The Tower of Babel and the Uruk World System: Part 2

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1. The Late Uruk 4 Period

We do agree with David Rohl that the archaeological period known as Late Uruk 4 is the background for the biblical city and Tower of Babel. It is further agreed that the hunter-king of the Late Uruk 4 period is none other than the biblical Nimrod (of which more later). Nevertheless, we simply do not think that there is any need to shift the Early Dynastic kings from their archaeological contexts. Nimrod was simply Nimrod, and we do not need to correlate him with Enmerkar, Gilgamesh, or Tukulti-Ninurta in order to recognize him as an historical figure.

In terms of archaeology, there was a collapse of the Late Uruk 4 system that led to the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic periods in Mesopotamia. We will show that it is impossible for Enmerkar or those who followed him to be rationally associated with the Late Uruk System.

New Courville holds that the collapse of the Late Uruk 4 period is the result of the Dispersion incident. We would agree with Classic Courville that the Jemdet Nasr period that followed Late Uruk 4 involves some residual effects from the Dispersion in Mesopotamia, but it is our opinion that it really reflects the post-Dispersion period in the southern alluvium. In Mesopotamia, it is more of a proto-dynastic level leading to the Early Dynastic period than it is a post-Uruk level (even though it is still labeled as Late Uruk 3). It sets the stage for a new urbanism. The peoples of the ancient world were regrouping, or re-urbanizing, and this is probably what the Jemdet Nasr period reflects in Mesopotamia.
2. The Mesopotamian Background

Author John H. Walton also accepts the Late Uruk 4 period as the time of Nimrod and the Tower of Babel.\(^1\) It does not appear that Walton is aware of, or understands, the chronological implications of his archaeological correlation. Nevertheless, his article serves as a useful starting point for a better understanding of the period in question.

Walton begins with a discussion of the word “migdal,” the Hebrew term which is translated into English as “tower.” Some have denied that “migdal” can refer to a Mesopotamian ziggurat but Walton’s response is that (a) the Hebrews did not build ziggurats, i.e., it’s likely they would use “migdal” to refer to more familiar fortifications in Palestine; (b) the Hebrews lacked any special term for ziggurat since ziggurat’s were not only not built, but were not part of Hebrew culture; and (c) since the Hebrews did not build ziggurats or regard them as part of their culture, they would have to borrow the term from some other language, or devise a new term, or make due with a word in Hebrew. Walton says,

“To call the ziggurat a tower is not inaccurate, and as a matter of fact, the term they used is derived from the Hebrew term... (to be large), which is somewhat parallel to the etymological root of the Akkadian word, ziqqurat (zaqaru, to be high).\(^2\)

The Bible, in Judges 9:46, uses the term “migdal” to refer to the huge fortress temple at Shechem that could contain nearly a thousand people. Thus, we agree with Walton that the “semantic range” of the term “migdal” cannot be limited just to military fortifications or watch-towers. The fact that “migdal” was not used anywhere else in the Bible to refer to ziggurats is simply because such towers, as Walton notes, were never a part of Hebrew culture. However, the word “migdal” could serve very well to describe such a stepped tower.

About thirty ziggurats have been found in Mesopotamia both in the north and in the south of that region. There are different theories on the origin or function of the towers: First, the term ziggurat does not refer to temples or terraced buildings, per se, but rather to buildings that have “stages.” Secondly, the function of the ziggurat has at various times been correlated to a mountain, supposedly reflecting the alleged mountain homeland of the Sumerians. At other times the function of the ziggurat has been thought of as a type of throne, or a temple, or a dwelling place, or place of appearing of a god, or a holy place for the divine spirit to rest, or an altar. Others have seen it as a tomb, or similar to the Egyptian pyramids, though Walton rejects this latter correlation since the basic architecture of the ziggurat predated the pyramids.\(^3\)

The names of the ziggurats run from “Temple of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth” (Babylon) to “Temple of the Stairway to Pure Heaven” (Sippar) to “Temple which Links Heaven and Earth” (Larsa) and several more. The names are categorized as naming gods,


\(^2\) Walton, p. 156.

\(^3\) Walton, p. 159.
or involving general praise, or referring to the structure or parts of the structure itself, or
the use of mountain terminology, while others are used to designate the function or role
of the ziggurat. Walton summarizes his theory regarding the function of the ziggurat:

“The ziggurat was a structure that was built to support the stairway (siminiltu), which was believed to be
used by the gods to travel from one realm to the other. It was solely for the convenience of the gods and
was maintained in order to provide the deity with the amenities that would refresh him along the way (food,
a place to lie and rest, etc.). The stairway led at the top to the gate of the gods, the entrance to the divine
abode.”

We will follow this definition of the function of the ziggurat, with the exception of the
notion that it was for the sole use of the gods. It is true that Jacob dreams about a ladder
that went up to the heavens, with angels ascending and descending upon it. God speaks
to Jacob from the top of this ladder, and reaffirms the covenant with him. When Jacob
awakes he is afraid and calls the place the “house of God” and the “gate of heaven.”

The Bible does not go into detail about the architecture of the ladder, though Jacob
interpreted the place as a house and a gate. Nevertheless, it does appear to be some kind
of stepped tower, with long stairways that the angels could ascend or descend. We need
to be careful, however, in that the Hebrew understanding of such a ladder—in which God
and his angels are the only ones using the ladder—may not be quite the same as the
Mesopotamian understanding of the ziggurat.

Still, the fact that Jacob referred to it as a house of God and gate of heaven may indicate
that such towers were conceived of as having three functions—first, as a place where
men could perform liturgies for a god, i.e., a temple or house of a god; —second, as a
place where men could ascend to the entrance of heaven; —and third, as a place where
heavenly beings could descend to the earth and back to heaven. Thus the tower
combined the religious ideas of sacred performance, sacred space, and a sacred nexus for
the world of men and the home of heavenly beings.

Walton discusses the building materials used for the Tower of Babel, and surveys the
types of brick-making that were available. Buildings as early as the Neolithic period
used mud-bricks that were hardened by baking in the sun. According to Walton, kiln-
fired bricks are first used in the Late Uruk 4 period, although I have not been able to
confirm this. The Bible only singles out Babel as involving the use of kiln-fired bricks.
If excavators ever get to the Late Uruk levels at the archaeological site of Babel, we
should expect to find kiln-fired bricks at the least, though this does not rule out the use of
sun-dried bricks for some parts of the tower or the city. Walton believes that kiln-fired
bricks were costly and would thus only be used for palaces, temples, or other important
buildings.

The building of such a tower would require a great centralization of authority. “So we
find,” says Walton, “that the development of ziggurats and the urbanization process go

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4 Walton, p. 162.
5 Gen. 28:12.
6 Walton, p. 163.
hand in hand.” The development of the tower was based on a desire of the Shinarians not to be scattered, and the view that this was a sin against the dominion mandate of Genesis 1:28 is rejected by Walton since the fulfillment of the mandate is mainly in terms of reproduction rather than geography.

The scattering of the Shinarians is ascribed to overpopulation and competition over scarce resources. As against Walton, this view assumes that the cities were not already overpopulated at the time of the building of the tower, and in any case, no evidence to support the overpopulation explanation is forthcoming; only an analogy with the strife between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot is appealed to.

In fact, it is not population increase per se that causes dislocation, since growing populations often bring about economic prosperity, and increase the usable resources even during unfavorable periods (e.g., irrigation techniques, planting, etc.). Outside of large scale famine, the collapse of political and economic entities is usually due to some human intervention, such as war, piracy, collapse of central authority, anarchism, or interference with market operations. There is always, of course, the biblical description, which traces the collapse of the Babel society to the judgment of God.

Walton is right to reject the view that urbanization is the sin of the Shinarians, since God himself at a later time associated his presence with a city, that is, Jerusalem. Rather, the problem was that the Shinarians were pursuing the wrong kind of urbanization. Walton says, “It is more likely that there would be something that was characteristic of the urbanization process within Mesopotamia that would be identifiable as the problem.”

The Mesopotamian understanding of the gods was based on an analogy with the Mesopotamian general assembly: “Although its period of operation was relatively brief, the general assembly format of government left a permanent impression on Mesopotamian society in that this was the form of government that mythology depicted as used by the gods. As the urbanized state began to function, the universe came to be considered a state ruled by the gods.”

Thus, the Mesopotamians moved away from seeing their gods solely in terms of natural forces and began to see the cosmos as organized as a state (cf. Jacobsen). The gods became more anthropomorphic, more reflective of human behavior, culture, and political organization. Walton says, “The development in Mesopotamian religion that took place with the development of urbanization, was that men began to envision their gods in conformity with the image of man. Man was no longer attempting to be like God, but more insidiously, was trying to bring deity down to the level of man. The gods of the Babylonians were not only understood to interact with each other and operate their affairs as humans do, but they also behaved like humans, or worse.”

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7 Walton, p. 165.
8 Walton, p. 166.
9 Walton, p. 167.
10 Walton, pp. 167-68.
11 Walton, p. 169.
It is not necessary to agree with Walton that a stairway to heaven was needed due to the new anthropomorphism, where the weakness of deity became prominent (i.e., where the gods needed some physical means of accessing the earth). It would seem more likely that the notion of a stairway was meant to create a “high place”—that is, a place where height creates a sense of awe or mystery in the service of liturgy. Still, we agree that the increased movement toward anthropomorphism led to increased idolatry:

“It is this system of religion that was an outgrowth of the urbanization process as it unfolded in Mesopotamia, and it was this system that had as its chief symbol the towering ziggurat. The danger of the action of the builders then has nothing to do with architecture or with urbanization. Nothing was wrong with towers or with cities. The danger is found in what this building project stood for in the minds of the builders. To the Israelites, this would be considered the ultimate act of religious hubris, making God in the image of man. This goes beyond mere idolatry; it degrades the nature of god.”

In our opinion, it is not altogether convincing that the sin of the Shinarians was related only to anthropomorphism and idolatry. It seems clear from the biblical account of the building of the city and Tower of Babel, that the Shinarians wanted glory, to make a name for themselves, and this was the opposite of being “scattered.” Scattered where? According to the Bible, the Shinarians did not want to be scattered “over the face of the whole earth.” It was this fear of being scattered far and wide over the whole earth that led to the building of the city and a Tower of Babel. They could not make a name for themselves under such conditions.

In terms of the dominion mandate, the man and woman were to be fruitful and multiply (reproduction) and to “fill the earth” (geography), and to “have dominion” over the earth and all of its animals (farming and herding). The mandate, contrary to Walton, involved more than just reproduction. Also, it should be noted that the dominion mandate did not include dominion over other human beings. In other words, it was not a political mandate.

Now, the Shinarians were attempting to bring about a result that was contrary to the will of God, and because of this, God came down in judgment upon them. When he did, it was noted that the unity of language and the tower-building went hand in hand, and by confusing the language, the effect was to scatter the Shinarians, bringing about a cessation of building activity. The dominion mandate was enforced.

In this way also man’s self-glory, his idolatry, and his dominion over man were delayed and made harder for future generations. While race, ethnicity or clan served as the basis for the division of languages, it is clear that the real barrier to human unity is not race but language. It is language that puts up barriers to unification, and thus also to idolatry and

12 Walton, p. 169.
13 Gen. 11:4. Parenthetically, those who would limit the term “earth” to a local area—for local Flood purposes—will have difficulty with this usage, since the Shinarians would have little to fear from being scattered over a local geographic area.
oppression. Not entirely, however, for as Walton points out, the effects of the scattering only delayed the illegitimate urbanization process.\textsuperscript{15}

Importantly, it also showed the need for divine revelation to enter into the world. Walton says, “We cannot deny the possibility that this account was understood by the Israelites as being pregnant with political implications. It main intent, though, we would argue, would seem to be not political polemic, nor even the account of yet another offense. Rather, the account demonstrates the need for God to reveal himself to the world. The concept of God had been corrupted and distorted; this would require an extensive program of reeducation to correct. So it was that God chose Abraham and his family and made a covenant with them.”\textsuperscript{16}

3. The Historical Setting of the Tower of Babel

Walton believes the account in Genesis 11 has a “solid historical foundation in early Mesopotamia.” He regards the Tower of Babel as a “failed prototype” and that the result of God’s judgment was to “delay the development of urbanization in Mesopotamia.”\textsuperscript{17} Logically then, the building of the city and Tower of Babel took place before the actual development of urbanization and its institutions (which begins in the Early Dynastic period).

Walton also believes the Ubaid period was the period of original migration to the land of Shinar. According to the Bible:

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.”\textsuperscript{18}

In Mesopotamian archaeology, the Hassunah period is followed by the Halaf period (both in northern Mesopotamia), and the Halaf period is followed by the Ubaid period. The Ubaid period is represented in both the north and south. It represents the first settled habitation in southern Mesopotamia, perhaps because the southern portion of the country was still under water.\textsuperscript{19} Logically, then, the migration of Genesis 11 must have happened after the Halaf period, since Halaf is not in the south, the very place to which the Bible says the Shinarians migrated.

So Walton may be correct that the Ubaid period represents the Eastern migration. However, the Uruk period, which comes after the Ubaid period, also seems to represent a good period for the migration of the Shinarians. The following is a chart of some of the archaeological levels in the early Mesopotamian period, with the earliest levels at the

\textsuperscript{15} Walton, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{16} Walton, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{17} Walton, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{18} Gen. 11:1-2.
bottom of the chart. These correlations are based in part on information provided in Seton Lloyd and Ann Perkins.\textsuperscript{20}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Southern Sequence</th>
<th>Northern Sequence</th>
<th>Uruk (Eanna)</th>
<th>Tepe Gawra</th>
<th>Nineveh</th>
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<td>Akkadian</td>
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<td>Jemdet Nasr, PL c-d</td>
<td>Ninevite</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late Uruk, PL a-b</td>
<td>5-4</td>
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<td>Early Uruk</td>
<td>Gawra</td>
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<td>11-10</td>
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<td>Late Ubaid, 4</td>
<td>18-15</td>
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<td>Late Ubaid, 3</td>
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<td>Hajji Muhammad, 2</td>
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<td>Eridu, 1</td>
<td>Ubaid</td>
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<td>Halaf</td>
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In the south, the Ubaid material has no prior occupation levels, but rests on virgin soil.\textsuperscript{21} It was preceded by the Hassunah culture and the Halaf culture, which overlapped with each other in the north. The Hassunah culture was basically a farming culture that was clan-based.\textsuperscript{22} The Halaf culture came next, and represents a new people into the region, but again only in the north. They may have been traders at first and migrated from near the Lake Van area. The Ubaid period represents a new culture in Mesopotamia, perhaps from Iran, and in our opinion, this may have involved the migration of the clan of Elam, son of Shem. Elam also appears to have settled in the region later known as Iran.

One problem with accepting Walton’s contention that the Ubaid culture represents the migrating Shinarians is that the Ubaid culture settled into both the north and south of Mesopotamia.\textsuperscript{23} The biblical description, however, indicates that the Eastern migration was into the southern portion of Mesopotamia, into the plain of Shinar. It is our belief that Mesopotamia was settled, for the most part, by the sons of Shem, but it is not clear which of the sons of Shem were part of the Shinarian migration.

Asshur and his clan must have settled in upper Mesopotamia (later called Assyria), while Aram may have settled in the Syrian region. That leaves Lud and Arphaxad, and perhaps these latter made up a large segment of the Shinarian population. One of Arphaxad’s Semitic-speaking descendants was Abraham, who resided in Mesopotamia.\textsuperscript{24} If Abraham was living in lower Mesopotamia, then evidently his ancestors had been there as well.

\textsuperscript{21} Perkins, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{23} Lloyd, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{24} Gen. 10:24; 11:10, 26.
Later, when we discuss the “Sumerian problem,” it will be seen that the cultures of Mesopotamia share a good deal of continuity, but also that there is enough uniqueness to separate the cultures into different migratory groups. The contention of the New Courville theory will be that the Uruk period represents the culture of the Shinarians in lower Mesopotamia. It will also be argued that the so-called “Sumerians” of the later historical period are in fact a new race in the region, and are not related to the Shinarians of the earlier period. This is only logical since the Shinarians had been scattered abroad at the time of the Dispersion, leaving a vacuum in lower Mesopotamia to be filled up by northerners and other opportunistic groups.

Walton’s acceptance of the conventional chronology, which places the Ubaid and Late Uruk cultures centuries apart, leads him to deny that the immigrants into Shinar were also the builders of the city and tower. He says, “In Gen. 11:2 a group of people is identified as having traveled to the plain of Shinar to settle. The traveling group is not necessarily ‘all the earth’ from verse 1, but perhaps just the descendants of Shem....” While this may be possible, the biblical text appears to suggest that the migrating Shinarians were the same as the Shinarians who built the city and tower. Gen. 11:3 says,

“Then they said to one another.”
“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower....”

The pronoun “they” refers back to the people in the previous verse:

“They journeyed from the east.”
“They found a plain in the land of Shinar.”
“They dwelt there.”

To emphasize the point again, the Bible appears to connect these new immigrants into Shinar with the people who built the city and Tower of Babel. If these people are to be identified with the Uruk period, as we are suggesting, this would require a drastic shortening of the elapsed time for the Uruk level. Walton, however, prefers the conventional chronology (based on uncertain carbon-14 dating), and cannot accept the above pronominal identifications.

Walton restricts the division of languages to the “Semitic” group, or perhaps to a “differentiation” of the Semitic languages from the Sumerian. Moreover, the scattering over the earth is restricted just to the “fertile crescent.” He goes on to point out that archaeology has shown “a clear dissemination of Babylonian culture through the ancient Near East at the end of the Late Uruk period and into the Jamdet Nasr period.” Nissen is quoted to the effect that settlements found in Syria are identical with what was known from Babylonia and Sussiana. Walton says that “this influence did not last for long but quickly was subsumed by the local cultures.”

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26 Walton, p. 173.
The city of Babylon is discussed next, and it is noted that the “shifting water table of the
Eurphrates has obliterated the strata.” It is not clear whether the strata have been
obliterated, though the water table is high, preventing vertical exploration. Walton,
however, appears to cast doubt on whether the city of Babylon was the site of the Tower
of Babel incident. We cannot follow him in this, since the Bible seems reasonably clear
about it. Lastly, Walton calls attention to a text we have alluded to in the discussion of
Rohl’s claim that Moses borrowed the idea of a confusion of languages from the
Enmerkar tale. It says,

“To Enlil in one tongue [spoke] ... (Then) Enki...changed the speech in their mouths, [brought (?)]
contention into it, into the speech of man that (until then) had been one.”

Walton concludes that this “may well represent the memory of an actual event from the
late fourth [sic] millennium BC.” We would agree and believe it is a reflection of the
biblical event.

4. The Expansion Pattern of the Late Uruk 4 Period

As we have said above, our position is that the Late Uruk period represents the time of
Nimrod and his kingdom. In this, we are in agreement with Rohl (though not on his
identification of Nimrod with Enmerkar). While the Bible is fairly laconic in its
descriptions of this period of time, we can at least infer that Nimrod’s kingdom was the
first empire. It began in the south of Mesopotamia with the cities of Babel, Erech (i.e.,
Uruk), Accad, and Calneh. This proto-empire was city-based, i.e., a multi-urban
confederacy, with one ruler to unite the cities into a kingdom. Once Nimrod had
established his rule in the south, he then went to northern Mesopotamia (later called
Assyria) and built the northern cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen, once
again establishing a multi-urban confederacy under his own rule in the north.

There are four things to note here: First, there was an empire of sorts, a proto-empire.
There is no need to regard this empire as a totalitarian state like Nazi Germany, or the
former USSR, or Communist China, North Korea, or Cuba, nor would it be much like the
authoritarianism of ancient Rome, with its far flung empire and complex legal
institutions. We must always be careful about using anachronistic comparisons. That
said, however, we should still see Nimrod’s kingdom as a multi-regional kingdom,
extending beyond a single core region, and sufficiently authoritarian to be designated as
the world’s first empire.

Second, the movement was from the south to the north. The original kingdom of Nimrod
was located within a core southern region in Mesopotamia, and then expanded to the
northern regions. The Bible does not say there was any great deal of warfare in this
expansion from the south to the north, but we can expect that some hard fighting,
however temporary, probably took place to bring about this unification.

29 Gen. 10:8-11.
The third thing to note is that Nimrod’s kingdom was defined in terms of cities, e.g. Babel, Uruk, Nineveh, etc. These should be regarded as power-centers, and without them as a base of political power, Nimrod’s kingdom would likely not have survived long enough to become an empire.

Fourth, the consolidation of Nimrod’s kingdom in both the south and the north would have brought about a great deal of peaceful trade once Nimrod was acknowledged as the king over both regions. Southern traders could now have access to northern markets, as well as to the eastern Elamite regions and the western Anatolian or Syrian regions. Basically, the political unity of the north and south fostered trade and created greater economic prosperity in all regions connected to Mesopotamia.

Does the archaeology of ancient Mesopotamia bear out the above scenario of a proto-empire during the Late Uruk period? In our opinion, it does, for in the last few years, one book by Guillermo Algaze, *The Uruk World System*, has done much to demonstrate a close correspondence between the material culture of ancient Mesopotamia and biblical history. It is not that Algaze made any connection between the Bible and his Uruk World System theory. Indeed, it did not occur to him at all, or to many of his colleagues in Mesopotamian archaeology, to link the Bible with this period in history. That, however, makes his account of things more objective since he did not start with any predisposition to interpret the evidence in terms of the biblical pattern of ancient history.

Algaze’s theory has attracted the attention of a number of Mesopotamian scholars despite the radical nature of his thesis. Basically, he argues that the Uruk period in southern Mesopotamia was the catalyst for far reaching changes in the ancient world. It was a “take-off” of sorts, a “decisive shift, in favor of southern Mesopotamia.” According to Algaze, the Uruk culture led to humanity’s first “world system,” and perhaps its “first imperial venture.”

5. *The Uruk World System Theory*

In this section, we will describe Algaze’s theory and compare it with our description of biblical history above, and note agreements or disagreements. In addition, we will critique Algaze’s notion of “asymmetric” exchange relationships, and suggest ways to improve his theory. The original thesis was first published in a 1986 dissertation for the University of Chicago, then was upgraded and published in 1993 as *The Uruk World System*, and has been modified and re-published in 2005 with a new chapter updating the theory. The basic theory is as follows:

In developing the Uruk World System theory Algaze followed the model proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein. This model is a quasi-Marxist, Braudelian view of capitalism in the modern world. Algaze theorized that the model was applicable to the ancient world,
and that during the Late Uruk period the southern core region of Mesopotamia had developed into a complex polity but lacked economic resources. The areas outside of lower Mesopotamia had more resources but were not as developed as the southern alluvium. In order to procure resources, then, southern Mesopotamia colonized Iran and also set up outposts at strategic trade routes in northern regions in Mesopotamia and Syria.

This “Uruk intrusion” represented a form of “economic imperialism” by the south over its neighbors, and was a “momentum toward empire,” even though it was not necessarily a territorial hegemony in non-southern areas. The Uruk expansion also led to the adoption of southern culture and ideologies, e.g., southern concepts of leadership (as illustrated in glyptic art).

Algaze speaks not only of an expansion but also of a collapse. The collapse of the Uruk expansion was due to the “long term” effects of unequal trade. This led to social disruption, the collapse of the southern-run exchange network, and the rise of local powers and non-southern controlled trade networks. This political fragmentation is seen in the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic periods.

Algaze discusses Uruk sites in the Susiana Plain of Khuzestan; Uruk settlements in the Syro-Mesopotamian plains and surrounding highlands, as well as their functions; the Late Chalcolithic period in Syro-Mesopotamia; social change in the northern periphery; the collapse of the Uruk enclave network; and the Early Bronze Age sociopolitical development in the non-southern periphery.³⁴

Algaze admits that the archaeological information from Mesopotamia is fragmentary but he thinks an approximation to his Uruk World System is possible. Southern Mesopotamia had to import goods from outside the south in order to support a stratified society. The non-southern societies were less stratified, and thus less politically unified.

Contrary to the fad in archaeological explanation that saw almost all growth and change as purely evolutionary, purely internal to a region to the exclusion of external factors, Algaze follows P. L. Kohl in rejecting such an approach. The growth of the south did not occur in a vacuum but was the result of “cross-cultural contacts and interregional exchange.” The emergence of the south’s complexity cannot be explained as an isolated phenomenon. Its growth is, according to Algaze:

“[I]ncomprehensible outside the framework of a broader universe, a wider system of economic and, on occasion, political relationships between it and areas with complementary resources and societies at significantly different levels of socioeconomic integration.”³⁵

Because of the south’s lack of certain resources, a “disequilibrium” grew that could only be calibrated by outside contact, giving the south a “head start” in responding to adverse cultural and environmental factors. Purportedly, this resulted in the development of

³⁴ Algaze, pp. 11-18; 19-60; 61-84; 85-97; 98-104; 104-09.
³⁵ Algaze, p. 2.
“long-distance exchange and cross-cultural contacts between Uruk societies in southern Mesopotamia and surrounding communities of the periphery in an attempt to secure and regularize the flow of desired resources.” An increase in “resource procurement activities” is the type of thing that leads to “expansion,” with concomitant attempts to control important trade routes.

6. **Uruk Cultural Influence in Southern Iran**

According to Algaze, there are important parallels between the material culture of southern Mesopotamia and southern Iran. This involved, among other things, equivalent sealing and accounting practices between the two regions, suggesting analogous and comparable patterns of social organization. Algaze says, “The results of the various surveys and excavations in Susiana show that by the later part of the Uruk sequence (Middle/Late Uruk in local terminology) the plain had become part and parcel of the Mesopotamian world, an extension eastward of the culture and institutions prevalent in the lowlands of southern Iraq.”

In this view, the convergence between the Uruk and Iranian cultures was brought about by colonization. Uruk settlers moved into the Susiana plains, which was a largely undeveloped region. However, this does not imply that the colonization was coordinated by a single Uruk polity, nor did it involve acquisitions of large amounts of territory. Instead, Algaze theorizes that the Uruk colonizers settled at strategic points that served as critical trade links between the west and east.

7. **Uruk Settlement in the Syro-Mesopotamian Planes and Highlands**

A number of Uruk sites are found in this region, but are located at strategic trade sites or are linked to overland routes in the north. These sites come within the framework of “the more informal (i.e., economic) modes of imperial relationships....” The presence of southern Mesopotamian enclaves reflects a “highly selective intrusion” with sites near the “junctures of the main north-south waterways and the principal east-west overland routes.” Some of these sites were located at ancient Nineveh, Tell Brak, Qannas, Jebel Aruda, and ancient Carchemish. According to Algaze:

“The riverine location of the Uruk enclaves...would seem to suggest that a crucial factor determining their placement was control of the major rivers. That consideration must have been important indeed, since historically the Tigris and Euphrates rivers functioned as important arteries for downstream commerce....However, a detailed analysis of the specific position of the enclaves reveals that they are also oriented along an east-west axis focused on the overland routes of communication across Syro-Mesopotamia.”

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36 Algaze, p. 13.
37 Algaze p. 18.
38 Algaze, p. 19.
40 Algaze, pp. 41-42.
The geographical framework of the trade routes of ancient Mesopotamia are compared to similar trade routes during classical times. This comparison shows that the location of Uruk enclaves is purposeful rather than random. Even those sites outside of the Uruk core regions are located at “critical junctures of the overland routes of communication.” These small, isolated outposts appear to be dated to the very end of the Late Uruk period.\footnote{Algaze, pp. 53, 57.}

Algaze regards the southern settlements of the Syro-Mesopotamian planes and highlands as “gateway communities.” It is suggested that they do not represent southern-run territorial acquisitions or the exploitation of large-scale agriculture resources by an intrusive population. Instead, these settlements represent the southern control of long-distance trade networks. Algaze doubts whether they represent political control of the regions. The settlement of these intrusive groups is said to have met with “cooperation” from the native populations, and Algaze even speaks of the “implicit consent of nearby rulers.”\footnote{Algaze, p. 62.}

It is held that the native Syro-Mesopotamian populations, along with Zagros populations, were supplying resources to the southern polity by way of the trade network effectively controlled by southern Mesopotamia. Some of the resources imported by the southern polity were copper, gold, silver, lead, lapis lazuli, timber and wood products for urban architectural requirements, obsidian, gypsum, flint, and bitumen.\footnote{Algaze, pp. 63-80.}

In return, the south exported textiles and cultural products such as ceramics, accounting, and seal-making. This would seem to indicate that the southern polity was an exporter of goods that involved specialization vis-à-vis importers from the periphery who provided non-worked commodities to the south for alteration into value-added goods (though Algaze is content to describe the commodities rather than theorize about their economic purpose).

The chronological relationship between the Copper Age indigenous settlements and the Uruk intrusive settlements is reviewed by Algaze who speaks of “an overwhelming southern Mesopotamian component....”\footnote{Algaze, p. 86.} The evidence points to a “partial contemporaneity of Late Chalcolithic sites in the north and the process of Uruk expansion into the area.”\footnote{Algaze, p. 91.} This shows that the Copper Age started before the Late Uruk expansion, and had a “surprising degree of material culture homogeneity” that “existed over an exceedingly broad area,” though sites were relatively small, village-sized, and dispersed. Algaze says,

“[I]t seems that the Uruk enclaves were introduced into a cultural milieu of indigenous polities at a less developed social and, above all, political stage....[T]here simply is no Syro-Mesopotamian or highland site
predating the Uruk intrusion that comes close to matching the size, complexity, and levels of internal differentiation documented for the Mesopotamian enclaves.”

The nature of the relationship between Uruk enclaves and indigenous communities is described, and at one point it almost seems that Algaze is contradicting his earlier view that indigenous rulers gave their “implicit consent” in allowing southern settlements within non-southern regions. He allows that force may have been required:

“Initially at least, their establishment may have involved some measure of coercion. How else to interpret the location of Mesopotamian enclaves at major previously occupied settlements such as Samsat, Carchemish, Brak, and Nineveh?”

The expansion pattern into northern Mesopotamia was not a process of colonization as was the case with the Susiana plane. “Rather,” says Algaze, “it involved the taking over of a few selected locations that allowed societies in the alluvium to tap into preexisting lowland-highland trade networks controlled by indigenous communities. The Uruk enclaves were in this way able to funnel that trade into a new (or rather, more extensive and better organized) long-distance trade network oriented toward the alluvium and controlled by alluvial polities.”

The Uruk enclaves in the north represented a pattern that was “well within the broad parameters of the informal empire model....The strategically located enclaves certainly dominated long-distance trade and may even have exercised some measure of political control over their immediate surroundings...but Syro-Mesopotamia as a whole was not under their political control. By and large, the hinterlands were not interfered with, though they were certainly not unaffected.”

8. The Collapse of the Uruk Expansion

At some point in time, the southern expansion came to an end and even contracted: “[T]he expansion phase of early Mesopotamian societies came to an abrupt halt at the end of the Uruk period....Nevertheless, the Uruk intrusion was to have important repercussions in the further development of polities in the Mesopotamian periphery for centuries after Uruk enclaves in the northern plains and outposts in the surrounding highlands were abandoned.”

It is clear from Algaze’s description that the expansion pattern was from the southern region to the northern regions and also into Syria and southern Iran. He does not believe this was necessarily a form of territorial or outright political control of peripheral communities, but sees it as the political control of long-distance trade routes, as evidenced by southern settlements at strategic trade nodes going from north to south and also east to west. Nevertheless, at some point, it all came crashing down, and Algaze

46 Algaze, p. 96.  
47 Algaze, p. 96.  
48 Algaze, p. 97.  
49 Algaze, p. 97.  
50 Algaze, p. 97.
spends some time reflecting on the causes of what he calls the “Collapse of the Uruk Expansion.”

He already believes that trade contacts between advanced societies and less-developed societies represent something of a Trojan Horse that does not bode well for the future of the less-developed communities who participate in the “supraregional exchange network.” Despite initial prosperity for the local communities, the long-term consequences are not benign:

“In the long run, however, this initial growth phase would have given way to a second phase of stagnation and regression, since the economic spinoffs of change would have been relatively negligible, and eventually, overspecialization in the procurement of only a limited variety of specific resources for export would have weakened the economic base of peripheral societies—the logical outcome of unequal terms of trade between societies at significantly different stages of social, political, and economic development.”

The southern polity would have experienced long-term strengthening, economic complexity, and social differentiation. In addition, the cross-cultural trade between the south and non-southern regions would have resulted in the “creation of larger and more complex urban agglomerations to take advantage of economies of scale....” However, this process was stopped by the “collapse of the expansion of Mesopotamian society at the very end of the Uruk period.”

Algaze does not think that the causes of this collapse are well understood, but looks to later historical periods for analogies to the Uruk collapse. It is claimed that the very success of the southern polity in controlling the exchange network contributed to the disruption of the “supraregional interaction system.” The “politico-economic centralization” of the southern polity is claimed to have been a “powerful destabilizing force.”

So far, cause and effect have not been carefully distinguished in Algaze’s argument, but he then provides a reason why he thinks the interaction system between Uruk and its neighbors would lead to collapse. The bottom line is that there was too much demand for agricultural produce and this led to salinization problems. This is a fairly disappointing explanation. If it were true, a collapse of the system all at once (at the end of Late Uruk 4) would have been unlikely, and a gradual dissolution of the trade network would be more in evidence.

Algaze goes on to note another reason for the collapse, though it again appears to mingle cause and effect. There were important discontinuities at various settlements at the end of the Late Uruk period, and while many urban centers remained from the earlier to later phases, “a significant proportion of surrounding villages were abandoned at the end of the

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51 Algaze, p. 98.
52 Algaze, p. 104.
53 Algaze, p. 105.
54 Algaze, p. 106.
55 Algaze, p. 106.
Late Uruk period, and a roughly similar number were established in the succeeding Jemdet Nasr time range.” Algaze traces this to:

“…social disruption in the alluvium that may be correlated broadly with the collapse of the network of Uruk enclaves in the north....Moreover, while the disruption affected the rural hinterlands more dramatically than the cities, it is also reflected in discontinuities in the archaeological record of some of the principal urban centers [such as Warka]....With the redating of the White Temple from the Jemdet Nasr to the Late Uruk period...it now seems reasonably certain that none of the principal Late Uruk public structures at the site survived the transition to the Jemdet Nasr period.”

In the peripheral regions, however, the opposite took place. With the collapse of southern influence or control of the northern trade networks, these societies became stronger, and “became expansive in their own right.” The “suffocating effects of long-term unequal exchange” freed the indigenous communities so that during the first phases of the Early Bronze Age (Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic 1) the non-southern polities grew into complex, differentiated, and independent systems.

These local powers took over their portions of the trade network and this allowed trade between southern and non-southern polities to continue after the initial collapse. By this time, many local kingdoms had come into existence in Mesopotamia and the situation led to what Algaze calls “political balkanization” and “chronic intercity warfare and political fractionation so characteristic of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia....”

Algaze concludes that the network of Uruk enclaves in northern Mesopotamia “may be characterized as an informal empire” where the economic control of surrounding regions far exceeds any political control. This situation is described as a “trading post empire” similar to the Carthage of later times. An area offering little in the way of resources or territory exercised a large degree of influence over surrounding regions. Control of strategic trade routes by way of enclaves and alliances with independent rulers contributed to this economic control.

It is not clear that the Uruk expansion involved alliances, but it seems likely given the opposition that the south would have experienced without some degree of cooperation: “Though coercion is certainly likely to have been part of the expansionary process of the Uruk period, the process as a whole is unintelligible unless a significant measure of indigenous collaboration is presumed.” A major question, of course, is how much force was used to obtain this presumed collaboration.

There was not a “single political center” in control of the trade network. Instead, control was disbursed among a few cities: “The survey evidence from southern Iraq and Khuzestan indicates that the political environment of the Uruk world was characterized by a small number of centralized cores, almost certainly in fierce competition.”

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56 Algaze, p. 106.
57 Algaze, p. 107.
58 Algaze, p. 108.
59 Algaze, p. 115.
60 Algaze, p. 115.
there does not seem to be any grounds for rejecting the idea of small numbers of urban core regions in the south as being in charge of the trade network, why would these be incompatible with the existence of one centralized polity?

The main reason Algaze offers for rejecting a unified empire appears to be the existence of armed conflict portrayed on Uruk glyptic art. The more basic reason for rejecting a unified empire is that Algaze prefers a “world system” model over an empire model to describe the political situation of Mesopotamia in the Late Uruk period. He concludes: “The Uruk expansion was thus no aberration. It merely represents an example—possibly the earliest—of the mode of cross-cultural interaction repeated many times in history, albeit at sharply varying scales and rates of complexity.”

9. Criticisms of the Uruk World System Model

Algaze’s thesis has received some criticism, but the main one is that he underestimated the social complexity of late Copper Age societies existing in the periphery of Mesopotamia. The results of recent archaeological work are examined, and it is conceded that the bearers of Uruk culture (such as traders and colonists) naturally gravitated toward more complex northern centers. Nevertheless, Algaze does not regard this as a decisive criticism:

“It does not follow from this, however, that indigenous Late Chalcolithic societies in the Mesopotamian periphery were comparable in scale to the Uruk polities that emerged in southern Mesopotamia by the second half of the fourth millennium or that they possessed an equivalent level of organizational complexity.”

The superiority of southern Mesopotamia over northern or peripheral cultures is seen in (a) southern population levels significantly higher than northern or periphery levels; (b) southern urban sites such as Warka were much larger than those in the peripheral regions, and their social complexity was much greater; (c) the monumentality of the south’s urban conglomerates is much greater than that of the less developed peripheral centers; and (d) formal accounting and writing systems in the south are not matched by anything of comparable complexity in the north. Despite the advancement of isolated peripheral sites, the aggregate complexity of the north was simply no match for the aggregate complexity of the interaction systems of the southern alluvium.

Our own criticisms of Algaze are twofold. First, we will challenge the very heart of Algaze’s theory that a “world-system” is somehow a bad thing for less-developed peripheral communities, and carries within itself the seeds of its own collapse. This will require a discussion of basic economics. Before discussing the issues of economics, trade, and the world-systems model, however, it is necessary to challenge the theory that the southern alluvium was not politically unified. There are good reasons for thinking that the Late Uruk period saw more than just a trade empire, that in fact, the southern

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61 Algaze, p. 116.
62 Algaze, p. 127.
63 Algaze, p. 141.
64 Algaze, pp. 140-143; 148.
polity was unified under a single leader and that this king proved his hegemony over the north by planting enclaves in the north. This suggests political power over the north rather than mere economic exploitation.

10. *The Hunter-King of the Uruk World System*

The Late Uruk glyptic tradition provides us with curious representations of a king (right) who officiates as a priest, and also hunts with bow and spear. As noted, Algaze does not believe there was a centralized power in southern Mesopotamia, but we believe that glyptic representations of this king provide support for the view that a political unity in Mesopotamia was not only possible, but was also fairly likely. Describing this individual, Algaze says,

“Comparable modes of social organization are also suggested by iconographical similarities in the fully modeled glyptic repertoires of each area: in each case it is the same larger-than-life male figure wearing his hair in a chignon who is depicted at the apex of the administrative and religious hierarchy....”

This male figure is shown in Figure 3, on p. 15 of *The Uruk World System*. He is wielding a bow and an arrow (pictured respectively in left-hand box M and also in right-hand box P). All the left-hand boxes are cultural assemblages found in Iran, and the right-hand boxes are those assemblages found in southern Mesopotamia (the Alluvium). Thus, the Hunter iconography is found in both the Uruk and the Susiana areas. Additionally, a somewhat cruder version of the Hunter (with bow and arrow pointed at fleeing animals) was found in assemblages of the Syro-Mesopotamian and surrounding highlands.

In his essay, “The Prehistory of Imperialism,” Algaze describes the development of institutionalized rulers, who based their power on religious, political, or military roles. He says:

“This may be inferred from the iconography of the period, which commonly depicts a muscular and bearded male figure sporting a net skirt, a cap, and his hair arranged in a chignon. The character can be recognized in (a) numerous seals and seal impressions...(b) stelae...(c) sculptures in the round...(d) carved stone vases...(e) furniture inlays...and (f) a small obelisk and matching plaque that record a poorly understood sale or transfer of land....Typically, this central character is depicted as a warrior, dispenser of justice, hunter and master of animals, and as a source of fertility....Less commonly, as is the case in the famous Warka vase, he is portrayed officiating in rituals connected with the goddess Inanna, possibly acting as her consort.”

Hans J. Nissen, in his essay, “Cultural and Political Networks,” describes the hierarchical nature of Uruk society, and finds it reflected in the Warka vase. According to Nissen,

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66 Algaze, p. 41, Fig. 19, M.
67 *Uruk Mesopotamia & Its Neighbors*, p. 34; emphasis added.
“The figure with a cap and a beard on the Warka vase is interpreted...as a king or ‘priest king’...He is depicted in hunting scenes, as a warrior, on ships, in front of monumental buildings, as a supplicant to the gods, or as a master of animals.”

In fact Nissen believes that Late Uruk society was not only economically, but also politically dominant over the surrounding regions, though he does not believe this allows any inference to the idea that there existed a “single” political or economic entity with a single central authority. On this latter point we disagree, and see this Hunter-King as good evidence that a single political authority existed in the person of the hunter himself. In her essay, “The Uruk Period in Southern Mesopotamia,” Susan Pollock describes the southern Mesopotamian Warka area as under the control of a “dominant figure,” usually regarded as a “political leader,” one who is portrayed as “supervising the killing of bound individuals.”

Pictures of this king can be found in Uruk Mesopotamia & Its Neighbors, pp. 429, 435 (showing him with a spear).

One can also see the same figure as Michael Roaf depicts it. Roaf says:

“Among the earliest pieces of monumental stone sculpture found in Uruk, some are of interest not only for their antiquity but for the emotional response that they can evoke from the modern observer....Another impressive piece was the Lion Hunt stele....The stele, now 78 centimeters high, showed two scenes: the upper one was of a bearded man wearing a knee-length skirt who was spearing a lion as it reared up on its hind legs; the lower showed a man, probably the same one, aiming his bow and arrow at a rearing lion.”

“The most fascinating find of this period from Uruk was the Warka vase....The top band, which was the most interesting, included a carving of the same man shown on the Lion Hunt stele, making offerings to the goddess Inanna.”

These artistic representations were meant to illustrate the “role of the ruler and to reinforce his position,” and this was done by emphasizing images of power (hunting) and divine favor (priestly offerings). Thus, propaganda was harnessed by the ruling elite in order to reinforce the political status-quo.

David Rohl, in his book, Legend, also provides some pictures of this Late Uruk Hunter-King. We have already noted that Rohl thinks this king is Nimrod. He quotes Collon, who said:

“One recurrent figures is a bearded man who wears his hair in a bun and a thick, rolled band around his head; he is dressed in a kilt or skirt which is diagonally cross-hatched. This figure appears in a variety of roles which have led to his being called the priest-king since he seems to fulfill both functions: he plays an important part in ritual, he feeds stylised plants to flocks, he takes part in hunting and he is shown in battle and with prisoners.”

68 Uruk Mesopotamia, p.157; emphasis added.
69 Uruk Mesopotamia, p. 218.
70 Michael Roaf, Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia, p. 71, emphasis added; (statue of Uruk ruler, p. 61.
71 Rohl, p. 283.
72 Dominique Collon, First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East, 1987, p. 15; emphasis added.
The “master of animals” is often depicted in antithetical pattern, standing in the middle of two animals facing toward him. The Hunter-King replaced an earlier nude figure and an even earlier shamanistic figure.\(^73\) Thus, the master of animals was a traditional figure and probably had religious or liturgical functions in all his phases.

Henri Frankfort described the Hunter King but confessed he did not know who it could be:

“Among the secular monuments found at Uruk is a black granite stela, retaining in large part the original shape of the boulder but showing on one smoothed face a bearded leader in the act of hunting lions. He uses a spear in one example, bow and arrow in the other, for he is represented twice. There is no inscription; no setting is indicated and there are no followers. The occasion of the hunt remains a mystery....”\(^74\)

The identification with Gilgamesh is rejected, and instead, this leader is regarded as a canonical figure for later art, though Frankfort admitted that nothing is known about this prominent individual:

“It is extraordinary that we know absolutely nothing about this figure from any text \([\text{sic}]\), for he plays a major part in the repertoire of the Early Dynastic seal-cutters, and is frequently found, in reliefs and on seals, down to neo-Babylonian times.”\(^75\)

There are a number of questions that could be asked about this mysterious king. For instance, why would this leader be correlated with hunting? This appears to be his most characteristic feature. What about the priestly functions? He is often associated with the concept of the divine in life. Was he the leader of the Inanna cult? What are his political dimensions? Was he a tyrant, who led his people into wasteful wars and profligate monumental construction? Or was he merely a passive king carrying out the wishes of his subjects? What can we surmise about this king based on how he is depicted in the architectural record?

First of all, the Hunter-King of the Late Uruk period appears to be the first leader in history whose “charisma” became a matter of routine. Our modern understanding of the notion of “charisma” is based on the work of the sociologist, Max Weber. Weber, among other things, described charismatic leaders who began mass movements. The memory of these leaders was kept alive by followers who were able to “institutionalize the movement....”\(^76\) This seems to be applicable to an extent in the case of the Hunter-King.

As mentioned by Frankfort, the Early Dynastic artists, as well as others all the way down to Nebuchadnezzar’s day, represented this hunter and leader as a model of kingship, his image being an authoritative or canonical representation for later kings. Thus, the image of the Hunter-King of Late Uruk times was institutionalized by his admirers so much so that we can speak of an artistic routinization of charisma for this king. The propaganda

\(^73\) Uruk Mesopotamia, p. 427.
\(^74\) Henri Frankfort, Cambridge Ancient History, 1:2, p. 80; emphasis added.
\(^75\) Frankfort, p. 86.
\(^76\) J. Monaghan & P. Just, Social & Cultural Anthropology, [2000], p. 126.
value of the image was similar to what one finds among the Egyptians, where the mace-wielding Pharaoh who smites his enemies served as a canonical image of the power of the Egyptian king.

Hunting, of course, is a symbol of power, especially if the animals being hunted are ferocious. The hunting symbolism did not just show that the King was of great physical prowess, but that he was able to defend his kingdom and his subjects against wild foreign fighters. The symbolism of hunting is therefore a form of political representation. In the Bible this is clearly shown in the cases of Samson and David, both having slain wild beasts, the sacred writer alluding to the fact that these two heroes would fight Israel’s enemies in the same way.

The Hunter-King also has priestly functions, serving as a priest of a goddess who would later be called “Inanna” (Babylonian “Ishtar”; Roman “Venus”). She was apparently the goddess of love or sexual energy, and the king was her lover. St. John may be describing her when he associates “mystery” Babylon with the Harlot in the Book of Revelation (a barely concealed reference to imperial Rome). This would not be surprising since the goddess was associated with licentiousness of various sorts.77

Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing how developed the Inanna cult had become during the Hunter-King’s liturgical administration, and the amount of sexual chaos or idolatry may have been quite limited at such an early time. It is probable he was the official head of this cult and may have cultivated it in order to appeal to the religious sentiments of the people. Accordingly, there would have been no separation between the kingly and priestly functions within the state, and this would set up a political pattern that lasted for millennia.

Algaze asks an interesting question in his new, 2008 book on Mesopotamia. He wonders how the “first rulers” of the newly formed city states in Mesopotamia managed to “persuade” or coerce people living in rural settings to give up both their labor and way of life to the urban elites. He does not believe this can be answered decisively but believes further iconographic analysis can help us better understand the process:

“One example will suffice to illustrate what I mean. As noted earlier, much of Uruk art deals with the activities of a larger-than-life bearded male figure, who wears his hair in a chignon and sports a net skirt. Typically depicted as a hunter of wild animals, as a leader in battle, as a fountain of agricultural wealth, and as the main officiator in various religious rituals. . . this individual is generally thought to represent a ‘priest-king’ . . . or ‘city ruler’. ”78

Algaze believes that such political and religious characterizations are based on what we know about later kingship in Mesopotamia, but he thinks we ought to be skeptical in accepting such a level of continuity between the Hunter-King and later Mesopotamian kings. I don’t really see the need for such caution. Algaze is still in the main committed to his earlier theory that the Uruk World System was generated through economic

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exploitation rather than through the imperial adventures of a political figure or figures. Once Algaze’s implausible theory is set aside, there is good reason to think that biblical Nimrod was the Hunter-King, and that he combined in himself the kingly and priestly traits that appealed both to the urban elites and to the common people.

11. Nineveh and Its Remains

Ancient Nineveh is located at a site near Mosul called Kuyunjik. Many travelers had walked on the mound of Kuyunjik over the centuries, but it was only in 1842 that P. E. Botta began the first real excavation at the mound. After fruitless searching, however, he left to work at the Khorsabad site, ten miles away. Khorsabad provided Botta with more success and he promptly declared it to be the real site of Nineveh.

Inspired by Botta, in 1845 Henry Layard excavated at a site called Nimrud (Calah) that was south of Kuyunjik, and discovered the palace of Assurnasirpal 2. Some hired hands among the locals found a lamassi, a large bearded head on top of a horse or lion’s body with wings attached. They could only see the head at the time and concluded somewhat prematurely that it was Nimrod. Layard also discovered the black obelisk of Shalmanessar 3, which records a meeting between Shalmanessar and the biblical king Jehu.

After publishing his famous Nineveh and its Remains in 1849, Layard returned to Iraq and excavated at Kuyunjik, and was quickly rewarded with the discovery of Sennacherib’s palace. He also found a relief showing a lion hunt scene from the palace of Assurbanipal, which find produced a sensation in England. In addition, thousands of baked clay tablets from the palace library were found, but were not considered of great value at the time. Later George Smith would translate one of these—it turned out to be the epic story of Gilgamesh—and Smith even went back to the site of Nineveh to find among the rubble a missing fragment of the story.

In 1852 while Layard was beginning his political career in England, his pupil, H. Rassam dug at Kuyunjik and uncovered a temple and a gate with reliefs telling the story of Shalmanessar’s triumphs. Digs were continued under Boutcher and Loftus, and in 1888, E. Wallace Budge began excavations. In 1903, L. W. King and later R. Campbell Thompson began digging, but it was not until 1927 that better, scientific excavations were attempted under Campbell Thompson, Hutchinson, Hamilton, and Mallowan.

12. Nineveh in the Bible

It is said that the first empire builder was Nimrod, and that his kingdom began in the south (Babylonia) and moved north into Assyria. There, the city of Nineveh was first built, along with Calah, Resen, and Rehoboth Ir. Nineveh is most famous from the

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79 2 Ki. 19:36; from 704–681 B.C.
81 Gen. 10:11.
episode with Jonah (c. 782 B.C.) and was considered to be a “great city” but also steeped in wickedness.\textsuperscript{82} During the time of Amaziah of Judah and Jeroboam 2 of Israel, the prophetic call came to Jonah, and required him to preach repentance to the city of Nineveh, but he fled instead to Tarshish, which is on the Anatolian coast above Joppa.

A Mediterranean storm rose up and thwarted the reluctant prophet, and at his own request, he was thrown overboard by the men of the ship. Everyone knows how Jonah was caught up in the belly of a huge fish for three days and three nights, and how after much praying he was disgorged onto a beach. This was clearly a miraculous event and the usual attempts to find a naturalistic explanation are misguided. The old story, circa 1881, of James Bartley’s fall overboard from the \textit{Star of the East}, and subsequent survival in the belly of a whale, was apparently concocted out of whole cloth. The widow of the ship’s captain denied that anyone had fallen overboard during her husband’s captaincy.\textsuperscript{83}

It is sufficient to point to Jesus’ quelling of a storm to save his disciples, and to St. Paul’s experience on board ship during a storm, and the miraculous rescue of the ship’s crew and passengers, to show that there is nothing unusual about sea miracles in the Bible. They only seem unusual to our modern era, which is constricted by ontological and methodological minimalism.

Jonah had no choice but to obey the Lord and travel to the “exceedingly great city” of Nineveh. Once there, it would take him three days to walk through the huge city, warning of the wrath to come.\textsuperscript{84} As it turned out, the king and people of Nineveh took Jonah’s warnings to heart and fasted and prayed for forgiveness. There is no need to think that the Ninevites were “saved” or “born again” or that their repentance lasted for very long, but it was definitely honest enough and of sufficient length to spare them from the immediate divine judgment.

Likely enough, the only thing that could have destroyed the city was an earthquake, a meteor shower, or a foreign conquest. An earthquake was more likely since Jonah went out of the city on the fortieth day and sat under a shelter on its east “till he might see what would become of the city.”\textsuperscript{85} It is not likely he would have done this if the mode of destruction were a meteor shower or a foreign army. In actuality Jonah was distressed at the repentance of the Ninevites and that the Lord would not destroy this powerful, potential enemy of Israel. The incident with the miraculously growing and subsequently withering plant was God’s \textit{a fortiori} argument for sparing Nineveh. If Jonah could feel pity for a plant that had provided him shade, why shouldn’t God also feel pity for one hundred and twenty thousand human beings and their livestock?\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Jonah 1:2.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Jonah 3:3.
  \item \textsuperscript{85} Jonah 4:5.
  \item \textsuperscript{86} Jonah 4:10-11.
\end{itemize}
Incidentally, we must reject Leslie Allen’s claim that the book of Jonah is a non-historical “parable” or that it intends to portray Jonah as a “ridiculous figure” who has “narrow pretensions and uncharitable grudges.” Nor is there any parallel to the “Unforgiving Servant” of Matthew 18:23-25, who was forgiven a great debt, but then refused to forgive a small debt. Nineveh was one of the great cities of Assyria, and Jonah was understandably disappointed that this looming threat to Israel was allowed a reprieve. It was not many years later that the Assyrians carried Israel into captivity, so Jonah’s fears were not groundless nor were they based on ethnic narrow-mindedness or simple Pharisaicism.

Nineveh comes into focus again in the prophecy of Nahum, which was given some time after the attack upon Judah by Sennacherib during Hezekiah’s reign. Nahum considers Nineveh’s past, and compares it to a pool of water, an oasis, but one that will become desolate. Interestingly, Nahum also associates the city with lions, probably a clue that he had once visited the city and seen its lion reliefs.

“In the New Testament, Jesus is mockingly challenged by the Pharisees to perform a sign, but instead, they receive an unflattering comparison with the Ninevites of Jonah’s day:

“Where is the dwelling of the lions,
And the feeding place of the young lions,
Where the lion walked,
the lioness and lion’s cubs
And no one made them afraid?
The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs,
Killed for his lionesses,
Filled his caves with prey,
And his dens with flesh.”

This comparison was used by Jesus to emphasize the need for repentance by Israel (which was now in the place of Nineveh, ready for divine judgment). It was not a time to mock the One who came to warn them of the wrath to come.

The message, of course, was that the wicked Ninevites had done what the supposedly righteous Pharisees would not do—repent of their sins. Thus, the Pharisees were risking divine judgment by their moral smugness and hardness of heart. Could Israel not do better than the heathen nations of the world?

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87 Allen, p. 178.
88 Allen, pp. 177-78; 186.
90 Nah. 2:8-10.
91 Nah. 2:11-12.
92 Matthew 12:41.
13. *Nineveh in Archaeology*

The following chart represents the archaeology of Nineveh compared with other important sites. These are rough correlations based on Tables 1 and 2 in Ann Perkins:93

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northern Mesopotamia</th>
<th>Hassunah</th>
<th>Nineveh</th>
<th>Tepe Gawra</th>
<th>Eanna</th>
<th>Southern Mesopotamia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ninevite</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7-8a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Protoliterate c-d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gawra</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8b-11a</td>
<td>4-8</td>
<td>Protoliterate a-b</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubaid 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>15-18</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ubaid 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubaid 1</td>
<td>13-11</td>
<td>15-19</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ubaid 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halaf</td>
<td>10-6</td>
<td>2c</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hassunah</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2b</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hassunah</td>
<td>1a</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A town proper appears to have begun only in the Late Uruk 4 period (Eanna 4) and was also well represented in the subsequent Jemdet Nasr period (Eanna 3). On his chart of the southern archaeological sequence in Mesopotamia compared to the northern sequence, Seton Lloyd shows Nineveh 4 as beginning in the Late Uruk period, prior to Jemdet Nasr.94 Despite some signs of occupation during the Hassunah, Halaf, and Ubaid periods, no evidence has come to light showing the existence of any sizeable city prior to the Uruk phase.

Mallowan says, “we know little about its extent in the ‘Ubaid phase.”95 It is claimed that this may be due to the accidents of excavation, but it is still admitted that “no ‘Ubaid pottery was found therein.” Some seal impressions, clay sickles, etc., representative of Ubaid were found at the site, and Ninevite 3 saw some burnished gray ware and some stone walling. Nevertheless, it was only in the next phase, Ninevite 4 of the Late Uruk period that an extensive building phase began.

According to Mallowan: “In the subsequent stratum, Ninevite 4, we have positive evidence that this city was then a very large site and that it was in close contact with Babylonia, as can be proved by the discovery of hundreds of crudely made bowls with bevelled rims [etc.]...Thus there is no doubt that Nineveh was then extensively occupied. At that time most of the pottery became markedly Babylonian in type and many parallels for the different kinds of vessels may be observed in Ur, Uruk and elsewhere.”96

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94 Seton Lloyd, p. 66.
96 Mallowan, 1:1, p. 402.
Nineveh was thus an Uruk enclave, similar to Tel Brak or Tabqa. Algaze points out that the original excavation reports from Nineveh indicate that Uruk deposits were widely scattered over the site, and that Uruk enclaves were close to local or indigenous sites, serving as trade centers:

“[N]ew surveys and excavations in the Eski Mosul Dam area north of the site have revealed what appears to be a pattern comparable to that observed along the Euphrates in the Ataturk Dam area where Samsat is located: a number of apparently local sites showing evidence for contacts with Uruk enclaves in their midst.”

It was no accident that Nineveh was built on the Upper Tigris, since the area was the most important of the fords on the Tigris, and was at the intersection of the river and important overland trade routes going from east to west. This convergence meant that Nineveh was “an ideal transshipment point where the overland traffic from the west could be easily and cheaply funneled south downstream on the Tigris.”

Algaze asks the question whether “the Uruk occupation at Nineveh” represented a base for foreigners living in the midst of a thriving local settlement, or whether the Uruk residents simply overpowered the previous owners. While admitting that the evidence is not conclusive, Algaze believes the latter situation was the reality, and even suggests population replacement. The Uruk materials were found at the center of the Kuyunjik mound, suggesting they had “full control.”

It seems rather unlikely that northern leaders would have allowed southern enclaves into the north without some opposition. This goes against Algaze’s world-system model, which denies political control of northern areas. And yet, as noted above, Algaze is almost forced to recognize a certain amount of political control. After all, an enclave is a base of operations from which a foreign power can launch raids and thus consolidate its political and territorial hold over the surrounding regions.

In short then we think the evidence from the archaeology of Nineveh, combined with the glyptic and artistic representations of the Hunter-King, provide a strong case in themselves for seeing Uruk political control over the north by way not only of colonial trading centers, but also of actual Uruk enclaves or cities. We will not belabor the point and go through all the correspondences of Late Uruk archaeology and art with the biblical description of Nimrod and his kingdom. It seems at this point to be overkill, but if this correlation is accepted, this would provide further proof that there was more involved in the Late Uruk period than a simple world-system along the lines of a semi-Marxian construction, with no political or territorial control of the south over the north.

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98 Algaze, p. 46.
99 Algaze, p. 48.
100 Algaze, p. 133.
14. Wealth, Poverty, and Profit

It is no secret that Algaze overlays his explanation of southern Mesopotamian expansion and subsequent collapse with what is essentially a “leftist” understanding of relations between wealthy nations and poorer nations. In leftist thought, at least since the days of Lenin, this necessarily involves an exploitative relationship, described by Algaze as “asymmetrical.” As noted earlier, Algaze’s whole model is based on the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, formerly professor of sociology at Binghamton University. Wallerstein, along with anti-American Noam Chomsky and Pierre Bourdieu, are the godfathers of the current anti-globalization fad, i.e., “Internet protestors,” who regularly use the World Wide Web to arrange protest events and engage in agit-prop at meetings of the World Trade Organization.

Wallerstein’s book, The Modern World-System, argued that imperialism was more than political or territorial control but also involved unequal trade relationships. He argued that modern capitalism divided the world into core and periphery regions, a distinction corresponding to the older distinction between wealthy nations and Third World nations. The essential point was that the wealthy nations (the core) exploited the resources of the poorer nations (the periphery).

In Wallerstein’s thought, his “world-system” is different from a political or territorial world-system, since it is primarily an economic world-system, one that contributes to a “destabilizing” effect on poor nations. This “malign effect” theory allows anti-capitalists such as Wallerstein, et al., to adopt the rhetoric of opposition to imperialism, even though no actual political or territorial control is in view. In order to qualify as an imperialist country, all that is needed is that the candidate country should play a dominant role in the relevant exchange network.

Granted, it is hard to believe in our day and age that anyone would still be hawking Marxist ideas of economics or trade relationships. Nevertheless, there are some today who still refuse to allow themselves to be guided by economics in their understanding of the relations between nations. From the point of view of economics, we would question the very notion of “asymmetrical” exchange as used in Algaze or Wallerstein’s sense. Exchange by its nature is always, everywhere symmetrical with respect to economic value. It is only asymmetrical with respect to ultimate goals or purposes.

Let us look a little more closely at the subject of trade, since it is basic to Algaze’s understanding of the ancient Mesopotamian world. Here we wish to combine Aristotle’s view of exchange value with the modern understanding of value. First, Aristotle was correct to suggest that there must be an element of equality in the exchanged goods. Unfortunately, during the 19th century, one of the founders of the “marginalist” school, Carl Menger, misunderstood Aristotle on this point, and claimed that Aristotle was proposing a theory of intrinsic value.

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101 Nichomachean Ethics, Bk 5, Ch 5.
However, Aristotle was only talking about accounting equivalency between goods, and was describing how the price system coordinates diverse participants and goods so that commensurate exchanges could take place. For example, if you know that a horse is valued at $200, and pigs are valued at $50 a piece, then it is a simple mathematical operation to determine how many pigs will have to be exchanged in order to “equal” a horse, i.e., four pigs. Thus, by using money as a measure of value (the price) you know what the proportionate equivalency is between horses and pigs.

Of course, Aristotle was describing an economic system that was already in place. For Aristotle (and for us) money measured or represented the value of commodities on a market, so that there is no need to memorize how many pigs, or shoes, or whatever, would need to be given up in order to be “equal” to (say) a horse, a physician’s services, a house, and so on. Thus, the kind of equality between goods that Aristotle was talking about is merely a kind of mathematical equality, and that is all that was meant by the idea of commensurability in exchange transactions.

I think Aristotle would have agreed with Menger that human needs or requirements are the ultimate reason for an exchange to take place rather than any (economically) intrinsic value of goods or services. In an aside, Aristotle said regarding demand or market desire:

“[F]or if men did not need one another’s goods at all, or did not need them equally, there would be either no exchange or not the same exchange.”

It could be said that Aristotle was here on the verge of a marginalist explanation of value, but did not pursue the issue any further. I believe he was talking about symmetry (or equality) in the accounting values and that human “need” was the ultimate source of exchange, not anything intrinsic to the desired products. In other words, Aristotle looked to psychology (i.e., subjective value) for an explanation. Subjective economic valuation is, of course, the heart of the Mengerian revolution in economics, and it is only on this basis that the notion of the marginal unit can be developed.\(^{102}\)

Menger certainly provides an improvement over Aristotle’s formulation by arguing that for market exchanges to take place even the subjective values of market participants had to be asymmetric. In other words, in terms of ultimate goals people need or want things unequally. If not, exchange would not happen. In the above example, if the seller of the horse was only getting another horse, he simply would not sell. He already has enough horses, and wants some pigs instead. In this case, the commodities are different or unequal and that is what makes the transaction possible. But once an exchange network is operating, and money prices are available, the goods can be exchanged on an equivalent market basis, which was what Aristotle was describing.

What takes place at the level of exchange between individuals can be extrapolated to the phenomena of trade between countries. It should be kept in mind, however, that for the most part countries do not really trade with countries. Rather, individuals within a

\(^{102}\) For an overview of economics from a marginalist, subjectivist, Mengerian/Misesian viewpoint, see Murray Rothbard, *Man, Economy and State*, 2009 edition.
country trade with individuals within the other country. As with individual trade, trade at the international level also involves symmetry or equality at the level of accounting values (represented by prices) whereas the actual cause of international trade belongs to the unequivalent wants and desires of individuals participating in the international markets.

Thus, there is no “asymmetry” in trade in the way that Algaze means it, i.e., a zero-sum game, with one country being the winner and the other country being the loser in the long run. Citizens of each country participate in international exchange because their subjective evaluation of foreign goods is higher than their subjective evaluations of domestic goods, and at the same time, they feel that the exchange is “equal” or commensurate, that the foreign goods are of equal accounting value as the domestic goods they are foregoing. In other words, trade takes place when market participants do not feel that they are being cheated, and when they don’t feel they are scamming anyone. Thus, everyone benefits from trade in both the short- and the long-run.

Usually, those who oppose international trade, or adopt an us-against-them approach to understanding economic relations, will usually attack the notion of profits (with wealthy countries “profiting” at the expense of poor countries). It is important to know that exchange or trade involves a calculation of profit and cost. Economic costs are equivalent to the value of foregone satisfactions (e.g., fishing, going to the movies, etc.). To produce something of (hoped for) market value, one must put off a certain number of satisfactions, and spend time in the production process (i.e., work), thus increasing savings.

The time that one spends in the production process could have been spent at leisure activities. This means the producer incurs a cost for his work, namely the value of all foregone leisure activity (or satisfactions) that could have been pursued if the producer had spent time on them instead. Costs could also involve the forgoing of other lines of production. Whatever is given up for a current line of production is a cost. With regard to the concept of profits, basically they are equivalent to the value of received satisfactions over the value of foregone satisfactions. Yield over cost.

The purpose of profit, of yield over cost, is to capitalize the business, and to reward risk-taking entrepreneurs. Profit allows the entrepreneurs to purchase land or structures, or more machinery and equipment (i.e., capital assets or durable wealth). These help to expand the business, or lower the costs of doing business over time, and also allow the owner to attract or retain better workers by way of salary increases. Importantly, profit also represents the reward to the entrepreneur for the risks he takes in establishing and maintaining a business, and for the time preference of future goods over present goods. There is, therefore, nothing wrong with profit in any moral sense, and it is rather the very basic motivation for all economic behavior.

The same economic phenomena are operative in large scale trade, or international trade activities. As noted, it is to everyone’s advantage to engage in trade, and there is no such thing as asymmetric trade in Algaze’s sense. The problem that underdeveloped countries
have in growing out of poverty has nothing to do with trade—as Algaze, or the United Nations thinks—but is a result of other factors. Speaking of the supposed economic evils of the leftist bugaboo—“colonialism”—Bauer says:

“Whatever one thinks of colonialism, it cannot be held responsible for Third World poverty. Some of the most backward countries never were colonies, as for instance Afghanistan, Tibet, Nepal, Liberia. Ethiopia is perhaps an even more telling example (it was an Italian colony for only six years in its long history).”\(^{103}\)

Bauer provides a wealth of counter-argument and empirical refutation of the leftist-inspired anti-trade propaganda of our day, and should be read by anyone who seeks to understand the economic relations between countries.

Trade benefits consumers in general because of what is known as the law of comparative advantage. According to Mises, “It is advantageous for the better endowed area to concentrate its efforts upon the production of those commodities for which its superiority is greater, and to leave to the less endowed area the production of other goods in which its own superiority is less.”\(^{104}\)

The world’s geography and environment are apportioned to human beings in a certain way, and as such humans acting in an economic manner have to play the hand that nature deals them. In economic terms this is known as the immobility of labor and capital, and is why some countries differ in what they can produce for the market. Thus, citizens of different countries have to do what they can, or what is possible for them in their conditions, and this inevitably means that some will be economically better off than others, and some will be economically less well-off than others. Nevertheless, as Mises points out, this in itself does not condemn any side of the exchange relationship to poverty, or require anyone to be a loser in economic life:

“[I]t is manifest that the division of labor brings advantages to all who take part in it. Collaboration of the more talented, more able, and more industrious with the less talented, less able, and less industrious results in benefit for both. The gains derived from the division of labor are always mutual.”\(^{105}\)

In a sense, Algaze lets the cat out of the bag when he admits that “peripheral” communities (the victims) would have enjoyed the new trade relations with the “asymmetric” trade partners (the exploiters). Algaze, however, gratuitously limits this improvement in prosperity to the “short term.” The victim community presumably does not understand that in the “long term,” trade with “asymmetric” partners will be “prejudicial” to the economic interests of the peripheral communities.

This is, of course, part of the “leftist” explanation of why poor nations stay poor and wealthy nations stay rich—the fault is ascribed to the wealthy nations, who are said to “exploit” the resources of the poor nations. The poor nations only fault, in this view, is

\(^{103}\) P. T. Bauer, *From Subsistence to Exchange*, 2000, p. 62.

\(^{104}\) Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, p. 159.

\(^{105}\) Mises, p. 160; for more on this concept, see Miles & Scott, *Macroeconomics: Understanding the Wealth of Nations*, 2002, Chapter 9, pp. 205ff.
that they traded with the wealthy nations, not that there was anything internally dysfunctional in those poorer nations. (This theory appears to be a distant cousin to Karl Marx’s ideas of the increasing misery of the proletariat, and the inevitable collapse of capitalism.)

But let us assume, *ex hypothesi*, that Algaze’s understanding of trade economics is correct. Would it still not represent an anachronistic application of a modern model of trade upon a culture that bears little resemblance to today’s global and international trade networks? For instance, what exactly were the geographical boundaries of the southern polity in ancient Mesopotamia? What “states” were in existence at the time of the south’s dominance? How far did the economic territory of the south extend? How far did its political power extend? Were there stock sales in ancient times? Were there capital flows from one country to another? Were there currency depreciations?

To be sure, Algaze attempts to answer the charge of anachronism, but admits that he is applying Wallerstein’s notion to an historical situation to which Wallerstein himself would not have agreed. This is because Wallerstein pinpoints the beginnings of his putative “world-system” to 16th century Europe, i.e., the beginnings of modern capitalism. Algaze, however, claims that the “world-systems” model can be fruitfully applied to the ancient world as well.\(^\text{106}\)

In summary, we disagree with Algaze’s view that the Wallerstein world-systems model can be applied to the pre-capitalist world (or even to the capitalist world, since we do not agree with Wallerstein’s theory in the first place). Nevertheless, our main objection to the Algaze thesis is that we simply do not regard a world-system of economic exchange relationships to be inherently destabilizing to any country involved in the network. In fact, just the opposite is the case. Less-developed countries that are part of an exchange network with wealthy countries benefit not only in the short-term, but also in the long-term. So, if the cause of the Uruk collapse is not to be found in a leftist interpretation of trade, or an anachronistic application of an already questionable economic theory, what then was the cause of the collapse? What caused the first market collapse in history?

15. *A Collapse of the Trade Network*

Can the collapse of the Uruk exchange network be adequately accounted for by any conventional explanations of market collapse? We will argue that neither famine, war, socialistic control of economic sectors, nor speculative market greed and subsequent market panic are sufficient to explain the Uruk collapse. We will argue that a different type of panic, as well as linguistic diversity, fueled the emigration of market participants, and this was the primary cause of the collapse of the Uruk trading system.

\(\text{a. Famine:}\) This is a war of nature against man. The natural resources that enable man to function at a certain standard of living begin to diminish, until a full-blown situation of extreme food-scarcity arrives. This would, in a literal sense, dry up the affected trade

\(^\text{106}\) Algaze, pp. 7-10.
networks, and men would be required to devote themselves to subsistence level behaviors rather than to more robust forms of market participation.

b. **War:** War between neighbors puts drastic restrictions on trade. It would have the same effect that a trade war would have, destroying economic networks, creating shortages, misallocating resources, inducing governments to act irresponsibly with whatever currency is at hand, and so on.

c. **Socialism:** Forced sharing of land and property is a sure way to destroy incentive among market participants, and therefore bring about the collapse of a market or trade network. When the separatist Puritans—known to history as the Pilgrims—first settled in the New World, they instituted their utopian view of economic life, i.e., socialism, and the result was calamity. The journals of William Bradford show that the answer was the discontinuation of socialistic farming practices. Bradford spoke of the “vanity of that conceit of Plato...that the taking away of property and bringing in community into a common wealth, would make them happy and flourishing....For this community (so far as it was) was found to breed much confusion and discontent, and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort.”

Socialistic sharing of property creates disincentives and leads to widespread indolence. Soon, the economy begins to suffer from the lack of productivity, and the result is economic collapse. Aristotle brought up the issue of human psychology long ago in his discussion of Plato’s socialism.

d. **Market Panic:** As an explanation of market collapse, this view has much to commend it. The irrationalism that enters into commodity, stock, or real estate bubbles is very real. There have been major panics in history, but the following were especially notable: the Mississippi scheme among the French, the South-Sea bubble among the English, “tulipomania” among the Dutch, and of course, the witch mania all around. In our day, of course, there was the great stock market crash of the late 1920s. We will discuss the first two, and the last, since they are the most important from an economic point of view.

The Mississippi scheme and the South-Sea Bubble illustrate what MacKay called the “avaricious frenzy” that a whole nation can fall into. In the Mississippi scheme, it was the lure of precious metals in Mississippi and Louisiana around 1717 that ruined the French people. Naturally, it had been fueled by the debasement of the coinage, and a vast increase in the issuance of paper money. Speculation in stocks became so great that a man “who had risen poor in the morning, went to bed in affluence.” But it was like a Potemkin palace, an exquisite palace made of ice for the delight of a queen, but “there came one warm breeze from the south, and the stately building dissolved away, till none were able even to gather up the fragments.” Those given to caricature described the stock bubble as the “Goddess of Shares” in a triumphal car driven by the “Goddess of Folly.” But remorse of this sort is always too late for those who are caught up in the

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108 MacKay, p. 28.
frenzy of greed. They don’t see it coming, and their precious earnings, spent on wildly overvalued stock, melts away as panic overtakes the market.

The English people, not wanting the French to outshine them in folly, ruined themselves in the South-Sea Bubble of 1720. The “treasures of the South American seas” beckoned and Exchange Alley was filled daily with purchasers of the treacherous stock.

“The greatest ladies thither came,
And plied in chariots daily,
Or pawned their jewels for a sum
To venture in the Alley.”

The statement of MacKay is a propos: “Men, it has been well said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one.” One example of this was a projector who advertised that he was setting up a company for a great undertaking, but without telling anyone what it was. People handed over their money to him to receive this mysterious stock and when the day’s selling was over, and the people were gone, the man had a tidy sum on his hands. He promptly took his earnings out of the country and “was never heard of again.”

South-Sea stock rose up to dizzying heights, until the Bubble burst and the fortunes of many were lost. Bankers simply closed up shop and left town to avoid a run on the banks. Cries for the government to punish the directors of the company rose from every side, and anyone who got rich off the scheme was subject to arrest and imprisonment. Many financial books were found to contain “erasures and alterations.” It was a long time before public confidence in the kingdom was restored. Said MacKay of this depressing episode, “Enterprise, like Icarus, had soared too high, and melted the wax of her wings; like Icarus, she had fallen into a sea, and learned, while floundering in its waves, that her proper element was the solid ground. She has never since attempted so high a flight.”

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Capitalism is a fine thing, the best economic system ever devised, but it requires the “slow but sure profits of cautious industry.” Market participants need to invest wisely, and not follow after the siren song of instant riches,

“And give rich metal for adultrate brass.”

This lesson was forgotten, or at least never learned, by Americans. In the late 1920s they attained a level of folly that would have excited the envy of the French and English. The Federal Reserve’s easy money policies of the 1920s, combined with the same greed that overcame the Mississippi and South-Sea speculators—over two centuries earlier—caused an inflationary bubble in Florida’s housing market and then on Wall Street’s stock market. Galbraith has chronicled the sorry spectacle of herd behavior. It did not help

110 MacKay, p. 88.
that the American people, with a proven track-record of economic disaster, made the situation far worse by entering into a trade war with the rest of the world.\footnote{Cf., Benjamin M. Anderson, \textit{Economics and the Public Welfare}, [1949] 1979, pp. 229ff.}

In these cases, a speculative fever fueled by greed and dreams of quick affluence was eventually followed by panic and disenchantment. The ballooning markets were ruptured, and panic brought them down with a crash. A story told by Mark Twain provides an example of this frenzy for riches.\footnote{Mark Twain, \textit{Roughing It}, Chapter 28.} He was prospecting in Nevada with hopes of finding great amounts of silver, and was already planning on ways to spend it. He sneaked away from his companions and began his search with a “feverish excitement that was brimful of expectation.” He found a “bright fragment” and was caught up in a fever dream of riches, so that he spent more time searching the mountainside for treasure. “Of all the experiences of my life,” said Twain, “this secret search among the hidden treasures of silver-land was the nearest to unmarred ecstasy.”

A little later he caught a glimpse of some shining \textit{yellow} fragments, and thought he had found a gold-mine. Of course, his ecstasy in finding silver was replaced with an even greater fever of riches at the finding of the golden fragments. When he returned to the camp, he was so full of dreams of “far away” that the mundane conversation of his companions annoyed him. Presently, he began to be amused by their “sighing” over hardships when he knew that a gold mine lay within sight of the cabin, so he decided to give them the news slowly. He wanted to enjoy the effects upon their faces when they realized they were all rich.

He asked “Mr. Ballou”—an experienced miner—what he thought of the country, and Ballou said the country was such that they need not fear starvation, but it was unlikely they could get rich there. Twain proceeded to ask what Ballou and the others would think if a ledge could be found that would yield a great deal of money, and of course this gained their interest. He favored them with some sarcasm about their supposed expertise in mining, and loftily dangled before their excited minds visions of gold and silver to make them all rich. Finally, in a self-satisfied manner, he threw down his golden treasure before the men and asked them what they thought of it. The men scrambled to have a look and after a moment, Ballou said:

> “Think of it? I think it is nothing but a lot of granite rubbish and nasty glittering mica that isn’t worth ten cents an acre!”

Fools’ gold. Twain’s dream vanished, his wealth melted away, and his “airy castle” toppled to the earth to leave him “stricken and forlorn.” His haughty was turned to humble-pie, whereupon he moralized to the boys that all that glitters is not gold, but this got him a rebuke:

> “Mr. Ballou said I could go further than that, and lay it up among my treasures of knowledge, that \textit{nothing} that glitters is gold. So I learned then, once for all, that gold in its native state is but dull, unornamental stuff, and that only low-born metals excite the admiration of the ignorant with an ostentatious glitter. However, like the rest of the world, I still go on underrating men of gold and glorifying men of mica.”
The desire to get rich quick, to become affluent overnight—so well described by Twain—these are the emotions that drive men to speculate wildly in high-risk money-making ventures. There is little that can stop one of these speculative booms and they keep going until many have joined in, fearing to be left out of the chance to get rich. Eventually, there must be an end to economic frenzy, and once that point is reached, desire to sell drives out everything before it. A panic ensues, and the market crashes.

e. Linguistic Collapse: The first three explanations—famine, war, or socialism—are possible causes for the Uruk collapse. The main problem is in finding any evidence for them. Mesopotamian archaeologists do not mention any widespread wars, or general famines, or much by way of socialistic control of agriculture, at the end of the Late Uruk period. With regard to the fourth possibility—the greed and panic on display in the rise and collapse of market bubbles—it is perhaps too anachronistic to appeal to this as a cause of something that happened long before the rise of stock-oriented capitalism.

As we said earlier, it is hard to apply modern economic theories geared toward an explanation of capitalism, to the ancient past, or at least to pre-capitalist economic systems. Nevertheless, a certain type of panic may have played a larger role in the collapse of the Uruk market system than some have been willing to consider. As noted, Algaze’s solution is to regard the collapse as a result of something internal to the Mesopotamian “world-system”—i.e., that in “the long run” such a system contains the seeds of its own destruction. As we’ve argued, however, this is not much of an explanation, but rather the imposition of a quasi-Marxist ideology onto the history of the ancient world.

In our opinion, something must have shocked the whole system, and brought about its collapse. The New Courville view is that the Late Uruk period correlates to the time of biblical Nimrod and the Dispersion event. Accordingly, on this basis, we theorize that the Uruk world system collapsed for the simple reason that a great number of the market participants disappeared from the network. The idea that the Dispersion led to the collapse of the Uruk network, and crashed the market of the ancient world, is an educated guess at this point but is at least consistent with the available evidence. After the Uruk collapse, the historical Sumerians (on our theory) moved into the abandoned cities, and the trade networks were reestablished. However, the south was no longer in control of the east or west, or northern networks.

It is not necessary to hold that all the nations or ethnic groups mentioned in Genesis 10—e.g., Jebusites, Amorites, or Girgashites—were in existence at the time of the Dispersion. The sacred writer is referring to the peoples of his own day, when the children of Israel were living in the Holy Land, and he is tracking the origins of some of these contemporary nations back to their ancestors. These ancestors were the clans in existence at the time of the Dispersion. How many there were is difficult to tell, but it seems likely there were several, or else the linguistic catastrophe would not have had the

114 Gen. 10:31.
results that it did. In any case, it is not likely that there were only a handful (three or four).

One explanation for the cause of national poverty in modern times is “ethno-linguistic diversity.”\textsuperscript{115} If we look to a state such as modern Kenya, it has about 40 different ethnic groups, and this leads to a “polarized political situation.” Imagine if this involved drastically different linguistic patterns. The polarization would have resulted in a fractionalizing of the whole political and market system. Ethno-linguistic diversity may also lead to civil war, but in Africa this appears to result when the linguistic diversity is limited to a handful of major linguistic-ethnic groups, not spread out over dozens of groups:

“Only societies with a few large and competing ethnic groups have a high risk of civil war.”\textsuperscript{116}

There was no civil war during the Dispersion, as related in the Bible, and we cannot find evidence of such a war in the Late Uruk period. As noted, this is due to the fact that the Uruk society was not divided into only a handful of politically competitive linguistic groups in the above-mentioned sense, but into dozens. Eventually these would lead to the greater linguistic and national diversity recorded later by the sacred historian. Probably the increased diversity of clan groups was due in part to the Uruk trade system, where representatives of many different clans would have lived in the cities of southern Mesopotamia in order to improve their trading posture.

Another reason for widespread ethnic diversity was given in the biblical description of Babylonian ideology, that the Mesopotamians wanted to make a name for themselves so that they would not be scattered. This must have led to the emigration of large numbers of non-Shemite clans into the southern cities, even though the Shemites appear to have been the original settlers in the land (thus accounting for the Semitic-speaking nature of much of Mesopotamia).

In our opinion, the collapse of the Uruk network is better explained by ethno-linguistic diversity combined with some level of non-market panic. While irritation and annoyance at the linguistic babble would have been a strong factor in bringing about the emigration of the Shinarians to other lands, we think that fear cannot be underestimated as a causal factor in this process. The Shinarians got too close to God, as it were, and wanted to remove themselves to a safer epistemological climate. The erstwhile Mesopotamians could then proceed to repress their (unwanted) knowledge of God, and serve idols. Of course, by leaving Mesopotamia, they also brought about an implosion of the Uruk trade system. It would not be reestablished until a new group of traders entered the market during the Jemdet Nasr and later Early Dynastic period, i.e., the Sumerians.

End, Part 2.


\textsuperscript{116} Miles & Scott, \textit{Macroeconomics}, p. 160.