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POLITICAL ECONOMY IN EARLY MESOPOTAMIAN STATES

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ABSTRACT

An enormous amount of work has been done in recent years on what can be called the political economy of the earliest states in ancient Mesopotamia. These investigations appraise the organization of the great manorial estates of temples and palaces and show that local systems of power and authority coexisted with and often resisted centralized governments. It is also apparent that social institutions were permeable and that individuals played multiple and varied roles, reducing risks, cooperating, and competing as political fortunes changed over time. The interaction of autonomous city-states within a Mesopotamian cultural sphere has been foregrounded in certain work. Studies of production, trade, and consumption are reviewed from ca 3200–1600 B.C.

INTRODUCTION

Geertz (65:6) has quoted CC Berg that "Krom's Hindu-Javanese history is a story about kings and their achievements in which we find scattered remarks about elements of culture. I for one would prefer a history of culture and elements of civilization in which the reader would find scattered remarks about kings." Breaking with most histories of Mesopotamia, which are primarily chronological accounts of kings, dynasties, and ethnic invaders (but see 125, 166 for exceptions), Postgate (170) has provided an informed and indispensable account of Mesopotamian "society and economy at the dawn of history" (ca 3200–1600 B.C.).

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Postgate's work reflects the large amount of recent research on what might be called the political economy of the earliest states in ancient Mesopotamia. However, because much of this work has been published in specialized journals or in obscure monographs and *Festschriften*, often as accompaniments to detailed philological analyses, and in languages other than English, the range and substance of such studies have not been widely disseminated to the anthropological and archaeological community. For example, most scholars in the field today have rejected the temple-city and totalitarian-state models (under their many guises, e.g. Asiatic mode of production, hydraulic despotism, integrated political system) of early Mesopotamian (city-)states. Furthermore, older ideas that salinization threatened the viability of otherwise stable political systems, or that ethnic invaders were responsible for social and political change, have been largely discarded. In addition, some newer ideas that have reached the academic public, e.g. that the first Mesopotamian writing evolved directly from a system of clay "tokens," have been critically appraised in the specialist literature.

This review presents some of the new directions in Mesopotamian archaeological and historical research from the late fourth through the mid-second millennium B.C. In organizing this material, I follow Roseberry (181) in using the term political economy to discuss literature that concerns (*a*) how political behavior evolves, shapes, and is shaped by the institutions of production, consumption, and distribution; (*b*) how ideological frames of political action—especially of why there should be a political center—evolve and how social actors define, participate in, and often resist the political ideologies of just and unjust social and economic arrangements; and (*c*) how administrative hierarchies are organized to implement a set of rules and procedures in their interactions with local community spheres of power and authority. The choice of the term political economy follows partly the discussions by Scott (188, 189) and Little (124): In early Mesopotamian states, local group autonomy is affected at every level by changing circumstances in political structures, by forces and goals of production and exchange that are set by rulers, and by the new possibilities and constraints on social mobility that are imposed on actors by their embedment in overarching political systems.

If there is one conspicuous flaw in Postgate's book on "society and economy," it is that under such topics as "city and countryside" or "crops and livestock" there is a certain homogenization of historical periods (see 255). This flaw is, to be sure, imposed in part by the nature of evidence: In some periods, one finds archaeological (mutatis mutandis, historical) material about palaces, whereas in others one learns about temples; in some periods information about trade or kinship is minimal, whereas in others data are so numerous as to be difficult to synthesize. Because Postgate has not explicitly delineated social and economic change, there is still a sense of orientalistic essentialism

attached to some of his discussions. Furthermore, the nonspecialist reader needs a basic chronological introduction to the various historical periods in order to both appreciate and occasionally dissect Postgate's narrative.

Following such a straightforward chronological path in this essay, I review the following topics: (*a*) the implosive nature of city-state formation in Mesopotamia, the development of the first writing systems, and the Uruk expansion in the late fourth millennium B.C.; (*b*) the interaction among city-states in the Early Dynastic period (ca 2900–2350 B.C.) and the trends toward "empire"; (*c*) the leading factors of stability and instability in the state of Akkade (2350–2200 B.C.); (*d*) the nature of the bureaucratic Ur III state and the reasons for its collapse (2100–2000 B.C.); (*e*) Old Assyrian trade and the state (in northern Mesopotamia, ca 1950–1750 B.C.); and (*f*) Old Babylonian economy and society (in southern Mesopotamia, ca 2000–1600 B.C.). I conclude with an assessment of the organization of local power throughout these periods. (Many extremely interesting topics, such as the finds at Ebla in the mid-to-late third millennium, and the history and archaeology of Mari in the Old Babylonian period, as well as other subjects, are not included in this essay).

Throughout this discussion, I provide a selection of the literature on the various times and subjects covered, but these are only a few of the many essays that one can compile for each time period or topic. Several collections of studies pertinent to our topic of political economy illustrate the scope and tenor of recent research (e.g. 8, 16, 32, 55, 56, 77, 88, 116, 128, 174, 257). The forthcoming *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (182) will provide a handy introduction to a wide variety of topics, especially on society and economy.

This select list, to which could be added titles, e.g. from several *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* volumes and *Festschriften* and the entire new journal *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture*, indicates a trend in historical studies of about the past two decades. Such new work, which is clearly influenced by eclectic reference to anthropologists, contrasts with the previous emphasis on using literary and mythological texts and royal inscriptions as the major sources for writing Mesopotamian history and culture (e.g. 109). As promising as such advances may be, however, one must also heed Liverani's warning (126) that culture history cannot afford to exclude the indigenous interpretations of events and behavior that are provided in myths and epics. For Liverani, one of the most anthropological of Mesopotamian historians, *belles lettres* are not merely codes that can be solved towards a "true" reconstruction of the past, but suggest the meanings of history for Mesopotamians. Finally, the method of studying Mesopotamian historical data in cross-cultural perspective that characterizes many new studies defies the formerly sacred precept of "cultural autonomy" (112), which holds that Mesopotamia should be investigated only on its own terms (and especially not those of biblical Israel). Because Mesopotamia (as a result of its early written documents) has often set

the discourse for the study of ancient states (e.g. 247; but see 20:361–367), this review highlights those aspects of ancient Mesopotamia that are important for the assessment of variability among ancient states, a topic that has received relatively little systematic attention in social evolutionary theory.

THE FIRST CITY-STATES: BUREAUCRACY AND EXPANSION

Most of our knowledge of state formation in Mesopotamia at the end of the fourth millennium is derived from the surface surveys of Adams (3) and colleagues and from excavations at the city-state of Uruk (14a; see also 158, 159, 169). The broad outlines are of a demographic nucleation in which the countryside became relatively depopulated [in comparison to the preceding Ubaid period (see 91)] and tens of thousands of people were gathered into Uruk (and other city-states in the early third millennium). This demographic implosion seems occasioned by a number of factors, namely that cities became nodal points for military protection from neighbors, and agricultural labor was coordinated to a patchwork of fields that were left fallow in successive years (1, 76, 83) because they were nodal points on rivers where branching canals controlled the flow of water to fields. Emerging city-states were also the locations of important shrines [evolving from pilgrimage sites as is speculated for Eridu and Gawra in the preceding Ubaid (200)] and their (inferred) markets. Migrations [mainly, but not only, from central to southern Mesopotamia (see 75, 99, 137)], occasioned by changing environmental conditions, shifting river channels, and the behavior of pastoralists (2), further swelled the numbers of urban dwellers.

Although this demographic implosion is often termed urbanization, it should be noted that the equally important and coeval phenomenon of ruralization is its companion. That is, in the process of city-state formation, the countryside was created as a hinterland of city-states and as a fertile no-man's land to be contested by rival city-states. The social evolutionary implications of ruralization are notable: The countryside in early states, with its villages connected to cities and with its own specialized institutions of production and consumption, is utterly different than the countryside of prestate times. The evolution of states, thus, cannot be modeled as a layer cake, with the state as the highest layer atop a stable and unchanging social base.

Intra-urban social and political relations were transformed rapidly in the city-states of the last part of the fourth millennium B.C. (155). One observes the creation of monumental architecture on an unprecedented scale, such as the temple complexes at Uruk; the Eanna precinct itself covered 6–7 hectares and included several temples, a putative palace, a sunken court, and other large structures. Record-keeping devices, such as cylinder seals and beveled-rim

bowls [most plausibly interpreted as ration containers (99, 154, but see 10, 140)] are characteristic artifacts of this extraordinarily specialized and differentiated society and economy. Naturalistic art further reflects and comments upon social distinctions (245), and cuneiform writing appears (163), the bulk of which concerns administrative accounts but also includes some lists of professions and geographical names (47a, 80, 159, 160). Rather than serving a bureaucratic function, these lists were conscious attempts by scribes to organize the Mesopotamian world and to instruct future generations of scribes in the art of writing (161).

Evolution of Writing

Schmandt-Besserat has propounded an extremely influential hypothesis for the origin of writing (184). Initially (183), she was stimulated by an idea of Amiet's (7) that certain small clay objects contained in clay envelopes (or *bullae*) in mid-to-late fourth millennium Susa were elements in an early system of recording. She found the small clay objects, which she called tokens (or counters, mainly of foodstuffs and livestock, which were created in early agricultural villages and then spread in the expansion of domestication), in dozens of Neolithic sites throughout Western Asia (and as far as Africa and South Asia in her earliest maps). Her view was that in the mid-to-late fourth millennium, these tokens were enclosed in *bullae*, which functioned as bills of lading and on which the token's shape was impressed (or drawn). When the clay envelopes were flattened and the shapes of the tokens were inscribed on the resulting tablets, writing naturally appeared. Schmandt-Besserat has further argued that the need to write abstract numbers—to recognize "fiveness," for example, not just specifically to denote five sheep as opposed to five units of grain—caused cognitive change. The more complex tokens in turn led to abstract pictographic signs on the first tablets. Although there were some early critics of this hypothesis (120, 121), its evolutionary implications have been discussed by Michalowski (142) and in reviews of her recent book (14, 47, 64a, 164, 260). The critics have argued that the many thousands of tokens, which come from numerous archaeological cultures and several millennia of time, could not have represented one system of accounting. Some perforated tokens are probably beads, and more complex tokens are likely gaming pieces. Because only a few of the tokens were adequately provenienced by excavators, it is difficult to ascertain in what context the clay objects were used. Some of the tokens were recovered in infant burials, unlikely loci for economic records. (Schmandt-Besserat now regards tokens buried with infants as denoting grave offerings of grain). Moreover, many of the supposed identifications of shapes of tokens with later pictographic and cuneiform signs seem dubious or erroneous, although some number signs are securely connected to shapes of tokens. Finally, in some cases, tokens and clay envelopes cannot be dated later than

impressed tablets, and so some tokens might even be modeled on the signs on the tablets.

It is agreed that writing is an outcome of the new arrangements of labor and management within late Uruk city-states. However, whereas Schmandt-Besserat holds that writing was but a small step in the use of tokens to record goods, Michalowski—harkening to the very idea that Schmandt-Besserat claims to refute—contends that writing was an invention, a complete transformation of methods of communication and record-keeping. Its inventor(s) created a new semiotic system, selecting and discarding elements from a variety of earlier communication systems, including tokens, while devising new forms of signs. This new system included pictographic signs, abstract depictions, rebus combinations, semantic classifiers, columnar "syntax," and the like, and it was designed in one fell swoop (80, 144), although it subsequently underwent practically universal processes of phoneticization and desemanticization. Furthermore, many of the earliest texts were used in the education of scribes, as can be seen from the production of lexical lists, of which we have at least 150 duplicates.

In his overview on the nature of early writing systems, Boltz (15) has differentiated carefully between the origin and history of script as a physical object and the evolution of writing as a graphic representation of speech. While Schmandt-Besserat has certainly demonstrated that the system (or probably several systems) of tokens conveyed meaning in Mesopotamian prehistory, she has not appreciated the difference between these (highly specific) *aides mémoires* and writing as a communication of speech acts. Boltz also notes that the invention of a way to write something (e. g. "fiveness") can hardly precede the invention of the concept of "fiveness" itself. Michalowski (144) reminds us of the obvious fact that the linguistic prehistory of number systems, that is, the commonality of terms for numbers across many related languages, must long precede the appearance of any writing system. Writing obviously has roots in prehistoric symbol systems, but its sudden appearance cannot be explained as a mere, gradual development from those forerunners. Although the first writing in Mesopotamia shows the important, but not exclusively economic, context in which it was devised (i.e. for keeping track of commodities), a cursory look at the cross-cultural evidence (15, 136) provides little justification for a single, simple, and linear progression from various complex iconographic systems to writing.

Uruk Expansion

The transformations in the division of labor within the late Uruk (i.e. late fourth millennium) city-states in southern Mesopotamia had repercussions well beyond Mesopotamia. This increasingly well-known phenomenon of Mesopotamians outside Mesopotamia—in Syria, southeastern Turkey, and

southwestern Iran—is now conventionally called the Uruk expansion. Recent research (5, 6, 219), much from salvage excavation projects accompanying the construction of large dams in Syria and Turkey, has disclosed sites with characteristic late Uruk architecture (especially temple architecture), ceramics, seals and sealings (see 138), numerical tablets, and decorative arts. Some of these settlements are fortified and seem to be southern Mesopotamian enclaves in the midst of local cultures. Algaze (5, 6) has employed a modified world-system model in which competitive Uruk city-states established colonies up the Euphrates in order to control important trade routes over which commodities flowed to the putatively resource-poor alluvium. This mercantile colony model was first proposed to account for Mesopotamian presence on the Iranian plateau (234), but at the site of Godin Tepe, Mesopotamians were coresidents with local folk (see also 199, discussed below).

The extent of such settlements [especially in Anatolia (48, 62, 63, 199, 228)] has shown the complexity of the Uruk expansion. Indeed, Stein's (199) analysis of Hacinebi shows that Anatolians were by no means overwhelmed by Urukians (*sensu lato*) and that Mesopotamians dealt with Anatolians as equals. Stein proposes a distance-decay model, in which Mesopotamians became less dominant the further away they were from southern Mesopotamia. Algaze (5) believes that more distant Mesopotamian settlements (in Anatolia rather than Syria) may even have "budded off" from Syrian colonies. One intriguing but troubling part of Algaze's model is his view that various Uruk colonies were founded by individual Mesopotamian city-states—since there was no regional Mesopotamian state in the Uruk period. Our knowledge of a congeries of competing Mesopotamian city-states, however, is practically nil (though theoretically possible) for the late Uruk period, and the foundations of colonies from separate Mesopotamian city-states (including from Susa, according to H Pittman) on the model of colonies founded by Greek city-states is unproved.

A heterodox approach to the Uruk expansion is offered by Johnson (100), who considers Mesopotamian presence in Iran, Syria, and Anatolia a product of a "late Uruk collapse." While rightly pointing to demographic upheaval in the mid-to-late Uruk, in which some sites were nearly abandoned or much reduced in size, the case for "refugees" founding settlements so far distant from southern Mesopotamia seems implausible. Whereas the world-system model employed by Algaze can be criticized for marginalizing the periphery, for denying creative response to a dominant core (whose existence Algaze himself problematizes), and for reducing the clear Mesopotamian presence outside Mesopotamia to that of economic exploitation, Algaze's connection of expansionist policies in southern Mesopotamia to the significant and unsettling metamorphosis in social and political life there at the end of the Uruk period seems cogent. This inferred large-scale change in the division of labor

accompanying the formation of temple-estates and city-states made feasible Mesopotamian expeditionary activities into distant, but hardly unknown, lands.

If this social and political asymmetry in southern Mesopotamia led to the establishment of a variety of enclaves, the long-term viability of sites several hundred kilometers from southern Mesopotamia was hardly guaranteed. Indeed, the collapse of the colonies and of the variety of arrangements with local folk sought by Urukians reflects both the relative suddenness and fragility of the expansion. Even if one doubts that refugees founded sites in Syria and Anatolia, one can argue that the activities of expansion would have stretched the first city-states to a breaking-point and contributed to collapse in the core Uruk area itself.

Future research must clarify three issues that concern the nature of the Uruk expansion: First, what is the relation of this late Uruk phenomenon to the foregoing Ubaid presence of Mesopotamians outside Mesopotamia (91, 219)? Second, why or how does the Uruk expansion stimulate the growth of secondary states, especially in Syria, and promote the emulation of Mesopotamian culture in Western Asia (186, 212)? Third, how does the Uruk expansion and its failure affect the internal structure of city-states in southern Mesopotamia itself and the relations among those city-states (57, 169)?

MESOPOTAMIAN CITY-STATES AND MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION IN THE EARLY THIRD MILLENNIUM B.C.

Smaller, simpler regional systems from after the Uruk collapse (at the end of the fourth and in the early third millennium B.C.) have been identified by their distinctive ceramic assemblages: Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic I in central and southern Mesopotamia, Proto-Elamite in the Susiana plain and the Zagros Mountains, and Ninevite 5 in northern Mesopotamia. Populations fluctuated throughout the early third millennium: Ninevite 5 sites were greatly reduced in size, ED I sites in the south became significantly larger, the Hamrin and Deh Luran plains were reoccupied, and settlement in Susiana was reduced (45). Through the middle of the third millennium, city-states grew in size, while the number of small sites was diminished greatly. According to Adams (3), 78% of the total recorded settlement in southern Mesopotamia was in sites larger than 10 hectares.

The analysis of social and political institutions in the city-states of the early third millennium reached a turning point in the 1969 publication of essays by Diakonoff (33) and Gelb (68). On the methodological level, these studies were informed by a rough quantitative and clearly comparative historical perspective that transcended their specific differences in interpretation (see 34–38, 66–72). Both (but especially Diakonoff) explicitly regarded social and eco-

nomic relations as keys to understanding the stability and failure of political regimes.

Diakonoff and Gelb equally refuted the temple-state model for early third millennium societies and the palace–totalitarian state model [originally proposed by Schneider (185) following Deimel's work (see 50) and influencing general readers mainly through the works of Frankfort (e.g. 64) and Wittfogel (245); see also 59, 157]. By delineating the organizational boundaries and spheres of power of temple-estates, palace-estates, and the community (which consisted of land-holding kin-groups), Diakonoff and Gelb stressed there was inherent tension and conflict among these organizations and thereby opened the possibility of attributing historical change to the process of social and economic struggle.

Diakonoff stressed the importance of pre-Sargonic land-sale documents (see 74), in which a single seller sold large amounts of land to a buyer, who was occasionally a city-prince or high office–holder (see 61a, 175a). Some documents include a list of witnesses to the transaction, each of whom received a gift from the buyer. Diakonoff interpreted these gifts to be part of the sale price and the witnesses to be kinsmen of the seller. The land was thus owned by a kin-group (possibly a lineage), and not only did the lineage-head have to agree to and accept the sale price, but the senior male members of the lineage also had to be part of the transaction. This analysis seems to answer some questions about the community ownership of land and how city-rulers/elites accumulated large estates, but it raises another: What happened to the group of people who sold their land? It may be inferred that the lineage members stayed on their land and became clients of the nobleman who bought it. Although we cannot specify why such sales took place, the process of land-sales itself indicates how early rulers of city-states became more powerful, acquired more land, and enrolled dependent laborers, who were not their own kinsmen.

Diakonoff and others also analyzed the key document known as the "reforms of Urukagina," which purports to restore to temples the land and privileges that were being eroded by newly powerful rulers [in the city-state of Lagash, ca 2400 B.C. (92, 111, 207)]. Rejecting the document's claim that Urukagina was reforming the palace's usurpation of temple lands, Diakonoff regards him as a reactionary, a creature of the temple-estate who attempted to counter the kings' new policies of levying taxes on temple land and extracting collective labor from temple dependents. Although most of the texts from pre-Sargonic Lagash were once used to show the all-pervasive nature of the temple-estate, those very documents come from a temple household that was under the authority of the queen of Lagash (134). The resulting picture of relations between the great estates of temple and palace in the early third millennium, therefore, was not one of an all-encompassing temple-estate being

taken over by an all-encompassing palace-estate. Rather, the amounts of power of these organizations waxed and waned according to local conditions within city-states and the larger political conflicts among city-states.

Competing with city-states for fertile agricultural land and for access to trade routes, especially along the rivers, kings built their power as representatives of the city-state in war and defense (28, 94). Gradually some kings achieved hegemony over their neighbors (e.g. Eanatum in Lagash, Mesilim in Kish, Enshakushana in Uruk, Lugalzagesi in Umma), forming evanescent coalitions and mini-territorial states for the first time in Mesopotamia. This endemic conflict among city-states was ended by Sargon of Akkade, from the area around Kish (229; evaluated in 61:172), who conquered the entire region and reorganized it into a genuine territorial state (or empire) (194).

Because Sargon was an Akkadian (Semitic)-language speaker and previous texts were nearly all written in Sumerian, generations of analysts have puzzled over the relationship of Sumerian and Akkadian, not just as language groups, but as ethnic groups or even races. Although, not surprisingly, this discussion was most virulently anti-Semitic in the 1920s and 1930s in France and Germany (11, 29, 119), with skull shape (54), nose size (135), and degree of hirsuteness carefully considered (preceding references from 45), nouveaux essentialists have tried to find Akkadian and Sumerian mentalities (123, 237), religions (86), and/or characteristic forms of social organization (208, 209).

Whereas Jacobsen (93) observed in 1939 that political warfare could not be reduced to Sumerian vs Semite/Akkadian categories, there are significant differences between social and economic systems in central and northern Mesopotamia and those in the south (just as there are differences in soils, rainfall, and irrigation practices in these regions). The vexing issue is to what degree these differences are ethnic ones. Steinkeller (208, 209) relentlessly dichotomizes the regions: In the (Sumerian) south there were city-states; the city-states were formed around temples of particular deities who claimed allegiance from all citizens; there were no classes, only differences in wealth; and private ownership of land was insignificant. In the area around Kish [and extending to Mari and Ebla, after Gelb's idea of a "Kish civilization" (73)] there was a territorial state (Kish), an oligarchy of noblemen or elders held power within a rigidly stratified social system, and the temple was of marginal economic importance in comparison with royal-estates and private landowners. Steinkeller also follows Gelb in his dispute with Diakonoff: The latter saw lasting importance of kin-groups in Mesopotamian society, whereas Gelb thought that private landholders and nuclear families characterized Mesopotamian land tenure after the mid-third millennium.

Steinkeller's dichotomy breaks down under the weight of his own evidence: There are other city-states in the north [Akshak and Mari are the chief two, although there are fewer city-states in the central part of Iraq than in the

south, as Adams's surveys (3) have shown]; Sumerian gods and Sumerian place-names are found in the north from the beginning; and the earliest texts are nearly identical there (Jamdat Nasr, Uqair) as in the south (Uruk). There are certain differences in northern and southern customs and norms, and Akkadian speakers clearly cluster to the north, but Jacobsen's conclusion that the city-state is the primary arena for social and political action (vs attachment to an ethnic or linguistic group) still seems wisest. That written language is an unreliable index to ethnicity or speech is further indicated in the Akkadian names of authors (scribal copiers) of Sumerian literary compositions at one site in the ED III period (12); some peculiarities in Sumerian grammar in economic texts of this period seem to be explained by reference to normal Akkadian syntax.

Rather than essentialize and reify linguistic differences into social, religious, or cognitive ones, more important questions are, How and why did a Mesopotamia, which was not centralized politically before the time of Sargon, form a cultural-civilizational entity? The evidence for such a "Mesopotamian" civilization is quite clear, both in the creation, management, refinement, and reproduction of a textual tradition that spanned city-states and regions (30, 130), and in the material objects that denote "Mesopotamianness" as opposed to "Syrianness" or "Elamness." One approach to this question has been investigated through the study of city-seals.

The city-seals are sealings, found on panels of clay around door sockets (53, 258), on jars, and also on tablets, which are decorated with names of various cities (and other motifs); they are known best from Ur in the ED I/II period. Jacobsen (94) thought that the seals indicated a "Kengir league" of cities that formed an amphictyony around the city of Nippur. Wright (246) interpreted the city-names as demarcating the locations of storehouses from which goods were circulated; Nissen (156, 161) thought they denoted trade associations (see also 138, 145). In his assemblage of all representatives of the city-seals, however, Matthews found no consistency of names or significant correlation of seals and transactions (based on the tablets that were sealed). While he inferred "real and practical intercourse between cities" to be indicated, he could only tentatively suggest that the small quantities of foodstuffs noted on the tablets might have been symbolic transfers to a central control depot at Ur (138).

It seems to me that another, nonfunctionalist interpretation for these early city-seals is possible (254). The scribes who composed lists of city-names and geographic names (81, 145, 159), which were the same names carved into seals, were not doing so to indicate an overall political system in Mesopotamia, which did not exist prior to Sargon, nor were they necessarily referring to a set of civil administrations involved in the circulation of goods. Rather, the lists of city-names may have conveyed a message of inclusivity of city-states,

all of which belonged to a "Mesopotamian textual community" (30). Many researchers (e.g. 140, 251) have argued that the "Sumerian King List" was a historiographic charter for the political and cultural interaction among Mesopotamian city-states in which city-states were independent but part of a larger civilizational boundary. Indeed, the earliest way of writing the names of the cities themselves combined the name of the central divinity of the city and the word *city* (145). Significantly, the name of Uruk, perhaps the first city, is just "the city." Because lists of cities and of Mesopotamian gods are essentially the same kind of text, one may see in the "decorations" of names of cities in city-seals a similar composition, not references to the route of materials being traded, but depictions of cities as the basic geographical units of cultural and political life in early Mesopotamia. This historical stage of city-state interaction changed irrevocably with the conquest of Sargon.

FROM AUTONOMY TO IMPERIALISM AND BACK AGAIN: POLITICAL ECONOMY IN THE OLD AKKADIAN PERIOD

In *Akkad: The First World Empire* (128; with a reference bibliography 61), several authors discuss the transformation of local spheres of power and authority (in city-states) to one of a regional state (or empire) and how social and economic organizations are affected in the process. Initially, Sargon's conquests from the city-state of Kish follow the Early Dynastic pattern of a ruler conquering his neighbors and/or effecting a confederacy of city-states against an enemy. Indeed, the rapid success of Sargon depended much on his victory over King Lugalzagesi of Umma, who had been able to consolidate much of the south under his control. By defeating this ruler, Sargon united the southern and central parts of Mesopotamia into a single, territorial state.

In order to stabilize his rule, however, Sargon significantly changed the ideology of domination. He first built a capital, Akkade, a city that was not part of the internecine rivalries of the land. In another innovation, he installed his daughter Enheduana as priestess of the moon-god at Ur and established the principle that only the ruler of the entire land (minimally, of course, one who controlled Ur) held the prerogative of such an appointment. To administer the new territorial state, Sargon appointed royal officials, who served alongside the traditional rulers of the conquered city-states (60). These officials were charged with breaking down the boundaries between city-states, furnishing material support (mainly foodstuffs) to the army [e.g. a single delivery of 60,000 dried fish is recorded in Lagash, where pottery was also centralized and mass produced (60)]. To these retainers of Sargon, land was redistributed; workers were conscripted and paid rations.

Many changes in material culture (though not in ceramics) occurred under the Akkadian dynasty, in seal designs (14, 162), and in plastic art, in which royal power and individually commissioned scenes were depicted (7a). Under Naram-Sin, the grandson of Sargon, the ideology for territorial rulership was enlarged in a number of ways. For example, the king's name was written with the semantic classifier "divinity," and so the king was portrayed not just as a highly competent mortal ruler but one who exercised the right to rule because he was more than human (51). Moreover, the ruler took a new title as "King of the Four Quarters," that is, of everywhere, not just from a victorious city-state.

In spite of such ideological and administrative changes accompanying the state-building attempts of Sargon's dynasty, the edifice collapsed quickly after the death of Naram-Sin and several epigones. Indeed, the signs of instability in the system were present from the outset. Especially at the transition from one king to his successor, rebellions erupted in the land, led by rulers of formerly independent city-states (96; but see 127). The tensions of territorial rule were considerable, the main ones classifiable in two groups: 1. The uneasy sharing of power between royal appointees from Akkade and local city-state rulers led to a power struggle. This occurred especially in the redistribution of land to royal officials and the requisitioning of labor and resources that formerly were within the jurisdiction of the local ruler. Furthermore, use of the Akkadian language in the official bureaucracy of state seems less an attempt to impose the vernacular of conquerors than a way to disenfranchise the old-line bureaucracy, which wrote Sumerian. 2. The imperial ambitions of the Akkadian kings are amply documented in the north [Brak, Nineveh, Assur, Mari, Mozan, Nuzi (see 143)], in the east (59), and in the Gulf (171). In a classic study on the fall of the Akkadian regime, Speiser (196) noted that it was the very success of the Akkadian army in these distant regions that galvanized local populations into forming alliances and conducting guerrilla operations against the Akkadians.

These two groups of tensions, one internal, the other external, can be interrelated as reasons for the collapse of the House of Akkade (27, 78, 79). Labor for the army and support for the troops heightened the pressure on the new administrative institutions to fund the imperial campaigns and the goals set by the bureaucrats in the capital. On the one hand, the state of Akkade promoted unprecedented amounts of social and economic mobility in the land. No longer was the city-state the basic arena in which wealth and status could be created. On the other hand, stretching the resources of the city-states resulted in massive resistance on the part of the local rulers and traditional elite who, in the end, were able to resist the demands of the central administration and to bring it down.

Discounting this historical logic, Weiss & Courty have claimed that new data shows that volcanic (and other climatic) disturbances at Leilan in Syria (231–233) caused population displacements and the depletion of resources

(upon which Akkadian kings allegedly were dependent) in the north, and so set in motion the train of events that caused the fall of Akkade. However, the nature and scale of such volcanic activity must still be confirmed, since its existence in Syria as a whole seems elusive (240), and its claimed effect on societies from Egypt to the Indus is debatable.

Several collateral aspects of the Akkadian state can be intimated. Although the campaigns of the kings were extensive and financially draining, the claims of actual durative control over distant areas were consonant with the ideological picture that was important back home: "while the Akkadian kings attained glory, they also created images of that glory for succeeding generations" (143:90). In the end, these depictions of conquest, copied by generations of scribes, influenced later generations of Mesopotamian kings and courtiers as well as modern scholars. The most famous legacy of the Akkadian dynasty has long been seen as the Sumerian King List (93, 140, 251), in which the elaborate fiction is portrayed that there was always one Mesopotamia, which was always ruled by only one city at a time, and that indeed there should be a politically unified Mesopotamia. This composition, written in the Ur III or early Old Babylonian period, expands the rhetoric of the Akkadian kings into primordial time.

The main research questions about the dynasty of Akkade now concern its struggle to legitimize sovereignty over formerly independent city-states and the profound restructuring of the lives of Mesopotamians within the new territorial state. For all these social and political changes, one also observes a studied continuity in cultural traditions, because "Mesopotamia" is, as before, "defined by and through a corpus of shared texts which provided it with a moral and spiritual unity" (30). This "textual community," in which the material world as well as the divine one were learned and classified, was both enlarged and invigorated in the Akkadian period.

THE POLITICIZATION OF THE ECONOMY: UR III

According to the Sumerian King List, no city-state could even claim preeminence in the land after the fall of Akkade: "Who was king, who was not king?" reads the text, which, from its point of view that only one city-state could and should be the rightful successor to Akkade, means there was anarchy in the land. In fact, during the reign of the last Akkadian kings, southern city-states had achieved their own traditional autonomy, whereas in central Mesopotamia, Gutian rulers, hostiles from the Zagros region, controlled some cities and countryside (84). After Utuhegal, king of Uruk, defeated the Guti and took control over Ur, a new dynasty there—the third dynasty of Ur to be mentioned in the Sumerian King List—under Ur-Namma (2112–2095 B.C.), son or brother of Utuhegal, began to consolidate power in "Sumer and Akkad."

The son of Ur-Namma, Shulgi, who reigned 48 years, transformed political administration in Mesopotamia so that nearly every aspect of social and economic life was affected. Beginning in the 20th year of his reign, he became deified, created a standing army, reorganized temple households, established a new system of weights and measures, began a series of campaigns near and far, and created a bureaucratic system that managed regular systems of taxation from the Mesopotamian core and a separate series of imposts from the periphery (204). In the 39th year of his reign, he founded a depot (ancient Puzrish-Dagan; Arabic site name, Drehem) mainly for the collection and distribution of animals (193).

From Drehem texts, especially, we read the details of receipts of animals (mainly cattle, sheep, and goats, but many other animals as well), classified according to biological species, origin, the sort of fodder they had eaten, color, the officials who brought them in, in which pens they were kept, and their eventual destinations (to temple kitchens in nearby Nippur or to other cities). In the texts [about 30,000 of which are now published (see 25)], we note festivals, river ordeals, and votive offerings, among many other things. On large tablets, clerks added the daily receipts into six-monthly or yearly accounts. The tablets were stored in baskets equipped with tags (102). A system of double-entry bookkeeping was invented to manage the accounts (87, 195). From other sites (notably Umma and Lagash), texts record the Ur III system of control of weaving (95, 226), metalwork (13, 122, 129), leather-working (212), pottery manufacture (225), and woodworking and other craft work (see 152, 219a). Many studies have examined the recruitment of labor, which is also recorded meticulously in Ur III tablets (e.g. 46, 131–134, 175, 203, 205, 213, 227).

The traditional picture of the Ur III state is of an enormous bureaucratic pyramid controlling communal and/or private action, and this picture must be substantially correct. Nevertheless, most of our documents come from royal archives or from temple archives that had been systematically placed under palace control during this period. There is additional evidence, however, of private sales, mainly of humans as slaves and of animals but also of house property and orchards (206). Hallo (85) and Zettler (258, 259) have also shown that temple offices were inherited and indeed controlled by elite families. One might infer from Steinkeller's elegant study of "foresters from Umma" (205) that extended families were charged with tasks for collecting reeds, grasses, and wood (poplar, willow, tamarisk) in return for land allotments.

In sum, the Ur III state, in attempting to reorganize most aspects of social and economic life, by creating provinces responsible for paying imposts to the capital in Ur, by placing civil and military appointees in key positions, by distributing land in return for services, and by conscripting labor in exchange

for land or rations or both, and most visibly by recruiting, training, and supervising a bureaucracy of unparalleled size (25, 141) that was obsessed with detailing the disposition of people and material, foundered and fell. Although foreign adventures must have drained some resources, these were much less extensive than under the Akkadian kings. Salinization, once thought a contributing factor to the instability of the ruling house, now seems of little consequence (173) when measured against the resistance of a dominated population.

Within 25 years after the founding of Drehem (252), provinces were able to break away from the centralized hold, after which city-states resumed their normal autonomy and neighborly struggles for hegemony. With supplies of food denied to the capital, famine resulted, and the essentially unproductive, gigantic bureacracy fell asunder. Enemies of Ur on the Mesopotamian margins conducted sorties into the heartland, eventually raiding Ur itself and dragging the dynasty's last king into captivity. Enterprising high officials from outside the royal circle began to pick up the pieces, ruling from city-states and engaging in alliances and confederations with their fellows in the time-honored manner.

ETHNICITY AND ENTERPRISE IN THE OLD BABYLONIAN AND OLD ASSYRIAN PERIODS

In the Babylonian south after the collapse of Ur, no supreme political power ruled in the land. The Old Babylonian (OB) period (ca 2000–1600 B.C.) can be subdivided temporally into three parts: early OB (pre-Hammurabi), middle OB [Hammurabi (1792–1750 B.C.) and the early years of his successor], and late OB, to the time of the last king of Babylon and the sack of the city by the Hittites. Geographically, the OB period can be divided into southern and northern parts. This geographical distinction is reflected in dialects of Akkadian, in political history, and in social and economic affairs. In the south, the cities of Isin and Larsa were the major competitors for power, in particular for power over the venerable city of Nippur, site of the temple of Enlil and the most important scribal academy (191). Larsa eventually took control of this entire region (219c). In the north (central Mesopotamia), competition was focused over control of the venerable city of Kish, which (like Nippur) symbolized rather than exercised broad political control (41). Babylon, under Sumulael, eventually unified this area, and Hammurabi, fourth successor of Sumulael, conquered Larsa, thus bringing the region under a single political center. Hammurabi ruled over this territory for five years, but in the tenth year of his successor, the south revolted and effected its independence. The region was eventually ruled by kings "of the sealand," that is from the southernmost marshes. In the north, the rump state built by Sumulael survived until the Hittite raid in 1595 B.C. [according to the so-called middle chronology (see 17

for all dates)], but much local power was ceded to local assemblies and "headmen" (250). In the north, the city-state of Assur became independent in the early twentieth century B.C. (114), after which the throne was usurped by Shamshi-Adad, member of a dynasty originally from the middle Euphrates region, and Assur (and Assyria) became part of a larger empire, ruled from Shubat-Enlil on the Habur in Syria (24, 230). This empire dissolved during the reign of the successor to Shamshi-Adad.

After 2000 B.C., rival leaders struggled for political power within city-states and with their neighbors. The most successful of these leaders were Amorites, the term denoting (speakers of) a northwest Semitic language, although not one document apparently was ever written in that language. Whereas we identify Amorites on the basis of their distinctive personal names, these Amorite leaders were also Mesopotamians, and under their rule Mesopotamian literature and history were carefully preserved and reproduced. Their genealogies typically allied various Amorite groups to historic Mesopotamian dynasties (58, 114).

Although Amorites traditionally have been thought of as invaders in Babylonia, the evidence does not support any simple scenario of invasion. Thus, Ishbi-Erra, bearing a good Amorite name, but who was a royal governor in the last years of the Ur III state, wrote of Amorite disturbances in the land. Early OB documents show that Amorite leaders were not arrayed monolithically against Akkadian city-states but were engaged in creating alliances with some Amorite leaders while they fought against other Amorites (4, 103, 237a). Although Amorites were stereotyped in literary texts as enemies of the Ur III empire, they were farmers, bureaucrats, and mayors in the kingdom of Ur. In the vacuum left after the fall of Ur, Amorites held selective advantage in the competition for power in city-states because they could mobilize kinsmen from various cities and in the countryside.

Although there is a long tradition of ascribing social and economic change in the OB period to Amorites (see 26), the prevailing opinion today is that new strategies were invented during the scramble for new political power after the fall of Ur. In the Old Assyrian north (contemporary with the early OB period), largely known from the remarkable records of long-distance trade found in the Assyrian merchant colony in Anatolia (113–115, 117, 118, 220–224), the well-known entrepreneurial trading system flourished in the absence of any strong central state in Assyria, Babylonia, or Anatolia. Thus, in Mesopotamia of the early second millennium B.C., local economic and social actions can only be understood in the scope of larger regional and interregional affairs.

For the early OB period, many studies now document the profound economic changes that were wrought in the aftermath of the Ur III empire (104, 178). Land was rented, bought, and sold in the north (31, 101, 108, 252) and property was accumulated, inherited, and disputed in both north and south (22,

40, 105, 177, 214, 215, 217). Although palace- and temple-estates managed great plots of land, administered large numbers of workers, and disposed of quantities of animals and grain (19, 180, 191, 192), the newest investigations show the extensive degree to which entrepreneurial middlemen supplied the palaces and temples with products (22, 165, 211, 219b,d). For example, van de Mieroop (219b) calculates that merchants delivered shipments of 4,123.3 kg of copper and 18,333.3 kg of copper to the palace; bakers' accounts show one transaction in which 14,700 liters of barley was issued for bread destined for palaces or temples; tons of bitumen were bought by temples; and temples leased fishing rights to businessmen who then sold fish for their own profit.

One particularly well studied and especially interesting social institution in the OB period concerns the group of women called *naditus* (39, 89, 90, 97, 98, 176, 216). Their activities provide a lens through which to observe social and economic behavior in the period. Citizens of Babylonia, unleashed from the restraints imposed by the Ur III state and able to buy and sell land (in the north) during the time of political competition in the early OB period and so make fortunes, faced new problems in keeping together their large estates. To evade laws of partible inheritance, in which a daughter's dowry would result in the alienation of land, burghers managed to send their daughters to the Shamash temple in Sippar (I only refer to the situation in Sippar in this example), where they would live unmarried the remainder of their days. Although these "nunneries" entailed lifelong service to the god, and devotion by the *naditus* is clear, these wealthy "nuns" were also businesspeople, buying, selling, and leasing land with their "ring-money," which they brought with them to the temple. This created wealth they often bequeathed to other younger *naditus* or to slave women who typically took care of the *naditus* in their old age and were then manumitted and installed as heirs in return for their duties, which included performing funerary rites.

During the Old Assyrian period, merchants moved tin and textiles from Assur to their main colony, Kanish, in central Turkey. In Anatolian markets they acquired silver and gold, which they sent back to Assur to their family firms for investment and additional purchases of goods. The Old Assyrian merchants profited from their entrepreneurial skills, moving goods from where they were plentiful to places they were scarce. The location of tin mines, from which they acquired the metal, remains controversial. Although tin might have come from Afghanistan (long known to be the source of lapis lazuli in Mesopotamia), in recent work Yener has documented the existence of tin mining in Anatolia itself (248, 249). Because the Assyrian texts consistently refer to tin coming from Mesopotamia to Anatolia, however, it is usually, if not convincingly, argued that the tin from Mesopotamia (and perhaps Afghanistan ultimately) was of higher quality than Anatolian tin.

The nature of political activity in Assur before Shamshi-Adad cannot be disembedded from this important entrepreneurial activity. Assyrian kings fought to keep open trade routes to the south, from which some textiles were acquired, and the state profited on the long-distance trade by taxing it (as did the local Anatolian princes to whom the Assyrian traders were subject). Furthermore, the Old Assyrian government was composed not only of a royal-estate but of councils and a city hall, in which the elite merchant families played dominant roles. This Old Assyrian state and social organization were altered dramatically after the conquest of Shamshi-Adad, after which time the Assyrian colonies in Anatolia failed. The rise of a centralized Babylonian state under Hammurabi and presumably of the growing power of Hittites in Anatolia seems to have placed severe restrictions on Assyrian merchant activity. The highly profitable but extremely fragile Old Assyrian long-distance trading system, like the entrepreneurial activity during the early OB period, functioned best in the absence of centralized state leadership.

Although little is known of Assyria after the fall of Shamshi-Adad's dynasty until the Middle Assyrian restructuring of the state in the thirteenth century, the late OB period offers many documentary sources. In one set of texts the rump state in northern Babylonia, no longer in control of the rich southern area, had to hire laborers to work its agricultural fields. These texts were notarized by the local community "headman" who thus permitted the palace to harvest its plots (23, 210, 250). Other documents show the palace (and temples) loaning goods (but sometimes recalling their notes early because of cash-flow problems, thus sacrificing interest) in an economically and politically enfeebled condition. The Hittite raid on Babylon, therefore, was merely a military incursion in which the Hittite monarch was able to take advantage of the situation in Babylonia before departing. The aftermath of the raid was a century-long absence of any regional state in Mesopotamia.

THE CHANGING STUDY OF MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION: UNFINISHED BUSINESS

This section provides a synopsis of what I consider major reorientations of research concerning the Big Questions about Mesopotamia: the nature of Mesopotamian states and civilization, the relations between political and economic institutions, and how material culture is increasingly employed in the understanding of political economy.

Whereas Mesopotamian archaeologists and historians had formerly tended to regard Mesopotamian states as centralized, seats of strong kings, bureaucratically specialized, controlling the circulation of goods, services, and information—in sum, functionally integrated, rational, systemic—current opinion about the nature of early Mesopotamian states challenges these views. As the

above survey has stressed, there was no Mesopotamian state, only city-states, for most of the time period I have covered. Exceptions of the empire of Akkade and the Ur III state collapsed in the space of a few generations, into the natural condition of city-states, which had systematically and successfully resisted their incorporation into a territorial political entity. Of course, these exceptional centralized states produced large buildings, conducted military campaigns that brought numerous and exotic materials into Mesopotamia (which were accounted for by the necessary large bureaucracies), and sponsored scribal academies whose professors wrote paeans to the heroism of the kings. For some famous analysts (e.g. 109), the imperial success of strong states like Ur III represented "the best of times"; for others (e.g. 33), Ur III was "the worst of times." Despotic kings required onerous taxation from conquered provinces, established a massive and unproductive bureaucratic system, and mobilized unfree labor to build temples, palaces (although no palace was found in the extensive excavations at Ur), and waterworks.

Although Diakonoff's view (33) may be persuasive, we can also see that Mesopotamian territorial states, however rare and unstable, followed a normative Mesopotamian logic: If there was a long evolutionary history that led to the formation of city-states, the same evolutionary trends dictated that rivalry among city-states—over land, water, and communication routes—would lead to alliances, conquests, consolidations, regional states, and empires. Furthermore, the bureaucracies and armies of regional states and empires of the third millennium provided Mesopotamians with social and economic mobility that life within city-states necessarily restricted. Ethnic ties took on increasing importance the early second millennium and served as a vehicle through which new kinds of regional confederations could be built.

From the inspiration of Gelb and Diakonoff, Mesopotamian historians of the later twentieth century have tended to see early social organization as a set of three major institutional arrangements: the great estates of temples and palaces and the community. As suggested above, this picture initially was drawn to refute the model of a monolithic (or dominant) mode of production in which the temple-state of early third millennium times gave way to the despotic palace-state of the late third millennium. For Gelb and Diakonoff and their followers the new task was to weigh the various lines of power in the third millennium, to observe how the palace encroached on temple domains, for example, and to denote how community members became attracted to the royal-estate or to the temples. Now, however, the neat picture of separate lines of authority is being broken down in order to demonstrate how royal officials manipulated temple property, how temples profited from royal largesse, and how community members often contracted with both temples and palaces (170, 219b). Although it is still useful to consider the temple's lands as existing because of the need to care for and feed the gods (166), and the

palace-estates to have arisen from a combination of land purchases and seizures, it is equally apparent that social institutions were permeable and that individuals played multiple and varied roles, reducing risks, cooperating, and competing as political fortunes changed over time (104). City-states were not so much directed by kings and managers as they were the primary arenas for social and economic struggle in early Mesopotamia.

Although no political system could be imposed on the city-states in early Mesopotamia, there was palpable an "idea" of Mesopotamian civilization that overarched the politically autonomous city-states and regions and made Mesopotamia Mesopotamia. Mesopotamian civilization could be and was depicted as a single land of cities; and kings could strive to actualize the idea of a unitary Mesopotamia, but they were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, in the various city-states and regions, elites preserved, maintained, commented upon, and reproduced a common body of texts, systems of writing, calendars, mathematics, iconography, and standards of material wealth. One concludes, much as Childe did long ago (but for a different, prehistoric context) (24a), that Mesopotamia created itself. First shaped as a metalinguistic code through prehistoric regional interactions (256), Mesopotamia crystallized in the cauldron of state formation and was then reproduced repeatedly for several thousand years.

The material foundations of Mesopotamian civilization are surveyed admirably by Potts (172), and new studies attempt to conjoin objects and architecture to the study of Mesopotamian political economy. Stone has delineated neighborhoods (217) in OB Nippur and interpreted the rebuildings of houses as dictated by inheritance practices, since houses were partible property (215, 252). Pollock has studied social inequality in the "royal cemetery" of Ur (168); Zettler has examined materials and texts found together in the temple of Inanna at Nippur (259); and Winter has discussed images of administrative authority (242–244). In a remarkable new project, Winter has studied traditional ritual in modern India, especially the rituals that invest sculptured divinities with life, in order to structure her investigations of the ways in which Mesopotamian images were endowed with power.

Several archaeologists have devised new research strategies to understand aspects of political economy. Schwartz (187) regards the small, mid-third millennium site of Raqa'i as providing storage facilities to hold grain that was intended for larger sites upriver or downriver. An alternate interpretation for the same data, however, is being explored by E Klucas (107), who considers Raqa'i as a depot in which grain from larger sites was stored and traded to pastoralists in inland Syria [on the model of plains-pueblo interaction in the American Southwest (197, 198)]. The campaign at Tell Leilan, which spans from the mid-third millenium to the OB period, includes studies by Senior on the specialized production of pots (190). Stein & Wattenmaker's (202) Leilan survey finds that such production was not necessarily intended for the hinter-

land, which produced its own wares; indeed, some research indicates that pottery produced in small villages was traded to large sites (49). Although much new work is being done in Syria and Anatolia, obviously little is currently being done in Iraq itself. Recent excavations are being analyzed and published. E Stone and P Zimansky (218), for example, are engaged in publishing their findings at Abu Duwari, which includes that of special activity areas. It is expected that when Iraq is again open to foreign expeditions, archaeologists will remain engaged with questions of political economy.

EPILOGUE: MESOPOTAMIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY AND SOCIAL EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

Critics of typological thinking or step-ladder models in archaeology (e.g. 9, 18, 139, 167, 253) have a particularly good case in early Mesopotamia. In Mesopotamia, states emerged quickly, were nonregional, and are best described as city-states. This evolutionary scenario is by no means unique to Mesopotamia, since city-states, also emerged in the Indus Valley, in Shang and Zhou China, in Maya, at Teotihuacan, and in the Andean highlands (153). Only Egypt, among the earliest states, seems a complete exception to the evolution of city-states, since it was from the start a regional state (235).

Whereas some Mesopotamian historians have considered community assemblies as residuals of a prehistoric past or of tribal customs of nomadic people who settled in city-states (43, 105, 210), the existence of assemblies can be seen as ordinary expressions of local power. Assemblies are identified in early vocabulary texts (82, 239) throughout the third millennium (236, 238), in the OB period [where in many texts they make decisions that pertain to family law and other local matters (44, 106, 110)], and in Old Assyrian texts showing that assemblies form part of the government along with the king and royal-estate. Although references to assemblies and other local bodies that take action on behalf of the community can be found in almost any ethnography, it seems an artifact of social evolutionary thought (in which "centralization" and "integration" are terms implying direction of economy and society by irresistably powerful kings) to think that such local forms of power and authority disappeared in the earliest states. Although assembly houses have not been excavated in Mesopotamia, the city hall as a structure is mentioned in Old Assyrian texts, and one might hope for the discovery of a council house like the one found at the Maya site of Copan (52).

Similarly, in older social evolutionary theory, it had been argued that kinship systems broke down in early states as new territorial, economic, and political bonds grew in importance. Although Chang argued this was not the case for Shang China (20) and few regard the importance of kinship to have diminished in South American or Mesoamerican states, the conclusion seems

to have been that New World states were different from Old World ones on this point (21, 241). From our survey of Mesopotamian political economy, however, one can observe the important roles of ethnic and kin-groups in all periods of early Mesopotamian social life, even if our understanding of the details of residence and descent is much debated (e.g. 239). If we can hastily devise a social evolutionary generalization on kinship in early states, it is not that kinship disappears in them, but that new official arenas in early states are created in which members of kin-groups can compete, often mobilizing their kin for selective advantage, but in which some important offices are not necessarily tied to membership in any particular kin-group (179). Furthermore, success in the competition for new offices and ranks often depends on the ability of a person to recruit nonkinsmen as well as kinsmen.

If I have been able to trace the broad outlines of early Mesopotamian political economy in this review, I conclude only by emphasizing again how much and how quickly our view of ancient Mesopotamian political systems and social and economic organization has changed in the past decades. Mesopotamian historians and archaeologists are working together to include more data in their purview and to assess bias in the data in new ways. Some students are now even receiving training in both Mesopotamian languages and in material culture. The richness of documentary sources from early Mesopotamian states makes the sort of social and economic analysis depicted here particularly attractive—even if likely to change with the appearance of new material and the employment of new research strategies—and excellent grist for the mills of anthropological thought.

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