

ited. Likewise, the potential for a certain minimum level of sustainable surplus production and economic control must be present. Optimal levels for these three variables may have been met on only a small portion of the central Andean coast, creating potential for development of some the first centralized polities in the New World out of the interaction of human behavior traits—such as risk minimization, cost minimization, and status striving—and key environmental variables.

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Chapter 10

“Who Was King? Who Was Not King?”

Social Group Composition and Competition in Early Mesopotamian State Societies

GIL STEIN

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades of archaeological and textual research have documented tremendous diversity in the ways that Greater Mesopotamian complex societies constituted themselves as polities (Fig. 1). This increasingly representative database, combined with the use of more processually oriented models of social action, have led to a gradual shift in research perspectives from a “top-down” emphasis on managerial structure toward a “bottom-up” perspective on the organization of Mesopotamian chiefdoms and states (see, e.g., Stein 1994a; Yoffee 1995). The traditional structural approach treated Mesopotamian complex societies as homogeneous, highly centralized entities whose urbanized governing institutions defined and controlled virtually every aspect of economic, political, and social life. This largely implicit view derived from the historic emphases of Near Eastern archaeology and philology. For over a century, archaeologists had concen-

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However, writing has been a mixed blessing for anthropological archaeologists studying early Mesopotamian state societies. On the one hand, written documents provide information on aspects of early state organization and ideology that are not preserved and cannot be reconstructed from nontextual or archaeological evidence alone. At the same time, textual evidence can be profoundly misleading, especially when we are attempting to reconstruct the political economy of early state societies. The first cities and state societies developed early in the fourth millennium BC, during the Uruk period. Shortly afterward, writing was invented in the Late Uruk period, probably some time between 3400 and 3200 BC (Green 1981; Nissen 1985, 1986; Nissen et al. 1993) (Fig. 2). The earliest uses of writing were administrative; Uruk texts are almost all records of the administration of economic activities. Only in later periods did the use of writing expand to more overtly

Type of Text	Period
	Uruk 3000 BC
Administration	Early Dynastic 2500 BC
Lexical lists	Akkad 2000 BC
Legal documents	Old Babylonian
Royal inscriptions	
Literary texts	
Letters	
Business records	
"Law Codes"	

Figure 3. The expansion of the uses of writing in Mesopotamia.

ideological uses such as letters, literary/historical texts, ritual texts, and royal inscriptions (Postgate 1992:66) (Fig. 3).

As a result, there are two main sources of bias in the use of textual data to reconstruct the political economy of the Uruk state and its successors in the third millennium BC. The first of these is the sampling bias that arises from using administrative texts from palace or temple contexts to reconstruct power relations in the society as a whole. The second bias arises after the Uruk period, once writing started to be used to record literary, historical, ritual, and royal discourses. At this point, we are faced with the bias of propaganda. Although state and elite claims to authority are valuable in their own right as a way to reconstruct ideologies of rule, we still need to determine the extent to which these ideological assertions accurately reflect the complex and shifting power relationships of the different groups that made up Mesopotamian society. "In all instances, we have to keep foremost in our minds that even strictly historiographic documents are literary texts and that they manipulate the evidence, consciously or not, for specific political and artistic purposes" (Oppenheim 1977:144). Thus, somewhat paradoxically, as written records become increasingly available as sources of information about Mesopotamian state societies, so too do the interpretive difficulties, sampling problems, and propagandistic biases increasingly affect our models of political economy.

These administrative and ideological biases—the first accidentally and

MESOPOTAMIAN CHRONOLOGY

Period	Dates	Comments
Hellenistic	330-143 BC	
Median/Persian	539-330 BC	
Neo-Babylonian	625-539 BC	
Late Assyrian	911-612 BC	
Middle Assyrian	1363-1076 BC	
Middle Babylonian		
Kassite	1415-1154 BC	
Old Babylonian	1812-1595 BC	
Isin Larsa (South)	2025-1736 BC	
Old Assyrian (North)	1900-1740 BC	Trading colonies in Anatolia
(collapse) ca.	2000-1800 BC	"Amarite invasions"
Ur III Dynasty	2112-2004 BC	
(collapse)	2193-2100 BC	"Gutian invasions," "period of Gudea"
Akkadian Empire	2334-2193 BC	Sargon, Naram-Sin. First empire
Early Dynastic I-III	2900-2334 BC	Sumerian city-states, Ur royal cemetery
Jemdet Nasr	3100-2900 BC	Spread of urbanism & kingship
Uruk	4000-3100 BC	First cities, states, writing, & colonies
Ubaid III-IV	4500-4000 BC	Spread of Ubaid to North Mesopotamia
Ubaid I-II	5500-4500	Complex societies integrated through ritual
Samarra	5500-5000 BC	Earliest canal irrigation in Mesopotamia
Halaf	5300-4500 BC	

Figure 2. Chronology of Mesopotamian state societies.

the second often deliberately—present us with a skewed picture that overemphasizes the economic, military, political, and ideological power of the centralized ruling apparatus, or the “great institutions” of ancient Mesopotamian states. The textual data can tell us much about the ideology of centralization, but they provide misleading information about the actual operation of ancient Mesopotamian states.

In assessing the extent and effects of these biases, we must remember that literacy was limited to less than 1% of the Mesopotamian population (Larsen 1989); as a result, textual data tell us little or nothing about most other social sectors, such as urban commoners, independent craft specialists (Stein and Blackman 1993), the rural sector, and pastoral nomads. Women as well are generally excluded or marginalized in written records (with the occasional exception of female dependents on the ration lists of palaces and temples or a small number of high-status women connected with either ruling families or temple priesthoods) (see, e.g., Durand 1987; Pollock 1991b; Winter 1987; Wright, 1996). In almost all cases, information about these textually underrepresented groups can come only from the archaeological record. Integration of archaeological and textual data also can highlight disjunctions between the state's ideologically based claims to power (reconstructed from texts) and archaeologically detectable patterns of economic organization in the society as a whole.

The title of this chapter is a quote from a document called the “Sumerian King List,” one of the most important literary texts in Mesopotamian history. It lists all the kings of Mesopotamia for a period of more than 1000 years, from the time “when kingship descended from heaven” in the beginning of the Early Dynastic period (ca. 3000–2900 BC) down into the second millennium BC. This frequently recopied text is not just a list, but also is a charter of legitimacy, or more accurately, of claims to legitimacy (Michalowski 1984). The Mesopotamians believed that legitimate kingship only resided in one place at any one time. However, at the end of the third millennium BC, the structure of Mesopotamian society had broken down so badly into competing warring polities and claimants to power that instead of the normal royal formula, the scribes were forced to throw up their hands figuratively and ask, “Who was king? Who was not king?” The scribes were, of course, confronted with the contradiction between the normative, propagandistic assertions of a universal royal ideology on the one hand and the harsh reality of conflicting claims to authority in a fragmented social landscape. This brief quotation highlights the fact that much of the rich textual record for ancient Mesopotamian states makes claims to legitimacy, power, and authority, but cannot fully deliver on that promise (see also Yoffee 1995:281–285).

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON THE ORGANIZATION OF MESOPOTAMIAN STATES

The first state societies developed in Mesopotamia during the Uruk period, sometime between 3800 and 3600 BC. By about 2700 BC, in the Early Dynastic period, we see the real flowering of Sumerian culture and the development of Sumerian writing to a point where the texts become readable, important historical sources for the reconstruction of political economy in this period. Five major social trends characterized the state societies of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia.

Widespread Urbanism

In the previous Uruk period, the city of Warka was the major urban center in Mesopotamia, standing at the top of a four level settlement hierarchy (Adams 1981:71; Johnson 1973; Wright and Johnson 1975). In the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic periods, urbanization spread widely so that there were numerous large city states all across southern Mesopotamia, notably at Umma, Lagash (al-Hiba), Uruk, Ur, Shuruppak, Kish, and Nippur (Adams 1981).

Endemic Warfare

The Sumerian city states of the Early Dynastic period were constantly at war with each other, as we can see from massive defenses, numerous finds of weapons, and depictions of warfare (Charvat, 1982; Gelb 1973; Nissen 1972; Winter 1985).

Emergence of Kingship

Although iconographic evidence suggests that kingship first developed in the Uruk period, the growth and spread of powerful royal dynasties in the Early Dynastic period is probably connected with their role as military leaders in the warfare between rival city states (Charvat 1982; Michalowski 1984; Moorey 1978; Oppenheim, 1977:98; Schmandt-Besserat 1993).

Pronounced Social Stratification

Kings were at the top of a very complex social hierarchy. Some of our best evidence for this comes from the royal cemetery of Ur where we have hundreds of graves of commoners and 16 lavish tombs, filled with gold,

silver, lapis lazuli, and large-scale human sacrifices of the retainers who accompanied the kings and queens of Ur into the next world (Moorey 1977; Pollock 1991a; Woolley 1934).

Increasing Use of Writing

Although writing was invented at the end of the Uruk period, the extremely abbreviated nature of these earliest pictographic texts makes it difficult to use them for anything more than reconstructions of recording and bookkeeping systems (Nissen et al. 1993). Writing did not become widespread until the Early Dynastic period. Of course, "widespread" is a relative term. Writing was a very specialized technology that was used in every Sumerian city but only by a tiny group of scribes in a very limited number of social contexts. We have some royal inscriptions, but most of the documents from this period are economic records from large temple archives. They show temples as vast, wealthy, and powerful organizations, owning massive amounts of agricultural land, controlling the labor of hundreds or even thousands of dependent laborers (Oppenheim 1977; Postgate 1992).

These documents provide a wealth of data about the complex political economy of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, but this information has come at a price. Once written documents are present, the texts tend to drive the research agenda; they define our perceptions of Mesopotamian society, and structure the entire way we organize our research. The most seductive aspect of the textual record is that it gives us the illusion that we know more than we actually do about Mesopotamian society. When literally thousands of documents are available, one can easily fall into the trap of assuming that the written record is an accurate and complete record of Mesopotamian society. Textually based biases have had an enormous and not always useful effect on the models that people have suggested to describe and explain the political economy of complex societies in Mesopotamia.

EARLIER MODELS OF CENTRALIZED MESOPOTAMIAN STATES

One of the earliest and most influential models of early Mesopotamian state organization was the textually based concept of the earliest Mesopotamian polity as a highly centralized, monolithic "temple-state." This reconstruction was proposed in 1931 by Father Anton Deimel (Deimel 1931). The temple state model was based on the approximately 1600 texts from the archive of the Bau temple at Tello (ancient Girsu) in the Sumerian city state of Lagash. These documents described temple control over land, agricultural laborers, craft workers, and the collection of tithes. Deimel calcu-

lated the extent of the Bau temples land holdings and estimated that the temple owned all the land in the territory of Lagash. On that basis he suggested that Early Dynastic Sumer was a series of highly centralized theocracies where temple priests controlled the entire state. The temple-state model was widely embraced by both Assyriologists and archaeologists for over 40 years (Falkenstein 1974). Although this reconstruction of Early Dynastic Mesopotamian states was finally critiqued and discredited by the work of Assyriologists such as Ignace Gelb and I. M. Diakonoff in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Diakonoff 1974; Gelb 1969; Foster 1981), it still survives in much of the popular literature and even in nonspecialist archaeological syntheses of early Mesopotamian history.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a major debate emerged concerning the nature of the state and its implications for the study of early civilizations such as Mesopotamia: Should one focus on the states as integrated, specialized, political-administrative entities or should one study states as whole but heterogeneous societies? The two approaches worked from different basic principles and led to fundamental differences in analytical focus.

The integrative model of states as homeostatic systems drew on ecology and systems theory to view a given state society such as Mesopotamia as a single integrated system made up of different specialized subsystems (Flannery 1972). The state or government was seen as regulating the flow of goods, services, and information among the lower order subsystems (see, e.g., Johnson 1973, 1978, 1982; Redman 1978; Wright 1969, 1977, 1978; Wright and Johnson 1975). This view assumed that the administrative and decision-making subsystems controlled all major economic and political aspects of an integrated social system. This centralized, control-oriented systems model fit well with the picture from the textual data of vast temple and palace bureaucracies regulating large amounts of labor, land, and capital. The focus on regulatory mechanisms, decision making, and administration was so strong that it was used to define the state as the essential component of society due to its managerial and coordinating function. The view of states as administrative systems was explicitly aimed at developing cross-culturally valid general principles to explain the development of social complexity. In this model, the key research problem was to explain what perturbations to the system required it to adapt and maintain homeostasis by developing increasingly complex and hierarchical decision-making organization to continue regulating all the subsystems of society effectively.

In contrast to the integrative systems model of highly centralized Mesopotamian states, more holistic models had a much stronger historical or particularistic element, concerned with understanding the specific factors that were critical in the development of Mesopotamia as a complex society (Adams 1981:76-77). This approach focused on trying to document

the broad social transformations that affected all of Mesopotamian society, specifically the processes of urbanization and the development of social stratification, as a substitute for the exclusive focus on administration and bureaucracy in the central state institutions. This perspective saw urbanism as not just a demographic phenomenon but also a fundamental change in social organization into communities that were larger, more specialized, hierarchical, and diverse than any other social grouping that had ever existed on the planet. This historically oriented approach focused on economic and social evidence to trace the development of urbanization and social stratification.

STATES AS HETEROGENEOUS SOCIAL NETWORKS

Building on this shift, in the last decade a heterogeneous, conflict-based model of state societies has developed (Brumfiel 1989, 1992, 1994; Crumley 1995a; Ehrenreich et al. 1995; Gailey and Patterson 1987; Gledhill et al. 1988; Mann 1986; Stein 1998); in the case of Mesopotamia, this can be seen as a shift from attempts to explain state origins toward a concern with "organizational dynamics," an attempt to figure out how these societies actually functioned (Stein and Rothman 1994). This model rejects the idea that societies are tightly integrated, regulated adaptive systems. Instead, it is probably more realistic to see societies as "fuzzy networks." I use the word "network" deliberately in order to emphasize that there is a larger whole composed of interconnected and interacting parts, but these parts need not be integrated in the kind of centralized rigid structure implied by the term "system." Networks are looser and not necessarily coercive. Social networks are also "fuzzy" in the sense that they do not have clear, uniform boundaries. Instead, we can identify these networks based on frequency of interaction, so that it is very clear what lies at the heart of the network, but less so at the edges.

This movement away from seeing state societies as self-regulating systems carries with it a shift in the way people use the concept of decision making. The earlier evolutionary systems model dealt with decision making as a monopoly of the administrative subsystem of society. More recent views emphasize the roles of human intentionality, agency, and strategizing in all sectors of society, not just chiefly or state elites. This means that societies are not composed of subsystems; they are composed of thinking people who are rational in terms of their own cultural values and social position. These people have goals and organize themselves into different groups to carry out those often conflicting aims.

SOCIAL GROUP COMPOSITION AND COMPETITION

Four main principles are especially important in this heterogeneous model of complex societies:

1. Societies are not unitary systems; instead, they are heterogeneous composites, made up of numerous overlapping and interacting groups.
2. Different groups in the same society can have completely different and often opposing goals. The scope of these groups extends beyond the hierarchically organized classes in the Marxian sense to include a broader range of social, cultural, economic, and kin-based units.
3. The goals and strategies of different groups are situationally contingent and can change over time so that the society will have a shifting mix of cooperation and competition among different groups.
4. Decisions made in terms of the short-term goals of these groups can have completely unintended long-term consequences. This is important because it implies that even though people have intentionality and agency, this does *not* mean that everything we see in a society was deliberately engineered to turn out that way. Major change is often unintentional, even in state societies that are nominally under highly centralized "absolute" rule.

Archaeological models recognize the limits of central power in chiefdoms (see, e.g., Earle 1991a; Spencer 1987; Wright 1984) but generally have an implicit view of the state as being all powerful. By counterposing chiefdoms and states as discrete categories, archaeologists have tended perhaps to overestimate the degree of centralization and power of the latter. Analyses of complexity and integration in Old and New World complex societies suggest that there is marked cross-cultural variation in both the administrative structure and the ideological, economic, or political strategies used by elite groups as instruments of rule (Blanton et al. 1996; Earle 1991a; Feinman 1995). However, despite this diversity, virtually all complex societies share an inherent tension between the opportunistic, centripetal tendencies of a chiefdom or state as a political institution/governmental structure (Adams 1981:76-77; Wright 1977) and the centrifugal tendencies of the other sectors of the broader society (see, e.g., Adams 1978, 1982; Yoffee 1979:21). Consequently, instead of viewing states as all-powerful, homogeneous entities, it is probably more accurate to characterize them as organizations operating within a social environment that for a variety of reasons they only partially control.

This alternative model sees Mesopotamian states as generally operating suboptimally, due to their inability to attain or maintain their desired levels of power, authority, legitimacy, and control over the wider society around them. When Mesopotamian states pursued maximizing strategies aimed at

extracting large, consistent surpluses from the countryside (Adams 1978), these attempts tended to be short-lived, unstable, and vulnerable to collapse from both internal and external stresses (Wilkinson 1994; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995). In particular, they often resulted in environmental damage that limited the very agricultural potential they wished to enhance (Gibson 1974; Jacobsen 1982; but see also Powell 1985). As a result, the centralized authorities of these polities would more commonly have been forced to eschew optimizing strategies in favor of what Simon (1959) called "satisficing" strategies. The state's satisficing strategies would have focused on survival, self-perpetuation, or social reproduction, while attempting to expand or increase its control on an opportunistic basis, whenever local political circumstances permit it.

State institutions faced limits on the exercise of their powers both within the urban centers and in their attempts to extend control over the countryside. Some sectors of society, such as nomads, lay completely outside the purview of the state's "core concerns." Other sectors of society may have fallen partially within the boundaries of the state's core concerns, but this does not necessarily mean that governmental institutions were able to control them. As just one sector within an unevenly integrated social landscape, the Mesopotamian state institutions were often forced to duplicate the subsistence and craft activities of other sectors, in order to provide for their own core concerns or survival needs. For example, the palace sector appears to have operated as a large, autonomous household, producing its own crops, animals, and utilitarian craft goods through its control over "attached" specialists (Stein and Blackman 1993; Stein 1996), rather than obtaining them through exchange with independent craft specialists or food-producing village communities. This duplication of economic activities and institutions reflects poor integration of the different sectors of society. It is essentially a kind of "dual economy" characterized by a high degree of sectorial autonomy. One pole of this dual economy, that of the centralized urban institutions, is prominent in both the textual record and archaeological evidence from large-scale public buildings in urban contexts. By contrast, the villagers, nomads, independent craft specialists, and other urban commoners who form the opposite pole of this dual economy are almost invisible in the cuneiform documents. These latter groups generally emerge only through archaeological research focused on village communities, urban residential quarters, craft production, exchange systems, and survey work to elucidate regional economic patterns.

What this means for archaeologists is that excavated sites and mapped settlement patterns are not the remnants of an integrated system with a unitary logic and a preconceived pattern. Instead, what we are finding is a heterogeneous mixture: the observed outcome that we call "Mesopotamian

society" is in fact the combined result of the interaction and jockeying for power among different often competing groups, each with its own goals and decision-making strategies. We cannot begin to get an accurate view of how these polities functioned unless we take into account the large proportion of society that appears only fleetingly or not at all in the cuneiform texts.

"SECTORS" IN EARLY MESOPOTAMIAN STATE SOCIETIES

Based on a combination of textual sources and archaeological data, we can identify several main interacting "sectors" or groups in Mesopotamian society. The most visible parts of Mesopotamian society are the "great institutions" or "great organizations" (Oppenheim 1977:95–109), a general term referring to two overlapping but often competing foci of power: the royal palace and the temple sector. These are the parts of society that left behind the monumental public buildings that predominate in excavations of Mesopotamian cities. The thousands of cuneiform tablets kept by the bureaucrats in these institutions give us detailed information about their economic organization. However, the great institutions are simply the most visible parts of a complex society that consisted of many overlapping and often conflicting social sectors.

The Palace

The palace sector consisted of the king, his royal household, and their extensive economic holdings of irrigated fields, orchards, flocks of sheep, and cattle, along with extensive stores of food, craft goods, and precious raw materials (see, e.g., Archi 1985; Dolce 1988; Matthiae 1978; Pinnock 1988). The royal household consisted of the king's extended family, administrative officials, craft specialists, a standing army, serfs or "semifree" workers (see below), and slaves. Sargon of Akkad, the founder of the Akkadian empire, boasted that he fed more than 5400 palace dependents every day. In addition to enormous economic power, the authority and power of the palace sector rested on the king's role as a war leader and on his control over a large, well equipped standing army (Garelli 1974; Oppenheim, 1977:98–105).

The Temple

Every Mesopotamian city state had several large temples, each dedicated to a different god and run by a professional class of priests. These

organizations were considered to be "households" belonging to each god, so they were as much economic as they were ritual institutions. The temples and their priesthoods controlled many of the same resources as the palace—land, flocks, slaves, semifree gurus, workers, and craft workshops. The temples also collected tithes from their worshippers, and acted as banks, providing loans of money or grain (Lipinski 1979; Postgate 1992:109–136).

Large Estates

Less well documented than the palace or the temple were the great families of wealthy Mesopotamians who were not directly part of the palace or temple sectors but also controlled large private holdings of fields, date palm orchards, flocks and other forms of wealth (Adams 1966:106–107).

Craft Specialists

Craft specialists were organized in several different ways in Mesopotamian society, so it is not really accurate to treat them as a uniform group. One of the biggest distinctions would be between "attached" and "independent" specialists. Attached craft producers were employed by or dependent on either the royal household or a temple (Maekawa 1980; Tjumeney 1969; Zaccagnini 1983). The great institutions controlled the products made by these specialists and in return would support them with rations of food, beer, and clothing. They also would provide the attached craft specialists with the tools and raw materials needed for their profession. We know of attached specialists because they appear in the textual record on the lists of people receiving rations and supplies from the palace or the temple storerooms. There also were independent craft specialists, who worked outside of the purview of the great institutions (see below).

Urban Commoners

Although they are invisible in the textual record (until the second millennium BC; see, e.g., Stone 1987), surface survey and limited excavations suggest that at least half of the Sumerian population lived in cities during the third millennium BC (Adams 1981:138; Postgate 1994). These people were probably for the most part agriculturalists, farming the lands immediately around the cities (Adams 1972), although a small merchant class existed as well, at least as early as the Akkadian period (Foster 1977; Westenholz 1984). Archaeological evidence suggests that urban commoner populations included independent craft specialists as well. We know that the citizens of

Mesopotamian cities had political representation and power through the institution of the assembly or council of elders. In addition to their right to conduct real estate transactions and make legal decisions, these assemblies were powerful enough to successfully claim legal and fiscal privileges from the palace (Oppenheim 1977:112; Jacobsen 1943, 1957; Yoffee 1995).

"Semifree" Individuals

One very large social group in Mesopotamia were those called *Gurush/Geme*. These were people reduced by debt or poverty to the point that they became indentured to the great institutions, for whom they worked as more or less unskilled agricultural laborers with restricted freedom, in return for rations of food and clothing (Davidovic 1987; Diakonoff 1976; Gelb 1965; Maekawa 1987; Milano 1987).

Slaves

Slaves were also common in Mesopotamian society. Probably most slaves worked in domestic service (Diakonoff 1976).

Villagers

The village sector of Mesopotamian society almost never appears in the textual record. Yet we estimate the number and size of settlements found by archaeological surveys that up to 50% of the Sumerian sedentary population lived in villages. These groups were apparently organized as autonomous, kin-based landholding communities (Diakonoff 1975). These communities appear fleetingly in the textual record through finds of *kudurrus* (inscribed boundary stones), which record royal purchases of land from villages that seem to have held corporate ownership over this primary agricultural resource (Gelb 1969; Gelb et al. 1991).

Nomads

Pastoral nomadic groups are the great invisible sector of Mesopotamian society (Cribb 1990). Nomads show up only in the most indirect way in the textual record (Adams 1974). We know they were there from periodic references to Mesopotamian kings either fighting them or making treaties with them to allow for safe passage of the caravan trade (Kupper 1957). In periods of weakened centralized authority, nomadic groups would increase their raiding activities. Nomadic raiding could and did periodically bring

about the downfall of Mesopotamian states (Postgate 1992:43). In addition to being an important military force to be reckoned with, the nomads were presumably also an important source of meat, dairy products, and wool to the village sector of Mesopotamia. Wool and textiles were some of the most important commodities in the Mesopotamian economy, so we would expect nomads to have been an economically powerful group. The line between nomads and sedentary is not hard and fast. People are always moving from one status to the other. Based on analogy with modern groups, we can assume that rich nomads often became sedentary, while the poorest of the poor nomads may have been forced to become semifree gurus in order to survive. Similarly, villagers in Mesopotamia always kept animals in addition to their fields, as a kind of insurance. Under conditions of drought or if taxation by the cities became too great, these groups could become increasingly mobile, both to survive economically and to evade state control. In other words, the social boundaries in Mesopotamia were extremely fluid, so that even though cities, villages, and nomads were often in conflict, there also were periods of collaboration and much movement from one sector of society into the other.

These nine main social groups appear differentially in the textual record. We know the most about the palace and the temple sectors because those were the institutions that used scribes and writing. We know a bit about dependent social groups like attached craft specialists, semifree laborers, and slaves, but only through their appearance on the ration lists—the payrolls—of the great institutions. But the majority of the Mesopotamian population is for all intents and purposes textually invisible. The textual record of the temples and palaces gives the impression of a highly centralized bureaucratic system. But once we factor these textually underrepresented sectors back into the social equation, they fit very well into a heterogeneous model of Mesopotamian states in which the great institutions were important but not the only powerful or influential social actors. Textually invisible or underrepresented sectors limited the exercise of centralized state power both within the urban centers themselves and especially in their hinterlands.

The tension between centrifugal conflict and the centripetal push toward integration created in Greater Mesopotamia a dynamic system of parallel, partially overlapping, and often competing social spheres, whose modes of interaction varied widely in time and space (Stein 1994a). The temple and state "sectors" were the main centripetal forces of integration and centralization. These great institutions attempted to extend administrative, political, and economic control over the other social sectors in order to gain access to the surplus labor, craft goods, agricultural goods, and pastoral products that were critical for the survival and social reproduction of Mesopotamian elites. However, the centralizing strategies of elite institu-

tions were counterbalanced by opposing centrifugal strategies of autonomy and resistance in other "sectors" of Mesopotamian society. Inside the cities, the temples and palace sector often were in conflict. The palace and wealthy commoners pursued markedly different economic strategies (Rothman 1994). As noted above, the urban assemblies or councils of elders could and often did oppose palace decisions. However, the main centrifugal force in Mesopotamian society was the persistent opposition by the countryside to centralized urban control. The rural village and nomadic sectors "... show definite and often effective resistance not only against living in settlements of greater complexity than the village but also against the power—be it political, military, or fiscal—that an urban center was bound to exercise over them" (Oppenheim 1977:110).

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF "INVISIBLE" SECTORS IN MESOPOTAMIAN STATE SOCIETIES

Archaeological fieldwork in Greater Mesopotamia has played a major role as a complementary line of evidence to clarify the social role of these textually underrepresented sectors or social spheres in Mesopotamian society. Broad-scale surveys of the south Mesopotamian alluvium (Adams and Nissen 1972; Wright 1981), southeastern Iran (Johnson 1973, 1980, 1987; Wright and Johnson 1975), the north Syrian/North Mesopotamian steppe (Stein and Wattenmaker 1990; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995), and southeast Anatolia (Algaze 1989; Algaze et al. 1991; Whallon 1979; Wilkinson 1990) have documented the ways in which patterns of rural organization evolved in tandem with cycles of integration and collapse in Mesopotamian complex societies. Assyriologists, too, have begun to recognize the importance of survey to obtain a more representative picture of ancient Mesopotamian society (Brinkman 1984; Postgate 1986).

Excavations and surveys by Hole (1981) have focused on the role of ancient pastoral nomads in ancient Mesopotamian society. Excavations at sedentary village sites have produced some of the first hard evidence for rural productive systems in Mesopotamia (Wright 1969). Syria (Curvers and Schwartz 1990; Schwartz and Curvers 1992), and southeast Turkey (Algaze 1990; Stein 1987; Wattenmaker 1987). Concurrently, a series of anthropologically oriented excavations and intrasite analyses of urban centers have done much to document the spatial patterning of residential, economic, and administrative functions (Pollock et al. 1996; Stone and Zimansky 1994, 1995); neighborhood organization (Stone 1987); craft production (Blackman et al. 1993; Nicholas 1990); and the organization of urban food supplies (Zeder 1991).

Two case studies can show how archaeological analyses of textually invisible parts of society can both complement the written record, while showing that we need to recognize the heterogeneous nature of Mesopotamian society in order to understand how it worked. The following two case studies examine the regional organization of crafts and subsistence in urbanized state societies of Northern Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC. These examples show that the rural hinterlands of urbanized states pursued economic strategies that paralleled, differed from, and probably competed with the goals and strategies of the state institutions in the urban capitals of these polities.

CRAFT PRODUCTION AND "DUAL ECONOMIES" IN MESOPOTAMIA

In assessing the textual evidence for craft production, it is important to emphasize that the existing corpus of late fourth millennium texts is a non-random, nonrepresentative sample that records the transactions of a very limited subset of Mesopotamian society—the "great institutions"—the palaces and temples. Even when textual evidence is available from palace or temple archives, we must remember that these documents represent specialized, abbreviated records of highly specific types of transactions that took place within circumscribed administrative spheres. Thus, the fact that the texts might mention a particular craft or activity does not necessarily mean that the latter was a state monopoly. It is important to distinguish between the crafts and activities that the "great institutions" practiced along with everyone else in Mesopotamian society and those crafts or activities that the state actually controlled. It is more accurate to view the Mesopotamian state as consisting of several different social domains such as an "institutional sphere" consisting of the temples, the palaces, and what we can call "noninstitutional" urban and rural spheres, each pursuing a more or less similar range of core activities in tandem, with only minimal interaction or exchange of value among the three domains. While the state institutions asserted general claims to control over the territory of their urban-centered city states, in practice this control was variable, contingent, and often quite restricted.

The Mesopotamian temple or palace was in many ways analogous to an extremely large and wealthy household; as such, it retained, as maintenance staff, low-status dependent workers who provided the goods and services needed for the internal consumption and day-to-day operation of that institution (see Lipinski 1979; Powell 1987). The inclusion of these dependent workers in the archives of the palaces and temples in no way implies that the state monopolized control over these professions. Instead,

these dependent workers merely duplicated, within the administrative sphere of the temple or palace, activities that were also taking place outside the purview of the great institutions in Mesopotamian society as a whole. These "duplicated" professions (and their products) apparently included a wide range of specialists such as farmers, herders, fishermen, woodcutters, carpenters, weavers, bakers, and possibly even potters as well, this last group producing utilitarian pottery for the internal consumption of the temple or palace.

From the Late Uruk period onward, Mesopotamia essentially had a "dual" craft economy (Fig. 4) consisting of both independent craft specialists operating in the community at large and attached craft specialists who were clients of the centralized institutions. The attached craft specialists themselves can be divided into two groups: those who produced the same goods as the independent specialists and those who manufactured high prestige goods.

The limited available evidence suggests that only those specialists who manufactured high prestige goods were actually under the complete or monopolistic control of the centralized state institutions in the fourth and third millennia BC. In Late Uruk Mesopotamia, gold, silver, copper (Moorey 1982:21–23), carnelian, polished stone vessels, and elaborate textiles appear to have been the main prestige goods whose display legitimized the

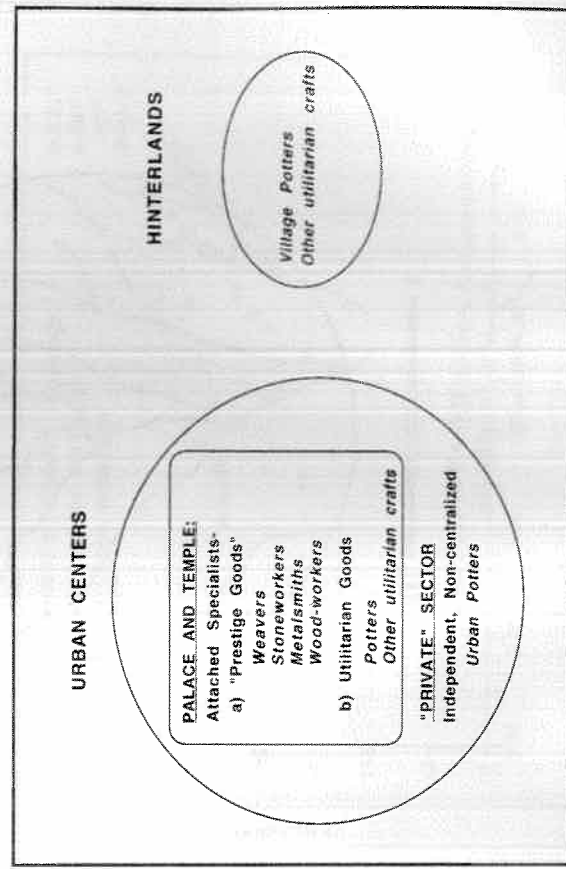


Figure 4. Dual economic organization in Mesopotamian society.

high status of the elite individuals or institutions who possessed them. By contrast, other goods such as utilitarian ceramics or low status textiles would have been produced both by attached palace specialists and by independent specialists operating outside the purview of the centralized institutions (Stein and Blackman 1993; Stein 1996).

Although they rarely appear in the textual records of the great institutions, we can infer the existence of independent specialists from archaeological discoveries of metalworking, weaving, and ceramic workshops in regular city neighborhoods or in the villages surrounding the cities. These people lacked institutional patronage and presumably exchanged their products with urban commoners, villagers, or nomads. Archaeological evidence from excavations in the major urban centers and surveys of their hinterland confirms the existence of a dual economy characterized by parallel urban and rural independent craft production.

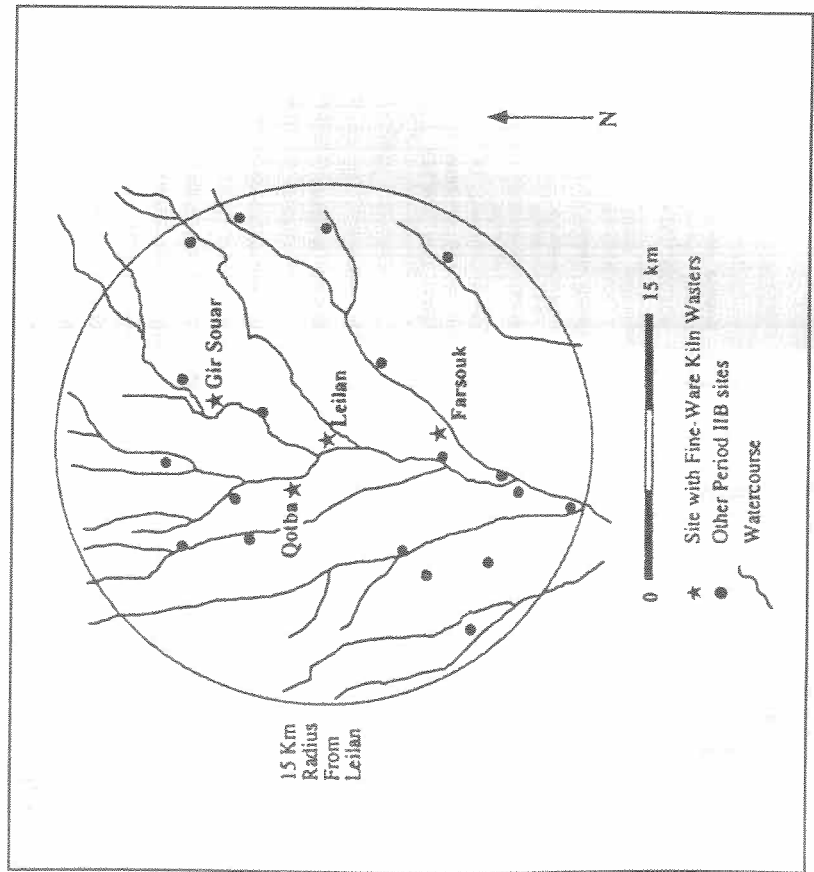


Figure 5. The urban center of Leilan (North Syria) and its hinterlands, showing locations of fine ware bowl mass production, based on finds of stacked kiln wasters.

At the city of Leilan in northwest Mesopotamia, the emergence of urbanism was accompanied by a major change in ceramic production, with the widespread distribution of open, simple rim, flat base, undecorated fine wares as the most common and characteristic ceramic form in the urbanized Period IIB (Schwartz 1988:40–42). High concentrations of fine ware wasters in the lower town of Leilan attest to the mass production of these ceramics within the urban center (Blackman et al. 1993; Senior and Weiss 1992; Stein and Blackman 1993).

Archaeological surveys of the Leilan region (Stein and Wattenmaker 1990) provide additional evidence for noncentralized ceramic production both within Leilan and in its hinterlands. Systematic surface collections at Period IIB sites within a 15-km radius of Leilan recovered stacked fine ware bowls and wasters in at least three nearby village sites, indicating that the same fine ware bowl types were manufactured in parallel by both urban and rural craft specialists (Fig. 5). Neutron activation analyses of 178 samples of finished fine ware bowls from the village sites and from Leilan itself show clear differences in chemical composition between the urban center and its hinterland, confirming the idea of regional economic duality in craft organization (Fig. 6). There is no evidence for exchange of ceramics between the villages and the Leilan, further supporting the idea that the urban and rural sectors had low or uneven levels of regional economic integration.

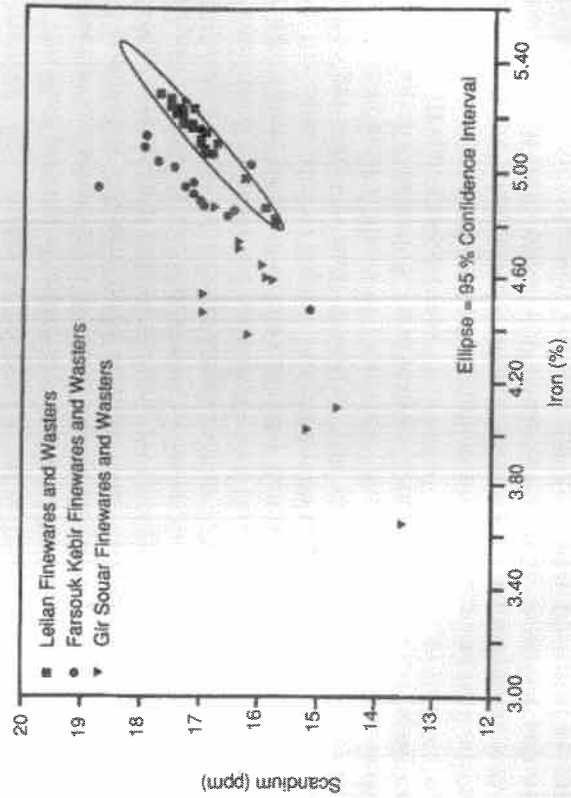


Figure 6. Neutron activation data showing compositional differences between fine ware bowls from Leilan and surrounding village production centers.

The ceramic evidence suggests that at Leilan and other city states of Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium BC, the centralized state institutions did not try to control the production of utilitarian crafts. In any case, they could not. As a result, utilitarian crafts were produced everywhere, both in-house in the great institutions by attached specialists and outside in the other sectors of society by independent specialists. The great institutions *did* try to control the production of luxury goods or prestige goods used to validate elite status or essential in rituals: what Brumfiel and Earle (1987:5) call "politically charged commodities." The production of objects in gold, silver, and semiprecious stones was limited only to attached specialists controlled by the palace and temple sectors (Stein 1996).

What this means is that Mesopotamia had a poorly integrated, "dual" economy where each sector was essentially duplicating the functions of the other. The elites were concerned with supplying themselves with food and craft goods and in protecting their control over the prestige goods that were essential to validating their own social status. They did not or probably could not exercise this kind of economic control over the rest of Mesopotamian society.

"RESILIENT" VILLAGE PRODUCTION IN AN URBANIZED REGIONAL SYSTEM

This dual political economy also had a marked effect on agropastoral production and urban-rural relations. Mesopotamian cities and villages pursued completely different goals and economic strategies. Robert Adams, drawing on ecological models (Holling 1973), suggests that cities followed strategies of stability that aimed for consistent, high levels of productivity within very specialized, narrow ranges (Adams 1978, 1982). In other words, the cities tried to maximize production with very labor- and capital-intensive agriculture, what we would call today factory farming. Whenever possible, the cities tried to impose this pattern on the countryside as well, in order to get access to rural resources. This picture emerges clearly from zooarchaeological analyses of fourth and third millennium urban centers such as Lagash (Mudar 1982) and Malyan (Zeder 1991) and the highly centralized Ur III state (Zeder 1994).

In contrast, the villages in these urban-centered regional networks followed economic strategies of resilience. Eschewing maximal productivity as a goal, the rural sector apparently aimed for the ability to survive perturbations in a constantly changing environment. As a result, instead of pursuing a narrowly focused, specialized economy that produced large levels of surplus, Mesopotamian villages seem to have maintained diversified econo-

mies that mixed agriculture and herding. Resilient strategies do not produce as much as maximization-oriented specialized production, but they give people the flexibility of lots of options, so they can survive economically in a constantly shifting, uncertain ecological and social environment. Thus villages with generalized, resilient economic strategies would have been able to survive natural disasters such as droughts and social disasters such as the collapse of their dominant urban centers.

The resilient strategies of the rural sector conflicted with the goals of the populous cities and their centralized state institutions. As a result, we can expect to see the extent of urban control over the countryside mirrored in rural production strategies. If cities dominated the countryside, then we would expect to see the villages pulled into increasingly specialized, maximization-oriented strategies where they produced surpluses to supply to the city. However, if the villages were able to retain some kind of autonomy, then we would expect to see this reflected in their practicing strategies of resilience.

One of the best ways to reconstruct and compare the differing economic strategies of cities (and their centralized state institutions) with those of the rural sector is through the examination of pastoral production strategies, since domesticated animals (such as sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs) and their secondary products formed one of the most important classes of commodities in the state societies of the ancient Near East. Pastoral production strategies can be defined as the related set of actions and decisions by which pastoralists manipulate the composition of their herds in order to meet specific goals. Pastoralists shape herd size, species, age, and sex composition by exchanging animals, controlled breeding, and selective culling. Pastoral production strategies can be reconstructed from textual evidence, where available (e.g., Postgate 1975; Sanmartin 1993; Van De Mieroop 1993) or from zooarchaeological data in the absence of written documents (Crabtree 1990; Mudar 1982; Stein 1987; Zeder 1988, 1991). Sandford (1982, 1983) contrasts two broad classes of pastoral strategies: maximization-oriented "opportunism" and the resilient strategy of "conservatism."

An opportunistic strategy "varies the number of livestock in accordance with the current availability of forage" (Sandford 1982:62). In good years, the extra forage can be converted into capital through growth in herd size. This pastoral capital can be retained, consumed, or exchanged for easily storable forms of wealth that can be reexchanged for livestock as needed. In bad years, livestock numbers are reduced as necessary. Opportunism thus is a strategy of continual readjustment to changing range conditions based on assessments of short term risk. By contrast, a conservative strategy retains a constant number of livestock in good (i.e., rainy) and bad (dry) years alike. "A conservative strategy implies that the number of animals is

not allowed to increase in the good years to utilize all the forage available, as they would then be too many for the subsequent bad years" (Sandford 1983:38).

In short, a conservative strategy sets an acceptable level of long-term risk and makes all production decisions accordingly. Conservative or risk-averse systems forego high levels of output, focusing instead on maximizing the capacity of their herds to survive and recover from serious environmental perturbations (see, e.g., Adams 1978; Sandford 1982:62). The easier it is to adjust livestock numbers upward or downward as necessary, the greater will be the tendency toward opportunistic strategies. Conversely, the more restricted the options of the herding group, the more it will tend toward conservatism.

We can reconstruct the economic strategies of the textually undocumented ancient rural sector in an urbanized state society by using excavated animal bone remains to determine whether the villagers were following specialized, maximization-oriented opportunistic strategies or generalized conservative herding strategies of resilience (Stein 1987, 1988). Specialized herding strategies would be those that tried to maximize production of a specific product like dairy products or wool, or supplying animals to the urban centers for meat. By contrast, a generalized herding strategy would just be oriented toward local subsistence and making sure that the herd is able to bounce back from possible environmental disasters like disease, harmful weather conditions, or wild predators.

Each of these different economic strategies has a different kind of optimal sheep and goat herd composition and would generate a distinctive age-sex profile of animal bone remains in the archaeological record (Payne 1973; Redding 1981). Dairy production strategies favor females and cull almost all the males at a very young age because they do not produce milk and they compete for fodder with the more valuable ewes; the resulting faunal assemblage would have large numbers (about 50% of the assemblage) of juvenile males killed between the ages of 2 and 12 months, while the remaining 50% would be almost all adult females. In wool production, the males are just as valuable as females; in fact, castrated male sheep (wethers) produce an especially fluffy wool. This specialized strategy would generate a pattern of bone remains where most of the animals would be adults, evenly divided between males and females. If the villagers' specialized production goal focused on providing animals on the hoof to a larger urban center, they would send the prime aged animals to the city, while retaining the breeding stock for themselves. This would generate a pattern where only the bones of very young and very old animals would be present in the village producing areas, while the urban consuming areas would have faunal patterns composed mainly of prime aged animals in the 2- to 3-year-old

age range. In contrast to these specialized herding strategies, a generalized subsistence-oriented strategy would be a compromise among dairy and wool production and would only produce meat for local consumption. This risk-averse strategy would generate a pattern of faunal remains in which all age groups are present, with males culled as they reached their optimum meat weight (at 2-3 years), while females would be culled after the age of 6 years, once their reproductive and dairy-producing capacities begin to decline (Stein 1987). The animals' ages at death can be calculated by examining patterns of tooth eruption and wear (Payne 1973). The age data let us reconstruct herd composition as a way to determine whether the rural sector was following surplus-producing specialized strategies of maximization as opposed to conservative, generalized strategies oriented toward subsistence autonomy.

Sheep and goat remains from a third millennium BC village site of Gritille in northwest Mesopotamia were examined to see if the herding economy had been drawn into an urban-dominated exchange system. Gritille is a small, 1.5-ha mound in the Euphrates river valley of southeast Turkey (Ellis and Voigt 1982; Voigt and Ellis 1981). The site is located in a well-populated and agriculturally productive area close to the Early Bronze Age urban centers of Samsat and Titris Höyük (Algaze et al. 1995; Stein 1988; Wattenmaker 1987).

Herding strategies at Gritille were calculated from a sample of 32 sheep and goat mandibles. The resulting survivorship curve was compared with expected model survivorship curves for both opportunistic and conservative herding strategies. The Gritille data were first compared with three models of opportunistic, maximization-oriented herding strategies: dairy production, wool production, and the intersite exchange of animals. The Early Bronze Age survivorship pattern did not fit any of these specialized, optimizing strategies (Fig. 7a-c). The Gritille survivorship pattern was then compared with the expected culling patterns for two conservative strategies of generalized, subsistence oriented herding: meat production for local consumption and Redding's herd security model. It is interesting to note that the model age distribution for locally oriented meat consumption closely resembles the expected survivorship curve for herd security. In other words, by following a herding strategy aimed at local meat production, villagers can at the same time very effectively minimize subsistence risk in sheep and goat husbandry. The Gritille data conform well with the expected culling patterns for both of these conservative, subsistence-oriented herding strategies (Fig. 7d).

The Early Bronze Age faunal remains suggest that village-based herders at Gritille did not try to maximize production or produce exportable surpluses of either animals or secondary products such as wool or dairy

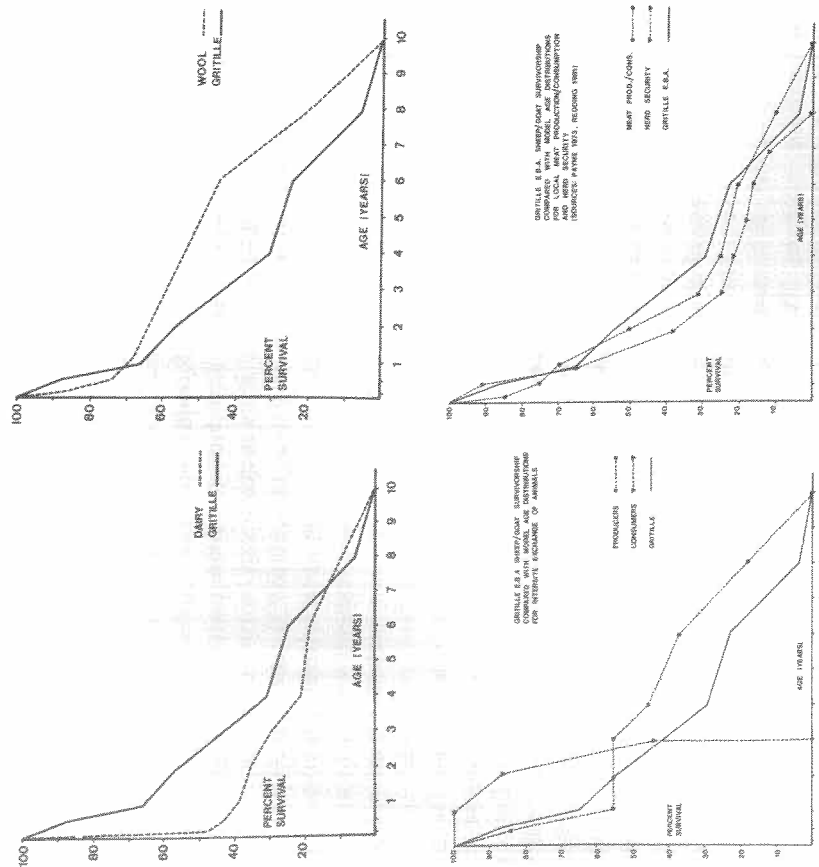


Figure 7. Sheep/goat survivorship curves for specialized and generalized pastoral production strategies compared with the evidence for animal herding at the third millennium village site of Gritille: (a) Dairy production (specialized); (b) wool production (specialized); (c) village supply of animals to urban centers (specialized); and (d) meat production for local consumption and maximization of herd security.

goods. Instead, the Gritille evidence is consistent with the kind of conservative strategies we associate with the generalized, subsistence-oriented herding that we see in rural strategies of resilience. The evidence for opportunistic, maximizing herding practices may only be present in urban sites or in a limited number of high status village households. In other words, rural production strategies for one of the most important agricultural commodities in the ancient Near East (animals and their secondary products) show a marked divergence between the economic and political strategies of the urban centers and their hinterlands. The cities appear to have attempted to impose maximizing, surplus-oriented production strategies on the areas under

their control in order to both feed urban populations mobilize surpluses to support the non-food-producing centralized institutions such as the temple and palace sectors.

Even in the absence of textual data, the archaeological evidence makes it clear that the villagers were practicing generalized herding strategies; they were producing for themselves and they were minimizing risk, rather than maximizing production of surplus products to supply the cities with pastoral products either as exchange items or as tribute. The fact that the villages were following resilient strategies shows that the cities could neither induce (through trade) nor compel (through taxation or tribute) the rural sector to meet urban and state demands for surplus production. The divergence between urban and rural goals, together with the evidence for a high degree of rural economic autonomy (and possibly resistance) reflect the heterogeneous organization of state societies in Mesopotamia.

CONCLUSIONS

These two case studies show the existence of important social groups pursuing economic strategies quite different from those of the temples and palaces. The significance of the relationships among these groups emerges only when we integrate archaeological information with cuneiform documents. The textual record is a priceless data source, but it is incomplete. We can only understand Mesopotamian society if we fit the textually invisible groups into a model that recognizes their importance as competing groups of social actors whose decisions and strategies affected both the organization of Mesopotamian states and their trajectories of change.

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Preface

The evolution of complex cultural systems is marked by a number of broad, sweeping patterns that characterize many different cultures at different points in time across the globe. Over the course of the past 100,000 years, there has been a general evolutionary trend for cultural systems to get larger and more complex. A consistent element in the broad course of cultural evolution has been the emergence and subsequent development of centralized forms of political organization.

The record of the first modern humans illuminates a global wide pattern of relative social equality and decentralized decision-making processes. Prior to about 10,000 years ago, there are no indications of clear social, political, or economic hierarchies. In these early millennia archaeological markers of social ranking are lacking and there is a similar absence of evidence pointing to the presence of leaders, chiefs or rulers. The pattern of social equality began to change at different moments and at different rates in various parts of the world in the course of the last 10,000 years. In some areas, such as Mesopotamia, politically centralized hierarchies emerged very early and developed rapidly, while in others, such as the Arctic, political centralization never emerged outside the context of Western colonialism.

In every culture area, the origins and development of politically centralized social systems and the emergence of leaders and rulers followed a unique evolutionary trajectory depending on local history and environment. At the same time, there are broad patterns of similarity in the evolution of politically centralized polities that cut across cultures and across time. This volume considers both the patterns of similarities as well as significant differences in the evolution of political centralization in diverse environments across the globe. The authors explore how and why leaders emerge out of egalitarian foundations, how chiefs evolve into state rulers, and how rulers

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