requiring about 400 hours to create a garment weighing approximately seven pounds.

IV. We now turn to two examples of 2nd-millennium cities, Sippar and Nuzi.

A. At Sippar, in central Mesopotamia, the discovery of different groups of tablets has yielded valuable information about family histories and professions. One home, belonging to Ur-Utu (chief singer of lamentations of the goddess Annunitum), contained more than 2,000 tablets.

1. Many of these are devoted to real estate transactions and show that Ur-Utu owned extensive property in the area.
2. Ur-Utu's father, from whom he had inherited the house, also kept copies of numerous contracts for agricultural labor.
3. The area where these tablets were found shows some evidence of disruption, but the tablets are valuable both for the information they provide and because we know the context in which they were discovered.

B. Nuzi, near Kirkuk in northeastern Iraq, was really more of a large village than a city. Nuzi lies in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, with Assyria to the west and Babylonia to the south.

1. Archaeologists have found nothing especially noteworthy about the economy of Nuzi, but the site gives us a good idea of what life was like in an average small town.

2. The site dates to roughly the second half of the 2nd millennium; it is in the heartland of Assyrian territory, but at this time, Assyria was not dominant. Its population is estimated to be about 1,600 at a time when Uruk had at least 40,000 (c. 3000 B.C.).
3. The city had two large public complexes and three large suburban villas beyond the walls.
4. A drainage system of terracotta pipes removed rainwater and waste from buildings to streets or to larger drains. Manholes allowed the sewers to be cleared; waste was directed away from the city.

C. The largest building in Nuzi was the administrative center; this was not a palace but probably the site where the assembly met and the mayor conducted business. This building measures approximately 130 by 85 yards and held more than 100 rooms and storage chambers.

1. Many texts were discovered in the business section of this center, offering information about Nuzi's economy.
2. The courtyards were highly decorated and could have accommodated most of the population.
3. Living space and a small chapel have also been identified in this building.

D. The private buildings in Nuzi display a wide variety of house plans.

E. Texts from Nuzi are exceptionally informative about women's economic status.

1. We see that a woman could own real estate in her own name; in fact, we have examples of this in both small single lots and larger urban complexes.
2. Women sued and were sued in civil cases over land and in criminal cases concerning property.
3. It is significant that women were able to own property because according to all the written sources, this was the key to real wealth.
4. We also find evidence of women negotiating marriages for their children.
5. At Nuzi, women seem to have had legal parity with men; women could be witnesses in court and were treated in the same way as men, although they could not be judges. We also find parity with respect to inheritance.
6. On the whole, however, far fewer women than men were engaged in business. Almost always, those women who conducted business were in some unusual marital situation in which no male representative was available.

F. By about 1300 B.C., texts inform us of an increasing economic polarization at Nuzi.

1. Agricultural land was subdivided into smaller and smaller plots, and the majority of land was owned by just a few individuals.
2. This doesn't really explain the decline of the city, but shortly afterward, Nuzi was abandoned.

V. City life in the 2nd millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia drew together people of many professions and incomes, and we have a wide range of written and archaeological evidence that informs us about urbanism.

Essential Reading:

Marc Van De Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, pp. 63–99.

Elizabeth Stone, "The Development of cities in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *CANE*, vol. I, pp. 235–248.

Supplementary Reading:

Elizabeth C. Stone and Paul Zimansky, "Mesopotamian Cities and Countryside," in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East,* pp. 141-154.

Questions to Consider:

1. What features of Mesopotamian culture and life required urbanization to thrive?
2. What conditions might have made it possible—or necessary—for women to own property?

Lecture Eighteen
Food and Drink

Scope: This lecture covers food and drink in Mesopotamia from prehistory to the time of Alexander the Great. The evidence for the food and drink enjoyed by the inhabitants of Mesopotamia comes from artistic representations, archaeological discoveries, scattered written references to feasts sponsored by temples or rulers, and poetry. Ration lists, accounts of royal banquets, and a lexicon of Akkadian and Sumerian terms supply additional evidence. A typical meal probably consisted of staples, such as bread and beer, but the availability of meat and fruit depended on the wealth of the individual or family. We are, as often, most knowledgeable about the diet of kings and the elite; official records note what goods were ordered and describe large feasts sponsored by rulers. Texts also list the rations given to temple or palace workers, giving us insight into the diets of average citizens.

Outline

I. The rich environment of Mesopotamia supplied a diverse diet for the inhabitants of the region.

- **A.** Grains, nuts, fruits, and vegetables were fully domesticated by the end of the 3rd millennium B.C. Barley and emmer wheat, barley, and chick peas were all common.
- **B.** Domesticated animals provided beef, pork, lamb, and goat, but these animals were, for the most part, too valuable to be used regularly for food. Wild animals were probably more common sources of meat.
- **C.** Rabbits, gazelles, many different birds, and fish were plentiful. Locusts provided another source of protein.
- **D.** Eggs also supplied protein. One source notes that more than 150,000 eggs and 50,000 birds were collected as tribute by Shulgi over two years.
- **E.** Dairy products were available, but it is uncertain how they would have been preserved without spoiling unless they were made into cheese.
- **F.** Onions, leeks, and garlic seasoned dishes, but other spices were costly and mostly available only to the wealthy. Cumin, coriander, and perhaps, mustard were also used.
- **G.** Sesame, linseed, and olive oil were available to enliven recipes. Honey, as far as we know, was not cultivated but may have been collected in the wild.
- **H.** Truffles were a delicacy that could please a ruler; at Mari, a workman delivered truffles to the palace.
- **I.** Dates were popular, and date orchards were among the most highly desired agricultural resources; apples, pears, figs, and pomegranates were also common fruits.

II. Two meals a day, in the morning and evening, were customary. Cult statues of the gods were also served two meals a day.

- **A.** Bread and beer were the staples of most meals. More than 300 Mesopotamian terms for bread have been identified, although no recipes survive.
  1. Added flavorings might include fruit or oils (sesame or olive). We also find references to large loafs, specific shapes, and different grains.
  2. Several clay molds with different shapes and designs have been found in the palace kitchens at Mari.
- **B.** Beer, made of barley, was a nutritious element of a Mesopotamian meal.
  1. The barley would be allowed to sprout, then crushed into a mash that was malted and fermented in large vats.
  2. Once fermentation occurred, the malt was dried, which allowed it to be transported and stored easily. Water and other flavors would be added, such as pomegranate and aniseed, and the liquid would again be fermented in large vats.
  3. Some artistic representations show people drinking from a vat using long straws. Individual beakers were also used.
  4. The alcohol content of beer was not especially high; at its strongest, it would approximate the alcohol content in modern beers.

5. The goddess Ninkasi was the patron deity of brewers, and female brewers are listed regularly.

III. Food preparation used an open fire for broiling and roasting and hot coals for warming.

A. Bread was baked in neighborhood ovens or, for unleavened bread, placed on a heated cylindrical burner made of clay. Covered ovens with domed tops produced enough humidity for leavened bread.

B. Pots and kettles of clay or metal were used for boiling, stewing, and making soups, which were very popular.

C. Braziers were used for cooking strips of meat or vegetables in the home.

IV. Palace archives fill in other details about the Mesopotamian diet and indicate specific occasions when rulers hosted large banquets.

A. Wine is described in some texts, especially in royal archives, and trace analysis of jars provides archaeological evidence for wine. Evidence from Uruk suggests that wine was available earlier in Mesopotamia than scholars had originally believed.

1. Some vines could grow in southern Mesopotamia, although few texts inform us about wine production in the region.
2. Most wine was probably imported; a reference to "wine from Carchemish" hints that wine was identified by different areas.
3. Red and white wines of varying qualities and strengths are listed in the surviving texts.
4. Wine was often sent to a king as a gift, and in turn, he would give wine to his favorite officials. Hammurabi received wine from a ruler "of the kind that he himself would drink."
5. Even at the height of its popularity, wine never replaced beer as the favorite beverage of Mesopotamia.

B. Zimri-Lim, an 18th-century B.C. king of Mari, was justly proud of the icehouse he had built in his palace. Ice was probably brought down from nearby mountains, stored, and used to cool drinks.

C. Kings sponsored feasts on a huge scale to earn support among their people and to impress visitors.

1. The palace kitchen staff was extensive; it would have to serve many people each day and provide food for special occasions.
2. The palace was a busy center, receiving envoys and merchants and sponsoring many craft industries; the palace kitchen would need a careful overseer of supplies.
3. A woman named Ama-Dugga was the keeper of the kitchen at Mari; she is known to us from her cylinder seal, which she used to authorize receipts of oil and grain. Her name appears first during the reign of Yasmah-Adad, but she retained her position when this king was deposed and Zimri-Lim took his place.
4. We also know from Ama-Dugga's cylinder seal that she kept her identification as a servant of the former king rather than changing her allegiance to Zimri-Lim. She was undoubtedly a powerful woman in the royal household.

V. One example of a banquet sponsored by a king allows us to see what a housekeeper such as Ama-Dugga would have overseen.

A. The 9th-century B.C. Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II sponsored a feast for 69,574 people when he opened a new palace he had built; he proudly recorded his generosity in a detailed inscription.

B. The celebration lasted for 10 days; the guest list included locals and 5,000 foreign ambassadors.

C. The menu for this feast shows the enormous quantity of food that rulers supplied, with 10,000 sheep, 34,000 types of fowl, 10,000 fish, 10,000 jars of beer, and 10,000 containers of wine.

D. In addition to food, public banquets of this sort would also supply entertainment for the guests, such as dancing, displays of acrobatics, and music.

E. Guests included foreign envoys, the local elite, court officials, and the ruler's subjects of all professions and income. Such banquets were memorable occasions that united the king with his people.

VI. Public institutions, such as the palace and temple, were connected with food supply in another venue—providing rations in exchange for labor.

A. We have already considered this responsibility of the political and religious elite with respect to the beveled-rim bowl commonly found in 4th-millennium sites that may have held rations for workers.

B. Ration lists survive from many different periods; the rations varied by age and gender but generally fulfilled the calories necessary for a day's work.

1. Workers who received rations were usually employed in communal projects, such as constructing temples or palaces or assisting with large agricultural harvests.

2. Rations averaged about 16 gallons of barley a month for a male worker. Children from ages 10 to 15 would receive 10 gallons of barley, while the elderly got about half of that.

3. Records indicate that a worker would consume half a gallon of beer and half a gallon of barley per day.

4. In contrast, when an employer had to pay workers for their labor, a male laborer could receive up to 62.5 gallons of barley a month. Presumably, the worker could sell or barter the excess food.

5. This system seems to reveal that the men, women, and children supplied with food could not command more in exchange for their work; they were probably the lowest members of society.

C. Scholars have identified some periods of famine, inflation, and siege, which kings rarely reveal in their texts.

Essential Reading:

Jean Bottéro, *The Oldest Cuisine in the World: Cooking in Mesopotamia*.

Stephanie Dalley, *Mari and Karana: Two Old Babylonian Cities*, pp. 78–95.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does food help kings display their wealth and control of resources?

2. What role does food play in the economy?

Lecture Nineteen
Assyrian Trade Networks

Scope: We now turn to an unusually specific study of merchant activity in the early 2nd millennium conducted by traders from Ashur (sometimes pronounced or written as *Assur*), a central trading post on the Tigris River that connected routes from southern Mesopotamia west to the Mediterranean. Later on, Ashur would become the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. The documents of the Old Assyrian period (so-called in contrast to the Neo-Assyrian era of the 1st millennium B.C.) allow us to study trade as a private enterprise, rather than as part of a statewide bureaucracy. The 20,000 or so tablets that comprise this evidence were found at an outpost of Assyrian trade, Kanesh (modern-day Kültepe), in central Anatolia. In these texts, we see evidence of an international trade network in textiles, tin, silver, and gold. Merchants loaded donkey caravans in Ashur and traveled west to reach Kanesh. Families of merchants often conducted this trade, with a brother, uncle, or son moving to Kanesh, while the rest of family remained in Ashur. Women were actively engaged in producing textiles. Despite the frequent disasters and risky nature of this enterprise, profits apparently were so tempting that they proved to be irresistible to the merchants involved.

Outline

I. In Kanesh, Assyrian merchants functioned independently in a *karum*, that is, a port or colony.

- **A.** The word *karum* also seems to be used to describe any marketplace or harbor; we can think of it as an independently functioning sector of a city with its own economic, legal, and social organization separate from local government.
- **B.** The *karum* of Kanesh was the largest of several Assyrian *karums* that reported to the Kanesh administrators; the *karums* were in direct contact with the Assyrian king and, more often, the city assembly of Ashur.
- **C.** The *karum* was a lower city of sorts at Kanesh, physically separate from the mound that marks the area where the Anatolian population lived. This distance did not prevent social interaction between Assyrian merchants and the local population.
- **D.** Local Anatolian rulers at Kanesh lived in palaces in the upper city; these would be the officials to whom the Assyrian merchants paid taxes and gave the rights to the best merchandise.
  1. Although such agreements have not been found, their existence has been derived from the taxes that were imposed: usually a 5 percent charge, 10 percent preferential duty for the palace, and transit fees.
  2. In return, the merchants had freedom of movement and were protected from raids and robbery.
- **E.** The Assyrian merchants had their own judicial and bureaucratic system that was much like the civic assembly in Ashur. Letters refer to a central office in Kanesh, which has not yet been uncovered. If it is found, it may reveal critical evidence for Assyrian political and legal offices.
- **F.** The homes of the Assyrian merchants were generous in size, with four or five rooms situated around a reception room and often with a second story.
- **G.** A massive fire destroyed the city around 1830 B.C.; this disaster preserved the tablets. Kanesh was abandoned for about 50 years before the settlement was reoccupied, also by Assyrian merchants.

II. The texts that survive from Kanesh were concerned with commercial issues, along with some records of trials or other legal problems. The majority of the tablets were dug up illegally before the modern Turkish excavations began, leaving us with no archaeological context for the texts.

- **A.** Those texts that have been excavated *in situ* show that houses had archive rooms, where tablets were stored on shelves or in very large jars.
- **B.** An archive of a merchant named Ashur-Nada contained several hundred texts, including letters from his father, who oversaw trade arrangements for the family; letters from other *karums* or towns; contracts with customers; receipts for taxes and merchandise; and legal documents.
- **C.** Most of the tablets date to the late 19th and early 20th centuries B.C., the high point of Assyrian merchant activity in the city.

III. The trading system described in the Karum Kanesh texts involved the exchange of goods from southern Mesopotamia to Anatolia.

A. Assyrian merchants focused on a few specific goods, especially tin and textiles.

1. Tin was an essential metal for bronze-making and was most readily available from Afghanistan and Iran.

2. Textiles from Babylonia were highly prized as exports. Records note that in a 50-year period, almost 10,000 textiles were imported to Kanesh by Assyrian merchants.

3. Raw materials for textiles, such as wool and dyes, were also transported, but this business was less profitable than dealing in the finished products.

B. Goods were transported using caravans of a few hundred donkeys, which brought the tin and textiles to Ashur from different locations, and from there, moved west to Kanesh in Anatolia.

1. Donkeys could carry approximately 150 pounds of textiles or tin. One text inventories what a donkey carried: 29 textiles of two different varieties and 65 sealed measures of tin, along with loose tin that could be used to pay for emergencies or bribes.

2. Note that there was no coined money at this time; instead, lump metal—gold, silver, and tin—was used. Non-metal goods, such as textiles, were given a metal value, usually in silver. A *mina*, a little over a pound of metal, is a common weight mentioned in the traders' letters; 60 *shekels* make up a *mina*.

C. Traders would have hired workers for the trip and paid for their accommodations and equipment. Traders provided donkeys, which could then be sold when the caravan arrived in Kanesh.

1. In addition, taxes or tariffs had to be paid during the trip, but these fees could provide some insurance or protection from theft. If a local ruler was paid taxes, he would reimburse the merchant for losses incurred from theft.

2. Should disaster strike, such as a flood, the merchant alone suffered the losses of goods and equipment.

D. Trips usually took about six weeks between Ashur and Kanesh, and the route was closed during the winter months. Merchandise was sometimes resold to the local palace or to other local agents. Local agents then dispersed the goods to other *karums* to sell.

E. Silver from sales of the goods was sent by donkey back to Ashur.

F. Moneylenders financed the caravans, usually through partnerships of about a dozen people.

1. Half of the total loan would be paid upfront; in one text, this was the equivalent of more than 30 pounds of gold.

2. Interest rates averaged 30 percent, and the period of the loan was 12 years. We can see that moneylenders were guaranteed significant profits.

3. In non-loan records, profits for traders could range from 50–100 percent; thus, the entire business was extremely attractive to those who undertook the risks.

G. The dangers and difficulty of setting up this trade must have been significant. The Assyrian court would likely have negotiated agreements for merchants to travel specific routes.

IV. One of the most interesting aspects of the Kanesh texts are the letters between family members. These suggest that entire families were involved in trade and inform us about effects of long-distance trade on family life.

A. In general, fathers and family elders remained in Ashur to oversee transactions, while the younger males in the family conducted business in Kanesh. The oldest of these men would stay in Kanesh, and other relatives could be divided up among the other *karums* in Anatolia.

B. Wives complained of the long absences of their husbands and the strain on the family, especially their difficulty in providing for their families.

C. Letters from traders to their wives criticized the quality or style of textiles that the wives produced. There were clearly preferences for certain types of textiles.

D. Women emerge as active partners in this trade, as weavers, leaders of the household, and negotiators with other merchants. Letters tell us about women who wrangled with Assyrian tax officials on behalf of their husbands, represented their husbands' interests in legal cases, and paid off their debts.

E. We also learn from letters that traders could disappear, perhaps intentionally on some occasions, when they wanted to default on a loan, or fell victim to crime or accident.

V. Although the political structure of Ashur is poorly attested for the period of the Kanesh merchants, an early hint of Ashur's later prominence occurs about a century later, in the early 18th century, with the rise of Shamshi-Adad (r. c. 1808–1776 B.C.) to the throne of Ashur.

A. As with many successful military rulers, we know little about Shamshi-Adad's origins, although we do know that he came from a northern city, Ekallatum, which has not been discovered. He conquered Ashur and took the throne in 1808 B.C.

B. Ashur was, at this time, probably still an important mercantile center. This focus on trade may have prompted Shamshi-Adad to move west against the rich trading center of Mari.

C. Shamshi-Adad controlled an impressive amount of territory in northern Mesopotamia, about 1,200 miles from the Tigris to Anatolia.

D. He set his two sons, Ishme-Dagan and Yasmah-Adad, on the throne of cities to the east and west, respectively. Yasmah-Adad's activities as ruler of Mari are documented in the archives of that city, and we will discuss them in connection with Hammurabi and the city of Mari.

E. Shamshi-Adad's kingdom did not outlast his reign; when he died in 1776 B.C., the borders of his state were reduced to the region surrounding the city of Ashur. But he and his sons appear regularly in the diplomatic correspondence that survives from this era, a sign of the power of this northern ruler and his state.

F. The reasons for the collapse of the Assyrian state are unknown, but Shamshi-Adad had to face numerous enemies along his borders, and this may have undermined the strength of the state.

G. Assyria will again become an important state in the 13th century and will expand to dominate all of Mesopotamia and the western states along the Levantine coast.

VI. Our first study of the Assyrians draws most heavily on evidence from 500 miles away, in the merchant colony of Kanesh in Anatolia.

A. We saw that families of merchants engaged in a risky but extremely lucrative caravan trade that connected southern Mesopotamia with Anatolia.

B. We have far less evidence for events in Ashur itself, although its interest in trade is marked by Shamshi-Adad's control of Mari.

C. In the next lecture, we will meet one of the figures best known from Mesopotamian history: Hammurabi of Babylon. He will permanently break down the old loyalty to the city-state and lay the foundation for later empires.

Essential Reading:

Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC*, pp. 89–96.

Klaas R. Veenhof, "Kanesh: An Assyrian Colony in Anatolia," in *CANE*, vol. II, pp. 859–872.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does evidence for family-run trade contribute to our understanding of Mesopotamian trade and economy in general?
2. What insights do we gain into the role of women in manufacturing and trade?

Lecture Twenty
Hammurabi of Babylon

Scope: In this lecture, we return to political history again, with the reign of Hammurabi of Babylon (r. 1792–1750 B.C.). When Hammurabi came to the throne as a young man, his territory was hemmed in, to some extent, by stronger men: in the north, Shamshi-Adad of Assyria; Rim-Sin of Larsa in the south; and the Elamites to the east. Hammurabi would create alliances and coalitions to take on these states in order to found a new and impressive kingdom. His long reign gave him time to create a strong personal rule that was largely concerned with justice for his people and, despite his period of successful command, a focus on bringing peace to the era.

Outline

I. Before we begin, we should note that the 18th century B.C. is a very confusing period in Mesopotamian history.

A. We have looked at the Assyrians and Shamshi-Adad's annexation of Mari and will pick up that thread in the next lecture, which is devoted to Mari's fall to Hammurabi's army.

B. We now explore the two states that Hammurabi defeated, the Elamites and Rim-Sin of Larsa, victory over which would make him the strongest ruler in southern Mesopotamia since the Akkadian kings Sargon and Naram-Sin.

II. Before Hammurabi, Babylonia was controlled by an Amorite dynasty, but we have little information about the early rulers of this dynasty or the circumstances under which it took control of the throne.

A. The Amorites were originally a nomadic people from the west of the Euphrates, but they had settled throughout southern Mesopotamia for several generations. We first met them in the Ur III period, when they were described in the sources as a major threat from the western desert.

B. The Amorites had begun to settle in Babylonian cities in the 300 years since the Ur III kings fell. Their names appear among the city officials, occasionally even as kings. We get no sense that they were seen as foreigners; in fact, sources acknowledge the Amorite heritage of rulers.

C. The Amorites largely adopted the Babylonian culture, but a few elements of their nomadic culture would become influential.

III. At this time, Babylon was just one of many city-states in Babylonia; Hammurabi's father, Sin-Muballit, had integrated smaller cities, such as Kish, under his rule, which made Babylon somewhat larger than other city-states but by no means a major power in the area.

A. Sin-Muballit joined with the leaders of other southern cities to defend against threats from all sides, especially from the powerful Iranian state of Elam. When Hammurabi took the throne on Sin-Muballit's death, he inherited a relatively strong and independent city-state. He would eventually march against several major enemies, but Hammurabi's early reign concentrated on strengthening the economy of Babylon.

B. Hammurabi followed a tradition of issuing a *misharum*, or a royal edict, that forgave certain types of debts.

1. Engaging in trade and agriculture often required loans, and debt was probably widespread.

2. Laws required that interest rates be capped at 20 percent for loans in silver and 33⅓ percent for grain. It was easy to fall behind on these payments, and the penalties were severe.

3. The purpose of the *misharum* was for a king to acknowledge the economic pressures that his subjects faced and to release people from debt slavery.

4. Mercantile loans were explicitly excluded from this generous gesture, and the effects on creditors were probably not severe because the debts that were included in the *misharum* were usually incurred to pay taxes to the king. The edict would affect the royal treasury but would also create goodwill toward the ruler.

5. This "tax cut" represented, for the populace, a brief return to an earlier, more prosperous time. Sometimes a king would order more than one *misharum* during his reign; Hammurabi did this at least three times during his life.

C. Hammurabi also ensured that the resources for profitable harvests were available; he restored old irrigation canals and dug new ones, including one named after him.

IV. By c. 1765 B.C., Hammurabi felt strong enough to lead attacks against his strongest rivals, first the Elamites, then a few years later, a powerful king in southern Mesopotamia.

A. We are unusually well informed of Hammurabi's planning for these campaigns because numerous letters relating to them have been found.

B. The Elamites had been a strong force in Babylonian and northern Mesopotamian politics even though they did not try to control this territory by military means.

C. By 1765 B.C., Hammurabi challenged the Elamites; he had received aid from other cities, including 2,000 soldiers from Mari, sent by Hammurabi's then-ally Zimri-Lim.

1. Zimri-Lim had some trouble conscripting enough troops to lend to the king of Babylon; his general related to his king that he had to threaten to kill a prisoner if the necessary contingents did not report for service.

2. Zimri-Lim's generosity was probably motivated by gifts or pay given to the troops by Hammurabi, as noted in an official receipt. Some portion of this undoubtedly went to the king.

D. After a year of fighting, the king of Elam surrendered to Hammurabi.

V. The city-state of Larsa commanded much of southern Babylonia; its king, Rim-Sin (1822–1763 B.C.), had challenged and annexed Uruk and other cites. By the time Hammurabi took the throne of Babylon in 1792, Rim-Sin controlled lands from the Persian Gulf north to Nippur.

A. After defeating the Elamites, Hammurabi moved against Rim-Sin, claiming that he was taking the offensive at the request of the gods.

B. Hammurabi captured smaller cities and besieged Larsa with Rim-Sin inside the city. The siege required an enormous number of troops; according to an account of the battle sent to Zimri-Lim, Rim-Sin marshaled 40,000 troops on his side. Hammurabi's army had to stay for six months before the city ran out of food and Larsa was captured.

C. In Larsa and its territory, Hammurabi established himself in Rim-Sin's palace, began controlling crime and building temples, and issued a *misharum* for the debtors of Larsa.

D. By the later years of his rule, Hammurabi had created a unified regional state in Babylonia; he would extend his reach up the Euphrates River, taking the city of Mari by 1761 B.C.

VI. It is possible to uncover some aspects of Hammurabi's personality.

A. We have the impression that we have complete documentation for Hammurabi's rule, but this is probably misleading. We must remember that we are reading official documents, not a diary, and even Hammurabi's letters were not dictated but written by scribes and approved by the king.

B. That said, several letters and reports about Hammurabi communicate his behavior, especially his bad moods.

1. Envoys were often the target of Hammurabi's outbursts; usually, they had passed on bad news or requests that irritated the king.

2. Hammurabi had little patience for his own officials either. In one letter, he demands that accountants coming from Larsa to Babylon (a distance of about 100 miles) should arrive in two days.

C. Hammurabi engaged in backroom diplomacy and double-dealing, pitting rulers against each other and making promises that he had no intention of keeping.

VII. We turn now to Hammurabi's governance of his kingdom: How did he control and ensure loyalty from such a large territory?

A. Hammurabi made Babylon the political center of his lands, with all taxes sent there.

1. Local leaders would report to officials who were chosen by Hammurabi, and they corresponded regularly with the king.

2. These letters note the productivity of the king's lands, the results of tax collection, and the available supply of labor for Hammurabi's building projects.

B. We have already glimpsed Hammurabi's royal ideology—his use of the *misharum* and the construction of temples—and indeed, these established functions of the king were the hallmark of his rule. Hammurabi also drew on the idea that he was a good shepherd of his people.

C. The king maintained close links with all the gods and did not advance the cult of one specific deity over others.

D. One way that a king served his people was to ensure that they were treated fairly. Hammurabi's law code, the longest surviving law code from Mesopotamia, supplies the best evidence for this aspect of Hammurabi's rule. We will return to this law code in a later lecture.

E. Letters also note Hammurabi's interest in justice, indicating that he interceded on behalf of his subjects even in minor matters.

F. Hammurabi's subjects believed that he was genuinely concerned for their well-being, and he was made a god. This deification probably began in the south, where the concept had become more common.

G. Hammurabi's concern for justice and peace for his people was remembered for centuries after his death. Praise poems note that he "gives the disobedient the death sentence," and he is "the great net that covers evil intent."

H. Hammurabi's reign was clearly successful, and his law code monument has ensured his fame over the generations. The dynasty that he established prospered for another century and a half, although other states in the Near East were becoming more powerful. In 1595 B.C., the city of Babylon was attacked and destroyed by invaders from Anatolia.

VIII. Hammurabi created the largest state since the Akkadian king Naram-Sin in the 23rd century B.C. His long rule helped to unify the region politically in a way that the Akkadians had not been able to achieve.

A. With Hammurabi, the old loyalty to the city-state was finally broken and would not return. Now, a new form of political unit, the territorial or regional state, was established. This shift is a significant break in our history of Mesopotamia and will lay the foundation for the enormous empires of the 1st millennium B.C.

B. Recall, too, that Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon, would replace Enlil as the king of the gods. Even though Hammurabi did not promote the cult of Marduk specifically, it would start to spread and dominate Babylonia. The religious and cultural primacy of Babylonia would continue long after its political dominance had come to an end.

Essential Reading:

Marc Van De Mieroop, *King Hammurabi of Babylon*.

Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, pp. 71–142.

Supplementary Reading:

Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, pp. 156–184.

Questions to Consider:

1. What can we learn about diplomacy and alliances in Hammurabi's time?
2. What historical events do you think allowed Hammurabi to gain control so quickly?

Lecture Twenty-One
Zimri-Lim of Mari

Scope: In the previous lecture, we discussed the reign of Hammurabi. When he took the throne, the city-state of Babylon was not particularly powerful, and Hammurabi focused his attention on reinforcing the infrastructure of the state. As he grew stronger, he led his army against the powerful states of Elam and Larsa. His success created a large regional state that Hammurabi governed with the same attention to detail that he had given to Babylon. We did not discuss the last major campaign of Hammurabi against the rich state of Mari, in part because there are so many sources for this era that they merit a more detailed study. Another reason is that during this attack, Mari was destroyed, ending the long history of this trading post. In this lecture, we will discuss the turbulent last few decades of Mari's history, in which it was controlled, first, by the Assyrians, then, by the last of its rulers, Zimri-Lim.

Outline

I. The city of Mari was located on the northern Euphrates River, in a position that controlled key trade routes between east and west. Mari was an important power in the Early Dynastic period (c. 2900–2350 B.C.), but it is the city that dates to the 18th century that is best preserved.

- **A.** One reason for Mari's prosperity was that the city collected taxes on all goods that traveled between Syria and Mesopotamia along the Euphrates River.
- **B.** In addition, Mari was placed at a key point on the land route that crossed the desert from northern Mesopotamia to southern Syria. Both diplomatic and military contacts between Mari and Mesopotamia are recorded from the Early Dynastic period until Hammurabi destroyed the city.
- **C.** The Akkadian kings Sargon and Naram-Sin had both considered Mari an important target in their military campaigns and referred to their attempts to control the city.
- **D.** An Amorite dynasty had taken control of Mari, just as the Amorites had in Babylonia, in the mid-19th century B.C. Mari was quite prosperous in this period, as we can determine from large building projects, such as the palace and irrigation canals that expanded the fertile land available to support the city.
- **E.** In 1795 B.C., Mari was captured by Shamshi-Adad (r. c. 1808–1776 B.C.), an effective military leader who took the throne of Ashur and dominated the region along the northern Tigris River.
  1. Shamshi-Adad installed his younger son, Yasmah-Adad on the throne in Mari, but he proved to be a disappointing choice. Letters from Shamshi-Adad to his son reprimanded him for failing to organize his household and compared him unfavorably to his older brother.
  2. Even without these letters revealing the strained family dynamics of the Assyrian palace, Yasmah-Adad did not appear to have been an especially successful ruler, and he disappeared almost immediately after his father's death.

II. Zimri-Lim became the new king of Mari in 1776 B.C. He claimed, probably falsely, that he had a blood relationship to the previous Amorite dynasty.

- **A.** Zimri-Lim was a far better administrator than the Assyrian ruler Yasmah-Adad, and the state flourished economically during his reign.
- **B.** Politically, Zimri-Lim reestablished a diplomatic relationship with Babylon and created a network of smaller vassal states that helped Mari thrive. These diplomatic alliances were secured by marriages with Zimri-Lim's daughters.
- **C.** One reason for the focus on diplomacy, rather than military expansion, was that the king of Elam was still very powerful. The Elamite king frequently arranged matters among the lesser kings of Mesopotamia, and Zimri-Lim was one of the rulers who fell under the control of Elam.

III. One of the most contentious issues between Zimri-Lim and Hammurabi was control over the city of Hit on the Euphrates.

- **A.** Hammurabi wanted Hit because it was a source of bitumen, a binding caulk used in boat-building. Hammurabi depended on shipping to transport troops and sustain trade.

B. Zimri-Lim's interest in Hit was that it was the site of a judicial ritual called the "river ordeal."

1. Accused criminals were taken to Hit, where they or their representatives would have to survive a swimming challenge, such as swimming a long distance underwater or swimming with a millstone around the neck.

2. If the person completed the assigned task and survived, he or she was deemed innocent; if not, he or she was guilty.

C. After Hammurabi defeated the Elamites, the matter of Hit once again became the subject of debate. A letter to Zimri-Lim from his messenger reported one of Hammurabi's outbursts concerning the control of Hit and his suggestion that the two kings try to share power there.

D. Zimri-Lim had lent 2,000 troops to Hammurabi to help the Babylonians defeat the Elamites; the slow return of this aid also created friction, as did Hammurabi's lukewarm response when Zimri-Lim requested aid in his own border conflicts.

E. As the situation deteriorated, Zimri-Lim grew increasingly nervous, consulting with his wife for help in interpreting oracles to predict what Hammurabi would do. While the oracles reported that Zimri-Lim would be victorious, in the end, he could not overcome the Babylonian army.

F. In 1761 B.C., Hammurabi turned against Zimri-Lim and attacked Mari; the city was destroyed two years later.

IV. The destruction of Mari preserved the six-acre palace, which has been excavated by French archaeologists since the 1930s.

A. The architecture of the complex is well preserved, but the palace was largely emptied of its rich contents by Hammurabi's army before it was destroyed.

B. Walls about 5 to 9 yards thick surrounded the palace, with the main entrance through the north gate. The gate drew visitors into a large courtyard; texts from Mari refer to a "court of palms" in the palace, which may have been this space.

C. The palace complex had 260 rooms. Archaeologists encounter the same problems with identifying the functions of the palace rooms that they have for less grandiose houses, but we can try to speculate based on the level of public versus private access, as well as the wall decorations.

D. An example of these decorations is found on the wall of a smaller courtyard within the palace. This painting has been called the "Investiture of Zimri-Lim" and shows a male standing before the goddess Ishtar as she hands him a scepter.

E. Sanctuaries and chapels to the gods were incorporated into the palace, and several statues of worshippers and deities were left behind when the palace was abandoned.

1. A limestone statue of a goddess, a little smaller than life-size, shows her holding a water jar in her hands; it is tilted toward the viewer and had a hollow channel to allow water to flow through the jar to create a fountain.

2. This statue was found in an antechamber to the supposed throne room and may have served as a small shrine.

V. Archives holding about 20,000 records were preserved in the final destruction of Mari.

A. Babylonian officials who occupied the palace after it was first attacked went through the archives, removing most of the letters from Hammurabi to Zimri-Lim.

B. The rest of the palace archives were divided up and labeled; the labels are clay sealings, noting the year of Hammurabi's rule.

C. Letters from Zimri-Lim's wife and queen, Shibtu, described the life of the royal family. For example, the daughters of Zimri-Lim and Shibtu sent letters to their mother and father that inform us about the different paths available to a princess.

1. One daughter was a *naditum*, a woman who entered into the service of a god. These women usually were related to a king and would pray and perform rituals on behalf of the royal family.

2. At least three daughters were married to the rulers of cities nearby to cement alliances between these men and Zimri-Lim.

D. Among the surviving documents are records of the rations provided for nine female scribes, a rare piece of evidence for women engaged in this profession.

E. As noted earlier, other correspondence between Zimri-Lim and his generals also survives. Letters relating to his civil administration reveal some of the same problems that we've already described with Hammurabi.

F. The records also offer some illuminating evidence about nomads. Various tribes would camp near Mari for a few months at a time and interact with the people of Mari.

G. Smaller details also plagued Zimri-Lim. A curious letter describes the capture of a lion on the roof of a house; Zimri-Lim could expect it to arrive at the palace, confined in a cage, as a gift.

VI. The texts from Mari reveal the complicated diplomatic and military history of this era, as well as palace culture.

A. After Hammurabi attacked the city for the second time, this historical trading center effectively disappeared.

B. The letters preserved in the palace at Mari also show the many problems, such as questions of justice, that a king was called on to resolve.

Essential Reading:

Stephanie Dalley, *Mari and Karana: Two Old Babylonian Cities*.
Jean-Claude Margueron, "Mari: A Portrait in Art of a Mesopotamian City-State," in *CANE*, vol. II, pp. 885–900.

Supplementary Reading:

Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What aspects of the letters from Mari are most surprising to you?
2. How are royal women involved in politics at this time?

Lecture Twenty-Two
Laws

Scope: Hammurabi is best known to history from the long list of laws attributed to him; in this respect, he followed a tradition of kings as dispensers of justice. In this lecture, we will survey the types of Mesopotamian laws that have survived, from the earliest laws dating to the very end of the 3rd millennium B.C., to Hammurabi's laws of the 18th century, to the 11th-century Middle Assyrian codes. First, we will survey the existing laws to consider the social ills they attempted to redress; then, we will examine the purpose of the law codes. Scholars increasingly see the term *law code* as anachronistic, misrepresenting both the purpose and the use of these law collections. A law code implies that the laws represent all the legal precepts in use at the time, but even the longest set of laws, that of Hammurabi, does not provide a comprehensive legal framework that could order a society. Finally, we will look at the Middle Assyrian precepts that regulated the appearance and behavior of the royal court, especially female courtiers.

Outline

I. The earliest collection of laws dates to the Ur III period (c. 2112–2004 B.C.) and consists of about 40 laws that address homicide, family issues, and personal injury.

- **A.** The laws are attributed either to Ur-Nammu, the founder of the Ur III dynasty, or to his son Shulgi; current opinion leans toward Ur-Nammu. The text includes a prologue that sets out the situation inherited by the king and outlines some of his tasks as ruler. Often, the king also lists the cities he governed.
- **B.** Ur-Nammu describes how he regulated trade and traffic on the rivers and highways, making them safe for his people and revealing an existing economic and social order.
- **C.** The first law of this code states, "If a man commits a homicide, they shall kill that man," followed by, "If a man acts lawlessly [word uncertain], they shall kill him."
- **D.** The laws that follow are not presented in an obviously logical order.
- **E.** Several of the laws concern women and marriage; for example, women who initiate sexual relations can be killed. When a man divorces his wife, he must hand over a mina of silver in compensation for turning her out of his house.
- **F.** Personal injury laws established fines for damages done; fines were also levied against perjurers.
- **G.** These laws reinforce the idea that kings are the mortal representatives of the gods, given the task of dispensing justice for their people.
- **H.** Laws by other kings who followed Ur-Nammu survive in a fragmentary state, but they expand our comprehension of legal issues.
  1. When someone rents an ox and the animal is hurt, the renter pays fines that vary according to the severity of the animal's injury.
  2. If someone helps a slave escape or knowingly harbors an escaped slave, he must give up one of his slaves in compensation.
  3. If a neighbor cuts down one of your trees, he will pay you 20 shekels.

II. Hammurabi's law code is by far the most extensive legal text. It is engraved on a seven-foot basalt stele, now in the Louvre, that was recovered in Susa in Iran, where it had been taken as war booty about 500 years after Hammurabi's rule.

- **A.** At the top of the monument is a scene carved in relief showing Hammurabi receiving his scepter from Shamash, the Sun god, the god of justice, and the patron deity of Sippar. The image provides visual corroboration of the god's approval of Hammurabi's rule.
- **B.** The laws are engraved carefully in 49 columns. The text is divided into three sections: a prologue, the laws, and an epilogue.
- **C.** Hammurabi first explains how the gods arranged themselves into a society and chose him as king to ensure justice. He then lists more than a dozen gods and cities that support him.

D. The first five laws are devoted to legal proceedings, specifically, legislation designed to prevent perjury and corrupt judges.

E. These laws are followed by penalties for property damage and theft, then problems that arise over real estate. Also addressed are matters concerned with loans, marriage and inheritance, fees for various professions, and rates for hiring workers, animals, or boats.

III. Certain themes recur in Hammurabi's law code.

A. One of the most informative aspects of the code relates to social status. The punishment for a crime usually varied according to the offender's status, and certain social classes were specifically defined in the laws.

1. In Hammurabi's laws, three groups of people were listed: free people (*awilum*), slaves (*wardum*), and commoners (*mushkenum*).

2. This seems to create a strict social framework, but in reality, these social classes raise additional questions.

B. As mentioned, penalties were connected to one's social status; for example, if a free person blinded another free person, then the offender would be blinded, but if a free person blinded a slave or commoner, he was to pay a fine.

1. Although these distinctions in punishment may seem unjust, the fact that laws existed for each class ensured some level of protection, even for slaves.

2. Most surviving laws provided for the poorest members of society and illustrated a desire to ensure justice for all.

C. In addition to social status, several laws referred to family connections and relationships. In general, the laws reinforced the authority of the father, who protected and controlled his family.

D. Several legal issues revolved around women and concerns specific to marriage and divorce.

1. The divorce laws varied depending on whether the husband or the wife initiated the action. The price paid to a wife whose husband divorced her also varied depending on social status.

2. Reasons were also given for women to initiate divorce, such as abuse or adultery.

E. Inheritance laws provide further insight into family life and reveal an interest in protecting family property and preventing lawsuits between family members.

F. Laws were set forth to ensure that no one damaged irrigation canals or used them improperly.

1. A negligent farmer who caused a flood by failing to reinforce the embankment on his section of a canal had to replace the lost grain.

2. In contrast, a flood sent by the rain god Adad that resulted in a failed harvest would earn a debtor a year's reprieve on the interest of a loan.

G. The king also legislated fees and responsibilities for professions.

1. Female innkeepers were singled out in two laws, one that required them to accept measures of grain as payment for beer in addition to silver and another that prevented them from allowing criminals to stay in their inns without reporting them to the palace. If an innkeeper failed to alert the authorities, she would be killed.

2. Physicians' fees were established, with higher prices for surgery, especially eye surgery, than other aspects of healing. A physician could earn 10 shekels of silver for a successful operation on a free person's eye; if the surgery resulted in the death or blindness of the patient, then the surgeon's hand would be cut off.

3. A veterinarian who operated on an ox or a donkey would be paid one sixth of a shekel if the animal was healed.

H. Architects and builders were held responsible for the safety of the structures they erected.

1. If a builder constructed a house, but it was unsound and collapsed, killing the owner, then the builder would be killed; if the son of the homeowner was killed, then the builder's son would be killed.

2. In less tragic circumstances, when no one died or was injured, the builder was required to repair the structure at his own expense.

3. Likewise, boatmen who lost cargo because of carelessness had to replace the goods.

I. Hammurabi concluded his list of laws with a praise poem to himself and a message to future kings. Should a future ruler contemplate changing Hammurabi's laws, the Babylonian king encourages the gods to visit terrible ordeals on him.

IV. Although Hammurabi's laws seem extensive, they do not address many important social ills nor do they create a workable set of legal precedents that could effectively resolve disputes.

A. A survey of all law codes shows that the laws were not always new but could belong to earlier codes issued by other kings. Further, major components of a well-established legal system are missing; the basic organization of a justice system, along with civic and political responsibilities, is not established in these texts.

B. The goal of a law code likely was not practical but ideological. Through a law code, the king guarantees justice, and the fact that he displays these laws in public proves his concern for justice.

C. If we view the law codes as part of a king's message to his people, we see that rulers had to acknowledge different economic and social distinctions to show their willingness to protect all members of society.

V. A final group of laws from Mesopotamia is not nearly as well known as Hammurabi's code but shows major shifts in one area of Mesopotamian society that we have discussed several times—the position and status of women.

A. These laws from the Middle Assyrian period address situations in which women figure prominently, as victims or instigators of a crime. The punishments mandated in these laws often included bodily mutilation; a woman who stole, for example, could have her ears cut off by her husband. Death is mandated for any woman who commits adultery.

B. Another group of edicts governs the behavior of palace officials, especially women. The goal here was to control interactions between men and women. Usually, men and women were separated into different quarters of the palace, and a man had to have permission to visit the women's quarters. Eunuchs were employed in the palace, but the regulations permit eunuchs to speak to women only with permission of the palace commander.

C. These laws mandate that women be veiled and have their shoulders covered in any conversation with a male attendant. Even conversational distance between males and females was established—no closer than seven paces.

D. These Middle Assyrian laws seem much more restrictive than laws of the earlier periods we have discussed, especially with respect to women.

VI. Laws are fascinating for the specific situations or issues they describe and the manner in which rulers settled them.

A. From law codes, we can determine the issues that were probably the most contentious, such as property disputes, especially with respect to inheritance or divorce, or those that required an intermediary, such as setting wages and fees, as well as penalties. Social divisions required different levels of punishment, as did one's gender.

B. We can't know how these laws were enforced in Babylon or Ashur; for example, we have evidence for lawsuits and corrupt judges, but nothing about lawyers or advocates. Law codes were, in reality, another public monument sponsored by the king to promote his rule to his subjects.

C. In the next lecture, we move from the laws set by kings to a survey of the scientific fields that attracted the curiosity of the Babylonians.

Essential Reading:

Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*.
Elizabeth M. Tetlow, *Women, Crime and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society: Ancient Mesopotamia*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What issues seem to be most pressing in Mesopotamian collections of laws? How do they help to inform us about social tensions?
2. If these laws are intended to represent the concern of the king for justice, how should that affect our interpretation?

Lecture Twenty-Three
Medicine, Science, and Math

Scope: In this lecture, we will examine scientific thought and how science helped to order and explain the natural world for Mesopotamian cultures. We will discuss medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and divination, which in the world of Mesopotamia, was the most challenging and important science. Certain scientific achievements, especially Babylonian astronomy, enhanced the fame of the region in antiquity, but others, such as medicine, were mocked. In an otherwise admiring description of Babylon, Herodotus, a 5th-century B.C. Greek historian, dismissed the entire field of Babylonian medicine. He claimed that the Babylonians had no use for physicians and that if someone fell sick, he would be taken to the marketplace, where everyone who walked by spoke to the sufferer, giving advice or comfort. As we will see, this assessment of Babylonian medicine was quite inaccurate.

Outline

I. Evidence about the practice of medicine in Mesopotamia comes from lists of symptoms and their treatment, prescriptions, and some clues from law codes, but most of the texts we have were created by scribes practicing signs, not from practical handbooks used by physicians.

A. The practice of medicine involved a combination of magic and diagnostic skill to successfully treat illness, because disease was seen as a struggle between good and evil.

B. All sickness and suffering was inflicted by demons. Sometimes, the demons did this without motive, but sometimes, illness came as the result of an evil act by an individual or a family member. Ancient medical texts list both the affliction and its cause.

C. Because illness represented a moral deficiency and a physical malady, it required specialists in both fields. An *ashipu* was a priest or diviner, who was consulted to determine the cause of the evil and to cast spells to drive out the demon.

1. A group of texts was devoted to helping the *ashipu* understand the meaning of omens that he saw on the way to a patient's home. Most of these were fairly pessimistic. For example, if an *ashipu* saw a black pig, the patient would die; if he saw a white pig, the patient would be cured or he would be in great distress.

2. In addition to casting spells to drive out demons, the *ashipu* made amulets to help protect individuals from the curse of illness.

II. Even though sickness was a manifestation of evil, it also needed to be treated by a physician, called an *asu*.

A. Diagnosis required the rational observation of symptoms to undertake the correct treatment; this aspect of Babylonian medicine indicates a scientific approach. A physician would examine the patient, check his or her temperature all over the body, and look for discoloration or inflammation of the skin.

B. Several medical texts detail particular types of ailments. Gynecological problems and skin and eye diseases were especially common in the written sources. An entry describing an illness consisted of two parts, first, a description of the symptoms and, second, the treatment or, occasionally, the prognosis.

C. Prescriptions were made by combining plants and herbs with minerals or animal products.

D. Medicine was delivered in pill form; added to beer, wine, or water; and inhaled in steam baths. Plasters and salves could be applied topically. Some remedies, such as potassium nitrate, are still used today.

E. The concept of contagion was known in Mesopotamian medicine, but the causes were not understood.

F. Kings had their own physicians; sometimes, if a fellow ruler fell ill, another king would send his court physician to help effect a cure. Zimri-Lim listed a female physician among his staff, and a few other female physicians are known; midwives also commonly appear in texts.

G. Surgeons are known, as well, although rarely from medical texts. Instead, they are described in legal texts that assign fines when a surgeon fails or protects the surgeon from malpractice lawsuits.

H. Our study of Babylonian medicine is hindered by the fact that most subjects were learned through hands-on experience rather than from texts. Thus, it is difficult know important details about this subject.

III. A good knowledge of mathematics was a necessity in all periods in order to keep accurate records in the royal and temple bureaucracies.

A. Weights and measurements were standardized at regular intervals. Often, multiple systems of weights and measures were used simultaneously by traders from different nations.

B. In addition to accounting records, tablets show work with multiplication tables, division, reciprocals, and square roots. More complex problems, usually involving algebra rather than geometry, and word problems were computed, as well. These problems focused on specific cases and did not establish general formulations or proofs.

1. Sometimes, the method of reckoning the answer for a problem is provided, indicating that an experienced mathematician had set out the problem. Often, however, only the solution is shown, making it seem as if the problem was part of a dictation or practice exercise.

2. The tablets show little interest on the part of the recorder in divining whether the answer was exactly right or approximate.

3. Other mathematical concepts, such as the properties of triangles, circles, and rectangles, were known, but there was not much interest in discovering the more complex properties of surface area and volume of these figures.

C. Mesopotamian mathematics used a place-value system based on units of 60 (sexagesimal), in which the meaning of a number depends on its position relative to other numbers.

D. The concept of zero did not exist until the 8th century B.C., which caused difficulties for Babylonian mathematicians.

E. Most of the evidence for mathematics comes from word problems, probably because these texts were used in scribal schools.

IV. Turning to science, astronomy was the field in which the most precise evidence was collected. Kings and priests were especially interested in any science that allowed them to predict the future or to interpret omens, and this aspect of the science connects astronomy with the practice of divination.

A. Divination was one of the most important scientific disciplines developed in Mesopotamia and the one that would have helped make sense of the world.

B. Divination revealed the gods' communication regarding the destiny of individuals. It required the belief that the natural world had the potential to reveal future events; diviners had to master many different skills to interpret signs.

1. For example, animal entrails, especially livers, could be studied and interpreted; this practice is found in other cultures, as well.

2. Other techniques, such as interpreting the patterns of oil poured over water or how smoke rose from incense, were used by experts to try to find answers to questions.

3. Observations of animal behavior, such as how an animal approached the gates of a city or the altar of a temple, or the birth of a cow with specific markings could also portend the future.

C. Special purification rituals could prevent or weaken the effects of a bad omen; in other words, diviners could attempt to change the future.

D. We are best informed about divination through celestial observations.

1. The Babylonian Astronomical Diaries are records of observations that astronomers in Babylon undertook from the Esagila, the temple of Marduk.

2. The diaries note events that occurred night or day in the sky, as well as changes in the weather or the depth of the river. These diaries are preserved from the 7th century B.C. on, although they are often in fragments.

E. The Persians, who succeeded the Babylonians, were also known for their interest in astronomy.

1. The Babylonians created a lunar calendar based on a 19-year interval. For 12 years, the year had 12 months; then for 7 years, the year had 13 months, for a total of 235 months.

2. Some of the observations that survive are focused on the appearance of a new moon and offer predictions about how the moon will affect the future.

3. Natural phenomena, such as earthquakes, were especially troubling.

4. Long lists of these descriptions and interpretations exist to help future diviners understand the meaning of events; these lists also give us a sort of natural history.

F. One of the most valuable achievements in astronomy could have been the ability to predict eclipses.

1. The records of these eclipses help modern scholars reconstruct a chronology for Mesopotamian history.
2. Unfortunately, there are three possible years for most of these events; thus, we remain uncertain about the exact year in which specific events occurred.

V. Much of the evidence for Mesopotamian scientific thought and literature was found in the library of the 7th-century B.C. Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal at Nineveh.

A. More than 25,000 tablets were found in the palace of Ashurbanipal; about half of these were scientific or literary compositions. These tablets form the bulk of evidence from which we derive our knowledge of medicine, astronomy, and mathematics.

B. Several letters from Ashurbanipal note his interest in amassing tablets, and his collection from Nineveh is the largest single library of tablets from Mesopotamia. It preserves many of the texts we have discussed in this lecture and the most complete versions of the Gilgamesh epic.

C. A *colophon*, which is a heading that usually gives the first line of a poem, for example, or describes what the text is about, was added to many of the manuscripts that scribes copied for the library in Nineveh. Some noted that the text had been collected by Ashurbanipal; others were lengthier.

D. One reason for Ashurbanipal's obsession with collecting texts is that he was controlling access to information that could explain the future through science. Further, he was interested in creating a legacy for successive rulers.

Essential Reading:

Francesca Rochberg, "Astronomy and Calendars in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *CANE,* vol. III, pp. 1925–1940.

Marvin Powell, "Metrology and Mathematics in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *CANE*, vol. III, pp. 1941–1958.

Robert D. Biggs, "Medicine, Surgery and Public Health in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *CANE*, vol. III, pp. 1911–1924.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways do science and religion interact in Mesopotamian thought?
2. What were the goals of these scientific disciplines?

Lecture Twenty-Four
Poetry and Literature

Scope: As we will see in this lecture, the poetry and literature of Mesopotamia touched on a wide range of topics. We will investigate literature that explores such themes as creation and the deeds and personalities of the gods. Other poems examine the ideas of suffering, divine justice, or the effects of misrule by a king who has lost the favor of the gods. Proverbial wisdom, jokes, and love poems give insight into the concerns of daily life. Finally, magic spells were cast to ease the pain of a headache or to dismiss an annoying lawsuit. As we begin our study of Mesopotamian literature, keep in mind that even though many tablets are preserved, they are often broken, leaving us with line breaks or gaps in the narratives. Further, the language of Mesopotamian literature is often repetitive, but working one's way through the literature can be quite rewarding.

Outline

I. Several creation myths survive that credit different deities with the act of forming the world.

- **A.** The *Enuma Elish* is one of the most famous Mesopotamian creation myths. It was probably composed in the 2nd millennium B.C., around the time of Hammurabi, but the earliest surviving texts date to about 1200 B.C.
- **B.** The Babylonian deity Marduk plays a prominent role in this version of the creation story, although an Assyrian version replaces him with the national deity of the Assyrians, Ashur.
- **C.** The poem describes the mingling of the deities of freshwater, Apsu, and saltwater, Tiamat, to create the first gods and form the horizon of the Earth.
- **D.** As more gods were formed, they began to annoy Apsu and Tiamat, who decided to kill them; instead, Apsu was killed, and the freshwater associated with him became the foundations of the first temple.
- **E.** Marduk is born from this first generation of gods and will become their champion to protect them from the angry Tiamat. In return, he will become the leader, or king, of the gods. This creation myth both explains the formation of the world and justifies the office of kingship, locating it specifically in Babylon.
- **F.** Marduk slays Tiamat and splits her body to form the sky and to run beneath the Earth. Afterward, he arranges the sun, moon, and stars in the sky, then creates humans to serve the gods. Finally, he decrees that 300 gods will live in the heavens and 300 will live on Earth with humans.
- **G.** The gods reward Marduk's hard work with a temple in Babylon and a feast.

II. Several stories revolve around the idea of a struggle for, or loss of, kingship among the gods. These must have been useful ways of explaining the political chaos that sometimes occurred in Mesopotamia.

- **A.** "Anzu, the Bird Who Stole Destiny" describes how Enlil temporarily lost the tablet that controlled destiny, a symbol of Enlil's kingship, when it was taken by the bird Anzu.
- **B.** Anzu was an extremely ugly, eagle-like bird who had been created during the Great Flood. Enlil brought him to guard his palace; Anzu watched as Enlil assigned different duties to the gods, while he himself held the tablet of destiny.
- **C.** Anzu stole the tablet while Enlil was in his bath and flew off with it. The poem reports, "Enlil was speechless," and the gods were dejected in the resulting chaos, but they refused to face Anzu and retrieve the tablet. The poem notes the increasing depression of the gods, giving us some sense of what can happen during a hiatus between rulers.
- **D.** The warrior god Ninurta finally agreed to meet Anzu, and eventually the tablet was restored to Enlil.
- **E.** In these stories of the gods, we see representations in the heavens of some of the same difficulties experienced on Earth.

III. One especially moving type of literature is the lament for a city when it has suffered destruction or invasion. The suffering of individuals is also recounted in several poems.

A. Such laments often describe the complete destruction of cities and the devastation of the population, but the archaeological record does not bear out this level of damage.

B. It is customary to frame these laments in terms of the abandonment of the city by its patron deity.

C. The poems of individual suffering often show a resigned acceptance that human pain, sickness, and poverty are inescapable if decreed by the gods. A Babylonian dialogue between a suffering man and a friend presents the difficult question of why the gods punish the righteous.

1. The sufferer wallows in poverty and sees the wealthy ignoring the gods but prospering.

2. His friend suggests that humans cannot understand the intentions of the gods and that it is possible for the gods to change an individual's fortune even within the course of a year. The sufferer accepts this philosophy, vows to be pious, and prays for relief.

D. These poems illustrate the universal difficulties of life and the eternal question of why the good and faithful must suffer, although the answer usually involves accepting that one cannot know the will of the gods.

IV. Other genres of literature, such as humorous stories, jokes, love poems, and magic spells, take a lighter view of life.

A. For example, an older scribe describes himself to a younger one as an ideal student, but we can imagine that the speaker might not have been as attentive as he asserts.

B. Another common genre of literature takes the form of debates between improbable creatures or concepts. In one dialogue between Summer and Winter, the two seasons argue over whose work is harder.

C. Humor can be one of the more difficult cultural elements to recover, but in Mesopotamia, we can see examples of social satire, as well as more obvious jokes.

1. The interaction between different economic classes was fodder for many stories, such as the visit of a wealthy man who gives detailed instructions to his cleaners.

2. His instructions are so explicit and lengthy that the cleaner is offended and suggests that the man do the cleaning himself.

D. Drinking songs were also a source of humor; one song waxes enthusiastic about the joy of drinking beer.

E. Finally, we see humor in Mesopotamian proverbs.

1. On authority: "Whatever the man in authority said, it was not pleasant."

2. On changes in profession: "A disgraced scribe becomes an incantation priest. A disgraced singer becomes a flute-player. A disgraced merchant becomes a con-man."

3. On health: "To be sick is all right, to be pregnant is painful, to be pregnant and sick is just too much."

F. Love poetry can be set in a beautiful garden, beneath cedar trees, with nature creating a romantic mood.

1. A poem about the wedding between Nabu, son of Marduk, and Tashmetu describes a garden with cedar, cypress, and juniper trees.

2. Tashmetu wears gold earrings and bracelets of carnelian, prompting Nabu to ask, "Why are you so adorned, my Tashmetu? She replies, "So I can go to the garden with you, my Nabu…and there bind fast, hitch up, bind your days to the garden…bind your nights to the exquisite garden."

V. Magic spells were used to help ease the annoyances of life.

A. Spells to cure a headache, fever, or other illnesses are frequent and tell us about some of the maladies from which Mesopotamians suffered.

1. "Cloudy eyes, blurred eyes, bloodshot eyes! Why do you cloud over? Why do you blur? Why do sand of river, pollen of date palm, pollen of fig tree, straw of winnower sting you?"

2. "Headache, applied in heaven, removed in the netherworld, which sapped the strength of the strong young man, which has not returned her energy to the beautiful young woman…who will remove it, who will cast it out?"

B. In a spell by an *ashipu*, we learn that he was called in to remove the moral flaw that caused sickness.

C. Other spells drove away evil spirits and ghosts.

VI. This lecture has given us a taste of the different types of literature preserved from Mesopotamia.

A. In this body of literature, we find many more myths and stories of the gods than any other form of non-royal literature. In them are also descriptions of the landscape, reminding us of the extraordinary natural setting of Mesopotamia.

B. Even though the environment was abundant, other stories and poems relate extreme poverty and misery, whether from illness or unrequited love. The gods were more often a source of pain than relief, as the poem of the righteous sufferer conveys.

C. This survey of literature gives us a glimpse of the philosophy or outlook on life in Mesopotamia, which can seem very negative. Some forms of literature, however, mitigate this pessimism with humor and an appreciation for natural beauty.

Essential Reading:

Benjamin Foster, *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia*.

Graham Cunningham, et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*.

Supplementary Reading:

Piotr Michalowski, "Sumerian Literature: An Overview," in *CANE*, vol. IV, pp. 2279–2292.

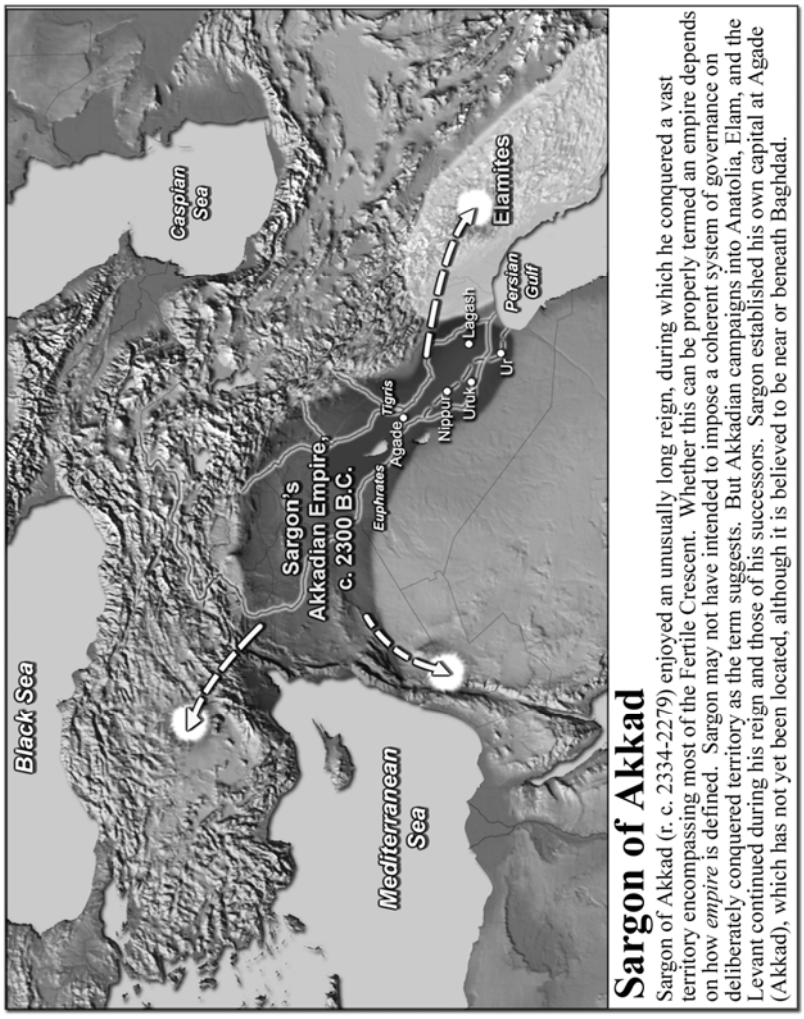
Jean Bottéro, "Akkadian Literature: An Overview," in *CANE*, vol. IV, pp. 2293–2304.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does this literature expand our understanding of the role of the gods in Mesopotamian life and thought?

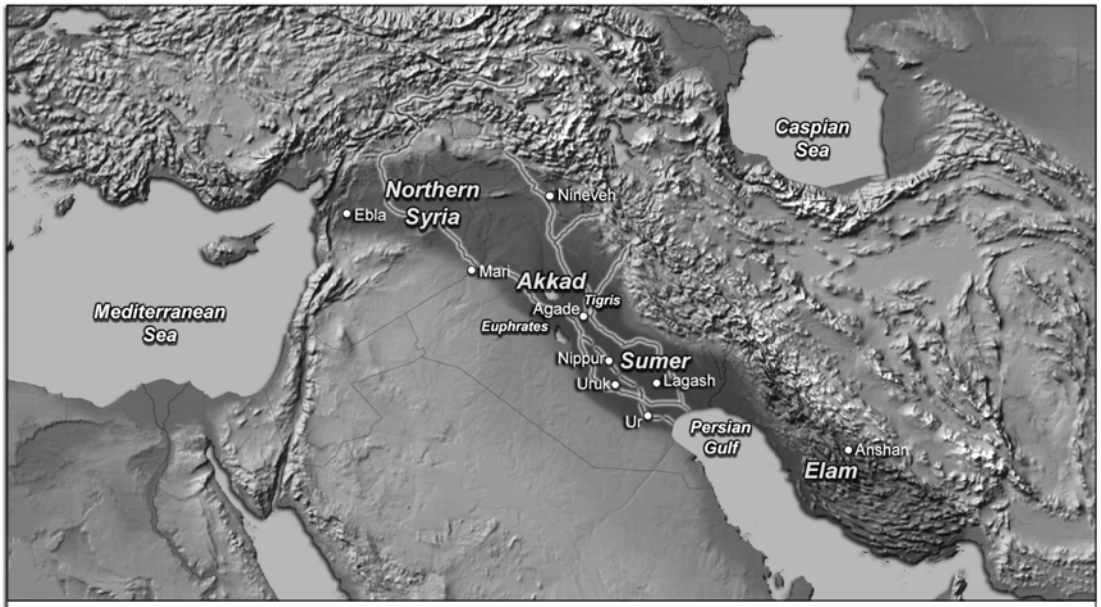
2. What genres of literature represent the concerns of ordinary life, and what issues are described in them?

Maps



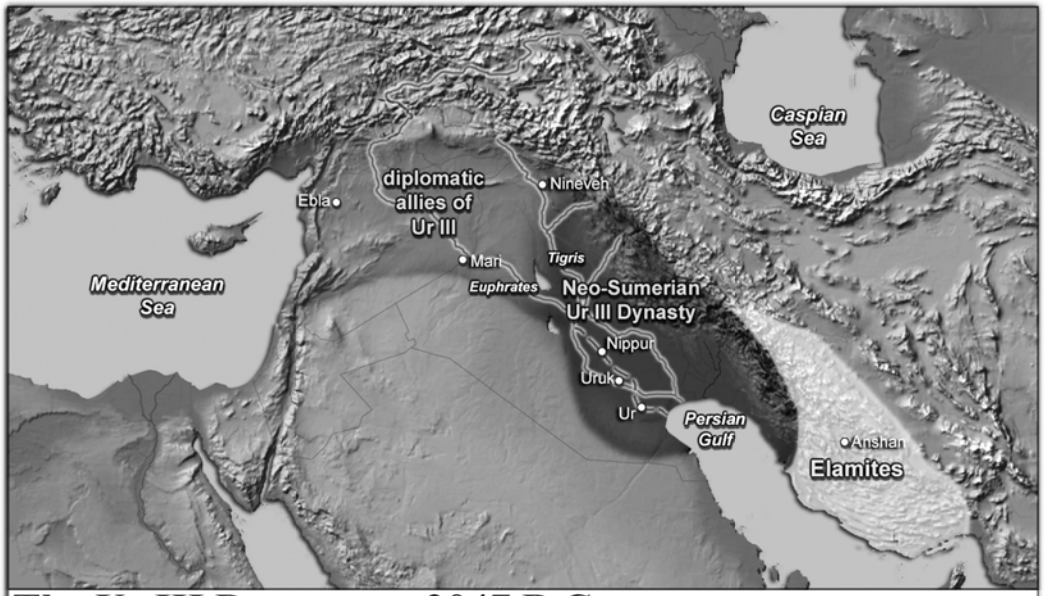
Sargon of Akkad

Sargon of Akkad (r. c. 2334-2279) enjoyed an unusually long reign, during which he conquered a vast territory encompassing most of the Fertile Crescent. Whether this can be properly termed an empire depends on how *empire* is defined. Sargon may not have intended to impose a coherent system of governance on deliberately conquered territory as the term suggests. But Akkadian campaigns into Anatolia, Elam, and the Levant continued during his reign and those of his successors. Sargon established his own capital at Agade (Akkad), which has not yet been located, although it is believed to be near or beneath Baghdad.



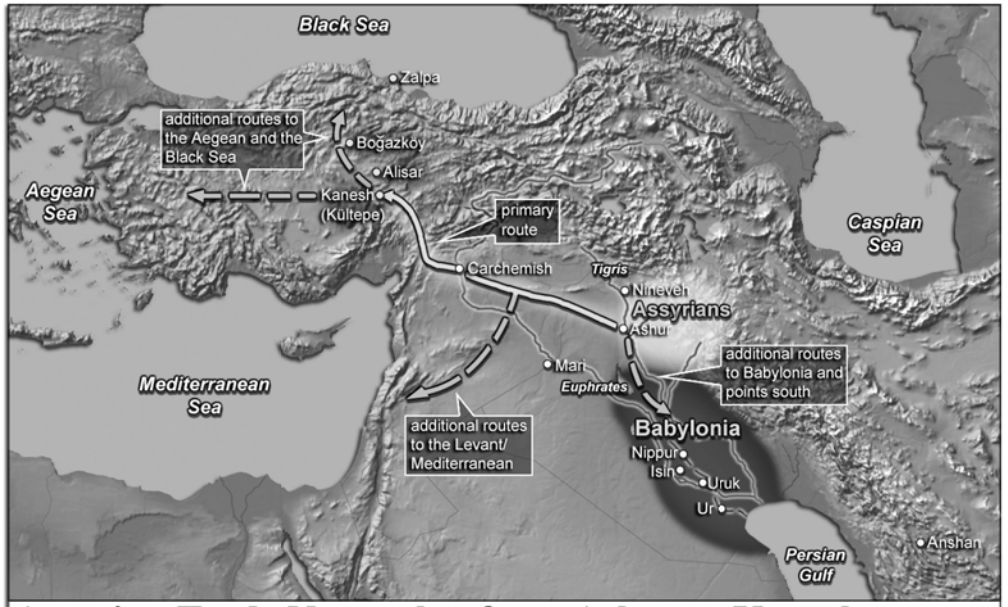
Akkadian Expansion under Naram-Sin

Naram-Sin (r. c. 2254-2218 B.C.), Sargon's grandson, dubbed himself "King of the Four Quarters of the World," and during his reign, he indeed ruled over Elam, Sumer, Akkad, and parts of Northern Syria. His focus was on securing trade routes; control of Elam ensured access to the Indus Valley in India, while key trading cities like Mari and Ebla were hubs of Syrian commerce. He successfully suppressed revolts in the city-states of Sumer and proved a quite capable ruler. It was his representation of himself as divine, on inscriptions and in visual media, that probably explains later hostile accounts that blame him for the collapse of Akkadian power, which occurred around 2190 B.C.



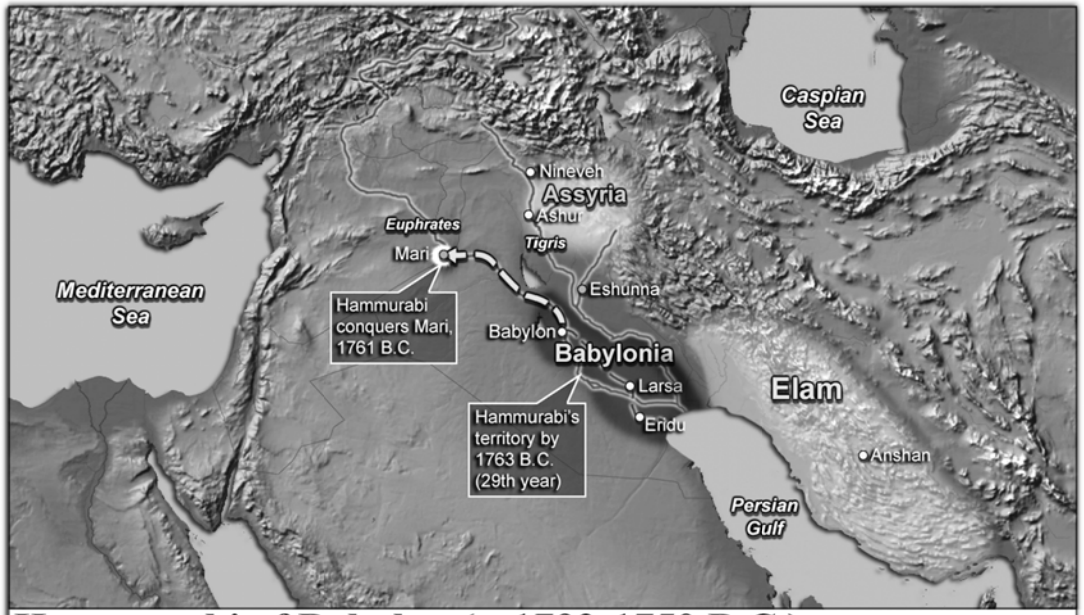
The Ur III Dynasty, c. 2047 B.C.

The Ur III Dynasty, named for the third group of rulers to hold kingship in the Sumerian city of Ur, dominated Babylonia for over 100 years (c. 2112-2004 B.C.) They united northern and southern Mesopotamia and lands along the Zagros Mountains under a single, sophisticated bureaucratic state, and exercised hegemony in the lands to the west through diplomatic alliances. This map shows Ur III territory at the end of the reign of Shulgi (r. c. 2094-2047), the single most influential ruler of the dynasty. Shulgi presided over innovations in taxation, territorial expansion, provincial administration, and record-keeping. The Ur III dynasty eventually fell due to outside pressures on its borders, especially from Elam, and internal economic disruption.



Assyrian Trade Networks: from Ashur to Kanesh

Long before the heyday of the great Assyrian Empire of the 1st millennium B.C., during the Old Assyrian Period (20th-19th centuries B.C.), private merchant activity flourished along a primary trade route between the Assyrian city of Ashur and the trade outpost of Kanesh in Anatolia. Donkey caravans loaded with tin, gold, silver, and Assyrian-made textiles traversed mountain passes to arrive at a merchant *karum* at Kanesh. The karum was a kind of lower city, separate from the area occupied by the Anatolian rulers. This primary Ashur-Kanesh route was supplemented by additional routes north and west from Kanesh, south from Ashur into Babylonia, and by additional routes into Levantine regions.



Hammurabi of Babylon (r. 1792-1750 B.C.)

When Hammurabi took the throne, he inherited a city-state controlling little more than the city of Babylon and the surrounding area. By 1765, he had led a coalition against Elam, which had been a threatening neighbor for some time. In 1763, aided by Zimri-Lim of Mari, he ended Rim-Sin's reign in Larsa. This made Babylonia a regional power controlling most of southern Mesopotamia. In 1761, Hammurabi turned on his former ally Zimri-Lim, conquering Mari, expanding Babylonian hegemony further north and securing the riverine trade routes upon which Babylonian prosperity depended. The state Hammurabi founded would endure for another century and a half.

Biographical Notes

Alexander the Great (b. 356–d. 323 B.C.): King of Macedonia (r. 336–323 B.C.) who invaded Asia Minor and defeated the last Persian king at the battle of Gaugamela in 331. Alexander took control of the Persian Empire and took his army further east to India. He died in Babylon in 323 B.C.

Ashurbanipal (r. c. 668–627 B.C.): Son of the Assyrian ruler Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal was challenged by his brother, who allied with the Elamites and the Babylonians to rebel against him. The revolt was put down, and Ashurbanipal led a campaign against the capital of Elam, Susa. Official Assyrian records stop in 639 B.C., although Ashurbanipal ruled another 12 years.

Ashurnasirpal II (r. 883-859 B.C.): Assyrian ruler who founded a new capital at Nimrud, led annual campaigns, and focused much of his attention on controlling the west, especially Israel and Judah.

Cambyses: Persian ruler (r. 529–522 B.C.), the son and successor of Cyrus, who spent most of his rule trying to conquer Egypt for the Persians.

Cyrus (r. c. 559–530 B.C.): Founder of the Achaemenid Dynasty, Cyrus was the leader of the Persians, an Iranian people. Cyrus further expanded his empire from southern Iran to include Babylonia, Assyria, Syria-Palestine, and Asia Minor. In 538 B.C. he allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem.

Darius I (r. 521–c. 486 B.C.): Darius was a Persian nobleman who took the throne of Persia in a palace coup after the death of Cambyses. He recorded a detailed description of his rise to the throne on a rock-cut inscription at Mt. Behistun/Besitun. In 490 B.C., Darius ordered the first invasion of Greece by the Persians.

Darius III (r. 336–331 B.C.): The last Persian King, defeated by Alexander in 331 at Guagamela.

Eannatum (r. c. 2450–2425 B.C.): A king of Lagash near the end of the war between the cities of Umma and Lagash.

Enheduanna: Daughter of Sargon I of Akkad (r. c. 2334–2279 B.C.) who was made the high priestess of Nanna at Ur. This act allowed her father to solidify his control over north and south Mesopotamia. In her position as priestess, she was the author of several hymns to the goddess and is the first named author in history.

Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 B.C.): Younger son and successor of Sennacherib, who attacked Babylon in retribution for rebellion. Esarhaddon had been a governor of Babylonia, and this may have encouraged him to begin rebuilding the city as soon as he took the throne. His rule was known for its internal stability.

Gudea (r. c. 2100 B.C.): Ruler of the city-state of Lagash after the fall of the Akkadian dynasty. Gudea is well known from many portraits that show him as a pious ruler.

Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 B.C.): Ruler of Babylon who expanded his territory to control all of northern and southern Mesopotamia and northern Syria after he destroyed the city of Mari. Hammurabi is credited with creating the longest surviving law code.

Herodotus (b. c. 484, d. between 430–420 B.C.): Greek historian known as the "father of history," he described Persian customs, history, and the two invasions of Darius and Xerxes into Greece.

Ibbi-Sin (r. c. 2028–2004 B.C.): Last king of the Ur III dynasty.

Nabonidus (r. c. 555–539 B.C.): Ruler who alienated Babylonia after he moved the capital to a desert oasis in the Arabian desert, perhaps because he wished to promote the worship of the moon god Sin.

Nabopolassar (r. 626–605 B.C.): A local ruler of Babylonia, Nabopolassar took the throne at a time when the Assyrian Empire was weak. He united all of Babylonia under his rule, allied with the Elamites, and attacked and destroyed the Assyrian capital at Nineveh in 612 B.C.

Naram-Sin (r. c. 2254–2218 B.C.): Grandson of the Akkadian ruler Sargon, Naram-Sin was the first ruler to represent himself as a god and to deify himself. This may have led to many negative depictions of Naram-Sin in later generations.

Nebuchadnezzar (r. c. 604–562 B.C.): Babylonian ruler who succeeded his father, Nabopolassar. He destroyed Jerusalem in 587 B.C., burning the temple of Solomon and deporting most of the population of Israel to Babylonia. Nebuchadnezzar also sponsored many building projects in Babylon; this was the city that was best known to Greek visitors, who described its wonders. Also called Nebuchadrezzar III.

Pu-Abi (r. c. 2500 B.C.): Sumerian queen whose jewelry was found in the Royal Cemetery at Ur.

Rim-Sin (r. 1822–1763 B.C.): Ruler of Larsa who controlled much of southern Mesopotamia in the early part of Hammurabi's rule. Rim-Sin ruled longer than any other king in Mesopotamia.

Sammuramat (r. c. 811–806 B.C.): Queen mother who was regent with her son Adad-Nirari III; this Assyrian queen may have been the inspiration for the legend of Semiramis. Assyrian sources give her name but no other details about her life or rule.

Sargon of Akkad (r. c. 2334–2279 B.C.): Founder of the Akkadian Dynasty.

Sargon II (r. c. 721–705 B.C.): Assyrian ruler who, like his Akkadian predecessor, claimed by his name that he was the "legitimate king." Sargon was successful in quelling rebellions in the west and in Babylonia. Sargon founded a new Assyrian capital at Dur-Sharru-ken, Fort Sargon, but it was abandoned after his death.

Sennacherib (r. c. 704/705–681 B.C.): The son and successor of Sargon II, Sennacherib was known for his siege and destruction of Babylon in 689 B.C. This unusual attack by an Assyrian ruler on an important cultural capital was denounced by Babylonian sources.

Shalmaneser III (r. c. 858–824 B.C.): Assyrian ruler who defeated a coalition of western rulers, Egyptian, Israelite, and other rulers from Syria and Palestine, at Qarqar in 853 B.C. Continued the building project at Nimrud begun by his father, Ashurnasirpal II.

Shamshi-Adad (r. c. 1808–1776 B.C.): Ruler who took control of Ashur and was the first king to expand the heartland of Ashur into a small kingdom. Shamshi-Adad installed his son, Yasmah-Adad, on the throne of Mari but was frustrated by his son's undisciplined behavior.

Shulgi (r. c. 2094–2047 B.C.): Ruler of Ur during the Ur III period, which is especially well documented. Shulgi instituted several administrative reforms and was the subject of many hymns celebrating his reign.

Tiglath-Pileser III (r. c. 744–727 B.C.): King of Assyria during the second and most extensive phase of the Assyrian Empire.

Ur-Nammu (r. c. 2112–2094 B.C.): First of the five kings of the Ur III dynasty.

Xerxes (r. 486–465 B.C.): Persian king who succeeded his father, Darius I, and invaded Greece in 480 B.C. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote a memorable description of this tyrannical ruler, who commanded a vast army but was defeated by the Greeks. His later years are not well known.

Zimri-Lim (r. c. 1776–1761 B.C.): Ruler of the city of Mari on the northern Euphrates during the reign of Hammurabi. His large and well-appointed palace was destroyed by Hammurabi after several years of alliance with the Babylonian king.

Between the Rivers:
The History of Ancient Mesopotamia

Part III: Empires of the East

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Between the Rivers:
The History of Ancient Mesopotamia

Scope:

Six thousand years ago, in the land bordered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the first cities arose, ruled by kings who created complex bureaucracies that fostered the invention of writing and other technological advances. The Greeks coined the term *Mesopotamia*, "the land between the rivers," for this region, a name that the Romans later applied when they conquered the territory. In this course, we will explore Mesopotamian societies from the Neolithic era (c. 9,000 B.C.) to the defeat of the great Persian Empire at Gaugamela by Alexander the Great (331 B.C.). Our study will take us from the world of international diplomacy with powerful neighbors in Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia to the mundane issues of daily life, such as providing food for the family, curing disease, and settling legal disputes. We will examine archaeological discoveries, historical documents, and literary texts to explore how these lands between the rivers created a civilization that has contributed to the development of our own. A recurring theme of the course will be the creation of an urban lifestyle, which becomes increasingly sophisticated and complex as cultures expand.

This introduction to the history and culture of Mesopotamia is divided into three parts. We will begin by looking at the region in which we see the development of agriculture, settlements, and the rise of cities. What do these early cities look like? What can we say about the people who lived in them? How were they organized and in what professions did the populace engage? Temples were the earliest public architecture and required thousands of laborers to erect the structures; the organization of this labor force results in an early form of bureaucracy. Because much of the evidence for this era derives from archaeological remains, we will explore the methods archaeologists use to reconstruct history from artifacts ranging from broken pieces of pottery to city walls.

In the second part of the course, we will study how the early city-states grew in size and complexity. Rulers promoted building projects, encouraged trade, and protected their people from harm. The ideal ruler was hailed as the shepherd of his people who had the favor of the gods. Literature and art celebrate the king in these roles, and we see energetic leaders digging irrigation canals and dedicating temples to the gods. During this era, we will meet historical figures such as Hammurabi, the king of Babylon in the 18th century B.C. Hammurabi is most famous for his law code, in which the ruler himself legislates a wide range of punishments for theft, property disputes, and familial quarrels. Sentences are levied based on one's social standing; these laws reveal a strictly hierarchical society in which the wealthy man pays fines, while the poor man suffers more extreme physical punishment.

International contacts with other areas of the Near East flourish at this time. We will examine diplomatic correspondence between the great cities in Mesopotamia and the powerful states of Egypt and Syria, as well as the foreign influences visible in the art and architecture of the era. Society grew ever more complex and cultured. Developments in such fields as medicine and astronomy reveal the Mesopotamian interest in understanding and ordering the world.

The last section of the course will explore the rise of empires, specifically, the great Assyrian and Persian empires. A strongly militaristic society, the Assyrians dominated much of the Near East and effected enormous cultural changes for the peoples of this region through their practice of mass transfers of population. Enormous palaces displayed images of their kings engaged in lion hunts and at the head of the mighty Assyrian army, reinforcing the strength of the state. Such a disciplined society required the smooth transfer of power from ruler to ruler to oversee the complicated bureaucracy necessary to control an empire of such great size. When palace intrigues weakened the throne, the neighboring Medes and Persians quickly seized power and established themselves at the head of ever-larger empires.

The interaction between the East and the West is the focus of the last six lectures of the course. During this time, the small and distant country of Greece was able to fend off two invasions led by the Persian king Darius and his son Xerxes in the early 5th century B.C. Although these defeats had little impact on the Persian Empire, which flourished for another century and a half, they were highly significant for the Greeks. The Greek historian Herodotus recorded these events from the side of the victors, and his account had enormous influence on the way that later generations of scholars understood the peoples of Mesopotamia. Despite the image that Herodotus and other Greek authors drew of a weak and corrupt Persian state, it remained a wealthy and vital empire that fell only as a result of the military brilliance of Alexander the Great. Alexander's victory allowed him to rule briefly at the

head of the largest empire then known, reaching from Greece to western India, but after his death in Babylon in 323 B.C., no single ruler was able to control these lands again. Many of the great cities of Mesopotamia were abandoned, known only as legends until archaeologists uncovered them 2,000 years later.

Lecture Twenty-Five
Internationalism

Scope: As we look at the historical development of Mesopotamia, we see that the shift from the city-state to a regional or territorial state sets the foundation for the 1st-millennium empires that characterize the Near East. We will also see, over the next several lectures, how the role of the king changes as a result of this new political hierarchy. In this lecture we will examine an exceptional period of international diplomacy in the 14th century B.C., as attested by an archive of letters from Amarna in Egypt. The powers involved controlled most of the Near East: Egypt, Hittite Anatolia, Kassite Babylonia, Mitanni, and Assyria. After a brief overview of these groups and the regions they governed, we will examine the evidence for diplomatic negotiations in the 14th century, the relations among the rulers of these powers, and the ways in which they established and maintained these relationships.

Outline

I. The Babylonian state was defeated in 1595 B.C. after Anatolian invaders, the Hittites, sacked the city. The sources for the next few centuries—in Mesopotamia and the Near East in general—are fragmentary.

A. In Babylonia, a semi-nomadic group from Elam called the Kassites took control sometime after 1595 B.C. and ruled there for about 400 years. The Kassites adopted traditional Babylonian culture, settling in cities, promoting literary and scientific thought, and worshipping Babylonian deities together with their own.

B. Northern Mesopotamia was controlled successively by Mitanni, then Assyria, about whom little can be reconstructed from the fragments of surviving evidence.

1. The archives of the city of Nuzi in northern Mesopotamia mention Mitanni overlords and give us an idea of the extent of Mitanni power.

2. Mitanni was clearly a major power, controlling land from northern Syria east to northern Mesopotamia and maintaining an army sufficient to challenge the other powers in the Near East.

3. Mitanni flourished from about the 16th to the 14th centuries and fell to the Assyrians in the mid-13th century B.C.

C. The Assyrians in northern Mesopotamia were a rising power in the region; for much of the early 2nd millennium, they had been vassals of Mitanni, but by 1350, they were gaining control in the north while pushing west and pressuring Mitanni.

D. The leading Anatolian kingdom at this time was the Hittite Empire, which controlled lucrative trade routes. The empire lasted from about 1800–1200 B.C.; at the height of its power in the 14th century, Hatti (the land governed by the Hittites) was an enormous state that controlled central and eastern Turkey, part of the northern Euphrates, and most of Syria.

E. In general, Egypt's relative geographic isolation meant that it kept apart from the invasions seen repeatedly in Mesopotamia.

1. Egypt had suffered some instability during the mid-17th to the mid-16th centuries B.C. when foreign rulers governed northern Egypt, but the state was reunified by the late 16th century. By about 1500, Egyptian rulers expanded into much of the southern Levant.

2. The pharaoh Tuthmosis III (r. c. 1479–1425) was a triumphant military commander and the victor at the great battle of Megiddo in Syria in 1468, the conquest that gave Egypt control of Syria.

3. Egypt did not dominate Syria long but reached an agreement with Mitanni, in which Mitanni controlled northern Syria while Egypt retained access to southern Syria.

II. The interactions among these states gives us insight into the diplomatic arrangements between them.

A. The mid-14th century is often referred to as the *Amarna period* after a collection of letters between kings that was found in Egypt at Tell el-Amarna.

1. Amarna was originally called Akhetaten; it was a new capital city founded by Amenhotep IV (r. 1352–1336), who changed his name to Akhenaten to announce his loyalty to the sun god Aten, rather than the older god Amun.

2. This radical shift in the traditional Egyptian ruling ideology was abandoned immediately after Akhenaten's death, as we can see in the name of his successor, Tutankhamun.

B. The Amarna letters consist of almost 400 official letters of Akhenaten and his father, Amenhotep III, which were left behind in the records office at Amarna after Akhenaten's death. They date from approximately 1360–1336 B.C. and include 40 letters between the Egyptian king and his contemporary rulers in the Near East.

C. The diplomatic correspondence from the Amarna archive describes a period of unusually peaceful cooperation among these major Near Eastern states.

D. One of the most noticeable features of the Amarna letters is the intimate language used by the great kings.

E. From the surviving texts, it seems that an essential element in maintaining these friendly relations was the exchange of luxury goods between rulers.

1. Many of the Amarna letters are concerned with receiving or sending gifts or chastising a brother-ruler for not sending gifts of equal value.
2. Because only the Egyptian ruler had ready access to gold, his wealth was much envied. In return for gold, Egyptian kings received horses, chariots, lapis lazuli, and other exotic goods that were common in other Near Eastern states.
3. One reason why gift exchange was such a significant part of the diplomatic process is that these gifts would likely be displayed in the palaces.
4. If relations between two nations were good, a foreign embassy was received by the king himself in front of his court. If a new king received fewer gifts than his father had from fellow rulers, the court officials and nobles might perceive that he was weaker.

F. Marriage alliances were another form of gift exchange that helped to strengthen diplomatic ties. This is the one instance in which the rulers were not equals in status.

1. Egypt generally refused to allow its royal princesses to marry foreigners. At the same time, Egyptian kings were eager to marry the daughters of other royal houses and frequently demanded such marriage alliances.
2. One exception to this general rule of Egyptians rejecting marriage with foreigners appears when an Egyptian widow, perhaps the wife of Tutankhamun, wrote to the Hittite king to ask for one of his sons as her husband.
3. It is not clear why the other states tolerated this significant restriction by Egypt, but it may have had to do with Egypt's gold resources.

III. A memorable letter from the Babylonian king Burnaburiash II chastised Akhenaten for not inquiring about his health after a bout of illness; in the letter Burnaburiash appears to be unaware of the distance between the two countries.

A. Scholars have puzzled over this odd missive: How could the king of Babylon be ignorant of the distance between his kingdom and that of Egypt? There are several possible explanations.

B. First, part of this personal, brotherly bond required that rulers keep aware of major events in other royal courts and provide constant reassurance of mutual support.

1. Other letters from the Amarna archive document the fact that rulers routinely sent their personal physicians when their brother-rulers fell sick; perhaps Akhenaten was the only ruler who had neglected to express concern or to offer help to Burnaburiash.
2. It is also possible that reading this explanation aloud in the Babylonian court served to explain the slight to king.

C. The members of the court may also have been susceptible to Egyptian self-aggrandizement: This letter was a way to remind the Babylonians not to be taken in by the rhetoric of the Egyptian diplomatic missives.

D. This peculiar letter, with its huffy tone about such a seemingly unimportant issue, is difficult to interpret, but it should make us aware that we cannot necessarily take the text of such letters at face value.

IV. The Amarna archive represents a specific form of diplomatic negotiation that was effective only between kingdoms of relatively equal status.

A. This may not seem to be an especially efficient or effective form of international policy, but it worked well in an era of peace and prosperity.

B. This system of diplomatic exchange and negotiation between the states of the Near East lasted until about 1200 B.C., when widespread disruption ended the period of peaceful interaction. A new theory suggests that the quantity of goods exchanged between rulers could have weakened economies that felt other pressures as well.

Essential Reading:

William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (read selected letters or the source as a whole).

Supplementary Reading:

Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, eds., *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does this type of diplomacy fit with the image of the king that we have discussed so far?

2. What role do diplomatic gifts between leaders serve today?

Lecture Twenty-Six
Assyrian Expansion

Scope: In the last lecture, we discussed Assyria as a member of the five nation-states predominant in the Amarna era during the 14th century B.C. At that time, Assyria was challenging Mitanni in northern Mesopotamia; over the next few centuries, Assyria drew on its increasing military expertise to push out Mitanni and establish control of the region. In this lecture, we will take a quick look at the events of the late 2nd millennium, a time of extensive disruption throughout the Near East, then focus our attention on two 9th-century rulers, Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III, who were essential leaders in the expansion of the Assyrian Empire. These kings represent the familiar qualities of victorious general and zealous builder that have characterized Mesopotamian rulers, but the venues through which they memorialize their success are typical of Assyrian culture.

Outline

I. Before we begin our study of Assyria, note that the name *Assur*, the god of Assyria, is alternatively spelled *Ashur*. *Ashur* may also be one part of a ruler's name, as we will see in this lecture when we meet Ashurnasirpal II.

II. During the 13th century B.C., Assyrian rulers proved to be adept at expanding and consolidating the power of their state.

- **A.** In the Middle Assyrian period (c. 1500 to 1000 B.C.), Assyrian records claimed tribute throughout most of northern Mesopotamia and west onto the Euphrates River.
- **B.** After a period of impressive expansion and administration of the territory in the 13th century, the next two centuries saw the Assyrian borders retreat along the upper Tigris River.
- **C.** There was a general withdrawal of large states in the late 2nd millennium. From 1200 to 1000 B.C., evidence for pervasive turmoil exists from Egypt to Mesopotamia.
  1. Written records decreased significantly or disappeared as the centralized governments collapsed.
  2. The few texts that survive come from Egypt; they refer to peoples of the sea who attacked Syria and defeated the Hittites and others.
  3. Egypt was able to fend off these attackers, but most areas in the Levant, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and even as far west as Greece suffered some sort of disorder.
  4. Archaeological evidence shows a long period of sustained destruction in certain areas and smaller settlements in general.
- **D.** This situation may be explained by economic stresses or environmental events. Interdependence of the regional states that we saw in the Amarna period might have meant that the ramifications of such events were more severe than they might have been otherwise.
- **E.** By the 9th century B.C., written records in Mesopotamia, specifically in Assyria, return. From these sources, we see that new populations from the west and east had moved into Babylonia in the late 2nd millennium.
  1. The Aramaeans, originally from Syria, vied with the Chaldaeans (another tribal group), the Elamites from Iran, and the Assyrians for control of Babylonia.
  2. The Aramaean language, which used an alphabetic script, eventually replaced cuneiform, a fact that will have significant ramifications for our study of written sources in Mesopotamia.
- **F.** Another development that had a critical effect on the relationship between the East and West was the domestication of the camel. We start to see evidence for a major increase in trade through the Arabian Desert, connecting the eastern routes overland to the Mediterranean. The Arabian tribes that inhabited the desert begin to appear more frequently in the written sources, often as yet another threat to the stability of Mesopotamia.

III. There were several important Assyrian rulers in the early 1st millennium, but two 9th-century kings, Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III, exemplify the qualities of Neo-Assyrian rulers.

A. When Ashurnasirpal II (r. c. 883-859 B.C.) became king, he would have benefited from two generations of stability on the Assyrian throne and an increasingly experienced Assyrian army.

1. Ashurnasirpal II was able to extend Assyrian control into the Taurus Mountains to the northwest and south to about the middle of the Euphrates River. This gave him an extensive center from which he could continue to pressure the regions west and south.

2. Ashurnasirpal led his army on annual campaigns, during which he set and executed severe penalties for the peoples he conquered. As a result, many potential rivals or enemies submitted to the Assyrians even before they were attacked.

B. Ashurnasirpal's campaigns are described in the Assyrian Royal Annals. Military successes dominate the royal annals, and as we might expect, the Assyrian ruler is always recorded as the victor in these official records.

1. Not only was the king successful in defeating his enemies, but he also tackled many logistical challenges to subdue them.

2. The texts focus heavily on the military aspect of Assyrian culture, rather than royal building projects, as we have seen in the past.

3. In addition to reporting the engineering feats and endurance of the Assyrian king and his army, the annals also recorded the penalties that enemies of the state suffered.

C. Explicit details of such penalties are represented in royal art, which reached an even wider audience than written records and could intimidate potential enemies and bolster the king's reputation.

1. Earlier in the course, in Akkadian art, for example, we saw that defeated enemies are shown nude, with their hands bound behind their backs, to indicate their complete subjugation.

2. Even in this cultural context, the written and artistic descriptions of the victims of Assyrian rulers can seem extreme, which has often led to a view of Assyrian culture as exceptionally violent.

3. We will return to this complex topic when we examine Assyrian royal ideology, but for now, we should say that the issue is unresolved and draws scholars into broader debates about representations of brutality in ancient and modern societies.

D. Ashurnasirpal II created a new capital at Kalhu (modern Nimrud), moving the center of government from the original capital at Ashur. This move gave the king a more central and defensible location from which to govern, and it would remain the capital for 150 years.

E. Ashurnasirpal created an entirely new concept of power and luxury in his royal residence. The palace was large—its walls encompassed a four-mile complex—and included administrative, religious, and domestic buildings for the king in the southern quarter of the city.

1. Nimrud was one of the earliest excavations in Iraq, conducted first by Austen Henry Layard and continued by Max Mallowan. This palace was also the scene of the huge banquet we discussed in Lecture Eighteen.

2. Ashurnasirpal II introduced the idea of stone relief sculpture as a decorative device in royal palaces. This was a new idea at the time that seems to have come from the great Hittite palaces in the west.

3. The palace courtyard was decorated with sculpted reliefs, as was the throne room. This sculpture is typical of Assyrian art, with the reliefs set in rows—at Nimrud, the slabs are about six feet high.

4. In the courtyard, rows of figures bring tribute to the king, and the inner court is protected by huge winged bulls with human heads.

5. Inside the throne room, the king is shown participating in religious rituals or in the presence of mythological creatures. He is also shown killing lions, as well as battling enemies.

6. We will return to the image of the king in these scenes in a later lecture; for now, note that these scenes are presented on permanent materials and in a much larger scale than in the past.

F. Another group of artifacts from Nimrud, one of the largest collections of carved ivories in the ancient world, is also noteworthy.

1. Carved ivory was used to decorate furniture and various small objects. Thousands of these ivories were dumped in the wells of the palace at Nimrud during the destruction of the city in 612 B.C.

2. One of the most famous of these pieces, an ivory plaque showing a lioness attacking an African youth, was gilded and inlaid with lapis lazuli and carnelian. This piece has been missing since the Iraq Museum was looted in 2003. It was one of a pair that probably decorated a chair; the other is in the British Museum.

3. Ivory was part of the tribute from the western regions that Assyria controlled; both the raw materials and the ivory carvers were brought to work in the capital.

G. Ashurnasirpal's legacy was that of an ambitious general who enriched the treasury of Assyria through tribute and introduced a new type of royal residence.

IV. Shalmaneser III (r. c. 858–824 B.C.) campaigned as actively and successfully as his father had. Shalmaneser was especially interested in expanding westward in the hopes of securing access to the Mediterranean Sea.

A. Five years after he took the throne, Shalmaneser faced an unusually strong and successful alliance of western states when he crossed the Euphrates River in 853 at Qarqar. According to Shalmaneser's own account, his opponents massed against him about 60,000 troops, 3,940 chariots, 1,900 cavalry troops, and 10,000 camels.

B. Shalmaneser claimed absolute victory over this force, although he did not return to the region for six years. By that time, the coalition had collapsed, and many states in the Levant offered Shalmaneser tribute in exchange for peace.

C. A carved black obelisk dating to the reign of Shalmaneser, now in the British Museum, includes five scenes of subject states bringing tribute to the king. One scene shows Jehu of the house of Omri, the king of northern Israel, prostrate before Shalmaneser. This is the earliest known image of a figure described in the Old Testament.

D. Assyrian relations with Babylon during the 9th century were basically peaceful, with a negotiated border established in the early 9th century.

1. During Shalmaneser's reign, we know that he visited the region and made the traditional sacrifices at Babylon, although we do not know if he came as an invited guest or a feared neighbor.
2. We also know that there were kings in Babylon at this time; in fact, Shalmaneser came to the aid of one of them, Marduk-zakir-shumi, when the king's brother tried to overthrow the Babylonian ruler.

E. One of the key pieces of evidence for the relationship between Assyria and Babylon during Shalmaneser's reign comes from a scene carved on a throne base at Nimrud.

1. The scene depicts Shalmaneser and the king of Babylon, Marduk-zakir-shumi, shaking hands as equals.
2. Given that Assyrian kings did not usually convey any relationship other than complete domination over other rulers, this evidence indicates that Babylonia was a significant power in the region.

F. Like his father, Shalmaneser also built a large palace in the new capital at Nimrud, dedicating it in the 13th year of his reign. This palace contained the usual reception rooms and domestic area; it also had workshops for the manufacture of armor and weaponry.

V. The success of Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III did not ensure lasting prosperity for their state.

A. Revolts broke out near the end of Shalmaneser's rule that continued for several years; his son Shamshi-Adad V quelled these, but Assyria was weakened in the late 9th to mid-8th century B.C. It is possible that strong governors challenged the king.

B. One indication of the weaker central rule of the empire is the fact that after Shamshi-Adad V died in 811, his queen, Sammuramat, ruled with her son Adad-Nirari III for five years (811–806 B.C.). This is the first female ruler recorded in Mesopotamian history.

C. The royal annals and other accounts describe the succession of Assyrian rulers, but undoubtedly, the king had little real authority. Regional governors began to set up monuments with their own names and images. This situation continued until the mid-8th century, when strong rulers similar to Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III took back control of the empire.

Essential Reading:

Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC*, pp. 197–215.

Supplementary Reading:

Joan Oates, *Nimrud: An Assyrian Imperial City Revealed*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why would Ashurnasirpal be so taken with the idea of introducing a stone palace in Mesopotamia?
2. How would this change or enhance the representation of the ruler?

Lecture Twenty-Seven
Sargon II

Scope: In the 9th century B.C., Assyria was well established as a significant power in Mesopotamia. Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III sponsored impressive palaces at the new capital at Nimrud that reflected the strength of the state they created. Their successes faded quickly in the late 9th century, and for the next several decades, Assyrian rulers faced internal challenges and a growing threat in the north. In this lecture, we will trace the remarkable spread of the Assyrian Empire in the second half of the 8th century, beginning with the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III and continuing with Sargon II. By the end of Sargon's reign, the Assyrian borders reached from the shores of the Arabian Gulf through Mesopotamia into southern Anatolia and south through the lands of Israel. Certain administrative changes were necessary to control this territory, and we will look at the methods used. We will also discuss the major campaigns of Sargon, the eponymous capital of Dur-Sharruken that he built, and the discovery of the intact royal tomb of one of his queens buried at Nimrud.

Outline

I. After half a century of decline, the second and most extensive phase of the Assyrian Empire began with the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (c. 744–727 B.C.).

A. This ruler was especially active in the west, concentrating on Syria, Israel, and the area of Gaza, and he seems to have been much more ambitious in campaigning than his predecessors.

B. Tiglath-Pileser also enacted some important administrative reforms, such as promoting eunuchs to powerful positions in the military and as provincial governors.

C. During the late 8th century B.C., there was a shift in Assyrian provincial control from compelling tribute from provinces to assimilating these regions completely into the empire. The goal may well have been to maintain closer control of the conquered regions and to establish a system of governance that would keep provincial governors in check.

D. Once control of a region was established through military means, the Assyrians put in place their administrative structure. Many details of governance had been worked out during the Middle Assyrian period, but the more effective control of the rulers in the Neo-Assyrian Empire made this administration more successful.

E. When the Assyrians claimed a province, they chose one of three ways to govern it, depending on the threat of rebellion.

1. A local ruler could be left in place to continue to administer the region and to ensure that Assyria was supplied with the required tribute.

2. If the existing political structure was not loyal, then the Assyrians would set up a puppet ruler whom they believed to be more reliable.

3. If neither of these methods proved to be successful, then a governor was sent who reported directly to the Assyrian king. In the Neo-Assyrian era, eunuchs were often selected for high military or political offices, in the belief that they would have no sons to promote and, as a result, would be more loyal to the king.

F. Another way to control the power of local rulers or governors was to limit the resources available to them. Both Tiglath-Pileser and Sargon reduced the size of individual provinces, creating smaller regions that would check the rise of provincial governors or other officials who threatened revolt.

G. At the same time, it was necessary to support the provincial leaders. Each province had a residence; those that have been discovered reveal decorations similar to those in the royal palaces. Such dwellings would be suitable for the king when he visited and would reinforce consistent themes of rulership throughout the empire.

H. Provincial leaders were supposed to supply the king with tribute and troops, to maintain roads, and when necessary, to provide labor for the king's building projects. The road system was created to enable

correspondence between the king and his administrators or generals, with stations placed every 20 miles to supply fresh horses for the exclusive use of official couriers.

II. We have 1,300 texts surviving from the reign of Sargon II (c. 721–705 B.C.); this collection is one of the latest large archives before the Assyrians (and succeeding powers) switched to the Aramaic language in the 7th century B.C.

A. There were numerous revolts in the period after Tiglath-Pileser's death, and the brief rule of his immediate successor suggests a lack of strong control of the throne.

B. This confusion probably made it possible for an unknown leader to take control. Sargon II, like his Akkadian namesake 1,500 years earlier, was likely a usurper to the throne.

III. Sargon led his army on annual campaigns for most of his rule; we will look in detail at the events in Babylon and in the west.

A. In c. 720 B.C., shortly after Sargon became king, a Chaldaean, Marduk-apla-iddina II, named himself an independent ruler of Babylonia with the support of the Elamites in Iran.

1. The Assyrian campaign against this ruler is described in three sources, each reporting a different outcome.

2. In one source, Sargon claimed complete victory; in another, Marduk-apla-iddina II described his crushing defeat of Sargon. The Babylonian Chronicle, which recorded events in Babylon from c. 750–240 B.C. and is probably the true account, noted that the Elamites repelled the Assyrians before the Babylonians appeared.

B. Often, when provinces learned that a ruler's attention was elsewhere, they took the opportunity to revolt. Sargon put down such revolts and expanded his empire to the northern border of Egypt. By now, Assyria controlled all of Syria-Palestine with the exception of Judah.

C. One method the Assyrians used to control such a vast empire was to transfer huge numbers of people from one part of the state to another.

1. Sargon deported 27,290 people from Israel to northern Syria and further east.

2. Deportation occurred on a large scale; one study suggests that 4.5 million people were involved in population transfers over the course of 300 years.

3. The point of these deportations was to control potential rebellions; at the same time, family connections and even small communities could be preserved if the people were compliant.

4. Deportees were mainly resettled in rural areas, where they would be used for agricultural production. Another possible destination would be one of the newly founded cities, where artisans and specialists would be especially desirable.

5. Sargon founded new settlements in Samaria and other parts of the west, populated with Babylonians and other easterners.

6. Deportees were not enslaved; they received legal protection and experienced no negative impact on their social status. The practice would later be adopted by the Persians and carried out on an even larger scale.

IV. Sargon eliminated two threats on the northern border of Assyria, the Anatolian states of Urartu, in the northeast region around Lake Van in Turkey, and Phrygia, also known as Mushki, further west.

A. Urartu dominated the Zagros Mountain regions and, in the early 8th century, was able to expand while the Assyrians were relatively weak. As Urartu stretched further south and east, trade routes in Iran could have been cut; even more dangerous was the fact that Urartu and Phrygia could join together to press Assyria out of Anatolia.

B. The state of Phrygia is better known to us because its king at this time was Mita, known by the Greeks as Midas. He defied Sargon originally but was unable to continue and, ultimately, allied with the Assyrian.

C. A letter from Sargon to the god Ashur sets out the victory against Urartu. The Assyrian army performed its usual engineering feats through the high mountains, annihilated the enemy, and brought back hundreds of thousands of objects to Ashur.

V. After a decade of significant victories, by c. 710 B.C., Sargon led a stronger, more experienced army against Babylon and his rival, Marduk-apla-iddina II; this time, Sargon drove the ruler out and claimed the throne of Babylon.

A. Sargon spent the next three years living in Babylon, carrying out repairs on public buildings and participating in important festivals. These acts spread support for Assyrian rule in Babylon.

B. Nonetheless, Babylonia remained difficult for the Assyrians to control. They had to be constantly vigilant for rebellions from the south, often supported by Elam, the marsh dwellers, or the tribes of the western desert.

1. Assyrian rulers were clearly reluctant to use the same devastating tactics in Babylonia that they employed elsewhere.

2. Scholars speculate that the Assyrians had a genuine respect for Babylonian tradition, which prevented most rulers from taking drastic steps to control the region.

C. News of Sargon's victories encouraged most neighboring states to ally themselves to Assyria; among them were rulers from the island of Cyprus and King Mita.

VI. In 717 B.C., Sargon began work creating a new capital at Dur-Sharru-ken ("Fort Sargon"), near modern Khorsabad.

A. Sargon had used Nimrud as his capital but wanted a new city that would not be identified with his predecessors.

B. Many letters to or from Sargon about the building project are extant, painting him as a severe supervisor. We also have letters about the transportation of materials, labor, and massive stone sculptures. One report describes an earthquake at Dur-Sharruken, which was probably interpreted as a bad omen.

C. Within the city was a walled-off citadel that held Sargon's palace and a temple. The 200-room palace was on a platform, offering a view over the city and the plain. The structure shows traditional decoration, perhaps to establish links with the past. Carved reliefs from the palace walls were lost in the 19th century A.D. when the boats transporting them to the Louvre sank on the Tigris River.

D. The city was built in about a decade and populated with displaced peoples from across the Assyrian Empire. Sargon lived in his new city for only a few years before he was killed in battle in 705 B.C. No successors occupied his extravagant palace because Sargon's death in battle was considered a bad omen; Dur-Sharruken was abandoned.

VII. We have one more piece of evidence for Sargon's reign, found in Nimrud. In 1989, a team of Iraqi archaeologists discovered a mid-9th-century-B.C. burial of Assyrian queens beneath the domestic quarters of Ashurnasirpal's palace.

A. Assyrian kings were buried at Ashur, while their queens were buried at Nimrud. The burial found in the 20th century was a chamber tomb, filled with gold jewelry, vessels, and semi-precious stones. An inscription on a mirror refers to Sargon II's wife, Queen Atalia.

B. A curse tablet threatens those who would disturb the burial and gives the name of the deceased, Queen Yaba, the wife of Tiglath-Pileser III. In fact, two skeletons were found in the sarcophagus in Yaba's tomb. The second burial is probably that of Atalia, the wife of Sargon II.

C. Gold jewelry, including a floral headdress that covered the head, recalls the Ur III tomb of Pu-Abi. Several bracelets, foot rings, necklaces, and chokers were also found, exemplifying the wealth of the royal house. There is no evidence here of human sacrifice.

VIII. In the next lecture, we will focus on the ideology of the Assyrian king. Although he had no legitimate claim to the throne, Sargon epitomizes the great war leader, administrator, and builder.

A. By the end of Sargon's reign, the Assyrians were the leading power in the Near East and had expanded the empire's borders to include southern and northern Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine.

B. Sargon's successor, Sennacherib, shared his father's determination to control his empire; his attacks on two cities—Jerusalem and Babylon—were recounted by his enemies.

Essential Reading:

Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 BC*, pp. 501–530.

Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, pp. 282–292.

Questions to Consider:

1. How did the control of the Assyrian state change as the empire expanded?
2. What is distinctive about Assyrian royal building projects?

Lecture Twenty-Eight
Ideology of Empire

Scope: Throughout this course, we have seen Mesopotamian kings portrayed in several ways—as heroes, shepherds, lawgivers, deities, warriors, and equals with rulers in other states. Assyrian leaders shared many of these qualities, but we can isolate specific features of kingship that are unique to Assyria. No previous cultures promoted the idea that the ruler embodied the state in the way that the Assyrians did. Because much of the surviving evidence was either originally displayed in official or royal settings or authored by the king, our view is naturally skewed. Even if we compensate for this bias, however, the king is still the focal point of the state; thus, our analysis of Assyrian ideology centers on him. In this lecture, we will also survey the army, which played a major role in the spread of the Assyrian Empire. The memorable texts and images that we have encountered fit well into the interpretation that Assyrian representations of violence were created to frighten enemies into submission and keep potential rebels loyal. Attention to detail in the sculpture also gives evidence for weaponry and technology used at the time.

Outline

I. Before turning to the king, it will be helpful for us to understand the way that the Assyrian Empire was envisioned.

- **A.** Originally, in the Middle Assyrian period, the king ruled the land of Ashur, which was both the god and the capital city. The traditional idea of the city belonging to a god was intensified here because there were no other temples in Ashur.
- **B.** When the ambition and success of the Assyrian kings increased, in the era of Shalmaneser III, Ashur became a national god but retained the character of the city-god. Tribute paid to Assyrian kings was described as belonging to Ashur. The land of Ashur in the Middle Assyrian period corresponded roughly to the area of northern Mesopotamia.
- **C.** As the state grew, another term came into use to describe the greater extent of the empire: the lands "under the yoke of Ashur."
  1. Lands to the west, for example, were administered by provincial governors; the significant tribute that was levied on them was not to provide for the god Ashur but his human representative, the king.
  2. Often, this tribute included costlier and more exotic goods, such as horses, gold and silver, and ivory.
- **D.** By the Neo-Assyrian period, the provincial administration was in the hands of governors appointed by the king. One of the distinctive features of Assyrian administration is that the titles for most officials had their origin in military positions. The imperial bureaucracy became larger; positions were granted by the king as a reward for loyalty.

II. What sort of leader was necessary for this empire?

- **A.** Assyrian kings were chosen by the god Ashur and connected closely with him. The idea that Ashur wanted kings to expand his territory is found in a surviving coronation hymn.
- **B.** Texts describing annual campaigns led by the king tend to be embellishments; not every king fought every year, although they were personally involved in planning strategy for campaigns.
- **C.** Assyrian kings were not described as gods, although they were understood to be the mortals closest to the gods. Access to the king was limited, especially in comparison to such rulers as Hammurabi, but Assyrian subjects still benefited from kingship.
- **D.** The Assyrians linked temples and palaces in a single complex for the first time, creating a seamless union of the ruler and the gods. This aspect of city planning was adopted by later cultures as an effective way to join the two controlling powers in one location.

III. We have discussed specific scenes of the sculpted reliefs that decorated Assyrian palaces, but we will now consider the type as a whole.

A. Long panels of gypsum, a soft, light-colored stone, lined the walls of the public areas of palaces at Nimrud, Nineveh, and Dur-Sharukken. Royal activities, including fighting, hunting, and conducting religious rituals, are the subjects depicted.

B. The panels show action scenes, such as horses drawing chariots over dead enemies, along with static views, such as lines of deportees. Certain carvings, for example, those depicting Sennacherib (r. c. 704/705–681 B.C.) and Ashurbanipal (r. c. 668–627), pay close attention to the surrounding natural environment.

C. The art of Ashurnasirpal II's throne room was clearly arranged to convey key points.

1. Winged deities flank the doorway, protecting the king; they also appear on the dais on which the king's throne was placed.

2. The king himself is shown in one panel, standing by a sacred tree that symbolizes the abundance of the empire.

3. Along the sides of the room were images of lion hunts and battle scenes. Everywhere, the king has power over life and death.

D. Who was the audience for these representations?

1. The king would have received foreign ambassadors and the tribute they brought in the throne room. The depictions of his empire were meant to impress these emissaries and, if they happened to be from the conquered peoples, humiliate them.

2. The usual viewers would be the king's own people: military leaders, provincial governors, courtiers, and members of the elite.

IV. The figure of the Assyrian ruler is shown frequently in these reliefs.

A. The ruler wears a tall cap; his hair is long and curly, as is the beard that covers most of his face and falls to his chest. His clothing is ornate. Originally, the reliefs would have been painted to show such details in vivid color.

B. When a king is shown receiving tribute, he is usually seated on a throne, with his feet resting on a footstool, while everyone else stands or bows. In addition to the distinctions in clothing and posture, the king is set apart by his attendants.

C. Others in the scene wear clothing and jewelry that is less ornate; non-Assyrians have a variety of costumes and hairstyles.

D. Rulers in Mesopotamia had long depicted themselves as physically strong, and the Assyrian kings continued this tradition. Depictions of the king emphasize his bicep and calf muscles.

E. Ashurbanipal showed himself in several hunt scenes.

1. Lions and lionesses would have been brought to his hunting grounds and then released. The king would chase them down in a chariot, on horseback, or on foot.

2. Assyrian artists focused on the strength of these animals, as well as graphic illustrations of their deaths.

3. The king shows no emotion, neither pride nor fear and certainly not exhaustion, at the end of the hunt; this cool contrast to the animals (and humans) who are being slaughtered further reinforces the strength and superhuman power of the king.

F. As we have seen war was also a common subject in art, as in texts.

1. Reliefs from the palace of Sennacherib (the son of Sargon II) at Nineveh showed the siege of Lachish in southern Judah in 701 B.C. This campaign was the subject of most of the surviving panels in one room in Sennacherib's palace.

2. The Assyrian army pushes siege engines up huge ramps of earth, while defenders of the city try to repel the attack by throwing lit torches.

3. The artistic rendering of the battle at Lachish would be memorable enough, but there is additional evidence for the campaign. The impressive earthen siege ramps constructed by the Assyrians at Lachish have been discovered by archaeologists. A hard layer of stones, clay, and logs formed a foundation on which to push the siege engines against the city walls.

G. We have spoken about the callous attitude of the Assyrians toward their enemies, and this is evident in their art.

1. In an extraordinary panel in Ashurbanipal's palace, the king and his queen are enjoying an outdoor banquet. The peaceful setting shows trees and birds, the well-dressed royal couple, and the head of the king of Elam, Teumman, hanging from a branch.
2. The display of Teumman's head is a recurring motif in Ashurbanipal's reliefs. The Elamite king is shown running away from the Assyrian force on foot; he is captured and murdered, and his head is hung around a captured ally's neck.

V. How do we justify the Assyrians' seeming propensity for violence?

A. When Assyrian kings were victorious (as they always were in their official sources), they were described as bringing moral order to a region. Earlier, we encountered a related theme—that of a god or ruler bringing civilization or urbanization to a region.

B. This moral authority of Assyrian rulers was so intense that just looking at the king would bring his enemies to their knees.

C. Ashurbanipal's account of his victory against a rebellious tribe notes that after their defeat, the people wondered why such a disaster had befallen them; the answer was that they had been disloyal to Ashur and Ashurbanipal.

VI. There is no doubt that the king was central to all royal art, but the other frequent subject of palace reliefs and documents was the army. Assyrian soldiers were never depicted as injured or in any way harmed by an enemy, and it was rare for inscriptions to refer to Assyrian losses.

A. Men from all parts of the empire fought in the army, and deportees were sometimes assigned to duty. Certain provinces or client states supplied special troops.

B. Sieges, such as the one at Lachish, required significant manpower and supplies, and field battles were not as frequent as we might imagine. The Assyrians relied largely on intimidation to subdue potential enemies.

1. The humiliation and desecration of corpses was an important visual reminder of the army's effectiveness.
2. Just as the official texts of Assyrian campaigns listed the number of dead and deported, these scenes seem designed to break the spirit of any enemy even before it faced the Assyrian army.

VII. The Assyrian kings emerge in royal ideology as powerful, decisive men whose actions were approved by the national god.

A. They carried this authority with them onto the battlefield, although no sane man would challenge the ruler. Victory was assured, later to be carved in stone to inspire respect, fear, and pride in those who visited the king in his palace.

B. In the next lecture, we will see the end of the Assyrian Empire, which seemed to come unexpectedly. When Assyria was defeated, the armies that sacked its royal palaces hacked away the faces of the rulers on many of the relief sculptures we have discussed, enacting their own revenge against the great empire.

Essential Reading:

Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 BC*, pp. 505–546.

George Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, pp. 312–327.

Supplementary Reading:

A. Kirk Grayson, "Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia," in *CANE*, vol. II, pp. 959–968.

Questions to Consider:

1. It is not surprising to see the king featured so prominently in these royal palaces, but how is the Assyrian army in general celebrated?
2. What would the effect of these scenes be to visitors who saw them for the first time?
3. How does the interaction between moral right and military success help to justify Assyria's control of the empire?

Lecture Twenty-Nine
Control and Revolt

Scope: In this lecture, we will see Assyria firmly control an enormous region, from Mesopotamia to Egypt, in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C. Assyrian kings were largely successful as commanders and as sponsors of projects that displayed their empire throughout this territory. But certain trouble spots, especially in Babylonia, reveal weaknesses that contributed to the unexpected collapse of Assyria in the late 7th century. The longstanding practice of attempted conciliation with Babylonia ceased when Sennacherib, the successor of Sargon II, sacked, burned, and flooded the city of Babylon in 689 B.C. The Babylonians would take their revenge when they joined with a new power in Iran, the Medes, to attack Assyria and destroy its capital, Nineveh, in 612 B.C.

Outline

I. Sargon II had left a strong, well-trained army and a well-organized administration for his son and successor, Sennacherib (r. c. 704–681 B.C.). But his unlucky death in battle was considered to be a bad omen, and Sennacherib abandoned the new capital at Dur-Sharukken in favor of a Nineveh.

- **A.** In Syria-Palestine, the small states that Sargon had conquered began to revolt. Sennacherib was successful in putting down these revolts and capturing cities in Judah.
- **B.** Babylonia required almost constant attention from Assyrian rulers to establish security on the southern border. Creative methods of rule were applied to Babylonia. Sometimes, as in the reign of Sargon, it was ruled directly; sometimes, a supposedly loyal ruler was put in place there, but neither of these policies proved to be effective.
- **C.** The attraction of Babylonia was what had drawn people to the region originally: the fertile agricultural lands. In addition, now that the camel permitted desert trade, firm control of southern Mesopotamia was essential to connect the west with Iranian trade routes.
- **D.** Shortly after Sennacherib became king, Marduk-apla-iddina II declared himself king of Babylon. Sennacherib forced Marduk-apla-iddina to take refuge in the marshes of the Sealand, then deported 208,000 people to Assyria. Marduk-apla-iddina returned a few years later but was again forced to escape, this time to Elam, where he later died.

II. The Elamites in Iran were allied closely with the Babylonians, and this, even more than the tenuous hold that Assyria had in Babylonia, could have convinced Sennacherib that he had to concentrate on securing the region. The people of the Sealand, in the southern marshes, also joined with Babylonia to try to force out Assyria.

- **A.** In 699 B.C., Sennacherib put his son and heir, Ashur-nadin-shumi, on the throne in Babylon. The seeming stability of the region for a few years encouraged Sennacherib to attack the Elamites.
  - **1.** The Assyrians tried a new strategy of naval assault against Elam. In response, the Elamites moved against Babylon, captured Ashur-nadin-shumi, took him to Elam, and killed him (c. 694 B.C.).
  - **2.** This move sparked an extended conflict between Assyria and the united forces of Elam and Babylon.
- **B.** The Assyrians narrowly escaped disaster in 689 B.C., but that year, the king of Elam suffered a stroke, and Sennacherib was quick to take advantage of the situation. After a long siege, Sennacherib finally captured the city of Babylon and destroyed it by flood and fire.
- **C.** Given Babylon's status as the religious center of the region, this attack would have been utterly demoralizing and shocking. Sennacherib proudly recorded his triumph, but later sources (primarily Babylonian) denounced his actions strongly; Sennacherib's assassination eight years later by his own sons was seen as just retribution for his sacrilege.
- **D.** Sennacherib's successor, one of his younger sons, Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 B.C.), quickly undertook to rebuild the city of Babylon, perhaps an indication of his discomfort with his father's attack on the city.

III. We know more about Esarhaddon's early life than that of most rulers. He was a younger son of Sennacherib and Naqi'a, a favorite wife from Syria.

A. Esarhaddon was declared Sennacherib's heir after the sack of Babylon, even though Sennacherib had older sons. Plots were hatched against Esarhaddon, who was sent to Lebanon for his own safety.

1. The palace intrigue then shifted to parricide; Sennacherib was murdered by his sons. Esarhaddon returned to Ashur but faced significant challenges in the form of revolts.

2. The extraordinary focus of the Assyrian state on the king required a smooth transition to sustain the idea of divine order and moral authority; when the succession was difficult, ramifications were felt throughout the state.

B. Esarhaddon sought to restore Babylon, but any royal act needed divine sanction. Sennacherib had decreed that Marduk had decided to abandon his city for 70 years; thus, Esarhaddon had to provide an explanation for his decision to rebuild earlier.

C. After construction began, Esarhaddon married a Babylonian woman to help create a stronger bond with the region. The restoration of the city was not completed until after Esarhaddon's death, but his attentions to the region were relatively successful.

D. Esarhaddon had other unresolved issues to tackle—chiefly, revenge against his brothers for his father's murder. They had fled north to the Taurus Mountains near Urartu to the land of Shubria; the king who provided sanctuary for them came to regret his decision.

E. Esarhaddon's military exploits compare well with those of his father and grandfather; he is best known for his campaigns against Egypt.

1. Before he set out against Egypt, he tried to ensure a peaceful succession and made his oldest son Shamash-shuma-ukin the king of Babylonia and Ashurbanipal, a younger son, ruler over the empire.

2. This scenario did not represent equal rule, because Ashurbanipal was the designated heir, but it probably reassured the Babylonians that they would have strong representation in the Assyrian court.

F. The internal stability of Assyria during Esarhaddon's rule allowed him to move farther west. He led two invasions of Egypt; the second, in 671 B.C., was successful and added Egypt to the Assyrian Empire for a brief period.

G. Esarhaddon died while en route to Egypt in 669 B.C. to put down a revolt there.

1. Several lunar and solar eclipses took place during Esarhaddon's rule. These bad omens prompted Esarhaddon to require loyalty oaths and even to place a substitute king on the throne to attract the evil spirits.

IV. Ashurbanipal (r. c. 668–c. 627 B.C.), whose letters we read from the palace at Nineveh, was the last Assyrian king. The fall of the Assyrian Empire follows his long and largely successful reign.

A. Esarhaddon's plan to secure the succession worked well. The frequent loyalty oaths he required, especially from Babylonia, where the elder son, Shamash-shuma-ukin, was king, helped to create a smooth transition.

1. After 17 years, however, Shamash-shuma-ukin began to plot against his brother with the rulers of the subject states in the west, the Elamites, and the Chaldaeans.

2. Ashurbanipal discovered the alliance and marched against his brother. After three years, Shamash-shuma-ukin immolated himself in his palace at Babylon.

3. A new Babylonian king, Kandalanu, then appears in the king list. The theory that this is a Babylonian name for Ashurbanipal is unproven.

B. Ashurbanipal followed this victory with an expedition against Elam, in which he sacked the capital city, Susa, in western Iran. It was in this invasion that Ashurbanipal took the head of Teumman, the king of Elam, depicted in the Garden Party panel of the Assyrian's palace.

C. Assyrian control of Egypt was always tenuous, and the main method of control was to impose harsher rule and increased tribute.

D. Even with the loss of Egypt, several key opponents of Assyria had been removed; thus, it seems even more surprising to see the state collapse. The official records of Assyria stop in 639 B.C., although Ashurbanipal lived until at least 631 and perhaps until 627 B.C. He had named a successor, but this ruler faced an immediate challenge by another son and did not take the throne for a few years. It is difficult to reconstruct events in Assyria after 639; the historical record shifts to Babylonia.

V. Babylonia became independent from Assyrian control after the death of Ashurbanipal. Kandalanu also seems to have died around 627.

A. A local ruler, probably an Assyrian official, Nabopolassar (r. 626–605 B.C.) then took the throne of Babylon. He had to defend himself against local rebellions, but by 616, Nabopolassar had successfully met these challenges and created a strong, unified state in southern Mesopotamia.

B. By 616 B.C., Babylonia was strong enough to lead a successful attack on Assyria with the aid of a new Iranian state, Media, which replaced Elam as the main rival against Assyria. In 612 B.C., the Babylonians and the Medes destroyed the Assyrian capital at Nineveh, and the Assyrian Empire had collapsed completely by 610 B.C.

C. The causes for Assyria's quick fall must have included internal instability, as well as the external attacks by Babylon and Media. Without records from Assyria, it is difficult to determine the reasons for the sudden collapse of the empire, but certain features of Assyrian rule could have become increasingly problematic.

1. Tribute was a mainstay of the Assyrian economy. One of the reasons for the aggressive expansion of Assyria centuries earlier may have been to gain plunder and tribute. For the subject states, Assyrian demands were a heavy burden, as evidenced by the many revolts they undertook despite their fear of the Assyrian army.

2. Putting down these rebellions in the provinces would be costly in terms of manpower and other resources. The Assyrians could not abandon Babylonia, for example, because it was too close to Assyria and too profitable. Further, there were real threats from the supporters of Babylon to the west.

3. Centuries of deportation may also have meant that many in the empire were not especially loyal, and this may have caused smaller-scale rebellions in Assyrian cities that were not recorded.

VI. Assyria's contributions as an empire and as a culture are never discussed by ancient authors. The militarism of the Assyrian state further complicates modern assessments because we are uncomfortable with the level of violence we see in official records.

A. The Assyrians did create a massive empire and changed the ethnic makeup of Mesopotamia through population transfer. Assyrian rulers sought to collect knowledge and art from their lands, in addition to tribute.

B. The best way to think about the Assyrians may be through their successors, the Persians, who will be the subject of the next few lectures.

C. This Iranian group could have imposed their own culture, but instead, they took up many aspects of Assyrian life. They adopted (and even exceeded) the scale of the Assyrian Empire and many of the administrative and ideological tools created by the Assyrians.

D. Through their invasions of Greece, the Persians became the Near Eastern culture with the closest contacts with the West; thus, their appropriation of Assyrian ways is a crucial link between East and West.

Essential Reading:

Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, pp. 292–347.

Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC*, pp. 222–252.

Questions to Consider:

1. How significant do you think the centuries of Babylonian rebellion were to the fall of the Assyrian state?

2. What sorts of demands on resources from these revolts would be most damaging to the internal structure of the Assyrian state?

Lecture Thirty
Medes and the Neo-Babylonian State

Scope: After the destruction of the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, Nabopolassar, the king of Babylon, announced that he had thrown off the "heavy yoke" of the Assyrians. Nabopolassar accomplished this with the aid of the Medes, a tribal people from the central Zagros Mountains. The success of the Medes was short-lived; in 550 B.C., they were overthrown by the Persians. Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar II (also known as Nebuchadrezzar), embarked on several campaigns to enforce Babylonian rule in the west; the Old Testament memorializes his destruction of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Although the Babylonian king achieved his political and military goals, he was even more ambitious in his building program in Babylonia. It was at this time that Babylonia was rebuilt and became a wonder admired by visitors from across the Near East and the Mediterranean world.

Outline

I. The Medes were a mountainous tribal people who, in the late 7th century, allied with the new Babylonian king, Nabopolassar, to defeat the Assyrians.

A. Before this time, the Medes were known as one of the many peoples who owed tribute to the Assyrians. Media lay on the overland route that brought lapis lazuli, among other goods, from the East.

1. Little evidence survives to inform us about the organization of the Median state, but until the 7th century, it probably consisted of several small regions within Media, each with its own leader.

2. Although the Medes originally appeared in the tribute lists, by the time of Esarhaddon, the Assyrian king was concerned about their growing strength.

B. After the defeat of Assyria, the Medes advanced into Anatolia; a battle between the Medes and an Anatolian kingdom, Lydia, was notable for a solar eclipse that stopped the fighting between the two armies on May 28, 585 B.C. The battle ended in a truce, but the land now controlled by the Medes reached from Iran to the Mediterranean in Turkey. By 550, however, the Median Empire was defeated by the Persians.

C. This somewhat sparse historical outline comes to us from relatively recent archaeological excavations.

D. Three sites, dating to the 7th century, represent Median settlements.

1. At Godin Tepe, archaeologists uncovered a building with strongly fortified walls. Within this structure are two halls, one with eight rows of columns and the other with 30.

2. The other two sites share this type of structure; all three sites were built with a view to defense.

3. The archaeological record shows a significant decline of Median settlements in the 6th century, just when the state was supposed to be at its height.

4. Columned halls are the most noticeable features of the palaces built by Persian rulers. The discovery of such architecture set off debate about the extent to which the Persians incorporated Median culture into their own.

E. Written evidence for the Median culture all comes from external texts.

1. Herodotus, a 5th-century Greek writer, supplies accounts of Near Eastern history that fit into his broader analysis of Greek customs and civic ideals, not necessarily with the political structure or goals of the Medes or the Persians.

2. In addition, biblical references describe some historical events, but the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians are usually presented in the Old Testament as the tools of Yahweh, sent to punish or reward the Jews or certain leaders for their relationship with their god.

F. These complications in the written sources carry over into our understanding of the material culture.

1. One theory proposed by scholars gives the Medes significant credit for influencing the Persians, but this is difficult to prove because of the imbalance in evidence.

2. Another theory asserts that the 7th-century archaeological remains show that the Medes flourished while they were subject to Assyria, rather than in the early stages of their own state.

G. What can be stated with certainty is that the Medes were justly feared by their contemporaries. Their joint assault with the Babylonians toppled the Assyrians, and their invasions of Anatolia disrupted the balance of power there.

II. In Babylonia, Nabopolassar was succeeded by his son Nebuchadnezzar II (r. c. 604–562), who stands as a notably successful general and builder.

A. When Nabopolassar died, his son was leading troops against the Egyptians in Syria. This region remained important for the same strategic reasons that had drawn the Assyrians: access to ports and the possibility of tribute. Further, Egypt was equally eager to control the region and would often join in or instigate rebellions against Babylonia.

B. Egypt had recently annexed Syria, but Nebuchadnezzar had won an important victory at Carchemish in 605. When his father died, he traveled back to Babylon to be crowned before returning to Syria.

C. Much of the evidence for Nebuchadnezzar's rule comes from biblical accounts that describe his attack on Judah.

D. Nebuchadnezzar installed a supposedly loyal ruler, Zedekiah, in Judah, but 11 years later, in 587 B.C., he, too, revolted. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city and deported most of the population back to Babylonia.

E. One of Nebuchadnezzar's most significant victories was his capture of the port city of Tyre in Phoenicia (modern Lebanon) after a 13-year siege.

F. The history of the last part of Nebuchadnezzar's rule is not well known, but the period after his death shows much turmoil. We will examine this period in the next lecture.

III. Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt Babylon, transforming it into the city that became famous far to the West when Greek visitors traveled there.

A. The 6th-century city on which Nebuchadnezzar lavished attention was uncovered by German archaeologists in the early 20th century.

B. The city was planned to survive an attack and to impress visitors who came to the many festivals and rituals for which Babylon was known.

C. One of the most impressive features of the city can be found in the two sets of defensive walls that surrounded Babylon.

1. The outer wall alone was composed of three separate walls that served as a road when the space between the walls was filled.

2. Later authors claimed that it was wide enough to enable chariots to turn around.

3. The 11-mile-long outer defensive wall surrounding the city greatly increased its limits. It is estimated that the population of Babylon was about 100,000, but more citizens could be protected within these walls.

D. The inner city contained the Esagila (the temple of Marduk) and other temples; at the center was the enormous ziggurat called "Etemenanki." Sennacherib had damaged the ziggurat in his attack on Babylon in 689; Nebuchadnezzar completed the restoration of this most visible monument. The foundations are approximately 300 square feet.

E. Next to the Etemenanki was the refurbished Esagila, which has not been completely excavated.

F. The structures of Babylon are remarkable, and they are displayed to their best advantage in the well-designed setting of the city.

1. The main streets are approximately 60 feet wide. The layout included a processional way paved with limestone that was used during the New Year festival.

2. This area of Babylon was also surrounded by a wall that served the city's defensive needs and was decorated with colorful glazed bricks.

3. This inner wall had eight gates, each named after a god. The Ishtar Gate, now in Berlin, is the best preserved.

G. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to build a significant palace for himself as a way to show the Babylonians that he intended to stay in their city.

1. Inscriptions describe the imported cedar and the gold, silver, and ivory decorations used in the construction of the palace.
2. The throne room alone was 50 by 166 feet and decorated with glazed bricks ornamented with animals.
3. The successors of Nebuchadnezzar, including Cyrus and Darius of Persia and Alexander the Great, all lived in this palace.

H. The famous hanging gardens described by Greek authors have never been identified, nor is it possible to reconstruct their appearance with any certainty.

1. They supposedly were built to remind Nebuchadnezzar's wife Amyitis, a Mede, of the lush mountainous regions of her homeland.
2. Diodorus, Strabo's near contemporary, explained that the Babylonians created a lead and reed cover for the walls to prevent the watering system from eroding the mudbrick walls of Babylon.
3. In general, Greek authors were fascinated by the engineering necessary to support the gardens and readily believed that the wealthy Eastern rulers could create such a miraculous setting.

IV. We know about the Medes from other cultures and from archaeology, but we have little information from their period of dominance.

A. We are far better informed about the Neo-Babylonian era and Nebuchadnezzar's enormously successful reign.

B. In the late 1980s, Saddam Hussein began to build a replica of Nebuchadnezzar's palace at Babylon.

Essential Reading:

Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 BC*, pp. 573–622.

Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC*, pp. 252–266.

Supplementary Reading:

Joan Oates, *Babylon*, pp. 144–160.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why do you think that the various dynasties discussed in this lecture, the Medes and the Babylonians, were unable to establish any lengthy control of this area?
2. How do we see religion playing a role in the political situations discussed?

Lecture Thirty-One
The Rise of the Achaemenids

Scope: Nabonidus (r. c. 555–539 B.C.), the last ruler of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, was an intriguing figure who behaved in unusual ways. He promoted the cult of the moon god Sin almost to the exclusion of other deities and moved the capital of Babylonia to an oasis in the Arabian Desert. These actions may have turned the Babylonians to a Persian king, Cyrus, who took Babylon in 539 B.C. Cyrus founded a dynasty that is perhaps best known for its attempt to conquer Greece in the 5th century. The Persians were an Iranian culture that, under Cyrus, moved far beyond the borders of Mesopotamia to reach the shores of the Mediterranean in Turkey and in Syria. They blended elements of earlier cultures to rule the empire and used a variety of communication systems, including a new language, coinage, and a road network, to control the area.

Outline

I. A chaotic succession resulted in Babylonia after Nebuchadnezzar's death, as witnessed by the fact that three rulers are listed in a six-year period, two of whom were assassinated.

A. The conspirators in the last plot put Nabonidus on the throne in 555 B.C.

B. Nabonidus's mother, Adad-Guppi, was from the city of Harran in northern Syria; she devoted much of her long life to the cult of the moon god Sin. According to her funeral stele, Sin had visited her in a dream and prophesied that her son would promote his cult. As a reward, Adad-Guppi writes that she lived a healthy life for 104 years.

C. This inscription also notes Nabonidus's devotion to the moon god, and indeed, his religious acts are among the most notable events in his reign.

1. He revived the custom of installing a daughter as a priestess of the moon goddess Nanna-Sin at Ur, claiming that he had discovered an ancient text instructing him to do so. He used this and references to the past to help place his actions in a historical (and justifiable) context.

D. In the third year of his rule, the king campaigned in Lebanon and northern Arabia and, in 552 B.C., decided to move his residence to a desert oasis at Teima in northern Arabia.

1. There was widespread worship of the moon god in this region, leading to speculation that the move was motivated by Nabonidus's religious beliefs.

2. Nabonidus left his son and successor, Belshazzar, as his regent in Babylon. The priests of Marduk interpreted this act as the abandonment of their god, but it could have been an attempt to control the trade routes that had opened across the desert.

3. Whatever the motivation, one result was that the New Year festival in Babylon could not be performed for the nine years that Nabonidus was absent. We should not underestimate the effects of this in creating a general uneasiness with his rule.

E. Nabonidus returned to Babylon after almost 10 years, probably because of a growing Persian threat. At this time, we can identify an extreme shift in his cultic loyalties: The temples of other gods, including the Esagila, were renamed for Sin.

F. Within a few years of Nabonidus's return, in 539, the Persians (under Cyrus) were able to capture Babylon; in doing so, they may have benefited from internal dissatisfaction. Nabonidus went into exile and disappeared from history. The book of Daniel in the Hebrew Bible describes Nebuchadnezzar as being driven into the wild, but this may be a misapplication of Nabonidus's history.

II. Sources for the Persian Empire, also known as the Achaemenid Empire after the legendary 6th-century founder Achaemenes, are typically vague on the rise of this new power, centered in southern Iran. The first historical Persian ruler was Cyrus (r. c. 559–530 B.C.), who defeated the Medes, then pushed east to capture Babylonia and the empire controlled by Babylon.

A. Our main source for the Persian Empire is Herodotus, a 5th-century Ionian Greek known as the father of history.

1. Herodotus explicitly notes in his introduction that the purpose of his long history is to explain the reasons for the Persian invasions of Greece in 490 and 480.
2. We will consider his biases later, but we should note a few caveats here. Herodotus claimed to have traveled widely but probably did not visit all the countries that he lists. He did consult official records, and in some cases, we have accounts that corroborate the history of Herodotus.
3. Herodotus was quite intrigued by different customs. His history gives some evidence for social practices, but these are the most challenging sections, containing wild exaggeration and cultural misconceptions.
4. His goal was not to write an unbiased historical narrative but to explain events using concepts that a Greek audience would understand.

B. Herodotus offers a vivid account of Cyrus's childhood, setting out recognizable motifs of an abandoned infant whose natural leadership strengths are revealed at a young age. In this instance, Cyrus was the legitimate child of a royal princess, but his grandfather, Astyages, the king of the Medes, ordered that the infant be exposed because he feared an omen predicting that Cyrus would overthrow him.

C. A shepherd and his wife reared Cyrus, who quickly became a leader of the village children and garnered the attention of the court, where indeed, he overthrew his grandfather to take the throne. As with the stories of the miraculous rescue of Sargon of Akkad, the story is likely exaggerated, but in contrast, Cyrus had a legitimate claim to the throne.

D. After taking the throne of Media, Cyrus turned west and attacked the kingdom of Lydia.

1. At the time, Lydia was ruled by Croesus, a king whose fate was a matter of great interest to the Greeks.
2. Croesus was defeated and captured by Cyrus in about 547 B.C., but, according to Herodotus, became an advisor to Cyrus.

III. Cyrus battled for the next several years to the east of the Persian heartland, and we encounter him again in his march on Babylon in 539.

A. Cyrus's version of this conquest is preserved in a clay cylinder found in Babylon and now in the British Museum. The first part of the text relates the offenses of Nabonidus, which angered Marduk, who then ordered Cyrus to go to Babylon.

B. The Cyrus cylinder lists the benefits of his rule.

1. First, he restored the worship of Marduk; then, "the inhabitants of Babylon…I allowed them to find rest from their exhaustion; their servitude I loosened."
2. This fits well with past royal declarations, but the claim is overstated, as is Cyrus's assertion that he took the region without contest.

C. With the conquest of Babylon and treaties established in Syria and Palestine, Cyrus controlled Persia, Media, Babylonia, Assyria, Lydia, Syria, and Palestine.

1. The Persian rule in the Levant is described in the Old Testament in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Cyrus is characterized as a benevolent ruler who allowed deported Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.
2. Cyrus continued to campaign in the latter years of his rule; Herodotus reports that he died while pursuing additional conquests in central Asia.

IV. We will spend the next few lectures studying the Persian Empire; at this point, we will look ahead to get a sense of how the Persians governed their lands.

A. A hallmark of Persian culture is that it tended to blend together aspects of other cultures, such as art, administration, and language, from the past and present.

B. In general, the Persians were tolerant of local traditions, religions, and even the ruling elite. If the provinces paid taxes, remained loyal, and performed military services when necessary, they were left alone by the Persian king. The local elite usually maintained their high positions, and we see evidence of their cooperation in the variety of political organization throughout the empire.

C. The Persians were open to established systems of agriculture, although they were careful to control access to water to ensure that the provinces supplied the necessary taxes.

D. A new system of provincial rule divided regions into *satrapies*, which were assigned taxes to support the empire and the local rulers. Small groups of texts have been recovered from scattered sites throughout the empire. Because the evidence is incomplete, we must be cautious about attributing uniform governance to the empire.

1. The king assigned a *satrap*, or governor, to command both the military and political aspects of a satrapy. Satraps were usually members of the Persian elite or belonged to the royal family. We know that satraps could adjudicate local disputes, but we are not sure that this was a universal prerogative.

2. Satraps lived in capital cities, each of which had a treasury and archives.

3. The benefits of rule included extensive land grants to the satraps. Other Persian elites or royal favorites were also given land. These large estates were sometimes protected by small private armies.

4. Satraps maintained contact with the king using a messenger system that expanded the Assyrian road network created centuries earlier.

E. Coinage was introduced in the 6th century B.C. as a way for the king to ensure payment for his armies in distant provinces. Coins were stamped with images of the king and, thus, can be understood as an especially effective means of communication between a ruler and his troops.

1. Even after coins came into use, they were reserved for large sums paid to the state, not for transactions among private individuals.

2. The iconography of the gold coins often shows the king in the traditional pose of an archer, but the images were not standardized.

F. The Persians did not have to face the persistent revolts in their satrapies that earlier empires did. Egypt would prove to be troublesome, but otherwise, the state was notably quiet in comparison to the Assyrian or even the Babylonian regimes.

V. Neo-Babylonian rulers defeated Assyria and essentially took over its empire. A shift in the tone of the royal accounts stresses their constructive activities, but there is no question that they supported these projects with plunder, tribute, and deportations in the same way that the Assyrians had.

A. After a long period of invasions and war in southern Mesopotamia, this native rule allowed the infrastructure to be rebuilt and restored productivity to the region. Nabonidus, with his attention to the moon god, is an anomaly; his behavior caused offense in Babylon and could have smoothed the way for Cyrus.

B. Cyrus offers an impressive example as a founder of a new empire. His success in battle is demonstrated by his swift capture, first, of Media; then, of Anatolia; and with his march on Babylonia, the incorporation of territory west to the Mediterranean. His unusually favorable reputation is a result of Nabonidus's radical behavior and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. With Cyrus, we begin to get a sense of what aspects of Persian kingship will be idealized.

C. Cyrus's son Cambyses succeeded him without immediate challenge and eagerly turned to annex Egypt. One of the few threats to dynastic control occurred while he was away, when a rival noble, Darius, took part in an intricate conspiracy to seize the throne. Darius succeeded, but after this coup, royal succession remained secure until the end of the Persian Empire.

Essential Reading:

Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*.

Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 BC*, pp. 656–670.

Supplementary Reading:

Herodotus, *The Histories*, Books I and III.

Questions to Consider:

1. How did the administrative changes instituted by the Persians suit the needs of this extensive empire?

2. How do we assess the Persian kings through the lens of Greek sources?

Lecture Thirty-Two
Persians in Egypt and Greece

Scope: Cyrus's son Cambyses had a short rule, most of which was spent in Egypt trying to annex and secure control of that wealthy and ancient culture. Upon his death, a Persian nobleman, Darius, took the throne in a palace coup, the details of which Darius recorded in an inscription carved on a mountain at Behistun (or Bisitun). In 490 B.C., Darius crossed the Hellespont and invaded Greece in what was likely an attempt to gain access to the resources of Europe. A campaign so far from the heartland of Persia had significant logistical hurdles to overcome, and that, combined with a strong defense of their homeland by the Greeks, resulted in the defeat of the Persian army at Marathon. This loss had few ramifications in Persia, where Darius ruled for another four years.

Outline

I. The short reign of Cambyses (529–522 B.C.), who succeeded his father, Cyrus, was consumed with a major attack against Egypt.

- **A.** Herodotus relates Cambyses's reign, but the exaggerated image of Cambyses in the history displayed him as an insane, tyrannical ruler whom the gods punished for his sacrilegious acts.
  - **1.** The historian writes that he visited Egypt and, while traveling there, learned about Cambyses. He may have encountered individuals exceptionally hostile to the Persians.
  - **2.** Cambyses fares better in the Egyptian sources, which include an account by an Egyptian commander who was well treated after the Persians took Egypt.
- **B.** There is some indication that Egypt was moving against Persian control in Syria and may have been plotting with other states in the West. We also know that Cambyses spent years preparing for the invasion of Egypt. He created a navy and met with desert tribes to plot the route that his army would take across the desert.
- **C.** The Persians deployed their navy well, defeated the Egyptians on the Nile, and retained their hold on Egypt until the 4th century B.C. Shortly afterward, Cambyses died on his return to Persia to put down a palace rebellion.

II. One of the few native Persian historical sources for the era is the Behistun (Bisitun) Decree, an autobiographical account of the accession of Darius (r. c. 521–486 B.C.) to the throne of Persia after the death of Cambyses. This source relates a complicated plot to seize the throne and offers one instance where the history of Herodotus accords well with another account.

- **A.** The decree was carved onto the rock of Mt. Behistun in Iran.
  - **1.** Recall that this text allowed Henry Rawlinson to decipher cuneiform because it reports Darius's story in three languages: Elamite, Akkadian, and Old Persian.
  - **2.** The decree also notes the use of Aramaic, and remarkably, a fragment of the Aramaic version of the Behistun Decree has been discovered in Egypt.
- **B.** Darius first lists his ancestry, which he assures us goes back to Achaemenes, then claims that he entered into the conspiracy only because Cambyses had murdered his brother Gaumata (Herodotus calls him Smerdis) before leaving for Egypt.
- **C.** The rest of the inscription listed the numerous revolts that Darius put down after he became king. Several of these revolts involved regions that supported either the imposter or the true heir.
- **D.** The rebellions lead us to suspect that it was widely known that Darius had no right to the throne, but his successful control of these threats would have impressed ancient viewers as a demonstration of his strength.
- **E.** The location of the Behistun Decree, carved on the mountainside high above ground level, with no visible access to the scene, gives the impression of divine or superhuman powers; this is a new way for the ruler to display his power and control.

III. One of the collections of administrative texts from the Persian Empire was found at Persepolis, the palace that Darius built and where he and his son Xerxes lived. These tablets date to the early 5th century.

A. Only 2,000 of the 30,000 tablets found have been translated. In these, we see aspects of the royal bureaucracy, such as ration lists and lists of goods given in kind for services to the *kurtash* (male and female workers), officials, and courtiers.

B. The thriving private merchant trade witnessed in these tablets contradicts the belief of Greek authors that the Persians did not engage in commerce.

C. The tablets also record travel expenses of various officials.

D. Goods allocated to the priests of various cults give us evidence for the deities common at the time.

1. Ahuramazda, the Wise Lord, was the god who helped Darius achieve the throne and was an important deity to Persian rulers. Ahuramazda was the chief deity of Zoroastrianism, named after the prophet Zarathustra or Zoroaster, who lived around 600 B.C.

2. The god Ahuramazda offered truth and virtue in opposition to a universal lie. This language is similar to that Darius used in the Behistun Decree; there, the imposter lied to his people, but Darius restored justice.

3. Some hints of the worship of Ahuramazda are contemporary with the Achaemenids, including numerous receipts for monthly rations that were likely designated for sacrifices to Ahuramazda.

IV. Written sources for the rest of the Persian Empire come mostly from Greece and the Old Testament; we know virtually nothing about Persian political or military actions elsewhere in the empire.

A. One of the many uprisings that Darius had to face in his reign occurred on the western coast of Turkey in Ionia in 499 B.C. The causes are unknown, but this may have been a rebellion against Persian demands for tribute or even the result of internal political disputes into which the Persians had been drawn.

B. Greek settlers had emigrated to Ionia in the 7th century B.C. This connection helps to explain the Greeks' political and cultural awareness of the Persians.

C. In 499 B.C. a small contingent of ships was sent by Athens and Eretria to aid their fellow Greeks in their revolt against the Persians.

1. This support was not enough to make a difference, but it may have been a convenient excuse for the Persians to justify their attack on Greece later on.

2. The Ionian revolt failed, although the rebels burned the capital of the satrapy in Sardis. Herodotus writes that when Darius learned that Sardis had been burned during the revolt, he vowed to punish the Athenians.

D. Herodotus explains the invasion of Europe by the Persians in 490 B.C. as Darius's personal revenge against Athens and Eretria for their aid in the revolt in Asia Minor. The real motivation for Persian interest in Greece remains unknown; the incentive may have been to gain tribute, to expand the empire, or to increase Persian power.

E. Before dispatching his army, Darius sent emissaries to many Greek states to demand their surrender, and many acceded, although not enough to ward off the invasion.

1. Darius sent several hundred ships to sail under the command of two Persian nobles. The fact that the king did not accompany the invasion has been interpreted to mean that Greece was not of great strategic importance to the Persians.

2. The first fleet sank off the coast of northern Greece, but the following year, another navy was sent that landed 20 miles north of Athens near the seaside town of Marathon.

3. The Greeks were confronted with an army of enormous size. On their side, the Greeks also faced many difficulties, including disunity among their commanders and the earlier capitulation of many Greek states. Up to the last minute, several Greek states were ready to surrender.

F. The topography of the battle site meant that the Persians could not exploit their numerical advantage fully. According to Herodotus, the Persians lost 6,400 men in the battle, in contrast to a mere 192 Athenian dead. The Athenian losses are confirmed in other sources, but the Persian casualties seem exceptionally high.

G. The significance of the battle for the Greeks, especially the Athenians, was that they were able to inflict a major defeat on the largest army that had ever attacked them. This military encounter had little effect on the Persians, but it was a moment of great importance for the Greeks.

H. Herodotus reports Darius's fury at the news of defeat. He supposedly began depleting his empire to create another force to conquer Greece but had to set that project aside to handle a revolt in Egypt. Darius died in 486 B.C.

V. Despite suppressing the revolts that accompanied his conspiracy to rule, Darius was not an especially successful military commander in comparison to Cyrus or earlier rulers.

A. Darius demonstrated great skill, however, at administration, as we will see when we return to the tablets from his palace at Persepolis, which give us a glimpse into what it took to maintain an empire of this size.

B. The Greek version of the Persian invasions dominated the European imagination, especially the notion of a small force defeating a great one.

C. In the next lecture, we will study the second Persian attack on Greece and meet the mercurial leader Xerxes. Herodotus's characterization of Xerxes made him the stereotype of the Eastern tyrannical ruler.

Essential Reading:

Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book VI.

Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 BC*, pp. 670–701.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the location and placement of the Behistun Decree illustrate specifically Persian ways of representing the ruler?

2. What stereotypes of Easterners can we see in the Greek version of their encounter with the Persians?

Lecture Thirty-Three
Xerxes's Invasion of Greece

Scope: A decade after Darius's invasion, his son Xerxes (r. 486–465 B.C.) launched a second expedition against the Greeks, this time with the king himself leading the army. Once again, the Greeks united to defeat the Persians on land and sea. Although this setback had little effect on the Persian Empire, which flourished for another 150 years, it was a turning point for the Greeks, especially the Athenians, whose cultural and political achievements reached their height in the aftermath of the Persian invasions. Most of this lecture will be taken up with Herodotus's characterization of Xerxes, which is more complete than his descriptions of other kings. Greek authors compared the Greeks and Persians as representative of democratic versus tyrannical modes of life. Xerxes's reputation also suffers from the account of the Persian king in the Old Testament. Although the historicity of the book of Esther is questioned, Xerxes is generally believed to be the king Ahasuerus, who chose the beautiful Jewish woman as one of his wives. Such texts had an enormous impact on later generations, who interpreted Mesopotamian culture along these highly exaggerated lines. In this lecture, we will study both Herodotus and the Bible to explore what messages the authors intended to convey, then focus on a few episodes in both to extract some Persian traditions.

Outline

I. Herodotus's portrayal of Xerxes stresses his emotional, unpredictable moods; his wealth; and the women at the Persian court. The last of these topics is addressed even before Xerxes takes the throne.

- **A.** Herodotus writes that when Darius was in the midst of planning his second attack on Greece (which was never carried out), he became concerned about his succession.
  - **1.** Darius had three sons by his first wife; Xerxes was the eldest son by another wife, Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus.
  - **2.** When Darius had to choose his heir, Xerxes suggested that because he had been born after Darius became king, he was the legitimate heir.
- **B.** Women in Greece had no political influence, and Herodotus's accounts of women's influence at the Persian court would have been unthinkable to the Greeks.
  - **1.** Herodotus undermines Xerxes's authority from the outset, painting a picture of a ruler who was destined to be weak.
  - **2.** Herodotus pairs this story at the end of his history with an account of Xerxes enmeshed in a love triangle with his brother's wife. Thus, Herodotus's first and last images of Xerxes show him surrounded by women, not generals or advisors.

II. Xerxes suppressed the revolt in Egypt that began before his father's death; then, two other rebellions broke out in Babylonia. Once these challenges had been resolved, Xerxes turned back to Greece.

- **A.** Herodotus relates a council meeting held by Xerxes with his advisors in which he announces his intentions to attack Greece.
- **B.** According to Herodotus, the sycophantic general Mardonius assured Xerxes that "the Greeks wage war in an extremely stupid fashion." Another councillor, Xerxes's uncle Artabanus, cautioned that a campaign against the Greeks would not be so easy.
- **C.** Xerxes's plan was to collect an even greater army to overwhelm the Greeks; its size would both intimidate many Greek states into surrendering and ensure victory.
  - **1.** This second invasion of Greece in 480 B.C. represented a concerted effort on behalf of the Persians to gain Greek territory.
  - **2.** Herodotus recorded that an army of more than 2 million men marched against the Greeks, but this figure is greatly exaggerated. Modern estimates range from 40,000 to 100,000 Persian soldiers.
- **D.** Herodotus also gives us some insight into the logistics and engineering feats necessary to transport such an enormous army, information that he could have gleaned from Persian sources.
  - **1.** Xerxes ordered a pontoon bridge built across the Hellespont so that his army could walk from Asia to Europe.

2. Xerxes's other logistical feat was a canal dug across the Athos peninsula in northern Greece. Traces of this canal have been identified.

E. Herodotus passes on many stories about Xerxes's temper, often ending with the murder of an innocent victim.

1. The story of a Lydian man, Pythius, is one example. He had contributed money to Xerxes's campaign, but when he asked that his eldest son be exempted from service, Xerxes became enraged.
2. Xerxes's reaction would have seemed arbitrary and despotic to the Greeks, who had largely rejected monarchical forms of government by this date.

III. Many areas of Greece surrendered to the Persians even before military engagement, just as they had a decade earlier. The defense of Greece lay with the Athenians and Spartans.

A. The first major encounter between the Greeks and Persians occurred at Thermopylae in central Greece, the site of a narrow pass that opened into southern Greece.

B. The Spartans undertook the defense of this pass. Leonidas, the Spartan king, knew that he would lose against the overwhelming force of the Persian troops, but he launched the suicidal attack to permit the rest of the Greeks to gain time and additional troops.

C. One of Xerxes's spies saw the Spartans' preparations for battle, which included exercising naked and combing their hair.

D. The Persians were given information about a secret pass that would permit them to surround the Greeks. When Leonidas learned that the Persians knew about the pass at Thermopylae, he sent away most of his army, leaving 300 Spartans to fight in one of the most famous battles in Greek history, one that has become a model for heroic sacrifice in Western thought.

E. After Thermopylae, the Persians moved into southern Greece and sacked Athens, but the Greek navy met and defeated the Persian navy off the coast of Athens.

F. Xerxes left Mardonius in charge of the army and returned to Persia. The following year, the Persian army met the Greeks at Plataia in Greece, where Mardonius was killed. The Persian troops then returned to Asia; like Darius's attack, Xerxes's invasion is never discussed in the Persian sources.

IV. Xerxes attracted the attention of another culture—the Jews—and is presented in the book of Esther in the Old Testament.

A. This story, in which Xerxes is identified with Ahasuerus, provides the historical explanation for the Jewish festival of Purim.

1. In the story, the king sponsors a beauty contest, and Esther, a woman hiding her Jewish origins, wins and becomes a queen. A plot to kill Jews is hatched at the palace, and eventually, Esther's heritage is revealed.
2. The story is set in Susa and includes several passages that describe the Persian king's lavish lifestyle there.

B. Aspects of royal justice and custom are also embedded in these passages.

1. In one episode, Xerxes learns from the Babylonian Chronicles that the Jew Mordecai, Esther's cousin, had uncovered an assassination plot against Xerxes but had not been rewarded.
2. Xerxes rectifies the situation by granting Mordecai certain prerogatives of the king.
3. Other details about the dissemination of the king's decree ring true, as well.

V. We know that Xerxes completed his father's construction at Persepolis, but we have little other evidence for his rule until his death in 465, supposedly at the hands of one of his own sons. Artaxerxes (r. c. 465–424 B.C.) avenged his father's death and took the throne.

VI. Persia's attacks on Greece brought two highly developed cultures into contact with each other and continued a long process of interaction between East and West.

A. The Athenian playwright Aeschylus wrote a tragedy, *The Persians*, that imagined the reaction of the Persian court at Susa to the news of the unexpected defeat of the Persians.

B. Herodotus notes the massive amounts of gold that the Persian king and army brought with them on campaign.

1. The Greeks did not normally flaunt personal wealth, and Herodotus's tone suggests that the Persians' taste for luxury made them effeminate and less skilled as military commanders.
2. The Greeks used a tenth of the Persian goods they captured to cast a gold tripod that stood on a bronze column base at the sanctuary of Delphi.

C. The historical accounts of Xerxes's reign were passed down to Western culture and were instrumental in generating the idea that Eastern decadence was partially responsible for the Persians' defeat.

Essential Reading:

Herodotus, *The Histories*, Books VIII and IX.

John Curtis and N. Tallis, eds., *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia*.

Supplementary Reading:

George Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars: The Failure of Persia*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do the Greeks misunderstand the behavior of the Persian king?
2. Why would the Greeks think that wealth undermined the military skills of the Persians?

Lecture Thirty-Four
Persian Art and Culture

Scope: In the past few lectures, we have seen how the East and West interacted and explored the ways in which Eastern ideas were received by the West. In this lecture, we will look at art as a vehicle of communication between these two cultures and see that a combination of different artistic styles created something identifiable as Achaemenid. Earlier in the course, we discussed the Assyrian employment of foreign artisans and their "international style." This differs from what we will see in Persian art; the Assyrians created an impression of blended style from displaying finished pieces together. In Persian art, the intermingling of styles and motifs is present in the newly created object itself. To illustrate this point, we will consider an array of artifacts, moving from small seal stones to massive palace architecture.

Outline

I. As we have seen with earlier empires, the Persian bureaucracy used cylinder seals as the equivalent of a signature for administrative records.

- **A.** On the Persian seals, the most frequent scene shows combat between a hero and a pair of animals. This was also a favorite image on some of the earliest surviving cylinder seals.
- **B.** A seal now in the British Museum adopted a standard Neo-Assyrian scene: A king, perhaps Darius but definitely one of the Achaemenids, hunts lions from a chariot. The Persian addition to this imagery is the representation of Ahuramazda as a winged disk floating above the hunt.
- **C.** Other seals show that by the time of the Persians, aspects of many cultures of the Near East were well known. Egyptian and Phoenician motifs are not uncommon and can appear with Mesopotamian subjects.

II. We have spoken at some length about the Greeks' wonder at Persian wealth, and we have some pieces that attest to their luxury, although very few of these were recovered in secure excavations.

- **A.** A collection of gold jewelry and cups called the Oxus Treasure is now housed in the British Museum; it may represent a gathering of votive offerings from a temple. The collection is named after the spot where it was supposedly found, on the banks of the Oxus River in Tadjikistan.
- **B.** The treasure was recovered around 1880 by a British officer after a group of merchants traveling in Afghanistan reported that they had been attacked and robbed.
- **C.** The Oxus Treasure includes about 150 rings, clothing ornaments, and pieces of jewelry, as well as coins. Many of these pieces resemble other known objects, but a small gold model of a horse-drawn chariot with two figures is exceptional.
- **D.** One challenge for interpreting the Oxus Treasure is that many of the objects date from different eras. The collection may consist of offerings from a temple that were buried during some crisis for safekeeping.

III. Metal drinking vessels, in gold, silver, and bronze, are characteristic of Persian elite culture.

- **A.** Typical vessel shapes include the *rhyton*, a curved drinking horn that tapers to form an animal shape, such as a stag, griffin, bull, or horse, and the small, shallow bowl called a *phiale*, often decorated with men in Achaemenid dress.
- **B.** Although the potential for research on these vessels is severely limited by the lack of archaeological context, the gold and silver drinking cups are tangible examples of what we see the tribute bearers bring to the Persian king on the stone sculpture in royal palaces.

IV. Turning to permanent monuments, we can gain even more insight into the Achaemenid style. We have already examined one such monument for its text, the Behistun Decree, which documented the accession of Darius I.

- **A.** The 10-by-18-foot engraved inscription and relief adds specifically Persian elements to several cultural and artistic motifs that we have seen earlier in the course.
  - **1.** The concept of a sculpted relief carved into rock had been known in Iran since the 3rd millennium B.C. A relief from that period of a local Iranian ruler, Annubanini, shows the king stepping on a defeated enemy, just as Darius does in the Behistun relief.

2. The Darius and Annubanini monuments quote the imagery of the Akkadian ruler Naram-Sin, who showed himself climbing over the bodies of his enemies, the Lullubi.
3. We may contrast this imagery with that of the Assyrian kings, who were shown in battle or seated on a throne, while the defeated leaders were brought before them.
4. Darius likely chose this archaic mode of representation to help validate his claim to the throne through his military success. One of the important features of the decree is the representation of Ahuramazda, the supreme deity of the Persians, whose presence would highlight the divine approval of Darius.
5. Darius is shown about life-size and larger than the rest of the figures, who include both supporters and rebels.

B. Darius also chose this style of rock-cut monument for his tomb, which was carved into the cliff face at Naqsh-i Rustem, near Persepolis.

1. The monument shows a large, cross-shaped relief cut into the rock. As he had done at Behistun, Darius made it seem as if this monument could not have been created by mortals; the base of the lowest part of the façade was 50 feet above ground level.
2. At the top of the scene, Darius stands on a platform before a fire altar and the god Ahuramazda. Below this, the platform is supported by individuals representing the different regions controlled during Darius's reign.
3. A text carved into the rock face was copied by Xerxes. Both of these set out the kingly ideals of justice and self-control.

V. The four capitals of the Persian Empire—Susa, Ecbatana, Pasargadae, and Persepolis—included palaces that were lavishly decorated with sculpture.

A. Persian rulers traveled between the different capitals according to season, moving from the moderate region near Susa in the winter to the cooler climate of Ecbatana in the summer. This progression of travel would allow the king to display himself to his people.

B. The Persians themselves did not have a tradition of monumental architecture; thus, these palaces combine aspects of many different architectural and sculptural styles. In general, the palaces are huge, built on platforms to stand above the plain or surrounding structures.

C. Darius I founded the capital at Persepolis as a new center for royal displays during important events. The palaces at Persepolis, the best preserved royal capital, are situated on a raised terrace that rose more than 40 feet above the surrounding plain. The terrace was 1,400 by 1,000 feet and was faced with stone sculpture.

D. An inscription by Darius on the side of the platform promotes the idea that the Persian Empire is crafted from people of many different regions who are united into one. The Persians use the great size and diversity of their empire as a way to justify their divine right to control this territory.

E. Persian architecture and sculpture is colossal in scale; the columns could be more than 60 feet tall and were topped with a variety of decorations at the capital, often some form of animal figures.

1. These animals, bulls, lions, or griffins, are typical Anatolian and Mesopotamian figures and serve as another example of the adoption of different artistic styles by the Persians.
2. Egyptian motifs, such as lotus-blossom capitals, were also used at Persepolis with some frequency.

F. The Apadana, the largest palace at Persepolis, stood on its own platform; its main hall could have held up to 10,000 people.

1. The most famous part of this palace is the monumental stairway leading up to the entrance. There is nothing like this stairway earlier in Mesopotamian art, although we can see precursors in Assyrian reliefs.
2. The stairway showed the ruler seated on the throne, receiving tribute from the different regions of his empire. Twenty-three representatives from the lands governed by Darius, dressed in native garb and led by a Persian courtier, deliver goods typical of their territories.
3. These scenes include a feature not seen before in Mesopotamian art: When an emissary from a subject state is brought before the king, a Persian court attendant takes him by the hand. This gesture was long used in Near Eastern and Egyptian art to indicate that the person being led was approaching a divinity. Again, we see that the Persians chose motifs from different settings—here, cultic imagery—to create an iconography with meaning in their own culture.

G. The Persians imported foreign artisans to decorate their palaces and other monuments. In fact, some scholars have suggested that the style of carving found on Persian relief sculpture is mirrored on the Parthenon in Athens, which also shows a procession.

H. In other scenes found at Darius's palace, we see familiar motifs of kings hunting lions and other powerful animals, adopted from earlier generations of Mesopotamian imagery. One innovation is that these scenes are found in doorways leading to the presence of the king, rather than the winged bulls that we saw earlier. This king is always shown as larger and more imposing than other figures.

I. Persian reliefs do not tell a specific story in the same way that Assyrian reliefs related a single campaign. Instead, they portray scenes that reflect the timelessness and, presumably, the permanence of their empire. Provinces perpetually bring tribute to the king, who graciously receives it, now in the guise of a god.

J. The great palace of Darius at Persepolis was used by all the subsequent rulers of Persia until it was burned in 330 B.C. by Alexander the Great. Even though the capital suffered much damage in the fire, it still stands as the most complete monument of Persian rule.

VI. In Susa, we find another palace built by Darius; here, the decoration is in glazed brick, as we saw in the Neo-Babylonian Ishtar Gate. Examples of art from this palace are now in the Louvre.

A. These scenes show not just animals but rows of spear-bearers with short, curly hair and beards; rich garments; and gold bracelets. These figures epitomize the appearance of Persians.

B. A foundation text at this palace records the different specialties and nationalities of the men brought to work there. Missing from this text are references to Persians, who may have been exempted from this service by their special status as natives of the empire.

VII. A final monument exemplifies the blending of artistic and cultural themes into a new style of Persian art.

A. The founder of the Persian Empire, Cyrus, built his tomb at the capital he created, Pasargadae.

1. According to Roman sources, the tomb was surrounded by a grove of trees that was watered by its own irrigation system.

2. In an aboveground chamber tomb, Cyrus's body lay in a gold coffin. Also in the tomb were carpets from Babylon and garments, including tunics, trousers, and purple robes.

3. Magi guarded the tomb and received, for their service, a sheep every day from the king, along with grain and wine. A horse was sacrificed every month to Cyrus.

B. We come across this evocative description as the author, the Roman general Arrian, writes about Alexander the Great's campaign into Asia, the subject of the next lecture.

C. Alexander visited the monument after he became the king of Persia; he then sealed the doors, transferring control for its security to his own men. This and many other acts were intended to legitimize Alexander's rule as a successor of the Achaemenids.

Essential Reading:

Dominique Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, pp. 177–187.

Margaret Cool Root, "Art and Archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire," in *CANE*, vol. IV, pp. 2615–2637.

Supplementary Reading:

John Boardman, *Persia and the West: An Archaeological Investigation of the Genesis of Achaemenid Art*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What images or ways of representing the Persian king seem derivative of earlier images of rulers?

2. How does the art of the Achaemenids reflect the way they governed?

Lecture Thirty-Five
Alexander the Great

Scope: Alexander the Great was only 25 years old when he crossed into Asia, claiming revenge against the Persians for their attacks on Greece in the 5th century. When Alexander defeated the Persian king Darius III at Gaugamela in 331 B.C., he quickly moved to take the capital at Babylon, which welcomed him as the legitimate successor to the Achaemenid dynasty. Alexander, in return, behaved much as a traditional ruler of Mesopotamia was expected to behave. He ultimately left Babylon to continue to expand his empire, eventually reaching India, but his army forced him to return, fearing that the expedition was reaching the end of the world. Alexander died of an illness in Babylon in 323 B.C., leaving no strong successor. As his empire was divided among his generals, the land between the rivers was drawn into broader Mediterranean political struggles.

Outline

I. The Persian court had involved itself in Greek internal politics since the failed attacks on Greece in the 5th century B.C.

A. During the Peloponnesian War, the great civil war between Athens and Sparta, Sparta had sought the aid of Persia and received support that contributed to its victory in the late 5th century B.C. Athens would never again become a significant military or political power in Greece.

B. We have poor sources for the Persian Empire in the period following Xerxes's death, but we do know that the succession became a troublesome issue, alternating between branches of the royal family. We also know that Egypt regained its independence from Persia early in the 4th century, but the Persians retained Syria-Palestine.

C. In the half-century or so between the end of the Peloponnesian War and the rise of the kingdom of Macedon in northern Greece, the Greek states fought several smaller civil wars. This constant infighting weakened much of mainland Greece and allowed the king of Macedon, Philip II (r. c. 359–336 B.C.), to gain control of most of Greece.

D. Philip planned to lead a united force of Greeks and Macedonians against Persia, claiming that this offensive was revenge for the 5th-century invasions of Darius and Xerxes. His goal was to revive the old alliance of Greek states that had fended off the Persians and to solidify his own hegemony in Greece. Philip was assassinated at his daughter's wedding, leaving his son Alexander as his heir.

II. The sources we have for Alexander's rule are almost all Roman, the earliest written three centuries after Alexander's death, when his legend was already firmly established.

A. As with Herodotus, the Roman sources show a fascination with the Persians, as well as quite a bit of cultural misunderstanding. This was exacerbated by the Romans' own encounters with the East; as the Greeks had, they adopted an attitude of military and cultural superiority.

B. We have a few Babylonian records, such as omen texts, astrological texts, and copies of decrees; these contribute only a little information to the history of the region under Alexander's rule.

C. Modern scholarship on Alexander also has an impact on how we assess this period of history. In exploring all these sources, we must keep in mind that each generation applies its own concerns to interpretation.

1. One of the most insidious theories is the idea that Alexander planned a policy of fusing Western and Eastern cultures. According to this notion, the Macedonian king would create a brotherhood of mankind with his new, enormous empire.

2. This theory was compelling in the aftermath of World War II, but there is little evidence in either Persia or Greece that supports it. In reality, the effect of this theory was to deny Persian culture in favor of the more familiar Greek world.

3. Scholars are now trying to readjust this picture and are much more interested in how Alexander changed his own behavior to appeal to the Persian tradition.

III. Alexander the Great (r. 336–323 B.C) was able to rally the Greeks, especially the Athenians, to support his goal of assembling a joint force against a common enemy. He crossed into Asia Minor with more than 35,000 Macedonian, Greek, and mercenary troops.

A. Alexander undoubtedly planned a much more limited campaign than he eventually executed, but the Macedonians won key battles early in the war, which helped to create enthusiasm for Alexander in the western part of the Persian Empire. These victories and Alexander's lenient treatment of surrendering cities spurred his success.

B. One of the major battles occurred at Issus, in southern Turkey, where Darius III, the last Achaemenid king (r. 336–331 B.C.), had arrived with his army, his treasury, several wives, his sister, and his mother. When Alexander won the battle and forced Darius to flee, the royal women were brought to him, as was the treasury.

C. Greek authors tend to demean Persian military capabilities, but the Macedonian victories were never assured. Both sides fielded massive armies, although Alexander's cavalry usually broke the Persian lines. Darius III was a strong commander, but he was faced with an excellent strategist in Alexander and a more disciplined, hardened Macedonian and Greek army. Alexander was also able to gain allies, either because they were enemies of Persia or because they were terrified to resist this new invader.

D. Later authors stressed Alexander's leniency toward cities or rulers who surrendered to him, but he made it clear early in his march through the East that those who opposed him would endure much suffering.

1. The city of Tyre in Lebanon attempted to remain neutral, but Alexander took it in seven months, killed all the men, and enslaved the women. This was severe treatment considering that the citizens of Tyre had not opposed the Macedonian conqueror.

2. Many cities welcomed Alexander, hoping to avoid a similar fate. Egypt, for example, had basically given itself to Alexander, and he celebrated the traditional rituals of a pharaoh while there. The Egyptian belief that rulers were divine caused tension within Alexander's army.

3. At Babylon, the governor escorted Alexander and his army into the ancient city, and in return, Alexander began restoring the temple of Marduk and offered sacrifices to the god. He also occupied the palace and "liberated" the royal treasury for his own use.

E. After the battle of Gaugamela in 331 B.C., Alexander was effectively the ruler of Persia, even though Darius was still alive. Babylonian records give Alexander the royal title "king of the universe" after 331. As Alexander pursued Darius III, he also claimed the royal capitals at Susa and Persepolis.

F. Alexander stayed at Persepolis for four months and, at the end of his stay, burned the capital city and took the massive treasury of the king. Sources claim that Alexander destroyed the city either in revenge for the 5th-century B.C. Persian destruction of Athens or accidentally after a drunken evening. Evidence for a massive fire dating to the late 4th century has been found at Persepolis.

G. Darius was eventually killed by one of his own generals, Bessus, who later claimed the throne. Alexander used Darius's murder as an excuse to make himself the true, legitimate heir and to avenge the Persian king's murder. A story emerged that Alexander had found Darius still alive, and Darius had made him king.

1. Alexander carried out certain acts that would help to ensure his succession to the Persian throne. He buried Darius III in the same way that his Achaemenid predecessors had been buried. This ritual reinforced the secure and legitimate succession of rulers.

2. As the legitimate successor to Darius III, Alexander used the king's murder as a way to justify removing potential rivals for the throne.

IV. As Alexander continued his push to the east, he began to behave more like a Persian ruler than a Macedonian king, changing his dress, for example, to incorporate elements of Persian costume. His actions were extremely controversial and caused much dissent among his friends and troops.

A. Alexander also included more Persians among his advisors, which resulted in alienation from his Macedonian companions. Sources write of several alleged conspiracies among Alexander's troops that broke out during the long campaign east. The main source of friction seems to have been that military promotions and favors were given to the Persians.

B. Alexander responded to challenges to his authority with anger. In a famous episode, he killed a companion, a Macedonian named Cleitus, for questioning Alexander's behavior. This act was appalling for many reasons, but it is treated in Alexander's biographies as a sign that he was behaving as a Persian despot rather than a Macedonian ruler.

C. Another divisive issue revolved around the practice of *proskynesi*s, that is, ritual prostration.

1. In Persian culture, this act was a symbol of social hierarchy; in Greek and Macedonian culture, it was a symbol of divinity.

2. As more Persians were incorporated into Alexander's court, the practice became more common, and ultimately, Alexander let it to be known that he would not object to the act from his Macedonian and Greek subjects.

3. Even ancient sources question Alexander's motivation for encouraging *proskynesis*.

V. Alexander was forced to turn back west in 325 B.C., when his army refused to go any further into India.

A. On the way back to Persia, Alexander led his troops on an arduous route across the Gedrosian Desert.

B. When Alexander arrived back in Persia, he faced a much different world than the one he had left years earlier.

1. He had installed Macedonians as governors in most provinces; many of these men suspected that Alexander would never return and had begun to act as independent rulers.

2. Alexander also had to deal with an Achaemenid rival who had installed himself at Pasargadae; after executing this claimant, Alexander visited Cyrus's tomb, sealing it with his own seal.

3. He then began to do what rulers in Mesopotamia had done for millennia: repairing canals, hosting extravagant banquets, and traveling to the Persian capitals.

C. At Susa in 324, Alexander led a mass marriage ceremony that joined Macedonian and Persian elite families. Alexander himself married Barsine, a relative of Darius III, and 80 of his companions married the daughters of Persian and Median nobles. Sources note that this ceremony was Alexander's most popular act, but after his death, his generals renounced the marriages.

D. When Alexander and his court arrived at Babylon in 323, he discovered that the astrologers and priests of the region had noted many omens predicting that harm would come to the king. He was warned to stay away or, if he would not leave the city, to install a substitute king.

E. Alexander fell ill at a banquet in early June after many hours of drinking; his final illness lasted for about 10 days, and he died on June 10, 323 B.C. He left no successor, and his Macedonian generals split the empire into smaller kingdoms.

VI. In the next lecture, we will survey the later empires that controlled Mesopotamia. At times, they drew on the ancient past of the region, and we will see how they interpreted the ruins that marked the landscape near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Essential Reading:

Plutarch, *The Life of Alexander*.

Peter Green, *Alexander of Macedon, 356–323 B.C.: A Historical Biography*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What aspects of Persian rule does Alexander seem most interested in?

2. How does Alexander behave as we have seen other Mesopotamian rulers behave? Would his Persian subjects have understood this?

Lecture Thirty-Six
After Alexander

Scope: As we conclude our study of ancient Mesopotamia, we will glance ahead at the history of the region after Alexander's campaigns. Other cultures, the Seleucids, Parthians, and Sassanians, controlled the regions that we have discussed and, in some instances, took up the ideas of their predecessors. These successor empires attempted to re-create the borders of the Achaemenid Empire. Cities remained important centers of population, but their locations and economies changed to accommodate the increasing importance of trade. As we survey the outline of historical events, we will look back at some of the recurring themes of the course: connections between Mesopotamia and the rest of the ancient world, the ways in which these cultures connected with the past, the cults and religions that drew worshippers, and the ways in which rulers presented themselves to their people.

Outline

I. Scholars usually mark the end of ancient Mesopotamian history with the death of Alexander the Great or, even earlier, with the reign of Xerxes. The reasons for this break have less to do with any significant changes in the way of life in Mesopotamia than with the different expertise necessary for research into the civilizations that occupied the area.

- **A.** New languages became common, such as Greek in the aftermath of Alexander, and these require specialization in fields other than those necessary to study the period we have covered.
- **B.** Even more challenging, however, are the issues raised by the scattered and diverse nature of the evidence.
  - **1.** Far less archaeological evidence is known for the period after the Persians. In part, this reflects archaeology's focus on exploring the early development of civilization. In part, the lack of evidence can also be explained by the fact that the new cities founded in later eras lie beneath urban centers that are still occupied.
  - **2.** In general, there has been relatively little systematic analysis of the cultures that follow the Achaemenids, and this situation makes us even more aware of the divide between the ideas and events documented in the official sources of the rulers of Mesopotamia and the lives of the vast majority of people.

II. After Alexander's death, his general Seleucus achieved domination over most of the eastern part of the empire, from India to the coast of Syria and Palestine, although this large territory was extremely difficult to control.

- **A.** The Seleucid Empire dates from 312 B.C., when Seleucus took the throne in Babylon, to c. 63 B.C., when the Roman general Pompey defeated the last of the Seleucid rulers in Syria.
- **B.** Seleucus founded a new capital to accommodate his rule—Seleucia-on-the-Tigris—about 20 miles south of Baghdad.
  - **1.** The city, at the confluence of goods moving from India and central Asia up the river or across the desert, flourished for several centuries, even though Seleucus established another capital in Syria from which he could govern his western lands.
  - **2.** According to some estimates, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris attracted a population of several hundred thousand people, reminding us of our early discussions of the rise of cities in Mesopotamia.
  - **3.** Urbanization was an important feature of Mesopotamian culture throughout its history; the same interest in city life did not develop in other civilizations, such as Egypt, until much later in their history.
- **C.** Seleucid art and culture is not well understood in Mesopotamia, but any Greek influence was likely limited to the ruling elite and did not affect the majority of people living in the area. Seleucid rulers seem to have remained attentive to local gods.
- **D.** The Parthians, a nomadic Persian people, began to challenge the Seleucids by the mid-3rd century B.C. and continued to exert pressure, pushing the borders of the Seleucid Empire further west.
  - **1.** In 129 B.C. the Seleucids surrendered Babylonia, including Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, to the Parthians, and afterward, the Seleucids were confined to the region of Syria.

2. There, they encountered the Romans, who were reaching the height of their dominance of the Mediterranean. By c. 63 B.C., the Roman general Pompey defeated the last of the Seleucid rulers.

III. At the height of their power in the late 1st century B.C., the Parthians controlled lands that stretched from the Arabian Desert east to Pakistan. They remained in power from approximately 250 B.C. to 224 A.D.

A. The Parthians were originally located in northern Iran and were skilled cavalrymen. Their innovative use of cavalry allowed them to gain control of the Silk Road. In fact, we have evidence that the Parthian king Mithridates II received a delegation from the Han Dynasty.

B. Although this speaks to exchange over a much larger region than we have usually incorporated in our study, long-distance trade has been a consistent subject in our discussions. Archaeological and written sources have testified to both state and private enterprise.

1. As we saw in an earlier lecture, in the 20th century B.C., the Assyrian merchants of Karum Kanesh established an active exchange of goods, primarily textiles and tin, between Babylonia and Anatolia.
2. Another metal, gold, was represented in the diplomatic gift exchange of Near Eastern rulers in the Amarna era of the 14th century.

C. The Parthian rulers, called the Arsacids after Arsaces, the first king, organized their empire loosely and with some recognition of the many groups they governed.

1. They used Greek on their coins long after the language fell out of widespread use in the region and adopted the Persian title "king of kings" to describe their position as head of the empire.
2. The Parthian administration was by far the most flexible of any that we have studied; the rulers of Parthia required tribute from their provinces, but otherwise, they allowed self-governance and did not interfere with the local economy.
3. One of the distinctive aspects of Parthian rule was that kings expected local leaders to have their own defensive forces, rather than supplying royal troops. This would result in a powerful system of independent leaders who might revolt against the king if they felt strong enough.
4. We can interpret this method of imperial rule in different ways. For example, the lack of a strong centralized ruler may have meant that the Parthian king could not protect himself from challenges. At the same time, this flexibility in administration may have enabled the Parthians to recover more easily from threats to the state. Whatever our interpretation, we should note that the Parthians dominated the East for almost 500 years.
5. In comparison with the methods used by earlier states, the Parthians created a much more decentralized administration. The Assyrians, for example, had enforced their tax and tribute demands with their army. From the number of revolts that are documented, scholars believe that Assyrian rule was too harsh for many provinces to endure.
6. The Parthian administration was closer to the Persian approach, which often left local rulers in place, likely believing that it would be easier to get the goods and resources necessary to support the empire if they rewarded their allies.

IV. In the 1st century B.C., the Parthians founded a capital city across the river from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris at Ctesiphon. Although the Parthians had several royal residences and capitals, Ctesiphon's location made it the primary center of administration.

A. This era of the Parthian Empire is confusing, but during the 1st century, Parthia appears as a determined and resilient enemy of Rome. The Romans had taken over most of the Mediterranean world and were now moving into Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, and further east.

B. Roman generals, such as Julius Caesar or Pompey the Great, were greedy for victory, which they could convert into political power at home, and campaigned aggressively.

1. A contemporary of Caesar and Pompey, Marcus Licinius Crassus, led 40,000 troops against the Parthians when he was governor of Syria in c. 54 B.C.
2. The Roman army was decisively defeated, and Plutarch reports that the head of Crassus was brought to the Parthian king and thrown on to the stage during a performance of *The Bacchae* by Euripides.
3. This story was meant to reflect the contrast between Greek and Roman cultures with the barbaric military practices in Asia.

C. Parthia was a challenging opponent for Rome; three times the Romans attacked and captured Ctesiphon in the 2nd century A.D. In c. 197 the Roman emperor Septimius Severus sacked the city, killing or enslaving

most of its population. Mesopotamian sources have noted similar violence over the millennia that we've studied.

1. As we saw with Umma and Lagash, city-states battled against each other in the 3rd millennium, hoping to gain additional agricultural lands to support the growing population in urban centers.
2. Conflict spread in the early 2nd millennium. Hammurabi of Babylon created the first regional state of Babylonia by controlling the territory from southern Mesopotamia to Syria.
3. Warfare increased in scale and devastation under the Assyrians. They instituted, and the Persians continued, the practice of deporting communities from one part of the empire to another.

V. A few decades after the Roman attack by Septimius Severus, the Parthians had another enemy to face, this time on their eastern borders.

A. The Sassanians, an Iranian people, were the dominant power in the East for most of late antiquity. The first Sassanian ruler was crowned "king of kings" in about 224 A.D. at Ctesiphon, and the empire lasted until about 651 A.D. The Sassanians are often named as the last Persian empire, an apt description considering the many traces of earlier Mesopotamian empires we find in their art.

B. The most impressive and best-known works of Sassanian art are the rock reliefs, of which about 30 are known from the first two centuries of Sassanian rule. Many of them are clustered in the very spot chosen by Darius for his tomb, Naqsh-i Rustem.

1. One of these reliefs depicts the first Sassanian king, Ardashir I, receiving the office of kingship from a deity. Kings and gods have often been linked in this course. The Sumerian king list noted that kingship had been lowered from the heavens by Enlil, and all the rulers we have studied were careful to set out evidence for their support by the gods.
2. Military success was also a sure sign of divine approval, and proper respect for temples was expected of rulers. Kings dispensed justice, another power granted by the gods. Hammurabi left the most detailed example of this duty in his law code, but the theme appears consistently in royal sources.
3. Divine approval granted to a ruler could be taken away; evidence of this appears in omens, the assassination of a ruler, or death on the battlefield.
4. In contrast to the many scenes of rulers in the company of gods that we have examined in this course, both figures on the Sassanian relief are of equal size. Mesopotamian kings most often chose to present themselves as the mortal closest to the gods, rather than as divinities themselves.
5. Beneath the Sassanian king and the god are the figures of fallen enemies, but we see no interaction between the king or the deity and these victims, unlike the depictions of enemies we've seen in many earlier cultures.

C. Rulers required an imposing setting to show off their special status. The 7th-century A.D. Sassanian palace at Ctesiphon incorporates this ancient concept.

1. Only part of the throne room survives today, but it was covered by the largest arch—a barrel vault that roofed the throne room—ever built in Persia.
2. Palaces have supplied most of our evidence for how a king presented himself to his subjects; by setting himself apart in large structures with elaborate decorations, the king could make a statement about the resources he controlled.
3. More than 100 gold and silver Sassanian drinking vessels have been found, but as with similar vessels from the Persian Empire, we lack an archaeological context for these discoveries.

VI. Foreign invaders, the Arabs, toppled the Sassanian Empire in c. 651 A.D., bringing with them a new religion, Islam.

A. The Arabs remained dominant in the Near East, controlling territory to the west in North Africa and Spain until the 13th century A.D. Baghdad had been founded as a capital in 762 A.D. and was a major center of learning until 1258 A.D., when the Mongols sacked the city.

B. From 1258 to 1918 A.D., the area of Mesopotamia was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. When the Ottoman Empire fell after World War I, the League of Nations assigned this land to Great Britain as a mandate. The British gave the name al-Iraq to the borders of the modern state, which gained its independence in 1932.

1. As we learned in an earlier lecture, Gertrude Bell, a British writer, diplomat, and archaeologist, played an instrumental role as an advisor in the early history of the Iraqi state.

2. Bell was also the main force in creating an archaeological museum in Baghdad. Bell helped to write a policy that kept antiquities in their native country; they would be housed in the Iraq Museum, which opened in 1926.
3. When the looting of the museum took place in 2003, it was not just objects that were lost or destroyed but the 5,000-year history that we have covered in the last 36 lectures. With the destruction of these objects, as well as archaeological sites in Iraq, other chapters in history will never be written.

Essential Reading:

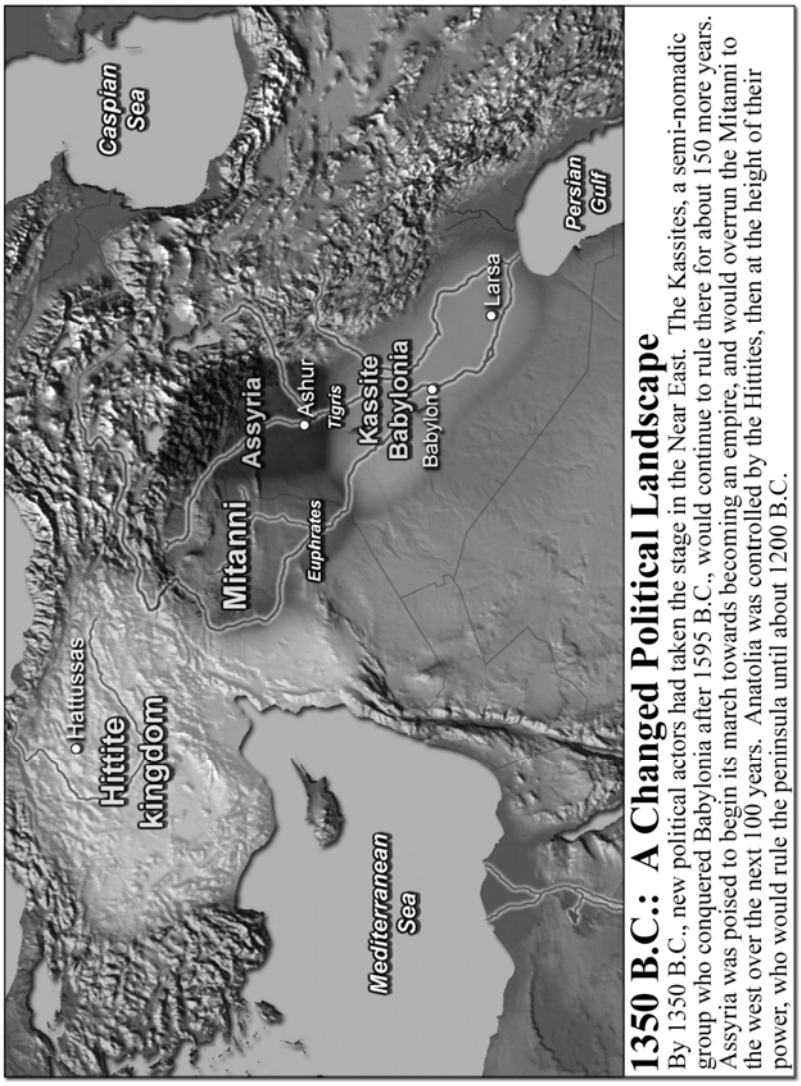
Marc Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, pp. 229–263.

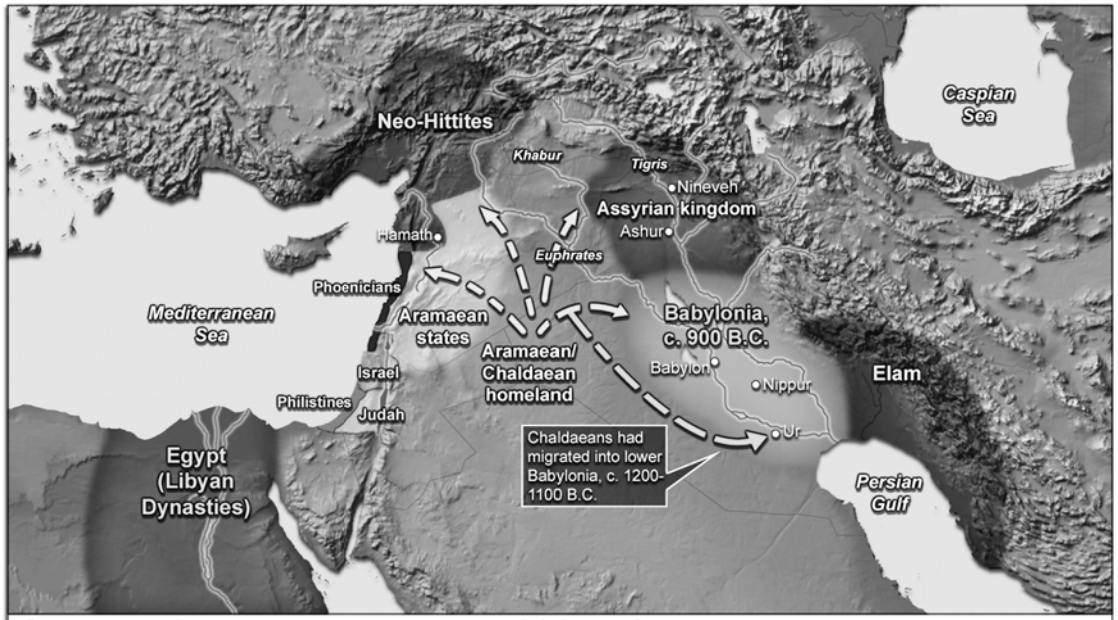
Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, pp. 374–395.

Questions to Consider:

1. How should we think about the question of the decline of a state? What sort of evidence explains decline?
2. How different are the Greek and biblical representations of Mesopotamia from the reality that we have explored in this course?

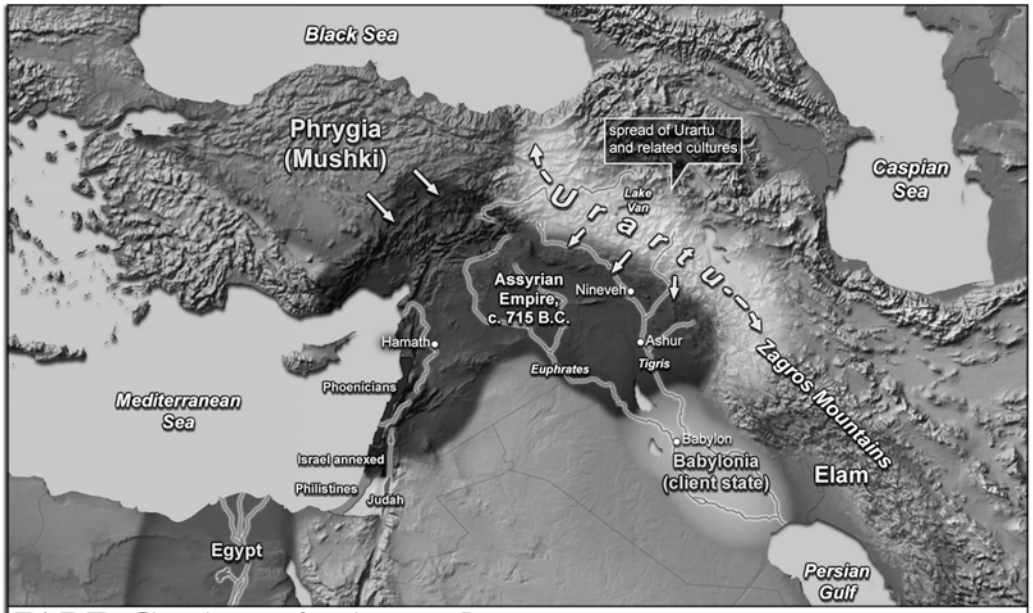
Maps





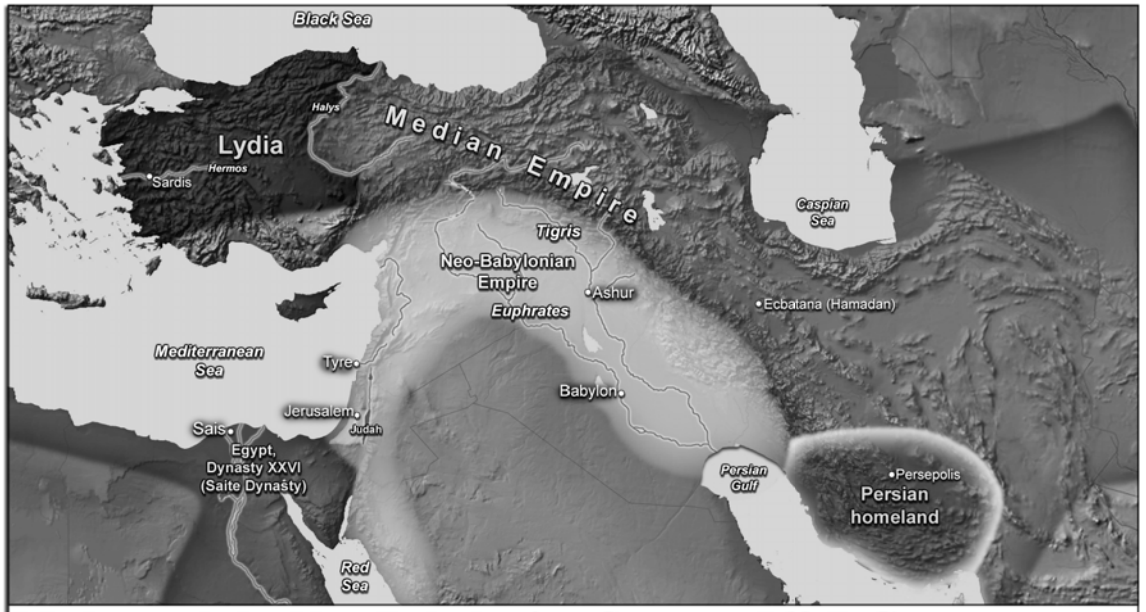
Changes in the Near East by 900 B.C.

The years 1200-1000 B.C. are something of a dark age in the Middle East. Written records for this period are sparse, but evidence exists for turmoil from Egypt to Mesopotamia. "Sea Peoples" attacked Syria, the Hittites, and Egypt. Egypt was able to fend off these attackers, but other political orders were severely disrupted. The Levant was settled by the Phoenicians and the Philistines, and the Aramaeans and Chaldaeans spread throughout Syria and into lower Babylonia, where they contended with Elam for power. The Assyrian kingdom contracted significantly, but by 900 B.C., the dawn of Assyrian dominance had begun.



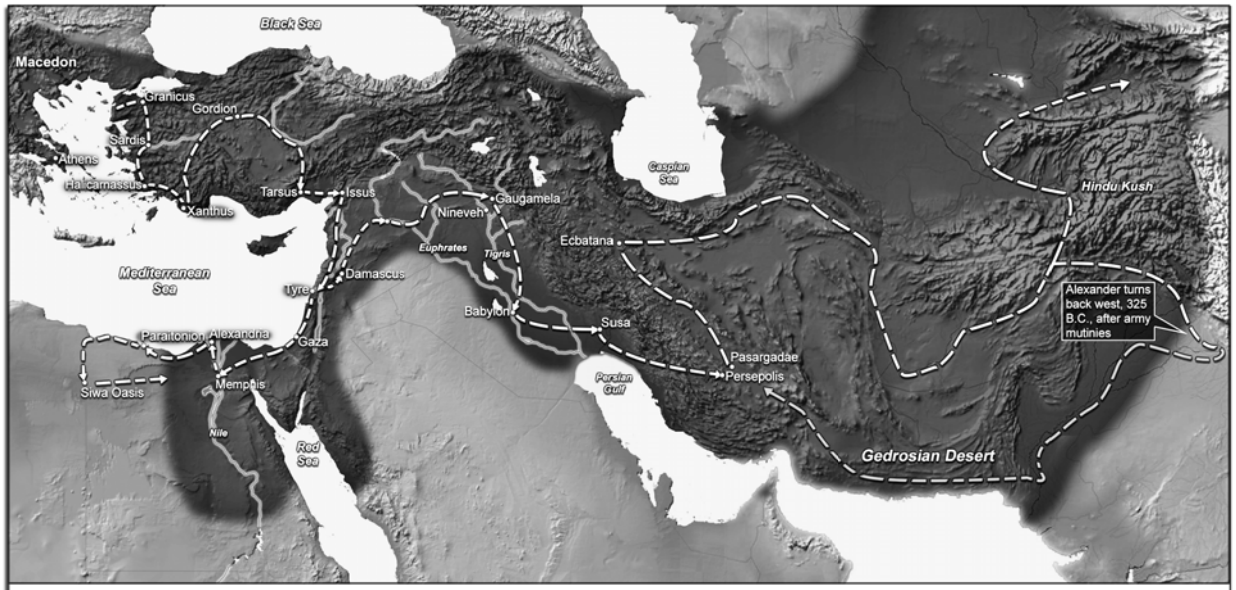
715 B.C.: Assyria Ascendant

Under the rule of Ashurnasirpal II (r. c. 883-859 B.C.) and Shalmaneser III (r. c. 858-824 B.C.), Assyria became a major power that held sway in northern Mesopotamia and threatened to control Syria. But further Assyrian expansion stalled until the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser III (r. c. 744-727 B.C.) and Sargon II (r. c. 721-705 B.C.) Under Sargon II, Assyria directly controlled, or ruled through client states, all of Syria-Palestine with the exception of Judah. Sargon dispatched northern threats from Urartu and Phrygia and finally subdued Babylonia, although this client state would remain restive and eventually assist in Assyria's final defeat.



Medes and the Neo-Babylonian State, c. 560 B.C.

In 612 B.C., the Medes, a tribal people from the Zagros Mountains, allied with the rebellious Babylonians to sack Nineveh and end the Assyrian state. These two powers would dominate the first half of the 6th century B.C., with the Medes establishing an empire that stretched from Anatolia to Afghanistan, and the Babylonians securing the Levant, reclaiming it from Egypt, and suppressing revolts in Jerusalem and Tyre. By 539 B.C., however, both of these states had fallen to the Persians. Led by Cyrus the Great, the Persians assumed control of Median and Babylonian territories and eventually expanded their empire to include Egypt, all of Anatolia, and lands farther east.



Alexander the Great, 332-323 B.C.

The Persian Empire projected an image of beneficence and peace throughout their lands, but like the Babylonians to the Assyrians, the Greeks were thorns in the Persian side. Greek settlers in Ionia (western Anatolia) had revolted in the late 6th century and, with the aid of Athenian Greeks, burned the satrapal capital in Sardis. Punitive expeditions into Greece by Darius I in 490 B.C. and Xerxes in 480 B.C. further inflamed tensions. Alexander the Great led a Greek and Macedonian army in 332 B.C. to dispatch the Persian threat once and for all, and he wound up conquering the entire Persian Empire in a nearly decade-long campaign. His push beyond Persian frontiers into India ended when his army mutinied, and he died before he could effectively govern the largest empire ever created in Mesopotamia, an empire no other power has ever replicated.

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