



6 The Growth of Territorial States in the Early Second Millennium

3000 2500 2000 1500 1000 500

1808	Shamshi-Adad seizes throne of Assur
ca. 1795	Mari placed under Yasmah-Addu's rule
1792	Hammurabi inherits throne of Babylon
1776	Death of Shamshi-Adad
ca. 1740	Samsuiluna loses control over southern Babylonia
ca. 1650	Creation of the Old Hittite state
1595	Hittite King Mursili sacks Babylon

Within the hurly-burly of competing dynasties that characterized the first half of the second millennium, a small number of highly accomplished rulers stand out. For short periods of time, these men were able to extend their political control over a wide geographical area, creating short-lived territorial states. These states were not radically different in nature from others of the period, only more successful in competing with their neighbors. They appeared in various regions of the Near East as the result of an individual's military successes and disintegrated soon after their founders' deaths. First, Shamshi-Adad unified Northern Mesopotamia, then Hammurabi Babylonia, and later Hattusili I Central Anatolia (see map 6.1). Despite the ephemeral nature of their states, the changes these men initiated laid the foundations for the system of territorial states in later centuries.

Since these events overlapped with the developments discussed in the previous chapter, the available historical sources are largely the same. In Babylonia and Upper Mesopotamia, the most explicit records do not derive from the capitals but from other cities conquered and controlled by the territorial rulers. Conversely, in the case of the Old Hittite state, almost all our information comes from the capital Hattusa, but the texts are dated centuries later and can only claim to be copies of the original royal annals. Their information thus has to be checked carefully against sources contemporary to the events they describe.

6.1 Shamshi-Adad and the Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia

The early history of King Shamshi-Adad is vague to us. We cannot even establish when and where he first ascended any particular Mesopotamian throne. Most likely around 1833 he inherited rule from his father, Ila-kabkabu, in Ekallatum, a city still unlocated but certainly in the vicinity of Assur. There he governed about ten years, until he had to flee to Babylon when Naram-Sin of Eshnunna conquered Ekallatum. When Naram-Sin died seven years later, Shamshi-Adad took the opportunity to return from exile and three years later conquered Assur as well. There he integrated his ancestors into the list of city-rulers, and is said to have ruled for thirty-three years (for a list of early Assyrian rulers, see p. 315). This allows us to date his accession to Assur's throne to 1808.

At that time he was still only the ruler of a minor power in the region. Soon, however, he extended his influence westward into northern Syria, where he clashed with Yahdun-Lim of Mari. Shamshi-Adad took control over the northern Habur Valley, annexing kingdoms such as the land of Apum whose capital, Shehna, he turned into his own royal seat and renamed Shubat-Enlil. The mighty kingdom of Mari to his south became easy prey when Yahdun-Lim was assassinated, and, probably in 1792, its capital was captured. Shamshi-Adad ruled now an area from Assur on the Tigris in the east to Tuttul on the Balikh in the west. The entire region to the north of Babylonia was incorporated in his state, which we will here call the "Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia."

Shamshi-Adad was very tolerant of existing practices in the various states he had united. At Assur he took on the title "governor of Assur," and in Nineveh he restored the Ishtar temple, said to have been built by Manishtushu five centuries before. Certain cities, such as Qattara, retained their former rulers, who now became his vassals. Local administrative procedures continued to be used, although we observe that officials used seals that indicated that they were in the service of Shamshi-Adad. Perhaps one crucial change was imposed, the dating of documents with the Assyrian eponym system to indicate the years (see box 6.1). Under Shamshi-Adad's rule it became used in such varied places as Mari, Tuttul (present Tell Bi'a), Shubat-Enlil, and Terqa. This "Assyrian" system of dating thus became the official system for the Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia.

Box 6.1 *The eponym dating system*

Unlike Babylonia, where years were indicated with names based on important events of the previous years, in northern Mesopotamia a dating system existed where each year was named after an individual holding office. The Akkadian term used to refer to such an individual was *limmu*, meaning something like rotation, which we translate with the Greek term indicating a rotating office, "eponym." The dating system probably originated in the city of Assur, and it remained the official system in Assyria to the end of the Assyrian empire in the seventh century (see document 12.2). The names of the officials who became the eponyms were originally chosen by lot, but in the first millennium a fixed rotation of officers headed by the king constituted the *limmu*. The office in the first millennium was of a cultic nature.

In the early second millennium, the office of eponym in Assur had an administrative character, and seemingly was more involved with trade than was the king. The earliest known attestations of year eponyms are at *Karum-Kanesh*. They became used in other Assyrian colonies in Anatolia corresponding in time to the later occupation of that site. The dating practice is attested throughout northern Mesopotamian cities,¹ and its spread was undoubtedly due to Shamshi-Adad's unification of the north: we see that in some places like Mari, year names were replaced by eponyms under his occupation alone. When his state fell apart, several cities, while politically independent, continued to use eponyms, but we do not know whether or not the names they used were chosen in Assur.

In order to keep track of the sequence of years, eponym lists were established, sometimes also adding succinct statements about events. These are fully reconstructed from the tenth through seventh centuries. In earlier periods the sequence is uncertain, owing to the absence of complete lists. At Mari an eponym chronicle was found covering a period from before Shamshi-Adad to when his son sat on the throne there. Unfortunately, it is not fully preserved, and the sequence of eponyms in the nineteenth to eighteenth centuries remains a matter of scholarly debate.

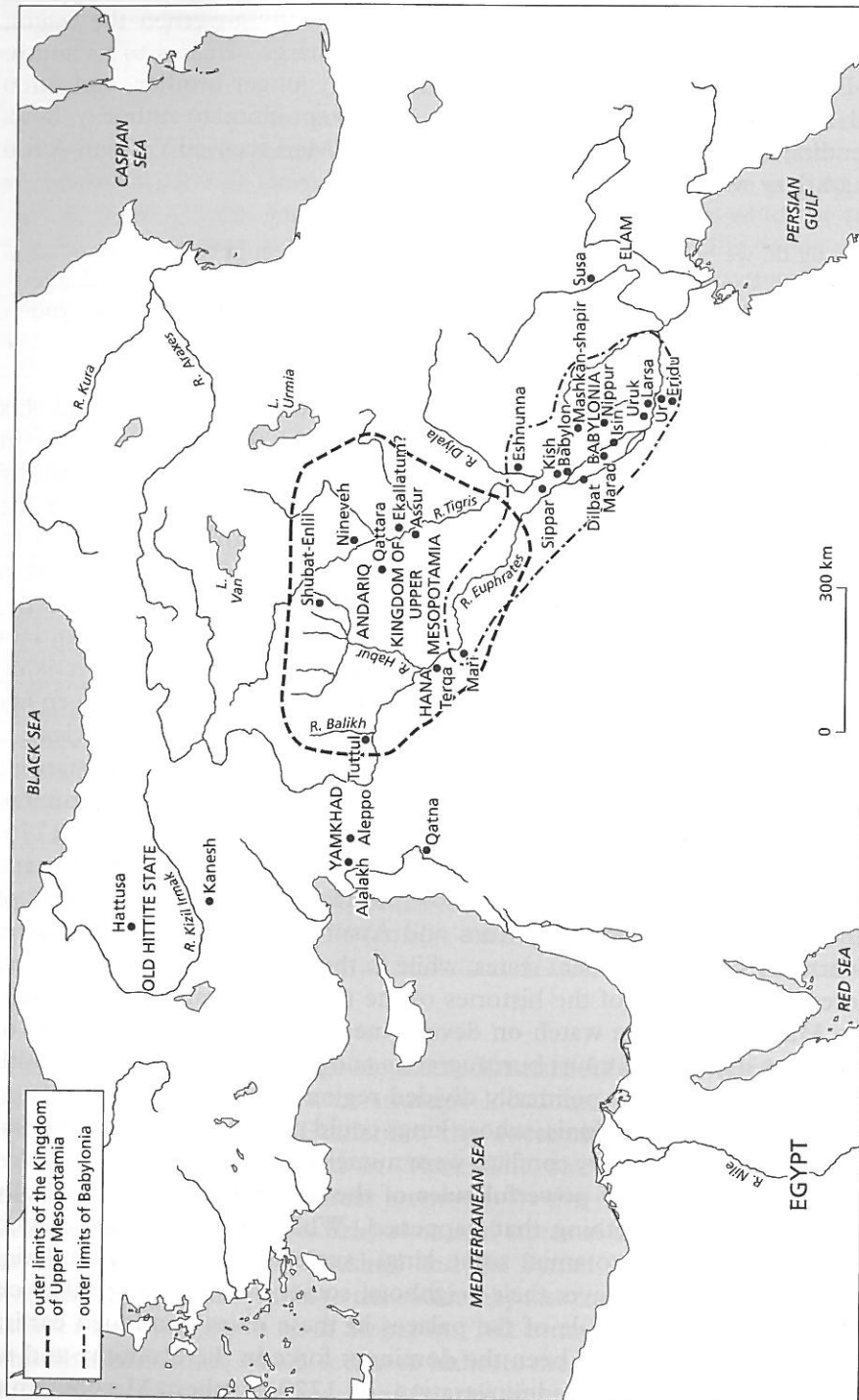
Having to control this large kingdom, Shamshi-Adad, who resided in Shubat-Enlil, placed his two sons in strategic locations. The eldest, Ishme-Dagan, ascended the throne at Ekallatum, the ancestral home, while the younger, Yasmah-Addu, was instated at Mari. The southeastern and southwestern frontiers were thus given direct attention. In the east the Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia bordered on Eshnunna and states at the foothills of the Zagros, in the west it bordered Yamkhad and the Syrian steppe controlled by semi-nomadic groups. Babylonia to the south may also have been subject to Shamshi-Adad: a contract drawn up at Sippar in 1782 contains oaths to both Hammurabi and Shamshi-Adad, which seems to indicate the latter's authority there as well for some brief time. The two sons in turn were given supervision of a number of districts in which governors were placed: Ishme-Dagan looked after those

between the Tigris and the Zagros, Yasmah-Addu those along the Euphrates, lower Balikh, and Habur rivers. Shamshi-Adad directly governed the region of Shubat-Enlil, while military governors were in charge of cities to its south. Ishme-Dagan clearly had more authority than his younger brother, and often scolded Yasmah-Addu for his inaction. The father kept ultimate authority, however, sending numerous letters to his sons. Those to Mari accused Yasmah-Addu of being a lazy weakling. He stated repeatedly:

How long do we have to guide you in every matter? Are you a child, and not an adult? Don't you have a beard on your chin? When are you going to take charge of your house? Don't you see that your brother is leading vast armies? So, you too, take charge of your palace, your house!²

The meddling in local affairs by the great leaders was not unusual, and this micromanaging was part of the ideal of kingship of the time, as I will show in the discussion of Hammurabi of Babylon. That it was not always appreciated by their subjects is clear from an episode in which Shamshi-Adad arranged for the marriage of Yasmah-Addu to Beltum, the princess of Qatna, a crucial ally in his conflict with Yamkhad. The king of Qatna wanted his daughter to have a prominent role in the Mari palace, but Yasmah-Addu already had a leading wife, the daughter of Yahdun-Lim. So Yasmah-Addu preferred to keep Beltum in a secondary position outside of his palace, among the group of lower-ranking women. Shamshi-Adad sternly reprimanded him and forced his son to keep her at his side in the palace. The hierarchy of power in the kingdom was clear.

Shamshi-Adad's state disappeared suddenly and under unclear circumstances. When he was old he was attacked simultaneously by Yamkhad and Eshnunna, his two major neighbors, and he died in battle or of natural causes in 1776. Local powers quickly reasserted themselves. Zimri-Lim, an Amorite upstart, chased Yasmah-Addu from Mari, while Ishme-Dagan lost control over all of his father's kingdom except Ekallatum and Assur. Northern Syria became a patchwork of small independent states, while in the south Eshnunna picked up the pieces nearby. Some of the histories of the new states can still be written because Mari kept a close watch on developments, but also because some of the local kings maintained court bureaucracies and actively communicated with one another by letter. The politically divided region was open to attacks from Eshnunna, Elam, and Babylonia, whose kings could make or break local rulers. Political intrigues and military conflicts were numerous and complicated. Zimri-Lim of Mari was the most powerful ruler of the area but too geographically marginal to control everything that happened. While local dynasties existed throughout Upper Mesopotamia, some kings, such as the ruler of Andariq, exercised strong influence over their neighbors, sometimes imposing rulers on their thrones. The crucial role of the palaces in these cities continued earlier practices. They seem to have been the dominant force in the economy and to have maintained a centralized administration. By 1720, northern Mesopotamia became unable to sustain this lifestyle, however. Many cities were abandoned



Map 6.1 Territorial states of the early second millennium

for reasons we can only suspect. Possibly a mixture of popular opposition to the court's domination and changes in the rainfall patterns led to a shift to a semi-nomadic life in villages and in the steppe. With the end of the palaces, the historical record disappeared.

6.2 Hammurabi's Babylon

During the last decades of Shamshi-Adad's life, the throne at Babylon was held by a man who would become one of the most famous kings of Mesopotamian history: Hammurabi. Babylon had existed for several centuries, known from the Old Akkadian period on, and Hammurabi's predecessors had managed gradually to create a state incorporating previously independent northern cities, such as Sippar, Kish, Dilbat, and Marad. Babylonia was hemmed in by the more prominent states of Eshnunna, Larsa, and the Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia. When Hammurabi became king in 1792, Rim-Sin had just unified the entirety of southern Babylonia while Shamshi-Adad reigned supreme in the north. Hammurabi may at first have even owed allegiance to Shamshi-Adad. Hammurabi ushered in what we now call the "Old Babylonian period," the beginning of Babylon's political dominance over southern Mesopotamia for the next 1500 years (for a list of Old Babylonian kings, see p. 306).

In these extremely volatile times, the young king could not avoid being drawn into regional conflicts. His early years mention campaigns against all of his powerful neighbors, but the results of those are ambiguous. Most of Hammurabi's attention seems to have been devoted to the internal development of his state, mainly digging canals and fortifying cities. When he decided to act on a wide scale, his military activity was short but devastating, and he used his considerable diplomatic skills. At first using troops from states such as Mari, he turned against those who earlier helped him once he was strong enough. The diplomatic correspondence from Mari shows how he first used diplomacy, then military action, to reach his goals (see document 6.1). In just five years, from 1766 to 1761, Hammurabi established his full dominance over southern Mesopotamia, after the death of Shamshi-Adad and when Rim-Sin was an old man. He defeated Elam, Larsa, Eshnunna, and Mari in quick succession, and incorporated Larsa and the Middle Euphrates area up to Mari into the Babylonian state. Eshnunna he left without a leader, while he blocked Elam's ability to exercise any influence over Mesopotamia. The only area of concern remained northern Mesopotamia, where Hammurabi campaigned twice in later years without fully controlling the region. There is no doubt, however, that he was the strongest king in Mesopotamia. After these events, he could proclaim himself "the king who made the four quarters of the earth obedient."³

His inscriptions make clear, however, that the core of his state was Babylonia. Many of the earlier city-states there and their cults received the benefit of Hammurabi's rule. It is indeed in this region that we can study his style of government: as ruler he concerned himself with the smallest detail. Due to

Document 6.1 *Letters to Zimri-Lim of Mari regarding Hammurabi and Eshnunna*

Tell my Lord (Zimri-Lim); Yarim-Addu, your servant, says:
I have written to my Lord about the instructions regarding the man of Eshnunna that Hammurabi issued to []. When Hammurabi was in Borsippa messengers of the man of Eshnunna came to him, but he did not see them. Only on the second day they met with him. After having them wait a night, he gave an answer to their news. He gave instructions to [Sin-], son of Kakkaruqqum and Mar[duk-mushallim, son of], and he sent them along. They took with them the small tablet (i.e., draft treaty), and they will make the man of Eshnunna accept it. [] will go and Hammurabi will accept it. After they will have accepted the small tablet, Hammurabi will send a large tablet, that is a treaty tablet, to the man of Eshnunna, and he will make him swear to it. The man of Eshnunna will send the large tablet, the treaty tablet, back to Hammurabi and they will establish an alliance. The alliance between Hammurabi and the man of Eshnunna is concluded or will be so very soon, that is certain. At this moment the answer to the diplomatic mission of Sin-[] and Marduk-mushallim has not yet arrived from Eshnunna. I cannot report on it for my lord. After this letter I will write to my lord all the news that reaches me from Eshnunna.

The letter continues with news about Larsa and Andariq.

Translation after Dominique Charpin, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988), volume 1, part 2, pp. 179–82.

Tell my Lord (Zimri-Lim); Yarim-Addu, your servant, says:
I have written earlier to my Lord that the words of Hammurabi were secret. Hammurabi has renewed frank conversations with the ruler of Elam as he did before. Elamite messengers who have come from the ruler of Elam to Hammurabi are staying at the entrance of his palace right now. After the ruler of Elam had given them his instructions they were escorted from Susa to Der of the god Ishtaran. The man of Der received them and has sent them under escort to Malgium, and the man of Malgium was supposed to give them an escort to Babylon. But the army of Eshnunna barred their way and they were unable to enter (the territory). Hammurabi heard that the army of Eshnunna blocked the roads. He no longer sends regular missions to Elam via Malgium and Der, as he did before. But there are open areas in the land Eshnunna and his couriers go to the ruler of Elam through these areas. The message from the ruler of Elam has not yet reached him.

The letter continues with news about Malgium and about Ishme-Dagan of the Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia.

Finally, regarding the small treaty tablet that Hammurabi previously sent to the king of Eshnunna, Silli-Sin. Silli-Sin continues to answer with a refusal and he has not concluded a treaty with Hammurabi.

Translation after Dominique Charpin, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988), volume 1, part 2, pp. 182–4.

extensive later rebuilding and the recent rise of the water table, the city of Babylon itself is virtually unknown archaeologically for this period, and only a handful of tablets from it have survived. Our information derives primarily from other cities, where royal agents represented Babylon's interests. In Larsa, for instance, these men were Sin-iddinam and Shamash-hazir, and some two hundred letters the king wrote to them are preserved. These involve themselves with matters of seemingly little importance. For example:

To Shamash-hazir say, thus speaks Hammurabi: "From the fields that belong to the palace give one of one hectare near the gate of Larsa, a fallow field that is of good quality and lies near the water, to Sin-imguranni the seal-cutter."⁴

This concern perhaps does not fit our image of a great ruler, but well reflects the ideology of kingship at the time. The king was a shepherd and a farmer. He had to take care of his people, providing them with fields for their sustenance and making these fields fertile through irrigation projects. The people expected such a level of concern from him.

The same ideology was expressed repeatedly in the introduction and conclusion of his most famous monument, Hammurabi's law code. He stated there:

I am indeed the shepherd who brings peace, whose scepter is just. My benevolent shade was spread over my city, I held the people of the lands of Sumer and Akkad safely on my lap.

The function of the law code itself has been much debated, but consensus is growing that the modern designation of it is wrong: it is not a code of law but a monument presenting Hammurabi as an exemplary king of justice. The text is best known to us from a 2-meter-high black diorite stele almost fully covered with an inscription (see figure 6.1). Framed between a prologue and epilogue are listed some three hundred statements, all structured on the same pattern: "if . . . , then . . ." For example, "If a man commits a robbery and is caught, that man will be killed" (§ 22). While dealing with many areas of life, the entries do not, by far, cover all possible crimes, and there are even some contradictions. Moreover, the many legal documents of the period, including records of law cases, never make reference to the code. Instead of a list of legal precepts, the entire monument is a vivid expression of Hammurabi as a king who provides justice in his land. He said himself:

May any wronged man who has a case come before my statue as king of justice, and may he have my inscribed stele read aloud to him. May he hear my precious words and may my stele clarify his case for him. May he examine his lawsuit and may he calm his (troubled) heart. May he say: "Hammurabi . . . provided just ways for the land."⁵

To prove his ability to guarantee justice, Hammurabi listed these three hundred-some cases, and thus urged future kings to study and follow his example.

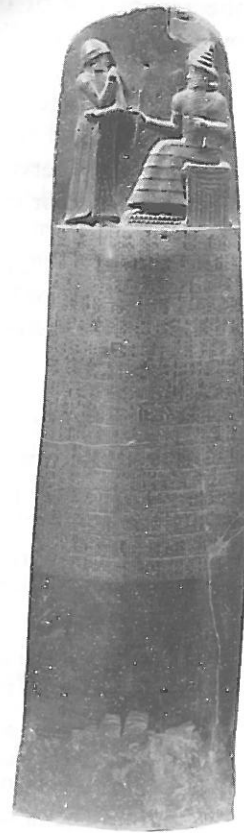


Figure 6.1 The stele of Hammurabi. Photo: Hevre Lewandowski. Courtesy of Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

Notwithstanding this, the code's contents provide insights into Babylonian society at the time. It demonstrates a social hierarchy with a tripartite structure of free man (Akkadian *awilum*), dependent (*mushkenum*), and slave (*wardum*). Punishments varied according to the status of the victim or the perpetrator of a crime: injuring a free man led to a harsher penalty than injuring a dependent. But these terms were not absolute, often defining someone's position in relationship to another. A high court official was still a "slave" to the king. The status of the intermediate group of dependents is most difficult to define. The term could indicate a relationship to the palace or to another person, but we do not understand exactly what was the basis or degree of dependence. The structure of society had changed from the third millennium, partly through the process of "privatization" described in the previous chapter. Full-time palace dependents were rare and contract labor provided most services. Hence the dependent class of Hammurabi's code was often in a situation where it owed obligations to private citizens. The use of entrepreneurs to take care of palace business was a

characteristic of the period, and their credit transactions led to the social disturbances described in the last chapter. Loan contracts continue to be numerous in private archives. Hammurabi and several of his successors are known to have decreed the annulment of debts several times, but the need to repeat such acts indicates their failure to rectify the situation.

By the end of his reign, Hammurabi had fundamentally altered the political layout of Mesopotamia. Babylonia was the single great power, surrounded by weak remnants of formerly great rivals: Elam, Eshnunna, and Assur. Only in western Syria were states such as Yamkhad unaffected by his actions. His unification of Babylonia was short-lived, however. Only ten years after his death his son, Samsuiluna, faced a major rebellion in the south led by a man calling himself Rim-Sin after Larsa's last ruler. Samsuiluna was militarily successful, but his grasp on the region gradually slipped away. Texts dated with his year names disappeared from southern cities by his tenth or eleventh year. By Samsuiluna's thirtieth year, Nippur and other middle Babylonian cities ceased to be under Babylon's control. The problems were not purely political, however. Archaeology shows that previously flourishing cities like Ur and Nippur were mostly abandoned. Segments of the population, such as the priesthood of Uruk, migrated to northern Babylonian cities. It is difficult to determine exactly what happened. Babylon's response to rebellions may have been so ferocious that the southern urban infrastructure was irreparably damaged, watercourses perhaps deflected, and agricultural fields turned into steppe. It is also possible that the policies of Hammurabi and his predecessor in the region, Rim-Sin, ultimately had a negative result. They had integrated the local economies of southern Babylonia into a system under which districts became interdependent. When the center required to coordinate production weakened, the exchange system may have collapsed, leading to an economic decline of all the regions.

Northern Babylonia continued to flourish, however. Hammurabi had five successors who ruled uncontested for 155 years over the area that he had originally inherited as a young king, in addition to the Euphrates River valley up to the vicinity of Mari. Samsuiluna campaigned even further upstream, attacking and perhaps annexing the new northern state of Hana around Terqa and reaching the Upper Habur. New opponents appeared on the scene, which indicates that the political situation there was unsettled. A previously unattested group of people called Kassites became a target of Babylon's military activity. In the sixteenth century, they would become rulers of Babylon.

The rapid abandonment of southern and central Babylonian cities under Samsuiluna in the mid-eighteenth century had as an unintended side-effect the preservation of most of the manuscripts of Sumerian literary texts now known to us. These were copied out or excerpted by young men who were schooled as scribes in private houses, and in Ur and Nippur the remnants of their work have been excavated. Normally the tablets containing their exercises would have been recycled and their clay reused, but when scribal activity stopped, the last works were left behind. We can study the school curriculum on the basis

of these exercises, including mathematics, surveying, and music. Most elaborate was the training of cuneiform writing and the Sumerian language. Rote learning was the norm. At first the students had to practice making single strokes with the stylus. This led to learning signs and their readings. Cuneiform signs were memorized by shape or by the sound of their pronunciation, and the order of learning was based on their increasing complexity. They were mastered by repeated copying. Then the students moved on to copying lists of Sumerian words with their Akkadian translations. The lexical corpus, already known from the late Uruk period tablets, was thus a central part of the curriculum. It is in this period that the first Akkadian translations of the Sumerian words started to appear. Grammar was taught similarly by repeating the paradigms of nouns and verbs in different forms.

The students learned syntax by writing out actual Sumerian compositions, chosen for their grammatical complexity. Thus the study of certain Ur III royal hymns was introduced at this time. Finally, the training culminated with the copying out of passages from the classics of Sumerian literature. A wide variety of literary genres were represented: myths, hymns, proverbs, literary letters, and others. The student exercises are often the only manuscripts we have of these texts, whose original date of composition is unknown. The court's patronage is clear: many of the compositions were intended to glorify the living king or his distant ancestors. That message is most obvious in the royal hymns and the accounts of legendary rulers. The courts of the early second millennium continued the Ur III tradition of glorifying the king with hymnic songs. They portrayed him in superhuman terms and thus perpetuated the ideology that saw him as a divinity. Similar ideas were expressed in a cycle of stories concerning the legendary rulers of Uruk, Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgamesh. Part-human, part-divine, they were considered to be the ancestors of the Ur III kings and the creation of the tales in that court seems likely. Their popularity in the early second millennium suggests that the ideals of kingship displayed there were still alive.

Royal hymns dedicated to early second-millennium kings demonstrate the ability of some scribes to compose intricate texts in the Sumerian language, which probably was no longer spoken at the time. It is likely that other genres of literature were also composed during these centuries, while earlier compositions were recorded in a fixed form. The intensity of scribal activity in the Sumerian language may have resulted from the fact that the language was under threat: oral preservation was no longer guaranteed, so written versions with explicit indication of all the grammatical elements were needed. The primary writers of the extant manuscripts were boys trained to compose contracts and administrative accounts made up almost entirely of stock phrases. Their education went beyond the skills they would need on a daily basis. They were trained in the private houses of learned men, who each worked with a group of boys assisted by a student helper. The teachers were probably affiliated with the temples and, when Sumerian texts needed to be composed for such occasions as a royal visit, they most likely were the authors.

In northern Babylonia, Sumerian literature was also studied. The majority of compositions found there are of a liturgical nature and often written out more syllabically than in the south. Scribal skills were not necessarily inferior, however. The numerous letters found throughout the courts of the Near East were inspired by models from Babylonia. Scribes at Mari, for example, were probably trained in the south or by Babylonian men engaged by the local kings. The courts were important patrons of scribes, and schooling may have been centralized in the palaces rather than in private houses of temple affiliates. The situation in Babylon itself is unknown as we do not have access to archaeological remains of the period. Nevertheless, literature in the Babylonian language, as well as in Sumerian, continued to be composed. Some of the royal inscriptions of Samsuiluna, including bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian examples, are of a high literary quality. This was also the first significant period of literary composition in the Akkadian language. Certain texts that have a long history in Mesopotamia, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh or the Flood story, are first attested in Old Babylonian times, and many Akkadian hymns and incantations of this period are known. Their mood reflected the political situation of the times: uncertainty and violence are dominant themes. The writers of these texts were not spared the difficulties that confronted the inhabitants of the Old Babylonian state.

At this time we see the first extensive written documentation of a science for which Babylonia was famous in the ancient world: mathematics. From the beginning of writing the administrators of Babylonia showed their mathematical abilities when measuring fields, harvests, numbers of bricks, volumes of earth, and many other things that were of importance to bureaucrats. The tools to calculate these had to be taught but, as with literature, the skills displayed in the school texts show a much higher level than needed in daily practice. At first the students repeatedly copied out standard lists of capacity, weight, area and length, division and multiplication. Their most challenging tasks were formulated as word problems, but these were not really of great practical value even if their wording related to actual accounting tasks. For instance, the size of a grain pile was given, and it was asked how one could calculate the contents, or the circumference and slope of a heap of grain were provided in order to calculate the height:

A heap. The circumference is 30. In 1 cubit the slope is 0;15. What is the height?
 You: Double 0;15, the slope. You will see 0;30. Take the reciprocal of 0;30. You will see 2. Multiply 0;30 the circumference, by 2. You will see 1, : the height.
 <This is> the method.⁶

The knowledge of mathematics displayed in such texts is very sophisticated, and based on an algebraic logic. For example, the Babylonians had calculated the square root of 2 accurately, and applied it in geometric calculations (see figure 6.2). They were aware of the Pythagorean theorem that in a right-angled triangle, the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sums of the squares of the other sides. The basis of most of these calculations was information provided



Figure 6.2 Old Babylonian mathematical tablet. Courtesy of The Yale Babylonian Collection (YBC 7289)

in tables, listing numbers in their sexagesimal notation and their reciprocals (that is, 60 divided by that number), and their creation is one of the many accomplishments of the Babylonian schools.

The political supremacy of Babylon shifted the religious focus of the region to that city. The city-god Marduk was favored by kings Hammurabi and Samsuiluna. He was integrated in the Sumerian pantheon of Nippur by making him the son of Ea, himself the god of Eridu in the extreme south. While Marduk's cult predominated only in the region surrounding Babylon at that time, a few centuries later it would become the primary cult of Babylonia. The popularity of northern Babylonian deities increased and people throughout Babylonia adopted them as their personal gods. Thus in the centuries of the Old Babylonian dynasty, many of the cultural elements characteristic of the Near East in the second half of the second millennium were developed, and the political, religious, and cultural focus of Babylonia shifted permanently to its northern part.

The end of this period is something of a mystery. Each one of Hammurabi's successors ruled for more than two decades, a situation that is usually indicative of political stability. They kept northern Babylonia unified for 155 years, longer than the entire Ur III period, for example. The written evidence from the region shows a continuation of administrative and economic practices, and there are no indications of a weakening of the Old Babylonian state. Yet it existed in a void, surrounded by sparsely inhabited regions. The only political

powers equal to it were located at a great distance in northwestern Syria and in Anatolia. Conflict between those states ultimately affected Babylon. In 1595, King Mursili of the Hittites, after a campaign in northern Syria, led his troops down the Euphrates River, seemingly without much resistance. He sacked the city of Babylon, ending its famous dynasty, and left the region leaderless.

6.3 The Old Hittite Kingdom

Central Anatolia became a pivotal player in the history of the Near East at this time. The appearance of the Hittites in the heartland of Mesopotamia was the result of a relatively short process of centralization of power and the creation of an entity we now call the Old Hittite state or kingdom. Anatolia's earlier history is mostly shrouded in mystery: there are no written sources until the Old Kingdom period, and our information for those early centuries of the second millennium derives solely from the colonies of Assyrian merchants in the region. These sources depict a network of small kingdoms, often in conflict with one another, and with populations that used varied languages. Many of the languages survived into later centuries: Hattic, Luwian, Palaic, Hurrian, and what is now called Hittite. In the native tradition the latter was called Nesili, the language of Nesa, which was the indigenous name for Kanesh, where the main Assyrian merchant colony was located. Nesili became the official written language of the Hittite state, even if it may not have been spoken by most of its subjects. Several of the Anatolian languages in the second millennium, most notably Hittite, were Indo-European. Under the influence of an outdated nineteenth-century idea that there was an Indo-European homeland somewhere north of India, much attention in scholarship has been devoted to finding out when and where the Indo-Europeans entered Anatolia and to finding evidence for an invasion. This search is futile, however. There is no reason to assume that speakers of Indo-European languages were not always present in Anatolia, nor can we say that they would have been a clearly identifiable group by the second millennium. We can only observe that when the textual sources inform us of the languages used in Anatolia, some people spoke Indo-European ones, others not.

The fact that Hittite was considered to be the language of Nesa, i.e., Kanesh, provides a connection between the period of the Old Assyrian colonies and later Hittite history. Another link is the find of a dagger on the citadel of that city, inscribed with the name Anitta, who is identified as the ruler. The inscription was written in the Old Assyrian script and language, which seems to indicate that the Assyrian merchants imported the technology of writing at that time. Anitta was the central character of one of the earliest records of the Hittites, the so-called "Anitta text." It described how he and his father, Pitkhana, kings of the unlocated city of Kussara, conquered various central Anatolian cities, including Nesa, which may then have become their new capital. They unified the entire valley of the Kizil Irmak River up to its mouth on the Black Sea. Such

military operations may have caused the end of the Assyrian trade network. While the kingdom of Anitta collapsed soon after his death, the preservation of his memory in later records may indicate that he was regarded as the ancestor of the later Hittite royal house.

The history of the Old Hittite kingdom is written using sources that are very different from those available in the rest of the Near East. The palace archives of the later Hittite state contained a set of texts relating military campaigns of these early rulers or dealing with succession problems (see document 6.2). For example, King Hattusili's campaigns are described in annalistic texts, which, if indeed from his reign, would be the oldest such texts from the Near East. But the manuscripts we have were mostly written in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries, and it is unclear whether they are actual copies of older texts or later compositions set in ancient times for current political purposes. They often provide vivid descriptions of events, but their historical accuracy is hard to establish. The records relating to succession problems are to be seen as very biased as they were intended to portray the ruler under whom they were written as the legitimate successor. The Hittite habit of providing surveys

Document 6.2 *An account of early Hittite history:
extract from the Edict of Telepinu*

Afterwards Hattusili was king, and his sons, brothers, in-laws, family members, and troops were all united. Wherever he went on campaign he controlled the enemy land with force. He destroyed the lands one after the other, took away their power, and made them the borders of the sea. When he came back from campaign, however, each of his sons went somewhere to a country, and in his hand the great cities prospered. But, when later the princes' servants became corrupt, they began to devour the properties, conspired constantly against their masters, and began to shed their blood.

When Mursili was king in Hattusa, his sons, brothers, in-laws, family members, and troops were all united. He controlled the enemy land with force, took away their power, and made them the borders of the sea. He went to the city Aleppo, destroyed Aleppo, and took the deportees from Aleppo and its goods to Hattusa. Afterwards he went to Babylon and destroyed Babylon. He also fought the Hurrian [troops]. He took the deportees from Babylon and its goods to Hattusa. Hantili was cupbearer and he had Harapshili, Mursili's sister, as wife. Zidanta stole up to Hantili and they committed an evil deed: they killed Mursili and shed his blood.

Translation after Inge Hoffmann, *Der Erlaß Telepinus* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter-Universitätsverlag, 1984), pp. 14–19 and Th. P. J. van den Hout, "The Proclamation of Telepinu," in W. W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture* vol. 1, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 194–5.

of earlier reigns may seem a boon to the historian, but can be a trap where we repeat fully fictional accounts.

Based on these suspect sources, the following reconstruction of Old Hittite history can be made. A ruler called Hattusili created the Hittite state in the early or mid-seventeenth century (for a list of kings, see p. 306). Heir to the throne of Kussara, he rapidly defeated his competitors in central Anatolia. Among his conquests was the city of Hattusa, located in the center of the region in a strategic and well-protected site thanks to its position on a hilltop. He made Hattusa his capital, and possibly changed his name to coincide with that of the city. The city was in the center of Anatolia, but not at the heart of the Hittite state, which primarily extended south into Syria. Its northern location exposed it to attacks from groups from the Black Sea shores, especially a people called Gasga, who at times completely sacked it. Although some later rulers temporarily established capitals further south, Hattusa remained the political and religious center of the Hittite state until the very end of that state's existence.

Hattusili initiated a pattern of southward expansion. As Anatolia is divided into river valleys with a limited agricultural area, the search for control over north Syria may have been driven by the need to obtain access to large cereal fields. Hattusili invaded the kingdom of Yamkhad, which by the mid-seventeenth century controlled north-west Syria. The Hittite king sacked several of its cities, including Alalakh. Aleppo, the capital of Yamkhad, remained uncaptured, however, despite several campaigns in the region. Hattusili also campaigned in southwestern Anatolia and had, by the end of his reign, created a large state. Internally, however, that state was in disarray. Hattusili's sons rebelled late in his life, and even the nephew he had chosen as his successor turned against him. Thus, on his deathbed, Hattusili appointed his grandson, Mursili, as his heir. The new king's reign is poorly known, but the laconic sources mention two extremely important acts: the destructions of Aleppo and of Babylon. His military operations were not followed by an occupation, however. By annihilating Aleppo, Mursili upset the balance of power in north-west Syria and created space for other entities to develop. The conquest of Babylon is only mentioned in later Hittite and Babylonian sources, and nothing is known about it except that it took place. We can only speculate how and why Mursili led his troops so far south in what is sure to have been merely a raid. The result was a power vacuum in Babylonia as well.

The situation that had characterized Mesopotamia and Syria for two centuries was thus totally reversed. No longer did a set of strong rulers dominate the scene, and the entire region was reduced to political fragmentation. Neither did the Hittites themselves benefit from this situation: upon his return home, Mursili was assassinated by his brother-in-law, Hantili, who seized the throne. When Hantili in turn was murdered, various parties contested the succession to the Hittite throne, and internal instability prevented the Hittites from maintaining control over anything beyond the heartland of their state. The Hittite state would not reemerge as a significant player on the international scene until the fourteenth century.

The Hittite scribal tradition was not an offspring of the Old Assyrian one, despite the fact that this was the earliest in Anatolia, but was fully inspired by Babylonian practices. Many of the early texts were bilingual, using Hittite and Akkadian. The Hittite language was written in cuneiform script inspired by the Babylonian forms and readings of signs, and the penetration of these practices into Anatolia has to be seen as an extension of their influence throughout the Near East. Babylonia was thus the center of literate culture for all courts of the Near East, even if they spoke different languages.

The nature of the Hittite sources leads to an almost total ignorance about the workings of the Old Hittite state. No administrative archives from this period are known, so the organization of the economy, for instance, is a mystery. Much has been made in scholarship of the references to a gathering of warriors and officials in Hattusili's succession edict. This is thought to refer to an assembly of noblemen, who elected one from amongst themselves as king. Sometimes Indo-European practices are assumed here, since they are considered to be more democratic than those of others in the Near East. But such conclusions are not founded in evidence, and most likely the Old Hittite court functioned in ways similar to the others of the time. The Hittite state is thus very poorly known beyond its military successes. On that front it had a radical impact on the Near East by its removal of Aleppo and Babylon. But neither the Hittites nor any other older powers immediately filled the void that was left behind.

6.4 The "Dark Age"

By 1590 the Near East looked very different from what it had been four generations earlier. A system of flourishing states, ruled by courts in close contact with one another, spreading from the Mediterranean coast to the Persian Gulf, had been fully wiped out. Some royal houses still existed in cities such as Babylon, Terqa, and Hattusa, but they were pale reflections of the past and most often had no connection to their famous predecessors. Throughout the Near East, urbanism was at an all-time low since the year 3000. Many cities, such as Mari, had been destroyed as a result of the earlier military competition. Some others were abandoned for reasons unknown: changes in the river courses or rainfall patterns, social and political upheavals may all have played a role. The situation had the usual consequence for the historian: a lack of centralized power led to a discontinuation of administrative and scribal practices as the levels of economic and cultural activities decreased. Texts were only sparingly written and we have thus no data with which to work. We enter into a "Dark Age."

The length of this age is much debated. Depending on whether scholars see continuity or discontinuity between the first and the second halves of the second millennium, their perception of the timespan of historical silence will be shorter or longer. Some crucial changes took place in this hiatus, which would lead to a very different situation in later centuries. My opinion is somewhere in the middle of current theories. When roughly one century of full darkness

lifted in the early fifteenth century, the state of Mittani appears in the record of northern Mesopotamia.

The political ascendancy of new population groups, the Kassites in the south and the Hurrians in the north, seems to have been the most important development in the sixteenth century. Both groups had been present in the Near East before, but only in this "Dark Age" were they able to begin asserting clear political control. Kassites had lived in the north of Babylonia from the eighteenth century on, recognizable by their names, which reveal a clearly distinct language from the other inhabitants in the region. There are many indicators that they had a tribal social organization, and they were most closely associated with the area where steppe and agricultural zones border one another. But as with earlier nomadic groups, Gutians and Amorites, some Kassites were fully integrated social members of the agricultural and urban economy from the moment we encounter them. The Hana dynasty, which had emerged at Terqa upstream from Mari, included a ruler with a Kassite name. The Middle Euphrates region may thus have been the first area where the Kassites gained political control over cities. When Babylon was sacked in 1595, it was left leaderless, but within the next decades a Kassite dynasty had taken over control there. By 1475 it had incorporated southern Babylonia. It is only in the fourteenth century, however, that we can really study its history.

In northern Syria and Mesopotamia, there is evidence that people with Hurrian names had been present since the mid-third millennium. States with Hurrian rulers are attested from the end of the Old Akkadian period on. In the late third millennium, there was a nebulous state called "Urkesh and Nawar," after two cities in the northern Habur basin, ruled by a man named Atal-shen. Several of the early second-millennium states known to us had Hurrian rulers, and at certain places a substantial percentage of the population bore Hurrian names. They were spread out over an extremely wide zone, from the Zagros Mountains to the Mediterranean. When the Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia fell apart, waves of Hurrian speakers may have entered its territory from the mountains to its east. These immigrants probably brought some cultural elements we usually associate with Indo-Europeans, even if Hurrian itself is not an Indo-European language. Later Hurrians honored the Indian gods Mitra, Varuna, and the divine pair Nasatya. There has been much speculation as to whether the Hurrians themselves were subjected to an Indo-European military upper class: later rulers of Mittani, the Hurrian state in northern Syria, bore Indo-European names and their charioteers were designated with the word *mariyannu*, a term that might include the Vedic word for "young man." The evidence is inconclusive as to the character of the military class, however, and it seems best to regard its members as men with a special training for warfare. In that aspect the Hurrians were very successful. They became a formidable opponent, invading the Old Hittite kingdom several times. Their moves southward may have pushed people from Syria-Palestine into Egypt, where they formed the so-called Hyksos dynasties of the early sixteenth century. The Hurrians certainly became the most prominent population group in a vast area

by the time the historical sources resume. Not only did they have their own territorial state by the early fifteenth century, called Mittani, but they were also dominant among the Hittites and in Kizzuwatna (south-west Anatolia), while several rulers of the Syro-Palestinian city-states had Hurrian names.

While Kassites and Hurrians became politically dominant during the "Dark Age," culturally they barely made an impression across the Near Eastern scene. Although many personal names were Kassite, and Babylonian texts indicate the existence of a Kassite vocabulary, no single text or sentence is known in the Kassite language. Some twenty Kassite names of gods are attested, but only for the divine couple that guarded the dynastic family do we know anything concerning a cult and the building of a special temple. The speakers of Kassite were fully assimilated into Babylonian culture.

The Hurrian tradition was older as far as we know and interacted with a variety of cultures that were not as dominant as that of Babylonia. We do have a number of Hurrian language texts, a few from the Mittani state itself, and a few from the Hittite state. The latter's multicultural environment permitted the survival of Hurrian myths and rituals. Still, in comparison with their political importance, the cultural impact Hurrians made in Near Eastern history was not that significant.

The Hurrians may have been responsible, however, for a major technological innovation that took place during the "Dark Age": the use of the horse and chariot. In the second half of the second millennium, all Near Eastern armies fielded chariotries while previously only infantries had fought, with asses or donkeys as draft-animals. A long Hittite manual for the training of horses, found in later centuries, starts with the statement, "Thus speaks Kikkuli, the horse-trainer, from the land of Mittani," and the text contains a lot of Hurrian vocabulary. It is thus possible that the Hurrians were responsible for the spread of horsemanship throughout the Near East.

Another technological change that may have taken place at this time related to seafaring. After 1500 we observe a shift of attention of the people of the Near East from east to west: islands and countries across the Mediterranean Sea became included in the Near Eastern world-view. Cyprus and the Aegean became regular trading partners, while trade contacts with Egypt intensified. A maritime trading system developed by which the countries along the eastern Mediterranean shores were tied together, visited by ships that circled the sea in a counterclockwise direction picking up items at all stops and exchanging them for others. Although the lands of Mesopotamia were too distant from the sea to participate directly in this system, they benefited from it. Tin, for example, which had been imported from the east until this time, now probably came from western sources. While contacts with Aegean islands such as Crete were already attested in the Mari archives, the mass of goods that entered the Near East from the west was much greater in the second half of the second millennium than ever before. It seems likely that innovations in boat construction and navigational techniques had something to do with this, but the details of those changes or who initiated them are unclear.

Our uncertainties about the events and historical developments of the sixteenth and early fifteenth centuries are great. That some radical changes took place is undeniable, however. The Near Eastern world that arose out of the "Dark Age" was in many respects a totally new one.

NOTES

- 1 Shubat-Enlil, Qattara, Ashnakkum (present Chagar Bazar), Tuttul, Mari, Terqa, and Qala'at al-Hadi and Tell Taya (ancient names unknown).
- 2 Jean-Marie Durand, *Documents épistolaires du palais de Mari* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1997), volume 1, p. 138.
- 3 Douglas R. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC) (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Early Periods, volume 4)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 341.
- 4 Translation after F. R. Kraus, *Briefe aus dem Archive des Shamash-hazir* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), no. 1.
- 5 For a recent translation of Hammurabi's law code, see Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, second edition (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 71–142.
- 6 Translation from Eleanor Robson, *Mesopotamian Mathematics, 2100–1600 BC* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 224.