

= Tell Brak =

Tell Brak ( Nagar , Nawar ) was an ancient city in Syria . Its remains constitute a tell located in the Upper Khabur region , near the modern village of Tell Brak , 50 kilometers north @-@ east of Al @-@ Hasaka city , Al @-@ Hasakah Governorate . The city 's original name is unknown . During the second half of the third millennium BC , the city was known as Nagar and later on , Nawar .

Starting as a small settlement in the seventh millennium BC , Tell Brak evolved during the fourth millennium BC into one of the biggest cities in Northern Mesopotamia , and interacted with the cultures of southern Mesopotamia . The city shrank in size at the beginning of the third millennium BC with the end of Uruk period , before expanding again around c . 2600 BC , when it became known as Nagar , and was the capital of a regional kingdom that controlled the Khabur river valley . Nagar was destroyed around c . 2300 BC , and came under the rule of the Akkadian Empire , followed by a period of independence as a Hurrian city @-@ state , before contracting at the beginning of the second millennium BC . Nagar prospered again by the 19th century BC , and came under the rule of different regional powers . In c . 1500 BC , Tell Brak was a center of Mitanni before being destroyed by Assyria c . 1300 BC . The city never regained its former importance , remaining as a small settlement , and abandoned at some points of its history , until disappearing from records during the early Abbasid era .

Different peoples inhabited the city , including the Halafians , Semites and the Hurrians . Tell Brak was a religious center from its earliest periods ; its famous Eye Temple is unique in the Fertile Crescent , and its main deity , Belet @-@ Nagar , was revered in the entire Khabur region , making the city a pilgrimage site . The culture of Tell Brak was defined by the different civilizations that inhabited it , and it was famous for its glyptic style , equids and glass . When independent , the city was ruled by a local assembly or by a monarch . Tell Brak was a trade center due to its location between Anatolia , the Levant and southern Mesopotamia . It was excavated by Max Mallowan in 1937 , then regularly by different teams between 1979 and 2011 , when the work stopped due to the Syrian Civil War .

= = History = =

Tell Brak is the current name of the tell . East of the mound lies a dried lake named " Khatuniah " which was recorded as " Lacus Beberaci " ( the lake of Brak ) in the Roman map Tabula Peutingeriana . The lake was probably named after Tell Brak which was the nearest camp in the area . The name " Brak " might therefore be an echo of the most ancient name which is unknown .

= = = Early settlement = = =

The earliest period A , is dated to the proto Halaf culture c . 6500 BC , when a small settlement existed . Many objects dated to that period were discovered including the Halaf pottery . By 5000 BC , Halaf culture transformed into Northern Ubaid , and many Ubaid materials were found in Tell Brak . Excavations and surface survey of the site and its surroundings , unearthed a large platform of patzen bricks that dates to late Ubaid , and revealed that Tell Brak developed as an urban center slightly earlier than better known cities of southern Mesopotamia , such as Uruk .

= = = The first city = = =

In southern Mesopotamia , the original Ubaid culture evolved into the Uruk period . The people of the southern Uruk period used military and commercial means to expand the civilization . In Northern Mesopotamia , the post Ubaid period is designated Late Chalcolithic / Northern Uruk period , during which , Tell Brak , whose original name is unknown , started to expand .

Period Brak E witnessed the building of the city 's walls , and Tell Brak expansion beyond the mound to form a lower town . By the late 5th millennium BC , Tell Brak reached the size of c . 55 hectares . Area TW of the tell ( see the map for Tell Brak 's areas ) revealed the remains of a

monumental building with two meters thick walls and a basalt threshold . In front of the building , a sherd paved street was discovered , leading to the northern entrance of the city .

The city continued to expand during period F , and reached the size of 130 hectares . Four mass graves dating to c . 3800 ? 3600 BC were discovered in the surroundings of the tell , and they suggest that the process of urbanization was accompanied by internal social stress , and an increase in the organization of warfare . The first half of period F ( designated LC3 ) , saw the erection of the Eye Temple , which was named for the thousands of small alabaster " Eye idols " figurines discovered in it . Those idols were also found in area TW .

Interactions with the Mesopotamian south grew during the second half of period F ( designated LC4 ) c . 3600 BC , and an Urukian colony was established in the city . With the end of Uruk culture c 3000 BC , Tell Brak 's Urukian colony was abandoned and deliberately leveled by its occupants . Tell Brak contracted during the following periods H and J , and became limited to the mound . Evidence exists for an interaction with the Mesopotamian south during period H , represented by the existence of materials similar to the ones produced during the southern Jemdet Nasr period . The city remained a small settlement during the Ninevite 5 period , with a small temple and associated sealing activities .

= = = Kingdom of Nagar = = =

Around c . 2600 BC , a large administrative building was built and the city expanded out of the tell again . The revival is connected with the Kish civilization , and the city was named " Nagar " , which might be of Sinitic origin and mean a " cultivated place " . Amongst the important buildings dated to the kingdom , is an administrative building or temple named the " Brak Oval " , located in area TC . The building have a curved exterior wall reminiscent of the Khafajah " Oval Temple " in central Mesopotamia . However , aside from the wall , the comparison between the two buildings in terms of architecture is difficult , as each building follows a different plan .

The oldest references to Nagar comes from Mari and tablets discovered at Nabada . However , the most important source on Nagar come from the archives of Ebla . Most of the texts record the ruler of Nagar using his title " En " , without mentioning a name . However , the text from Mari record king Amar @-@ An , who could be identical to Mara @-@ II , a king of Nagar mentioned in one of Ebla 's texts . Thus , Mara @-@ II is the only king known by name for pre @-@ Akkadian Nagar , he ruled a little more than a generation before the kingdom 's destruction , and was most probably the " En " recorded in the other texts , including the ones from Nabada .

At its height , Nagar encompassed most of the southwestern half of the Khabur Basin , and was a diplomatic and political equal of the Eblaite and Mariote states . The kingdom included many subordinate cities such as Hazna , and most importantly Nabada , which was a city @-@ state annexed by Nagar , and served as a provincial capital . Nagar was involved in the wide diplomatic network of Ebla , and the relations between the two kingdoms involved both confrontations and alliances . A text from Ebla mention a victory of Ebla 's king ( perhaps Irkab @-@ Damu ) over Nagar . However , a few years later , a treaty was concluded , and the relations progressed toward a dynastic marriage between princess Tagrish @-@ Damu of Ebla , and prince Ultum @-@ Huhu , Nagar 's monarch 's son .

Nagar was defeated by Mari in year seven of the Eblaite vizier Ibrium 's term , causing the blockage of trade routes between Ebla and southern Mesopotamia via upper Mesopotamia . Later , Ebla 's king Isar @-@ Damu concluded an alliance with Nagar and Kish against Mari , and the campaign was headed by the Eblaite vizier Ibbi @-@ Sipish , who led the combined armies to victory in a battle near Terqa . Afterwards , the alliance attacked the rebellious Eblaite vassal city of Armi . Ebla was destroyed approximately three years after Terqa 's battle , and soon after , Nagar followed in c . 2300 BC . Large parts of the city were burned , an act attributed either to Mari , or Sargon of Akkad .

= = = Akkadian period = = =

Following its destruction , Nagar was rebuilt by the Akkadian empire , to form a center of the provincial administration . The city included the whole tell and a lower town at the southern edge of the mound . Two public buildings were built during the early Akkadian periods , one complex in area SS , and another in area FS . The building of area FS included its own temple and might have served as a caravanserai , being located near the northern gate of the city . The early Akkadian monarchs were occupied with internal conflicts , and Tell Brak was temporarily abandoned by Akkad at some point preceding the reign of Naram @-@ Sin . The abandonment might be connected with an environmental event , that caused the desertification of the region .

The destruction of Nagar 's kingdom created a power vacuum in the Upper Khabur . The Hurrians , formerly concentrated in Urkesh , took advantage of the situation to control the region as early as Sargon 's latter years . Tell Brak was known as " Nawar " for the Hurrians , and kings of Urkesh took the title " King of Urkesh and Nawar " , first attested in the seal of Urkesh 's king Atal @-@ Shen .

The use of the title continued during the reigns of Atal @-@ Shen 's successors , Tupkish and Tish @-@ Atal , who ruled only in Urkesh . The Akkadians under Naram @-@ Sin incorporated Nagar firmly into their empire . The most important Akkadian building in the city is called the " Palace of Naram @-@ Sin " , which had parts of it built over the original Eye Temple . Despite its name , the palace is closer to a fortress , as it was more of a fortified depot for the storage of collected tribute rather than a residential seat . The palace was burned during Naram @-@ Sin 's reign , perhaps by a Lullubi attack , and the city was burned toward the end of the Akkadian period c . 2193 BC , probably by the Gutians .

= = = Post @-@ Akkadian kingdom = = =

The Akkadian period was followed by period N , during which Nagar was the center of an independent Hurrian dynasty , evidenced by the discovery of a seal , recording the name of king Talpus @-@ Atili of Nagar , who ruled during or slightly after the reign of Naram @-@ Sin 's son Shar @-@ Kali @-@ Sharri . The view that Tell Brak came under the control of Ur III is refused , and evidence exists for a Hurrian rebuilding of Naram @-@ Sin 's palace , erroneously attributed by Max Mallowan to Ur @-@ Nammu of Ur . Period N saw a reduction in the city 's size , with public buildings being abandoned , and the lower town evacuated . Few short lived houses were built in area CH during period N , and although greatly reduced in size , archaeology provided evidence for continued occupation in the city , instead of abandonment .

= = = Foreign rule and later periods = = =

During period P , Nagar was densely populated in the northern ridge of the tell . The city came under the rule of Mari , and was the site of a decisive victory won by Yahdun @-@ Lim of Mari over Shamshi @-@ Adad I of Assyria . Nagar lost its importance and came under the rule of Kahat in the 18th century BC . The name " Nagar " ceased occurring following the Old Babylonian period , however , the city continued to exist as Nawar , under the control of Mitanni .

During period Q , Tell Brak was an important trade city in the Mitanni state . A two story palace was built c . 1500 BC in the northern section of the tell , in addition to an associated one roomed temple . However , the rest of the tell was not occupied , and a lower town extended to the north but is now all but destroyed through modern agriculture . Two Mitannian legal documents , bearing the names of kings Artashumara and Tushratta , were recovered from the city , which was destroyed between c.1300 and 1275 BC , in two waves , first at the hands of the Assyrian king Adad @-@ Nirari I , then by his successor Shalmaneser I .

Little evidence of an occupation on the tell exists following the destruction of the Mitannian city , however , a series of small villages existed in the lower town during the Assyrian periods . The remains of a Hellenistic settlement were discovered on a nearby satellite tell , to the northwestern edge of the main tell . However , excavations recovered no ceramics of the Parthian @-@ Roman or Byzantine @-@ Sasanian periods , although sherds dating to those periods are noted . In the middle of the first millennium AD , a fortified building was erected in the northeastern lower town .

The building was dated by Antoine Poidebard to the Justinian era ( sixth century AD ) , on the basis of its architecture . The last occupation period of the site was during the early Abbasid Caliphate 's period , when a canal was built to provide the town with water from the nearby Jaghjagh River .

= = Society = =

= = = People and language = = =

The Halafians were the indigenous people of Neolithic northern Syria , who later adopted the southern Ubaidian culture . Contact with the Mesopotamian south increased during the early and middle Northern Uruk period , and southern people moved to Tell Brak in the late Uruk period , forming a colony , which produced a mixed society . The Urukian colony was abandoned by the colonist toward the end of the fourth millennium BC , leaving the indigenous Tell Brak a much contracted city . The pre @-@ Akkadian kingdom 's population was Semitic , and spoke its own East Semitic dialect of the Eblaite language used in Ebla and Mari . The Nagarite dialect is closer to the dialect of Mari rather than that of Ebla .

No Hurrian names are recorded in the pre @-@ Akkadian period , although the name of prince Ultum @-@ Huhu is difficult to understand as Semitic . During the Akkadian period , both Semitic and Hurrian names were recorded , as the Hurrians appears to have taken advantage of the power vacuum caused by the destruction of the pre @-@ Akkadian kingdom , in order to migrate and expand in the region . The post @-@ Akkadian period Tell Brak had a strong Hurrian element , and Hurrian named rulers , although the region was also inhabited by Amorite tribes . A number of the Amorite Banu @-@ Yamina tribes settled the surroundings of Tell Brak during the reign of Zimri @-@ Lim of Mari , and each group used its own language ( Hurrian and Amorite languages ) . Tell Brak was a center of the Hurrian @-@ Mitannian empire , which had Hurrian as its official language . However , Akkadian was the region 's international language , evidenced by the post @-@ Akkadian and Mitannian eras tablets , discovered at Tell Brak and written in Akkadian .

= = = Religion = = =

The findings in the Eye Temple indicate that Tell Brak is among the earliest sites of organized religion in northern Mesopotamia . It is unknown to which deity the Eye Temple was dedicated , and the " Eyes " figurines appears to be votive offerings to that unknown deity . Michel Meslin hypothesized that the temple was the center of the Sumerian Innana or the Semitic Ishtar , and that the " Eyes " figurines were a representation of an all @-@ seeing female deity .

During the pre @-@ Akkadain kingdom 's era , Hazna , an old cultic center of northern Syria , served as a pilgrimage center for Nagar . The Eye Temple remained in use , but as a small shrine , while the goddess Belet @-@ Nagar became the kingdom 's paramount deity . The temple of Belet @-@ Nagar is not identified but probably lies beneath the Mitannian palace . The Eblaite deity Kura was also venerated in Nagar , and the monarchs are attested visiting the temple of the Semitic deity Dagon in Tuttul . During the Akkadian period , the temple in area FS was dedicated to the Sumerian god Shakkan , the patron of animals and countrysides . Tell Brak was an important religious Hurrian center , and the temple of Belet @-@ Nagar retained its cultic importance in the entire region until the early second millennium BC .

= = = Culture = = =

Northern Mesopotamia evolved independently from the south during the Late Chalcolithic / early and middle Northern Uruk ( 4000 @-@ 3500 BC ) . This period was characterized by a strong emphasis on holy sites , among which , the Eye Temple was the most important in Tell Brak . The building containing " Eyes " idols in area TW was wood paneled , whose main room had been lined with wooden panels . The building also contained the earliest known semi columned facade , which

is a character that will be associated with temples in later periods .

By late Northern Uruk and especially after 3200 BC , northern Mesopotamia came under the full cultural dominance of the southern Uruk culture , which affected Tell Brak 's architecture and administration . The southern influence is most obvious in the level named the " Latest Jemdet Nasr " of the Eye Temple , which had southern elements such as cone mosaics . The Uruk presence was peaceful as it is first noted in the context of feasting ; commercial deals during that period were traditionally ratified through feasting . The excavations in area TW revealed feasting to be an important local habit , as two cooking facilities , large amounts of grains , skeletons of animals , a domed baking oven and barbecuing fire pits were discovered . Among the late Uruk materials found at Tell Brak , is a standard text for educated scribes ( the " Standard Professions " text ) , part of the standardized education taught in the 3rd millennium BC over a wide area of Syria and Mesopotamia .

The pre @-@ Akkadian kingdom was famed for its acrobats , who were in demand in Ebla and trained local Eblaite entertainers . The kingdom also had its own local glyptic style called the " Brak Style " , which was distinct from the southern sealing variants , employing soft circled shapes and sharpened edges . The Akkadian administration had little effect on the local administrative traditions and sealing style , and Akkadian seals existed side by side with the local variant . The Hurrians employed the Akkadian style in their seals , and Elamite seals were discovered , indicating an interaction with the western Iranian Plateau . Tell Brak provided great knowledge on the culture of Mitanni , which produced glass using sophisticated techniques , that resulted in different varieties of multicolored and decorated shapes . Samples of the elaborate Nuzi ware were discovered , in addition to seals that combine distinctive Mitannian elements with the international motifs of that period .

= = = = Wagons = = = =

Seals from Tell Brak and Nabada dated to the pre @-@ Akkadian kingdom , revealed the use of four @-@ wheeled wagons and war carriages . Excavation in area FS recovered clay models of equids and wagons dated to the Akkadian and post @-@ Akkadian periods . The models provides information about the types of wagons used during that period ( 2350 @-@ 2000 BC ) , and they include four wheeled vehicles and two types of two wheeled vehicles ; the first is a cart with fixed seats and the second is a cart where the driver stands above the axle . The chariots were introduced during the Mitanni era , and none of the pre @-@ Mitanni carriages can be considered chariots , as they are mistakenly described in some sources .

= = Government = =

The first city had the characteristics of large urban centers , such as monumental buildings , and seems to have been ruled by a kinship based assembly , headed by elders . The pre @-@ Akkadian kingdom was decentralized , and the provincial center of Nabada was ruled by a council of elders , next to the king 's representative . The Nagarite monarchs had to tour their kingdom regularly in order to assert their political control . During the early Akkadian period , Nagar was administrated by local officials . However , central control was tightened and the number of Akkadian officials increased , following the supposed environmental event that preceded the construction of Naram @-@ Sin 's palace . The post @-@ Akkadian Nagar was a city @-@ state kingdom , that gradually lost its political importance during the early second millennium BC , as no evidence for a king dating to that period exists .

= = = Rulers of Tell Brak = = =

= = Economy = =

Throughout its history , Tell Brak was an important trade center ; it was an entrepot of obsidian trade during the Chalcolithic , as it was situated on the river crossing between Anatolia , the Levant and southern Mesopotamia . The countryside was occupied by smaller towns , villages and hamlets , but the city 's surroundings were empty within three kilometers . This was probably due to the intensive cultivation in the immediate hinterland , in order to sustain the population . The city manufactured different objects , including chalices made of obsidian and white marble , faience , flint tools and shell inlays . However , evidence exists for a slight shift in production of goods toward manufacturing objects desired in the south , following the establishment of the Uruk colony .

Trade was also an important economic activity for the pre @-@ Akkadian kingdom of Nagar , which had Ebla and Kish as major partners . The kingdom produced glass , wool , and was famous for breeding and trading in the Kunga , a hybrid of a donkey and a female onager . Tell Brak remained an important commercial center during the Akkadian period , and was one of Mitanni 's main trade cities . Many objects were manufactured in Mitannian Tell Brak , including furniture made of ivory , wood and bronze , in addition to glass . The city provided evidence for the international commercial contacts of Mitanni , including Egyptian , Hittite and Mycenaean objects , some of which were produced in the region to satisfy the local taste .

= = = Equids = = =

The Kungas of pre @-@ Akkadian Nagar were used for drawing the carriages of kings before the domestication of the horse , and a royal procession included up to fifty animals . The kungas of Nagar were in great demand in the Eblaite empire ; they cost two kilos of silver , fifty times the price of a donkey , and were imported regularly by the monarchs of Ebla to be used as transport animals and gifts for allied cities . The horse was known in the region during the third millennium BC , but was not used as a draught animal before c . 18th century BC .

= = Site = =

= = = Excavations = = =

Tell Brak was excavated by the British archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan , husband of Agatha Christie , in 1937 and 1938 . The Eye Temple was the first building unearthed and some artifacts from that initial excavation are now preserved in the British Museum 's collection , including the famous Tell Brak Head .

A team from the Institute of Archaeology of the University of London , led by David and Joan Oates , worked in the tell for 14 seasons between 1976 and 1993 . After 1993 , excavations were conducted by a number of field directors under the general guidance of David ( until 2004 ) and Joan Oates . Those directors included Roger Matthews ( between 1994 @-@ 1996 ) , for the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research of the University of Cambridge ; Geoff Emberling ( between 1998 @-@ 2002 ) and Helen McDonald ( between 2000 @-@ 2004 ) , for the British Institute for the Study of Iraq and the Metropolitan Museum of Art . In 2006 , Augusta McMahon became field director , also sponsored by the British Institute for the Study of Iraq . A regional archaeological field survey in a 20 km ( 12 mi ) radius around Brak was supervised by Henry T. Wright ( between 2002 ? 2005 ) . Many of the finds from the excavations at Tell Brak are on display in the Deir ez @-@ Zor Museum . The most recent excavations took place in the spring of 2011 , but archaeological work is currently suspended due to the ongoing Syrian Civil War .

= = = Syrian Civil War = = =

According to the Syrian authorities , the camp of archaeologists was looted , along with the tools and ceramics kept in it . The site changed hands between the different combatants , mainly the Kurdish People 's Protection Units and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant . In early 2015 , Tell

Brak was taken by the Kurdish forces after light fighting with the Islamic State .