

## I. GEOGRAPHY, ETHNICITY, AND HISTORY

### 1. Geographical zones.

Strictly speaking the Greek term Mesopotamia denotes the land between the Euphrates and the Tigris, the northern part of which is called in Arabic the Jezira, the 'Island.' Syria on the western side of the Euphrates and Elam on the eastern edge of the Delta Plain play an important part in the history of Mesopotamia, and the larger unit consisting of Mesopotamia, Syria and Elam will be called 'Greater Mesopotamia.' Greater Mesopotamia is enclosed in the west, north, an east by mountains, and in the south by increasingly dry steppe and desert. As such Greater Mesopotamia is a geographical and historical unit.

Inside this larger geographical unit various interdependent zones can be distinguished, each with its own climate, economy, and history. The basic distinguishing feature is the amount of rainfall, and the availability of river water. The zones can be defined as follows (Fig. 1A):

#### A. *Mountain Chains; Agropastoralism.*

The high mountain barriers of the Zagros in the east and the Taurus in the north close off Mesopotamia from Iran (Persia) and Anatolia (Turkey), throughout history distinct cultural units (Fig. 1A). In the west the greater Mesopotamian world is bordered by the Amanus, the Jebel Ansariyah, the Libanon, and the highlands of Judea. The coastal strip beyond these mountains (Phoenicia, Canaan/Palestina) has a more or less independent history, influenced not only by Mesopotamia, but also by Egypt and the eastern mediterranean world, specifically Greece and Anatolia.

The mountain valleys and coastal strips sustain small chiefdoms usually independent of each other, but sometimes fusing into larger units (federal states). The economy is agropastoral, an opportunistic mixture of agriculture and pastoralism.

#### B. *Fertile Crescent; Rain-fed Agriculture.*

The arc of foothills and rolling plains below the mountains of zone A is called the fertile crescent (Fig. 1A). In winter it receives sufficient rain for rain-fed agriculture. Zones A and B harboured the wild progenitors of the later domesticated plants and animals: wheat, barley, sheep and goats (Fig. 2). The lower limit of this area is defined by the 200 mm reliable rainfall isohyet (Fig. 3A). Through time the location of this isohyet is not completely stable, but shifts from north to south and back again (wetter and dryer periods). Since in marginal areas small changes may have large consequences, these periodical shifts are of great relevance for the economy of the regio, and hence for its history and culture. The specialists, however, have not yet found a reliable time scale for these climatic fluctuations.

Within the zone of rain-fed agriculture a number of subregions can be defined, separated by stretches of steppe unfit for settlement (Fig. 3A): 1. The strip Carchemish, Aleppo, Qatna, Damascus (Syria); 2. The Chabur Triangle; 3. The Assyrian heartland within the square Assur, Kirkuk, Erbil, Ninua (Nineveh). These areas play an identifiable part in the history of Geater Mesopotamia. One area partakes in two zones: 4. Elam. Less important are: 7. Rania Plain; and 8. Sulaimaniyah Plain.

The lands west of the Euphrates (Syria) have a more mediterranean character, with olive oil, wheat, and wine instead of sesame oil, barley, and beer.

#### C. *Steppe; Pastoralism.*

The arc below the fertile crescent receives some rain, but not enough for a settled way of life (agriculture and cities) (Fig. 1A). Nomadic pastoralism is a mobile life style, which utilizes the sporadically available pasture in this zone. The pastoralists and their herds (sheep and goats) move from pasture to pasture, usually in a fixed yearly pattern. There are two types of yearly movement (transhumance), horizontal and vertical. The first type is typical for the lowlands, where the pastoralists move from south (winter) to north (summer), the second type is typical for the mountains, where the movement is from low (winter) to high (summer).

Although movement is essential for the pastoralists, most tribes have partly or completely sedentary sections, that live in more or less permanent villages (with storehouses, treasuries, and burial grounds), and may engage in some additional agriculture. Most of the time the nomadic pastoralists are distinguished from the settled agriculturalist by the use of a different language. The settled portions of the pastoralist tribes usually adopt the language and culture of the agriculturalist cities, but sometimes replace it.

The social organization of the nomadic pastoralists is based on family interests (tribes), that of the agriculturalists on territorial interests (cities, states). Although pastoralists and agriculturalists need each other for the exchange of specialized products (meat, wool; grain, beer), there are often tensions between the two differently natured groups. Settled kings prefer farmers, whom they can tax, and mobilize as a work force; the often leaderless pastoralist tribes prefer their freedom. In conjunction with the climatic fluctuations noted above this social tension causes a periodical expansion/contraction of tribal lands in relation to sedentary states (Fig. 3B).

In the middle of the steppe is the oasis town Palmyra (Tadmor), from the late 3rd millennium onwards an important station on the shortest route from Mesopotamia to the Levant.

#### *D. Desert; Uninhabited.*

South of zone C is a desert zone with even less rainfall, or none at all (Fig. 1A). As long as the donkey was the only means of transportation (until ca 1200 BC) the desert was largely uninhabited. It was opened up in the 1st millennium BC by the large scale introduction of the domesticated camel.

#### *E. River Plains and Delta: Irrigation Agriculture.*

If instead of rain water river water can be used to water the fields (irrigation), zones C, D, and E become inhabitable. The upper stretches of Euphrates and Tigris have cut their bed into a rocky plateau, and run too deep for practicable irrigation. On some points along the Euphrates, however, the valley is wide enough for habitation, specifically at Mari (Fig. 1A). About half-way to the Persian Gulf the two rivers reach the plain, and from there on can be easily tapped. Irrigation agriculture requires knowledge and investment (digging and maintaining canals), and the areas in question are usually put into use later than those in the zone of rain-fed agriculture.

The most important areas in this zone (Fig. 3A) are Sumer (5) and Akkad (6). Sumer, the Delta Plain, is inhabited from ca. 6000 BC onwards, but until ca 3000 it was wetter than after that time, which made agriculture and irrigation easier. East of Sumer is Elam (4), which has a mixed rain-fed (in the east) and irrigation (in the west) agriculture. In the north, in zone C, there are from ca 2000 BC onwards a few smaller areas with irrigation agriculture, specifically along the Balikh, the Khabur, and the Tharthar.

The fertile crescent (Zone B), the steppe (Zone C) and the plains of Sumer and Akkad (Zone E) produce plenty of grain and wool, but lack everything else, specifically metal, stone, and timber. Thus trade (Fig. 1B), war, or peaceful expansion becomes a necessity.



## 2. Ethnic Units and Languages (Fig. 4).

- *Sumerian* is an isolated language, in the 3rd millennium BC spoken in Sumer (5), and in prehistory (Uruk period) perhaps over a larger area. In the course of the 3rd millennium Sumerian is gradually replaced by Akkadian, and around 2000 BC it dies out as a spoken language. Sumerian remains important as the language of science and religion, somewhat like Latin in the middle ages.
- *Akkadian* is a member of the Semitic language family, introduced in the Flood Plain (6) in the early 3rd millennium BC by nomadic pastoralists. The early presence of Akkadian or a related Semitic language (Early Semitic) in the Delta Plain (5) is evidenced by Semitic loanwords in Sumerian. Old Akkadian is the language of the Akkadian Empire (Akkad Period 2334-2154), its younger relative in the south is called Babylonian, and in the north Assyrian, each of which is subdivided in an Old, Middle, and New (Neo) phase. The term "Akkadian" covers all language periods, and includes Babylonian and Assyrian.
- *Elamite* is an isolated language spoken in Elam (4). Limited sources, imperfectly understood.
- *Gutian* is the language of the invaders from the Zagros that brought the Akkadian Empire to an end. All that is known of this language is a handful of personal names.
- *Kassite* is the language of the pastoralists from the Zagros that contributed to the downfall of Babylon (1595), and then ruled it until 1155. Of this language about a hundred words are known. It is sometimes considered to be Indo-European.
- *Hurrian*, related perhaps to present day North Caucasian, is spoken in the mountainous arc roughly between the Euphrates in the west and Lake Urmia in the east. The earliest written sources stem from North Mesopotamia in the 2nd half of the 3rd millennium BC, and in the Late Bronze Age (ca 1600-1200 BC) it was the language of the Mittannian Empire, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Tigris and the mountains beyond. In the Iron Age the language of the Urartian state to the north of Assyria was a sort of Hurrian, called Urartian. Limited sources, imperfectly known.
- *Mittannian* is the language of the rulers of the Mittannian state, and distinct from the Hurrian language of the rest of the population. It is related to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European languages. Of this language only a handful of words is known: elements of personal names, a few deities, and some terms concerning the training of horses.
- *Hattic* is one of the early languages of Anatolia, spoken there before the arrival of the Luwians and Hittites. Limited sources, imperfectly known.
- The Anatolian branch of the Indo-European languages has entered Anatolia somewhere in the 3rd millennium BC, presumably from the west. *Hittite* is the official language of the Hittite Empire (ca. 1600-1200 BC), the closely related *Luwian* that of the majority of the population. Luwian is best known from the period after the fall of the Hittite Empire (ca 1200-750 BC). Iron Age successors of this family are *Lycian* and *Lydian* in western Anatolia. Hittite is written with cuneiform, Luwian with a pictographic script called Luwian Hieroglyphics, Lycian and Lydian with variants of the Greek alphabet.
- The late prehistoric *pastoralists* (4th-3rd millennium BC) presumably spoke an early version of *Akkadian*, the language that became Old Akkadian after these pastoralists settled and adopted agriculture (ca. 2500 BC). Assyrian in the north, Eblaite in the northwest, and Babylonian in the south are more and less closely related to Old Akkadian, and presumably of pastoralist descent as well.

From the late 3rd to the end of the 2nd millennium the language of the steppe was *Amorite*. Amorite tribes settled in Mesopotamia, where in the first half of the 2nd millennium they came to power in a number of cities (a. o. Babylon and Assur). In Mesopotamia the

Amorite language is known only from its use in personal names, since there the settled tribes adopted the languages of the cities that they took over. In the Levant too Amorite tribes took over the settled lands, but there the Amorite language replaced the original ones, and developed into *Ugaritic*, *Canaanite/Hebrew*, and *Phoenician*. There is some evidence on these languages from cuneiform sources of the 2nd and 1st millennia BC, but most documents stem from the 1st millennium, and are written in an alphabetic script, the forerunner of the later Greek and Latin alphabets.

In the steppe Amorite is from ca 1000 BC onwards replaced by the related *Aramaic*. From ca. 800 BC onwards Aramaic became the language of the settled communities, and gradually replaced their original languages.

### 3. Outline of Mesopotamian History.

*Ubaid-period (ca 6000<sup>2</sup>-4000 BC) (Fig. 5B).*

Up until ca 3500 the climate was wetter than after that date, and consequently the natural network of rivers and channels in the Delta Plain was denser, affording ample space for human habitation. Agriculturalists first settled in southern Mesopotamia (Sumer) in the Ubaid-period. The first settlers may have colonized Mesopotamia descending from the foothills of the Zagros, where irrigation agriculture was developed earlier (Samarra Culture). Before that time advanced hunter-gatherers may have lived in the marshes around the shores of the Persian Gulf, but the assessment of all early habitation in Southern Mesopotamia is hampered by the enormous amount of silt deposited by the rivers, which buried all early archeological remains deep under the level of the present plain (Fig. 5A).

The Ubaid people lived in small villages, that do not seem to have been hierarchically organized (no "capital" cities). Their ceramics are hand-painted. In this period, and already earlier, there was some form of administration, which used 'tokens' representing countable items (like 'sheep' or 'piece of cloth'), and stamp seals.

*Uruk-Period (ca 4000-3000 BC) (Fig. 5C).*

Around 3500 BC the climate got drier, which forced human habitation to a more limited number of localities along the less abundant rivers and channels. In the Uruk-period, and especially during its second half, Mesopotamia became hierarchically organized, with large urban centres functioning as regional "capitals". The ceramics of this period are mass produced and unpainted, indications of a centralized (rather than domestic) industry. The most important city in the south was Uruk, after which the period is named. It is probably during this period that the later regional identities are first developed (Fig. 5B, C), specifically Kengir (Sumer), and Wari/Uri (later called Akkad) in southern Mesopotamia, and the fertile square Assur, Kirkuk, Erbil, Nineveh (later called Assyria) in northern Mesopotamia.

During this period the Mesopotamian cities founded "colonies" outside of the Uruk heartland of southern Mesopotamia, among others: Susa in Elam, Habuba Kabira (modern name) and Jebel Aruda (modern name) on the Middle Euphrates, and Godin Tepe (near Hamadan) in Persia. Basically the colonies seem to have functioned in a trade network, set up to supply the growing economy with what the southern plains lacked: metal, stone, and timber (in exchange for textiles and grain). The Uruk example inspired parallel urban developments in areas beyond its direct presence.

The cities were built around the temple, the only or at least the most important land owner. The agricultural activities of the temple created a surplus, which was redistributed by a "priest-king," who in this way could redirect the available labour as he saw fit: to dig canals, to serve in the army, to administrate the temple's estates, to produce specialized handicraft (textiles, metal work). This practical organization is matched by an ideological (religious)



one, in which the city's deity is the head-of-state, who resides in his palace (the city's temple), while the priest-king, the actual ruler, presents himself as the deity's first servant. Such a theocratic model is typical for all early states.

The individual cities were independent of each other, but may have been loosely associated in a kind of federation. Later traditions show that in the early periods Eridu, the home town of Enki, was some sort of national religious centre, and guardian of the sacred traditions (m e).

The administration of the temple engendered two important inventions: a pictographic writing system that would develop into cuneiform, and the cylinder seal. These new inventions replaced the older administrative system with tokens and stamp seals. In the beginning the use of writing was confined to Uruk, and the number of texts produced limited.

*Jamdat Nasr Period (3000-2900 BC) (Fig. 6A).*

At the end of the Uruk-period Mesopotamian civilization shrunk back to its southern heartland, while in the north and east separate cultural provinces sprung up, recognizable mainly by their ceramics (painted) and art styles; notable are especially the Ninevite V and Proto-Elamite cultures. The latter developed its own version of cuneiform, called "Proto-Elamite". From now on the various regions would follow interdependent but separate historical paths.

In Mesopotamia cuneiform writing had been adopted everywhere. The texts (archives from Uruk and Jamdat Nasr) concern mostly administration, mixed with some scholarly material serving scribal education, specifically sign-lists. The latter are extremely important for understanding the early script.

*Early Dynastic Period (2900-2335 BC) (Fig. 6B).*

The Uruk/Jamdat Nasr period developed without a break into the Early Dynastic period, the beginning of which is marked by stagnation. The south is rent by internal strife, but the Sumerian city states lacked a higher authority to decide their quarrels.

The Sumerians in the south called their own land Kengir (later: Šumer), and the Flood plain and the adjacent Diyala plain Wari (> Uri). Early on in the third Millennium BC the Flood Plain was inhabited by Semitic tribes, who, among other founded Kiš, and whose Sumero-Semitic civilization spread beyond their home territories to Mari on the Euphrates and Ebla in northwest Syria. Contrary to their southern colleagues, who limited themselves to their own cities, the "kings of Kiš" had territorial aspirations, and assumed the right to intervene in the affairs of their neighbours. About half-way this period one of them, Enmebaragesi, rebuilt Enlil's temple in Nippur, and called it Urunanum, "It-is-truly-the-city". Thus Nippur, situated right between the mostly Semitic Flood Plain and the mostly Sumerian Delta Plain, became the new national religious centre, where kings with territorial aspirations went to seek the support of Enlil, the head of the national pantheon.

The history of the earlier part of this period is known mainly from much later sources, which contain a mixture of fact and fiction; contemporary administrative texts are few, and of limited value except for the history of language and script (Early Dynastic I, ca. 2900-2750). Enmebaragesi is the first king of the later historical sources who has left us a contemporary inscription. On the basis of paleography (the form of the signs) this very brief inscription has been dated to ca. 2700 BC (Early Dynastic II). According to later traditions the legendary Gilgameš, king (e n) of Uruk, is a contemporary of Enmebaragesi's son, Akka.

The later part of this period (Early Dynastic III, ca. 2600-2350) is marked by an abundance of inscriptions, administrative, royal (specifically from Lagaš), religious, and scholarly (specifically from Šuruppak, Abu Salabikh, and Ebla). The language is

Sumerian disappeared everywhere, and survived only as the language of learning and cult (corpus of *eduba* texts).

The Old Babylonian states are much less centralistic than the Ur III empire, and consequently the amount of texts is somewhat smaller. The relative lack of large administrative archives is offset by a massive appearance of other, more interesting text types: letters (business and governmental) and juridical documents. Large archives with mixed material stem from the palace of Mari on the Euphrates, and from the houses of the Assyrian merchants in Kaniš (modern Kültepe, in Anatolia). Besides these there are many smaller public or private archives from almost every town that has been excavated, e. g. Ur, Isin, Larsa, Sippar, and Nippur. Unfortunately there is very little material from Babylon itself, on account of the present high ground water table.

*Late Bronze Age (1600-1200 BC) (Fig. 7B).*

Already in the Old Babylonian Period there was some contact between the states of Mesopotamia (Babylon, Mari, Assur) and Syria (Aleppo, Qatna, Hazor). In the Late Bronze Age the territorial interests of the various Near Eastern states came into serious conflict, especially in Syria and Palestine, and their once independent histories became interrelated.

*Babylonia. Kassite Dynasty (1595-1155).* After the fall of Babylon a dark period set in (few contemporary texts, King-Lists damaged or unclear), the length of which is generally estimated at between 50 and 150 years (there are even higher estimates). Depending on their assessment of this dark period scholars variously date the fall of Babylon to 1595 (Middle Chronology), 1531 (Short Chronology), or 1499 (Ultra Short Chronology). During the dark period the leaders of Kassite tribes from the Zagros established themselves as kings in Babylon, and reunified the land; a relatively prosperous and uneventful period set in. Babylonia was in contact with the other great states of the period, but remained geographically too excentric to play an important role. Its eastern neighbour, the kingdom of Elam, played no role at all on the international stage.

In 1155 an Elamite raid brought the Kassite Dynasty to an end; the Elamite king, Šutruknaḫunte I, captured Babylon, and removed many monuments to his capital, Susa (among them the Naram-Sin stele and the Code of Hammurabi).

During the Kassite Period Babylonian scholars started to collect, organize, and edit the chaos of current religious and scientific texts, and thus created a fixed and coherent body of "literature". This text-critical process starting in the Kassite Period is referred to with the term "canonization"; it continued until the end of the cuneiform tradition.

*Egypt. Second Intermediate Period (1759-1540), New Kingdom (1540-1070).* After a long recession and a period of foreign rule (Amorite Hyksos) Egypt was reunified, and started taking care of its foreign interests again (18th Dynasty 1540-1292). Around 1450 Thutmose III (1479-1425) led his armies deep into Syria, and even crossed the Euphrates. According to his inscriptions he received messengers bearing gifts ("tribute") from the kings of Babylonia, Assyria, Alalakh (a kingdom on the Orontes), Assuwa (a confederacy in western Anatolia), and the Danajū (Mycenean Greeks), which marked the end of the dark age and the beginning of the international period. The heretic pharaoh Akhenaten (1353-1336) moved his capital to Akhetaten (Amarna), where part of his international correspondence was dug up. Most of the letters are written in Babylonian cuneiform, few in Hittite and Hurrian. This part of the international period is called the Amarna Period.

The pharaohs quarreled with their Mittannian and later their Hittite colleagues over their respective spheres of influence in the Levant. The undecided battle of Qadeš (1275)



between Ramses II and the Hittite king Muwatalli II brought peace to the region, later formalized in a treaty.

Mittanni Empire (ca 1600-1350). In the beginning of the Late Bronze Age the Mittannian Empire was centred on the Jezira and the mountainous areas to the north, while Mittannians and Hittites competed for power in north Syria (Aleppo, Alalakh). Until ca.1350 Mittanni had the upper hand, but after the Syrian campaigns of Suppiluliuma II (ca. 1350-1324) it was reduced to a Hittite vassal state east of the Euphrates. At about the same time Assyria regained strength, and conquered a large part of the Mittannian Empire to its east and north. In the course of the next century the remaining Hittite vassal state was assimilated into the Assyrian Empire.

There are very few historical documents or administrative records in Hurrian, the language of the Mittannian Empire. Most of Mittannian history must be reconstructed from non-Mittannian sources.

Hittite Empire (ca. 1670-1175). During the Late Bronze Age the Hittites created a large empire comprising Anatolia from the Aegean to the Euphrates, and a large part of northern Syria. Until ca 1350 they competed mainly with the Mittannian Empire, after that date with Egypt, Assyria, and their enemies in the west, among them the Mycenaean Greeks (Ahhiyawa).

The Hittites spoke an Indo-European language, but they took over their writing system from Mesopotamia, and with it assimilated much of Mesopotamian culture. In their capital at Hattuša thousands of clay tablets have been found, most of them written in Hittite.

Middle Assyrian Empire (ca. 1350-1000). Assyrian history after the death of Šamši-Adad I (1776) is largely obscure. During the ascendancy of the Mittannian Empire until ca 1350 Assyria seems to have been a Mittannian vassal. Beginning with Aššur-uballit (1353-1318) Assyria progressively freed itself from Mittannian domination, and became a notable player on the international stage. The pinnacle of the Middle-Assyrian power is reached under Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233-1197), who for a short while even ruled over Babylon. After his reign the Middle Assyrian Empire shrunk back to its heart lands (brief revival under Tiglathpileser I 1114-1076).

Peoples of the Sea and the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca 1200). During the whole of the Late Bronze Age in Syria, Mesopotamia and Anatolia urban populations had been diminishing; many old urban centres were abandoned, whole regions left to the nomads. This de-urbanization changed the balance of power between farmers and nomads, and constituted an important weakness for the states, whose power basis lay precisely in the settled populations. The appearance of the Sea Peoples brought about a crisis that quickly developed into an almost total collapse of all civilization, which lasted several centuries.

The Sea Peoples, so called after Egyptian sources, are a coalition of Greeks (Philistines), Anatolians (Lycians), and others (Etruscans, Sicilians, Sardinians), looking for land to settle. Their attack on the Levant and Egypt in ca. 1180 (8th year of Ramses III) resulted in the destruction of many important Syrian city states, and finally in their settlement on the Levantine coast from Gaza in the south up to Byblos (and Cyprus) in the north. The fall of Hattuša and the Hittite Empire was perhaps brought about by local Anatolian tribes, who took the opportunity to finish off their weakened adversary. Egypt survived, but would never be as powerful as it was during the late Bronze Age. Assyria shrunk back to its heartland, and only Babylonia came through unscathed.

During the Late Bronze Age Mesopotamian literacy was spread widely outside the ken of Mesopotamian civilization. Large archives stem from Nuzi (near Kirkuk) in Mittannian territory, from Emar on the middle Euphrates, from Hattuša and other towns in Anatolia, from Ugarit on the Levant coast, and from Amarna in Egypt. Smaller groups of texts stem from many localities in Palestine and Syria. With the cuneiform writing system the foreign scribes assimilated Mesopotamian culture in various degrees; they were trained in Sumerian, and in various branches of religious science, specifically magic and divination (extispicy).

Cuneiform requires a long training, and therefore institutional back-up, that is: someone has to pay for it. With the collapse of the states at the end of the Late Bronze Age this back-up disappeared in the Levant, and cuneiform with it. In the course of the Early Iron Age it was replaced by a much easier and less ideologically overburdened writing system, the alphabet.

A writing system that survived the collapse is Luwian Hieroglyphic. It remained in use until the north Syrian and Anatolian states supporting it were swallowed up by the expanding Neo-Assyrian Empire (9th-7th centuries BC) (Fig. 8B).

#### *Iron Age and Neo-Assyrian Empire (883-612)(Fig. 8A).*

Assyria survived the crisis of the Late Bronze Age, but not unscathed. In the west large tracts of lands were lost to the Arameans, closer to home important agricultural regions were subject to the king only in name. In the 9th century BC urban life picked up again, and from then on the cities gradually expanded. After the reign of Aššurnasirpal II (883-859) the empire had regained its lost territories, and was about the size of its Middle-Assyrian predecessor. Subsequent kings reorganized the administration of the provinces and the army, and step by step conquered the whole of Syria, Palestina, Babylonia, Elam, and Egypt, and parts of Anatolia and Armenia (Urtu). In 612 Nineveh fell to a coalition of Medes and Babylonians, after which the empire was divided between the two conquering nations.

Assurbanipal (669-631) collected a large library in Nineveh, composed out of earlier Assyrian collections and texts confiscated in Babylonia. This "library of Assurbanipal" is the largest deposit of "canonical" texts excavated to date; smaller collections of the same type stem from the Nabû temple in Nimrud, and from private libraries in Assur, Huzirina, and Uruk. All library texts are written in a special library dialect called Standard Babylonian. Assyrian kings used the same dialect for their official inscriptions.

The Assyrian kings left us a large amount of very informative royal inscriptions, and a sizable collection of epistolary documents concerning the administration of the empire and related matters (such as prophecy, divination, and the confiscation of tablets).

#### *Neo-Babylonian Empire (625-539)*

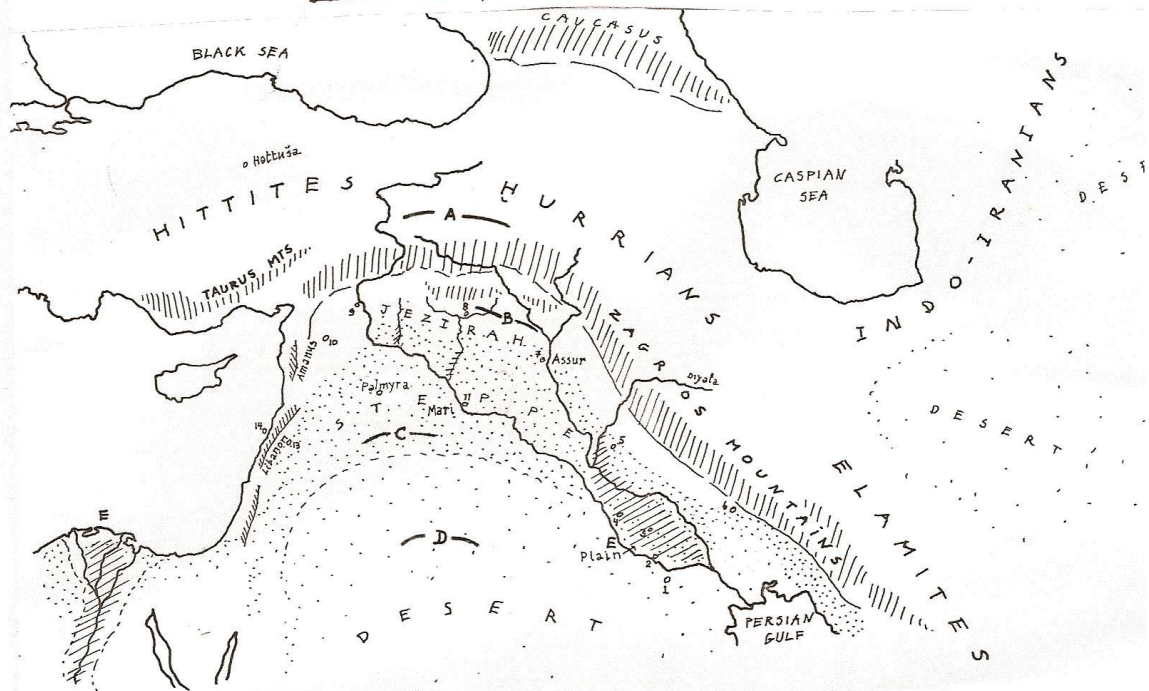
Since the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions deal only with religious matters, and an archive with royal letters has not (yet) come to light, the history of this period is much less well known than that of the Neo-Assyrian empire. The most important king was Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562). Nabonid (556-539) neglected the cult of Marduk in favour of that of Sin in Harran, and spend ten years in Tema in Arabia. Apparently he was not very popular, so that Cyrus II (559-530), who captured Babylon in 539, could present his victory as a liberation, blessed by Marduk.

There is an enormous amount of Neo-Babylonian administrative documents, both public and private. They enable the modern student to reconstruct important aspects of Neo-Babylonian society. Generally speaking it impresses one as absorbed in an antiquated religion, quarrelsome, and stagnant.

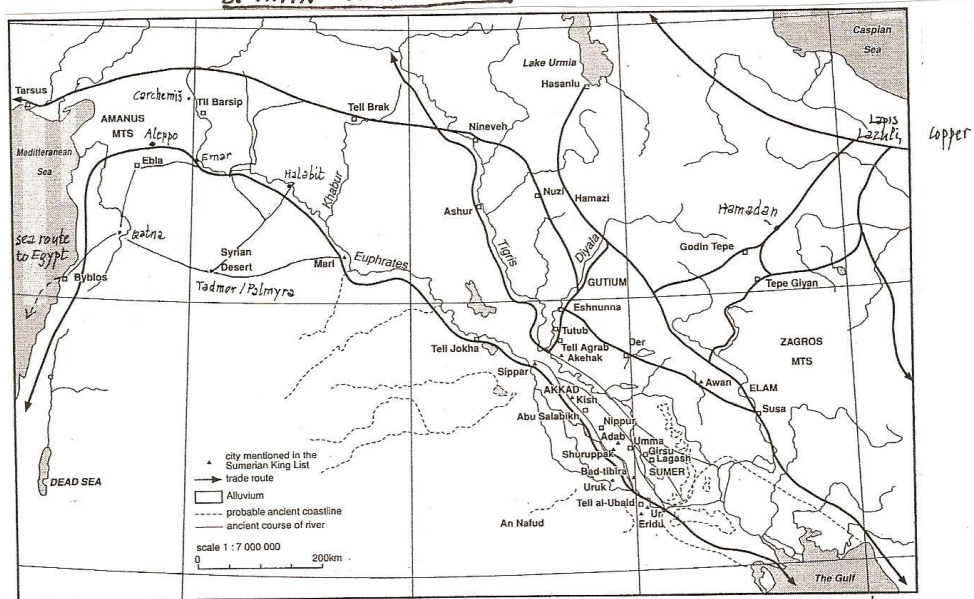


Fig.1

A. GEOGRAFISCHE ZONES EN ECONOMIE



B. MAIN TRADE ROUTES



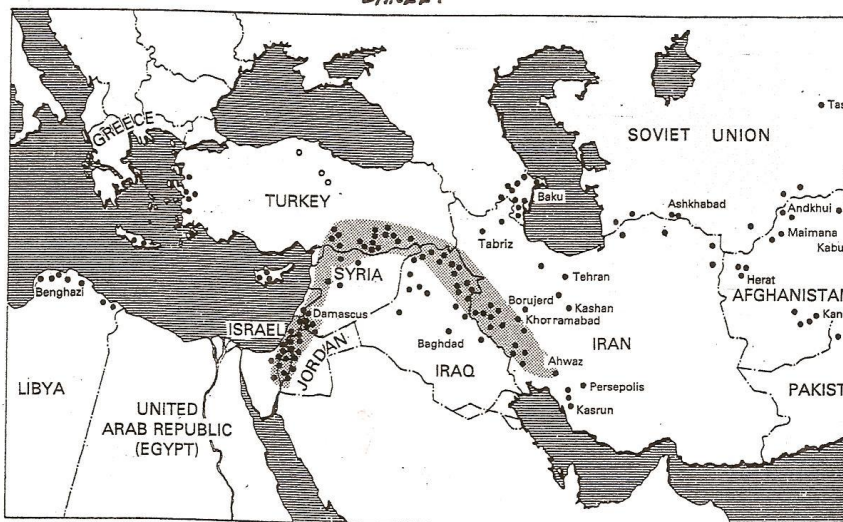
Map 2 Early Mesopotamia

sea route to  
Egypt and  
Indus valley

Fig.2

Map 3.5 Natural distribution of wild barley

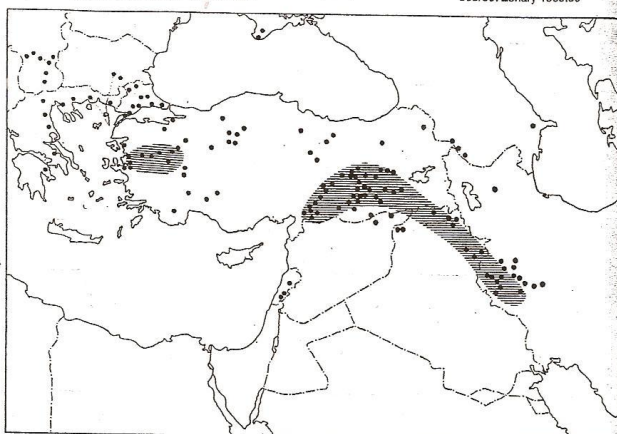
### BARLEY



Map 3.6 Natural distribution of wild einkorn

### WHEAT

Source: Zohary 1969:50



Map 3.11 Probable distribution of four main progenitors of domestic livestock  
[Majid 1990]

### SHEEP and GOAT

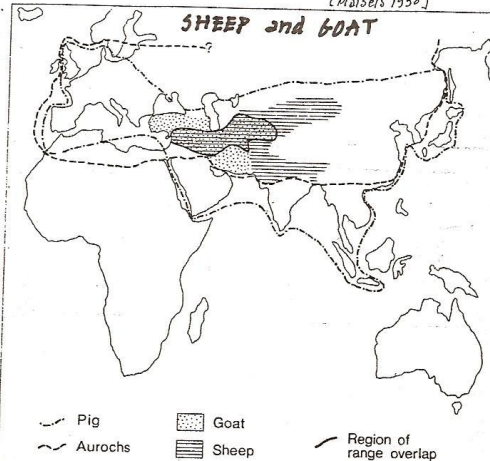




Fig. 3

**A. Zones B en E: sedentaire staten (landbouw)**

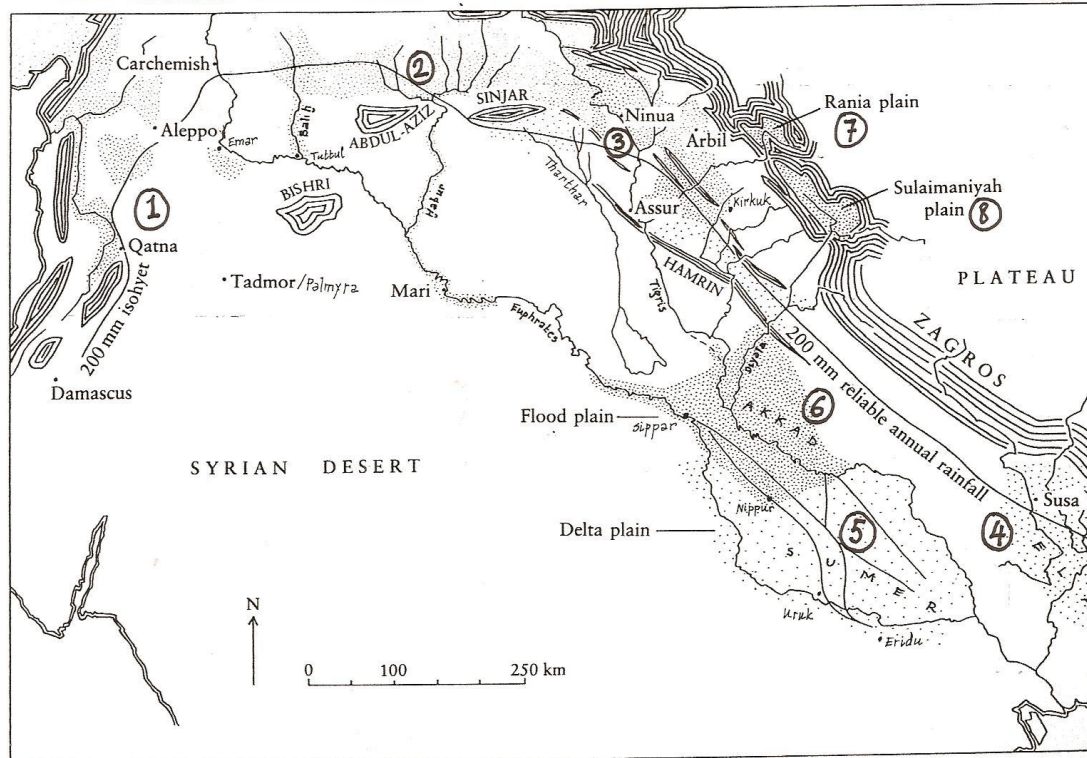


Figure 1:7 Mesopotamia and Syria: relief and soils, showing best areas for irrigation and rainfall agriculture. (Based partly on Buringh 1960 and Wirth 1971) (Postgate 1992)

**B. Zones B and E (sedentary states) in contrast to Zone C (Pastoralism): Contraction and Expansion**

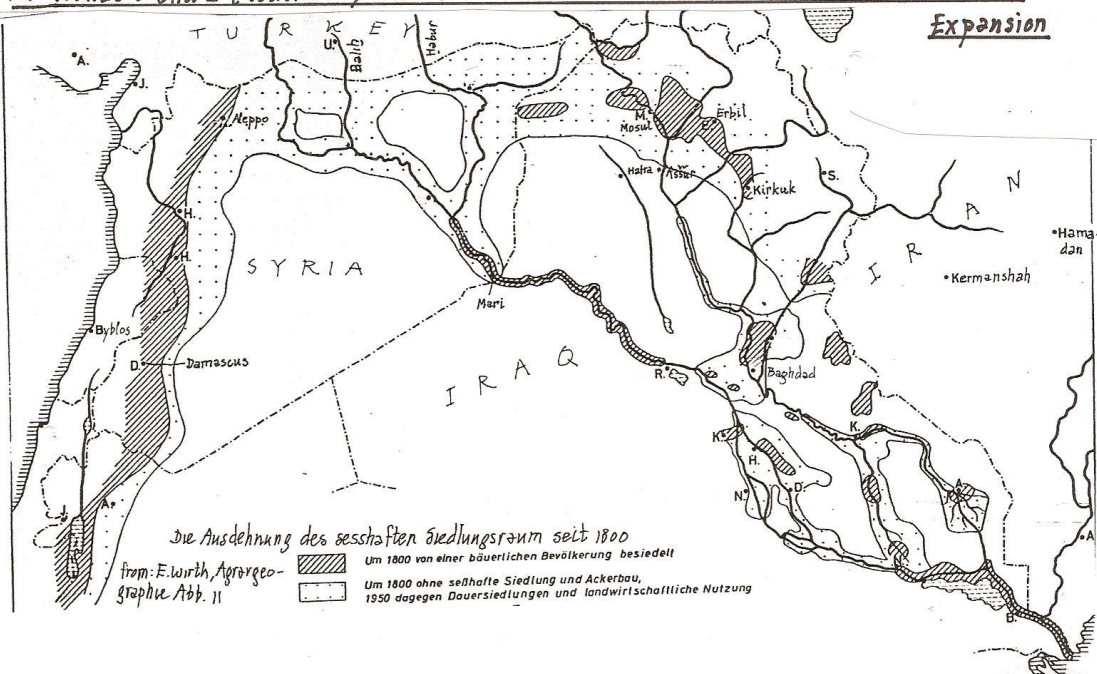
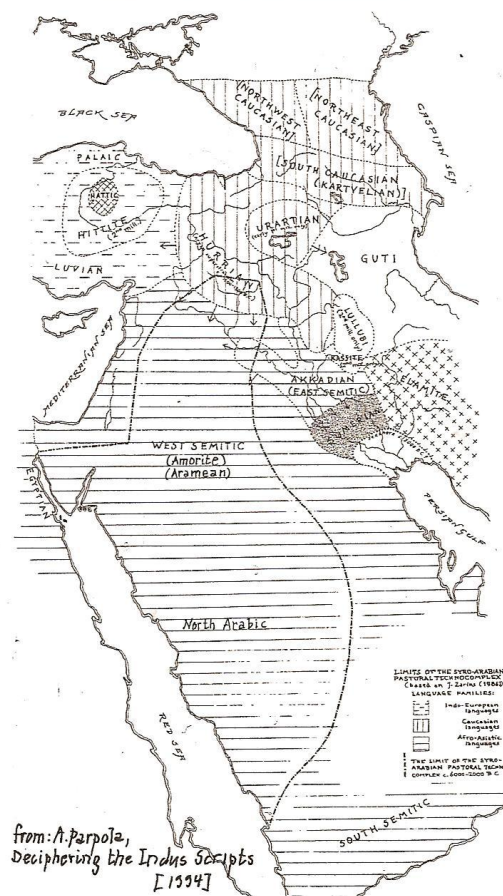


Fig-4



DISTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGES ca. 2000 BC

Fig. 8.1. Languages spoken in the ancient Near East. The map mainly reflects the situation in the third and second millennia BC. The Hurrians of Mitanni were ruled by Proto-Indo-Aryan-speaking nobles c. 1500–1300 BC (fig. 8.16). The recently discovered 'Syro-Arabian pastoral technocomplex', dated to c. 6000–4000 BC, may in its older stage (c. 6000–4000 BC) represent speakers of the Proto-Semitic language. This map has been adapted from an unpublished one by Gene Gragg (1979), with the borders of the Syro-Arabian pastoral technocomplex added after Zarins 1986: 237, fig. 68.

	Central Anatolia	Levant coast and Syria	East Anatolia and North Mesopotamia		South Mesopotamia		Zagros/Iran	
3000					uitvinding van het schrift	C Sumerian		3000
2500			C Eblaite	C Hurrian	C Akkadian	Early Semitic	C Elamite	2500
2000	C, H Hittite and Luwian		Amorite		Old Akkadian	Ur III	C Gutian	2000
1500		C, A Ugaritic and Phoenician	A Aramaic and Hebrew	C Mittanian	Old Assyrian	Old Babylonian		1500
1000			Uartian		Middle Assyrian	Middle Babylonian	C Kassite	1000
500					Neo-Assyrian	Neo-Babylonian		500
language type	Indo-European Anatolian Branch	W. Semitic	Ergative	Indo-European	E. Semitic (Akkadian)	Ergative	?	

C = Cuneiform H = Luwian Hieroglyphs A = Alphabet

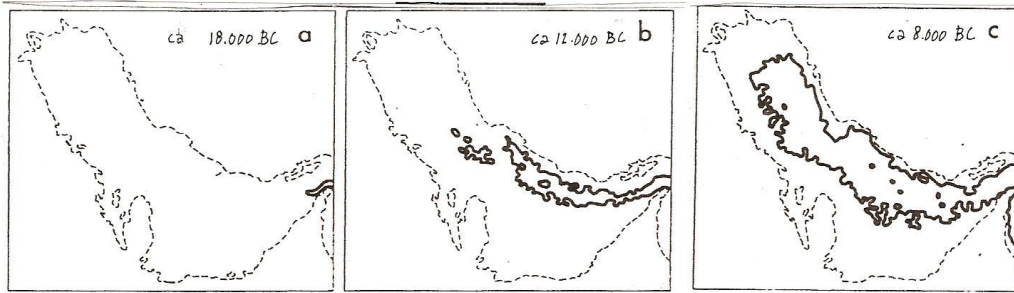
- ⊥ not known to have survived after this time
- ↓ survived after this time
- | descended from or related to

Figure 2.9 Chart of the principal languages of the ancient Near East with their geographical base and genetic relationships.



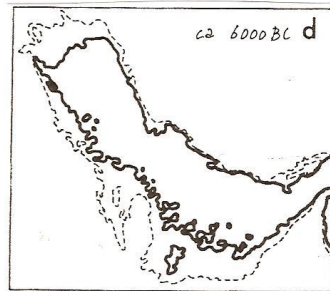
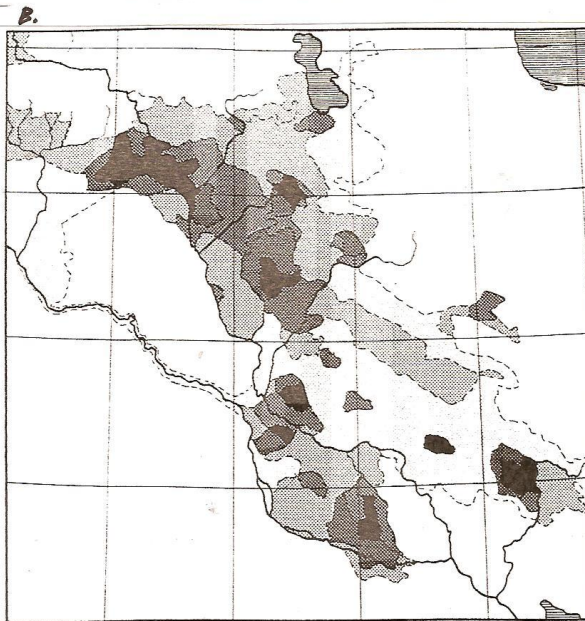
# PREHISTORY

Fig. 5

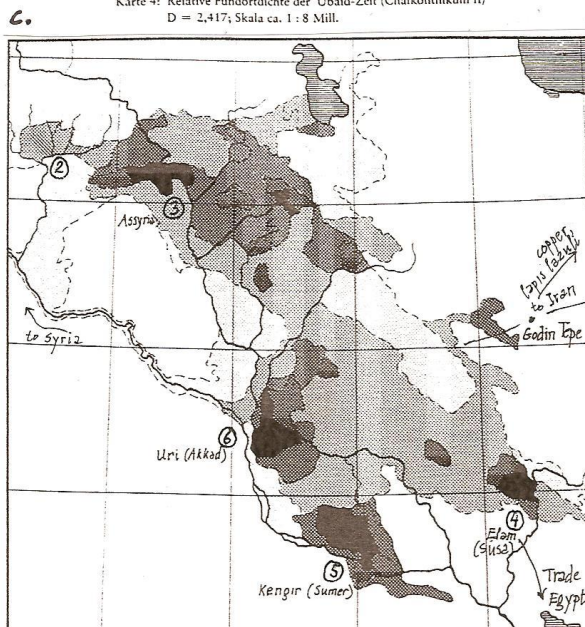


(Potts 1937)

## Ubaid-Period (ca 6000-4000 BC)



Karte 4: Relative Fundordichte der Ubaid-Zeit (Chalkolithikum II)  
D = 2,417; Skala ca. 1 : 8 Mill.



Karte 5: Relative Fundordichte der Warka-Gaura-Zeit (Chalkolithikum III /früh/)  
D = 1,972; Skala ca. 1 : 8 Mill. (Verthesalji)

## Uruk-Period (ca 4000-3000 BC)

development of urban centres (Uruk ca 250 ha, perhaps 20.000 inhabitants;  
hierarchical organization (priest-king; specialized craftsmen), temple center of power and organization;  
writing invented for administration (end of Uruk period)

development of local identities:

5: Delta Plain: Kengir (Sumer) } Southern Mesopotamia  
6: Flood Plain: Uruk (Akkad) }  
3: The area later called Assyria } Northern Mesopotamia  
2: The Habur triangle }

colonies founded, and trade developed

C. Territorial 'Empires'

A. Jamdat Nasr Period (3000-2900); Contraction

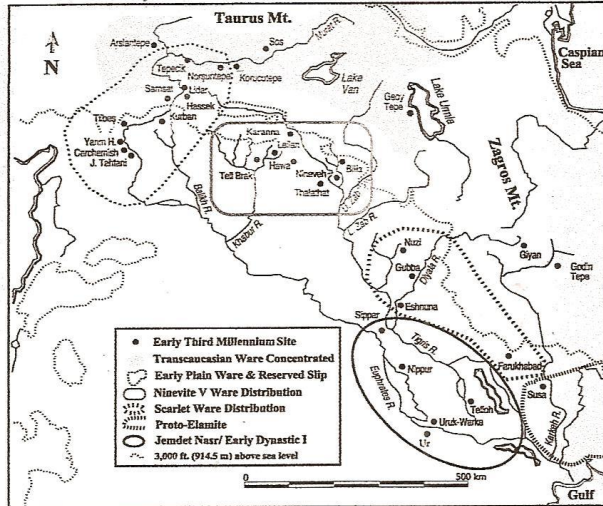
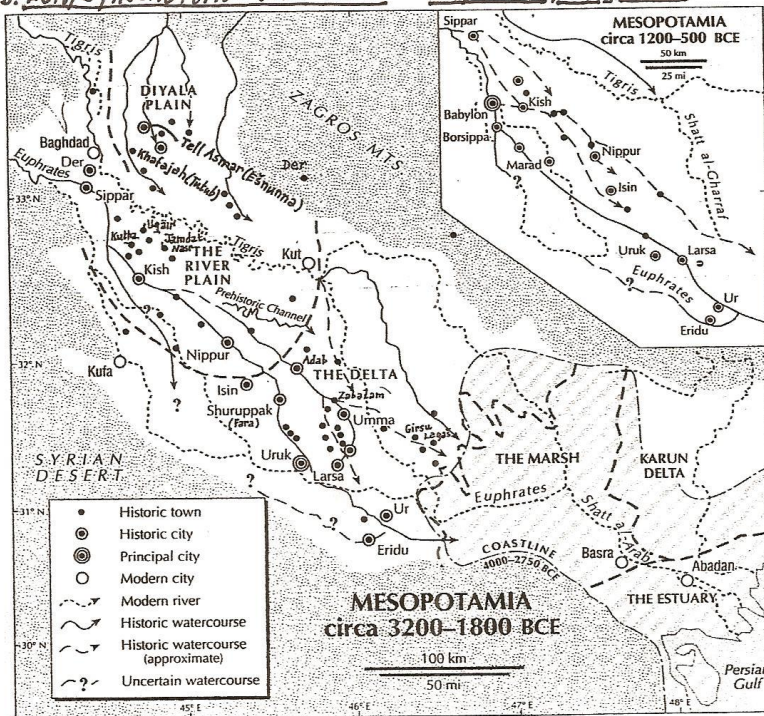


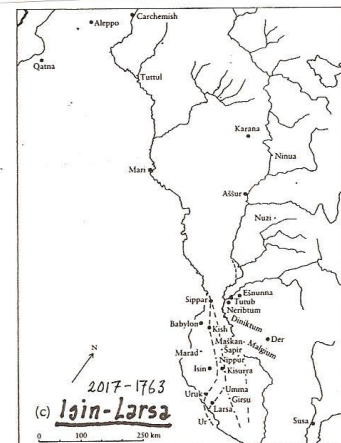
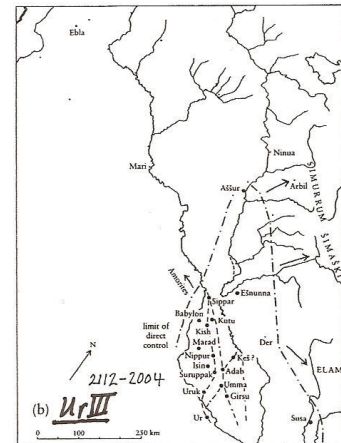
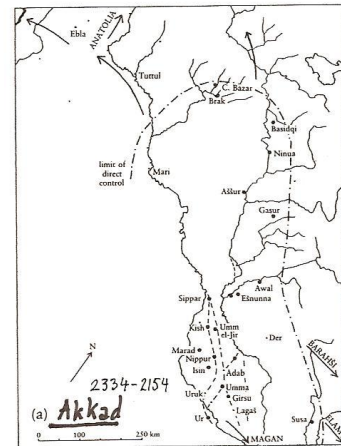
FIGURE 5-7

Distribution of pottery style areas in post-Uruk Mesopotamia, early third millennium B.C.  
 Rothman ed., *Ur III Mesopotamia*

B. Early Dynastic Period (2900-2334) City States, king of Kish



Map 5. Mesopotamia 3200-1800 BCE, identifying the different environmental regions, probable watercourses and coastline, and the location of contemporary towns. The inset map highlights the pattern of around 1200-500 BCE. From J. Sasson ed., *CANE* p. 143



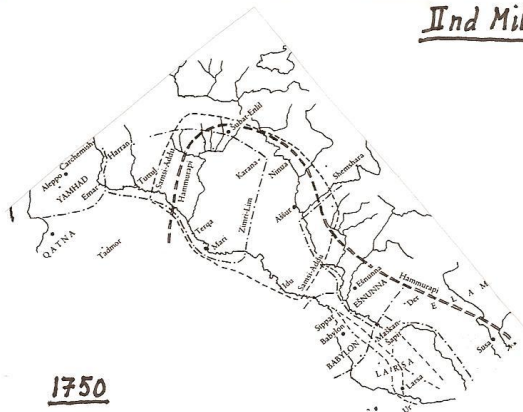
Postscript Fig 2.41



## Ind Millennium BC

## Late Bronze Age

Fig. 7



1750

*Babylonian Empire of Hammurabi*

1600

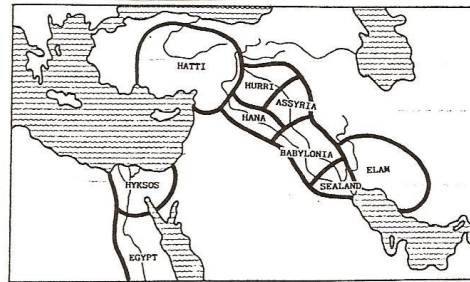


Fig. 1: The Near Eastern Political System ca. 1600 B.C.

At the end of the MBA Hittites and Hurrians compete for power in Syria; the Old Hittite empire includes the former great-kingdom of Aleppo. Kassites appear in Babylonia, and play a leading part in the ephemeral state of Hana. Supported by Hana, Mursili I sacks Babylon (1599; 1530; or 1499?), which ends the Amorite dynasty. In Babylonia the Kassites come to power.

1450

In the North Mittanni gains strength (Pazratarna), and occupies previously Hittite territory in Syria (Aleppo, Alalah). Egypt gets rid of the Hyksos, and under the XVIIIth dynasty renews its interest in the Levant; Thutmose III (1479-1425) reoccupies Canaan (battle of Megiddo), Phoenicia, and Amurru, campaigns in Syria, and crosses the Euphrates. Egypt (Thutmose IV) makes peace with Mittanni (Artatama I) in Syria (ca. 1400), and the Kassites (Kurigalzu I, Karaindash) take up diplomatic contacts with Egypt.

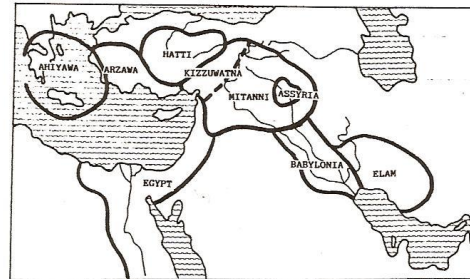


Fig. 2: The Near Eastern Political System ca. 1450 B.C.

1350

Mittanni's power dwindles: Suppiluliuma takes over their Syrian possessions, and makes Mittanni East of the Euphrates into a vassal state. Assyria regains strength (Assur-uballit I), and takes over part of Mittanni's Eastern possessions (Nuzi). Under Echnaton (Amarna period) Egypt's power in the Levant weakens, and Ugarit and Amurru become vassals of Suppiluliuma (ca. 1340).

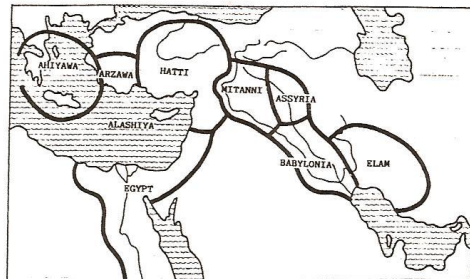


Fig. 3: The Near Eastern Political System ca. 1350 B.C.

1220

Under the XIXth dynasty Egypt tries to reoccupy its former Levantine possessions, and thus threatens to damage Hittite interests in the region. After the indecisive battle of Qadesh (1275, Ramses II and Muwatalli II) the two powers conclude an enduring peace (1259, Ramses II and Hattusili III). Assyria (Adad-nerari I) first makes the remainder of Mittanni East of the Euphrates into a vassal state, and then (Salmanassar I) incorporates it into its empire; Tukulti-Ninurta defeats the Babylonians (Kashtiliash IV), and briefly unites the two countries. Ca. 1175 the LBA ends in total catastrophe (invasions of Sea Peoples, Kaskaens, and Phrygians).

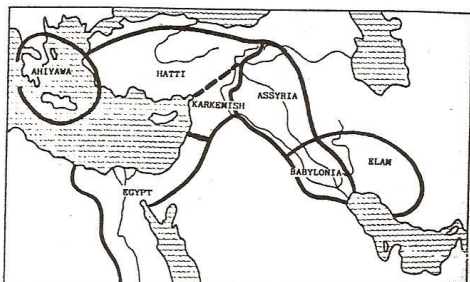
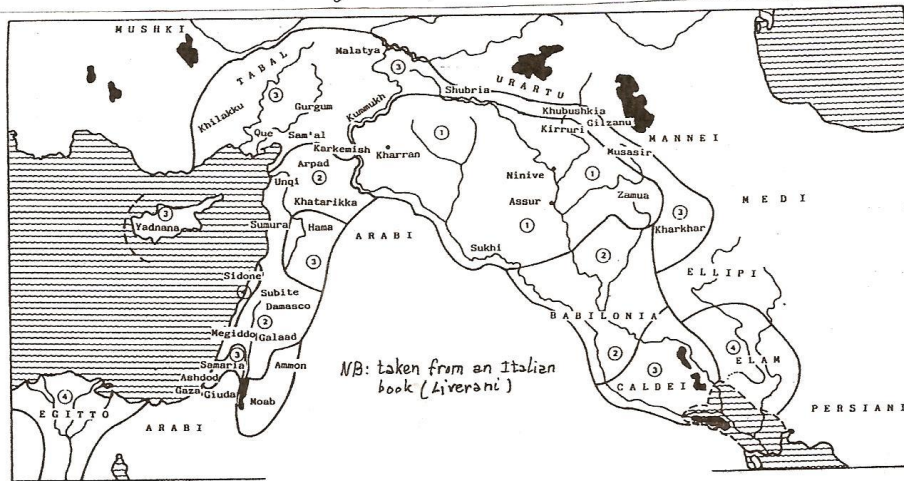


Fig. 4: The Near Eastern Political System ca. 1220 B.C.

*End of Late Bronze Age ca 1180*

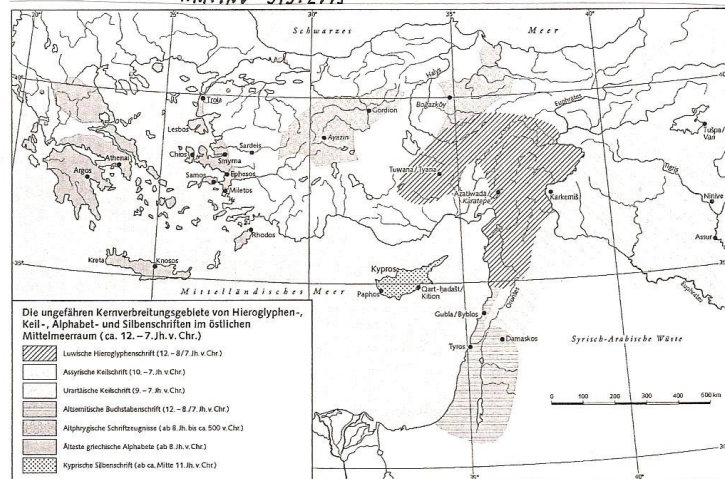
Neo-Assyrian Empire



NB: taken from an Italian book (Liverani)

- 1 Extension of the empire until 859 (Ashurnasirpal II 883-859)
- 2 Annexations of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727)
- 3 Annexations of Sargon II (721-705)
- 4 Annexations of later Neo-Assyrian kings (704-612)

WRITING SYSTEMS



Röhmig in Novsk ed., Außenwirkung [2004]