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Near East

A Brutal Social Landscape: Mesopotamian Civilization as Exclusive and Exploitative?

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Ancient Mesopotamia at the Dawn of Civilization: the Evolution of an Urban Landscape (2008) Guillermo Algaze. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

The nature of 'origins', and its twin companion the 'rise and fall of civilizations', are continuously subject to inquiry by philosophers, historians, and social scientists. The inquiry began several millennia ago. The question remains the same: "What is the origin of X?" X may be the cosmos or a civilization. With the passing of time the answers differ dramatically. The Sumerians, in asking of the origins of agriculture, kingship, or the plow, had a singular answer: They were all the gifts of the gods. Divine intervention was the primary agent of change whether in nature or in society. It took the passing of millennia before the Greeks challenged the divine ordination of what we call the historical process. Attempts to answer the question, "What sort of being must being be when being becomes?," led Plato in *The Laws* and *The Republic* to outline social evolution from primitive pre-state conditions to the rise of civilization. Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, and Thucydides are but a few of the classical authors who laid the foundation for Western social thought. Their overriding concern for addressing the *origin* of things, a belief that developmental processes followed definite *patterns*, a concern for isolating the *cause(s)* that underlie patterns, a belief that all things within nature are set to specific *purposes*, and an emphasis placed on *methodology* provided guidelines that transformed historical inquiry.

In the long eighteenth century the Enlightenment challenged the theologically perceived Judeo-Christian dogma in which origins and causes were, once again, held to be guided by divine ordination. The Enlightenment propagated the notion that a utopian ideal of social harmony could be attained through the application of reason and rationality in guiding the inevitability of human progress. To the Enlightenment *philosophes* progress was reason in the survival of needs. Enlightenment philosophers, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, Ferguson, Montesquieu, Kant, Herder, Mirabeau, Locke, Diderot, Condorcet, and Adam Smith [to mention but a few, see Wolff and Cipolloni 2007] were all as one in propagating the notion that origins, causality, progress, freedom, and individuality could all be determined, achieved, and directed by the application of human reason in the service of rationality. The arch-conservative Louis Bonald (1754-1840) asked, "The great question that divides man and societies in Europe: whether man makes himself and makes society or society makes itself and makes man." Over a hundred years later the archaeologist V.G. Childe opted for *Man Makes Himself* (1936).

If origins is a millennia-long quest, the words *culture* and *civilization* are by no means old words or concepts. Samuel Johnson's celebrated dictionary of 1755 defined *culture* as "the act of cultivation, the act of tilling the ground, tillage." Such a definition was in conformity with the French *Encyclopédie*. James Boswell (1791:xxv) reported that in 1772, "On Monday March 23 I found him [Samuel Johnson] busy preparing a fourth edition of his folio dictionary… He would not admit *civilization*, but only civility. With great deference to him, I thought civilization from to civilize, better in the sense opposed to barbarity than civility." Somewhat earlier Ephraim Chambers (1728), with great prescience, noted that "Civilisation is performed by turning the information into an inquest, or vice versa." Thus, the nature of civilization was to be turned into an inquiry, to ascertain or decide upon a series of facts. Since the eighteenth century, when Chambers and Johnson reflected on the nature and definition of culture and civilization, there has been an industrial output of writing on the origin(s), nature, and even survival of culture and civilization.

In an earlier and influential work Guillermo Algaze (2005) argued that in the fourth millennium Mesopotamia was involved in an imperial expansion extending from southern Mesopotamia and colonizing distant reaches of northern Mesopotamia, Iran, and Anatolia. This book incorporates that vision, with modifications, and expands upon a narrative exposition that interweaves a multiplicity of causes and processes that

bring about the emergence of the world's first civilization. In preferring to allow 'civilization' to remain undefined the author positions the narrative itself to serve as its definition. While Algaze does not advance any single theoretical perspective, his book is very much theoretical. There is no mention of Weber, Marx, Foucault, Derrida, etc. and no review of anthropological archaeologists reflecting on the origin and evolution of civilization and/or the state. The views of Jane Jacobs on the role of "diversification and specialization" in the emergence of cities, Gunnar Myrdal and Allen Pred on "circular and cumulative causation theory", and David Ricardo and Paul Krugman on "comparative and competitive advantage" all offer positive insights for what Algaze refers to as the "Sumerian takeoff" (for an earlier discussion on "comparative advantage" and the benefits of water vs. land transport in Mesopotamia see Silver 1985). An emphasis upon the theories of classical and modern economists, as they pertain to the emergence of economic complexity, is a laudable aspect of this book. Locational theories, on the other hand, as advanced by Johann von Thünen, and Walter Christaller "fail to account for the complexity of the situation in southern Mesopotamia" (pp. 25, 27). Discussion focuses upon the causal factors that coalesced in the emergence of cultural complexity. The neo-evolutionary paradigm, which argues for the transition from band to tribe and state, which could have framed his longue dureé, is advisably ignored. Emphasis is placed upon specific environmental and cultural factors that brought about a specific archaic state in southern Mesopotamia. His theory is firmly grounded in the evidence he explores. Caroline Bynum (2009:78) has recently written that: "Searching for deep structures and large patterns seems located at the opposite pole from the postmodern sense of history-writing as fragmentary, fragile, and so to speak, under perpetual construction."

Algaze would agree. In his search for "structures" and "large patterns" he offers a robust narrative involving something more than theory, something that approaches explanation and understanding. Algaze begins his argument by positing that the favorable Mesopotamian environment is a *necessary* condition for the emergence of cultural complexity. The conjuncture of a rich "natural landscape" and a "created landscape" offered *sufficient* conditions for a "Sumerian takeoff". The natural landscape of the Tigris and Euphrates alluvial lowlands offered an agricultural base that was at least twice as productive, and more reliable, than that of neighboring societies. Recent research, well reviewed by Algaze, indicates that the Tigris-Euphrates fluvial system of the fifth and fourth millennium was entirely different from that of the historic period: "...the two rivers formed a single dynamic network of anastomosing channels at the time of early urban emergence" (p. 49). The richness in the alluvial, coastal, and aquatic ecotones offered an abundance of resources that were complimented by summer monsoonal rains that brought the alluvium summer precipitation throughout the fifth and fourth millennia. Today the monsoonal rains barely reach the northern edge of the Persian Gulf. The author's argument for southern Mesopotamia's "unique ecology and geography" (p. 8) as necessary cause for the Sumerian takeoff is both thorough and convincing. His perspective is not, however, reducible to environmental determinism— "And yet, natural advantages derived from geography and environment do not explain in and of themselves the chystallization of early Mesopotamian civilization—or that of any other pristine civilization for that matter" (p. 47).

A necessary environmental condition still requires a sufficient cultural setting and Algaze is at his best in discussing that cultural setting. The dramatic "Sumerian takeoff" in southern Mesopotamia is given a narrative frame of reference that suggests an event-like process. In fact, the "takeoff", beginning in the Middle Uruk and extending to the Late Uruk Period is a process that lasted at least 500 years, 3600-3100 BC. Conflating the chronology of the "takeoff" as event-like conjoins a number of cultural, technological, and perhaps environmental, attributes as co-occurring. Thus, the emergence of new forms of organizing labor, new forms of record keeping, trade for the control (?) of foreign resources, the domestication of the donkey, a "created landscape" allowing for cheap water transport, to mention but a few cultural transformations, are presented as contemporaneous. More than likely each of the above took place at different times (our chronology and periodization of the Uruk Period is at best both ambiguous and imprecise) and some, like seals and seal-

ings, for record keeping, and long distance trade, existed millennia prior to the Uruk Period.

In 1798 Thomas Malthus wrote *An Essay on the Principles of Population* in which he argued that natural populations grow at an exponential rate whereas the increase in food supply is linear. How then do agrarian societies break the grip of the "Malthusian Trap"? A trap characterized by an equilibrium between population growth and agricultural productivity resulting in homeostatic, self sufficient, village communities. Algaze in defending his earlier work (1993, 2005) on the Uruk Expansion and the "world's earliest regional asymmetries" recognizes that "it did not postulate a coherent set of mechanisms or processes to account for how that supraregional system evolved in the first place" (p. xvii). In the book under review Algaze addresses how the Malthusian Trap was broken and how it led to the "Sumerian take-off". In summary form, which does not do justice to Algaze's fulsome treatment, the following points are of major significance to his thesis:

1. Trade, organized for "the control of coveted resources" (p. 8), involved the import of elite goods, preciosities: metals, precious stones, timber, etc., derived from distant peripheries. "Where trade flows, its ramifications in the form of increasing social complexity and urbanism follow" (p. 100).
2. The rich "natural landscape" with a variety of complementary ecosystems was the "trigger" (p. 40) that offered environmental and geographic advantages that, in turn, allowed for a "created landscape", riverine and canal systems that allowed for integrated water transport (being up to four times more efficient than land transport) and communication.
3. New forms of organized labor. Corvée labor attached to central institutions, i.e., temples, for the construction of monumental buildings, irrigation systems, agricultural projects, warfare (?), etc.
4. New forms of record keeping within administrative bureaucracies: writing, seals, sealings, standard measures: weights, volumes, distance.

The unique presence of the above offered southern Mesopotamia a "competitive advantage" over its neighbors. This "competitive advantage" was manifest in trade, involving the control of foreign resources, changes in commodity production, labor organization, and transport advantages evident in cheap riverine and canal communication. All of the above offered opportunities for diversification and specialization, which led, in turn, to the institutionalization of growth and Mesopotamian urbanization. Once this urban process is set in motion how is it sustained? Algaze turns to the role of "circular and cumulative causation", a concept first introduced by Gunnar Myrdal (and not fundamentally different from Colin Renfrew's "multiplier effect") that involved the recognition that economic, social, and cultural factors can reinforce each other in the process of directed change. Algaze is to be commended for introducing the concepts of modern economists, Allen Pred, Paul Krugman, Nicholas Kaldor, Edward Malecki, and Paul Bairoch, among others. He makes a persuasive case that their concepts are as consequential in the past as they are today.

In the first half of the fourth millennium sites in northern Mesopotamia were roughly comparable in size to those of the south. The growth of large settlements in the south are placed at ca. 3500 BC. Of the four allegedly co-occurring 'causes' for the growth of the southern cities, cited above, two are given pride of place: trade and the unique and favorable environment. Joyce Marcus (1998) and Kent Flannery (1995), dedicated to neo-evolutionary paradigms and universally applicable models, suggest that regional chiefdoms within Mesopotamia were consolidated by force to form the state. Algaze favors a view in which "trade fueled asymmetrical growth leading to co-evolutionary polities of varying size" (p. 111). Uruk emerges as a single dominant center while the Nippur-Adab region suggests the possibility for multiple competing centers.

Algaze suggests that with the "exception of metals it [trade] was characterized by the exchange of lightly processed commodities from the periphery for processed prestige goods crafted in southern Mesopotamia" (pp. xiv-xv). This is surely wrong. The mining and transport of lapis, carnelian, and a variety of stone, was not "lightly processed" nor is there anything but very limited evidence, save perhaps for invisible exports, i.e., textiles, for "goods crafted in southern Mesopotamia" found in the periphery.

One may also add that textual evidence for the third millennium suggests that foreign traders were more likely to go to Mesopotamia than Mesopotamian merchants to go to foreign lands (for references see Lamberg-Karlovsky 2009).

Some scholars have argued that political paramountcy dominated the southern Mesopotamian social landscape (Liverani 2006) while others have emphasized the role of religion as a coalescing force (Adams 1966, Steinkeller 1999). Within southern Mesopotamia political and religious centrality may have existed within distinctive settlement regimes. Thus, throughout the third millennium Nippur was the acknowledged religious center of the southern alluvium but never the seat of a political dynasty. Algaze opts for a cautious approach: "…the fact remains that available survey and excavation data from southern Mesopotamia remains entirely too ambiguous to allow for detailed reconstruction of either the political or the religious landscape of southern societies at that time [the millennia long Uruk period (Wright and Rupley 2001)]". Such constraint does not occur in confronting the reconstruction of the economic landscape. Algaze's "Sumeran takeoff" is essentially an economic one.

World systems, cores, and peripheries dominate the perspective. Mesopotamia is an extractive, controlled, colonizing, exploitative, archival, dominant core, extracting resources from an underdeveloped, subservient, and manipulated periphery. Southern Mesopotamia "united previously independent regions and polities into an overarching system of asymmetrical relationships of interdependency that were principally, but not solely, economic in nature." The establishment of Uruk colonies in northern Mesopotamia, and regions of Anatolia and Iran, "may be conceptualized as unwittingly creating the world's earliest world system" (p. xv). Thus, Uruk colonies established for the control of trade and the extraction of resources result "unwittingly" in the earliest world system. 'World Systems Theory' (WST) takes its lead from Wallerstein's (1974) study of the emergence of capitalism in the 15th -16th century and has had a major influence upon archaeologists (Kardulias 1999). WST insists upon three assumptions, none of which are applicable to the Bronze Age of the Near East! 1. The core dominates the periphery, be it by organizational efficiency, military means, or ideological agency; 2. The core exploits the periphery by asymmetric trade; the extraction of valuable resources from the periphery by exporting cheap goods from the core, and; 3. The politics of the periphery are structured by the cores organization of trade and exchange. This essentialist view, inspired by Marx, is demonstrably wrong when applied to the Near East and perhaps to all pre-industrial societies. Algaze's faith in WST is firmly alleged but weakly demonstrated. As Marshall Sahlins (1994:412-413) has observed, in denying agency to the periphery, "world systems theory becomes the superstructural expression of the very imperialism it despises." For Algaze the periphery is a wholly benign entity, neither described nor explored, an ill-defined entity whose presence merely served southern Mesopotamia's purpose for colonization and resource exploitation. In discussing core-periphery relations Liverani (2006:69-70) is more to the point:

> The [Mesopotmian]population supports itself with local agro-pastoral resources, on which inter-regional exchange has no influence… It is certain that, in the period of concern here [the Uruk] the economic exploitation pertained to resources that were of secondary character only [elite goods]...it contributed to an increase in the local socio-economic stratification and it strengthened the elite's hold over the general population.

Mesopotamia can be characterized as a cuneiform state in which writing is favorably glossed by Algaze as "technologies of the intellect" (p. 127). In Uruk times texts were the tools of a centralized bureaucracy almost exclusively devoted to monitoring labor, the distribution of goods, production, consumption, and redistribution. These "technologies of the intellect," writing, seals, and sealings are better seen as "technologies of social control" (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1999). The community was at the service of a centralized brute power, dominating a mob of people, attached laborers and slaves, whose labor was counted by the state in the same manner and terminology as were "cattle", each with clearly delineated roles and defined rations (Renger 1996). Claude Levi Strauss (1972) was on target in regarding "the primary function of writing as a means of communica-

tion, is to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings." Within the Uruk period neither the texts nor archaeology is able to adequately address the nature of individual agency. How did the urban elites coerce the populations to accede to their authority, to accept the newly constituted institutions, and to their structured organization of labor? It is to iconography that one must turn to suggest that individual agency was involved. Algaze doubts that "we will ever be able to answer such questions" (p. 153). Recently, Denise Schmandt-Besserat (1993, 2007) has convincingly summarized what a number of authors had previously alluded to: the frequent depiction, on a number of different sites within the Uruk period, of an outsized bearded male, wearing a standard hat, hair in a chignon, wearing a net skirt and depicted as a hunter, warrior, or performing in various ritual activities. Pierre Amiet (2005) is forthright in his identification: it is the iconographic representation of a "Priest-King". The implications indicated by the presence of this individual is largely overlooked or avoided. What role did this individual(s) play in the emergence of the southern Mesopotamia city-state? The fact that this individual appears on several different sites may indicate that either priest-kings dressed in a similar manner existed in the different emerging city-states or that there was a *single* individual(s) [dynasty?] involved in the centralization of the Uruk polity. In the former instance one has co-evolving polities that emerge as independent city-states, in the latter, a single powerful center coercing and coordinating a centralized polity. Algaze firmly selects the former. It is his belief that there was no "national" Uruk state (p. 115) and that 'trade fueled asymmetric growth leading to co-evolving polities of varying size' (p. 111). Perhaps. Initial conditions may differ greatly from the intended, or unintended, consequences of an end product. The chicken is not an obvious end product of the egg. The *longue durée* of the Uruk millennia may well have vacillated between centripetal forces, directed toward a singular state, even empire, and the more normative Mesopotamian condition in which centrifugal forces fostered independent city-states.

A substantial part of Algaze's book is devoted to discussing the economic structure, trade, and industry, mostly textile, of the Ur III period (2113-2029 BC, being the dynasty of five successive kings). The Ur III period is perhaps the best textually documented period within Mesopotamian history. Even though the Ur III is later than the Uruk period by a thousand years Algaze presents it as proxy evidence for understanding the "dawn of civilization". In fact, the highly centralized, bureaucratic, extraordinarily well documented, and expansionist nature of the Ur III Empire is without parallel in the history of the Near East. Algaze's informed use of Ur III texts highlights the industrial scale production of textiles, the organization of labor, and the organization of long distance trade. To highlight the importance of long distance commerce Algaze summarizes the nature of the Assyrian colonies in Anatolia (ca. 1900 BC). An extensive archive documents a century of trade that united the Assyrian city of Asshur with the distant Anatolian town of Kultepe. Both cities traded an extensive array of goods, principally Anatolian textiles for tin from Asshur. (The tin was likely derived from Susa which in turn obtained it from further East.) The unique archive at Kultepe documents the role of individual families involved in private commerce, the effect of supply and demand on prices, the laws governing commerce, the trade routes and custom duties to be paid, as well as the personal concerns of individual merchants. Algaze (pp. 83-84) fairly asks: "Can the Ur III texts or the Kultepe archive offer an understanding of the social formation, economic or political conditions existent a millennia earlier in the Uruk period?"

> Can fragmentary statistics derived from the record of a much larger imperial society [Ur III], that thrived in southern Mesopotamia a millennium after the Uruk period be relevant to an assessment of conditions operating in the same area during the fourth millennium? Indeed they can, provided that a number of defensible assumptions are explicitly made and that those assumptions are taken for what they are: analytical sleights of hand that allow us to conceptualize a problem, however tentatively, and the results inferred from later cuneiform sources are checked against pertinent ethnographic data where possible.

Fair enough. However, his assumptions are highly dubious. His first assumption is that the

technology of wool production in the Uruk and Ur III periods had "no significant technological differences" and were "organized along the same principles" (p. 84). There is absolutely no way of documenting, or proving, either assumption. It is very doubtful that the textile production of the Uruk period compared to the extraordinarily large Ur III production and export. His last assumption is that "survey data show no significant differences in the *relative* proportion of people who lived in cities in the Mesopotamian alluvium during the Late Uruk and Ur III periods." Algaze's use of Robert Adams' survey data (1981), particularly for the Ur III period, is challenged by Piotr Steinkeller's (2006) analysis of settlement patterns and demography derived from the written texts. Steinkeller documents a significantly larger settlement number, of both cities and particularly villages, than recorded in the Adams' surveys. Finally, Algaze's method of using the cultural context of the Ur III period to understand the cultural world of the Uruk and asking both to be compared to ethnographic data, conjures up a primordial unchanging Mesopotamian universe that Edward Said (2003) found so typical of western Orientalist perspectives.

The evidence from the Ur III period counters Algaze's perspective that "asymmetric" trade characterized the relations of the Mesopotamian core with the periphery. The texts abundantly attest to the fact that the Ur III imperial design was not one of conquest nor asymmetric exploitation but one built upon economic and political alliances. The political alliances with Marhasi (eastern Iran), Anshan (central Iran), Mari (northern Mesopotamia) and Shimanum (eastern Anatolia?) offered an attempt to establish a symmetric international order between defined geographic spheres. To the east Ur's partners were Marhasi and Anshan. Both alliances were cemented by dynastic marriages during the reign of Shulgi. In the year Shulgi 34 the rule of Anshan was transferred to the family of Yabrat of Shimashki, who likely also married a daughter of Shulgi. To the west Ur's strategic and enduring ally was Mari, already initiated by Ur-Namma founder of the Ur III dynasty. There is virtually no evidence of Ur III military activity in the north or in the west. As for Shimanum, situated on the upper reaches of the Tigris, a dynastic marriage united one of Shulgi's daughters with Shimanum, while a military campaign in the year Shu-Sin 3 permitted Ur to stabilize the reign of the ruling family and restore order. The strategy of the Ur III empire was characterized more by diplomatic alliances than military conquest. Strategic alliances allowed for the extension of territorial influence, the expansion of trade routes, and security for obtaining desired resources. Rather than an asymmetric, exploitative, militarily dominant relationship, the Ur III 'core' maintained diplomatic alliances that were more symmetric – permitting Shulgi to attain an imperial consolidation over the 'periphery' by political means (Steinkeller 2008).

However, neither common economic interests, nor marriage alliances, nor security considerations were sufficient to maintain Shulgi's international system of political alliances. The imperial system began to disintegrate during the first years of Ibbi-Sin's reign (2029 BC). An increasing resistance to Ur III hegemony, the breakdown of alliances, and a military increasingly staffed and influenced by foreign contingents led to the defeat of Ur and to Ibbi-Sin being carried away in chains to Anshan. For a short period of time Ur was occupied by an Elamite garrison (Postgate 1992).

For Algaze the periphery is not an active agent of change. Its sole purpose is to provide resources, by coercion, to Mesopotamia. Far more preferable, and realistic a view is that of Kardulias (1999) who writes of a "negotiated periphery" in which the periphery negotiates its own incorporation. Alliances and warfare with the periphery go unmentioned by Algaze. Both had very considerable consequences particularly for Ur III Mesopotamia. Shulgi, the most formidable of Ur III kings, married his daughter to a son of the King of distant Marhasi, located in southeastern Iran (Steinkeller 1982, 2006b; Potts 2002). Such political alliances with the periphery offered military assistance to an expanding Ur III empire. Marhasi can now be more precisely centered along the Halil Rud River in the Jiroft of southeastern Iran—well over 1000 kilometers from Mesopotamia. To date, although systematic surveys have yet to be undertaken, over 150 sites have been located along the Halil Rud (Madjidzadeh 2008). One of these sites, Mathoutabad, is presently being excavated by Massimo Vidale who has uncov-

ered hundreds of sherds of Mesopotamian (Uruk period) beveled-rim bowls within a local cultural context dated to the first half of the fourth millennium.

What happened to the Ur III Empire, or for that matter, the Uruk? For the Ur III we know that Mesopotamia was brought to its knees in a military defeat coordinated by the periphery, an alliance of the Elamites and Shimashki. Daniel Potts (in press) argues for identifying Shimashki with the far distant Bactrian-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) of Central Asia (located in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, see Sarianidi 2002, 2006). The exploitative nature of southern Mesopotamia's relations with a subordinate periphery, one characterized by asymmetric trade relationships, has been well countered by Gil Stein (1999, 2005). Stein distinguishes colonialism from colonies. Colonialism is characterized by relationships of dominance and inequality while the nature and relations within a colony, a more neutral term, is open-ended. Stein's excavations at Hacenebi (3700-3300 BC), in Anatolia, 1200 kilometers from Uruk, revealed a strong southern Mesopotamian Uruk colony. In contrast to Algaze's Uruk colonialism dominating the periphery, Stein presents the Uruk colony as an independent enclave, the "foreigners were an autonomous diaspora rather than a dominant colonial elite…. The Mesopotamian and Anatolian communities produced, exchanged, and consumed goods with their own encapsulated social domain." (Stein 2002:58). Rather than asymmetric relations in which the Uruk colonialists were in control of trade Stein derives evidence for each community, the Uruk and Hacenebi, producing its own distinctive diet, crafts, and administrative methods. Exchanges were small scale and symmetric. Each community maintained a relationship of parity. The archaeological and textual evidence for trade relations that brought Mesopotamia into contact with the Persian Gulf, Anatolia, and the Iranian Plateau (Elam) throughout the third millennium, evidence bilateral, symmetric trade, political alliances, gift-giving, occasional conflict/warfare, state monopoly, as well as private entrepreneurial markets. Reducing the complexity of trade relations to an asymmetric core-periphery relationship simplifies the remarkable expanse of geography involved, the scale of interaction, i.e., tons of copper shipped to Mesopotamia in the Dilmun trade, and the mosaic of cultural regions, ethnicities, and languages spoken (Adams 1992; Silver 1985; Lamberg-Karlovsky 2009).

The theoretical underpinning for Algaze's "dawn of civilization" involve cores and peripheries, relations of dominance, exploitation, asymmetries, and hierarchical relationships involving colonization. It takes its lead from an understanding of western dominance, colonization, and the processes involved in the emergence of capitalism. In the final analysis, even ignoring the untenable Ur III as proxy for the Uruk period, I find the theoretical edifice unconvincing, monolithic, and simplifying. Centuries prior to the Ur III period the southern Mesopotamian world was in contact with the distant reaches of the Iranian Plateau, with the Dilmun culture of the Persian Gulf, with ancient Magan (the Sultanate of Oman), the BMAC, Anatolia, and Meluhha, the Indus Valley. What matters in these distinctive and distant Mesopotamian foreign relations is not dominance and exploitation by a core of a distant periphery but political, economic, and social *connectivity*; the recognition of the existence of numerous independent and interdependent interaction spheres in which southern Mesopotamia, beginning in the Ubaid period, is but one actor among many. This is true for the Ur III as it was for the Uruk Period. Connectivity breaks down the treatment and privileging of assumed geographical cores and places a more interactive cultural geography as paramount in the process of emergent complexity in *all* regions concerned. Connectivity implies mobility, mutual influences, diversity, cultural borrowings, a porousness of borders rather than fixed frontiers, and a complex multiplicity of relations involving marriage alliances, private markets, state monopolies, open warfare, and simple avoidance. Connectivity appreciates that trade is subject to the vulnerability of commodity flows, the safety of overland routes, and above all that cooperation among a mosaic of ethnicities is absolutely essential to transport resources from a distance. Exploring the nature of connectivity allows for an open-ended exploration for examining the *different* reasons and/or causes for cultural interaction at a distance rather than applying universal attributes as

common cause for all foreign relations. Levi-Strauss arbitrarily divided interaction into two categories: weak and strong (for reference and discussion see Rouse 1986:11). Weak interaction consists of trade, religious pilgrimages, intermarriage, political alliances, and other sociable activities. Strong interaction includes warfare, political control, and other kinds of forcible activities. Algaze supports strong interaction in which southern Mesopotamia attained, through economic dominance, a political control over its periphery. The periphery, whether in northern Mesopotamia, Iran, or Anatolia, maintained its own cultural identity, assimilated the foreign into their own culture, and maintained their own local development. Thus, a weak interaction might better express what has been termed transculturation, the exchange of cultural norms when an immigrant population enters a new area (for the process of transculturation see Ortiz 1947:97-103).

Algaze's "Dawn of Civilization" offers a sampling of the internal developments within southern Mesopotamia that led to cultural complexity. However, one reads little of the role of an earlier Ubaid cultural expansion that preceded the Uruk, the nature by which order was established, how power was legitimized, of the political organization and alliances ('leagues', Matthews 1993) of the early city-state, of shifting settlement regimes, evolving villages to urban centers (Ur 2007), the changing functions of the household (oikos), the temple, land tenure, or of the role of pastoral nomads, of irrigation, or what Norman Yoffee (2005), in discussing state origins, refers to as the "ubiquity of conflict". Many of the above concerns are discussed in Steinkeller's (1993) important analysis of the evolution of southern Mesopotamian political structures, kingship and the territorial state, and its northern Mesopotamian adoption (and difference) in the form of the "Kish Civilization" (for other fine reviews of Mesopotamia's "dawn" see Nissen 1988; Postgate 1992; and Liverani 2006).

To a certain extent Algaze appears trapped by the "Ionian Fallacy", the belief in a single integrating principle for bringing order to a complex set of features, namely, trade and the exploitation of the periphery to control resources. In order to support this contention for the mid-fourth millennium, he uses late third and early second millennium evidence as proxy for understanding the structure of trade, the organization of labor, and the emergence of an administrative bureaucracy. Even if one takes into account the textual and the archaeological evidence of late third millennium trade between Mesopotamia and Iran, a relationship that Roger Moorey (1993:43) correctly characterizes as one of "vitality and centrality," his conclusion that "taken together the evidence of artifacts and texts sustains a minimalist rather than a maximalist view of the overland trade between them, a trade in luxuries for the privileged rather than in staples for the masses". Trade in such luxury items, however, was far from trivial for enhancing the status and hierarchies of Mesopotamia's elite. In negating trade as 'cause', Christopher Edens (1992:121) is perhaps most strident "to analyze precapitalist complex societies, and the place of long distance trade in those societies, as economic configurations is to misplace basic social forces in those societies."

Paradoxically, if the Uruk colonies, and the very process of colonization and the control of trade and resources were seminal elements to the dawn of Mesopotamian civilization, there is no discussion of either the collapse, or its cause, of the Uruk colonies. Whether in northern Mesopotamia, Iran, or Anatolia, the Uruk presence completely disappears ca. 3100 BC. Similarly, the Assyrian trading colonies in Anatolia also disappear ca. 1850 BC. Why? While the reasons are elusive the results are not. Following the collapse of the Uruk presence in northern Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Iran each region sustains its indigenous cultural polities. Only with the passing of 500 years does northern Mesopotamia, once again under the influence of the south, but NOT within a context of colonization, emerge as urban and literate communities. Far from being unique, the Uruk Expansion is preceded a millennia earlier by a Mesopotamian Ubaid Expansion (ca. 4500 BC) to Anatolia in the north and to the Persian Gulf in the south (Iran, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Oman) and a slightly later (ca. 3300-2900 BC) Proto-Elamite Expansion throughout the Iranian Plateau (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1978, 1989). Algaze discusses neither. Just as the Uruk colonies withdrew from the distant periphery so too did the Ubaid and Proto-Elamite colonies. Given the location, size, and context of the Ubaid and

Proto-Elamite colonies it is difficult to assert that they represent a primary process of colonization involved in asymmetric trade. It is entirely reasonable, however, to view trade as a by-product of their presence in distant lands. The presence of numerous Mesopotamian type bevel-rimmed bowls in Pakistan at Miri Qalat (Benseval 1997) and in Iran at Mathoutabad in the Jiroft, (as previously alluded to) may attest to the adoption of their specific function rather than as instances of migration, colonization, or trade.

Migrations, and the establishment of colonies in distant lands, have a myriad of reasons for their undertaking. Colonization, and resultant colonialism, for control of trade and resources is the leitmotif of the European experience. However, migrations and colonization, in the absence of colonialism, can come about as a result of climate change, inequalities of landholding, political oppression, conflict/warfare, natural disasters, prejudices due to religion/race/ethnicity, poverty, and population pressure to name but a few 'causes'. Recently, Barry Cunliffe (2008) in a magisterial review of the archaeology of Europe points out that Europe, throughout the millennia, experienced numerous episodes of large-scale migration. These were often due to population pressure in which the growth of urban communities exceeded the carrying capacity of local productivity—requiring emigration and colonization. One can also imagine that within Mesopotamia a relatively rapid urban transformation placed a stress on maintaining equilibrium between carrying capacity and populations. Adams (1981:69-70) documents a "massive process of growth at the very outset of the Uruk period... Yet something closer to a tenfold increase than to a doubling [of population] seems to have occurred on the central Euphrates floodplain, and within a period not exceeding one or two centuries." Such a dramatic increase in early Uruk population must have placed a considerable stress on agricultural productivity perhaps requiring the movement of populations in search of arable lands. Dramatic population increase and subsequent stress, perhaps also evident in the shifts in settlement regimes as seen between Nippur-Adab and Uruk (Adams 1981:84), in conjunction with the emergence of coercive forces in the management of labor, land tenure, craft production, and social life increasingly enmeshed in a network of control, resulted in social dislocation and migration leading to the Uruk Expansion to the periphery.

For decades archaeologists dismissed the role of migration/diffusion as a major factor of social change. Recently they have regained a semblance of respect. In fact, mass migration/diffusion are omnipresent in the archaeological and historical record. In addition to the Uruk and Proto-Elamite migration/diffusion we can add the south-to-north spread along the Nile of the Naqada III, the spread of the Namazga III culture from the foothills of the Kopet Dagh in Central Asia to Baluchistan, the spread of the Harppan civilization from the borders of Iran to the Ganges and from northern Afghanistan to the Narbada River in India, the spread of variants of the Andronovo culture from the Ukraine to Zinjiang in China, and the dissemination of the Bell Beaker culture from central Europe to Britain. In each and every instance, and others could be mentioned, the above migrations/diffusion resulted in a major impact enhancing both connectivity and cultural complexity. Within the archaeological and historical record there is hardly a single instance for the emergence of what we call a 'civilization', or cultural complexity, that did not experience, prior to its emergence, migration/diffusion—from Uruk to Ellis Island.

The reasons, or causes, for the migration/diffusion are subject to great debate and too often are elusive. The great American historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1920:37) asked what motivated the pioneers to migrate to the western frontiers. Finding little in the way of materialist causes he opted for attributing it to the spirit of adventure, discovery, and rugged individualism, attributes that he believed molded the American character—best said in his own words:

> …coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients, that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic, but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes from freedom or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier…

Written over 75 years ago the above finds resonance in what Cunliffe (2008:139) has recently written concerning the migrations that populated the European landscape:

> We have suggested that this dynamic [migration] may have been embedded in a system of social values enshrining the belief that young men could gain status only by heading colonizing expeditions… behind it lay an innate desire to explore the unknown.

We learn that throughout European history the *consequence* of migration, rather than the cause, was trade. In Italy toward the end of the first century BC the relationship of population to carrying capacity is implicated in state organized migrations. Civil wars and massive urban upheavals characterized the Italian social landscape. Population pressures exceeded the holding capacity of the land initiating migrations that led to one-fifth of the population of Italy to migrate to distant provinces. A hundred overseas colonies were established, each with 2-3,000 male inhabitants. (Cunliffe 2008:368). Earlier in the 3rd and 4th century BC, "The continent wide scale of the migration was unprecedented…What initiated the migrations is not entirely certain but Livy was probably right when he saw uncontainable population growth as the underlying dynamic" (pp. 360-361). Migrations are far from uncommon, invariably disruptive, and often carry with them new technologies and ideas initiating new cultural complexities. A multiplicity of causes implicating both materialist and ideological factors are brought to bear within a single migration.

The author does not discuss the most distant echo of the Uruk Expansion, namely, the presence of Late Uruk, i.e., seals, at Maikop in the Caucasus. Neither is the contemporaneity of the Late Uruk Culture with the expansion of the Transcaucasian Kura Araxes Culture mentioned. The Kura Araxes Expansion is directed to the south (as far as Israel where it is known as the Khirbet Kerak Culture) at the very time of the abandonment(?) of the Uruk colonies in the north. This correlation may well address the 'cause' of the abandonment of the Uruk colonies in the north (for an expansive discussion see the important study of Palumbi 2008). Algaze does not address the near universal abandonment of the Uruk 'colonies' on the distant periphery. By the end of the fourth millennium the Uruk presence, whether in Anatolia at Arslan Tepe or in Iran at Godin, is absent. Only at Susa, following the presence of a Late Uruk settlement does there appear to be an indigenous assimilation, acculturation, and/or adoption, of the Uruk bureaucratic technology of writing, seals, and standard units of measurement. An emergent Proto-Elamites culture adopts and transforms Uruk texts and seals into distinctive glyphs and styles that suit their particular needs which become the hallmark of a Proto-Elamite Expansion. An interesting, but little discussed phenomenon, the Proto-Elamite Expansion, appears to undertake an identical process that characterized the earlier Uruk Expansion, namely, the establishment of colonies and settlements on numerous distant sites of the Iranian Plateau: Sialk, Malyan, Yahya, Hissar, Shahr-I Sokhta, Miri Qalat (Pakistan) and recently at Tepe Sofalin on the Tehran Plain where hundreds of Proto-Elamite texts and seals have been recently excavated. The earliest Proto-Elamite texts reportedly are contemporary with Late Uruk texts and ceramics (personal communication Rohoullah Yousefi).

Algaze has given us a richly textured book. The Mesopotamian environmental advantage, the colonization of the periphery, the control of foreign trade and resources, the cheap cost of water transport, and irrigation canals which he deems to be "the most important source of developmental asymmetries between southern Mesopotamia and neighboring regions" (p. 128), an efficiency in the organization of "dependent laborers", the development of "technologies of the intellect" consisting "of new modes of social control", are all implicated in the Mesopotamian "dawn of civilization." To the above substantive arguments can be added the theories of modern economists that are productively exploited, world systems theory that construct cores, peripheries, and colonialism, the use of analogy and proxy evidence derived from the texts and archaeology of a Mesopotamian world separated from the "Dawn" by at least a thousand years. The book is informative and provocative. Although this reader could not agree with all of the attributes, analogies, and metaphors that Algaze harnesses to drive the emergence of Mesopotamian civilization, the book is, without doubt, a landmark in the study of Mesopotamian civilization! □

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