Special Section: Temporalities and Periodization in Human History: Conversations across the Disciplines of History and Archaeology

Eva von Dassow

Temporality and Periodization in Ancient Near Eastern History

In this article I consider the issues of temporality and periodization in the ancient Near East under three rubrics: how modern scholars have periodized ancient Near Eastern history, how societies of the ancient Near East periodized their own history, and, more broadly, how they conceptualized the temporal dimensions of their world and mapped themselves onto time. In each case I illustrate the issue with a selection of examples, which in no way represent comprehensive coverage. Under the last rubric, I focus on Sumer and Akkad.

Modern Periodization of Ancient Near Eastern History

Since the European rediscovery of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, commencing in the time of Napoléon,[1] scholarship has developed an array of incongruent, regionally specific periodizations for the ancient Near East. There is the sequence of stone and metal ages shared with the study of pre-

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history and ancient history generally. There are sequences based on political referents, such as the series of alternating "kingdom" and "intermediate" periods employed in the periodization of ancient Egypt's history. There are historical sequences based on the definition of language phases, such as Old, Middle, Neo-, and Late Babylonian for central and southern Mesopotamia during the second and first millennia BCE and Old, Middle, Neo-, and Late Assyrian for the same time period in northern Mesopotamia. And there are archaeological sequences based on elements of material culture, such as Late Bronze Age I, II, and III for the Levant in the mid- to late second millennium BCE. Every such periodization scheme captures some aspect of ancient reality while misrepresenting everything else, and they all reflect the growth of the disciplines in which they are employed as much as they do the past to which they are applied.

To draw an example from the "metal" sequence, the term "Iron Age" ostensibly refers to the introduction of iron in place of bronze as the preferred metal for making tools and weaponry, and in the Near East the period so designated begins in the twelfth century BCE. However, while iron was in use in the Near East centuries before the start of the Iron Age, it did not come into common use until well into that period.[2] The transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age is real, but it was fundamentally a social and political transformation; the gradual change in the use of metals was an effect of this process, not an element of it. Metallurgy is not even involved at the other end of the period: we just stop calling it the Iron Age once we can apply regionally specific terminology that has a political referent.[3] Thus with the advent of the Persian Empire, the entire Near East enters the "Persian period," even though on the criterion that putatively defines it, the Iron Age did not end at that time.

Other such technological referents prove similarly slippery. Meanwhile, the definition of archaeological periods according to features of material culture raises a further set of problems. In the ancient Near East, such problems are exemplified by the disagreement over how to characterize, label, and date the last phase of the Early Bronze Age in Canaan—or is it the first phase of the Middle Bronze Age? Or should it be divided into subphases, and should these subphases be distributed between Early and Middle Bronze; should some part of this stretch of time be distinguished as the "Intermediate Bronze Age" to explicitly recognize its transitional character? The period at issue encompasses the last two or three centuries of the third mil-

lennium BCE, and the indicia used to characterize it include disruption of the previous urban settlement pattern, introduction of new burial customs, and changes in the ceramic repertoire. The debate over definition and labeling revolves around the question whether these new developments, or the populations responsible for them, were continuous with the preceding or the following period, and the issues of definition and dating are entangled with questions of cause and effect and correlation with neighboring regions. With which slices of Egyptian and Mesopotamian history should this part of the Bronze Age in Canaan be equated? When did the settlement pattern in Canaan start to change; when did the new features of material culture emerge? Were the developments that mark this transitional not–Early–nor–yet–Middle Bronze period precipitated by events or processes in Egyptian or Mesopotamian history? How those questions are answered affects the dating of the period at issue, but of course dates are required to address cause and effect in the first place. The various types of data and modes of explanation employed to define an archaeological period combine in a network of mutually dependent relationships, the indeterminacy of which in the case chosen as an example results in an array of differing dates, designations, divisions, and characterizations.[4] At an extreme, such problems give reason to question whether archaeological periods actually exist in any sense, that is, whether they correspond to real phenomena that may be grasped in the terms employed to create such periodization schemes.[5]

The periodization of Mesopotamian history according to phases of the written forms of the Babylonian and Assyrian dialects is particularly nonsensical, but being so patently artificial it should have less potential to mislead than schemes overtly based on political, cultural, or technological developments. Thus the Old Babylonian period, so called by reference to the dialect of the Akkadian language that was used in writing in most of Mesopotamia during this period, covers roughly the first four centuries of the second millennium BCE. Other than the choice of written language, the only feature that could be said to characterize the entire region of central and southern Mesopotamia during all these centuries is that political power was broadly distributed among many autonomous polities, whose competition would sometimes result in one of them—for example, Babylon under Hammurabi during the eighteenth century—exercising ephemeral hegemony over many of the others. Hence "Old Babylonian" can readily be understood as a convenient moniker designating a block of time in a certain part of the world,

roughly equivalent to the period called Old Assyrian in reference to the part immediately to the northwest. Yet the designation of this block of time by the terms "Old Assyrian" and "Old Babylonian" remains problematic, inasmuch as these terms incorporate the names of Assur and Babylon, thus implying the central importance of these two cities during a period long before either of them achieved any such preeminent position.[6]

Problems of this sort seem to fade into insignificance once one becomes sufficiently fluent in the terminology, and sufficiently well acquainted with the areas to which it is applied, to take it for granted that historical developments are not accurately reflected by the periodization schemes in use. But that very familiarity can inhibit as well as facilitate historical inquiry. The delimitation and naming of time periods delimits and channels one's apprehension of the subjects of study, structuring it according to the framework that periodization supplies. This is not a wholly bad thing—some sort of framework for segmenting the past and naming the segments is necessary to enable discussion (it is much simpler to say "the Old Babylonian period" than "the period from the twentieth to the sixteenth century BCE in Mesopotamia"). The danger lies in failing to recognize and see beyond the parameters embedded in the system. This danger is epitomized by the division of ancient Egypt's history into "kingdom" periods and "intermediate" periods, mentioned above. The Old, Middle, and New Kingdom were periods when all the land of Egypt was united under the rule of one royal house; during the First, Second, and Third Intermediate periods, by contrast, two or more royal houses ruled different parts of Egypt. The presupposition underlying these designations is that Egypt took paradigmatic shape as a single state encompassing a certain stretch of territory and that the coexistence of more states than one within that territory was a violation of the paradigm; the model thus depends on a preconceived idea of Egypt as a perennial entity having a particular geographic and political form. What if one did not take this paradigm for granted but instead considered it normal for a multitude of states to occupy the Nile Valley from the First Cataract to the Mediterranean (the traditional bounds of ancient Egypt) while viewing the imposition of a single monarchy over this entire territory as an aberration (albeit one that eventually became permanent)? New questions would arise, starting with the definition of Egypt; neglected aspects would come to the fore, such as the political significance of the nomes (the "states" of the united states of Egypt, as it were); and the history of ancient Egypt would be a lot more difficult to

narrate once one abandoned the plotline in which a single unitary monarchy was the principal or only political protagonist (hence this step has seldom been taken). The paradigm according to which Egypt was in its essence a unitary, monarchic state is a crystallization of the ideology propounded by the apparatus of monarchic rule during the periods when ancient Egypt did approximate this model. That modern scholarship has willingly deferred to this ideology, and even magnified it, does no credit to the field of ancient history.[7]

The foregoing discussion sets forth a problem without offering any sort of solution other than to direct the attention of scholars within and outside the disciplines of ancient Near Eastern history toward the issue of periodization. Replacing long-established conventional terms is difficult even if everyone agrees that the conventions are flawed, the terminology misleading, and the systems of periodization illogical, and this would not in any case be the right forum for proposing any new system. My aim in the paragraphs above is simply to explain what the existing periodization schemes are, exposing their defects to view, so as to provide something of a key to the field for specialists in other historical disciplines. Be our systems of periodization ever so flawed, they are indispensable to inquiry about the past; they provide, at a minimum, a common vocabulary with which to discuss things.

Ancient Near Eastern Periodizations of Ancient Near Eastern History

Some elements of modern periodizations of ancient Near Eastern history accord with or are actually derived from native periodizations. The most thoroughgoing instance of this is the derivation of the modern numbering of Egyptian dynasties from the Hellenistic Egyptian historian Manetho, who lived in the third century BCE and wrote a history of Egypt in Greek. In his history, which is extant only in the form of quotations and references by later authors, Manetho recorded every ruler of Egypt known to him, giving the ruler's name, length of reign, and other information of various sorts, proceeding in chronological sequence from mythical protohistory up to the period right before his own time. Moreover, Manetho grouped the rulers into what he called "dynasties," taking the Greek word *dynasteia*, which carried the basic meaning "ruling power," and using it to denote a series of holders of ruling power who shared a common origin or affiliation; thus

he gave the word "dynasty" the meaning for which we use it now (though without necessarily denoting a line of rulers belonging to a single family as in modern usage).[8] He also gave us the chronological framework of ancient Egyptian history that we use now: a sequence of 30 dynasties starting with that founded by Menes and concluding with the last native Egyptian dynasty (Dynasty 30), followed by an interlude of Persian rule (Dynasty 31) that was ended by the Macedonian conquest.[9] Manetho, writing in Greek in the Hellenistic period, is a very late source and moreover one known to us only indirectly. However, insofar as both the information Manetho records and the way he structures this information accord with earlier Egyptian sources, his history can be understood to instantiate a native Egyptian historiographical tradition. It was his innovation to render Egyptian history into Greek literary form, but he did so using data that he derived from Egyptian sources (both written and oral, and wherever his data can be checked he proves to be reasonably accurate). The scheme of 31 dynasties may have been largely original to him, but he evidently drew on earlier precedents for constructing this scheme.[10]

A concept similar to that for which Manetho used the term *dynasteia* is known from Sumerian and Akkadian sources for the history of Sumer and Akkad (southern and central Mesopotamia). This concept was denoted by the Sumerian term BALA, borrowed into Akkadian as *palû*, which carries the basic meaning "turn" or, when applied to time, "term" or "period." The temporal sense of BALA encompassed a range of meanings originating (probably) with the word's use to denote a "turn" in a rotating office or duty, thus a term of office or a period of duty. It then came to mean the "term" of rule by a king or other entity, thus "reign" in a temporal sense and even in the abstract sense "rule" or "hegemony." In this sense, then, the BALA of X means the period during which X held office or exercised power, and X could be an individual ruler, a city, or a population group. The "period of rule of X" can be the "dynasty of X" in the Manethonian sense of the term, or it can carry the broader connotation "the period when X was dominant or supreme" or "the age of X."[11] In this set of meanings, BALA/*palû* was sometimes used in (native) Mesopotamian historiography to divide and label periods of the past.

For example, in the Sumerian King List, one of the earliest Mesopotamian chronographic compositions, the past is divided into periods of rule by particular cities, each of which putatively held power in turn. The Sumerian King List records sequences of rulers city by city, stringing the

sequences together in linear fashion as if each followed the preceding one in temporal succession.[12] It states how many years every king reigned and concludes every sequence with a subtotal for the city, "*n* kings reigned its n_2 years," then marks the caesura between one city and the next with the statement that the kingship of city A was transferred to city B. This "change of regime" statement is formulated in different ways in different manuscripts of the Sumerian King List. In one group of manuscripts it is formulated with the phrase BALA . . . KÚR, literally "the turn changed"; that is, city A's period of rule was over, and it was now the "turn," BALA, of the next city.[13] Each period of rule by a given city, each BALA of a city, is the "dynasty" (*dynasteia*) of that city, both in a temporal sense and in the sense that all the rulers during that period originate from the same city (whether or not they belong to the same family). This element of the Sumerian King List's periodization scheme has been taken up in modern scholarship and used as the basis for naming certain periods, in particular the Third Dynasty of Ur (or Ur III Dynasty, c. twenty-first century BCE), so called because, according to the Sumerian King List, this was the third time the city of Ur held kingship in Mesopotamia.[14]

The use of BALA/*palû* to mean "dynasty of X" or "age of X" is not limited to chronographic texts, and, as noted above, X may be a population group or an individual as well as a city. In an omen tablet dating to the Old Babylonian period, one of the omens has the apodosis "the dynasty (*palû*) of the Akkadians is finished," referring to the royal house of Akkad, one of the ruling cities whose "turn" (BALA) is included in the Sumerian King List.[15] From roughly the same period, the text known as the "Genealogy of the Hammurabi Dynasty" lists individual ancestors and categories of people who are invoked to partake of the offerings made on behalf of a deceased member of the royal house of Babylon; the list includes the *palû* of the Amorites, the *palû* of the Haneans, the *palû* of the Gutians, and "(any) *palû* not recorded on this tablet." Here *palû* denotes the power-holding group rather than the period during which that group held power.[16] The term *palû* reappears with the temporal connotation "reign, age, dynasty" in an astronomical text titled MUL.APIN ("Plow Star") composed several hundred years later. In a section devoted to explaining how to determine when to intercalate an extra month to bring the lunar and solar years into alignment, this astronomical text includes the obscure statement that three different intercalary months belong to each of three *palû*s: the *palû* of Shulgi, the *palû* of the Amorites,

and the *palû* of the Kassites.[17] While it is not clear what is meant by associating particular intercalary months with particular *palû*s, what the *palû*s themselves are is clear enough. The "*palû* of Shulgi" refers to the Ur III Dynasty, Shulgi being the most famous king of that dynasty; in this case, the "dynasty," both in the sense of a royal lineage and in the sense of the period during which that lineage ruled, is named after the lineage's foremost member. The "*palû* of the Amorites" refers to the period when royal lineages of Amorite affiliation ruled most of Mesopotamia, which modern scholarship has dubbed the Old Babylonian period, and the "*palû* of the Kassites" refers to the subsequent period of rule by royal lineages of Kassite affiliation, which modern scholarship similarly designates the Kassite period.[18] Recently, this passage of MUL.APIN has been adduced in support of replacing the designation "Old Babylonian period" with "Amorite period" on the grounds that the latter accords with native usage (Charpin 2004: 38; see n. 6 above).

The section of MUL.APIN in which the cited passage is found reflects the actual practice of constructing a calendar and reckoning time on the scale of days, months, and years as well as longer periods. To start with, the year and its subdivisions required astronomical and mathematical definition for both administrative and cultic purposes. For long-term time reckoning, whether for historiographical purposes or to serve practical needs (such as calculating interest on mortgages), it was necessary to keep track of years as individual units in a linear sequence. Various methods of doing this were employed at different times and in different parts of Mesopotamia.[19] In Sumer and Akkad, beginning in the time of the Akkad Dynasty (c. twenty-third century BCE) or earlier, years were named for important events. Each kingdom issued its own year names; the year of a new king's accession would be named for that event, and subsequent years of his reign were given names chosen by the king and his court. Scribes therefore kept lists of year names to date documents, keep track of dated documents, and reckon time from past to present.[20] In northern Mesopotamia a different system was in use, one that is best known from the city of Assur but was also in use elsewhere in the region: years were named for the successive holders of a rotating office, termed *limmu*. This was an annual office, like that of eponym archon in Athens or consul in Rome, held for one year at a time by one after another of the heads of leading families; it eventually became customary for the *limmu* office to be held by the king in the year of his accession, after which it passed to other noblemen. Scribes in Assur therefore kept lists of *limmu*s for the same purposes

that lists of year names were kept in Sumer and Akkad, and they kept doing so from the early second millennium almost to the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the late seventh century BCE.[21] Meanwhile, in the mid-second millennium another system developed in Sumer and Akkad, united under the Kassite dynasty: this was to count years rather than name them, starting with the year of a king's accession and continuing through successive years of his reign.[22] Counting regnal years required no listing of years, only a list recording kings in chronological order and indicating the number of years each ruled, following essentially the same structure as the Sumerian King List.[23] This system remained in use under dynasty after dynasty through the first millennium BCE, until the Macedonian conquest resulted in the establishment of the Seleucid kingdom, at which time someone hatched the idea of starting the calendar over at "year 1" and counting the years of a new era from that point forward.[24]

All these systems of identifying years and keeping them in order were fundamentally grounded in some prominent element of political organization, whether kingship or collective governance. Therefore each of them could work fine as long as the element of political order on which it was based continued to function, but when that element failed, the dating system failed, too. So if a kingdom fissioned or if rivals claimed the throne, it might be impossible to decide by whom to date documents, while in the confusion years might either be lost from lists or chronicles, or they might be multiplied (by adding together the years of simultaneous or overlapping office-holders).[25] This is a problem for us, because we want to construct an absolute chronology for the past, and ideally we require reliable exact dates. Such malfunctions in dating systems also would have presented temporary problems for the people of ancient Near Eastern kingdoms who had to be able to determine, for example, how many years' worth of rent or interest who owed whom. But they would not have been of much concern to ancient Mesopotamian chroniclers, who, while they had an interest in recording the past, had no stake in constructing an absolute chronology that was reliable and exact from year to year to year. If one's written records enabled the calculation that king A rebuilt a certain temple so many hundred years after his predecessor king B had built it, who would challenge the assertion and why, unless perhaps by pointing out that king C had first built it even earlier?[26] Exact counts of years were deployed in making such claims, and these counts were based on real data, but their reliability was not their raison d'être.

Concepts of Time and Their Materialization in Sumer and Akkad

For Mesopotamian literati, the measurement of time served primarily theoretical or ideological, not practical or empirical, ends. While constructing and maintaining an accurate time line extending back a couple of centuries had practical utility for scribes or notaries producing legal documents and the like, the use of temporal indicators in historical and literary works instead reflects a way of conceptualizing time and history that was integral to the Mesopotamian worldview. It was most fully articulated in the cultural production of Sumer and Akkad. Aware of the temporality of human works, the people of Sumer and Akkad made a habit of securing their monuments in the firmament, as it were, through ritual, through objects with symbolic significance, and through the written word. The idea that their cities, institutions, and lineages were anchored in deep time, even cosmic time, is made palpable in particular types of artifacts as well as the texts that are typically inscribed on them. The practices that yielded such inscriptions also yielded motifs used in structuring literary works, and the same idea was employed in the construction of intangible "monuments," such as genealogies; but, appropriately for the land of earliest urbanization, it is in the building of cities and their institutions that the indigenous idea of time and human history is most characteristically reified. Cities served as anchors of time in the Sumero-Akkadian conception of history. More precisely, certain cities, especially ones that housed the cults of important deities and that were already ancient when writing was invented, anchored past and present experience, like a surveyor's pegs fixed into the landscape of time.

Here it is necessary to pause and consider what defined a "city" in the Mesopotamian, particularly the Sumero-Akkadian, view.[27] All settlements of whatever size were called by the same word, URU in Sumerian and *ālu* in Akkadian. But while most settlements remained unimportant, passing in and out of history and leaving little impression, some attained lasting importance and played significant roles in the region's history and culture. These were true cities, anchors of civilization, in the indigenous view. Whatever factors made a city grow important to begin with, the defining features that made it truly a city in Sumero-Akkadian eyes were the institutions located therein, institutions that served the public at large and that outlasted individual lifetimes to link generation after generation, embodying the continuity of the

community and its place in the cosmos. These institutions were most visibly and durably concretized in the city's temples. Every major city was the home of one or more deities who were in charge of that city, who represented it in the cosmos and the divine assembly, and who required maintenance by the city's population. So long as the deity chose to abide in the city, he or she was guarantor of the city's well-being, while conversely the deity's departure meant the city's demise; therefore the community strove to maintain the city as the deity's home. Maintenance of the city's tutelary deity was tantamount to maintenance of the community, for what served the one also served the other, whether it was dredging the canals to ensure adequate irrigation or sponsoring long-distance resource acquisition to obtain goods not locally available.[28] Beyond this, the attribution of independent and complementary powers to the gods was reflected in the political ideology developed by the cities of Sumer and Akkad. The well-being guaranteed by the city's god or goddess embraced not only happiness and prosperity but autonomy: the city's freedom to run its own affairs and not to be dominated by a superordinate polity, in particular not to be involuntarily subjected to conscription and taxation by another power.[29] In sum, cities were independent political entities, the seats of independent divine powers, in the native southern Mesopotamian view.

But this independent, prosperous, privileged existence could only be sustained by divine consent. And the conditions for divine consent required making and maintaining a home for the city's tutelary deity, so that the deity would be willing to abide there, present in the community and representing the city in the cosmos.[30] Of course, the city's fate could be affected by arbitrary decisions in the divine assembly beyond human cognition or control, but what people *could* do was make the deity at home in their city. This meant, first and foremost, providing the deity a house—a temple furnished with all the necessities and luxuries of life where the deity could reside and receive appropriate cultic service. And the house of the god must be maintained in perpetuity on the same sacred ground. How do you distinguish the house of a god from an ordinary house? In ancient Mesopotamia you build it on a raised platform (hence the development of the ziqqurrat), and you embellish it as well as your means will allow, but above all you consecrate the site and the structure through rituals that identify the building as the house of the deity. The rituals could be accomplished without writing, but once writing had been invented it was also desirable to label the site and the

structure with inscriptions saying that this is the house of the god so-and-so, which so-and-so built (the builder was usually but not always a king). Similar inscriptions were also employed in other constructions that, like temples, served the public good, such as city walls, and they were eventually employed in royal palaces, too.

Such inscriptions, borne on objects of various significant forms, were placed in various significant locations in the structure of the building either during its consecration or during its construction. The bricks of which the structure was built could be inscribed, and inscribed objects could be embedded in the structure as well as placed in foundation deposits. The most typical form taken by objects bearing such inscriptions was the peg, which could be elaborated into a figurine. Pegs were driven symbolically through rings or plaques set at the corners of the structure when its foundations were laid, just as one drives tent pegs into the ground when, having marked out the site, one begins to erect the tent. Or else pegs or peg figurines might be placed in boxes accompanied by a miscellany of other articles and soaked with libations, as the texts tell us, and buried in the foundations like time capsules.[31]

The symbolic function of the peg was literally to anchor the building in the earth.[32] When the peg became a figurine and when it was placed in a box in the foundation, its form and placement carried other meanings besides that original one. On the other hand, the addition of an inscription enhanced the object's utility as a carrier of information to the point that this function could surpass others. Thus in some classes of objects, text overtook form altogether, leaving nothing of symbolism, so that the object served purely to label a building from the inside; the inscribed clay cones employed promiscuously in some early second-millennium buildings exemplify this development (see figures 1–2).

A superficially similar class of object, the clay nail, retained the symbolism of form when it acquired an inscription.[33] The nail could be inscribed on the shaft only or on both the head and the shaft (figure 3). Clay nails have seldom been found in situ, but when they have, they have been found embedded in exterior walls so that the head of the nail is visible on the wall's surface, as shown in photographs taken by Leonard Woolley during his excavations at Ur (figures 4–5). To help anchor the heavy clay nail in place, its shaft was sometimes made to flare slightly at the end instead of tapering like a real nail, so that the object came to resemble a large inscribed mushroom. The differ-

Figure 1 Inscribed clay cone of Sin-kashid, king of Uruk (nineteenth century BCE)
Source: University of Minnesota Libraries, Special Collections and Rare Books, UM 14.

Figure 2 Inscribed clay cone of Lipit-Eshtar, king of Isin (c. 1900 BCE)
Source: University of Minnesota Libraries, Special Collections and Rare Books, UM 15.

ent placement and function of clay cones and nails is illustrated in figure 6, a diagram showing cones in the foundation and a nail in the wall.

Assuming that Woolley's finds represent the usual placement of clay nails, this would account for why they are rarely found in situ, because over time walls would collapse or be replaced, or their bricks would be reused in new construction. Similarly, foundations would often be reexcavated, whether in the process of reconstructing the building or to obtain construction materials, providing occasions for discovery and dispersal of objects deposited in them. Sometimes foundation objects were replaced in the process of construction, responding to injunctions contained in their inscriptions. Sometimes they were broken and scattered. And sometimes inscrip-

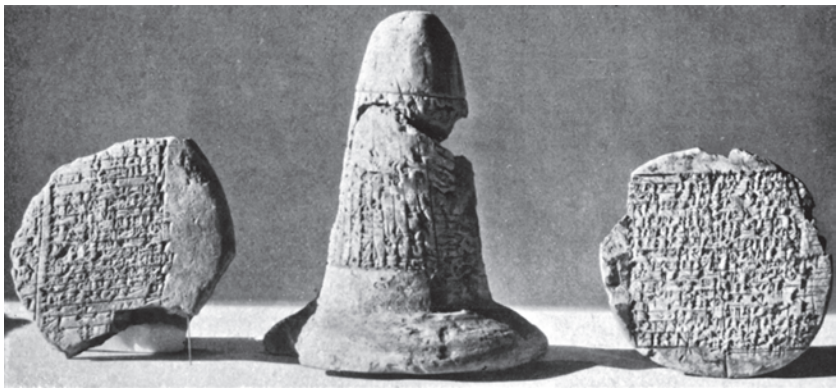

Figure 3 Inscribed clay nails of Rim-Sin, king of Larsa, and his queen, Simat-Eshtar (eighteenth century BCE)
Source: Woolley 1923: pl. 34, no. 2. Reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

tions and other interesting objects found in old buildings were collected and kept as antiquities.[34]

Though their form, placement, and function differ, cones, nails, bricks, foundation pegs, figurines, and tablets may all bear essentially the same inscriptions. They identify the building, its owner, and who built it in greater or lesser detail. The redundancy of repeating such inscriptions on dozens or even hundreds of objects placed in diverse parts of the building's site and structure would ensure that when the building fell into ruin or was under renovation, its identity could be ascertained at multiple key points.

Thus, for example, Sin-kashid, the successful founder of a new dynasty at Uruk, had clay tablets and cones recording the construction of his palace embedded in the foundations of an adjacent structure, which enabled archaeologists to locate and identify Sin-kashid's palace when they commenced excavations at Uruk (see figure 1).[35] They found much more from this dynasty, for Sin-kashid and his successors left their marks throughout Uruk, avidly building and restoring temples, palaces, city walls, and more—or at least commissioning inscriptions saying that they had done so.[36] And these kings knew the history of the buildings they restored. One of them, Anam, renovated the walls of Uruk, noting that these walls were "the ancient work of the divine Gilgamesh"; he also renovated the temples of An and Inanna, noting that they were "the ancient work of Ur-Namma and Shulgi," the kings of Ur who had ruled almost 300 years before him (Frayne 1990: nos. E4.4.6.2,

Figure 4 Clay nails of Ur-Namma, king of Ur (twenty-first century BCE), embedded in the wall of the ziqqurrat terrace at Ur
Source: Woolley 1925: pl. 31, no. 2. Reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

E4.4.6.4). How did he know? Legends about Gilgamesh circulated widely, and literature about Ur-Namma and Shulgi was available in Anam's time, too. But while Gilgamesh, if he existed, left no inscriptions, Ur-Namma and Shulgi did. Anam or any other would-be restorer of the temples of Uruk had only to excavate and locate the old foundations, and inscriptions telling who built the building would surely turn up. The inscribed nails and pegs that symbolically anchored the structures in place would actually anchor them in time, ensuring that these kings and their works would not escape history.

Ten centuries later, when Assyrian and Babylonian kings rebuilt the temples of Uruk and other cities, their construction work turned up old inscriptions from former kings. In fact, such inscriptions were sought through excavation to determine the correct spot, the ground already consecrated, for raising the temple anew. Scribes could read the old inscriptions to see who the earlier builders were, and, using chronographic texts such as those described in the preceding section, they could figure the temporal distance separating the earlier king from the present one. The present

Figure 5 Clay nails of Warad-Sin, king of Larsa (c. 1800 BCE), embedded in the bastion wall of the ziqqurrat terrace at Ur
Source: Woolley 1932: pl. 66, no. 2. Reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

king's inscription could then report the finding of the old inscription, the identity of its royal author, and how many years ago that king had built the temple now under renovation.[37] In one of his inscriptions, Nabonidus, king of Babylon (r. 556–539 BCE), mentions no fewer than five earlier kings, from Naram-Sin of Akkad (c. 2200 BCE) to Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605–562 BCE), who had previously (re)built the temples that Nabonidus now rebuilds. For the two most ancient of those kings, he gives figures indicating how long ago they deposited their inscriptions in the foundations of the temples he has excavated: Naram-Sin, son of Sargon, had laid his inscription in the foundation of Ebabbar, the temple of the sun god Shamash, 3,200 years ago; and Shagarakti-Shuriash, son of Kudur-Enlil, king of Babylon, had (re)laid the foundation of Eulmash, the temple of the goddess of battle, 800 years ago.[38] Nabonidus further reports that he restored the inscription naming Naram-Sin to its place, joining his own inscription in the foundations of the restored Ebabbar.[39]

Another celebrated example is the case of the Sun-God Tablet, also from the Ebabbar temple (on this artifact and its text, see Woods 2004). The Sun-

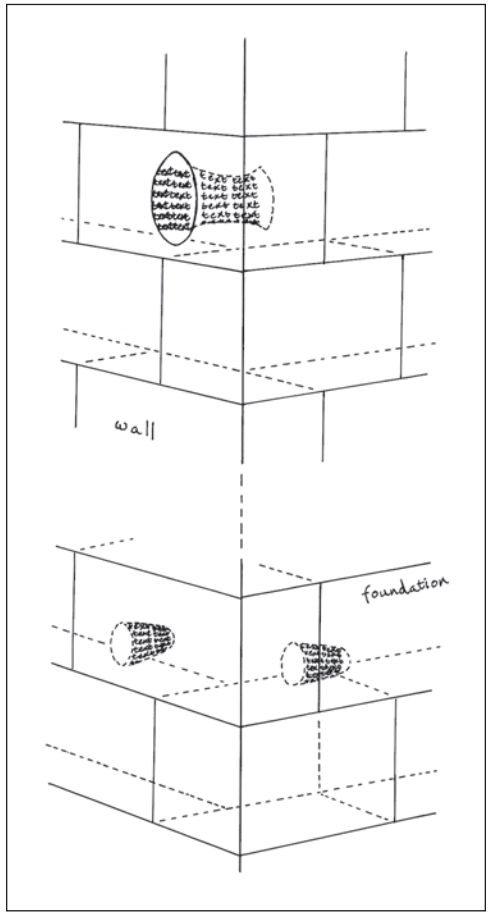

Figure 6 The placement of clay nails in the wall and clay cones in the foundation

God Tablet is a stone tablet inscribed with a text relating the reestablishment of the statue and cult of Shamash under Nabu-apla-iddina, king of Babylon in the ninth century BCE. Two centuries previously the god's cult image had disappeared in a time of troubles, so that his cult lapsed; successive kings made efforts to restore the cult, enshrining a sun disk to stand for the god and appointing a priest. Then in the time of Nabu-apla-iddina, the discovery of a relief illustrating the god's image enabled the fashioning of a new divine statue. Finally, having installed the new image, Nabu-apla-iddina richly endowed the cult of Shamash, his divine family, and his human priesthood. Above the inscription on the tablet is carved a relief illustrating Shamash

Figure 7 Clay box (British Museum 91004) containing a stone tablet of Nabu-apla-iddina (ninth century BCE) and two clay impressions of it, (re)deposited in the foundations of the Ebabbar temple when Nabonidus (sixth century BCE) restored the structure
Source: British Museum Free Image Service, no. AN00418646_001. © Trustees of the British Museum.

enshrined, the sun disk before him, approached by the priest, the king, and an intercessory goddess; the archaizing imagery of the relief draws on motifs and styles of ages gone by (as shown in detail in ibid.: 45–76). The tablet was found, mended where it had broken, in a clay box inscribed, "Image of Shamash, the lord of (the city) Sippar, who dwells in Ebabbar" (figure 7), located inside a chamber in the temple's foundations directly beneath a deposit containing inscriptions of Nabonidus. With the tablet were three clay impressions of the relief carved on it, one of which was inscribed on the reverse with a list of garments to clothe (the divine image of) Shamash. Evidently, Nabonidus found the broken tablet of Nabu-apla-iddina when he conducted excavations preparatory to renovating the Ebabbar temple. He had the tablet mended and had the clay box made for it as well as the clay impressions with

the record of the god's new wardrobe, then he interred the box containing the tablet in the foundations below his own foundation inscriptions—similar to what he says he did with the inscription of Naram-Sin.[40]

Nabonidus did the proper thing by returning his predecessors' inscriptions to the temple's foundations, for many an inscription of this kind explicitly enjoins anyone who should find it in the future not to alter or remove it but to put it back in place.[41] This is not what was always done, however. Sometimes ancient inscriptions found in the course of excavating old structures were collected, copied, even labeled and cataloged in the libraries or treasuries of temples and palaces.[42] So, for example, a scribe in the sixth century BCE made a copy of an inscription of Sin-kashid that commemorated the building of a temple, and the scribe kept his copy in another temple where he worked. Twenty-six centuries later, archaeologists working at Uruk found more exemplars of the very same inscription.[43]

Also during the first millennium BCE, the epic of Gilgamesh was redacted in what became a standard edition.[44] In the opening stanzas of the epic, the poet calls the audience to hear of Gilgamesh, he who "saw the Deep, the country's foundation," who learned the secret of the Deluge, who built the ramparts of Uruk. The poet evokes the holy city of Uruk, inviting the listener to "take the stairway of a bygone era, draw near to Eanna, seat of Ishtar." He urges us, "See the tablet-box—release its clasp—pick up the tablet and read of the travails of Gilgamesh," just as we would do upon excavating a foundation box containing an inscription, just as we and our forebears two, three, four millennia ago *have* done many a time in Mesopotamia. The poet closes the epic with the arrival of Gilgamesh back in Uruk after his trip to the ends of the earth to learn the story of "the Flood" and the secret of life and death. Seeing his city, Gilgamesh proudly invites the boatman to admire the walls of Uruk. Though Gilgamesh himself could not escape mortality, he could point to his city, its physical and cultural reality, as a perennial monument of human existence in the cosmos.

A few years ago I was at a symposium about a totally different topic, the fate of Iraq's cultural heritage in wartime, when the epic of Gilgamesh came up. An audience member, a fan of the epic, asked the panelists this question: "Do the walls of Uruk still stand?" Most of us looked at each other, unsure, because we have never been able to go to Iraq and see the sites for ourselves. But the oldest among us, who had been there, said, "Yes—you can look out over the site and see the remains of the ramparts that encircle Uruk."[45]

Notes

This article is based on a paper presented at the round table session "Temporalities and Periodization in Human History: Technology, Gender, and Measures of Civilization," at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association in Miami on October 24, 2008. I thank Mary Jo Maynes and Ann Waltner for inviting me to participate in the roundtable.

In this article Sumerian words are given in small capitals, words in Akkadian and other ancient languages are given in italics, and logograms are given in uppercase letters.

1 Actually, somewhat earlier, but Napoléon's expedition to Egypt, which famously included an army of savants, marks a watershed moment in the age when the modern disciplines of Egyptology and ancient Near Eastern studies were given birth through the labors of successive European explorers. In the first chapter of his recent volume on the archaeology of Mesopotamia, Roger Matthews (2003) notes the existence of an older Arab intellectual tradition of inquiry into the pre-Islamic Near Eastern past in the course of a brief but engaging survey of the history of the field (with some remarks on the development of periodization and ample references to previous literature). For a survey of European engagement with ancient Egypt before and after Napoléon, see Baines and Málek 1980: 22–29.

2 For a concise and informative survey of the use of iron before the Iron Age and the development of iron metallurgy in the Near East, see Muhly 1995: 1514–16.

3 This switch from "raw-materials technologies" to political history as the basis for the terminology of periodization is acknowledged in so many words by Amnon Ben-Tor (1992: 2) in his introduction to the archaeology of ancient Israel. A similar disjunction is typically found wherever predominantly archaeological evidence gives way to predominantly textual sources, starting with the traditional use of the invention of writing to mark the boundary between "prehistory" and "history."

4 For the particulars of this case and a summary of competing models, see Ram Gophna's chapter on the Intermediate Bronze Age in Ben-Tor 1992: esp. 126–28, supplemented by Ben-Tor's (ibid.: 123–25) discussion of Early Bronze IV at the end of the preceding chapter.

5 These observations are hardly novel. Half a century ago Stuart Piggott (1959: 5) made the same point in an introductory work on the discipline of archaeology, remarking that "in a sense, the Bronze Age never existed in the past." The problem had been articulated in detail by Glyn Daniels in an essay on the origins, development, and application of periodization based on the sequence of stone and metal ages (and subdivisions thereof). Daniels (1943: 32) criticized the (mis)use of such sequences as chronological systems, noting that "there is frequently no identity in time and in technological associations between the objects nominated with reference to these stages and the stages themselves." And V. Gordon Childe had already cautioned against mistaking the (putative) stages for ages in *Man Makes Himself* (1936), as Sally Green (1981: 13) notes in her introduction to a subsequent edition, where she remarks that "it is now generally accepted that the division of prehistory into such

ages is highly artificial." But periodization is no less necessary to archaeological and historical inquiry for being artificial, as Piggott (1959) explains in a chapter devoted to the topic of constructing chronological frameworks ("Making Time-Scales"). For this reason if no other, Daniels's recommendation that stone- and metal-based periodization schemes be retired has not been followed, despite his demonstration of their cultural and chronological invalidity.

6 Similar points are made by Dominique Charpin (2004: 29–30, 38) in his history of Mesopotamia during the period that he prefers to designate "Amorite," although the series for which he wrote it retains the term "Old Babylonian." Charpin criticizes the conventional terminology, because it retrojects Assyrocentrism and Babylocentrism into a period when Babylon was not central and Assyria did not yet exist as such and because linguistic criteria are ill suited to historical periodization. He argues for designating the four centuries in question the "période Amorrite" instead, on the grounds that this term captures the importance of the Amorite population as well as the Amorite affinities declared by most royal dynasties during this period. He adds that it agrees with native nomenclature, according to which this was the "Amorite period" (see below, with nn. 16–18). Whether Charpin's term will oust "Old Babylonian" (outside France) remains to be seen. The problematic ramifications of naming periods for (putative) ethnic groups had, however, already been pointed out by Marc Van De Mieroop (see n. 7).

7 Compare the remarks of Van De Mieroop (1997b: 289–93) in a similar vein in his discussion of the periodization of Mesopotamian and Egyptian history, which remains almost the only critical examination of the subject. As Van De Mieroop (1997b: 289) observes, "Periodization is a tool that the historian rarely questions." He then lays bare the various (often rather arbitrary) criteria that have supplied the basis for constructing the existing systems of periodization, points out the deficiencies of such criteria, and explores some of the problematic ramifications of using the resulting periodization schemes. Inter alia, the naming of periods of Mesopotamian history for what have appeared (on a superficial reading of the data) to be dominant populations tends to generate unconscious assumptions about the existence and historical role of ethnic groups, hence to produce corresponding preconceptions about the nature of Mesopotamian history (ibid.: 291–92).

8 See Verbrugghe and Wickersham 1996: 98 regarding Manetho's innovative use of the word *dynasteia*. The information available about Manetho's life and work under the early Ptolemies is set forth on pp. 95–97, the scope and substance of his *History of Egypt* are discussed on pp. 98–101, Manetho's sources and methods are the subject of pp. 103–15, and the transmission of his work is summarized on pp. 115–18.

9 Gerald P. Verbrugghe and John M. Wickersham (1996: 100) argue in favor of attributing Dynasty 31, comprising three Persian rulers, to Manetho's original work rather than identifying this dynasty as a later addendum. Preceding his First Dynasty, Manetho recorded a series of gods and a series of periods of rule by (human) kings, divine offspring, and spirits of the dead (ibid.: 99, 130–31); if he had numbered these periods, they would surely show up in our histories, too.

10 In discussing Manetho's likely sources, Verbrugghe and Wickersham (1996: 98, 105–6) identify the Turin Royal Canon as an example of the type of record that Manetho must have used to construct his history of Egypt (though this particular text cannot have been his main source because of differences in content). Among other features that point in this direction, the Turin Royal Canon includes summaries totaling up numbers of kings and numbers of years, and these groupings correspond in part to Manetho's dynasties.

11 On the use of BALA/*palû* to mean "age, era, period, dynasty," see the classic discussion of J. J. Finkelstein (1966: 103–6) and, more recently, Jean-Jacques Glassner (2004: 7–8, 65). Glassner (ibid.: 65), emphasizing the connotation "cycle," rejects the translation of BALA as "dynasty" because the word "dynasty" "denotes succession of rulers of the same bloodline." But he therewith ignores both Finkelstein's remarks voiding this very objection and the availability of a broader meaning for "dynasty"—though he does cite Polybius for the standard Greek meaning of the term (ibid.: n. 17; see n. 8 above). Having translated BALA as "cycle" in the French edition of this work (Glassner 1993: 25; text 3, pp. 142–45), Glassner (2004: texts 3–4, pp. 126–37) renders it "dynastic cycle" in the English edition, not a semantically felicitous turn of phrase.

12 This scheme does not correspond to historical reality except for the very latest periods covered by the Sumerian King List and then only inexactly (inter alia, the list omits cities that did not fit its program). For a recent discussion of the nature of this text, its historiographical program, and its compositional history, see Glassner 2004: 55–70, 95–99, 101–8 (Glassner calls it the "Chronicle of the Single Monarchy"), with references to previous literature.

13 See Jacobsen 1939: 28–50 (the variant formula is given on p. 37 and discussed in the following pages) and Finkelstein 1966: 105. This formula for transfer of power from city to city is also used in the text called the Dynastic Chronicle in the edition of A. K. Grayson (1975: no. 18), who renders it "the dynasty . . . was terminated"; the same text is called the Babylonian Royal Chronicle in the edition of Glassner (2004: text 3), who renders the formula "the dynastic cycle . . . changed."

14 Other examples that remain in the literature, given that they have proven to correspond to historical realities, are the Dynasty of Akkad (c. twenty-third century), the Gutian period or "Gutian Interregnum" (which would, if a real period, fall between the Akkad Dynasty and the Ur III Dynasty), and the Isin Dynasty (twentieth to eighteenth centuries BCE). In some strands of twentieth-century scholarship, earlier "dynasties" in the Sumerian King List were also accorded historical reality, and it was not uncommon to develop chronological schemes on this basis. Notably, Leonard Woolley, the excavator of Ur, tended to read the archaeological record in light of the Sumerian King List (even identifying "the Flood" among the excavated strata). For him, the discovery of inscriptions naming kings of the "First Dynasty of Ur" proved this text's reliability, and it was warranted to designate a (putatively) later archaeological assemblage by the term "Second Dynasty" (see, e.g., Woolley 1954: 14–16, 93, 110). Most of the dynasties recorded in the Sumerian King List,

however, have failed to make an appearance as historical phenomena recognizable as "periods" in the textual and archaeological record (while Woolley's identification of "the Flood" has been generally abandoned). In light of the recognition that the Sumerian King List presents a political program more than a record of past facts, the units of the sequence given therein were largely omitted from modern periodization.

15 The omen is Götze 1947: plate 123, ll. 9–10. This and the citations that follow are collected under *palû* A, mng. 3, in *CAD* 2005.

16 The "Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty" was published, with extensive commentary, by Finkelstein (1966). Though his explanation of the meaning and usage of BALA/*palû* is correct, Finkelstein's inference that it must carry its temporal reference in this text, therefore the sequence of BALAs must signify the historical sequence of "periods of X," does not follow.

17 The text of MUL.APIN is published in a score edition with astronomical as well as philological commentary by Hermann Hunger and David Pingree (1989). For the section cited here, Tablet II ii 18–20, see Hunger and Pingree 1989: 96, with commentary on p. 132; and on the date and composition history of MUL.APIN, see ibid.: 9–12.

18 Finkelstein (1966: 104) argues that while the "*palû* of the Amorites" may have encompassed the entire period between the Ur III Dynasty and the Kassite period, the name given to this period referred specifically to "the Amorite dynasty *par excellence*, that of Babylon." In this he is followed by Hunger and Pingree (1989: 132) but apparently not by Charpin (2004: 38).

19 For a brief overview of Mesopotamian methods of dating, see Glassner 2004: 16–17. A more detailed survey is presented by William W. Hallo (1983), who makes a number of intriguing observations about Mesopotamian chronography; the same article later appeared in a second, updated edition (Hallo 1988), complete with the references the first version lacked. The following notes offer a selection of references concerning particular dating methods.

20 Nowadays of course we reproduce their data so as to put the time line of Mesopotamian history in order. All currently known year names are cataloged on the website Mesopotamian Year Names, prepared by Marcel Sigrist and Peter Damerow (2001): cdli.ucla.edu/tools/yearnames/yn_index.html. In his entry "Datenlisten" in *RlA*, vol. 2 (1938), Arthur Ungnad presents all the lists of year names known at the time he wrote and compiles all attested year names. Ungnad's collection of material has not yet been superseded, but more year-name lists have since been discovered. An updated list of them is provided by Malcolm J. A. Horsnell (2004: 167n9) in an article discussing how year names and lists thereof were generated and used in antiquity and how they may be used by the historian today. Michel Tanret (2001) focuses on a cluster of year-name lists found in the recent excavation of a private house in Sippar, synthesizing the archaeological and textual evidence of the archives to which these tablets belonged to produce a close-up view of the creation and use of such date lists.

21 There are gaps in coverage, however, and no extant list encompasses the empire's

last few decades. Ungnad's comprehensive presentation of *limmu* (eponym) lists in his entry "Eponymen" in *RlA*, vol. 2 (1938) has been superseded both by new treatments and by a series of new discoveries. On the *limmu* institution as it operated in early second-millennium Assur and its colonies, see Dercksen 2004: 52–62 (with previous literature); for the Neo-Assyrian period, see Millard 1994. Two eponym chronicles (one apiece for the second and first millennia) are presented in transliteration and translation by Glassner (2004: 160–76).

22 On the establishment of the system of dating by numbered regnal years during the Kassite period, see Brinkman 1976: app. A, esp. 397, 402.

23 The compilation of king lists of this kind did not depend on whether dating by regnal years was in use. Such lists were compiled and in some cases reedited in several political centers over the course of many centuries; in time the Assyrian and Babylonian king lists achieved canonical status commensurate with the historical importance of Assyria and Babylon. On the recensions of the Sumerian King List and similar Sumerian chronographic texts, besides the references in nn. 12–13 above, see D. O. Edzard's entry "Königslisten und Chroniken, A. Sumerisch" in *RlA*, vol. 6 (1980). In the subsequent entry, "Königslisten und Chroniken, B. Akkadisch," Grayson provides editions of the extant king lists in Akkadian plus the relevant section of the Ptolemaic Canon.

24 On the establishment of "eras" in the Hellenistic period, see Bickerman 1980: 70–78. The first was the Seleucid era, which began with the year 312/311 BCE, the year Seleucus I Nicator secured power in Babylon. The Seleucid era continued in use both in and beyond the Seleucid kingdom for many centuries, even into the modern period, and in the meantime the invention of this method of dating inspired the inauguration of other eras (including eventually the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim ones). In an essay exploring the origins and functions of "era" dating, Hallo (1984–85: 149) argues that the hypothetical "era of Nabonassar" (king of Babylon, r. 747–734 BCE) has a valid historical basis, though it never came to be employed as a dating system, and he suggests that this proto-era might actually have been the model for the Seleucid era. Citing a point made by Bickerman, Hallo (ibid.: 144) observes that the development of mathematical astronomy in mid-first-millennium Babylonia was the precondition and probable inspiration for dating by eras. Here and elsewhere Hallo (1983: 14; 1984–85: 147, 149; 1988: 186) has pointed out that the system of dating by Olympiads and that of dating from Rome's foundation (*ab urbe condita*), which were introduced in the Hellenistic period and retrojected to a starting point in the eighth century BCE, are thus roughly coordinated with the "era of Nabonassar."

25 To give an example, Graham Hagens (2005) analyzes instances in the Assyrian King List in which the terms of competing rulers or officials may have been "telescoped," so that political rivalries resulted in the codification of chronological error. Not all of his proposals are persuasive, but his arguments reveal the logical risks inherent in relying on chronography to fix chronology.

26 Glassner (2004: 7–8) lists several examples of such time-depth indicators in the

foundation inscriptions for temples; they generally report the number of years that elapsed from king A's building of the temple to king B's rebuilding of it. The earliest comes from an inscription of the thirteenth-century Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I commemorating his rebuilding of the temple of Ishtar in Assur. He states that his predecessor Ilu-shumma had previously built this temple 720 years ago (Grayson 1987: no. A.0.78.11, ll. 15–28). See also the next section and nn. 37–43, where I return to this topic from a different angle.

27 The ancient Mesopotamian city is the subject (and title) of Van De Mieroop 1997a. Mesopotamian urbanism is also illuminated in Leick 2001, a book that devotes one chapter each to 10 important cities of Mesopotamia.

28 The ideal harmony linking community and deity through good management of resources and cult is famously expressed by the Warka Vase, found in late fourth-millennium Uruk. The produce of a flourishing land is presented by a procession of people before the goddess Inanna, tutelary deity of Uruk, whose bounty thus sustains the land and its people (see Winter 2007).

29 On political autonomy as the gods' concern, see von Dassow 2011.

30 For an accessible overview of how temples and cultic service worked in ancient Mesopotamian theory and practice, see John F. Robertson (1995); he also discusses modern theories on the topic. In the same volume, Michael Roaf (1995) provides a brief survey of how Mesopotamian temples were built. The best recent presentation of ancient Near Eastern religion for nonspecialists, though it focuses on Hatti, is Beckman 2005. While the details pertain to the Hittite world, the general structure of religious ideas and practices that Gary Beckman describes is broadly valid for the entire ancient Near East.

31 On foundation deposits, the basic study remains that of Richard Ellis (1968), who also discusses and differentiates objects placed elsewhere than in the foundations; he provides illustrations of several types of objects and deposits. The ancient terminology and its referents are further illuminated by Sally Dunham (1986). Primacy is appropriately accorded to the object, and the operations in which it is employed and carries meaning, over the text that may be inscribed on it.

32 See Jean-Claude Margueron's (2004: 261–63, with fig. 251) succinct remarks on the bronze foundation pegs driven through pierced plaques found in early third-millennium temples at Mari, which he illustrates; compare the later third-millennium inscribed plaques, sometimes accompanied by pegs (ibid.: 331–32, with figs. 310–12).

33 Clay nails and cones have usually been conflated as one category of object, but they differ in function and significance as well as form. See von Dassow 2009: 75–85 (this article also serves as the basis for much of the discussion that follows).

34 See Braun-Holzinger 1996; see also below, with nn. 42–43.

35 Cones and tablets of Sin-kashid's palace had already entered the antiquities market when the archaeological excavation of Uruk commenced in 1912. The excavation director, Julius Jordan, identified the spot these inscriptions were coming from, dug there, and found more of them. Curiously, however, the structure he partly exca-

vated, whose foundation was seeded with inscribed clay cones and tablets recording the construction of the palace, appears not to have been part of the palace itself, which was completely exposed after excavations recommenced in 1928. See von Dassow 2009: 79–80, with references there.

36 On the findspots and spatial distribution of inscriptions of Sin-kashid's dynasty at the site of Uruk, see van Ess 2001: 347–58. In some instances, the building identified by inscriptions may never have been built, as may be the case with the palace of Naram-Sin of Uruk (probably Sin-kashid's predecessor) commemorated by two clay cones and a clay nail (see von Dassow 2009, with Eckart Frahm's appendix on the clay nail, and, for a third newly identified exemplar, Sanati-Müller 2011). In the case of the clay nails recording Sin-kashid's construction of two temples at the town of Durum, which were found abandoned in kilns beneath Sin-kashid's palace at Uruk, whether or not those two temples were in fact built, these inscriptions never got there. In other cases, meanwhile, inscriptions were deliberately placed in structures other than those they commemorate or even in other sites, thus to reiterate commemoration of the ruler's building works at important locations. See ibid.: 83–85, with nn. 53–54.

37 See n. 26 above, where an Assyrian example is given. Paul-Alain Beaulieu (1994: 41) calls attention to the significance of calculating and citing such figures—regardless of their accuracy—as indicators of an understanding of the past as history that transpired over the course of linear, countable time.

38 See the translation of Beaulieu in Hallo 2000: no. 2.123, pp. 310–13. The inscription is reedited as no. 2.12 in Schaudig 2001. While the inscription of Nabonidus dates the Kassite king Shagarakti-Shuriash only a century too high, the figure for Naram-Sin is roughly double the right number of years. Most of the inscriptions of Nabonidus that commemorate the building of temples contain reports of seeking and finding the original foundations, identified by original inscriptions, through excavation projects on which scholars worked alongside digging crews. However, Hanspeter Schaudig (2003) demonstrates that many of the ancient inscriptions Nabonidus cites (including the tablets purportedly of Naram-Sin found in the Ebabbar) must actually have been concocted in his own time. (Schaudig [ibid.: 491] also points out that most of the excavation and reconstruction projects must have been conducted by the king's staff, as Nabonidus himself was absent on an extended religious expedition in Arabia.) On the antiquarian and even historical dimensions of Nabonidus's unprecedented concern to find and curate old artifacts, see Beaulieu 1989: 138–42; and cf. Schaudig 2003: 490–97. On this kind of activity in first-millennium BCE Mesopotamia generally, see Beaulieu 1994 and nn. 42–43 below.

39 The like is not said in the report about the Eulmash of the goddess of battle, but the omission is more than compensated by another inscription of Nabonidus that actually quotes a putative inscription of Shagarakti-Shuriash. In the quoted text, which as Schaudig shows must have been composed in the time of Nabonidus, Shagarakti-Shuriash purportedly states that the temple had fallen into ruin after the time of

Sabium, a forebear of Hammurabi, and that he has now restored it (Schaudig 2001: no. 2.14 iii: 40–65; for analysis, see Schaudig 2003: 465–74). In another part of the same inscription (Schaudig 2001: no. 2.14 ii: 28–74), Nabonidus, reporting on his restoration of the Eulmash temple of Ishtar of Akkad, lists previous kings who had sought the original foundation, failed to find it, and left written records saying so. Nabonidus, however, conducted a three-year excavation campaign that was crowned with success, exposing the foundation of Naram-Sin. Unfortunately for the credibility of Nabonidus and his team of scholars, Schaudig (2003: 474–78) shows that this report, which contains numerous anachronisms, cannot be a wholly factual record either of the contents of earlier records or of the excavation results.

40 Here I follow Christopher E. Woods's (2004) reconstruction of the ancient history of the Sun-God Tablet and the assemblage to which it belongs. With regard to the find itself, which was made in 1881, Woods points out that (a) one of the three clay impressions was evidently taken from a different tablet; therefore (b) there must originally have been a second tablet (as some reports at the time of the find suggest), which (c) might have been made by Nabonidus to accompany the original. Furthermore, he notes the suspicion that the two clay impressions lacking an inscription may be modern additions to the find (ibid.: 38n72). Woods also provides an edition of the text of both the tablet and the inscribed clay impression and discusses the imagery and its captions in detail.

41 An elaborate example, complete with curses on the one who would fail to obey the injunction, is found in an inscription of Shamshi-Addu, king of Assyria in the eighteenth century BCE, recording his building of the temple of Enlil in the city of Assur (Grayson 1987: no. A.0.39.1). The injunction may also apply to uninscribed objects with which the builder marks his work. In an inscription for the temple of the god Assur, Erishum, king of Assur, states that any king who rebuilds that temple should not disturb the clay nail that he drove in but restore it to its place (ibid.: no. A.0.33.1, ll. 21–23). Since in that period clay nails appear not to have been used as carriers of inscriptions in Assur, Erishum's clay nail must have been uninscribed (von Dassow 2009: 66, 78, with nn. 8, 36).

42 The curating of antiquities in first-millennium BCE Mesopotamia occasionally entailed the creation of "museums." Irene Winter (2000) has argued that the practices of excavation, study, conservation, and display of ancient artifacts and texts in this period are tantamount to a native Mesopotamian practice of archaeology. A contrary assessment is offered by Schaudig (2003: 490–97), who argues that these practices only superficially resemble those of archaeology and do not represent truly "historical" inquiry.

43 The inscription is Frayne 1990: no. E4.4.1.8; the sixth-century exemplar is no. 26. The scribe who copied it added a colophon identifying his copy as the property of Ezida, which was the temple of Nabu (god of writing) in the city of Borsippa, and identifying himself, Nabu-balassu-iqbi of the Misiraya family. This example is one of many; numerous others are given by Beaulieu (1994), Winter (2000), Woods (2004),

and Gonzalo Rubio (2009), the last in a wide-ranging study of ancient Mesopotamian antiquarianism rich with references. Rubio discusses much of the chronographic and other material that I cover here, albeit from a rather different perspective.

44 The modern standard edition of the epic, in its successive recensions, is George 2003. The same author has also produced an excellent Penguin edition (George 1999).

45 This exchange occurred at the public forum "The Future of the Past in Iraq," which took place at the conclusion of the workshop "The Organization of Knowledge in Antiquity: Archives and Records Management in the Ancient Near East," organized by Steven Garfinkle at Western Washington University in Bellingham on May 22, 2006. Several of the workshop participants, not including myself, served as panelists in the public forum. I quote the question from the audience member verbatim, and I quote the answer given by Mogens Trolle Larsen as closely as I can remember it.

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