

THE PAX ASSYRIACA: AN EXAMPLE OF HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF CIVILISATIONS

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seek to provide a study of the evolutionary process of ancient civilizations stressing the complementarily between theoretical principles with the relevant historical evidence. For this reason, the study will focus on the origin, development and collapse of the first stage of the ‘Central Civilization’, which was the result of the merger of two primeval civilizations, such as Mesopotamia and Egypt, during the ‘Near Eastern phase’ of this Central Civilisation. This merger seems to have been the result of the political expansion of an imperial entity coming from Mesopotamia under the aegis of the so-called Neo-Assyrian Empire from 1000 BC to 600 BC – better known as the *Pax Assyriaca* – although the process of full integration with Egypt seems to have been concluded by the successor empires of Assyria circa 430 BC.

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# Introduction

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## 1. The Concept of Civilisation

Before considering the study of human civilisation, it is necessary to clarify the real meaning of the concept. In fact, *civilisation* is a neologism invented in France during the eighteenth century –*civilites*– used in cases of jurisprudence (Mazlish 2004: 1). In particular, this term was applied to designate a legal case ‘in accordance with legal norms’, transforming a criminal process using the ‘civil’ law (Velkley 2002: 11-30). Subsequently, it was also applied to the process of transforming or ‘civilising’ a person, with the objective of instilling good behaviour, manners and morality (Braudel 1970; Febvre 1930: 198).

It seems that the French concept aimed to conduct a comparison between the ‘civilised’ and ‘barbarian’ terms for the French elite during the eighteenth century. It was considered as the principal parameter for distinguishing a primitive society, with respect to a civilised people who lived ‘in a city’ (Service 1975: 4). Indeed, the root of this French neologism is derived from the Latin *civis*, which is a term used by Romans for exclusively designing the concept of a ‘city’. It could provide a standard by which European societies could be considered as the criteria ‘by which non-European societies might be judged sufficiently civilized to be accepted as members of the European-dominated international system’ (Huntington 2003: 41).

Thus, the first approach on the concept of civilisation in the eighteenth century was a name or concept employed in its singular form –*civilisation* – to denote Western European achievement or ‘self-consciousness of the West’. Nevertheless, in 1819 the word began to be used in its plural form –*civilisations* – to refer to the common characteristics of collective life belonging to human groups in a specific period, emphasising their geographic origin, cultural zones, economies and societies (Roudometof and Robertson 1995: 281).

The first approach of civilisation in its singular form has been the central idea used by Western scholars and philosophers from antiquity until today. Indeed, for millennia, different peoples have tried to differentiate themselves with respect to ‘others’, proclaiming their apparent superiority or exclusion (Mazlish 2004: 2). In this approach, the classical attitudes about ‘civilisation’ and ‘barbarism’ used by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes and Rousseau had one major limitation because they ‘equated government or civilisation with society itself, and pre civilisation was not understood as anything but anarchy, with people constrained only by nature rather than by cultural institutions’ (Service 1975: 5).

The second approach of civilisation in its plural form was adopted also by Western modern anthropological scholars during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They preferred to define civilisations as the evolution of human groups from a primitive organisation to a more complex one, and they were developed by modern historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and sociologists.

However, they were not interested in the terms ‘civilised’ or ‘barbarian’ for describing societies. Rather, they wanted to explain the origins, development, interactions, achievements, decline and fall of civilisations according to an evolutionary process. Indeed, human societies were segmented and in small groups with egalitarian relations, but eventually some of them became more hierarchical and were ruled by a central authoritarian power, which was instituted as a government (Service 1975: 3-4).

It seems that both approaches of civilisation –singular and plural – have a common characteristic: the sense of creativeness developed by human groups which is the most important indication of civilisation (Eckhardt 1995: 79). With this information it is possible to define *civilisation* simply as *everything that humankind has created, preserved and used as artificial isolation to interact with the natural environment for its own benefit*. This artificial isolation had been built in a relatively short period of time in the human past (40,000 years BC) and they were developed in different latitudes throughout human history with uncertain durations.



This is the reason why Huntington (2003: 40) believes that the history of humankind is, at the same time, the history of civilisations because civilisations ‘have provided the broadest identifications for people’. These characteristics confirm the interpretation of the French historian Fernand Braudel (1984: 23-27), who thinks that speaking about civilisations invokes concepts such as *spaces*, *societies*, *economies*, *collectivementalities* and *continuities*. These categories portray that each civilisation developed itself in a particular space and its natural conditions influenced its peculiar characteristics.

However, this attempt of defining and characterising a civilisation leads to another problem: the clarification of the difference between *civilisation* and *culture*. The Romans used the terms *cultus* and *cultura* when discussing agriculture or cultivation of domestic crops. It seems that this word was associated with an activity developed by sedentary people as a preamble of the later urban or *civilised* life (Mazlish 2004: 4). Thus, in 1830 a German philosopher from the University of Berlin, G. H. F. Hegel, argued that, in fact, civilisation was the same as culture; moreover, this German term (*Kultur*) was born as a German variant of the French concept of ‘civilisation’ (Fernández-Armesto 2001: 12).

Nevertheless, in 1848, Karl Marx established the difference between them, emphasising that ‘civilisation’ represented the *physical* infrastructure, whilst ‘culture’ was the *spiritual* superstructure. In other words, civilisation involved mechanics, technologies and material factors; and culture involved social values, moral qualities, language, religion, ideals and intellectual artistic qualities (Braudel 1970: 139; Huntington 2003: 41).

Using a similar approach, in 1921, Alfred Weber applied the concept of civilisation to designate technical knowledge, with culture being applied to the set of moral values. Additionally, Oswald Spengler highlighted in 1928, perhaps under the influence of the European universe (which was a drift after the First World War), the existence of a first stage of human evolution called ‘culture’, which was characterised by a vigorous creative

capacity; and a second stage called ‘civilisation’ characterised by its decline or moral weakness.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, anthropological studies are still defending the notion of culture as a social entity less developed than a civilisation. Anthropologists of the twentieth century have considered that ‘culture’ could be associated with non-urban societies that are not very complex. Meanwhile, the civilisations were linked with urban, developed and complex societies (Huntington 2003: 41). However, culture can also be defined simply as *the social heritage that is transmitted from generation to generation*, varying according to different groups of individuals and involving both material and intangible elements. For this reason, it is common to refer to ‘material culture’ to designate the characteristic artefacts produced by a specific society which, in turn, certainly binds with the mentioned concept of civilisation (‘everything that humankind has created and preserved’).

Service (1975: 3) argues that culture has been the most important achievement of humankind and societies have made their own contributions to maintain their societies, such as in the realms of technology, religion, art, recreation and traditions, among others. The objective of culture is maintaining, integrating and protecting the society, but the only way to achieve these objectives is to adopt a political organisation that organises these cultural elements. This political-cultural result could be referred to as ‘civilisation’, and its principal objective is to preserve a larger and complex society ‘at the expense of competitors of its own as well as of other species’.

Under this point of view, according to Huntington (2003: 43), ‘civilisation’ seems to be a concept more durable than culture, because although many empires, kingdoms and governments have disappeared over time, civilisations ‘remain and survive political, social,

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<sup>1</sup> However, these concepts were not original ideas from the nineteenth century. Indeed, Giovanni Bautista Vico (1668-1744), who was inspired by the Roman Empire model and the later Christian order, proposed that when vigorous ‘barbarian peoples’ became ‘rational people’, they became weaker because the decline itself began when rationalism replaced the old ‘energy’ of the people. In another case, Flinders Petrie suggested in 1911, influenced by Darwinism, that there were ‘periods of struggle’ in human evolution where ‘vigorous’ barbarian peoples were absorbed by more sophisticated societies, but –as Vico suggested –this phenomenon also included a ‘period of decline’ whose origin was in the progressive decrease in these barbarian peoples’ wish to ‘fight’ (Quigley 1979: 129-130).

economic, even ideological upheavals'. In contrast, culture seems historically a reality that in some cases has disappeared in history. For example, many native cultures did not resist the impact of clashing against other more complex cultures or against certain elements of the technological development and for this reason their cultural roots have been lost forever.

To sum up, culture is how human groups live in relation to one another inside of a simpler and complete form that could be easily understood as a whole. In other words, a civilisation is a larger and complex entity that can be distinguished from simpler cultures by their greater control of their environment (agriculture, surplus of food, cities, public buildings, etc.): 'whereas a simple culture changes so slowly that it is usually studied in static terms, a civilisation changes rapidly to be considered chronologically: it has *history*' (Melko 1995: 29).

## **2. The Historical Evolution of Civilisations**

The traditional study on the evolution of historical civilisations inherited from Toynbee and Spengler has considered the changes in civilisations as natural processes of growth and fall, using the organic terms of living systems such as *birth*, *maturity* and *death* (Melko 1995: 42). Nevertheless, the evolutions adopted by Toynbee and Spengler, and many other scholars, are fictitious creations with special personalities but without a historical basis. In other words, they were facile imagined generalisations that became the philosophies of history but were never researched or proved.

So, a new study on the historical evolution of civilisations should be done.

### a) The Origin of Civilisations

What would be the principal cause of the emergence of civilisations? Historically, ancient philosophers such as Aristotle provided a teleological explanation, in which everything – including the emergence of civilisation – had a purpose by itself (Quigley 1979: 55). During the Middle Ages, this purpose was identified with the 'love of God for

humankind', as a *formula* for explaining the origin of everything. However, since the 1600s, the explanation was sought for inside of man; for example, Spinoza thought it was the 'soul' of a man, Schopenhauer in 1818 associated it with the strength of the human 'will', Bergson in 1890 called it *elan vital*, while modern scholars prefer to call it 'energy'.

The historical method seems to have a similar pattern for explaining what motivates the emergence of civilisation. On the one hand, the French scholar Lucien Duplesy (1959) proposed the concept of 'civilisation-strength' to designate a 'mysterious power' that humans have used to create a civilisation; and 'civilisation-product' as the final result of these human efforts in developing a civilisation. On the other hand, the English scholar Arnold Toynbee (1960) made a huge comparative analysis of 24 different civilisations in order to establish his principal contribution to the study of civilisations: that throughout history there has always been *challenges* in nature with a human *response*, which could be identified as the principal motive for the emergence of civilisations under the principle of 'challenge and response' or the 'struggle for existence'.

It seems that this lack of consensus amongst scholars is proof that their analyses were supported by studies on a number of small or abundant entities, based generally on the Greco-Roman historical experience of late antiquity, and confusing different concepts about civilisations, cultures, peoples, political units, societies and religions. Redman (1978: 217) makes a critical assessment of these theories: 'As universal synthesis based on very scanty data, except those drawn from the western civilisation model, these attempts were inadequate'.

Thus, the historical study of civilisations is a phenomenon that is difficult to understand, inasmuch as it is dynamic (constantly changing in time), subjective (possesses very inaccurate data for analysis) and irrational (because it exists and works, but not through a rational or conscious scheme) (Quigley 1979: 85-93). Nevertheless, the theme of the reasons that motivated the emergence of the civilisations could be attributed to the fact that human nature has been, throughout its existence, the sum of emotional, social and intellectual needs and the search for potentialities that allow them to satisfy these needs.

The summation of these potentialities has allowed humankind forging civilizations to undergo a process of historical change, which can be defined as a basic evolutionary process of rise and decline. In other words, *the civilisation comes to constitute the cultural responses of a society to the pressures of the environment*, following Toynbee's idea. For instance, demographic pressure has been, since ancient times, a real 'challenge' for many societies, and they have 'responded' in different ways to control the pressure according to their respective cultures: by developing the social class (Service 1975; Adams 1966); by the confrontation of classes, according to the Marxist theory (Diakonoff 1974); by fighting for resources (Carneiro 1970); or by developing the commercial trade (Wright 1974).

However, following a different approach, civilisations were able to rise when they used the 'instrument of expansion', which allowed the accumulation of surplus and investments in different development areas such as economic, religious, political or warfare (Quigley 1979: 100-101). In other words, Quigley believes that civilisations need to grow, thrive and expand by the development of *inventions* of one or several instruments of expansion, which allows capital *accumulation* and future *investment*.<sup>2</sup>

This surplus-creating instrument is the essential element in any civilization, although, of course, there will be no expansion unless the two other elements (invention and investments) are also present. However, the surplus-creating instrument, by controlling the surplus and thus the disposition of it, will also control investment and will, thus, have at least an indirect influence on the incentive to invent. This surplus-creating instrument does not have to be an economic organization. In fact it can be any kind of organization, military, political, social, religious, and so forth.

The classical approach of Quigley has support in the modern economic interpretation used for complex societies. For instance, Tainter (1988: 91) suggests that human societies are maintained by a continuous flow of energy in their respective

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<sup>2</sup> Quigley 1979: 138.

institutions and interactions. On the other side, the mechanisms used by humans for getting and distributing basic resources are conditioned by socio-political institutions. Energy flow on the one hand and socio-political organisation on the other hand will depend on each other but evolve in harmony.

The conflict starts when the human groups become more complex and become civilisations, because they need more resources and mechanisms, such as networks, hierarchical controls, centralisation of information flow, and support of specialists not involved in resource production. The result, according to Tainter (1988: 92), 'is that as society evolves towards greater complexity, the support costs levied on each individual will also rise, so that the population as a whole must allocate increasing portions of its energy budget to maintaining organizational institutions'.

In sum, Tainter (1988: 93) proposes four stages for describing an economic explanation for the rise of civilisations developed by human societies. First, human societies are considered as 'problem-solving organizations'; second, the socio-political systems developed by human societies for solving problems require energy for their maintenance; third, the increase in complexity of these socio-political systems will also carry an increase in cost per capita; fourth, investment in the socio-political complexity as a means of solving problems often reaches a point of declining marginal return from the periphery of the civilisation.

In this analysis, Tainter highlights:<sup>3</sup>

The principle of diminishing returns is one of the few phenomena of such regularity and predictability that economists are willing to call it a 'law'. In manufacturing, diminishing returns set in when investment in the form of additional inputs causes a decline in the rate of productivity. (...) The law of diminishing returns refers to changes in an average and marginal products and costs. Average product and average cost respond to, and ultimately follow,

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<sup>3</sup> Tainter 1988: 92.

changes in marginal product and cost. Both are subject to this principle, which is called the law of diminishing marginal productivity.

Service (1975: 319) offers similar conclusions, although his terminology is different. He considers that the phenomenon of the rise of civilisations is the capacity of a society to adapt to the environment by the success of only one organism, called simply a 'government'. Thus, a civilisation rises when it is able to provide solutions for its inhabitants for different problems originating in the outside environment, by means of creating the solutions inside the society, such as a centralised bureaucracy. This 'instrument' allows the society to grow and spread into other environments.

This expansion also produces some changes over less socially developed peripheral communities, which are incorporated into the centre through conquering, economic interchanges or providing them with a new colonial model of social organisation. When this adaptation is successful, according to Service (1975: 313), there is a radiating and expanding movement into the periphery, which increases the contact between this expanding society and other communities. Thus, the society originally in expansion incorporates not only new lands but also other peoples, who are dominated, exploited, culturally absorbed or simply transformed by treaties or alliances. However, 'since success in adaptation eventually bespeaks conservatism, successful dominant societies become less able to adapt to any new or different circumstances'.

#### b) The Development of Civilisations

What is the process of historical change of any civilisation? As previously mentioned, the concept of 'civilisation' was originally associated with the idea of *city*, *citizen* or a *style of life* developed in cities, according to the reality developed in France during the eighteenth century. For this reason, cities have also been appropriate barometers of long-term economic and political development process and trends, especially measuring pressures, movements and directions of change in the last 5000 years. To sum up, the only instrument that could be used for identifying the periods of historical changes in civilisations has been the study of the *cities* that have forged the respective civilisations

According to Redman:<sup>4</sup>

Cities exist only within the context of a civilisation. Hence, to be able to understand and distinguish a city, one must have an understanding of civilisation. Definitions of the two terms are closely interrelated, as are the phenomena themselves.

Nevertheless, historians, archaeologists and anthropologists (Kroeber 1968: 234) have associated the evolution of human civilisations mostly with the *organisational aspects* that existed before the first urban societies. Morgan (1950), for example, suggested that the evolution of civilisations is associated with the degree of evolution in the type of internal organisation of its society, which has varied according to the evolution of a specific human group.

Thus, some societies have lived in a state of ‘savagery’, whose principal characteristic is the conformation of a society of bands; meanwhile other groups became more organised as tribal societies within the ‘barbarism’ stage; finally, only some societies became ‘civilisations’, because they were able to build an urban society, characterised by the existence of government, development of social classes and common laws. Indeed, from the anthropological point of view of Trigger (2006: 43-46), the civilisation comes to represent a *form of complex organisation* that is not based on mere kinship relationships and whose maximum expression has been associated with the existence of urban settlements.

These models could be defined as complex because it has many elements working as a holistic system. For instance, Childe (1950) established which elements constitute a civilisation, specifying some *primary* characteristics based on the *organisational characteristics of society* (construction of a monumental city, organisation of a state, class structure, specialisation of labour and accumulation of surplus); and *secondary* characteristics associated with their *material culture* (public works, monumental art, development of commerce, writing and development of science).

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<sup>4</sup> Redman 1978: 216.



This approach is emphasised by Maisels (2010: 14-15), who identifies the different systems used by former civilisations, which also involved the existence of cities as an important element of their societies, but incorporated inside of a more complex system – city-state, small territorial state or *kingdoms* and large territorial state or *empires* – either by the proportion of their settlement, by the proportions of their urbanised population (Figure 1) or simply for its distinguishing characteristics (Figure 2).

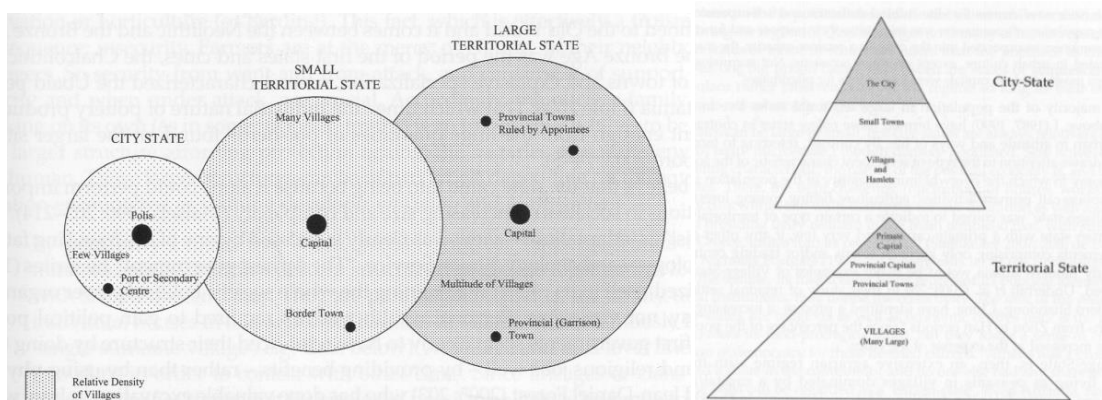


Figure 1 Different settlement attributes of city-states, small and large territorial states and the proportions of urbanised populations (Maisels 2010: 14-15)

	CITY-STATE	SMALL TERRITORIAL	LARGE TERRITORIAL
Urban form	Nucleated (synoecism) <sup>1</sup>	Aggregated (clustered)	Aggregated (clustered; core-and-satellite)
Urban economy	Basically autarkic Citizens farm and trade	Relies on tribute/taxes Peasants are squeezed	Relies on tribute/taxes Peasants are squeezed
Settlement pattern	High proportion of total population lives and works in or from the city	High proportion of total population lives in villages	Overwhelming majority of total population lives in villages
Culture	(1) civic: institutions of civil society. (2) deity (Athene, Nanna etc) represents civic identity and cult. (3) culture is common to other city-states of the region: Mesopotamia, Greece, Italy etc.) (4) relatively widespread literacy	(1) court/aristocratic culture versus peasant/folk culture. (2) state ideology: divine kingship, son of heaven, pontifex maximus etc. (3) some elite literacy	(1) court/aristocratic culture versus peasant/folk culture. (2) royal/imperial ideology: divine kingship, son of heaven, pontifex maximus etc. (3) some elite literacy; corps of literate functionaries
Politics	Participatory	Confined to dynastic/court struggles	Confined to dynastic/court/military struggles
Military	Citizen army: 'phalanxes' of hoplites	Royal core plus infantry levies.	Standing army plus mass levies.

Figure 2 Distinguishing characteristics of an ancient city-state and two territorial states (Maisels 2010: 15)

However, there are many problems with these interpretations. Redman (1978: 216-217) has been very critical because this model has problems in its data and their respective interpretations: ‘any classificatory scheme in which diachronic (through time)

relationships are assumed on the basis of synchronic (at one point in time) examples is weak’.

In other words, it attempted to ethnographically classify different cultures with the objective of explaining the phenomenon of the origin of the civilisation of their societies in evolutionary terms, but in a very simplified manner. Besides this, there was a prejudice in the terms because it seems that ‘savagery’ is a worse state than ‘civilisation’ for survival. Finally, it should be considered that the building of cities is only one characteristic of the civilisation process but it does not explain the complete process of historical change.

Perhaps the general evolution of civilisations could be simplified following the ideas of Bosworth (1995: 206), who identified two basic tendencies that have become constant in the historical analysis of any civilisation: the existence of phases of expansion (‘A’), which are periods of simultaneous consolidation hegemonies; and the existence of phases of contraction (‘B’) in political and economic matters. The alternation between both phases could generate a cycle of 250 or 500 years. However, it is important to clarify that both tendencies are not ‘historical laws’ for the study of the evolution of civilisations. Even more, the period of time between ‘phase A’ and ‘phase B’ has never been universal and it will change according to the respective civilisation (Figure 3).

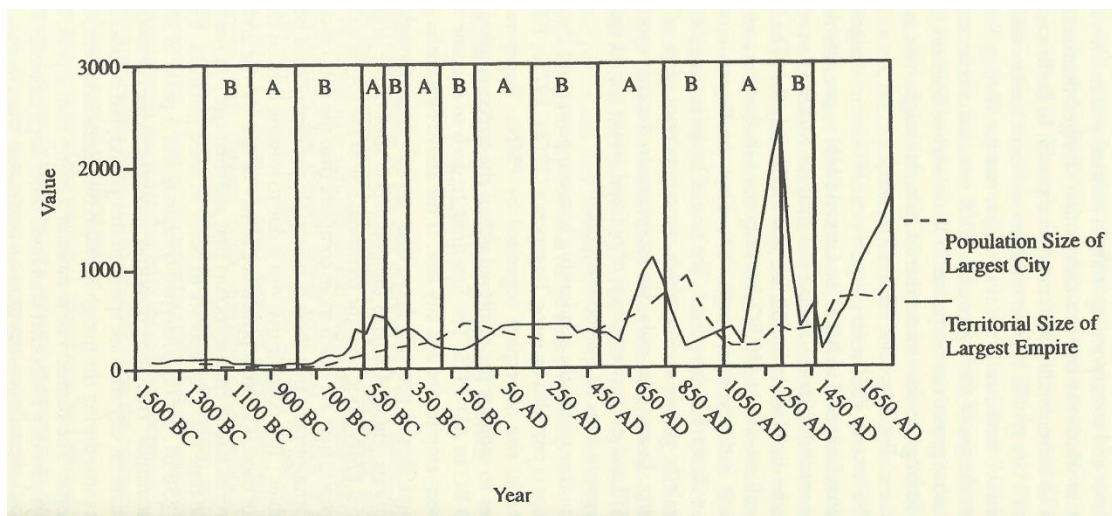


Figure 3 Example of historical evolution with phases of expansion (A) and contraction (B) in the Near East according to Chase-Dunn and Hall (1995: 130)

If these concepts were applied to the cities it would be possible to identify a sequence of political *centralisations* and *decentralisations* that all these urban centres have experienced, especially with the rise and fall of hegemonic core powers (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1995: 120). This behaviour will be the result of an interstate system of competing civilisations and their respective cities, which will seek to control the international trades linking their cores with their respective peripheries.

In other words, large cities are signs of a higher concentration of resources and a large population, which could be considered as an indicator of power, especially when some cities present a settlement-size hierarchy with respect to other settlements. This characteristic is emphasised by Chase-Dunn and Hall (1995: 124) because ‘when a city is able to use political / military power to acquire resources from surrounding cities, it will be able to support a larger population than dominated cities can and this should produce a hierarchical city-size distribution’.

Rather, they become hierarchical societies with an unequal division of the community, depending on power, wealth and social prestige. In these societies, a minority group of people use methods of coercive power to justify their authority, promote the distribution of resources amongst individuals, according to the role that they play in their society, and organise – by horizontal divisions called ‘classes’ – the community work of a large group of producers and artisans.

When civilisations arrive at this stage of power and domination over its periphery, it is possible to speak about ‘empires’, especially when civilisations reach an imperial form and start conquering other core states or adjacent regions with the objective of establishing a new order or ‘universal empire’ to extract taxes and tributes from there. Eckhardt (1995: 91) suggests that there is a strong relationship amongst the three concepts *civilisations*, *empires* and *wars*, because all of them tended to go and grow together. Wars and economic support have been the principal instruments of historical change in civilisations during the

course of human history and the principal tactics that have allowed civilisations to become empires:<sup>5</sup>

Civilisations and empires may not be twins, but they were very close relatives indeed. Civilisations seemed to precede empires in time, but empire had the effect of spreading civilisation over larger territories, which generally included more people. If civilisation was the parent of empires, empires returned the favour by increasing the territory over which civilisation were extended.

As a pattern of development, civilisations created around themselves a cultural splendour and military formidability, which depended on the concentration of food, commodities, goods and raw materials by exercising direct command (McNeill 1995: 311). For this reason, war has always been a policy of development for civilisations since early times, especially when a civilisation wishes to stay inside of the imperial stage.

Perhaps war has been the principal ‘instrument of expansion’, using Quigley’s concept, but it could be more accurate to outline that civilisations have used different ‘instruments of expansion’ in their respective historical evolution (trade, political organisation, cultural influence and so on). However, when civilisations arrive at the imperial stage – by expansion, conquest and domination – the only unique ‘instrument of expansion’ used by them seems to be war or military power. That is the reason why Wilkinson (1995: 19) emphasises war as a type of ‘engine of history’ in the imperial evolution of these civilisations:

A unifying social entity or system exists where we have evidence that a pair of groups alternates war with negotiation, or war with trade, or war with coalition, or war with subordination, or war with watchful waiting, or war with threats and preparation for war.

Besides the imperial stage of some civilisations has a special relationship with some historical period identified as the ‘Golden Age’ of empires. They have been periods

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<sup>5</sup>Eckhardt 1995: 86.

of high creativity in subjects such as philosophy, musical creativity and science. At the same time, these ‘Golden Ages’ have also been periods of aggressive variables that involve a large number of riots, aggressions and wars. However, it is evident that these characteristics have been made possible by economic power, whose growth and decline have depended on how this economy may support important expressions of military power.

In other words, more civilisations meant more empires and more empires meant more wars. Civilisation and empire could be considered good for those who get it or who profit from it more. In a similar way, empires may be better for those who defend an imperial civilisation, but not necessary for their colonies because the quantity of civilisations, empires and wars change the social structure ‘to one of greater inequality, indicated by slavery, caste, class, social stratification and so forth’ (Eckhardt 1995: 92).

### c) The Decline and Collapse of Civilisations

When does the decadence or fall of any civilisation begin? Civilisations enter into a period of crisis or decline –either during an imperial stage or not – when its ‘instrument of expansion’ becomes a simple ‘institution’ that is not able to produce accumulation of surplus and investments because, ‘like all instruments, an instrument of expansion in the course of time becomes an institution and the rate of expansion slows down’ (Quigley 1979: 128). This process is interrupted with the *institutionalisation* of this former instrument of expansion, which appears when there is a breakdown of one of the three necessary elements of expansion: *invention*, *accumulation* and *investment*.<sup>6</sup>

The decline starts when this instrument of a civilisation cannot adapt or respond to new environmental conditions because of their bureaucratic nature, they begin to increase inability and its instrument of expansion become less efficient. Following Quigley’s model,

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<sup>6</sup> According to Quigley (1979: 101-102), an *instrument* ‘is a social organization that is fulfilling effectively the purpose for which it arose. An *institution* is an instrument that has taken on activities and purposes of its own, separate from and different from the purposes for which it was intended. As a consequence, an institution achieves its original purposes with decreasing effectiveness. Every instrument consists of people organized in relationships to one another. As the instrument becomes an institution, these relationships become ends in themselves to the detriment of the ends of the whole organization’.

the former 'instrument of expansion' becomes an 'institution' but, according to Service (1975: 320), 'this marks not exactly the decline and fall of the older culture, but simply that there is this obvious penalty in taking the lead, so that the leader is bypassed and superseded by a later more effective challenger'.

That means that civilisations begin to decline when they are not able to apply new surplus to stimulate new inventions and allows them to carry on the development of the civilisation. In other words, a civilisation starts to decline when its people are more interested in wasting the surpluses obtained in the past than to provide new and more effective instruments of production. In this stage, the civilisation has three options to overcome the crisis. The first would be a policy of *reform* of the former instrument that became an institution, with the objective of bringing it back to being an instrument once more.

The second policy would be *circumvention*, where the former instrument remained as an institution preserved by a sector of the community. Meanwhile, the civilisation finds and promotes a new instrument of expansion that allows a new accumulation of surplus. The last policy is the *reaction*, which is produced, according to Quigley (1979: 144), when some members of the elite of a society decide to maintain the system of institutions, despite their limitations, because they are satisfied with the social order and do not want to change it through either reform or circumvention. Thus, the rate of expansion continues to decrease and becomes chronic, provoking the end or fall of the civilisation.

In a similar way, Gills (1995: 152) believes that the crisis is the result of 'over concentration of wealth and over extraction of surplus, as well as the deformation of the state from a facilitator of production and distribution to a parasitical and corrupt apparatus of economic exploitation', both in ancient and modern civilisations. Thus, any political consolidation of a civilisation precedes generally a period of economic prosperity, which also produces a favourable political and social framework. However, a spiral of political and economic disarray that tends to amplify itself could produce a general crisis inside of a civilisation.

The principal consequence could also be observed in cities: the rise of a civilisation could be identified by the existence of an important centre of control as a city-capital that controls its periphery; when this centre is in decadence, it loses the control of its periphery, characterised by decentralisation, feudalisation and abandonment of this centre or by foreign conquest. Recently, it has been important to establish that the vanishing of an urban centre does not mean the fall or the end of a civilisation. Generally an urban centre could transform itself by fusing two separate urban entities and become autonomous, or it may be absorbed as part of another civilisation.

Even a civilisation could be composed of several urban centres and in this case, ‘no multi urban civilization can properly be said to have fallen until *all* its cities are gone’ (Wilkinson 1995: 54). Of course, it could be a moment of catastrophic destruction that ends an urban centre but Wilkinson insists (1995: 62) that it is not synonymous with the end of a civilisation because ‘no multi urban society has ended its history as a civilisation until all its cities are destroyed or depopulated, then we have no tolerable warrant for accepting epochs of succession of civilisations’:

What is true of Rome’s fall is true of the fall of other cities. Each fall of any city could have been horrifying and tragic. Some surely were those of Hazor, Nimrud, Tyre, Babylon, Corinth, Syracuse, Carthage or Baghdad. But these seem to have been *local* catastrophes, balanced or more than balanced elsewhere within or at the edge of the urbanized area. Other Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Syrian cities remained or rose when their neighbours fell 2250 BC – 825 BC; semi peripheral Mediterranean cities rose while Middle East core cities fell 825 BC – 375 BC; Rome, Rhodes, Rayy, Seleucia, Antioch, Alexandria rose while Carthage, Syracuse, Corinth, Babylon declined 375 BC -145 BC; Constantinople rose as Rome fell, Tabriz rose – and semi peripheral Paris, Milan, Venice rose – as Baghdad fell. This is a picture of turnover, *not* of collapse and rebirth, at a civilisational level.

To sum up, the civilisations have three alternatives in this stage: they may disintegrate themselves and disappear suddenly in history, such as Carthage in Nord Africa

or the Mayan cities in Mesoamerica (although this alternative has curiously not been the most common in history); or they may become fixed in a steady state of decadence for many centuries, such as the Roman Empire or the Ottoman Empire, before falling; or they may experience ‘a period of transition in which disintegration takes place while new material is being added before the onset of further development’ (Melko 1995: 42). The last alternative is the appearance of new civilisations that incorporate the legacy of their predecessors, and this alternative has apparently been the case for the majority of the civilisations in history.

### **3. First Aim of this Thesis: the Central Civilisation and the Mesopotamian / Egyptian Merger**

The last comment, that the appearance of new civilisations that incorporate the legacy of their predecessors as has apparently been the case for the majority of the civilisations in history has not been investigated enough by scholars and it is one of the principal aims of this thesis. Generally, the analysis on civilisations made by scholars follows the same pattern of specific study about origin, development and fall of different civilisations. However, it seems that there is not any consideration about the possibility that the majority of the civilisations in the world did not disappear at all but that they merged with their successors and inaugurated new historical periods.

However, that point of view has not the consent of the scholars of today. The reason for this academic view could be interpreted as the result of a traditional method of study that persists nowadays. According to Melko (1995: 26), one of the most common problems of historical research about civilisations is that there have been relatively few scholars who have decided to investigate civilisations in direct relation with other civilisations as comparative historians. The reason could be that the concept of ‘civilisation’ has been generally studied under the principle of *uniformity* rather than *connectedness*.



That means scholars usually prefer to study with *uniformity* the different civilisations as a collection of adjacent, successive and different entities throughout history such as ‘Mesopotamian’, ‘Western’, ‘Islamic’, ‘Medieval’ or ‘Greco-Roman’. In contrast, the criterion of *connectedness* would allow for the spatial temporal boundaries of an urbanised society to be located, whose inhabitants were interacting intensely with other societies, although their respective civilisations were dissimilar or their interactions were mostly hostile.

One of the first scholars that used the criterion of connectedness amongst civilisations was the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, who adopted, in 1970, the concept of a *World System* (Wallerstein 1995: 239) His concept was the result of a synthesis from the Braudelian historiography, the Marxian historical materialism and the theory of Andre Gunder Frank. He defined a World System as a relatively large social system which is autonomous and persists on its own but with interactions with other World Systems.

Each World System has a complex economic division of work and contains a plurality of societies and cultures that experience different sequences of expansion and contraction throughout its history (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1995: 116). The problem has been that Wallenstein and his school of thought established an arbitrary starting point for the World Systems that began in 1650, possibly for the impact of the European expansion to other continents and the beginning of the first European colonial empires.

The ideas of Wallerstein inspired several scholars but many of their followers have disagreed with this arbitrary starting point. One of them is David Wilkinson, who has elaborated a criterion that unifies these World Systems with a single entity, heterogeneous, divided and conflicted systems designated with a new concept: the *Central Civilisation* (Wilkinson 1995: 46). This is a concept that was invented for describing an ensemble of civilisations that through history finished converging from antiquity until now, becoming one unique civilisation, identified today under the concept of *Westernisation* or *Globalisation* (Figure 4).

Bergensen (1995: 196) is more specific and preferred going back many centuries, pushing and stretching the sense of systematic continuity deeper into this Central

Civilisation in the historical past. Thus, the Central Civilisation would have been born in the ancient Near East about 5000 years ago (3500 BC), with two independent civilisations (Mesopotamia and Egypt) coming together through a long process of historical evolution known as the ‘Near Eastern phase’ in 1500 BC, inaugurating the first historical stage of the Central Civilisation.

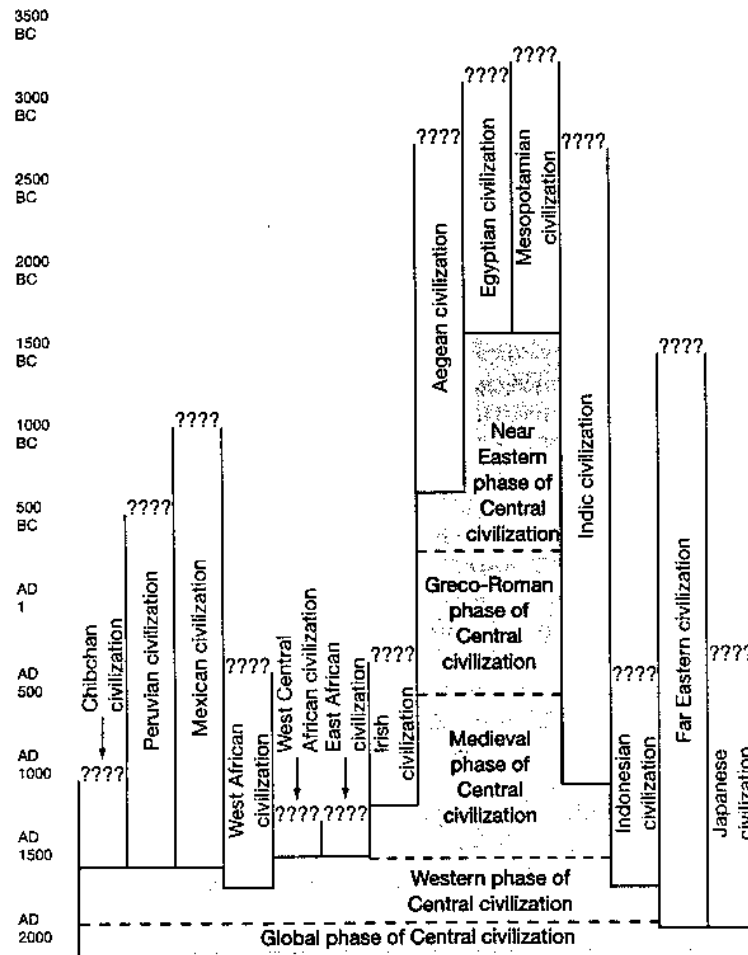


Figure 4 An outline of the Central Civilisation and its later evolution by Wilkinson (1995: 48)

This ‘Near Eastern phase’ of the Central Civilisation later incorporated the Aegean civilisation and finally all of them were absorbed chronologically by the Persian Empire, the Hellenistic kingdoms, the Roman Empire and so on until the present. In other words, it seems that there was one continuous World System throughout history that started firstly with this Central Civilisation in the ancient Near East. So, the modern concept of

World System invented by Wallerstein is really a manifestation of many of these entities that have existed in history and that have finished engulfing around a common Central Civilisation (Sanderson and Hall 1995: 103).

In effect, actually it has grown to a global scale, with the network having expanded and absorbed or engulfed other civilisations, showing a long-term trend of steady geographic and demographic expansion. Although it has had occasional declines and crises, the Central Civilisation has never fallen until today. Even more, this entity has since then expanded all over the world, absorbing all other previous and independent civilisations until it will become a global one in the near future:<sup>7</sup>

Central Civilization is of course positionally ‘central’ only in retrospect, by reason of its omnidirectional expansion: this network, originally located where Asia and Africa meet, spread over time in all directions, encompassing the civilized networks of Europe, West Africa ... and East Asia by moving east, and thereby rendering itself historically ‘central’ as well.

However, it is possible to establish two principal disagreements with respect to this historical ‘Near Eastern phase’ supported by these scholars with respect to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations. First, there is no mention of why the Mesopotamian and Egyptian entities merged with each other in 1500 BC and how. Second, there is no analysis on the historical evolution of both civilisations and whether they merged finally into a single and global imperial entity. Indeed, the school of Wallerstein and Wilkinson seems to identify that there were no relevant imperial entities in the ancient Near East until 600 BC with the Persian Empire.

The appearance of the Persian or Achaemenid empire is pointed out by another follower of this school, Eckhardt (1995: 80), who mentioned that only the Persians ‘developed civilization, empire and war into arts based on a hierarchical delegation of power such as the world had not known before’ because ‘empires did not amount to much prior to 600 BC, when Medes and Persians introduced a degree of hierarchical bureaucracy

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<sup>7</sup> Wilkinson 1995: 47.

unknown in human history'. So, it seems that for the World System School, and for the followers of the Central Civilisation, there was a 'historical vacuum' of one millennium without analysis because there is no mention of what happened from 1500 BC to 600 BC in the context of the Central Civilisation.

The analysis of the evolution of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisations carried out by these scholars would corroborate this appreciation. Figure 5 represents the imperial territorial expansion of ancient Egypt, which is calculated by the 'mega-metre'. This is a metric unit of distance equal to 1000 kilometres or about 621 miles invented by Taagapera (1978) for studying the extension of ancient and modern empires. The figure shows the variation in size in mega-metres (vertical axis) during the principal chronological periods of Egyptian history (horizontal axis).

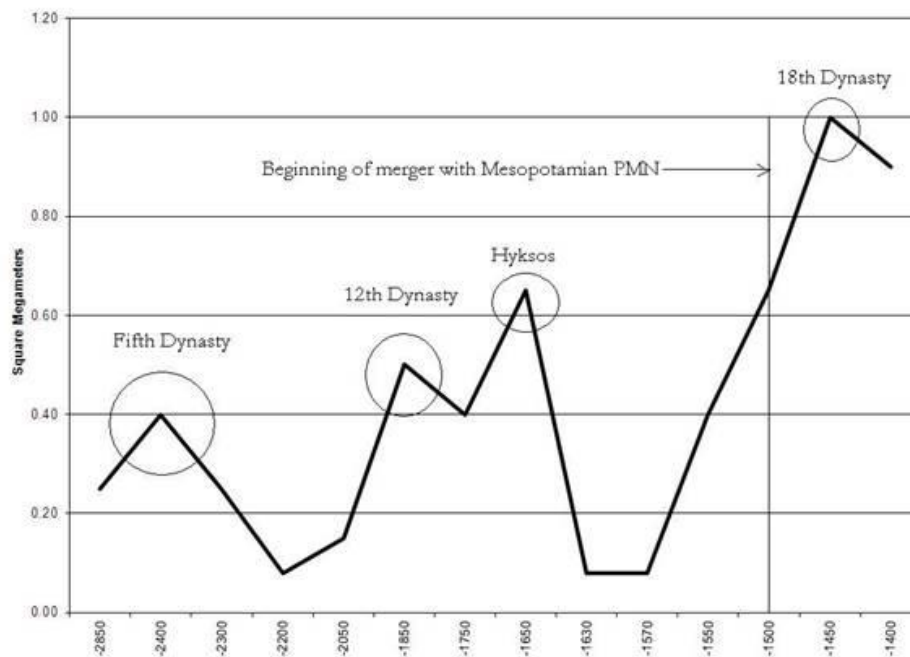


Figure 5 Historical evolution of Egypt before merging with Mesopotamia according to Taagapera (1978)

It is evident that the periods of major extension of Egypt were during the time when strong dynasties ruled Egypt and allowed this civilisation to reach the peak of territorial extension in three specific periods under three dynasties: the Fifth Dynasty (Old Kingdom), the Twelfth Dynasty (Middle Kingdom) and the Eighteenth Dynasty (New

Kingdom). However, it seems that Egypt suffered periods of decline – known by Egyptologists as ‘Intermediate periods’ – where the imperial extension plummeted to lowest level in size of square mega-meters at least in two periods and possibly in a third one, which is not shown in the figure.

Besides this, it is evident that the reference of the year 1500 BC when Egypt merged with Mesopotamia, identified in this figure by ‘Mesopotamian PMN’ (political / military network) – a modern term used by Chase-Dunn and Hall (1995: 111) for ‘civilisation’ – coincides with the apparently dramatic fall of the Egyptian state after 1400 BC, although it is not explained in the figure at all. Moreover, as it was previously mentioned, it is evident that this historical analysis did not consider the later period of 1500 BC to 600 BC.

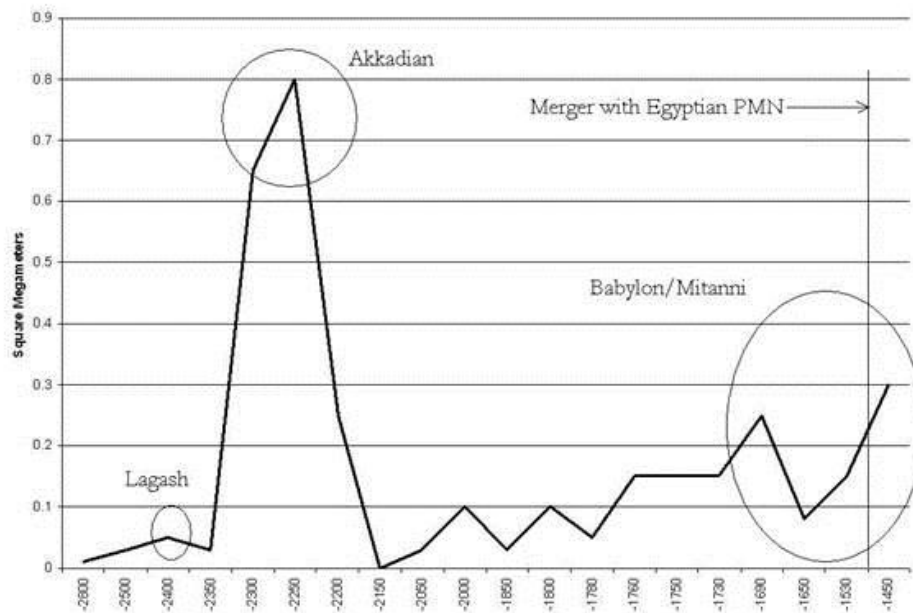


Figure 6 Historical evolution of Mesopotamia before merging with Egypt according to Taagapera (1978)

In Figure 6, there is a similar scheme that shows the variation, also in mega-metre squares, of the principal Mesopotamian ‘empires’ and it is evident that its historical evolution is very different compared to Egypt’s. The level of imperial extension in square mega-metres is ostensibly less than Egypt’s and more fragmented such as the political reality of Mesopotamia was. Indeed, it is possible to corroborate the existence of four

different political entities that reached a peak of extension: the city of Lagash; the Akkadian kingdom, which was a real exception with respect to other Mesopotamian periods with respect to its high level marking square mega-metres; and the kingdoms of Babylon and Mitanni.

Nevertheless, the general Mesopotamian imperial extension in this figure would only demonstrate a stabilised trend of growth and fall over several centuries, but without much variation. Perhaps the Akkadian Empire could be considered as a gigantic upsurge. Meanwhile, the Babylon/Mitanni upsweep was not as relevant as the Akkadian had been, but at least it was more than a third larger than the average of the three previous peaks, and it could be qualified as an upsweep but never to the level reached by any of the Egyptian kingdoms.

In around 1500 BC, the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations merged to become what we call the primeval Central Civilisation (or the Central PMN, as it is called in the figure). This situation will be evident with the analysis of the figure that combines both realities (Figure 7) and it would demonstrate the deep differences in the historical evolution between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Principally, it does not allow us to understand how both civilisations became merged and how the 'Near Eastern phase' of the Central Civilisation started.

In effect, the figure shows that the periods of territorial expansion of Egypt do not coincide with the expansion of Mesopotamia. So, during the periods when Egypt was at a peak (2500 BC – 2400 BC, 1900 BC – 1800 BC and 1600 – 1500 BC), Mesopotamia had lower levels of territorial expansion and vice versa. For instance, the period of the Akkadian power coincides with the First Intermediate Period in Egypt; and the peak of the Babylonian dynasty of Hammurabi coincides with the following Egyptian crisis of the Second Intermediate Period.

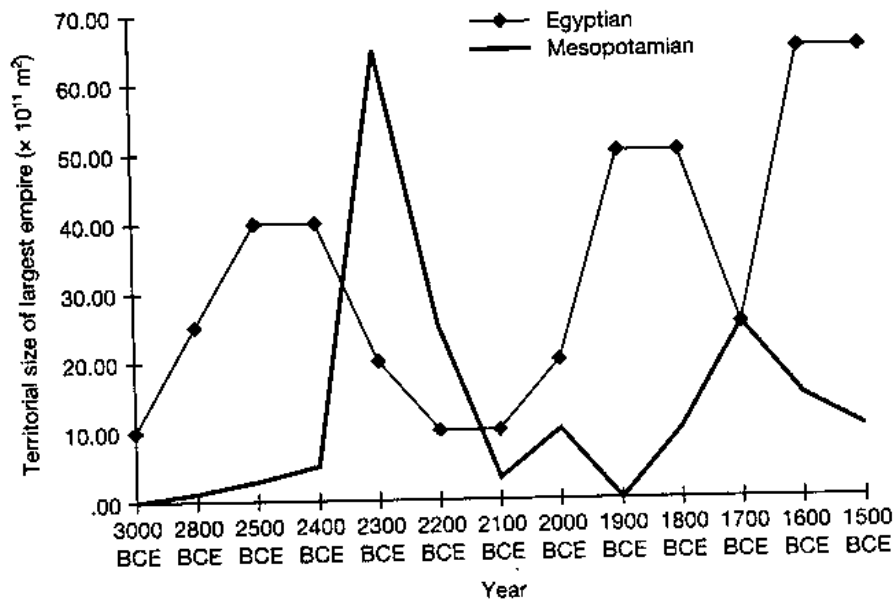


Figure 7 Comparative graph of the expansion evolution of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia according to Taagapera (1978)

The only conclusion that could be drawn would be that in 1500 BC Egypt was in the historical peak of its power, while Mesopotamia declined. So, that could be a signal that if the so-called ‘Near Eastern phase’ of the Central Civilisation occurred in that period, Egypt was in a better position of expansion and it should have engulfed the Mesopotamian region. However, there is no historical evidence of any Egyptian conquest of the Mesopotamian core and the instauration of the Egyptian universal empire. To sum up, the theory of the origin of the first stage for explaining the origin of the Central Civilisation in 1500 BC elaborated by Wilkinson and his school of thought is wrong or inaccurate.

Fortunately, there are other sources that could be used for understanding the evolution of this Central Civilisation better. One of these is to calculate the amount and movements of the population of the largest cities in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The second is the historical chronological prolongation until 650 BC applied in the following graphic (Figure 8), whose lines of fluctuation for the urban population are initially very different with respect to both civilisations. In the Egyptian case, it rose from 60,000 to 100,000 inhabitants in less than 200 years but it started too quickly and suddenly decreases; meanwhile, the Mesopotamian population gradually decreased and later it stabilised in 1350 BC followed by a very important and fast variation of increase since 800 BC.

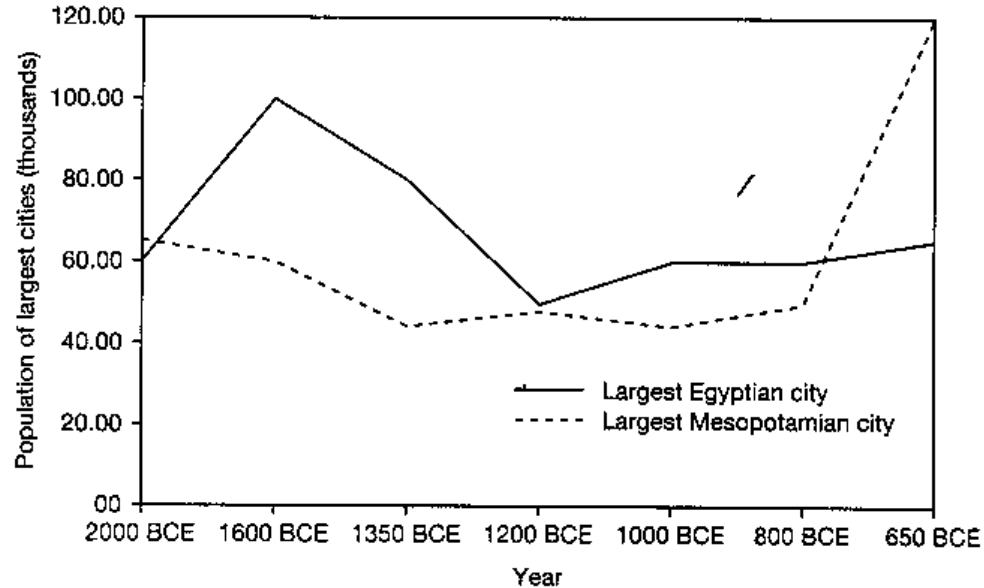


Figure 8 Population of the largest cities in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia from 2000 BC until 650 BC by Bosworth (1995: 212)

However, there is another particular phenomenon: both civilisations reached the same amount of urban population in around 1200 BC (the date in consensus for the end of the Bronze Age). After that, the Egyptians remained proportionally stabilised and recovered slowly, while the Mesopotamian line has a light decrease until 800 BC, when it had a huge and remarkable ascension never seen before. The long interval from 1300 BC to 825 BC should be taken into special consideration because it offers a special tendency: many cities had been simultaneously reduced and since then suddenly the cities and the population increased in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. That is significant evidence of the formation of an imperial entity and its respective urban centres.

Wilkinson (1995: 61) himself suggested that ‘it seems more likely that Central Civilisation will be found to have persisted, even if wounded and reduced for the Iron Age troubles’. Even more, it is more plausible to suggest that the key should be found in the following tendency: both civilisations were following separate territorial expansion paths and urban growth, where levels of territorial expansion of Egypt were proportionately greater than Mesopotamia. However, both civilisations reached a turning point in history, in around 1200 BC, when the trend changed forever and the Mesopotamian civilisation grew to a level never seen before. Thus, Mesopotamia ended up incorporating or conquering the



Egyptian territory into its own sphere of influence from 800 BC. In other words, this should be the beginning of the ‘Near Eastern phase’ of the Central Civilisation, when an empire from Mesopotamia established a new order in the ancient Near East, incorporating the Egyptian territory.

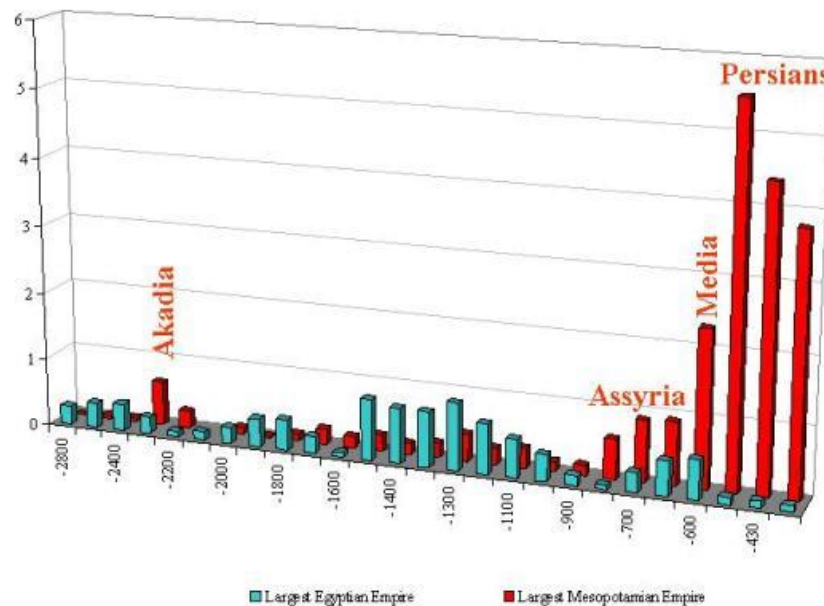


Figure 9 Comparative graphic of the expansion evolutions of Egypt and Mesopotamia until 430 BC according to Taagapera (1978)

The Figure 9 sums up the historical evolution of both of the aforementioned civilisations. On the one hand, the Egyptian territorial expansion in square mega-metres allows us to identify the three traditional periods of the Egyptian kingdom with their respective intermediate periods. On the other hand, the Mesopotamian evolution is very flat – with the lone exception of the Akkadian kingdom – and this poor territorial expansion is evidence of the fragmentation of the Mesopotamian civilisation.

Nevertheless, there is a crucial point at 1200 BC when the Egyptian kingdom begins a gradual decline until it reaches the minimum expression in 800 BC. This date coincides with the apparition of Assyria whose increase in the columns of square mega-metres would demonstrate the appearance of a real imperial civilisation in Mesopotamia that would be continued enormously by the successive Mesopotamian empires such as

Media and Persia. While Egypt looks to have made a revival under the Assyrian predominance, which could be understood as the last Egyptian attempt of resistance against this Mesopotamian power, it became more insignificant in the later periods, which could be interpreted as the final integration or subjection of the Egyptian civilisation to the Mesopotamian sphere (500 BC – 300 BC).

An important objective would be to elucidate the connectedness developed in the ‘Near Eastern phase’ with this Central Civilisation, originated by the fusion of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations. In this case, emphasising the different historical evolutions of both civilisations and especially the period between 1200 and 600 BC, which apparently constituted the formative period of the first expression of the universal empire developed in Mesopotamia and continued later by the Media and Persian civilisations?

#### **4. Second Aim of the Thesis: the Methodological Approach to the Knowledge of the Ancient Near East**

The problems of inaccurate historical data amongst the scholars of the World System and Central Civilisation schools of thought described before would demonstrate a general tendency that has become common in modern research in the analysis of civilisations. It could be ironic but several of these scholars who have studied the process of origin and evolution of civilisations are not historians or they have no factual knowledge or knowledge about historical methods of research. Indeed, a great number of these scholars are social scientists with different specialisations such as sociologists (Wallerstein), political economists (Weber), anthropologists (Service), political scientists (Huntington), archaeologists (Childe) or simple theorists (Quigley).

As it was previously mentioned, Wallenstein and his school of thought established an arbitrary starting point of 1650 for the Central Civilisation, motivated possibly by the impact of the European expansion to other continents and the beginning of the first European colonial empires. Nevertheless, it is another convention inherited from the idea that the studies about civilisations and World Systems should be restricted to Western

civilisation. The principal reason, according to Gills (1995: 156), is the development of the capitalistic economy in the Western civilisation that has allowed it to unify and civilise the entire world for the first time. Thus, the contemporary world in the twenty-first century is a product of this event because of the mythological idea that ‘progress’, ‘capitalism’ and ‘the West’ are synonymous.

The principal problem is that this view was, in fact, invented 100 years ago with the objective of defending the idea of Western superiority in world history, giving ‘scientific’ support to the Eurocentric or Western colonisation and the relevance of capitalism as the economic system. Nevertheless, this vision also denigrates the role and contribution of any civilisation whose roots are not precisely Western. Indeed, Gills (1995: 155) says ‘all or most of the known historical modes of production (accumulation) have existed since about 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. It includes the capitalistic mode, based on the existence of capital, as abstract wealth taking money form and of wage labour’.

It is important to declare that there is no problem with these professionals wanting to investigate ancient history but, as Sanderson and Hall (1995: 232) outline, ‘their training has seldom given them the factual knowledge they need to make sense out of world history in their own terms’. The same criticism could be made with the majority of the historians who have no knowledge about theory or try to avoid the theoretical approach to history, especially with respect to ancient history. Nevertheless, this thesis considers that it is necessary to have a continuous dialogue between historians and theorists for understanding the historical evolution of any civilisation.

In such dialogue it is necessary to avoid any objective whose finality could be the discerning of the general laws of human behaviour (case of Spengler and Toynbee) because that practice would want to imitate the classical method used in physics to replicate it in history. The experience would demonstrate that the search for general laws in the sphere of the historical evolution of civilisations is as futile as dangerous because it has pushed scholars away from their primary task: the *empirical reality* which is not always coincident with the theoretical approach of these scholars. The orthodox Marxist theory on history applied to Mesopotamian history (the school of Leningrad) is an example of that.

Besides this, the historical study of the social reality in antiquity is a very complex reality because the subjects such as the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations are known superficially by the specialists in civilisation studies and too specifically by the historians. On the one hand, the civilisation specialists have paid more attention to the social structures and dynamics of agrarian communities, looking for patterns or regularities that are usually cyclical in nature, to apply them in any latitude or any historical period, whether it be in the Southern Asian continent, Mesoamerica or China (Sanderson 1995: 262). On the other hand, historians have been studying very specific cultural themes such as philosophies, literature, art styles, and political and religious matters, avoiding the use of theoretical approaches or the study of the general structures of the historical evolution in both civilisations.

For this reason, it would be important to unify the criteria of a specialist in history interested in the evolution of the ancient civilisations, emphasising subjects such as the economic development, the political structure and the historical changes both in Egypt and in Mesopotamia, with the objective of studying these agrarian and preindustrial societies from a very different point of view.

To sum up, this thesis will seek to conduct a study on the historical process of evolution of civilisations. However, this topic has been studied mainly by theoretical sociologists rather than professional historians. The principal drawback has been that the theorists have shown little knowledge on the materials, data and historical evolution; while the historians expressed little interest in the theoretical scope, especially in ancient history.

Therefore, this thesis will rescue some theoretical models developed since 1995 and have been the view of Wallerstein's *World System*, and especially its implication in the later vision of the 'Central Civilisation' invented by Wilkinson. This 'Central Civilisation' would represent the original civilisation, which merged with or engulfed the majority of the civilisations known today, and whose origin would be the merger of two originally ancient and independent civilisations: Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Both civilisations ended up merging through a long historical process whose starting point was the maelstrom of 1200 BC caused by the end of the Bronze Age, but whose consolidation was between 800 BC and 600 BC by the existence of an entity of imperial character from Mesopotamia called Assyria, according to the evidence on territorial and urban expansion from Mesopotamia to the detriment of Egypt. It is at this time that the consolidation of the so-called 'Near Eastern phase' can be considered, which marks the beginning and the consolidation of the Central Civilisation.

Therefore, this thesis will cover in the following chapters these subjects:

1. An introductory study following the Braudelian analysis about the relevance of the geographical formation of Mesopotamia; the structural changes in their civilisation, in terms of urban development and their instruments of expansion; and finally the most important historical data and facts on the formation of the first city-states and kingdoms or territorial states. This analysis will conclude with the global crisis that shook the Ancient Near East at the end of the Bronze Age in 1200 BC and its implications for the consolidation of Assyria as the first universal empire known in Mesopotamia from 1000 BC.
2. A theoretical analysis of the scope of the notions of 'empire' and 'imperialism' developed by the Assyrian civilisation from 800 BC to 600 BC, the Neo-Assyrian Empire period, highlighting its main characteristics and its application in the context of the Ancient Near East before the incorporation of the Egyptian civilisation into this new world order.
3. A study of Egyptian civilisation, emphasising its geographical, structural and historical peculiarities, such as the study made with respect to the Mesopotamian civilisation. Thereafter, the thesis will explore how the Egyptian civilisation confronted the Mesopotamian expansion represented by the Neo-Assyrian imperialism and how ancient Egypt ended up becoming incorporated into the new order of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, establishing the 'Near Eastern phase' of the primeval Central Civilisation that originated from the conquest and incorporation of Egyptian territory.

4. Finally, this thesis will try to explain the final process of the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, emphasising the theoretical implications of such concepts as the 'fall', 'decline' and 'collapse' of an imperial entity such as Assyria both at the epicentre of Mesopotamia and in the Egyptian territory. The main issue to be clarified is whether it is possible to speak of an end of the civilisation expanded by the Neo-Assyrian Empire or whether it was a fundamental step for the initiation and consolidation of the so-called Central Civilisation from the new order established by the Neo-Assyrian Empire and continued by the imperial states that followed it.

## Chapter 1

# The Historical Evolution of the Ancient Near East and the Rise of the Assyrian Phenomenon

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## 1. The Ancient Near East as Geopolitical Entity

Any study of the historical evolution of the human civilization must begin by providing general knowledge of the ecological environment in which it took place. The principal reason for this is that human evolution has always been connected with humans' environment setting because civilization is an integral part of a complete ecosystem, which includes several elements such as material and spiritual culture (Redman 1978: 16). Historical evidence suggests therefore that the environment of a particular region offers different possibilities and limitations for human adaptation.

Following the traditional idea of Toynbee, in his *A Study of History* (1960) human culture and civilization have depended on the human answer to its environment. One of the most important legacies that the geography of the Ancient Near East produced in human history was the development of the first human civilizations as an answer to the challenges of nature. Under this perspective, Redman (1978: 6), Matthews (2003: 93) and Nissen (1988: 2-3) consider that the current archaeological evidence would indicate that there is no region where either agriculture or urbanism developed earlier than in the Ancient Near East.

Thus, it remains unquestioned that the early developments in this region had a greater effect on the nature of Western civilization than any other analogous developments anywhere else in the world. Thus, the early Mediterranean civilizations of Greece and Rome, which have been acknowledged in many respects to be ancestral to European civilizations, were undoubtedly influenced by their Ancient Near Eastern predecessors'

writings, ethnics, science, engineering, art, mythology, architecture and political administration (Maisels 2010: 81).

Therefore, the Ancient Near East is a classical example to aid in the understanding of the origin of the first human civilization, 10000 years ago, as the product of trial and error of many aspects of the modern culture, in matters such as religion, agriculture, science, politic and economy, which represents the principal legacy inherited from this ancient time. Thus, according to Redman (1978: 17), although ecological relationship can be studied in many parts of the world, it seems that the Near East data offers one of the longest, best-documented, and most diverse sets of historical data about human civilization.

According to Matthews (2003) scholars of the Ancient Near East past have failed to understand the nature and relevance of the archaeological record because they assumed a general point of view, which was restricted to the written information rescued in ancient archives, considered as 'primary sources'. A critical assessment of this methodology is explained by Matthews (2003: 99) who believes that historians have failed 'to consider issues of how the evidence was generated, how it may have been manipulated, how it may have been changed and distorted through time, or how it might be seen in a totally different light if less visible forms of evidences could be brought to bear on the problem in question'.

There are many other sources (archaeology, geography, sociology and theoretical approaches), which could be also used for interpreting the past as primary sources. An example is the knowledge of historical terms and how they are currently applied, such as the concept of 'Near East'. This notion was adopted with property also in the European context during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to identify the remains of the Ottoman Turkish Empire, scattered along the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean Sea, which included the modern states of Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq (Kuhrt 1995: 1-3). In fact, the British were the first to adopt the term 'Near East' or 'Middle East' after the Crimea War, to reflect their strategic interests in these areas at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has retained valid until today, although it has been extended beyond its initial scope (Beaumont 1998: 16).



It should be recognised that throughout history, these borders have varied to a greater or lesser extent. Thus, from Antiquity, the Near East also expands from the shores of the Aegean Sea to the Iranian plateau and from the plateau of Anatolia to the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula. On the other hand, ancient Egypt and the Aegean civilizations, historically linked to the African continent and the Mediterranean Sea, have also been associated with this region in some periods Antiquity, as well as the Arabian Peninsula, Afghanistan, central Asia and the Indus Valley.

Following the point of view of the German scholar von Soden (1994: 1-2) this approach was possible because many times it was the result of mixing the concept of 'Near East' with the concept of 'Orient'.<sup>8</sup> However, the concept and the boundaries of the 'Orient' have never been constant in relation to adjacent cultures. Indeed, in the past the Mediterranean region, northern Africa, Eastern Iran, Central Asia, India and China have been included in this. Only with the origin of the Islam during the 7<sup>th</sup> century did it become possible to associate the concept of 'Orient' with the Muslim world because it was the only dominant power in the region since the pre-Hellenistic period (Said 1993: 59-62).

Nevertheless, the concept of either Ancient or Modern Near East has had geographical natural boundaries, which have been permanent since ancient times. They have allowed for the establishment and identification of a region that, during Antiquity, included the northern region of Caucasus with the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea; the Persian Gulf in the south and the Indian Ocean in the southeast; and the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea in the west and southwest, respectively. The land enclosed within these marine natural borders is known as 'Ancient Near East' (Figure 1.1).

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<sup>8</sup>During Antiquity Greek geographers such as Strabo associated the *Orient* with the continent of Asia. Meanwhile, in the European Middle Ages it was common to associate the notion of *Orient* with the Islam (Said 1993: 59-62). That is because this civilisation was the definitive power which extended its influence beyond the actual confines identified as belonging to the Orient, which means the continental parts from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. For this reason, until nowadays, it has been difficult to define exactly what 'Orient' means under a historical or geographical point of view. Indeed, this term generally has referred to by the Western mentality, as any regions far away from Western Europe or even East Asia (Said 1993: 73-78).

The Ancient Near East is also geographically a vast territory located at the intersection of three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe - with converge over three tectonic plates, the Arabian plate, the Iranian and the African, whose geological movements determined the shape of this region. For this reason, according to Redman (1978: 21 and 30) the Ancient Near East has a general continental climate, emphasised by the presence of high coastal mountain ranges, with two distinct seasons: a dry and hot summer (May-October) and relatively cold winter (December-March) which have developed an agricultural society with winter rainfall.

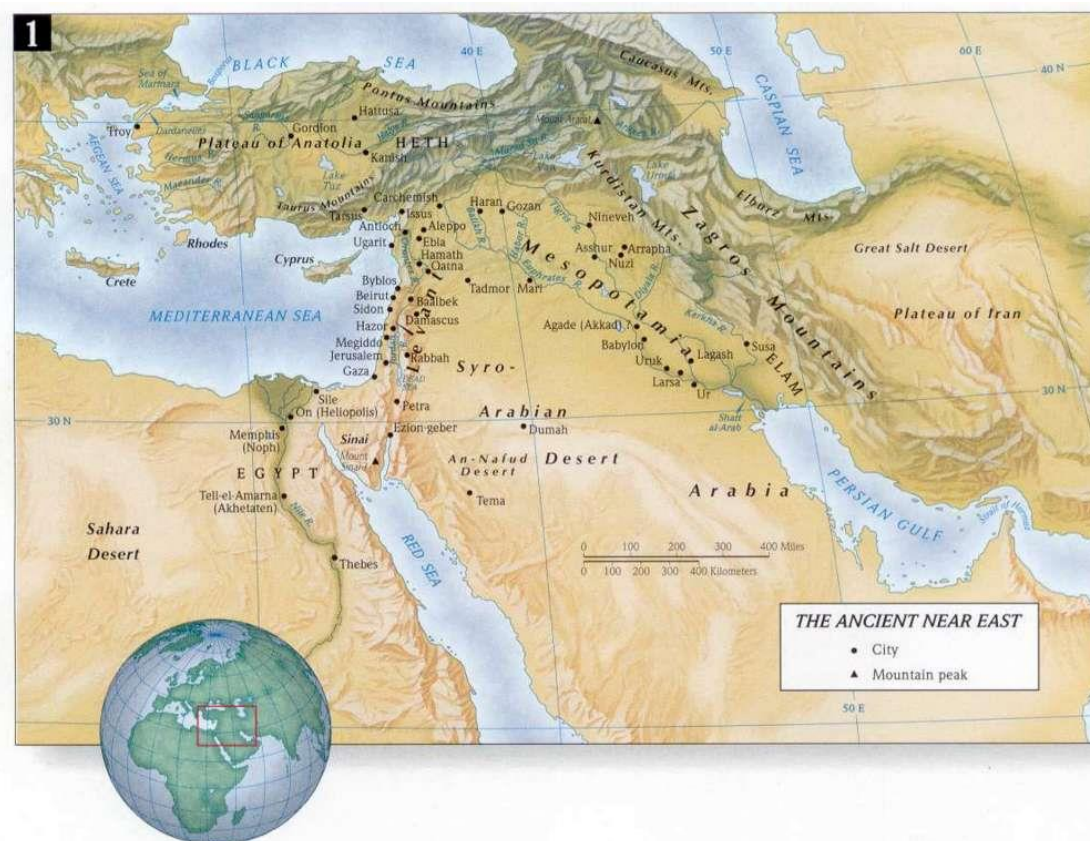


Figure 1.1 The Ancient Near East (<http://www.bible-maps/ancient-near-east.html>).

Another particular feature of the Ancient Near East is that their natural borders encompass a great variety of geographic phenomena, such as mountains, seas and deserts, which have allowed the Near East to be shaped as a historical entity until today (Figure 1.2). Although there is great diversity with respect to different areas, it is possible to synthesise its geography into two major landform zones (Redman 1978: 19). The first of

them is defined by two major mountain ranges, which are the *Pontic* and *Taurus* in Anatolia and the *Zagros* and *Elburz* of Iran. Both of them are better known by Maisels (1990: 45) as *the Zagros-Kurdi-Taurus arc*.<sup>9</sup> In both mountainous regions there are two important and generally dry plateaux; the *Anatolian* and the *Iranian*, with elevations ranging from 500 to 1500 meters.

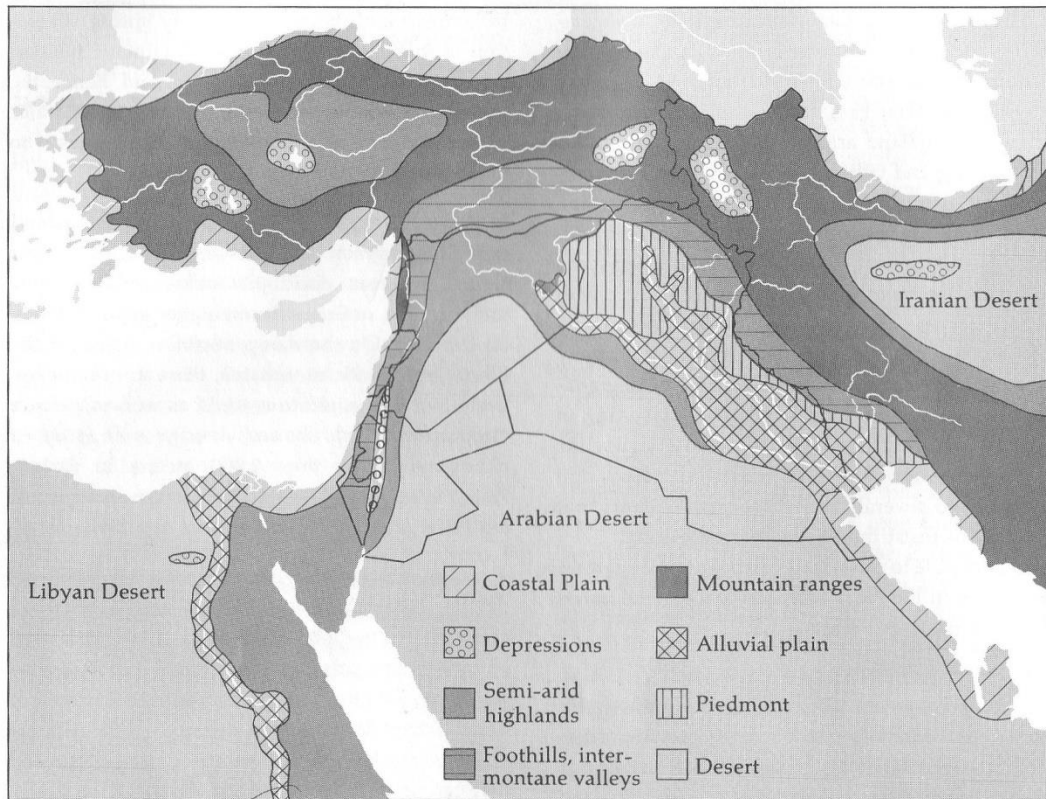


Figure 1.2 The geography and major environmental zones of the Near East (Redman 1978: 26).

Thus, both the northern and eastern regions of the Ancient Near East are dominated by these high mountain ranges, which provide the water resources for this area and also for the powerful source of two rivers strongly linked to its history: the *Euphrates* and the *Tigris*. On the other hand, according to Pollock (1999: 41) the mountain chains of Zagros and Taurus were always massive barriers to the ancient states that were born

<sup>9</sup> The Zagrosian Arc mentioned by Maisels is not synonymous with the mountain ranges themselves or merely with the alluvial plains of what James Henry Breasted referred to as 'the Fertile Crescent' in 1906. In fact, this concept concerns only the mountain ranges with their intramontane valleys, their extramontane piedmonts or foothills and the steppe transition to the alluvium itself (Maisels 1990: 53).

between the Tigris and the Euphrates because the expansions of their current water were slowly controlled both for these natural barriers and the artificial barriers, built for their respective inhabitants (Figures 1.3 and 1.4).

The second major landform zones of the Ancient Near East are the *southern hills* and *plains*, which include diverse topographies such as alluvial plains, rolling hills and low elevations. Another important characteristic is the broad valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers, which were formed during the Pliocene by compression movements of the Earth that forced the Iranian plateau closer to the central platform of Arabia. Indeed, the Syro-Palestine region itself is, according to Redman the product of this geological phenomenon:<sup>10</sup>

[It] is a zone of junction where relatively recent sediments are folded onto the buckled and broken edge of the Arabian platform. Fracturing in a generally north-south direction, with cross-faults and intervals, has given rise to a series of detached upland masses separated from each other by small lowland areas arranged in a roughly rectangular pattern. This terrain was effective in limiting the development of politically unified states in the Levant and has also been a long-time refuge for religious and ethnic minority groups.

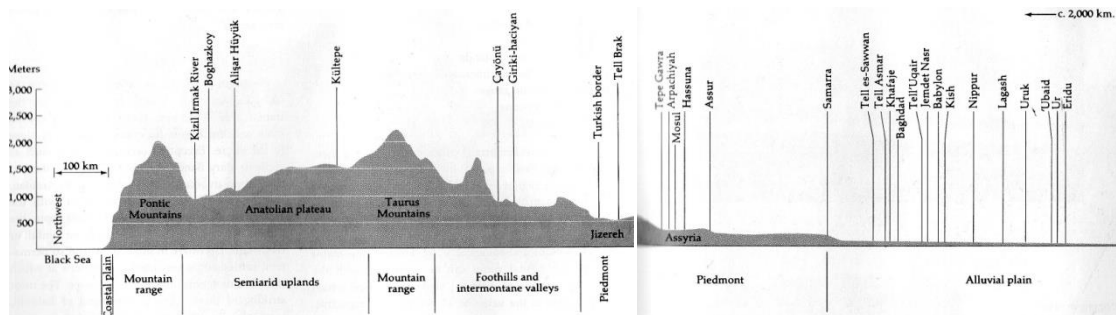


Figure 1.3 Altitudinal cross section of the Near East from southeast to northwest (Redman 1978: 28-29).

<sup>10</sup> Redman 1978: 19.

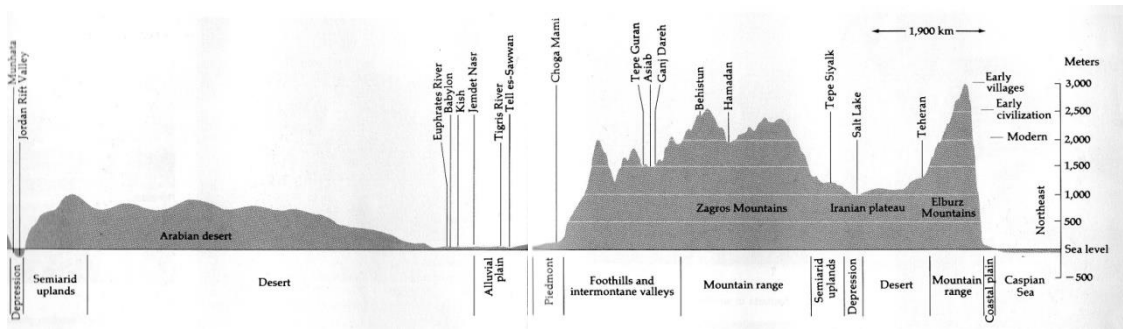


Figure 1.4 Altitudinal cross section of the Near East from southwest to northeast (Redman 1978: 38-39).

In other words, this region has some smaller scale mountains, with a similar relevance to the geopolitical and historical context of the area, such as the mountains of the *Lebanon* and *anti Lebanon*, which enabled the development of multiple ecosystems in Antiquity. These mountains have proved to be an effective barrier to movement inland from the narrow and broken coastal plain, restricting the settlements in the valley floors and pushing them closer to rivers or springs. This characteristic would also explain the emergence of small cities-states instead of unified territorial empires in this region (Redman 1978: 40). The mountain ranges of the Lebanon formed a narrow corridor, which allowed different areas of the Syro Palestinian region to be connected with the ancient Egypt.

Similarly, the seas of the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf were, in principle, a natural frontier that separated different cultures of the Ancient Near East. However, they also became an incentive for interconnection, cultural, and economic exchange. Thus, since the 5<sup>th</sup> Millennium BC, it was possible to circumnavigate the southern edges of Mesopotamia to reach the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula, stretching to the Valley of the Indus and establish the first commercial maritime trades with ancient Egypt (Lamberg-Karlovsky, 1996: 154-159).

Across the Mediterranean, and specifically in the Aegean, a new maritime path was developed from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC which enabled intense communication amongst the port cities of the Syro Palestinian region, the islands of the Aegean, the Nile Delta and the coastal edge of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. In this sense, the notion of ‘the earth

separated; but the sea joined' has complete validity today, following the thesis of Cyrus Gordon's school, which has been defended since 1950.<sup>11</sup>

The last natural frontier was constituted by the *deserts*. Indeed, the southern region of the Ancient Near East has been always characterised by the existence of vast desert plains, such as the Syrian and the Arabian deserts. It also has a geographic and climatic explanation, which is regarded by Redman (1978: 21) as a great territory of the Ancient Near East in the north and the west which are blocked by major mountain ranges. They prevent the passage of air to the continental region losing their moisture in the coastal uplands and increasing in temperature by the time they reach the interior lowlands.

Thus, a regional characteristic of the Ancient Near East weather is its proximity to a huge extension of deserts encompassing hot and dry air. For this reason, the majority of peoples belonging to the Ancient Near East inhabited and developed their social evolution around the edges of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. However, it was necessary to pass through the Syrian and Arabian deserts to reach the Mediterranean or the Persian Gulf in order to obtain and sell different products. The domestication of animals such as donkeys and camels increased the circuit for these desolate geographies.

Notwithstanding, there was an element that was impossible to control across time: *humans*.<sup>12</sup> In fact, both desert and mountains were considered by many Ancient Near Eastern cultures as territories and peoples which were difficult to control by the successive cities, kingdoms and empires of this region (Machinist 1985: 188-189). On one hand, the

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<sup>11</sup> The study of the approach of Cyrus H. Gordon on cultural diffusion between the ancient Mediterranean and the eastern cultures has been analysed in terms of a synthesis of cultures which perspectives joined the Ancient World from Mesopotamia until the eastern Mediterranean (Marblestone 1996: 22-31).

<sup>12</sup> A general study of universal history allows discovering the emergence of different peoples and their movements and invasions can be isolated and studied in regards to its origin, causes and structures; such as the cases of the waves of German, Turkish and Mongol peoples. But the case of the Ancient Near East is much more complex. This region, as it was said, is located in the middle of the crossroads of three continents, therefore, different populations of Africa, Europe and Asia moved into and out of this area regularly, causing cultural interaction, exchange of technology and increased pressure on natural resources. This situation has not allowed until today a real certainty about the origin of many ancient peoples that historically marked this region: Sumerians, Hurrians, Chaldeans, Israelites, 'Sea Peoples', among others. In fact, each one of them contributed to the human universe that was the Ancient Near East, and this variety is an example of how this region came to be the first centre of cultural developments in Antiquity.

physical conformation of the country had an obvious effect on its human geography because these mountains ranges acted as natural barriers to communication and interchange of culture. Indeed, its inhabitants came to always represent the opposite to the sedentary and urban life: non-alienation, nomadic life, and ‘uncivilized’ life (Pollock 1999: 69-70).

Machinist highlights as follows:<sup>13</sup>

What must be noted is that our descriptions cluster around the latter third early second millennia and the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, when other sources document the full scale emergence of the nomads and mountaineers in Mesopotamian society, at its urban core. It was, therefore, in the urgent complexity of differentiating ‘outsider’ from ‘insider’ that the descriptions seem to have been composed: an ideological device, as it was, to co-opt at least part of the outsiders, the ‘acceptable’ ones, in the urban inside.

Thus, on the one hand, the intervening mountain ridges and valleys of the Taurus and Zagros, as many geographical accidents in the world, fostered local independence and discouraged the rise of larger political, ethnic and linguistic grouping. On the other hand, the desert and its inhabitants were also throughout the history of the Ancient Near East, a special characteristic, and a relevant element in the cultural development of this region (Matthews 2003: 100). The reason of this phenomenon lies in the complementary and flexibility between two different systems of life, despite natural differences: *nomadic* and *sedentary* (Pollock 1999: 69; Masseti-Rouault 2001: 32).

First, the common belief of associating the Ancient Near East with the modern Bedouin Arab system of life should be revised. An archaeological study of the Ancient Near East sites, specifically in Mesopotamia and the Syro-Palestine region, would corroborate the existence of blank spaces, which were occupied by a mobile segment of population according to Maisels (1990: 186-188). Second, some areas of the Ancient Near East were more suitable for pastoral pursuit than agriculture. For this reason, it became very common in this region for different systems of life to interact, depending on the seasons

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<sup>13</sup> Machinist 1986: 190.



and climatic changes. This means that there were permanent settlements with seasonal residence triggering a particular ‘transhumant nomads’ (Figure 1.5).

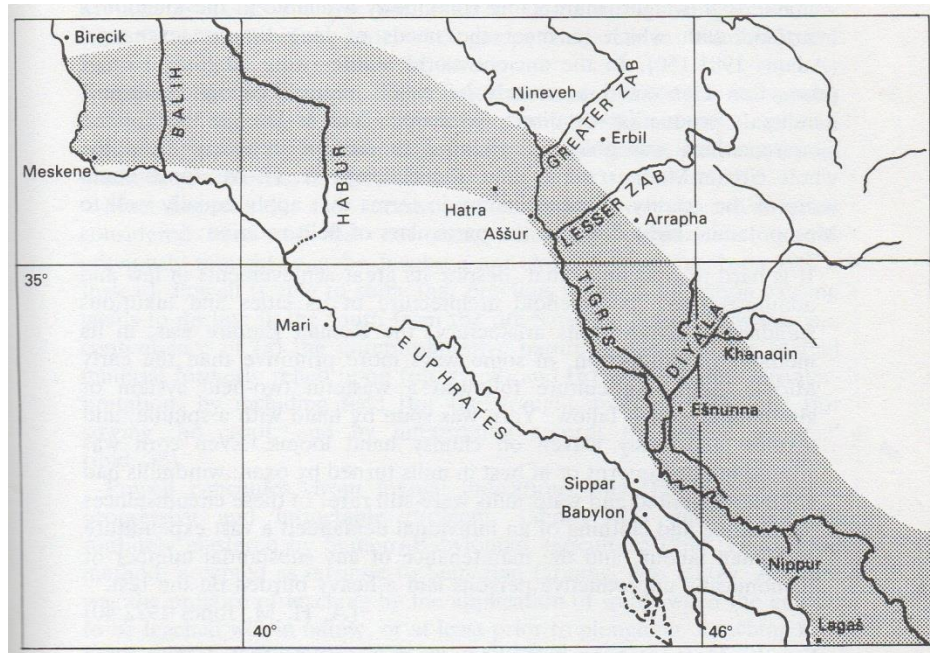


Figure 1.5 Distribution of the transhumant nomadic (Maisels 1990: 189).

As Pollock (1999: 70) points out: ‘nomads and settled groups may not be distinct populations; rather, herders may be village dwellers who leave home for a few months a year to take their flocks to better pastures (...) but both may be members of a single family’. Under this point of view, both systems of life do not represent only two different and opposite economies, but also two different poles of a cultural continuum, which allowed the reworking of strategies of human surviving and development (Masseti-Rouault 2001: 34).

## 2. The Land of Mesopotamia as the Cradle of Civilization

The regional name of Mesopotamia comes from the ancient Greek root words μέσος ‘middle’ and ποταμός ‘river’ and literally means ‘(land) between rivers’ (Quenet 2008: 7). The Greek term was adopted because neither words nor names in the native original lexicon from this region have been found to represent the civilization that was born



there. Nevertheless, some of its former civilizations, such as Sumer and Akkad, invented some terms to denominate the region as a whole (Machinist 1986: 184-185) such as the Sumerian *kalama* ('the land') or the expression *ki engi ki uri*, which have parallels with the Akkadian **mat Šumeri u Akkadi** ('the land of Sumer and Akkad').

Nowadays, Mesopotamia represents the lower Iraq (*al-Iraq*), specifically the parallelogram of land bounded on the north by the Tigris River; on the south and west by the *Hillah* branch of the Euphrates and on the east by the *Shatt al-Gharraf*; a tributary of the Tigris which runs from *Kut al-Amara* south to *Nassiriyah* on the Euphrates (Potts 1997: 1). For this reason, a more topographically accurate description of Mesopotamia would be 'the plains and piedmonts between the Zagros Mountains folds and the Arabian massif with both rivers running down the depositional plains filling the sunken lands between'.<sup>14</sup>

Mesopotamia has provided the geographical and chronological unit to the general historical context of the Ancient Near East, specifically through the adoption of its old system of writing, their religious practices and its cultural continuity developed by different cultures established in this geographical area. Thus, Potts (1997: 40) emphasizes the importance of understanding the *physical setting* in which Mesopotamian civilization could develop. Historically, people have depended on the physical world around them for developing their livelihood; specifically, the climate, vegetation, water and landforms.

It seems that this region – as ancient Egypt with respect to the Nile - was *made* by the Tigris and Euphrates. In effect, it would not exist without the silt and salts brought south and deposited each year in their lands. According to Potts (1997) the management of these great rivers was of paramount concern in antiquity, as it remains today, because they were fundamental to the very existence of the ancient Mesopotamian population and motivating their creative efforts: 'None of the achievements of Mesopotamia production in the realm of agriculture, animal husbandry, or related industries (textiles, leather working,

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<sup>14</sup> Maisels 1990: 51.

boat-building) can be understood except in reference to the very specific river regimes and soil conditions of the alluvium'.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the study of the palaeo climate of this region would corroborate that Mesopotamia has suffered minimal changes since the beginning of the Holocene (Potts 1997: 3). Indeed, since man entered Lower Mesopotamia 4000 years ago, there were important changes in the climate of this region. Only the evidence from pollen cores would suggest that there have been minor climatic variation in the northern Mesopotamia and the north-eastern Arabia, where the climate was wetter between 6000-5000 BC (Oates and Oates 1977: 116-117; Maisels 1990: 54). Also Potts (1997: 6) points out these micro variations were not of a magnitude as to permit dry-farming in the south, they were certainly not without consequences for the settled agricultural and herding population of the alluvium.

One of these micro variations seems to have happened during the mid-Holocene, with an increase in the rainfall in Mesopotamia owing to the northward displacement of the summer monsoon (Potts 1997: 54). This climatic change allowed hunter-gatherers from the north Arabian Desert to penetrate the area at the same time as the first agriculturalists (better known as the *Hassuna* culture) who, with a rudimentary knowledge of irrigation, came from the north of Mesopotamia. Thus, the origin of the first population in Mesopotamia was a mixture and co-existence of a number of different ethnic groups who spoke different languages and had different strategies for surviving (hunting, gathering and agriculture).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Potts 1997: 41.

<sup>16</sup> Scholars as Landsberger, Kramer, Frankfort and Falkenstein seem to coincide that the existence of many words translated from cuneiform tablets (farmer, herdsman, fisherman, palm, date, metalworker, carpenter, potter and merchant, among others) has an unknown origin because they do not belong to the Sumerian language. Anciently, the origin of the civilisation in Mesopotamia had been attributed to the appearance of this people, but modern studies seem to accept that the Sumerian people arrived between 3500-3000 BC during the Late Uruk period (3400-3100 BC) when the base of the Mesopotamian civilisation was already done for other pre-Sumerian cultures (Potts 1997: 45-47 and 54).

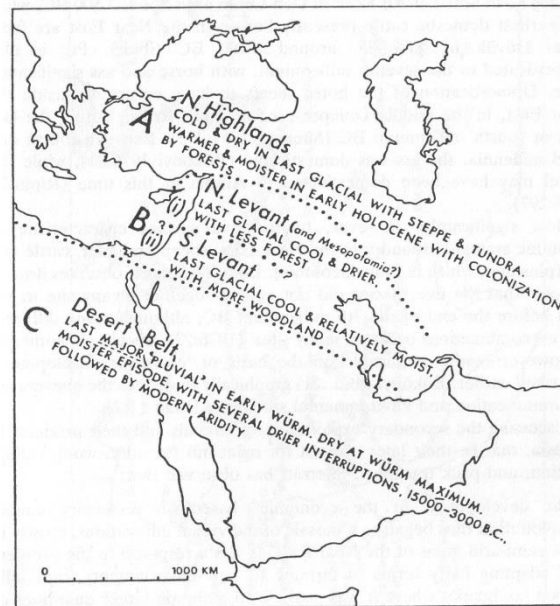


Figure 1.6 Regional conditions during the late Pleistocene/Holocene (Maisels 1990: 291).

Maisels (1990: 290) synthesises this process, starting with the ending of glacial conditions which were themselves destabilising. For this reason, new adaptations had to be made in an environment that continued to fluctuate differentially for millennia after the nominal onset of the Holocene neo thermal, which reached 2 - 3° higher between 5000 and 3000 BC than nowadays (Figure 1.6). Therefore, a rising density of subsistence resources, especially grains, led to a downward spiral of human mobility until to reach a complete process of sedentary life (Maisels 2010: 82-83).

This situation was possible due to particularly favoured sites where people still lived by taking advantage of wild plants and animals (Pollock 1999: 299). Thus, following the idea of Maisels, this region termed as ‘the Zagrosian Arc; there was not a single focus for the origin of the agriculture and sedentary life from which such technique diffused: ‘Rather the complementary of diversity was stressed in the concept of *lateral step-wise progression* whereby innovation made in separate zones connected at different places, forming new synthesis that themselves served as the cores of new departures’.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Maisels 1990: 291.

The characteristic deserts of this region were never uniform in character but they enclosed Mesopotamia on the west from Euphrates bend down to the head of the Gulf, although their inhabitants never lived in isolation (Pollock 1999: 31). Mesopotamia could be accessed by a few routes open from outside by ancient nomads and transhumant people. In addition, the eastern flank of Mesopotamia, which was close to the Tigris, allowed contact with the Iranian plateau and its resources, despite similar geographical difficulties for trade and communication produced by the mountainous region of Zagros.

In this case, Mesopotamia has been also a product of geographical phenomena. According to Pollock (1999: 29) Mesopotamia has been a 'trough created as the Arabian shield has pushed up against the Asiatic landmass, raising the Zagros Mountains and depressing the land to the southwest of them'. Inside this trench, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and their respective tributaries have laid down a huge quantity of alluvial sediments, which allowed the plain of the southern Mesopotamia to develop.

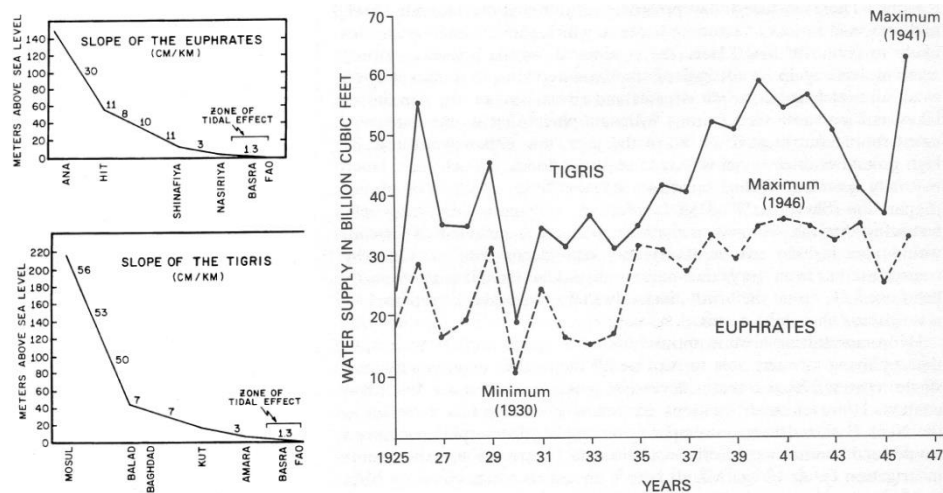


Figure 1.7 Slopes and variation in the discharge of the Tigris and Euphrates (Potts 1997: 8; Maisel 1990: 296)

Both rivers were not only important because of trade and communication. On the one hand, the Tigris (known by ancient Sumerians as *idiglat*), whose origin is in the Taurus Mountains, has a total length of 2,032 km and drains an area of 68,975 sq. km (Maisels 1990: 47). Besides, the Tigris has a different constitution with respect to the Euphrates: more than half of its drainage area is comprised of a territory, which is mountainous and it loses less water due to evaporation than the Euphrates (Figure 1.7).

What is more, this river has a higher level of water from many other minor rivers such as the Greater and Lesser Zab, the Adhaim and the Diyala (Potts 1997: 7). Moreover, the gradient of Tigris is much steeper than that of the Euphrates and its discharge is greater because its bed is deeper. For this reason, the Tigris was generally unsuitable for gravity flow irrigation before the introduction of pulleys and animal traction during 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

On the other hand, the Euphrates (known by ancient Sumerians as *buranum*) rises in central Turkey thanks to the confluence of two tributaries: Kara Su and Murad Su. The Euphrates runs for 2720 km and drains an area of 163,120 sq. km, which is almost three times more drainage than the Tigris (Maisels 1990: 47). The Euphrates owes its existence to melting mountain snows from Kurdish mountains. However, unlike the Tigris, the Euphrates gradient is gentler, which produces a slower river that crosses a vast stretch of desert-steppe and lost more water to evaporation (Potts 1997: 9).

Besides, the Euphrates has a natural pattern of multiple channels and meanders, in contrast with the Tigris, which follows a single course, with a common tendency to flood and to damage. Pollock underlines:<sup>19</sup>

The severity of the floods and the quantity of silt deposited were both substantially higher in the river plain than in the delta plain. These rivers, unlike the Nile, flooded just before or at harvest time (April-May), too late to benefit the crops and in fact at the time when they could do them the most damage. Not surprisingly, flood control has been of as much concern to people living in this region as the procurement of sufficient water: as we have seen, the story of the flood is found not only in the Bible but also in Sumerian literature.

It seems that the support of the Euphrates has been more important than the Tigris in the evolution of Mesopotamian civilization, because its rapid loss of water velocity caused sediments carried in the water to drop, allowing the formation of branches of water. This phenomenon was especially important for human settlement because it was made

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<sup>19</sup> Pollock 1999: 32.

possible to easily cut the irrigation channels through the levee, allowing the water to flow by gravity to cultivate the fields (Pollock 1999: 31-32). Indeed, it is possible to suggest that Mesopotamia, specifically the southern area, was not the 'land of the Twin Rivers' but the 'land of one river' (Potts 1997: 9).

However, Heimpel (1990: 205-206) believes that the inhabitants of the ancient Sumerian cities of Lagash and Nippur always considered the Tigris and not the Euphrates as their main source of water in the late of 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. Besides, critical assessments of researches suggest that both rivers created the landscape of Mesopotamia, helping to shape the historical evolution of this civilization thanks to the salt and silt of both rivers which determined the nature of the soils found in southern Mesopotamia and their utility for the human inhabitants of this region (Potts 1997: 13).

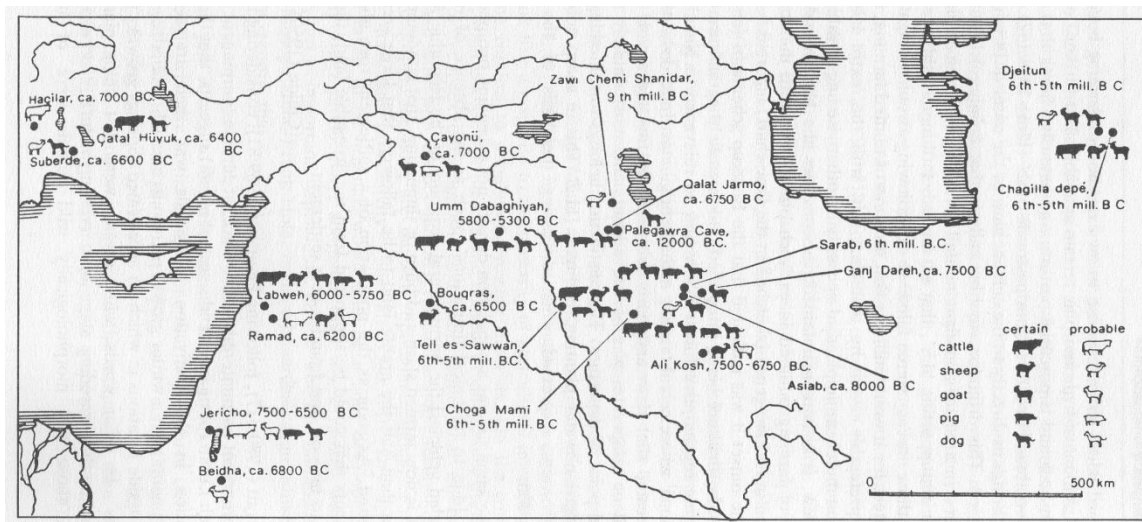


Figure 1.8 Distribution and sites of domesticated animals in the Ancient Near East (Maisels 1990: 293)

Besides, it seems that the first domestication of plants and animals in the Ancient Near East took place in the foothills and mountainous zones of Zagros, Taurus and in the Syro Palestine region during the Neolithic period (ca 10000 BC). Thus, when the first settlements appeared in the Mesopotamia (6000 BC), many of these vegetable products (barley, oil, legumes, dates) and animals (sheep, goat, pork) were to form the principal repertoire of the new Mesopotamian economy for generations (Figure 1.8).

These characteristics are also pointed out by Postgate (1992: 3), who considers that the geography and the rivers of Mesopotamia were essential to understand the history and the lifestyle of the agricultural community and thereby the emergence of the first Mesopotamian cities. They prearranged the location of different settlements and the routes among them.

On the other hand, extremes of temperature and abrupt changes in landscape divided the area into very distinct environments. Thus, this geographical structure allowed the human development of two important areas on the *south* and on the *north* of Mesopotamia. Both zones favour or impose specific lifestyles, which have often coincided with ethnic and political divisions and so have a direct impact on ancient history.

#### a) Southern Mesopotamia and the First Socio-Economic Development

The *south* of Mesopotamia is identified by alluvial plains whose cultural development depended on a subsistence strategy because the natural vegetation provided grazing in the steppe and natural resources along the rivers, but the rainfall was unreliable and inadequate to support an extensive agriculture (Pollock 1999: 29-31). Moreover, the soils of the alluvium were deep and the flatness of the land enabled the agricultural development but only by an efficient agriculture regime, which depended on the controlled exploitation of the water from the rivers.<sup>20</sup>

Considering the characteristics of the alluvial planes surrounded by natural frontiers everywhere, it is possible to understand how their inhabitants – the future people who built the civilization both of Sumer and Akkad - were linked by a common lifestyle, although they were not politically unified (Figure 1.9).

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<sup>20</sup> The consensus among scholars since 1950 allow suggesting that the cultivable land of southern Iraq could be classified only with a 6% excellent, 68% good and 23% mediocre. Indeed, the Sumerian themselves used terms for evaluating the lands which could be 'best' (**sig**), "good" (**mur**), 'mediocre' (**hul**), 'bad' (**murgu**) and 'infertile' (**ũ**). Also there were terms for 'steppes' (**eden**), 'economic hinterland of the city' (**uru-bar**), 'dry land' (**kislab**) and 'heavily salinated land' (**ki-mun**). Summary, as Potts makes reference (1997: 15): 'the natural fertility of the soils of the Lowland Mesopotamian Plain is... low. This conclusion is in contradiction to the general opinion, written in many articles and books, in which the plain is prized for its high fertility'.

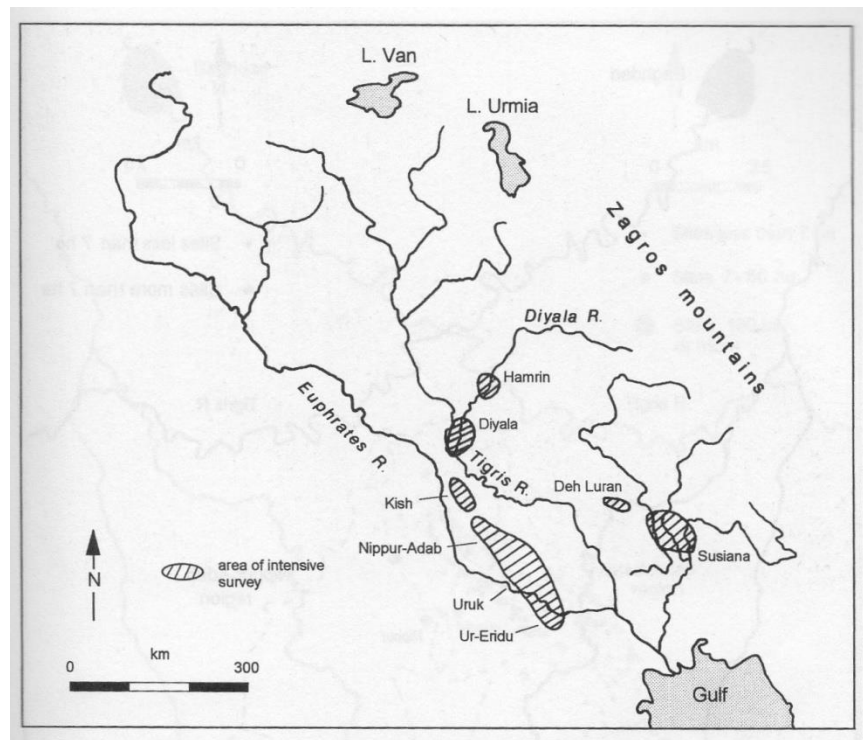


Figure 1.9 First sites of intensive human settlements in the southern Mesopotamia (Pollock 1999: 55).

The style of human life in southern Mesopotamia was based on the principle of shortage, which means a complete lack of raw materials, specifically metal, stone and wood, which did not exist in the environment of the Mesopotamian alluviums. This situation could be considered as the principal driving force behind the development of the southern Mesopotamian civilization (Pollock 1999: 42) because their inhabitants had to import several kinds of raw materials from other latitudes. The strategies used by them to procure them took on different forms: exchange, raids, warfare and territorial expansion. Nevertheless, these strategies were essential for developing the first socio-economic organization in the history of Mesopotamia.

Pollock states: ‘The scarcity of durable natural resources in the Mesopotamia lowlands played a fundamental role in structuring Mesopotamia economies throughout the millennia’.<sup>21</sup> In other words, it was the response to the environmental difficulties existing in the Mesopotamian lowlands that motivated the search of resources and the use of those

<sup>21</sup> Pollock 1999: 78.



durable materials by long distance exchange, booty won from war, gifts, raw material and exotic goods from distant regions. Besides, in the wake of increasing urbanization, this policy produced new forms of economic, political and social organization, although the basis of the economy remained fundamentally agrarian.

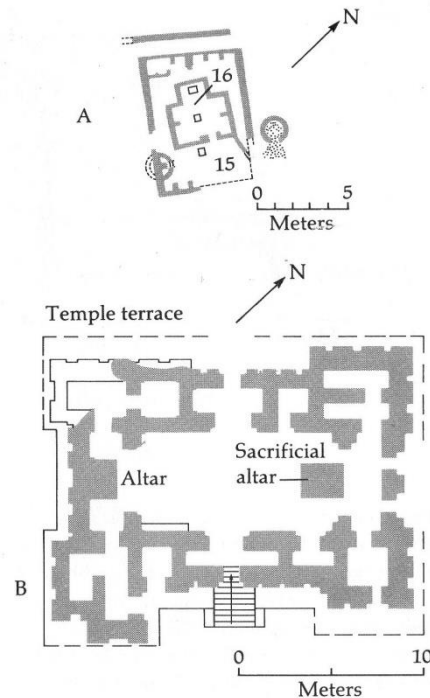


Figure 1.10 Plans of the temple of Eridu in levels 16-15 (A) and level 8 (B) (Redman 1978: 251)

One of the first cultures in the southern Mesopotamia was the *Ubaid* culture (6500-3800 BC), which emphasised the utilisation of locally available resources such as animals and plants.<sup>22</sup> They were transformed in goods of consumption as beer, meat, barley, cloth and textiles, which were contained in storage building for its distribution amongst the inhabitants of a site (Maisels 1990: 135). This building in *Eridu* (Figure 1.10)

<sup>22</sup> The Ubaid culture received this name from the site of *Tell al-Ubaid* close to other important archaeological site of Mesopotamia: the city of Ur. The Ubaid culture is better known for the archaeological finds of the site of Eridu which was found on virgin soil. This would be a proof this site belonged to the same period of the initial colonisation of the southern Mesopotamia by sedentary agriculturists. The different archaeological *stratum* of Eridu corroborate that its size was larger than other settlements around this place (10 hectares and a population between 2000 to 4000 inhabitants) which is an evidence of a more sophisticated society. Indeed, Sumerians regarded Eridu as the original city and the locus of sorcery, because it was the place where the god Enki brought order to chaos which was the undifferentiated waters (Redman 1978: 247; Matthews 2003: 102).

has been identified by archaeologists and scholars as a ‘temple’ or ‘proto-temple’ because it is the first evidence of a religious building in Mesopotamia which was rebuilt many times from a small one room resident until a huge building over a platform (Maisels 1990: 139).

For this reason, the first political economy developed in southern Mesopotamia during the Ubaid period can be denominated as a ‘tributary economy’ because it depended on significant degree on the mobilization of tributes (goods or labour), which were done under the command of the political elite (Pollock 1999: 80).<sup>23</sup> With this strategy the producers had access to their necessary means of production and the final products (surplus food and utilitarian craft goods) were collected by these elites who nevertheless neither had the complete control of all material form of production, nor an absolute control over the population with the exemption of the distribution of goods.

It seems that these temples played the role of catalysts in the formation of the first cities on the Mesopotamian alluvium. They were really cultic centres but also purchased many accounts of social stores and institutions of economic co-ordination, uniting these three roles in one singular catalytic organization. According to Maisels (1990: 155) in the emerging of the southern Mesopotamian temples ‘we see the integration of a great variety of post-Neolithic practices that included the long distance trade required to import materials, especially metals, woods, and minerals, in which the alluvium was almost entirely deficient, exporting textiles and other manufactures in exchange’.<sup>24</sup>

Whereas these elites were in charge of developing institutions of political control, they became sponsors for long distance trade for procuring exotic raw material as prestigious symbols and also for buying the labour of other people under their command. It seems that the principal objective of this policy was a dual one. On one hand, they needed

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<sup>23</sup> Also, according to Matthews (2003: 103), the existence of many similarities in layout, orientation and elaboration of contemporary building in other sites of Mesopotamia both in the south as in the north, such as *Uruk-Warka* and *Tepe Gawra*, would be an important antecedent of a common cultural background perhaps motivated by a common Mesopotamian religious creed and practice across of its territory.

<sup>24</sup> This is the reason, according to Pollock (1999: 49 and 88) and Maisels (1990: 160), the storey houses of this period shared a similar tripartite plan, with a central cruciform hall, to the north and the south of which were rows of rooms. These kinds of construction are characteristic of the demands imposed by the concentration of resources and storage where rain fed agriculture is not viable or highly risky.

tributes, which could be used as reserve in periods of disaster such as a crop failure. On the other hand, the presence of a large community could always represent a real threat to any social order when its people cannot be employed and fed (Matthews 2003: 105).

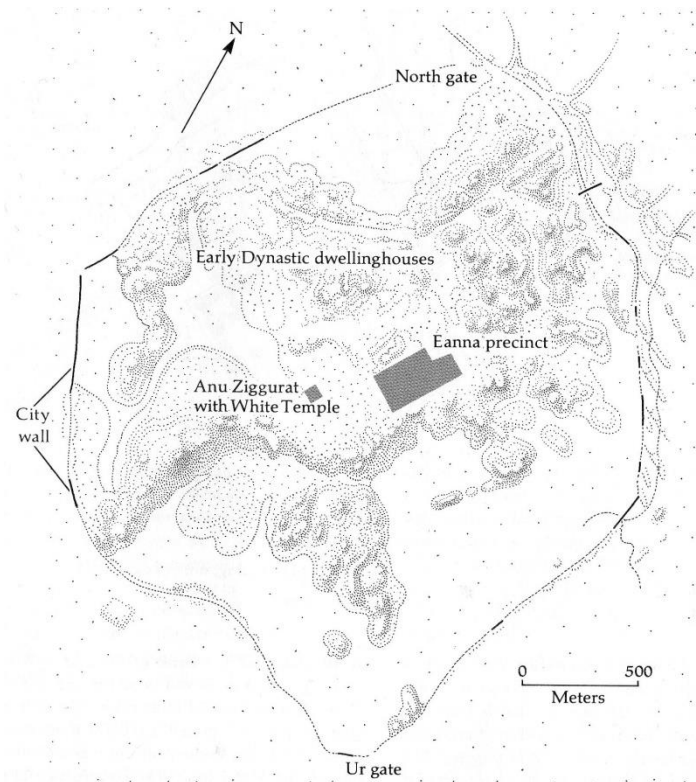


Figure 1.11 Plan of the city-state of Uruk (Redman 1978: 255).

The subsequent period, denominated by scholars as the *period of Uruk* (3800-3300 BC), is considered as one of the most important periods in the history of Mesopotamia. The reason for this is the Uruk period became the best documented city-state built in the southern Mesopotamia during this period (Figure 1.11). Indeed, it was during this period that the first southern Mesopotamia city-state takes its initial form which will be imitated later by others political entities (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 63).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Lamberg-Karlovsky underlines (1996: 71) that 'virtually all of the attributes of Sumerian society are present in the city of Uruk within the first two hundred years of the Uruk period'. Also, he points up that the archaeological evidences from other sites around Uruk suggest that this city-state was but one, the largest and the most significant of many other communities engaged in a revolutionary transformation which included monumental buildings and literate bureaucracy over a short period of time.

Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 71) points out that archaeological and textual materials recovered by German expeditions to Uruk remains as the best evidence for a dramatic and rapid urban transformation in Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, evidence derived from the excavation of other communities suggests also that Uruk was but one, surely the largest and perhaps the most significant of the many communities engaged in this revolutionary transformation. Thus, Uruk expanded from 250 hectares at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, up to 600 hectares in 2900 BC, with a population of between 20,000 and 50,000 (Nissen 1988: 158 and 173).

Thus, the first written evidences rescued by archaeologists in Uruk are made up of references to a specific building denominated *e*, which later became the denomination of the entire community that lived in Uruk. Generally, scholars have described this monumental building as the ‘temple’ of Uruk but it had not only a ceremonial role but was also in charge of both economic and political organisation of the city. For this reason, it has been known as the ‘city-temple’ or ‘city-state’.<sup>26</sup>

However, the intentional use of the word *revolutionary* implies that the monumental scale of temple construction and the rapid emergence of a literate bureaucracy occurred over a short period of time. On the other hand, the rapid increase in the size of Uruk is but one sign that the community was undergoing what archaeologists refer to as an ‘urban process’: the transformation of an undifferentiated, self-sufficient community of small size to a specialised community of a large size that politically dominated its rural countryside (Matthews 2003: 95-96).

The behaviour pattern of this change would have been inspired in the principle of a more coordinated approach to both irrigation practice and agriculture production. It

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<sup>26</sup> The importance of the temple as institution is corroborated for two huge constructions (Figure 1.11) denominated by archaeologists as the *White Temple* and the *Anu platform*. Whereas the earlier temples from Eridu were smaller and their leaders had a modest control over the population, the complex built in Uruk gives evidence of elite with a major control over a highly organised force of workers (over 7500 individuals) working ten hours par day during at least five years (Matthews 2004: 110). According to Redman (1978: 257): ‘The size of the labour force, the skill in planning and execution, and the repeated rebuilding imply an institutionalised hierarchy with access to large economic resources, pools of labourers, and skilled craftsmen’.

seems that during this period of Uruk, the city rapidly increased in size, as did the satellite communities around Uruk. Both phenomena could be explained by the demographic pressure, which motivated the necessity of more land for agriculture and centralisation in the use of irrigation system, as well as an increase in specialisation and exchange for raw materials (Redman 1978: 233; Aubet 2007: 181).

Amongst the reasons for the origin of this new model of city-state in the southern Mesopotamian city-states, Maisels (1990: 270) identifies three: the advent of settlements on the alluvium in the southern Mesopotamia of organized human group of farmers; the inexistence of a real hinterland in the alluvium but an open frontier (or open steppe) in which peoples and cultural influence could get around the length of the Zagrosian Arc; and the competitive situation amongst the rising population who are obligated to organise, concentrate in nucleons and continue to produce surplus. As Maisels points out: ‘The city-state was the outcome of a configuration –cultural, social, and techno-environmental- determined by the trajectory from Neolithic in the Near East’.<sup>27</sup>

The later city-states of southern Mesopotamia, which followed the Uruk model, were characterized, in principle, by a similar egalitarian system; decentralized and self-sufficient.<sup>28</sup> They were controlled directly by their own temples, which administrated their own resources and distributed them to the community such as a ‘primitive democracy’ (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 67-68).<sup>29</sup> However, the phenomenon of urbanization since the period of Uruk, brought a fundamental reorganisation of the economy because the rural population of farmers around these city-states began to diminish, absorbed by the urban

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<sup>27</sup> Maisels 1990: 271.

<sup>28</sup> However, this characteristic could be also corroborated by archaeological studies in the Ubaid period. It seems that the late prehistoric temples of this period were very similar in design with respect the common houses, specifically for sharing the same tripartite plan. The only one difference could be the elaborate use of niches and buttresses for the images of the divinities inside of the temples (Potts, 1997: 197). Later, the temples were built on platforms which ranges were from 1 to 10 meters and with decorative architectural features more elaborate. These characteristics would prove the appearance of a new elite class with more political, economic and social power with respect to the common inhabitants (Pollock 1999: 88).

<sup>29</sup> Some scholars as Thorkild Jacobsen (1957: 159-172) have seen this phenomenon as the first demonstration of a ‘primitive democracy’ which ended subordinated to the authority of these strong leaders only in period of emergencies and recovering the power when the threat was over.

environment. This affected the chances of maintenance of the city-states, which needed tax farming to survive and, incidentally, to confront and overcome the demands of a growing private sector inside of the city-states. Indeed, the decrease of taxes led to an internal crisis for some urban residents, whose standard of living was dependent on the degree of surplus extracted from rural producers or farmers (Pollock 1999: 117).<sup>30</sup> The response was that residents of the city-states decided to increase a substantial force of workers, composed of individuals not belonging to the same family group, in order to produce more of what he consumed to create an economic surplus.

This situation is explained by Pollock (1999: 93) who believes that the restriction of production of certain critical goods to a few sites necessitated a system of administered exchange, by which those goods could be moved from producer to the consumer. Thus, administrators were especially concerned with mundane items, such as food, which supported the growing segments of the population, which did not produce their own (artisans, merchants, officials and priests). Meanwhile, urban and rural labours were needed for large public construction and maintenance projects such as building temples and periodic cleaning of irrigation channels.

The final result was a hierarchically organized political system in which state institutions controlled large-scale economic activities. This allowed the population to keep growing and incidentally, to exercise its domination over it by means of extraordinary resources in case of any future crises of production. Furthermore, and despite the fact that tax economic organization did not disappear entirely, a complex network of independent economic units emerged, led by a single authority, which imposed obligations on all dependent groups. Thus, the *oikos* system was born.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The same process was explained by Redman (1978: 233) as a 'redistributive economy' which increased the efficiency of food production by administrative elite during the emergence of urbanism. Thus, a surplus of food is accumulated from the productive segment of the society to support and to feed craftsmen, traders and the elite. Thanks to the redistributive economy the administrator is able to encourage the production of a surplus by setting high requirements which is a powerful weapon against deviants.

<sup>31</sup> Both Maisels (1990: 163) and Matthews (2003: 122-123) believe that this system had its origin long time before the Uruk period. It seems for them that older culture as the *Samarran/Ubaid* already knew the economic system of *oikos* because their houses and administrative buildings had the same tripartite

This term has been applied from the Greek word *oikos* ('house') to designate in the ancient Mesopotamia a great socio-economic unit (the same Sumerian word *e* and the Akkadian *bitum* for 'house' or 'household') with a large force of workers, personal administrative, pastures, fields, animals, storage facilities and craftsmen (Maisels 1990: 166; Pollock 1999: 117).

According to Pollock, who follows the thesis of Max Weber, the economy of *oikos* comes to be a model oriented mainly to the satisfaction of needs: on the one hand, several 'houses' or families (units of production) were responsible for the production, storage of goods and raw materials for their own use; on the other hand, they also must produce elaborated objects which needed a strong specialization (clothing, metals and wood) indispensable to exchange with other city-states (Pollock 1999: 118-119).

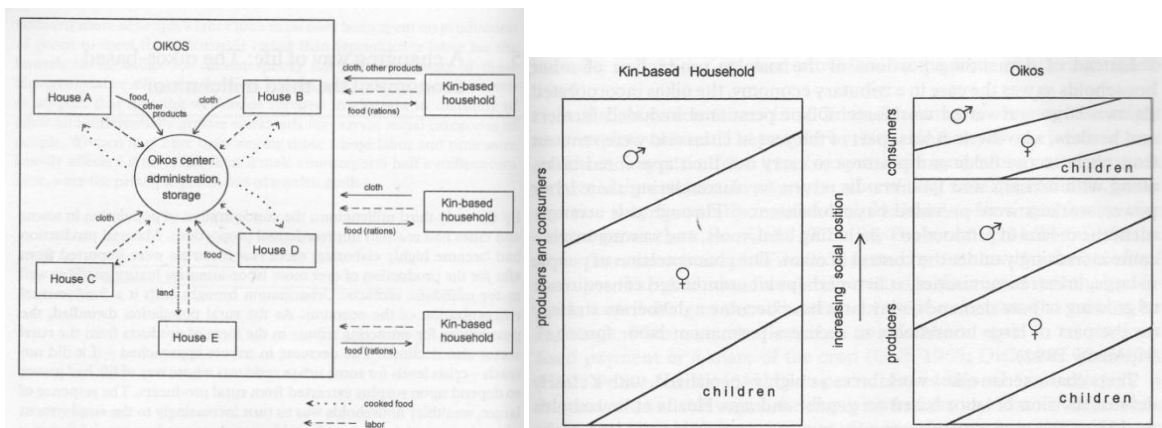


Figure 1.12 The system of *oikos* and its distribution of work according to sex and age (Pollock 1999: 118-119)

For this reason, the *oikos* possessed a highly specialized organization, because its division of labour and the size of the rations depended on gender and age of the workers, as well as the type of work performed (Figure 1.12). The rations given to members of the *oikos* consisted mainly of basic products developed by families such as wool, oil, and barley (Pollock 1999: 120). Such provisions were generally distributed as supplies that required a prior process to its consumption: barley should be fermented to produce beer, or cooked to produce food; whilst the wool was worked to produce clothes and fabrics. Only

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structural plan. The archaeological excavation in sites as Erbil, Tell Qalinj Agha and Tepe Gawra would be a proof of that.

on special occasions were the rations distributed in processed form such as bread, clothing, fish, dairy products, fruits, meat or beer (Pollock 1999: 125).

Many family members, from the richest to the poorest, were connected to this system of *oikos*, not by kinship, but by *official relations of dependence*. They could be contractual obligations of time free (help in times of famine or participate in a large construction project) or mandatory work of permanent nature. The *oikos* staff included farmers and flocks, who resided part of the year in the city-states, from where they were sent to the fields and pastures to carry out specific tasks which were they were paid for with food for their basic subsistence (Pollock 1999: 121). On the other hand, there were permanent citizens; artisans and workers, who made specific labour inside of the city-states

One of the principal technologies adopted for this organization of *oikos* was the irrigation system (Figure 1.13). It was a fundamental implementation into the southern Mesopotamia because the absence of sufficient rainfall did not permit the practice of dry farming as the northern lands of the region (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 73 and 133). However, there were two special conditions that allowed the fast development of southern Mesopotamia: rich soils with the capacity to produce a large scale agricultural surplus; and a specific form of social organization with a strong sense of ideological legitimating of elite who was the leader group of the community.

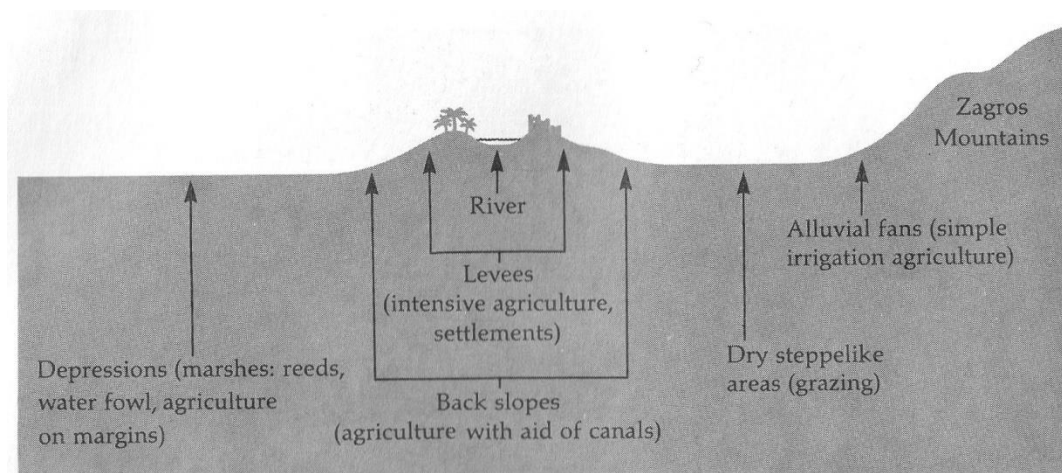


Figure 1.13 Cross section of topography near natural river courses in Mesopotamia (Redman 1978: 42).



The last characteristic has been used by Wittfogel (1954) as the principle cause to explain both the origin of the first civilization and the theory about *Oriental Despotism*. The thesis of this German historian is also known as ‘Hydraulic Civilizations hypothesis’, which tried to explain a universal model applied to different civilizations from Asia, which were dependant on the control of irrigation systems. Thus, the hydraulic civilizations allowed developing administrative regimes that were politically despotic because they were under the control and authority of a despotic ruler.

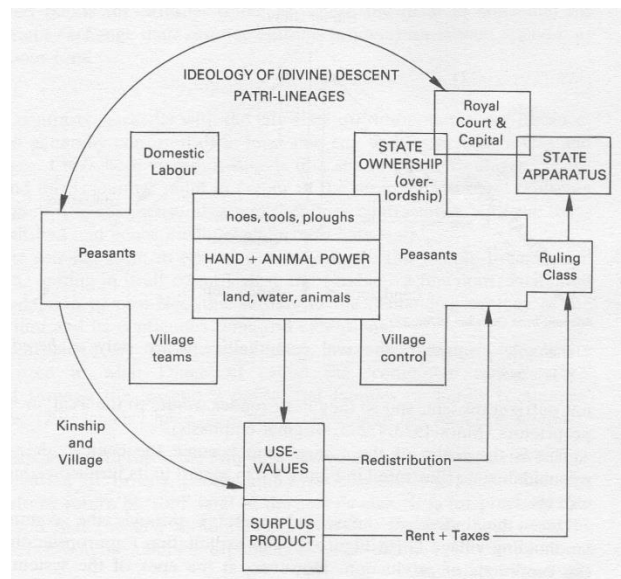


Figure 1.14 Outline of the Oriental Despotism or ‘Asiatic mode of production’ of Wittfogel (Maisels 1990: 267).

According to this theory, any culture that had an agricultural system depended on a large and government-managed waterworks, which were both productive (for irrigation) and protective (for flood control). On the one hand, Wittfogel believed that such civilizations were common in the East or Orient: ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and India and also the pre-Columbian Mexico and Peru, although the latter neither belonged to the Orient, nor had characteristic of Oriental societies. Nevertheless, he thought that they were quite different from those who were born in the West.

On the other hand, Wittfogel thought that wherever irrigation required substantial and centralized control, some groups became government representatives that monopolized the political power and dominated the economy, resulting in an absolutist managerial

state where the forced labour for irrigation projects was directed by the bureaucratic network (Figure 1.14). In other words, it became *despotism*. Besides, there was a close identification of these elites with the dominant religion of the region which stunted the development of other centres of power (Wittfogel 1954: 18-19).

Nevertheless, the extreme importance of the role of irrigation in social development has been disputed by other writers. Moreover, not all of the features that Wittfogel linked were necessarily found together, and they also may appear without large-scale irrigation. In addition, the static nature of his model has also been criticized. For example, the anthropologist Robert Adams (1966) suggested that archaeological evidence fails to support the thesis of Wittfogel about the irrigation as the primary cause of the formation of coercive political institutions. However, it is possible that as part of a larger system of subsistence techniques, political structure, and economic relationships, might have helped to consolidate political control.

In addition, Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 77) disagrees with this point of view; for him there was a phenomenon named ‘*expansion of Uruk*’ (3400-3100 BC) which involves migration of people from the southern Mesopotamia who founded many urban centres or settlements which seem to have followed the Uruk model (Figure 1.15). Indeed, this Uruk expansion more so represented a migration of population from this city who established settlements for distant points to the north, west and east of Mesopotamia. In these places the colonists from Uruk exported their cylinder seals, written tablets, bureaucracy and construction of temples in different regions such as Iran, northern Mesopotamia, Syria, Anatolia and – possibly - Egypt (Aubet 2007: 184; Matthews 2003: 108; Quenet 2008: 261).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A possible proof of the impact of this migration from Uruk in the Ancient Egypt could be the emergence of the Pharaonic regime in this civilisation. The archaeological finds discovered in *Tell el-Fara'in* in the western Delta of Egypt could be associated with the Sumerian migration from Uruk which would open again the question as to what role Mesopotamia may have played in the formation of the Egyptian state. The most important archaeological finds there have been the characteristic clay wall cones embedded in walls and columns –besides of Uruk ceramics- to decorate a temple of this site which could be interpreted as a Sumerian temple or shrine in Egypt. As Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 81 and 128) says: ‘It becomes increasingly clear that Mesopotamia-Egyptian contact must have played an important role in the in the contouring of *both* civilisations. We cannot speak of the independence emergence of civilisation in Mesopotamia or Egypt.

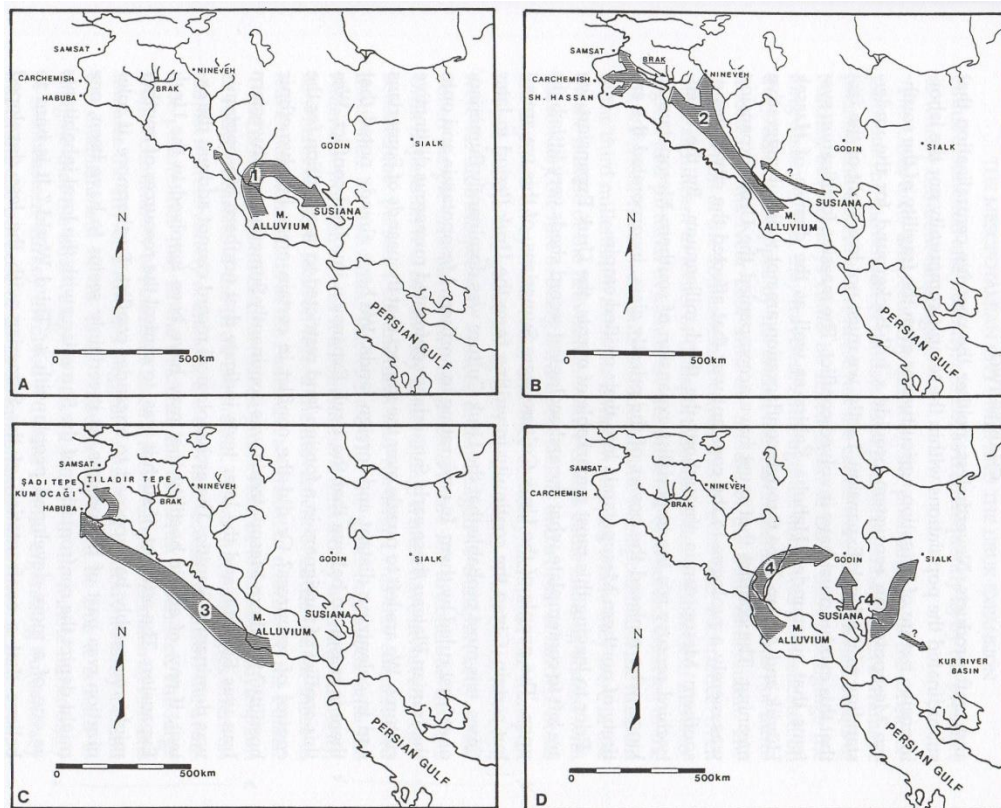


Figure 1.15 The Uruk expansion (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 89).

The causes of this movement of population are still being investigated, but it seems the shortage of resources in southern Mesopotamia was not the essential necessity of this migration. Possibly were many factors, which could be interrelated: demographic stress, political centralization and a fragile ecosystem for agricultural production.<sup>33</sup> According to Masseti-Rouault (2001: 24) there was from the period of Uruk until the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur an excessive exploitation of the agriculture soils in southern Mesopotamia

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The question of the priority in the emergence of these civilisations of far lesser significance than an understanding of the role of acculturation, assimilation and interaction that *both* experienced. A great deal more information and excavation will be required before the hints available to us today can be fully appreciated'. Besides, it is interesting to underline that both in Mesopotamia as in Egypt used the same symbol for representing the most important architectural feature in their communities: the temple as a circle with the interior cross dividing the sphere into equal quadrants.

<sup>33</sup> According to the archaeological study of this settlement made by Robert McAdams (1981) the southern Mesopotamia in the half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC had an increasingly urbanised society where the 78% of the population lived in towns that were larger than 10 hectares. That situation would corroborate the southern Mesopotamia was the most densely clustered urban environment in the Antiquity.

and a deficient control of the irrigation produced a general salinisation of the lands, which seem have produced the advance of the steppe.<sup>34</sup>

In a similar approach, Redman points out:<sup>37</sup>

Salinisation of the soil is the most pressing agricultural problem in contemporary Mesopotamia, and from historic and archaeological evidence it was a major problem for the early civilization as well (...). Salinisation has resulted in the abandonment of large parts of southern Mesopotamia, and the lack of vegetation has allowed the encroachment of desert sands into areas that were once fertile farmlands. The inhabitants of lower Mesopotamia have always had to fight this battle against salinisation and the advance of the desert.

Thus, although the causes of this migration are still being discussed by scholars, the majority of them agree that this movement of population revealed a pattern of confrontation with other less developed cultures especially in the north of Mesopotamia. Thus, the confrontation between foreigners and local population could have produced the phenomena of assimilation, acculturation and conflict (Masseti-Rouault 2001: 20). Notwithstanding, there is not enough archaeological evidence on the full process and, besides, there is controversy about the last point.<sup>38</sup>

According to Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 90) southern Mesopotamia was Sumerian ethnically; meanwhile, the south-western Iran was Elamite, and the

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<sup>34</sup> Matthews (2003: 101) reveals a pattern of the potentially critic role of climate and environment that affected several times the trajectory of early Mesopotamian states according to environment studies. It seems that there were many events of climatic adversity and desertification that affected the natural environment of Mesopotamia and its surrounding regions at least three times in the antiquity (3000 BC, 2200 BC and 1400 BC). The expansion of Uruk, the fall of the first Mesopotamian kingdoms and the End of the Bronze Age could be the results of these events.

<sup>37</sup> Redman 1978: 29.

<sup>38</sup> The written texts appear to shed no light on the Uruk expansion or the reason of abandonment of many of their colonies in the east and the north of Mesopotamia. Only the archaeology would corroborate that many of these settlements belonging to Uruk were abandoned apparently with no reason. Examples of this phenomenon are the colonies of Uruk in the northern Mesopotamia which revert to their earlier non-urban and illiterate stage, such as before of the Uruk colonisation (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 81-82).

archaeological and epigraphic evidences indicate that northern Mesopotamia was dominantly Semitic. Even if the archaeological record cannot address the extent, if any, of ethnic hostility that may have been involved in the Uruk Expansion, the attempt, if such it was, to control the resources of another, might reasonably be supposed to engender conflict between both cultures.

Furthermore, if colonisation was part of the process, as it certainly seems to have been, one might depict the confrontation between the Sumerian colonizers with the local inhabitants who could be considered as a kind of less developed people or the 'Third World'. It is hard to believe that a confrontation of the Sumerian with the less developed 'other' did not engender a conflict of values and feelings of mutually held ethnic distinction and hostility, reified and the presence of wholly different languages between both cultures.

Spanish scholars, Algaze and Aubet (2007: 202-205) suggest that the body of evidence rescued from the expansion of Uruk meant the inauguration of a 'World System' based in three assumptions: the dominance of trade from a core region (Uruk), a technological superiority of this core in comparison with its periphery, and the development of trade in the transformation of its society between 3400-3100 BC. This would be the principal reason that the principal colonies from Uruk sought to settle near to strategic points of communication or trade routes such as the Tigris, Euphrates and Khabur rivers (Aubet 2007: 191).

In the same point of view, Algaze (1989: 579-580; 2001: 47-51) points out that the existence of these colonial settlements – such as in *Godin Tepe* and *Hacinabi* - provide an illustration of a direct or indirect contact with aborigine people who stayed in the Chalcolithic period and were owners of raw material specially metals, which apparently was another of the principal motif of the Uruk colonization (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 20). Moreover, the archaeological finds in sites such as Tell Brak, Carchemish and Nineveh, would be perceived as a military conquest of these places by people from southern Mesopotamia.

In addition, the construction of fortified centres surrounded by small satellites settlements in Tell Qannas and Jebel Aruda would be a testimony of this method of

colonization.<sup>39</sup> This point of view is also defended by Matthews (2003: 114) who considers like Algaze (1989) that the factor that triggered the colonization was the natural resource poverty of the Uruk heartland, which contracted with the resource richness of adjacent regions with ‘an asymmetric in resource distribution that underlay the asymmetry in political development of the communities of the heartland and the outer zones’.

Thus, the high-status elite groups of the sophisticated communities of the southern Mesopotamia craved the luxury commodities present in the territories of less sophisticated societies in the northern and eastern Mesopotamia. It was during this process of obtaining and appropriating resources, luxuries and raw materials, that their activities constituted the main engine for change and social development of the Uruk world as a ‘momentum toward empire’ or a ‘prehistory of imperialism’ (Figure 1.16).

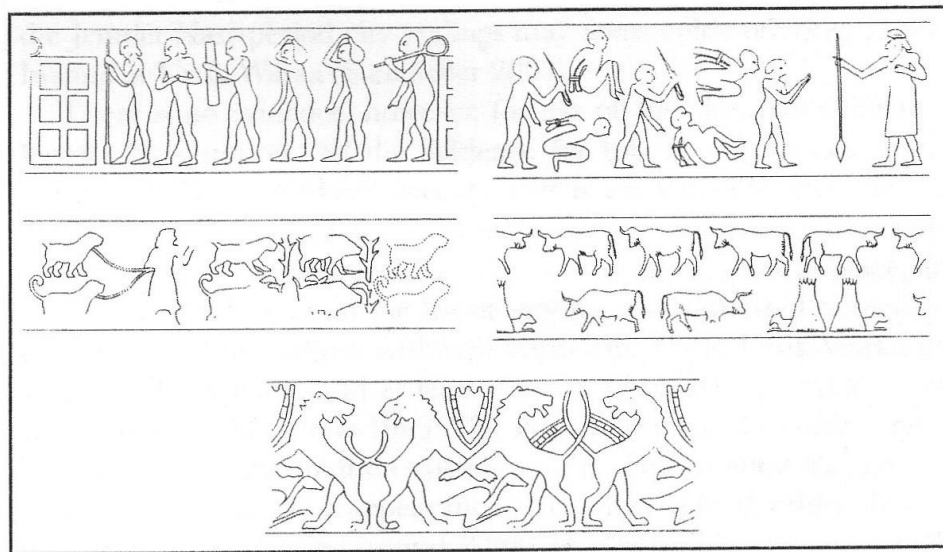


Figure 1.16 Seal impressions from Uruk describing the emergence of a new order by the rule of powerful leaders in the spheres of economy (herds of animals), military (captives and prisoners) and ideology (cultic paraphernalia) (Matthews 2003: 113)

In other words, it seems that the development of literary and urban complexity in Uruk are associated with the emergence of an elaborated new form of power in

<sup>39</sup> Algaze (2001: 212) identifies three different categories –enclaves, stations and outpost- of Uruk settlements in the peripheral zones, depending on the grade of economic and cultural influences or control by the colonialists over these territories.

Mesopotamia supported upon the basic tripod of *economy*, *military* and *ideology*. Indeed, the seals, texts and iconographic rescued by archaeologists in the sites belonging to the expansion of Uruk represent scenes within a framework of power in the sphere of economy (herds of domestic animals), military (prisoners and soldiers) and ideology (cultic paraphernalia). Furthermore, the monumental architecture of the great complex of *Anu* and *Eanna* reinforces the same motifs of this ‘imperialist idea’ (Matthews 2003: 113 and 115).

However, a more critical point of view from Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 92) suggests that the *Uruk* colonization process had neither technological advantage over the population of some region as Iranian Plateau and Anatolia nor the control of the trade outside the southern Mesopotamia. The evidence relating to the primitive communication system during the Uruk expansion would hardly corroborate a long distant control trade. Finally, Pollock (1999: 114) points out that the southern Mesopotamian polities did not have enough military or political power for dominating a vast area.

Nevertheless, a critical assessment of colonialist behaviour revealed a pattern whereby a group of foreigners from Uruk – devoted to the management, production, consumption and communal redistribution of resources - tried controlling both the production of the local inhabitants as well as the local trade. It seems, at least in the northern Mesopotamia, that the northern population was not devoted to the southern Mesopotamian managerial system for some reason. As a result, the majority of the Uruk colonies in Syria, Anatolia and in the Zagros Mountains were suddenly abandoned or destroyed (Aubet 2007: 197; Masetti-Rouault 2001: 22).

Lamberg-Karlovsky underlines this aspect:<sup>40</sup>

Following the abandonment of the Uruk colonies, northern Mesopotamia sustains its traditional culture. In the process of acculturation, the local populations failed to adopt the institution of the temple community or its managerial baggage.

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<sup>40</sup> Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 99.

Writing, the cylinder seal, or standard units of weights and measures that were all part of the Sumerian temple communities were simply not adopted in the north.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps, the differences between the north and the south of Mesopotamia grew with time and, finally, it caused stagnation of the peripheral economies because of the overspecialisation and the dependence on only one market implanted by the colonies from the southern Mesopotamia (Algaze 1989: 573 and 587). However, it is questioned whether there was a particular organization of the northern region that sharpened the difference with respect to southern Mesopotamia. It seems that during this period, this system was responsible for destabilizing the southern Mesopotamian temple communities and the concept of powerful autocratic kings was introduced for the first time in the history of Mesopotamia.

#### b) Northern Mesopotamia and the Origin of the Kingship

Historians and archaeologists of the Ancient Near East believed for decades that northern Mesopotamia had always been an empty region or simply a cultural peripheral backwater, with respect to the southern Mesopotamia. However, as Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 139) says: ‘Far from being an area which merely adopted Sumerian social institutions, northern Mesopotamia was a region of distinctly different cultural and ecological adaptation’. First, there is a natural separation of southern Mesopotamia from northern Mesopotamia as an east-west line running through modern Baghdad. This region is nowadays known in Arabic as *al-Jazira*, ‘the island’ (Quenet 2008: 8), because it is bounded to the east and west by the broad sweep of Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (Figure 1.17).

*Al-Jazira* is an undulating plain from 150 to 300 metres above sea level with a number of small-enclosed basins from which there are no drainage outlets (Redman 1978:

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<sup>41</sup> Gosden (2004: 41-53) suggests a different point of view. For him, there was always in both southern and northern Mesopotamia – or since Anatolia until Sumer - a particular cultural *koine* before any process of interaction and colonisation such as the Uruk case. Thus, the expansion and development of commercial treats and interchanges allowed consolidate the unification of the Mesopotamian region paving the apparition of the future Mesopotamian empires as Akkad, Babylonia and Assyria.



34). The heartland of *al-Jazira* is watered by the two major tributaries of the Euphrates: the *Khabur* and the *Balikh*. In addition, the northern region is defined by the gradual rise of the Anatolian Plateau in the north and the merging of the steppe with the Syrian Desert in the south (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 12).

Secondly, the north of Mesopotamia is a mountainous region whose rolling configuration does not permit the building of canals of irrigation. For this reason, the agriculture in the north depends on rainwater and the band of cultivation spreads uniformly out on to the territory on the diminishing rainfall contour (Postgate 1992: 14-18). This ecological characteristic was different with respect to southern Mesopotamia: in the north, the arable land was abundant, which allowed for dry farming with no artificial irrigation. Moreover, this region does not have the problem of salinisation and receives enough rainfall (300-500 millimetres per year), which is useful for supporting grassland vegetation and marginal cultivation (Redman 1978: 34; Masetti-Rouault 2001: 21).

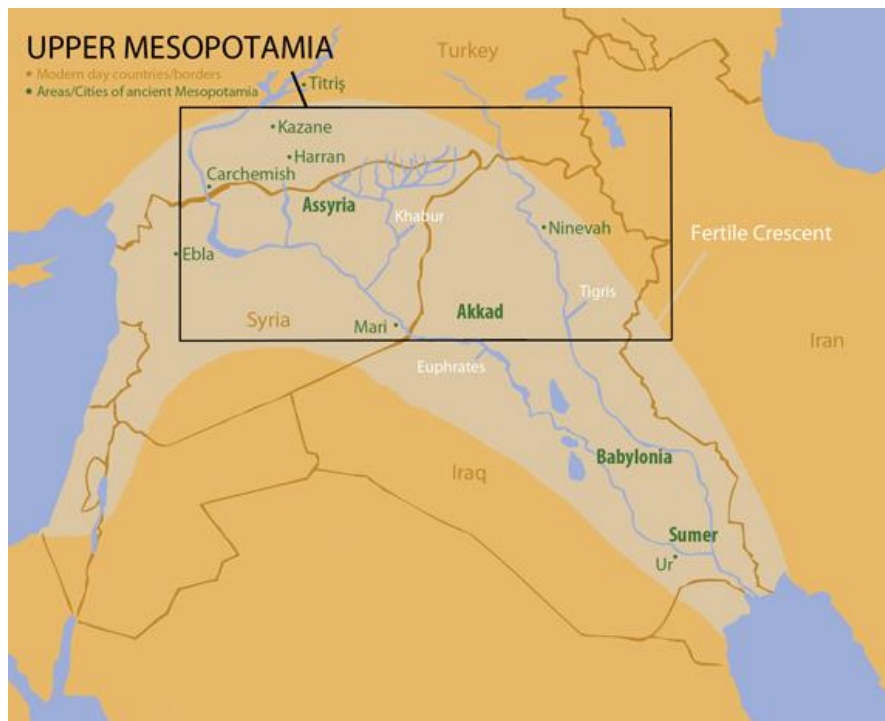


Figure 1.17 The Upper or northern Mesopotamia (<http://uvamagazine.org>).

Besides, the landscape of *al-Jazira* is completely open with low undulating hills from 200 to 900 meters. Thus, meanwhile southern Mesopotamia is dominated by the

Tigris and Euphrates and dependent upon irrigation, northern Mesopotamia is dominated by the steppe lands and rainfall to make dry farming possible. Moreover, the piedmont, mountains and plateau region of northern Mesopotamia have a wide variety of natural resources: metal ore, basalt, granite chlorite, gypsum, limestone as well as various sorts of trees (Pollock 1999: 41).

For this reason, the northern region did not originally have an urban development such as the south, or the kind of collective social organization developed in southern cities-state. Also, according to Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 88 and 141) northern communities ‘lacked writing, temples, priestly hierarchies and remained far less urbanized thought the entire half of the third millennium’, after the influence of the Uruk colonization. Indeed, the northern Mesopotamia always was the homeland of nomads because their extensive grass lands, being known since 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium in Sumerian cuneiform texts as the region of **mar-tu** which means ‘nomad’ or Bedouin’ (Halloran 2006: 169).

It does not mean that northern Mesopotamia completely lacked cities or many human settlements, but this region took a different urban process with respect to the southern Mesopotamia.<sup>42</sup> As Redman states (1978: 293); in northern Mesopotamia, and also in certain areas outside Mesopotamia, there were large towns, which had developed similarly with respect to the development of southern city-states, but ‘they cannot be considered city-states because of their small size and a lack of emphasis on central institutions and specialized activities’.

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<sup>42</sup> It should be emphasised the very important ethnic difference between the population from northern and southern of Mesopotamia. The people who created the Uruk culture were Sumerians who colonised other regions around Mesopotamia. Indeed, when the Uruk colonies were founded in the northern Mesopotamia and the Iranian Plateau, they found new population who already had been lived long time ago in these foreign lands. Archaeologists have described the new settlements that appeared after the Uruk colonisation as belonging to *Ninivite* culture from the *stratum V*. This new culture endured for almost half millennium and remained distinctly different with respect to the temples communities of southern Mesopotamia, until the conquest of Sargon of Akkad at 2350 BC when the northern Mesopotamia was fully integrated into Mesopotamian world. However, the northern Ninivite culture was also characteristic of the northern Mesopotamia. That means the northern Mesopotamia had its own highly distinctive culture rather being a backwater of the Sumerian civilisation (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 140; Aubet 2007: 196; Masetti-Rouault 2001: 21).

It seems that the roots of this kind of social organization should be sought amongst the primitive tribal nomadic organizations of the ancient Mesopotamia. They were initially structured by totemic leaders who became stronger when they accumulated more authority over their respective communities. Due to the ‘dimorphic society’ inherited from their nomadic origins, the social power was generated by a tribal chief who finally established himself as an official resident in an important centre inside the region that these tribal chiefs controlled (Masseti-Rouault 2001: 34).

These tribal leaders exercised their authority over other semi nomadic tribes, and also over both the sedentary tribes and urban population of a specific region. Nevertheless, they represented only an autonomous group with respect to others neighbouring populations with their own leaders, who exercised their power over a specific territory which was personal and directly controlled (Masseti-Rouault 2001: 29). For this reason, these emergent tribal leaders started to create an institutionalised authority structure with an ideological base and used a monopoly of force for competing amongst them.

The tribal leader, chieftain, kinglet or simply “king” of a region was imbued with an aura of sacred neutrality because his identification with a specific human group and territory could be superseded by ritually sanctioned authority over his people or tribe (Tainter 1988: 27 and 28). The image of the northern Mesopotamian king was focused on two parameters: the *political* and the *religious*. The political was linked with an authenticity dynastic that sustain it. Therefore, it was imperative that a king was descended by direct line from an ancient lineage, which in some case could be even deified.

From a political point of view, the Mesopotamian king had his duties or functions. First, he performed with the Mesopotamian function of ‘king patriarch’ – the Roman equivalent of the *pater familia* - whose main mission would be to regulate the social and economic relationships within their community, so that the stronger members of the community do not oppress to the weak.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, the future Mesopotamian kings

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<sup>43</sup> For this reason, the futures kings of Mesopotamia always were worried in the regulation and control of prices inside of their respective kingdoms because it was a good propaganda for expressing his fair, paternalist and equitable character for all their subjects such as they are corroborate in the edicts of kings as Urukagina (2112-2095 BC) and Šhamši-Adad I (1813-1781 BC) (Aubet 2007: 167).

should be principally a *fair* king, because he had received the title of ‘king of Justice’ [*sar misari (m)*] in the future royal inscriptions found in Babylonia and Assyria.

The importance of this implementation of the notion of justice for the image of the Mesopotamian king was the only guarantee for its subjects of what is known today as ‘constitutional rights’ of the citizens inside of a Mesopotamian kingdom (Tadmor 1985: 216). On the other hand, the concrete actions of the monarch applying the laws should be energetic and relentless because it allowed the social balance to be maintained when it was in danger by ‘establishing of Justice’ [*sakin musarim*] (Maisels 1990: 180-181 and 279).

Second, the king was considered as a *pastor* [*sipa, re’um*] because, for the nomad Mesopotamian mentality, the ‘people led as a herd by a pastor’ was also an allegory of the absolute power (Postgate 1992: 56). Despite this, the two poles – king and people - formed a social unit, which constituted a single social unit such as there is no herd without a shepherd; neither shepherd without a flock. Thus, the kingdom became the justification of the existence for the king because he was the guarantor of the life of the people in his triple role of feeder, maintainer of the internal order and to become a defender against external aggressions.

Furthermore, the allegory of the good shepherd justified the right of the king to enrich his people by military conquests of other territories [*murappis mati*] because the opulence and the power over others were the instruments that manifested a good government. In this case, the war was a prominent mechanism that led to increased political economy from conquered territories. All of the above contributed to increase the power and wealth of a king, as also benefits and new resources for his people (Redman 1978: 281; Maisels 1990: 219).

Another special symbol of the northern Mesopotamian king is the association with the figure of the lion in seals and relieves. Indeed, lion hunts and close combat between kings and lions were common topics in the Mesopotamian art in the Mesopotamian history from 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. Examples of this iconography that has been adopted by several civilisations have been found in the Uruk lion hunt stele, in the Neo-Assyrian palaces of the

9<sup>th</sup> century BC, in Aramaean relieves, in the Achaemenid art in the palace of Persepolis and in several cylinder seals from their palaces.

The theme of the origin of this symbol was developed in northern Mesopotamia, specifically in seals elaborated during the Late Chalcolithic Period (3800-3600 BC) according to archaeological finds excavated in the site of Tell Majnuna during the session 2006 -2007. The body of evidence found in this place suggests the existence of a strong ideology elaborated in northern of Mesopotamia, which was also adopted later in southern Mesopotamia. Some seals from Tell Majnuna were themes about the human-lion combat and caged-lion seals which would mean the eternal conflict between a leader and a powerful wild animal whether as active fight or after the domination of the animal (Figure 1.18).

The lion seems to reflect the physical strength as an abstract symbol which could represent an enemy vanquished, however, according to McMahon (2009: 122): ‘The close-range and dangerous killing of the lion is a heroic deed that glorifies the leader but is limited to a single moment. By contrast, the trapping and caging of a living lion represents control, and control that has an implied back-story and persist through time into an abstract future’.



Figure 1.18 Different representations of kings and lions from (a) *Uruk*, (b) Assyrian and (c) Achaemenid periods (<http://www.2dcode-r-past.com>)

In other words, the special relationship between the northern Mesopotamian king and the lion lies in both of them are paradoxically equal and opposite characters. Kings and lions are powerful creatures and this animal is the only one that is able to fight with a king in similar conditions. However, whilst lions are wild, vicious and brutal, the king uses his

power and strength only as protective abilities for defending both his people and the civilization against internal and external stresses and inequalities (McMahon 2009: 121).

The king also used a *religious* parameter. This aspect was always present in the Mesopotamian kingship because in the ancient Mesopotamia that the royalty was something ‘that fell down from the sky’ (Dalley 2000: 189-190) although never existed anything as a written dogma or a theology of kingship for the Mesopotamian royalty. In fact, the religious infrastructure of the Mesopotamian monarchy was varied depending on the historical period: meanwhile some courtier texts refer explicitly the religious dimensions of Mesopotamian kingship, as the administrative documents and non-literary texts, emphasize more the secular figure of the king (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 141).

Indeed, there are two ideological lines that fed on the religious dimension of the Mesopotamian kings, two versions that did not exclude, but rather were combined. On one hand, the king was chosen by the divinity, which constituted an ideological legitimization of the king rather than the will of the divinity. For this reason, the oldest title receiving for the Mesopotamian king was ‘beloved’ [**ki.aga**, *naramu (m)*] or ‘son’ [**dumu**, *maru (m)*] of a particular divinity because he had to preserve the divine order on earth (Maisels 1990: 282).

However, the divine filiations were not of an ontological character, but an allusion of the divine predilection for a specific person anointed as king (Pollock 1999: 188 and 191). Therefore, one of the most common characteristics of the Mesopotamian kings lies in the human character of his person, avoiding the divine aspect. Only few kings who tried to divinize [**dingir**] themselves came to be part of the canonical lists of gods, but most of them were not considered in the future Mesopotamian pantheon.

In another aspect, the political organization in northern Mesopotamia was notoriously different with respect to the hinterland of southern Mesopotamia, because it was a more extensive territory. Thus, urban centers built in the north became epicentres of power that controlled the surrounding regions in a higher level in comparison with the southern Sumerian city-states. Moreover, secular ideological policy was developed at

northern Mesopotamia that was different with respect to the theological order developed southward (Foster and Polinger 2009: 53).<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, it seems that since 2800 BC, northern Mesopotamia was progressively organized as territorial units – not like the older southern ‘city-state’ organization - which could be denominated as *kingdoms*. These territorial kingdoms seems have been unified by an ancient city called *Kish* which came to represent the epicentre of the first gravitational urban centre ruled under the command of a singular power. For this reason, scholars suggest that the city of Kish was the place where the Mesopotamian concept of *reign*, *kingship* and *kingdom* was born (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1990: 142).

This city was located at north of the future ancient city of Babylon and it was founded as an intermediate point between the southern and the northern region of Sumer. It is interesting that the root of the name Kish – **kiš** or **keš** - connoted the expressions ‘he who holds sway’, ‘controlling others’ or ‘keep dominated’ (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 141; Halloran 2006: 146). Even the southern Sumerian neighbour considered the institution of the kingship as a ‘gift of the gods’ which idea was born in this city according the ancient Mesopotamian story of the king *Etana of Kish* (Dalley 2000: 189-190).

The first archaeological remains, identified as a palace, in Mesopotamia werediscovered in Kish (Figure 1.19). It was a structure of large size – denominated ‘Palace A’ by archaeologists - and dated from 2800 BC.<sup>45</sup> This building was oriented by the

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<sup>44</sup> According to Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 142) the emergence of a secular power in northern Mesopotamia could have its origin in the tribal organisation: the leaders of a tribe were generally elected among ‘able-bodied men whose personal qualities and military prowess enabled them to extend their power over other communities’. Indeed, it seems that the earlier dynasties of the northern Mesopotamia, such as happened also in the pre-dynastic Egypt, bore animal names which suggest they were structured along totemic lines. The totemic tribe fought among them until the appearance of a tribal chief who established a political hegemonic over his rivals.

<sup>45</sup> The complex of Kish is considered as one of the best preserved of the Early Dynastic architectural complex which shares several characteristics with the Temple VIII of Khafaje although they were different due to a thick defensive wall which enclosed the upper half of the complex. Also, this massive structure was flanked by fortified towers and it was built as a secular residence which rivalled with other traditional building as the southern Mesopotamian temples in size and sophistication. It seems that the inhabitants of this kingdom belonged to Semite group and their language had certain similarities with the later Akkadian language (Redman 1978: 290; Moorey 1964: 83-98; Foster and Polinger 2009: 40).

cardinal points and contained towers fortified on every corner, besides a facade with a niche in its entry, adorned with stairs and columns (Pollock 1999: 176).<sup>46</sup> The natural form of its design suggests that it contained several different apartments for specific administrative functions.

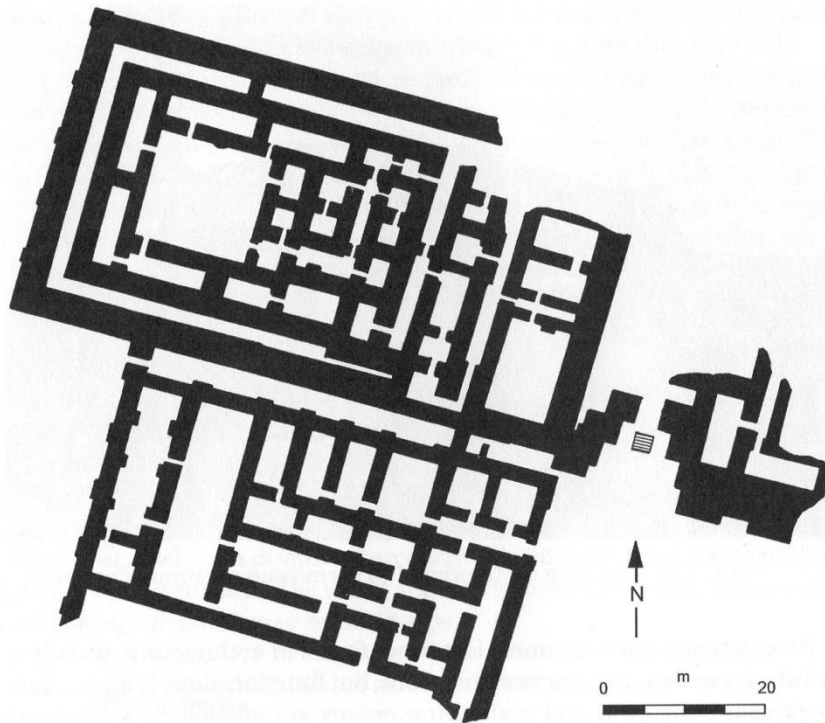


Figure 1.19 The palace of Kish (Pollock 1999: 176).

In addition, the cemetery of Kish had special characteristics for the existence of a number of unearthed tombs that have been qualified as ‘royal’ or belonging to one unique military leader for the archaeological object which were found there. One of them – the Y529 - contained a vehicle of two-wheeled, numerous weapons and copper plates. The content of the tomb would suggest not only a particular accumulation of personal wealth, but also a militaristic accumulation of goods obtained in wars and military campaigns (Ross 1930: 291-300; Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 143-144).

<sup>46</sup> Traditionally, in the ancient Sumer, the temple was also designate as ‘house’ [e], but with the appearance of the concept of king and royalty, the temple was replaced by a new bigger structure denominated ‘big house’ [e.gal], term used to designate the modern concept of ‘palace’.



### 3. The Mesopotamian Symbiosis

At the end of the Early Dynastic Period (2500 BC), the influence of Kish had expanded to the south, threatening the city-state of Ur.<sup>47</sup> This Sumerian city-state decided to organize a military confederation of southern city-states to defend against the aggression of Kish for defeating in battle. Notwithstanding, after the victory over the threats from the north, the city-states of Ur, Uruk and Lagash decided to form a new confederation which implemented their hegemonies in the region adopting the same style of kingship government of their former enemy, Kish. Indeed, Foster and Polinger (2009: 40) give emphasis to this new policy: ‘If the Sumerian had taught the Kishites how to write, the Kishites taught the Sumerian how to rule. It was Kish, not Uruk or Ur, that may have produced the first king to establish an empire’.<sup>48</sup>

Before the conflict with Kish, the Sumerian cities were generally organized around the Council of Elders (in Sumerian I-ti- DINGIR) consisted of men of the standing – similar to the Roman *pater familias* - which was supplemented by the Assembly of the

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<sup>47</sup>In 2800 or 2700 BC the king of Kish emerged victorious after a number of battles of conquests and began to exert a powerful influence southward. However, Kish was not initially alone in its attempts to control the northern region because, according to available data, this city competed and defeated others three cities (Mari, Akshaq and Hamazi) before starting a campaign for the hegemonic control of the southern Mesopotamia. This phenomenon was product of two important factors. The first of them was the knowledge of the powerful kingdom of Kish about the general weakness and vulnerable nature of the Sumerian southern city-states. The second was the structural difference in the political systems between the north and the south of Mesopotamia which provided a natural conflict between two competitive economic systems which contrasted absolutely: the south was represented by temples, priest administrators and a communal ownership of agricultural resources and irrigation; the north was the region of the palaces, powerful and authoritarian kings and private property of the agricultural land. Therefore, according to Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 142) the political, economic, religious, ethnic –Semites versus Sumerians- and environmental contrast was complete.

<sup>48</sup> Before the appearance of Kish, the leader of the Sumerian city-states received the name of ‘Lord’ [en], title normally reserved to the high priest. Alternatively, there were other officials called **ensi** or *issia* who were governors with an authority limited by a popular assembly. In other words, the role of governor of a city-state served to describe a variety of specific forms of government focused on a single individual with a political power awarded directly from people or from powerful assemblies or Elders’ Council (Jacobsen 1957: 159). Indeed, the Sumerian title **en** was used by the high priest around the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC and it is compounded into divine and royal names. The second title **ensi** was only reserved for purely human and mundane function such as the stewardship of temples and agricultures activities. Later, the **ensi** was known as a subordinate king or governor who was a subject of another supreme king or the steward of private property (Maisels 1990: 170-171).

able-bodied men or ‘Popular Assembly’. All of them ruled conjointly with the leader of the city-state and also chose him from their ranks, especially from the ‘senate’ or ‘Elders Council’. However, with the territorial expansion of the city-states, the competition for appropriating of the production from agriculture fields led to armed conflicts among different city-states for controlling both agricultural resources and trades.<sup>49</sup>

Maisels explains the political structure of Mesopotamian city-states with this description:<sup>50</sup>

We have already seen what has been called ‘elders’ acting as the Board of Directors of the temples. The term for elders is, in the plural, **ab-ba-ab-ba-me**, which has the same etymology as ‘fathers’. City-states were run by a bicameral **unki** or ‘cycle of the people’, composed of **lú-tur-mah**, or *sahir rabi*, the ‘small and great’; but literally, the ‘young and old’.

This situation generated the need for military leaders that would ensure the conquest of resources, raw materials and the distribution of goods inside the population. According to ancient Mesopotamian inscriptions and steles, it seems that the inhabitants of the first city-states decide to choose warrior leader, whose authority was only exercised temporarily in times of crisis or conflict against other cities-states, such as in the future Rome would be later the figure of *dictator*.

Thus, in the southern Mesopotamia adopted the northern title of ‘great man’ [**lugal**; *sharru (m)*] for appointed new powerful leaders who came to represent the personification established by the Mesopotamian divinity to govern the fate of the urban community as temporary political war leaders chosen during periods of conflicts. However, after the period of emergency, they generally ended up imposing a familiar dynastic system whereby the royal power passed from father to son to perpetuate his lineage.

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<sup>49</sup> At the end of the Early Dynastic period (2500 BC) the title **Lu.gal** *Kish* came to be also adopted by different political leaders of southern Mesopotamia who controlled under their command a strong secular political organisation system. Also the title came to represent a single king that ‘dominated others’ city-states (Nissen 1988: 144).

<sup>50</sup> Maisels 1990: 169.

This political change is emphasized by Redman (1978: 305) who considers that the political pattern that emerges from this situation is the need for a more efficient full time ruler to settle the problems of increasingly complex societies. The most plausible source of problems, that demanded a strong leader, was the increasing warfare with other city-states when this intercity conflict became more common. According to Redman: ‘the point would soon have been reached when the position of war leader became a full time job at the head of a standing army. After the position had been created and the power base of a standing army had been formed, it was not difficult for a war leader to usurp complete authority’.<sup>51</sup>

At this moment, a new event was born in Mesopotamia, which inaugurated a longstanding conflict that Western history knew only millennia later: the political confrontation between dynastic lineages inaugurated by a warrior leader – originally elected by the popular assemblies - with the religious leaders of the cities-states, elected by the divinity, who had traditionally managed the city-states (Redman 1978: 303). Indeed, both of them had different bases for their respective authorities: one derived from its effectiveness on the battlefield, another of the perception of the divine favour.

Thus, during this so-called Early Dynastic Period, a new institution within the southern Mesopotamian city-states would arise, represented by a new building within its walls: the *Palace* (Figure 1.20). The appearance of ‘kings’ and ‘palaces’ motivated henceforth a change of mentality in southern Mesopotamia, because since this moment, the exaltation of royal power became more important, leaving the former temple or ‘House of the God’ attached to the ‘Palace of the King’ (Redman 1978: 287; Moorey 1964: 83-98).

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<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Redman (1978: 305-306) recognizes that war menace was not the only factor that demanded leadership. Also the growing system of irrigation and water control needed a centralised government that allowed benefits for the entire community. Besides, long distance trade and participating industries could be facilitated by military protection granted by a peace leader and not necessarily by a war leader.

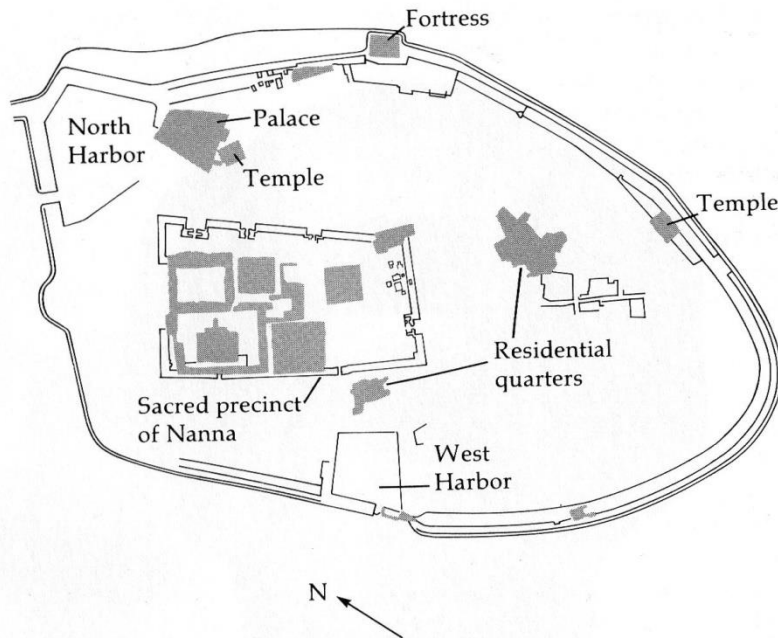


Figure 1.20 Palace and temples in the city-state of Ur during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty (Redman 1978: 316).

Besides, the Mesopotamian kings began to have the responsibility of the maintenance both social order and economy through offerings and religious donations. The temples became institutions, depending more of the royal palace and were subjected to its control. Therefore, the owner of the city was no longer the divinity but his representative, whose first duty was to take care of the temples in his territory and, in particular, of the divine guardianship of the city who had delegated the power on the earth.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the archaeological findings suggest that profound changes affected the political organization of the community during the appearance of the palaces. The principal aspect of these changes involved the redistribution of power and wealth within a society, which began to increase the militarily mentality.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the administration of the temple

<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, meanwhile the king had concentrated the supreme political decision, as the war and the peace, under his control it seems that other civil and internal affairs continued to be administrated by their own elders and councils (Maisels 1990: 172).

<sup>53</sup> This new policy could be corroborated also by the archaeological finds from the cemetery of Uruk which was filled with treasures and luxury goods. It seems that this find is a clear example of accumulation of wealth by a few individuals who were buried with a number of objects found in his tomb. However, the majority of these objects were composed of military weapons such as daggers, gold helmets, cars, war axes

was changed by warlords, who were more interested in incorporate more and more territories to their domain (Lamberg Karlovsky 1996: 143). For this reason, the defence of the community became indistinguishable, with respect to the offensive campaigns against the neighbouring city-states and the acquisition of wealth through the loot, tribute, and such trade such is described by the iconography of this period.

The theme of the economic model of the *oikos*, which already have been implanted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC in southern Mesopotamia, concurred broadly with the development of this new particular type of social organization. Indeed, with the rise of kingdoms, the economic organization of the *oikos* began to expand gradually in the majority of the city-states both in northern and southern Mesopotamia (Maisels 1990: 168). Thus, the temples were gradually losing the absolute right to ownership the lands and also the leading role in the economy, which passed into the hands of these former powerful leaders or kings.<sup>54</sup>

Redman (1978: 280) points out the emergence of this new vision of “national state,” with its characteristics form of government as an achievement of long-range significance due to the fact that ‘the political history of the Near East from 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC until the spread of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AC has alternated between segmentation into small warring city-states and unification under a strong dynasty authority’. Thus, there is a tendency towards separatism and competition in Mesopotamia, which was overcome only periodically by integrative mechanism that temporarily welded the feuding constituencies into a unified state.<sup>55</sup>

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and banners that portrayed a military procession which makes combat with tributes (Redman 1978: 295-296 and 299).

<sup>54</sup> Thus, the Mesopotamian society was transformed from a basic social organisation focused on the temple, in an emerging society under the control of powerful kings. This system will be also used in future by others Mesopotamian cities as the same ancient site of Eridu in the southern Mesopotamia or Mari on the middle Euphrates River (Redman 1978: 292). All these city-states started to expand themselves gradually, competing among them for the hegemony and control of resources following the same path of the southern city-states of Mesopotamia (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996: 145).

<sup>55</sup> However, Redman (1978: 280) clarified that the use of the word ‘state’ for describing these new imperial social organisation from Mesopotamia during the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC does not mean they had the same characteristics on states that exist nowadays. Whereas some mechanists of human organisation have

Van de Mieroop (2007: 36) provides an illustration of this historical evolution:

... when we look at the late prehistoric and early historic city in Mesopotamia, we see that all four sources of power were centred in it: economically it acted as a redistributive centre, ideologically it contains the focal institutions of temple and palace, militarily it organized the army used by the kings and politically it incorporated the organizing forces of the state.

Thanks to this policy, the new leaders or rulers of Mesopotamia began to acquire a reputation gained from military conquests or ephemeral alliances. In this way, a character as Sargon of Akkad – whose name means ‘real king’ in Akkadian - inaugurated a new period in the history of the Ancient Near East because he was the first in carrying on the policy introducing the notion of the ‘universal rule’ based in four principles: *concentring of economic and political power, organization along political and territorial lines, hierarchical and differential access to basic resources and monopoly of force* (Redman 1978: 280 and 307).

During this period, the kingdom of Sargon developed important advances: an official new language, the Akkadian, as *lingua franca* instead of Sumerian; a system of governors with military garrisons in the conquered provinces; long trades extended as far as the Indus Valley and the Mediterranean Sea (Figure 1.21); a new style of art; and the development of the royal ideology inherited from the time of *Kish*: new titles as ‘King of *Agade*’, ‘King of *Kish*’ or ‘King of the Land’. Nevertheless, Redman emphasizes one aspect:<sup>57</sup>

Although many factors may have motivated the assembling of the first nation-state in the Near East, perhaps the overriding factors were economic. The assembly of wealth acquired both directly through looting and tribute and indirectly through a state monopoly on trade was a crucial factor. Sargon and his

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experimented changes in the past, other characteristics as the evolution of urbanism, stratified class society and laws remain being the basis of all civilisations through time.

<sup>57</sup> Redman 1978: 312.

descendants never seemed to attempt to create a true political empire; perhaps it was not necessary for their economic goals.

The ‘empire’ of Sargon and the success of his military expeditions without precedent in the past of Mesopotamia became a model for future empires inside and outside of Mesopotamia. However, under a critical point of view, the kingdom of Sargon seems to have been a conglomeration of different groups under a military power which was never well known because its historical capital, the city of *Agade*, has not been identified yet and only a few pieces of evidence of Akkadian material and sites have been rescued by archaeologists (Matthews 2003: 153).



Figure 1.21 The ‘empire’ of Sargon of Akkad and its principal trade (<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/mladjov/files>).

Besides, it seems the ‘empire’ of Sargon was never an efficient administrative organization (Redman 1978: 311). Indeed, it was organized by local garrisons which were in charge of suppressing revolts by force of arms until finally fell down when it succumbed to the local resistance and external pressures (Nissen 1988: 185). Both causes would demonstrate that the ‘empire’ of Sargon never developed an efficient mechanism of integration.

This approach is underlined by Matthews:<sup>58</sup>

The inference is either that we are failing to isolate and identify the specifics of Akkadian material culture, or that a political entity apparently so large and sophisticated as the Akkadian empire can rise and pass without making notable impact on settlement patterns or any aspect of material culture (...) in fact the Akkadian empire is much more an inhabitant of prehistory, or better ahistory, than it is of history.

A critical assessment of the political structure elaborated for the Akkadian kingdom, could corroborate it was not exactly an 'empire', especially when it is compared with later and modern Western empires. The same cases were other future kingdoms of Mesopotamia, such as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur or the kingdom of Hammurabi (Nissen 1988: 165-167).

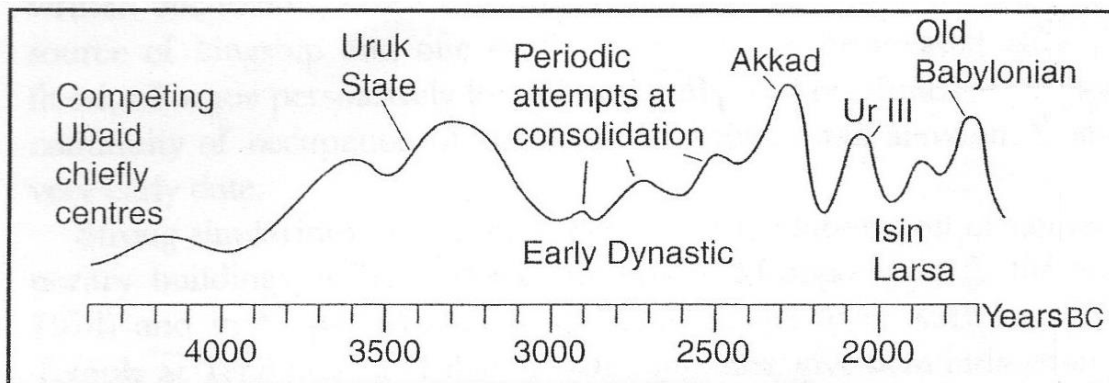


Figure 1.22 Development of states through time in Mesopotamia (Matthews 2003: 101)

In fact, all of them were basically highly centralized states with absolute monarchies over every branch of government and a general stability, which allowed the development of arts, literature, trades and a more efficient bureaucratic organization.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, these different Mesopotamian states were basically brief

<sup>58</sup> Matthews 2003: 152.

<sup>59</sup> The 'empire' of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur, for example, is another classical type of a political structure with a very centralised bureaucracy, perhaps the most despotic of the Ancient Near East. The real owner of the administration of the state was the **ensi** nominated by the king, but the king controlled the production of



political organizations which emerged, developed and finally it fell due to difference circumstances in short period of time (Figure 1.22).

According to Redman (1978: 319) ‘it was the combination of the disequilibrating influences of semi nomadic peoples, rebellious territories, and weak central control that eroded the administrative and military capabilities of the states’.<sup>60</sup> For this reason, none of these kingdoms, states or political structures could survive for a long time when they had to confront foreign invasions, rebellions or inner crisis. The only Mesopotamian exception became a city-state founded in the northern Mesopotamia: *Assyria*.

#### 4. The Assyrian Phenomenon

There is not enough information about the original character of the Assyrian people. However, like other Semitic people of the Antiquity, the Assyrians belonged to family groups or clans who were organized by larger groupings called tribes, whose social status was generally associated with the family or clan which every one belonged (Bedford 2009: 37). Indeed, the name of *Aššur* or *Ashur* has presented difficulties for scholars because this name represents, at the same time, either the main divinity of this people and

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textiles and wool besides of being owner of large extension of lands. Also the temples administrated the goods and the tributes in name of the crown and, for this reason, it could be considered as the typical case of “patrimonial state” with redistributive system of resources (Aubert 2007: 149).

<sup>60</sup> Maisels (1990: 132) considers that the general history of Mesopotamia between 5500- 1595 BC reflexes a continuum evolution with only three important disruptions made by nomadic people: the end of the empire of Sargon by the Gutians (2160 BC), the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur by invaders from Elam and *Martu* (2000 BC) and the fall of the Babylonia of Hammurabi (1595 BC) provoked by the Hittites, leaving the way open to other nomadic people, the Kassites who took the control of Babylon and inaugurated a new dynasty there. As Maisels points out: ‘the policy of Greater Mesopotamia was adapted to those conditions, which, if failing to unite the cities of Sumer and Akkad other than transiently, generally provided enough sinew to keep enemies at bay (...) the millennial continuity of the system of Mesopotamian city-states (a system which also obtained beyond the limits of Sumer and Akkad) was subject to external disruption and despoliation only in times of relative decrepitude’.

the city with its surrounding environment, such as the later association between the Greek goddess Athena with the city-state of Athens.<sup>61</sup>

The vast majority of the Assyrian population were farmers who worked family-owned land around villages near their agricultural holdings. It seems that the Assyrian ancestors had some ethnic relationship with Amorite nomad tribes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC being the first Assyrian kings chosen *primus inter pares* among different tribal leaders (Aubet 2007: 304; Larsen 1976: 298). Thus, Assyria became a more organized Semitic kingdom in the same period of the Babylonian kingdom of founded by the famous Amorite king Hammurabi (1728–1686 BC).

The place of origin of the future Assyrian kingdom is the site of *Ashur*, which is located 100 kilometres from the current Mosul, in the West Bank of the Tigris River. It was founded in a favourable area of rainfall, which, for many centuries, made the use of irrigated agriculture unnecessary. It also had an excellent geographical position with communication routes ranging from north to south and from east to west in northern Mesopotamia.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, the territory controlled by the city of Assyria included the triangular territory from Ashur in the south, to Korsabad in the north, across to Arbela in the east. Akkadian sources mention the name of the city and its area, but the divine only appears in the records of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur. For this reason, it is possible that the name of the city

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<sup>61</sup> Larsen (1976: 29-30) and Aubet (2007: 299) believe that the origin of the city of *Ashur* was connected with its function as regional religious centre where the tribes went to interchange their product and worshiped the gods Ishtar and *Ashur*. For this reason, *Ashur* became the god of this site and the titular divinity of trades and merchants. Indeed, the worship of these divinities generated an important richness which had been an important antecedent for the future colonial trade of Assyria. On other approach, Livingstone (1997: 165) suggests that the existence of a mountain rising majestically above the plain of this site motivated, since prehistoric times, the association with a holy place such as the holy high places sited in Palestine and Northern Arabia.

<sup>62</sup> The city of Ashur laid behind the northern most end of the Hamrin mountains which formed a natural barrier against Babylonia, because this geographical accident straddling the Tigris from northwest to southeast. Babylonians themselves considered Ashur as the gateway to the north region of Mesopotamia which was called *Subartu* or *land of Ashur* (Hallo and Simpson 1998: 111).

and its region was conceived before to the existence of its divinity (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 21; Aubet 2007: 297).

On the other hand, the city of Ashur (Figure 1.23) was situated on a triangular shaped spur over the narrow Tigris valley north of the confluence with the lesser *Zab*. This geographical characteristic with a special geomorphologic situation of the town is the reason of its atypical layout, especially when this city is compared with Babylonia: while the southern Mesopotamian city had its buildings and temple area in the centre; all public building from Ashur were situated in a progressive chain along the northern edge of the town, which was close to the steep slope of the rock (Novák 2005: 177).

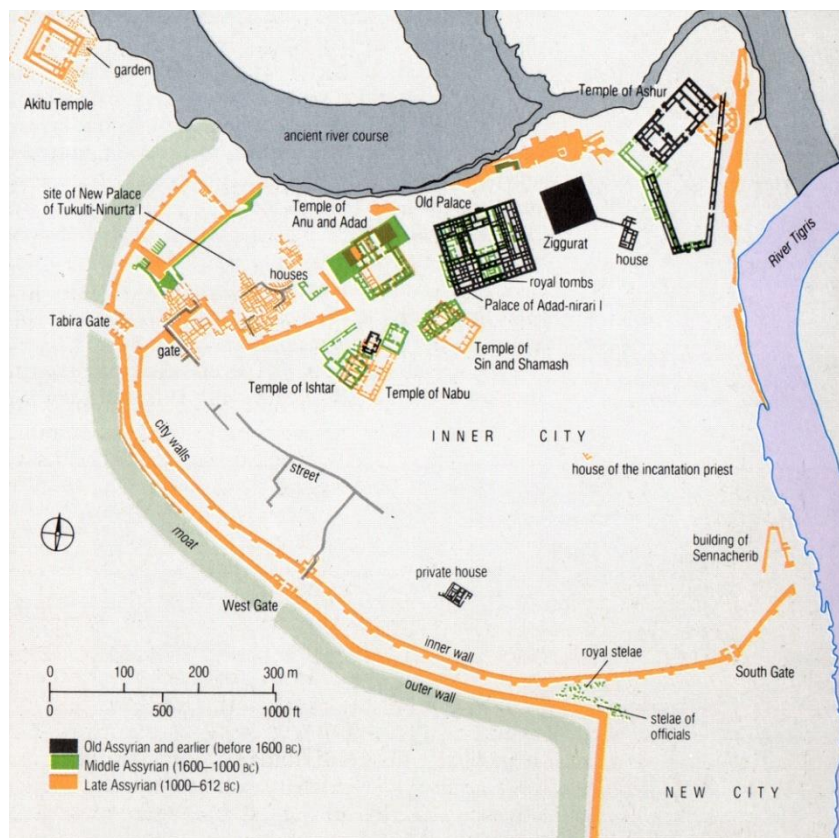


Figure 1.23 Plan of the ancient city of Ashur (<http://www.bet-david.com>).

Inside of the city of Ashur there was an important prominent position at the peak of the spur. The temple and the *ziggurat* of the main deity of the city, who had the same name of the city, were built there. Adjacent to these building was the old palace of the king

who became the principal priest of the Assyrian god. However, there were other deities with important temples inside of the city, which belonged to the Mesopotamian gods *Anu*, *Adad*, *Sin*, *Šamaš* and *Ištar*. The whole area of public building was bordered by quarter of private dwelling to the south. Another special characteristic of Ashur, which was not common in other Mesopotamian cities, was the inexistence of an inner wall inside the city that separated the public area with respect the private one.<sup>63</sup>

The origin of the Assyrian kingdom is associated with its emergence as an independent entity around 2025 BC – denominated as the *Old Assyrian kingdom* period - when was ruled by its own local kings.<sup>64</sup> It was in this time that one of the most powerful kingdoms in the ancient Mesopotamia – the Sumerian 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur - lost its administrative grip on what has been called its northern periphery or ‘the defence zone’ which was also the region where the city of Ashur was located (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 20).

Assyria seems to have inherited from southern Mesopotamia – perhaps thanks to the Uruk expansion - a political tripartite structure with a king, a council of elder or assembly and a public administrative sector of temples (Maisels 1990: 169). However, the Assyrians originally had the particularity of denominating to their monarchs by quite simple titles, such as ‘Viceroy or Governor in the name of the God Ashur’ (*‘išš’ lariyatskoe* [*dingir*] *Aššur*) or simply ‘the God Ashur is King, X is its ruler’. Assyrian kings could also

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<sup>63</sup> Other important buildings excavated by archaeologists were the ‘new palace’, the *Adu-Adad* temple with twin ziggurats and the great *Enlil* ziggurat that later was dedicated to Ashur. Also there were about 13 gates and an open area between the two southern walls over two parallels rows of inscribed *stelae*. Meanwhile, outside the city, there was a special house which was built for commemorated the festival of New Year or *akitu*. When Ashur became an important city in Mesopotamia, the city enlarged with the help of a new fortification wall which enclosed a huge area to the south of the original area (Hallo and Simpson 1998: 111; Novák 2004: 178).

<sup>64</sup> For asiriologists, the term ‘Old Assyrian period’ characterizes its culture during the first centuries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, when it is possible to set a group of features such as a distinctive language, economic structure, law, trade and art inside of the city of *Ashur*. However, the ‘Old Assyrian period’ also represents the emergence of the Old Assyrian dialect in some written records, Assyrian calendar, cylinders seals and legal customs. Indeed, the Old Assyrian dialect was developed out of Old Akkadian language at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, but was only at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC the Old Assyrian dialect received its distinctive writing conventions with orthography sufficiently different from other version of Old Akkadian as the Babylonian (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 21-22).

receive the title of ‘Prince’ (*ruba’i um*) or ‘Lord’ (*belum*). This means that the position of the Assyrian king in the community, during this period, seemed closer to the representative of the royal family more than an autocratic leader (Hallo and Simpson 1998: 112-113; Aubet 2007: 306).

The second establishment was ‘the City Assembly’, which represented the city, and it was composed by a council of elders or *šibutum*. This institution had an advisory role and it was compounded by a group of free citizens with executive power for fixing the political frame of the international trade. The members of this institution were the principal and rich families of Assyria who represented a merchant oligarchy with more political power than the king. In fact, evidence from cuneiform records also reveals the existence of an assembly of citizens gathered in a particular building, which made executive and legal decisions and housed diplomatic relations (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 22).

This political characteristic was not new in the Ancient Near East as Maisels underlines:<sup>65</sup>

The Mesopotamian city-state was run by, and for the benefit of, its citizens, and its free members, those in control of their own lands whether in communal or private ownership. The heads of such ‘free’ or citizen households, whom we may for convenience call patriarchs, constituted the ‘ruling class’ whether they did the executive ruling or not, for it is they who were the major beneficiaries of the distribution of property and thus wealth secured by the state. They were quintessentially the ‘Assembly Men’.

The last institution in Assyria seems to have been the “the City Hall” or *bit alim* which was the centre of commerce and city council in a similar way with respect to the southern Mesopotamian temples. For this reason, Yoffee (Figure 1.24) associates this Assyrian institution with ‘temples’. This institution ensured the general administration of the city, sold slaves and goods of debtor families, gave loans and credits for long distance trade. The official in charge of the *bit alim* was the *limun* who mandate lasted one year and

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<sup>65</sup> Maisels 1990: 271.

were chosen among the more distinguished persons of Assyria. This official was the person in charge of appointing the name of the respective year such as the later *ephoros* from Sparta (Aubet 2007: 309-310).

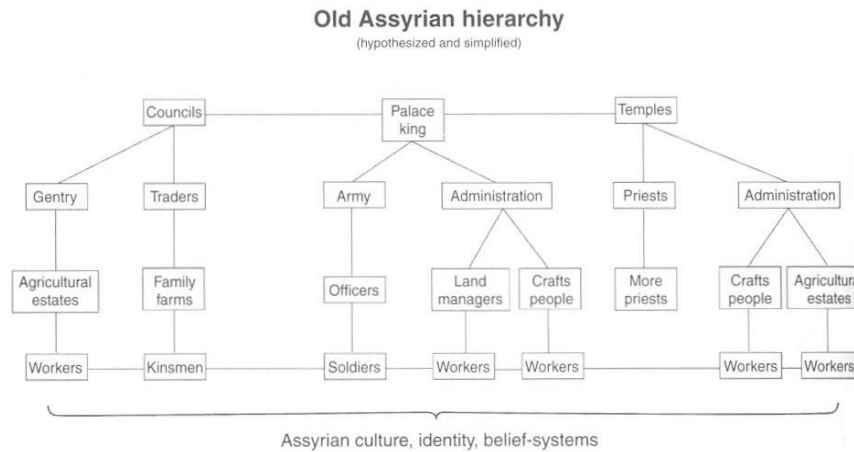


Figure 1.24 The Old Assyrian kingdom organization (Yoffee 2010: 186).

These characteristics would demonstrate that the historical origins of the Assyrian kingdom were quite modest – a kind of ‘commercial Republic’ - with a simple civic structure, led by a group of merchant families and where the figure of the king was further restricted to ceremonial and religious functions; besides monitoring the implementation of justice inside the kingdom (Kuhrt 1995: 254).<sup>66</sup> It seems that amongst the total of inhabitants of Assyria in this period (possibly 15,000) at least 1,500 or 2,000 of them could have been dedicated explicitly to business and long distance trade (Aubet 2007: 310).

Therefore, whereas the state controlled the means of production, there was an important private economic sector with property rights ensured by the state itself. The

<sup>66</sup> According to Betina Faist (2010: 16) this special character of the Assyrian state reinforces her idea that there were not three important institutions but only two: the ‘City Assembly’ (*alum*) as the highest judicial authority for solving legal disputes among Assyrians and to perform as a collective body for financing public structures in colonies, settlements and fortifications; and the ‘City Hall’ (*bit alim*) which was the main economic and administrative institution. Both powers had their respective leaders: the ‘king’ who was really only a representative of the god Ashur (the real king) and the eponym (*limun*). This structure seems to have certain similarities with the performance of two characters in equilibrium of power such as the later couple of Spartan kings and Roman consuls.

Assyrian state was in charge of developing the expansion of agriculture, the construction of monuments and roads, besides the mineral exploration (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 151). However, the territory of Assyria was too small for producing surplus in agriculture and invests it in long distance trade. For this reason, during this period, Assyria developed a commercial development thanks to the control and management of strategic routes to and from Anatolia around the year 1900 BC (Figure 1.25).

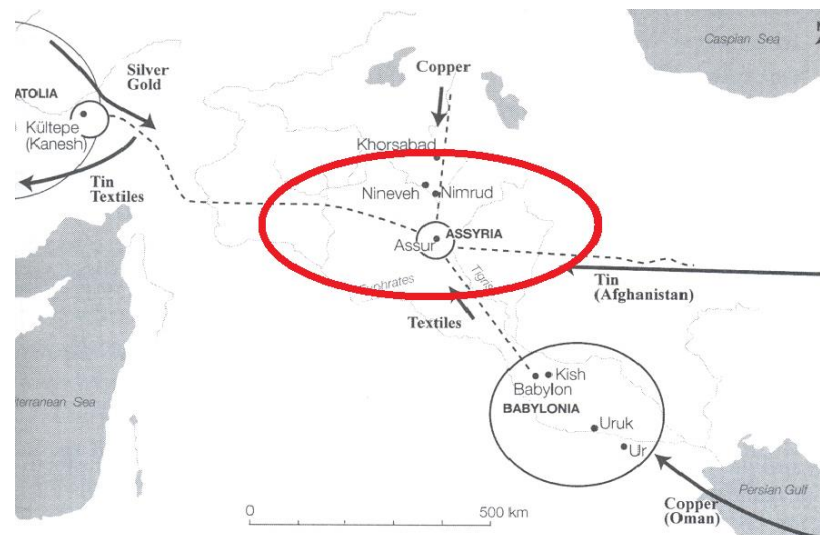


Figure 1.25 Assyria, its area of influence and principal trade routes (Yoffee 2010: 185).

A special case was the acquisition and sale of tin from Anatolia and Iran for the southern Mesopotamian cities-states (Aubet 2007: 298). Tin was a metal used to enhance bronze which use was generalized in the totality of the Ancient Near East as raw material for weapons and tools. The Assyrians took advantage of the control of its transit by the routes of Zagros Mountains and Anatolia, which were exchanged by products from southern Mesopotamia such as textiles and copper from Dilmun (Aubet 2007: 315-317). This corroborates an important characteristic of ancient Assyrian people in this period: *its commercial character*.

The epigraphic evidence also reveals two types of trades used by the ancient Assyrians, especially in the region of Anatolia and northern Syria. The first and best known is the *karum* which is a term used in southern Mesopotamia for naming the wharf, port or pier of the ancient city-states where commercial transactions were performed (Aubet 2007:

335-336). However, the Assyrians adopted the name to designate a series of *emporiums* or commercial basis, not necessarily located at the side of rivers, which were used as operational centres for trade. Also the Assyrians gave them a more permanent character to their *karum* as commercial colonies than in the southern Mesopotamia (Aubet 2007: 337).

These Assyrian colonies were settled in the suburbs of the Anatolian cities and became autonomous neighbourhood exclusively commercial; generally in the ‘low city’, meanwhile the aborigine Anatolian population lived in the ‘upper city’. Under this point of view, the Assyrian *karum* was a multiethnic community because the trade and contact with the aborigine population occurred daily, although the status of the Assyrians in Anatolia is unknown (Aubet 2007: 360). However, there were several marriages between both identities but not enough information about commercial consortium between them.

The other type was designated *wabartum*, an exclusive term or concept of the ancient Assyrian language to designate a ‘guest’, but which really consisted of a sort of commercial colony although less autonomous than the *karum*. They were in areas adjacent to the cities less important economically speaking or with a more difficult access (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 76). The key of this commercial particular development lies in the basic organization found by Assyrians in Anatolia and the interests and experience of the Assyrians themselves as merchants in the past.

According to Veenhof and Eidem (2008: 149) the movement of goods, both those imported from Ashur and those of Anatolian origin and exported to Ashur or traded inside Anatolia, were conditioned by economic factors such as transport, supply and demand, which considered both the commercial network and an efficient communication. The large area covered and the geography of the Ancient Near East with its mountains ranges and rivers, made transport facilities for heavy and bulky goods such as tin, copper, textiles and wool essential.<sup>67</sup> Fundamentally, the Assyrians needed markets where they could sell and

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<sup>67</sup> The research developed by Veenford since 70s allowed understanding better the mechanism of the economy in ancient societies, especially in the Assyrian case. Thanks the information rescued in *Kaneš*, Veenford concluded that Assyrians merchants developed many of the modern concepts of price (*šimūm*), sell (*tadanum*), profit (*nemelum*), merchandise (*luqutum*), place of trade (*maḥīrum*), expensive (*batqum*) besides of private initiative, profit, offer and demand, economic risk, fluctuation of prices, etc. (Veenhof 1972: 348-349).



buy at good rates of exchange, either directly or by indirect exchange, in order to acquire the silver and gold which were their goal.

It seems that Anatolia was always considered by Assyria as a region of resources and economical support. Anatolia in its origins did not constitute a unified kingdom, as Assyria, but rather a set of independent city-states which controlled closer areas using small settlements in the surrounding area. The people who inhabited this territory were designated by the Assyrian records as *hattians*, which is a complex term that some specialists have used to describe the ancient people who inhabited in Anatolia before the arrival of Indo-European peoples (Bryce 2005: 12).

Notwithstanding, the Assyrian records described several names of Indo-European roots between them such as the three major *hattians* city-states: *Purushhatum*, *Kaneš* and *Wahshushana*, which were ruled by 'princes' who somehow were controlled by Assyria, as it could be interpreted from the treaties, trade agreements and rescued oaths belonging to this period. Some of these kingdoms were already known during the period of Sargon of Akkad who sent many military expeditions to conquer them due to commercial rivalry between his 'empire' and the kingdoms from Anatolia and the control of the main routes of trade in this region (Aubert 2007: 338).

In 1881 was found a commercial archive in the Assyrian *karum* of *Kaneš*, which corresponded to the Assyrian colony in this archaeological site. The translation of the cuneiform tablets demonstrated that Assyrian colonies in Anatolia did not reflect an imperialist penetration such as the Venetian and Genovese in Byzantium during the Middle Age but a commercial one (Figure 1.26). Indeed, the Assyrian merchants lived in *Kaneš* in a separate section of the settlement with respect to the aborigine population (Aubert 2007: 246).

The archaeological evidence rescued in *Kaneš* also corroborated that Assyrian colonies never lost contact with the Assyria metropolis, Ashur. The information of the cuneiform tablets of the *karum* denotes a kind of self-government by the Assyrians who created their own institutions following the similar model existing in *Ashur* such as the 'House of *karum*' and the 'Assembly of *karum*' (Aubert 2007: 362-363). It seems that the

settlers saw themselves as an extension of *Ashur* which had been funded with private capital from there.

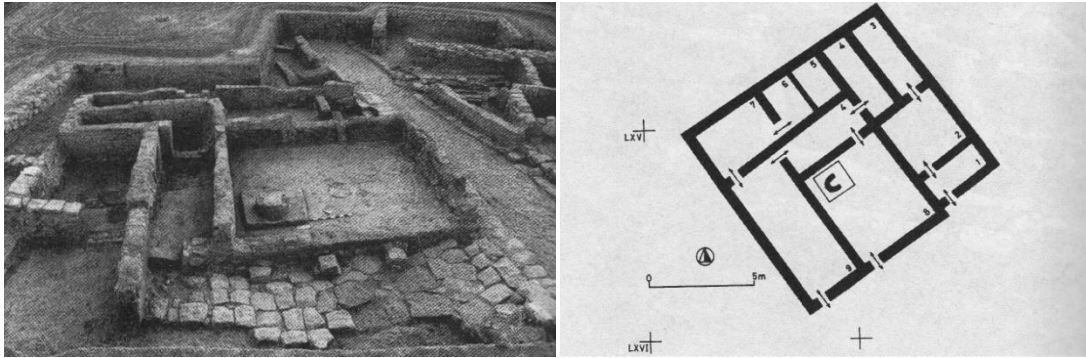


Figure 1.26 House of Assyrian private merchant in *Kaneš* and its archaeological plan (Aubet 2007: 350).

Nevertheless, the relationships between Assyria with others kingdoms or people during this colonial period were not always peaceful. Around 1800 BC, Assyrians were controlled by Amorite kings –the same people to whom King Hammurabi belonged - who had conquered the Assyrians and, somehow, contributed to the development of a more powerful idea of monarchy in Assyria. Only when the Amorite monarchs conquered the country, did the Assyrians adopt the ancient Akkadian royal title of *sharrum* to nominate to their monarchs in the future (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 123).<sup>68</sup>

This period, characterized by the appearance of the Amorite people, was the same period between the Middle and Late Bronze Age (2100-1200 BC). During this historical period, the complete Ancient Near East was unified under a common politic system by the initiative and the intervention of the Amorite people who had great orpoor influences on the different states and kingdoms from Syria to Elam (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 39). Thus, the

<sup>68</sup> Masetti-Rouault (2001: 37) follows the interpretation of the Italian specialist Bucellati who suppose that the traditional philologist interpretation which separates the Amorite language with respect to the Akkadian following a historical, geographic and morphologic base should be newly analysed. Both scholars think that Akkadian and their derivatives (the Old Assyrian and the Old Babylonian) represented the languages spoken inside of an urban context by the palatial aristocracy during the Bronze Age, specifically for the administration and the written culture. Meanwhile, the Amorite was the same language but spoken only by Semitic nomads from the countryside without fixed tradition in the cuneiform writing. This is the reason why the general morphology of the Amorite language is practically unknown nowadays.

impact of this people in different aspects increased different forms of communications, conflicts and contacts among different entities, even with no Mesopotamian states as Egypt.

The new character of the Amorite dynasties was not characterized by former tribal ties as it was in the past, but by an exclusively political relationship. Thus, the fundamentals of these new Mesopotamian regimes were basically supported by *political institutions* scattered inside of specific territorial borders (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 41). The political institutions promoted the concept of one national monarchy with a kingdom, which could overcome the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of their respective people.

Masetti-Rouault (2001: 55) also considers that due to the Amorite influence from its capital Babylon, the Assyrians could adopt the Babylonian culture by a new and larger political vision of political state, besides of introducing their own monarchies in the international political context of the Ancient Near East, beyond trade and commercial business (Machinist 1985: 186-187). However, the death of Hammurabi in 1750 BC provoked the subsequent weakness of his kingdom because of the appearance of new powers from the northern region, which snatched the monopoly over trade in Anatolia.

That was the case of the Hittites and the kingdom of Mitanni, which appeared around 1600 BC. It seems that the Hittites represented a new wave of people of Indo-European origin who adopted the same political system and administrative organization which were common during the Bronze Age period in the Ancient Near East. Meanwhile, the Mitanni kingdom finally subjugated the Assyrian kingdom itself during the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC until 14<sup>th</sup> century BC (Figure 1.27). Indeed, the Assyrian colonies in Anatolia during this period were abandoned.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless these complicate situations, the Assyrian dynasties of this period were characterised by its long stability. Such stability is corroborated when an almost unknown and remote Assyrian king named Adasi came to power in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC and established an official royal list. As result the subsequent Assyrian kings, until the last of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, sought always to legitimize them by resorting to long and detailed dynastic lists from this period. This allowed developing an ideological concept about legitimate genealogy, which persisted in the history of ancient Assyria until the political disintegration in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC and it also would demonstrate the emphasis of integration of the Assyrian rulers, legitimate or not, to become an unified state (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 55; Machinist 1985: 186).

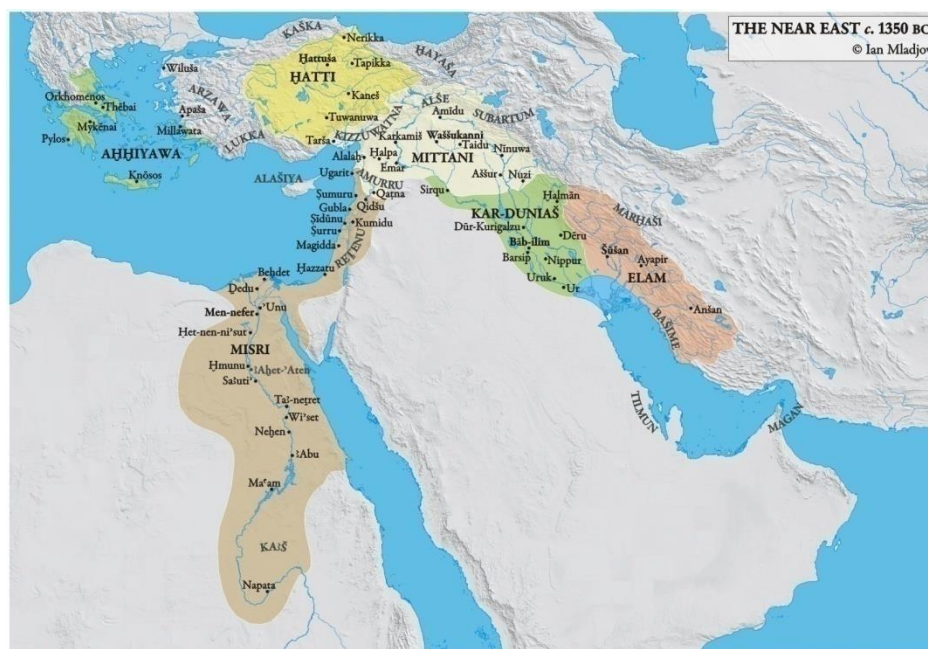


Figure 1.27 Assyrian under the Mitanni control (<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/mladjov/files>).

Nevertheless, the history of Assyria between from 1400 BC until 1050 BC is considered as one of the most important in the history of this people and it has been identified as the *Middle Assyrian kingdom* period. However, there is not a clear distinction between this period and the *Old Assyrian kingdom*, due to the lack of Assyrian historical data between the 18<sup>th</sup> century BC and the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC. Archaeological findings discovered in the northwest of Syria demonstrate the impact and influence that the Assyrian power left in this area, which would be an evidence of its new commercial and political expansion.

This is corroborated by Bedford, who underlines:<sup>70</sup>

Economic gain has been commonly accepted as the primary motivation for Assyrian territorial expansion. The ruling elite sought to organize territory and people for its own economic benefit, to maximize agricultural output through a more efficient use of labour or newly opened cultivable lands, to enhance the flow

<sup>70</sup> Bedford 2009: 48.

of luxury goods and raw materials to the centre, and to keep the costs of running the empire as low as possible by lessening the threat of internal revolt.

However, Assyria did not become initially a mighty kingdom during the *Middle Assyrian kingdom* period because it was still dependent on the decisions from other kingdoms of this period. Indeed, compared to other states – such as the Babylonian *kassite*, the New Hittite kingdom and the Egyptian New kingdom - the titles used by the Assyrian monarchs in their diplomatic contacts were rather modest. But it seems that none of these kingdoms had the enough military power for subjugating the others because none had yet attained the military, technological and organization power that would make the imperial unification of the Ancient Near East possible (Kravitz 2010: 123).

The situation changed radically with the appearance of the Assyrian king Assur-uballit I (1363-1328 BC). This monarch promoted a change of mentality when Assyria was still economic and politically under the Mitannian kingdom domain. Ideologically, Assur-uballit I used this old conflict of subjugation to the Mitanni kingdom for transforming Assyria to a new independent state, where the Assyrian crown became a more powerful institution supported by a new aristocratic class as officials (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 56).

Besides, this Assyrian king wanted to rebuild the Assyrian state by strengthening the institution of the monarchy, which was the official institution responsible for the new distribution of lands and properties. It seems that this reform also changed both Assyrian behaviour and economy. On the one hand, the institution of the Assyrian monarchy became more powerful than in the past and it had the support of administrative elite which was under the direct control of the king (Figure 1.28). These changes will become fundamental for the future political, social and religious level of the later Neo-Assyrian Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

According to Masetti-Rouault (2001: 57) this reform of Assur-uballit I was also a truly political reform, which would be adopted and improved by the future Neo-Assyrian Empire. Hereinafter, the Assyrian king will be the person in charge of distribution of lands and properties among their subjects once every person performs their duties with respect to the Assyrian state. Thus, the reform of this Assyrian king were not only administrative and

fiscal changes but a truly political operation, which was determinant in the creation and installation of a new social class which, unified to the royal power, modified deeply the structure and the political and geographical definition of the Middle Assyrian kingdom.

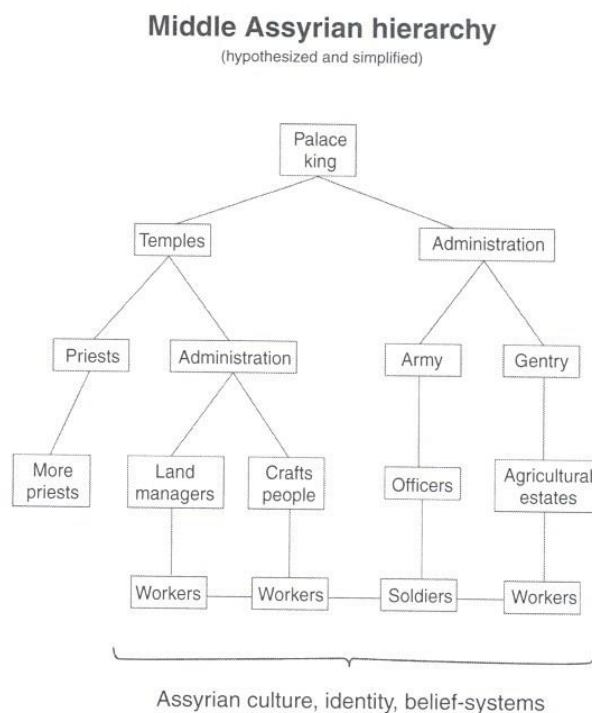


Figure 1.28 The Middle Assyrian kingdom and its new social order (Yoffee 2010: 191).

In another aspect, the Assyrian state changed some institutions belonging to the Old Assyrian Period. Thus, the City Assembly disappeared, being replaced by new royal officers whose position depended on the grade of influence that they had in the royal organization or social group. On the other hand, the City Hall carried on with their traditional functions although it lost its importance in the administrative hierarchy, restricting its prominence to the checking of the standard weighing stones in public transactions under the command of the royal palace (Faist 2010: 17).

Basically, the royal palace became the principal economic institution of the new Assyrian state because it was both the more important consumer of resources and the principal centre of manufacture and storage administration. The royal palace was administrated by a royal steward (*mašennu rabi'u*) who was in charge of the resources

consumed in the palace from large estates controlled by the palace and spread around the kingdom (Faist 2010: 20).

It seems that Assyrians did not forget their merchant past because the Assyrian palace of this period carried on the policy of acquiring luxury goods and raw material engaged Assyrian and foreign merchants on a commercial basis. Later, the palace was involved hiring specialized workmen in order to retrieve the raw materials in finished products using a system called *iškaru*, which used the principle of fiscal obligation (Postgate 1979: 205). In fact, the palace adopted the same *oikos* system developed in southern Mesopotamia many centuries ago.

On the other hand, the importance of domain titles for the new distribution of lands means that agriculture production has become the most important task for the Assyrian people, besides commerce. However, historically, the Assyrian territory has been relatively poor in arable lands therefore it was fundamental for the new Assyrian ideology that the king would be able to obtain new land for his people, driving the territorial expansion by military conquests and ideological propaganda (Faist 2010: 15). For this reason, the Assyrian kings adopted new titles depending on new circumstances.

Thus, Ashur-uballit I (1353-1318 BC) was the first Assyrian king to call himself ‘king of the Land of Ashur’ (*šar mat Aššur*) which implies he was both the ruler of an enlarged territory and also the owner of a ruling power that had been in the past only in hand of the god Ashur. Meanwhile, other Assyrian king, Adad-narari I (1295-1264 BC), the former conqueror of the Mitanni kingdom, preferred to be called as ‘king of universe, strong king, king of the Land of Ashur’ (*šar kiššati šarru dannu šar mat Aššur*) which became the formal titles of later Assyrian kings.

Besides, he adopted the title of ‘extender of border and boundaries’ (*murappiš mišri u kudurri*) for stipulating his military conquests. In a similar way, Tukulti-Ninurta I (1224 – 1208 BC) adopted titles more pompous from the southern Mesopotamia such as “king of the four quarters” (*šar kibrat erbetta*), “king of kings” (*šar šarrani*), “lord of lords” (*bel beli*) and “ruler of rulers” (*malik maliki*) and soon his kingdom would join to the

“club of the great powers” of the Amarna Age (Figure 1.29) during the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 24; Faist 2010: 17-18).



Figure 1.29 Assyria after the *Tell el-Amarna* period (<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/mladjov/files>).

This last Assyrian king was able to organize an army that crossed the border with the Hittite kingdom to defeat it in battle; carrying out also raids in the mountainous areas to ensure the provision of horses, tin, copper and lapis lazuli. These events were described in details by the royal Assyrian inscriptions belonging to Tukulti-Ninurta I:

On my accession to the royal throne, in my first year of reign, I carried off 28,800 Hittite warriors from the other side of the Euphrates, and in the Iauri mountains, my hand conquered the Kurti and Ukumani as far as Sharnida (and) Mehri. The tribute of their lands and the abundance of their mountains, yearly I received. Kutmuhi, Bushshi, Alzi, Madani, Nihani, Alaia, Teburzi, Burukuzzi, all of the wide spreading Shubari, with fire I burned. The kings, their rulers, I brought in submission to my feet and imposed task work.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Luckenbill 1968: 57.



It seems that the real objective of this campaign was to reach a geopolitical necessity: the Hittite had mastered the methods of producing important amounts of iron around the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, meanwhile the Assyrian carried on still largely dependent on bronze for weapons and tools.<sup>72</sup> Such as Bedford highlights (2009: 34), the iron was seemingly appropriated by Assyrians for military use from caches captured in Syria-Palestine, which allowed to Assyria become the first producer during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.

However, the most important military campaign of Tukulti-Ninurta I was in the south with the conquest of Babylonia (*Karduniaš*) by the Assyrians when the Assyrian king was able to defeat and conquer the city of Babylon and exerted dominance in that city for some period of time (Luckenbill 1968: 49). When he returned to Assyria, the Assyrian king mentioned his booty of prisoners and a large collection of cuneiform tablets from the library of Babylonia with several and different kinds of literature (epics, omens, annals, hymns and prayers) by a poem called the *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic* (Luckenbill 1968: 57).

An interesting approach to this poem, according to Kravitz (2010: 124) lies in the motivation or cause of this war against Babylonia. The Assyrian king considered that Babylonia was not loyal with a treaty signed between both kingdoms according to a classical pattern of the standard forms of diplomacy existing in the Ancient Near East. For this reason, the Assyrian military punishment expedition was justified and supported by many Mesopotamian divinities and not only by the national god of Assyria. Thus, this poem or epic not only celebrated the victory at war but it also tried to find a divine justification of the conflict (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 62).

Later, the same poem was rewritten in the Assyrian Royal inscriptions, which considered that this was only an additional victory of the Assyrian king (Luckenbill 1968: 60). However, this version emphasises the idea of the enemy defeat, the obligation of other kings of swearing oaths to the Assyrian king and his new role as lord of 'Sumer and

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<sup>72</sup> According to Potts (1997: 177) the iron was current in Mesopotamia for much of the Bronze Age, but it was considered more as rarity or curiosity used for small pieces of jewellery, ornaments and blades of presentation weapons. Notwithstanding, this metal was not considered strategic or important in the southern Mesopotamia as opposed that it became in Assyria. A proof of that is the fact there were not attested prices for iron in cuneiform texts before 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

Akkad'. It seems that this old Mesopotamian title – ancient legacy from the period of Sargon and Naram-Sin - become much more important for Assyrian kings who consider themselves as the legacy of ancient powers of the Mesopotamian region for unifying all the world under the Assyrian command (Kravitz 2010: 125).

As Edward points out:<sup>73</sup>

The military triumphs of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries acted as a powerful stimulus to Assyrian literary activity. The desire to record and perpetuate the memory of victory and conquest led to the elaboration of campaign reports in the royal inscription and to the composition of epics and also, perhaps, of chronicles. At the same time, closer contact with countries with a developed literary tradition, in particular Babylonia greatly enriched the resources of literature and learning at the command of the Assyrian scribes.

This detail has some relevance considering that the development of the Assyrian literature in this period was strongly influenced by the Babylonian style, particularly in the epics and prayers devoted to Tukulti-Ninurta I.<sup>74</sup> This is also a testimony of a cultural impact – and cultural complex, as well - that the Assyrians never could better themselves: such as Rome with respect to the Greek culture; the Babylonian civilization was the reflection of an ancient and well developed culture that the Assyrians always respected and tried of assimilating as religious centre in Mesopotamia.

This characteristic is also mentioned by Kravitz (2010: 127) who considers that the royal inscription was unconcerned with justification for any military conquest because the wars of conquest always have been taken for granted. Nevertheless, the campaign was

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<sup>73</sup> Edward 1975: 295.

<sup>74</sup> Such as Hallo and Simpson (1998: 115) say: 'The fame of Tukulti-Ninurta was such that garbled features of his reign are thought to be preserved both in biblical and Greek literature: in Genesis 10, his prowess as conqueror and hunter in the name of Nimrud (for whom, however, Naram-Sin of Akkad provides a likelier model); in the Greek legends, 'King Ninos' and the building of his new capital, 'the city of Ninos' [the Assyrian city of Kar-Tukultinurta or 'Quay of Tukulti-Ninurta']; and, in the Greek recollections surrounding Sardanapalos, his fiery death there. Separating fact from legends, it is clear that his death marked a new eclipse of Assyrian power destined to last for almost a century'.

more focused on re-designing the Mesopotamian world which had been centred on the historical city of Babylon for centuries. Now the Assyrians moved the center of that world to northern Mesopotamia, making Ashur the new city of kingship and the center of divine authority by right of military conquest.

However, after the death of Tukulti-Ninurta I, Assyria faced a period of upheavals, general weakness and territorial losses, some of them originated by a general crisis that shocked the entire Ancient Near East: *the End of the Bronze Age*.

## **5. The Ancient Near East and the ‘Catastrophe’ at the End of the Bronze Age**

### a) Old Theories and New Approaches

Around the year 1200 BC, there was an important phenomenon in the history of the Ancient Near East. From a chronological and technical aspect, the Bronze Age concluded and the Iron Age began. Notwithstanding, there are other relevant historical phenomena which point out a before and an after in the order of event in the Ancient Near East. Under this point of view, the ancient order characterized by the dominance of kingdoms as Hatti, Egypt and Mycenae, disappeared and was replaced by a new one.<sup>75</sup>

With the demise of the Hittite kingdom, Anatolia lost contact with the ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, isolating itself from the development of events beyond its borders. Something similar happened with Assyria, Babylonia and Elam which, in the

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<sup>75</sup> An overview of this area before 1200 BC would show two different geographical realities: the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. The first included the Syro Palestine region, Anatolia and the islands and territories adjacent to the Aegean Sea; territories and kingdoms ruled or influenced directly or indirectly by the two great powers of that time, the Egyptian New kingdom and the Hittite kingdom. The second represented the hinterland of Mesopotamia, with three specific kingdoms: the Babylonian kingdom of the Kassita dynasty in the south, the Assyrian kingdom in the north, and kingdom of Elam in the east. When the period of the Bronze Age concludes, around 1200 BC, it is possible to see that the eastern Mediterranean has changed dramatically with the disappearance of several states or kingdoms, such as the Hittite kingdom, the Mycenaean kingdoms, the colonies or settlements in Cyprus and several cities in the Syro Palestinian region as Ugarit and Emar. In the majority of these places there was evidence of destruction or abandonment of cities and palaces throughout Anatolia, Cyprus, the Syro-Palestine region and the Aegean Sea (Drews 1993: 29-30). Meanwhile, the Egyptian New Kingdom survives but it loses his control over Palestine and Nubia and it gradually begins to be a weaker state.

absence of contacts beyond Mesopotamia, were reduced to small states which practiced international exchanges of small scale between them, losing the important contact with the Mediterranean and Egypt (Singer 2000: 21-33).

Thus, the immediate consequence was the disappearance of several elements that had generated a cultural stability from the 1500 BC until 1200 BC. In fact, the ancient states and kingdoms had coexisted before this crisis with others of a diplomatic relationship, formal institutions and administrative organizations, such as archives, commercial treaties, trades and monumental constructions (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 71). But this ancient order disappears suddenly as a global ‘catastrophe’ in the ancient world and a new order seemed to emerge.

Traditionally, the cause of this ‘Catastrophe at the End of the Bronze Age’ has varied with the time and the perspectives of different scholars depending on different historical interpretations (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 71). One of them belonged to the French archaeologist C. F. A. Schaeffer in 1955, who excavated in one of this destroyed sites, the city of Ugarit, and concluded that it was a natural disaster motivated by a great earthquake which also destroyed many other sites in the Eastern Mediterranean – Troy VII, Mycenae, Alalakh, Hattusas, and Pylos, among others - and changed the face of the region at the End of the Bronze Age.

However, a modern critic archaeological study corroborates that many of these sites were not destroyed by collapse of structures but by fire which principal evidence is the great existence of ashes in their archaeological *stratum* (Drews 1993: 38 and 40). There is another important antecedent: the eastern Mediterranean coast always has been, as it is nowadays, a region that has suffered several telluric movements. However, there is no evidence that any of them had finished with the different cultures or civilizations settled there in the past or the present.

Besides, it is important to consider the critical assessment of Tainter (1988: 53) who believes that ‘catastrophe explanations’ for civilizations are weak because complex societies, ancient or modern, routinely withstand catastrophe without collapsing. It seems that history teaches that catastrophes never have exceeded the capacity of societies to

absorb and recover from natural disasters. As Tainter concludes (1988: 206): ‘If any society has ever succumbed to a single event catastrophe, it must have been a disaster of truly colossal magnitude’.

Another traditional explanation of this ‘catastrophe’ has been attributed to migration of new and aggressive people in a similar pattern than the German invasion, which overthrew the Roman Empire. Following the pattern of this phenomenon, some scholars believed that the cause of the End of the Bronze Age in the eastern Mediterranean has been the emergence, spread and aggression of the so-called ‘Sea Peoples’ (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 72). However, the main source about these people emerges the information extracted principally from Egyptian sources<sup>76</sup>. This denomination is a designation used precisely by the ancient Egyptian sources for a cluster of overseas peoples, which ravaged the Eastern Mediterranean and the Ancient Egypt and changed forever the face of the ancient Mediterranean during this time.

Thus, in the year 1209 BC, the Pharaoh Merneptah reportedly fought and rejected a Libyan coalition of these peoples who attacked the Egyptian Delta (Figure 1.30). However, it is an interesting matter that this group of attackers included Libyans with their families and also a set of people who were providing a large contingent of troops. The Egyptian sources called them *Šrdn*, *žkwš*, *Trš* and *Rwkw*. Forty years later, at the time of the Pharaoh Ramses III, Egypt should reject another attempted invasion against but in this moment against peoples coming from Syria, who attacked by land and by sea (Figure 27); some of whom were identified by the Egyptian sources as *Prst*, *Wšš*, *Tjkr* and *Dnn* (Kuhrt 1995: 387).

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<sup>76</sup> The principal graphic evidence of these peoples comes from the relief and inscriptions of Ramses III at the temple of *Medinet Habu*. Scholars as R. Gareth Roberts (2009: 63-84) has identified two principal groups of these ‘Sea People’. The first of them were identified by their horned helmet at *Medinet Habu* and called by the Egyptians as ‘Shardana’ or ‘Sherden’ (*šrdn*) who were also settled as a minority population in the Eastern Mediterranean cities as Ugarit, where they are denominated as *šerdanu* or *šertannu*, who were involved in legal transactions. The other group was unknown by the Egyptians who drew them with the same plumed headgear – although they had three different names: ‘Peleset’, ‘Tjeker’ and ‘Weshesh’ - who could have come from the south-eastern of Anatolia.



Figure 1.30 The “Catastrophe” at the end of the Bronze Age (<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/mladjov/files>).

The country of origin of these ‘Sea Peoples’ has been studied in the last few decades and generally it has been associated with places such as Sicily, Sardinia or even Anatolia (Vagnetti 2000: 305-326). Thus, the ‘Sea Peoples’ should have been populations from the southern coast of Anatolia who were deeply affected by a crisis of livelihood among from 1300 years BC until 1200 C which could be the origin of this ‘catastrophe’ (Tainter 1988: 44). Indeed, it is very possible that a moderate or seasonal drought could have affected some areas of Anatolia and northern Libya which obliged some people migrate to other latitudes, such as Egypt, in searching of major source of grains and food (Drews 1993: 79).

Some of these peoples ended up serving as mercenaries for the Egyptian kingdom or allying with other people with similar problems, such as the Libyan case.<sup>77</sup> Besides, according to Drews (1993: 198-201) the reason whereby Egypt could refuse the waves of attacks from the ‘Sea People’ was owed to its strategy of using a new style of infantry combat enrolling these former invaders for transforming them in mercenaries *Shardan* or *Shardana* useful for fighting against other similar invaders (Figure 1.31). It seems that the motifs drawn in the relief of the Egyptian temples in *Luxor* and *Medinet-Habu* try to illustrate this historical event (O’Connor 2000: 85-102).



Figure 1.31 Egyptian representation of some of the “Sea Peoples” warriors from left to right: two Sherden, two Philistine, three unidentified warriors –perhaps from Canaan or Asia- and four Libyans (Wise 1981: 32)

However, the destructive impact of this migration, associated particularly with the cases of the Hittite kingdom and Ugarit, as well as the Egyptian propaganda, should be analysed carefully in detail. Indeed, Egyptians themselves realized the existence of many of these peoples before the great crisis at the End of the Bronze Age, but it was only after the year 1200 BC when these peoples produced one greater impact (Kuhrt 1995: 385-386). So,

<sup>77</sup> This seems has been also the case of the ‘Sherden’. This people were already known in Egypt for many years before the apparition of the ‘Sea Peoples’ and many of them fought as mercenaries in the Egyptian army. Indeed, there are Egyptian evidences that the ‘Sherden’ were settled in Egypt for most of the Ramesside period and beyond. However, Drews (1993: 92) points up the analogy between the ‘Sea Peoples’ phenomenon with respect other later cases as the Goths, the Saxons and the Vikings: all of them had in common have been barbarians neighbours of civilised states who were hired as cheap soldiers and mercenaries and they learnt to supplement their earning by plunder and appropriate outlying section of the civilised world.

following the critical analysis of Drews (1993: 48) the migration hypothesis is based not on the Egyptian inscriptions themselves but *on their modern interpretations*.

Finally, the origin of the migration thesis belongs to the French scholar Gaston Maspero who wrote in 1870 about the migration of some of these ‘Sea People’ but his research was based only on the Egyptian evidences. On one hand, Maspero did not want to explain the End of the Bronze Age provoked by the ‘Sea People’ but the unsuccessful attacks of this population against the Egyptian kingdom. On the other hand, Maspero was more interested in the special relationship that he believed to have discovered between the migration of the ‘Sea People’ and the appearance of the first Indo-European people crossing the Danube and taking control of Asia Minor and the Balkans (Drews 1993: 59 and 61).<sup>78</sup>

In addition, according to the critical analysis of Tainter (1988: 63) these theories about invasions that help to explain the end of entire civilizations are popular only because ‘they provide a clear, simple resolution to a distressingly convoluted problem. As *deus and machine*, invasions are an old favourite in archaeological studies, where sudden episodes of cultural change may otherwise be difficult to explain’.<sup>79</sup> Besides, these theories do not clarify much when they try to explain how a ‘barbarian’ society can finish suddenly a more evolutionary state.

In summary, different scholars and specialists have argued that the most diverse cause for explaining the causes of the End of the Bronze Age are: prolonged drought and

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<sup>78</sup> Drews (1993: 71) is very critic with the approach of Maspero. Drews believes that Maspero assumed ancient national entities which never existed in the Antiquity. That is because Maspero belonged to 19<sup>th</sup> century period where the concept about nationalism was very common, but it would be a strange idea at the End of the Bronze Age. In fact, gentilities as ‘the Sicilians’, ‘the Sardinians’, ‘the Achaeans’ or ‘the Etruscans’ could not be applied in this period because the majority of these people had neither a shared history nor common purpose or goal and never became nations.

<sup>79</sup> This subject was one of the most popular topics for European scholars during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as Spengler, Toynbee, Danilevsky or Petrie. They believed in a special ‘mystical’ factor which could be used for explaining the conquest of people or the fall of civilisations such as the ‘vigour’, the ‘decadence’, the ‘senility’ of some peoples. However, this interpretation did not have reference to empirically knowable processes and some of them had racial prejudices common of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



destruction of crops, natural disasters, floods, earthquakes and invasions of foreign peoples. Nevertheless, in the last few decades it has been possible to add many others: climate change, crisis of overall production, disruption of trade, prolonged wars, social revolutions, among other causes. However, it is important to make an attempt of clarify some concepts.

First, the concept of ‘catastrophe’ is perhaps too extreme for historical studies, following the idea of Tainter (1988: 18-19) who provides an illustration of this approach:

Popular writers and film producers have developed a consistent image of what life will be like after the collapse of industrial society. With some variation, the picture that emerges is of a Hobbesian war of all against all (...) extended globally. Only the strong survive; the weak are victimized, robbed, and killed. There is fighting for food and fuel. Whatever central authority remains lacks the resources to reimpose order. Bands of pitiful, maimed survivors scavenge among the ruins of grandeur. Grass grows in the streets. There is no higher goal than survival. Anyone who has read modern disaster literature, or seen it dramatized, will recognize this script.

Besides, following the approach of Masetti-Rouault (2001: 71) the period between the End of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age has been one of the most productive in the history of the Ancient Near East. Indeed, this period is characterized by the emergence of new political, social and economic systems besides the origin of new religious expression both the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Ancient Near East.

For this reason, in a more impartial historical analysis, it is better to speak about the *collapse* of civilizations belonging to the Bronze Age as a political process inside a socio-political sphere. But a *collapse* does not affect exclusively states or government, also the global civilization – as was the case at the End of the Bronze Age - can be affected. Thus, the collapse is not only the fall of empires or the decentralization of societies but also the *transformation* (Tainter 1988: 31) of a society either by the change from a large state to smaller kingdom or chiefdom or the abandonment of small villages and towns.

Second, Tainter (1988: 4 and 19) emphasises: *a society collapse when it displays a rapid, significant loss of an established level of socio-political complexity*. Among the principal characteristic of a collapse are a lower degree of social stratification, less economic development, less centralized control, less behavioural control, less investment in complexity and social order and less trading and redistributions of resources and smaller territory integrated within a single political unit. Indeed, there are more implications in art, literature and other cultural phenomena but they are not essential, despite some scholars perceiving this collapse as a 'dark age' or 'paradise lost'.<sup>81</sup>

Third, it is easier to speak about several causes that to use only one for explaining the general collapse. With respect to the End of the Bronze Age, one of the newest researches about the causes of this crisis indicates that during the transition between the period of the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age (1220-900 BC) coincided with one of the current interglacial (Holocene) Rapid Climate Change (RCC) which had happened between the years 1500-500 BC (Rohling, Hayes, Mayewski and Kucera 2009: 2). It was characterized by glacier advances on a global scale in Scandinavia, central Asia, North America and Southern Hemisphere; in a very similar pattern that in the intervals 4000-3000 BC, 2200-1800 BC, 800-1000 AC and 1400-1850 AC.

This research was developed by a scientific team who investigated the Rapid Climate Change (RCC) during the Holocene in the eastern Mediterranean region by the study of marine microfossil assemblages in sediment core recovered from Aegean and Levantine Seas. The result would prove that, from 13<sup>th</sup> BC until 10<sup>th</sup> BC, the climate conditions were unstable with wildly fluctuating temperatures, but on the whole significantly drier than the previous centuries (Rohling, Hayes, Mayewski and Kucera 2009: 3-4).

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<sup>81</sup> The complexity refers to such things as the size of a society, the number and distinctiveness of its parts, the variety of its specialised social roles, the number of distinct social personalities present and the variety of mechanisms for organizing all these characteristics into a coherent whole which the inequality of vertical social differentiation and the heterogeneity of its society are fundamental in the general order (Tainter 1988: 23).

Among the principles consequences of this climatic change would be a change in climate from warming and humid to cool and arid. The eastern Mediterranean in particular experienced warming winters and cooling summer between the years 1600 BC and 1300 BC. Also there was an increase in temperature and aridity in the Eastern Mediterranean, as was demonstrated by the dramatic drop in the level of the Dead Sea. The immediate result of this situation is explained in this research as a terrible impact for the ancient order known before the 1200 BC.

Thus, since 1600 BC there was a gradual period of substantially reduced Nile flooding that lasted over eight centuries. Rohling, Hayes, Mayewski and Kucera (2009: 5) state: 'In the critical setting of the Nile valley, reduced flooding would likely have affected the agricultural capacity, while the definitive step to hyper aridity in the wider Sahara around 1500 BC would have finally rendered that environment incapable for any substantial food production'. To sum up, in the Ancient Near East, there was a sharply defined arid episode, which would have been severe enough to influence the agricultural capacity of that region between 1000 BC until 500 BC.

The archaeology seems to corroborate this phenomenon (Moody 2009: 19). Indeed, the studies of the vernacular architectural pattern in the islands of the Aegean Sea demonstrated structural changes in the buildings between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age. Thus, the single-storied, cosy houses with their indoor hearths and ovens would have been better suited to such changes in temperature and humidity than the airy houses which were characteristic in the Minoan Places periods (Figure 1.32).

This phenomenon would have had a terrible impact, especially on the agriculture production of important states such as the Hittite kingdom. According to Egyptian sources – the famous *Merneptah stele* - a famine struck the Hittite kingdom requiring even the shipment of grain from Egypt. In other words, the entire region of Anatolia was suffering from serious internal problems that weakened the central administrative of the Hittite kingdom, forcing the majority of its population to emigrate to the south (Kuhrt 1995: 391; Wood 1987: 221).

CHRONOLOGY	LM I	LM III A-B	Early Iron Age
VENTILATION	EXCELLENT Large windows and doors, on more than one side of a building, multi-storied, semi-detached.	POOR to GOOD The new axial 2-3 room structures appear poorly ventilated, while those built on Minoan foundations are better.	POOR Poorly ventilated. 'Axial' plan and lack of windows prevent cross-ventilation.
INSULATION	MODERATE Building materials would provide insulation, but exteriors colours were not always white allowing exterior walls to heat. Offset by windows and doors.	MODERATE to GOOD Building materials would provide insulation, Minoanizing structures less so than the 'axial' ones.	GOOD? Building materials would provide insulation, 'axial' plan and lack of windows.
SHADE	GOOD Tall structures would provide shade, possible gardens.	GOOD to MODERATE Shade would be provided by the narrow lanes and courtyards.	GOOD to MODERATE Shade would be provided by the narrow lanes and courtyards.
HEAT	MODERATE to POOR Portable braziers? Rare indoor hearths.	MODERATE Common hearths and ovens, but often in outdoor courtyard.	GOOD to VERY GOOD Common indoor hearths and ovens.

Table 2.7: Summary of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age vernacular architecture

FEATURES OF EIA HOUSES	Climate	Topography	Economy	Defence
SINGLE-STORIED	Easier to heat and cool. Less wind exposed. Greater flood risk (though probably not where EIA sites are located)	Work well in steep terrain, but so do 'split-level' houses.	Less labour-intensive to construct. Multi-storied houses can be associated with wealth.	Less visible from a distance, but easily accessed if attacked directly. A tower house would be much more defensible.
POORLY VENTILATED	Suitable for dry climates, whether warm or cool. Not suitable for humid, especially humid, warm climates. Also suitable for cold humid climates.	Steep topography does not constrain the construction of doors and windows except on the slope side. It would be easy to improve ventilation in an axial house by having a door at both ends.	Windows and doors are labour-intensive to build and maintain. In some cultures they indicate wealth.	Fewer or smaller windows and doors would make breaching the walls of the single storied house more difficult. And would make the light from interior hearths less visible.
INTERIOR HEARTHES AND OVENS	Suitable for cold climates.	Might expect more hearths at higher elevations? But most EIA settlements are below 450 m, including those with the most hearths!	No connection? (See Wallace forthcoming for a discussion of social considerations).	The movement of hearths to the interior would make it harder to see a settlement at night from a distance.

Table 2.8: Early Iron Age vernacular architecture: climate, topography, economy, and defence

Figure 1.32 Comparative architectural study between the houses of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age in the Mediterranean region (Moody 2009: 18).

Thus, when this crisis was at its worst in 1200 BC, it generated the so-called 'catastrophe' at the End of the Bronze Age, which, historically speaking, was in fact a *collapse* of an ancient order. This collapse was characterized by new waves of migrations constituted by entire families coming from different parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, which were becoming increasingly aggressive. This situation was made possible by the decline of the central authority, which was exercised by the Hittite kingdom in Anatolia and parts of the eastern Mediterranean.

This is supported by Tainter's (1988) interpretation of an important principle of collapse: *collapse occurs, and can only occur, in a power vacuum*. This means that collapse is possible only where there is no competitor strong enough to fill the political vacuum of

disintegration as happened during the End of the Bronze Age: 'Where such a competitor does exist there can be no collapse, for the competitor will expand territorially to administer the population left leaderless'. In other words, collapse 'is not the same thing as change of regime. Where peer polities interact collapse will affect all equality, if and when it occurs, provided that no outside competitor is powerful enough to absorb all' (Tainter, 1988: 202).

As no power appeared to fill the political vacuum left by the Hittite kingdom after 1200 BC, this situation prompted the emergence of a multitude of people with low social organization strength who also changed the outlook known until then. Historically, the trade in the Eastern Mediterranean was controlled by kingdoms or small states from their respective palaces. In other terms, it was a kind of 'palatial trade'. However, during this period of crisis at the End of the Bronze Age, it is possible to uncover a transition to the Early Iron Age in terms of a shift in the balance of international trade in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The ancient order of a palatial economy changed to a private one which was managed by initially by a marginal social position of private merchants, sailors and caravan traders. In appearance, it is possible to speak about a kind of 'privatisation' of the ancient trade with respect to new routes, facilities, loans, skills and demand of raw materials that was under the palace or kingdoms control (Routledge and McGeough 2009: 22). In other words, this new kind of trade has a significant role in undermining the old centralised economies existing before 1200 BC.

On the one hand, as a result of this change in economic policy, some segments of international trade in Cyprus and Palestine (specifically in the Phoenician coast) remained active as a network despite the absence of a palatial system belonging to any powerful kingdom. On the other hand, the destruction of several states and cities during the End of the Bronze Age motivated a general migration of peoples throughout the region. However, since 1200 BC, there was a reconstruction of the society in the Ancient Near East, owing to the apparition precisely of new peoples. Therefore, the human factor represented by the waves of these marauders and plunderers were simply *another sign* of the collapse and

general disintegration of the states belonging to the Bronze Age originated by a drastic climatic change; but not *its real cause* (Kuhrt 1995: 393; Drews 1993: 91).

Therefore, the movement of the so-called 'Sea Peoples' was only the result of growing economic problems caused by the excessive length of the former superstructure of the existing states both in Anatolia as in Syria. This would have led to the depletion of resources administered by these states and the disintegration of its political structure (Drews 1993: 90). Thus, helpless people and landless bands of marauders, pirates and plunderers ended up moving in different directions in the Eastern Mediterranean, searching for alternative ways of life. Whereas the identification of many of these peoples has been unclear until today, the records that have been preserved from this period verify the emergence of communities unknown until then.

Nevertheless, the case of the 'Sea People' was not the only human phenomenon during the collapse of the End of the Bronze Age. Masetti-Rouault (2001: 72) believes that the study of these new peoples provides a good illustration of the role they played in the formation of a new order during the Iron Age in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. All of them were important elements of innovation in the culture, the mentality and the general structure because they transformed the language, the writing and the society itself (Karageorghis 2000: 255-280); besides, new national monarchies originated, which were based in smaller regional territories as Phrygian, Phoenicia, Israel, Judah, Edom, Moab and the Syro-Hittites and Aramaean kingdoms.

For example the Phrygians, coming from the Balkans, occupied Anatolia, stood firm on the Taurus Mountains and they succeeded in passing on the tradition of Anatolian arts and culture to the West (Edward 1975: 442). Another important people were the Arabs who appeared in the 1st millennium BC from the Arabian Peninsula. They introduced another important technological innovation in the Ancient Near East: the domestication of the camel. This advance enabled the region to know a new type of nomadic life, which covered extensive areas and also allowed for more extensive trade connecting all the Ancient Near East (Sapir-Henand and Ben-Yosef 2013: 277-285).

A similar case with respect to a people that left an undeniable importance in the complete Ancient Near East during this period: the *Aramaeans*. They were possibly a set of pastoral tribes from the north of Syria who also took advantage of the dissolution of several states in the region to acquire influence over territories and cities. The Aramaeans were recognised by their tribal association as belonging to certain ‘House’ (in Akkadian *bit*) followed by the name of a person considered as the tribal ancestor (Edward, 1975: 529-536; Postgate 1974: 234).

The first written evidence on Aramaeans came from Assyrian archives after 1300 BC. The Assyrians described the encounter with some nomadic Semitic groups who were building fortified and permanent settlements who they referred to as *Ahlamu* (‘new troops’) and later as *Aramu* (Postgate 1976: 49). This people was initially rejected by Assyrians and Babylonians but new and successive waves of Aramaeans tribes, reinforcement by other people from Arabia, were able to occupy the southern plains of Mesopotamia, close to Babylonia, and establish themselves sporadically inside Assyria.<sup>82</sup>

After 900 BC, the Aramaeans even formed an increasingly great portion of the total population of Mesopotamia and created the first Aramaeans kingdoms. That was the case of Aramaeans kingdoms founded in Syria of *Bit-Adini* and *Aram-Damascus*. Besides, at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, the Aramaeans also reached Assyria and Babylonia, where they became more known, thanks to the spread of its language in both kingdoms. They imposed a vernacular language in most parts of the Ancient Near East for more than one millennium, when it was displaced by the Arabic 1500 years later (Beyer 1986: 11).

With respect to the human factor, Drews (1993) places emphasis on another important antecedent during the End of the Bronze Age: the *warfare*. Drews believes that

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<sup>82</sup> There is a discussion if the Aramaeans or the Arabs were the first nomad people who domesticated the camel in the Ancient Near East. Also there is a debate about the origin of the Aramaeans during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC because its special relationship with other people as the Canaanites from Palestine, specifically the Israelite who could be considered as partially Aramaeans or ‘Proto-Aramaeans’ (Von Soden 1994: 23). In any case, the historical impact of the Aramaeans in Mesopotamia was huge, such as the ‘Sea Peoples’ were in Egypt and Eastern Mediterranean and the Phrygians in Anatolia.

before the collapse of 1200 BC the powerful kingdoms of the Ancient Near East as Egypt, Mycenae, Mitanni, Ugarit, Hatti and Assyria developed a common strategy of war: the use of chariots corps (Drews 1993: 97). This strategy of chariotry war was applied in the Ancient Near East since 17<sup>th</sup> century BC until 12<sup>th</sup> century BC (Fields 2006: 38-43) as it is corroborates in one of the most famous battles of the antiquity in *Megiddo* and *Kadesh* between Egypt and Hatti, or the biblical descriptions about the chariots of King Solomon (1 Kings 10. 29) and the ‘Song of the Sea’ (Exodus 15. 1-21).

Many later ancient civilizations, such as Persia, Greece and Rome preferred to use the infantry as the principal army in battle; meanwhile the cavalry was a peripheral corps. However, it was the opposite in the Ancient Near East, during the Bronze Age the chariots were the central element and the infantry or foot soldiers were principally support units or reconnaissance. Besides, it seems that both army corps did not fight together or in conjunction but one always depended on another as subordinate part (Drews 1993: 138). Moreover, in the case of the Ancient Near East, the kingdoms and their cities were in fertile plains, which could be defended by chariots in charge or chasing barbarians who raided its perimeter. Thus, the infantry was only occupied in sporadic tasks such as chasing mountainous or barbarian peoples in rough terrains.

However, with the appearance of new population as the ‘Sea Peoples’, the strategy and the military technique changed at the End of the Bronze Age (Figure 1.33). Now, the people who attacked and destroyed the cities and kingdom of the Bronze Age, with apparently no relationship with any of these former kingdoms, adopted new weapons (javelins, spears, lances, long swords, round shields, helmets and armours) and strategies (infantry close combat, clash of foot soldiers formation, use of light cavalry) which allowed, for example, to halt a charge of chariots through an intensive launch of javelins or a close phalanx formation (Drews 1993: 169, 170 and 182).<sup>83</sup> Thus, the days of the Bronze Age chariots strategy was over and had been replaced by the new infantry of the Iron Age.

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<sup>83</sup> An example of this new strategy were the ancient Israelites, who appeared at the beginning of the Iron Age, developed a militia corps organised in units of 1000, which were subdivided into units of 100, 50 and 10 men according to the information found in Deuteronomy 1. 15. Besides, it seems that there was a tribal



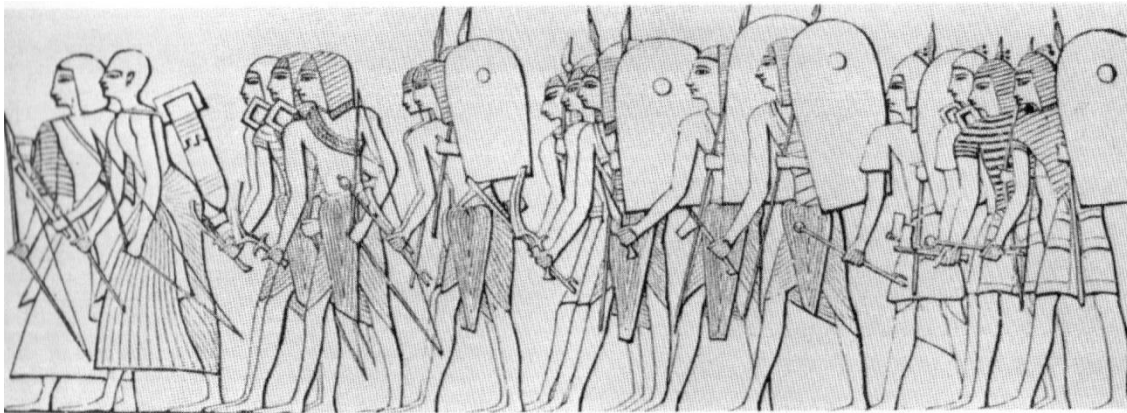


Figure 1.33 Egyptian infantry at the beginning of the Iron Age based on wall painting at Thebes. It is possible to distinguish in some of these soldiers the new concept of heavy infantry with armour, shields, spears, javelins and different variety of weapons inherited from the End of the Bronze Age (Wise 1981: 10)

Another important consequence at the End of the Bronze Age lies in its technological impact, specifically in metallurgy. Before the year 1200 BC it was common for bronze to be used; an alloy of copper and tin, as metal used for elaborating of weapons and utensils. Both the tin and copper had to be extracted and marketed from different places, because no people had direct access to both resources in one place (Potts 1997: 165-174). Thus, throughout the Bronze Age, the majority of international trade in the Ancient Near East was organized in the palatial administration, especially in the Syro Palestine region, focused on the acquisition and sale of both metals (Caubet 2000: 35-52).

Notwithstanding, with the interruption of trade as a result of the crisis in 1200 BC, the peoples started to use a metal substitute which was more economic and could be found in different latitudes without the need to export it: *iron*. It is a stronger metal than the bronze, which did not require greater effort for their production and marketing. This opened up a new era in the historic concert of the Ancient Near East: the *Iron Age*. Nevertheless, Drews (1993: 75) points out: ‘although in conventional terminology the *Iron Age*

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specialisation among them (1 Chronicles 12): the members of the tribe of Benjamin were archers and slingers; the members of the tribes of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh were principally sword and buckler men; the members of Zebulun were expert in spearmen in phalanx formation; the member of Naphtali used spear and shield; the member of Dan and Asher were ‘expert in war’; meanwhile the member of Issachar were expert in raiding and scouting mission. Finally, the members of Levi were reliable troops for unstable border areas (Wise 2008: 31).

commenced with the Catastrophe, it is now quite clear that iron did not come into regular use until well over a century after Catastrophe ended’.

To sum up, the collapse at the End of the Bronze Age was not exactly the entrance to a ‘Dark Age’ which spanned several centuries and led to the disappearance of an ancient order in the eastern Mediterranean and the emergence of a new order only several centuries after (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 73). As a matter of fact, it seems that the concept of ‘Dark Age’ after the End of the Bronze Age could be due to the parallel made between the Ancient Near East with respect to the Aegean world, specifically with the end of the Mycenaean kingdoms in Greece and the inexistence of written records there.

In the same approach, the region of Mesopotamia underwent significant changes in two of their three important kingdoms but it does not mean necessarily a ‘Dark Age’. In the case of Babylonia, which was ruled by the *Kassites*, its dynasty remained firm for a long period of time but also ended succumbing after the year 1200 BC. The reasons could be the waves of Aramaean invasions and the conflicts between the neighbour kingdoms Elam and Assyria which had debilitated gradually the *Kassite* kingdom. However, Babylonia could recover part of its splendour when strong figures as King Nebuchadnezzar I (1126 BC - 1105 BC) gained power, taking royal titles that imitated the style of great characters of the Mesopotamian past, such as Sargon of Akkad and Hammurabi of Babylonia (Sommerfeld, 1995: 917).

He also managed to transform Babylonia in an eternal city or the holy place. In this way, Babylonia became the capital of the kingdom for excellence, the residence of the king and the centre of one of the most important events of Mesopotamian religion: *the festival of the New Year* (Bidmead 2004: 1-6). However, new waves of Aramaean invasions impacted on the stability of the kingdom at 1050 BC to 900 BC in the entire region. Indeed, the Aramaeans could penetrate the Babylonian territory on several occasions to attack urban centres and interrupted some religious ceremonies, such as the festival of the New Year of 960 BC, for nine successive years (Kuhrt 1995: 335).

With respect to the other kingdom; the Elamite, its sources provide little information on these three centuries that preceded the debacle after the year 1200 BC.

During this same period, archaeology shows that there was a progressive abandonment of many cities in the *Khūzestān*. Despite the reason for this phenomenon being unknown, the Aramaean invasions could be the cause of this abandonment (Kuhrt 1995: 371; Potts 1997: 231). Therefore, only one Mesopotamian kingdom of this period seems to remain steady and with show potential for developing itself: *Assyria*.

#### b)The Survival of the Assyrian World and the beginning of a New Era

The Assyrian kings of this period were able to survive the general collapse of the End of the Bronze Age, although the general destruction and collapse in other places of the Ancient Near East. For example, the military expeditions of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207 BC) were an important antecedent of the military capacity of the Assyrian state. The Assyrians were not specially affected by the collapse at the end of the Bronze Age, especially with the appearance of new aggressive waves of Semites nomad people like the Aramaeans (Drews 1993: 18).

Thus, the attack of waves of Aramaean invasions and the confrontation with other northern and eastern peoples forced a series of military campaigns against them. This motivated the new Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076 BC) to adopt the practice of listing his campaigns using a commemorative chronological order. This practice becomes common for recalling the achievements of the Assyrian kingdoms, until the end of its existence as a political entity at 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, which has been currently known by scholars as the *Assyrian Annals*.

However, the relevance of these Annals was not only for dating historical matters or events, but also for *an ideological objective*. An ideology is the portrayal of the particular interests and values of a social group as if they were shared for everybody inside of a society. The ideology works from power relationship but depends more on gaining consent by 'natural' or 'common sense' than by the use of coercion power (Pollock 1999: 173). The final objective of an ideology will be to develop a thought, which groups in power seek to perpetuate their dominant position promoting social solidarity and identity (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 83).

Thus, the ideology allows structuring a system of beliefs, knowledge and values, which will serve to legitimate a particular set of interests with a particular view of world. For this reason, the ideology is not only present in ideas and values but it has different kinds of manifestation: artefacts, writing and monuments. Thus, the material expression allows the presentation of ideological messages a long time after they are made. Following the critical assessment of Pollock:<sup>84</sup>

The notion of a dominant ideology does not, however, imply something done consciously by a dominant group to subordinate groups; rather, it is a way of conceptualizing the world and one's position in it that is internalized to a significant degree by all groups.

The ideological message transmitted to posterity the essential qualities that the Assyrian king sought to convey to his people: being represented as pious, blessed by the gods, defender of his people, punisher of those who threaten the security of the kingdom, experienced military conqueror of territories and provider of wealth and stability (Watanabe 1999: 258-259). For this reason, the future representations found inside Assyrian palaces showed their kings fighting and killing lions and enemies of Assyria, which comes to demonstrate the way in which the Assyrian kings were guarantors of peace and security before the threat that aimed to destroy the orderly Assyrian society.<sup>85</sup>

In fact, already at this time it is possible to note that the Assyrian society of this period was greatly influenced by a militaristic notion of the state. The land belonged to the state and it was delivered as a concession to certain individuals in award for their services. When an individual fulfilled his obligation – *ilkum* - to the Assyrian state, especially in military service or participation in construction projects, he was rewarded with lands that

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<sup>84</sup> Pollock 1999: 174.

<sup>85</sup> This characteristic is a legacy inherited by the Assyrians from the period of Akkadian kings of southern Mesopotamia who changed the notion of Mesopotamian art emphasizing a portrayal of their kings as heroic military leaders whose royal authority was based on conquest of both southern cities-states and external enemies (Pollock 1999: 10).

could be worked as private property, which could be inherited or sold without interference from the state apparatus (Postgate 1992: 304-312).

However, this policy only became effective when the person continued to comply with her duty to the Assyrian state; otherwise, the land returned to the palatial administration although it had been previously sold, and delivered to another person with the same type of obligation to the Assyrian state. Besides, Assyria was a pioneer in the adoption of the new Iron Age military tactics of infantry (Drews 1993: 147) because being Assyria a frontier kingdom, the leaders kept its tradition of tribal militia during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, as it apparently did also during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium.<sup>86</sup> Drews provides an illustration of this military policy used by Assyrians during the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC:<sup>87</sup>

When Gutians, from GUTI in the Zagros Mountains, came down into the plain to raid Assyria dependencies, Shalmaneser I left his infantry behind and swiftly rode out – with only a third of his chariots - to rout the Gutians (...). But when Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208) boasts of invading GUTI itself and of slaughtering (...) we must assume that this was done by an infantry capable of hand to hand fighting.

It seems that the kings of Assyria such as Salmaneser I (1274-1245 BC) and Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207 BC) frequently fought against barbarous enemies on their northern and eastern borders. However, these territories always have been mountainous terrain which required the employment of a sizeable Assyrian infantry. Perhaps the long experience of the Assyrians in infantry warfare was not unrelated to the fact that the

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<sup>86</sup> Another important detail about the Assyrian army lies in its principal characteristic of foot professional soldiers who did not depend exclusively on chariots or infantry which was an advantage for surviving the collapse of the End of the Bronze Age. The recruitment of foot soldiers among the kingdoms of the Ancient Near East during the Bronze Age was preferably enrolling mercenaries or foreign professional warriors as the Shardana in Egypt or the Sharikuwa of Hatti. But in those kingdoms there is no evidence that the general population was mobilised for becoming a national army neither a general call up of adult and citizens as later troops mobilised from the Greek city-states, the Roman Republic and the mentioned tribal militias of Israel and Judah (2 Samuel 8. 3-4).

<sup>87</sup> Drews 1993: 139.

kingdom of Assyria was one of the few to survive the collapse at the End of the Bronze Age.<sup>88</sup>

Redman (1978: 230) proposes a model for explaining the origin of the militarism in ancient societies as Assyria at the End of the Bronze Age. To him, the development of size of settlements or cities and the increase of wealth by commerce and trade produced a high level of resources, prosperity and good status. All these characteristics became a real temptation to raiders from outside the community but also for the poorest groups of their own population. Both threats motivated the creation of a military force which could keep under control the inner order and to protect of foreign attacks. Thus, the elite of these societies created military forces for protecting themselves and their *status quo*, using different strategies: to settle disputes about lands, protect trading routes or looting goods from other communities.

Nevertheless, for any of these ancient societies, it was always a social and economic risk to allow this militia or army to remain idle. For this reason, it might have been sent to earn its own keep by a vicious cycle of plunders wealth, looting and militarism. Thus, Redman (1978: 234) identifies a historical process which could be connected with the Assyrian experience in this period. First, the growing of urbanization and its problem motivated the creation of an army which had to be supported by surpluses accumulated by the elite which demanded in turn the support of the army.

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<sup>88</sup> A similar case could be applied in Egypt where the 'Sea Peoples' failed applying this new strategy of infantry. Drews himself made a good description (1993: 223) of the Egyptian victory of Ramses III against the Philistine, Sicilians and *Tjekker* invaders described in the relieves of *Medinet Habu*: 'The skirmishers had not expected a battle while still in their ships and were virtually annihilated. With remarkable foresight Ramses III had assembled a fleet and assigned to each ship a detachment of archers (most likely the archers who in other circumstances and other times would have shot from chariots) and hand to hand warriors. The Egyptian ships were able to cut off the enemy, who had no usable long range weapons. The Philistine and Sicilian warriors would have had javelins, but javelins on these crowded ships were of no value at all, since a javelin must be thrown on the run. The Egyptian archers, on the contrary, were able to shoot their bows far more effectively from the deck of a ship than from the platform of a bouncing chariot, even worse for the aggressors, while the Egyptian archers could leave the rowing to the oarsmen whom Ramses had impressed into service, the Philistine and Sicilian warriors had to do their own rowing. Perhaps the Medinet Habu relief does not exaggerate the extent of Ramses' victory at sea of *Djahy* in 1178 BC'.

Second, when there were periods of instability, the population of the countryside went into defensible cities which brought this people under a more direct control of the urban elite. Third, in periods of crisis or after them, militarism became an independent force which could exercise the power directly through the use of force and not only by rituals and economic means. Finally, this situation motivated the appearance of a new kind of authority which was the principal instrument in the formation of secular states supported by the force.

For this reason, when new waves of Aramaean invaders destabilised both Assyria and Babylonia, this situation caused disorder and confusion in both places, but, meanwhile Babylonia stagnated and suffered conflict with the attack of these Chaldean nomads; Assyria could develop a better relationship with this new population. According to Postgate (1976: 50): ‘the heart of Assyria was one step more remote from the threat of Bedouin *razzias*, and any relations with the nomads whether peaceful or hostile, would be predominantly on the borders of the country towards the desert’. Thus, there were no major powers contesting control of northern Mesopotamia, which was obviously a prerequisite for Assyrian expansion.

On the other hand, Bedford (2009: 40) underlines: ‘Assyria had a clear military advantage over the smaller polities in northern Mesopotamia, as it was able to muster more resources to overpower these smaller states if they were not immediately intimidated into submission’. Thus, the Assyrians will believe that it will be necessary for a more permanent control of northern Mesopotamia, the incorporation of the major cities under its command, the administration of important agricultural territories in the north and in the east, a new political organization, administration and management of resources for the financing of major public works and the elaboration of a new idea of national identity.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Precisely, there is an interesting point underlined by Bucellati (1966: 324) about the Assyrian sense of ethnic: ‘We seem to lack the very word for ‘foreigner’ [in Mesopotamia]. At least the word which can be used to refer to foreigners, namely **lú kúr** (Akkadian *ahum*, *ubaru* and *nakrum*) does not seem to be used anywhere to qualify specific persons in contrast to others who are considered natives. It is interesting to note that this is also true of later periods in Mesopotamia history: the clearest passage where *ahiatum* means ‘foreigner’, as opposed to *aliutum* ‘citizen (of Aššur)’, is in a text coming not from Mesopotamia but [from an Assyrian colony in] Anatolia”’

To sum up, whilst the coastal areas of the eastern Mediterranean and southern and eastern Mesopotamia suffered the greater impact at the End of the Bronze Age and its respective collapse; the territories and the kingdom situated at the north of Mesopotamia, such as Assyria, survived almost intact. Later, Assyria would be able to consolidate and develop by itself establishing the bases of a new power in the Ancient Near East thanks to the large tradition inherited from the Mesopotamian organization:

1. A southern *oikos* system of production which allowed for the development and organizing of the society for intensive production.
2. A northern ancient legacy of strong tribal power under the command of one leader.
3. The experiment of the first ‘empires’ and kingdoms (which mixed the southern economic system of production with the northern system of government) that unified politically, during some short periods, both northern and southern Mesopotamia.
4. These ‘experiments’ would include: the famous and powerful Akkadian ‘empire’ of Sargon, which was used as model for many future Mesopotamian kingdoms; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur, a short-lived territorial-political state which some scholars would consider it as the last Sumerian ‘empire’; the Dynasty of Isin and Larsa, which periods there was peace and trade between distant lands, such as the Indus Valley; the Babylonian kingdom of Hammurabi, who extended Babylon’s control throughout Mesopotamia through military campaigns; and the subjugation of the Middle Assyrian kingdom itself with respect to the Mitanni-Hurrite kingdom. In other words, the ideas of government, territorial expansion and subjugation amongst Mesopotamian political entities were known for centuries, and being Assyria a cultural part of the Mesopotamian civilization, and the only one who survived the Collapse at the End of the Bronze Age, these ideas were assimilated on its own political practice.



5. The strategic position of Assyria which conferred it as a geopolitical support for tributes and redistribution.
6. The vacuum of power in the Ancient Near East after the collapse at the End of the Bronze Age.
7. The military innovation and experience of the Assyrian army supported by a new strong ideology.

The final result of these contributions and experience appeared naturally and it was only a matter of time before it was laid out in its entirety: the *Neo-Assyrian Empire*.

## Chapter 2

# The Neo-Assyrian Empire and the *Pax Assyriaca*

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## 1. The Meaning of “Empire” and its Principal Dimension

The meaning of the word ‘empire’ has had different *interpretations* in the last few centuries but generally, it has been associated with any type of political relationship that exists between two entities, where one of them is more powerful than the other and exerts control over it (Howe 2002: 13). This characteristic became a fundamental aspect in the study of historical empires because the relationship of domination between a centre and a periphery is a basis for establishing an empire (Cohen 1974: 16). Thus, generally, historical empires have become huge and composite entities, which were formed from previously independent and isolated units with specific differences, such as cultural, religious, ethnic and political.

Howe (2002: 14) seems to repeat the same conclusion when he tries to define the concept of an empire:

A kind of basic, consensus definition would be that an empire is a large political body, which rules over territories outside its original borders. It has a central power of core territory – whose inhabitants usually continue to form the dominant ethnic or national group in the entire system - and an extensive periphery of dominant areas.

Nevertheless, the concept of ‘empire’ maintains a negative connotation because empires have depended on territorial expansions got generally by the use of violence and intimidation (Rageau 2012: 10) and also for its implication with another associated concept: the ‘imperialism’. The difference between them, according to Howe (2002: 22), is an ‘empire’ which is generally a political entity whilst ‘imperialism’ describes a process which involves both an attitude and ideology, or even a philosophy of life. Besides, ‘imperialism’

is a modern concept, which was born with the policies of expansion of European empires around the world during 1860 – 1890, such as the French colonial expansion of Napoleon III or the British colonialism diffused by Disraeli and his successors (Cohen 1974: 10).

This approach also has had a profound impact since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the development of the European economic expansion and the consolidation of Marxist ideology. The last thought developed an interpretation of imperialism as the ‘monopoly stage of capitalism’ in some countries before its complete collapse as economic system (Howe 2002: 24; Cohen 1974: 12). Nevertheless, the Marxist interpretation of an empire has been the final result of several years of interpretations and reinterpretation of the Karl Marx’s theory made by John Hobson, Rosa Luxemburgo, Rudolf Hilferding and Vladimir I. Lenin (Kemp 1976: 16-17).

Thus, the concept of ‘imperialism’ was applied to some European nations that had developed a colonialist policy outside of Europe, especially for the control of the sea, of maritime enclaves and the trade developed around the world since 16<sup>th</sup> century. Such was the case in Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, France and finally by other non-European countries, such as the United States and Japan at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In any case, these imperialism experiences become ‘clearly an economic phenomenon, implying certain relationships in the international division of labour, in trade and the movement of capital’ (Cohen 1974: 11).

Apparently, the Western notion of empire has been inherited and adopted since the time of the ancient Roman Empire – the *imperium romanum* - by different European countries in the last four hundred years. However, the original Latin term, invented by the Romans, has different connotations with respect to the common notion of empire used by modern European countries. For ancient Romans, the concept of *imperium* did not describe a political organization or economic capitalism structure but the *sphere of executive authority possessed by the Roman magistrates* (Padgen 1995: 12).

For this reason, the root sense of the word could be associated with the action of ‘order’, ‘command’, ‘authority’, ‘rulership’ or simply ‘power’ (Colás 2007: 6). Therefore, a Roman magistrate was the person with the power of ordering or exercising *imperium* over

the citizens (Padgen 1995: 14). In the same approach, during the Roman republic, the institution of the Roman senate also had the right of exercising *imperium* in the name of the Roman people, to declare the war and enforce the law (Howe 2002: 13). In a similar manner, a Roman military commander was also anointed *cum imperio*, which meant ‘he had been entrusted, by the Senate and the popular assembly with supreme military responsibility’ (Lichtheim 1977: 24).

However, with the decadence of the Roman republic and the beginning of the *Principate* of Octavian, this term was used by a limited group of army commander whose *imperium* did not derive from the civil sphere but from the military one (*militae*) although they spoke, as later Octavian did, as ‘representing’ the people (*imperium populi romanum*). Thus, the former republican *imperium populi romanum* was transformed in a more different monarchical *imperium romanum*, which was not always precisely ruled by the best representatives of the Roman society.

Generally, they lacked the traditional republican virtues disseminated by nostalgic intellectuals as Livy, Seneca or Tacitus. Besides, it seems that Octavian himself was inspired before by the theocratic and despotic Hellenistic monarchies existing before the Roman phenomenon. It was evident that the *Principate* system established by Octavian, was really an act of usurpation whose constitutional façade, hiding the reality of military power to make and also unmake emperors (Lichtheim 1977: 21). Meanwhile, the old institution of the Senate was a collection of officeholders whose tenure depended on the grace and favour of the *Princeps* and not on the old assembly of proud and independents aristocrats of the past republican period.

Such circumstance allowed, in the same period, for the title to be adopted by Octavian and his successors, *Augustus*, which became synonymous of absolutism because the emperors made a particular combination of former separate magisterial powers which included governmental, judicial and military (Lichtheim 1977: 25). Indeed, the title of *Augustus* was also associated with the term *imperator* to express a kind of power and degree which was denied for common kings, because an *imperator* also had a theocratic

dimension which was reinforced later both by Christian emperors and their apologists (Colás 2007: 6; Padgen 1996: 15).

When the Christians took over, the Roman Empire adopted the principle of *universalism* – better known as *imperium orbis terrarum* or the *sacrum imperium* - for expressing that anybody who was outside of the Christian doctrine –the former *imperium romanun-* was uncivilised and ungodly.<sup>90</sup> This idea was also adopted by both Christians and Muslims who believed that ‘inferior people to be brought under the sway of universal empire by conquest would also be to bring them access to civilization and true religion’ (Howe 2002: 14).

Although this concept of *sacrum imperium* failed to unify the European continent, it was used for justifying the later spread of European monarchies of Spain, Portugal, Holland or England to Asia, Africa and America originating from the first overseas empires in Western history. For this reason, it is common to associate the term ‘monarchy’ as a synonym for *empire* that means by Padgen (1996: 16): ‘to describe a domain composed of a number of different states which the legislative will of a single ruler was unquestioned’.

Nevertheless, a critical study of history would allow supposing that neither Greece nor Rome either Europe were the inventors of the imperial concept. Lichtheim make a critical assessment of this concept:<sup>91</sup>

If the Romans invented the concept of empire, they did not invent its reality. Domination over other people had been the rule rather than the exception in the age of the despotic Oriental monarchies whose power antedated the Hellenistic thalassocracy and its successor, the *imperium romanun*. The ancient Egyptian,

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<sup>90</sup> The origin of this idea lays both Rome and Greece considered in the Antiquity that the cities –*orbis*- as the only places where virtue could be practiced. For this reason, cities became communities governed by the rule of law and demanded the complete submission to a specific kind of life closely identified their physical location (Padge 1996: 18). Thus, the ancient cities became political, administrative, religious and legislative centres, which also become source of the authority needed to retain provinces once they were conquered. Thus, the urban style life was considered as an instrument for expanding and transforming the civilisation (Padge 1996: 22-23).

<sup>91</sup> Lichtheim 1977: 29.

Babylonian and Hindu despotism centred upon the river valleys of the Nile, the Euphrates and the Indus.

Thus, the body of evidence that could be rescued from different imperialist expressions in the historical past would allow for the identification of three different and fundamental dimensions, as characteristics of empires (Colás, 2007:6). Firstly, empires have been built on *expansion* from a small political community, which becomes an important centre through a combination of coercive, cultural, legal and economic policy over a specific periphery. As Colás (2007: 7) highlights: ‘this persistent boundary-extension is what today we might call imperialism: a policy and a process, guided in large measure by an ideologically constructed sense of superiority, which seeks to assimilate foreign regions and population into an expanded polity.’

The second dimension or characteristic is the hierarchical rule of a *center* or metropolitan capital, which concentrates the power and the wealth over a periphery around it. The last dimension is the sense of *order* as ‘the conditions of stability, legitimate authority and sense of belonging which empire has fostered’ (Colás 2007: 8). Historically, this last dimension has been applied through a combination of coercion and consent but it is generally the concept of coercion that has predominated wars and violence against other peoples. To sum up, the three essential characteristic of empire are *expansion*, *hierarchy* and *order*, which has been combined in very different ways by various imperial entities over time, depending on the historical context and the specific period (Colás 2007: 9 and 18).

On the other hand, archaeological theorists, such as Matthews (2003: 128) point out that those empires have been immense phenomena, which have left large traces in the archaeological evidences which have allowed connecting them with anthropological theories of human organization. Curiously, both Colás and Matthews coincide in three dimensions for defining empires: meanwhile Colás speaks about *expansion*, *hierarchy* and *order*; Matthews identifies with different order, an *imperial core* (hierarchy), *peripheral polities of domination* (expansion) and *global context* (order) working as a holistic system.

The only new element contributed by Matthews (2003: 131) is the archaeological approach of *collapse* of empires.

Thus, any archaeological finds, such as dominant settlement in a core region, with craft specialization, architectural variation in housing, landscape control, massive public monument, agriculture intensification with net of irrigation and peripheral cult status – amongst others characteristics - would reveal an *imperial core*, which exerts peripheral control (Matthews 2003: 129). In the same approach, the existence of goods imported from periphery to core, and exported from core to periphery – as well as roads, garrisons and nucleation of settlement pattern in the periphery - else establishment of regional centres, depending on the core are evidence of *peripheral polities of domination* (Matthews 2003: 130).

Finally, the search of exotic goods from others latitudes in the core, and also goods made in the core, which are found beyond empire borders – as well as fortresses and defences in border zones and copies of temples and their cultic paraphernalia in other regions, which do not belong themselves to the imperial core - are proof of the *global context* developed by an imperialism policy. In a similar vein, discontinuities in material culture or settlements which suffer a progressive or abrupt regional abandonment, disappearance of movement of raw and goods and the inexistence of writing texts inside and outside of the core, would be a demonstration of *collapse* of the complete imperial structure (Matthews 2003: 131).

This holistic interpretation of archaeological analysis, devised by Matthews was applied in a reliable manner in the study of the Ancient Near East but in Pre-Columbian and Asiatic contexts. This could be a paradox considering that the Ancient Near East has historically been a territory where several empires have appeared, expanded and collapsed for almost 5000 years. For instance, the academic consensus has identified ancient Mesopotamian kingdoms as Akkad, like the ‘first empire of History’, according to the analysis of the last chapter with respect to the Akkadian expansion in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC.

According to Taagepera (1978: 115) the major disadvantage of the Ancient Near East, in comparison with later empires, was that the majority of its empires, which were located in the region of Mesopotamia, rose and fell so rapidly that it was difficult to analyse them deeply in comparison with ancient Egypt, China or Rome. Another disadvantage was that the Mesopotamian empires were known in their time by the names of countries, lands or peoples, instead of imperialistic entities. Moreover, in the Ancient Near East, apparently there was not any word or concept for 'empire', as the Roman case, in any Mesopotamian royal inscriptions. Thus, the historical analysis of Mesopotamian empires has been generally restricted to translation of texts belonging to royal inscriptions of kings who recalled conquests, wars and monumental constructions made by them.

Both the archaeology of the Ancient Near East and the anthropological studies have allowed for the identification of certain traits in the historical evolution of the Ancient Near East with imperial connotation. This phenomenon was the result of recurrent problems as the extreme vulnerability of the land between two rivers for controlling the environment, the rivalry amongst differences political entities and the contention of menaces from the periphery (Rageau 2012: 23).

These factors, either separately or together, would have inflicted, according to the analysis of Taagepera (1978: 119), three periods or phases in the history of imperial development in the Ancient Near East. The first phase spanned from the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, which started with the Uruk phenomenon until 600 BC with the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. This phase was characterised by the appearance of the first Mesopotamian complex urban societies analysed in the last chapter, along with the development of ideologies of political control.

The second phase from 500 BC until 1600 AC was characterised by the appearance of the Achaemenid Empire and their successors from Parthia and Sassanid until the emergence of Islam. This was the period of more extensive territories and a more developed system of administration and integration or synthesis of cultures and political systems. Meanwhile, the third phase from 1700 to modern era is characterised as the era of



globalization in the fields of industries, commerce, communication and technology of the modern empires.

Essentially, it is possible to discover a special hiatus between the first and second phases, which is determined with the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and the birth of a new era (Figure 2.1). The general territorial extensions of the former 'empires' from Mesopotamia, before the Neo-Assyrian Empire, were modest and scattered. However, with the appearance of this empire, this territorial extension grew dramatically with respect to others former entities. In other words, the principal characteristic of the Neo-Assyrian Empire lies in its comparative territorial extension with respect to any former 'empires' or kingdoms known until then, and the precedence that it would mean for future imperialism entities of this region.

<i>Empire</i>	<i>Approximate date</i>	<i>Core</i>	<i>Maximum extent (Mm<sup>2</sup>)</i>
Uruk	3200 BC	Lower Mesopotamia	0.90
Akkad	2250 BC	Northern Lower Mesopotamia	0.80
Ur III	2050 BC	Lower Mesopotamia	0.10
Old Assyrian	1850 BC	Upper Mesopotamia	0.15
Old Babylonian	1800 BC	Northern Lower Mesopotamia	0.25
Mitanni	1400 BC	Upper Mesopotamia	0.30
Middle Assyrian	1300 BC	Upper Mesopotamia	0.40
Neo-Assyrian	700 BC	Upper Mesopotamia	1.40
Neo-Babylonian	600 BC	Northern Lower Mesopotamia	0.50
Achaemenid	400 BC	South Iran	5.50
Seleucid	300 BC	Northern Lower Mesopotamia	4.00
Parthian	100 BC	Northern Lower Mesopotamia	2.50
Sasanian	AD 250	Iran	3.50
Abbasid	AD 800	Northern Lower Mesopotamia	11.00
Mongol	AD 1300	Central Asia	24.00
Ottoman	AD 1550	Anatolia	4.50
British	AD 1920	London	34.00

Figure 2.1 Chart of historical empires in the Near East and their respective territorial expansion. The maximum extent is calculated in square mega-meter (1 square mega-meter = 1,000,000 square kilometre (km<sup>2</sup>) or 386,000 square miles) (Matthews 2003: 133).

For this reason, the analysis of the Neo-Assyrian Empire will consider the he four stages proposed by Colás and Matthews working as holistic system:

- The Neo-Assyrian expansion and its peripheral polities of domination.
- The Neo-Assyrian hierarchy of its imperial core.
- The Neo-Assyrian order and its global context.

## **2. The Neo-Assyrian Expansion and its Peripheral Polities of Domination**

One of the most important steps for establishing imperial entity is the creation of both the conception of the world and the manner of organizing it spatially. As Colás (2007: 31) emphasised: ‘Empires tend to develop intricate conceptions of their place in the world, and therefore also attempt actually to model those parts of it under their auspices in this image’. This situation would motivate the first dimension of imperialism: *the sense of expansion in relation to the wider world and the universe beyond*. Indeed, Greeks, Macedonian and Romans adopted the concept of *oikoumene* for designing a worldview where territorial limits did not depend on natural obstacles by unfixed human boundaries, which could be extended and changed.

As was mentioned in the preceding chapter, the Assyrians were originally a merchant people (Kuhrt 1995: 254; Aubet 2007: 310; Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 151; Yoffee 2010: 185) who, due to the constant invasions and attacks by foreign peoples during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, decided to transform themselves into a more militarised group (Parker 2001: 3-4). Subsequently, as a form of self-defence, Assyria developed a policy of military expansion, conquering neighbouring states in search of loot, taxes and tributes, useful to preserve their subsistence system.

This process was repeated during a long period of time (1400-700 BC, best known as *Middle Assyrian Kingdom*) and was only interrupted in circa 1000 BC, when the Assyrians tried to protect their kingdom against the historical crisis at the End of the

Bronze Age which involved the losses of ancient colonies and territories that had belonged to Assyria in the past (Masseti-Rouault 2001: 58).

In other words, it is possible to find the origin of the Assyrian Empire at the beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, followed by a hiatus in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and a recovery in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the mechanisms of imperialism may in fact derive from a period earlier than the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium. According to Bedford (2009: 41) the primordial reason for understanding the Assyrian expansion from 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, from the Assyrian perspective, was rather the re-establishment of control over territories in rebellion against their long-standing overlord, because they had tried to withdraw from the natural condition of belonging to Assyria.

It seems that the Assyrian kings of this period saw themselves as standing in a tradition that reached back to the Middle Assyrian period, which is evidenced not only by the occasional reference by name to military exploits of Middle Assyrian kings, but also by reference to the fact that 'Assyrians' had lived in these territories before having been displaced by other people (Masetti-Rouault 2001: 125). The Assyrian kings were seeking to return to political normalcy by reasserting Assyrian rule and returning Assyrians to towns and lands from which they had been displaced. So, one motivation for the territorial expansion in this period, as well as in the next centuries, was the *correction of perceived political anomalies*.

Thus, once recovered from the historical crisis at the End of the Bronze Age, Assyria became one of the most powerful empires that emerged in the Antiquity. In fact, a study of existing historical reality during the Iron Age shows that the only important political power in this period was precisely the so-called *Neo-Assyrian Empire* which had its origin around the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, when the Assyrians had once again secured control over the north and the south of Mesopotamia, part of Anatolia, the Syro-Palestinian region

and Egypt (Figure 2.2) thanks to its progressive organization military also developed since the time of the Middle Assyrian Kingdom.<sup>92</sup>

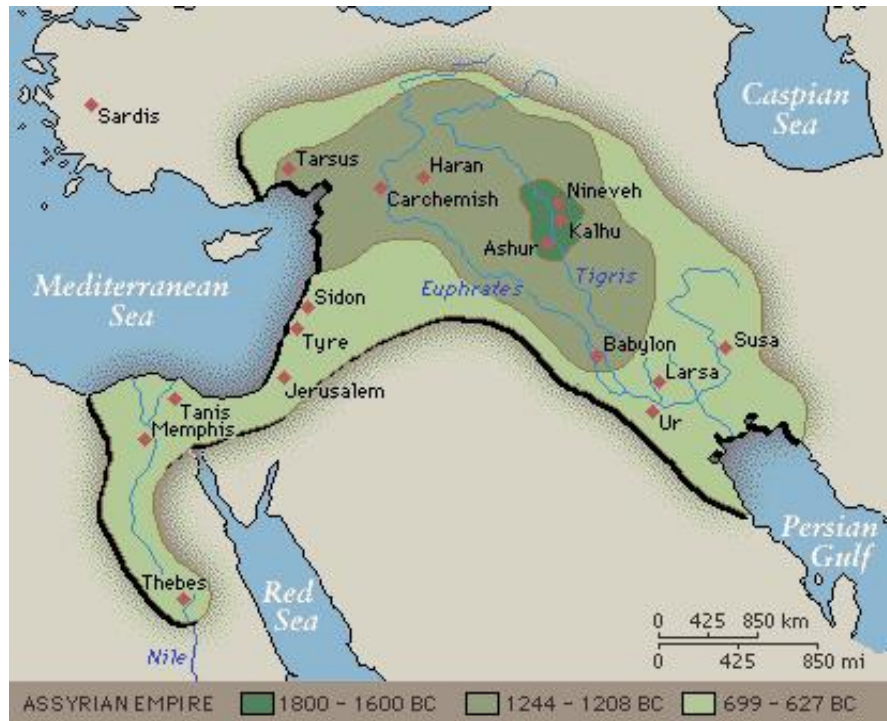


Figure 2.2 The three different expansions of Assyria since the Old kingdom until the Neo-Assyrian Empire (<http://www.allempires.com/empires/assyria/assyria1.htm>).

Notwithstanding, the study of any empire –ancient or modern- is a complex study because the phenomenon of imperialism is a complicate subject. To speak about imperialism is deciphering and defending an unnatural condition amongst egalitarian societies, because they have to accept that a minority rules over the majority.

For this reason, according to Matthews (2003: 141), it is necessary to develop an ‘ideological reinforcement in order to become palpable to many oppressed and reluctant

<sup>92</sup> Historically, the emergence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire has some similarities with respect to the Roman case. Both of them had a ‘conquest phase’ and an ‘imperial phase’ but in a shorter scale of time. The ‘conquest phase’ of Assyria is connected with the military conquests of some kings as Aššur-nar-apli II (884-859 BC), Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) and Adad-nirari III (811-783 BC). This phase represents the first attempts of establishing an imperial structure but facing periods of instability. Only with the appearance of figures like Tiglat-Pileser III (745-727 BC) the ‘conquest phase’ is over with a new provincial organisation which will be the base of a new imperial structure –the ‘imperial phase’- entrenched by later monarchs from Sennacherib (705-681 BC) until Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC).

participants in empire' that they must accept its condition in order to make 'natural' this 'unnatural' order. The Neo-Assyrian case was supported by two principal pillars: the *royal ideology* and the *militarism*.

#### a) The Royal Ideology of the Neo-Assyrian Monarchy

The origin and development of the powerful Assyrian monarchy can be found in the reforms put in place during the Middle Assyrian kingdom, as studied in the last chapter. Nevertheless, the changes provoked by the collapse at the End of the Bronze Age and the unprecedented geographical expansion since the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC motivated some new changes in the Assyrian royal ideology. According to Parpola (2010: 35) the Assyrians faced new challengers and problems: encouraging cohesion and internal stability inside of an empire composed of heterogeneous element; facing external threats that did not accept the Assyrian authority; promoting the unity of dynastic succession; and administrating the vastly increased distances of the empire and their respective excessive accumulation of tasks.

For this reason, Howe (2002: 36) suggests that the Assyrians were the first people to develop an imperial ideology. An important element that galvanised Assyrian unity around a common ideology was religion. Thus, the principal support of the Assyrian monarchy and its ideology was reinforced by the particular characteristic of their national god. The Assyrian god Ashur had very special characteristics, which converted to Assyrians in a particular people in the context of the Ancient Near East with a special model of monarchy. Ashur was a god without other cult centres, except when they were established by the Assyrians themselves, and he was not a *deus persona*, but a mountain, which the town and city built were built around (Livingstone 1997: 167).

What is more, Ashur's identity was hidden, he lacked family connections as other gods from Mesopotamia or Egypt had; he was not originally associated with a female consort. He lacked also divine epithets or physical representation – at least, at the beginning - as other deities from Mesopotamian pantheon. Generally he was not related to powers and

other phenomena of nature and he only received divine titles as *beli* ‘lord’ or *ilum/ili* ‘the god/my god’ which were connected with the name of Ashur, according to Lamberg (1983: 82-86).

In other words, there was an Assyrian ideological discourse with a strong support in the confidence of their kings as representatives of this Assyrian god. Nevertheless, while the king was the supreme human being in the Assyrian thought, he was still a mortal amongst his people. It seems that the Assyrians always resisted the deification of their ruler, unlike ancient Egypt and in some episodes of the history of Sumer and early Babylonia.

This phenomenon also contrasts with others ancient kingdoms of Mesopotamia where each king chose his personal god as the main divinity of the state, which also involved internal dissensions on the correct choice of these royal gods. In Assyria there were a great number of internal plots and rebellions against kings, but they were actions carried out against certain monarchs or *individuals*, and not against the *institution* of the religion belonging to the state divinity (Grayson 1995: 966).<sup>93</sup> For this reason, the Assyrians came to conceive a vision of the strongest absolute monarchy in the history of the Ancient Near East many centuries earlier than Rome.

The Assyrian king was the co-regent of the Empire in the name of the god Ashur, and all the warriors acts of the Assyrian kings responded to the desire of this god himself. Thus, the Assyrian king inhabited a special sphere, close to the divine world (Radner 2010: 25). The divine support of Ashur motivated the creation of a royal character that was characterised as a perfect man in theological terms because he represented the unity of divine powers. As Parpola suggests (2010: 36): ‘The perfection of the king was God-given.

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<sup>93</sup> However, following the approach of Von Soden (1994: 183-184) the Assyrian religion shared many characteristics with other Semitic peoples from Mesopotamia, especially with the Babylonians. Indeed, the Assyrian religion was polytheistic and the pantheon was organised by a hierarchy under the principal deity of Ashur. All of them had assigned roles and were worshipped in different Assyrian cities, such as Ishtar in Arbela, Ninurta in Kallu and Ashur. Other Mesopotamian divinities as Enlil, Marduk and Nabu were also worshipped by the Assyrians although they were not always connected with the same function that in Babylon. The temporary subjugation of Assyria to the Hurrians and to Mitanni led to many changes in the Assyrian religion, especially the change of the individual character of Ashur who became the official god of the State and who demanded the territorial expansion of Assyria.

He was miraculously conceived by the divine spirit, which made him consubstantial with God and thus implicitly the son of God, an incarnation of the celestial crown prince’.

These concepts reveal a pattern of god in human form, constitution and perfection representing every quality such as wisdom, prudence, mercy, justice, love, glory and power. Nevertheless, critical assessments of the evidences belonging to the Neo-Assyrian period did not claim a complete divinity of the king or the diffusion of his shrine to the masses of empire. The names of the Neo-Assyrian kings were never written using the common Mesopotamian divine determinative.

It seems that the Assyrians, although they acknowledged the divine influence of their kings, emphasizing their human virtues: merciful man, good shepherd, wise ruler, righteous judge and ‘a model of virtue to be emulated by those yearning for eternal life, for the perfect king would become fully divine and resurrect to heaven after his death’ (Parpola 1997: 51-58).



Figure 2.3 Typical Assyrian representations of royal figure: a) Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal, shown twice either side of a symbolic tree and the god Ashur on the top in a relief from Nimrud (865 BC) b) The king Ashurbanipal hunting lions which was a very popular topic in Neo-Assyrian royal art for the ideological connotations from northern Mesopotamia. (<http://classicalarthistory.weebly.com/ancient-near-eastern.html>).

The central doctrine of this Assyrian royal ideology was diffused to the common people by several types of propaganda, imagery and iconography (Figure 2.3). On one hand, there was a verbal propaganda, which was represented by monumental inscriptions in royal statues, steles, obelisks, relieves on palace walls, streets and other public places. All these resources had a practical objective, which is described by Parpola (2010: 37): ‘Even

though only part of the population could read cuneiform, the monumental inscriptions were certainly targeted to the illiterate masses as well, with an aim to awe and impress’.

On the other hand, the written propaganda represented by ballads, epics and myths were common for the learning of the elite and the administrative officers in temples and public festivals (Figure 2.4). These festivals had great repercussion as one of the most important channels for spreading the central dogmas used as supporting pillars of the Neo-Assyrian ideology. In this case, a network of temples were used for impressing the fundamental of the royal ideology on the masses through daily cult and periodical festival which hawked the belief in the Assyrian god who sent his son for the salvation of mankind throughout the entire Near East.

<i>Festival and its timing</i>	<i>Background myth</i>	<i>Central theme</i>	<i>Projected image of the king</i>
New year's festival 1 <sup>st</sup> month ~ March; equinox	<i>Enūma eliš</i>	Victory over chaos, creation of world, divine assembly	Saviour, creator of order, supreme judge
Wedding of Nabū 2 <sup>nd</sup> month ~ April	Divine love lyrics	Mystical union of the soul with God	Heavenly bridegroom
Wailing of Tammuz 4 <sup>th</sup> month ~ June; solstice	Descent of Ištar to the Netherworld	Death and resurrection of Tammuz	Redeemer, healer, innocent sufferer
<i>Tašritu</i> festival 7 <sup>th</sup> month ~ September; equinox	<i>Enūma eliš</i>	Divine assembly	Maintainer of divine order, supreme judge
Race of Nabū 9 <sup>th</sup> month ~ December	Lugal-e, <i>Bin šar dadmē</i>	Victory over Anzū, Qingu and Asakku	Heaven-sent saviour, vanquisher of evil
<i>Kanūnu</i> festival 10 <sup>th</sup> month ~ January, solstice	Nergal and Ereškigal	Victory of light over darkness	Destroyer of evil and death
<i>Šabāpu</i> festival 11 <sup>th</sup> month ~ February	Angimdimma	Ninurta's triumphal return to his heavenly home	Exalted hero, pantocrator

Figure 2.4 Principal festivals associated to the figure of the Neo-Assyrian kings (Parpola 2010: 42).

On this matter, Parpola (2010: 42) points out:

There can be little doubt that these cults, which persisted all over the ancient Near east until late antiquity and were actively fostered by Neo-Babylonian, Persian, Achaemenid and Seleucid kings, contributed to the emergence of later Graeco-Roman mystery religions and cults, including Gnosticism, Mithraism and early Christianity. It can be argued that many features and dogmas of early Christianity, such as the doctrine of the trinity of God, were based on practices and ideas central to Assyrian imperial ideology and religion.



An important explanation of this Assyrian behaviour was also in the own ideological formation developed since the Middle kingdom and reinforced during the Neo-Assyrian period. Assyria was since the Middle Assyrian kingdom ruled by an absolute king, who was also Commander-in-Chief of the army. He commanded campaigns, which allowed forging both a reputation as a mystique about his person. Ideologically speaking, the continued expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire over other territories became part of the political structure of the State, often accompanied by extreme religious zeal (Tadmor 1997: 327).

However, even in such contexts, the Assyrian king appears to be a remote figure that left the annihilation of the enemies to their generals and commanders (Parpola 2010: 36). In other words, Assyria was a militaristic state and the king was the chief military leader although he did not always lead the army in person (Figure 2.5). Nevertheless, Bedford (2009: 35) points out that ‘when Assyria was marching to war, the army became a sort of religious procession, led along by priests and statues of the gods because all wars were religious wars, justified by the will of Ashur’. Indeed, it has not been possible to find any official or extra official evidence from Neo-Assyrian archives which questioned the relevance of the national god Ashur over other gods and its right to be identified by his earthly representative, the Assyrian king, as the lord the ‘four regions of the world’.



Figure 2.5 The idealised figure of the Assyrian king on the left during a siege (<http://www.bible-history.com/ibh/Assyrian+Warfare/>).

Neo-Assyrian inscriptions expound an imperial ideology claiming to expand their territory to a level which never had been seen before, because Ashur was the pre-eminent deity who ruled over all the gods and, as a corollary, the political reality on Earth should be that all people acknowledged the sovereignty of Ashur’s representative: the Assyrian king.

For this reason, the Assyrian kings were charged from the beginning to ‘extend the borders’ of Assyria, because the territories beyond Assyrian control were held to be disordered, chaotic realms that did not conform to proper conduct (Parker, 2001: 265). Thus, the Assyrian king was a divine agent for implementing new order in the world.

The conception of a global horizon became a feature of the new order imposed for this empire in the Ancient Near East. Under this perspective, the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire allowed the development of the idea of increasing the horizon of unification of different people under the shadow of one unique power.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, considering the royal inscriptions and annals belonging to the Neo-Assyrian period between 8<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, it is possible to discover in the speeches of Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II and Sennacherib the idea of reaching expansive conquests for developing a project of a world dominated by the king of Assyria on earth and the god Ashur in heaven:

Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the earth); the wise ruler, favourite of the great gods, guardian of the right, lover of justice; who lends support, who comes to the aid of the needy, who turns (his thoughts) to pious deeds; perfect hero, mighty man; first amongst all princes, the flame that consumes the in submissive, who strikes the wicked with the thunderbolt, the god Ashur, the great mountain, has instructed to me an unrivalled kingship, and, above all those who dwell in palaces, has made powerful my weapons; from the upper sea of the setting sun to the lower sea of the rising sun, all humankind he has brought in submission at my feet and mighty kings feared my warfare (...).<sup>95</sup>

Another ideological innovation created by the Neo-Assyrian Empire was to believe that their kings were not common kings amongst others monarchs. The Assyrian

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<sup>94</sup> According to Radner (2010: 28) the use of epithets such as ‘king of the universe, without equal rivals’ and others expressing similar sentiments can be traced back to the Mesopotamian rulers of the past, most importantly the kings of Akkad of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, and link Assyria kingship to the traditional ideological concepts of rulership.

<sup>95</sup> Luckenbill 1968: 115.

kings became the Great King because if Ashur was the only supreme god amongst the deities in the heaven, the Assyrian king must be his unique representative on the earth (Bedford 2009: 50). For this reason, it was important for all the kingdoms that were under the Neo-Assyrian control to recognize the authority of the Assyrian king for being, in the same way, legitimised as real monarchs by Ashur in front of their respective peoples.

Moreover, the Neo-Assyrian ideology elaborated an important characteristic in the conviction that foreign gods belonging to other peoples as had already accepted the Assyrian rule on the earth. Indeed, the Assyrians believed that all the divinities known in its world had already accepted Ashur as the principal deity in the heaven where they had arguably served him appropriately in the heavenly realm.

For this reason, when a kingdom or people did not accept the Assyrian rule or they rebelled against its power, the Assyrian could destroy them and their cities, but always took possession or confiscated their divine statues for moving them to Assyria capital (Livingstone 1997: 167). This behaviour was explained by the Assyrians; they thought that the defeated people did not know how to honour their divinities because the divinities always have been loyal to Ashur. No gods could be made responsible for the disloyalty of their people, and for this reason these deities should be taken on Assyrian care (Figure 2.6).



Figure 2.6 Procession of foreign divine statues of defeated peoples to Assyria in a relief from the palace of Tiglath-pileser III (British Museum).

This point of view is also emphasised by Bedford (2009: 53) who believes that the removal of the deity from its original shrine was not a demonstration of disrespect by Assyria, but was interpreted as the result of the decision of this deity to pay homage to Ashur. Thus, the local deity abandoned its people because of the effrontery of oath violation allowing to the Assyrian army captures this kingdom, replacing its monarchy, and taking the local god back to Assyria where it would be properly cared for. As Bedford points out (2009: 54): ‘The spoliation of the divine images of rebellious vassals and the destruction of shrines was thus viewed as just punishment for unwillingness to submit to Ashur and his king’.<sup>96</sup>

<i>Ideological concept, or royal quality or function</i>	<i>Associated god or mythological figure</i>	<i>Associated image or iconographic motif</i>
King as pole connecting heaven and earth	cosmic MES-tree	sacred tree with palmette or rainbow crown standing on a mountain
Unity in plurality	Aššur and the great gods	winged disk hovering over sacred tree surrounded by pomegranate or pine-cone garland
King as earthly representative of god	Marduk	king in priestly garb facing or flanking the sacred tree
King as recipient of divine powers and blessings	Marduk, Ninurta	king holding streamers emanating from winged disk before sacred tree
King as image of god	Ninurta	king facing god(s) or sacred tree
King as son of god	Ninurta	goddess suckling child, cow suckling calf, ewe suckling lamb
Unity with god	Ninurta	king with pointed index finger flanking the sacred tree
King's <i>homoousia</i> with god	Mullissu/Ištar, Ninurta	sacred tree depicted as date palm
Apotheosis of the king	Ninurta, Mullissu/Ištar	gods riding the winged disk over tree
Royal perfection	Gilgameš	cosmic / anthropomorphic tree
Authority, majesty	Anu	heaven, crown
Wisdom	Ea, Utnapištim, Adapa, mythical sages	tree tended by “genies” or men in fish garb; streams emerging from vase or fountain; abyss, ocean; fish
Prudence, circumspection	Šin, Mullissu	moon, mural crown, conch, veil
Righteousness, Justice	Šamaš	sun; scales
Omnipotence	Marduk, Ninurta	cross; Jupiter; dragon
Mercifulness	Marduk	six-pointed star
Purity, sanctity	Šin, Šamaš, Ištar	radiance, nimbus of stars, lotus, lily
Love	Ištar	dove, deer, stag, rosette, rainbow; Venus, eight-pointed star

Figure 2.7 Concepts and doctrines of Neo-Assyrian kingship with mythological association and symbolic representation (Parpola 2010: 38).

<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the Assyrians generally destroyed both the images of minor deities and their respective shrines belonging to the people who were conquered by them, whilst the images of the most important divinities were carried together with accompanying religious objects to Assyria. They were, indeed, treated with respect and placed inside of the Assyrian temples (Bedford 2009: 54).

This habit also could explain the development of the Assyrian royal imagery of divine symbols adopted from other peoples. The Assyrians were extremely comprehensive in associating the figure of the king and his government with several tenets belonging to Mesopotamian mythology (Figure 2.7). They were represented virtually in almost every decoration in imperial palaces, jewellery, insignia, implements or weapons. These symbols included celestial and cosmic motifs, human body, animals, botanical, minerals, weapons and tools, implements, clothes, and colours (Parpola 2010: 37-38). All these elements became central concepts and doctrines for the Neo-Assyrian kinship, specifically when they were mythological associated with symbolic representation.

#### b) The Neo-Assyrian Military Reform during the Iron Age

A specialist in war and civilization; the French scholar Gérard Chaliard (2008: 83-85) claimed that Assyrians were both the first military empire of history and the first military society of the world. The organization of its society, as was described in the last chapter, was military organised in army terms but the real transformation was during the Neo-Assyrian period and specifically during the reign of Tiglat-pileser III and the instauration of the permanent army. This reform was based in the principle of a military superiority by means of professional officers, troops and leaders over any kind of military organization known before in the past as nomad warriors lacking leaders, indiscipline troops enrolled by feudal systems or mercenaries depending on payment (Chaliard 2008: 89).

Furthermore, the Assyrians developed a war machine, which was improved with new and different tactics adopted gradually by them from others peoples (Grayson 1995: 959). Thus, the Assyrians adopted the light horse-drawn chariot of war in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, increased the imports of iron at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC as raw material for the development of weapons, developed an extensive use of cavalry in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC borrowed from the Iranian tribes (Dandamayev 1997: 43) and organised the best and most disciplined army of the Ancient Near East around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC for fighting in the open field or being masters in the technique of besieging cities (Figure 2.8).

In this subject, Stern suggests (2001: 4) ‘the Assyrian army had probably already incorporated within its units many of the military improvements usually associated with much later periods: Persian, Achaemenid, Greek, Hellenistic, or even Roman’. Indeed, many later empires never reached a level of effectiveness to consolidate its military power, such as was the case of the Achaemenid army during the war against Greeks because they lacked of discipline, capacity, leadership and the typical Assyrian personality of superiority (Chaliard 2008: 89).

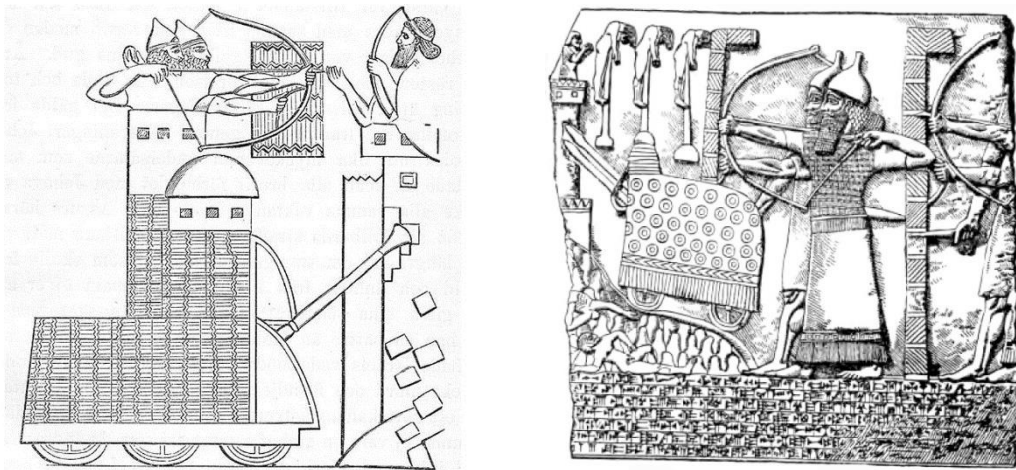


Figure 2.8 The Neo-Assyrian warfare machines for siege of cities during the Neo-Assyrian period (<http://www.bible-history.com/ibh/Assyrian+Warfare/>)

In reaching this objective, the Assyrians transformed their standard armies of the Middle Assyrian kingdom improving their size and by organizing them later by different corps such as chariots, cavalry, engineers, infantry and supply personnel (Saggs 1963: 145-154). According to Postgate (2000: 89-108) the use of chariots in Assyria was associated with the figure of the king and his military might. The Assyrians used this vehicle both in battles and at other ceremonial events as it is well attested in accounts of military activity from Babylonia, Egypt and the Hittite kingdoms. Notwithstanding, it seems they were not numerically of great significance because, by the sources of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, there were generally no more than one hundred in battle.

Nevertheless, the Assyrians used two different kinds of chariots: one of them was known as *pattutu* which was relatively light small-wheeled, low sided, with two crew and



used for royal hunting; the other was the which was bigger, heavier and higher with a side chariot protected by metal reinforcement used in skirmishes (Figure 2.9). On other hand, the use of cavalry was not common in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC although Hittites, Egyptians and Babylonians perceived horse riders as symbol of authority or messengers.

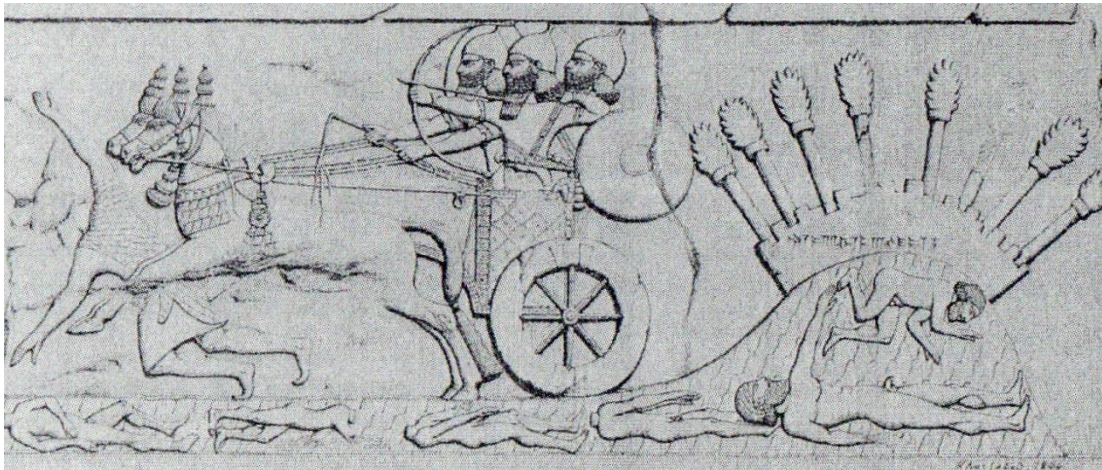


Figure 2.9 Heavy Assyrian chariot *tahlip* used in battlefield and skirmishes (Postgate 2000: 94)

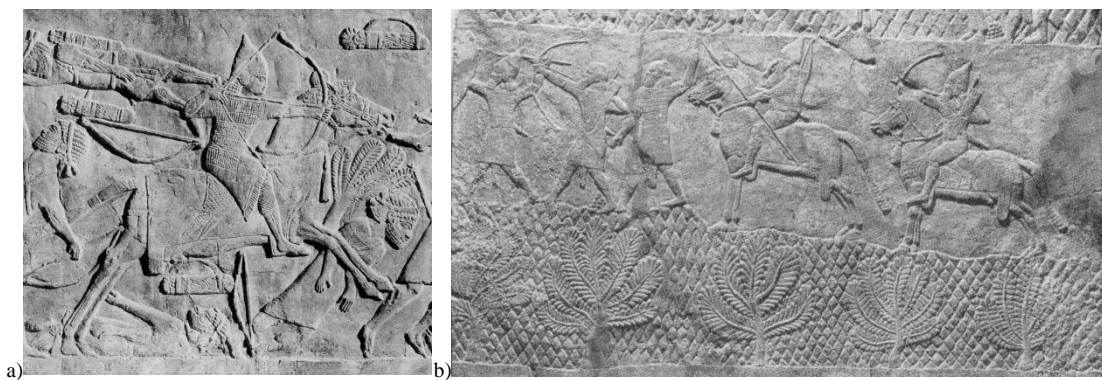


Figure 2.10 The Assyrian cavalry according relieves from Assyrian palaces: a) Assyrian Cavalryman with armour b) Assyrian infantry directed by a mounted officer (maybe a *rab kišri*) in the centre (Postgate 2000: 100 and 106)

Nonetheless, the Assyrian army was the first to employ large units of cavalry alongside chariots, both equipped with light or heavy armour (Figure 2.10). Later, the Assyrian kings, as Tukulti Ninurta II in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, incorporated the cavalry as a branch of fighting troops, not limited to supplying messengers. Proof of this tactic was the Assyrian interest for developing the equestrian technology (breeds of horses, methods of harnessing and importing foreign experts from Nubia and Samaria for chariots and from

Urartu for cavalry) in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC as a newly powerful weapon of war (Wise 1981: 34).

Otherwise the Assyrian infantry was organised by permanent corps called *kallapu* or foot soldier –especially slingers, archers and spearmen- that was divided into *kišru*(cohort) under the command of a *rab kišri* who depended of a *šaknu* (captain). However, the number of soldiers who was part of the Assyrian cohort, which included professional and auxiliary troops, besides of infantry and cavalry, is still unknown (Postgate 1979: 212-213). Furthermore, the Neo-Assyrian army had considerable logistical support, which was represented by corps of engineers responsible for the construction of roads and bridges and a complementary corps of priests and diviners (Parker 2001: 260).



Figure2.11 Different representation of Neo-Assyrian soldiers from Assyrian palace reliefs. All of them use heavy iron armour as standard uniform inherited from the ‘warfare reform’ after the collapse of the End of the Bronze Age (<http://www.bible-history.com/ibh/Assyrian+Warfare/>).

An important aspect of the military organization lies in the composition of its members. It seems that some corps as chariots and cavalry were composed by full blooded Assyrians who were professional full-time soldiers developing their *ilku* service for the Assyrian state and with the most advanced military implement inherited from the End of



the Bronze Age (Figure 2.11). Meanwhile, the majority of the infantry or foot soldiers seem has been a nucleus of permanent Aramaeans used as mercenaries often as police force in the outer parts of the Assyrian empire (Figure 2.12). On the other hand, the Assyrians seem to have avoided enrolling conscripts from ordinary citizens, belonging to annexed territories, although they incorporated some units from conquered states (Postgate 1979: 210).<sup>97</sup>

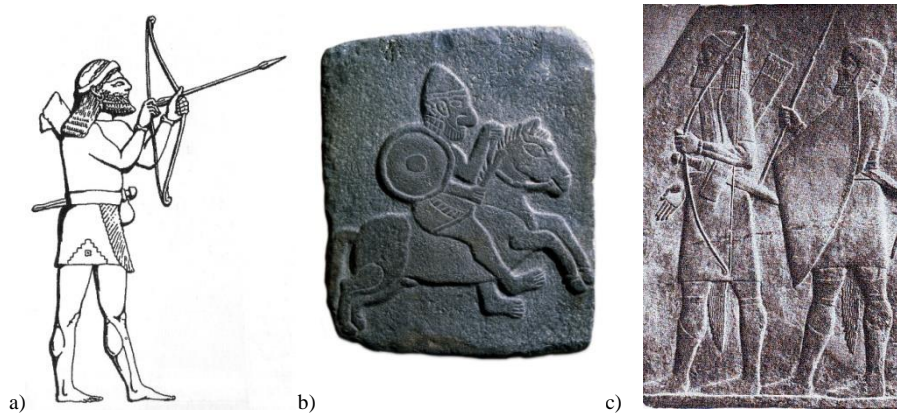


Figure 2.12 Three different military contingents used as mercenaries by the Neo-Assyrian empire: a) Elamite archer b) Aramaean horseman c) Israelite auxiliary troops.

The Assyrian army practiced three principal major tactics: open battle, city sieges and psychological warfare but the second was more common with the Assyrian expansion (Kelle 2007: 24). The Neo-Assyrian army travelled every year in a straight line from one destination to the next. Thus, the Assyrian army began to campaign every year, choosing one of three directions: to the north into Anatolia, east into Iran or west into Syro Palestine region.

This strategy allowed the concentration of all the power of the Assyrian army on a specific singular target, which was obliterated, with a severe level of destruction and atrocities against their inhabitants. This behaviour allowed the Assyrian army to seem

<sup>97</sup>Also the Assyrians incorporated foreign units from the people who had been conquered by them, such as *Ituaeans* from Samarra, Aramaeans from Syria, Israelite from Palestine and *Qurraeans* from Anatolia (Dalley, 1985: 31-48), and developed especially some warfare strategy as the psychological tactic, siege and assault of cities (Eph'al 1997: 49-53). However they developed neither guerrilla methods nor a navy but usually used Phoenicians ships when they had to go the sea (Reade 1972: 87-112).

invincible developing those that Parker calls ‘psychological warfare’ which was feared for centuries by the enemies of Assyria (2001: 261).

It is corroborated by the own Assyrian sources, such as the annals of kings as Shalmaneser III:

In my second year of reign I drew nigh to Til-barzip. The cities of Ahuni, son of Adini, I captured. In his city I shut him up. The Euphrates I crossed at its flood; I captured Dabigu, a fortified city of Hatti, together with the cities of its neighbourhood.

In my third year of reign Ahuni, son of Adini, took fright before my might weapons, and forsook Til-barzip, his royal city. I crossed the Euphrates. The city of Ana-Assur-utir-asbat, which lies on the other side of the Euphrates (...) I seized for myself.

In my fifth year of reign I went up against Mount Kashiari. Eleven strongholds I captured. Assur-itti-sheruriai I shut up in his city. His many gifts I received from him.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, the military campaign was costly and slow; it also wasted the resources of both the Assyrian state and the future country conquered. According to Parker (2001: 252) this policy would demonstrate that the Assyrians carefully weighed the potential military, political and economic benefits of expansion to other regions and decided always a specific policy for each region. In fact, the military campaign was for the Assyrians only the last resort when the counterpart broke a treaty – which was considered as a sin against Assyrian god *Ashur* - and only then the Assyrian army had the right to destroy and annex this land to Assyria. In this procedure, the Neo-Assyrian Empire kept a similar behaviour with the future Roman Empire and other imperialist entities nowadays.

According to Parker (2001: 261) the territorial expansion was achieved in three distinct phases. The first of them began with an ideologically charged military campaigns

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<sup>98</sup> Luckenbill 1968: 201-202.

were, theoretically, led by the Assyrian king, being recorded by the royal inscriptions in the Assyrian annals. All these campaigns were aimed at specific targets that are said to have committed some sort of offence against the empire, such as failure to recognize Assyrian gods or an attack on Assyrian allies. They provided an ideological justification for the initial military expedition and paved the way for imperial expansion in a very similar manner that the Roman *Jus ad bellum*.

### **3. The Neo-Assyrian hierarchy of its imperial core.**

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was very interested to develop the benefits from the periphery because this part of the empire provided the principal commodities and the most important raw materials for the core of the empire: metals, dyes, processed foodstuffs, fibres, resins and lapis lazuli. Indeed, Liverani (1979: 314) and Matthews (2003: 145) have made a parallel between the processing of raw materials into elite luxury goods at the imperial centre 'as part of the ideological process whereby chaos (the periphery) is transmuted into cosmos (the core) through the channel of the king'.

According to Colás (2007: 71) this is the reason because there is always a special relationship between empires and markets as expression of economic development. Indeed, empires have depended on circulation of products, people and money across their territories as policy of future development as 'the extensive control of extraterritorial markets from an imperial centre, or, put differently, as a structure of economic exploitation of a colonial periphery by a metropolitan core'.

Notwithstanding, the theme of government during the Neo-Assyrian period has been a complicated subject of study in Assyriology. Postgate (1979: 193) provides an illustration of this difficulty when he declares there was not an Akkadian word for 'government' – the structure of the royal state as a whole - in the period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. However, it seems that Assyrians could distinguish between state business and private affairs of their kings. In other words, 'state businesses' can be interpreted as 'central government'. On the other hand, Postgate in another article (2003: 124-138)

considers that the Assyrian hierarchy is ‘invisible’ for modern studies because the functioning of the Neo-Assyrian Empire remains obscure (Figure 2.13).

Chart 1

	Royal inscriptions	Royal decrees	Legal – sales etc.	Legal – loans etc.	Royal correspondence	Palace archives	‘Doomsday book’	Archaeological data	Relative assessment
Palace sector	x	o			x	x		x	good
Army	x				x	x		o	fair
State labour	o				x	x			fair
Administration	o			o	x	x			fair
Tribute	x				o	o		o	fair
Taxation	o	x	o		x	o			fair
Social structure			x				o		poor
City economy	o		o	x					poor
Village economy				o			x		poor
Land holding		x	x				x		fair
Non-state labour				o					bad
Crafts & industries				o	o	o			bad
Trade	o			o					bad
Prices & currency	o		x	o	o				poor

x = substantial evidence available  
o = some slight evidence available

Figure 2.13 Chart elaborated by Postgate (1979: 195) about the availability of source material for studying the administration of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

In other words, the lack of specific evidence about how the activities of the Assyrian government were administrated and the chain of authority, the delegation of it and its command are a bit ambiguous nowadays. There is a huge corps of administrative evidences from archives and palaces but they could not be considered a systematic archive, which would allow mapping the regular activities, developed by the Assyrian administration. Perhaps, these documents were written over perishing material like papyrus or they were never common inside the Neo-Assyrian administration as Postgate clarifies (2003: 7): ‘They give the impression of being, and I am sure they mostly are, pieces of writing produced by officials as part of their official activities *only as and when an occasion demanded*’.

It seems that the economy was the central part in the social and administrative structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Then, the administrative channels used by the Neo-

Assyrian Empire for controlling the supplies were organised in three sectors: the *palace*, the *government* and the *private* (Postgate 1979: 200) although the borderline amongst these sectors is hard to define. The first of them was centered in the figure of the Assyrian king, his family, relatives and high officials and courtiers from different cities whose remuneration depended on the royal treasure.

Nevertheless, the *palace* was not merely an enlarged household inside of the imperial structure because the inflow of wealth that this sector administrated was higher than any other private household. In addition, the temples were incorporated as administrative entities that depended on the palace. Besides, the palace made up according to Postgate (1979: 202) ‘the channel through which they [the profits] entered the economy, and the preponderance of the profits of domination in the income of the palace sector gave it a structure quite different from the private sector’.

The *government* sector in the Neo-Assyrian economy was in charge of appealing to the private sector, for providing resources to the official administration of the empire, and providing resources for the Assyrian army. Some officials who belonged to this sector worked in the different departments of the palace sector but the essential difference was that the government sector impinged the total population meanwhile the palace sector was restricted to a group of person who depended on the Assyrian king. Again, Postgate (1979: 202-203) makes a good description of this system:

The backbone of the government sector is the provincial system. The governor and his subordinates were responsible for the collection of payment of all kinds from their province and for the conscription and supply of soldier and civil laborers. Although some central control of these activities was obviously essential, it was through the provincial government that the state came into contact with the ordinary person.

During the Neo-Assyrian Empire, two strategies were adopted from former periods in order to organize the functioning of the government sector. One of them was to continue the system of *ilku*, described in the last chapter as state service. The second strategy was denominated *iškaru* system, which was used to transform raw material under

the direct control of the government into the finished product that the Assyrian state needed. Apparently, the government sector hired different craftsmen by contract in order to supply the needs of the Assyrian state. It seems that the difference between both systems lies in that the supervision of the *iškaru* was minimal in comparison with the *ilku* because this system worked more on the principle of commercial contract rather fiscal obligation with the Assyrian state (Postgate 1979: 205).

With respect to the *private* sector there is not enough information about it in comparison with the Old and Middle Assyrian periods. However, the existence of private enterprises or private business during the Neo-Assyrian Empire could be corroborated by the existence of government taxation to private merchants, individuals involved in long distance trade but essentially *in the inexistence of an Assyrian government trade monopoly* inside and outside of the Assyrian homeland (Postgate 1979: 206). Otherwise, the interest for promoting the commercial life in the different regions of its empire would suggest that the Neo-Assyrian Empire never created a trade vacuum, hindering the merchant routes and killing the regular exchange of privates within them.

Accordingly, the administration of the Neo-Assyrian Empire depended on the manner in which the territories were incorporated to the empire and how Assyrians practiced its influence to a greater or lesser degree. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify two large portions; one of them was ruled directly by the provincial administration of the empire; while the other had some kind of treaty arrangements with it. Thus, it seems that the Assyrian mixed two different concepts in the organization of its empire: *the hegemony with sovereignty* and *the hegemony without sovereignty*.

For Kolata (2006: 212) both concepts produced different impact on subject peoples. On one hand, the hegemony with sovereignty is associated to the concept of *orthodoxy*, which has a relationship with the process of transformation of historical consciousness at different matters such as social, economic, religious and ideological practice. Thus, the subjects aspire to the values promoted by state authorities (Neo-Assyrians in this case) often through religious practice. As Kolata says (2006: 214) ‘in the world of orthodoxy, behaviour and belief become isomorphic: subjects of the state do what

they believe, and they believe what they do'. This was the Neo-Assyrian policy in the *imperial province*.

On the other hand, the hegemony without sovereignty is associated with the principle or concept of *orthopraxy*, which generates a synthesis between the foreign (dominant) elements and the local (subordinate) population. In this case, there is not a deep transformation of historical consciousness because the local beliefs, values and social memories were not erased by the dominant system (Neo-Assyrian, in this case). In other words, they retain their integrity and local meaning although some foreign influences or institutional practices penetrate them occasionally. As Kolata says (2006: 215) 'unlike the orthodoxy, orthopraxy produces strategic subjects, not committed citizens'. This was the Neo-Assyrian policy in the *client provinces*.

This characteristic is also pointed out by Howe (2002: 15) who considers that empires have involved a special mixture between *direct* and *indirect* rule. On the one hand, the centre power of empires exercises direct control over their periphery by the use of the military power and economic control as expression of domain. On the other hand, empires have requested of decentralised control of their periphery with the object of improving efficiency of the periphery by colonial or provincial government in each parts of the respective empires.

In other words, the political system devised by the Neo-Assyrian Empire differed from those known until then. Unlike of the Mitannians, Hittites or Babylonians who incorporated 'a hierarchy of local dynasties into the same system as the high king's core domain' (Postgate 1992: 251), the Assyrians immediately established a difference between two differences depending of the kind of direct or indirect control. Thus, once the territories were conquered, they were administered under a new concept, which was conceived of two main units: *the land of Assyria (Aššur mat)* and *the largest Assyria*.

a) The Land of Assyria (*Aššur mat*)

The concept of *the land of Ashur* was referring to the nerve centre of the Neo-Assyrian Empire which formed a triangle amongst the cities of *Ashur*, to the north; *Arba'il*,

east; and *Nineveh*, to the west. Within this triangle there were the four main cities of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (*Ashur*, *Arba'il*, *Nineveh* and *Nimrud*), which were surrounded by fertile agricultural fields (Bedford 2009: 32). The entire area was under the jurisdiction of a principal governor (*šakin mat Aššur*) and each city had its own governor (*šaknu*) and mayor (*hazannu*) with an administrative hierarchy.



Figure 2.14 Representation of a Neo-Assyrian king with his officers according to Layard (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/>).

Thus, immediately under the command of the Assyrian king there were three important officers: the Field Marshals (*turtanu*), the Vice-Chancellor (*ummanu*) and the Butler (*rab ša muḫḫi ekalli*). The last of them had more authority over others because he was the only one with direct access to the Assyrian king; other officials could only access interviews in the royal court only with his permission (Postgate 1995: 5-7). However, on matters of state, the Assyrian king consulted regularly to the Vice-Chancellor and his position went on being highly influential (Figure 2.14). The Field Marshals, on the other hand, were in charge of fulfilling the orders of the king in the army and led the military campaigns in his absence.

Under this structure, there were other officials performing domestic functions at the palace, such as the Chief Servant (*rab šaqê*), Administrator (*abarakku*) and Herald of Palace (*nagir ekalli*). However, these characters were not mere servants of the Neo-



Assyrian Royal Court. Some of them could reach high administrative positions or be appointed as government leaders of the newly Assyrian provinces, as a way of rewarding their performance before the king. Each one of them had his own palace, court, and local army in the capital of the province, where they developed their respective tasks to the Neo-Assyrian Empire, especially in the collection of taxes (Grayson 1995: 963).

However, the main drawback of this system was there was no distinction between private and public life in the administrative work developed by these officials. Thus, many provincial governors and vassal states were able to act with a great independence with respect of the central authority of the Assyrian capital. As a result of this situation, the Neo-Assyrian Empire was restructured internally around the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, limiting the power of the provincial governors, and assuming the Neo-Assyrian Empire more control over the provinces.<sup>99</sup> In addition, more campaigns were carried out almost every year outside their borders to incorporate new territories as provinces and foreign resources to the empire administration, and deporting conquered peoples to prevent future resistance of the local populations.

When a country was conquered by force and became a province, the Assyrians developed a systematic administration, which was inspired by his own military organization. Thus, after obliterating a part of the defeated population and deported the survivors, certain Assyrian state officials were assigned in administrative positions as responsible for governing and administering those territories. Generally speaking, the new

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<sup>99</sup> As Grayson points out (1995: 964) 'as long as Assyrian greed was satisfied with the goods provided by a region under a treaty obligation, there was no need to make a large military and administrative expenditure to create a province'. However, this situation produced a serious problem because several Assyrian governors had such a free hand that they became more independent rulers. This was the reason because Tiglat-pileser III reduced the size of provinces and thereby the power of the Assyrian governors. This policy was useful when the Neo-Assyrian Empire was under a strong leadership of kings as Tiglat-pileser III, Sargon II, Sennaquerib and Esarhaddon. However, when weak Assyrian kings, as Adad-nirari III, raised the power, some provincial governors became independent rulers with no dependence of the Assyrian crown. It has to be considered that during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC the Assyrian kings were ruling through a select few officials who seemed a kind of oligarchy. They remained in service for long periods of time in the provinces as governors and had tremendous power and wealth. That means, they made military campaigns, captured territories and received tribute from the conquered people to their own treasure, such as the Assyrian kings did it from the capital in the past.

provincial rulers were officials belonging to the Neo-Assyrian army. In the same manner as the king was at the same time head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the army from the Assyrian capital.

It seems that there was a change in category from 'client state' to 'imperial province' with respect to their characteristics (Parker 2001: 249). In the first case, the client states were allowed to retain their national ideology and territorial integrity and national identity, although to remain inside of the Assyrian order. But, with the second case, the Assyrian state proclaimed that the territory and the people belong to the Empire. That means the inhabitant of this territory incorporated to the Neo-Assyrian Empire must be 'Assyrians' and its territory was already part of 'Assyria' (Postgate 1979: 251).

The Neo-Assyrian Empire constantly needed to keep different conquered regions, traditionally independent, under its control. Therefore, Neo-Assyrian kings as Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II had to transform Assyria in an apparently more brutal and predator state able to achieve the direct control over their vassals, breaking its resistance with new methods such as the deportation of entire people. Thus, the Neo-Assyrian Empire could decide to move different people if the circumstances were required, translating population from one region to other for developing the agriculture in marginal areas in northern Mesopotamia or for building new Assyrian cities and fortress.

#### b) The Largest Assyria

*The largest Assyria or the yoke of Ashur* according to Postgate (1979: 252) corresponded to all territories outside of the centre, which could be client or vassals kingdoms ruled directly or indirectly from the Assyrian capital. However, anciently it was supposed that Assyrians had a voracious appetite for territories and populations for extracting their surpluses through ruthless military aggression. However, it seems that it is necessary to make a distinction between those territories east of the Euphrates bend and those to the west. Territories to the east were seemingly incorporated to Assyria but the territories to the west were not initially incorporated to the empire and the Assyrians did not want to administrate these territories by themselves.

Bedford (2009: 44-45) emphasizes that Assyria would have preferred that these territories remained under their indigenous ruling houses and send tribute and goods to the centre of the empire. Moreover, as Postgate points out (1979: 254): ‘The relationship between the two states is a secular one between two rulers’. In other words, it was without an absolute or despotic Assyrian control. It seems that a controlled kingdom worked better than an imperial province because the conquered peoples had their own self-government, which was more helpful than dismantle the original government and transform it starting from the beginning. Thus, the vassal kingdom paid their taxes and tributes contributing to the imperial coffers in the same manner than a province directly administered by the Assyrian power, but it presented fewer problems to keep.

Also the Neo-Assyrian Empire considered some kind of ‘Buffer States’, a concept used by Parker (2001: 251) for defining an entity that lies between two or more rival states and their respective spheres of influence. According to the Assyrians, the existence of several states placed in strategic region, such as the states of Ukku and Šumbria in the northern border, allows them to support or even enforce the neutrality amongst them for providing a degree of security for both sides. Besides, both states served as ‘Buffer States’ in front of a potential rival of the Neo-Assyrian Empire as the kingdom of Urartu, which was also in the north (Figure 2.15):

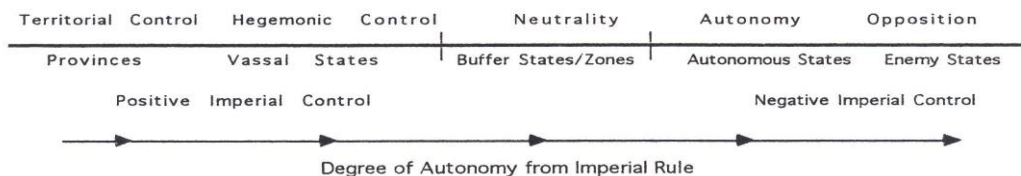


Figure 2.15 Outline of the Neo-Assyrian control in its periphery (Parker 2001: 252)

In the same approach, there were also ‘Buffer Zones’ which were similar to ‘Buffer States’ but they were lands situated between two or more rival states or their respective spheres of influence. They differed with respect of the ‘Buffer States’ because they did not have viable political structures nor were controlled by any political force. For this reason, they look like empty zones that physically separated the rival states and provided a degree

of security for all sides (Parker 2001: 252; Matthews 2003: 147). It seems that regions as *Dirru* and inner *Habhu* in the northern border of the Neo-Assyrian Empire could be identified as ‘Buffer Zones’ because they were neither political structure nor economic potential or geographical advantages but they allowed separating from autonomous and enemy states.

In a very similar approach, Parker (2001: 258) believes that precisely the classical view of an empire as an imperial core with a series of adjoining provinces expanding into periphery would involucre a high level of cost and benefits to the core, because it would be formed of a series of concentric zones of diminishing imperial control. Notwithstanding, if this model of empire is abandoned by a new model with an imperial core whose territorial control of the periphery is restricted by limited ‘pockets’ that offer enough political, military and economic advantages, it would be possible to better understand how the Neo-Assyrian Empire was historically.

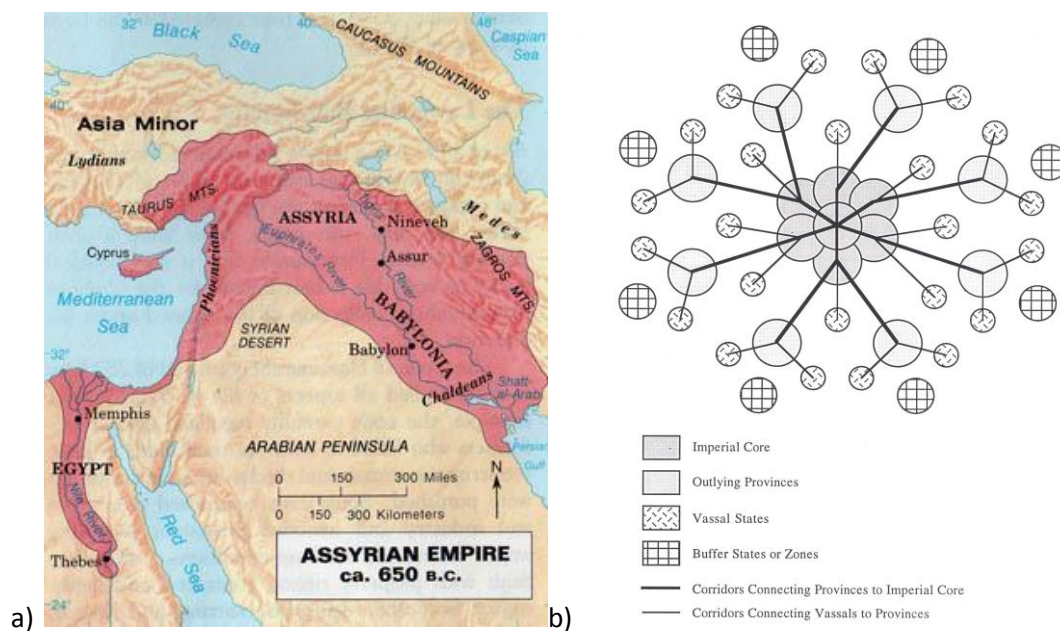


Figure 2.16 Two different approaches of the Neo-Assyrian Empire: a) The classical ‘oil stain’ (Bedford 2009: 42); b) The outline of Parker (2001: 258).

Therefore, the Neo-Assyrian Empire was not a contiguous territory, but an imperial core dotted with ‘islands’ of imperial control or outlying provinces, surrounding of

other states, which are considered ‘allied’ or vassals. Both of them connected to the imperial core by a vast network of fortified communication and transportation corridors. This point of view, as Bedford says (2009: 42), would change the traditional perception of this empire which ‘can be contrasted with the more common view of Assyrian expansion and administration control as an *oil stain* that slowly spread across northern Mesopotamia and that covered everything in its path’ (Figure 2.16).

Otherwise there was a famous policy of Assyrian government used commonly in the creation of new provinces: the forced deportation of defeated or conquered peoples. This policy had several geopolitical purposes: to recruit different populations conquered by Neo-Assyrian forces, weaken and stabilize the conquered regions, reorganise works in these regions, maintain psychological control of future rebel states and ensure conquered borders, break ancient identities and construct new ones (Bedford 2009: 56).

This policy was especially effective when the Assyrian deported and mixed different people across its empire and installed new settlements within it. Thus, the policy of deportation was effective in two principal objectives: dissolving national and ethnic roots and legitimating the movement of labour within Assyria to a location where it could be better economically exploited. Nevertheless, according to Parker (2001: 262) this policy needs to be studied under a new perspective.

Although this policy could be cruel when it was used for destroying the national conscience of peoples, it was far more humane than other kind of deportation that occurred in the XX century. Essentially, the ‘black legend’ on this Assyrian policy of deportation was born from the biblical narratives and from some modern comparison with the old *gulag* practiced during the Soviet regime. However, the Assyrian policy of deportation derived from a causative Akkadian verb – *šabatu* - which means either ‘to deport’ or ‘to resettle’.

A special case is described by Stern (2001: 43) in the Palestine region of Samaria:

In Samaria, in contrast, where the movement of deportees was bidirectional, not only was overall damage smaller, but also the arrival of the new population brought a new era of growth and prosperity, as well as better conditions than those existing

during the final Israelite phase. It does seem, however, that the settlement of the new population was anticipated with careful planning, as well with the efficient support of the local Assyrian administration.

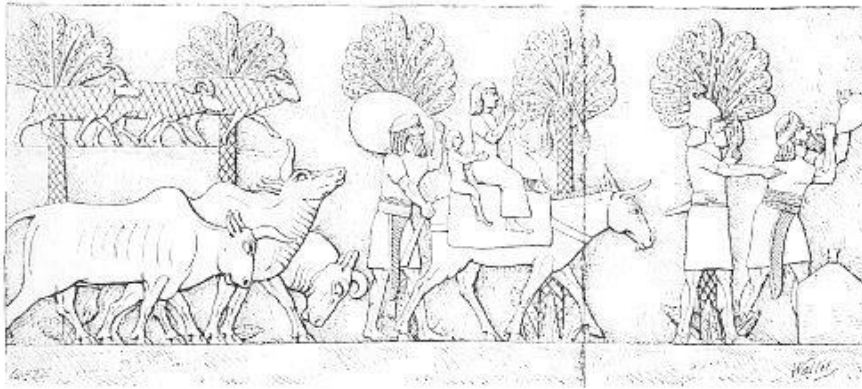


Figure 2.17 Deportation of family according to the Neo-Assyrian 'resettlement program' in an Assyrian relief (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files>).

Parker supports the view that Assyrian sources emphasised that the deported families were not split up, but rather that they conformed human groups who were allowed to stay together and settle in the same destination. The Assyrian officers were obliged to provide provisions and equipment to deportees travelling through their area (Figure 2.17). They received lands, garden plots, animals and dwelling from the Assyrian state, and the provincial governors were responsible for the wellbeing of the people who had resettled in these regions. In addition, they had to provide supplies to them in periods of bad harvesting (Parker 2001: 263).

For Postgate (1974: 237) the Assyrian deportation was based on the principle of 'resettlement programme', which was pursued by the Neo-Assyrian Empire. For this reason, it is possible to discover in the royal annals an enumeration of policies developed by Assyrian kings in order to restore both military strength and agricultural prosperity around the country. Thus, they developed the building of palaces or military centres in strategic places, promoting provisions for ploughs, the incentive for storing grain reserves and the acquisition of draught-horses. According to Postgate (1974) this behaviour 'reflects a delivery policy of first winning back and defending the deserted lands from their

Aramaean invaders, and then cultivated them, so as to permit the growth of population and improve agricultural prosperity'.<sup>100</sup>

On the other hand, the study the administration developed by the Neo-Assyrian Empire would confirm that many territories were controlled mainly by treaties and not through military conquest or direct control from the Assyrian capital. In fact, the discovery in the last decades of numerous treaties written in cuneiform tablets, between the Neo-Assyrian Empire and various kingdoms considered vassals, is a body of historical evidence demonstrating this phenomenon (Grayson 1995: 964).

Again, this image might be strange for an empire that was apparently built and organised under a strong sense of military expansion, brutal conquests and despotic control, considered as typical Assyrian characteristics, according the description of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, a superficial reading of these treaties leads to the assumption that they were merely an imposition of the will of the Assyrian king over other countries, in order to obtain unilateral concessions on the counterpart:

[If the Assyrian army] goes to war at the orders of Aššur-nerari, king of Assyria, and Mat'-ilu, together with his magnates, his forces and his char[iotry] does not go forth (on the campaign) in full loyalty,

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<sup>100</sup> It seems this policy of resettlement was emphasised in the territories located near to the major Assyrian cities in the 'Zab-Tigris triangle' described in the last chapter. Later, when the Neo-Assyrian Empire was expanded westwards, the Assyrian kings carried on the same program of resettlement with the objective of recovering the deserted but fertile lands on the west bank of the Tigris. On the other hand, a stele of the Assyrian king Adad-ninari III found during the archaeological excavations in Tell al-Rimah would corroborate the building of 331 villages around the Euphrates valley as governmental policy of settlement (Postgate 1974: 238).

<sup>101</sup> This policy of vassalage was common in many periods of Antiquity, because its political structure was useful for all parties involved, but it seems that Assyrians were the first who applied it in a more systematic manner. Besides, Assyrians already knew and practiced various types of diplomatic treaties with other peoples since the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. These treaties were subsequently recorded on cuneiform tablets or inscriptions where the states employed divine symbols and ceremonies in front of their people as witness. Despite the differences in content, these treaties, identified by Watanabe and Parpola (1988: XXIII) as 'oaths', were essentially agreements between two parties, which were mentioned at the beginning of the document. However, it was during the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire when these treaties became a typical expression of the new imperial administration and an important source for the understanding of foreign policy developed by its rule.

May Sin, the great lord who dwells in Harran, clothe Mati'-ilu [his so]ns, his magnates, and the people of his land in leprosy as in a cloak; may they have to roam the open country, and may there be no mercy for them. May there be no more dung of oxen, asses, sheep, and horses in his land (Watanabe and Parpola: 1988: 11).

This means a vassal kingdom that was under the tutelage of the Neo-Assyrian Empire could become a kingdom that remained politically independent of both the king and the Assyrian capital; however, it had an obligation to make payments of taxes and tributes to this power. Moreover, the most common demand that Assyrians made upon their vassals involved the flow of information, because they were concerned with gathering military intelligence, especially on the matter of internal and external security (Parker 2001: 249).

According to Watanabe and Parpola (1988: XVI) a more contemporary view shows a different reality, because a deeper study of these treaties would express that also the kings of Assyria maintained some responsibility with his counterpart in order to obtain the agreement that they desired. Thus, relatively few Neo-Assyrian treaties could be considered under a modern concept of imposition of one of the parts. This means that these treaties were written, in appearance, initially for the benefit of the Assyrian kings because they won several concessions.

Nonetheless, the subordinate part temporarily gained a great profit from the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Parker 2001: 251), such as military help, political support, strategic alliance or, simply, *peace* in a very similar strategy applied by the Romans many centuries later. Indeed, the scholars W. Hallo and Simpson (1998: 134) adopted the term *Pax Assyriaca* to depict a period of the Neo-Assyrian zenith during which there was, for the most part, political stability and economic growth and prosperity between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, such as the following oath translated by Watanabe and Parpola (1988: 27)

If there is a ship of Baal or the people of Tyre that is shipwrecked off the land of the Philistines or within Assyrian territory, everything that is on the ship belongs to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria; however, one must not do any harm to any person on board the ship but one must return them all to their country.



These are ports of trade and trade routes which Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, [entrusted] to his servant Baal: to Akko, Dor, to the entire district of the Philistines, and to all the cities within Assyrian territory on the seacoast, and to Byblos, the Lebanon, all the cities in the mountains, all (these) being cities of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria.

Baal [may enter these] cities. The people of Tyre [will], in accordance with what Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, has per[mitted, stay] in their ships, and all those who enter into the towns of [...] for collecting [toll...], and all (the places) in their outskirts will [pay toll], as in the past..

Therefore, it is more feasible to perceive the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire as a gradual and unnoticeable phenomenon in the Antiquity, which was owed to these strategic treaties between the Assyrian kings, with foreign rulers who preferred to exchange their national independence in order to make good use of the Assyrian protection (Yamada 2000: 305). In fact, local kings who were vassals of Assyria were not seen by their Assyrians lords as governors, but as legitimate kings of their own land.

In the same way, Neo-Assyrian Empire used different models of diplomatic treaties, such as peace, friendship, secret pacts and alliances, for mutual assistance. Others were more specific and recurring, as was the case with some treaties with exiles and noble princes who sought refuge in the Assyrian Royal Court. They received military support from the court and the Assyrian army; they returned to their land and corrected the ‘injustice’ that had experienced as a result of gaining the power. However, they were obliged to repay the aid to the Assyrian crown. A more sophisticated treaty is described by Watanabe and Parpola (1988: XXI) and Yamada (2000: 306-307) as another strategy to gain control over a country through a puppet controlled by the Assyrian monarch.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> This former procedure was more complex. It began when the Neo-Assyrian Empire demanded the children of foreign monarchs, who were sent to the Assyrian capital as hostages to be educated at the Royal Court until they had been completely *Assyrianised*. Then, they were prepared for the respective installation on the thrones of their parents at the right time (Livingstone 1997: 168). The obligations of these new puppet monarchs were also defined by treaties but they had more advantages for Assyria: they could incorporate troops from vassal king to the Imperial forces, channelling a substantial part of the wealth of the

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was a true political expert in using all traditional medias of political manipulation when they developed international and diplomatic relations with other peoples. Thus, they carried out treaties involving mutual friendship and assistance pacts, only to later invade that country using any pretext of providing military resources and assistance to unstable governments, only to add to its sphere of influence, and acquire initially territories of old independent friend states or lied to methodically install their puppets in them..

Others kings as Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal reinforced the traditional conquests developed by the traditional imperial ideology implemented through military expeditions, economic intervention and deportation of people, as described previously. From this perspective, it is possible to consider, as Bedford points out (2009: 44), that Assyria was not primarily interested in controlling new territories, rather goods, materials and surpluses.

In other words, Assyrian's were not interested in the lands, they wanted to appropriate and redeploy the labour available there via military conquests or treaties. Thus, the development and consolidation of the power of the Neo-Assyrian Empire could be attributed more to this foreign policy of diplomatic treaties than military campaigns or menaces of psychological terror. However, it is necessary to agree with the conclusions made by Watanabe and Parpola (1988: XXV) in the sense that those treaties not might have been successful without the backing of a strong army and a will to use it without mercy or hesitation.

#### **4. The Neo-Assyrian order and its global context**

It seems that historical empires have been built on specific structures of political rules, which are reflected in economic terms by surplus production, distribution and appropriation. These terms also involve political, military and socio-economic resources

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vassal country to Assyria and promote progress of gradual *Assyrianisation* vassal countries without any additional cost.

from the periphery to the centre of imperial administration. However, it is possible to identify another important characteristic in the process: *human input*.

Human input refers to the people immersed inside the imperial structure – colonists, slaves, workers, soldier, administrators and others-who have always contributed to its performance. Colás (2007: 116) claims: ‘... in addition to political-military and socio-economic entities, empires must be seen as human communities which generate their own expression of subjectivity, meaning and collective identity, that is, distinctive forms of culture’.

In general, empires have used two different policies with respect to culture, which have generated different types of tensions. On the one hand, some empires have unified peoples disintegrating and using their own culture as a tool of oppression, segregation and domination, which the notion of ‘civilization’ over that of ‘barbarism’. Under this point of view, the imperial culture has allowed the construction of imperial civilization, generating a division between two segments of a population: dominators and those being dominated (Howe 2002: 18).

On the other hand, others empires have preferred the integration of their subjects, promoting a lingua franca, religious syncretism and multiculturalism. However, it seems that historically, empires have promoted a mix of both policies. Thus, from the point of view of Colás (2007: 117): ‘Empires and imperialism shape and promote both the demotic and anarchical miscegenation of cultures as well the most rigidly hierarchical and violent form of exclusion’.

This has been one of the principal reasons wielded by historians and scholars in identifying the majority of the genocides and mass murders that took place during the development of empires (Howe 2002: 16). The Neo-Assyrian Empire was not a stranger to this phenomenon and it is possible to reconstruct some characteristics of its influence, both in infrastructure (material constructions) and in superstructures (complex of ideas).

### a) Infrastructure and Archaeology of Empires

A common policy developed by many kingdoms and empires in the Antiquity was the foundation of imperial capital as manifestation of power and charismatic identity of a specific leader (Matthews 2003: 135). The Assyrians were not indifferent to this policy, which is demonstrated by the large cities built during the Neo-Assyrian period. Unfortunately, many of these cities were discovered and excavated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the archaeological techniques were not sufficiently developed, and the academic interest was more interested in the ‘science of antiquary’ than in a modern anthropological or theoretical approach to archaeological data.

As a matter of fact, according to a comparative analysis of planning and building, it seems that the Neo-Assyrian Empire made important contributions to the urban development of the Ancient Near East, especially when they were at the height of their power. This contribution is manifested in the new programme of urban development, which is evident when it is compared with the classical planning of cities performed in other places of the region such as Mesopotamia, Syro Palestine and Anatolia.

It seems that the first step of any Neo-Assyrian campaign in the exterior was the annexation of foreign territories and cities. Following on from this, once the enemy was neutralised, the process of imperial consolidation was initiated by the establishment of strategic administration and military support. To fulfil this objective, the Assyrians chose a previously existing town or city (Parker 2001: 262) or built a new one (Yamada 2000: 302). Finally, this project was complete with a policy of construction of fortification walls around the perimeter of these cities, fortified citadels and water systems.

The Assyrian capital of the Middle kingdom *Kar Tukulti-Ninurta* and the Babylon of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, were built using a square or quadrangular plan. Nevertheless, they carried on with the inner planning of administrative and public buildings erected in different places as part of the urban structure inside of the walls (Bunnens 1995: 118). Meanwhile, in other regions of the Ancient Near East, such as the Syro Palestine region, the urban plan followed other paths from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC onwards.

The cities of the Syro Palestine region were built by the erection of an inner palace, a temple, and some secondary administrative construction, inside a precinct erected close to a city gate. The mixture of these public buildings became an acropolis, which was grouped on the edge of the settlement surrounded by a wall of quadrangular shape (Bunnens 1995: 128). Examples of this planning can be found in the Syrian cities of Alalakh, Ugarit, Ebla and the Palestine city of Megiddo.

Meanwhile, the region of Anatolia adopted another system of urban structure under the Hittite rule: palatial building erected over an acropolis on one side of the settlement with an inner and outer city (Bunnens 1995: 128). During the Late Bronze Age, the Hittite capital city of *Hattusa* was assembled in three parts: an acropolis with a palatial complex, a lower city with a huge temple complex in the middle of domestic quarters and an upper city with additional temples and domestic building (Figure 2.18).

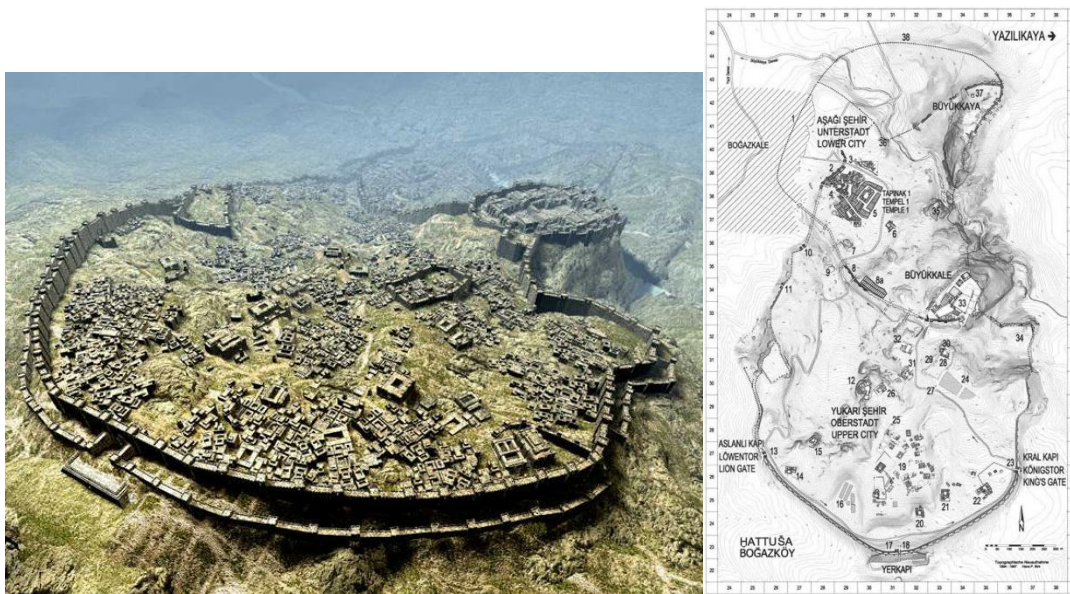


Figure 2.18 Reconstruction and plan of the Hittite capital of Hattusa (Boğazköy) (<http://artehistoriaestudios.blogspot.co.uk>)

A particular characteristic of this city is underlined by Bunnens<sup>103</sup>:

The acropolis has been built on the eastern side of the settlement and that no attempt seems to have been made to place this symbolic structure in the middle of

<sup>103</sup> Bunnens 1995: 125.

the settlement. Lastly, and contrary to the Syrian model outlined above, no sacred structure seems to have been associated with the palatial complex.

However, within another settlement, named Carchemish – which was located on the border between Syria and Anatolia - it is possible to identify a mix of urban traditions inherited from older Syrian sites, such as Tell Halaf (Figure 2.19). In Carchemish there were also three parts: an acropolis in the north-eastern side dominating the Euphrates River; an oval city on the southwest, enclosed by a wall, and an outer city, which formed the third part of the settlement which was also enclosed by a wall. It is important to point out that Carchemish was the Hittite capital of Syria, which survived the collapse of the End of the Bronze Age and remained as one of the most powerful states of northern Syria until its conquest by the Neo Assyrian Empire in 743 BC (Hawkins 1982: 380-381).

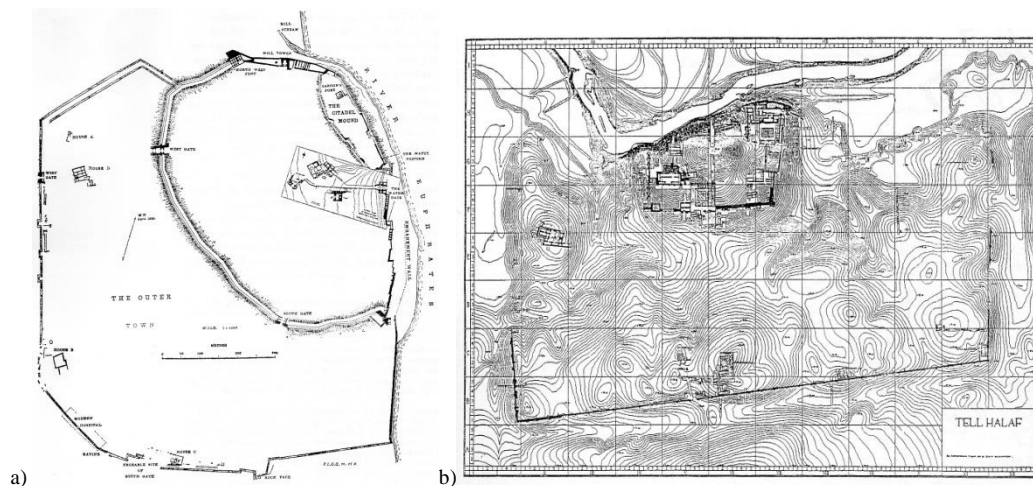


Figure 2.19 Archaeological plans of the Syrian cities of a) Carchemish and b) Tell Halaf (Bunnens 1995: 121 and 127).

This Assyrian conquest of these Neo-Hittite and Aramaean cities had important consequences for the future Neo-Assyrian imperial planning of cities. The Assyrians were very receptive to western ideas about planning a city and other architectural features such as lining walls with carved *orthostats*, adorning gates with protector figures and architectural plans for temples. All of these characteristics were adopted from the conquered cities of Syrian and Anatolia and were used in the new cities built by Assyria.

Assyrians also were experts in mixing different architectonic elements from Anatolia and Syria, with the objective of elaborating a new model or synthesis of urban plan for future imperial building. Thus, the Assyrians used a similar plan for the majority of their cities – like Nineveh, Nimrud and Kalhu - which had common features: the shape of the planning was square or round, protected by a line of outer ramparts, with two separate official quarters built against the enclosing wall, where the major official quarter was composed for a royal palace and temples (Figure 2.20).

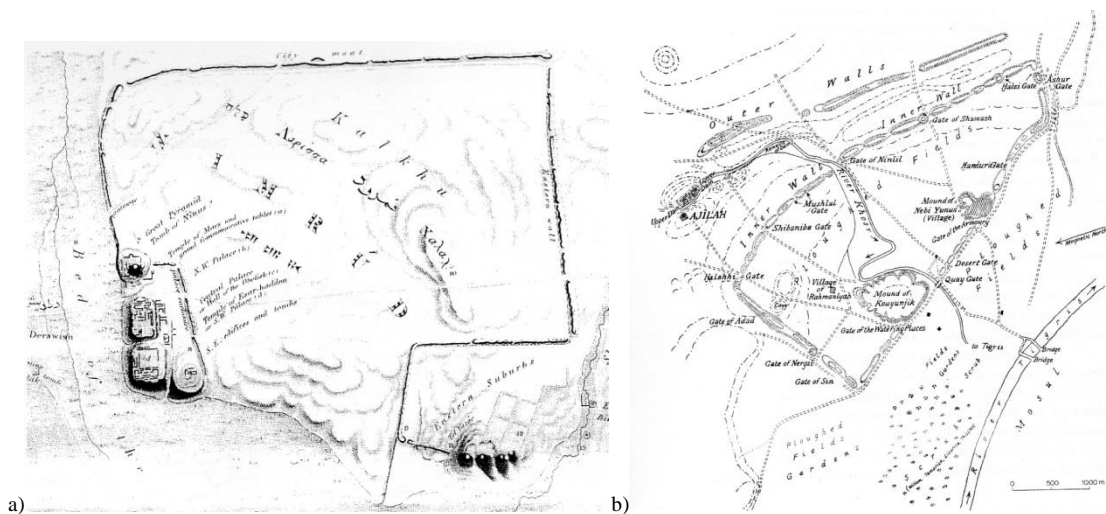


Figure 2.20 Plans of the Assyrian cities of a) Nimrud; b) Nineveh (Bunnens 1995: 116-117)

Nevertheless, in the last Neo-Assyrian capital built by Sargon II – known as Dur-Sharrukin - there were some differences, although the general structure remained similar: the settlement was square, shaped with four corners pointing to the cardinal points, with seven gates on the four sides of the fortification wall, and two enclosed areas on the north-west and south-west sides, protruding outside the city wall (Figure 2.21). The new characteristic was that the construction of the administrative building, as the palace and the temples rather faced north-west than a central position.

Perhaps they were imitating the Anatolian and Syro Palestine cities urban design because this new capital was built by workers from these regions (Matthews 2003: 139). Besides, the Assyrians included two new urban elements (Bunnens 1995: 128): the entrance to the acropolis complex from an inner gate situated in the lower city, and a second walled quarter.

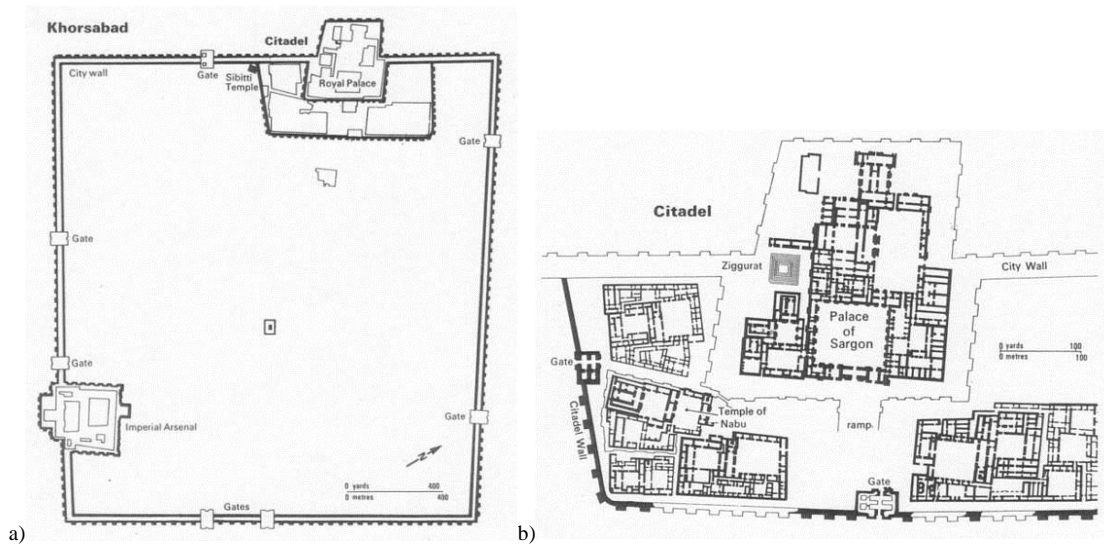


Figure 2.21 a) Plan of Dur-Sharrukin; b) Details of the palace of Dur-Sharrukin (Bunnens 1995: 115)

According to Bunnens (1995: 120) and Oppenheimer (1964: 134-135) the origin of this concept of urbanism was the adoption of the Assyrian military camp in a similar way with respect to the Roman *castrum*. Oppenheimer believes that the Assyrian military camps were composed by the royal tent, together with the sacred standards, and they were placed off centre because the safest area of the military camps should be near to the stockade and surrounded by rows of tents (Figure 2.22). On the other hand, Bunnens (1995: 120) proposes that the quadrangular plan was inspired in the classical model, inherited by Assyrians from southern Mesopotamian cities.<sup>104</sup>

Another important strength in the Neo-Assyrian Empire infrastructure was its management of the internal communication inside the state. Indeed, historically, good communications were indispensable for the existence of many empires. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC the Neo-Assyrian Empire constructed garrisons on borders or near to strategic points in the territories that they controlled (Figure 2.23). Later, the Assyrians improvised and developed a relevant change in the central administration of its empire, devising a ‘real

<sup>104</sup> However, the Mesopotamian centres such as Nippur, Ur, Uruk, Eshnunna, Isin and Larsa were built with a similar pattern which was characterised for irregular overall shape of the settlements which was due to alterations during the course of history. For this reason, the temples, palaces and official buildings were built in the centre or in marginal positions but they did not become specific districts inside of the cities. Rather they were integrated into the urban scheme (Bunnens 1995: 119).



roads' network, which was an exact equivalent of the later Roman *vias*, serving for a fast delivery of reports from the provinces.

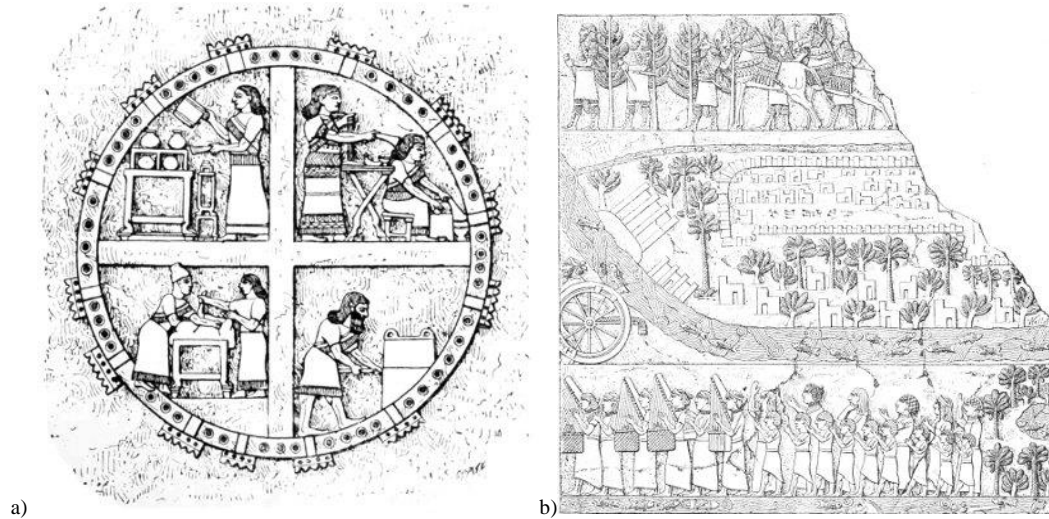


Figure 2.22. a) The Assyrian *castrum* used as base of future Assyrian cities; b) The Neo-Assyrian cities built or rebuilt from old settlements (<http://www.bible-history.com/ibh/Assyrian>).

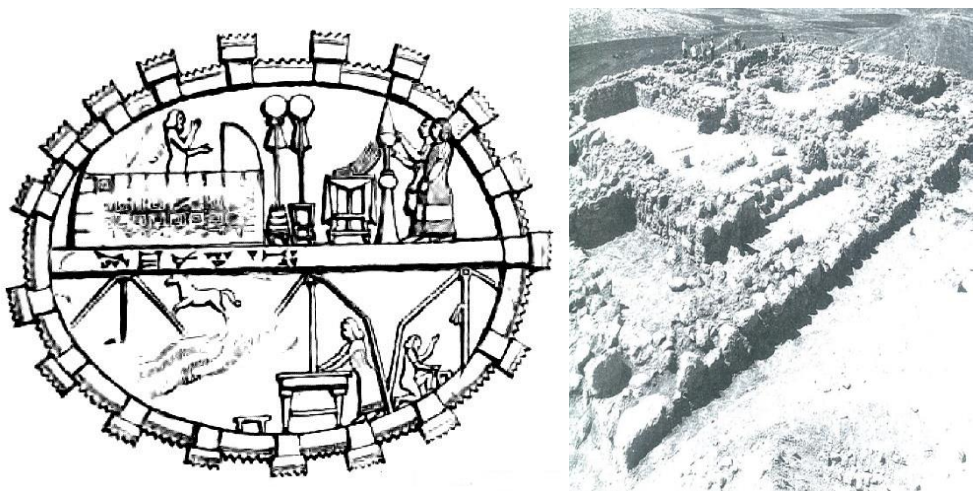


Figure 2.23: a) Assyrian fortress (<http://www.bible-history.com/ibh/Assyrian>); b) Assyrian fortress in Tell Hazor (Stern 2001: 47).

It should be considered that the control of newly acquired territories was really a network with a series of control points, nodes or garrisons, known as *birtu* or HAL.SU which were connected by roads surrounded by the territories that were not directly under Assyrian administration. As a result of these garrisons, the Assyrians could strike out against Aramaeans incursions or any other rebel people.

For this reason, Postgate (1992: 255-256) believes that the Neo-Assyrian empire was not a spread of lands, but rather a web of communications over which material goods were carried across the empire. In Palestine, for instance, important forts were built in some strategic places in the south –Tell el-Hesi, Horvat Huga, Shiqmah River, Tell Jemmeh, Tel Sera', Tel Haror and Sheikh Zuweid- which were essential for controlling the routes to Egypt and the Arabian desert (Stern 2001: 21).

Meanwhile, Parker (1997a: 77) considers that the Neo-Assyrian forts served as garrison outposts in formerly hostile areas and were therefore the first footholds of Assyrian expansion into recently annexed territories. Thus, they were military centres, from which campaigns and intelligence operations were conducted into and beyond the frontiers, also administrative centres where the daily affairs of the surrounding areas were directed and monitored, and also communication hubs through which news and information were channelled (Matthews 2003: 144-146).

This Assyrian infrastructure was built with massive defensive walls connected with protruding towers at regular intervals and protected by a slanted rampart or glacis against a possible enemy siege. There was a main gate, which was surrounded by other defensive tower, and had to be wide enough to allow a chariot pass through. This was a defensive measure that allowed the occupants of the fort a chance to view anyone approaching the gate. Inside the fort there were two principal areas: the *bet ubri*, which was the residence of the garrison commander or main officials; and the *bet-nap̄arte* which was the residence of the garrison soldiers (Parker 1997a: 82-83). Indeed, the Neo-Assyrian garrison centres or *birtu* had a similar approach to the later Roman military camp or *castrum*.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The similarity with the Roman case is the colonial character associated between *castrum* and *birtu*. On one hand, a Roman *castrum* could become a permanent settlement such as *coloni* or *urb*. In the Assyrian case, on the other hand, there are many evidences of report during the period of Sargon II which the *birtu* was associated to agricultural land and allocation of field to the garrison centre personnel, because the inhabitant of the fort were expected to produce their own agricultural goods. It seems that the Assyrian imperial administration did not rely on local inhabitant for the procurement of stable goods as security measure or because they wanted to avoid antagonizing the local people. Wherever, such as Parker (1997b: 84) says: 'Once forts or garrison towns established the military stability of an area, the process of

In addition to these roles, forts or garrison centres also served as conduits through which the Assyrian ideology of imperialism could be diffused into the periphery of the empire and where the process of the acculturation of the ‘foreign’ inhabitants of peripheral zones could be conducted. Following the idea of Kolata (2006: 210) it is possible to identify a colonial ideology of ‘civilizing mission’, which was central to the dynamics of state formation and expansion (Matthews 2003: 144-145). Peripheral regions were not, therefore, brought under the Assyrian yoke solely through swift military action, but by the gradual growth and spread of ‘islands’ of occupation into new regions. As Kolata (2006: 150) states: ‘The strategy of hegemony and sovereignty reflects the logic and the logistic of the empire’.

The importance of these garrison centres as networks of communication for the Assyrians was due to the fact that none of the major rivers close to the Assyrians capitals or cities – Tigris and Euphrates - were navigable, except at river mouths at the Persian Gulf. For this reason, much of the postal service was on horseback or in caravans, which would cross the deserts of the Ancient Near East. Furthermore, several roads were constructed as to provide databases for their messengers. In this way, it was possible to travel from the capital *Nineveh* to the Syro Palestine region in a matter of days. However this was only possible only under optimal conditions (Grayson 1995: 965-966).

Notwithstanding, a Kessler (1997:129) disagrees with this point of view. He underlines that an organised road system – *hul šarri* - described in the royal correspondence, was always the backbone of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, especially for military considerations: the numerous campaigns of the Assyrian army to different regions of the empire; from east to west and from north to south. However, Kessler (1997:129) refers to a complete absence or limited number of Assyrian sources which mentioned the “royal roads” in the whole region west of the Euphrates, the east of Tigris and north of Mesopotamia.

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‘Assyrianisation’ of that area was one of agricultural colonisation, which included the founding of new rural villages and the settling of people deported from various parts of the empire for the purpose of agricultural production’.

This aspect could demonstrate that the shortage of roads inside of the Neo-Assyrian Empire could be a sign of weakness in the imperial structure. As Kessler (1997:129) states: ‘the lack of this term – *hul šarri* - west of the Euphrates or north of the Assyrian capital remains at the moment a serious obstacle for the assumption that all important Assyrian provincial capitals were integrated’. However, Dubovský (2006) suggests that the well-preserved archives found in Nineveh and Nimrud would confirm the existence of a powerful Assyrian secret service networks which allowed the direct communication between the Assyrian courts with the province officers. These officers collected, transmitted and double checked sensitive information from the border to the Assyrian metropolis.

#### b) The Superstructure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire

Some of the principal reasons behind the manifestation of the idea relating the Neo-Assyrian superstructure can be found in the festival of *akitu*, celebrated during the New Year, in both Babylonia and Assyria. This festival was a Babylonian invention which represented the divine control over the part of cosmos that symbolizes the anti order and it was adopted and transformed by the Assyrian king Sennacherib after the destruction of Babylonia in 681 BC (Prongratz-Leisten 1997: 252). The Assyrian changed the role of the Babylonian god Marduk for Ashur who, in the Mesopotamian myths, fought and defeated the chaos – Tiamat - and this victory was commemorated in a special building or house with the procession being renewed every year, known as the adventus of Ashur.

However, from the point of view of Prongratz-Leisten (1997: 251) the study of written evidence of this festival, rescued in different Assyrian sites, would demonstrate a new interpretation. The existence of registers inside of cities, which were either royal residents or strategic garrisons, close to the borders of the Neo-Assyrian empire (with Anatolia in the northwest, Urartu in the north, the Mannaeans in the northeast and Elam in the southeast) would demonstrate that the Assyrian kings were very interested in being supported and protected every year by other patron gods who existed in border garrisons surrounding of enemies.

Following the interpretation of Prongratz-Leisten (1997:251), whilst the Babylonians wished that other gods from the periphery would come to Babylonia to attend the procession, in order to strengthen the cultic bonds to the capital due to its political status, the Assyrian preferred a visit from or the presence of the king in the peripheral regions, even if it occurred only symbolically through his garments.

It seems that the Assyrians did not consider the net of power by the visiting gods coming from the periphery to the centre of the empire, as the Babylonians did, however the Assyrian king departed from the centre toward the periphery because the meaning of this festival was, from the Assyrian point of view, not only to legitimise the Assyrian power, but to visualize and step up his territorial claim of controlling the universe.<sup>106</sup>

Archaeologically, when an empire has expanded, it is possible to discover a phase of consolidation that involves not only military control, administrative supervision or asymmetric economic interaction, but an important ideological message as well. According to Matthews (2003: 143) ‘peripheral ideologies may be appropriated by the core, perhaps involving the transport of cult images, and core ideologies may be manifest in the culture of periphery’. In other words, meanwhile the elite belonging to the periphery adopted some element of the core as status symbol; the core will try to accept some characteristics from periphery, with the objective of becoming a common part of this region, like the Romans did later with many foreign eastern religions, which were assimilated to their cults.

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<sup>106</sup> A similar case could be the commemorative monuments of the Neo-Assyrian king Shalmaneser, which were set up at the remotest points of his military campaigns during the period of his reign at west, north, east and south. Yamada (2000: 294) identifies two different kinds of monuments and sets out the categories of both depending on their location: at particular geographical with no associated settlements (mountains, riverbank or seashore) and in cities after their subjugation or conquest. The first commemorated the contact between the Assyrian king and the quasi-divine mark, which symbolised the end of the world (Mediterranean Sea, Anatolian mountains, Lake Urmia or any remotest places that the Assyrian kings had reached. The second method was done inside of the subjugated cities placing a stele or inscription of the Assyrian king close to the statue of the national divinity of the place. Such as Yamada (2000: 296) highlights: ‘the Assyrian king was thus associated with every act of worship performed in the sanctuary, both as an earthly representative of Assyrian and local gods and as a participant in every favour they might vouchsafe to grant’.

There is another example of the Assyrian superstructure. Empires were promoted to equate cultural style in their political relationship, which is evident in art expressing cultural conformity in the provinces. The most common case is the official representation of provincial governors or elite groups who depended on the Assyrian administration. Generally, they were represented in relieves and sculptures following royal Assyrian patterns emulating from the typical ‘scene throne’ of Assyrian kings, although they changed the characters (Figure 2.24).

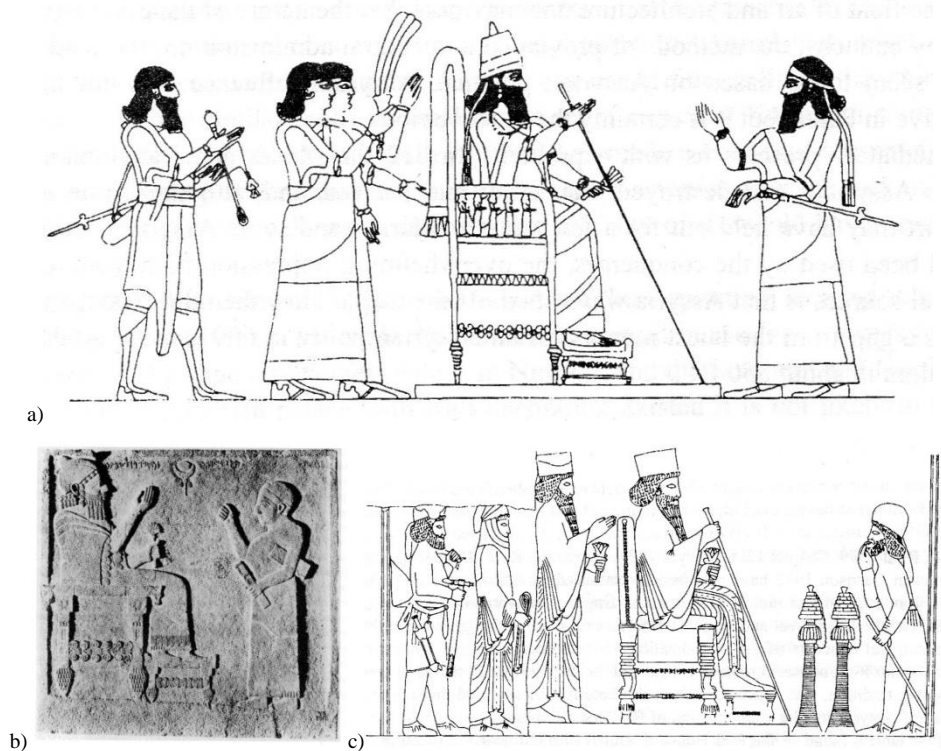


Figure 2.24 a) Representation of the ‘scene of the throne’ from the provincial palace of Til Barsip; b) From the Aramaean client king Bar-rakab in the city of Carchemish; c) From the *apadana* at Persepolis (Roaf 2003: 13).

The provincial palace of Til-Barsip on the Assyrian bank of the Euphrates had this characteristic and also in Syria in the stele of a client king at home called Bar-rakab of Sam’al, whilst the hall of the Tell Halaf building preferred to use Assyrian style glass wall plaques in the throne room. This scene was indeed adopted later empires; for example, the Achaemenid, in the palace of Persepolis, as a ceremonial composition inherited from the Assyrian period (Roaf 2003: 13). However, it seems that Assyria developed a cultural

uniformity inside the boundaries of the Land of Ashur but outside, in the yoke of Ashur, the situation was somewhat different.

Postgate (1979: 261) offers an illustration of this phenomenon:

Beyond the frontier, the empire took the form of semi-autonomous states, whose ethnic and cultural diversity increased with the growth of Assyrian power. Here, close political bonds to Assyria did not suppress local traditions, and indeed there are clear instances of artistic and architectural influence operating ‘in reverse’, on Assyria from outside.

According to Colás (2007: 26) this phenomenon exists because empires constituted civilizations with a particular understanding about culture and cultural identity, forging a shared national identity in the process of state-formation such as in the Abbasid Empire in medieval Spain, the Ottoman Empire, or the Austro-Hungarian Empire. One example of this policy can also be found in Assyria, with the inscription of Sargon II in his city of Dur-Šarrukin:

People of the four regions of the world, of foreign tongue and divergent speech, dweller of mountain and lowland, all that were ruled by the light of the gods, the lord of all, I carried off at Ashur, my lord’s command, by the might of my sceptre. I unified them (made them of one mouth) and settled the therein. Assyrians, fully competent to teach them how to fear god and the king, I dispatched to them as scribes and sheriffs (superintendents). The gods who dwell in heaven and earth, and in that city, listened with favour to my word, and granted me the eternal boon of building this city and growing old in its midst.<sup>107</sup>

Despite the fact that Assyrian incorporated diverse peoples and cultures to the empire, erasing their identity to gradually transform them into Assyrians, there are some doubts about the real implications of what the ancient Assyrians understood when they transformed people ‘like Assyrians’, especially in the royal inscriptions. Some scholars,

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<sup>107</sup> Luckenbill 1968: 65-66.

such as Machinist (1993a: 135-144) believe that this term did not refer to any specific ethnicity, but a more elaborated political one, such as citizenship or nationality. The base of this approach would suggest that both the region and people should obey the Assyrian king. What is more, according to Bedford (2009: 56) the existence of many cuneiform tablets, which identify specific names of deported people and persons who are known by the Assyrians themselves as foreigners is proof that they were never really ‘Assyrians’.

A particular exception was the Aramaeans who were gradually incorporated as members of the Assyrian administration (Brikman 1997: 8). Important proof of this reality was the discovery of several administrative documents of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, which corroborates the existence of Aramaeans tribes and names in the Assyrian administration. Indeed, during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, most of the families with more resources of Assyria were also of Aramaic origin (Grayson 1995: 964). The integration of the Aramaeans could be explained by the fact that the Western Semitic language, developed by them, had a great impact in the administration of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Stern 2001: 14).

The Aramaic language had a simpler simple alphabet than to the other administrative language used anciently in the cuneiform archives; the Akkadian. Owing to this characteristic, from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Aramaic language became the *lingua franca* of the greater part of the Ancient Near East, controlled by the Assyrians. The reason for the success of its expansion was owed to its easier writing system which was ideal for commercial purposes. Despite this, the Akkadian language of Assyrian variant maintained its predominance for the purposes of literary and religious works.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> The texts and tablets rescued by archaeological excavation in the Assyrian cities would prove that the ‘scribes of Aramaic’ – in contrast with the ‘Egyptian scribes’ - listed in Assyrian cuneiforms texts were not specialist in diplomacy but mercantile affairs. In other approach, since the origin of the Assyriology as discipline in 1865, has been demonstrated the existence of a symbiosis of Aramaic and Assyrian writing systems. As Millard (1983: 107) says: ‘it was surely through the penetration of Aramaeans society at all levels that the greatest impact was made. The Assyrian language was a local dialect of Akkadian but the Aramaic was already a widely understood language with an easily used script. For practical purposes, especially for trade, it offered many advantages Assyrian lacked. (...) How fast Aramaic came to dominate over Assyrian in speech cannot be shown, nor the extent to which it displaced Assyrian in writing. That is suggested by the term applied to the Aramaic script in Greek, Hebrew and Egyptian, ‘Assyrian writing’. For many the only recollection of the fallen empire of Assyria lay in the name they gave to the Aramaic alphabet.’



Nonetheless, the only place where this policy of integration presented problems was in Babylonia. For centuries, this kingdom and its capital of Babylon was regarded as the headquarters of the religion and Mesopotamian culture for Babylonians and many other cultures of the Ancient Near East. Thus, the Assyrian conquest of this city initiated many conflicts between both cultures, especially for the privilege that every city demanded of the other. When the Assyrian king Sennacherib finally decided to destroy it in 689 BC, it was considered as a terrible sacrilege by both Babylonians and Assyrians, because Babylonia was a city privileged by the protection of various gods.

Indeed, the murder of the Neo-Assyrian king Sennacherib, by his own sons, was interpreted as a divine punishment for his actions. It was under this context that his heir, Esarhaddon, ascended to the throne of Assyria in 680 BC, and decided on a new policy with respect to Babylonia. Esarhaddon rebuilt Babylonia in eleven years, restoring the sanctuaries of the Babylonian gods, especially the temple belonging to the god Marduk, and made the rebuilding of Babylon a political propaganda (Leichty 1995: 951).

The reason for this rebuilding policy was that Esarhaddon believed that Babylonia should not be treated by the Assyrians simply as a territory to suppress and exploit, as other towns and cities conquered before by the Assyrians were. Furthermore, Esarhaddon believed that Babylonia had had a significant historical, religious and cultural impact on Mesopotamia, so it could not accept a situation of subordination to the Assyrians. It should be considered also that Esarhaddon had a natural reaction against the disastrous policy that his father had made before his assassination; better known as the 'Sin of Sargon' (Tadmor 1985: 214).

Esarhaddon thought that only a change in the Neo-Assyrian policy of Babylon, restoring their political, economic, religious and cultural rights, could prevent a future revolt against the Assyrian power (Boardman 1991: 135). However, as Grayson (1995: 965) states: 'The problem for the Assyrians was, therefore, one of finding a means of controlling Babylonia that would both be effective and at the same time satisfy the sensitivity of the Babylonians and the Assyrians themselves. The quest for such a Babylonian policy was hardly ever very successful and often a total failure'.

Nevertheless, Radner (2010: 30) offers an interesting explanation about the Assyrian interest in the control of Babylonia. Radner considers the Assyrian ideological conception of the world where the Assyrian king develops the divine order on the earth, which has been supported by ancient Mesopotamian astrological texts in vogue during the Neo-Assyrian period. A very general principle quoted in these texts is the description of the four kings representing the coordinates of the world, known in Mesopotamia since the Akkadian period: a king from Akkad, a king from Northland (the region of *Subartu*), a king from Westland (the region of *Amurru*) and a king from Highland (the region of *Elam*).

From an Assyrian point of view, this scheme should change because the kingdom of Akkad did not exist anymore and there was had not been any kingdom in the region of *Amurru* since the period of Hammurabi. Thus, if the Assyrian crown ruled the entire world these coordinates should be changed as well: there was only one important kingdom in the north of Mesopotamia (region of *Subartu*) and it was Assyria that controlled the rest. The absence of any state in the West (region of *Amurru*) this term was used for designing other dominant rule as Egypt; and in the east (region of *Elam*) was identified with the kingdom of the same name.

Finally, Babylon would occupy the site of Akkad, although the ‘region of Akkad’ was already a concept used for appointing the region of Babylonia and its capital Babylon since the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. Thus, according to Radner (2010: 30): ‘the kinship of Babylon was therefore not only respected because of whatever admiration the Assyrian kings may have harboured for Southern Mesopotamia but because it was built into the structure of the world (...) not only as an attempt to promote Ashur to the status of Marduk, lord of Babylon’.

Another less known aspect of Neo-Assyrian civilisation was his keen interest in the preservation of literature, which was encouraged and sponsored by the Assyrian palaces. Indeed, one of the most important archaeological discoveries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the great library of the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in his capital of *Nineveh*. It has been estimated that the number of cuneiform tablets that belonged to his personal library was approximately 5,000 texts; namely literary and academic texts, as well as letters

and administrative documents detailing many aspects of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Fincke 2003/2004: 115-124).

This library represents a true reflection of management and collects all the knowledge and cultural heritage of Mesopotamia known up to that point. It would suggest that the scribes from Assyria were neither self-centred nor xenophobic because the library at Nineveh in the 7<sup>th</sup> century had cuneiform tablets which stated the word ‘god’ and ‘goodness’ in eight languages (Livingstone 2007: 98-118). Meanwhile other table lists included six multinational calendars with respect to the two that had been long used in Assyria. It is also possible that many of these texts were mostly acquired, purchased, copied or simply confiscated from the private Babylonian libraries or from other places.

However, these cuneiform tablets were not simply gathered; in many cases they were copied according to a standard format from the Neo-Assyrian libraries, because their cuneiform writing and the design of the tablets were uniform and each tablet was identified as belonging to the library of Ashurbanipal. The compositions preserved in Nineveh were of varied nature: approximately 300 were lists of omens, 200 of lexicon, 100 of bilingual Sumerians/Akkadian texts with varied characters, 60 of medical texts and 40 of corresponding to epics and Mesopotamian literary compositions (Fincke 2003/2004: 125).

The principal motive of these literary collections could be interpreted as fundamental for the royal Assyrian ideology. The majority of the texts found there were based on the principle of supporting the contemporary image of the Assyrian king by Mesopotamian mythological, sapiential and religious literature, which were copied, taught, propagated and explained to both the elite and the common people in temples and at public festivals (Parpola 2010: 37). Thus, the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* was used as backbone of the doctrine of the ‘perfect king’ and the *Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld* was used as the backbone of the Assyrian doctrine of salvation. Meanwhile, others literary works defined the status of the king as the righteous judge (Hurowitz 1998: 43-57).

Nonetheless, the library of Ashurbanipal was not unique in the period. Other Assyrian cities, such as Kalhu, contained collections of cuneiform tablets with literary and academic subjects. There were also private houses of this period that held collections of

cuneiform tablets or private libraries. According to Livingstone (1997: 173) there is evidence that in the city of Ashur there were many individual archives or libraries, which could be associated with the architectural details of the building involved: private houses, palace or temples.

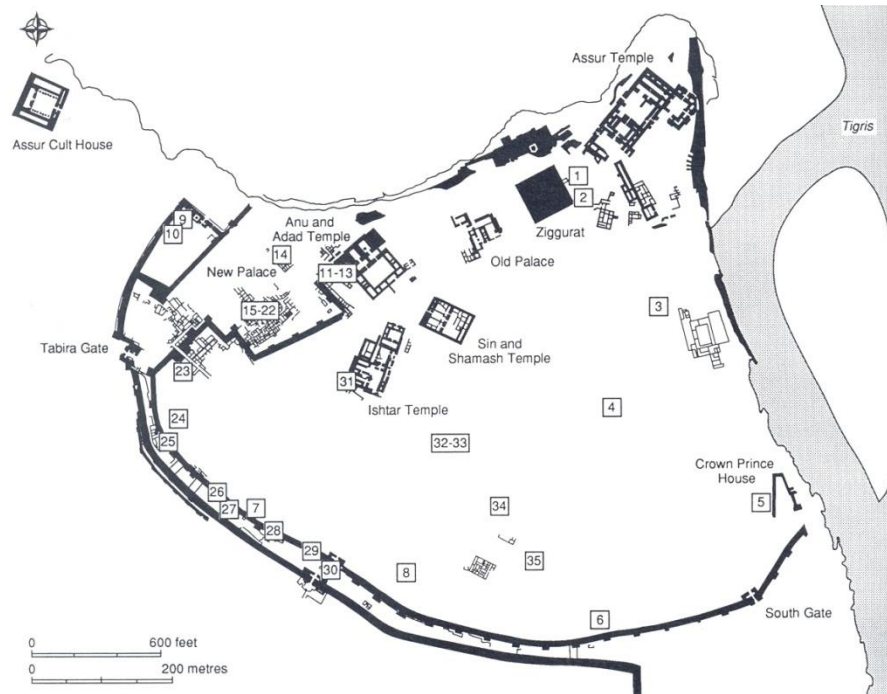


Figure 2.25 Private libraries, archives and collections found at Ashur (Livingstone 1997: 73).

Indeed, some of them belonged to a family of scribes with an associated archive, which have been identified by Arabic numbers (Figure 2.25). This should be a proof of the importance of literary culture in the period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Although it is obvious that this written knowledge was a direct cultural influence from the Babylonian, Akkadian and Sumerian legacy, especially with regards to knowledge derived from the written document, the Assyrians did not hesitate to incorporate them as an element of their own culture (Frahm 2004: 45-50).

This characteristic is summarised by Howe:<sup>109</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Howe 2002: 20.

Empire, it is thus suggested, always involved cultural diversity. It often rested on, and its rulers sometimes justified themselves by references to, deep cultural divisions and inequalities. But it also inevitably produced many kinds of cultural interchange, of synthesis, mixture, or – in a word that has become exceedingly fashionable amongst modern students of colonialism – hybridism. For some scholars, such hybridism is its most important continuing legacy.

## Chapter 3

# Ancient Egypt and the *Pax Assyriaca*

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## 1. General Introduction to the Egyptian Civilisation

To understand how the Neo-Assyrian Empire could subjugate ancient Egypt and transform it into one of their provinces, it is necessary to know what kind of civilisation Egypt was and determine its confrontation with the Assyrian power. This subject is important not only because Egypt was the last province incorporated in the Neo-Assyrian Empire structure, but also because this historical episode was the final confrontation – the ‘clash of civilisations’ - between two great and complex civilisations of the ancient world: Mesopotamia (represented by the Neo-Assyrian Empire) and Egypt.

### a) Ancient Egypt and its Geographical and Human Characteristics

Ancient Egypt was an important civilisation, considered by some scholars as the first territorial state in history (Maisels 2010: 139), which extended originally from the first cataract of the Nile to the Mediterranean Sea, with the Nile River being the principal geographical reference in the historical evolution of this civilisation (Kemp 1992: 18-20). The epicentre of the Egyptian civilisation, such as the case of the Tigris and the Euphrates in Mesopotamia, was the Nile River, specifically for the development of the agriculture in the valleys.

Nevertheless, there were also the same disadvantages of catastrophic floods in some periods as in the Mesopotamian case, though never were as common (Lévêque 1991: 59). Indeed, an important characteristic of the Nile River that made it different from Mesopotamia was its perfect harmony with the agricultural cycles that allowed the development of the normal farming that fulfilled the needs of the local people (Kemp 1992: 21).

The Nile River is the longest river on the planet (6,500 kilometres), which presents two specific characteristics in Egypt: in the south (Upper Egypt) the river flows

through a valley which extends from the first cataract to the modern city of Cairo; meanwhile, in the north, the course of the Nile River changes into a huge triangle called the Delta region, which has several branches that lead to the Mediterranean Sea (Figure 3.1). With respect to the specific Egyptian civilisation, the Nile River only occupied a distance of 1,360 km with a plain average of only 10 km. Meanwhile, the Delta region stretched for about 37,540 square kilometres (Maisels 2010: 139).



Figure 3.1 The Nile River and the Delta region (<http://www.mnh.si.edu/exhibits/eternal-life/>)

The Egyptian civilisation also had some particularities and differences with respect to the Assyrian case. On the one hand, the country was located, as Assyria, in a strategic place – the edge of northeast Africa – which served as a corridor that connected Africa and Asia (Hendrickx and Vermeersch 2007: 37). This characteristic allowed the transfer of cultures, the population and resources. Moreover, the Nile River did not have a long tradition of settlements or sedentary life in comparison to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers before the formation of the Egyptian state.

However, the archaeological finds seem to corroborate that the process of formation of the Egyptian state was faster than the Mesopotamian phenomenon at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. According to Maisels (2010: 139), this was the result of two important elements, with one being economic and the other being political. On the one hand, the economic element was the introduction of the Neolithic progress (characterised

by the development of agriculture, the domestication of animals, the invention of ceramics and trade) from the Syro Palestine region (Lalouette 1991:11-12); on the other hand, the politics were the unequal exchange of resources and its control amongst the primitive Egyptian inhabitants and the hierarchy that was consolidating in the form of the future Egyptian state (Maisels 2010: 141).

The Egyptologist Barry Kemp (1992: 34-35) made another contribution to the subject of the first Egyptian social organisation which finally finished forging the appearance of the first cities. He believed that the first proto-cities in Egypt were born in the fifth millennium but they did not have the 'type of organic growth of cities seen in Mesopotamia, but one of centralization based on conquest, or at least of the hegemony of a dominant settlement over a number of villages strung out along the narrow floodplain of the Nile'.

There is no consensus about what kind of people the ancient Egyptians were. Van de Mieroop describes this phenomenon as follows:<sup>110</sup>

The ancient Egyptians liked to portray themselves as separate from the rest of the world, with a long local pedigree and immune from outside interference, but that was a false image. Throughout its history Egypt was exposed to external influences as foreigners were drawn to the country. The longevity of ancient Egyptian culture was partly due to the readiness of others to absorb it.

In other words, Van de Mieroop (2011: 6-7) believes that the ancient Egyptians never had a uniform appearance because Egypt was the result of a long process of acculturation, in which 'Egyptian society constantly integrated newcomers with various origins, physical features and customs. However, unless there was a reason to make the difference explicit, they all appeared alike stereotypical depictions. They were all Egyptians, not people with Nubian, Syrian, Greek, or other background'. It seems that Egyptians were, in this case, more open-minded about the integration of foreign people into the Egyptian society than the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

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<sup>110</sup> Van de Mieroop 2011: 10.



## b) Ancient Egypt and its Historical Evolution

The Egyptian civilisation was less technically innovative with respect to Mesopotamia, perhaps because the prodigality of the Nile River in comparison with the aggressive floods of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers that motivated the control of the waters and the hydraulic innovations. In the Egyptian case, it was not necessary to involve the concept of 'hydraulic society' for explaining the origin of the Egyptian state or the rise of the kingship as a despotic one. For this reason, Kemp (1992: 46-48) proposes that in the prehistoric period Egypt was originally a group of egalitarian farming villages scattered along the banks of the Nile River.

These villages started to develop a real competition amongst them, which is a common characteristic of many Neolithic societies where some individual households or social sectors try to obtain more power, resources or production than their neighbours. In the Egyptian case, many households fought also for prestige or precedence and for the control of a range of resources distributed near the Nile River, known as fishing (Maisels 2010: 154). This would be the principal motivation for the emergence of the first large farming town, which became fortified towns and finally regional capitals such as Naqada, Hierakonpolis, This and Abadiya, which competed and fought for control amongst them.

Kemp (1992: 48) also provides an illustration of this historical process, and considers the natural conditions that allowed the consolidation of the political order which became the Egyptian state. He believes that the original objective was not to serve the needs of this emerging society, but was the inevitable outcome of a trajectory of privilege institutionalisation. The first stage was the ordering of the Nile settlements according to their rank in terms of dominance (Badarian period), the second stage was the consolidation of an elite stratification (Amratian/Naqada I period) and finally, the emergence of the proto-state formation (Gerzeah/Naqada II period). The common element during this period (4000-3500 BC) was the consolidation of a minority living at the expense of the majority (Figure 3.2).

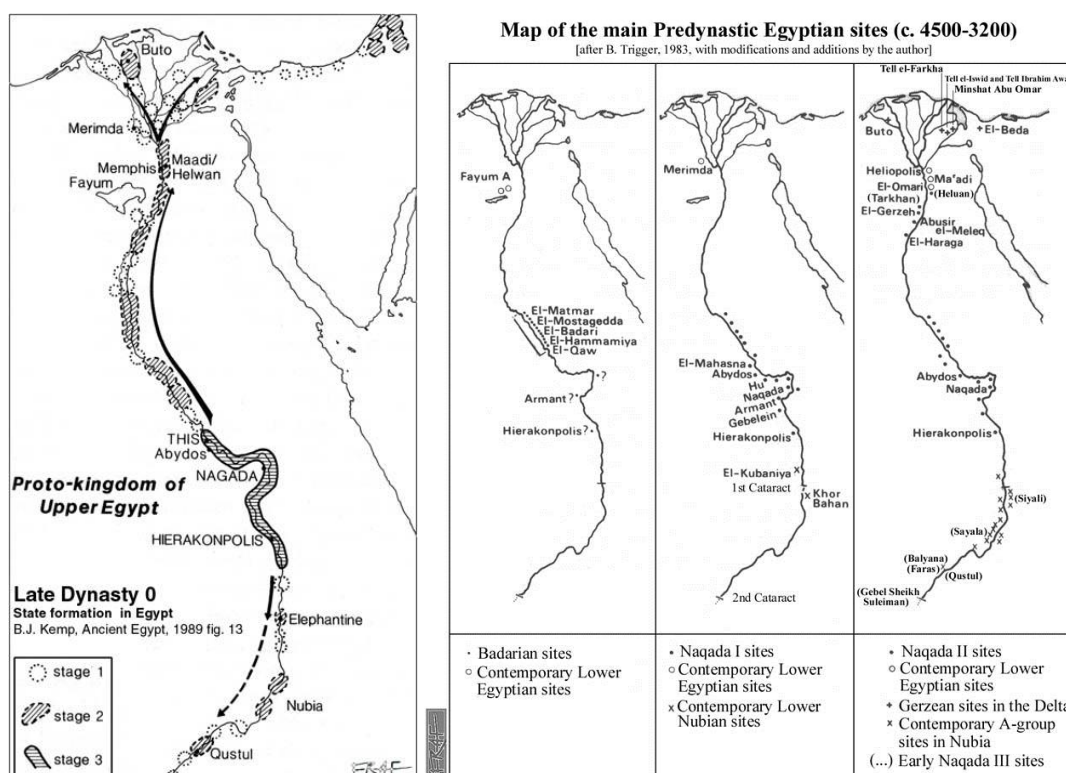


Figure 3.2 The Predynastic period in ancient Egypt (<http://xoomer.virgilio.it/francescoraf/hesyra/Egyptgallery074.html>)

The competition amongst different households led to the election of military leaders – just as in Mesopotamia and hence in Assyria – by fighting amongst themselves until the emergence of one ruler, who exercised his control over the other households. The principal evidence for the existence of these military leaders has been archaeological finds such as mace heads or palettes that described events and the military conquests made by them (Lévêque 1991: 81-85; Finkenstaedt 1984: 110).

They were the leaders that began the unification of the Egyptian territory, establishing the former chiefdoms of totemic rulers such as Scorpion king and Narmer. The extension of this policy was finally the unification of Upper Egypt, the expansion and conquest of Lower Egypt and the final unification of the ‘Two Lands’ in 3150 BC. Other evidence is the appearance of *serekh* which was a specific important type of heraldic crest used in ancient Egypt from the early periods, for accentuating and honouring the names of these characters (Wilkinson 1999: 56-57; Shulman 1992: 90).

The temporal extension of the Egyptian civilisation and their dynasties was the principal reason used by scholars for ordering and subdividing the Egyptian history according to the kingdoms and dynasties. For this reason, it has been recognised that there were three different periods of kingdoms (Old, Middle and New) separated by three intermediate periods, respectively. The distribution of the dynasties has been: the Fourth to Sixth Dynasties belong to the Old Kingdom; the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties belong to the Middle Kingdom; and the Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties belong to the New Kingdom (Lalouette 1991: 36-37). The remaining dynasties were distributed in the intermediate periods (Figure 3.3).

Nevertheless, this distribution is questioned because there is no consensus with respect to the distributions of the dynasties in the respective periods. As Jan Assmann emphasises (1995: 12), these designations impose a mental framework on Egypt's history that is largely erroneous. Indeed, the alternation between the kingdoms and intermediate periods suggests that in ancient Egypt there were only two modes of political structures and all of the kingdoms and intermediate periods had the same characteristics, but the historical facts deny this.<sup>111</sup>

Scholars have identified the New Kingdom period of Egypt (1549–1069 BC) as the 'imperialistic era' because Egypt developed a powerful army that expanded the territory of Egypt and conquered territories in the south (Nubia) and northwest (Syro Palestine region). After numerous prolonged wars, Egypt was able to administrate these territories and obtained booty, trades and cheap labour (Assmann 1995: 48). The border of Egypt

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<sup>111</sup> The Old Kingdom is the name given to the period in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. During the Old Kingdom, the pharaoh of Egypt became a living god, who ruled absolutely and could demand the services and wealth of his subjects. This period is characterised by monumental architecture. For this reason, the Old Kingdom is frequently referred to as 'the Age of the Pyramids'. After the collapse of the Old Kingdom, Egypt entered a period of political weakness and decentralisation called the First Intermediate Period. The Middle Kingdom of Egypt is the period between 2000-1700 BC, when the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom restored the prosperity and stability of the country. Also, they stimulated a general resurgence of art, literature and monumental building projects. Around 1785 BC, perhaps because of the weakness of the Pharaonic power, a Semitic Canaanite people called the Hyksos had already settled in the Eastern Delta town of Avaris, seized control of Egypt and forced the central government to retreat to Thebes. This period is identified as the Second Intermediate period and was the result of external factors, not internal ones, as with the First Intermediate period (Assman 1995: 13-16).

reached the northwest of Mesopotamia before being stopped by the Hittite kingdom in Anatolia. That was the period of the Ramesside kings during the Nineteenth and Twentieth dynasties.



Figure 3.3 The historical evolution of ancient Egypt (<http://www.viaarticles.ca/Kings-Queens.html>)

The cause of the decline of the New Kingdom was connected with the inability of the Egyptian state to provide for its dependants the wealth given in the past. In other words, the loss of control over the territories and kingdoms in Palestine and the progressive abandonment of Nubia produced an economic decline of the international system, aggravated by inner corruption (Van Dijk 2007: 400). The final consequence was the progressive weakness of the pharaoh towards the end of the New Kingdom period and the strengthening of the priesthood. This was not in vain as, while the pharaohs fought in external wars, the priests increased their power, inherited the position of high priest and

instituted a real theocratic dynasty that functioned in parallel with the royal dynasty (Van Dijk 2007: 410).

c) Ancient Egypt during the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire

Egypt had a period of 400 years which is referred to by scholars as ‘the Third Intermediate period’, which included the Twenty-first Dynasty up to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty (1069-664 BC). The general period had very specific characteristics, which were based on the principles of political fragmentation, the re-emergence of local centres of power, a substantial influx of foreign people who changed the traditional ethnicity of Egypt and the general weakness of the kingdom in its foreign affairs, because Egypt definitely lost control of Palestine and Nubia (Taylor 2000: 330).

According to Taylor (2000: 368) and Török (2009: 285), the use of the name ‘Intermediate’ for this period (1069-664 BC) is inexact or even pejorative. In other words, it is thoughtlessly associated with the former First and Second Intermediate periods in Egyptian history. Rather, there was a general prosperity in the economy, trade and artistic expression, despite the political decentralisation of the country and the loss of the former glory of the New Egyptian Kingdom (Leahy 1986: 51-64). Furthermore, a general overview of the First and Second Intermediate periods of Egyptian history would demonstrate that in both periods, the concept of fragmentation of power was unacceptable for the ancient Egyptians (Taylor 2000: 344).

However, it seems that during the Third Intermediate period this characteristic did not have any negative aspects, according to the research of Kitchen (1986). Indeed, it would provide an explanation for the long-term survival of different dynasties because there was not one authority in Egypt but many of them. Thus, every regional province of the former New Egyptian Kingdom became independent centres or many of them came under the control of a specific leader who inaugurated a new local dynasty, such as is described by Gozzoli (2006).

One of the problems of studying this period is (in comparison with the other Egyptian historical periods) the lack of historical records and complete chronological listsof

monarchs during these new dynasties during this period. Thus, Egyptologists have used evidence from other periods to reconstruct the general historical scenario of this period, based principally on three different sources: the stele of Piye, the *Rassam Cylinder* of Ashurbanipal, and the later work of the ancient Egyptian historian Manetho (Yoyyote 1961: 121-181). Thus, after the death of the last pharaoh of the Twentieth Dynasty, Ramses XI, ancient Egypt was still politically a unified kingdom but gradually the control was divided between a group of minor kings in northern Lower Egypt (Delta region) and military commanders in southern Upper Egypt around the city of Thebes (Taylor 2007: 432-433).

Indeed, during this period, the reputation of this divided Egypt in the Syro Palestine region was very weak, as is described in a report by *Wen-amun*, an Egyptian officer who was dispatched for a trade mission to Phoenicia. According to a description by Mysliwicz (2000: 22), ‘the story of Wen-amun thus conveys an authentic witness to the collapse of the state into two independent entities already in the reign of the last Ramesses. The two power centres remained on friendly terms, but as a state, Egypt did not inspire much respect abroad as it had enjoyed in the past’.

The Delta region fell gradually under the control of new rulers from the western desert, whose origin has been associated with the Libyan population that had gradually occupied this region at the end of the New Kingdom period (Leahy 1985: 55). Although Ramses III had successfully fought Libyan forces twice, there is textual evidence that conquered Libyans were assigned to military settlements in Egypt (Redford 1992: 299). Indeed, as mentioned in the first chapter, the contact between ancient Egypt and the Libyan people was not a new phenomenon from the ancient periods (Redford 1992: 102).

The Libyan situation was possible, according to Taylor (2000: 339), because the ‘settlement here was facilitated by the natural proximity of the area to the Libyans’ homeland, and by the relatively unimportant status of this part of Egypt in the eyes of the pharaohs, thinly populated and with low agricultural productivity; it was mainly used for grazing cattle’. Indeed, the later Libyan occupation of the Delta region would demonstrate the progressive utilisation of cultivable land – which until then was unoccupied or

uncultivated – from the eastern and western borders of the Delta to the centre (Figure 3.4).<sup>112</sup>



Figure 3.4 Ancient Egypt during the Third Intermediate period (<http://www.anthrogonica.com/showthread.php?714-Ancient-Egypt>)

Despite the origins of the Libyan culture being scarcely known and no traces having been found of it since the Bronze Age in Cyrenaica and the Western Desert of Egypt (Leahy 1985: 52), there was a strong relationship between both entities since the end of the Bronze Age, when some Libyan populations became captives, workers or mercenaries of the Egyptian authorities (Taylor 2000: 339). Later, a steady influx of Libyan immigrants settled in the west side of the Delta region with other groups without coming under Egyptian control. For this reason, it is possible to consider the settlement of Libyans in

<sup>112</sup> Thus, the Libyan populations were fundamental in the settlement and cultivation of the Delta region: the Meshwesh occupied principally some towns of the eastern and central zones such as Mendes, Bubastis and Tanis; meanwhile the Libu preferred to settle in the western edge around Imau where they founded the dynasty of Sais; another Libyan group known as the Mahasun settled towards the south. See article of Ritner (2007: 327-340).

Egypt as a prolonged process from the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC until the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC and beyond (Leahy 1985: 53 and 56).

Taylor (2000: 345) makes a critical assessment of this new Libyan order in ancient Egypt:

The political picture that emerges as the Third Intermediate period progresses is one of a federation of semiautonomous rulers, nominally subject (and often related) to an overlord-king. This is perhaps an example of the impact of the Libyan presence on the administration, since such a system can be seen as consistent with the patterns of rule in a semi-nomadic society such as theirs.

In other words, the Delta region was divided into rivalling chiefdoms with different dynasties ruling simultaneously (Dynasties Twenty-one to Twenty-four). All of them claimed to have the royal authority in the territory of Egypt, although their practical control was limited to some miles beyond their epicentre. Only some of these rulers are now known because of their personal achievements, ethnic designations, titles and relationships with other kingdoms of Palestine.

Amongst the traditional Egyptian characteristics adopted by them is the writing of their names in cartouches in black, erection of buildings with their own names and adoption of royal kingship myths (Redford 1992: 316). However, the majority of them preserved their Libyan names: Osorkon, Sheshonq, Takeloth Iuput, Nimlot and others (Leahy 1985: 54).<sup>113</sup>

Another important people of the Third Intermediate period appeared from the south of Egypt during the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. They became a powerful contender to the rulers of the Delta region for controlling all of ancient Egypt. These people come from the southern Nubian region, a former Egyptian province, where they founded

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<sup>113</sup> There are some problems in identifying the different Libyan pharaohs who ruled the Delta region because there were six of them named Shoshenq, three Osorkon and three Takeloth, who ruled from the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC until the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. In other words, these names and titles and the fragmentary condition of the preserved record made it difficult to determine whether they were dealing with one and the same pharaoh or with two distinct individuals. See Jurman (2007: 113-138) and Kitchen (2007: 161-202).



the kingdom of *Kush*, which finally conquered all of Egypt and inaugurated a new dynasty (Figure 3.5). Egyptologists have identified these Kushite rulers as the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, which was associated with such historical characters as Shabaqo, Shabito, Taharqa and Tantamani (Taylor 2007: 441).

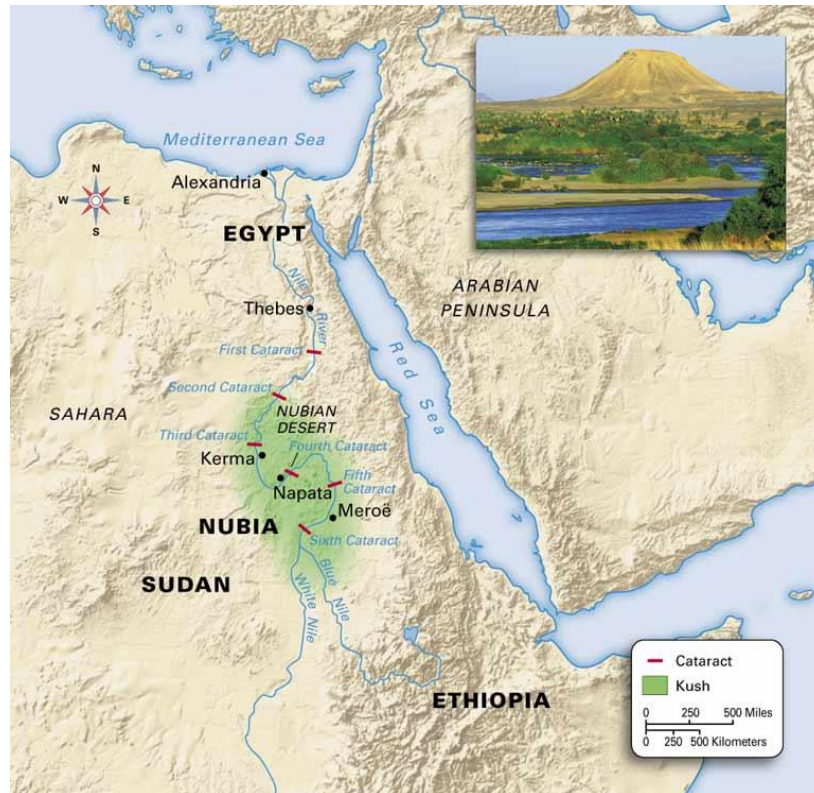


Figure 3.5 The region of Nubia and Kush ([http://westshore.hs.brevard.k12.fl.us/teachers/sarverr/world\\_cultures\\_maps.htm](http://westshore.hs.brevard.k12.fl.us/teachers/sarverr/world_cultures_maps.htm))

The origin of the Kushite kingdom is not clear at all but it could be considered as the result of an autochthonous culture originating in the Nubian region. The prophet Isaiah (18. 1) mentioned ‘a land shadowing with wings beyond the rivers of Kush’. Meanwhile, Assyrians considered Kush as a ‘far and inapproachable region’ and the Egyptians themselves called it ‘the horns of the earth’ (Morkot 2000: 1-2). Greeks and Romans believed that Kush and the region of Nubia were the same and named it *Aethiopia*, a name associated with the concept of ‘the land of the burnt-faced people’ or the land where the

people lived closest to the rising sun on the southern border in the Greek map of the world.<sup>114</sup>

There was a strong link between ancient Egypt and Nubia since the Predynastic period (3300 BC), according to the archaeological evidence found in Nubian tombs, which were comparable with those found in Abydos and Saqqara in Egypt (Yurco 2001: 29). Generally, these finds have been identified by archaeologists as A-Group Nubian, which established the kingdom of *Ta-Seti* or 'Land of the Bow'.

In fact, the monument and artefacts are considered as part of the emerging tradition of Upper Egypt called Naqada IIIa, which was the earliest ancestors of the former pharaohs who unified Egypt in 3100 BC (Yurco 2001: 32), although Barry Kemp (1992: 52) supports the idea that ancient Nubia lacked the population and resources to support the appearance of an important royal dynasty.

Whatever the case, the founder of the Twelfth Dynasty, Amenemhat I (1991-1961 BC) was the son of an Egyptian father and a Nubian mother, which would suggest that the Egyptian high class was mixed with Nubian elements since the Middle Kingdom period (Yurco 2001: 49). Moreover, the fortresses of Buhen and Mirgissa were built by Egyptian authorities at the border with Nubia during the reign of Seswosret I (1961-1928 BC), and Semna, Kumma and Uronarti were built by the pharaoh Senwosret III (Figure 3.6).

These buildings firmly guarded the trade routes from Nubia to Egypt, protecting the gold resources in that country and defending the river traffic. For this reason, Nubia belonged to the nomarch of Aswan and the Egyptian troops were posted there with the recruited Nubians.

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<sup>114</sup> The name Kush originally designated the northern portion of Upper Nubia but later was also applied to all the southern portions or the complete territory of Nubia, as it is mentioned in the inscription of the pharaoh Senwosret I of the Twelfth Dynasty in the 20<sup>th</sup> century BC and in the period of the New Kingdom (Zamazalová 2011: 298).

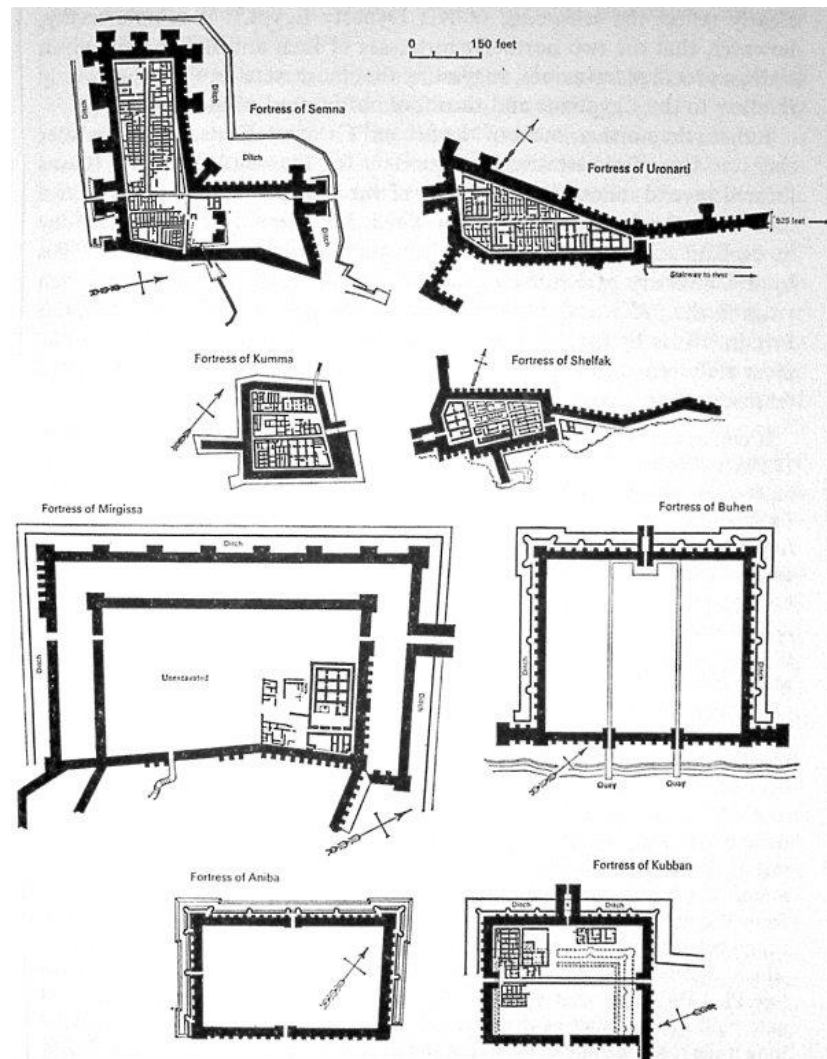


Figure 3.6 The Egyptian fortresses built in Nubia (Yurko 2001: 56 and 59)

The region of Nubia had been under direct Egyptian control since the New Kingdom period; this was due to several rebellions and attacks by the Nubian population at the Egyptian borders. That was the principal reason that motivated the military campaigns of Thutmose II (1518-1504 BC), who erected more fortresses at the border. The body of evidence rescued from the end of the New Kingdom period would suggest that the region of Nubia was progressively abandoned by the Egyptian administrative authorities, such as the Viceroy of Kush (Török 1997: 625). Moreover, during the Libyan dynasties, the region of Nubia seems to have been without Egyptian authorities, although the cultural tie with Egypt never disappeared (Taylor 2007: 463).

For instance, some Egyptian icons and hieroglyphic inscriptions, which were found in the temple of Semna, are proof of this legacy (Taylor 2007: 459). This situation allowed one specific group of Nubians to arise and they acquired major control over the resources and religious installations left by the Egyptians in the area downstream of the Fourth Cataract inaugurating the kingdom of Kush (Morkot 2000: 37).

However, it is not clear what motivated the later northward expansion of the Kushites until they conquered all of Egypt. Nevertheless, archaeological finds could give some information about the evolution of this African society because the evolution of the tombs would indicate that select people with local Nubian cultural traditions acquired greater wealth and the ability to create such impressive mortuary monuments.

The most important Kushite conglomerate settled in *el-Kurru*, where a settlement was built with defensive walls and important royal tombs with the Old Kingdom period *mastaba* style, built around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Another important place that was identified as also including the culture of el-Kurru is Napata, which was used as a political and religious centre (Török 1997: 132-139).

Taylor (2000: 353) considers that Napata had been the centre of the cult of Amun in Nubia, whose worship became an important feature for the Kushite rulers and overlords in the future. At the beginning, the rulers of Kush were identified in the Egyptian sources with the title of *wer*, which means ‘tribal chief’, as was the case for the Kushite ruler Alara (780–760 BC) perhaps as a way of demonstrating his character of having a partial or pseudo Egyptian royal title (Kendall 1994: 64).

The Egyptologist Ronald Redford has a similar approach. He argues that the Kushite civilisation has a dual origin (Redford 1992: 343-344). On the one hand, there is a strong inner African root, which is manifested in the simple tumulus burials in the earlier areas of the tribal cemetery at Napata. These buildings could be considered as a typical manifestation of a chieftain.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, there is undeniable high Egyptian

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<sup>115</sup> Archaeologists have identified some characteristics of the chieftain organisation (3000-3100 BC) with tombs built for the elite with a higher standard of living in comparison with the common people. Some objects found in the tombs such as wine jars, stone cosmetic vases and decorated gold mace would

influence that was inherited from the period when Egypt exercised direct control of the region by formal administration and religious influences such as the temple of Amun erected in Napata during the Eighteenth Dynasty (Russman 2001: 116).

Morkot makes an approach about this phenomenon:<sup>116</sup>

How far this emulation was able to extend beyond adopting styles of regalia and iconography is difficult to assess: the internal political and religious structures of individual states would have served as a bar on some of the aspects of kingship practised in the great empires. But there certainly were influences, and, in the same way, the rulers of Nubia were doubtless deeply influenced by Egypt, combining aspects of the Pharaonic kingship with their own traditions.

It seems that the most famous Kushite pharaoh was Taharqa, who is very significant in this research because this pharaoh is known because of his conflict against the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the subsequent conquest of Egypt. A historical fact that was indeed mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 19. 9 and Isaiah 37. 9) because the actions of Taharqa provoked the Assyrian invasion of Egypt, the conquest and slaughter of Memphis in 671 BC, and the later expedition of Ashurbanipal, who plundered Thebes in 663 BC.

The epilogue of this period was constituted by the Saite dynasties, whose name is designated by scholars because their city of origin was located in the western Delta: Sais. The Saite rulers are associated with the Twenty-sixth Egyptian Dynasty, which survived and consolidated through an alliance with the Neo-Assyrian Empire that avoided this dynasty several times, and disappeared with the renewed Kushite attacks. Finally, after the decline and fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the Saite dynasties ruled Egypt until the conquest of the Persian Empire in 525 BC (Yoyotte 1961: 121-181).

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corroborate the existence of a ruler class which had cylinder seals with impressions that would demonstrate that the chiefs between Nubia and Upper Egypt had certain communications (Morkot 2000: 42).

<sup>116</sup> Morkot 2000: 37.

## 2. Ancient Egypt, the Neo-Assyrian Expansion and its Peripheral Polities of Domination

In the previous chapter, it was revealed that one of the most important steps for establishing an imperial entity is the creation of both the conception of the world and the manner of organising it spatially. This situation would motivate the first dimension of imperialism: the sense of expansion in relation to the wider world and the universe beyond. This refers to a worldview, where territorial limits did not depend on natural obstacles by unfixed human boundaries, which could be extended and changed.

In the case of the Neo-Assyrian Empire there were two important elements that determined these imperialistic characteristics. One of them was the elaboration of a royal ideology with a special ‘manifest destiny’ and another was the formation and support of a military power. The question is to elucidate if Egypt disposed of similar elements or if this civilisation was not able to confront with the Neo-Assyrian model.

### a) The Royal Ideology of the Egyptian Monarchy and its Confrontation with the Neo-Assyrian Model

The ancient Egyptians considered, as did the Assyrians, that their monarchs or pharaohs were an important part of the universe. For this reason, every reign represented a complete era in Egyptian history because every time a new pharaoh came to the throne, he inaugurated or renewed a full cycle of existence by a jubilee or the so-called *Sed festival*, which had been realised by the Egyptians since the Old Kingdom period (Kemp 1992: 69-82). Nevertheless, every pharaoh had several royal duties, which became ritual acts inherited from their predecessors. Additionally, the pharaoh was essential in the Egyptian cosmology, which interpreted the universe and the common reality as the eternal fight (Kemp 1992: 61-69; Lalouette 1991: 105-108; Assman 1995: 34-35) between order (*maat*) and chaos (*isfet*).

This interpretation is described by Lehner:<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Lehner 2000: 84.

A prime royal imperative was the maintenance of social and political order over chaos and formlessness, reflecting an anxiety deeply embedded in the Egyptian world view from earlier times. A theme repeated to tedium through the millennia of the Pharaonic ‘Great Tradition’ is the king securing order against forces of disorder and conflict. This is symbolized by the king hunting wild animals, subduing the traditional nomadic tribes on Egypt’s border, or balancing opposing forces.

The Egyptian concept of life depended on order. However, this ‘order’ cannot be generated and exist by itself; rather, it had to be imposed constantly, and defended against the concept of *isfet*, which represented a natural tendency to chaos and disintegration. According to Lehner (2000: 85), ‘the annihilation of *chaos* and the realization of *order* were achieved by satisfying the gods – which meant the king extended his patronage over the temple households – and by judging men’. It seems that the principal expression of this Egyptian thought was the perception of the pharaohs as protectors at the pinnacle of patronage, such as what the Mesopotamians represented originally to their kings (Redford 1992: 24-28).

This mentality was reinforced by the demonstration of power in the maintaining of the political order in the country by the endeavour of monumental buildings in the kingdom. Also, in ancient Egypt, the pharaoh had a dualistic form, cosmologically/philosophically and for historical/geographical reasons. In other words, following the approach of Maybury-Lewis (2000: 40), ‘the pharaoh was not only known as king of Upper and Lower Egypt but also as Horus and Seth, thus embodying the gods whose implacable hostility towards each other was the very symbol of conflict’. In other words, the pharaoh contained within him, and thus reconciled, the twin poles of opposition itself.

In this approach, Kemp supports (1992: 37-43) the same idea, which is that every unity in ancient Egypt was formed by two different and contrasting elements. That vision was fundamental in the observation of natural phenomena: night following day, death following life, flowing from south to north, the Nile River dividing the land into east and

west, temples built on an east-west axis with a similar distribution of rooms north-south, and the fundamental confrontation of two important divinities such as the order associated with Horus and the negative qualities personified by the god Seth.

This dual organisation was very common in societies that conceived the world as the synthesis of opposites such as the ancient Chinese and Inca civilisations (Willey 2000: 25-36). They believed in the existence of a special link between the social and the cosmic order for maintaining social peace on Earth, not for conquering it as the Assyrians did, which was in concordance with the cosmic harmony. Indeed, this kind of thought was common, originally in small communities without a central authority of state, and it had the objective of guaranteeing that the justice constrained the social system inside of a cosmic equilibrium.

Nevertheless, when a society such as the Egyptians evolved to state formation, it was necessary to maintain this balance. For this reason, the Egyptian society subscribed to the same theory of dual organisation with their rulers because they 'linked human society with the cosmos while mediating in their persons the contending forces that could wreak havoc on earth' (Maybury-Lewis 2000: 41). However, there is an important difference between the tribal societies that became kingdoms with this dualistic order, such as in Egypt, and those societies that became great empires, such as Assyria.

A small-scale society could use the theory and practice of the dual organisation as a restraint that prevented this society from transforming itself for long periods. However, when a small-scale society became a more complex society such as an empire, this ideology itself was not enough for controlling this changing society and it had to be supported by an armed force. That could be the explanation for some 'intermediate' periods of Egyptian history being characterised by the pharaonic authority being weak and the non-existence of a military power to support some Egyptian dynasties, such as the First and Second Intermediate periods in Egyptian history (Assman 1995: 15-16).

Hence, the Egyptian royal ideology was more a 'social contract' between the monarch and his subjects; meanwhile, the Assyrian royal ideology was an absolutism monarchy with a strong military support for the coercion policy and a royal ideology of



conquest behind it. Assyria was, since the Middle Assyrian kingdom, ruled by an absolute monarchy, whose king was also the commander-in-chief of the army and he commanded campaigns, which allowed strengthen both his reputation as his mystique.

There were some Egyptian pharaohs that followed the same conquering model as the Assyrian kings such as Thutmosis III, Seti I and Ramses II, but they were exceptions, and their achievements were not the general tendency for their heirs. Furthermore, their conquests were relatively modest compared to the annual expeditions carried out by the Assyrian kings of the Middle kingdom and Neo-Assyrian Empire. Ideologically speaking, the continued expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire over other territories became part of the political structure of the State, often accompanied by extreme religious zeal, which was not present in the Egyptian context (Tadmor 1997: 327).

#### b) The Egyptian Legacy during the Third Intermediate Period and the Neo-Assyrian Empire

The Egyptian pharaoh of this period – Libyans and Kushites – only took some elements of this former royal Egyptian ideology. The Libyans, for example, adopted the theocratic form of government inherited from the former Egyptian pharaohs, which allowed them to lend divine authority to their policies. The Libyan pharaohs rescued an ancient tradition inherited from former dynasties, which associated its power to the cult of the god Amun as a pillar of the pharaonic authority.<sup>118</sup> The Libyans were very interesting in following this tradition because, such as Taylor suggests<sup>119</sup>:

During this period, the government of Egypt was in effect a theocracy, supreme political authority being vested in the god Amun himself. In a hymn to Amun on a

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<sup>118</sup> The god Atum generally represented Lower Egypt, while Upper Egypt was represented by the gods Montu or Khons. Atum was brought into having a special connection with the kingship, perhaps the association of Atum as ‘father of gods’ and his authority in Lower Egypt, by the Libyan pharaohs but the importance of Atum as the principal god was recorded during the Old Kingdom period. In later periods, the figure of the pharaoh was associated with some titles or epithets such as ‘living image of Atum’, ‘incarnation of Atum’ or ‘messenger of Atum’ (Lalouette 1991: 68 and 87-88).

<sup>119</sup> Taylor 2000: 332.

papyrus from Deir el-Bahri, which has been dubbed the ‘*credo* of the theocracy’, the god’s name is written in a cartouche and he is addressed as the superior of all the gods, the fountainhead of creation, and the true king of Egypt. The pharaohs were now merely temporal rulers who were held to be Amun’s appointees and to whom the god’s decisions were communicated via oracles.

The reason for this adoption could be that this god was worshiped in the city of Bubastis in the Delta and he was not only ‘the father of the gods’ but also the god who had ratified the concept of kingship as a legacy which could pass to a new family. Thus, the subordination to Amun amongst the Libyan rulers was a strategy of securing divine sanction as new pharaohs. However, it seems that this practice, suggested originally by the Egyptian priests of Amun, was only a strategy whose objective was originally to weaken the authority of the pharaoh and strengthen the position of the high priests of Amun. Thus, the character of the pharaoh during the Twenty-first Dynasty could be restricted only to cult purposes (Taylor 2000: 346).

What is more, the behaviour of the Libyan Twenty-second Dynasty was based more on the principle of a military power than its theocratic character. Pharaohs such as Sheshonq I were more interested in the political authority manifested in warfare and conquest than in religious or ceremonial rituals (Taylor 2000: 347). It seems that the Libyan dynasties were more interested in the consolidation of their power by such initiatives as building monuments and fighting wars. That information could be verified in the biblical narratives, which made mention of the Libyan pharaoh Sheshonq I’s conquest (I Kings 14.15 and Chronicles 12. 1-10).<sup>120</sup>

The Libyan pharaohs used several characteristics of the former Egyptian dynasties, which were manifested in costumes, fivefold royal names, art representation, religious ceremonies and formal titles such as ‘Pacifying His Two Lands’, ‘Bull of His Two

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<sup>120</sup> A good synthesis of the Sheshonq I campaign in Palestine in 926 BC is the research of Wilson (2005). The thesis of this scholar is that this campaign was aimed solely at the kingdom of Judah with the purpose of supporting king Jeroboam for ruling Israel as a separate nation. The principal evidences used by Wilson are the Hebrew Bible (such as 1 Kings 14. 25-28 and 2 Chronicle 12. 1-12), the triumphal relief of Sheshonq I at Karnak, and a fragment of a stele found at Megiddo.

Lands' or 'Ruler of Egypt' (Kitchen 1986: 369). However, the Libyan people in Egypt were never absolutely egyptianised and it seems that the different Libyan rulers never considered the idea of a unified kingdom but instead had a fragmented state such as that in the Egyptian Predynastic period.

An example of this view could be the new relevance of women in temple cults since the Twenty-first Dynasty, who occupied important roles in religious offices such as 'the first great chief of the musical troupe of Amun'. Meanwhile, during the Twenty-second Dynasty, there was the celibate 'god's wife of Amun', whose principal function was to stimulate 'the god's procreative urges, and thereby to ensure the fertility of the land and the cyclical repetition of creation' (Taylor 2000: 360). For this reason, the 'god's wife' was generally the daughter of a king or high priest installed at Thebes.<sup>121</sup>

The principal objective of this policy seems to have been the consolidation of these new Libyan dynasties, which did not have legitimate ancestors to occupy the pharaonic institution.<sup>122</sup> Taylor describes it as follows<sup>123</sup>:

The rise of the 'god's wife' coincided with the decline of the power of the high priest of Amun, and may have been promoted as a measure to solve the 'problem' of Theban secessionism, for, while the 'god's wife' enabled the distant royal house to be represented at Thebes, her celibacy meant that no sub dynasty could arise (successor being adopted).

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<sup>121</sup> The importance of these women was evident because during the period between 754 and 525 BC, there were at least one Libyan, two Kushite and two Saite women who held this title. It is a very interesting subject because, although these women had different ethnic origins, all of them shared common characteristics. In other words, all of them were daughters of kings and used this title *-sat nesou-* before the royal circle or cartouche enclosing her name as their unique identifying title (Ayad 2009: 1-3).

<sup>122</sup> A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be the importance of the priest families to support the downcast pharaonic institution during the Libyan period. According to Redford (1992: 317), the Egyptian society felt in the past a strong connection with the royal family when the monarchy was the central institution in ancient Egypt. However, with the decline of the pharaonic institution, especially in the Delta region, the members of the priesthood acquired more power amongst the common people.

<sup>123</sup> Taylor 2000:360.

Rather, they could tolerate and coexist with several kings both in Upper and Lower Egypt, adopting different patterns of ruling, generally as *primus inter pares* (Leahy 1985: 59).<sup>124</sup> Finally, when the Kushites conquered Egypt, beating the Libyan dynasties, it was evident that the Kushites never fought against a unified Libyan rule on the Delta but against a series of local potentates organised by chiefdoms with little offensive power.

The different rulers of the Kushite dynasty revealed an intention of being recognised as real pharaohs for the Egyptian people. Meanwhile, the Libyans broke the Egyptian norm of unified territory and kingship; the Kushites promoted the restoration of the old Egyptian traditions by military campaigns. For this reason, they made an attempt to display special respect for the Egyptian religion and institutions, perhaps as an ideological link with the great periods of the Egyptian past (Taylor 2007: 464-465).



Figure 3.7 Three different versions of King Taharqa: two as sphinxes and one by Winifried Brunton (Morkot 2000: 34)

They also emphasised remembrance of the Old Kingdom period using difference approaches, such as the artistic, literary and religious trends. Thus, the royal tombs in Kush were built in a pyramidal pattern and the style of their figures recalled the art of the Old

<sup>124</sup> There were two Libyan kings in the eastern Delta (Bubastis and Leontopolis) associated with the Twenty-second and Twenty-third dynasties mentioned by the Egyptian historian Manetho. There were two more in Middle Egypt (Herakleopolos and Hermopolis) and a number of chiefdoms such as Tefnakht associated with the Libyan Twenty-fourth Dynasty. Nevertheless, there were other chiefdoms of second rank such as the Prince of the West – Tefnakht – who occupied the western half of the Delta. Also, there were the four main Great Chiefs of the Ma who occupied a narrow area of the central Delta between the territories of Tefnakht and the northern Libyan pharaohs and the southeast route into the Delta (Kitchen 1986: 368).

Kingdom period, and the Kushite pharaohs such as Taharqa were portrayed as sphinxes (Figure 3.7).<sup>125</sup>

Additionally, the Kushites thought of themselves as representatives of order (*Maat*) in the country that rescued the old pharaonic ideology, although the Kushite pharaohs changed some aspects of the Egyptian kingship ideology. Redford describes this behaviour<sup>126</sup>:

After 800 BC the rich archaeological evidence shows that these chieftains were beginning to aggrandize their territory, and to fall increasingly under the influence of Egyptian civilization. Square, stone *mastabas* begin to appear at Kurru, an Egyptian form of monarchy was mimicked and the title ‘king’ adopted by chief Alara, as well as the full-fledged hieroglyphic script. It was the influence of the old, Ramesside ruins in Nubia, and in particular the temple and cult of Amun in Nubia, that informed Alara’s and his successor’s adopted culture; but it was a species of Egyptian culture that was somewhat old-fashioned and fraught with a solemn, conservative piety. Adherence to such a ‘straight-laced’ fundamentalism, always stronger in a convert, was to enhance the Kushites’ loathing of their contemporaries, the Libyan rulers of Egypt who had loose morals, showed no reverence for ancient dietary laws, and always acted perfidiously.

The Kushites also adopted a new crown, which was composed of three different elements: a cap or helmet, a gold diadem with a pair of *uraei* emerging from the front, and a pair of streamers which hung behind the cap or the diadems (Leahy 1992: 232). With respect to this crown, Mysliwiec (2000: 88) highlights that ‘the symbolism of the double crown in the iconography of the Kushites assumed a new meaning, referring no longer to the two parts of Egypt but to the two lands of Egypt and Kush. Perhaps the epithet

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<sup>125</sup> For the archaeological evidence of the Kushite period, see Leclant (1965: 331-332) and Russmann (1974: 25-26). Among the literary evidence of the Kushite military expeditions, the most famous is the Piye’s Victory Stele that describes the campaign of this Kushite king against northern Egypt, which was translated by Wente (2009: 465-492).

<sup>126</sup> Redford 1992: 344.

designating them as Lords of the Two Lands at that time had a broader meaning than just lords of Upper and Lower Egypt'.<sup>127</sup>



Figure 3.8 Prototypes of the Kushite crown ([http://www.memphis.edu/hypostyle/entrance\\_passage.htm](http://www.memphis.edu/hypostyle/entrance_passage.htm))

The same policy was used in the selection of the royal resident. The most important Kushite pharaohs such as Shabaqo, Shabito and Taharqa chose Memphis as the chief royal residence, following the example of the Egyptian pharaohs in the Old Kingdom period. Taylor (2000: 355) suggests that there was another reason for this choice, which was motivated by geopolitical interests, because any other city could be too remote geographically and it would be useless as the focus of a united Egypt.

Besides, the Kushite pharaohs developed several building works there and the royal ideology of the Kushites adopted the Memphite gods such as Nefertem and Ptah as important elements of their ritual. With respect to the mode of transmission of the kingship, the Kushites also used the former Egyptian system of patrilineal transmission, replacing it sometimes with designating the brother, as was the case with the pharaohs Piye and Shabito (Taylor 2000: 355). Moreover, the same source describes the Egyptian pharaoh as an individual who was initiated in superior secrets, which were detached from common mortals.

<sup>127</sup>An explanation for this policy could be that the Kushites associated the former Egyptian blue crown with the Libyan dynasties and for political connotations preferred to choose a new crown during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. This Kushite rejection also would explain why the Saite dynasty reverted to using the Blue Crown in a similar way because, while the Kushites avoided the Blue Crown because of its association with the conquered Libyan dynasties, the Saites preferred it because the Kushites did not (Mysliwiec 2000: 91).

The Egyptian pharaohs as the Assyrian kings were considered ‘as supreme priest, he is able to have direct contact with god, accessing his secret knowledge’ (Gozzoli 2009: 247). The Kushite pharaohs also used the concept of universal rule, which was similar to that used in Assyria. In the inundation stele of Taharqa – known as Kawa V – it is possible to read: ‘I give you the crown of the land of Nubia. I give you the four corners of the land in its entirety. I give you the good water; I give you a sky of good rain’ (Gozzoli 2009: 243; Kitchen 1986: 388).

Ayad points out a similar approach of this Egyptian universal order using a ritual of the Egyptian god Amun:<sup>128</sup>

The ritual was performed in order to assert Amun’s supreme universal authority. His rule over Egypt, *and* the entire universe, is here symbolically represented by the presence of Horus, whose authority was over Upper and Lower Egypt, and the three other deities, whose presence signified their authority over three specific localities situated to the South, East, and West of Egypt.

This quote about controlling the four coordinates of the world and the wish for expansion has many similarities with the Neo-Assyrian texts and inscriptions that emphasised the same idea of universal rule on Earth. However, it seems that the Egyptian idea used by the Kushite pharaohs – such as Room E of the edifice of Taharqa built in the Sacred Lake of Karnak (Cooney 2000: 29) – was more a rhetoric element than a real practice.

Meanwhile, the Assyrian concept of expansion implicated really the territorial expansion beyond the real borders of Assyria; the Egyptian idea looks more restricted because the sense of ‘universe’ was the land of Egypt itself. Further, the real expansion developed by both the pharaohs of the New Kingdom and those of the Kushite period was restricted merely to control two specific regions: indirect control over Palestinian cities and direct control over the region of Nubia (Figure 3.9).

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<sup>128</sup> Ayad 2007: 6.





Figure 3.9 The kingdom of Kush (<http://www.nairaland.com/1316015/somalis-ethiopians-eritreans-superior/2>)

Moreover, it is striking that the Neo-Assyrian Empire always called the Kushite pharaohs simply *sharru Kusu Musri* ('king of Kush and Egypt') or *sharru Kusu* ('king of Kush') but never *sharru Musri* ('king of Egypt'). Even the Assyrian texts, such as the military campaign of Ashurbanipal, used the old name of the Harappa civilisation – *Meluhha* – when designing the land of Kush, perhaps as a way of describing a region or country far from Assyria:

In my first campaign I marched against Egypt (Magan) and Ethiopia (Meluhha). Tirhakah (*Tarqû*), king of Egypt (*Mušur*) and Nubia (*Kûsu*), whom Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, my own father, had defeated and in whose country he (Esarhaddon) had ruled, this (same) Tirhakah forgot the might of Ashur, Ishtar and the (other) great gods, my lords, and put his trust upon his own power (...). I



called up my mighty armed forces which Ashur and Ishtar have entrusted to me and took the straight road to Egypt (*Muṣur*) and Nubia (*Kûsu*).<sup>129</sup>

Perhaps, the Neo-Assyrian Empire never identified or associated the kingdom of Kush with the original kingdom of Egypt. In other words, they were for the Assyrians only minor personalities that occupied the ancestral land of Egypt, despite the manifestation of the royal power developed by the Kushite pharaohs in the conquest of this country (Morkot 2000: 201).

#### c) The Egyptian Militarism and the Confrontation with the Neo-Assyrian Power

The Neo-Assyrian Empire based its royal ideology on the military organisation of its society and the instauration of the permanent army. This reform was inspired by the principle of an Assyrian military superiority by means of professional officers, troops and leaders over any kind of military organisation known before in the ancient Near East. In fact, the organisation and maintenance of a professional army able to carry out endeavours of conquest and submission of enemies has been a constant element in any political entity identified as imperialistic.

Nevertheless, what was the real importance of the military power in ancient Egypt? During the Old Kingdom period, every province had its own militia composed of trained men enrolled during moments of necessity. These militias recognised the pharaoh as their warlord in the city of Memphis, although the army was commanded by the vizier and it was basically infantry corp. The principal problem of this original Egyptian army was that their militias tended to be more loyal to their respective *nomos* at the expense of national interests. For this reason, it was common during this period for pharaohs to have already recruited mercenaries from Libya and Nubia to provide a larger army that preserved the kingdom (Wise 1981: 14).

Only during the Middle kingdom period, the pharaohs of Thebes were more interested in organising a 'national army' whose components were native Egyptians,

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<sup>129</sup> Oppenheim 1969: 294.

reducing the number of foreign mercenaries. These soldiers were isolated from the common Egyptian population and received designations such as ‘those who live in the army’ or ‘followers of His Majesty’ (Wise 1981: 15). However, this national Egyptian army was still restricted to basically infantry in units whose numbers ranged from 100 to 3,000 soldiers. According to Wise (1981: 16), in the peak of the Middle Kingdom period, the Egyptian standard army probably never exceeded 10,000 to 13,000 soldiers, divided into two divisions of 5,000 soldiers that were more royal bodyguards.

Nevertheless, this Egyptian national army was able to resist the foreign invasion of the neither Hyksos or against the new warfare tactics developed during the Bronze Age such as the chariot, scale armour and the composite bow. All of this warfare was adopted with the instauration of the New Kingdom period but it seems that even after the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt the national army still remained a small one with only two divisions during the reign of the pharaoh Haremheb (1340-1320 BC), adding one more during the reign of Seti I (1318-1298 BC) and a fourth division during the reign of Ramses II (1279-1218 BC).

According to the estimation of Wise (1981: 16-17), based on the military expedition of Thutmose III to Megiddo and Ramses II in Kadesh, the number of soldiers during the New Kingdom period in peacetime was 10,000 soldiers, and 20,000 soldiers in wartime. Furthermore, there were about 20,000 reservists for any emergency, who were called up to protect the country while the official army was away. This ‘imperial’ army of the New Kingdom was still composed of infantry, of which the numbers were gradually reduced in order to improve important units of chariots, which was the base of the warfare tactics of many kingdoms of the Bronze Age (Fields 2006).

Some scholars, such as Pascal Vernus (2011: 175-197), tend to attribute the ‘Egyptian empire’ to this period of approximately five hundred years from the Eighteenth Dynasty until the Twentieth Dynasty (1580-1085 BC), which is associated with the New Kingdom period. Generally, scholars call this period ‘empire’ because Egypt reached the peak of its power and influence by its territorial expansion in the context of the ancient

Near East with military expeditions to Nubia and Palestine and the final clash with the Hittite kingdom in Syria.

In effect, the beginning of this 'Egyptian empire' has a strong relationship with the development of the national army of native Egyptians, which was capable of expelling the Hyksos from Egypt. In addition to this, the 'imperial' Egyptian army started a series of military conquests outside of the natural borders of Egypt. These conquests allowed them to grab lands, slaves, raw materials and different kinds of booty for rewarding to veteran soldiers, officers and temples (Schulman 1964: 51-69). In this approach, the Egyptian religion and the militarism share a common ideology during the New Kingdom period because the wars of the Egyptian kingdom and the principal manifest are in the reliefs of the temples and palaces, specifically the representation of the "killed enemy" by the pharaohs (Assmann 1995: 50-51).

Nevertheless, any comparison between the Neo-Assyrian and the Egyptian armies to explain the similarities and differences between both military entities requires a more critical analysis. First, it is true that during the New Kingdom period Egypt had a large and more professional army in comparison with those in the preceding Old and Middle Kingdom periods (Kemp 1992: 287). However, the levels of impact, professionalism and battle experience were not better than other Bronze Age kingdoms. Second, the level of conquests made by the Egyptian New Kingdom army was much reduced: punitive expeditions against rebel cities in Palestine (Stern 2001: 228-235), the conquest and later abandonment of Nubia (Yurco 2001: 81-89) and the famous but indecisive battle in Kadesh against another powerful kingdom, the Hittites.

Kemp (1992: 288) also considers that Egypt during the New Kingdom could adopt new warfare and military techniques but it was unable to resist any foreign powers because it adhered to the outdated military technology of the Bronze Age period. It seems that the Egyptian army was not a match for the seasoned warriors that attacked it from Libya, Kush and finally Assyria. Thus, for about half of the Third Intermediate period, the country kept its independence, but that was often due to a reliance on foreign mercenaries

who had adopted the new warfare methods of the Iron Age. To sum up, militarism seems never to have been a characteristic of the Egyptian state (Kemp 1992: 289-290).

Finally, another problem that affected the Egyptian army that needs to be considered was the strong dependence on mercenary troops during the three periods of the Egyptian kingdoms. The Egyptians, like the Medes in Assyria and the Germans in Rome, recruited foreign ethnicities as military corps as private royal guards, border police and auxiliary troops, and indeed they occupied a high position in the Egyptian administration. In comparison with this demonstration of strength, ancient Egypt was historically weak in presenting a strong military resistance against their enemies.

Thus, Egypt did not have a national army but depended on mercenaries as the Libyans in the north and Kushites in the south. Both peoples seemed to have assumed their roles later as protectors but they in the end became the true conquerors of Egypt. The Libyan pharaohs, for example, exercised both civil and military functions, although they were prouder about the second one. Indeed, they adopted the title 'first (one) or leader', which is similar to the later Roman imperial *dux* or military leader (Redford 1992: 316).

Moreover, the sons of these leaders got military ranks and the soldiers of every Libyan ruler were bound to the chief by a feudal system which gave plots of land in exchange for military service and loyalty. One of the best exponents of the Libyan period was the pharaoh Sheshonq I (943-922 BCE), who had the principal objective of restoring the unity in Egypt, invading Palestine with the object of reasserting the former Egyptian power and prestige in this region by a military expedition in 925 BC (1 Kings 14. 25-26). The geopolitical success of this expedition was the commercial contact by the reopening of relations with Byblos (Taylor 2000: 336).

Another military structure of the Libyan period was the building of fortresses during the Twenty-first Dynasty. These fortresses were concentrated on the east bank of the Nile in northern Egypt, specifically in el-Hiba, Sheikh Mubarek and Tehna. The objective of these buildings was to become strongholds that allowed control of the Nile river traffic and prevented any local insurrections. This policy of military construction could be compared with the building of fortresses developed by the Neo-Assyrian Empire described

in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, Taylor made a critical assessment of these kinds of Libyan buildings:<sup>130</sup>

The relatively unadventurous foreign policy of Egypt's rulers in the Third Intermediate Period can be seen as the logical counterpart to the internal situation. Under a progressively decentralized regime, and with a substantial part of the available military force required to keep order within Egypt, the concentration of military effort and economic resources necessary to pursue a consistent policy abroad probably could not be achieved.

An example of this spoiled foreign policy developed by the Libyan dynasties was when King Hoshea of Israel decided to cease the tribute to the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 725-726 BC and asked the Libyan pharaoh Osorkon IV for help, the king of Tanis and Bubastis, who is identified in the Hebrew Bible as 'So, king of Egypt' (2 Kings 17. 4).<sup>131</sup> It seems that the Libyan pharaoh sent one of his army commanders, Re'e, who was named in a Neo-Assyrian report as *tartanu* KUR *Muṣuri*, with the objective of supporting a general rebellion against the Neo-Assyrian power in Palestine, who was beaten by the Assyrians (Morkot 2000: 127).<sup>132</sup>

On the other hand, the Kushites, who conquered Egypt, were comparatively different from the Libyans because they had an older legacy of warrior traditions and military skills. According to Redford (1992: 286), the Kushites inaugurated a new period in Egyptian history because it was the first time that Egypt was incorporated into a foreign empire, even if it came from inner Africa. The fundamental basis of the Kushite dynasties

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<sup>130</sup> Taylor 2000:350.

<sup>131</sup> There is an academic discussion about the identity of So. Morkot (2000: 126) and Kitchen (1986: 373) suggest that he could be Shabako, acting on behalf of Kashta or Piye, or perhaps equated So with *Sau* (Sais) or with a ruler in the eastern Delta called Osorkon IV ([O]so[rkon]).

<sup>132</sup> The fast defeat of the Palestinian kingdoms and their allied Egyptian forces, besides the advance of the Assyrian army less than 120 miles away from Tanis and the border-front of Sile, changed the Libyan perspective against this new and dangerous neighbour. For this reason, they avoided any confrontation with the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Kitchen 1986: 376). The Assyrian records report that in 716 BC an Egyptian ruler called 'Shilkanni' sent his tributes to the Assyrian king: 45 horses from Egypt and 23 from Gaza.

was a more evident exercise of military power that allowed them to conquer all of the Egyptian territory and subjugate the Libyan dynasties in the Delta region.

Morkot (2000: 44) believes that the role of the Nubian region was to export not only luxury items to Egypt but also soldiers and troops for the Egyptian state: ‘Nubian soldiers played an important role in the Egyptian armies in many later phases of Egyptian history, and they may also have played a part in the armies which brought about the united Egyptian state’. Indeed, Yurco (2001: 37) points out that the Sixth Dynasty was the first in using Nubians as mercenaries and several Egyptian officers used the title of ‘overseer of mercenaries or interpreters’ of Nubians. This policy was also continued by later Egyptian dynasties (Figure 3.9).



Figure 3.10 Reproduction of Nubian soldiers found in the tomb of a provincial governor in the 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Mesehti in Asyut ([http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/cairo%20museum/cm,%20models/pages/egyptian\\_museum\\_cairo\\_5010.htm](http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/cairo%20museum/cm,%20models/pages/egyptian_museum_cairo_5010.htm))

During the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, the Nubians were still considered because of their military skills as archers in the Egyptian army, being

recruited and released depending on the circumstances. Yurco (2001: 48) believed that the Nubian corps that came back to Nubia returned home somewhat Egyptianised.<sup>133</sup>

The body of evidence rescued from archaeological finds, such as the existence of Kushite ceramics across the Nile and the building of fortresses close to the Nile River, would suggest that the Kushites also had great military strength in their river fleet. Moreover, during the New Kingdom, the province of Nubia had its own military force known as ‘the battalion of Kush’, under the command of the Egyptian vizier (Yurco 2001: 67 and 78).

According to Gardiner (1911), the Papyrus Anastasi I, from the Ramesside period ([http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/texts/anastasi\\_i.htm](http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/texts/anastasi_i.htm)), reports that one Egyptian division was composed of 5,000 soldiers, of which 880 or 18% were from Nubia. This estimate would support that in the four division standards during the Ramesside period there were about 3,500 Nubian soldiers in the Egyptian army. There is also evidence from the tombs of the Kushites who served in the Egyptian army found at Nubia, which contained weapons and jewellery, which would suggest that they were licensed troops that came back to Nubia (Yurko 2001: 86-88).

Taylor (2000: 354) mentions that the devotion of the Kushite pharaoh Piye’s troops ‘to their master is constantly stressed in the text of his triumphal stele, and physical prowess and military training were held to be of importance both to the rulers themselves and to their soldiers’. Also, Taharqa is portrayed fighting in person during the battle of Eltekeh (701 BC) or doing a military exercise in the desert between Memphis and the Faiyum (Shea 1997: 184-186).

Meanwhile, the Assyrian sources mentioned the king of Kush as the person in command of his respective army during battles when they attacked Egypt. The Assyrian

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<sup>133</sup> A similar policy was used by the population of the eastern desert identified as *Medja* who were employed as soldiers, mercenaries or police in the territory of Egypt. Indeed, the term ‘*wer Madjayu*’ was used for the ‘chief of police’ during the New Kingdom period (Morkot 2000: 84-85). According to Yurko (2001: 88), these *Medja* were from the Nubian Desert, were government employees and obtained at the end of their service payment and bonuses because many of them got battlefield awards for bravery.

sources also made mention of foreign units of chariots and cavalry that were taken prisoner and served in the Assyrian army itself after the conquest of Egypt. This is information that was rescued from the *Rassam Cylinder* translated by Grayson and Novotny<sup>134</sup>:

Formed a confederation with the kings of Egypt (and) the archers, chariots, (and) horses of the king of the land Meluhha (= Kush), forces without number, and they came to their aid. In the plain of the city Eltekeh, they sharpened their weapons while drawing up in battle-line before me. With the support of the god Aššur, my lord, I fought with them and defeated them. I capture alive in the heat of battle the charioteers and sons of the Egyptian kings with the charioteers of the king of the land of Meluhha (= Kush).

According to an article by Stephanie Dalley (1985: 31-48), there are several reports about ‘Kushite horses’ used exclusively in chariots, especially as booty after the military expeditions to Egypt by Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal and also some terms or concepts for an Assyrian harnessing, which was called ‘Kushite’. Another possibility with this evidence could be that the Kushites were breeding and exporting horses for military purposes several years before the clash between Taharqa and Assyria (Heidorn 1997: 106-107).

Kahn (2004: 109) associated the Kushite period of Egypt, and particularly the reign of the pharaoh Taharqa (690-664 BC), as the climax of the Kushite domination of Egypt and also when Egypt became again a great power in the ancient Near East. It seems that Taharqa wished for both the restoration of the Egyptian power and the cultural renovation of Egypt under the command of Kush. Thus, Taharqa developed a huge ‘empire’ from the Mediterranean Sea until the modern Khartoum.

Notwithstanding, it seems that the Kushite army never was able to control absolutely its own native land and less keeping ancient Egypt unified for a long period of time. A historical explanation for this situation could be that the Kushite rulers had to adapt and tolerate a tradition of decentralised administration since the period of the Libyan

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<sup>134</sup> Grayson and Novotny 2012: 43-45.



dynasties (Taylor 2000: 354). Mysliwieck believes (2000: 57) this disaggregation was an advantage for any ambitious empire that would propose to initiate a process of conquest:

It is quite clear that in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, there was no longer an Egypt consisting of ‘Two Lands’. Rather, there were many princedoms, united primarily by fear of one another. There were two military superpowers threatening Egypt from the south and the north: Kush and Assyria. These two powers would decide the fate of Egypt during the century to follow. They regarded the delta and the valley of Egypt as a huge gaming board with pieces in the form of vassals at odds with one another.

The importance of the Neo-Assyrian conquest of Egypt is highlighted in the Assyrian sources more than in the Egyptian ones because they gave complete details about the military campaigns and the later administration of the country. According to Zamazalová (2011: 298-299), both groups of sources sometimes disagree and it is necessary to try to find the cause of these divergences because between 750 BC and 650 BC, there were two great powers – Assyria and Kush – which tried to control Western Asia, and this is the same period as that of the Biblical prophets and their writings.

Redford (1992: 338) provides an illustration of the real impact of the Neo-Assyrian Empire during this period. He considers that the year 745 BC might be considered of importance for the historical evolution of the ancient Near East as the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the crossing of the Hellespont by Alexander in 333 BC and the victory of Octavian at Actium in 31 BC were. In 745 BC, there was a civil war in the Neo-Assyrian Empire and a general –Tiglath-pileser III – became king and he was able to change the scene of the ancient Near East by a series of aggressive and victorious military campaigns (Figure 3.11).

Redford (1992: 341) also considers him ‘to be an organizational genius and a master strategist, worthy of comparison with Hannibal or Scipio’. Redford supports his view with the countless military campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III, through which he destroyed the kingdoms of Damascus, Samaria or Israel, Urartu, Ullubu and Kullanu. Indeed, Tiglath-pileser III changed the political scenery of the region with the liquidation of all the Palestinian states on the border of Egypt. As Redford (1992: 343) says: ‘while from

732 to 725 BC the Assyrians were occupied elsewhere, it was but the calm before the storm. It may well have looked to observers on the Nile that Assyria considered expansion into Africa its *manifest destiny*.

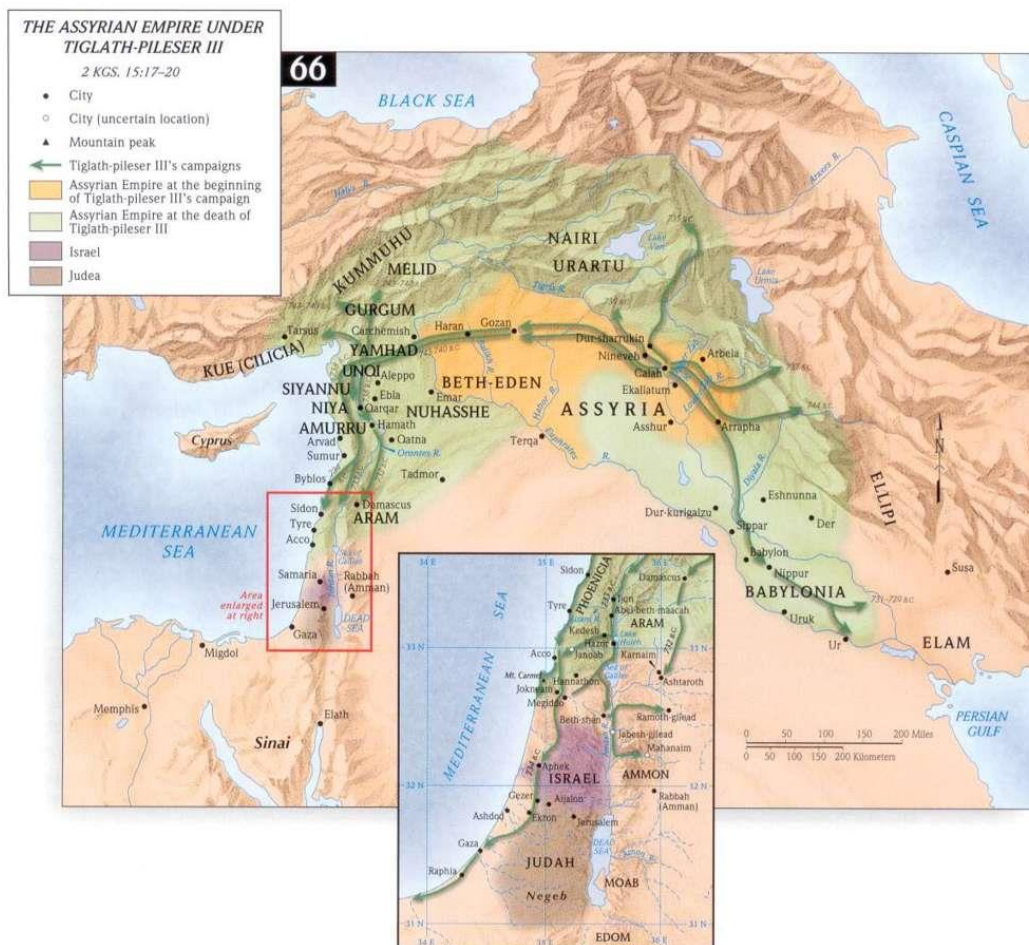


Figure 3.11 Assyrian military expedition of Tiglath-pileser III (<http://www.4shared.com/all-images/d>)

The analysis by Redford is supported by the approach of Morkot (2000: 123), who believes that the key to the success of Tiglath-pileser III was to make military campaigns every year of his eighteen years of reign (745-727 BC), reorganising the Assyrian army, adding mercenary foot soldiers, divisions of chariots and cavalry. However, there was another important detail: the Assyrian army had developed an extensive military reform

with the advantage of the use and production of iron weapons, while the Kushites still used tactics inherited from the period of the Bronze Age (Figure 3.12).<sup>135</sup>



Figure 3.12 Classical representations of Kushite archers, compared with an Assyrian infantry soldier in a historical illustration by Angus McBride (Wise 1981: Plate A)

Morkot (2000: 289) also believes that chariot warfare was still the norm in Egypt during the Assyrian invasion and neither the Libyans nor the Kushites considered the use of cavalry on a large scale as the Assyrians did. Additionally, the body of evidence rescued from reliefs carved in the Assyrian palaces would demonstrate that the Assyrian siege apparatus was the most important tactic employed by the Assyrians. On the other hand, it seems that the Egyptians themselves (including Libyans and Kushites) never were sophisticated enough in their siege tactics and tried to avoid this tactic. Indeed, Stern (2001: 107) mentions the problematic Egyptian siege of the Palestinian city of Ashdod, which lasted 29 years (!).

The first direct confrontation between the Assyrians and Kushite Egypt was in 702-701 BC, when the Kushite pharaohs Shabako and Shabataka (or Shebitku) changed the

<sup>135</sup> Petrie (1897) excavated the temple of the queen Tawosret on the west bank at Thebes. In his report of 1896, he relates that he found a large group of iron tools and some bronze objects. The iron weapons were not Egyptian so it could be possible they were Assyrian weapons used during the occupation of this city. Besides, there was an Assyrian helmet which would corroborate this fact.

foreign policy, adopting a more aggressive one in Western Asia (Baer 1973: 7-25).<sup>136</sup> Zamazalová (2011: 314) describes this political situation:

The potential for open conflict between the two entities escalated as a result of two factors. Firstly, Tiglath-Pileser III's change in policy, namely his integration of conquered territories into the Assyrian empire as provinces under the direct control of Assyrian governors, increased Assyria's hold on the territories on the outskirts of its empire and brought it closer to Egypt. Secondly, Shabako's reversal of Egypt's political fragmentation placed Egypt in a position to try and revive its military heritage and become a significant player in western Asia again, thus bringing the Egyptian and Assyrian kings within striking distance of one another.

For this reason, he sent a military expedition under the command of his brother Taharqa to support some Palestinian cities against a new rebellion against the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Shea 1997: 182). Nevertheless, in a clear manifestation of the Assyrian military organisation, the Assyrian king Sennacherib defeated the confederates, taking Eltekeh, Timmah, Ekron and Lachish, and besieged Jerusalem. Later, Sennacherib reorganised his troops to deal with the Kushite troops in Philistia, forcing the retreat of Taharqa homewards to Egypt.

When the Kushites suffered this humiliation, they were very cautious about provoking Assyria militarily at the beginning. An example of this policy is described by Kitchen (1986: 380) as a momentary strategy because both Assyria and the Kushite

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<sup>136</sup> There is a problem in the chronology of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty with respect to the dates and the succession of the Kushite pharaohs. Nevertheless, an Assyrian inscription of Sargon II at Tang-I Var (Iran) dated to 706 BC would suggest an order of succession. This inscription celebrates the military victories of Sargon II in Palestine and it mentions 'šapataku, king of the land of Meluhha'. This character has been identified with Shabataka or Shebitku, the successor of Shabako who acceded to the Kushite throne in around 702 BC. However, there are some doubts about the political relationship between them because it seems that they shared co regency of the kingdom or perhaps they divided the government of Kush and Egypt separately (Zamazalová 2011: 320; Frame 1999: 52-54; Yurco 1991: 35-45). Nevertheless, the French scholar Payraudeau has doubts about the line of succession between Shabako and Shabataka because he thinks that Shabako ruled before Shabataka (Payraudeau 2014: 115-127).

Egyptian king Shabako had a common interest in the region of Palestine, with the king trying to maintain ‘friendly or at least neutral relations with Assyria, whatever sympathies he may have had for the pretty Palestinian states that stood as a buffer between him and Assyrian power’.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the Kushite pharaohs saw the Neo-Assyrian Empire as a new threat for both Egyptian interests in the Syro Palestine region and the Kushite kingdom itself. What is more, Egypt and particularly the Delta region became a site of refuge for many rebellious leaders from Palestine who organised complots against the Assyrian rule. Indeed, Morkot (2000: 203) believes that the existence of Nubian warriors in Palestine is unquestionable during this event, even if the Kushite pharaoh was not directly involved in the rebellion against Assyria.

Mysliwicz (2000: 105-106) attempts to explain the reason for Taharqa’s policy:

Taharqa conducted an active, even aggressive foreign policy. Perhaps he felt compelled to do so by the growing power and imperialism of Assyria. Nevertheless, he made a mistake common to all political megalomaniacs, especially the rulers of large but heterogeneous empires: he overestimated his own power and underestimated that of his opponent. He also failed to foresee that his successors might be a figure of lesser stature, unsuited to the military challenges he would be obliged to face.

Important evidence comes from the V room of the Neo-Assyrian palace of Dur Sharrukin (Reade 1976: 99-102). In this room was carved a battle scene, which could have been inspired by one of the Neo-Assyrian conquests in Palestine, specifically during the siege and destruction of the cities of Ekron and Gibbethon in 720 BC. Some of the defending soldiers were portrayed with a Negroid appearance such as the classical Sudanese corps that fought in the Egyptian armies during the New Kingdom period (Figure 3.13). For this reason, it is possible to identify them as Kushite soldiers dispatched as auxiliary forces, sent from Egypt to support the Palestine cities against the Neo-Assyrian aggression (Redford 1992: 348).

Thus, after defeating the forces of Taharqa in Palestine, the Neo-Assyrian Empire dominated the whole Syro Palestinian region and the Negev, so it was the time of the final confrontation against Egypt (Kitchen 1986: 391). The first Neo-Assyrian invasion of Egyptian territory was in 674 BC, when the troops of Esarhaddon crossed north Sinai, but they were defeated on the eastern frontier of the Delta. The reason for this unexpected defeat could be that the Assyrians chose the wrong path for invading Egypt: they followed the traditional ‘Way of the land of the Philistines’, which ended in the well-fortified frontier station of Sile (Redford 1992: 359).<sup>42</sup>

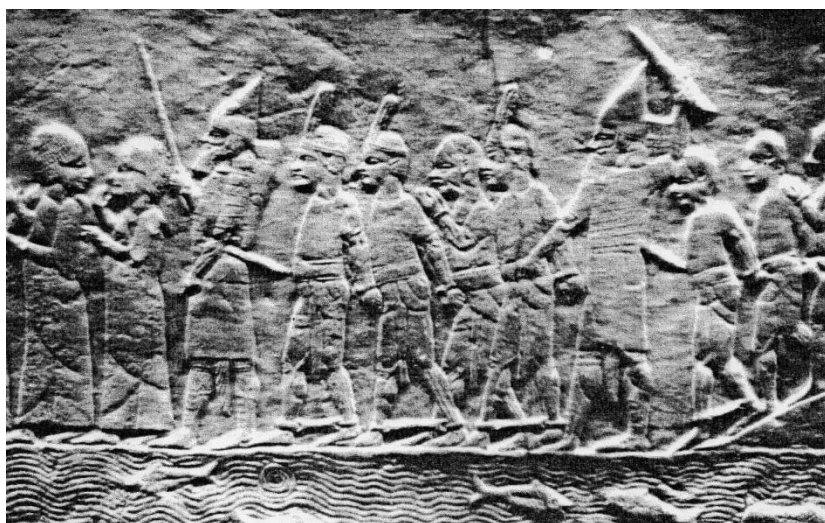


Figure 3.13 Kushite prisoners of the Assyrian troops after the destruction of the cities of Ekron and Gibbethon in 720 BC (Redford 1992: 363)

Nevertheless, Esarhaddon came back in 671 BC following a different route further south, which was supported by Arab tribes, who provided the logistics of water and camels. Stern (2001: 296) considers that only the Arabs had the resources and the experience of handling such matters. In this way, ‘they became an essential factor in the success of the Assyrian campaign into Egypt, and there is no doubt that they were granted a favourable

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<sup>42</sup> The principal route from Egypt led along the coast through the Desert of Sinai and it was difficult to cross because it was almost waterless. The fortress of Sile was built on both sides of a channel that connected Lake Manzaleh with Lake Ballah, and it was the principal impediment for accessing a net of small stations at oases and wells (Morkot 2000: 124).

position within the Assyrian administrative and military organization in the days of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal'.<sup>137</sup>

Another scholar, Eph'al (1986: 96), is more explicit with respect to the Arab support for the Assyrians, because he considers that the Assyrian professional army was very small in comparison with the huge extension of the borders and territories that they had to defend. In addition, there was strategic trade in the south of Palestine, which involved the Arabian trade of species across the desert. For this reason, the Assyrian kings decided to incorporate different Arab tribes within the administrative and military organisation of the western part of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Radner 2008: 307-308). Indeed, some of the leaders of these Arab tribes obtained official recognition as 'guards to the gates of Egypt' (Stern 2001: 296).

With this strategic support, Esarhaddon was able to surprise and defeat the Kushite troops of Taharqa, who fled from Memphis southward. A description of the events is detailed by Esarhaddon in his stele from Lebanon<sup>138</sup>:

From the town of Ishhupri as far as Memphis, his royal residence, a distance of 15 days (march), I fought daily, without interruption, very bloody battles against Tirhakah (*Tarqû*), king of Egypt and Ethiopia, the one accursed by all the great gods. Five times I hit him with the point of (my) arrows (inflicting) wounds (from which he should) not recover, and (then) I led siege to Memphis, his royal residence, and conquered it in half a day by means of mines, breaches and assault ladders; I destroyed (it), tore down (its walls) and burnt it down. His queen, the women of his palace, Ushanahuru, his heir apparent, his other children, his possessions, horses, large and small cattle beyond counting, I carried away as

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<sup>137</sup> This policy had been used before by Sargon II, who wanted to control both the Syro Palestine region and the eastern border of Egypt in 716 BC. Thus, Sargon II named the leader of one nomad tribe of the region as 'sheikh of the city of Laban', with the objective of guarding southern Palestine and northern Sinai. Furthermore, Sargon strategically opened the 'sealed-off harbour of Egypt' in el-Arish to control the route from Gaza through Repeh, el-Arish, Migdol and Tjel (Eph'al 1982: 93).

<sup>138</sup> Oppenheim 1969: 293.

booty to Assyria. All Ethiopians I deported from Egypt –leaving not even one to do homage (to me).

The Neo-Assyrian Empire did not tolerate other insurrections in Egypt instigated by Kushites and tried to stop these people from coming back to the Delta region. Nevertheless, it is evident that the Kushite army was not a real opponent for the Assyrian army and Assyrian kings such as Ashurbanipal knew this. The military conquest of the Syro Palestine region by the Assyrians could have motivated a general feeling of superiority amongst the Assyrians. According to Redford (1992: 359), the last skirmishes with the Kushites in Palestine ‘might have suggested to Esarhaddon that the Kushites were no mean adversaries, and that they too could acquit themselves well, at least when not blinded by the dazzle of their own propaganda’.

Another quote from Russman (2001: 113) is equally critical: ‘The kingdom of Kush furnishes a classic example of a successor state: a barbarian people assuming the mantle and the burdens of empire from the hands of their former overlords’. Indeed, when the heir of Taharqa, Tantamani or Tanwetamani, tried to invade again north onwards, Ashurbanipal only sent a small army in 663 BC – Assyria had a more dangerous problem with the kingdom of Elam, which was its priority – to beat him, plunder Thebes and put an end to the Kushite Twenty-fifth Dynasty.

The event of this military campaign was also recorded by Ashurbanipal himself<sup>139</sup>:

In my second campaign I marched directly against Egypt (*Muṣur*) and Nubia, URdamane [Tantamani] heard of the approach of my expedition (only when) I had (already) set foot on Egyptian territory. He left Memphis and fled into Thebes to save his life. The kings, governors, and regents whom I had installed in Egypt came to meet me and kissed my feet. I followed URdamane [Tantamani] (and) went as far as Thebes, his fortress. He saw my mighty battle array approaching,

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<sup>139</sup> Oppenheim 1969: 295.



left Thebes and fled to Kipkipi. Upon a trust (inspiring) oracle of Aššur and Ishtar I, myself, conquered this town completely.

In other words, the political and military situation of the Delta region was restricted to mention different pharaohs over different parts of Egypt from Aswan to the Mediterranean Sea. Indeed, Assyrian sources identified the ‘chiefdoms’ of Egypt, Gaza, Judah, Moab and Ammon. Nevertheless, there was not enough Assyrian evidence about the inner situation of Egypt during the Libyan period or about the forthcoming Kushite conquest of the country, or this episode was not considered as politically or militarily important by the Assyrians.

### **3. Ancient Egypt and the Neo-Assyrian Imperial Core**

There is a special relationship between empires and markets, which is an expression of economic development. Indeed, empires have depended on the circulation of products, people and money across their territories as the policy of future development, as the extensive control of extraterritorial markets from an imperial centre, or, put differently, as a structure of economic exploitation of a colonial periphery by a metropolitan core.

In the case of this confrontation between Egypt and the Neo-Assyrian Empire, there was a common factor of economic interest for both of them: the strategic corridor of the Syro Palestine region. Thus, it is necessary to evaluate how this region was administrated by both political entities and which were the principal consequences with respect to the metropolitan core from this periphery and how the Neo-Assyrian Empire finished absorbing Egypt into its centre.

#### **a) The Egyptian Order and its Personal Global Context**

Ancient Egypt was a kingdom geopolitically isolated from ancient times. The eastern and western desert borders of Egypt were not able to support the development of agriculture or herding of animals. Nevertheless, both desert sides were important for their resources: metal and stones in the eastern area and copper and semiprecious stones,

such as turquoise, on the west of Sinai since the archaic periods (Gophna 1987: 13-22). It could be considered that the region of Sinai was the Egyptian ‘buffer zone’, which separated Egypt from the states of the Syro Palestine region and Asia (Zamazalová 2011: 302).

Ancient Egypt was also a society where their communities shared a communicative life force called *ka*, which passed from the creator god to the king, similar to a legacy from a parent to their child (Assmann 1995: 29). This transmission was organised as a hierarchy of embedded households, where the pharaoh represented the ‘greatest house’ in a similar pattern to the Mesopotamian system of *oikos* (Assmann 1995: 19-20) analysed in the first chapter: ‘In Egypt the household provided the model and vehicle for all forms of social and political organization [thus] the life force, while residing discretely in each and every person, was characterised by its transferability and communality’ (Lehner 2000: 70).

In the case of Egypt, the larger households were established for temples, which held portfolios of usufruct rights to land, and these temples or larger households were scattered over the land of Egypt. They organised production at the local level – the Egyptian *nomos* – according to a hierarchy of cultivators, holders and administrators (Lehner 2000: 72; Lalouette 1991: 44-45). Therefore, despite the pharaoh being the political ruler and the high priest of the temples of Egypt as a divine incarnation, in the real operation of ancient Egyptian society, he did not intervene in local mechanisms of production: loan payments, cattle sales, division of fields and general production (Figure 3.14). Nevertheless, the pharaoh had an important role in protecting the poor and weak against the abuses of the local rulers (Assmann 1995: 30).<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> It seems that ancient Egyptians organised their society in a similar pattern to that in the premodern Muslim period, when the village was the basic unit of economic production in agrarian terms. Thus, the villages constituted units that were traditionally autonomous, which preserved their own land records, inheritances and tributes organised by their principal local families generally organised by conceals (Lehner 2000: 82).

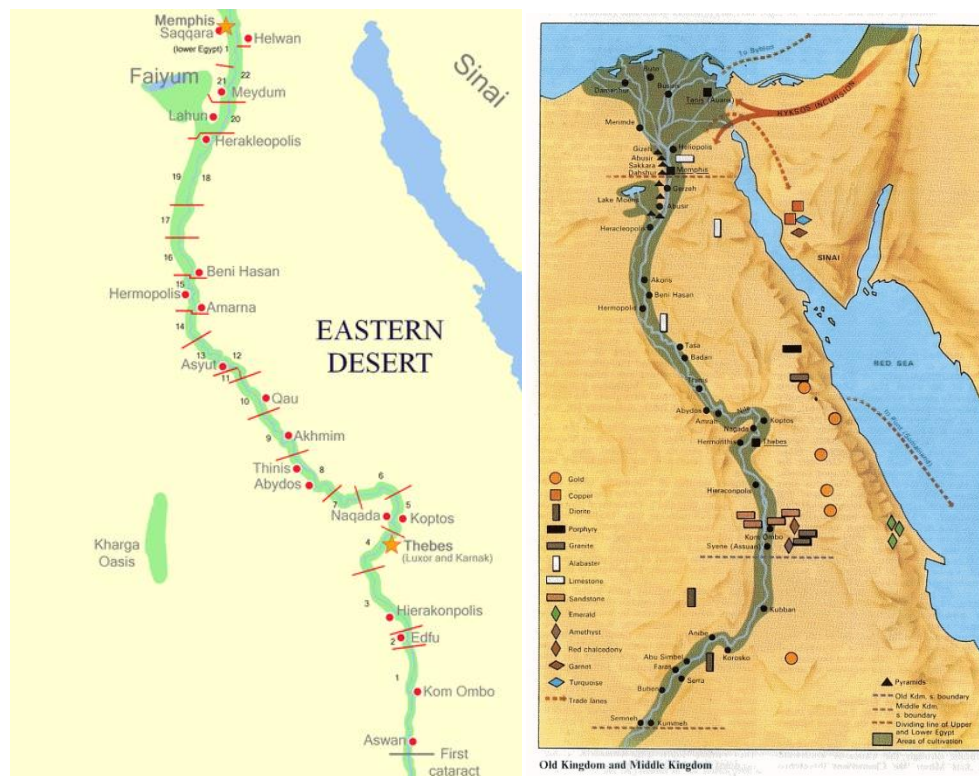


Figure 3.14 Distribution of Egyptian *nomos* and a map of the resources of the country (<http://egiptomaniacos.top-forum.net/t119p30-mapas-y-planos>)

In others words, Egypt could definitely have been a highly centralised structure supported by a strong royal ideology, which was very similar to that in the Neo-Assyrians' case. However, the real power of the Egyptian pharaoh was not the theological fiction as a divine being or his military power but his control of the machinery of government and the bureaucracy (Kemp 1992: 141-150). Therefore, the Egyptian pharaonic ideology also was backed by a highly decentralised and locally controlled infrastructure because the performance of the Egyptian kingdom was 'an order too large and too complex at the local level for central control to be able to react swiftly enough to the most seriously threatening changes in its conditions' (Lehner 2000: 89).

A brief synthesis of the Egyptian administration would be to divide it based on its activity and its geography. There were official departments such as the royal treasure and the royal granary, which operated through Egypt, but the country was also divided into administrative districts with their own organs of local administration (conceals or temples),

although they were subordinates to the central government (Assmann 1995: 17-18). Nevertheless, there were no officers who could exercise authority in every part of the country or in all the departments of the government at the same time. Ancient Egypt historically always was a country longer than it was wide due to its dependence on the Nile River valley. Indeed, one type of important officer, the *vizier*, could only perform their role in line with the geographical location under their rule: Upper Egypt, Lower Egypt and later the region of Kush (Bárta 2013: 152-172).

This geographical limitation also had repercussions on the political authority because ancient Egypt was effectively an autocratic and complex bureaucracy highly centralised, although this order depended also on the decentralisation and autonomy of their provinces, as in the Assyrian model. This contradiction allowed the appearance of contradictions or conflict of interests amongst different elements of the bureaucracy – officers, military commanders and priests – which were used by the pharaohs consciously in order to strengthen whatever dynasty happened to be ruling from time to time (Moreno García 2013: 9-11).

This could be the explanation for why Egyptian history can be divided into periods when the kingdom was united because the pharaoh was at the top of a hierarchy of embedded households with their respective patronage and influence in the production of resources. Meantime, in periods of economic crises, the pharaonic institution declined because the different conflicts predominant amongst the *nomos* or by the hegemonic dispute between Upper and Lower Egypt (Moreno García 2013: 13). Notwithstanding, it seems that during these periods of disseverance, the local hierarchies survived as ‘states in miniature’ with reciprocal obligations between the local rulers and their dependants. For this reason, Maisels (2010: 173) believes that the Egyptian kingdom had a similar pattern to the kingships developed in Medieval Europe.

To sum up, when Egypt entered the Third Intermediate Period, it had lost its national task to consolidate the country’s economy as a guarantee of their independence and establish a sustainable policy. This fosters a conclusion that the kingdom failed not as a result of the force of invaders but because of weaknesses in the policies themselves, but

more recently because of its own political weakness that led to it being conquered by foreign powers.

b) Egypt and the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Syro Palestine region

Egypt always considered the Palestinian region as a natural extension of its political, economic and cultural influences. Indeed, there is a similarity between the phenomenon of colonies developed by Uruk and later by Assyria, as described in Chapter 1, with respect to the colonial process developed by Egypt in Palestine in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. However, there is an important difference: it seems that the Egyptian process of colonisation was modest in comparison to that in Mesopotamia.

The Egyptian colonisation was only a series of modest settlements between 'En Besor in the north of Sinai and the Yarkon River (Aubet 2007: 236). Perhaps these colonies never had a geopolitical objective of military control but a peaceful mechanism for getting raw materials and products from Palestine during the First Dynasty, these colonies being abandoned in around 2900 BC. The later contact between ancient Egypt and the Syro Palestine region was restricted to international interchange with some specific harbour cities such as Byblos, which were known as *kpn* by Egyptians or *Kupna*.

This city had important resources for the pharaonic court because of its timber – indispensable material for coffins, columns, ships, and the roofs of the burial chambers – the agricultural products coming from the valley of Beqaa in Syria and the contact with the Mesopotamian region. Besides, since the Fourth Dynasty, the majority of the Palestinian ceramics found in Egypt came from Byblos (Aubet 2007: 224 and 241).<sup>141</sup>

During the Twelfth Dynasty, Byblos became the first connection between the Egyptian kingdom and the Syro Palestine region with respect to the sources of metal

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<sup>141</sup> The evidence found in Byblos demonstrates that almost every pharaoh sent gifts to the rulers of Byblos, especially grants to the temple of Baalat Gebal, which was identified by the Egyptians as a representation of the goddess Hathor (Aubet 2007: 254). This Egyptian goddess was originally from the Delta region because of her association with the papyrus plant and her sovereignty over all the countries that imported richness and resources to Egypt, being the goddess par excellence. Indeed, during the New Kingdom, there is a mention of Thutmose III, about a new temple to Hathor edified in Byblos (Aubet 2007: 285).

imported from Anatolia and the Mediterranean coast. According to Aubet (2007: 264), the number of small statues and weapons made of bronze could be proof that there was an important metallurgical factory in Byblos, which was corroborated by an Egyptian inscription of the pharaoh Amenemhet I.

This relationship of dependence between Egypt and Byblos would explain the impact of the Egyptian culture inside the royal family of Byblos. During the Thirteenth Dynasty, the rulers of Byblos called themselves ‘princes’ and wrote their names in Egyptian hieroglyphic script as ‘small pharaohs’. Moreover, the administration of Byblos invented a system of writing that mixed some Egyptian symbols with the Semitic language (Aubet 2007: 273). Egypt developed more trade contacts with other Syro Palestine cities such as Tyre, Megiddo, Ashkelon and Acco, although it seems that Byblos carried out the majority of their interchanges with Egypt.

The Libyan pharaohs renewed the trade contacts with some Palestinian cities such as Byblos, Tyre and Sidon. In all of them votive statues of the Libyan pharaohs Sheshonq I, Osorkon I, Osorkon II and Takelot II have been found (Redford 1992: 334). One of the principal products imported from this region by the Libyan pharaohs was the timber from Tyre. The Libyan pharaohs also realised the importance that the *Via Maris* had for the development of the Delta region both in economic terms and in diplomatic terms (Radner 2008: 309).

This route allowed for contact with the political powers of Asia and specifically with the Neo-Assyrian Empire because many Egyptian ambassadors, scribes and officers were sent to Assyria, Samaria and the Philistine cities to improve the contact between both states (Redford 1992: 337). Proof of this important commercial relationship between the Libyan dynasties and the Palestine states is the adoption of the Egyptian system of weights, measures and numerals for commercial transactions (Stern 2001: 235).

This commercial trade changed when the Kushite pharaohs appeared on the scene from the south. The Kushites were famous not only because of their warrior skills but also because of their experience in commercial trading. The kingdom of Kush was inside of the region of Nubia, and it became an intermediary in the trade of exotic products and gold

coming from inner Africa (Ayad 2009: 11). The gold was obtained by military expeditions and punitive raids of Nubia from Egypt, such as the deposits of gold in the rocky terrain of Wadi Allaqui excavated by Soviet archaeologists in the years 1961-1963.

Mysliwiec provides an illustration of this region:<sup>142</sup>

Nubia, a land south of Egypt that today comprises northern Sudan, was already the object of special interest to the pharaohs early in the dynastic period. The huge area was first and foremost a veritable mine of valuable raw materials, the most precious being gold. It has even been surmised that the name Nubia, first used by Greek writers, is derived from the Egyptian word *nub*, which means 'gold'.

On the one hand, the Egyptians were interested in sub-Saharan African products which were exchanged with other states of the ancient Near East. Amongst the products exported from Nubia were stones such as diorite, ebony, wood, incense, oil, exotic animals and important manpower used by Egyptians as slaves, police and soldiers. On the other hand, the Kushites acquired many Egyptian objects which were imported as proof of cultural adoption, because the population of Nubia differed ethnically and linguistically from the Egyptians and also from other human groups around them.

For instance, the Neo-Assyrian records and reliefs carved in their palaces corroborate their interest in acquiring exotic animals from inner Africa such as hippopotamuses, rhinoceroses, elephants and monkeys, which were marketed from Egypt by Kush using Red Sea harbours (Morkot 2000: 122). It seems that the most important animal amongst them was the elephant due to the Assyrian necessity for ivory in the Neo-Assyrian palaces, especially after the extinction of the Syrian elephants. Another important product for Assyria was Nubian horses, which would demonstrate that the Kushites were the preferred breed for cavalries during this period. To sum up, the organisation of the trade of these products would demonstrate the renewed wealth of the kingdom of Kush.

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<sup>142</sup> Mysliwiec 2000: 68.

Thus, the economic trade could also be the principal reason that explains the origin and power of the Kushite kingdom during the Third Intermediate period and its progressive interest of expansion northward. The conquest of the rich and strategic territories in the Delta region by the Kushites could be considered as proof of this policy. Indeed, Shabaqo was the first Kushite pharaoh of this period who secured the eastern border of Egypt in the Sinai and took care of the western Delta, designating a governor there (Ayad 2009: 14).<sup>143</sup>

Another important ethnic element of this confrontation was the role played by the Arabs. Ancient Egypt had tried since the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC to dominate different tribes of the region of 'Arabah as a strategy for controlling both the material resources of the region and the incense trade. However, the decline of the Egyptian power in the region after the end of the Bronze Age motivated several nomad peoples of the region of Negev to opt for a progressive sedentary process. This phenomenon allowed the appearance of new kingdoms who tried to control the local trade routes, also the vast southern wilderness. Meanwhile, the Palestinian cities such as Ashkelon and Gaza benefited from the incipient trade of aromatic and exotic products which passed from south Arabia via the Negev and 'Arabah (Redford 1992: 350-351).

The relationship between the Libyan and Kushite administrations and the Arab tribes was complex. Firstly, neither the Libyans nor the Kushites were able to dominate the region of Sinai, in which these tribes lived as transhumant groups who entered and left at the Egyptian border. In addition, both the Libyans and Kushites did not identify each one of these tribes but called them by generic names such as the *ḥryw-š* ('sandy ones') or the '*Mntiu* of Asia' which was used by the Egyptians as a general concept for identifying Philistines, Judaists or even Assyrians (Redford 1992: 350).

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<sup>143</sup> Proof of the new role played by Shabaqo in the international sphere is the find of a seal bearing his name found in Nineveh and also a seal impression on the handle of an amphora from Megiddo. Both archaeological finds would demonstrate the diplomatic and economic contact with the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Mysliwiec 2000: 89).



The Kushite expansion had a curious parallel of economic interests with the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in Palestine (745-731 BC), which was the frontier territory of the Egyptian Delta. The final result of both expansion policies would have to be the open confrontation or clash between two different civilisations for the economic control of both the Delta region and Palestine. As Redford highlights (1992: 345), ‘as devout worshipers of the gods and *protégés* of Amun, the Sudanese rulers felt in their mission to move on the shores of the Mediterranean and to reform Egypt. The question now was which of these new, major powers would win the race for the Lower Egypt, and would the Delta remain a power vacuum?’

Morkot (2000: 262) believes that ‘the main issue at stake was probably control of the Mediterranean trade and Phoenician timber’. The theme of the trade of timber had an important effect during the earlier years of the Neo-Assyrian expansion because it had stimulated the payment of taxes by the coastal cities of Palestine to the Assyrian states. However, these taxes were resented and refused many times by the Palestinian cities, initiated apparently in Egypt with the objective to end the Assyrian vassalage in Palestine.

Both the Delta region and Palestine had an emergent endeavour in the field of maritime trade in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, specifically with the merchandising of timber. Indeed, the Libyan Twenty-three Dynasty could have developed a real *thalassocracy* which, according to Redford (1992: 345), could be the principal motivation for the Neo-Assyrian conquest of these regions: ‘it was probably the prosperous trade that was converging on the south Philistine coast from the Nile and south Arabia that prompted Tiglath-pileser III to turn Gaza into a *bît kâri*, and later Sargon II to promote actively direct trade between Egypt and Assyria on the Egyptian border’.

With respect to Assyria, the Assyrian policies of domination over other countries and lands had originally a geopolitical goal: the inner Assyrian economy depended originally on the cultivated plains of corn-growing lands in northern Mesopotamia (Postgate 1979: 197). This product was fundamental for the needs of the Assyrian armies and also to secure the survival of the larger Assyrian cities in the centre, besides straw for feeding animals and brick-making.

Perhaps, as Postgate points out (1979: 215): ‘The health of the empire’s economy naturally depended very much on the success of the harvest. Consequently it is not surprising to find that the kings were intensely interested in the state of the crops’. The same policy of intensive agriculture was used with the new territorial acquisition near to the Assyrian centre across the Euphrates River and beyond the Syrian steppes. Nevertheless, this situation changed when the Assyrians started progressively to conquer the region of the Taurus and the Syro Palestine region (Figure 3.15).

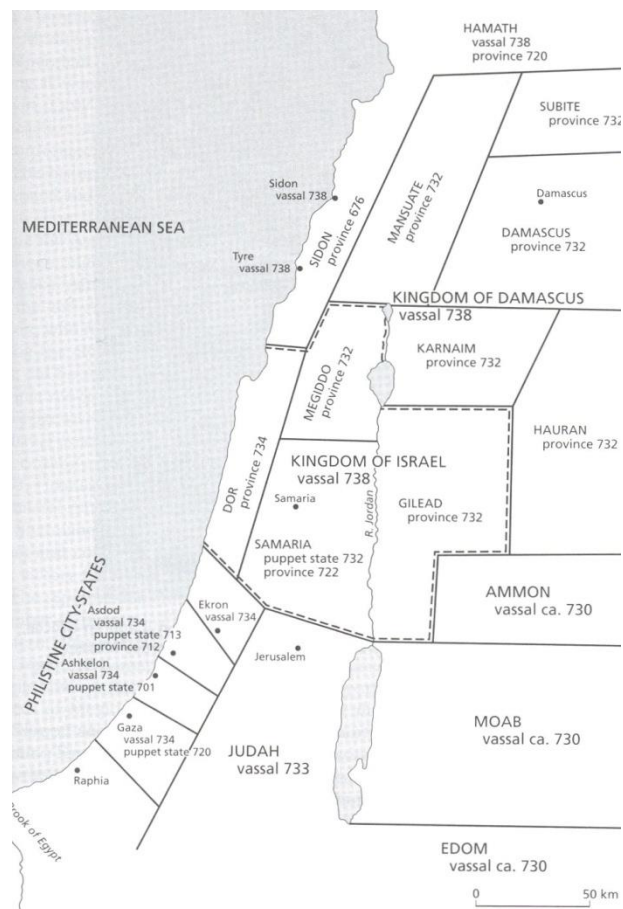


Figure 3.15 Map of the different Palestine kingdoms transformed into vassal states or puppet monarchies by the Neo-Assyrian Empire during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Van de Mierop 2004: 249).

Both regions had a different type of economy. The Taurus region was in the north-western mountains and had little to contribute to the agricultural economy of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. However, this region had several mines, which allowed for the Assyrians to have direct access to metals, especially iron. This advantage, according to

Postgate (1979: 200), of having ‘direct access to them may well have had a radical effect on the empire’s economy and, on its currency system. Equally, the loss of direct control of these areas may have had the reverse effect’.

Sargon II reported that he had subjugated the island of Cyprus, where he erected a stele in Kition, demanded tributes and fought against the Greeks at sea. Nevertheless, the Assyrians never possessed a fleet for conquering or defeating enemies at sea. Rather, they depended on the Phoenician ports and ships for developing the Assyrian control in the west and exercise a possible domination over the island of Cyprus (Karageorghis 2002: 157). Actually, it seems that the principal interest of the Neo-Assyrian Empire was to renew the activities of the harbour cities in the Syro Palestine region under its control by demanding taxes and tributes from them.

In Palestine, the Assyrians developed an aggressive policy of economic exploitation that allowed the Assyrians to dominate their contiguous periphery in the eastern Mediterranean basin. According to Gittin (1997: 77-78), this situation also allowed Assyria to develop the central and western Mediterranean area as an extended periphery, which would be used by the Assyrians themselves for stimulating the commercial activities amongst the Mediterranean harbours.

Sennacherib, for example, was the first Neo-Assyrian king in transforming Sidon in the principal epicentre that organised the trade in the region. When this city rebelled against Assyria, Esarhaddon killed its king, deported its people, rebuilt it and resettled it with deported people from different parts of the empire. Later, Esarhaddon built a new town close to Sidon called *Kur Esarhaddon*, with the support of other cities such as Arwad, Byblos and Tyre, which became an Assyrian colony in the region.

Furthermore, according to Stern (2001: 65), the Assyrians needed the harbours ‘for transferring rations and equipment to their soldiers stationed in the southern part of Palestine, and later to their soldiers and officials in Egypt, the domination of which became one of the major goals. This is why the coastal region of Palestine became such an important transit area’. This policy would carry on with the Assyrian fortification in the city

of Dor, which became a provincial capital and the kingdom of Gaza where the Assyrians built another trading maritime post at Ruqesh (Stern 2001: 67-68).

This approach is also underlined by Stern:<sup>144</sup>

It is noteworthy the Assyrians made some efforts to develop the Phoenician overseas trade with Egypt and the west, as well as that of the nomads in South Arabia, they themselves never participated in it directly, benefiting from it indirectly by the appointment of officials who were located in all important harbours and in desert forts along the trade routes. They inspected the stream of merchandise coming and going and made sure that the Assyrian government received its proper share.

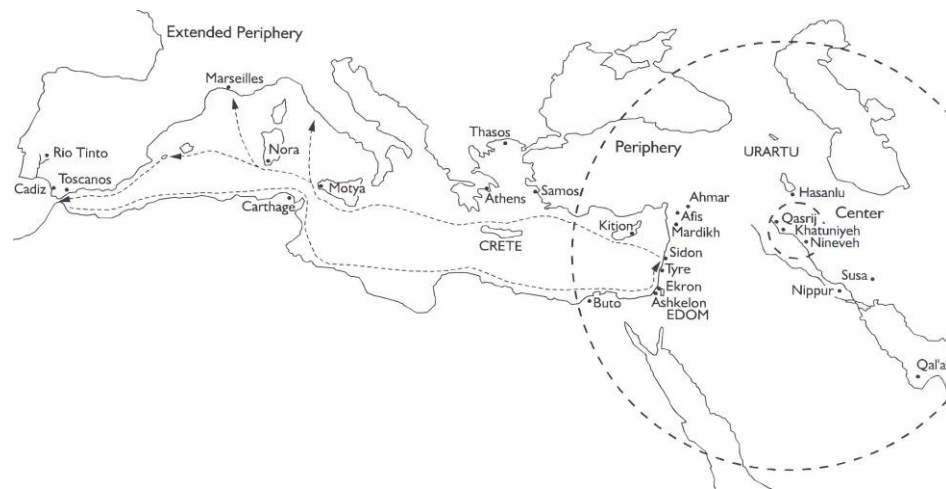


Figure 3.16 The Mediterranean periphery of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Gittin 1997: 78)

With a similar perspective, Gittin (1997: 79-80) highlights that some of the coastal cities of Phoenicia became major ports and world-wide distribution centres. Others became fortified settlements, which suddenly appeared such as in Edom, a region that previously had been unable to support a significant settled population (Figure 3.16). Meanwhile, the densely populated areas of the Lower Galilee and the Shephelah were all abandoned, whereas the Buqeah, an arid zone in the northern Judean desert, which has no early

<sup>144</sup> Stern 2001: 13.

settlement history, became intensively farmed as part of the hinterland for the new metropolitan area of Jerusalem.

Finally, the Philistine capital city of Ekron, whose status had been reduced to that of a small town, was transformed into a major urban and industrial centre in the region. This central role in these imperial politics would demonstrate that the Neo-Assyrian Empire was more than the cruel image of conquering people, taught for years by the historical books of the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, the evidence coming from other Palestinian kingdoms such as Ammon, Moab and Edom, that accepted the Assyrian domination because of the benefits it promised, is archaeologically corroborated on its economic and cultural prosperity.

For example, Stern (2001: 237) points out that these three Jordanian states never were hurt by the Assyrian conquest but they became consolidated states with a high level of prosperity thanks to the Assyrian order. The Neo-Assyrian Empire protected them from their former enemies, the Aramaeans in the north and the Israelites in the west, allowing them to develop as semi-independent states. Besides, the Assyrians were their protectors against the nomadic attacks from the desert. For this reason, these kingdoms were also incorporated as part of the imperial defences of Assyria in the south of Palestine (Obed 1970: 177-186).

Stern (2001: 10) also identifies four different types of administrative units: the Assyrian provinces under direct control; the autonomous vassal kingdoms; the Phoenician and Philistine harbour towns along the coast whose autonomy was supervised by the Assyrians, allowing trading with Egypt, North Africa and Greece; and the nomad region with its tribes that linked the region with the surrounding desert and its lucrative trade of incense and spice from the south, although the Assyrians never established a real control of the deserts (Stern 2001: 12).

To sum up, while the Egyptians controlled only some aspects of commercial trade with specific Syro Palestine cities but without having direct control in this region, the Neo-Assyrian Empire inaugurated a new international trading network in the Syro Palestine region that surpassed in scope and scale the former exchange system of the Mediterranean Bronze Age palace economies.

The Neo-Assyrian control of this region allowed them to develop an increase in trade with the entire Eastern Mediterranean region by the access and control of the Phoenician seaports and the cedars from the Lebanese region (Gittin 1997: 79), the mineral deposits in eastern Anatolia and the Zagros, and the control of the trade of spices coming from Arabia by the Syro Palestine route. In addition, the countries of this region had enjoyed independence since the end of the Bronze Age and had amassed much wealth from the trade routes that crossed their territories (Yamada 2000: 271).

### c) The Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Administration of Egypt

When the Assyrians finally conquered Egypt, the dynasties from the Delta region were subordinated officially to the Neo-Assyrian Empire but the far influence of the kings of Kush in the south never disappeared at all. Whereas the Kushite defeat in 664 BC spelt the end of the Kushite control of the Delta region and the subordination of this land to Assyria, the region around the city of Thebes – after the Assyrian plunder – was virtually an entity independent from both the Delta vassals and the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Kitchen 1986: 394-395).

Following the same policy described in the previous chapter, the Assyrians incorporated many rulers from the Delta region to run the country, because the Neo-Assyrian Empire was not able to do it by itself. In other words, the Assyrians chose local rulers – generally old families of the region – with the objective of obtaining compulsory tributes and avoiding the organisation of a huge central bureaucracy so far from the Assyrian metropolis (Figure 3.17). Besides, the Assyrians had to be prepared for restoring the peace and crush any potential rebellions.

Kitchen explains the inner policy in Egypt used by Assyria:<sup>145</sup>

The delta chiefs found Assyria military rule less congenial than the overlordship of Napata. They intrigued with the distant Taharqa, to share rule with him, the plot was discovered, and many of the princess were arrested and sent to Nineveh,

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<sup>145</sup> Kitchen 1986: 393.

while executions were held in Sais, Mendes, Pelisium, and elsewhere as a punishment and a warning to the Egyptian populace against attempting a revolt.



Figure 3.17 Map of the Neo-Assyrian Empire up to Egypt (<http://faculty.catawba.edu/cmcallis/history/eww/eww1.htm9>)

In the case of the Kushite Dynasty, the situation was different. When the Assyrians conquered and plundered, the city of Memphis tried to erase the Kushite lineage over Egypt, according to the inscription of Esarhaddon (Borger 1956: 99), ousting the Kushite officers and leadership and exiling them to Assyria. Generally, these Kushite officers were high members of the court, relatives of the royal family, artisans or intellectuals. The presence of these people in the Assyrian court is well documented according to Morkot (2000: 270), who mentions thousands of tablet fragments found at Tell Kuyunjik during the periods of Sargon II, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, which have been translated by Kwasman and Parpola (1991).

In one of these tablets (Morkot 2000: 272), there is a reference to the two Kushite eunuchs called Darisharru and Shulmu-sharri, who acquired a high position in the Assyrian court, perhaps because they had no descendants and being foreigners, they would be more

loyal officers to the Assyrian crown. Morkot underlines the fact that both Kushite officers adopted Assyrian names before starting to work in the Neo-Assyrian Empire administration. This absorption of Kushite individuals, as royal hostages from Egypt at the Assyrian court, would reflect the final triumph of Assyria over its last and newest province of Egypt (Radner 2012: 471-479).

Nevertheless, the Assyrian presence in Egypt had very particular characteristics. According to the description of the Ashurbanipal reports, the Assyrian control of the country was restricted to the Delta region and the cities of Memphis and Thebes rather than all the Egyptian territory (Oppenheim 1969: 294-295). Indeed, the Assyrian domination did not reach the level of control found at the provinces of the Syro Palestine region.

The imperial administration of Assyria in Lower Egypt or the Delta region and Upper Egypt was limited to the presence of an Assyrian officer in the principal Egyptian cities for demanding yearly tributes and regular offerings to the Assyrian god in the temples. The records of the Neo-Assyrian Empire are very exhaustive with respect to the number of Egyptian officers and kings designated by Ashurbanipal<sup>146</sup>:

Necho (*Ni-ku-ú*), king of Memphis and Sais (*Sa-a-a*), Sharruludari, king of Si'nu, Pishanhuru, king of Nathu, Pakruru, king of (Pi) shaptu, Bukkunanni'pi, king of Athribis (*Ha-at-ḥi-ri-bi*), Nahke, king of Hininshi, Putubishti, king of Tanis (*Ša- ' - nu*), Unamunu, king of Nathu, Harsiaeshu, king of Sabnuti, Buaima, king of Pitinti, Shishak (*Su-si-in-qu*), king of Busiris (*Bu-šī-ru*), Tabnahti, king of Punubu, Bukkananni'pi king of Pahnuti, Siha, king of Siut (*Si-ia-a-ú-tú*), lamentu, king of Himunu (Hermopolis), Ishpimatu, king of taini, Mantimanhe, king of Thebes; these kings, governors and regent whom my own father had appointed in

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<sup>146</sup> Oppenheim 1969: 294. It seems that many of the officers were Assyrians but it seems that in some cities the Assyrians allowed the permanence of former Egyptian rulers. For example, Niku of Memphis and Sau are identified with the Egyptian name of Nekau; Sharruludari of Si'nu is an Assyrian name granted to loyal officers, thus he should have had an Egyptian name; Pishanhuru of Nathu is the Egyptian name of Pasenhor; Pakruru of Shaptu is Pakur of Per-Soped; Putubishti of Sanu is the pharaoh Pedubast of Djanet; Shishak of Bushiru is Sheshonq of Djedu. The rest of the names belonging to the Delta rulers have been more complicated to identify (Morkot 2000: 274; Verreth 1999: 234-247).



Egypt and who had left their offices in the face of the uprising of Tirhakah and had scattered into the open country, I reinstalled in their offices and in their (former) seats of office.

Apparently, there was no mention of a high Assyrian military officer, the *tartanu* or *rab shaqeh*, living or being sent to be supervised by the Egyptian administration. Even though the Egyptian cities and their rulers were given new Assyrian names, there is no archaeological evidence of monumental Assyrian inscriptions, steles or statues. A possible explanation would be that they were destroyed after the end of the Assyrian domination but it is still hard to understand the lack of any Assyrian testimony in the land of the pharaohs in a pattern similar to that of the future Persian occupation (Morkot 2000: 273).<sup>147</sup>

The only plausible explanation for this Assyrian disinterest in administrating the country directly, in contrast with its strong policy on the Syro Palestine region, would be the practical Assyrian sense of maintaining a former structure inherited from the pharaonic times, which apparently still worked. At least the Libyan dynasties were able to make the Delta region productive before and after the Kushite invasion and the Assyrians only kept the former system for achieving earnings.

For no particular reason, the Assyrians preferred this system rather than organising a policy of tributes for the Egyptian country as a whole. However, following the approach of Redford (1992: 364), it seems that while the Assyrian army demonstrated that they were unbeatable in battles; its administration was incapable of controlling the Egyptian country because the Egyptians were not passive during the Assyrian administration. Thus, some scholars have been more critical with respect to the Assyrian sources, such as the Prism of Ashurbanipal, about the invasion of Egypt and specifically have considered the occupation of the Egyptian territory of Ashurbanipal as doubtful (Olmstead 2007: 53).

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<sup>147</sup> According to Ryholt (2004: 483), the Assyrian invasion and subsequent occupation of Egypt in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC 'was a traumatic experience which gave rise to a rich literary tradition in Egypt. In the temple libraries this tradition lived on until the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century AC when it seems to have died out alongside the ancient indigenous cults'.

Anthony Spalinger is one of them:<sup>148</sup>

The pacify policy of Ashurbanipal was the result of his decision that that country was extremely hard to control, especially with the fierce enemy in the south and with the ever present danger of another revolt in the Delta. In a word, the Assyrians failed in their conquest of Egypt (if they ever dreamed of such a thing) when they failed to crush Taharqa. Unlike the Persians, who had only to fear the native Egyptians and not the Kushites (who were not military threat at all), the Assyrians had bitten off more than they could chew. We should also remember that the only reason that the Assyrians ever moved to Egypt was a result of the meddling by the Kushite king, and not by native Egyptians, in the Phoenician cities of Gaza. As has been stressed, the Assyrians only wanted commercial domination over Phoenicia and Philistia –no invasion and eventual conquest of Egypt or Judah was on the agenda of the Assyrian monarchs.

In other words, it seems that the Assyrians could invade the Egyptian country many times because of the rebellions instigated by the Kushite kings such as Taharqa and his successor Tanoutamon in the south. Tanoutamon at least was able to reach Lower Egypt, killing there to the principal allied governor of the Assyrians –pharaoh Necho of Sais – and to rule in Memphis as the nominal king of all of Egypt, based on the information rescued from his *Dream Stele* (Breasted 1903: 468-470).

So, apparently the Neo-Assyrian Empire was never able to control the Egyptian country. That is the reason why the Assyrians sought an alliance with the governors of the Delta with the intention of preparing a defence against the Kushite kings when they decided to strike back from the south, recovering the cities of Thebes, Memphis and so on until they arrived in the Delta region, such as the case of Tanoutamon (Spalinger 1974: 323).

This point of view defended by these scholars could have historical sense but they are wrong because they did not understand the performance of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. As it was described in the second chapter, the Assyrians developed a very special imperial

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<sup>148</sup> Spalinger 1974: 323-324

structure that included the Assyrian core or metropolis, provinces, vassal states, buffer states and buffer zones. In this case, the ‘buffer states’ or ‘buffer zones’ are essential for understanding the political borders of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

‘Buffer states’ were political entities that lay between two or more rival states and their respective spheres of influence provided a degree of security for both sides. The regions of the Delta and their respective cities controlled by the Assyrians seem to have been the ‘buffer states’ of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in Africa. Meanwhile, ‘buffer zones’ were lands situated between two or more rival states or their respective spheres of influence. They differed with respect to the ‘buffer states’ because they did not have viable political structures nor were controlled by any political force. The area around the cities of Memphis and Thebes in the southern desert, up to the enemy region of Kush, seems to have been the ‘buffer zone’ of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the African continent.

The best manner of corroborating is a comparison with other Assyrian buffer states and zones and the kind of reactions adopted by the Assyrians there. Eph'al (1986) made a good analysis of the warfare and military control used by the Assyrians after conquering a region or country. Apparently, the Assyrian army was a very professional one in their tactics of sieges, conquest of cities and open battles. However, the Assyrians had the same problem as many other imperial armies in history: huge borders and a small number of soldiers. So, according to Eph'al (1986: 97), ‘this situation arose due to the limitations of the imperial army, stemming from the combination of time and space factors, in the light of its obligation and missions throughout the empire and on its borders’.

Thus, the first task of the Assyrian army was subduing the enemies by conquest or destruction of their cities within the Assyrian borders but also beyond them. Later, the Assyrian army consolidated a safe ‘buffer zone’ between the new conquest – that could become new provinces, vassal states or ‘buffer states’ – and the peoples, kingdoms or territories that were not vassals of the Assyrians and that could become potential enemies in the future. When this ‘buffer zone’ was consolidated, the Assyrian army could return to the capital.

In other words, ‘the border of an empire was sometimes determined not by the existence of another great power in its neighbourhood but by the limits of its ability to maintain effective control in view of the time and space factor’ (Eph’al 1986: 99). Because those limits were obtained by a safe ‘buffer zone’ controlled by border guards, the governors of the provinces and allied kings ‘had command of small units able to cope with local problems within their boundaries or in neighbourhood region without bothering the central army’.<sup>149</sup>

This policy allowed them to integrate the vassal peoples under the Assyrian command, receiving in exchange permission to graze or official recognition of their leaders with benefits given by the Assyrian authorities. That was the case for the Bedouin tribes that supervised the Egyptian and Syrian borders or the Chaldean chieftain that supervised the Elamite border that allowed ‘the mobility of the relatively small Assyrian army to be maintained and ensured that it could be assigned for substantial fighting’ (Eph’al 1986: 106).

The problem for the Assyrians was that these ‘buffer zones’ also could become ‘lands of nobody’ where there commonly were raids between the patrols of the Assyrian army or their vassals and raiders mainly from the rebel population, nomads, conflicting bands or neighbouring kingdoms who were enemies of the Assyrians, such as in the Kushite case (Eph’al 1986: 95).

These skirmishes took place on several borders of the Neo-Assyrian Empire such as the ‘buffer zone’ between Assyria and Elam, where several letters from the reign of Ashurbanipal report the clash between Assyrian troops and Elamite bands of 250-500 warriors in both parties with several casualties (Aharoni 1970: 16-28). Besides these, the Assyrian army had similar skirmishes with bands of rebel Chaldeans from Babylon, and Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites in Palestine.

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<sup>149</sup> This point is corroborated through archaeology: royal inscriptions attest the existence of huge arsenals (*ekal mašarti*) inside of the Assyrian cities such as Nineveh and other Assyrian capitals. These arsenals had battle equipment such as weapons, horses and chariots. However, there is no evidence about such arsenals in the provinces or vassal states. See Turner (1970: 68-85).

These skirmishes between small groups of contingents were the result of another common characteristic existing among the empires: in case of rebellions at the borders, the Assyrians had to calculate the time and resources in their cities and demand the support of their vassals because the Assyrian army could not be deployed every time a new problem arose at their borders but only when it became a threat. In other words, the Assyrians sent their armies only when the danger exceeded the safety of the empire, such as the formation of an anti-Assyrian coalition or loss of territories. Eph'al (1986: 96-97) describes this situation:

The answer can be found in the recognition that even a great power's ability to react was restricted because of the difficulty of operating a relatively small army in extensive areas. There was a large number of missions imposed on such an army, often at a rate a campaign *per annum* and this compelled it to postpone reacting in regions of secondary importance because of the need to carry out missions in high priority regions. Such a situation is reflected, for example, in the postponement of Sennacherib's reaction in Palestine until 701 BC because of his need to pacify Babylonia first. If the rebels were able to hold out longer than the time which the imperial army could allocate for actions against them, there was a reasonable chance that the emperor would either not send his army against them because the action extended beyond its allocated time.

That would be the historical explanation for why the Assyrian army undertook five campaigns against Egypt within 11 years (673-663 BC), in three of which the Assyrian army engaged with the Kushites in open field battles or besieged cities such as Thebes (Thomason 2004:161). In any case, these Assyrian expeditions against Taharqa and Tanoutamon would not have been possible without the chariots, supporting troops and general logistics of all their western vassals (Radner 2008: 310-311).

Finally, it is important to underline that the existence of the Assyrian 'buffer zones' never was definitive, but that they changed each time the Neo-Assyrian Empire gradually expanded westward. So, the first 'buffer zone' was in Syria, later in Palestine, then in the Sinai region and the Delta, and finally southward up to Memphis and Thebes. If

the Assyrians had conquered the Kushite kingdom, there is no doubt that the last frontier or 'buffer zone' of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in Africa had been the region of Nubia.

#### 4. Ancient Egypt and the Neo-Assyrian Order in its Global Context

In the previous chapter, it was established that in addition to the political-military and socio-economic entities, empires must be seen as human communities which generate their own expression of subjectivity, meaning and collective identity, that is, distinctive forms of culture. On the one hand, some empires have unified peoples *disintegrating* and using their own culture as a real tool of oppression, segregation and domination, where prevailed the notion of 'civilisation' over that of 'barbarism'.

From this point of view, the imperial culture has allowed the construction of an imperial civilisation, generating a division between two segments of the population: dominators and those being dominated (Howe 2002: 18). On the other hand, other empires have preferred the *integration* of their subjects, promoting a common language, common beliefs and multiculturalism. It is possible to reconstruct some characteristics of its influence both on the *infrastructure* (material constructions) and on the *superstructures* (complexity of ideas).

In the case of the Assyrian control of Egypt, it is necessary to consider what kind of infrastructure and superstructures were developed before the Assyrian conquest during the Libyan and Kushite periods, as cultural precedents, and what the new elements provided by the Neo-Assyrian Empire in Egypt could have been.

##### a) Infrastructure and Archaeology of the Empires in Egypt during the Assyrian Domination

During the period from the Twenty-first to the Twenty-fourth dynasties, there was not a huge policy of buildings or important monuments in the Delta region. The different Libyan dynasties preferred to perform minor additions or repair the ancient structures made by the Egyptians a long time ago. The only exception seems to have been the royal building

work developed in the city of Tanis, where it is possible to discover a policy of ‘recycling monuments and materials’ such as blocks, columns, obelisks and statues.<sup>150</sup> According to Taylor (2000: 350), this phenomenon could be interpreted as a sign of economic weakness because the new Libyan rulers were able to neither import raw materials from Palestine and inner Africa nor mobilise huge labour forces for building new monuments or cities.<sup>151</sup>

Meanwhile, the Kushites had a certain background of monumental building in Nubia before their expansion northward. Before the emergence of the Kushite kingdom, also the Egyptians had built a number of fortresses in Lower Nubia during the Twelfth Dynasty with the objective of controlling the Nile River and protect the access to the gold mines close to the second cataract. Another series of fortresses were built on islands sited at the west bank of the Nile River.

According to Morkot (2000: 57), ‘this strong Egyptian presence at the Cataract and the action to the south was not directed against Kush, but was to protect the Nile route and assist in the exchange of goods’. Archaeological excavations made in Kerma would support that this was the capital of the original Kushite kingdom because it was a well-fortified town with a defensive ditch, stone and mud brick walls and a large structure used as a stronghold or castle (Yurco 2001: 65). Moreover, many royal tombs were built in large

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<sup>150</sup> An example of this behaviour also could be found at the site of Tell el-Balamun. This is an inhospitable area of marshy ground in the region of the Delta that had been excavated by Howard Carter in 1913 and by Jeffrey Spencer since 1991 with a team from the British Museum. Spencer discovered three destroyed temples within a huge mud-brick enclosure wall with high walls, finding several royal names in foundation deposits. The oldest belonged to the pharaoh Shoshenq III of the Twenty-second Dynasty and dedicated to the Temple of Amun. This temple had been dismantled in antiquity and much of the stone re-used elsewhere or burnt for lime at the site. The second temple was built by Psamtek during Twenty-sixth Dynasty and the third by Nakhtnebef or Nectanebo I of the Thirtieth dynasty. Besides these, the discovery of a damaged quartzite statue of Ramses II with Amun and Mut would suggest that there were also earlier temples in the area. See the general report written by Spencer (1996).

<sup>151</sup> Other proof of this lack of Libyan cultural sophistication was the dismantling of the royal tombs belonging to the New Kingdom period. Indeed, the mummies of the pharaohs were removed from their respective tombs and stripped of their valuable objects, being reburied in groups. Additionally, according to Mysliwicz (2000: 29), the tombs built by the Libyan pharaoh were too modest in comparison with those excavated in the Valley of the Kings during the New Kingdom, which would corroborate the difference in the opulence between both periods.

and circular tumuli with a central burial chamber for the ruler and a corridor that guarded the body of the king.

On the site of Sanam, there was a huge temple to Amun with evidence of craft workshops of small artefacts. There was also a columned building of over 250 metres long with 17 storerooms which could have been a warehouse for the exotic raw materials imported from different parts. Moreover, this site had more than 1,500 burials of different architectural shapes but the majority followed the Egyptian style of subterranean chambers entered by staircases (Bard 2008: 277).

Another case is the site of Kawa, which includes a number of temples, other religious monuments and houses. This place was excavated by Francis Llewellyn Griffith in 1929–1931, and Laming Macadam and Laurence Kirwan in 1935–1936. Actually, excavations were made under the direction of Derek Welsby, who outlines (2000: 2), with respect to the ruins, that ‘the presence of the Temple of Amun towards the northern end of the site, and the numerous references to Kawa in inscriptions of the earlier Kushite period, indicate that it was one of the most important religious, and urban, centres in the Kushite realm and, it has recently been suggested, perhaps the ancestral home of the earliest Kushite rulers’.

The most famous mortuary buildings of the Kushite kingdom were at el-Kurru and Nuri because they were more sophisticated and complex. All of them were built for the royalty 15 kilometres downstream from Napata (Figure 3.18). Some of them had square structures with chapels, which were originally described as classical Egyptian mastabas, but it seems that they were probably small pyramids, although they were smaller in comparison with the pyramid of Memphis, with an inclination at an acute angle of 68 grades and without connections to subterranean chambers (Lehner 1997: 196-197; Reisner 1923: 11-27).

However, it is evident that the architects tried to emulate the model of pyramids used both in the Old and New Egyptian periods, besides the same processes of mummification and attending to the body and the classical funeral objects deposited inside of the tombs (Bard 2008: 280; Taylor 2007: 441). The most impressive tomb of the Kushite



period belongs to Taharqa, with a base length of 51.75 metres. This was built over an older pyramid that covered a funerary chapel to the east. The inside of the subterranean tomb was 21 x 16.5 metres, with a narrow rectangular passage as an entrance (Bard 2008: 281).

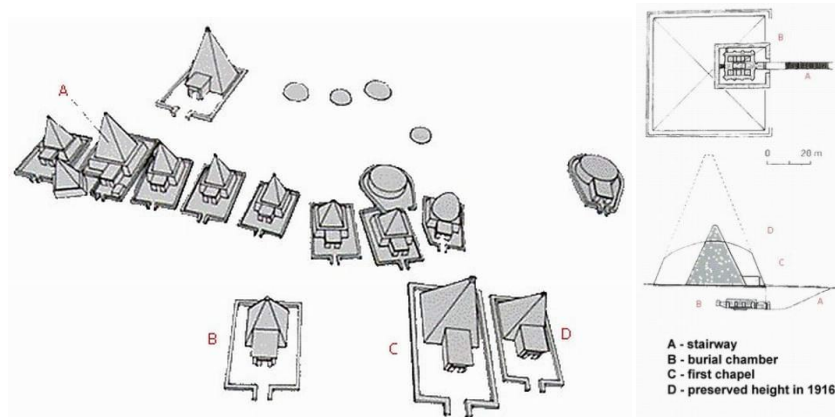


Figure 3.18 Complex of Kushite tombs in el-Kurru (<http://fadubroz.com/jarir/interests/hist/egypt/rsrscs/taharkabig.JPG>)

When the Kushites conquered Egypt, they made a more developed programme of new buildings in the territory in comparison with the Libyan dynasties. Even though the Kushites imitated and copied old forms of artistic expression inherited from former Egyptian periods, they were able to create innovative statues and reliefs (Bard 2008: 270). One of the first Kushite pharaohs, Piye, brought several architects and sculptors from Egypt for the aggrandisement of the Kushite sanctuary, adorned with the statues brought from older sanctuaries of Nubia. Piye also erected ‘massive animal sculptures, statues of earlier pharaohs and of officials of the Egyptian vice regal administration [which] added prestige to the new halls and courts’ (Morkot 2000: 197).

Shabaqo was the first Kushite king who preferred to live in Egypt after its conquest. This is the reason why he could be considered as the real founder of the Kushite Twenty-fifth Dynasty. Besides this, he was the first Kushite ruler who developed an Egyptian-centric policy, which adopted the administrative control, iconography, symbols and style of ancient Egypt (Russman 2001: 118). This policy is evident in the campaigns of building both in Upper and Lower Egypt, specifically in the temples of Memphis, Dendera, Thebes, Karnak, Luxor and Medinet Habu. According to Ayad (2009: 14), this ‘active

building program all over Egypt may be viewed as a sign of his desire to be acknowledged as ruler of all the land’.

Taharqa built four gateways at Karnak following four cardinal points and developed a building policy from Philae in the south to the Delta in the north. Furthermore, he erected several temples in his native land, turning Napata into a monumental complex of sanctuaries, using many craftsmen from Memphis (Ayud 2009: 15). It seems that Taharqa followed the same policy used by the tyrants of ancient Greece because he was always worried about the development of public works and building activities both in Egypt and in Nubia (Tabo, Semna, Faras, Qasr Ibrim, Philae), especially restoring old temples and building new ones. He dispatched artists from Memphis to renovate and uniform the temples of the country and developed the production of bronze votive figurines on a large scale. These statues highlight the animalistic representation of deities as often the anthropomorphic representation of divinities (Mysliwiec 2000: 98).

An important ideological detail for the Kushites was inherited since the period when Upper Nubia was under the direct control of the Egyptian Nineteenth Dynasty. In this period, a temple was built by Amun, which became an important element for the later royal Kushite ideology: the steep cliffs rising in Gebel Barkal near to Napata was considered a sacred residence of Amun and later it conferred legitimacy upon the Kushite king (Reisner 1970: 3-5). This is the reason for a number of temples of Egyptian style (a series of pylons, an outer court, hypostyle hall, *pronaos*, inner sanctuaries and chapels) and a palace complex built by the Kushite dynasties (Török 2002: 309).

In comparison, the Assyrian impact on the infrastructure of Egypt is practically non-existent. It seems that the policy of the Neo-Assyrian Empire of leaving the Egyptian country under the control of its own people is also manifested in the lack of Assyrian infrastructure there. The Assyrians apparently considered that the infrastructure built by the Egyptians and Kushites was enough for their policy of giving tributes and taxes to a country supervised only by Assyrian officers and without deporting people for controlling.

This situation is more evident when it is compared with the neighbouring region of Palestine, where the Assyrians effectively developed a huge policy of building

superstructures. The reason for this policy is manifested according to the fast urban policy of the Assyrian authorities of rebuilding the centres or cities which had been destroyed during the process of the conquest. The Assyrians developed a huge policy of rebuilding for a relatively short period of time, which left clear traces in archaeological finds.

In the case of the Palestine cities, there were some specific characteristics. This region was plundered by the Neo-Assyrian Empire, which destroyed some Palestine kingdoms such as Israel. However, the period of rebuilding was intensive in the north of the region, following new plans of building partly adopted from the Mesopotamian model which was completely unknown in this region before the Assyrian conquest.<sup>152</sup> By principle, the new Assyrian towns of the region were not fortified with the exception of the new capitals of Megiddo, Samaria and Dor, whose fortifications were rebuilt soon.

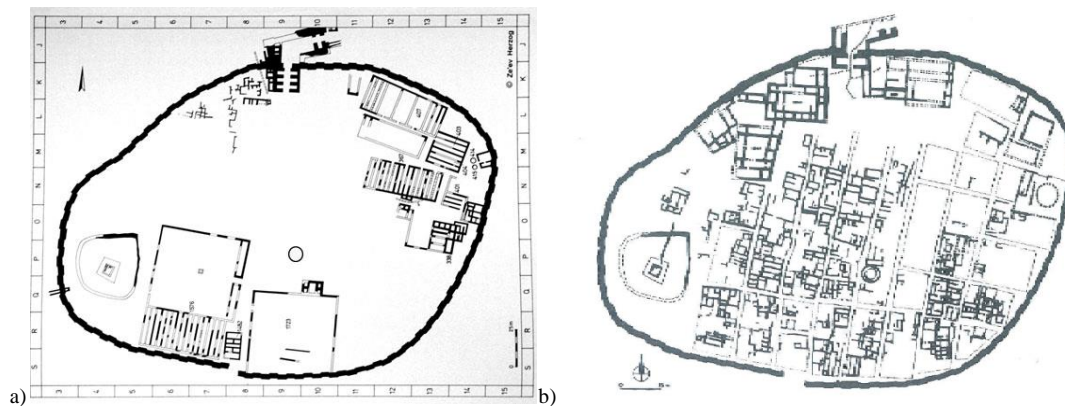


Figure 3.19 a) Stratum IV of Megiddo before the Assyrian conquest; b) Stratum III of Megiddo during the Assyrian period (Stern 2001: 20)

Both Megiddo and Dor followed a similar architectural pattern imposed by the Assyrians: the walls of the cities were of offset-inset type, the inner gates of two chamber plans and an outer gate. However, the city of Megiddo is considered by Israeli archaeologists as the best expression of Assyrian reconstruction (Stern 2001: 20, 27-28), specifically in Stratum III (Figure 3.19). The archaeological plan reveals a well-planned

<sup>152</sup> According to the Israeli archaeologist R. Reich (1992), amongst the new Assyrian architectural elements and techniques are typical layouts, elevated podiums, the use of burnt square bricks, horn-shaped stone thresholds, shallow niches in walls and vaulted openings and roofs.

town divided into regular blocks (similar to the future Roman *insulae*) with intersecting streets. The public buildings were concentrated at the north end of the town near to the gate.

The Assyrian conquest of southern Palestine was different in structure and administration. The south of Palestine is associated with the kingdoms of the Philistines, who were governed by a confederation of small cities. When they were dominated by the Assyrians, these cities were distributed as four semi-autonomous political units headed by their own kings. These units were Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza and Ekron and their kings were under the supervision of an Assyrian officer (Stern 2001: 104; Kuhrt 1995: 496).

It seems that these Philistine cities kept their autonomy because the Assyrians were interested in the annual tributes that these cities would send to the Assyrian court, thanks to their commercial and trade business in the region. In addition, they were in a strategic position with the Egyptian territory and the Assyrians needed them as 'buffer states', despite the risk that involved the proximity of the Egyptian influences over these vassals and their intents of complots and rebellions (Zamazalová 2011: 301 and 306-308).

The Assyrian military expedition of punishment against the Philistine kingdoms during the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III (734 BC), Sargon II (720 BC) and Sennacherib (701 BC) is proof of that risk. Nevertheless, the Assyrians achieved this objective because during the three military expeditions against Egypt (674, 671 and 669 BC), the Philistine cities were allied and collaborated with the logistics of the expeditions for conquering Egypt (Radner 2008: 309).

In this moment, according to Stern (2001: 109-110), the political and economic status of Palestine changed after the campaign of 701 BC, because it is possible to see the first signs of economic growth and prosperity for the entire coastal region of Palestine and Transjordan: the settlement growth and the cultural development of this zone that was the result of the peace and security that followed the Assyrian conquest and reorganisation; the large-scale buildings in the Philistine cities; the erection of new Assyrian military and administrative centres for serving the Assyrian soldiers posted along the main road to Egypt and those Assyrian officers who dwelled in Egypt (Eph'al 1986: 98-99).

Moreover, the Assyrians developed a huge programme of construction that involved fortresses, palaces and at least one temple. The rests of fortresses have been found at Tell el-Hesi, Horvat Hugah, Shiqmah River, Tell Jemmeh, Tel sera', Tel Haror and Tell Abu Salima (Stern 2001: 110). Meanwhile, in the north of Sinai, there has been found more than 30 settlements belonging to the eighth and seventh centuries BC. They were built between Wadi el-'Arish and Wadi Ghazzed, which would demonstrate the presence of Assyrians because 'these sites were a spring board for the Assyrian military incursions into Egypt and buffer zones between Egypt and Assyria' (Stern 2001: 114).

The Neo-Assyrian Empire changed the old Phoenician style of architecture, introducing Mesopotamian architecture with an Assyrian prototype style that was manifested in burial customs, temples, palaces and glyptic art (Stern 2001: 18-19). The only Palestinian kingdom, as it was mentioned, that apparently did not have Assyrian influence in its infrastructure was the kingdom of Judah.

According to Stern (2001: 166), there is no vestige of Assyrian architecture or characteristics inside the borders of this kingdom, perhaps because its capital, Jerusalem, was besieged but never destroyed after the Judaic diplomatic capitulation. Furthermore, it seems that the kingdom of Judah always had a stronger link with Egypt than with Assyria (Stern 2001: 156). For this reason, the Phoenician style of its architecture remained as in the past because the Judah accepted its role inside of the Assyrian order and its capital, Jerusalem, was not destroyed.

#### b) The Superstructures in Egypt during the Assyrian Domination

An important policy developed by the Assyrians in its imperial order was the gradual incorporation of different conquered peoples such as officers or functionaries of the empire. A particular case was discovered in the Palestine region in the city of Gezer in the Assyrian province of Samaria, where a clay tablet mentions 21 personal names of the people residing there and their respective legal rights. Twelve of them were Akkadian, specifically Babylonians; five were West Semitic, specifically Aramaeans and one Israelite; and the governor of the city was an Egyptian (Stern 2001: 16).

Nevertheless, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, it is not possible to identify whether this policy had the objective of integrating different people as citizens of the Neo-Assyrian Empire or that they were simply of different ethnicities that had the obligation of working for the Neo-Assyrian administration. Although the Egyptians never became a real empire like Assyria, they expressed a different behaviour with respect to foreign people. Under this point of view, Egypt was, in practice, a more cosmopolitan society since its origin and this practice was also common during the Third Intermediate period.

An example of this is the Libyan population. Both the Egyptians and the Libyans came from different cultural backgrounds. On the one hand, the Egyptians were a literary society with a sedentary life and a long tradition of formal institutions and monumental constructions. On the other hand, the Libyans were non-literate people with semi-sedentary lives and no experience of urban and complex organisations. Therefore, Taylor (2000: 338) believes that if the Libyan dynasties were able to conquer and administrate Egypt for almost 400 years, it was principally due to mixing of both societies.

The Libyans tried to integrate themselves into Egyptian society by acculturation since the New Egyptian Kingdom. It is possible to identify in this period a strong process of Egyptianisation amongst the new population settled in the Delta region that adopted Egyptian dress, burial and names. This situation would be evidence of the classical phenomenon of cosmopolitan society. However, the evidence is not conclusive at all because the material culture of the Libyans was poor and the Egyptians themselves during the Libyan Twenty-first and Twenty-fifth dynasties did consider their pharaohs as foreigners with Libyan names such as the pharaohs Osorkon, Sheshonq and Takelot (Taylor 2000: 340).

This characteristic was possible because Egypt was traditionally a culture more permeable than Assyria to foreign influences. This aspect is underlined by Leahy:<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Leahy 1985: 54.

Egypt has been exposed to a constant small-scale influx, accentuated at period of weak central government, and probably due largely to climatic fluctuations driving people from marginally habitable areas to Egypt for survival. Egyptian society had been sufficiently elastic to absorb these without apparent difficulty, and with little trace of xenophobia, despite the contrary impression given by the theological dogma of Egyptian triumph over foreign lands.

Despite Assyria being a more militaristic empire with a strong concept about universalism inside of its structure as a state, the Egyptians seem to have been more open-minded in their contact with other people and their later integration. According to Morkot (2000: 88), the Egyptians did not have different attitudes towards other people's racial or ethnic differences. It is evident that in Egypt there was prejudice and antipathy against foreign people or civilisations but the Egyptians developed a more explicit concept of assimilation with other people than the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

In other words, the Libyans, Asiatics or Kushites could become 'Egyptians' when they were accepted, being absorbed into the Egyptian system. Perhaps this is the reason why the Egyptians used a common word – *wer* – when referring to all foreign rulers or peoples. Besides this, many of the foreign individuals who were accepted into the Egyptian society adopted Egyptian names and they could move up in the Egyptian society. An example of this practice was some foreign princes or officers whose mummified bodies were found in the Valley of the Kings from the New Kingdom period, such as the Asiatic Yuya or the Kushite Maiherpri (Morkot 2000: 85).

With respect to the scripts, literature and systems of measurement and weights, there was an important Egyptian product that the Assyrians needed for their administration: the papyrus. According to Morkot (2000: 122), there was a special interest in this product because the Aramaic language had already replaced Akkadian as the commercial and diplomatic language, and Aramaic was written with ink on paper and not with a stylus on clay. For this reason, the acquisition of this product was fundamental for the Assyrian bureaucracy, although the production of papyrus was, on a royal monopoly enterprise since

the origin of the pharaonic state. This could explain the necessity for Egyptian scribes in the Assyrian court since the period of Adad-nirari III (811-783 BC).

This event had several repercussions both in Palestine and in Egypt, which would demonstrate the status of the ‘buffer zone’ of the Syro Palestine region between Egypt and the Neo-Assyrian Empire. First, there was a linguistic phenomenon during the Libyan dynasties, which would corroborate the breakdown with respect to the cultural tradition inherited from the New Kingdom period. Second, the scribes of the Libyan period used grammatical constructions and phonetic spelling, which would demonstrate current usage more than a traditional one of the Egyptian language. Finally, the former hieroglyphic script was replaced by the hieratic script on monuments and in inscriptions in areas such as spelling, grammar and script (Leahy 1985: 60).

Taylor (2000: 346) suggests that these phenomena ‘reflect a lack of concern for tradition on the part of Libyans grappling with an unfamiliar idiom’ during the Third Intermediate period. Later, the Egyptians adopted another form of script, besides the traditional hieroglyphic and hieratic script, which was the demotic script. It was an invention from northern Egypt, which is more cursive than the hieratic script. For this reason, it was more extensively used because it was a system of scripts for administrative, legal and trade matters; such as the Assyrians using the Aramaic script in their provinces.

This fact may demonstrate a curious phenomenon because during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, when Assyria ruled and administrated the region, the Philistines also used two different systems of scripts: the Aramaic international language used in the Western provinces of Assyria (according to the *ostraca* found in Tell Jemmeh, Tell el-Fa‘rah and Tel Sera‘) which was used by the members of the Assyrian garrison; and the ‘Philistine’ script, which means a local script, that the Philistines learnt from their neighbours such as the Judaists but with some particular features unknown in the Hebrew language (Stern 2001: 115).

Otherwise, both the Philistine and the Judaist kingdoms used a mixed system of numbering and weights, which included Phoenician and Egyptian Hieratic numbers. However, there is also evidence, according to Stern (2001: 118), of ‘the use of foreign weights, such as the crouching lion bronze weight from Tel Jemmeh, which imitates an



Assyrian prototype, or the bronze cubic weights from Ashkelon, which were, according to their incised numbers, undoubtedly Egyptian’.

This mixture of scripts, languages and weight systems would demonstrate the borderline between Egypt and the Neo-Assyrian Empire around the Syro Palestine region and how this ‘buffer zone’ worked for both of them with a special interaction. It seems that both Egypt and Syro Palestine used two different systems of scripts but both of them had a common objective: to be a faster system useful for trading, administration and correspondence. Meanwhile, at the common border for both civilisations – Palestine – there was an amalgam of weight systems and numbering, which is a common characteristic at the border of any imperial entity.

Another possible example of cultural interchange and influences may be the development of a genre of historical chronicles during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, which was common both in Egypt and in the Palestine region. These chronicles seem to have been inspired in the Ramesside form of king lists such as the *Turin Canon*. The papyrus lists the names of pharaohs, the lengths of reigns in years, with months and days for some kings, and sometimes they are grouped together by family. The list also includes the names of ephemeral rulers or those ruling small territories not mentioned in other sources (Málek 1982: 93-106). A similar style was developed in the kingdom of Judah according to the biblical books of Chronicles and Kings during the same period.

Redford points out (1992: 332) that during the period Kushite-Saite (711-525 BC), there was a great interest in the historical past of Egypt. This attitude was motivated principally by ‘its heightened interest in the past and its archaizing that stimulated the rapid growth of the chronicle and established the parameters followed by Manetho two centuries later’.

Examples of this Egyptian influence could be found in historical works such as the Phoenician chronicle form of the ‘Annals of Tiro’, the ‘History’ of Philo and the lost works of Mochus and Dios. Indeed, there are some similarities with the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles because both Egyptian and biblical authors used a chronicle style, which mixed historical events with prophetic and cultic stories (Redford 1992: 333).

Taylor (2000: 357) thinks that the Kushites lacked suitable indigenous traditions in their homeland and tried to adopt archaic trends and patterns actively, probably with the aim of being accepted as Egyptians despite their foreign origin. An additional factor, however, was the desire to preserve the past through copying earlier monuments. The most explicit reference to this behaviour is the introduction to the *Memphite Theology of Creation* on the 'Shabaqo Stone', which relates how the king found the text and ordered for it to be transcribed for posterity: 'Whether or not this statement is literally true, the intention to preserve the integrity of an ancient text was reflected through conscious imitation of the format, wording, and spelling of earlier documents'.

However, it is also true that the Neo-Assyrian Empire developed the same style of historical chronicles to describe the principal events and conquests of their kings. These chronicles also have the same characteristics as those found in Egypt and the biblical chronicles: every ruler was identified by his name, the length of his reign and some historical events that happened during his period (Oppenheim 1969; Luckenbill 1968). Thus, during the period which the Neo-Assyrian Empire exercised its control in the ancient Near East, Egypt, Judah and Assyria shared a common view about their past. The problem of whether this was a parallel phenomenon or a matter of mutual influences is still in debate.

The Assyrian new order was also the principal incentive that reopened and maximised the trade between Syria, Egypt, Cyprus and Greece. The principal evidence of this international trade was supplied by the heterogeneous amount of pottery vessels whose styles included Phoenician, Egyptian, Edomite, Cypriot, Corinthians, Greek and local ceramics produced in Ashdod.

There is also evidence that would corroborate the introduction of Assyrian pottery but not as an imposition because they also shared with local traditions. For instance, the use of Assyrian pottery in native tombs or the use of Assyrian style vassals inside of Judaist palaces modified by the addition of red burnishing, which was typical of local Palestine cultures (Stern 2001: 38).

Moreover, Stern (2001: 92) discusses the impact of Assyrian aesthetics on seal impressions:

With the arrival of the Assyrians, a real revolution took place in Phoenician glyptic art. It is true that many of the previous motifs continued, but many of new ones were added, the majority of which were taken from the Assyrian or even the general Mesopotamian repertoire. (...) Of the Assyrian motifs, figures wearing Assyrian dress, Assyrian cultic emblems such as the moon crescent and the stars, the hero struggling with one or more monster, and the hero stabbing a lion are common examples.

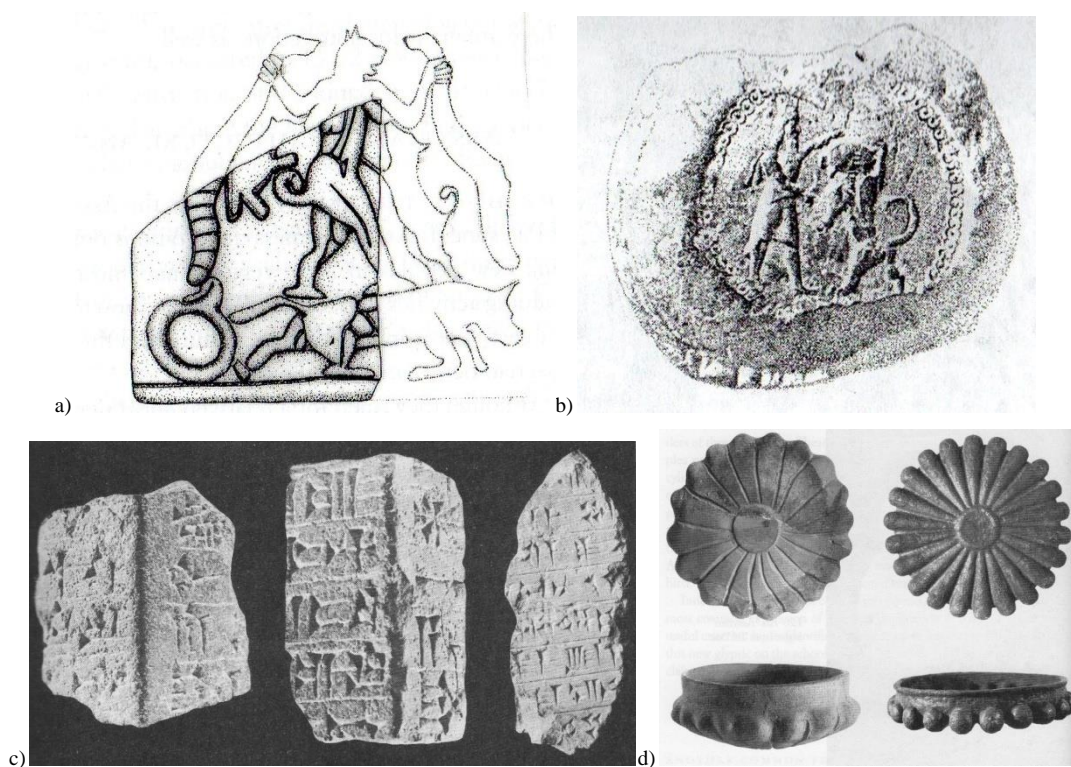


Figure 3.20 Neo-Assyrian culture material found in Palestine: a) *Lamashtu* from the region of Lachish; b) Royal Assyrian bulla from Samaria; c) Stele of Sargon II from Ashdod and Samaria; d) Assyrian style bronze and clay bowls from Samaria (Stern 2001: 15-17, 38)

A particular case is found again in Palestine. Here the Assyrians built small temples in some places such as Sheikh Zuweid and Buseirah, which were erected with the objective of being used by the local Assyrian administration (Stern 2001: 32-33). In these places were found many objects such as *lamashtu* plaques, seals and amulets with

Mesopotamian divinities, besides a new type of incense burner and burial customs such as the use of clay ossuary (Figure 3.20).

Nevertheless, it seems that the Assyrians were also very receptive to foreign art and, especially, that from Egypt. An article by Marian Feldman (2004) sets out the impact of the Egyptian royal art from the Ramesside period (13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), which stimulated both the Neo-Assyrian royal ideology and its respective iconography since the period of the Middle Assyrian kingdom.

Apparently, the Egyptian artistic representations found in the rock relief at Nahr el-Kelb (Lebanon) and the battles carved in Egyptian temples illustrate what both artistic concepts – the Neo-Assyrian and the Egyptian – draw upon and how they contrast each other (Figure 3.21).

Morkot (2000: 265) describes it as follows:

Here the mountains of the Lebanon range come down to the sea, forcing the road to follow a narrow path along the coast. The route was used by many passing armies, and inscriptions had been left here recording their triumphs by the Egyptian pharaohs Thutmose III and Ramesses III and by the Assyrian emperor Shalmaneser III. In later centuries the Babylonian, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Roman emperor, Caracalla, were to add their own monuments.

On the one hand, the reliefs of Lebanon are made up of a series of carved rock reliefs, which were made by the pharaoh Ramses II when he reached the border of the Syro Palestine region during his military campaigns against the Hittite kingdom. This commemorative behaviour was imitated later by the Assyrian kings themselves such as Tiglath-pileser I (114-1076 BC), Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) and Esarhaddon, who also carved three different reliefs in the rock that commemorated their military campaigns and victories in this region.

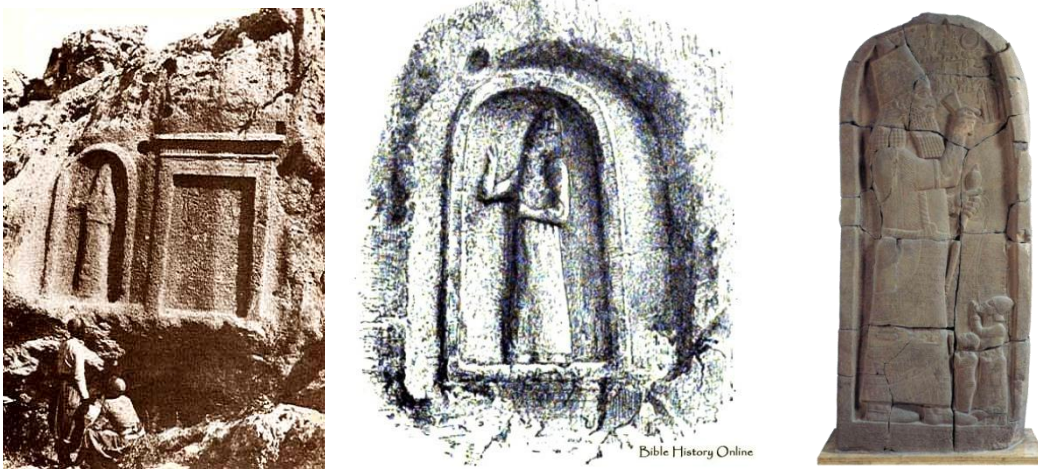


Figure 3.21 Esarhaddon relief in Nahr el-Kelb and in Tel Barsip (<http://arthistoriansblog.wordpress.com/2013/05/20/nahr-el-kalb-dogwolf-river/>)

Feldman (2004: 142) highlights that the representation of both royal iconographies in the same place is not a coincidence, specifically in the case of Esarhaddon, who conquered and plundered Memphis: ‘while the Assyrian relief clearly shares a conceptual basis with its Egyptian neighbour – that is, carving a monument to imperial expansion in the living landscape – all other formal aspects stand out in striking counterpoint to those of the Egyptian forerunner’.

Thus, while the Egyptian representation of Ramses II portrayed him inside a decorated rectangular frame close to an anthropomorphic image of the Egyptian god Amun and occupied less than half of the entire relief, the Neo-Assyrian representation of Esarhaddon stands the full height of its respective carved relief dominating the complete scene with additional divine symbols in the upper field. According to Feldman (2004:143), this could be interpreted as a message of the Neo-Assyrian imperialism as inheritor of the Egyptian control in the Syro Palestine region and as an emergent power able to defy Egypt in the same region.

The point of view of Feldman could be corroborated with the comparison of a stele erected by Esarhaddon himself in Til Barsip. In this stele there is a massive figure of his person with small figures of Assyrian gods and their emblems poised before his face. Esarhaddon holds a cord that attaches to two small figures as captives. One of them seems



to be the king of Sidon or Tyre while the other looks more African, which would indicate he is the Kushite pharaoh Taharqa or his son because he uses a cap with the typical royal *uraeus* of the Kushite monarchy (Morkot 2000: 265).

Another example is the Battle of Til-Tuba carved in the Room XXXIII in the southwest palace of Nineveh during the period of Ashurbanipal. This representation could be considered as the best example of Assyrian artistic complexity, besides ‘the culmination of a progressive line of development beginning with the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud’ (Feldman 2004: 144). However, it seems that there are many similarities with respect to Egyptian reliefs in the temples of Luxor, Karnak, Thebes, Abydos and Abu Simbel from the Ramesside period of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties, which showed the military events and campaigns of the Egyptian expansion in the west and south of Egypt, such as the battle of Kadesh of Ramses II and the voyage of Hatshepsut to Punt.



Figure 3.22 Comparative study of the Battle of Kadesh (1274 BC) and Battle of Til-Tuba (652 BC).

The Egyptian and the Assyrian representations have similar characteristics: chaos in battle, dead bodies, collapsing enemy chariots and royal images (Figure 3.22). Nevertheless, the Assyrian version was probably carved in 660-650 BC and it seems it was inspired by the different great battle reliefs of Seti I, Ramses II and Ramses III (Feldman 2004: 148). All of them were carved in the same temples plundered and sacked by Ashurbanipal during his campaigns in Egypt but also this artistic influence could have been transmitted since the late Bronze Age, when the fame and power of Egypt was a stimulus for the later Assyrian imperialist idea.

As Feldman points out (2004: 149), Egypt, as a great imperial presence in western Asia, was something to be emulated and admired by the Assyrians. However, Egypt, as an antagonist to Assyria's growing empire, was also something to be opposed and distinguished from: 'Both the Nahr el-Kelb rock relief and the Battle of Til-Tuba, through their forms, compositions, and even geographical situations, boldly proclaimed Assyria's unique and independent imperial vision; yet, at the same time, they stood upon the shoulders of a giant: the empire of the New Kingdom Egypt'.

There is another important phenomenon for the Assyrians with respect to Ancient Egypt, specifically regarding the collection of luxury objects as an important element for the Neo-Assyrian royal culture according to the register in the royal inscriptions of booty obtained in foreign lands (Oppenheim 1969: 295). According to Thomason (2004:161), it is possible to speak about a real 'Egyptomania' amongst the Neo-Assyrian kings, who seem to have considered that 'the incorporation of Egyptianica into the Assyrian heartland demonstrated that the kings had a dualistic vision of the distant realm of Egypt, as they presented themselves simultaneously as its conquerors but also as receptive to its art'.<sup>154</sup>

Examples of this behaviour are the Neo-Assyrian royal reports during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal of objects from Egypt which included statues of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty Egyptian king Taharqa, which were found at the entrance to the

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<sup>154</sup> A similar case was the respect that the Egyptian court felt about the Kushite dances or the Asiatic musicians who were accepted and diffused by the cosmopolitan New Kingdom in ceremonies, temples and royal festivals such as Sed and Opet in Thebes (Yurco 2001: 83).

arsenal on Nebi Yunus (Thomason 2004:157). Moreover, in the Prism of Ashurbanipal, translated by Piepkorn (1933: 57), there are important mentions about typical Egyptian objects and artefacts which were plundered from the palace of Taharqa in Thebes such as obelisks, statues of Taharqa himself, horses, linen, amulets, scarabs, ivories, and bronze and golden statuettes.<sup>155</sup>

Thomason provides (2004: 159) an illustration of this phenomenon:

The Assyrian royal court was receptive to aspects of Egyptian visual culture and incorporated them into their native art. In fact, the Neo-Assyrian kings seemed to have preferred to decorate their palaces with Egyptianizing images found in Phoenician art (...). Conversely, the Assyrian desire for things Egyptian may have created a 'tourist market' in which the Phoenician artisans produced for a specific Egyptophile Assyrian royal audience.

With respect to the canon art, it seems the Kushites developed a particular pattern of drawing human figures of their kings: the human body was represented more realistically than in the art belonging to the Old and Middle Egyptian kingdoms. The musculature, broad shoulders and thick necks are emphasised, but have African characteristics (fleshy lips and flat and broad noses). This stereotype was apparently inspired in the Assyrian model, especially in the musculature of figures, which would demonstrate the grade of artistic influences between both civilisations (Morkot 2000: 286).

To sum up, following the critical assessment of Redford (1992: 318), ancient Egypt could seem weak and pusillanimous in the political context of the Iron Age when the Neo-Assyrian Empire ruled the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, Egypt still had a formal reputation, which was a motif of inspiration for other kingdoms, and the Assyrians always demonstrated their respect for the Egyptian culture.

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<sup>155</sup> According to this evidence, Kitchen (1986: 394) defends the thesis that the military expedition of Ashurbanipal to Thebes not only plundered and looted the city, but also appropriated 14 centuries of treasure accumulated inside of their walls such as the two solid electrum obelisks. Proof of this event is in the biblical prophetic book of Nahum (3. 8-9), which describes the destruction of the 'city of Amun' (No-Amon) or Thebes.



## Chapter 4

# The Collapse of the *Pax Assyriaca*

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## 1. The Collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

There are still some doubts about the Assyrian collapse and about what the principal consequences of it were. Indeed, the fall of the Neo-Assyrian represents a special case of historical study – both in the Antiquity as in modern times- because this empire was, by the standard of its days, a real colossus: the largest and most complex political structure the Ancient Near East had known up until then (10<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC). For this reason, it seems that a better explanation of the causes of decline and fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire is needed.

The peoples that constituted the Ancient Near East always knew the idea of the collapse of their respective civilizations. This was an inherited idea that the Mesopotamians would corroborate in its building materials, which were mainly clay and bricks, which, sooner or later, were demolished, destroyed or brought down by the floods, heavy rains, occasional fires, earthquakes, military attacks and other factors. Therefore, by Liverani (2001: 377) the idea of collapse always existed within the Mesopotamian culture and became the basic mental structure to explain the events of the story: everything is born, grows and then dies. The same principle could be used in other matters such as administration and politics as destinations of kingdoms, empires and dynasties.

But what does *collapse* mean? Some clues were given in the last chapter in the analysis of the End of the Bronze Age: *collapse is a transformation and loss of social complexity that happens after a power vacuum* (Tainter 1988: 202). Nevertheless, according to scholars such as Schwartz (2006: 5) and Yoffee and Cowgill (1988: 1-19) the concept of *collapse* is also adapted from the archaeological literature for studying four specific phenomena: the fragmentation of states into smaller entities; the partial abandonment or complete desertion of urban centres, along with the loss or depletion of

their centralizing functions; the breakdown of regional economic system; or the failure of ideological thought.

In a similar approach, Matthews (2003: 147) provides an illustration of this phenomenon, suggesting a comparison amongst different imperialism entities in history, which demonstrates the fragility of empires as political entities. For this reason, empires always collapse after short periods of extension and prosperity, depending on ‘a growth rhythm of slow-quick-slow, as empires approached maximum size, and intimated that the slower the rate of growth, the longer the duration at maximum extent’. Otherwise, following the outline of Schwartz (2006: 3-4), historians and anthropologists from the 1960s and 1970s have adopted different models for explaining the historical evolution of ancient civilizations.

However, these models were more interested in comparative studies on the emergence of the first states and urban societies, its development or ‘Golden Age’ and the final fall generally restricted to the invasion of foreign peoples with its respective ‘Dark Age’. Nevertheless, there was not enough evidence about another important aspect: the reasons why the ancient civilizations declined and what happened after the fall of these entities. Indeed, there were doubts about if the civilizations really disappeared suddenly in history or if it somehow survived.

For this reason, in the 1980s the principal interest became how and when the ancient civilizations or empires *collapsed* and if they could *regenerate* in any form in the future (Schwartz 2006: 11). Nowadays, scholars such as Tainter (1988: 42) have identified many causes: climate change, crisis in the production, internal variables and ideological failures. In other words, it seems that the collapse of ancient civilizations depended on multiple factors but it was always possible for them to *regenerate* in one way or another after this collapse.

When the king Ashurbanipal died in 630 BC, the Neo-Assyrian Empire entered a long period of civil wars and general crises. Up until the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Neo-Assyrian Empire had also expanded to maintain and control many of their vassal kingdoms, which suddenly revolted against Assyria; specifically Chaldeans/Babylonians

from the southern lands of Mesopotamia, allied with the Medes from mountains Zagros and Iranian plateau that had already destroyed the city of Ashur in 604 BC.

At this moment, Babylonia emerged as a new power in the Ancient Near East under the leadership of Nabopolassar (658-605 BC), later destroying the important city of Nineveh, the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire the 609 BC, after a dramatic siege (Stronach 1997: 307-324) thanks to a coalition with the Median King Cyaxares and a people called the *ummanmanda*.<sup>156</sup> This name was a term for 'tribal hordes' from the north, of which the Scythians were one of them, although Machinist (1993b: 187) believes that it was only other name for the Medes themselves:

In the sixteenth year, in the month of *Aiaru*, the king of Akkad (Babylonia) mobilised his army and marched against the land of Assyria. In the month of *Arahsamnu*, the Umma-manda..... came to the support of the king of Akkad and they united their armies and toward Harran, against Assur-uballit, who sat on the throne in Assyria, they marched. Assur-uballit and the army of Kullania, which had come to his aid, fear of the enemy fell upon them and they forsook the city and.... they crossed. The king of Akkad reached Harran and.... he took the city. Much plunder, beyond counting, he carried off. In the month of *Adaru*, the king of Akkad.... He left and he returned to his land and the Umma-manda who had come to the aid of the king of Akkad.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> However, Liberani (2003: 2 and 7) believes that Medes never were a political power, which could become a serious rival against Assyria. The evidence suggests that 'Mede Empire' or 'kingdom' were a misunderstanding of Herodotus about the succession of different empires since Assyria until Persia (Radner 2003: 37). Besides, the Babylonian propaganda should be considered because the principal written records come from them. As Liverani says: 'The idea that the two victors (Babylonia and Media) share the territory of the Assyrian Empire is completely wrong. The Medes assumed the dirty job of destruction, whilst the Babylonian assumed the role of the restorers. Almost the entire territory of Assyria was inherited by Babylonia, the Medes being left with the Zagros that Assyria had already lost beforehand.'

<sup>157</sup> Luckenbill 1968: 420-421. This Babylonian information is known principally by two sources. One of them was the Basalt Stela of the king Nabonidus which made some parallels between the destruction of the sanctuaries of 'Subartu', that means Assyria, with respect the Babylonians sanctuaries destroyed by the Neo-Assyrian king Sennacherib in the past. The other source was a Neo-Babylonian tablet (identified as BM 55467), which represents a declaration of war against Assyria and Nineveh by Nabopolassar. Both sources

However, for many years, the only one source that had been traditionally referred to find out the causes of the Neo-Assyrian Empire's fall were the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, specifically the complete prophetic books of Nahum and Jonah and the verses of Isaiah 10. 5-27; Zephaniah 2.13-15; Ezekiel 32.22-23 and Tobit 14. 4-7. The biblical narratives provided a theological interpretation on the collapse of Assyria, seen as a world imperial force, whose conquests affected a multitude of states and peoples. They also signify a significant proposal about the divine revenge for the treatments of the Neo-Assyrian with respect the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

As Machinist (1993b: 184) states; from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC until the following centuries, this schema of a former arrogant conqueror being himself, then conquered and destroyed by Yahweh, was quite persuasive to post-Assyrian generations of Judean/Jewish thinkers and intellectuals. For instance, the later comparisons of Assyria and new states and empires that became enemies and oppressors of Judah and the Jews illustrate this. The most prominent was Neo-Babylonian Empire, which was the formal imperial successor of Assyria. The prophets Habbakuk, Jeremiah, the Second Isaiah and Psalms 137 are amongst the authors of 7<sup>th</sup> century BC texts that take up this schema, using the same language and imaginary found in Nahum with respect to Assyria.<sup>158</sup>

In the same approach, Weinfeld (1986: 170-171) considers that the wake of the Neo-Assyrian Empire was the principal motivation of the Israelite/Judaist prophetic literature developed since the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. The case of Isaiah, who apparently was a

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saw the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the conquest of their cities as a revenge, sanctioned by the Babylonian gods, for the earlier Neo-Assyrian subjugation of Babylonia (Machinist 1997b: 186).

<sup>158</sup> This could be corroborated by the Dead Sea Scrolls belonging to the Period of the Second Temple in Judea. One of these scrolls, known better as 'The Scroll of the War', made mention on the *kittim of Ashur* a concept used by the ancient Jews between the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC – 1<sup>st</sup> century AC, as universal nickname applied to all enemies, no matter whether they were Seleucids or Romans. For the Jewish collective mentality, Macedonian, Greek, Seleucid or Roman became a synonym to represent the same kind of imperialist who exercised an oppressive political dominance over them, remembering always the Neo-Assyrian case: 'the first attack of the sons of light will be launched against the lot of the sons of darkness, against the army of Belial, the troop of Amun and the troop of Philistine, and against the troops of the *Kittim of Ashur* and [those who help them from the wicked] of the Alliance' (1QM Col. I, 1-7).

direct witness of the apogee of Assyria under Tiglat-Pileser III and Sennaquerib, was apparently the first character to raise his voice as a critic against the Neo-Assyrian imperialism. This protest rests on the protest against the Assyrian domination and their crimes (Isaiah 10. 5-15) including annihilation of nations, destruction of cities and devastating lands, removal of national boundaries, plundering and exploitation of peoples, degradation of national leaders and exile of populations.

A critical assessment of this information would suggest that Israelite prophets were the first intellectuals, according to Weinfeld (1986: 172), to raise the protest voice against the concept of ancient imperialism reflected by the Neo-Assyrian Empire.<sup>159</sup> Thus, the new critic anti-imperialist is not a conviction against a specific people who has had hostile acts against Israel or against a specific Assyrian king but a public critic against an imperial system which only subdued nations, exploited them and plundered them. A very similar case was described centuries later by Aeschylus in *The Persians*.

Weinfeld (1986: 178) believes that this approach is based on the principle which was apparently the real mission of the Neo-Assyrian Empire on the earth. Under an Assyrian point of view, they had as mission to reflect the wills of their god Ashur on the earth; but for the Israelite point of view, they distinguished between the will of man and the divine predestination: ‘God sent Ashur to punish nations because of their sins, but the Assyrian king performs the mission not on behalf of God but simply because he wants to wipe nations, humiliate their leaders and plunder their treasures’. Perhaps, that was the origin of the negative Israelite concept on empire, still holds some validity nowadays (Colás 2007: 2).

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<sup>159</sup> It is interesting the Israelite knowledge of some archaic Mesopotamian concepts used by the Assyrian imperialism. It would corroborate some biblical expressions like referring to the oppressive imperial Assyrian regime as yoke, burden and yoke bands for denominating imperial regime (‘the Yoke of Assyria’), heavy taxes and *corvée* work such as they were by the Assyrian administration. Thus, Isaiah speaks about removing the burden and the yoke of the Assyrians (9. 3; 10. 27; 14: 25), meanwhile Jeremiah mentions to break the yoke and tearing the yoke bands (30. 8) such as Nahum (1. 12-13). Besides, there is the classical association of the power of Assyria with the figure of lion (Nahum 2. 12-13) following the archaic Mesopotamian relationship between this animal and the institution of kingship.

Notwithstanding, meanwhile a biblical author, Nahum was pleased about the destruction of the Neo-Assyrian power; another, Jonah, speculated about the fate of Nineveh and the possibility of its salvation. Indeed, when the people of Nineveh saw the light, repented of its 'hubris' and acknowledged the power of Yahweh avoiding punishment (Jonah 3. 7-10). Perhaps it is the manifestation of the ambiguous relationship that some vassal states had with the Neo-Assyrian power, because many of them cooperated with it and even they were integrated into the global economy of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

What is more, according to Machinist (1993b: 179-180) the Babylonian Chronicles never mentioned a definitive date of the end of the Assyrian rule. Indeed, these chronicles state that the Assyrian army was still fighting three years after the collapse of the last of the heartland capitals. In the same approach, Machinist also points out that the archaeological evidence from the Assyrian cities would corroborate the existence of Assyrian groups there even after 609 BC. Thus, it is inaccurate supporting evidence for the empire disappearing on a specific date.

For this reason, it is necessary to discover why and how its imperial structure collapsed and if the Neo-Assyrian Empire definitely fell down in the three scopes which characterize an empire: *imperial core* (hierarchy), *peripheral polities of domination* (expansion) and *global context* (order).

#### a) The Hierarchical Crisis of Imperial Core

An important aspect of the Neo-Assyrian Empire collapse is pointed out by Boardman (1991: 183) who considers that the fundamental seeds of failure were simply attributed to the small size of metropolitan Assyria. A study of the population and resources of the homeland suggest that a series of inadequacies dictated policies, which had created the empire and compelled its maintenance, contributed to its collapse when they became exhausted. For example, the royal grandeur, of which the great Neo-Assyrian cities were an expression, could only be supported by the tribute of territories far beyond the natural borders of Assyria.

From an economic point of view, large cities located in the heart of Assyria were populated mainly by native Assyrians who enjoyed large profits from the imperial government and concentrated the bulk of the wealth that the Empire could produce. However, the flow of tribute and taxes from the vassal states to the Assyrian cities never received any benefits in return. This situation led to another phenomenon pointed out by Grayson (1995: 967): the growth of the Neo-Assyrian cities compared to the size and the increasingly decline of the settlements that existed in the provinces. Archaeological evidence confirms that the arable fields on peripheral areas of the Neo-Assyrian Empire were more depopulated.

Besides, the tribute from the provinces could only be exacted by the threat, or at least with the presence of an overwhelming military force. Subject populations proved loyal as long as the military success of Assyria assured their prosperity, but they had no reason to risk their lives in its defense, especially when the Neo-Assyrian Empire could not ensure the loyalty of the vassals in times of troubles and weakness. The analyses of the historical sources from Mesopotamia would corroborate this approach: in 672 BC Esarhaddon called together representatives from all the Neo-Assyrian vassal states because he wants to secure the succession to the throne for his two sons: Shamash-shum-ukin in Babylonia and Assurbanipal in Assyria. Indeed, Esarhaddon made vassal states all swear to treaties that recognised his successors:

(This is) the treaty which Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, has concluded with you, in the presence of the great gods of the heaven and the earth, on behalf of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, whom he has named and appointed to the crown principship:

When Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, passes away, you will seat Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, upon the royal throne, and he will exercise the kingship and lordship of Assyria over you. You shall protect him in country and in town, fall and die for him. You shall speak with him in the truth of your heart, give him sound advice loyally, and smooth his way with respect.

You shall not depose him nor seat (any)one of his brothers, elder or younger, on the throne of Assyria instead of him.

You shall neither change nor alter the words of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, but serve this very Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, whom Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, has presented to you, and he shall exercise the kingship and dominion over you (...)

(...) 18<sup>th</sup> day of Yyar, eponymy of Nabû-belu-usur, governor of Dur-Šarrukku. The treaty of Esarhaddon, conclu[ded] on behalf of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate of Assyria, and Šamaš-šumu-ukin, the crown prince designate of Babylon (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: 30 and 58).

The structure of this treaty is very similar to the classical type of Neo-Assyrian vassal treaty, whose principal purpose was to confirm the loyalty of whole population of the empire to the heir of the Assyrian crown. Indeed, the subjects of the different regions were made to pledge to accept the supremacy of the god of Assyria; a kind of stipulation that was common only with newly acquired vassals. This would confirm the thesis of Postgate (2003: 28) who believes that the Neo-Assyrian administration was not a bureaucratic one but also depended on ‘the sense of institutional loyalty and personal interaction up and down the system’.

Nonetheless, most of these rulers or governors – to whom this treaty was written - ruled areas in the eastern periphery of the Assyrian empire, and none of them appears to have been firmly under Assyrian control in the period of Esarhaddon. The discovery of a copy of this treaty belonging to Esarhaddon in *Tell Tayinat* would corroborate the urgent need of demonstrate the loyalty of the vassals to the Assyrian crown.<sup>160</sup> In the same matter,

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<sup>160</sup> The recent archaeological discovery in *Tell Tayinat* would confirm the feeling of suspicion of the Neo-Assyrian crown on the loyalty of their vassals: in 2008 an archaeological expedition belonging to University of Toronto discovered a temple in southeastern Turkey, in *Tell Tayinat*. This temple was, originally, a complex belonging to the Neo-Hittite kingdom of *Palastin*, which was conquered by the Neo-Assyrian Empire under the command of the Neo-Assyrian king Tiglat-pileser III in 738 BC. Thus, the Neo-Assyrian administration rebuilt the city; transform it into an Assyrian provincial capital and making some renovations in the plan of the original Neo-Hittite temple. Indeed, many cuneiform tablets were found inside of this building, specifically on the platform or *cella* of the temple, a part of the building, which is better known as



the letters and reported rescued from Assyrian libraries, and forwarded by astrologers to the Assyrian kings, are also proof that the kings were very worried about their personal security and only secondarily concerned about the well-being of the empire. Moreover, even in this period of peak of the Neo-Assyrian power under Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, these kings spent their days secluded in their respective palaces, in constant fear of plots and rebellions.

Besides, following the proposal of Liverani (2001: 384) the study of extant letters sent or received by the Neo-Assyrians kings as Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal would demonstrate that they were dealing more with personal and court affairs than with official reports about border defense, foreign relations, tribute income, economic matters or administrative arrangement of provinces. Indeed, it would seem that the last Assyrians kings inherited a complex and efficient administrative and imperial machine from their predecessor, and that they imagined that such a machine could continue by inertia alone. In summary, while the Neo-Assyrian kings such as Sargon II and Sennacherib did not hesitate to personally lead his troops in campaigns of conquests.

That is corroborated by the translation of Luckenbill (1968: 48) of this classical Neo-Assyrian royal inscription belonging to Sargon II:

Palace of Sargon, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, viceroy of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad; the king who, with the help of Ashur, Nabû and Marduk, beginning with Iatnana (Cyprus) which is in the midst of the sea of the setting sun, to the border of Egypt and the land of Mushki,

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'holy of holies'. They were a proof of the imperial ambitious of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its lasting influence on the political culture of the Ancient Near East. In fact, one of these tablets was a copy of a treaty from the early 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. It was a kind of covenant between the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon and a secondary ruler who acknowledged Assyrian power. This treaty had been confirmed in 672 BC and it had many similarities with other treaties wrote in tablets at elaborate ceremonies hold in *Nimrud*, the royal Neo-Assyrian city of the same period. In general terms, the treaty describes how the ruler and other citizens vow to recognise the authority of the son and successor of Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal, because he tried to secure the accession of his son, avoiding the political crisis that persisted inside of the Neo-Assyrian Empire before, during and after of this treaty. It has to be considered this period was a critical one for the Neo-Assyrian Empire, specifically with respect to its imperial relation with other new political entities, such as the rise of the Phrygian people and other rival powers from Anatolia along the northwestern frontier of the Neo-Assyrian empire; as well the increased contact between people of the Syro-Palestine region and Egypt with the Greeks of the Aegean world. Perhaps for this reason, the presence of the oath tablet of *Tell Tayinat* is a proof of the attempts of Esarhaddon for keeping the Neo-Assyrian Empire unified after his death.

the wide land of Amurru, Hatti in its entirety, all the Gutium, the distant Medes, on the edge of the Bikni Mountains, the lands of Ellipi and Râshi which are on the Elamite border, all of the Aramaeans who live on the banks of Tigris, Surappi and Uknû rivers, all of the Sutû, desert folk, of Iatburu, all there were, the city of Til-Huma which belongs to the Elamite territory, Babylonia (Karduniash) north and south, all the Chaldeans' cities, as many as there were, the land of Bit-Iakin on the shore of the Bitter Sea as far as Dilmun's border, the king who brought (all these) under one rule and set his officials over them as governors, and (who) imposed upon them the yoke of his sovereignty.

But the latter Assyrian kings preferred staying in their respective palaces, as Liverani said (2001: 386) 'trusting the order and administration, on the human level, to their officers, and in the ideological field, to the gods'. With respect to the Assyrian army there was a paradox in its inner structure. Formally, the Assyrian troops belonged to the Assyrian kings and they were recruited into the service of the state. However, in the practice, they did not serve directly to the Assyrian kings but to their respective governors in every one of the Assyrian provinces. Perhaps, some of this troops were professionals who had chose the army as a career; while other were mercenaries or auxiliaries who depended on others condition of service such as the *ilku* service (Postgate 2003: 16).

Moreover, there are many doubts about the regular Neo-Assyrian standing army. Actually, there is not enough evidence with respect to the disposition of the troops as a whole corps ready under arms throughout the year or how permanent the services of their members were or the organization or *modus operandi* of their military campaigns (Chaliard 2008: 90). Also Postgate (2003: 21) revealed a pattern of troop enrolment during the Neo-Assyrian period: 'Some permanent soldiers were no doubts Assyrians (whatever that precisely implied), but it seems likely that most of the foreign contingents which we know to have been incorporated into the *kisir šarruti* were also long-term professional soldiers who did not disperse annually to their places of origin in the off-season'.

This situation also contains another paradox. According to the rescued archaeological evidence from the Assyrian archives, some Neo-Assyrian kings, such as

Esarhaddon, finally decided to agree certain treaties with some pastor peoples from the mountain regions. Perhaps, it could be interpreted as a strategy for controlling the perimeter of the empire in the borders (Lanfranchi 2003: 107). One of these peoples were the Medes who were recruited to serve as armed corps in the Assyrian palaces and, specifically, as bodyguards of the crown at the end of the reign of Esarhaddon and others Assyrian kings until the period of Assurbanipal (650 BC).

Nevertheless, it seems that Assyrian kings knew the Mede people for a long time ago which territory was considered as a marginal provincial territory or a tributary state that was progressively drawn into the imperial mechanism of Assyria (Lanfranchi 2003: 80). Indeed, the corpus of Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, since the period of Shalmaneser III to Esarhaddon (850-670 BC) have been concentrated the major part about the Medes.

Generally speaking, the Assyrian saw them as a group of tribes placed in the mountainous region of the Zagros who were led by local chiefs and lacking of political unity or even political coordination (Liverani 2003: 4-5). Their ‘cities’ were small towns, villages or pastoral camps probably fortified as it is corroborates in archaeological places as Nush-I Jan and Godi Tepe II.



Figure 4.1 Medes give tributes to the Assyrian king Sargon II ([http://realhistoryww.com/world\\_history/ancient/Elam\\_Iran\\_2.htm](http://realhistoryww.com/world_history/ancient/Elam_Iran_2.htm)).

Nevertheless, the Medes were placed in a strategic location along the trade route which connected Mesopotamia with Central Asia and it was called the ‘Khorasan Road’. In

other words, they controlled the gate of the Iranian plateau that connected Kermanshah to Hamadan, a strategic route that the Assyrian always tried to control it. Besides, this region became the principal supply for horses (Figure 4.1) to the Assyrian army (Radner 2003: 43).

For this reason, they built Assyrian enclaves with the objective of becoming an economic and ideological reference point for the local Medes whose leaders coexisted with the Assyrian authorities but without direct control over them (Liverani 2003: 6) because these Mede leaders acted more like ‘wealthy robber barons guarding their commercial interests’ (Radner 2003: 52). During its military service, the Medes gained important knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, specifically on modernization of military techniques and the study of the inner defense system of the Neo-Assyrian.

After that, the Medes tribes from the highlands decided to organize themselves as a Confederation in order to shake off the Assyrian yoke. Liverani points up (2003: 7) that the Medes were more interesting in destruction, slots and booty than become a real state because their leaders never had enough authority to keep themselves as a common people. Also they were divided in two fractions: pro-Assyrians and anti-Assyrians (Radner 2003: 60).

Moreover, it should be considered that, from a military point of view, the Assyrian army was already gradually formed by foreign elements incorporated from other vassal States (Grayson 1995: 967; Liverani 2001: 390-391). Thus, at the end of the hegemony of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, there were simply no sufficient Assyrian native elements to fill the ranks of the army because the majority of the infantry and cavalry of the Neo-Assyrian army *were no longer native Assyrians*, such as the Roman army with respect to the Germans at the end of the Western Roman Empire.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> This comparison between Medes and Germans is not incidental. According to Lanfranchi (2003: 84) the term ‘Italian’ was a Greek invention which was used as denomination of a group of tribes in the southern Italy, meanwhile the name of ‘Germans’ was invented by Romans for denominating a people on the basis of a name which belonged apparently to one specific tribe. Besides, the Roman used originally the name

### b) The Collapse of the Assyrian Periphery

With regards to the account of movement of deported people and capital from the conquered territories, the result according to Liverani (2001: 387) was a total imbalance that could not be corrected by the Neo-Assyrian Empire administration. Thus, it was producing a major flaw in the internal administration of the empire, which was a factor important in his decline and final fall. In other words, the Neo-Assyrian Empire was a political state primarily agricultural, but inside it there was no balance between its producers (mainly peasants) and non-producers (palace, bureaucrats, priests and professional army officers). To sum up, the growth of the administrative apparatus had no parallel growth with available assets, due to excessive exploitation of the conquered periphery, which was exhausting human and economic resources (Kolata 2006: 220).

In this point, Colás (2007: 24) considers that ancient empires were ‘entangled political authority and economic power in ways that precluded the kind of separation between state and market that obtains under capitalism’. For this reason, these ancient empires were built as rigid, centralized and intensively controlled in matters as consumption, trade and distribution by bilateral systems of exchange and circulation between the periphery and the metropolitan centre. Nevertheless, the centre will always have predominance over the periphery and the history of imperial entities has demonstrated a tendency of empires to concentrate the power and wealth in detriment of redistributing and devolving them the periphery (Colás 2007: 34).

On the other hand, the annexation of others territories by treaties or conquest may have provided new resources to the Neo-Assyrian Empire but only temporarily. These new territories became more expensive to conquer; especially the further away they were from the Assyrian capital. Moreover, none of them could ever be completely controlled. This aspect could be corroborated by a general survey of the Neo-Assyrian expansion which took place in the lowlands, specifically to the west and south; while the northern and

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‘Greek’ for denominating to the foreigner settlers from Peloponnesus residing in southern Italy. In the same approach, the Assyrians seem have adopted the heteronym ‘Mede’ and ‘Media’ as designation of the ‘barbarian’ mountainous inhabitants from Zagros gradually incorporated to the imperial structure.

eastern borders remained almost stable or were only extended from very high costs and unstable results (Liverani 2001: 389).

The explanation for this phenomenon is found in geography of the Ancient Near East explained in the first chapter: the mountains to the north and east of the borders of the empire could never be completely conquered, exploited and controlled because of the resistance of mountain peoples who had the geographical rugged in their favour. This insight of Liverani (2001: 389) also provided theoretical support in the study elaborated by Parker (Figure 4.2):

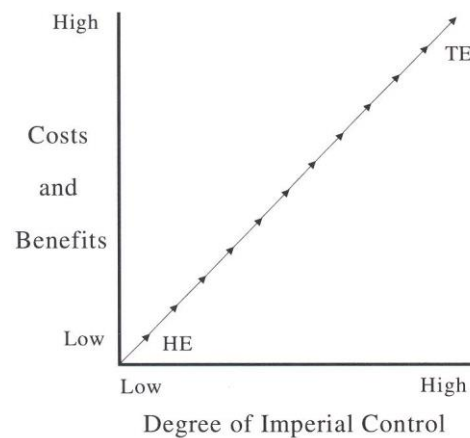


Figure 4.2 Degree of the Neo-Assyrian control according to Parker (2001: 15).

He points out that the territories close to the borders need the constant presence of imperial personnel and an adequate infrastructure to support them, especially of security both within the territories and along the imperial perimeter. Notwithstanding, when there is an expansion of the empire, it increases both the size of the territory and the perimeter, which demands a concomitant increase in resource expenditure. Therefore, unless the territorial empire has continuously increasing in human and material resources, the area that could be effectively controlled will be limited depending on the resource base of the core polity.

### c) The Collapse of the Assyrian Order

Under a theoretical point of view, following the idea of Kolata (2006: 220), the Neo-Assyrian Empire was not able to produce ‘citizens’ of the Empire but ‘strategic subjects’ who did not ideologically hew to state orthodoxy. That means, these strategic subjects – as the Mede case - adopted a strategy of orthopraxy to negotiate daily life under the domination of empire, but only adopting some external appearances of the Neo-Assyrian values and practices but preserving their local values systems and worldviews. As Kolata (2006: 220) states: ‘When the empire collapsed, their strategic mimesis of states institutions, values and social practices disappeared with it’. That was the Neo-Assyrian case.

Nowadays there are discrepancies amongst scholars about the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. For Norman Yoffee (2006: 226) the Neo-Assyrian case represents a classical example of the disappearance of a universal empire – the greatest empire in the ancient world - but which was not able to regenerate and fell in the late of 600s. The collapse of this empire was not followed by the regeneration because the structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire was constituted by the rule of absolute and strong monarchs who increased the effectiveness of the military, conquered new lands and deported a great number of defeated people to various parts of its increasingly centralised empire.

However, according to Yoffee (2006: 226) this policy was expensive for the Neo-Assyrian Empire because its population became a mixture of peoples both in the cities and in the countryside. Meanwhile, the traditional Assyrian nobility was replaced by military leaders and bureaucrats who were more interested of being the owners of villages and agricultural land that participate in the Assyrian government. As Yoffee (2006: 227) states: ‘The removal of natural ties between local, rural people and their traditional leaders had been effected by the Assyrian king themselves. Such non-Assyrian elites as existed had little reason to follow Assyrian models and to rebuild the Assyrian state’.

This perspective was supported by the own Yoffee in a later article (2010: 176-203) in the Figure 4.3:

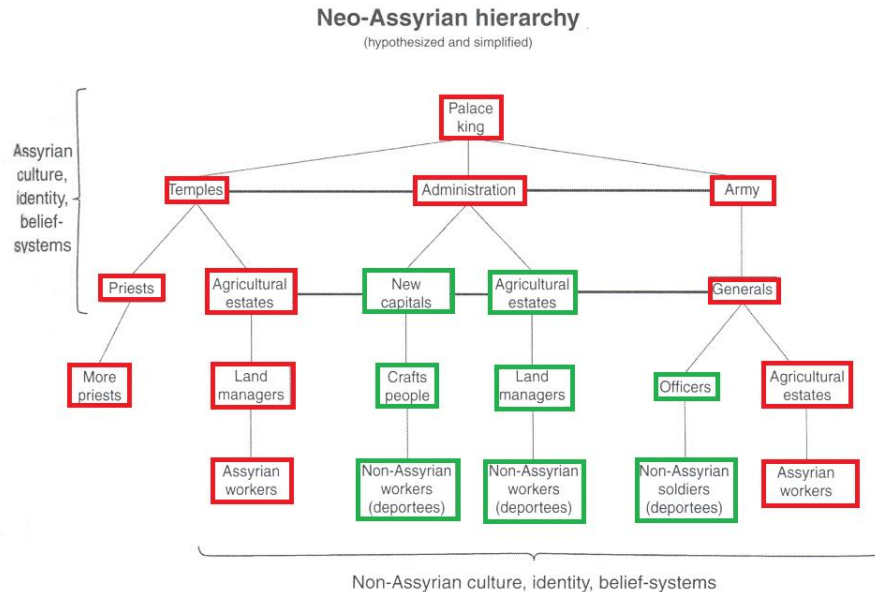


Figure 4.3 The Neo-Assyrian Empire social structure (Yoffee 2010: 191).

It shows the structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire was organised under a unified monarchy, which had three upper levels of imperial organization: the temple, the royal administration and the army and their respective personal (red). The problem was that the lower levels that supported this structure, which was constituted by the peoples who had been deported by the own Assyrians in the past (green). However, the peoples who were at the base of this system were neither Assyrian nor spoke the language: they were workers (artisan, farmers and soldiers) who knew little and cared less about Assyrian culture and history.

According to Yoffee (2010: 193) when the upper structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire disappeared (monarchy, army and administration) there were only villages and towns whose leaders had no relationship –culture, language, ideology or religion- with the ancient Assyrian order, creating a vacuum of power in the territories that anciently had belonged to Assyria (Figure 4.4). This vacuum will be filled by the new conquerors (Babylonians, Achaemenids, Macedonians, Parthians and Sassanids) in the future, especially when they occupied the upper levels of administration over the lower level that these new people found after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire:





Figure 4.4 Draft of Assyria after the collapse of its empire (Yoffee 2010: 193).

Postgate (1979: 216) would corroborate this approach. He considers that the rescued evidence from the Neo-Assyrian Empire suggests that the administration of the Assyrian provinces was concentrated in the capital city of each province. The administrative task of the capital city was developed by officers (*rab alani*) who performed their authority over the villages of the province, which depended on the capital city, not on the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In this point Postgate (1979: 216-217) highlights:

The Assyrian provincial system, as reorganised by Tiglat-pileser III, tended to concentrate the wealth and economy activity of each province at the one provincial capital. (...) In the political sphere, it is likely that the Assyrian domination ironed out local distinctions and killed local loyalties. We now wonder whether the empire's administration framework did not contribute to the vacuum, which followed its collapse by concentrating the economic life on its own administrative centers.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was replaced for a short period by Babylonia as the dominant state in Mesopotamia before being conquered turn by the Persians in 539 BC. However, this event marks a difference with respect to the history of Mesopotamian states because the new rulers – and thereafter Achaemenid, Hellenistic, Parthian and Sassanid dynasties - did not think of themselves as native Mesopotamians because their language,

culture and religion were not from this region. For this reason, it could be considered that the history of the ancient Mesopotamia is over with the Persian conquest.

Nevertheless, following the ideas of Boardman (1991: 161) scholars and historians should be careful with the concept of 'fall' of ancient empires or civilizations because, if that means a total collapse followed by chaos, it was not the Neo-Assyrian case. In effect, the structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, in administration and territory, essentially remained the same. This situation would allow for the thesis of Eisenstadt and Friedrich-Silber (1988: 242) to be supported, which the ancient states, civilizations or empires do not collapse at all *if* by 'collapse' means the complete end of the political system developed by these entities.

Indeed, the collapse of these structures is part of a continuous process of reconstruction in the boundaries of these civilizations, states, or empires. This phenomenon of 'regeneration' is characterized by the survival of institutions or idea from the era before the collapse, which provides a base for the future recreation of a new society or state. Thus, for Schwartz (2006: 10), the lower-level administrative units or personnel from collapsed states could survive in local contexts for a second generation of states. It seems that the Neo-Assyrian Empire was really an evidence of this historical process.

When the last capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire fell down there was not a prolonged period without a central authority, because of transferring of power from the city to another (Nineveh to Babylon). In other words, there was a power from the Neo-Assyrian Empire which flourished for almost three centuries, before its capital being transferred to an adjacent and related kingdom: *Babylonia*. Such as in later times would happen between Rome and Constantinople.

As was mentioned before, the Babylonian Chronicles of the period 614-612 BC curiously seems not to highlight a radical break with respect to the Neo-Assyrian administration (Brikman 1997: 3). They were simply limited to describe the events that led to the Babylonians to power under the command of Nabopolassar who, at least in the rescued inscriptions, they did not celebrate the victory against the Neo-Assyrian Empire. It should be considered that the emergence of Nabopolassar took place in the midst of a civil

war between two Neo-Assyrian candidates to the crown, which facilitated his triumph (Luckenbill 1968: 418).

However, this point of view could be invalid because the Neo-Babylonian Empire of Nabopolassar and his successor, Nebuchadnezzar II, carried out campaigns to ensure the control of former territories formerly ruled by the Neo-Assyrian Empire – excluding Egypt - but the main intention was not always to restore order and civilization inside the ancient Near East region. According to Dandamayev (1997: 42) the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire had significant economic changes, because their enemies – Medes and Chaldeans/Babylonians - destroyed the achievements of both administrative system and commercial centres developed by Assyria such as the olive oil industrial centre in Palestine (Gittin 1997: 101-102).

Dandamayev himself (1997: 43) gives an explanation of this Neo-Babylonian policy:

Such destructive politics were typical of the behaviour of the Neo-Babylonian and Median kings during the early periods of the rule. This can be explained by the fact that the well-organised Assyrian World Empire was replaced with rather primitive states. Thus, Media was an early state based on a tribal confederation. The Chaldean kingdom was also a comparatively primitive empire, though it comprised Babylonia and wide-extending territories as far as the border of Egypt.

Moreover, in contrast with the Neo-Assyrian case, there is not much information about how the Neo-Babylonian Empire was administered because the Royal Archives from this period were not preserved (Jursa 2003: 174). Under this point of view, the Neo-Babylonian Empire seems have continued some of the practices developed by the Neo-Assyrian Empire, as the case of deportations of defeated peoples or the rebuild of some ancient Assyrian cities as Ashur, Nimrud and Nineveh (Reade 2003: 156). Otherwise, for the Israeli archaeologist Ephraim Stern (2000: 45-51; 2001: 14) it seems that the Neo-Babylonian domain, in Palestine at least, was much more oppressive and destructive than the Neo-Assyrian Empire, since its role was limited to devastate and not to develop the conquered territories.

An explanation of this destructive policy would be the great potential and richness that enjoyed Babylonia at that time, which – unlike the Neo-Assyrian case - gave full freedom to devastate the periphery and not require resources in the future. In fact, the Neo-Babylonian period marks the beginning of twelve centuries of great economic prosperity for Babylonia whose base was the extensive agriculture. Following the analysis of Dandamayev (1997: 43) the Chaldeans/Babylonians were not interested in the Neo-Assyrian system of taxes from the provinces because their kings, as Nebuchadnezzar II, preferred to march annually to Palestine and Syria to collect tributes. The destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC is an example of this policy.

It seems that the Mesopotamian concept of ‘universal empire’ implemented and refined by Assyria could be misleading because, except in some periods which this empire was ruled by strong figures as Tiglat-pileser III or Sargon II, the Assyrians never had absolute control of the surrounding areas and any serious attempt to throw off Neo-Assyrian bondage seldom succeeded. Perhaps, the basic problem in the Neo-Assyrian foreign policy was its own system of provincial administration and vassal treaties, which evolved slowly, *and it did not have enough time for improving as a more effective system in this region.*

This situation changed with the Persian conquest of Babylonia in 539 BC and the development of the Achaemenid dynasty which inherited and stretched the former provinces of the Neo-Assyrian Empire adopting and improving many of the strategies and administrative methods developed before by the Assyrians (Dandamayev 1997: 43 and 45): the adoption of the Aramaic as *lingua franca*, the regular postal services for the administration of the provinces, the organization of the armies, the service of *ilku*, the use of archives, the patterns of the royal art and the divine ideology associated to the king.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> However, it seems that the Persians also were the heirs of another important civilisation of the Ancient Near East: Elam. This kingdom had an important tradition of centralised administration, written records and state organisation. Besides, they were able to build large coalition of people coming from the Iranian plateau with the surrounding areas in central, northern and eastern Iran (Liverani 2003: 10). Nevertheless, Roaf (2003: 16-17) believes that there was an indirect transmission of Assyrian material culture to Persia but it was transmitted by the Medes who did not have any material culture of its own. For this reason, they

As Dandamayev (1997: 44) concludes:

When within a few decades, between 550 and 512 BC, the Persian state became an enormous world empire, its administration had to create a new administrative system in order to govern the provinces. For this the Persian had apparently to turn to the experience of the Assyrian empire, which at that time was regarded as a rather glorious past.

Parpola (2010: 39) underlines the same conclusion. He believes that the successor of the Neo-Assyrian Empire –Babylonians, Medians and Persians- never made a big distinction between Assyria and their respective empires. For them, the concepts of ‘monarchy’ or ‘universal hegemony’ had been adopted from Assyria, passing or being usurped by other nations. According to Parpola (2010: 39): ‘We know for certain that the Neo-Babylonian and Persian kings and no doubts the Median as well, saw themselves as successors of the Assyrian kings. Nabonidus and Cyrus refer to them as their royal successors, while Greek and Jewish sources refer to several Neo-Babylonian, Persian and Seleucid kings as *kings of Assyria*’.<sup>163</sup>

To sum up, the new Achaemenid imperial order was a universal imperial organization, mostly inspired by the Neo-Assyrian ‘experiment’. It became the real ‘regeneration’ of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In effect, the Achaemenids assimilated it, refined it and passed it to successive empires that appeared in the Ancient Near East: since the empire of Alexander the Great, through the Hellenistic kingdoms (including Rome) and

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adopted the Assyrian culture (columned halls, fortified plans and platform for individual building, vaults made with long curved mud brick struts, stepped altars, elaborate wall niches and other form of wall decoration) and later it was adopted by the Persian.

<sup>163</sup> In another article of Parpola (2000), he makes mention that the destroyers of Nineveh – Nabopolasar and Kyaxares - were not really foreigners for the Assyrian system because they belonged to the ruling elite of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Besides, they knew the administrative system inside out and never had the intention of replace it. The Persian elites, for example, had been ‘Assyrianised’ by the Medes 220 years after the fall of Nineveh and they perpetuated the Assyrian legacy for the future. Indeed, the secretary of the Persian king Cambyses was an Assyrian named Pan-Aššur-lumur.

ended with the Parthian and Sassanid Empire, when finally this imperial structure was absorbed by the Arab conquest thousand years later.

In other words, the Neo-Assyrian Empire represents an entirely new level of political development in history because the Assyrians were the first true empire builders: they were the first to overrun Egypt twice, to make of Babylonia a vassal and incorporate peripheral cultures of Anatolia, Iran and Syria into this empire. If there were other empires before Assyria, they never achieved the level of efficiency and the scale of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, which was unprecedented in world history because it was the first state to unite the diverse cultures of the Ancient Near East into a single political unit.

At least, this situation is described and corroborated by Eph'al:<sup>164</sup>

The Ancient Near Eastern empires to be dealt with survey are the Assyrian, Chaldean and Achaemenid which existed in the 9<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. One basic characteristic they had in common was that they were large political divisions extending over most of the Fertile Crescent and sometimes even beyond it. Each came under the central authority of a king assisted by a social class which was relatively small in comparison both with the population of that empire, which consisted of various nationalities, and with the size of the territories under its control. I refrain from referring here to other political bodies which dominated various parts of that region (such as the Hittite and Egyptian kingdoms) because I doubt whether the numerical proportion between the ruling group and the size of the territory controlled by it, would enable us to include them in the same category as the empires which we are discussing.

For this reason, the next task of this research will be to discover how the Neo-Assyrian collapse in ancient Egypt was.

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<sup>164</sup> Eph'al 1986: 88-89.

## 2. Ancient Egypt and the Collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire

The circumstances of the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire that were described also affected Egypt. Nevertheless, this piece of evidence could be found not in the Egyptian territory but in Palestine because this territory always remained under Assyrian control, while Egypt only knew the Assyrian rule indirectly in the Delta region, Memphis and Thebes. For this reason, the Israeli archaeologist Finkelstein (<http://www.haaretz.com/grounds-for-disbelief-1.10757>) imagines the political situation of the kingdom of Judah during the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire as follows:

From 734 to 625 BCE the Assyrian Empire ruled here. Today's American empire is negligible in comparison, in terms of its power and its crushing strength. For example, if someone in Judah had talked about expansion into Assyrian-dominated territories in 720 that would have been the end of him. King Hezekiah tried, and we saw happened to him. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, arrived with a huge army and decimated him. But, a few years later, when Josiah was in power, something incredible happened. Assyria, the kingdom of evil, collapsed in front of his eyes. In the same way we saw the Berlin Wall collapse in 1989, that's what happened to Assyria. It fell apart and beat a hasty retreat from the Land of Israel. By this time the kingdom of Israel no longer existed, so Josiah woke up one morning, looked to his left and to his right and there was neither an Assyrian nor an Israelite to be seen.

Egypt went through a similar experience. Generally when two different political entities – such as the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Kushite kingdom – are in conflict over a common territory such as Egypt, there is always a third party that benefits from the situation. Between the Assyrians and Kushites was the former territory of the Libyan dynasties in the Delta region, now developing around the cities of Sais, Herakleopolis, Hermopolis and Asyut. The inhabitants of the Delta remained fairly independent of the fight between Assyria and Kush. As Mysliwiec underlines (2000: 107): 'They wagered on the Assyrians, for they reckoned that the yoke of a more distant superpower would be easier to shake off'.

The rulers of the city of Sais, former ally of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, were the first to shake off their Assyrian yoke and assume the formal title of 'Lords of the Two Lands', inaugurating the Twenty-sixth Dynasty with the Pharaoh Necho and his successor Psametik. Indeed, the pharaoh Psametik or Psammetichus tried to extend the influence of Egypt over the Palestinian region, perhaps trying to emulate the New Kingdom period, and improving the special Egyptian monopoly in this region. What is more, Psametik sent military expeditions against Kush, establishing a garrison in the island of Elephantine, and organising punitive expeditions against the new tribes of Libyans in the west.

With the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian administration in Palestine in 649 BC, the rich harbour cities of the Syro Palestine region became an important objective for both Egypt and Babylonia, who fought for the control of them. First, the Egyptian pharaoh Necho of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty conquered Sidon and erected a memorial stele there (Stern 2001: 62). Later, the pharaoh Psametik carried on the policy of conquering the Philistine cities and dominated the Philistine cities, with the exception of Ashdod, which resisted for a long time.

The key of Psametik's success was also, as was the Neo-Assyrian Empire's, the military power and the use of Greek mercenaries, who used new infantry strategies and improved the Egyptian warfare technology in sea battles using triremes (Lloyd 2007: 483-486 and 497; Darnell 1992: 81-84). The use of these Greek mercenaries is mentioned both in the kingdom of Judah and in Egypt. During the reign of King Josiah, according to the archaeological finds in the western border of the kingdom, a fort-town was found on the site of Mezad Hashavyahu, which had the objective of annexing part of the coastal territory (Stern 2001: 226). In the Egyptian case, Greek mercenaries were an important element of the Egyptian army of Psametik, which is mentioned by Herodotus and the Hebrew Bible (Jeremiah 46. 9).

Na'aman believes (1979: 68-90) that, before the Assyrian decline in Palestine, there was originally a treaty between Assyria and Egypt, and that the Assyrian retreat from this region was an agreement between both political entities. Indeed, the Egyptian army of the Saite Dynasty during the reign of Psametik and Necho II helped the Assyrian forces



against Babylonia in 616 BC and 609 BC, and took part in the defeat of the Judaist king Josiah in Megiddo (Jeremiah 47. 1-5). Nevertheless, it seems that the Egyptian conquest of Palestine was also accomplished by the destruction of many places, which contributed gradually in the general decline of the local economy.

Nevertheless, the Egyptian control of Palestine, which lasted for approximately 40 years, had similar characteristics to that of the Assyrian administration. In other words, the Philistine cities kept their autonomy in developing the advantages of the commercial trade developed during the Assyrian period (Stern 2001: 107). The Twenty-sixth Dynasty apparently only replaced the Assyrian authority and carried on with the accumulation of earnings obtained by taxes and tributes in the same region (Lloyd 2007: 482). This is corroborated by the amount of archaeological evidence rescued in the Philistine cities belonging to the Twenty-sixth Dynasty (Stern 2001: 233), which would demonstrate the proper functioning of the Assyrian imperial structure even after its disappearance.

This situation changed drastically when the Egyptian army was defeated by the Babylonians at Carchemish:<sup>165</sup>

In the twenty-first year the king of Akkad stayed in his own land, Nebuchadnezzar his eldest son, the crown-prince, mustered (the Babylonian army) and took command of his troops; he marched to Carchemish which is on the bank of the Euphrates, and crossed the river (to go) against the Egyptian army which lay in Carchemish, ..... fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat and to non-existence [beat?] them, as for the rest of the Egyptian army.

Thus, the Egyptian army was beaten by the Babylonians in 605 and it had to retreat to Egypt, and two years later, the Babylonian army conquered and plundered the region of Palestine, destroying the cities (Wiseman 1956: 69). The huge archaeological evidence gathered by Faust (2012: 152-163) demonstrates the high level of destruction in Palestine surpassing even the devastation in the Assyrian period. The Assyrians at least

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<sup>165</sup> Wiseman 1956: 67

resettled the region and later developed economically the Syro Palestine region; the Babylonians were devastated to such an extent that 'the area reached a settlement and demographic recovery only in the Hellenistic period' (Faust 2012: 166).

Nevertheless, Necho II knew how to confront the Babylonian army of Nebuchadnezzar, according to the translation of the Babylonian Chronicle of Wiseman (1956: 71) that outlines:

In the fourth year the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to the Hatti-land. In the Hatti-land they marched unopposed. In the month of Kislev he took the lead of his army and marched to Egypt. The king of Egypt heard (it) and mustered his army. In open battle they smote the breast (of) each other and inflicted great havoc on each other. The king of Akkad and his troops turned back and returned to Babylon.

There are several interesting points about this battle mentioned in the source. First, the confrontation of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, who took over command of his army in person and marched to Egypt, and the relevance of the Egyptian pharaoh Necho II calling out his army to fight in open battle against the Babylonians. Second, the Babylonian Chronicle seems to manifest a special frankness because it states that both sides suffered heavy losses and, indeed, Nebuchadnezzar and his army had to retreat immediately and return to Babylon. Third, sadly, there is not more information about this confrontation between the major powers in this text, and there are no references in Egyptian sources with which the Babylonian record might be compared.

Nevertheless, on the one hand, it is significant that the Egyptians were sufficiently strong to stop Nebuchadnezzar from attacking them for some time but that was not the case when they confronted the Neo-Assyrian Empire. On the other hand, it is evident that Egypt could not recover her control of Syria and Palestine by direct action; and therefore it remained within its own borders. Perhaps that is the reason why the Babylonians never demonstrated a real interest in controlling or conquering the Egyptian kingdom either. So, ancient Egypt was not incorporated into the administration of the Neo-Babylonian

kingdom, although the Babylonian Chronicle mentions a Babylonian conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar during the rule of the pharaoh Amasis.<sup>166</sup>

The situation changed with the appearance of the Persian Empire, which was able to improve the imperialistic structure of the Assyrians. However, the incorporation of the Egyptian territory into its empire in 525 BC was originally the result of the incorporation of the conquered kingdom of Babylonia with all their provinces and territories west of the Euphrates, which placed the Persian king Cambyses immediately at the Egyptian border as the last kingdom for conquering (Olmstead 1943: 87).

Besides this, the Persians not only conquered the Egyptian country (525-332 BC) but also conquered the Mesopotamian region and the Mediterranean coast in the west of Egypt, and tried to dominate Nubia in the south. They also wanted to conquer Central Asia and Europe – Greece – but with limited success. Nevertheless, the Persians could expand their empire from the Indus Valley to the Mediterranean Sea.

Indeed, Persia invaded Egypt in two separate eras (525-402 BC and 343-332 BC), until the arrival of Alexander the Great. Although the later Ptolemaic dynasties demonised the Persian kings (Jansen-Winkel 2002: 309-319; Devauchelle 1985: 67-80), and most traces of their rule were systematically removed, the Persian period can be reconstructed thanks to written sources in different languages (Hieroglyphic, Demotic, Aramaic, Old Persian and Greek) and the multicultural archaeological record.<sup>167</sup> These periods of foreign domination helped to solidify Egypt's national identity during the intervening 'Late Period'

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<sup>166</sup> This text was discovered in 1878 and published in 1882 by T. G. Pinches in *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* (Vol. VII, pp. 210-225). In this text there was a mention of a Babylonian expedition in 568-567 BC for Nebuchadnezzar to take Amasis's Egyptian throne after his defeat in 572 BC. This text is not apparently part of the Babylonian Chronicle but rather a historical allusion inside of a religious text.

<sup>167</sup> This 'black legend' would have a historical explanation: when the first Ptolemaist pharaohs ruled Egypt, they repeatedly claimed to have recovered lost Egyptian divine statues found in the Syro-Palestine region, supposedly stolen by the Persian authorities. These sources are often dismissed as mere Hellenism anti-Persian *topos* or propaganda, but detailed accounts of such discoveries are recounted in the Pithom Stela of Ptolemy II (Thiers 2007: 45-49, 100-106) and the recently discovered decree of Ptolemy III from Akhmim (Masry, Altenmüller and Thissen 2012: 97-102, 164-167).

of the Egyptian history and set the stage for subsequent centuries of Hellenistic and Roman rule.

On the one hand, the Persian kings were identified with the Saite Twenty-seventh Dynasty when they took control of Egypt, maintaining the administrative structure and incorporating new elements inherited from the Assyrians. For example, the Persians codified the Egyptian legal system, rebuilt old Egyptian temples, adopted Aramaic as the *lingua franca*, as the administrative language, and controlled the country by designating a Persian satrap (Lloyd 2007: 496).

On the other hand, the Persians developed a more extensive policy of administration on Egypt, following and improving the strategy used by the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Olmstead 1943: 92). In addition, in comparison with the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the Persians put in a military appearance with a strong number of troops, which included Jewish mercenaries at Elephantine, and Persian forts in Tell el-Herr, Tell el-Maskhuta and Wadi Tumilat (Bard 2008: 271).

With respect to both points, Klotz says:<sup>168</sup>

The Persian Period also introduced Egypt to foreign domination, being occupied by alien soldiers and administered in a new language (Aramaic), and thus presented valuable lessons for the subsequent Ptolemaic Dynasty. For example, most native Egyptian revolts against the Persians originated in the Western Delta, and this is precisely where the early Ptolemies concentrated their administration in Alexandria, while they offered numerous benefactions to Lower Egyptian temples and cities (e.g., Sais, Buto, Mendes, Tanis, Pithom, Sebennytos, Behbeit el-Hagar).

However, the most important fact with respect to the Persian conquest of Egypt was that the Egyptians were incorporated into an imperial structure developed by the Persians but adopted from the Neo-Assyrian Empire period. Nevertheless, the results were

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<sup>168</sup> Klotz 2015: 10.

apparently deficient, although the Persian kings tried to be considered as true pharaohs amongst the Egyptians and designated, as did the Assyrians, Persian officers for administrating the country in concordance with local Egyptians. Thus, Egypt never accepted the Persian control and there were many rebellions against the Persian authorities, although some Egyptian officers developed a career inside the Persian administration such as the famous case of the Egyptian Udjahorresnet (Lloyd 1982: 166-180).<sup>169</sup>

The key of the Persian failure in the administration of Egypt lies with the Persian Empire being seen as a people of many ethnicities and cultural mixes. In that reality, foreign influences were tolerated rather than matched, although the Persians tried to fit the facts of the place and were presented as Syrian kings in Syria and as pharaohs in Egypt. For this reason, Egypt never could be pacified and integrated into this empire, although the Persians promoted settlements in the oases of the western desert and other public buildings and temples for Egyptian divinities (Posener 1936: 75-76; Traunecker 1995: 115-11).

Moreover, it seems that the Persian Empire failed in developing a real control over this country. Perhaps the cause was Egypt's distance from the core of the empire, which would explain why it was so difficult to control. A good complement to this point of view is an article by Rottpeter (2007: 9), who suggests that, although Egypt had been under the control of foreign domains before the Persians, it had never before been downgraded to a Persian satrapy amongst many of them. The experience of being only one amongst the provinces of a great empire was again, at least for the elite of the Nile, a cultural humiliation. It also could have been very sensitive the physical absence of Pharaoh who had been presented as the sole master of Egypt through history. So, his absence could hardly be accepted by the Egyptians.

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<sup>169</sup> A good study of this conflict is the book of Ruzicka (2014) that deals with the difficulties of the Persians for conquering Egypt and the problems in holding it. Ruzicka argues that the principal interest of Persia in the West, during approximate two centuries, was not Greece but Egypt. However, the Persian control of this country could be never secure. The thesis of Ruzicka is supported principally by the several and unsuccessful Persian expeditions usually triggered by rebellions in the western part of the Delta, a region that the Persians never could dominate.

Both ideas also contribute to explaining the reason, because the Neo-Assyrian Empire never wanted to administrate Egypt personally. One possibility would be that the extension of the Neo-Assyrian Empire prevented controlling the country directly, whose large geography along the Nile valley demanded huge resources of logistics and troops (Lloyd 2007: 510). Indeed, several times the Assyrians had to abandon suddenly conquest and military campaigns in Palestine and Egypt because of revolts in other provinces of the empire.

A second explanation would be to accept that the Neo-Assyrian Empire was not so sophisticated in administrating a huge empire and its policy needed more experience to become a real imperialistic entity. Under this point of view, the empire encompassed much more than it could control and manage, and when the period of greatest crisis arrived, their distant borders, such as the Egyptian, were the first to be abandoned and left to their fate.

A final explanation would be that the Assyrians actually had the political wisdom of avoiding administrating the Egyptian territory directly due to the difficulties of its vast geography. The Assyrians also knew of the problems of controlling a civilisation completely different to theirs, and a long permanence in the country had caused countless revolts where subsequently the Persians suffered. In this case, the Assyrians already had the experience of having to deal with the Babylonian civilisation and the disastrous result that implied its stay in Babylon.

Perhaps the final answer about this Assyrian administration in Egypt could be a fusion of these three alternatives.

# Conclusion

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This thesis sought to provide insight into the evolutionary process of ancient civilisations, stressing the complementarity between theoretical principles and the relevant historical evidence. In the introduction of this thesis some theoretical models were mentioned to explain the historical evolution of the civilisations developed in 1974, with the *World System* idea of Wallerstein and Wilkinson's idea of 'Central Civilisation' developed by their followers since 1995.

Both models presented a simple but apparently effective draft that insinuated some basic steps in the historical development of any civilisation, both in the past and in the present, because they consider more the relevance of *connectedness* amongst civilisations than their *uniformity* from antiquity until now. An example would be the study that focused on the origin, development and collapse of the first civilising entity known as the 'Central Civilisation', created by the merger of two major, independent and ancient civilisations: Mesopotamia and Egypt in around 1500 BC.

However, the historical reconstruction and date given (1500 BC) by the scholars of the Central Civilisation school was wrong in many aspects. This merger has been known as the 'Near Eastern phase' and apparently this process took shape and direction during the so-called *Pax Assyriaca*. In other words, it was the result of the political expansion of the imperial character coming from Mesopotamia under the aegis of the Neo-Assyrian Empire from 1000 BC to 600 BC, although the process of full integration with Egypt seems to have been concluded by the successor empires of Assyria circa 430 BC.

However, it could be considered also wrong to analyse the origin and evolution of the 'Near Eastern phase' of the Central Civilisation by only starting from these new dates. The principal reason is that it should be considered that this historical phase was only the final result of a large process in which every culture, kingdom and empire of Mesopotamia

gave its contribution for the consolidation and final development of the ‘Near Eastern phase’ of the Central Civilisation before merging with Egypt.

Indeed, there are many other points in this large evolution that were not considered in both of the theoretical approaches such as in the historical data by the schools of Wallerstein and Wilkinson. Firstly, the full process for becoming the ‘Near Eastern phase’ of the Central Civilisation was more complicated and longer and it must consider the complete evolution of the Mesopotamian civilisation before the merger with Egypt.

That is the relevance of the Braudelian analysis used in this thesis because it gives priority to long-term historical structures over events and it is still fundamental for the modern historical knowledge about both Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations. Because, as Fernand Braudel (1984: 23-27) said, any civilisation will incorporate concepts such as spaces, societies, economies, collective mentalities and, the most important, *continuities* through history.

With the approach of Braudel, it was possible to confirm that the geographical description of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian environments; the political, social and economic structures developed in both civilisations; and the complement of historical data would allow a better understanding of the historical evolution of both civilisations, instead of so called *histoire événementielle* or ‘event history’, that has been predominant in the studies of the civilisations on the Ancient Near East.

For instance, there was a period of cultural mixture in the Mesopotamian historical evolution that could be identified thanks to the climatic micro variation during the mid-Holocene. That event happened between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates and their repercussions were fundamental amongst the inhabitants of this region. So, the original mixture of the former Mesopotamian population was the result of the coexistence of a number of different ethnic groups who performed several strategies for surviving since 6000 BC.

This approach would confirm also the theoretical definition of civilisation used in this thesis as *everything that humankind has created, preserved and used as artificial*



*isolation to interact with the natural environment for its own benefit.* Furthermore, Toynbee's theoretical idea that *the civilisation comes to constitute the cultural responses of a society to the pressures of the environment* would be correct in this assertion.

In fact, this situation motivated the emergence of the first agriculture communities in Mesopotamia, because the geographical structure of the Mesopotamian region allowed the human development of two important areas in the south and in the north of Mesopotamia. This basic distinction is very important for understanding the historical evolution of Mesopotamia because there was not one process of mixture and gestation in this region but two different ones in these regions of Mesopotamia. The development of both regions had important consequences in the future history of the Ancient Near East as historical legacy.

Southern Mesopotamia was an alluvium without metal, wood and raw materials, which always have played an important role for the development of any complex society in antiquity. However, the advent of settlements on the alluvium, where there were groups of farmers within the inside of an open frontier – as a steppe – lacked basic resources. Conditioned by the obligation of a rising population to organise and concentrate in settlements, this produced the accumulative need for surplus for survival and the ability to find solutions to the scarcity of their resources.

These failures motivated the social and economic evolution of southern Mesopotamia, specifically with the development of an economical organisation – the first 'instrument of expansion', using Quigley's terms (1979: 128), or 'the problem-solving organizations' described by Tainter (1988: 91) – identified as a 'tributary economy'. The objective was based on seizing and distributing different products inside and outside of southern Mesopotamia.

This would correspond with the time between the period of Ubaid and the period of Uruk (6500 BC – 3100 BC), when the 'tributary economy' was perfected as the *oykos* system that allowed the development of urban structures (cities-states), administrative institutions (temples) and elites (priesthood class). This situation would confirm the other theoretical principle that the cities have been the most appropriate barometers of long-term

economic and political development processes and trends, especially measuring the pressures, movements and directions of change in the last 5000 years.

Thus, the historical phenomenon called ‘the expansion of Uruk’ (3200 BC – 2900 BC) could be also identified as the first urban expansion of Mesopotamia. This event allowed the diffusion of the organisation of southern Mesopotamia, with the development of colonies in the north, east and west of Mesopotamia, which could be interpreted as a sort of reconvention of the former ‘tributary economy’ of *oikos*. The reasons for this policy seem to have been related to the fragile ecosystem of the agriculture products developed in the south, beside the problems with respect to the political centralisation and the demographic press. Thus, the new colonial and fortified centres surrounded by small satellite settlements were both the solution for the former conflict and the motivation for a new expansion of southern Mesopotamia.

Meanwhile, northern Mesopotamia had another independent and important development. It seems that this region was originally steppe lands without the classical southern organisational structures: temples, priestly hierarchies and urban development. Rather, northern Mesopotamia was the cradle of primitive tribal nomadic organisation structured by the mixture of totemic leaders that exercised their power over specific territories which were personal and directly controlled.

The gestation of northern Mesopotamia took place when some of these totemic leaders decided to create an institutionalised authority whose structure had an ideological basis that exercised a monopoly of force. This ‘instrument of expansion’ that characterised northern Mesopotamia could be called the principles of ‘king’, ‘reign’, ‘kingship’ and ‘kingdom’. Meanwhile, southern Mesopotamians lived under the concept of several city-temples with their respective priesthood. Northern Mesopotamia was progressively organised from 2800 BC as territorial units called ‘kingdoms’ such as the reign of Kish. This kingdom was the first reign able to reach a period of expansion in northern Mesopotamia.

It is evident that there was a final confrontation between the northern and southern political organisations that could be considered as the first period of conflict in the

Mesopotamian civilisation. Moreover, there was a curious phenomenon which could be described as the ideological clash between the southern Sumerian cities and the northern kingdom of Kish. This confrontation originated a long war, the result or principal consequence of which was, although a Sumerian victory, a new mixture which could be described as the ‘Mesopotamian symbiosis’ in around 2500 BC.

This symbiosis was the political mixture of both northern and southern concepts of government, which were to be inherited by future political entities in the Mesopotamian region during three millennia. On the one hand, the new Mesopotamian society preferred to adopt the figure of a warrior leader, as governors or kings were elected by assemblies especially during periods of conflict. On the other hand, there was a formal continuation of the southern *oykos* system of production. This political mixture of both southern and northern concepts was able to produce the first royal dynasties and kingdoms in Mesopotamia. This event would confirm the theory of E. Service (1975: 313) with respect to the importance of the government institution in the early civilisations.

In other words, there was a new period of gestation in Mesopotamian history, in which the new ‘instrument of expansion’ was the transformation of the region via political entities or kingdoms with their redistributive economic centres, independent focal institutions such as temples and palaces, and their respective military organisation. Perhaps there was only one of these kingdoms – the one belonging to Sargon of Akkad – that was able to inaugurate a new period in the Mesopotamian history that could be determined as a period of expansion, because this kingdom became the most extensive and powerful political entity never known before.

The kingdom of Sargon of Akkad was used as a model by many other Mesopotamian kingdoms in the future due to its fame and power: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur, the dynasties of Isin and Larsa, the Babylonia of Hammurabi, the Middle Assyrian kingdom and the Mitanni-Hurrite kingdom. Nevertheless, it seems that it is not possible to identify any of these kingdoms and their respective expansions – even the one built by Sargon – as historical ‘empires’, between 2500 BC and 1200 BC. In fact, they were basically highly centralised states with absolute monarchies over every branch of government, and general

stability that allowed the occasional development of arts, literature and trade and an efficient bureaucratic organisation.

However, they were more brief political organisations that emerged, developed and finally fell down in a short period of time by the attack of nomadic people. They were rebellious territories with weak central control. In other words, these kingdoms were basically conglomerations of different groups unified under a military power that succumbed to the local resistance, inner pressures or external attacks. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur was destroyed by the Elamite kingdom, the dynasties of Isin and Larsa by the Amorites, the Babylonia of Hammurabi by the Hittites and later conquered by the Cassites, and the Assyrian Middle kingdom conquered by the Mitanni-Hurrite kingdom.

Thus, the succession of Mesopotamian kingdoms from 2500 BC until 700 BC should not be considered as a period of stagnation or an extensive period of conflict. Rather, it should be considered as a long period of ‘multiple processes’, but only until 1200 BC. During this period of time, there emerged several kingdoms or territorial states which followed the same historical process described. In other words, from 2500 BC until 1200 BC, several kingdoms arose by processes of mixture, gestation and expansion and conflict before being conquered by invasions that recommenced again the process of mixture.

This characteristic would confirm other theoretical approaches about civilisations and their respective cities: the existence of phases of expansion (‘A’), which are periods of simultaneous consolidation hegemonies; and phases of contraction (‘B’) in political and economic matters. If these phases were applied to the cities, it would be possible to identify a sequence of political *centralisation* and *decentralisation* that all these urban centres have experimented, especially with the rise and fall of hegemonic core powers (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1995: 120).

An example of this Mesopotamian historical reality between 2500 BC and 1200 BC was the Assyrian case. This was a kingdom located in the northern border of the Mesopotamian region. Its period of mixture could be associated with the contact between northern tribal communities (possibly of Amorite origin), who adopted the southern political organisation developed by Sumerian colonies from the south of Mesopotamia in

around 2600 BC. Thus, in 2025 BC the Old Assyrian kingdom was born with a particular tripartite political structure organised into three estates: a king, a council and an assembly.

This period could be considered as the process of gestation of the Assyrian kingdom and its 'instrument of expansion' seems to be the economic trade that allowed this kingdom to become a 'commercial republic'. The period of expansion for Assyria was due to the commercial development, which was the result of the control and management of strategic trade routes to and from Anatolia. However, the Assyrians suffered three different moments of conflicts which could be corrected by the Assyrians by 'reconversions' and 'inventions'.

In 1750 BC the Assyrians were controlled by Hammurabi's Babylonia and the principal consequence was both economic and cultural. It seems that the Assyrians preferred a policy of reconversion with respect to the Babylonian impact to develop its kingdom further. Thus, they adopted and respected the Babylonian culture and assimilated its concept of royal absolutism that allowed the institution of the Assyrian monarchy to strengthen during the Middle Assyrian kingdom. The second conflict was after 1600 BC, when the Hittite kingdom took control of the former Assyrian colonies established in Anatolia during the Old Assyrian kingdom. The Assyrians rectified this situation of losing their colonies with the invention of new resources such as maximising their own agricultural output of cultivable lands.

The last conflict that Assyria had to face was the short but traumatic Mitanni-Hurrite domination in around 1500 BC. This foreign dependence originated both new 'inventions' and 'reforms' by the Assyrians. On the one hand, it was necessary not only to support again the mentioned strengthening of the royal institution for guarding the kingdom, but also to develop a new ruling class and a new distribution of properties and lands. On the other hand, the Assyrians developed new 'instruments of expansion' such as the military conquest and ideological propaganda. The final result was the consolidation of the Middle Assyrian kingdom alongside other Bronze Age kingdoms such as Egypt, Hatti, Babylonia and Elam before 1200 BC.

However, there was an important historical phenomenon that shocked the ancient Near East: the ‘catastrophe’ at the end of the Bronze Age (1200 BC). It could be considered as a moment of conflict in the historical evolution of any civilisation. However, scholars apparently do not seem to identify the magnitude of this event and its repercussions on the overall process which led to the establishment of the Central Civilisation during the ‘Near Eastern phase’. It should be emphasised that the end of the Bronze Age was not only a moment of conflict for any specific civilisation of the ancient Near East of the Bronze Age, but a *general conflict* for all of them.

There appears to be a climatic change that transformed the entire Eastern Mediterranean region and made a huge impact in around 1200 BC, the consequences of which had repercussions throughout the entire ancient Near East. Many kingdoms of this region, such as Hatti, Mycenae, the Syro Palestine kingdoms, the Kassite Babylonia and the Elamite kingdom, collapsed; and only ancient Egypt could survive, although weakened. This situation motivated the end of an ancient order of palatial economy, which would be replaced by private merchants under the appearance of marauders and plunderers (Sea Peoples, Phrygians, Arabs and Aramaeans).

It seems that the only kingdom that could survive this *general conflict*, although there was now an appearance of the new aggressive waves of Semite nomads such as Aramaeans, was Assyria. The reason could be associated to the fact that Assyria already had several ‘instruments of expansion’, or rather ‘instrument of defence’, forged from the time of the Middle Assyrian kingdom: a militaristic notion of state, the Iron Age tactic of infantry and a powerful monarchy. Nevertheless, it was also a fundamental fact that the political vacuum of any kingdom or power after 1200 BC, which was reached by Assyria from 1000 BC to 600 BC, enabled its status as ‘empire’, controlling all of the region of the ancient Near East. This imperial entity is known as the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

This means that there was a complete process of Assyrian imperialism in the region because when civilisations arrive at this stage of power and domination over their periphery, it is possible to speak about ‘empires’, especially when the civilisation reaches an imperial form and starts conquering, from its city capital, other core states or adjacent

regions with the objective of establishing a new order or ‘universal empire’ to extract taxes and tributes from there.

As Chase-Dunn and Hall (1995: 124) suggested, when a city is able to use political / military power to acquire resources from surrounding cities, it will be able to support a larger population, and then will dominate other cities. This policy should produce a hierarchical city-size distribution around its capital, and that was precisely the historical reality of Assyria in this period. In this case, Eckhardt (1995: 91) was also right when he suggested that there is a strong relationship amongst the three concepts *civilisations*, *empires* and *wars*, because all of them tended to go and grow together.

In effect the process of the Assyrian *universal empire* was a complex phenomenon that involved, under a theoretical point of view, *peripheral polities of dominion*, *an imperial core* and *a global context*, working as a holistic system. These structures were practically non-existent before the appearance of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and, for this reason, the Assyrians were the first people in history inside and outside of Mesopotamia to adopt the concept of imperial rule and the beginning of a true *Pax Assyriaca*.

It is important to point out that before the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the general territorial expansion of many of the former civilisations, kingdoms or ‘empires’ (Akkad, Egypt, Babylonia, Hatti, Elam, Mitanni-Hurrite and Assyria itself during the Old and Middle kingdoms) were modest and scattered only in the region from which they came: Akkad in Mesopotamia; Egypt in the Nile valley, and sporadically in Palestine and Nubia; Babylonia in southern Mesopotamia; Hatti in Anatolia; Elam close to the Iranian plateau; the Mitanni-Hurrite and the Old and Middle Assyrian kingdoms over northern Mesopotamia. The Neo-Assyrian Empire seems to have been the first to reach a complete expansion outside of its original cradle and conquer the majority of the regions already mentioned.

With respect to the peripheral polities of dominion, the Neo-Assyrian Empire had, as did the modern empires, a concept of justification for explaining their policy of military expansion, which allowed them to conquer neighbouring states as a form of self-defence. The Neo-Assyrian case was supported by two pillars. One of them was the royal ideology,

developed since the period of the Middle Assyrian kingdom, which supported that the Assyrian kings were to be considered as the co-regents of the god Ashur. The principal mission as co-regent was the 'extension of borders' because the general world was seen as chaotic and disordered. The other pillars were the militarism notion, which transformed Assyria into the first military empire in history, the first militarist society in the world and one of the most innovative entities in the history of military warfare.

The comparative study, with respect to Egypt – another important ancient civilisation which, by the way, will consolidate the so-called 'Near Eastern phase' of the Central Civilisation after the Assyrian conquest – and its monarchy, demonstrates the difference between the Assyrian royal ideology and the common royal ideology of any kingdom of this period. The Assyrians developed a powerful royal absolutism supported by an army and coercion policy, while the Egyptians developed a pharaonic ideology, which was more of a 'social contract' of sorts between the Egyptian monarchs and his subjects. Indeed, the Egyptian pharaohs – the Kushite dynasty, par exemple – used the same royal title of 'conquest of four corners' but it seems that the Egyptian case was more rhetoric than a real practice.

The military impact of Egypt – in comparison with the Neo-Assyrian Empire – could be described as modest, although certain famous military campaigns of pharaohs such as Thutmose III and Ramses II conquered Palestine and Nubia. Even when Egypt was under the rule of the militaristic Kushite dynasties, the Kushite army was never able to control or keep ancient Egypt unified for a long period of time. Both the Egyptians and Kushites used old tactics inherited from the period of the Bronze Age, while the Assyrians developed more sophisticated tactics spanning from the time of the Iron Age.

On the question about the imperial core, the Neo-Assyrian Empire set up a real hierarchy which was imitated and copied by later empires. Thus, the organisation of the empire involved the notion of 'Land of Assyria' (the metropolis) and the 'largest Assyria' with their provinces, besides 'buffer states' and 'buffer zones' for designing a series of concentric zones of diminishing imperial control. Assyria always used markets as an expression of imperial economic development because the economy was a central part in



the social and administrative structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire according to their three sectors: palace, government and privates.

The study of Egypt before, during and after the Assyrian conquest demonstrates historical reality because the principal confrontation between both states had a common interest: the strategic corridor of the Syro Palestine region. Specifically, there was prosperous trade that converged on the south of the Philistine coast, which connected the Nile Valley with Arabia, and also the direct trade between Assyria and Egypt using the Palestinian border.

Thus, the mixture of script, language and weight systems in Palestine during the Assyrian rule would demonstrate the borderline between Egypt and the Neo-Assyrian Empire around the Syro Palestine region and how this 'buffer zone' worked for both of them with a special interaction. Moreover, this aspect would confirm the other theoretical criterion of *connectedness* between the Neo-Assyrian Empire and Egypt, which would end with the so-called 'Near Eastern phase': locating the spatial temporal boundaries of an urbanised society whose inhabitants were interacting intensely with other societies, although their respective civilisations were dissimilar or their interactions were mostly hostile.

Finally, the global context of the Neo-Assyrian Empire involved the appropriation of lands and territories, but it seems that the Assyrians were more interested in redeploing the labour available there by military conquest or treaties than by imposition or rebuilding from the beginning. The explanation for this policy lies in how these empires have always had a mixed concept of integration and disintegration of the peoples under its control. Thus, the Neo-Assyrian Empire developed both infrastructures (material culture) through urban programmes and inner communication such as superstructures (ideas and concepts) through the notion of art, creating a sense of the integration of peoples and the development of the Mesopotamian culture around the empire.

Nevertheless, it seems that the latter characteristic was always a weak one inside the administration of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Indeed, it would demonstrate that the Assyrians failed in the integration of the different peoples under its command. The

comparison with the Egyptian kingdom permits the suggestion that the Egyptians were more open minded about the integration of foreign people within the Egyptian society than the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Thus, Libyans, Asiatics or Kushites could become 'Egyptians' when they accepted being absorbed into the Egyptian system of cultural practices and way of life.

Apparently, the Assyrians were not able to adopt this policy in actual practice, although they maintained a deep respect for the advanced civilisations of Babylonia and Egypt. This situation also would demonstrate that the Neo-Assyrian control over many of their provinces – such as Egypt – was not always consolidated or sophisticated enough for administrating a huge empire with enough efficiency. In the Egyptian case, the Assyrian control was restricted to both the Delta region and the cities of Memphis and Thebes, where the Assyrians designated officers in the principal cities and demanded yearly tributes and regular offerings to the Assyrian kings.

Thus, the lack of monumental Assyrian buildings or temples in Egypt would be proof that the Assyrians preferred to maintain the pre-existing structures inherited from pharaonic times and carried out by the Kushites. These administrative and organisational structures apparently still worked, and were established in accordance with the benefit of the Assyrian policy requirements and taxes.

Another possibility would lie in considering the extension of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its prevention of the direct control of the provinces in Egypt due to its large geography along the Nile Valley, which demanded huge resources for logistics and troops for occupation. So, the Assyrians had enough political wisdom to avoid direct disruption to the administration of the Egyptian territory due to the difficulties of its vast geography.

A possible explanation for this situation could be that both the Delta region and the cities of Memphis and Thebes were for the Neo-Assyrian Empire 'buffer states' and 'buffer zones' rather than Assyrian provinces. Notwithstanding, the mere incorporation of the Egyptian territory and civilisation within the Assyrian imperial structure would be proof of the consolidation of the 'Near Eastern phase' of the Central Civilisation circa 600 BC.

Although the process of full integration with Egypt, as it was mentioned, seems to have been concluded by the successor empires of Assyria circa 430 BC.

It is a historical fact that, after the universalempire period, the decline or decadence process is almost immediate. The Neo-Assyrian Empire was not the exemption and its decadence was manifest by the fragmentation of its state into smaller entities, the partial or complete abandonment of the Assyrian urban centres, the depletion of their centralising functions, the breakdown of its regional economic system and the failure of their civilising ideologies as the Assyrian identity among their subordinate peoples.

For this reason, it is possible to identify the same process considered as invasion in the introduction, which would precede both the end of a civilisation and a new beginning with the mixture of peoples (conquerors with the conquered). The attack of the Babylonian and Medes against the Neo-Assyrian Empire could be interpreted under the same principles. Nevertheless, it seems that there are important elements which could be identified in the Assyrian civilisation. Such is the case with how some imperial entities remained in time or merged under a new structure or under a new name. Many scholars have failed to consider, theoretically at least, the survival of imperial structures throughout history.

On this aspect, it is interesting to suggest, under a theoretical approach, that any civilisation could be composed of several urban centres and in this case no multi-urban civilisation can properly be said to have fallen until *all* its cities are gone. Of course, it could be the moment when a catastrophic destruction ends an urban centre but it is not synonymous with the end of a civilisation because no multi-urban society has ended its history as a civilisation until all its cities have been destroyed or depopulated.

To sum up, the civilisations have three alternatives in this stage: they may disintegrate themselves and disappear suddenly in history; they may become fixed in a steady state of decadence for many centuries; or they may experience a period of transition in which disintegration takes place while new material is being added before the onset of further development. The last alternative is producing the appearance of new civilisations that incorporate the legacy of their predecessors, and this alternative has apparently been

the case for the majority of the civilisations in history. In this case, at least, the schools of Wallerstein and Wilkinson are right, if these principles are applied to the Assyrian case.

In effect, the Neo-Assyrian Empire was replaced by Babylonia as the dominant power in Mesopotamia before being conquered in turn by the Persians in 539 BC. However, the specific date of the ‘fall’ of the Neo-Assyrian Empire is still not clear. That is because the administrative structure of this empire and its territory remained essentially the same under Babylonia, Persia, Parthia and Sassanid. This situation would allow support for the thesis in that ancient states, civilisations and especially empires do not collapse completely, but they become a phenomenon of segmentation characterised by the survival of institutions or ideas inherited by other later societies after an imperial collapse.

This legacy would supply a basis for a future recreation or an imperial ‘rebirth’ by a new society or state in the future. So, it seems that the Neo-Assyrian Empire was for Babylonia, Persia, Parthia and Sassanid what might have been the imperial ‘eagles’ of Rome for Byzantium and the Slavic kingdoms until the Russian empire. For this reason, the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its *Pax Assyriaca*, that consolidate the ‘Near Eastern phase’ of the Central Civilisation, is a subject of study that requires more research because the *Pax Assyriaca* period could also be considered as the true beginning of the Central Civilisation that has survived until today.

Another possibility would be to consider that if human history could be merely restricted to the study of the succession of empires – without considering the theory of the Central Civilisation and its ‘Near Eastern phase’ – the Neo-Assyrian Empire is still the starting point of this historical phenomenon.

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