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History of Climate Change & Collapse in Syria: The Bronze Age & The Arab Spring

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Introduction

In 2023, there was a program for international relations which I had taken that explained the need for cooperation and education on global climate change. One of the classes involved reading an article about climate change and its effects on Syria in 2011. From my initial perspective prior to reading this article, the Syrian Arab Spring and subsequent civil war was seen as another conflict in the Middle East. A dictator who ran a country was being overthrown as already seen in Egypt. What this article did was show that the collapse of a polity was not simply because of a loss in support by the common people. Instead, there are elements which can lead to a greater collapse that may not be a result of any action which the polity had done. In other words, everything is interconnected and nothing happens in a vacuum. Two years later I am in another program involving archaeology discussing the Late Bronze Age Collapse. During this class, a theory from Mario Liverani is discussed. This theory was about the invasion of the Sea Peoples which is credited with causing the collapse of multiple Late Bronze Age polities. Mario Liverani claimed that instead of an outside group causing the fall of these polities, that instead it was internal migrations by roving bandits and nomadic groups. During this discussion, the previous discussion about climate change in Syria during 2011 reappeared in my mind. More specifically, how the climatic shift in Syria led to the now unemployed agrarian population to move into the urban centres in search for employment. After the move, dissent against the government of Bashar al-Assad grew and soon led to the Syrian Arab Spring. It was reading about the events of the 2011 Syrian Arab Spring and the theory of Mario Liverani which led me to do my thesis on climate change in Syria during the Bronze Age and 2011.

Typically, when seeing papers or discussing the fall of polities in history, the natural world is less discussed. More commonly, the discussion moved towards the internal policies of a polity. Otherwise, the discussion leads to the power of outside forces versus those within the polity. In a classicist perspective, this can be the fall of the Achaemenid Empire, with the unexpected strength of the Macedonian armies along with dissent by the Greek and Egyptian populations within the empire. Later examples can include the collapse of the Russian Empire with an unpopular autocrat combined with a population demoralized from losses in the First World War. Examples from a migratory perspective include the Germanic migrations into Central and Western Europe leading to the fall of the Western Roman Empire. This case saw the Germanic invaders initially cooperate with the Romans, only for later dissent among the Germanic leaders to result in first the fall of Rome to the Visigoths in AD 410 followed by the overthrow of Romulus Augustulus by Odoacer in AD 476. All of these summarizations

leave at least one aspect from the understanding for the collapse of polities. That aspect being the natural world and the events which change how a polity operates. For the Russian Empire, war exhaustion came with the movement of people into the major cities from the western frontier. This frontier, which included the breadbasket of the empire, Ukraine, was devastated and with it came famine for the Russian population. The Western Roman Empire saw the migration of Germanic peoples into their territory as a result of nomadic migrations from the Pontic Steppe, specifically the westward movement of the Hunnic Empire. Another Roman Example comes from the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. When the Sasanids conquered Egypt, the Byzantine Empire was no longer able to feed their subjects, leading to a period of internal strife. While in some of these examples there is a man-made reason for the collapse of a polity, there is also an environmental and internal factor.

The intention of this thesis is to show how climate change affected polities which were located within the confines of modern Syria and give a comparative analysis. Initially, the intention of this thesis was simply to discuss the migration of peoples that coincided with the collapse of polities in Syria. The problem with having such a narrow topic was that the migrations which led to these polities to collapse were not random events. Instead, there was a catalyst, and in the case studies which I am using it was a change in the local climate. This led me to look into another aspect about the collapse of these polities, and that is how they functioned. Coincidentally, all of the polities used for this thesis had a similar system of governance. While those during the Bronze Age were hereditary monarchies, the Syrian Arab Republic was a republic with a de facto hereditary succession. This similarity was compounded with the authoritarian, if not totalitarian, system of governance which all of these polities employed. The extreme centralization of the polities was also noted, with economic policies being regulated by those who were the heads of the polity. A final important similarity I found was the cult of personality which the leaders of these polities had manifested. While they were not all of the same vigor or intensity, they all shared an aspect of the leader being the central figure and epitome of the polity. For some polities the leader was the culmination of all the previous great leaders of the region. For other polities, the leader was a god whose legitimacy was assumed by their divinity. These similarities in how the polities functioned along with the migratory situations led to me wanting to compare Syria in both times. This comparison between the Bronze Age and the 2011 Arab Spring is to show at least two things which I noticed in researching all three sections. The first is that polities rise and fall in cycles based on changes within the natural world. This means that no polity will last forever and will either constantly adapt or be replaced with another polity. The

second is to show that despite the modern world being seemingly above the natural world, modern polities still require the natural world to function. This is especially seen with the 2011 Syrian Arab Spring, as the problems which caused the collapse of the Syrian Arab Republic originated from changes in the natural world. The end goal with this thesis is to show that since modern polities are still vulnerable to climate change that there is still a present need to properly maintain the natural world. Another aspect may be more optimistic in that nothing the shifts seen in the natural world, while accelerated by human development, are not something which humanity have not seen before. Even during the earliest establishment of polities, there were always climatic changes, it is how polities and societies responded that determined a continuation, rise, or fall in them. A final point of intent is that we can find solutions from the ancient world to modern problems, but also warnings from both the ancient world and more recent events. In every section, there is a pattern of problems which can be found in how polities historically functioned and are looked into in each example given. To best summarize what this thesis is about, there is a quote which states that there is no unique or permanent change but rather cycles throughout history.

What solidified my desire to analyze Syria and climate change in the Bronze age and modern period were the events in Syria which coincided with my first year at the University of Pavia. During my first year, Syria saw the end of its civil war, with the Syrian Arab Republic being replaced with a new interim government. This saw not only the end of the Assad dynasty in Syria but also the Ba'athist ideology ruling a country. Again, there were comparisons which could be made with the fall of polities at other points in history. The continuation of a similar identity mirrors what happens with other collapsing polities. In civil wars this is more common, but occasionally this is seen with polities which have no direct connection with the previous polity in the region. Odoacer, the Germanic King of Italy, was not seen as the end of the Western Roman Empire in contemporary times but instead the King of Italy at the behest of the Eastern Roman Emperor. The later Frankish and Ottonian monarchies in Europe continued the legacy of Rome despite the minimal connection between their people and the Western Roman Empire. After the conquest of China by both the Borjigin and the Jurchens, both groups integrated aspects of the earlier Chinese bureaucracy and administration, leading to these "barbarians" embracing the Chinese system of government. In other instances, the Syrian Civil War saw other polities and societies – such as Turkey, the Druze, and the Kurds in the Rojava region – take advantage to try and either expand their territory or become independent polities. This again is seen in history with societal collapses. The Russian Civil War saw multiple self-declared independent polities and

governments with the intention of establishing a new order from a collapsed system. Some proclaimed successorships from the previous regime while others declared a separate identity, be it cultural, ideological, or geographic. In both cases, this is also seen in Syria with the earlier examples given within this thesis.

For the question of why I chose Syria over other regions, one answer is my previous time seeing Syria as an example for collapse. There is another pertinent reason, that being how different each example I will use is to each other. Despite the superficial similarities already given, all three points in the history of Syria show a different type of polity with a differing level of power. For the Early Bronze Age, the Akkadian Empire is used, which was at the time of its inception the first major empire in world history. Ugarit, meanwhile, was a significant trading site and city-state along the Alawite coast of Syria. While they were a major trading site, Ugarit was not a major power, instead being a polity which was fought over between the Hittite and Egyptian Empires. The Syrian Arab Republic was not a major power in Western Asia even during its height. Instead, it was part of a network of alliances with equal or greater powers such as Egypt under Nasser, Iran under the Islamic Republic, and Russia and the Soviet Union. The Syrian Arab Republic was a means between the extremes of Ugarit and the Akkadian Empire. Syria required protection from other nearby polities but was also able to fend for itself, such as the de facto conquest of Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War. Another reason is the geographic location of Syria and the fairly consistent climate of the region. Syria is part of a larger crossroads for the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Therefore, there has historically been a lot of interconnection between the three continents which revolves around the Levantine coast, including Syria. The region also never had a purely isolated history from other polities, with both Egypt and Mesopotamia having the earliest known polities in human history. For climate, Syria has since the Bronze Age to the modern day had a consistently arid and semi-arid climate, meaning the changes in one period can be seen again in a later one.

For the final question as to how this thesis will be structured, there are four parts which will be explained. First, there is a section on how climate affects polities in general using a model created by Thomas F Homer-Dixon. This model shows how climate change leads to both internal and external shifts that affect the functions of polities. This model will be used as a baseline for how the polities which are written about fell. A further aspect which will be looked at is how climate has changed in Western Asia. This will include looking into the end of the last Ice Age and kiloyear events which affected Western Asia. Afterwards, the collapse of the Syrian Arab Republic will be looked into. For the Syrian Arab Republic, a

background will be given to how the modern state of Syria was established. Afterwards, the history of the Syrian Arab Republic from its establishment until 2011 will be discussed with the intention of giving background to why the events of 2011 happened. After this, the events of the 2011 Syrian Arab Spring will be analyzed with the background information given already to show why these events happened. The next section will be about the Late Bronze Age Collapse in Syria. This section will cover the Late Bronze Age in Western Asia in its entirety as background information. This is due to how the main aspect which will be analyzed, the collapse of Ugarit, was under the subjugation of more powerful polities within this region. After this, the history of Ugarit as a polity will also be shown from its known settlement until the collapse of the polity. For the Late Bronze Age section, migrations will be prominent in the section. Migrations during the Late Bronze Age were both internal and external to Western Asia. Due to the small size of the Ugarit polity, the discussion around migration will revolve more around whether the migrations which led to the Late Bronze Age Collapse were from within Western Asia or from groups outside of the region. The final sections of this thesis will cover the Akkadian Empire in Syria. While the Akkadian Empire itself was not centered around Syria, it was a major part of the Akkadian Empire and its later quasi-successor polities. Specifically, The Akkadian Empire was the foundation for many later polities in how they functioned. Furthermore, Syria during the Akkadian Empire was at a higher risk for climate change compared to the center of the polity in Mesopotamia. This section will begin with the history of the Akkadian Empire with specific emphasis on the reigns of Sargon the Great and Naram-Sin. After this, the history of the Akkadian Empire in Syria will be discussed further, with emphasis on specific settlements both within Northeastern Syria and on the frontiers of the empire. The reason for giving this difference is due to the conflict in sources and lack of reliable evidence for long-term Akkadian governance the further away settlements are from Mesopotamia. The last section for the Akkadian Empire will look at how climate change led to the end of the empire and the migrations which came afterwards.

Chapter I: From Modern to Ancient: Systemic Approach to Societal Collapse and Climatic/Environmental Change

Since the start of human society, there have been changes in how people interact both with those inside of their communities as well as those deemed outside of these communities. Beyond these interactions, human societies also have to respond to changes within their own environments. This includes both natural and “man-made” challenges, the latter of which can create further natural changes. The most consistent of these challenges is changes in the climate. This change can range from minor changes in a local environment to large-scale global shifts of multiple climates. In a modern context, this is referred to as “climate change” and while in this context there is an implied “man-made” reason for this challenge, climatic change has occurred prior to human polity.¹ Regardless of how this factor historically or currently comes into play, it nevertheless exists as a major role for how a society builds itself and functions.² To understand how the climate can create or destroy states, a theory proposed by Thomas F Homer-Dixon will be used.³ This theory states that with a decline in renewable resources – in either the quality, quantity, or both – there comes a decline in the accessibility of these resources, leading to a down spiraling effect on a society.⁴ While resource scarcity can be a main catalyst for polity-wide collapse, there are also independent factors which can come into play.⁵ However, in all cases it is both the functions of the polity and the natural environment which leads to either the rise and prosperity of a polity or its fall. There are other theories for how societal collapse can happen, such as a cyclical theory showing collapse as a result of natural changes to an environment.⁶ While this theory will not be primarily used, it shows the significance of climate change in not only the collapse of a society but also in the creations of societies.⁷

The theory by Thomas F Homer-Dixon is made to relate the collapse of polities with changes to the climate or at the very least fluctuations which can result from either human or natural events.⁸ More specifically, this theory is an attempt to explain why conflicts happen

¹ Arie S. Issar & Mattanyah Zohar, *Climate Change– Environment and History of the Near East*, (2007), 6.

² Ibid, 6.

³ Thomas F Homer-Dixon, “Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1994), 6.

⁴ Guy D. Middleton, “Nothing Lasts Forever: Environmental Discourses on the Collapse of Past Societies,” *Journal of Archaeological Research*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2012), 258.

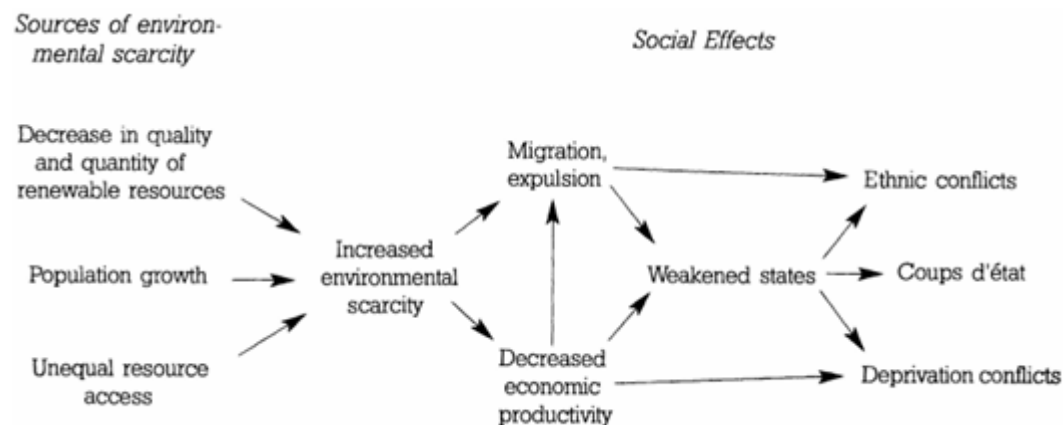
⁵ Graeme S. Cumming & Garry D. Peterson, “Unifying Research on Social-Ecological Resilience and Collapse,” *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, Vol. 32, No. 9 (2017), 696.

⁶ David D. Zhang, Hary F. Lee, Cong Wang, Baosheng Li, Qing Pei, Jane Zhang, Yulun An, (2011), “The causality analysis of climate change and large-scale human crisis,” *PNAS*, 17298.

⁷ Ibid, 17298.

⁸ Homer-Dixon, 8.

between peoples, be they internal or interstate.⁹ From the general findings, there were six “types” of environmental changes which generate group conflict.¹⁰ These being greenhouse-induced climate change, ozone depletion, degradation of agricultural land, degradation of forests, pollution of freshwater, and depletion of fisheries.¹¹ These environmental changes can occur both as a result of natural climate change as well as human intervention in the environment.¹² These six types of environmental degradation are then used in the creation of four flowcharts which show cause-and-effect relationships between different factors.¹³ The first of these four flowcharts shows two separate factors independently creating a similar end result.¹⁴ In this case a decrease in resources plus a rise in population creating unequal access to resources, then creating a rise in environmental scarcity.¹⁵ The second chart uses the same factors but has unequal access creating the decrease in resources.¹⁶ The last two charts that are given show how complex environmental factors can then create the backdrop for later social problems for a state.¹⁷ The conclusion of the article then goes into detail about how these problems for a state can then create a snowball effect for neighbouring states.¹⁸



(Fig. 1: Flowchart correlating environmental scarcity with social conflict [Homer-Dixon])

SECTION I: Climate Change in History

⁹ Ibid, 8.

¹⁰ Michael Kevane & Leslie Gray, “Darfur: rainfall & conflict,” *Environmental Research Letters*, (2008), 1-2.

¹¹ Homer-Dixon, 8.

¹² Ibid, 8.

¹³ Ibid, 10.

¹⁴ Ibid, 10-11; 31-32.

¹⁵ Ibid, 31.

¹⁶ Kevane & Gray, 7.

¹⁷ Ronnie Ellenblum, *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean: Climate Change & the Decline of the East, 950-1072*. Cambridge University Press (2012), 19.

¹⁸ Susan Martin, “Climate Change, Migration, and Governance,” *Global Governance*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2010), 398.

Climate change has been a part of global history since the beginning of the creation of Earth.¹⁹ For the context of this chapter, however, only climatological shifts which have occurred during the existence of modern humans will be analyzed, starting from the Pleistocene. Furthermore, I will consider here either global climatic shifts or more localized ones within the area of the Levant and Mesopotamia, which is the broad geographic area considered in this thesis. The term “climate change” will also be used interchangeably with “climate variability.” While these two definitions are used for human and natural shifts in the climate respectively, for the sake of brevity, the phrase “climate change” will be used for both contexts. Much of the evidence for these climatic shifts come from Greenlandic and Antarctic ice cores.²⁰

The first of these climatological events in modern human history was the Last Glacial Period, also known as the “Ice Age” which lasted from the Late Pleistocene until the beginning of the Holocene.²¹ During this period, there was a decrease in the global temperature and an extreme expansion of glacial fields.²² This glacial expansion went as far south as the Northern continental United States.²³ In the context of modern Syria, the region saw semi-desert along the coast with extreme desert conditions more inland.²⁴ During this period the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers were part of the larger Ur-Shatt river system.²⁵ The nearest ice fields to the Levant and Mesopotamia were found in modern-day Turkey, Iran, and the Caucasus.²⁶ During the later part of this Late Pleistocene, known as the Bølling–Allerød Interstadial, temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere rose significantly, though to a lesser extent in the Middle East.²⁷ During this period the presence of cereal grains in the Levant region also occurred.²⁸ In much of the world there was megafauna which was a major source of food for early humans.²⁹

¹⁹ Chad M Eliason, Leah Hudson, Taylor Watts, Hector Garza, & Julia A Clarke, “Exceptional Preservation and the Fossil Record of Tetrapod Integument,” *Proceedings: Biological Sciences*, Vol. 284, No. 1862 (2017), 1.

²⁰ Issar & Zohar, 165.

²¹ G. DeBlonde & W.R. Peltier, “Late Pleistocene Ice Age Scenarios Based on Observational Evidence,” *Journal of Climate*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1993), 709.

²² Ibid, 713.

²³ Ibid, 713.

²⁴ Mauricio E. Graipel, Matheus S. Lima-Ribeiro, Jorge J. Cherem, Paul R. Momen Miller, José A.F. Diniz-Filho, Nilton C. Cáceres, “Seasonality and Desertification drove the Global Extinction of Megafauna in the Late Quaternary,” *Quaternary Science Reviews* (2024), 2.

²⁵ Lanari, Alex Boutoux, Claudio Faccenna, Frederic Herman, Sean D. Willett, Paolo Ballato, “Cenozoic exhumation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East”, *Earth-Science Reviews*, Volume 237, (2023), 21.

²⁶ Ibid, 5.

²⁷ Ibid, 13.

²⁸ Graipel et al, 2.

²⁹ Ibid, 2.

After the Pleistocene is the Holocene, specifically the Holocene Climate Optimum, which occurred just before the rise of the first polities.³⁰ During this period, temperatures rose from the Last Glacial Maximum by approximately 4.9 degrees centigrade.³¹ For the Middle East, this meant a lack of cold winters and the growth of savanna compared to the initial desert and semi-desert biome from the Pleistocene.³² Global sea levels also rose with the rising temperatures.³³ During the Holocene was also the 8.2 kiloyear event, which saw a drop in the global average temperature.³⁴ For Mesopotamia, this event lasted for around 300 years and was a long period of aridification and cooling.³⁵

While the previous two ages for climatic change occurred in times when complex human polities were either in a scattering of locations or nonexistent, later Holocene climatic events occurred at the earliest over 2000 years after the beginning of human polities.³⁶ The first of these which affected the Middle East was the 4.2 kiloyear event which started around 2200 BC and lasted for four generations until around 2100 BC.³⁷ This was one of the two major climatic events which occurred during the Bronze Age and in both cases there were major declines in prominent polities.³⁸ What caused the 4.2 kiloyear event was the weakening of the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation, which is a main ocean current that affects the climates of North America and Europe.³⁹ This caused other major climatic systems to shift both in location and variability.⁴⁰ This time period also saw glacial advance and increased volcanic activity, meaning this period was a cooling event for the Earth.⁴¹ For the Middle East, this period saw a period of aridification with a brief period of increased humidity, known as a “W-shaped event.”⁴² This period in Mesopotamia saw a rise of

³⁰ Dominik Fleitmann, Matthew Bosomworth, Diary Ali Mohammed Amin Al-Manmi, Melanie J. Leng, Diana Sahy, Karen Radner, Alistair Morgan, Alistair W.G. Pike, Mark Altaweel, “Mid-Holocene hydroclimatic optimum recorded in a stalagmite from Shalaih Cave, northern Iraq”, *Quaternary Science Reviews*, (2025), 1.

³¹ Ibid, 9.

³² Ibid, 10.

³³ Ibid, 10.

³⁴ Ibid, 11.

³⁵ Ibid, 11.

³⁶ Cumming & Peterson, 703.

³⁷ Ibid, 703.

³⁸ Ibid, 703.

³⁹ Mohamed A. Almarri, Marc Haber, Reem A. Lootah, Pille Hallast, Saeed Al Turki, Hilary C. Martin, Yali Xue, Chris Tyler-Smith, (2021), “The genomic history of the Middle East,” *Cell*, Volume 184, Issue 18, 4621.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 4616.

⁴¹ S. Badertscher, A. Borsato, S. Frisia, H. Cheng, R.L. Edwards, O. Tüysüz, D. Fleitmann, (2014), “Speleothems as sensitive recorders of volcanic eruptions – the Bronze Age Minoan eruption recorded in a stalagmite from Turkey,” *Earth and Planetary Science Letters*, Volume 392, 58.

⁴² Almarri et al, 4614.

salinization in modern-day Southern Iraq as well as longer sandstorm, or shamal, seasons.⁴³ Sea temperatures were also cooler which contributed to the aridification of the region.⁴⁴

For the Late Bronze Age Collapse, there is evidence of climactic shifts in the Mediterranean region, including the Middle East.⁴⁵ During this period, as with the 4.2 kiloyear event, there was another shift from the initial increased humidity and temperatures to a colder and more arid environment.⁴⁶ As a result, water levels in the Middle East were 50 meters lower than the modern day.⁴⁷ There are questions as to whether this shift towards drought conditions was spontaneous, as seen with similar droughts in the 1970s in Northwest Africa, or the culmination of a long term decrease in precipitation.⁴⁸ Volcanic activity is also said to have caused this climactic shift, with the Hekla 3 volcanic eruption in Iceland potentially causing a volcanic winter.⁴⁹

Between the Late Bronze Age Collapse and the Modern Day, the Middle East has also been affected by other “warm periods” and “ice ages,” such as the Roman Warm Period, the Little Ice Age, and the Mediaeval Warm Period.⁵⁰ In all of these cases, the results of these climactic shifts were due to natural causes. Since the Industrial Revolution, however, climatic changes have not only been the result of natural changes but also from human activity.⁵¹ Before the Industrial Revolution, there was a period of cooler temperatures which had lasted for the previous 300 years.⁵² Since this period, there has been a warming trend globally with the exception of thirty years between 1950 and 1980 which saw a global cooling period.⁵³ This warming period has resulted in glacial retreat as well as variations in both temperature and snowfall.⁵⁴ The causes of climatic change come from human actions on the environment, specifically habitat destruction and reliance on fossil fuels such as oil and coal.⁵⁵ This has led to human activity emitting carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, and water vapor which

⁴³ Issar & Zohar, 15.

⁴⁴ Cumming & Peterson, 703.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 703.

⁴⁶ Issar & Zohar, 170.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 165.

⁴⁸ Kevane & Gray, 7.

⁴⁹ J. Eiriksson, K.L. Knudsen, H. Haflidason, and J. Heinemeier, (2000), “Chronology of late Holocene climatic events in the northern North Atlantic based on AMS 14C dates and tephra markers from the volcano Hekla, Iceland,” *J. Quaternary Sci.*, 15, 574.

⁵⁰ Guy D. Middleton, (2012), “Nothing Lasts Forever: Environmental Discourses on the Collapse of Past Societies,” *Journal of Archaeological Research*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 279.

⁵¹ Norm Catto & Gail Catto, (2004), “Climate change, communities, and civilizations: driving force, supporting player, or background noise?” *Quaternary International*, 8.

⁵² Ibid, 8.

⁵³ Ibid, 8.

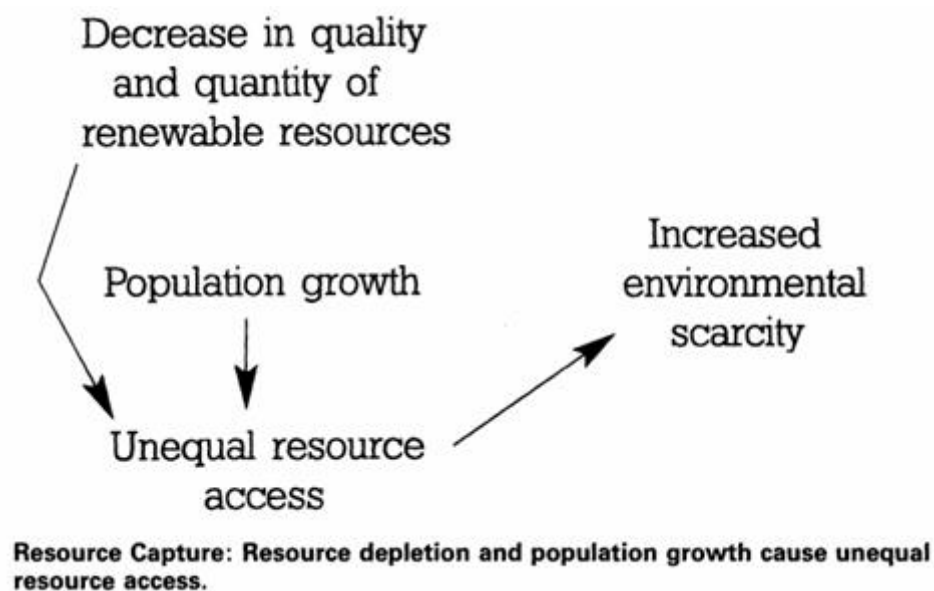
⁵⁴ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁵ Homer-Dixon, 18-19.

increases air temperature.⁵⁶ This increase results in the thawing of permafrost and reduction of snowfall, creating a downspiral effect where there is more emission of greenhouse gases.⁵⁷ This has also led to other environmental effects such as ocean acidification, an increase in intense weather events, desertification, decrease in freshwater, coral bleaching, disease propagation, and rising sea levels.⁵⁸ For the Middle East, this period of warming in a region dominated by desert and semi-arid conditions means the continued encroachment of deserts, increased risk of drought, and less natural defenses from volatile weather patterns.⁵⁹

SECTION II: How Politics Fall

Polities collapse through “factors.” These “factors” are changes which occur independent of a polity which influence actions done by said polity. Each factor can be a result of either an internal or external change in the environment.⁶⁰ This environment can be the result of a natural change without any direct human intervention or be from direct human intervention.⁶¹



(Fig. 2: Flowchart of how factors impact resource scarcity [Homer-Dixon])

⁵⁶ James Dobbins, Richard H. Solomon, Michael S. Chase, Ryan Henry, F. Stephen Larrabee, Robert J. Lempert, Andrew M. Liepman, Jeffrey Martini, David Ochmanek, and Howard J. Shatz, (2015), “Climate Change,” In *Choices for America in a Turbulent World: Strategic Rethink*, 69.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 69.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁹ Aurore Vigan, Jacques Lasseur, Marc Benoit, Florent Mouillot, Maguy Eugène, Laura Mansard, Mathieu Vigne, Philippe Lecomte, Céline Dutilly, (2017), “Evaluating livestock mobility as a strategy for climate change mitigation: Combining models to address the specificities of pastoral systems,” *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*, 89.

⁶⁰ Thomas-Dixon, 2.

⁶¹ Ibid, 13.

Internal Factors

For this section, internal factors will first be discussed, leaving the treatment of external factors for the following section. Internal factors can be defined as all elements producing meaningful societal change that occur within a given polity.⁶² The first major type of internal factor is population growth. This can come from either an increased birthrate or immigration.⁶³ In both cases, this factor can create scarcity of certain resources, but can also be advantageous for the polity in question.⁶⁴ More specifically, if a polity has a low birthrate, an increase in immigration can help maintain production rates.⁶⁵ Also its opposite can result in a lack of production and new vulnerabilities. Lower population growth can lead to economic collapse in the long term.⁶⁶ Combined with population is the question of how the population is growing. A final major part of the population factor is which sector of the population of a polity grows. This is a question based on the demographics of a polity. If the population sector which is growing is considered a “native” or “accepted” population, then this factor can be a net positive.⁶⁷ If, however, this demographic has a negative connotation with those governing a region or polity, this population increase can become a catalyst for future conflict.⁶⁸ This risk of conflict is only exacerbated, as seen by the flowcharts of Thomas F Homer-Dixon, when there is a resource scarcity.⁶⁹

Population is also a factor in a more localized context, with internal migration. Internal migration can be caused from multiple other factors, such as economic conditions, social conditions, or environmental conditions.⁷⁰ Internal migration as the result of economic conditions, for example, may mean people leaving a city with few opportunities for another location within the same polity. The reason for migration itself is a factor which can be analyzed. For the factor of economic conditions, these can come from actions both by the state, locality, or a result of the natural environment.⁷¹ In this context, the natural environment is an internal factor since it is something which is occurring within the polity in question. An example of an economic factor can be the increase of the price of a commodity. First there are the questions of what this commodity is and why this commodity has increased

⁶² Ibid, 8.

⁶³ Ibid, 15.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁵ Tom Abate, (1994), “Climate and the Collapse of Civilization,” *BioScience*, 519.

⁶⁶ Ellenbaum, 29.

⁶⁷ Issar & Zohar, 233.

⁶⁸ Martin, 398.

⁶⁹ Homer-Dixon, 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 29.

⁷¹ Ibid, 21.

in price. An increase can come from either the monopolization of the commodity or the resources required for the production of this commodity. Another reason can be due to physical scarcity of the commodity. A perishable good that is produced in a humid environment will struggle to grow in an arid one. Economic factors from a political point of view can include economic centralization. Centralizing an economy is commonly done as a means of generating greater efficiency for the benefit of a state commonly as a means of economic autarky.⁷² This means, in an internal context, there is a reliance on the state in order for a system to function.⁷³ If a state does not have the same functionality under an autarkic system, there becomes a need for new means of production.⁷⁴ For localized economies, decentralization and autonomy can help reduce damage done by certain factors.⁷⁵

Resource scarcity is another internal factor for a polity, specifically, the scarcity of a natural resource within a polity. Resource scarcity is a cause for both internal and external conflicts throughout history and is therefore one of the biggest catalysts for historical and future conflicts.⁷⁶ How this scarcity occurs is commonly from either an overexploitation of a resource, the necessity for an external partner, or a natural scarcity.⁷⁷ Natural scarcity being either a result of an environmental change or from the original settlement by a polity.⁷⁸ This resource scarcity can then create a factor which will be called a “resource curse.”⁷⁹ This resource curse originates from how states and polities act when there is an abundance of a highly sought after resource.⁸⁰ In a modern context this creates “rentier states” in which the development and diversification of an economy is disincentivized due to the profits one resource develops.⁸¹ Oil is a critical resource, therefore want of this resource can lead to trade or conflict.⁸² Other resources, such as water can create more versatile conditions for conflict both internally and externally.⁸³ Water as a resource is a basic need for all life and as such there will always be competition for water where it is scarce. Desert climates with human

⁷² Ibid, 21.

⁷³ Ibid, 21.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 21.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 24.

⁷⁶ Kevane & Gray, 9.

⁷⁷ Homer-Dixon, 6.

⁷⁸ Dobbins et al, 72.

⁷⁹ Nicholas Shaxson, (2007), “Oil, Corruption and the Resource Curse,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 1123.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 1129.

⁸¹ Ibid, 1129.

⁸² Dobbins et al, 75.

⁸³ Middleton, 277.

populations will see groups contend for this resource, as seen with conflicts such as those in Darfur and Nigeria between herding and farming communities.⁸⁴

The final internal factor that will be discussed in length is the environment. This factor has the most variability and can be caused by both natural fluctuations as well as human impact.⁸⁵ This is also the broadest of the factors as all other factors can either directly affect or be directly affected by other factors.⁸⁶ The environment that is internal to a polity both directs how a polity functions and can test how well a polity can adapt to changes.⁸⁷ Environmental changes can include changes to the local climate, a decline in a species, environmental destruction, and a change in weather patterns.⁸⁸ Changes to a climate can impact what the environment will be like for a polity.⁸⁹ As a climate gets warmer or cooler, humid or drier, the environment will change with different animal and plant life to adapt to this climatic shift.⁹⁰ A polity which has a large dense population that suffers a drought will have a more difficult time adapting than one with a smaller less dense population.⁹¹ It is the environment which polities primarily have to adapt to or dissolve themselves, and this is not exclusive to the local environments of a polity.

External Factors

For external factors, these can come either as a result of the internal factors which affect other polities or be from the environment itself. External factors are how a polity reacts to the internal factors of other polities.⁹² This is regardless of whether a polity is isolated or completely interconnected with other polities.⁹³ With the first described category, population, an external population factor can come in the form of immigration or migration. In the case of immigration there needs to be a place where a community is emigrating from. This then must have a reason, be it economic opportunities, seeking refuge, or a simple desire for a community or individual to move.⁹⁴ In this context, immigration implies an influx of people from various locations for a myriad of reasons. In the case of migration, there is an implication that this is a singular or group of communities all moving with the intention of

⁸⁴ Kevane & Gray, 1.

⁸⁵ Andrew Lawler, (2010), "Collapse? What Collapse? Societal Change Revisited," *Science*, 907.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 907.

⁸⁷ Martin, 399.

⁸⁸ Homer-Dixon, 6.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁹⁰ Ellenbaum, 64.

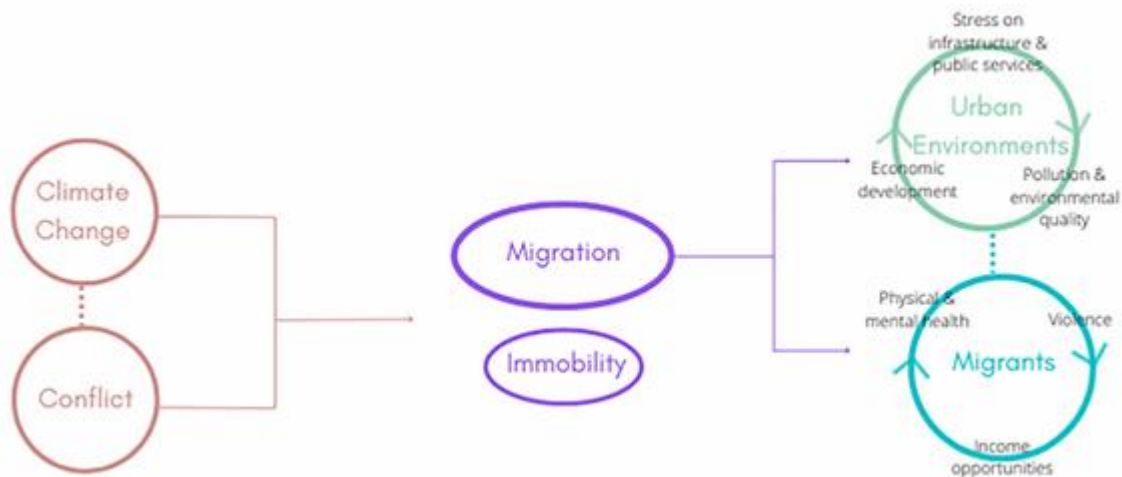
⁹¹ Ibid, 132.

⁹² Homer-Dixon, 36.

⁹³ Martin, 400.

⁹⁴ Zhang et al, 17297.

settling down in a new location.⁹⁵ In the case of polities these are nomadic communities which typically move with climactic patterns.⁹⁶ For non-polity migrations this can be certain ethnic and religious communities fleeing from persecution as refugees or a response to the migration of other groups.⁹⁷ These migrations can then cause a shift in population sizes as well as access to resources, leading to potential future conflict.⁹⁸



(Fig. 3: Chart showing impact of climate change to Urban migration [Alverio et al])

For economics in an external context, the simplest way to determine this factor comes from trade between peoples and polities. Economies have historically been interlinked more internally rather than externally.⁹⁹ If there were any economic interactions between communities or states, they came due to either there being a need or want of a certain resource or as a means of power politics.¹⁰⁰ In this sense, economics as an external factor can show how dependent a state is on another state.¹⁰¹ External economics, such as trade, can also show the relations which states have as trade is a form of diplomacy as well as a means to receive resources and goods that another state wants.¹⁰² Production of grain on an internal scale by a state can determine how powerful a state is and how valuable this state may be for another.¹⁰³ If one polity needs grain while another has an abundance of this resource, then these states may either trade with grain for either investment or a diplomatic or economic

⁹⁵ Abate, 7.

⁹⁶ Ellenbaum, 48.

⁹⁷ Homer-Dixon, 20.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 9.

⁹⁹ Issar & Zohar, 98.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 98.

¹⁰¹ Cumming & Peterson, 704.

¹⁰² Homer-Dixon, 16.

¹⁰³ Zhang et al, 17297.

good.¹⁰⁴ Another option is conquest depending on the power and vulnerability of said state, as a weak state with an abundance of resources will be the target of another state.¹⁰⁵ External economics can also show dependencies of communities. If a state is reliant on another for certain resources, they may be vulnerable when an internal factor disrupts the stability of the state.¹⁰⁶ Migration of people creating a strain on a resource can mean a need to find more of this resource.

Resource scarcity in an external context is strongly interlinked with the other three factors. This factor can come as either an external polity or community pursuing the attainment of a domestic resource within a polity or an internal need becoming an external factor in diplomacy.¹⁰⁷ Similar to economics, a need for resources will cause polities on an external level to find either internal means or outside partners to obtain these resources.¹⁰⁸ Food, for example, can cause external competition as seen with conflicts involving fishing rights.¹⁰⁹ In this way, resource scarcity pushes states or communities to find new means to obtain a resource and depending on the dynamics of the group or state in question, can result in either a diplomatic solution or conflict for resource rights.¹¹⁰

The environment as an external factor is indirect for a polity and comes more as what causes other polities or communities to interact with the polity in question. A change in a nearby environment either by a population in the area or from natural causes can lead to any other factor becoming more prominent for an outside polity.¹¹¹ In this sense, the environmental factor confirms how nothing happens in a vacuum. Rather, the environment and the changes which come from it enable changes which will affect at the bare minimum other nearby areas.¹¹² A natural disaster in one area will affect the response and actions of another.¹¹³ A change in the climate can also lead to similar situations where an outside group has a change which creates a response towards another polity.¹¹⁴ Migratory tribes and

¹⁰⁴ Ellenbaum, 149.

¹⁰⁵ Issar & Zohar, 78.

¹⁰⁶ Cummin & Peterson, 708.

¹⁰⁷ Shaxson, 1130.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 1130.

¹⁰⁹ Homer-Dixon, 12.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 18.

¹¹¹ Martin, 411.

¹¹² Middleton, 268.

¹¹³ Peter F. Nardulli, Buddy Peyton, Joseph Bajjalieh, (2015), "Climate Change and Civil Unrest: The Impact of Rapid-onset Disasters," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 311.

¹¹⁴ Middleton, 277.

nomadic peoples commonly moved for better environments and left areas either because of known better lands or by force from other peoples or climactic shifts.¹¹⁵

SECTION III: The Climate & Politics

The history of peoples and politics and the changes therein can be found in the climatological history both of where these peoples and politics were found and the surrounding environment. For this section, first the history of the environment in the context of general human adaptation will be discussed. Afterwards, a more open context about politics throughout history and how the environment has affected them first directly and later indirectly. For how humans have acted historically with climate change, the most noticeable way is the transition from the Paleolithic to the Mesolithic.¹¹⁶ While this was not a uniform change, the environment did change how humans acted in general.¹¹⁷ In the Paleolithic the climate was much cooler with the glacial range being much further south than it is today.¹¹⁸ This colder climate resulted in more tundra and less forests as well as harsher winters.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the Late Pleistocene was the last period where there was a significant amount of megafauna species. For the human population at the time, there were no “civilizations” or “polities,” but rather small hunter-gatherer societies.¹²⁰ These populations were small, nomadic communities and moved with prey species.¹²¹ For the human population at the time, megafauna and herd animals were the basis for their diet.¹²² With the Mesolithic, there was both a rise in temperatures and a decline in megafauna populations.¹²³ This resulted in a gradual transition from nomadicism to sedentarism for human societies.¹²⁴ This change was not universal, but in specific areas with high concentrations of foodstuffs.¹²⁵ For their diets, with the decline in megafauna due to both overhunting and biome reduction, human

¹¹⁵ Lawler, 909.

¹¹⁶ Lawrence Guy Straus, (2009), “The Late Upper Paleolithic-Mesolithic-Neolithic Transitions in Cantabrian Spain,” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 288.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 288.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 293.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 294.

¹²⁰ Eric J. Guiry, Maria Hillier, Michael P. Richards, (2015), “Mesolithic Dietary Heterogeneity on the European Atlantic Coastline: Stable Isotope Insights into Hunter-Gatherer Diet and Subsistence in the Sado Valley, Portugal,” *Current Anthropology*, 460.

¹²¹ Ibid, 462.

¹²² Graipel et al, 8.

¹²³ Straus, 288.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 290.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 290.

populations started to consume smaller animals.¹²⁶ Fishing also became more prevalent and with shellfish consumption.¹²⁷

Climatic change has also helped for people not only to begin settling permanently, but also led to the rise of pastoralism and agrarianism.¹²⁸ With the rise in temperatures and sea levels, there was also a rise in available usable fresh water.¹²⁹ This warmer and more humid climate meant new plant species could be both gathered and cultivated.¹³⁰ During the Neolithic, this climactic shift led to an even warmer climate as well as significant environmental shifts.¹³¹ The continued decline in large game species along with the proliferation of forests led to new animal and plant life coming into fruition.¹³² For the Neolithic, the rise in human population came with the new wild plant and animal species found in Mesopotamia and the larger Fertile Crescent region.¹³³ This area, known as the Golden Triangle, was where the earliest agricultural species came from.¹³⁴ From this point, human societies began to grow along areas of fresh water, and with the abundance of new resources, came less hunting and gathering and more agriculture and settled life.¹³⁵ Populations no longer were reliant on where herds of animals were moving to or specific locations for gathering certain plants.¹³⁶ This decline in both full and seasonal nomadicism was not everywhere following this rise in domestic plants and animals but it did begin a trend known as the “Neolithic Revolution.”¹³⁷ What this did do for settled human populations is make the effects of climate change more damaging due to the sedentary nature of these polities.¹³⁸ While migratory tribes, pastoralist, and nomadic and semi-nomadic communities could adapt by relocating to new places for necessary resources, settled societies require resources to remain consistent both in their own territories and in outside regions.¹³⁹ In some cases, such as in the Bronze Age, there were both pastoral and agricultural communities living in the same space, with pastoral groups moving with the climate for both food for the

¹²⁶ Guiry et al, 463.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 460.

¹²⁸ Straus, 293.

¹²⁹ Guiry et al, 462.

¹³⁰ Straus, 293.

¹³¹ Ibid, 293.

¹³² Ibid, 293.

¹³³ Giacomo Benati & Carmine Guerriero, (2023), “Combining social sciences, geoscience and archaeology to understand societal collapse,” *Quaternary Science Reviews*, 1.

¹³⁴ A. Nigel Goring-Morris & Anna Belfer-Cohen, (2011), “Neolithization Processes in the Levant: The Outer Envelope,” *Current Anthropology*, 198.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 204.

¹³⁶ Guiry et al, 468.

¹³⁷ Benati & Carmine, 204.

¹³⁸ Straus, 293.

¹³⁹ Dobbins et al, 72.

animals and more available water.¹⁴⁰ In this case, it was the administration of the polity where these groups interacted which at the least attempted to preserve peace between the two groups.¹⁴¹

Migration due to climactic events has affected the history of polities both through direct invasion by a migratory force or through the indirect migration of people fleeing a new invading group.¹⁴² In this context, the region of the Eurasian steppe has had a large amount of migratory forces which have throughout history moved from east to west and from the western steppe either further into Europe or into Iran, Western Asia or South Asia.¹⁴³ This is due to how the climate of Eurasia is by itself with the further east being less suitable for large populations of people and especially herding and agricultural communities.¹⁴⁴ The Scythians of the Pontic Steppe, the portions of the Eurasian steppe between modern-day Ukraine and Kazakhstan, moved out of the region into Anatolia and Persia due to the lack of available resources to satiate the entire population.¹⁴⁵ Cooling periods in the Mediaeval Period saw the change of hands of the Pontic Steppe from the Huns to the Bulgars, Khazars, Cumans, and lastly the Mongols.¹⁴⁶ Migratory tribes, unlike nomadic peoples, don't move in the same fashion since their lifestyles are more settled.¹⁴⁷ Instead, migratory tribes move usually as a response to outside pressures rather than internal ones.¹⁴⁸ Germanic tribes in Europe moved in reaction to the movement of the Hunnic Empire, which itself expanded to accommodate a rising population as well as the environmental conditions in Europe versus the Pontic Steppe.¹⁴⁹ Migratory tribes also have more of a history of political integration into another polity, however this varies depending on other conditions, such as how powerful nearby

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 72.

¹⁴¹ Homer-Dixon, 26.

¹⁴² Ibid, 20.

¹⁴³ Ellenbaum, 123.

¹⁴⁴ Johanna Nichols, (2011), "Forerunners to Globalization: The Eurasian Steppe and its Periphery," *Studies in Slavic and General Linguistics*, 189.

¹⁴⁵ Issar & Zohar, 228.

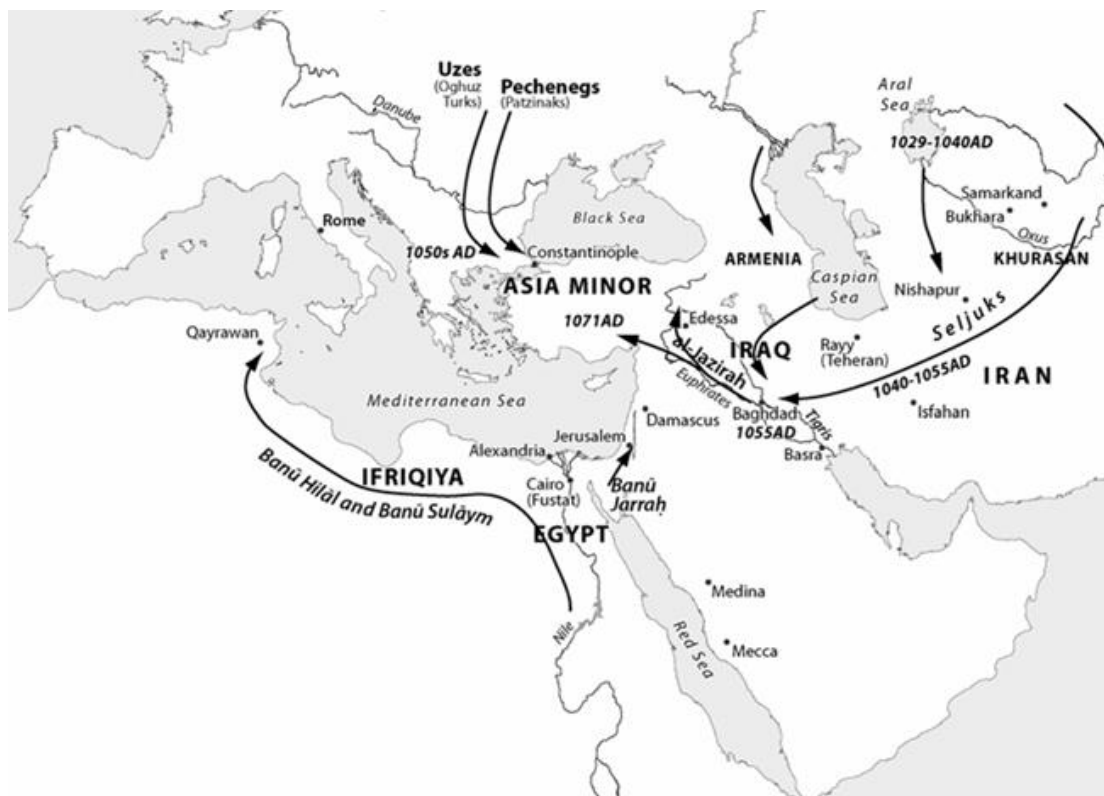
¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 228.

¹⁴⁷ Walter Goffart, (1981), "Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians," *The American Historical Review*, 276.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 284.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 288.

polities are.¹⁵⁰



(Fig. 4: Map of Western Asia showing High Mediaeval Period migrations [Ellenblum])

The final portion about climactic change and history is how humans themselves have impacted climatic changes. Since the Industrial Revolution, humans have had a direct effect on the temperature of the globe.¹⁵¹ While historically, humans have changed the environment with the rise of agriculture, pastoralism, and the eradication of wildlife, modern climate change sees mankind affect how the environment itself functions beyond a traditional ecological level.¹⁵² One major aspect is how people both now move due to seasonal resource scarcities but also now because of human-made scarcities either on purpose or a result of overuse for industries.¹⁵³ In order for certain resources to be produced, water is required in the process, for example the use of steam power or water for irrigation.¹⁵⁴ However, with the rising temperatures, there is a simultaneous rising of ocean levels, making certain areas more of a risk to live in.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, this means areas with already arid or semi-arid climates now have less available fresh water.¹⁵⁶ The result of this dual problem is a decline in

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 296.

¹⁵¹ Gabriela Nagle Alverio, Jeanne L. Sowers, Erika Weinthal, (2024), "Climate change, conflict, and urban migration," *Environment and Security*, 2.

¹⁵² Ibid, 2.

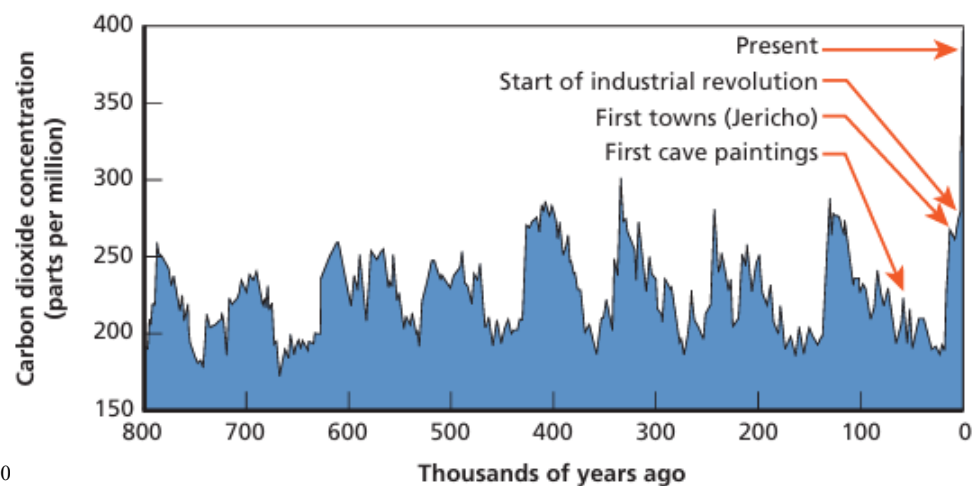
¹⁵³ Dobbins et al, 75.

¹⁵⁴ Homer-Dixon, 25.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 10.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 13.

available water for the general population, with water being diverted either to large industrial-scale farming or for other industries.¹⁵⁷ This forces people to either move into already heavily populated areas where water access is more of a guarantee or move to other locations for this resource.¹⁵⁸ Shifts in the climate by humans, therefore, can accelerate already existing climatic trends and force polities to adapt to the new environment. For modern humanity, and therefore modern polities, the problem of environmental impacts, combined with a growing population in countries with high poverty rates, poses a risk to modern polities.¹⁵⁹ A high population plus less resources means there is a high chance for larger-scale resource wars in



the near future.¹⁶⁰

(Fig. 5: Chart of carbon dioxide concentration since 800,000yrs BP [Dobbins et al])

SECTION IV: Collapse in the Study of Ancient Societies

When studying ancient societies, there is always the understanding that no system lasts forever. Every polity has a rise and fall, the question is how these polities collapse. What is found in these studies is that all polities and human-made systems are vulnerable to change and it is the question of how a polity reacts to these changes that determines whether or not it will survive.¹⁶¹ This vulnerable nature of polities is even more noticeable with ancient societies which were at the mercy of shifts in the natural world.¹⁶² While this is still present in the modern world, technology has helped in making polities more secure from environmental shifts both man-made and natural.¹⁶³ Studying the collapse of a society requires a

¹⁵⁷ Cumming & Peterson, 710.

¹⁵⁸ Homer-Dixon, 25.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 25.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 36.

¹⁶¹ Joseph A. Tainter, (1988), *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 211.

¹⁶² Ronald K. Faulseit, (2016), *Beyond Collapse: Archaeological Perspectives on Resilience, Revitalization, and Transformation in Complex Societies*, Southern Illinois University Press, 71.

¹⁶³ Jared Diamond, (2005), *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, Viking, 7.

multidisciplinary outlook including both aspects of the humanities and the natural sciences. The humanities give the more human-centric view of a collapse with records by contemporaries and how their societies and polities functioned. For the sciences, it is comparative knowledge of an environment and its later shifts. For both, archaeological expeditions and surveys are required to provide evidence for a societal collapse.¹⁶⁴

The reason for studying the collapse of ancient societies can vary depending on the context. For those in the humanities it may be to have a greater understanding of the history of a society.¹⁶⁵ For those in the sciences the reason may align more with wanting to know how environments can change over time.¹⁶⁶ According to Joseph A Tainter, the reason comes from a combination of scientific interest and concern for contemporary societies.¹⁶⁷ For contemporary societies, collapse is not seen as an inevitability but rather the result of unfortunate events or poor policies by polities.¹⁶⁸ The reality of societal collapse, however, is seen in ancient societies with “unfortunate events” being more common as gradual changes which slowly add up.¹⁶⁹ Major shifts for ancient societies, such as sudden disasters or temperature fluctuations, come less frequently, hence the greater reporting both by contemporaries and later scholars.¹⁷⁰ What ancient societies show is that a polity can have near-perfect policies and means of counteracting environmental changes, however there will always be a change which leads to vulnerabilities within a system to be revealed.¹⁷¹ Modern societies are not immune to this despite technological advancements.¹⁷² These collapses come first from an environmental change and continue into the anthropocentric world with societal changes or disintegration.¹⁷³ Despite differences in time, the collapse of the Akkadian Empire, Ugarit, and the Syrian Arab Republic all have the same origin.

¹⁶⁴ Faulseit, 31.

¹⁶⁵ Tainter, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Faulseit, 71.

¹⁶⁷ Tainter, 2.

¹⁶⁸ Tainter, 54.

¹⁶⁹ Diamond, 220.

¹⁷⁰ Faulseit, 71.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 75.

¹⁷² Diamond, 8.

¹⁷³ Tainter, 2.

Chapter II: The Syrian Arab Spring

For the modern country of Syria, the 2011 Arab Spring and subsequent Civil War primarily credited for the collapse of the Assadist regime. This fall was solidified with the capture of Damascus by Tahrir al-Sham, a Syrian rebel group, in December 2024. The question of how Syria fell into a collapse of central authority, however, remains unanswered by answering the question with these two events. Both events were a culmination of both political and environmental changes which negatively impacted both the Syrian government and the general population. For this chapter, the political history of Syria up until the 2011 Arab Spring will first be looked at in a cursory context. This is intended to give more information to the reader for how Syria became a dynastic dictatorship. Afterwards, an in-depth analysis of the political situation in Syria during the 2011 Arab Spring and the subsequent Syrian Civil War. Lastly, a climatological and ecological analysis of Syria during the rule of Bashar al-Assad will be conducted.

SECTION I: Background

History of Syria: Pre-Assad Dynasty

As a modern political entity, Syria has existed since the end of the First World War. Arguably, one can start the modern political history of Syria with its conquest by the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷⁴ This is because of the relationship between the Ottoman Turks and Arab populations, with the latter vying for independence towards the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷⁵ The name of “Syria” was used in earlier periods, however as an independent polity, the name was used for the territory of the Levant lost to the Ottoman Empire with the division of the Middle East by the British, French, and Italians.¹⁷⁶ From the start, Syria was positioned as an independent Arab kingdom under the Hashemite Dynasty, but was later made into the French Mandate.¹⁷⁷ During this period, Syria went from a single united entity to being divided between the Syrian Arabs, Alawites, Druze, and Kurds by the French colonial government.¹⁷⁸ After the end of the Second World War, the French Mandate

¹⁷⁴ David Ayalon, “The End of The End of the Mamlūk Sultanate: (Why Did the Ottomans Spare the Mamlūks of Egypt and Wipe out the Mamlūks of Syria?),” *Studia Islamica*, no. 65 (1987): 126, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595720>.

¹⁷⁵ Michael Provence, “Stateless Revolutionaries and the Aftermath of the Ottoman Great War,” *Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift Für Moderne Europäische Geschichte / Revue d’histoire Européenne Contemporaine* 13, no. 3 (2015): 411, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26266193>.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 413.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 402.

¹⁷⁸ Florence Gaub, “Syrian Separation: Why Division Is Not the Answer.” *Federal Academy for Security Policy*, 2016. 1-2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep22211>.

of Syria was dissolved with an independent Syrian Republic being established.¹⁷⁹ Since independence, Syria has been under the control of dictatorial governments. Originally, these governments were made up of military leaders. However, with the ascension of Hafez al-Assad, the country was put under the rule of the al-Assad family.

Assad Dynasty

Born in 1930 to a poor Alawite family, Hafez-al Assad was an early supporter of the ideology of Ba'athism.¹⁸⁰ Ba'athism is a revolutionary socialist ideology based on the unification of the Arab world under a single political entity.¹⁸¹ Ba'athism as a political belief does not align itself with any religious movement, instead being more secular in its religious notions.¹⁸² The movement itself is also republican, with monarchism seen as a relic of either failed attempts at uniting the Arab people or a tool of foreign powers. The ideology lastly is strongly anti-colonial in nature, being a response to the rule of France and Britain over Arab territories. Two countries practiced Ba'athism through dictatorial regimes, these being Iraq and Syria.¹⁸³

Hafez al-Assad was an Alawite, one of the groups given autonomy by the French-run Syrian government.¹⁸⁴ This community, along with the Druze and Kurds, were historically treated poorly by the majority Sunni Arab population in Syria. More specifically, the Muslim Brotherhood which is a Sunni religious movement and the Syrian Sunni population in general because of alleged support of the French Mandate by Alawites.¹⁸⁵ Hafez al-Assad was one of the military members who orchestrated the 1963 Syrian coup d'état.¹⁸⁶ Hafez al-Assad was a lieutenant in the Syrian Air Force, joining due to his lack of money to continue his education.¹⁸⁷ This coup, reorientated the Syrian government from a geopolitically non-aligned entity to aligning more with the Soviet sphere of influence. The reorientation was not sudden, but rather the result of prior influence by the United States of America as well as

¹⁷⁹ James A. Melki, "Syria and State Department 1937-47." *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 1 (1997): 96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283848>.

¹⁸⁰ Moshe Ma'oz, "The Assad Dynasty: Quo vadis Damascus? (Hafiz: 1930-2000; Bashar: born 1965)," *Dictators and Autocrats*, 251, 2024. Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/98781003100508>.

¹⁸¹ Gordon H Torrey, "Tha Ba'ath: Ideology and Practice," *Middle East Journal*, 447, 1969, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4324510>.

¹⁸² Ibid, 449.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 445.

¹⁸⁴ Ma'oz, 251.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 251.

¹⁸⁶ Torrey, 446.

¹⁸⁷ Ma'oz, 252

American alignment with countries seen as geopolitical rivals to Syria, such as Israel.¹⁸⁸ The 1963 Syrian coup d'état, also known as the March 8 Revolution, created the framework for the Syrian government which lasted until the fall of Damascus in 2024. The coup was inspired by the actions of the Egyptian Free Officers a decade earlier, which overthrew the Egyptian Monarchy and replaced it with the Republican government led by Gamal Abdel Nasser.¹⁸⁹ Another important part of this portion of Syrian history to understand is that Syria from 1958 until 1961 was not an independent country but rather in political union with the Republic of Egypt.¹⁹⁰ This new Syrian government was under the rule of the Ba'ath Party. From here the question of what Ba'athism is will be answered as it is one aspect of how the government of Syria from 1963 until 2024 had operated.

Ba'athism in Syria was originally a means both to distance the Syrian people from European powers while also uniting the diverse population of Syria. Hafez al-Assad being an Alawite was welcomed more within the Ba'athist movement than in other organizations. Hafez al-Assad during his early life was subject to discrimination both during the French Mandate in Syria as well as the early independent Syrian Republic due to his unorthodox religious beliefs.¹⁹¹ Alawitism is separate from other forms of Islam as it is both an ethnic religion and based on Twelver Shia Islam.¹⁹² For Hafez al-Assad, his role in the new government was to remove any opposition to Ba'athism within the military and strengthen the ideology among all ranks of the military.¹⁹³ The simplest reason for this was to ensure that the new regime had the favor of the military, avoiding the potential for counter coups. One of these counter coups did occur, but was from inside of the Ba'athist party, known as the "Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party - Syria Region."¹⁹⁴ This coup was part of an internal conflict between that Ba'athist party's "national command" which worked as the central organization for Ba'athist parties across the Arab World, and the Syrian Ba'athist Party. Hafez al-Assad sided with the victorious regional branch in Syria and entered into a new conflict between himself and the leader of the 1966 coup, Salah Jadid.¹⁹⁵ Salah Jadid ruled Syria for four years until he was overthrown by Hafez al-Assad in 1970.¹⁹⁶ This coup was called the "Corrective

¹⁸⁸ Melki, 104.

¹⁸⁹ Anees Jillani, "Nasser, Saddam and Pan-Arabism," *Pakistan Horizon* 44, no. 2: 77, 1991, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41394583>.

¹⁹⁰ Ma'oz, 251.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 251.

¹⁹² Mustafa Khalifa, "The Impossible Partition of Syria," *Arab Reform Initiative*, 2013, 6.

¹⁹³ Ma'oz, 252.

¹⁹⁴ Torrey, 445.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 468.

¹⁹⁶ Ma'oz, 252.

Revolution” and pushed for new policies within Syria.¹⁹⁷ The biggest one was changing the party’s goals from pushing Ba’athism in neighboring Arab countries to now having a staunchly anti-Israel foreign policy.¹⁹⁸ This was the last successful coup in Syrian history and paved the way for the al-Assad family to dominate Syrian politics until 2024.

Hafez al-Assad’s Syria: 1971-2000

For Hafez al-Assad, consolidation of power was made easy due to his work indoctrinating the military in Ba’athist ideology. For Hafez al-Assad, every aspect of the governing of Syria had to be credited to himself, both for the loyalty of those in government and the loyalty of the general population. A major aspect of this “Assadization” was the creation of a cult of personality.¹⁹⁹ Hafez al-Assad fashioned himself as a savior of the Syrian people and someone keeping the Ba’athist ideology free from imperfections. This was done through propaganda in all levels of the administration.²⁰⁰ Hafez al-Assad in this centralization of power also began purges of the party, specifically de-radicalization.²⁰¹ In this case, de-radicalization targeted the socialist and internationalist movements within the Ba’athist movement.²⁰² The religious affiliation of Hafez al-Assad also led to his government securing loyalty with the Alawite population, who were now represented by his leadership.²⁰³ During the rule of Hafez al-Assad, Syria saw a revolution in its economy, society, and its politics. This change was seen in two forms, the first being the “Corrective Movement” and the second was “Assadization.”²⁰⁴

The “Corrective Movement” based itself on earlier economic projects done by the Ba’athist government. This included the continuation of “Five Year Plans” which themselves were based on socialist and communist periods of economic reform.²⁰⁵ Six of these “Five Year Plans” occurred during Hafez al-Assad’s rule, and continued under Bashar al-Assad until 2015.²⁰⁶ During these economic reforms, Hafez al-Assad increased the centralization of

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 256.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 256.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 255.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 255.

²⁰¹ Torrey, 467.

²⁰² Ibid, 449.

²⁰³ Khalifa, 7.

²⁰⁴ Ma’oz, 255-256.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 256.

²⁰⁶ Hanna Batatu, “Syria’s Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics,” Princeton University Press, 2012, 66.

the economy under the state started by his predecessor.²⁰⁷ Further centralization of the economy was done by enlisting the help of technocrats.²⁰⁸ This centralization in some ways was similar to economic models found earlier in Syrian history, and continued under the government of Bashar al-Assad. One example of this economic centralization came with the subsidization and price control of food.²⁰⁹ Education and healthcare was publicly funded for the entirety of the Syrian population by the Syrian government.²¹⁰ While centralization was happening in this context, economic liberalization also occurred during the reign of Hafez al-Assad.²¹¹ These liberalizations occurred in two phases, the first being “Infiraj” in the 1970s, and the second was “Al-Ta`addudiyya Al-Iqtisadiyya” in the 1990s.<sup>212</sup> These liberalizations came in a limited fashion, as the entrepreneurial class in Syria was given a larger ability to invest in businesses and industries.<sup>213</sup> These industries, however, still remained under state control. During “Al-Ta`addudiyya Al-Iqtisadiyya,” the liberalization was much more intense, with the ending of subsidization and state control of industries.²¹⁴ By the end of the reign of Hafez al-Assad, a new “bourgeoisie” had emerged in Syria which became a major powerplayer in Syrian politics during the government of Bashar al-Assad.²¹⁵ Further economic reforms included public works projects on infrastructure and agrarian reforms, including the inflating of food prices to keep farmers from moving into the cities.²¹⁶

Socially, “Assadization” pushed for a view of Hafez al-Assad, and from there his family, as the liberators and saviours of Syria. To promote himself, he created a cult of personality which claimed he was the new leader of Pan-Arabism, being a successor to Gamal Abdel Nasser.²¹⁷ Hafez al-Assad also promoted a new unity of the Syrian people, giving the title of “Mujahadeen” and pensions to those who participated in the uprisings against the French Mandate of Syria. Hafez al-Assad also promoted Saladin, and compared his government with that of Saladin, even comparing Israel to a new Kingdom of

²⁰⁷ Ivan Briscoe, Floor Janssen and Rosan Smits, “Syria’s Political Economy: Background and Development,” *Stability and Economic Recovery after Assad: Key Steps for Syria’s Post-Conflict Transition*, 9, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05545.5>.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 21.

²⁰⁹ Guilia Soffiantini, “Food Insecurity and political instability during the Arab Spring,” *Global Food Security* 26, 1, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2020.100400>.

²¹⁰ Ma`oz, 256.

²¹¹ Batatu, 328.

²¹² Ibid, 44.

²¹³ Briscoe et al, 9.

²¹⁴ Batatu, 78.

²¹⁵ Briscoe et al, 10.

²¹⁶ Batatu, 78.

²¹⁷ Ma`oz, 252.

Jerusalem.²¹⁸ Monuments, statues, and paintings of Hafez al-Assad decorated Syrian cities and communities to promote a sense of paternal leadership among the population.²¹⁹ The cult of personality went into the military as well, with military badges containing his face along with a series of three purges to promote loyalty.²²⁰ Despite his promotion of secularism, Hafez al-Assad portrayed himself as a pious Muslim, even being called “the sanctified one” by officials in the government.²²¹ Women and the peasantry were also major groups where he consolidated support. The former through liberalising social reforms while the latter was a counterweight to the urban class which was less supportive of his government.²²² Another major aspect of social culture in Syria was the backlash to the rule of Hafez al-Assad by Islamist groups, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood, due to Hafez al-Assad’s own distaste for political Islam.²²³ This culminated in the 1982 Hama Massacre, which ended a conflict between the Syrian government and the Muslim Brotherhood which lasted from 1979 until 1982.²²⁴ The death toll from the attacks, which were done by air strikes, ranged from 10,000 to 40,000 people.²²⁵

Reign of Bashar al-Assad Before the 2011 Arab Spring

In the year 2000, Hafez al-Assad died, but the rule of the Assad family did not. Instead, he has chosen a successor before death to lead the country, this being Bashar al-Assad.²²⁶ Bashar al-Assad was not the only member of the Assad family who had the chance to take over Syria, but he was the one with the most legitimacy due to him being the chosen successor by his father.²²⁷ The biggest piece of evidence for this comes from an amendment made to the Syrian constitution following the death of Hafez al-Assad, changing the minimum age to become president from 40 to 34, the age Bashar al-Assad was.²²⁸

During the government of Bashar al-Assad, Syria oversaw another period of “Five Year Plans” that created a larger amount of economic liberalization.²²⁹ The intention of this

²¹⁸ Bernard Reich, *Political leaders of the contemporary Middle East and North Africa: a biographical dictionary*, Greenwood Press, 57-58.

²¹⁹ Ma’oz, 255.

²²⁰ Torrey, 467.

²²¹ Reich, 57.

²²² Batatu, 9.

²²³ Ma’oz, 256.

²²⁴ Ibid, 257-258.

²²⁵ Ibid, 257-258.

²²⁶ Ibid, 258.

²²⁷ Ibid, 258.

²²⁸ Ibid, 254.

²²⁹ Briscoe et al, 10.

economic liberalization was to further centralize power within the Assad family.²³⁰ These economic reforms came with two “Five Year Plans,” the first from 2001 until 2005 and the other from 2006 until 2010.²³¹ For the first of these, the main goal was propagandistic since Bashar al-Assad had only reigned for one year at this point.²³² For Bashar al-Assad, the means for this popularity came through opening the economy to more private investments through regulatory and bureaucratic reforms along with investments into education, technology, and industry.²³³ These reforms were not intended to increase privatization, but did allow for a more open economy for the general public through private investment into state-owned businesses.²³⁴ All investments made by the Syrian government during this Five Year Plan were intended for public utilities rather than businesses themselves.²³⁵ On top of the economic plans, there was also a push for greater job opportunities for both men and women. For the latter, this meant improving the social status of women.²³⁶

The Five Year Plan from 2006 until 2010 saw Bashar al-Assad change the economic trajectory of the Syrian economy from a centralized and autarkic system led by the state. This new economic plan, called the “Five-Year Plan for Deregulation,” instead moved the Syrian economy towards more neoliberal reforms.²³⁷ In this context, neoliberal economics is the globalization and decentralization of an economy, with the economy being open for private business and investment both from within and outside of the country.²³⁸ The main goal of this plan was globalization of the Syrian economy within at the shortest a decade from the start of the plan.²³⁹ Within the plan, investment by the Syrian government went to propping up private businesses and banks, dismantling state monopolies, abolishing price regulations, and eliminating subsidies for industries.²⁴⁰ The economy was also no longer run through a centralized apparatus, with instead economic planning being done through regional governments.²⁴¹ This economic plan did not mean the end of the Syrian government's economic control or investments as there were plans to greatly increase infrastructure with

²³⁰ Ibid, 10.

²³¹ Batatu, 84.

²³² Ma'oz, 255.

²³³ Ibid, 255.

²³⁴ Batatu, 84.

²³⁵ Briscoe et al, 15.

²³⁶ Batatu, 44.

²³⁷ Briscoe et al, 16.

²³⁸ Ibid, 16.

²³⁹ Anthony Axon & Susan Hewitt, *Syria 1975/76-2018*, BRILL, 2018, 11.

²⁴⁰ Batatu, 37.

²⁴¹ Axon & Hewitt, 49.

the intention of making Syria a major trade hub for the Middle East.²⁴² This plan also saw cooperation between the Syrian government and the United Nations, which saw the United Nations promote this economic change in Syria as the first step towards democratization and liberalization.²⁴³ The aftermath of this Five Year Plan will be looked into when discussing the political and climatological reasons for the 2011 Arab Spring in Syria.

The start of the reign of Bashar al-Assad was also characterized by an immediate attempt at political reform known as the “Damascus Spring.”²⁴⁴ This movement was an attempt by the Syrian intelligentsia to push for the Syrian government to end political repression. More specifically the release of political prisoners from the rule of Hafez al-Assad, the ending of the state of emergency martial law done after the death of Hafez al-Assad, safe passage for political exiles, an independent judiciary, and the right to establish political parties.²⁴⁵ The movement failed and was repressed by Bashar al-Assad with the help of the Ba’athist Old Guard, despite initial optimism.²⁴⁶ These crackdowns were referred to as the “Damascus Winter.”²⁴⁷ Initially, political prisoners were released and the Mezze prison was closed down.²⁴⁸ Many of these political prisoners were members of the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁴⁹ By the next year, however, political repression resumed and intellectuals in Syria continued to promote reform until 2005, when the last political salon stopped functioning.²⁵⁰ This was not the only event of political upheaval that Bashar al-Assad faced before the 2011 Arab Spring, with his government being involved in the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon.²⁵¹ The Cedar Revolution occurred in 2005 as a response to the occupation of Lebanon by the Syrian government, which started in 1976, with the purpose of annexing Lebanon into Syria.²⁵²

Geography of Modern Syria

To understand the environmental conditions of Syria and the impact it had on the 2011 Syrian Arab Spring, the geography of modern day Syria must first be understood. Syria

²⁴² Ibid, 11.

²⁴³ Briscoe et al, 21.

²⁴⁴ Ma’oz, 258.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 258.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 258.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 258.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 258.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 258.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 258.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 258.

²⁵² Ibid, 257-258.

is located along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea in the northern portion of the Arabian Peninsula.²⁵³ The country borders Lebanon and Israel to the west, Turkey to the north, and Iraq to the east, and Jordan to the south.²⁵⁴ For much of the landmass of the country, Syria is a desert, however this is not where the majority of the population lives.²⁵⁵ Instead, much of the population lives along the coastal regions of Syria where the climate is more temperate compared to the arid deserts.²⁵⁶ There are two geographic regions in inland Syria, the first being the Syrian Desert in the east and the Jabal al-Druze Range in the south.²⁵⁷ The Syrian desert is mostly an arid climate and covers more than half of Syria.²⁵⁸ This desert can then be further divided based on nearby cities and administrative regions, such as the Palmyrene Desert for the area of Palmyrene.²⁵⁹ The area is generally inhospitable with no large permanent wildlife species.²⁶⁰ The desert also contains seasonal lakes, making permanent settlement for people dependent on access to outside resources.²⁶¹ The Jabal al-Druze is a volcanic region located mostly within the Suwayda Governorate in Syria.²⁶² This region has a similar climactic makeup as the coastal regions of Syria and is part of the larger Harrat al-Sham volcanic field.²⁶³ In the northeast of Syria is the Euphrates River, one of the two major rivers of Mesopotamia.²⁶⁴ Within Syria, the Euphrates was dammed during the early reign of Hafez al-Assad in 1974.²⁶⁵ From this damming, the largest lake in Syria was created, known as Lake Assad.²⁶⁶

²⁵³ Thomas Colleo, *Syria: A Country Study*, 1948, xiii

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 65.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 74.

²⁵⁶ Laura Etheridge, *Middle East Region in Transition: Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan*. Britannica Publishing, 2011, 6.

²⁵⁷ Colleo, 86.

²⁵⁸ Etheridge, 6.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 6.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 8.

²⁶¹ Wadid Erian, "Case Study - Drought in Syria: Ten YEArs of Scarce Water (2000-2010)," *Drought Vulnerability in the Arab Region*, Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands, 2011, 5.

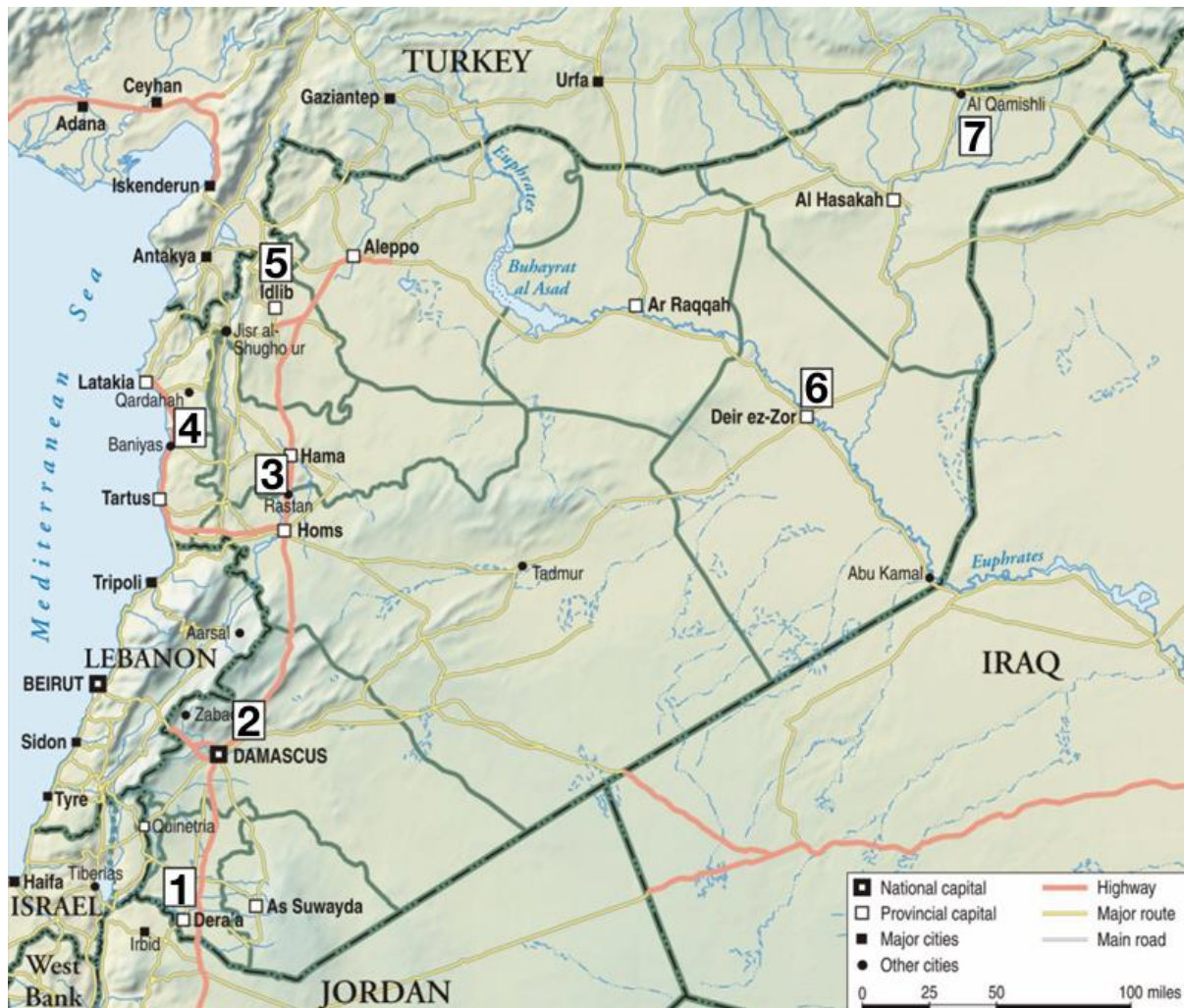
²⁶² Colleo, 86.

²⁶³ Ibid, 86.

²⁶⁴ Peter H Gleick, "Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria," *Weather, Climate and Society*, American Meteorological Society, 2014, 338.

²⁶⁵ Colleo, 56.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 56.



(Figure 1: Political Geography of Syria [Source: Holliday])

Syria itself is typically divided into three geographic regions: the coastal plain, the upland areas, and the eastern plateau. The coastal plain is the smallest of these regions, being the coastal strip of Syria going from Turkey to Lebanon.²⁶⁷ The region is mostly flat and has promontories which come from the mountainous portions of Syria.²⁶⁸ The upland areas are a buffer between the coastal plain and the eastern plateau. The mountain upland areas are a mountain range called the Jabal an Nusayrih, with a second mountain range along the Lebanese border called the Anti-Lebanon mountains.²⁶⁹ Between the Anti-Lebanon mountains lies the Homs Gap, a mountain pass that was historically used for movement between modern day Lebanon and Syria.²⁷⁰ The eastern plateau is the rest of Syria, containing the Euphrates River, the Syrian Desert, and Jabal al-Druze with a series of low-

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 57.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 57.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 57.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 57.

level mountains.²⁷¹ Climatically speaking, Syria is mostly an arid desert which changes into an arid steppe between the Syrian Desert and the coast. The coast itself is temperate with a dry climate with some portions of the Syria-Lebanon border having a cold climate.²⁷² The Euphrates river separates the northern steppe region of Syria between the east and west.²⁷³

For natural resources, Syria has an abundance of petroleum, which is where much of the Syrian economy's value comes from.²⁷⁴ Other major natural resources found in Syria include phosphate, chromium, manganese, iron, salt, marble, gypsum, limestone, and asphalt.²⁷⁵ Most of these natural resources are found further inland where there is a less significant human population.²⁷⁶ Land usage in Syria by people is also low due to the lack of arable land outside of the coastal plain and upland areas, with under 25% of Syria being arable.²⁷⁷ Of this percentile, less than 5% is used for the growing of food on a permanent basis.²⁷⁸

Demographics of Modern Syria

To understand the political and social history of Syria, the demographics of the country from the French Mandate until now needs to be understood. Syria is not a country with one ethnic or religious group. Instead, Syria, like its neighbors, has one dominant cultural and religious group but also a multitude of smaller but prevalent ethnic and religious minorities.²⁷⁹ For Syria, the majority of the population belong to the Syrian Arab culture, ranging from 80-85% of the population.²⁸⁰ This demographic group is the majority in all of Syria with the exception of the northeast of the country in the Al-Hasakah Governorate, where instead the Kurdish population make up the largest demographic.²⁸¹ Inside this large Arab demographic, there are three smaller groups which identify themselves as Arabs. The largest of these are the Alawites which consist of 15% of the population.²⁸² This ethnic group is more based on its religious beliefs and therefore are an ethnoreligious identity seen as

²⁷¹ Ibid, 57.

²⁷² Etheridge, 6.

²⁷³ Erian, 26.

²⁷⁴ Giulia Soffiantini, 1.

²⁷⁵ Eckart Woertz, "Mining Strategies in the Middle East and North Africa," *Third World Quarterly*, 2014, 939.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 945.

²⁷⁷ Ma'oz, 256.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 256.

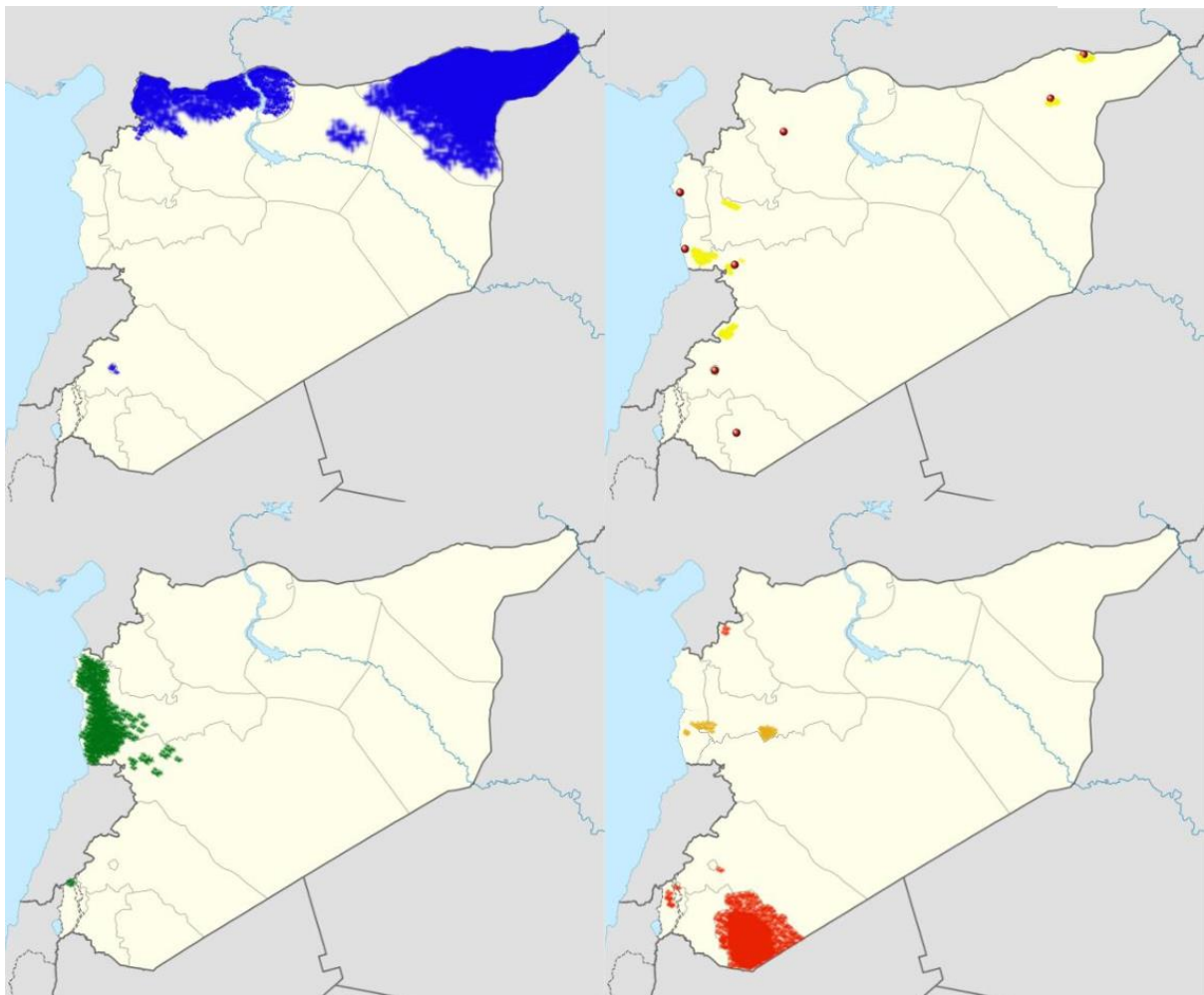
²⁷⁹ Nazir Hussein, "The Syrian Crisis and Regional Order in the Middle East," *Pakistan Horizon* 66, no. 4: 41, Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, 2013, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24711514>.

²⁸⁰ Khalifa, 3.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 3-4.

²⁸² Ibid, 6.

separate by most of the Arab population.²⁸³ Next are the Levantine Arabs found on the Syrian coastline consisting of 10% of the total population, and lastly there the Druze at 3% found in the south of Syria as an ethnoreligious community.²⁸⁴ The Kurdish population of Syria is approximately 10% of the entire population, mostly concentrated in “Kurdish Syria,” which is the northwestern part of the country that is east of the Euphrates River.²⁸⁵ Other ethnic groups in Syria include the Assyrians, also called Chaldeans, Arameans, or Syriac Christians; Turkoman or Turkmen; Circassians; and Armenians with a scattering of smaller minority populations found in urban centres.²⁸⁶ For religion, the Syrian government has not officially done any census work on religion since 1960.²⁸⁷ About 75% of the Syrian population practice a form of Sunni Islam, 13% are Shia, the majority being Alawite, 10% are Christian, and 3% are Druze.²⁸⁸



²⁸³ Ibid, 6.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 6.

²⁸⁵ Gaub, 4.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 4.

²⁸⁷ Mouna Liliane Samman, “La population de la Syrie: étude géo-démographique,” *IRD Editions*, 9, Paris, 1978.

²⁸⁸ Hussein, “The Syrian Crisis and Regional Order in the Middle East,” 41-42.

(Figure 2: Maps of minority populations in Syria. Clockwise from top-left: Kurdish population (Blue), Christians (Yellow & Red dots), Alawites (Green), Druze (Orange), Ismaili (Yellow). [Source: Khalifa])

SECTION II: EVENTS BEFORE 2011 ARAB SPRING

Drought & Famine

For the environment of Syria, the impacts of climatic change and human settlement have created conditions for environmental degradation. For people themselves, however, the damage to the environment has also led to increased risks of resource depletion and scarcity. One major part of the Syrian economy affected by climate change is the agricultural sector, which makes up a quarter of Syria's GDP.²⁸⁹ Syria does not have a lot of arable land, with only about 10% of the country having irrigated agricultural fields.²⁹⁰ For the rest of the country, this land is either barren or reliant on rainfall.²⁹¹ In fact, rainwater collection during the wet winter months is how crops are grown in much of Syria, meaning there is heavy dependence on natural weather cycles which climate change disrupts.²⁹² The Fertile Crescent area, which includes the Euphrates River, has seen significantly lower precipitation rates resulting in lower crop yields.²⁹³ The Euphrates River for Syria is also the main source of agriculture and pastoralism for the country.²⁹⁴ Herders in this region require the land to maintain their animal livestock.²⁹⁵ With the decline in precipitation and seasonal lakes in the Syrian Desert, however, herding communities have seen higher animal mortality rates and even negative output.²⁹⁶ Groundwater in Syria has also been depleted for agricultural maintenance due to the intensification of water scarcity.²⁹⁷ Another water-based problem for agriculture in Syria is the seasonality of the water supply in much of the country, specifically outside of the coastal plain.²⁹⁸ One major reason for this simultaneous overreliance and decline of the available groundwater is due to earlier agricultural reforms to maximize crop

²⁸⁹ Erian, 15.

²⁹⁰ Mohamad Noufal, Zena Maalla, & Sylvia Adipah, "Households' Participation in Solid Waste Management System of Homs City, Syria," *GeoJournal*, Springer Nature, 2021, 1442.

²⁹¹ Erian, 15.

²⁹² Ibid, 15.

²⁹³ Jan Selby, Omar S Dahi, Christiane Fröhlich, and Mike Hulme, "Climate change and the Syrian civil war revisited," *Political Geography*, 2017, 11.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 11.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 19.

²⁹⁶ Erian, 27.

²⁹⁷ Selby et al, 23.

²⁹⁸ Erin, 17.

output.²⁹⁹ The problem with these reforms is that they were short term solutions for long term, and likely unthought of, problems. Lack of arable land has also led to herding and agricultural groups moving into the already scarce forest regions of Syria, causing greater deforestation.³⁰⁰ This poor output of crops due to climate change and the overreliance on scarce water resources has led to the agricultural industry becoming a less reliable and secure source of both income for individuals and food for the country.³⁰¹ In other words, the human impact on the environment in Syria has led to a greater risk of food insecurity in a country with already low rates of arable land.³⁰² Deforestation also means a greater runoff of water and a higher risk of flooding, meaning in Northern Syria, where average precipitation has risen, there is a greater risk of natural disasters.³⁰³ Waste dumping into the Mediterranean also means that local ocean water cannot be as easily desalinated, removing another potential source of clean water.³⁰⁴



(Figure 3: Map of water resources in Syria [Source: Benzoni])

²⁹⁹ Benedetta Benzoni, *Uncharted Waters: Two Opportunities for Water and Security in Syria's Reconstruction*, Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2025, 5.

³⁰⁰ Konstantin Ash & Nick Obradovich, "Climactic Stress, Internal Migration, and Syrian Civil War Onset," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2020, 10.

³⁰¹ Soffiantini, 6.

³⁰² Clemens Breisinger, Perrihan Al-Riffai, Tingju Zhu, Gerald Charles Nelson, "Economic Impacts of Climate Change in Syria," *Climate Change Economics* (2013), 19.

³⁰³ Ibid, 2.

³⁰⁴ Woertz, 946.

Water scarcity and the poor environmental regulations in Syria have also resulted in heightened risks of disease. In the case of water scarcity, this is both because of waste management and how water is diverted within Syria. With how poor waste management is in Syria, bodies of water have been contaminated from medical and industrial waste.³⁰⁵ Combine the poor waste management with poor sanitation infrastructure and the risk of waterborne disease becomes even greater.³⁰⁶ Higher risks of drought means that with less available water, the already scarce options for water usage means lower quality water being used for agriculture, sanitation, and consumption. The mining of phosphate and usage of phosphate fertilizers in Syria both result in large amounts of waste product.³⁰⁷ In the former case, this comes from radioactive material found while mining for phosphate, which is then dumped away from the excavation site.³⁰⁸ Poor regulations and oversight however mean that dumping locations are arbitrary and can even include sources of water.³⁰⁹ This waste dumping contaminates the water through deoxygenization, reducing the water quality significantly as well as spreading radiation.³¹⁰ Radiation itself also can lead to sickness being spread, and with the lack of oversight, this means high density populations are at risk of radiation poisoning.³¹¹ For the usage of phosphate fertilizers, both the runoff from these fertilizers and their usage in general can cause soil degradation and water contamination.³¹² Water contaminated by these phosphate byproducts can again cause a spread of radiation and should be disposed of away from potential sources of water.³¹³ Poor environmental and disposal regulations also means waterborne diseases are more likely to spread such as cholera.³¹⁴ This combined with high population density and a decrease in domestic food production means an even greater risk of disease spread.³¹⁵ The additional issue of medical waste being poorly disposed of also increases this risk of disease.³¹⁶

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 948.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 948.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 948.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 948.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 948.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 948.

³¹¹ Ibid, 948.

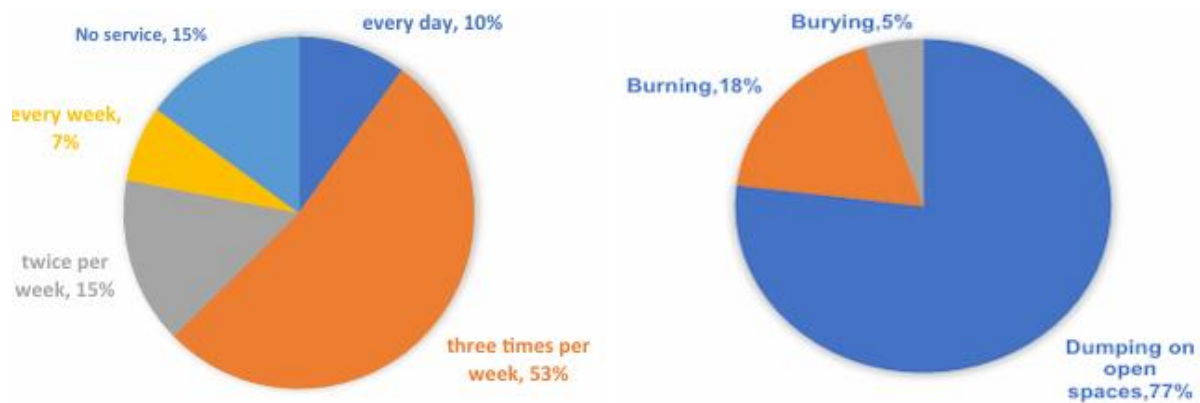
³¹² Soffiantini, 2.

³¹³ Woertz, 948.

³¹⁴ Erian, 15.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 15.

³¹⁶ Ibid, 15.



(Figure 4: Frequency of waste collection & form of disposal in Syria. [Source: Noufal et al])

A final important problem for humans in regard to disease spread comes from ecological damage. More specifically, the extinction of local predatory species and the rise of livestock monoculture. Local predatory species, such as cheetahs, have gone locally extinct in Syria as a means to protect farmers.³¹⁷ The problem is that without these animals, small game such as rodents can grow in population.³¹⁸ These same rodents are also less susceptible to climatic changes while also being vectors for diseases as well as being general pests.³¹⁹ For livestock, having a monoculture of animals, as with monocultural plants, means when diseases or droughts do strike, the chance of recovery is much lower.³²⁰ Climate change also means that areas that still have water can also become breeding grounds for insects such as mosquitoes, which means a greater risk of disease such as malaria.³²¹ The dumping of waste material into the Eastern Mediterranean also means environmental damage along the coast. This damage for people means less healthy populations of wildlife, especially fish.³²² Lower fish populations mean less opportunities for fishing communities and again, a lower chance of profit and livelihood sustainability. These heightened risks for farmers and urban populations due to both natural and human-caused climate change are what set the foreground for how Syria fell into disorder in 2011.

The Five Year Drought (2006-2011)

³¹⁷ Etheridge, 8

³¹⁸ Ibid, 8

³¹⁹ Erian, 15

³²⁰ Ibid, 15.

³²¹ Etheridge, 8.

³²² Etheridge, 8.

From 2006 until 2011, Syria, along with the rest of the Fertile Crescent region, experienced a long term drought.³²³ What makes this drought particularly severe in Syrian history was both the length of the drought and how the drought impacted Syria in particular. This drought was not the first drought that Syria was affected by and it was not even the first drought the government of Bashar al-Assad had faced.³²⁴ Similar droughts had occurred throughout his early time in government, specifically from 2000 until 2002.³²⁵ During this period, Syria saw a low amount of precipitation, which over two-thirds of agriculture was reliant upon at the time.³²⁶ What makes this drought different from the later five year drought was that the Syrian government was able to respond quickly.³²⁷ Furthermore, the drought only lasted for two years, making any immediate cause for concern null as the average length of droughts in Syria is a two year period.³²⁸ What is interesting about the period between this drought and the 2006-2011 drought is that drought conditions technically did not end at all.³²⁹ Vegetation data from 2003-2006 shows that while drought conditions in Syria did go away for much of the country, it was mostly in the Syrian Desert and Euphrates River.³³⁰ Elsewhere, drought conditions remained, especially along the Syrian coast.³³¹ What this means is that while geographically Syria did see recovery from the initial 2000-2002 drought, drought conditions remained constant in highly-populated areas. Fortunately, the less severe drought conditions in the Euphrates River region meant that food production continued without too much hindrance, though at a lower rate.³³² What this does mean for Syria is that there was never a full recovery, and this can explain why the five years from 2006-2011 caused the collapse of the Syrian government.

In 2006, the five year drought started with the initial stage of lowered rainfall in agricultural areas.³³³ From this point, crop yields declined and the mortality rates of domestic wildlife also increased.³³⁴ This initial beginning of the cycle was not out of the ordinary, what made it extraordinary was the amount of time the drought lasted. From 2007 until 2008, the

³²³ Carmit Valsnei, Shira Efron, and Kim Noach; "A Decade of War in Syria: Between Climate Change and Political Stability," *INSS Insight*, 2021, 1.

³²⁴ Ma'oz, 259.

³²⁵ Ibid, 259.

³²⁶ Soffiantini, 4.

³²⁷ Valsnei et al, 3.

³²⁸ Erian, 15.

³²⁹ Soffiantini, 4.

³³⁰ Alexander D Barder, "Environmental Crisis and the Syrian War," *New Conflict Dynamics*, 2017, 140.

³³¹ Erian, 17.

³³² Gleick, 338.

³³³ Breisinger et al, 5.

³³⁴ Erian, 23.

drought conditions in Syria were the same as other nearby Arab countries, showing a state of consistency of this drought pattern.³³⁵ As the drought lasted longer, however, cracks in the Syrian agricultural and pastoral sector began to be revealed. One of the biggest problems with the agricultural sector was the lack of flexibility from its centralized structure.³³⁶ Hafez al-Assad in his agricultural reforms did not allow for any potentially fertile land to be unused for agriculture.³³⁷ The main intention for this was to help Syria become self-reliant for food rather than depend on other countries. This was part of the push for economic autarky done throughout the government of Hafez al-Assad.³³⁸ The problem came however when this supply of food started to dwindle for the Syrian population, as there was not enough rainfall to keep the Syrian population self-reliant for food.³³⁹ Another major problem was that because the Syrian government was producing more food than there was irrigation or permanent water sources, there was not enough infrastructural support for a situation such as a long-term drought.³⁴⁰ In this case, Syria was preparing itself for a continuing status quo in regards to the environment in a region where drought conditions were commonplace. Furthermore, the agrarian land reforms that were done planned to use ground water sources for irrigating crop fields.³⁴¹ This plan however did not involve all farmland and therefore meant farmers were still reliant on rainfall during the winter months.³⁴² Ground water is also not a permanent solution as droughts do affect them since drought conditions mean more usage of ground water.³⁴³ Remember that ground water sources were not well regulated in the amount that could be used in such a situation.³⁴⁴ Even more damaging was the lack of waste management oversight meaning potential and in use ground water sources were contaminated.³⁴⁵ This meant an even higher risk of crop failure and animal mortality for farmers and pastoralists.³⁴⁶

³³⁵ Ibid, 23.

³³⁶ Soffiantini, 7.

³³⁷ Ibid, 7.

³³⁸ Ma'oz, 256.

³³⁹ Soffiantini, 7.

³⁴⁰ Selby et al, 18.

³⁴¹ Ibid, 18.

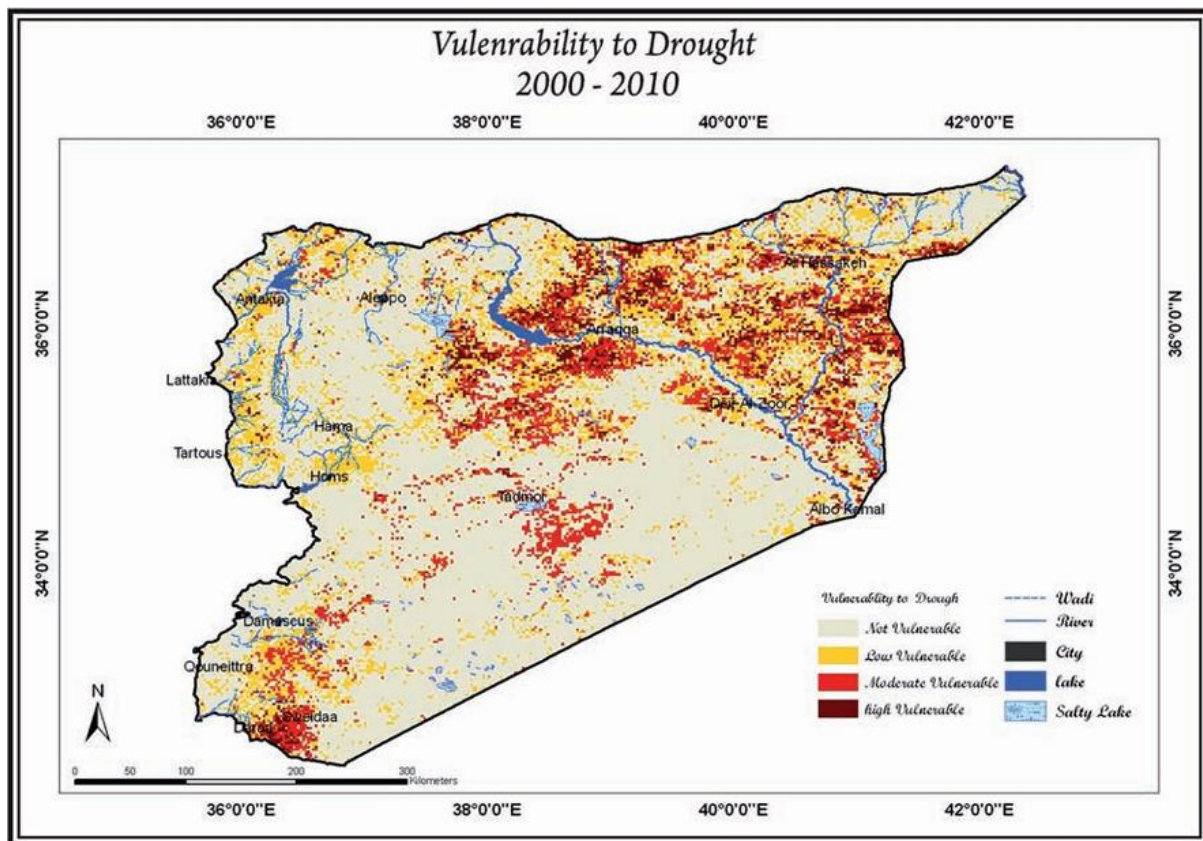
³⁴² Ibid, 35.

³⁴³ Erian, 31.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 31.

³⁴⁵ Carmit Valensi, Shira Efron & Kim Noach, "A Decade of War in Syria: Between Climate Change and Political Stability," *Institute for National Security Studies*, 2021, 3. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep33848>.

³⁴⁶ Erian, 23.



(Figure 5: Map of drought vulnerability in Syria (2000-2010) [Source: Erian])

For the farming and pastoral sectors of the country, this led to a loss of profit and motivation to continue their work.³⁴⁷ Lack of profit and massive crop failures and high animal mortality rates led to these groups losing employment and their livelihoods, which for Syria meant a decline in the economy and a food crisis.³⁴⁸ During these five years of drought, Syria was the only country in the Fertile Crescent Region to have a humanitarian crisis be declared.³⁴⁹ The end result of this poor harvest was the need for the Syrian government to import food from other countries.³⁵⁰ This importation of food as a response to the poor harvest meant that the farming population no longer could rely on the Syrian government to intervene on their behalf when their crop yields failed.³⁵¹ This also impacted the pastoral population, which saw their own subsistence farming and raising of animals impacted by the lack of available water.³⁵² These groups, traditionally more nomadic, became one of the first to start the movement of the agricultural sector of Syria from the fields into the cities.

³⁴⁷ Valensi et al, 2.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 2.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 3.

³⁵⁰ Breisinger et al, 7.

³⁵¹ Ibid, 7.

³⁵² Ibid, 7.

Political Instability

On the political front, the history of modern Syria is one where political liberties were an uncommon luxury for the general population. The country was initially run as a colonial mandate, only to then become an independent state under the rule of military governments.³⁵³ With the rise to power of Hafez al-Assad, this military rule continued, but soon transitioned into a *de facto* dynastic system of government.³⁵⁴ The Assad governments were also run by Alawites, a minority group in Syria, which led to dissatisfaction by the majority Sunni population.³⁵⁵ This dissatisfaction remained noticeable during the rule of Hafez al-Assad in the 1980s but sprang up again in 2011 under the government of Bashar al-Assad.³⁵⁶ This dissatisfaction and repressions, however, are not the only reason for the collapse of the Syrian government. Other factors are required for a state to fall, and one of these is the conditions of the general population, as “no society is more than three meals away from revolution.”³⁵⁷

Climatological Record

Throughout the history of the world, the natural world has constantly changed. This includes changes to the climate, and in the case of modern Syria, this can be credited both towards natural trends of warming and human impact on the environment. For Syria, the country already has a small area which is easy for human life to inhabit. Most of the country is arid desert with little water other than the Euphrates River and Lake Assad as well as seasonal lakes.³⁵⁸ Water shortages are the most prominent problem in Syria because of this lack of large natural water sources.³⁵⁹ Furthermore, the semi-arid climate that is found in Syria means that drought conditions are common, meaning water management is even more crucial for the country.³⁶⁰

Syria has one of the highest cases of “water stress,” meaning a high scarcity of water, in the world, being ranked twelfth.³⁶¹ Climatic changes, specifically the global trend of higher average temperatures, means that the susceptibility for drought conditions becomes more likely.³⁶² In the case of Syria, the frequency and severity of drought conditions has increased

³⁵³ Melki, 101.

³⁵⁴ Ma’oz, 149.

³⁵⁵ Khalifa, 6.

³⁵⁶ Ma’oz, 149.

³⁵⁷ Quote attributed to Vladimir Lenin.

³⁵⁸ Colleo, 56.

³⁵⁹ Selby et al, 18.

³⁶⁰ Erian, 31.

³⁶¹ Ibid, 31.

³⁶² Selby et al, 3.

since the 1990s, with some droughts lasting over 200 days.³⁶³ In the northwestern portion of Syria, the average rainfall has decreased as well.³⁶⁴ What is noticeable is that in the south and southwestern portions of Syria, rainfall has actually seen an increase in rainfall.³⁶⁵ Water management is also a problem which comes from droughts, and with rising temperatures meaning a higher rate of droughts, the risk of poor water management also rises.³⁶⁶ Drought conditions mean the need to reuse water that is less pure, meaning a higher risk of disease outbreaks, such as cholera.³⁶⁷ For Damascus, the most important water source is the Fiegh Spring, which has seen a decrease in its peak discharge.³⁶⁸ The Barada River is also found within Damascus creating an oasis which has since decreased in size.³⁶⁹ The reason for this decrease is both due to higher temperatures but also because of poor urban development, exacerbating water shortage problems.³⁷⁰ For average rainfall, Damascus in the summer typically receives 0.4 millimeters of rain, which commonly comes only in June, meaning greater reliance on permanent water sources.³⁷¹ For comparison, the average in the winter months is 75 millimeters.³⁷² Lattakia, a coastal city, receives more rain on average with the lowest in July at 0.9 millimeters and the highest in January at 163 millimeters.³⁷³ The coastal plain typically receives up to 1000 millimeters of rain annually, with the northern steppes ranging from 250 to 500 millimeters and the deserts receiving less than 130 millimeters.³⁷⁴ Water shortages themselves have also been exacerbated through human activity on the environment independent of climate change. This human activity on the environment and its consequences will be looked into further after finishing discussion on the natural climate of Syria and its noted changes.

Average temperatures in Syria have also increased significantly, with consistent above average temperatures since 1998.³⁷⁵ All of these above averages after 2011 have also been major spikes compared to the average and even previous above average temperatures.³⁷⁶

³⁶³ Ibid, 3-4.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 11.

³⁶⁵ Ibid, 11-12.

³⁶⁶ Soffiantini, 4.

³⁶⁷ Gleick, 337.

³⁶⁸ Colleo, 57.

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 56-57.

³⁷⁰ Erian, 3.

³⁷¹ Ibid, 3.

³⁷² Ibid, 3.

³⁷³ Ibid, 3.

³⁷⁴ Ibid, 5.

³⁷⁵ Konstantin Ash & Nick Obradovich, "Climactic Stress, Internal Migration, and Syrian Civil War Onset," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2020, 7.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, 7.

Syria, with its desert climate, average hot temperatures, and lack of large vegetation outside of the coastal and upland regions, is also prone to heatwaves.³⁷⁷ These heatwaves since the 2010s have seen a large increase due to the increase in temperatures and the lower amounts of rainfall in the south of Syria.³⁷⁸ Northern Syria also has seen higher temperatures, however rainfall has also increased overtime, reducing the risk of heatwaves.³⁷⁹ Temperatures in Damascus on average are at their lowest 0 C and the average maximum at 37 C.³⁸⁰ These temperature differences come from the arid steppe climate where Damascus is located, with higher temperatures the further from the coast a location is.³⁸¹ Lattakia, comparatively, has less extreme differences between the average minimum and maximum temperatures, these being 8 C and 30 C respectively.³⁸² By the coast temperatures typically are more mild, however desert temperatures can vary from frost conditions at night to highs up to 45 C during the day.³⁸³ With higher temperatures comes a myriad of consequences for the natural environment. For Syria this means a rise in desertification which happens when rising temperatures, combined with a lack of precipitation, leads fertile areas to degrade into desert conditions.³⁸⁴ This process can also happen due to human activity, specifically overgrazing by domestic animals.³⁸⁵

³⁷⁷ Soffiantini, 2.

³⁷⁸ Ibid, 4.

³⁷⁹ Ibid, 2.

³⁸⁰ Selby et al, 21.

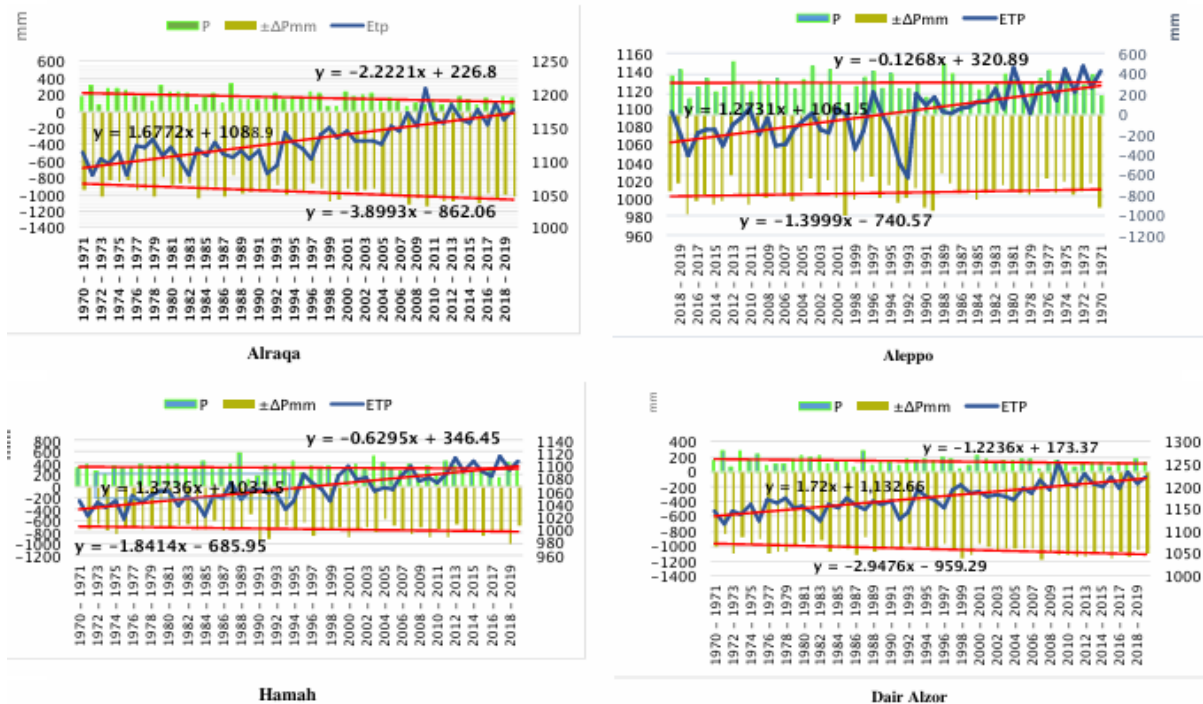
³⁸¹ Erian, 6.

³⁸² Ibid, 6.

³⁸³ Ibid, 6.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, 29.

³⁸⁵ Ibid, 4.



(Figure 6: Graph of water deficit in Alraqa, Aleppo, Hammah, & Dair Alzor from 1970-2019 [Source: Ghazi Haleme])

Ecology of Syria

With the geography and climate of Syria, the ecology of the country can show how both what can live in Syria and the historical human impact on Syria itself. The location of Syria makes the country a crossroads for multiple ecological zones.³⁸⁶ The three geographic zones of Syria; the coastal plain, the upland area and the eastern plateau; all have their own environments and can be treated as separate entities within Syria.³⁸⁷ For vegetation, there are around 3100 different species of plants that have been recorded in Syria, 112 of which are perennial trees.³⁸⁸ Vegetation zones in Syria are divided by the same geographic regions, with the coastal plain, due to its more Mediterranean climate, having Mediterranean conifer forests.³⁸⁹ Prior to Syrian independence, around 33% of modern day Syria was forested.³⁹⁰ Today, the total area of forestry in Syria is approximately 3% of the country.³⁹¹ This remaining area of forest is predominately found in the coastal mountains with trees such as

³⁸⁶ Colleo, 53.

³⁸⁷ Ibid, 53.

³⁸⁸ Etheridge, 7-8.

³⁸⁹ Ibid, 7.

³⁹⁰ Colleo, 134.

³⁹¹ Ibid, 134.

strawberry and wild olive trees.³⁹² In areas where deforestation occurred, this region is dominated by shrublands.³⁹³ Outside of the Mediterranean climate, most plants are bulbous flowering plants such as tulips and iris.³⁹⁴ The semi-arid climate zones also contain terebinth trees which are commonly harvested for turpentine, a material for synthetics.³⁹⁵ Shrub plants are also found in the semi-arid and arid regions of Syria and are used as grazing fodder.³⁹⁶

For animal life in Syria, most animals that can be found are bird species, with around 394 recorded species.³⁹⁷ These bird species are mostly migratory and are found in two places, the coastal mountain regions and the arid region.³⁹⁸ In the case of the arid region, this is due to salt flats that form around the Euphrates River. For mammals, most predatory large fauna that existed in Syria are no longer found, such as big cats.³⁹⁹ Smaller predatory species and large ungulates are still found in Syria.⁴⁰⁰ Along the coast whale species, monk seals, and sea turtles have been recorded.⁴⁰¹

Human Impacts on Syria

While climate change and environmental disasters can be solely a result of natural changes, human activity can and has impacted both climate and the environment. For human impacts, only actions which predate the Syrian Civil War will be written about, since the Civil War and post-Civil War period saw even greater environmental degradation.⁴⁰² For Syria its most internationally profitable natural resource is petroleum.⁴⁰³ Because of this, the al-Assad governments pushed for greater oil production to finance their governments and the Syrian economy.⁴⁰⁴ More specifically, over 25% of the Syrian economy and the government's revenue came from oil extraction and production prior to the 2011 Arab Spring.⁴⁰⁵ Oil is a fossil fuel, and the reliance on oil production by the Syrian government has

³⁹² Etheridge, 7.

³⁹³ Ibid, 7.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, 7.

³⁹⁵ Ibid, 7.

³⁹⁶ Ibid, 7-8.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, 8.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 8.

³⁹⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁰² Solomon Hsiang & Marshall Burke, *Attributing Excess Conflict Risk in Syria to Anthropogenic Climate Change*, Stanford University and the National Bureau of Economic Research, 2025, 1-2.

⁴⁰³ Esma Saeb Afandi, "From Dictatorship to Transition: Syria's Future in a Changing Middle East," *Insight Turkey* 27, no. 1, 2025, 82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48815788>.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, 82.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, 82.

resulted in greater carbon emissions due to fossil fuel burning.⁴⁰⁶ This reliance on oil also led to a stunting of industry since oil production being a profitable industry, creating the conditions for a rentier state, which was the case for Syria prior to its takeover by the Ba'athist Party.⁴⁰⁷

Other natural resources being extracted in Syria have led to environmental damage. The most prominent resource other than oil which Syria extracts and produces is phosphate.⁴⁰⁸ Phosphate in Syria is extracted with the intention of producing fertilizer for the domestic agricultural industry.⁴⁰⁹ The problem with phosphate production is twofold, with negative environmental effects coming from the extraction of phosphate when mining it and the waste management of phosphate by-products.⁴¹⁰ For the mining of phosphate, a major problem is radiation exposure which results in both environmental degradation and human health risks.⁴¹¹ This radiation is further exacerbated by the fertilizer itself which can contain uranium and increases this exposure to a wider range of people and areas in Syria.⁴¹² The management of waste material that results from both phosphate mining and later usage as fertilizer is also poorly regulated in Syria.⁴¹³ The specific waste from phosphate mining and production, phosphogypsum, is the largest source of waste production in Syria.⁴¹⁴ This waste material can be used as a material for construction, such as for paving roads.⁴¹⁵ In Syria, as with much of the world, however, the material is dumped into nearby water systems or other undesignated areas.⁴¹⁶ The end result is this waste material both potentially seeping into water supply and evaporating into the air.⁴¹⁷ In the Palmyra region, phosphate waste has been reportedly dumped into the Mediterranean, degrading the nearby coastal environment.⁴¹⁸ The dumping of this material can also de-oxygenate local water sources due to its heavy metal and radioactive content.⁴¹⁹

Waste management itself in Syria is also a more general problem for the environment. While phosphate waste is the largest by tonnage waste material produced, the next largest are

⁴⁰⁶ Woertz, 945.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 941.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, 945.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, 944.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, 953.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 948.

⁴¹² Ibid, 948.

⁴¹³ Briscoe et al, 14.

⁴¹⁴ Woertz, 952.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, 952.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 946.

⁴¹⁷ Erian, 31.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 17.

⁴¹⁹ Woertz, 948.

medical and industrial hazardous waste.⁴²⁰ Of this medical and industrial waste, the overwhelming majority was infectious waste followed by chemical and lastly radioactive waste.⁴²¹ With this waste, the Assad governments did not have any enforced regulation on dumping waste material.⁴²² This meant that waste management was done through local municipalities or through private companies.⁴²³ Medical centres also did not have standardized policies for dumping their waste material.⁴²⁴ This unregulated waste management industry did not give any enforced protocols on how and where waste material should be dumped, and therefore dumping was commonly done in uncontrolled sites close to settled areas.⁴²⁵ In the short term this led to potential damage to environmental damage based on littering but also the potential spread of radiation and disease.⁴²⁶ In the long term, this poor waste management has led to greater air pollution, especially in major cities such as Damascus.⁴²⁷ Poor management of waste also means further risk with soil and water contamination. Considering the geography of Syria, this means less land that can be used for agriculture or clean water.

While the impact on climate change to water supplies in Syria has already been discussed, what has not is how humans have impacted the already scarce water supply in Syria. The biggest reason for the creation of Lake Assad was to reduce the severity of droughts in Syria.⁴²⁸ Despite this, drought conditions in Syria have been historically more severe within the country than neighbouring states such as Lebanon and Jordan.⁴²⁹ This is despite similar annual precipitation averages and settlement patterns in these countries.⁴³⁰ Water quality during drought conditions typically decreases as there are less sources for water itself.⁴³¹ For the semi-arid and arid regions of Syria, unregulated waste dumping to places of convenience means an even higher risk of local water contamination and therefore less accessible places for water.⁴³² The high usage of water also for people means that when scarcity hits, all sectors of life are heavily affected, creating a larger domino effect.⁴³³ Water

⁴²⁰ Noufal et al, 1442.

⁴²¹ Ibid, 1442.

⁴²² Ibid, 1455.

⁴²³ Ibid, 1443.

⁴²⁴ Ibid, 1443.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, 1443.

⁴²⁶ Gleick, 337.

⁴²⁷ Erian, 6.

⁴²⁸ Colleto, 154.

⁴²⁹ Selby et al, 35.

⁴³⁰ Ibid, 35.

⁴³¹ Erian, 3.

⁴³² Ibid, 4.

⁴³³ Soffiantini, 6.

usage can also be found in the cotton industry which went from localized community-based businesses to government-run industries.⁴³⁴ This industry was one of the largest for both the raw production and raising of cotton but also the manufacturing of cotton products.⁴³⁵ One problem with this is that cotton requires a large amount of water to be grown, but also that cotton, while versatile, is not a consumable crop.⁴³⁶ This meant that for the Syrian economy, cotton production was a necessity but also another place where water needed to be diverted.⁴³⁷

SECTION III: 2011 ARAB SPRING

Movement of People in (and out of) Syria

With the crop and livestock failures that occurred during the 2006-2011 drought, the agrarian population of Syria was unable to rebound on losses.⁴³⁸ With the lack of economic opportunity now in their field of work, these populations moved to new areas.⁴³⁹ For the agrarian population, this meant relocation to urban centres for potential employment opportunities.⁴⁴⁰ During the Ba’athist period, mass industrialization and later commercialization meant there were more opportunities for people to find new sectors of employment.⁴⁴¹ Furthermore, the addition of women into the workforce and the centralized control of the domestic economy throughout much of the early Ba’athist period meant there was always a large, loyal labor market for the Syrian government to use.⁴⁴² For the agrarian population, this meant there was an alternative for them instead of continuing in their uncertain professions. For the urban centres, this saw a large uptick in population growth and with it a larger population with no immediate employment opportunities.⁴⁴³ Where these people were coming from are parts of Syria where drought conditions were at their worst, which for the five-year drought was along the Euphrates River.⁴⁴⁴ These communities were predominately not of the Arab population as the Euphrates River is a natural border between

⁴³⁴ Ibid, 4.

⁴³⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁴³⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, 4.

⁴³⁸ Kinana Ghazi Haleme, Saadoun Zahir Al-Dulaimi and Qusai Abd Hussain, & Saher Muhammad Taleb, “Water Needs of Cotton Plants under Climate Change in Syria During the Period 1970-2020,” *Arab World Geographer*, 2024, 220.

⁴³⁹ Selby et al, 26.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 26.

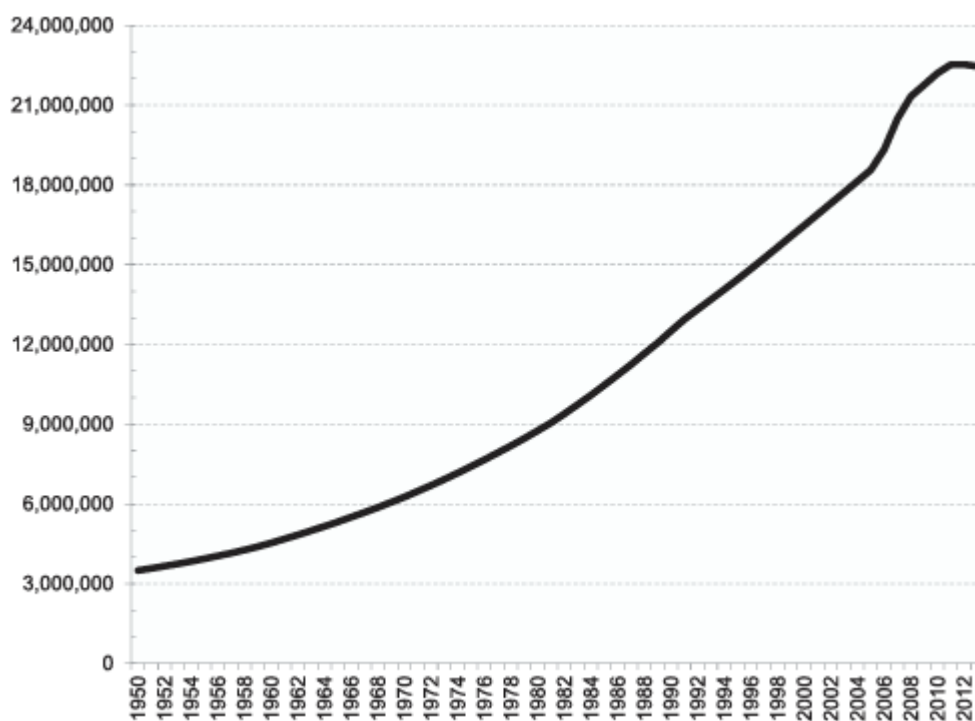
⁴⁴¹ Ma’oz, 255-256.

⁴⁴² Ibid, 255-256.

⁴⁴³ Selby et al, 26.

⁴⁴⁴ Erian, 26.

the majority Sunni Arab and Kurdish populations within Syria.⁴⁴⁵ From data during the start of the Syrian Revolution, cities such as Aleppo, Latakia, Homs, Damascus, and Dara'a were where a large majority of the protests which led to the Syrian Revolution and later Civil War occurred.⁴⁴⁶ These urban centres are both the most prominent within Syria and also where internal migration was the most significant.⁴⁴⁷ What is also important is how close some agrarian areas were to these cities, as outside of the Western Syrian Desert, much of Syria is classified as "cropland," making this internal migration much easier for the local population.⁴⁴⁸ These communities were viewed negatively by the local urban population as people undercutting employment opportunities and wages as well as being competition.⁴⁴⁹ Furthermore, the population moving into the cities from the rural areas were susceptible to spreading disease to the urban centres.⁴⁵⁰ This is because of the lack of clean water sources, the homogeneous domestic livestock population, and the uptick of insect populations in the rural agricultural areas.⁴⁵¹



(Figure 7: Population in Syria from 1950 to 2013 [Source: Gleick])

⁴⁴⁵ Selby et al, 22.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, 24.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, 24.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁵⁰ Ash & Obradovich, 19-20.

⁴⁵¹ Etheridge, 8.

While this internal migration into Syria was the most impactful for starting the Syrian Revolution, there was also a large population coming from outside of Syria. This outside population mostly came from Iraq and Palestine.⁴⁵² For people moving from these two countries to Syria, the main reason was fleeing conflict.⁴⁵³ Since 1960, Arab refugees from neighboring countries have been allowed into Syria.⁴⁵⁴ This was part of the pan-Arab and Ba'athist ideology which the Syrian government promoted.⁴⁵⁵ For Palestinians, this influx into Syria started with the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and was relatively small in number with around 80,000 refugees.⁴⁵⁶ Since then, the number of Palestinians in Syria has increased to around 120,000.⁴⁵⁷ What makes this population important in regard to Syrian politics is how domestic Palestinian politics work. Palestinians, as with Syrians, can be divided into two camps. The first are the left-wing pan-Arabists and communists, the second are the Islamists.⁴⁵⁸ For Iraqis, their history in Syria is more complicated but also more recent. Iraqis are also not a monolithic group, as both Syria and Iraq share cultural groups across their borders beyond Arabs. More specifically, the Kurdish population in Iraq has in recent history had people seek refuge in Syria.⁴⁵⁹ This was both because of the insurgencies within Iraq since the 2003 Iraq War and the anti-Kurdish policies enacted by Saddam Hussein.⁴⁶⁰ Other Iraqi groups within Syria originate from other periods of conflict within Iraq, such as the Iran-Iraq War.⁴⁶¹ Most of these refugees stopped entering after the Gulf War in 1991, but Iraqis continued into Syria up until 2007, when the Syrian government ended their open door policy towards other Arab groups.⁴⁶² These Arab refugees shared a similar reputation as the agrarian internal migrants during the five year drought, but with the addition of them not being seen as Syrian but rather as foreigners.⁴⁶³ These migrations by both foreign refugees and the domestic unemployed into urban centres led to higher tensions within the cities both between themselves, the locals, and most importantly, a government seen as unresponsive to the drought and famine crisis.

⁴⁵² Selby et al, 25.

⁴⁵³ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁵⁵ Torrey, 457.

⁴⁵⁶ Selby et al, 25.

⁴⁵⁷ Khalifa, 2.

⁴⁵⁸ Asher Susser, "Review: Secularism, Islamism, and Sectarianism: The Inevitable Linkage," *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review*, 2016, 132.

⁴⁵⁹ Khalifa, 3.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁶¹ Selby et al, 25.

⁴⁶² Ma'oz, 259.

⁴⁶³ Selby et al, 25.

The Spark for the Arab Spring

The movement of people as a result of both internal and external factors all helped to culminate with the rise of political and social dissent in Syria. Already Syria had political organizations which were opposed to the ruling government of Bashar al-Assad, but there were even more people which these organizations were able to rally to their causes. The easiest way to do so was to appeal to the problems of the economy. The Syrian economy by this point saw neoliberal reforms correlating with the environmental downturn which affected all sectors of life.⁴⁶⁴ The Syrian economy historically was very centralized with the state running all major industries and businesses.⁴⁶⁵ This created for the general population an assumption that when problems with the economy did arise, it was the duty of the state to rectify these problems.⁴⁶⁶ During this time, however, the government of Bashar al-Assad was pursuing a plan of greater economic deregulation and globalization.⁴⁶⁷ This did not mean privatization of industries, but more relaxed policies for industries to grow.⁴⁶⁸ This was combined with an increase in free trade and the opening of the domestic market to the global market.⁴⁶⁹ Something that should be understood about neoliberalizing reforms, especially in countries with extremely centralized and state-run industries is that open markets can lead to weaker domestic markets.⁴⁷⁰ What this means is that state-run industries are unable to compete in a globalizing system without further support from the state.⁴⁷¹ During this time, the government of Bashar al-Assad was beginning to withdraw subsidies from the state-run industries, forcing them to become more self-reliant.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁶⁵ Ma'oz, 256.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 258.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, 258.

⁴⁶⁸ Selby et al, 25.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁷² Ibid, 25.

	GDP (%)	Private consumption (%)	Import intensity	Export intensity
Wheat	2.8	0.1	7.9	1.1
Barley	0.4		42.1	87.1
Other cereals	0.1	1.1	72.9	0.7
Fruits	3.0	8.3	1.5	5.1
Vegetables	2.5	6.5	1.8	30.4
Olives	1.0	0.5	0.0	42.8
Cotton	1.1			
Other crops	0.6	1.0	19.4	14.0
Sheep	3.1	5.1	0.1	0.5
Cattle	1.8	4.3	0.2	0.1
Camels	0.1	0.0		
Poultry	0.7	3.6	0.1	
Fish	0.2	0.5		
Food processing	1.5	20.4	12.9	16.9
Manufacturing	12.9	13.1	77.2	80.3
Mining	24.5		87.9	42.9
Energy and water	6.2	4.8		
Public services	11.7	0.8		
Private services	25.7	29.7	17.8	45.8
Total	100.0	100.0	28.2	34.8

(Figure 8: Structure of the Syrian economy from 2007 [Source: Breisinger et al])

This pursuit of economic self-reliance and market neoliberalization, mixed with the long drought caused by both natural climatic change and human environmental degradation led to these industries failing. For the agricultural industry, this saw a lack of agrarian reforms under the Bashar al-Assad regime.⁴⁷³ For the agrarian population, this meant there was no chance for their occupations to be saved.⁴⁷⁴ The last agrarian reform done in Syria by this point predated the series of droughts which impacted Syria since the turn of the millennium.⁴⁷⁵ This meant that the reforms which intended to exploit all available land where crops could be grown were based on potentially outdated information regarding where clean water was available.⁴⁷⁶ This lack of clean water also meant that whatever was grown may have been contaminated with unclean water sources, leading to a higher risk of disease.⁴⁷⁷

The need for clean water and economic downturn led to more people in the cities, while the population already in the cities were now being affected by the decline in job opportunities.⁴⁷⁸ By 2011, the rate of unemployment in Syria had surpassed 33% of the

⁴⁷³ Afandi, 82.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, 82-83.

⁴⁷⁵ Valensi et al, 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, 1.

population.⁴⁷⁹ This rise of unemployment later grew further with the continuous migration of economic refugees from the countryside.⁴⁸⁰ The most immediate problem with this large unemployed population is that there are no opportunities available for them. This lack of opportunity then leads to these same people pushing for changes for their own benefits. From here, the spark of revolution began from those with no immediate opportunities for themselves. Earlier pushes for reform did not come from this group of people, but rather from the upper echelons of Syrian society.⁴⁸¹ Initially it was communities with a lack of representation that already had figures in positions of power, such as the Alawites with the al-Assad family.⁴⁸² In other cases, it was the intelligentsia influenced by political and social movements found outside of Syria.⁴⁸³ In this situation, it was the large, impoverished populations of people who saw a lack of opportunities other than crime or insurrection.⁴⁸⁴ For the urban population, the blame could be pinned on the rising refugee population both domestic and abroad. For those who left their agrarian livelihoods for the cities, the blame could be placed on the natural environment and the inability to survive in the countryside anymore. But for both groups, the government of Syria was an easy target for blame since it was the Syrian government which intervened before and was now seen as being complicit in the damage.⁴⁸⁵

With a large unemployed population concentrated in a few major urban centres who see the state as to blame for their grievances, the opportunity for political organization to mobilize now comes to fruition. Political opposition in Syria during this period was able to take advantage of the long period of drought to promote the overthrow of the al-Assad regime.⁴⁸⁶ How these aims were declared varied with every population and in each city. For some, the secular government was the target, with Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood appealing to the majority Sunni population.⁴⁸⁷ For ethnic and minorities such as the Druze and Kurds, the problem was a lack of political representation or local autonomy to

⁴⁷⁹ Noufal et al, 1444.

⁴⁸⁰ Selby et al, 19.

⁴⁸¹ Ma'oz, 258.

⁴⁸² Joseph Holliday, "The Struggle for Syria in 2011: an Operational and Regional Analysis," *The Struggle for Syria in 2011: an Operational and Regional Analysis*, Institute for the Study of War, 2011, 9-10. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07928.1>.

⁴⁸³ Ma'oz, 258.

⁴⁸⁴ Selby et al, 24.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, 24.

⁴⁸⁶ Aidan Hehir & James Pattison, "The Responsibility to Protect after the Arab Spring," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2016, 142. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48512893>.

⁴⁸⁷ P. R. Kumaraswamy, "The Arab Spring," *India International Centre Quarterly*, 2011, 61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44733617>.

fix their internal affairs.⁴⁸⁸ For the general population it was a lack of political representation that allowed for the crisis in Syria to spiral to what it now was.⁴⁸⁹ For those within the government, now was an opportunity to assert their own power over Bashar al-Assad.⁴⁹⁰ These political movements had already existed since the start of the Hafez al-Assad government, but now there was an opportunity not seen since the ascension of Bashar al-Assad in 2000.⁴⁹¹ The political landscape in Syria now saw not only the intelligentsia, much of which was exiled from the country, but also the lower classes.⁴⁹² These political groups can themselves be divided between Islamist organizations and liberal republican movements.⁴⁹³ Islamist groups were mostly dominated by the majority Sunni Arab population within Syria with some organizations also including Kurdish communities.⁴⁹⁴

Another way to divide these organizations is between the general Syrian opposition whose goals were internal and for Syria itself, and Kurdish and other minority-based political organizations.⁴⁹⁵ The general Syrian Opposition during this period was united in their opposition to the government of Bashar al-Assad and the policies that were implemented both by him and his predecessor Hafez al-Assad.⁴⁹⁶ Some of this opposition also came from the Assad family being Alawite rather than Sunni Arab which was seen as the majority of the population being unrepresented while a minority community was given greater political power.⁴⁹⁷ This same sentiment against minority and foreign communities was used by the Syrian Opposition and other political dissident groups as blame for the economic crisis affecting Syria.⁴⁹⁸ Within the Syrian Opposition, ideology ranged from Secular democratic liberalism to Trotskyite revolutionaries and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁹⁹ Within this movement were also two separate opposition groups with the first being a big tent movement while the second being a broadly Islamist organization.⁵⁰⁰ This general Syrian Opposition also included the Druze population found in Southern Syria who were against the

⁴⁸⁸ Ma'oz, 260.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, 260.

⁴⁹⁰ Udi Dekel, Nir Boms, & Ofir Winter, "Mapping the Non-State Actors in Syria and their Attitudes toward Israel," *Syria's New Map and New Actors*, 2016, 49.

⁴⁹¹ Ma'oz, 258.

⁴⁹² Barder, 140.

⁴⁹³ Ma'oz, 258.

⁴⁹⁴ Valensi et al, 3.

⁴⁹⁵ Ma'oz, 262.

⁴⁹⁶ Dekel et al, 46.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, 39.

⁴⁹⁸ Selby et al, 23.

⁴⁹⁹ Dekel et al, 25.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, 25.

Assad government for similar reasons as the Kurdish groups.⁵⁰¹ The Kurdish majority organizations ideologically held their grievances towards the lack of Kurdish representation within the Syrian government.⁵⁰² Kurds are also not an Arab culture but are instead an Iranian culture, meaning the Syrian Ba'athist ideology ran opposed to a separate Kurdish identity.⁵⁰³ These groups are not exclusively Kurdish, but also consist of other ethnic minority groups found in the Northeast of Syria, such as Assyrians and secular Arabs.⁵⁰⁴ Politically these groups were both for minority representation but also were broadly more aligned with socialist, anarchist, and communist movements.⁵⁰⁵ For all of these groups, the original push for change came through peaceful means, however the means to do this were difficult.

How to Voice their Concerns

Historically, the Syrian government under the Ba'athist period did not tolerate dissent from any part of the country, be it those with political power or even those in the lowest echelons of society.⁵⁰⁶ This meant that any attempt at voicing criticism towards the government was met with harsh reprisals. The same happened when the urban populations within Syria in 2011 began protesting.⁵⁰⁷ Initially, these protests were for reforms in the government system as for the people of Syria it was the state that was the machination which brought prosperity in the past.⁵⁰⁸ It was the Syrian government that had responded to past droughts with relief and quick-fix reforms during the government of Hafez al-Assad and now it was time for relief by Bashar al-Assad.⁵⁰⁹ Instead, the relief not only did not come from the government, but it came from outside assistance which in some cases had a negative impact on the lives of the unemployed masses.⁵¹⁰ The most prominent example being the importing of food creating competition for the already struggling agrarian and pastoral communities, accelerating the migration of these people to the urban centres.⁵¹¹ These initial protests were both calls for government intervention on behalf of the people, but also for the state to assist them in keeping or returning to their livelihoods.⁵¹² The response from the Syrian government

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, 39.

⁵⁰² Ibid, 40.

⁵⁰³ Torrey, 470.

⁵⁰⁴ Khalifa, 4.

⁵⁰⁵ Dekel et al, 40.

⁵⁰⁶ Ma'oz, 257.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, 259.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, 255-256.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, 258.

⁵¹⁰ Barder, 142.

⁵¹¹ Ibid, 137.

⁵¹² Soffiantini, 4.

under Bashar al-Assad was similar to that of Hafez al-Assad, with dissent met with force rather than negotiation.⁵¹³ For Hafez al-Assad this worked due to both the lack of wide-range communication between people and also his cult of personality and propaganda for great projects such as Lake Assad.⁵¹⁴

For Bashar al-Assad, he neither had the means to successfully suppress the means of communication between people nor the same political veneration by the masses.⁵¹⁵ Communication by the 2010s had improved with the rise of the internet which became a means for people to communicate easily.⁵¹⁶ The internet and its accessibility for especially the younger generation is credited for the start of the Arab Spring protests and revolutions.⁵¹⁷ This access to the internet along with the amount of people who were unemployed being in the younger generation meant there was a lot of time and energy that was being unspent.⁵¹⁸ As seen in other cases of revolutions in the modern age, when the youth have no immediate purpose, they will make themselves a purpose.⁵¹⁹ Because of the political repression, however, they did not see a legal avenue to petition for their grievances against the government. This led to political opposition attaining a new pool of people to recruit from and with the ability to communicate beyond physical interactions, this allowed for dissent to grow despite political repression.⁵²⁰ With the rise in unemployment, migration of a low-wage labor pool into the cities, and lack of purpose in the younger generation, this led to the initial protests for reform.⁵²¹ The crackdown by the government of Bashar al-Assad, instead of suppressing this dissent, made the dissent even more powerful as messages of dissent could be spread beyond the cities under crackdown.⁵²² It was this new mode of communication where people could petition their grievances to others who agreed with them, and with a government that refused initially to negotiate, opposition became more organized and prepared to start a revolution.⁵²³

Bashar al-Assad & The 2011 Syrian Arab Spring

⁵¹³ Ma'oz, 259.

⁵¹⁴ Colleo, 154.

⁵¹⁵ Simon Mabon, "Aiding Revolution? Wikileaks, Communication and the "Arab Spring" in Egypt," *Third World Quarterly*, 2013, 1845.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid, 1845.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid, 1845.

⁵¹⁸ Selby et al, 24.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, 24.

⁵²⁰ Ma'oz, 259.

⁵²¹ Selby et al, 26.

⁵²² Kumaraswamy, 57.

⁵²³ Ibid, 57.

In 2011, the government of Syria saw a series of large-scale protests by the local population.⁵²⁴ The initial protests started after a police officer assaulted and arrested a man on 26 January, leading to calls for protests from 4 to 5 February.⁵²⁵ These protests were for the release of this person from prison, however these protests were minor and quickly fizzled away.⁵²⁶ This early set of protests did however show that people were critical of how the government, at least in Damascus, conducted itself. Both the governments of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad were referred to as “totalitarian” with noticeably unfair elections and a lack of civil liberties.⁵²⁷ One month later, on 6 March, security forces in Daraa, Syria apprehended 15 students who were accused of writing anti-government slogans, such as “the people want the fall of the regime.”⁵²⁸ Starting from 15 March until 19 March, a series of large-scale protests occurred in the Daraa governorate and quickly spread into other parts of Syria.⁵²⁹ Initially, the Syrian government blamed foreign powers for sowing dissent and inciting the protests, specifically the Qatari government.⁵³⁰ On 15 March, protests occurred in Damascus calling for the end of the Bashar government along with the release of political prisoners and the end of the “emergency law” which gave the Syrian president immense powers.⁵³¹ This ended with another round of crackdowns by the Syrian government.⁵³² By 18 March, the protests became some of the largest in recent history for Syria, and the government responded with lethal force via the Syrian Arab Army to quell the protests.⁵³³ Estimates state there were approximately four deaths and 3000 arrests, however there is no official documentation of either statistic.⁵³⁴ One incident included the attacking of the Omari Mosque with initially non-lethal means.⁵³⁵ Despite the firepower of the Syrian Arab Army, control of Daraa was not regained and the initially peaceful protests soon devolved into a popular uprising.⁵³⁶ The overthrow of the local Ba’athist government by protesters resulted in Daraa being known as the “Cradle of the Syrian Revolution.”⁵³⁷ Other cities also saw protests during 18 March,

⁵²⁴ Ash & Obradovich, 4.

⁵²⁵ Ma’oz, 259.

⁵²⁶ Ibid, 259.

⁵²⁷ Ibid, 258.

⁵²⁸ Holliday, 7.

⁵²⁹ Briscoe et al, 19.

⁵³⁰ Holliday, 19.

⁵³¹ Ibid, 15.

⁵³² Ibid, 15.

⁵³³ Briscoe et al, 19.

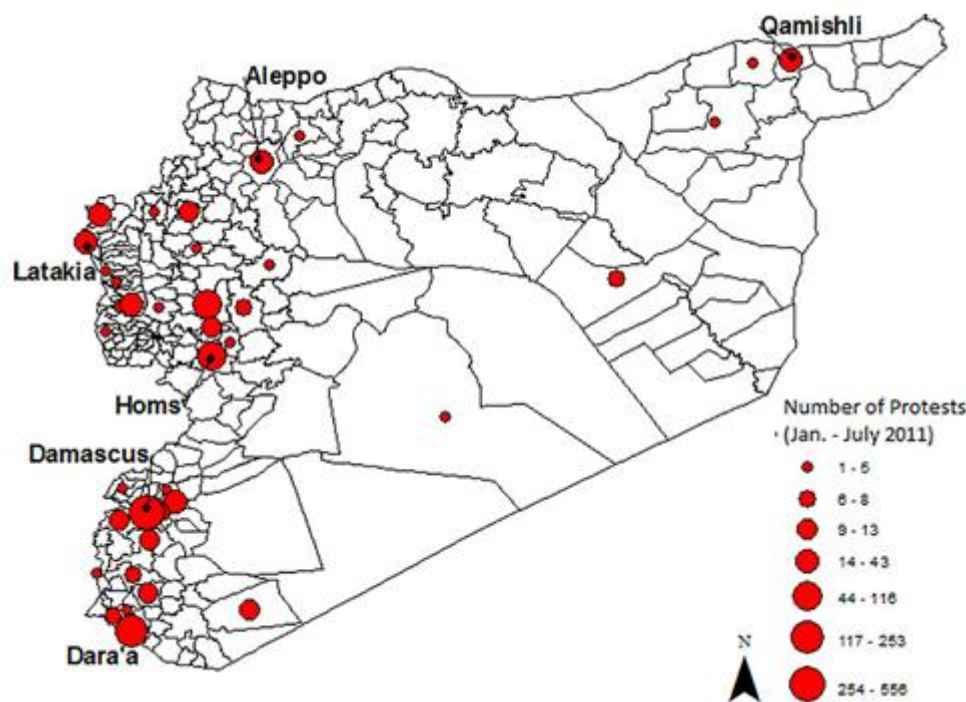
⁵³⁴ Holliday, 15.

⁵³⁵ Ibid, 13.

⁵³⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁵³⁷ Ibid, 14.

including Damascus and Hama, the site of the Hama Massacre.⁵³⁸ On 23 March, Maher al-Assad, leading an armoured division of the Syrian Arab Army, attacked a mosque in Daraa, resulting in further casualties.⁵³⁹ The reason for the attack on the mosque was over claims that protesters were stockpiling weapons to combat the government crackdown.⁵⁴⁰ Two days later, more mass protests across Syria occurred, with the desolation of statues of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad, resulting in more crackdowns. On 30 March, Bashar al-Assad addressed the protests and crackdowns, calling the protests a conspiracy being led by the Israeli government to destabilize the Syrian government.⁵⁴¹ In his address, reforms were mentioned as a possibility only after the economic and political crisis was stabilized.⁵⁴²



(Figure 9: Locations of Protests in 2011 in Syria [Source: Ash & Obradovich])

This “Syrian Revolution” was not a sporadic event, but rather the result of a wave of earlier protests across the Arab World. Syria itself was the eighth Arab country to see turmoil.⁵⁴³ These protests and their consequences have become collectively known as the “Arab Spring” and lasted from late 2010 until at the latest 2014, with Syria’s crisis ending even later in 2024.⁵⁴⁴ These protests were due in large part to human rights violations being

⁵³⁸ Ma’oz, 258.

⁵³⁹ Holliday, 13.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁴¹ Ma’oz, 260.

⁵⁴² Ibid, 260.

⁵⁴³ Valensi et al, 1.

⁵⁴⁴ Afandi, 75.

committed by their respective governments.⁵⁴⁵ Initial protests were met with harsh reprisals, such as in the Western Sahara.⁵⁴⁶ However the first successful protest came out of Tunisia with the overthrow of the government with the exile of the President of Tunisia to Saudi Arabia, the dissolution of the political police and the ruling political party, the releasing of prisoners and the creation of a new government.⁵⁴⁷ This government overthrow became an inspiration for other movements in the Arab World. The success and severity of these protests varied greatly between countries, with only five countries seeing their governments overthrown, two of these countries also suffered civil war, Syria and Libya.⁵⁴⁸ Most countries saw either unsuccessful protests or government reforms.⁵⁴⁹ The aftermath of the event of the Arab Spring led to what is known as the “Arab Winter.”⁵⁵⁰ The Arab Winter refers to the subsequent political violence and failure of political liberalization.⁵⁵¹ Another aspect of the Arab Winter is the rise of political Islam, specifically Salafism and Qutbism.⁵⁵²

After the Syrian government lost control over the Daraa Governorate, the government proposed and pushed concessions to appease those protesting. Most of these early concessions were directed towards the Sunni population which makes up the majority of people in Syria as well as the Kurdish population.⁵⁵³ The only casino in Syria was closed and restrictions on religious garments were loosened.⁵⁵⁴ Kurds in Syria were also granted citizenship who were treated as “foreigners.”⁵⁵⁵ Another major concession was the end of the “emergency rule,” which ended on 21 April, 2011.⁵⁵⁶ There was also an attempt to have dialogue between the Syrian government and the protesters, however this never came to be due to there being no end to the crackdowns and the representatives being almost exclusively from the Ba’ath Party.⁵⁵⁷ Despite these planned concessions, they did not strike at the heart of the problems in Syria, but instead were ways to alleviate pressure on the Syrian government. This failure to implement, or at least portray themselves as implementing, substantial economic and political reforms led to the intensification of the Arab Spring in Syria.

⁵⁴⁵ Hehir & Pattison, 141.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid, 141-142.

⁵⁴⁷ Valensi et al, 1.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁴⁹ P. R. Kumaraswamy, 60.

⁵⁵⁰ Hehir & Pattison, 142.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, 142.

⁵⁵² Ibid, 142.

⁵⁵³ Holliday, 22.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, 18.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁵⁷ Briscoe et al, 20.

Starting in April of 2011, the Syrian government intensified their crackdown on protesters, starting in the Daraa region.⁵⁵⁸ On 25 April until 5 May, 2011, the Syrian government deployed troops to the city of Daraa.⁵⁵⁹ Prior to this on 8 April, there were clashes between the Syrian security forces and protesters leading to the deaths of protesters, with another clash on 22 April.⁵⁶⁰ The resultant siege started with the raiding of mosques by the Syrian military, specifically the Omari Mosque as it was seen as the main headquarters for the protesters in Daraa.⁵⁶¹ Another action taken on the first day was the cutting off of supplies, including water and electricity, to the city as a means of forcing capitulation by the protesters through attrition.⁵⁶² Aid, including access to water, did not arrive into the city until 5 May.⁵⁶³ On the same day when supplies were cut from the city, the military entered, with over 100 casualties and hundreds more arrested.⁵⁶⁴ Claims surrounding the immediate aftermath of the initial assault included a continued military presence, with snipers constantly on watch in Daraa for potential dissenters.⁵⁶⁵ Other sources, including Al-Jazeera, a new network associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, claimed troops were injured and arrested for refusing orders to kill suspected protesters.⁵⁶⁶ The city of Daraa continued to have protests against the military presence, and on 16 May, people were allowed outside of their homes.⁵⁶⁷ The political consequences of this siege included the resignation of 233 members of the Ba'ath Party over the increasingly harsh treatment of civilians.⁵⁶⁸ Furthermore, the siege had the opposite effect, as instead protests intensified.

In May, multiple cities surrounding Damascus were also stormed by the military as a means to quell dissent. From 15-19 May, the city of Talkalakh, in the Homs region of Syria, was besieged by the Syrian military, resulting in at least 27 deaths as well as a major refugee crisis, with thousands attempting to flee into Lebanon.⁵⁶⁹ This, along with other sieges by the Syrian military only led to further destabilization of the government and a greater intensification of the protests. By the end of May 2011, the protests in Syria quickly changed

⁵⁵⁸ Holliday, 24.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, 24.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid, 24.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁶² Ibid, 13-14.

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 14.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, 14.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁵⁶⁸ Ma'oz, 259.

⁵⁶⁹ Holliday, 15.

into a full-fledged opposition movement.⁵⁷⁰ This now organized opposition started to gain support within the Syrian government and military apparatus, with at least two military or security officials defecting to the opposition.⁵⁷¹ The response by the Syrian government being harsher crackdowns, including another purging of the military of potential dissenters.⁵⁷² Early instances of this change from protest to insurrection came on 4 June, when a building housing security forces was set on fire in Idlib.⁵⁷³ Two days later, Sunni militiamen ambushed military forces entering Idlib, resulting in civilians in the city, fearing reprisals, to flee to Turkey.⁵⁷⁴ More sieges by the military occurred in June in most cities, however two saw a lack of protests, Damascus and Aleppo.⁵⁷⁵ The main reason was due to urban support for Bashar al-Assad at this time remained relatively high.⁵⁷⁶ On 3 July, continued repressions resulted in another siege of Hama, known as the “Ramadan Massacre.”⁵⁷⁷ Following this action, which resulted in over 200 deaths by the end of the siege in August, the Free Syrian Army was established.⁵⁷⁸ This group was founded by defecting Syrian military members and became the first formal armed opposition against the Assad government, starting the Syrian Civil War.⁵⁷⁹

Conclusion: Theory Implementation

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid, 77.

⁵⁷¹ Ma’oz, 259.

⁵⁷² Ibid, 260.

⁵⁷³ Ibid, 260.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid, 260.

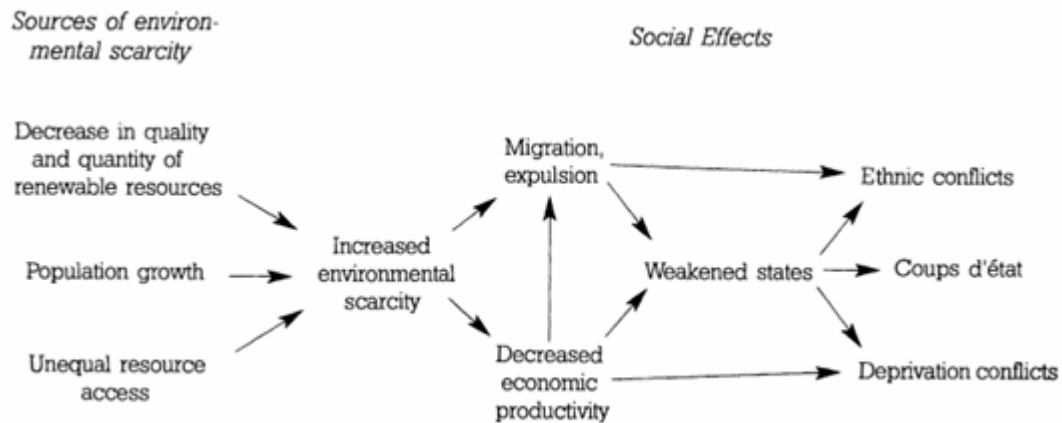
⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, 260.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid, 258.

⁵⁷⁷ Holliday, 15.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, 16.

⁵⁷⁹ Afandi, 77.



(Figure 1X: Flowchart on the collapse of polities [Source: Homer-Dixon])

In applying the theory of environmental scarcity and its increase in violence by Thomas F Homer-Dixon, the reasons for the collapse of the political authority of Syria can be seen in a greater light. In general, what the theory showed is how an unequal access to resources combined with a rising population leads to greater scarcity of these resources.⁵⁸⁰ Even further, these resources can also see a decline in quality over time either as the initial cause for later problems, or an after effect of previous issues.⁵⁸¹ This environmental scarcity which comes from these initial factors then leads to a decrease in production and the migration of populations.⁵⁸² From here, states lose authority and the ability to manage themselves and potentially assist their populations, resulting in internal strife such as ethnic conflicts, resource conflicts, and coup attempts.⁵⁸³ For Syria, the roadmap for these events are easy to spot. Renewable resources, specifically water, saw a decline in quality with poor regulations in regard to waste management.⁵⁸⁴ The decrease in quantity came from the five year period of drought, which, compared to previous drought cycles, lasted longer than the Syrian government had historically managed.⁵⁸⁵ Population growth is a constant in modern states without any catastrophic events, and for Syria this is no different.⁵⁸⁶ For unequal resource access, the centralization of the state and its exclusive access to resources meant all resources were directed to specific industries by the state.⁵⁸⁷ The cotton industry, for example, was given priority access to water as this industry was already heavily reliant on water for the

⁵⁸⁰ Erian, 31.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁸² Ibid, 32.

⁵⁸³ Soffiantini, 7.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁵⁸⁵ Erian, 7.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁸⁷ Haleme et al, 220.

cultivation of cotton.⁵⁸⁸ This came at the expense of the agricultural and pastoral population which needed water for their own crops and livestock. These groups, however, were not as profitable for the state as the cotton industry. When the five-year drought hit, the amount of water decreased for the general population, despite historical attempts to alleviate this natural occurrence through agricultural reforms and the creation of artificial lakes.⁵⁸⁹ Soon the agrarian population started to leave the countryside since their means of living were now being destroyed by a lack of water.⁵⁹⁰ This lack of clean water also led to a rise in disease susceptibility and a decline in the quality of crops and livestock yields.⁵⁹¹ This new population moving into urban centres were unemployed, and with the weakening economy for the entire state, this led to a crisis of government management.⁵⁹² From here, tensions that were already underneath the surface in Syria began to come to the top, with an unruly population pushing for change. First came the calls for reform based on deprivation of livelihoods and a perceived, though accurate, lack of political representation.⁵⁹³ These escalated with ethnic groups aligning themselves with political factions and soon ethnic conflict which was already underneath the surface came to the forefront of the political culture of Syria.⁵⁹⁴ This all culminated with the 2011 Arab Spring protests and the later Syrian Civil War, which ended in the total collapse of the government of Bashar al-Assad.⁵⁹⁵ What this shows is that the theory helps to describe how one problem which was overlooked by the state soon led to a snowball effect, with the environmental problem becoming a social one, ending with the collapse of the state.

SECTION IV: CONCLUSION

Climate Change

With the initial response by the Syrian government to the protests in 2011, Syria was again in a situation the region had seen before in its history. The violent suppression as a means for the government to buy time and accelerate the end of these protests instead led to the sudden rise in both protests and later armed revolts.⁵⁹⁶ The collapse of the political authority of the regime of Bashar al-Assad shares aspects with earlier events in Syrian history

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 420.

⁵⁸⁹ Ash & Obradovich, 14.

⁵⁹⁰ Barder, 141.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, 141.

⁵⁹² Ibid, 141.

⁵⁹³ Ash & Obradovich, 9.

⁵⁹⁴ Khalifa, 2.

⁵⁹⁵ Afandi, 77.

⁵⁹⁶ Valensi et al, 1.

that saw the fall of both foreign empires and local polities. In the case of modern Syria, as with other examples that will be given, there was the problem of a shift in climate and the problem of centralization. For climate change, Syria was already susceptible to droughts due to the semi-arid and arid climate in much of the country.⁵⁹⁷ The problem was that unlike previous droughts that occurred in modern Syria, this one lasted for more than double the usual time.⁵⁹⁸ This drought led to people no longer being able to feed themselves in the countryside via subsistence farming and herding.⁵⁹⁹ From there, any labor that could help these people survive had to come from the cities, meaning a mass migration of people into already highly populated cities.⁶⁰⁰ These same cities were also suffering because of both a lack of food and water being produced but also from the poor conditions inside these cities.⁶⁰¹ High unemployment was also prevalent already by the time this migration of people was happening, meaning there was no ability for this new population to improve their livelihoods.⁶⁰² This large unemployed population then tried to find help from the government, and the response was not reform but repression.

Centralization

As climate change, specifically a long drought, led to the initial crisis of population migration, it was the Syrian government that caused its own demise. The Syrian government in its centralized system was seen as the means in which positive change comes to the country.⁶⁰³ This centralization of the Syrian government was similar to ancient Syrian polities, with the same political culture and a similar style of administrative institutions.⁶⁰⁴ The leader was not seen as simply the head of state, but also as a savior of the people.⁶⁰⁵ For the al-Assad family, sometimes referred to as a dynasty, this went as far as comparisons to divine figures such as Muhammad.⁶⁰⁶ This centralized system also pushed away any potential rival movements that could threaten the absolute authority of the state.⁶⁰⁷ This included political organizations, ambitious figures within and outside of the functions of the state, and

⁵⁹⁷ Selby et al, 35.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, 35.

⁵⁹⁹ Erian, 26.

⁶⁰⁰ Soffiantini, 4.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, 4.

⁶⁰² Ibid, 4.

⁶⁰³ Erian, 32.

⁶⁰⁴ Soffiantini, 5.

⁶⁰⁵ Ma'oz, 255.

⁶⁰⁶ Reich, 57.

⁶⁰⁷ Ma'oz, 258.

even religious institutions.⁶⁰⁸ This persecution saw violent purges and political repression, including massacres of cities where political dissent was seen as rampant, such as Hamaa in 1981 and 1982.⁶⁰⁹ This cult of personality, while lessened under Bashar al-Assad, remained a powerful tool of keeping the state centralized.⁶¹⁰

This centralization of the state was also an economic action, with all institutions under the authority of the one in charge of the state, and all functions pertinent to the state being under the same rule.⁶¹¹ In the context of the economy, the internal development of Syria, including electrification, infrastructure projects, and improvements in agriculture and water access, were credited to the government of Hafez al-Assad.⁶¹² It was during this period of centralized rule where reforms to make Syria more self-reliant came to pass, meaning that every aspect of industry, from cultivation to manufacturing and commercialization, was directed by the state in some capacity.⁶¹³ For the general population, this included access to food being from within rather than a reliance on outside assistance.⁶¹⁴ It was this centralization that led the population into seeing the Syrian government as the means in which economic progress, prosperity, and stabilization came about.⁶¹⁵ More importantly, it meant any problem or change that occurred was the responsibility of the leader, in this case Bashar al-Assad, to fix.⁶¹⁶

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, 258.

⁶⁰⁹ Susser, 140.

⁶¹⁰ Ma'oz, 258.

⁶¹¹ Ibid, 258.

⁶¹² Ibid, 255-256.

⁶¹³ Ibid, 256.

⁶¹⁴ Soffiantini, 4.

⁶¹⁵ Ma'oz, 256.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, 259.

Chapter III: Late Bronze Age Collapse in Syria

From around 1595 BC until 1200 BC, the Near East was in the last phase of the Bronze Age.⁶¹⁷ In the 12th century BC, a series of political, social, and environmental events within the Eastern Mediterranean region led to the wide-scale collapse of polities within the region.⁶¹⁸ The biggest of these collapses were the fall of the Hittite Empire in Anatolia, the Mycenaean civilization in Greece, and the city-state of Ugarit in modern-day Syria.⁶¹⁹ From this period onwards, the Near East entered a “dark age” period until the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 911 BC.⁶²⁰ Understanding why the Late Bronze Age collapse happened in the Near East requires an analysis of how polities in the region acted both internally and with neighboring polities. Furthermore, the question of how the environment changes and the domino effect it had will also be analyzed. More specifically, the problem which these polities had in their failures to survive during this period of both political and environmental instability. For the case of Syria, Ugarit as a polity shows the most promise in understanding why the Late Bronze Age Collapse happened in the Near East. The main reason for using Ugarit as an example is because of the power which the polity had in the region, with it being a main centre of trade.⁶²¹ The standing of the polity among other polities also helps to show how interpolity relationships worked.⁶²² Lastly, the question of the Sea Peoples will be looked into. More specifically, whether the Sea Peoples were an internal community to the Near East or, as depicted in Egyptian iconography, a group external invading force moving into the Near East.⁶²³

SECTION I: Background to Late Bronze Age

⁶¹⁷ Gregory McMahon, (1989), “The History of the Hittites,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 52, no. 2/3, 64.

⁶¹⁸ Brandon L Drake, (2012), “The influence of climatic change on the Late Bronze Age Collapse and the Greek Dark Ages,” *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 39, 1862.

⁶¹⁹ Neil Asher Silberman, (1990), “Of Bronze Age Crisis and Collapse,” *Archaeology*, 43, no. 5, 64.

⁶²⁰ Drake, 1862.

⁶²¹ Jesse Michael Millek, (2021), “Dual Narratives: Collapse and Transition at the End of the Late Bronze Age,” *Bridging the Gap: Disciplines, Times, and Spaces in Dialogue – Volume 1*, 250.

⁶²² A. Bernard Knapp & Stuart W. Manning, (2016), “Crisis in Context: The End of the Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean,” *American Journal of Archaeology*, 120, no. 1, 137.

⁶²³ Alexander V. Safronov, (2020), “Миграции «народов моря» в начале XII в. до н. э. по данным письменных источников, нарративной традиции и археологии,” *Исторические науки*, 1234.



(Figure 1: Four Maps of the Late Bronze Age)

The Late Bronze Age was the final part of the larger Bronze Age Period, which precedes the Iron Age and succeeds the Caltholithic Age.⁶²⁴ The Bronze Age itself is defined by the use of bronze in a community or geographic region.⁶²⁵ For Western Asia, the Bronze Age started with the rise of Sumer in the Fourth Millenium BC and ended with the Late Bronze Age Collapse in 1200 BC.⁶²⁶ The Late Bronze Age in Western Asia began with the rise of large regional powers such as the Hittite Empire in Anatolia, the Middle Assyrian Empire in Northern Mesopotamia, the Hurrian-Mittani Empire of the Northern Levant, and the Kingdom of Egypt.⁶²⁷ One important aspect of the Late Bronze Age to note is that the term is not universal.⁶²⁸ Instead, the division of the Bronze Age into Early, Intermediate or Middle, and Late is used exclusively in reference to Western Asia.⁶²⁹ During the Late Bronze Age, these major polities conducted diplomacy and pursued policies of influence onto nearby neighboring polities.⁶³⁰ This also included diplomatic hierarchies produced by the power these polities projected both onto their weaker neighbors and towards polities of equal power.⁶³¹ Another major part of the Late Bronze Age was the major trade routes throughout

⁶²⁴ Mario Liverani, (2011), *The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy*, Routledge, 9.

⁶²⁵ Ibid, 11.

⁶²⁶ Drake, 1862.

⁶²⁷ Tate Paulette, (2012), "Domination and Resilience in Bronze Age Mesopotamia," *Surviving Sudden Environmental Change*, 179.

⁶²⁸ Liverani, xxiv.

⁶²⁹ Ibid, 13-14.

⁶³⁰ McMahon, 65.

⁶³¹ Liverani, 282.

Western Asia.⁶³² These trade relations were the backbone for interpolity diplomacy as well as what birthed more cosmopolitan material cultures in Western Asia.⁶³³ More specifically, a material culture known as the “international style,” which saw designs for goods based from multiple different polities.⁶³⁴ This style of decorations and goods shows how interpolity trade and cultural exchange grew in prominence.⁶³⁵ The “international style,” due to the target demographic being the elites and rulers of polities, used material of high value such as gold, silver, and ivory.⁶³⁶ Qatna in particular has a large amount of goods based on the “international style.”⁶³⁷ This mass trade also generated more power for those governing polities in the Late Bronze Age.⁶³⁸ How these polities, both the large regional powers and the smaller communities interacted and governed themselves can explain why the Late Bronze Age Collapse happened.⁶³⁹

The political geography of Western Asia in the Late Bronze Age shows three general types of polities that were found during the period. The first being city-states which were dominated by a single hereditary monarch.⁶⁴⁰ These polities typically had the ruling of a king over the city itself and tribal groups holding authority in the outskirts of the polity.⁶⁴¹ The second are tribal confederations which were decentralized polities united either by a system of alliances or a single ruler.⁶⁴² These types of polities were commonly based around similar cultural backgrounds.⁶⁴³ The final type of polity were empires which covered vast expanses of Western Asia.⁶⁴⁴ While there was a single absolute ruler who dominated the polity, there was also a system of bureaucrats and governors below the ruler which assisted in the

⁶³² Igor Linkov, S.E. Galaiti, Benjamin D. Trump, Elizaveta Pinigina, Krista Rand, Eric H. Cline, & Maksin Kitsak, (2024), “Are civilizations destined to collapse? Lessons from the Mediterranean Bronze Age,” *Global Environmental Change*, 1.

⁶³³ Erika Fischer & Dirk Wicke, (2021), “Review to Marian H. Feldman, Diplomacy by design,” University of Chicago Press 2006, *Die Welt des Orients*. 41. 95.

⁶³⁴ Ibid, 95.

⁶³⁵ Liverani, 283.

⁶³⁶ Fischer & Wicke, 96.

⁶³⁷ Teresa Bürge, (2016), *Qatna and the Networks of Bronze Age Globalism. Proceedings of an International Conference in Stuttgart and Tübingen in October 2009*, (Qatna Studien Supplementa 2), by Peter Pfälzner and Michel Al-Maqdissi, *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes* 106, 316.

⁶³⁸ Ellery Frahm & Joshua M. Feinberg, (2013), “Environment and collapse: Eastern Anatolian obsidians at Urkesh (Tell Mozan, Syria) and the third-millennium Mesopotamian urban crisis,” *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 1868.

⁶³⁹ Drake, 1863.

⁶⁴⁰ Frahm & Feinberg, 1868.

⁶⁴¹ Liverani, 278.

⁶⁴² Ibid, 279.

⁶⁴³ Robert S. Merrillees, (1986), “Political Conditions in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age,” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 49, no. 1, 49.

⁶⁴⁴ Paulette, 184.

administration of the polity.⁶⁴⁵ These polities also had a system of viceroys and vassals which paid tribute in taxes and soldiers.⁶⁴⁶ The Late Bronze Age itself starts with the sack of Babylon by the Hittite king Mursili I in 1595 BC.⁶⁴⁷

In Anatolia, the Hittite Empire dominated the region with the Late Bronze Age being both the height and the latest point of the history of the polity.⁶⁴⁸ The Hittites themselves were an Indo-European culture which had taken the name of a non-Indo-European group which preceded their migration to Anatolia called the Hatti.⁶⁴⁹ The Hittites were also one of the dominant powers of Western Asia during the Late Bronze Age competing with Egypt over dominance in the Levant.⁶⁵⁰ In the Late Bronze Age, the Hittite polity is referred to as being in the “Hittite Empire period” due to their extreme expansion under King Tudhaliya I.⁶⁵¹ This early phase saw initial expansion followed by successive weakening of the polity.⁶⁵² This was also the period of Hittite history with the reigns of Šuppiluliuma I and Mursili II who both saw continued territorial expansion of the polity.⁶⁵³ The decline of the Hittites came with the death of Tudhaliya IV who oversaw the decline of the empire to its eastern rival, the Middle Assyrian Empire.⁶⁵⁴ The last king was Šuppiluliuma II who reigned during the Bronze Age Collapse which saw the complete destruction of the Hittite Empire and the rise of the Syro-Hittite states.⁶⁵⁵ Other groups in Anatolia included the Hattians which lived in what became the central territory of the Hittite Empire.⁶⁵⁶ This territory during the early parts of the Late Bronze Age saw the development of Assyrian trading posts called Karums, meaning ports.⁶⁵⁷ These trading posts were colonies which lasted until the conquest of Assyria by Hammurabi in 1756 BC.⁶⁵⁸ Karums held permanent settlements of Assyrians which intermarried with local communities, sometimes even having other families in Assyria proper, and used these ports to claim resources such as silver for themselves.⁶⁵⁹ These

⁶⁴⁵ Liverani, 281.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid, 281.

⁶⁴⁷ William R. Thompson, (2006), “Climate, Water, and Crises in the Southwest Asian Bronze Age,” *Nature and Culture*, 1, no. 1, 106.

⁶⁴⁸ McMahon, 69

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, 65.

⁶⁵⁰ František Válek, (2024), “Divination and political administration at Ugarit,” *Axis Mundi*, 18, no. 2, 49.

⁶⁵¹ McMahon, 64.

⁶⁵² Ibid, 66.

⁶⁵³ Ibid, 66.

⁶⁵⁴ Lorenzo Castellano, (2024), “Farming the land of Hatti: Emergence and collapse of the Late Bronze Age agricultural landscape of central Anatolia,” in *Ancient Western Asia Beyond the Paradigm of Collapse and Regeneration (1200–900 bce)*, 93.

⁶⁵⁵ McMahon, 75.

⁶⁵⁶ Merrillees, 44.

⁶⁵⁷ McMahon, 62.

⁶⁵⁸ Nimet Özgüç, (1969), “Assyrian Trade Colonies in Anatolia,” *Archaeology*, 22, no. 4, 250.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid, 250.

Karums were also how writing was introduced to Anatolia, specifically cuneiform as another group in Anatolia, the Luwians, also had their own writing system.⁶⁶⁰ The Luwians were an Anatolian group found in the Hittite Empire which had a hieroglyphic writing system.⁶⁶¹ This group were Indo-European and were found in Kizzuwatna, a kingdom under Hittite vassalage located in modern-day Cilicia.⁶⁶² Surrounding the Hittites in Anatolia were multiple confederations such as the Lukka in Southwestern Anatolia and the Arzawa who were a confederation as well as vassals of the Hittites.⁶⁶³ Another group were the Wilusa which have been identified with the ancient city of Troy.⁶⁶⁴

Egypt during the Late Bronze Age was under the “New Kingdom” also referred to as the “Egyptian Empire.”⁶⁶⁵ This period of ancient Egypt contained the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth dynasties and is seen as one of the three “golden ages” of Egypt.⁶⁶⁶ For Egypt, it was the Nineteenth Dynasty which was the height of power for the New Kingdom and saw Egypt expand into the Levant with the city of Kadesh as the furthest extent northwards.⁶⁶⁷ The end of the Nineteenth Dynasty resulted in a civil war which ended with the rise of the Twentieth Dynasty of Egypt.⁶⁶⁸ This final dynasty of the New Kingdom of Egypt saw the invasion of the Sea Peoples under Rameses III and the further weakening of Egypt.⁶⁶⁹ After the death of Rameses III, the priestly class of Egypt gained more power over the politics of Egypt to the point that they were de facto ruling Upper Egypt.⁶⁷⁰ The way Egypt governed in the Levant was different from the governing done in Egypt proper, with the polities of the Levant being near independent city states under the protection of either the Egyptians, Hittites, or the Assyrians.⁶⁷¹ For the Levant, the Late Bronze Age saw the fall of the Kingdom of Mitanni or Hanigalbat which was a Hurrian polity.⁶⁷² The Hurrians were an Indo-Aryan culture that had both linguistic and political similarities with the Indo-Aryan polities found in

⁶⁶⁰ McMahon, 76.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid, 76.

⁶⁶² Lorenzo d’Alfonso, (2023), “Resilience Theory, Human Agency, and Political Archaeology: A RT Revised Model for the Understanding of the Late Bronze– Iron Age Transition in the Post-Hittite World,” *Journal of Near Eastern History*, 14.

⁶⁶³ Liverani, 383.

⁶⁶⁴ Safronov, 1243.

⁶⁶⁵ Paulette, 184.

⁶⁶⁶ K. A. Kitchen, (1991), “The Chronology of Ancient Egypt,” *World Archaeology*, 23, no. 2, 206.

⁶⁶⁷ Merrillees, 46.

⁶⁶⁸ Kitchen, 206.

⁶⁶⁹ Jesse Michael Millek, (2021), “Just What did they Destroy? The Sea Peoples and the End of the Late Bronze Age,” *The Mediterranean Sea and the Southern Levant: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives from the Bronze Age to Mediaeval Times*, 65-66.

⁶⁷⁰ Millek, 253-254.

⁶⁷¹ Thompson, 102.

⁶⁷² McMahon, 75.

South Asia.⁶⁷³ The throne names of Mittani rulers were of Indo-Aryan origin from the first known ruler, Shuttarna I.⁶⁷⁴ Indo-Aryan deities such as Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and Nasatya were also invoked by the Mittani as seen in treaties between the Hittites under Šuppiluliuma I and the Mittani under Sattiwaza.⁶⁷⁵ The social classes were based around a warrior elite with charioteers having the highest privileges and most powerful estates.⁶⁷⁶ These military elite also show a language that was explicitly Indo-Aryan.⁶⁷⁷ Conversely, the general population under Mittani rule were Hurrians, which were a people from Northern Syria with a unique language.⁶⁷⁸ While the Mittani were a major polity, there are no texts by the Mittani which have been found.⁶⁷⁹ Instead, knowledge of the Mittani comes from neighboring polities and their commentaries about the Mittani.⁶⁸⁰ The Kingdom of Mittani lasted as the most prominent polity in Syria until the Great Syrian War between Šuppiluliuma I and Tushratta, the king of the Mittani around 1345 BC.⁶⁸¹ After this war the Mittani were partitioned between the Hittites and the Assyrians, with the remaining unconquered territory becoming the rump polity of Hanigalbat.⁶⁸² This remaining territory was later conquered and administered by the Assyrians with the governor of the region being referred to as the “King of Hanigalbat.”⁶⁸³

Other than the Mittani, all other polities which were found in the Levant were small-scale city-states.⁶⁸⁴ Prior to the Late Bronze Age, these polities were under the control of large kingdoms ruled by Amorites.⁶⁸⁵ These Amorite kingdoms were found in Syria and Mesopotamia with the Amorites themselves being a Semitic people.⁶⁸⁶ Polities founded by the Amorites include Mari, Ugarit, and Ebla which were major polities in the Northern Levant.⁶⁸⁷ These small polities were important trading centres and used as an intermediary region between the Assyrians, Hittites, and Egyptians for influence.⁶⁸⁸ The early Assyrians

⁶⁷³ Merrillees, 49.

⁶⁷⁴ Liverani, 291.

⁶⁷⁵ Merrillees, 49.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid, 49.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid, 49.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid 49.

⁶⁷⁹ McMahon, 68.

⁶⁸⁰ Frahm & Feinberg, 1868.

⁶⁸¹ McMahon, 68.

⁶⁸² Liverani, 260.

⁶⁸³ Ibid, 308.

⁶⁸⁴ Linkov et al, 2080.

⁶⁸⁵ Thompson, 105.

⁶⁸⁶ Liverani, 177.

⁶⁸⁷ Thompson, 107.

⁶⁸⁸ Liverani, 124.

and Babylonians were also governed in their early history by autocrats who were Amorites.⁶⁸⁹ Another Amorite polity was the kingdom of Amurru, the name of which later became used as a broader name for the entirety of the Northern Levantine region.⁶⁹⁰ Northern Levantine civilizations also included the Phoenicians which lived along modern day Lebanon and Syria.⁶⁹¹ The Late Bronze Age Collapse period was also the beginning of the rise of Phoenician civilization.⁶⁹² The Southern Levant contained the Canaanite people with the later Israelite people appearing towards the very end of the Late Bronze Age.⁶⁹³ Both of these people were Semitic with the latter group, the Israelites, being unique in their religion being henotheistic or even monotheistic during this period.⁶⁹⁴ The final major group from Syria were the Arameans who were a semi-nomadic pastoral people from the region.⁶⁹⁵ The Arameans never had a singular polity but rather multiple independent polities throughout Western Asia.⁶⁹⁶ While not a Levantine polity, Alasiya was a major region for Western Asia, located in modern-day Cyprus.⁶⁹⁷ This island was during the Late Bronze Age a major connection between Western Asia and the Mycenaean Greek world through trade routes.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid, 280.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid, 293.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid, 465.

⁶⁹² Ibid, 420.

⁶⁹³ McMahon, 72.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, 72.

⁶⁹⁵ Jonathan Valk, (2024), "Who are the Arameans? A selective re-examination of the cuneiform evidence for the earliest Arameans," in *Ancient Western Asia Beyond the Paradigm of Collapse and Regeneration (1200–900 bce)*, 413.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid, 413.

⁶⁹⁷ Knapp & Manning, 118.

⁶⁹⁸ Bürge, 317.



(Figure 2: Locations of Mycenaean Pottery Found in the Levant & Cyprus)

The final portion of Western Asia was Mesopotamia which in this period was divided between the northern power of Assyria and the southern power of Babylonia.⁶⁹⁹ Assyria during the Late Bronze Age was after the Assyrian Dark Age which was a result of the collapse of Old Assyria after conflict with the Old Babylonian Empire.⁷⁰⁰ As such, the fall of Old Babylon in 1595 BC helped to propel the rise and expansion of Assyria into a major power in Western Asia.⁷⁰¹ This fall led to a power vacuum which led to Assur, the capital of

⁶⁹⁹ Thompson, 106.

⁷⁰⁰ Paulette, 184.

⁷⁰¹ Liverani, 13.

Assyria becoming first independent of Babylonia and later a subject of the Mittani.⁷⁰² The end of the Mittani subjugation of Assyria coincided with the rise of the Middle Assyrian Empire around 1363 BC with the ascension of Ashur-uballit I.⁷⁰³ It was under this first king of Assyria that the Middle Assyrian Empire became a major regional power in Western Asia.⁷⁰⁴ The decline of the Middle Assyrian Empire came with the migrations and invasions of Arameans into Assyrian territory.⁷⁰⁵ An important aspect about the Middle Assyrian Empire to note is that despite this setback by the Aramean migrations, the empire itself continued after the Late Bronze Age Collapse.⁷⁰⁶ In fact, the polity fell in 912 BC, with the ascension of Adad-nirari II 911 BC beginning the Neo-Assyrian Empire.⁷⁰⁷ Assyria itself was located in northern Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.⁷⁰⁸ Babylonia in the Late Bronze Age is defined by the end of the Old Babylonian Empire in 1595 BC after the sack of Babylon by the Hittites.⁷⁰⁹ Early in the Late Bronze Age, the Babylonians were divided between two dynasties. The first was the older Sealand dynasty which was an independent polity founded around 1796 BC.⁷¹⁰ While they were referred to as the “Second Dynasty of Babylon,” the polity was located not in Babylonia proper but instead in Chaldaea, where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers began to merge.⁷¹¹ The population was predominantly Akkadian, however the kings, especially later in the history of the polity, used pseudo-Sumerian names with references to the older Neo-Sumerian Isin dynasty.⁷¹² The second Babylonian polity was the Kassite Dynasty founded immediately after the fall of the Old Babylonian Empire.⁷¹³ Similarly to the Old Babylonian Empire, the Kassites were not native Babylonians, but instead a people with an unknown origin.⁷¹⁴ In the case of the Kassites, their origin may have been the Zagros Mountain region.⁷¹⁵ Despite this origin, the Kassite Dynasty did not change Babylonian customs or traditions, with the Kassites instead being seen as a moment of restabilization for Mesopotamia.⁷¹⁶ During the greatest extant of the Middle

⁷⁰² Daniel E. Fleming, (2024), “After Emar: The disappearance of cities in the Iron Age Middle Euphrates,” in *Ancient Western Asia Beyond the Paradigm of Collapse and Regeneration (1200–900 bce)*, 487–488.

⁷⁰³ Liverani, 350.

⁷⁰⁴ Fleming, 490.

⁷⁰⁵ Valk, 418.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid, 419.

⁷⁰⁷ Liverani, 475.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid, 476.

⁷⁰⁹ McMahon, 64.

⁷¹⁰ Liverani, 244.

⁷¹¹ Ibid, 244.

⁷¹² Ibid, 250.

⁷¹³ Thompson, 106.

⁷¹⁴ Liverani, 252.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid, 252.

⁷¹⁶ Thompson, 106.

Assyrian Empire, the Kassite Dynasty was a vassal of the Assyrians.⁷¹⁷ The Kassites fell during the Late Bronze Age Collapse due to an invasion by the Elamites, a polity located in modern Khuzestan, Iran.⁷¹⁸ The Kassite Dynasty was not a major political power in the Levantine region, however it was still treated as an equal power to their Hittite, Mitanni, Assyrian, and Egyptian contemporaries.⁷¹⁹ With all of these groups in the Late Bronze Age, it can be seen that the region of Western Asia was dominated by major powers which fought for hegemony both through warfare and vassal diplomacy until the collapse of these polities in the Late Bronze Age Collapse.⁷²⁰

How Polities Functioned

During the rise of civilizations until the development of states, territories under a governing system are referred to as “polities.”⁷²¹ The term “polity” comes from combining the words “political” and “entity” and is used as a neutral phrase for governing bodies prior to the idea of state.⁷²² During the Late Bronze Age, polities functioned under the rule of a singular person with absolute power.⁷²³ With larger polities, there were appointed administrators who worked for this absolute ruler as a means of better managing larger polities.⁷²⁴ The style of rulership by the heads of polities was more often hereditary, with succession being based on familial ties.⁷²⁵ Traditionally, the ruling class of a polity came to power from historical wealth tied to land and resource ownership.⁷²⁶ In other cases, the power of a polity came as a result of a military aristocracy.⁷²⁷ This ruling class may be either of the local culture and ethnicity or from an outside group.⁷²⁸ Another important aspect about the way polities functioned was the nature of the absolute ruler. Depending on the size of a polity, the function of the absolute ruler varied. Smaller polities saw rulers have much more overt authority among the population which said ruler governed over.⁷²⁹ In contrast, larger

⁷¹⁷ Ibid, 106.

⁷¹⁸ Liverani, 253.

⁷¹⁹ Thompson, 102.

⁷²⁰ Linkov et al, 1.

⁷²¹ d’Alfonso, 18.

⁷²² Kari Palonen, (2003), “Four Times of Politics: Policy, Polity, Politicking, and Politicization.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 28, no. 2, 179.

⁷²³ Liverani, 266.

⁷²⁴ Ibid, 266-267.

⁷²⁵ Ibid, 367.

⁷²⁶ Ibid, 367.

⁷²⁷ Ibid, 367.

⁷²⁸ McMahon, 65.

⁷²⁹ Merrillees, 43.

polities depended more on how this ruler was able to delegate authority.⁷³⁰ Smaller Syrian city-states or even larger polity sub-divisions only had to worry about what was within their jurisdiction, which was usually a city and the surrounding agrarian and pastoral lands.⁷³¹ The larger a polity was, the larger in scale the responsibilities were and therefore the more important it was for the ruler to delegate authority in some capacity.⁷³² The decentralization of this power did sometimes happen, but not as a form of decentralizing authority itself but the need to act directly in a territory.⁷³³ In this case vassals and viceroalties were established as a means of delegating authority.⁷³⁴ Kizzuwatna, a polity located in Cilicia, for example was an independent polity which was later made a vassal of the Hittites as seen with the rebellion of the polity against Suppiluliuma I.⁷³⁵ In Egypt, there was a provincial administration which acted on behalf of the Pharaoh of Egypt to collect taxes and levies.⁷³⁶ None of these forms of delegation and decentralization should be mistaken for surrendering authority. On the contrary, these actions were done as a means of cementing the authority of the head of a polity.⁷³⁷

Internal Function

The main function of a polity during this period was to both satiate the people being ruled under and promulgate power to those who were ruling the polity.⁷³⁸ For governing the polity, the absolute rule of the head of the polity, usually referred to as a king, functioned under the “palatial system.”⁷³⁹ This form of government was a heavily centralized system where the king held absolute authority on all aspects of polity functions.⁷⁴⁰ This went as far as conducting all economic and diplomatic functions directly.⁷⁴¹ An example of this is the distribution of food, which was done by the palace.⁷⁴² Food, specifically cereal grains, were used as a form of taxation for those outside of the city.⁷⁴³ This food was then distributed

⁷³⁰ Liverani, 262.

⁷³¹ Ibid, 279.

⁷³² Merrillees, 43.

⁷³³ Liverani, 313.

⁷³⁴ Ibid, 313.

⁷³⁵ d’Alfonso, 14.

⁷³⁶ Liverani, 286.

⁷³⁷ Ibid, 286.

⁷³⁸ Drake, 1863.

⁷³⁹ Galaitzi et al, 2080.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid, 2080.

⁷⁴¹ Linkov et al, 5.

⁷⁴² Castellano, 97.

⁷⁴³ Liverani, 289.

among the population as a form of rations.⁷⁴⁴ This storage of food by the palace also was used for activities hosted by the palace as well as for consumption by the palatial family.⁷⁴⁵ Storage of these grains also helped with combatting future poor harvests within the polity.⁷⁴⁶ These taxes through food were brought to the palace to be stored in silos.⁷⁴⁷ The way these food silos worked was not only for preserving surplus and to feed the palatial administration, but was also used for the promotion of the polity internally.⁷⁴⁸ Festivities both civil and religious were done through the palatial administration.⁷⁴⁹ During this time period, the difference between civil and religious functions were nearly non-existent as the civil authority was based on a belief of divine authority.⁷⁵⁰ These festivities were intended to help placate a population for the benefit of the ruling authority while also being a means to break the day-to-day functions of a population for the benefit of the population themselves.⁷⁵¹ Commonly, these festivities were a form of feasting hosted by the palatial authority for the population within the city walls.⁷⁵² This is seen with records of these festivities as seen in the archives of Mari and Ugarit.⁷⁵³ These festivities also included religious aspects with these actions being somewhat dependent on the religious practices of the polity.⁷⁵⁴ Sacrifices were a prominent aspect of the religious system of Western Asia and much of the world at this time.⁷⁵⁵ Sacrifices of grain and livestock preceded festivities with the consumption of the sacrificed flesh being part of uniting the palatial government and the broader society through feasting.⁷⁵⁶ These actions were not a means of equalizing reestablish hierarchies but rather to legitimize these preexisting systems of power and authority.⁷⁵⁷ An important example of this authority comes from the fact any actions which occurred within the polity had to have the approval of the ruler.⁷⁵⁸ This has been found with written evidence on clay tablets which show the deeds to properties within the jurisdiction of a polity requiring the witness of at least

⁷⁴⁴ Valk, 411.

⁷⁴⁵ Claude Doumet-Serhal, (2010), "Sidon during the Bronze Age: Burials, Rituals and Feasting Grounds at the 'College Site,'" *Near Eastern Archaeology* 73, no. 2/3, 117.

⁷⁴⁶ Paulette, 168.

⁷⁴⁷ d'Alfonso, 15.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid, 15.

⁷⁴⁹ Doumet-Serhal, 121.

⁷⁵⁰ František Válek, (2024), "Divination and political administration at Ugarit," *Axis Mundi*, 18, no. 2, 50.

⁷⁵¹ Liverani, 62.

⁷⁵² Ibid, 62.

⁷⁵³ Ibid, 343.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid, 123.

⁷⁵⁵ Doumet-Serhal, 120.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid, 120.

⁷⁵⁷ Válek, 52.

⁷⁵⁸ Thompson, 94.

a palatial official with the approval of the king.⁷⁵⁹ Other tablets depict the king as the central figure in the stamp used as a means of authorizing the land transfer or other action within the polity.⁷⁶⁰ The depiction of the ruler is also a form of legitimacy, with the ruler shown as larger and more prominent than even those which a transaction directly involves.⁷⁶¹

Religion within a polity was a critical part of the internal function of the rulership of said polity. Religious practices varied between regions within Western Asia with varying degrees of syncretism, however there was some form of a state religion within all polities.⁷⁶² Polities themselves had some divine figure as the protector of either an entire polity or even of certain cities.⁷⁶³ In both cases, these gods were presented in temples which were found within the cities they were viewed as protecting.⁷⁶⁴ This idea of protection by a deity was also a major reason for the offering of sacrifices both by the polity and the general populace.⁷⁶⁵ Religious practice itself during the Late Bronze Age was one of currying favor with divine figures rather than constant expressions of religious zeal.⁷⁶⁶ Sacrifices were a means of communicating with these divine figures, with the end being these divine figures finding favor with the person or polity which sacrificed to them and therefore bestowing what the sacrificing party desired.⁷⁶⁷ Religious festivities celebrating the polity and the deity seen as the protector of said polity were common practice.⁷⁶⁸ In this case, it was a mass sacrifice followed by the consumption of the sacrificed meat.⁷⁶⁹ This helped not only to legitimize the authority of a ruler but also was a civic means to unite the people living within the polity.⁷⁷⁰ Religious activity was a main part of the daily life of those living in the Late Bronze Age and the culture of the period, with references to the divine being found in all forms of civic structure.⁷⁷¹ Again, the ruler is depicted and treated as a divine figure, with these rulers either being seen as ruling with the authority of a divine figure or being divine figures themselves.⁷⁷²

⁷⁵⁹ Liverani, 255.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid, 330.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid, 382.

⁷⁶² Thompson, 93.

⁷⁶³ Válek, 50.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid, 53.

⁷⁶⁵ Doumet-Serhal, 120.

⁷⁶⁶ Roger Atwood, (2021), "The Ugarit Archives," *Archaeology*, 74, no. 4, 28.

⁷⁶⁷ Liverani, 492.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid, 79.

⁷⁶⁹ Doumet-Serhal, 120.

⁷⁷⁰ Liverani, 123.

⁷⁷¹ Paulette, 178.

⁷⁷² d'Alfonso, 15.

Polities typically had two layers of internal function, the first was the city or settlement while the second was the surrounding areas outside of the densely populated area.⁷⁷³ An example of this type of two system polity function can be seen in the Kingdom of Mari.⁷⁷⁴ While the internal polity had the palatial system, the government outside of the city had both a settled agrarian population but also a seasonal pastoral one.⁷⁷⁵ The pastoral population followed the availability of water along the Euphrates River and were divided into two tribes, Yaminites and Sim'alites, with leading figures representing these tribes, referred to as "Hanaeans," a term for nomads.⁷⁷⁶ The way these pastoral societies functioned within the polity varied, however the main form was through seasonal settlement by a pastoral community.⁷⁷⁷ This seasonal settlement brought this community under the authority of a polity, as seen with Mari, wherein those which led these semi-nomadic pastoralists paid tribute in some form to the polity.⁷⁷⁸ Commonly this was either through a tax on the livestock which these pastoralists tended or through manpower for labor for the polity.⁷⁷⁹ In both cases these were in exchange for safe passage and the ability to graze their animals in the region.⁷⁸⁰ These nomadic communities were also in conflict with the agrarian populations which were under the protection of their respective polities.⁷⁸¹ In this internal function, this meant that the rulers of polities had to in some capacity either promote cooperation between pastoralist and agrarian populations or choose a side in these conflicts for limited resources, specifically water.⁷⁸²

External Function

Externally, the function of a polity was the preservation of the polity against outside forces.⁷⁸³ How this was done during the Late Bronze Age varies between polities. The simplest understanding of the external function is interpolity diplomacy through trade and protection.⁷⁸⁴ Trade was a common means for smaller polities which high demand resources

⁷⁷³ Thompson, 105.

⁷⁷⁴ Paulette, 180

⁷⁷⁵ Liverani, 222.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid, 222.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid, 222.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid, 224.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid, 224.

⁷⁸⁰ Valk, 428.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid, 428.

⁷⁸² Frahm & Feinberg, 1875.

⁷⁸³ McMahon, 65.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid, 63.

to secure protection from other polities.⁷⁸⁵ Trade during the Late Bronze Age was dominated by a mercantile class.⁷⁸⁶ This mercantile class was more cosmopolitan in nature due to the constant need for travel between polities.⁷⁸⁷ Because this class of people were constantly moving goods between polities, there was a risk of these people being harmed or their caravans being looted by marauding bands.⁷⁸⁸ As a result, any trade done between polities was done between the absolute rulers who administered what was being brought into the polity and what was being sent to other polities and which polities these goods could be sent to.⁷⁸⁹ While the production of goods is an internal action by a polity in nature, the distribution of this good outside of the polity is an external action.⁷⁹⁰ This also meant that merchants needed places to sojourn within a polity as well as protection from marauders and pillagers.⁷⁹¹ Since any action of trade required the approval of those who governed a polity, this also meant any deals required positive interpolity relations.⁷⁹² One major factor in interpolity diplomacy was how polities referred to each other in diplomatic messaging.⁷⁹³ Clay tablets between polities showed a paternalistic attitude taken by polities.⁷⁹⁴ Tablets from the Late Bronze Age show that more powerful polities were typically given familial titles by the rulers of weaker polities.⁷⁹⁵ More specifically, the rulers of more powerful polities were given the title “father,” whilst the weaker ruler was referred to as “son.”⁷⁹⁶ When polities of similar power interacted with each other, more fraternal language was used such as “brother.”⁷⁹⁷ The only exception to this was interactions between the Egyptian Pharaohs and other powerful polities as the Egyptian Pharaohs referred to all other polity rulers as “sons.”⁷⁹⁸ This external function continued in diplomacy with a common way of securing alliances being through marriages between polities.⁷⁹⁹ This intermarriage system was practiced between polities of equal strength typically.⁸⁰⁰ There are exceptions to this, for example some marriages were between major polities and city-states as a means for smaller

⁷⁸⁵ Merrillees, 50.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid, 45.

⁷⁸⁷ McMahon, 62.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid, 63.

⁷⁸⁹ Frahm & Feinberg, 1868.

⁷⁹⁰ Knapp & Manning, 131.

⁷⁹¹ Atwood, 31.

⁷⁹² Ibid, 27.

⁷⁹³ McMahon, 65.

⁷⁹⁴ Liverani, 349.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid, 284.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid, 349.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid, 349.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid, 284.

⁷⁹⁹ Linkov et al, 2.

⁸⁰⁰ Paulette, 184.

polities to seek protection by these larger polities.⁸⁰¹ Since the way polities interacted with each other was based on power dynamics, vassalization was one way in which weaker polities were able to secure a form of independence.⁸⁰² One way vassals interacted with those who subjugated them was through the payment of tribute either through money and goods or with soldiers and ships.⁸⁰³ Interactions between polities reference these obligations.⁸⁰⁴ Examples of these obligations come from clay tablets found at palaces which show that these obligations were commonly shorted by both sides.⁸⁰⁵ The reason for these actions can vary, however one theory is it was a means by both polities to test both the competence and the administration of the other polity.⁸⁰⁶ Another form of interaction was through the tributary system. Tributary systems were not the same as vassalization, in which goods were given to a more powerful polity with the guarantee of protection.⁸⁰⁷ Instead, tributary systems were a diplomatic form of gift-giving between polities.⁸⁰⁸ The way this worked was that a weaker polity would send gifts to a more powerful polity as a way to initiate diplomatic relations with the more powerful polity.⁸⁰⁹ The response by the more powerful polity was to then grant more prestigious and valuable gifts.⁸¹⁰ This was a way for more powerful polities in return to demonstrate their power to weaker polities, with the benefit being closer relations between the two polities and the potential for stronger polities to be more involved with weaker polities.⁸¹¹ Letters between polities also show that there were points where polities gave gifts which were seen as less than expected.⁸¹² The Amarna letters show the interpersonal relationship which rulers had between each other in their exchanges.⁸¹³ For example, complaints were given though questions of the prosperity of another polity, asking if the polity entered decline or was suffering a catastrophe.⁸¹⁴ External actions by polities, as seen with internal polities, show familial interactions between polities with polities as an extension of the absolute ruler.⁸¹⁵

⁸⁰¹ Merrillees, 48.

⁸⁰² Fleming, 486.

⁸⁰³ Paulette, 170.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid, 176.

⁸⁰⁵ Atwood, 28.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid, 30.

⁸⁰⁷ Knapp & Manning, 136.

⁸⁰⁸ Válek, 53.

⁸⁰⁹ Paulette, 184.

⁸¹⁰ Merrillees, 48.

⁸¹¹ Liverani, 280.

⁸¹² Ibid, 281.

⁸¹³ Ibid, 293.

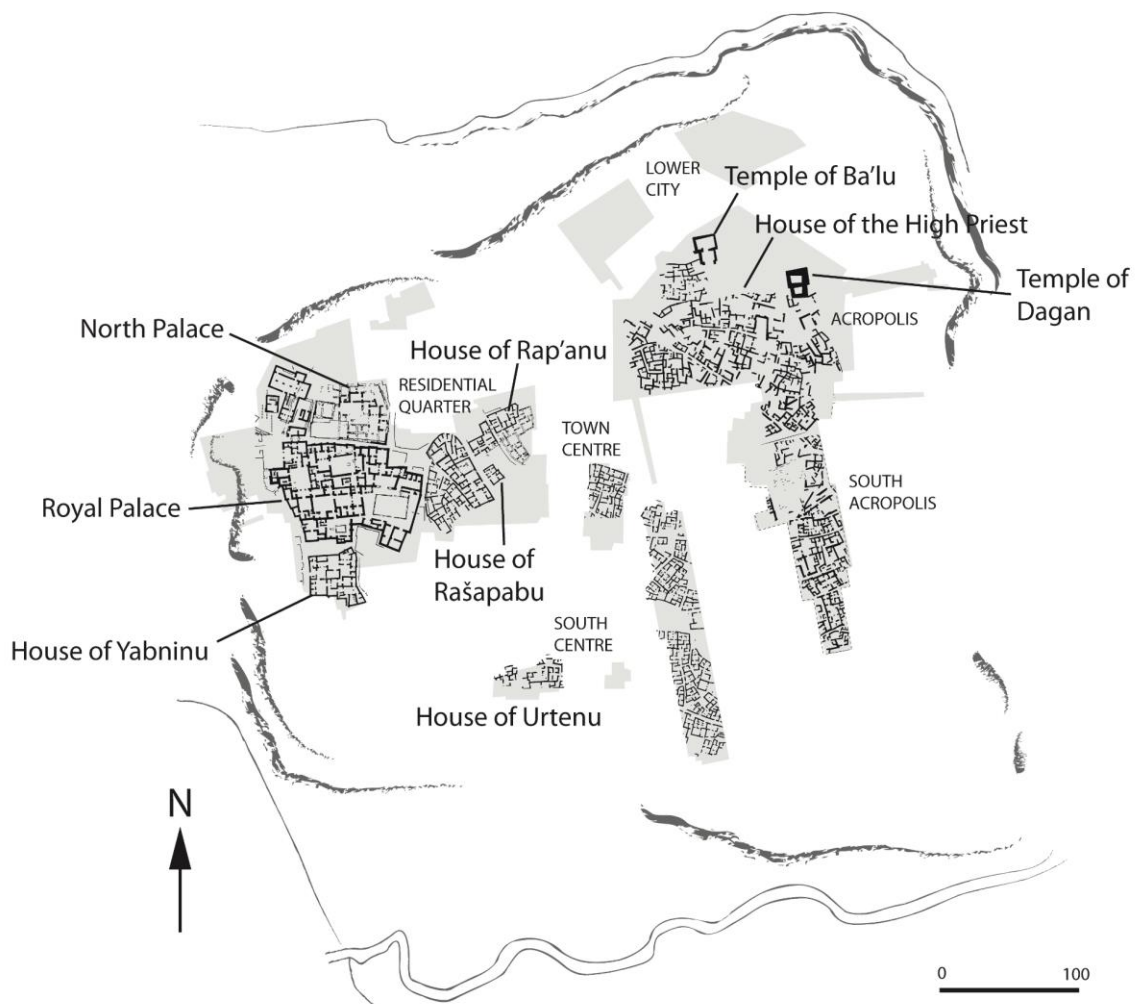
⁸¹⁴ Ibid, 359.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid, 349.

Example:Ugarit



(Figure 3: Location of Ugarit)



(Figure 4: City Plan of Ugarit)

Ugarit was a city located in the modern-day Latakia region of Syria.⁸¹⁶ During the Bronze Age, Ugarit was one of the major trading ports for the Near East.⁸¹⁷ This has been evidenced by the various materials found which originated from outside of the Levantine region.⁸¹⁸ The layout of Ugarit was a city surrounded by a rounded wall with two rivers flowing in the north, the Chbayyad, and south, the Ed-Delbe, of the city.⁸¹⁹ There were at least two entrances to the city, one by the main street located at the southern part of Ugarit and the other being next to the Royal Palace.⁸²⁰ The palace was located on the northwest section of the city with the residential quarter being to the east of the palatial complex.⁸²¹ The northeast of the city contained the acropolis with temples to Baal and Dagon.⁸²² North of the acropolis was the lower city while to the south was the southern portion of the city.⁸²³ Two ports found five kilometers south and one and a half kilometers west of Ugarit have also been found., with the latter being speculative⁸²⁴ These ports have shown the importance of Ugarit as a trading centre with Mycenaean pottery, ivory and terracotta objects from Egypt, bronze objects, and the shells of *hexaplex trunculus* which were used in the production of purple dye.⁸²⁵ Within Ugarit was also a large quantity of Egyptian objects as well as evidence of foreign communities from the Eastern Mediterranean being present.⁸²⁶ Ugarit also had its own language, called the Ugaritic language, which was a Semitic language similar to the Phoenician and Aramaic languages.⁸²⁷ Ugarit, while a major trading centre during the Late Bronze Age, was not rediscovered until 1928 by French excavations in what was French Latakia.⁸²⁸ Excavations in Ugarit were dominated by French expeditions until 2005, when these expeditions became joint-French and Syrian.⁸²⁹ Archaeological excavations in Ugarit have given the general layout of the palatial city.⁸³⁰ Within the city walls are three major buildings: the royal palace of Ugarit, the Acropolis, and the Temple of Rhyton.⁸³¹

⁸¹⁶ Válek, 49.

⁸¹⁷ Linkov et al, 3.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid, 3.

⁸¹⁹ Atwood, 27.

⁸²⁰ Ibid, 30.

⁸²¹ Ibid, 30.

⁸²² Gert Jan van Wijngaarden, (2002), "Ugarit," In *Use and Appreciation of Mycenaean Pottery in the Levant, Cyprus and Italy: (Ca. 1600-1200 BC)*, 44.

⁸²³ Marguerite Yon, (2000), "Ugarit: 6,000 Years of History," *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 63, no. 4, 186.

⁸²⁴ Knapp & Manning, 120.

⁸²⁵ Atwood, 27.

⁸²⁶ Ibid, 27.

⁸²⁷ Yon, 189.

⁸²⁸ William G Dever, (1992), "The Chronology of Syria-Palestine in the Second Millennium B.C.E.: A Review of Current Issues," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 288, 4.

⁸²⁹ Harvey Weiss, (1997), "Archaeology in Syria," *American Journal of Archaeology* 101, no. 1, 131.

⁸³⁰ Ibid, 137.

⁸³¹ Ibid, 138.



(Figure 5: Modern Picture of the Royal Palace of Ugarit)

The Royal Palace of Ugarit was constructed from the Fifteenth until the Thirteenth centuries BC.⁸³² The structure was built in a continuous fashion with the palace itself being located on the northwest corner of the city.⁸³³ The palace was around 6,500 square meters with three entrances, one of which being the main gate in the northwest and surrounded by fortified walls.⁸³⁴ The other two entrances were located in the northeast and the southwest of the palace.⁸³⁵ The palace according to a tablet found in the Amarna archives, a collection of clay tablets involving diplomatic correspondence between Egypt and its administrators in the Levant, was likened to the palace at Tyre in modern Lebanon.⁸³⁶ The palace itself was constructed of stone and ashlar blocks with wooden beams and plaster covering the walls.⁸³⁷ This architectural material and style was common for the Western Mediterranean region with influence from the Hittite and Mycenaean civilizations and their architecture.⁸³⁸ The palace itself consisted of rooms arranged around courtyards, four large and four small, with ninety

⁸³² Ibid, 137.

⁸³³ Ibid, 138.

⁸³⁴ Ibid, 137.

⁸³⁵ Ibid, 138.

⁸³⁶ Yon, 189.

⁸³⁷ Ibid, 189.

⁸³⁸ Atwood, 30.

rooms and two floors as well as an underground floor.⁸³⁹ The underground portion was used for burial chambers, with three in total found in the northern side of the palace.⁸⁴⁰ The ground floor was used almost exclusively for administrative functions, such as archives, offices, palatial advisor quarters, and storage rooms.⁸⁴¹ The second floor was used for the purposes of housing the royal family.⁸⁴² What has been found in the palace include artefacts of ivory, stone stele, and multiple tablets.⁸⁴³ Artifacts that were found in the palace show material evidence of close Egyptian ties which Ugarit had.⁸⁴⁴ These included an alabaster vase made in Egypt depicting the wedding of King Niqmaddu II to an Egyptian woman.⁸⁴⁵ The tablets themselves were found in what have been referred to as archives.⁸⁴⁶ Eight of these archives have been found throughout the palace with over one thousand tablets being found, most of which were in Akkadian or Ugaritic while others have been found in Hurrian and Hittite.⁸⁴⁷ Of the Hurrian tablets found in the Royal Palace included 36 hymns known as the Hurrian songs.⁸⁴⁸ This collection of tablets contained a hymn to Nikkal, the spouse of the moon god in Mesopotamian mythology and being the oldest surviving complete work of music known.⁸⁴⁹

⁸³⁹ Weiss, 137.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid, 137.

⁸⁴¹ Válek, 50.

⁸⁴² Yon, 189.

⁸⁴³ Válek, 52.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid, 53.

⁸⁴⁵ Gordon Douglas Young, (1981), *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, Eisenbrauns, 17.

⁸⁴⁶ Atwood, 31.

⁸⁴⁷ Knapp & Manning, 119.

⁸⁴⁸ Válek, 53.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid, 53.



(Figure 6: Baal Stele found in the Temple of Baal in Ugarit)

The Acropolis was located in the northeastern section of Ugarit and contained the primary temples of the city.⁸⁵⁰ These temples were dedicated to the two primary gods of Ugarit: Baal, the god of fertility, weather, war, and sailors; and Dagan, the father of the gods and the god of prosperity.⁸⁵¹ Both temples have steles which confirm the gods being worshipped.⁸⁵² The former, Baal, was also written of as a protagonist in the epic “the Baal Cycle,” which was found in Ugarit.⁸⁵³ This text is about the rise of Baal to kingship after battling Yam, the sea god, and the later fight with the god of the underworld Mot.⁸⁵⁴ At the

⁸⁵⁰ Yon, 186.

⁸⁵¹ Weiss, 138.

⁸⁵² Atwood, 31.

⁸⁵³ J. C. L. Gibson, (1984), “The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle,” *Orientalia*, 53, no. 2, 202.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 205.

temple to Baal in Ugarit, Baal is shown through the Baal stele which depicts Baal with a club in his right hand and a thunderbolt shaped as a spear on the left.⁸⁵⁵ Baal is on a pedestal which has representations of mountains and the sea, the spheres of power Baal controlled.⁸⁵⁶ A second figure is also depicted, this being the king dressed in ceremonial clothes and with a bare head praying at a horned altar.⁸⁵⁷ What this depicts can be interpreted as the king submitting to Baal in exchange for protection of the polity as well as for a bountiful harvest.⁸⁵⁸ The construction of the acropolis was dated to the Late Bronze Age, however the material and style used has led to a theory that the acropolis may have been constructed during the Middle Bronze Age.⁸⁵⁹ Both temples were destroyed around the thirteenth century BC, with the temple of Dagon later being rebuilt.⁸⁶⁰ Since the destruction of Ugarit, the Acropolis has since been used as a quarry for settlements near the area.⁸⁶¹ What has been found at the temples to Baal and Dagon are consistent with other temples for the same gods in other parts of Syria.⁸⁶² Many of the stelae found at the acropolis are based not only on the local style, but also the Egyptian style.⁸⁶³ Other artefacts used as offerings found at the acropolis include other stelae with depictions of the gods Baal and Dagaon as well as astral symbols and stone anchors.⁸⁶⁴ These offerings have also been found to have been made as offerings by Egyptians.⁸⁶⁵ The temples themselves had a pronaos and naos, the former being the porch of the temple and the latter being the sanctuary for the god.⁸⁶⁶ Another major structure at the Acropolis was the House of the High Priest west to the temple of Dagon.⁸⁶⁷ Inside the house was a myriad of bronze objects including tools which support the building being the residence of the high priest of Ugarit.⁸⁶⁸

The final major site found in Ugarit was the Temple of Rhyton located within the city centre.⁸⁶⁹ The name of the temple may come from the rhytons, a ceremonial drinking vessel

⁸⁵⁵ Atwood, 31.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid, 31.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid, 31.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid, 31.

⁸⁵⁹ Weiss, 138.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid, 138.

⁸⁶¹ Yon, 186.

⁸⁶² Ibid, 186.

⁸⁶³ Weiss, 148.

⁸⁶⁴ Charles Gates, (2003), *Ancient Cities: The Archaeology of Urban Life in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, Greece, and Rome*, Second Edition, 163.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid, 163.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid, 163.

⁸⁶⁷ Válek, 53.

⁸⁶⁸ Gates, 164.

⁸⁶⁹ Marisa Ruiz-Gálvez & Eduardo Galán, (2013), "A Meal fit for a Hero. on the Origins of Roasted Meat, Spits, and the Male Ideal," *Cuadernos de Arqueología Mediterránea*, 21, 51.

for libations, which were found in the temple.⁸⁷⁰ The temple was used for cultic practices during the Late Bronze Age to the god El.⁸⁷¹ El in the Ugaritic pantheon was the head and the father of the gods, a title shared with Dagon in Syria.⁸⁷² Another function of the temple was for Marzēah, a communal celebration done in the Levant honoring a deity, one of which could be El.⁸⁷³ Evidence of this function is found from similar temples with benches along the wall and rooms intended for storing food.⁸⁷⁴ The temple being located in the centre of town, more specifically in a residential part of the city, is unique for not only Ugarit but polities in general.⁸⁷⁵ The reason for this location has been alleged to be due to a nearby oil press north of the temple that was accessible on the same street as the temple.⁸⁷⁶ This oil press may have been a means to financially support the temple.⁸⁷⁷ The temple itself was made of calcarenite limestone which can be found along the Latakian coast.⁸⁷⁸ The complex consisted of a portico to the northwest with a hallway leading to a platformed altar with the rooms within the hall being for preparing priestly vestments, storing offerings, and functioning as annexes.⁸⁷⁹

Brief History of Ugarit

The first recorded settlement of Ugarit began in the 8th millennium BC during the Neolithic period.⁸⁸⁰ Ugarit became a major polity during the Late Bronze Age with the polity entering its highest point from around 1450 BC until its destruction during the Late Bronze Age Collapse around 1185 BC.⁸⁸¹ Ugarit itself was located along a crossroads between the two major polities of Egypt and the Hittites with constant changes between which polity Ugarit was under the subjugation of.⁸⁸² The biggest reason for this was due to the power which Ugarit had as a trading centre for Western Asia.⁸⁸³ During the height of power of Ugarit, the polity was either a tributary of Egypt or a vassal of the Hittites.⁸⁸⁴ Ugarit had

⁸⁷⁰ Marguerite Yon, (2006), *The City of Ugarit at Tell Ras Shamra*, Stony Brook University, 151.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid, 82.

⁸⁷² André Caquot, (2000), "At the Origins of the Bible," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 63, no. 4, 227.

⁸⁷³ Ruiz-Gálvez & Galán, 51.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid, 52.

⁸⁷⁵ Yon, 78.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid, 78.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid, 78.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid, 109.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid, 40.

⁸⁸⁰ Yon, 186.

⁸⁸¹ Válek, 49.

⁸⁸² Fischer & Wicke, 8.

⁸⁸³ Linkov et al, 3.

⁸⁸⁴ Yon, 36.

connected with the Mycenaean and Cypriot world through trade relations with the Alashiya polity.⁸⁸⁵ Relations between Ugarit and Alashiya included the use of Alashiya by Ugarit as a polity to banish rivals in the Ugaritic government.⁸⁸⁶ Prior to the Late Bronze Age, Ugarit was a vassal of the Kingdom of Yamhad, a kingdom which was centered in modern-day Aleppo.⁸⁸⁷ Ugarit during the Middle Bronze Age was a vassal of Yamhad until the destruction of the polity by the Hittites in 1620 BC.⁸⁸⁸ While a vassal of the Yamhad, Ugarit had diplomatic relations with both Egypt and Mari, the latter of which was a direct rival of the Yamhad.⁸⁸⁹ One of the kings of Mari, Zimri-Lim, even made a state visit to Ugarit while under Yamhad vassalage.⁸⁹⁰ Objects from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom have also been found in Ugarit showing that even before the golden age of Ugarit in the Late Bronze Age, the polity was a major source of trade for Western Asia.⁸⁹¹ One reason for this growth in the beginning of the Late Bronze Age can be credited to the destruction done to the Northern Levant by the Hittites after the collapse of Yamhad.⁸⁹² This destruction did not affect the polity of Ugarit due to its geographic location along the Syrian coast with a nearby mountain range creating a natural defence.⁸⁹³ The destruction of Ugarit occurred around the year 1185 BC by unknown assailants.⁸⁹⁴ Historically, the “Sea Peoples” have been credited for the destruction of the polity.⁸⁹⁵ During the destruction period, tablets from multiple polities were sent as pleas for foodstuffs to be given to their respective polities.⁸⁹⁶ During this period, Ugarit was a major trading centre with tablets from Karkamish, Egypt, and the Hittite Empire all being found that were contemporary with the collapse of Ugarit.⁸⁹⁷

From what has been found at Ugarit, there is knowledge of at least ten kings which ruled the polity, two of which are only known from a broken tablet stating “Yaqarum, son of Niqmaddu, king of Ugarit.”⁸⁹⁸ Others have been found from letters and treaties exchanged between Ugarit and other polities, mostly these being Egypt and the Hittites.⁸⁹⁹ One of these

⁸⁸⁵ Linkov et al, 1.

⁸⁸⁶ Doumet-Serhal, 126.

⁸⁸⁷ Liverani, 229.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid, 235.

⁸⁸⁹ Gates, 158.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid, 158.

⁸⁹¹ Yon, 131.

⁸⁹² Liverani, 235.

⁸⁹³ Yon, 188.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid, 189.

⁸⁹⁵ Silberman, 66.

⁸⁹⁶ Knapp & Manning, 120

⁸⁹⁷ Gates, 158.

⁸⁹⁸ Liverani, 332.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid, 293.

tablets was between Chancellor Bay, an Egyptian official under the service of Twosret, the last ruler of the Nineteenth Dynasty of Egypt, and king Ammurapi of Ugarit.⁹⁰⁰ What is significant about this tablet is that prior knowledge of when Chancellor Bay was in office helped to give an approximate “high point” for the destruction of Ugarit, that benign 1194 BC.⁹⁰¹ Multiple other artefacts found in Ugarit have also helped in understanding the history of Ugarit in relation to other events occurring in Western Asia, such as a sword with the name “Merneptah,” the fourth ruler of the Nineteenth Dynasty of Egypt, proving Ugarit was around after 1203 BC, the death of Merneptah.⁹⁰²

Ugarit in the Late Bronze Age

The Late Bronze Age for Ugarit was the point where the polity had the most power and influence in the Near East.⁹⁰³ Most of this power came from their location along the Mediterranean Coast as a major trading centre.⁹⁰⁴ This economic and trade influence brought goods from across the Eastern Mediterranean to the polity.⁹⁰⁵ The influence which Ugarit had from its trading power can be seen also in the demographics of Late Bronze Age Ugarit.⁹⁰⁶ From epigraphical evidence regarding a feast done in Ugarit, the population of the polity contained not only the local Ugaritic people but also communities from surrounding polities and regions.⁹⁰⁷ Hurrians, Mittani, Hittites, and Cypriots are all referred to by name as examples of peoples living within the city walls of Ugarit.⁹⁰⁸ These communities likely originated from merchants who settled in the city or due to migration by people from the Hittite Empire into Ugarit.⁹⁰⁹ Not only was the trade influence a major point of economic power, but also a reason for the constant conflict between the Hittites and the Egyptians in the Levant.⁹¹⁰ The desire to control major trade routes while also having buffer states between their polities made Ugarit into a prime target for influence and subjugation.⁹¹¹ For most of the history of Ugarit during the Late Bronze Age, the polity was under the

⁹⁰⁰ Atwood, 26.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid, 26.

⁹⁰² Knapp & Manning, 121.

⁹⁰³ Castellano, 101.

⁹⁰⁴ Atwood, 27.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid, 27.

⁹⁰⁶ Linkov et al, 3.

⁹⁰⁷ Atwood, 28.

⁹⁰⁸ Liverani, 341.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid, 341.

⁹¹⁰ Young, 56.

⁹¹¹ Válek, 49.

subjugation of the Hittite Empire.⁹¹² Initially in the fourteenth century BC, Ugarit was not a formal vassal of the Hittites as one document showed a cordial relationship between King Ammittamru I and the pharaoh of Egypt.⁹¹³ It was after the death of Ammittamru I in the late fourteenth century BC when the Hittites vassalized the city state of Ugarit.⁹¹⁴ During the vassalage, Ugarit was under the control of the viceroyalty, and later kingdom, of Karkemish.⁹¹⁵ Karkemish was an autonomous part of the Hittite Empire until the Late Bronze Age Collapse when it became an independent polity.⁹¹⁶ Throughout the Late Bronze Age, Ugarit maintained positive diplomatic relations between the two hegemonies of Egypt and the Hittites.

The Late Bronze Age Collapse for Ugarit saw the total destruction of the polity around 1190 BC.⁹¹⁷ The reason for the end of Ugarit can be credited to multiple factors all coming into one point, with the biggest being the climactic shift during the Late Bronze Age, which may have caused mass crop failures due to drought or the spread of plant disease.⁹¹⁸ What is known about this period is that Ugarit was shown as a major trading hub for the period during the collapse as neighboring polities along with the hegemonies of Egypt and the Hittites all sent messages to Ugarit requesting food.⁹¹⁹ Both requests for food for trade and relief have been documented as well as requests as a form of aid or tribute specifically from Kerkamish.⁹²⁰ In both cases, evidence of Ugarit being a trading centre and a major agricultural centre can be found and interpreted from these interpolity messages.⁹²¹ One of these letters comes from the pharaoh Merenptah who reigned at the latest a decade before the collapse of Ugarit is about the king of Ugarit requesting grain from Egypt to relieve famine “to save the citizens of the land of Ugarit.”⁹²² Another letter from the reign of Suppiluliuma II, the last ruler of the Hittites, by the last king of Ugarit, Ammurapi, gives further depth to the problems which were plaguing Ugarit during the Late Bronze Age Collapse.⁹²³ The military of Ugarit during this period was part of the larger Hittite military as a means to combat the raiding, which meant that Ugarit was left with minimal defences against potential

⁹¹² Ibid, 49.

⁹¹³ Young, 17.

⁹¹⁴ Yon, 20.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid, 44.

⁹¹⁶ Knapp & Manning, 127.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid, 129.

⁹¹⁸ Linkov et al, 2.

⁹¹⁹ Knapp & Manning, 120.

⁹²⁰ Yon, 44.

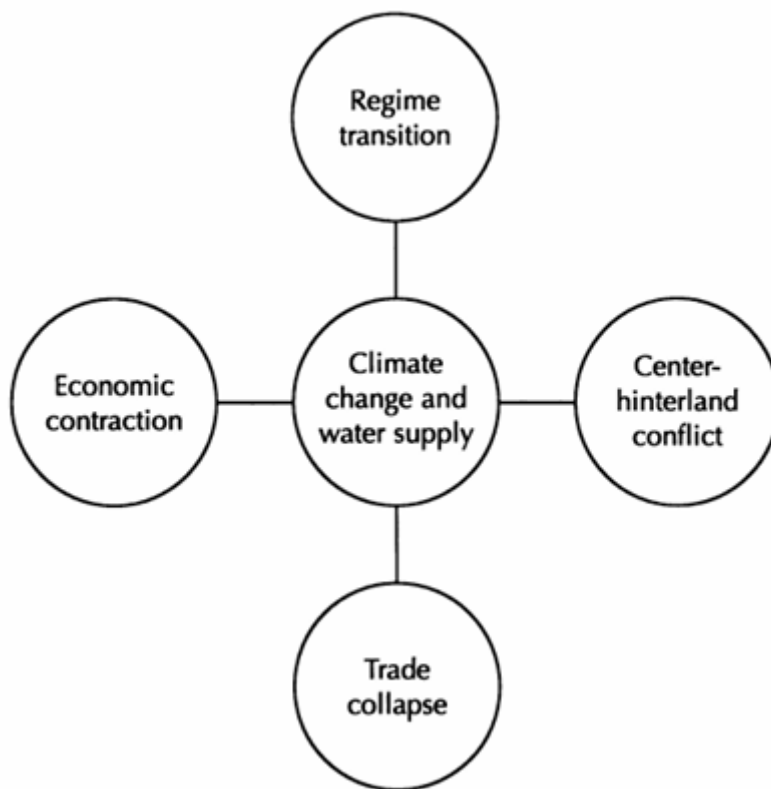
⁹²¹ Atwood, 26.

⁹²² Knapp & Manning, 121.

⁹²³ Ibid, 121.

raiding parties.⁹²⁴ This is emphasized in a letter between the king of Ugarit and the governor of Alashiya, modern-day Cyprus, in which the king of Ugarit uses the paternal term “father” for the governor.⁹²⁵ This use of father was an implication that Alashiya had an obligation to defend the polity.⁹²⁶ The letter emphasizes this lack of defence for Ugarit, citing the Ugaritic army and navy being in Central and Southwest Anatolia, the Land of Hatti and the Land of Lukka.⁹²⁷ The governor of Alashiya responded by accusing the people in Ugarit as being the perpetrators of the current destruction occurring in the region.⁹²⁸ The last set of letters from Ugarit concerned requests for help from Karkamesh, which were accepted by the viceroyalty, but came only after Ugarit had already been destroyed.⁹²⁹

SECTION II: Late Bronze Age Collapse Factors



(Figure 7: Graph of Factors which led to the Late Bronze Age Collapse)

There were multiple factors which led to the collapse of civilizations in Western Asia during the Late Bronze Age. The biggest reasons for this collapse come from the inability for

⁹²⁴ d’Alfonso, 14.

⁹²⁵ Knapp & Manning, 119.

⁹²⁶ Ibid, 119.

⁹²⁷ Millek, 64.

⁹²⁸ Knapp & Manning, 119.

⁹²⁹ Linkov et al, 4.

polities to adapt to a changing climate and the external effect of migrations due to this climactic shift.⁹³⁰ In the former case of climate change, this was predominately an internal factor due to these changes being within Western Asia.⁹³¹ As for migration, there are two schools of thought with scholars such as Mario Liverani claiming the migrations were within Western Asia.⁹³² Other scholars have argued that these migrations came from raiding bands from the Eastern Mediterranean named “The Sea Peoples” referred to in Egyptian art and epigraphy during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages.⁹³³ Other factors mentioned for the Late Bronze Age Collapse come from these larger two areas.⁹³⁴ Climactic shifts, for example, can lead to the migration of peoples due to a desire to find more habitable land for a population.⁹³⁵ Within the context of these two larger factors also are the problems which arise from the function of polities.⁹³⁶ The rise of ironworking, which originated from modern-day Romania and Bulgaria combined with new military tactics from outside forces are also seen as factors for the Late Bronze Age Collapse.⁹³⁷ Iron was already in use during the Late Bronze Age, however it was not in widespread use nor was it used in a military context.⁹³⁸

The question of how well can a polity adapt to changes can be raised as a result of these changes. The large-scale collapse seen in the Late Bronze Age shows that these polities were unable to adapt to either factor.⁹³⁹ The reasons for the failures of these polities may come from both the internal and external functions of these polities. Both the internal and external functions of polities in the Late Bronze Age required some form of dependency between one authority with another.⁹⁴⁰ An example of internal dependency is the reliance which those within the city walls had on the actions of the absolute ruler.⁹⁴¹ More specifically, the reliance on the function of the distribution of food by the ruler.⁹⁴² This dependency was tertiary to the secondary reliance which the ruler had on those living outside of the city walls.⁹⁴³ Those who lived outside of the city walls were those who produced the

⁹³⁰ Drake, 1863.

⁹³¹ Frahm & Feinberg, 1875.

⁹³² Valk, 414.

⁹³³ Drake, 1863.

⁹³⁴ Ibid, 1862.

⁹³⁵ Arie S. Issar, (1995), “Climatic Change and the History of the Middle East,” *American Scientist*, 83, no. 4, 353.

⁹³⁶ Frahm & Feinberg, 1868.

⁹³⁷ Millek, 60.

⁹³⁸ Linkov et al, 5.

⁹³⁹ Frahm & Feinberg, 1868.

⁹⁴⁰ Drake, 1868.

⁹⁴¹ Liverani, 265.

⁹⁴² Paulette, 181.

⁹⁴³ d’Alfonso, 15.

food which the ruler taxed by seizing a portion of the harvest.⁹⁴⁴ Furthermore, some polities which did not have the means to fully satiate their populations with food produced within the territory of the polity required merchants who could deliver food.⁹⁴⁵ This came with a primary reliance which those outside of the city walls had. This primary reliance was for those who raised livestock and grew the crops for both their estates and the polity as well as the merchants which could provide food.⁹⁴⁶ On one hand, the merchants would not deliver food without something in exchange and some form of means to sojourn within the polity.⁹⁴⁷ On the other hand, the farming and pastoral groups needed suitable conditions for the animals and plants to survive and produce goods which could then be taxed by the ruler.⁹⁴⁸ In both cases, the farmers, pastoralists, and the merchants required some form of protection both from the natural but also human actions.⁹⁴⁹ Natural actions include surplus in case of poor harvests or good conditions for travel in the case of mercantile caravans.⁹⁵⁰ For human protection there was the need for protection against bandits, marauders, and raiding parties.⁹⁵¹ For the former there were religious practices which could be used as a form of legitimization or even discrediting the power and favor of a ruler.⁹⁵² For the latter case, protection may come from tribal associations which pastoralists may have, such as those who were semi-nomadic.⁹⁵³ For those who were more settled in nature, there was a need for levies by the polity to protect their desired goods from being appropriated by either a rebellious estate or marauders.⁹⁵⁴

The external factor can be seen with interpolity diplomacy and the reliance which both weaker and stronger polities put upon each other.⁹⁵⁵ The archives of Ugarit give multiple examples of this reliance between polities, such as the reliance which the Hittites had towards Ugarit for food and soldiers.⁹⁵⁶ In this case, it was the result of raids done by the “Sea Peoples” in Hittite territory.⁹⁵⁷ Initially, the requests by the Hittites were for food since there was not enough for the entire population while Ugarit had connections with multiple polities

⁹⁴⁴ Liverani, 289.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid, 329.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid, 329.

⁹⁴⁷ Yon, 188.

⁹⁴⁸ Fleming, 495.

⁹⁴⁹ Liverani, 289.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid, 289.

⁹⁵¹ Thompson, 97.

⁹⁵² Gates, 151.

⁹⁵³ Thompson, 93.

⁹⁵⁴ Drake, 1863.

⁹⁵⁵ Young, 33.

⁹⁵⁶ Atwood, 26.

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid, 26.

as far as Cyprus which itself had trade links with the Mycenaean world.⁹⁵⁸ This dependence was also shown when the Hittite king requested soldiers from Ugarit to help defend Hittite lands during this raiding period.⁹⁵⁹ In this case, the king of Ugarit responded decrying the idea, stating how this would mean Ugarit would not be defended in case raids from these people came to their shores.⁹⁶⁰ An unsent tablet found in Ugarit also shows the status of Ugarit, wherein the king of Ugarit proclaims the collapse of the polity and requests help from the Hittites.⁹⁶¹ This unsent clay tablet is the last known communication given by Ugarit, with the polity no longer being permanently settled after this date.⁹⁶² In both the internal and external actions of polities, there is a reliance on some form of centralization of outside force.⁹⁶³ In the case of centralization, this meant that the general population were reliant on the authority of the state to be stable enough both to protect the people and the interests of the polity itself while also providing benefits to the people.⁹⁶⁴ At the same time, these centralized states were reliant also on outside powers for some assistance, be it military protection or the arrival of resources such as food.⁹⁶⁵ This meant that polities and people were not only reliant on the stability of their polities, but also the stability of other polities.⁹⁶⁶ Any interruption in this system meant that the entire palatial system was put in jeopardy across Western Asia.⁹⁶⁷ This also explains why more autonomous and decentralized groups were also not only to survive but supplant the palatial governments.⁹⁶⁸ This self-reliance and ability to move to more preferable conditions by migratory and nomadic groups meant a lower risk of dissolution due to a lack of available resources.⁹⁶⁹ The benefit of these groups are seen with not only the factor of climactic shift benefiting movement, but also that migratory, nomadic, and marauding peoples themselves being a reason for the Late Bronze Age Collapse.⁹⁷⁰

Climactic Shift

⁹⁵⁸ Fischer & Wicke, 8.

⁹⁵⁹ Young, 22.

⁹⁶⁰ Yon, 34.

⁹⁶¹ Young, 66.

⁹⁶² Yon, 21.

⁹⁶³ Atwood, 27.

⁹⁶⁴ Paulette, 181.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid, 187.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid, 187.

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid, 187.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid, 179.

⁹⁶⁹ Knapp & Manning, 106.

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid, 106.

The Late Bronze Age was not only a time of political instability but also of climactic instability. From around 1198 until 1196 BC, there was a period of severe drought which affected Anatolia.⁹⁷¹ The drought saw the lowering of water levels by more than 50 meters in the Southern Levant.⁹⁷² This severe decrease in available water for the agricultural population was extreme enough that rainwater either from surrounding areas or from periodic rain storms were not enough to sustain agricultural life.⁹⁷³ As seen already with climate-civilization cycles, when there is a lack of a resource, in this case water, then populations will begin to move to more suitable areas.⁹⁷⁴ A drought alone meant that agricultural populations needed to either migrate to cities for work, move to a now more scarce area where agriculture can still be practiced, move with nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples, or resort to pillaging and banditry for survival.⁹⁷⁵ Towards the end of the Late Bronze Age, the climate in the Eastern Mediterranean became drier leading to drought conditions in the region.⁹⁷⁶ The reason for this was because midwinter storms which commonly go through the Mediterranean had instead diverted northwards.⁹⁷⁷ This northward diversion of these storms led both to the rise in drought conditions in Western Asia as well as wetter conditions in Central Europe.⁹⁷⁸ The next time a similar drought occurred was in 1972 which affected Greece, Turkey, and Western Asia, showing that these conditions were susceptible to happen in the region, albeit very rarely.⁹⁷⁹ While this drought period was only about three years, there is evidence that this may have been one part of a greater environmental shift in the region.⁹⁸⁰ Instead, precipitation in Western Asia may have already been declining in earlier decades resulting in continuous and growing stress on the local populations.⁹⁸¹ For this period, a continuous strain on resources due to a lack of rainwater in an already semi-arid to arid region means greater incentives for population movements and decline.⁹⁸² This is even greater with the already

⁹⁷¹ Catherine Kuzucuoğlu, Ali Gürel, Müslim Demir, Şahabettin Çakıcı, & Jean-Pascal Dumoulin, (2024), “Hydrogeomorphological records of climate changes during the Bronze and Iron Ages in the Bor Plain (central Anatolia),” in *Ancient Western Asia Beyond the Paradigm of Collapse and Regeneration (1200–900 bce)*, 43.

⁹⁷² Drake, 1865.

⁹⁷³ Frahm & Feinberg, 1868.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid, 1868.

⁹⁷⁵ Liverani, 331.

⁹⁷⁶ Drake, 1864.

⁹⁷⁷ Kuzucuoğlu et al, 43.

⁹⁷⁸ Drake, 1866.

⁹⁷⁹ Kuzucuoğlu et al, 47.

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid, 47.

⁹⁸¹ Ibid, 48.

⁹⁸² Drake, 1868.

large nomadic and pastoral populations which dominated Western Asia outside of heavily settled cities.⁹⁸³

Another point of climactic shift can be credited to the Helka 3 eruption which occurred around 1000 BC.⁹⁸⁴ Helka 3 is a volcano located in Iceland and was said to have caused 7.3 cubic kilometers of volcanic rock to be sent into the atmosphere.⁹⁸⁵ What this caused was a volcanic winter that resulted in around eighteen years of global cooling.⁹⁸⁶ The exact dating of the eruption varies due to bioarchaeological evidence found in the northern hemisphere.⁹⁸⁷ Dendrochronologically, there is evidence that has been found in Irish oaks dating from the period which gives an approximate date of 1021 BC with a variation of 130 years.⁹⁸⁸ There are two chronologies for the eruption of Helka 3, a low/late and high/earlier, as well as one used by Egyptologists.⁹⁸⁹ The low chronology gives the year 929 BC with a variability of 34 years.⁹⁹⁰ Later forms of the low chronology, which is used to rebuff Egyptologist and high chronology claims, move the date to 900 BC with solifluction calculations.⁹⁹¹ Egyptologists align more with the high chronology, which dates the eruption to 1135 BC with a 130 year variability.⁹⁹² Specifically, Egyptologists put the date of the eruption at 1159 BC, claiming that the eruption and the subsequent volcanic winter and cooling period led to famine conditions in Egypt.⁹⁹³

When it comes to climactic change, there is evidence that while these shifts had an impact, they were not the sole reason for the Late Bronze Age Collapse.⁹⁹⁴ There was a regional cooling and a spike in aridity for three centuries as well as the three year drought period, but climate change was one of multiple factors which came together.⁹⁹⁵ One interesting point to notice is that while there was this drought and cooling in Western Asia, Syria does not show evidence of water stress for the plant life.⁹⁹⁶ This evidence is specifically

⁹⁸³ Ibid, 1868.

⁹⁸⁴ J. Eiríksson, K.L. Knudsen, H. Haflidason, and J. Heinemeier, (2000), "Chronology of late Holocene climatic events in the northern North Atlantic based on AMS 14C dates and tephra markers from the volcano Hekla, Iceland," *J. Quaternary Sci.*, 15, 574.

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid, 574.

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid, 574.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid, 576.

⁹⁸⁸ Emily Teeter, (1999), *Gold of Praise: Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, 456.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid, 456.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid, 457.

⁹⁹¹ Ibid, 457.

⁹⁹² Ibid, 456.

⁹⁹³ Ibid, 458.

⁹⁹⁴ Linkov et al, 2.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid, 3-4.

⁹⁹⁶ Frahm & Feinberg, 1869.

for domestic plant species however.⁹⁹⁷ Irrigation may be a reason for why there was a lack of domestic plant stress.⁹⁹⁸ This may also mean that on a regional level, Syria may have not seen as severe of famine conditions during the transition between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age.⁹⁹⁹ There is evidence of a decline in the amount of trees in Western Asia during this period which may be the result of both climactic changes with an inability to rapidly adapt and human activities destroying forests.¹⁰⁰⁰ Three final points of evidence pointing to climate change come from temperatures, plankton, and diseases. Temperatures during the Late Bronze Age until the Greek Dark Ages saw a drop in average temperatures in the Mediterranean and Western Asia by three to four degrees celsius.¹⁰⁰¹ Much of this temperature change is evidenced by photosynthetic plankton and the changes in known populations.¹⁰⁰² What evidence involving plankton showed that there was a rapid loss in precipitation during the Late Bronze Age.¹⁰⁰³ This also further emboldens the drought condition evidence as even with average precipitation.¹⁰⁰⁴ The final point comes from evidence of a strain of the bubonic plague spreading throughout Greece and Western Asia.¹⁰⁰⁵ This evidence comes from genomes for the bubonic plague and salmonella found in Crete dating to the Late Bronze Age.¹⁰⁰⁶

The Sea Peoples

The group credited most for the Late Bronze Age collapse are an unknown amalgamation of peoples said to be from the Western Mediterranean referred to as “The Sea Peoples.”¹⁰⁰⁷ The idea of an invading force from the Western Mediterranean originates from Egyptologists Emmanuel de Rougé and Gaston Maspero in the Nineteenth Century.¹⁰⁰⁸ The hypothesis comes from reliefs found at the Mortuary Temple of Rameses III in Medinet

⁹⁹⁷ Ibid, 1869.

⁹⁹⁸ Castellano, 91.

⁹⁹⁹ Linkov et al, 2.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Knapp & Manning, 109.

¹⁰⁰¹ Drake, 1862.

¹⁰⁰² Ibid, 1868.

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid, 1864.

¹⁰⁰⁴ d’Alfonso, 2.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Gunnar U. Neumann, Eirini Skourtanioti, Marta Burri, Elizabeth A. Nelson, Megan Miche, Alina N. Hiss, Photini J.P. McGeorge, Philip P. Betancourt, Maria A. Spyrou, Johannes Krause, & Philipp W. Stockhammer, (2022), “Ancient *Yersinia pestis* and *Salmonella enterica* genomes from Bronze Age Crete,” *Current Biology*, 32, no. 16, 3644.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid, 3644.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Young, 22.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Emmanuel de Rougé, (1855), *Notice de quelques textes hiéroglyphiques récemment publiés par M. Greene*, E. Thunot, 14.

Habu.¹⁰⁰⁹ Medinet Habu is located around modern-day Luxor in Egypt and the temple contains inscriptions about battles which occurred during the reign of Rameses III.¹⁰¹⁰ More specifically, the north wall of Medinet Habu depicts “the Battle of the Delta,” which is said to have occurred around 1175 BC.¹⁰¹¹ From the analysis of this relief, along with the use of Biblical sources, there came two major points of reference to an invasion by the “Sea Peoples.” The first came from a group which had sources in Akkadian and Ugaritic called the “Sherden” as well as the “Teresh” with crests that bore the phrase “People of the Sea.”¹⁰¹² Another point of reference is an idea that these people may have come from Cyprus however this was based more on likelihood rather than from any direct evidence.¹⁰¹³ The term “Sea Peoples” comes exclusively from Egyptian sources with no other Mediterranean polity from this period using a similar name for these raiding parties.¹⁰¹⁴

Historically, the Sea Peoples were credited by historians as the primary cause for the destruction of the Late Bronze Age civilizations.¹⁰¹⁵ More recent observations, however, show the Sea Peoples not as a primary catalyst for the Late Bronze Age Collapse but instead as a result of other prior factors such as climate change.¹⁰¹⁶ This migration also came with another collapse which occurred in Central Europe which saw the transition from the Urnfield culture to the Hallstatt culture between the thirteenth and tenth centuries BC.¹⁰¹⁷ There is also evidence that the “Sea Peoples” were not a singular homogenous entity that worked in tandem, but rather various separate groups which all came around the same period.¹⁰¹⁸ Climactic shift along with simultaneous migrations elsewhere helps in reinforcing this narrative as it shows a large-scale event leading to similar patterns.¹⁰¹⁹ As noted, the climactic shift that led to droughts in Western Asia also led to a more humid Central Europe, where the Hallstatt culture originated.¹⁰²⁰ Another point is that other cultures mentioned also migrated in correlation with large-scale migrations and destruction within their home regions.¹⁰²¹ Mycenaean and Anatolian groups mentioned as being part of the larger “Sea

¹⁰⁰⁹ Safronov, 1235.

¹⁰¹⁰ Yon, 189.

¹⁰¹¹ Liverani, 386.

¹⁰¹² Robert Drews, (1993), *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe Ca. 1200 B.C.*, Princeton University Press, 49.

¹⁰¹³ Safronov, 1240.

¹⁰¹⁴ Millek, 61.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid, 60.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibid, 60.

¹⁰¹⁷ Peter S Wells, (1980), “Iron Age Central Europe,” *Archaeology*, 33, no. 5, 7.

¹⁰¹⁸ Merrillees, 47.

¹⁰¹⁹ Drake, 1867.

¹⁰²⁰ Wells, 9.

¹⁰²¹ Safronov, 1240.

Peoples” originated in areas which had their own migrations by other groups.¹⁰²² Some of the groups mentioned were known beforehand, specifically from Egyptian sources from the Nineteenth Dynasty.¹⁰²³ In this case, the documentation varies by location but all were within the confines of Egyptian rule.¹⁰²⁴ The “Sherden” in particular are referenced by multiple pharaonic inscriptions as are groups coming from Libya, referred to as the “Nine Bows Confederation.”¹⁰²⁵ One point of interest is that there were groups from outside of the Eastern Mediterranean which also migrated during this period. This group, the Elamites, did not leave their previous location but had groups raid and move into Mesopotamia.¹⁰²⁶ The significance of this migration is that this was a common route for other peoples historically.¹⁰²⁷ The Kassites, who were the rulers of Babylon at this time, were themselves from the Zagaros Mountain region of Iran where the Elamites lived and had since migrated.¹⁰²⁸

Theory of Internal vs External

Mario Liverani, an Italian historian and professor, has speculated that the Sea Peoples may have not been an outside force but instead a more local population from Western Asia.¹⁰²⁹ The question of whether this population was a cultural group or a broader and more general population is debatable. In the former case there were Western Asian populations which migrated during the Late Bronze Age Collapse.¹⁰³⁰ There were also words which were used both for specific populations which are said to have been part of the “Sea Peoples.”¹⁰³¹ These words however also were used as general terms for bandits and marauders.¹⁰³² For this section the arguments for the internal hypothesis built by Mario Liverani and the external hypothesis by Rougé and Mapsero will be compared and given further potential evidence. In the case of Liverani, this evidence comes from non-Egyptian sources and Eastern Mediterranean linguistics.¹⁰³³ In the case of Rougé and Mapsero, their evidence comes from Egypt primarily and external powers such as the Greek world secondarily.¹⁰³⁴ For both the

¹⁰²² Ibid, 1240.

¹⁰²³ Drews, 54.

¹⁰²⁴ Liverani, 384.

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid, 384-385.

¹⁰²⁶ Drews, 18.

¹⁰²⁷ Liverani, 227.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid, 227.

¹⁰²⁹ Ibid, 318.

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid, 318.

¹⁰³¹ Drake, 1863.

¹⁰³² Liverani, 388.

¹⁰³³ Ibid, 383.

¹⁰³⁴ de Rougé, 13.

internal and external schools of thought, there is anthropological evidence from the Eastern Mediterranean which legitimizes both claims.¹⁰³⁵

In the case of an internal population, one polity which is used as evidence is the Hittite Empire. The Hittite Empire, located within Anatolia, had a large frontier to the north and west.¹⁰³⁶ Groups which are found in this part of Western Asia include the Lukka, the Phrygians, and the Kaska people.¹⁰³⁷ The Lukka are one of the groups mentioned in the Battle of the Delta relief in Medinet Habu.¹⁰³⁸ There are two interpretations, however, of this name with one being an anthropological name for a people from Anatolia.¹⁰³⁹ The Lukka are credited with the destruction of Alasiya, a polity located in modern-day Cyprus.¹⁰⁴⁰ This interpretation states that the Lukka were a community found in Southwestern Anatolia during the Bronze Age.¹⁰⁴¹ A second interpretation which comes from Liverani states that the term “Lukka” was not exclusively the name of a community but instead a general term for bandit groups.¹⁰⁴² In the case of the Phrygians, this group was already found on the western frontier of the Hittite Empire.¹⁰⁴³ Liverani states that after the collapse of the Hittite Empire and the reemergence of written sources, it was the Phrygians which had settled down in the lands of the former Hittite Empire.¹⁰⁴⁴ For the last group, the Kaska, were located along the northern frontier of the Hittite Empire in Pontic Anatolia.¹⁰⁴⁵ For this group, they were historically a constant “enemy” of the Hittites with them being referenced in Hittite prayer inscriptions.¹⁰⁴⁶



¹⁰³⁵ Millek, 67.

¹⁰³⁶ Gates, 139.

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid, 152.

¹⁰³⁸ Millek, 66.

¹⁰³⁹ Teeter, 456.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid, 455.

¹⁰⁴¹ Drews, 50.

¹⁰⁴² Liverani, 384.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid, 388.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid, 388.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid, 388.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ibid, 388.

(Figure 8: Relief Depicting the Invasion of the Sea Peoples & Rameses III in Medinet Habu)

Another group which can be used to back the internal migration argument are the Arameans. The Arameans were less a concise group but instead a broad grouping of Semitic people which are said to originate from Aram in modern-day central Syria.¹⁰⁴⁷ The first documentation of the Arameans comes from the twelfth century BC, the same time as the Late Bronze Age Collapse.¹⁰⁴⁸ These early documentations are found first from Ebla around 2300 BC, the Akkadians around 2250 BC, and later from Mari in Ugarit in 1900 and 1300 BC respectively.¹⁰⁴⁹ The origins of the Arameans are as a part of the nomadic pastoral culture which dominated Western Asia.¹⁰⁵⁰ As with other nomadic and pastoral communities, their population fluctuated heavily in tandem with the climate.¹⁰⁵¹ During the Late Bronze Age, seasonal pastoralism grew in correlation with the decline of urban settlement.¹⁰⁵² It was this climactic shift that helped the nomadic pastoral way of life to expand in usage.¹⁰⁵³ One important factor about the Arameans is that not only were they a nomadic culture but also one known for raiding and disrupting trade.¹⁰⁵⁴ This raiding along with trade disruption meant that urban centres and settled polities were at minimum very disruptive for the palatial economy of these polities.¹⁰⁵⁵ In the aftermath of the Late Bronze Age Collapse, the Arameans had established themselves as the new major group in the northern Fertile Crescent region with multiple city-states.¹⁰⁵⁶ Initially, the region which the Arameans settled within was governed by the Amorites which had founded the polity of Mari as well as the Kingdom of Babylonia.¹⁰⁵⁷ In the thirteenth century BC, these Amorite polities were then destroyed by a people called the Ahlamu.¹⁰⁵⁸ The Ahlamu people were not a singular group but rather a general term for semi-nomadic people west of the Euphrates river.¹⁰⁵⁹ This group included both the Amorites and the Arameans, however in the context of the thirteenth century, the Amorites were already a settled people.¹⁰⁶⁰ The phrase Ahlamu is used in the thirteenth

¹⁰⁴⁷ Valk 411-412.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Ibid, 411.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Liverani, 443.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Ruiz-Gálvez & Galán, 52.

¹⁰⁵¹ Paulette, 181.

¹⁰⁵² Fleming, 495.

¹⁰⁵³ Drake, 1868.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Liverani, 444.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ibid, 444.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibid, 435.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ibid, 441.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ruiz-Gálvez & Galán, 52.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid, 52.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Thompson, 107.

century BC for the Semitic nomads which moved across Western Asia during this period.¹⁰⁶¹ The Arameans themselves were only one of multiple groups which were defined as Ahlamu with another being the Suteans who lived east of the Euphrates river.¹⁰⁶² The Ahlamu, and to the same extent the Amameans, share other aspects with the Sea Peoples attested to by the Late Bronze Age civilizations. Assyrian texts cite the Ahlamu as being present within the territory of the Middle Assyrian Empire.¹⁰⁶³ Ugaritic and Assyrian texts note the fighting capabilities of the Ahlamu people specifically as mercenaries.¹⁰⁶⁴ The raids on trading centres was also a means of exacting tribute by nomadic groups, some of which were used as caravan or pastoral guides.¹⁰⁶⁵ Assyrian texts also attest to the Ahlamu attacking trading outposts and trade routes in Mesopotamia.¹⁰⁶⁶ Assyrian texts also refer to the Arameans and Ahlamu as “Ahlamu-Arameans” with later texts conflating the Ahlamu as Arameans.¹⁰⁶⁷ Both the mercenary and trading aspects of the Ahlamu show that if these groups wanted to disrupt any polity there was already previous knowledge not only of where to attack but also the benefits of the potential plunder.¹⁰⁶⁸ The Late Bronze Age also saw the Arameans gain independence from the Middle Assyrian Empire and with it the rise of Aramean settlements west of the Euphrates as city-states.¹⁰⁶⁹

There are two pieces of evidence which give credence to the traditional hypothesis about the “Sea Peoples” being an external invading force. The first piece is the relief on the north wall of the Mortuary Temple of Rameses III in Medinet Habu.¹⁰⁷⁰ In the relief, there are a series of four battle inscriptions which detail the fifth, eighth, eleventh, and twelfth years of the reign of Rameses III.¹⁰⁷¹ These inscriptions give details to the reliefs which are found on both the western and the northern walls of the temple.¹⁰⁷² These reliefs contain thirteen scenes which depict a military campaign starting with conflict against the Libyans, called the “Meshwesh,” and later the “Sea Peoples” in the “Northern War.”¹⁰⁷³ In the description of the “Northern War,” the names of the groups which were called the “Sea Peoples” are given,

¹⁰⁶¹ Liverani, 434.

¹⁰⁶² Ibid, 434.

¹⁰⁶³ Ibid, 348.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibid, 434.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Fleming, 493.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Liverani, 434.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Valk, 416.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Liverani, 435.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Fleming, 493.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Drews, 50.

¹⁰⁷¹ Ibid, viii.

¹⁰⁷² Ruiz-Gálvez & Galán, 58.

¹⁰⁷³ Teeter, 345.

some of which are only named in the relief with no other pieces of evidence available.¹⁰⁷⁴ Two of the groups named come from Anatolia, the Lukka and the Karkiya.¹⁰⁷⁵ The Lukka, as already mentioned, originate from Southwestern Anatolia, specifically Lycia.¹⁰⁷⁶ Their name can either be used as a reference to the community from this region, or a more general term for bandits.¹⁰⁷⁷ The Karkiya is the name of a region in western Anatolia whose population had a similar history as the Lukka with the Hittites.¹⁰⁷⁸ Karkiya was not a singular polity similar to Lukka having a decentralized system.¹⁰⁷⁹ The Karkiya were also soldiers and mercenaries which had both fought for and against the Hittites.¹⁰⁸⁰ The Peleset are also mentioned who are said to have originated from the Aegean region.¹⁰⁸¹ The Shekelesh are a group who are theorized to have originated from Sicily being referred to by Egyptian and potentially Hittite records.¹⁰⁸² This group are said to have been troops under the command of the Libyans and are mentioned in older Egyptian records.¹⁰⁸³ The Sherden are said to be from Sardinia, with evidence of Nuragic pottery found in Cyprus during the time of the invasion of the Sea Peoples.¹⁰⁸⁴ The Weshesh are an unknown community referred to in the Medinet Habu inscription.¹⁰⁸⁵ This group has been identified as Oscians, a south Italic people; Anatolians, specifically the Carians through the settlement of Wassos; Cretans; and Achaeans through the Ekwesh group.¹⁰⁸⁶ The Ekwesh are said to be one of two ancient Greek groups who were part of the Sea Peoples with the other being the Denyen.¹⁰⁸⁷ This is attested through Homeric literature which uses the terms “Achaiwoi” and “Danaoi” though this is only speculative.¹⁰⁸⁸ The last group mentioned are the Tjekker who are believed to have settled in the Southern Levant and originated either in Crete or the Teuci tribe.¹⁰⁸⁹ The latter group originated in either Crete or Attica and later settled in Anatolia.¹⁰⁹⁰

¹⁰⁷⁴ Drews, 52.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Liverani, 383.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ibid, 303.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Ibid, 384.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Fred C. Woudhuizen, (2018), *The Luwians of Western Anatolia: Their Neighbours and Predecessors*, Archaeopress, 29.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Ibid, 29.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ibid, 29.

¹⁰⁸¹ Drews, 56.

¹⁰⁸² Ibid, 70.

¹⁰⁸³ Ibid, 49.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid, 153.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Safronov, 1241.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Drews, 54.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid, 54.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ibid, 117.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Gates, 192.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Drews, 52.



(Figure 9: Depiction of Weshesh at Medinet Habu)

The second portion which benefits the argument favoring an external invasion is one of the mentioned groups in the Medinet Habu relief. More specifically, the Peleset people who are an alleged precursor to the later Philistine people.¹⁰⁹¹ The Philistines were a people who lived during the Iron Age in the Southern Levant, specifically what was Canaan.¹⁰⁹² The question of the Philistine origin comes from both Egyptian and Hebrew sources.¹⁰⁹³ There is also linguistic and genetic evidence which has been used to find the origin of the Philistines.¹⁰⁹⁴ The first piece of evidence for the origin of the Philistines comes from the Hebrew Bible which gives two origins for the Philistines.¹⁰⁹⁵ The first being the region of Caphtor, which refers to modern-day Crete, specifically the Minoans.¹⁰⁹⁶ Some translations of the Hebrew Bible use the term Peleset and Philistine interchangeably.¹⁰⁹⁷ The second comes from the claim that the Philistines were descended from Casluhim, a people which came from Egypt.¹⁰⁹⁸ From Egyptian epigraphy, there are five pieces of evidence for the Philistines, all of which come from references to the Peleset.¹⁰⁹⁹ The first comes from around the twelfth century BC with one being the Mortuary Temple of Rameses III in the description of the Sea Peoples.¹¹⁰⁰ The second piece from the same time from the Great Harris Papyrus found near

¹⁰⁹¹ Woudhuizen, 141.

¹⁰⁹² Yon, 21.

¹⁰⁹³ Dever, 18.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Millek, 257.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Gates, 178.

¹⁰⁹⁶ d'Alfonso, 14.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Gates, 178.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid, 178.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Yon, 21.

¹¹⁰⁰ Safronov, 1235.

Medinet Habu which contained around 1,500 lines of text and is 41 meters long.¹¹⁰¹ This text is a summary of the reign of Rameses III which includes a line about defeating the Peleset along with the Denyen and Tjeker people.¹¹⁰² The third piece comes from Deir el-Medina on a stela to Rameses III.¹¹⁰³ The fourth comes from the eleventh century BC from an Egyptian text called the Onomasticon of Amenope which references the Peleset.¹¹⁰⁴ The fifth piece of evidence comes from the tenth century BC and is Padiiset's Statue dated from the Third Intermediate Period of Egypt.¹¹⁰⁵ The statue is a black basalt made to commemorate a government visor which contains the inscription "envoy - Canaan - Peleset."¹¹⁰⁶ The next argument comes from a theory based on Luwian texts using the phrase "Palistina."¹¹⁰⁷ "Palistina" may be a way of spelling "Falistina" which was a kingdom located in the modern day Hatay Province in Turkey.¹¹⁰⁸ This has created a hypothesis that the Philistines were a part of the Syro-Hittite population.¹¹⁰⁹ There is also evidence that Palistina had an Aegean origin, which is one of the proposed origins of the Peleset and Philistine people.¹¹¹⁰ The final piece of evidence for the origins of the Philistines comes from genetic work done on skeletons in Ashkelon in 2019.¹¹¹¹ The result of this genetic analysis saw that skeletons from the time of Iron Age Philistia saw a genetic mixture of Levantine and Southern European heritage.¹¹¹² The most likely location of this Southern European heritage is from Crete with other potential locations being Iberia and Sardinia.¹¹¹³ Material culture of the Philistines was also different from local populations as their pottery was closer to Aegean and Greek styles along with an Aegean script.¹¹¹⁴ This Aegean heritage also is considered in the Peleset name, which has shown other Aegean theories including being synonymous with the Pelasgians, a culture which preceded the Greeks in the Aegean, and the Bronze Age city of Pyla in Cyprus.¹¹¹⁵ In all of the theories and evidence of the Philistines and the preceding Peleset,

¹¹⁰¹ Terry G. Wilfong, (1997), *Le Papyrus Harris I. (Bibliothèque d'Étude; v. 109:1-2)*, by Pierre Grandet. The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists 34, no. 1/4, 137.

¹¹⁰² Ibid, 138.

¹¹⁰³ Bernard Bruyère, (1930), *Mert Seger à Deir el Médineh*, l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 34.

¹¹⁰⁴ Donald B Redford, (1993), *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, Princeton University Press, 287.

¹¹⁰⁵ Peter Niels Lemche, (1991), *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 54.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 54.

¹¹⁰⁷ Redford, xxii.

¹¹⁰⁸ Knapp & Manning, 135.

¹¹⁰⁹ Liverani, 420.

¹¹¹⁰ Ibid, 387.

¹¹¹¹ Millek, 83.

¹¹¹² Drews, 69.

¹¹¹³ Millek, 83.

¹¹¹⁴ d'Alfonso, 14.

¹¹¹⁵ Drews, 55.

there is a migration from outside of Western Asia with most theories asserting an Aegean origin.¹¹¹⁶ One important aspect about the groups depicted in the relief at Medinet Habu is that some of these groups had interacted with Eastern Mediterranean civilizations prior to the Late Bronze Age Collapse.¹¹¹⁷ Specifically, the Shekelesh and Weshesh were two groups with a prior reputation for raiding the Eastern Mediterranean.¹¹¹⁸



(Figure 10: Depiction of the Philistines at Medinet Habu)

The two theories for which group was the main catalyst for the Late Bronze Age Collapse comes with a confounding issue. More specifically, when looking at the external question, the many groups attested to vary not only in location but also in their potential positions as invaders.¹¹¹⁹ In both theories, the participating groups in the pillaging and invading did not have the same ambitions and desires. Some being based around location, such as the Lukka and other Anatolian groups, may have been fighting greater conflicts with other polities, specifically the Hittites which Ugarit was also a tributary state of.¹¹²⁰ The case of the Philistines and other pre-Hellenic communities in the Aegean may have been a migration as a result of the encroachment of the proto-Hellenistic people in modern Northern Greece.¹¹²¹ Individual groups of peoples may have come as raiding parties as attested by

¹¹¹⁶ Ibid, 55.

¹¹¹⁷ Ibid, 55.

¹¹¹⁸ Redford, 248.

¹¹¹⁹ Safronov, 1234.

¹¹²⁰ Redford, 243.

¹¹²¹ d'Alfonso, 14.

Egyptian epigraphy while other groups may also have been mercenary groups part of larger forces.¹¹²² The biggest problem for the external theory is that there are many reasons for groups from both inside and outside of Western Asia to invade the region. For the internal theory, not only are the reasons more straightforward, but also fit into the climate-civilization cycle theory. The main reason for internal migrations and pillaging were because of climactic shifts making the way of life of the Arameans and other semi-nomadic cultures more suitable.¹¹²³ The two theories create a situation in which both migrations could have happened with one being a response to the other or occurring simultaneously. In the case of the external migration, many of the groups referred to were already located in the Near East, specifically in Anatolia.¹¹²⁴ Arguing for a simultaneous migration does make sense as both Western Asia and the Mediterranean saw a major upheaval in the local climate.¹¹²⁵ When populations experience upheaval as a result of either internal or external factors, this population will either adapt to the local climate or begin moving to other potential areas of settlement.¹¹²⁶

¹¹²² Drake, 1863.

¹¹²³ Ibid, 1868.

¹¹²⁴ Safronov, 1234.

¹¹²⁵ Frahm & Feinberg, 1868.

¹¹²⁶ Ibid, 1868.

Chapter IV: The Fall of the Akkadian Empire

The final example of the climate-civilization theory in Syria occurring will be the fall of the Akkadian Empire. Unlike the previous examples of Ugarit and the Syrian Arab Republic, the Akkadian Empire was not centered in Syria.¹¹²⁷ Instead, the Akkadian Empire was a polity which originated in and dominated Mesopotamia.¹¹²⁸ The reason for being used in the context of Syria is because of its westernmost frontier being located in the modern Rojava region of Syria.¹¹²⁹ The Akkadian Empire was the first of the “true empires” to exist in human history, with the polity covering almost the entirety of Mesopotamia.¹¹³⁰ For this section, there will be a broad analysis of the history of the Akkadian Empire from its rise to the most prominent polity in Western Asia in the 24th century BC.¹¹³¹ Afterwards, a look into how the Akkadian Empire was administered will be shown as with both Ugarit and Assadist Syria, there were similarities in how much power the leadership had on domestic and interpolity affairs.¹¹³² The next section will look further into the Akkadian Empire in modern Syria with how the settlements in the region functioned and where exactly Akkadian authority was. The final section will be about the fall of the Akkadian Empire in the 22nd century BC, which will look into the climatological effect on the Akkadian Empire and the response not only by the Akkadians but neighboring civilizations.

SECTION I: Brief History of the Akkadian Empire

The Akkadian Empire as a polity existed for a short period of time before its transformation from a regional power in Mesopotamia to the most powerful polity in Western Asia.¹¹³³ As a polity, the Akkadian Empire influenced Western Asia from its inception until the second century AD.¹¹³⁴ Initially, Akkad, the centre of the Akkadian Empire was part of a

¹¹²⁷ Douglas Frayne, (1993), “Sargonic and Gutian Periods” in *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia (2334-2113)*, Vol. 2, University of Toronto Press, 7.

¹¹²⁸ Ibid, 7.

¹¹²⁹ Ibid, 86.

¹¹³⁰ Mario Liverani, (1993), *Akkad the First World Empire: Structure, Ideology, Traditions*, Tipografia Poligrafica Moderna, 3.

¹¹³¹ Mario Liverani, (2011), *The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy*, Routledge, 133.

¹¹³² Ingo Schrakamp, (2020), “The Kingdom of Akkad: A View from Within” in *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East Volume : From the Beginnings to Old Kingdom Egypt and the Dynasty of Akkad*, Oxford University Press, 661.

¹¹³³ Lorenzo Nigro, (1998), “The Two Steles of Sargon: Iconology and Visual Propaganda at the Beginning of Royal Akkadian Relief,” *Iraq*, 93.

¹¹³⁴ Liverani (1993), 70.

larger system of city-states which dominated Southern Mesopotamia.¹¹³⁵ This period, known as the Early Dynastic Period, was one of small city states but also small-scale unity within Mesopotamia.¹¹³⁶ The dating of the Akkadian Empire itself generally starts at 2334 BC and ends in 2154 BC, meaning the empire lasted for around 180 years.¹¹³⁷ This comes from the middle chronology, with the short chronology changing the dates to 2270 BC until 2083 BC.¹¹³⁸ The first ruler of the Akkadian Empire was Sargon of Akkad, also referred to as Sargon the Great.¹¹³⁹ It was during this reign that the Akkadian Empire went from one of the major city states in Southern Mesopotamia into the first major empire in Western Asia.¹¹⁴⁰ Akkad was the city where the Akkadian Empire both originated and where the Akkadian Empire attained its name.¹¹⁴¹ This city is believed to be located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the northern portion of Southern Mesopotamia.¹¹⁴² However, all proposals for the location are speculative as there is no absolute knowledge other than being in Mesopotamia.¹¹⁴³ The name “Akkad” is also not of Akkadian origin, which can mean that the polity may have been either preoccupied before the rise of Sargon or the name itself comes from secondary sources.¹¹⁴⁴ For both the short and middle chronology, the Akkadian Empire existed during the Early Bronze Age period.¹¹⁴⁵

In the most general terms, the Akkadian Empire grew immediately with the first ruler, Sargon I.¹¹⁴⁶ His military conquests resulted in much of the Fertile Crescent region of

¹¹³⁵ Ibid, 70.

¹¹³⁶ Schrakamp, 612.

¹¹³⁷ Ann Gibbons, (1993), “How the Akkadian Empire Was Hung Out to Dry,” *Science*, Vol. 261, 5124, 985.

¹¹³⁸ E. A. Speiser, (1952), “Some Factors in the Collapse of Akkad,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 72, 3, 97.

¹¹³⁹ John F. X. McKeon, (1970), “An Akkadian Victory Stele,” *Boston Museum Bulletin*, Vol. 68, 354, 234.

¹¹⁴⁰ Takaaki K. Watanabe, Tsuyoshi Watanabe, Atsuko Yamazaki, & Miriam Pfeiffer, (2019), “Oman corals suggest that a stronger winter shamal season caused the Akkadian Empire (Mesopotamia) collapse,” *Geological Society of America*, 1.

¹¹⁴¹ Benjamin R. Foster, (2015), *The Age of Agade: Inventing Empire in Ancient Mesopotamia*, Routledge, 30.

¹¹⁴² Richard L. Zettler, (2003), “Reconstructing the World of Ancient Mesopotamia: Divided Beginnings and Holistic History,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 46, 1, 20.

¹¹⁴³ Ibid, 20.

¹¹⁴⁴ Harvey Weiss, (1975), “Kish, Akkad and Agade,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 95, 3, 438.

¹¹⁴⁵ P.J. Marshall, (2005), *Proceedings of the British Academy, Volume 131, 2004 Lectures*, OUP/British Academy, 2.

¹¹⁴⁶ H. Weiss, M.-A. Courty, W. Wetterstrom, F. Guichard, L. Senior, R. Meadow, & A. Curnow, (2014), “The Genesis and Collapse of Third Millennium North Mesopotamian Civilization,” *Science*, Vol. 261, 5124, 998.

Western Asia to be brought under his administration.¹¹⁴⁷ From the rule of Sargon I onwards, the Akkadian Empire experienced some reduction in size but also a lot of consolidation.¹¹⁴⁸ These later rulers began to reform the administration and bureaucracy of the Akkadian Empire.¹¹⁴⁹ This included the perception of the rulers of the Empire, both the rulers at the present time as well as prior ones.¹¹⁵⁰ With these reforms, most of which were cementing greater ruler authority and centralization, there were also internal conflicts after the conquests by Sargon I.¹¹⁵¹ These conflicts were over who in the Akkadian royal family were to rule, leading to later fragmentation and internal instability.¹¹⁵² One aspect to note about the Akkadian Empire was that despite the territorial conquests, the empire also acted militarily similar to migratory peoples and war bands.¹¹⁵³ More specifically, military units practiced raiding parties into nearby weaker polities, especially in Syria.¹¹⁵⁴ Some of these raids were destructive enough that they decimated the cities where they occurred, though there was no known attempt to conquer and establish rule over these razed areas by the Akkadians.¹¹⁵⁵ The Akkadian Empire came to an end after two-hundred years of dominance with migratory invasions by peoples on the frontier of the polity.¹¹⁵⁶ These groups were mostly from the Zagros mountains in modern day Iran.¹¹⁵⁷ Despite the Akkadian Empire lasting only two hundred years, the impact the empire had on Western Asian political culture was long-lasting, with Sargon the Great and Naram-Sin becoming major figures in later literary works.¹¹⁵⁸

Rise of the Akkadian Empire

¹¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 998.

¹¹⁴⁸ Jason A. Ur, (2010), "Cycles of Civilization in Northern Mesopotamia, 4400-2000 BC," *Journal of Archaeological Research*, Vol. 18, 4, 410.

¹¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 410.

¹¹⁵⁰ Liverani (2011), 133.

¹¹⁵¹ Zettler, 22.

¹¹⁵² Schrakamp, 664.

¹¹⁵³ Ur, 408.

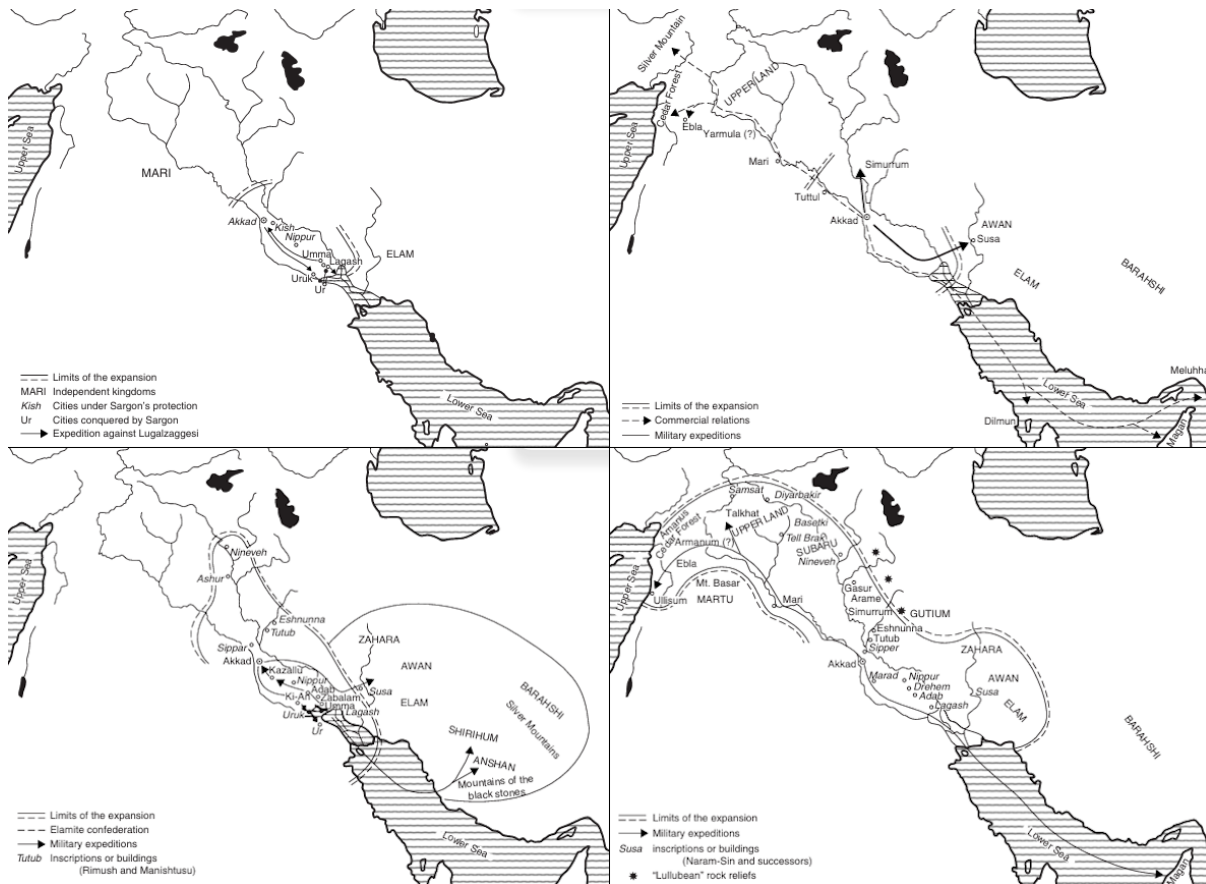
¹¹⁵⁴ Schrakamp, 617.

¹¹⁵⁵ Ur, 407.

¹¹⁵⁶ Speiser, 100.

¹¹⁵⁷ Zettler, 23.

¹¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 18.



(Figure 1: Expansion of the Akkadian Empire; top-left: first phase of Sargon the Great; top-right: second phase of Sargon the Great; bottom-left: Akkadian Empire under Rimush & Manishtusu; bottom-right: Akkadian Empire under Naram-Sin. [Liverani, 134 & 136]).

Understanding the rise of the Akkadians requires an understanding also of who the Akkadians were. Unlike other groups in Southern Mesopotamia, the Akkadians were not Sumerian.¹¹⁵⁹ Instead, the Akkadians were Semites who migrated into the region at an unknown point in time.¹¹⁶⁰ What is known is that the city of Akkad being a pre-existing polity means the people likely either overwhelmed the original population and outnumbered them, or the region was conquered outright.¹¹⁶¹ This city known as Akkad is also different from the later established Agade, with the former being a reference to the area of Kish or Old Babylon.¹¹⁶² The projected site of Akkad and the surrounding area also saw a decline in settlements and known populations with the arrival of the Akkadians.¹¹⁶³ One potential explanation is that the early Akkadians were a semi-nomadic group.¹¹⁶⁴ Regardless of the

¹¹⁵⁹ Liverani (1993), 2.

¹¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹¹⁶¹ Weiss, 438.

¹¹⁶² Frayne, 7.

¹¹⁶³ Weiss, 438.

¹¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 438.

population decline, the region had enough open space for the Akkadians to settle in the region according to the Akkadian-influx hypothesis.¹¹⁶⁵ The Akkadians used a similar script as the Sumerians with cuneiform.¹¹⁶⁶ Sumerian culture did heavily influence the Akkadian culture and religion, with the language remaining the koine for the general population.¹¹⁶⁷ Sumerian religious figures were also commonplace under the broader Mesopotamian religious traditions which combined aspects of the Sumerian and Semitic religious customs.¹¹⁶⁸ Another important point about the Akkadian Empire is that prior to the conquests by Sargon the Great, the city-states in Southern Mesopotamia saw interpolity warfare.¹¹⁶⁹ This may have also been an aspect for how the Akkadians came to gain power in Mesopotamia.¹¹⁷⁰ This idea comes from a theory that the Akkadians rose up as part of a league of cities around Kish which then overthrew the ruler of Kish, with Sargon the Great assuming power in the aftermath.¹¹⁷¹

Sargon the Great

The Akkadian Empire was located within the confines of Mesopotamia, with the Early Dynastic Period being the beginning of a unified identity within the region.¹¹⁷² Akkad and Sumer were the big two polities during this Early Dynastic Period, with both being major sites of centralized agriculture administered by absolute rulers.¹¹⁷³ The first ruler of the Akkadian Empire was Sargon of Akkad, also known as Sargon the Great.¹¹⁷⁴ The name Sargon translated roughly to “The king is true or firm or legitimate” and may have been a nickname as a means to legitimize his rule.¹¹⁷⁵ The ascension of Sargon the Great is not entirely understood.¹¹⁷⁶ One piece of potential evidence for this ascension comes from the “legend of Sargon,” a writing from around the eighth century BC which contains an alleged

¹¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 438.

¹¹⁶⁶ Roger D. Woodard, (2008), *The Ancient Languages of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Aksum*, Cambridge University Press, 2.

¹¹⁶⁷ Liverani (2011), 133.

¹¹⁶⁸ Nigro, 93.

¹¹⁶⁹ Frayne, 5.

¹¹⁷⁰ Schrakamp, 623.

¹¹⁷¹ Liverani (1993), 60.

¹¹⁷² Schrakamp, 612.

¹¹⁷³ Ibid, 671.

¹¹⁷⁴ Hugo Radau, (2005), *Early Babylonian History: Down to the End of the Fourth Dynasty of Ur*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 31.

¹¹⁷⁵ Schrakamp, 612.

¹¹⁷⁶ Samuel Noah Kramer, (1963), *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character*, The University of Chicago Press, 60.

copy of an inscription found on a statue of Sargon the Great.¹¹⁷⁷ According to this inscription, Sargon the Great was born into an elite family through the matrilineal line, meaning that his mother was of noble birth but not his father.¹¹⁷⁸ Though this is even contested as some translations of the inscription state that the mother of Sargon was poor.¹¹⁷⁹ The father of Sargon is not known, stating his brother and father he did not know and that they “inhabited the mountains.”¹¹⁸⁰ There is a claim according to the Sumerian King List which claims the father of Sargon the Great was a gardener.¹¹⁸¹ Later portions of this inscription then assert a similar story to that of Moses in the Book of Leviticus, with the birth of Sargon being in secret with the baby being put in a reed basket and placed in a flowing river and found by a person named “Akki”.¹¹⁸² Another alleged part of the early life of Sargon the Great was as a cupbearer for the king of Kish, Ur-Zababa.¹¹⁸³ While this story may not be accurate, it builds a narrative of Sargon the Great being either the head of a new dynasty or, less prestigiously, a usurper.¹¹⁸⁴ Later forms of the legend of Sargon the Great change the paternal lineage with his father being named with Itti-Bel or La’ibum.¹¹⁸⁵ In the case of the mother she is sometimes depicted as the priestess, prostitute, or a supernatural being.¹¹⁸⁶ Further parts of the legend of the origins of Sargon the Great later coalesce into his mother being a high priestess and him being a cupbearer for the king of Kish named Ur-Zababa.¹¹⁸⁷ This title of cupbearer in the context of Sumerian kings meant Sargon had a large amount of political power as well as being responsible for maintaining irrigation with a personal retinue.¹¹⁸⁸ Sargon the Great is then said to have been crowned king after the end of the reign of Ur-Zababa.¹¹⁸⁹ This first ruler of the Akkadian Empire may also be a legendary figure rather than an actual ruler, though this is speculative.¹¹⁹⁰ It is also not known whether Year One in the Sumerian King List refers to the year Sargon the Great was the year ascended to the throne of

¹¹⁷⁷ Alan Lenzi, (2019), *An Introduction to Akkadian Literature: Contexts and Content*, Eisenbrauns, 125.

¹¹⁷⁸ Georges Roux, (1992), *Ancient Iraq*, Penguin Books, 152.

¹¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 152.

¹¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 152.

¹¹⁸¹ Ibid, 152.

¹¹⁸² Ibid, 152.

¹¹⁸³ Lenzi, 60.

¹¹⁸⁴ Roux, 152.

¹¹⁸⁵ Kramer, 131.

¹¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 131.

¹¹⁸⁷ Lenzi, 60.

¹¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 60.

¹¹⁸⁹ Roux, 152.

¹¹⁹⁰ Kramer, 131.

Agade or if it refers to a different point in time.¹¹⁹¹ One point of contention is the name “Sarrukin” which some believe to have been the name used by Sargon the Great when he declared independence from the king of Kish.¹¹⁹² Another belief is that “Sarrukin” may have been the real name of Sargon the Great since the name Sargon means “the king is legitimate.”¹¹⁹³ A final point to note regarding Sargon the Great is that most of the epigraphic evidence about him is not contemporary to his reign.¹¹⁹⁴ Instead, most of the evidence comes from Old Babylonian inscriptions.¹¹⁹⁵

Under Sargon the Great, the Akkadian Empire went from a polity, to the first true empire of human history.¹¹⁹⁶ According to inscriptions made to commemorate his rule, Sargon the Great was credited with thirty-four military campaigns which resulted in victory.¹¹⁹⁷ These campaigns went in three general directions, the first were from the city of Akkad down to the Persian Gulf.¹¹⁹⁸ These campaigns were the first ones done by Sargon the Great and ended the initial rule of Southern Mesopotamia through city-states.¹¹⁹⁹ These conquests were concluded with the capture of the king of Uruk, Lugalzagesi, in Sumer as mentioned by commemorative inscriptions.¹²⁰⁰ Further conquests in Southern Mesopotamia included the defeats of the cities of Umma, Lagash, and Ur.¹²⁰¹ These regions connected the Northern and Southern regions of “Babylonia.”¹²⁰² In this context, “Babylonia” refers to Lower Mesopotamia, sometimes also referred to as “Sumer.”¹²⁰³ These two regions, which were now united by Sargon the Great, at this point had differing forms of politics and economics.¹²⁰⁴ While these two portions of Babylonia were now united by Sargon the Great, the socioeconomic and political styles of the two portions of the region remained different after the conquest.¹²⁰⁵ According to epigraphic sources, there is reference to when conquests

¹¹⁹¹ Gianni Marchesi, (2010), “The Sumerian King List and the Early History of Mesopotamia,” *Quaderni di Vicino Oriente* V, 231.

¹¹⁹² Ibid, 243.

¹¹⁹³ Lenzi, 123.

¹¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 124.

¹¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 124.

¹¹⁹⁶ Schrakamp, 526-527.

¹¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 531.

¹¹⁹⁸ Liverani (1993), 71.

¹¹⁹⁹ Nigro, 93.

¹²⁰⁰ Ibid, 93.

¹²⁰¹ Ibid, 86.

¹²⁰² Schrakamp, 526.

¹²⁰³ Piotr Michalowski, (2020), “The Kingdom of Akkad in Contact with the World” in *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East Volume : From the Beginnings to Old Kingdom Egypt and the Dynasty of Akkad*, Oxford University Press, 600.

¹²⁰⁴ Marchesi, 234.

¹²⁰⁵ Schrakamp, 530.

occurred, such as the invasions of Syria occurring after the conquest of Southern Mesopotamia.¹²⁰⁶ There is also reference to how some parts of the Akkadian Empire under Sargon the Great were not under direct administrative control after being conquered.¹²⁰⁷ Specifically Elam in modern-day Khuzestan and Mari in modern-day Syria did not have an Akkadian-style administrative system.¹²⁰⁸ Some of the claimed conquests were also even more indirect in nature.¹²⁰⁹ For example, there are claims of warfare occurring between the Akkadians and the people in Magan and Dilmun, which are modern Oman and Bahrain respectively.¹²¹⁰ Trade under Sargon the Great was also expanded as far east as the Indus Valley, referred to as Maluhha.¹²¹¹ Sargon the Great following his conquests, which potentially included areas as far south as Bahrain and west as Cyprus, resulted in a declaration of ruling “the totality of the lands under heaven...from sunrise to sunset.”¹²¹² Another title which Sargon the Great held was “Lugal Kish” meaning “king of the world” further emphasizing the power he had in Western Asia compared to other contemporary rulers.¹²¹³

Naram-Sin

From the years 2254 until 2218 BC, around fifty-six years, the second major Akkadian ruler reigned.¹²¹⁴ This fifty-six years reign the same amount of time as the reign of Sargon the Great.¹²¹⁵ This figure, Naram-Sin, was the fourth ruler of the Akkadian Empire and continued the expansion of the realm.¹²¹⁶ Not only this, but he also changed how the ruler was defined and viewed by those subject to Akkadian rule.¹²¹⁷ This came after his two predecessors saw a series of revolts which continued under Naram-Sin.¹²¹⁸ The reasons for these revolts varied, but they came during a period of succession crisis after the death of Sargon the Great.¹²¹⁹ Both preceding rulers lasted for relatively short periods of time with

¹²⁰⁶ Ur, 407.

¹²⁰⁷ Michalowski, 611.

¹²⁰⁸ Ibid, 614.

¹²⁰⁹ Ibid, 614.

¹²¹⁰ Ibid, 614.

¹²¹¹ Adrian G. Parker, Andrew S. Goudie, Stephen Stokes, Kevin White, Martin J. Hodson, Michelle Manning, & Derek Kennet; (2006), “A record of Holocene climate change from lake geochemical analyses in southeastern Arabia,” *Quaternary Research*, 66, 473.

¹²¹² Michalowski, 605.

¹²¹³ Frayne, 32.

¹²¹⁴ Schrakamp, 527.

¹²¹⁵ Ibid, 527.

¹²¹⁶ Lenzi, 124.

¹²¹⁷ Liverani (1993), 1.

¹²¹⁸ Liverani (2011), 135.

¹²¹⁹ Ibid, 135.

both being assassinated in palace conspiracies.¹²²⁰ Naram-Sin in the context of expansion moved the frontiers of the empire further in all directions, going into Anatolia, Iran, Syria, and potentially as far south as modern Oman.¹²²¹ During the start of the reign of Naram-Sin, an event referred to as “The Great Revolt” occurred when a coalition of city-states in Southern Mesopotamia attempted to regain independence from the Akkadian Empire.¹²²² The name of this comes from an Old Babylonian record of the event, which may be more legendary in nature.¹²²³ After the failure of the Great Revolt, Naram-Sin declared himself the god of Akkad and posthumously made Sargon the Great a god as well.¹²²⁴ This declaration was followed with the construction of a temple to Enlil in the city of Nippur.¹²²⁵ It was under the reign of Naram-Sin that the Akkadin Empire reached its greatest extent.¹²²⁶ The expansion of the empire under Naram-Sin is evidenced in structures constructed in settlements and cities which were destroyed by the advancing Akkadians.¹²²⁷ Tell Brak in Syria for example shows evidence of Akkadian administration through the Palace of Naram-Sin which has the name of Naram-Sin on the stamps on the mud bricks used.¹²²⁸ The Sumerian King List gives a series of conquests following the deification of Naram Sin.¹²²⁹ These conquests started with settlements along the Tigris river followed by advances into the Upper Euphrates in Syria, Anatolia, and the Northern Levantine coast¹²³⁰ The last series of conflicts were between the Akkadians and the Lullubi and other people from the Zagros Mountain region.¹²³¹

Administration of the Akkadian Empire

The administration of the Akkadian Empire was in many ways a precursor to how polities in Western Asia conducted themselves.¹²³² The way which the Akkadian Empire

¹²²⁰ Ibid, 135.

¹²²¹ Michalowski, 617.

¹²²² Steve Tinney, (1995), “A New Look at Naram-Sin and the ‘Great Rebellion,’” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 47, 3.

¹²²³ Ibid, 1.

¹²²⁴ Frayne, 103.

¹²²⁵ Ibid, 103.

¹²²⁶ Roux, 157.

¹²²⁷ Michalowski, 602.

¹²²⁸ Liverani (1993), 36.

¹²²⁹ Schrakamp, 554.

¹²³⁰ McKeon, 239.

¹²³¹ Kramer, 62.

¹²³² Liverani (2011), 137.

acted was the inspiration for other polities, with changes varying between regions.¹²³³ This is especially noticeable with polities which succeeded the Akkadians such as the Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian states.¹²³⁴ Some cases of these administrative similarities may also have been convergent as with the administrative functions of Egypt.¹²³⁵ The general broad styles however were nearly universal with polities, these being the deification of the ruler either as a god or as being placed into power by a god, the centralization of the polity around an absolute ruler, and the ruler being from a hereditary dynasty.¹²³⁶ The use of a singular lingua franca other than Sumerian was also an innovation, with the Akkadian language becoming used for communication on an administrative level.¹²³⁷ This language since the end of the Akkadian Empire until the beginning of the second century AD was used in interpolity and religious communications for Western Asia.¹²³⁸ This use of Akkadian language was enforced to a point where areas with pre-established scripts were forced to adopt Akkadian cuneiform when under Akkadian rule, such as Elam.¹²³⁹ Economics and trade were also under the purview of the ruler, with irrigation and agricultural production being under the command of the ruler, then sent down to the “ensi” or local rulers.¹²⁴⁰ The final general change which influenced later polities was who the ruler was in relation to the people, with rulers traditionally from a religious position in Southern Mesopotamia.¹²⁴¹ The Akkadian Empire changed this to something more akin to the Syrian polities where rulers were not directly part of the religious class or of temple functions.¹²⁴² This became more important with the evolution of the Akkadian ruler from a somewhat secular military figure to one referred to as a living god, which became more common with the rulers of later powerful polities such as the Babylonian and Assyrian Empires.¹²⁴³ Most of what is known about Akkadian administration also comes from the reigns of Naram-Sin and Shar-kali-sharri.¹²⁴⁴

Depiction of the Ruler

¹²³³ Ibid, 137.

¹²³⁴ Woodard, 9.

¹²³⁵ Ibid, 9.

¹²³⁶ Liverani (2011), 137.

¹²³⁷ Woodard, 8.

¹²³⁸ Ibid, 8.

¹²³⁹ Liverani (2011), 139.

¹²⁴⁰ Kramer, 74.

¹²⁴¹ Ibid, 117.

¹²⁴² Liverani (2011), 139.

¹²⁴³ Roux, 156.

¹²⁴⁴ Liverani (1993), 4-5.

One of the most crucial aspects of the Akkadian administration was how it changed the way rulers were depicted and treated. In particular, the ruler was no longer just an administrative and theocratic head of a polity, but now also a military figure and a deity in their own right.¹²⁴⁵ This was seen in the steles and epigraphic sources made both during and after the reign of Sargon the Great as well as his successors.¹²⁴⁶ Sargon the Great himself was credited with thirty four successful campaigns of conquest.¹²⁴⁷ In the case of showing the ruler as a divine figure, Naram-Sin, the fourth ruler of the Akkadian Empire, declared himself as a living god.¹²⁴⁸ There were other terms which were used during and after the reign of Naram-Sin to refer to the Akkadian emperor, such as “King of the Four Quarters,” “King of the Universe,” and “Ruler of the World.”¹²⁴⁹ This propagandization of the ruler became a central figure of later rulers in Western Asia, with Akkadian kings becoming examples for how rulers should and should not act.¹²⁵⁰ In Mesopotamia before the emergence of the Akkadian Empire, the primary ruler of a polity was also the primary religious figure of the polity.¹²⁵¹ More specifically, it was the “ensi” who was the dominant figure in the administration of a polity.¹²⁵² Below the “ensi” was the “lugal,” meaning “great man” which was a temporary position used in times of crisis.¹²⁵³ Over time the “lugal” soon attained greater power, with those in this position functioning independently of the “ensi.”¹²⁵⁴ With the rise of the Akkadian Empire, these roles changed significantly, with the “ensi” no longer being the head of the polity and instead becoming provincial governors.¹²⁵⁵ The rulers of the Akkadian Empire also changed the meaning of titles. One example is the title of “šar kiššati,” meaning king of Kish, being changed to mean “lord of the universe.”¹²⁵⁶ The reason for appropriating this title was because the king of Kish in Sumerian tradition was the person who held the most authority due to the location of Kish along the Tigris and Euphrates.¹²⁵⁷ This gave the ruler of Kish the ability to control the irrigation of all the lands south of the

¹²⁴⁵ Ibid, 26.

¹²⁴⁶ Ibid, 26.

¹²⁴⁷ Ibid, 43.

¹²⁴⁸ Roux, 156.

¹²⁴⁹ Michalowski, 617.

¹²⁵⁰ Liverani (1993), 1.

¹²⁵¹ Nigro, 85.

¹²⁵² Foster, 59.

¹²⁵³ Ibid, 173.

¹²⁵⁴ Marchesi, 235.

¹²⁵⁵ Foster, 40.

¹²⁵⁶ Liverani (1993), 60.

¹²⁵⁷ Kramer, 186.

city.¹²⁵⁸ Deification was another aspect of the Akkadian administration. Prior to the Akkadians, a ruler could be defied but only after they had died.¹²⁵⁹ During the reign of Naram-Sin, this changed with his claim as “dingir” with temples to his rule being established along with this new title.¹²⁶⁰ The deification was also a way to legitimize the growing absolute power which Naram-Sin attained after The Great Revolt.¹²⁶¹ A final point for the administration of the Akkadian Empire was the linkage of religion with politics. While religion was always a major function of polities in Western Asia, with those in Mesopotamia being led by the clergy, there was not as much a dynastic religious order.¹²⁶² As a way to preserve religious legitimacy, both Sargon the Great and Naram-Sin appointed their children to religious positions of power.¹²⁶³ The daughters of both Sargon and Naram-Sin were made high priestesses of the Akkadian moon deity, Sin in Akkadian or Nanna in Sumerian.¹²⁶⁴ Their sons were also placed as “ensi” in various locations and their daughters were also married to rulers under the Akkadian Empire as a means of preserving internal peace.¹²⁶⁵

Power of the Royal Family

Local rulers were also replaced after conquests, with Akkadian nobles replacing the local figures in areas directly controlled by the Akkadian Empire.¹²⁶⁶ The bureaucracy and administrative structures did remain from the previous rulers after being conquered by the Akkadians.¹²⁶⁷ This is seen with the continuation of native administrative traditions in Southern Mesopotamian cities under Akkadian administration.¹²⁶⁸ During times of revolt, Akkadian rulers such as Rimush conducted pacification campaigns with extreme brutality.¹²⁶⁹ During the reign of Sargon the Great, military campaigns and the pillaging of cities were a means of paying soldiers and attaining more economic power for the Akkadian Empire.¹²⁷⁰ For internal actions, Rimush acted the same way, with cities such as Ur, Adab, and Lagash

¹²⁵⁸ Ibid, 186.

¹²⁵⁹ Schrakamp, 555.

¹²⁶⁰ Frayne, 101.

¹²⁶¹ Schrakamp, 555.

¹²⁶² Liverani (1993), 126.

¹²⁶³ Ibid, 82.

¹²⁶⁴ Ibid, 82.

¹²⁶⁵ Ibid, 28.

¹²⁶⁶ Ibid, 159.

¹²⁶⁷ Ibid, 160.

¹²⁶⁸ Schrakamp, 552.

¹²⁶⁹ Ibid, 559.

¹²⁷⁰ Ibid, 549.

revolting under his reign being destroyed with the slaughtering of the city inhabitants.¹²⁷¹ Provincial administration has been shown from archival records to at some points been done through members of the royal family.¹²⁷² During the reign of Naram-Sin, five provinces were under princely governorships and places with large agricultural estates were also under the control of members of the royal family.¹²⁷³ Priestly positions also saw this as seen with the appointment of the daughters of Sargon the Great and Naram-Sin as high priestesses.¹²⁷⁴ This form of administrative management was nepotistic in nature but also a means to avoid ambitious nobles from asserting too much power.¹²⁷⁵ This came at the cost of powerful family members potentially attempting to usurp power.¹²⁷⁶

Economy & Agriculture

Administration under the Akkadian Empire was heavily centralized with a heavy emphasis on agricultural production through irrigation.¹²⁷⁷ Much of what is known about the administration was found in archival collections which showed differing forms of administration between Northern and Southern Mesopotamia.¹²⁷⁸ The system of economics under the Akkadian Empire was similar to a planned economy with all economic actions being proposed and acted upon through the authority of the sovereign ruler.¹²⁷⁹ While the system was heavily centralized, there was a use of local rulers as a means of maintaining stability in parts of the Akkadian Empire, especially in the frontier.¹²⁸⁰ The Akkadian language, for example, was used almost exclusively in administrative actions and was enforced onto vassal and tributary states.¹²⁸¹ Sumerian was also used as a language for religious affairs as well as by the general population.¹²⁸² Agriculture in the Akkadian Empire is divisible between irrigation-based Southern Mesopotamia and the rain-fed agriculture in Northern Mesopotamia.¹²⁸³ The way the agricultural economy worked required a stable environment not only in areas where irrigation was limited but also in places with general

¹²⁷¹ Liverani (2011), 135.

¹²⁷² Schrakamp, 533.

¹²⁷³ Liverani (1993), 35.

¹²⁷⁴ Schrakamp, 533.

¹²⁷⁵ Ibid, 549.

¹²⁷⁶ Zettler, 22.

¹²⁷⁷ Watanabe et al, 1.

¹²⁷⁸ Weiss et al, 1002.

¹²⁷⁹ Ur, 408.

¹²⁸⁰ Schrakamp, 531.

¹²⁸¹ Woodard, 8.

¹²⁸² Ibid, 8.

¹²⁸³ Weiss et al, 1002.

seasonality between wet and dry seasons.¹²⁸⁴ During the latter, Mesopotamia had an average rainfall of around twenty millimeters annually with a rising salt content in the soil as a result of poor irrigation.¹²⁸⁵ As a result, wheat was less used by the Akkadian Empire with barley replacing wheat as the main crop in Southern Mesopotamia due to its higher tolerance of salt.¹²⁸⁶ Flooding was also a problem, meaning that there was a constant need for maintenance on the irrigation and draining systems.¹²⁸⁷ During the months from August to October, farmers were put under the control of temple authorities to do this maintenance as these months were a time of food shortage.¹²⁸⁸

Administration in Southern Mesopotamia

Administration in Southern Mesopotamia also saw less changes than in the north, with the local administrative functions generally continuing.¹²⁸⁹ This included the use of temples as the main centres of the administration and the continuation of Sumerian as the local administrative language.¹²⁹⁰ During the Akkadian period in Southern Mesopotamia, only around thirteen percent of the provincial authorities had Akkadian names while the remainder were people of local origins.¹²⁹¹ Despite these differences between administrations in Northern and Southern Mesopotamia, there were consistencies regarding legitimacy and reflections of royal power.¹²⁹² One example comes from Tell Leilan in Syria which revealed cylinder seals used in the polity contained similar iconography as seen in Southern Mesopotamia, such as banqueting scenes.¹²⁹³ Rationing was also a common function of Akkadian administration, with grain being a common medium of taxation.¹²⁹⁴ The administrative system ran as a function of collecting and redistributing grain across the empire.¹²⁹⁵ Another aspect of the Akkadian administration was population relocation and settlement.¹²⁹⁶ The main intention of this population control was to both solidify authority in

¹²⁸⁴ Ibid, 995.

¹²⁸⁵ Richard A. Kerr, (1998), "Sea-Floor Dust Shows Drought Felled Akkadian Empire," *Science*, Vol. 279, 5349, 326.

¹²⁸⁶ Liverani (2011), 105.

¹²⁸⁷ Liverani (1993), 144.

¹²⁸⁸ Schrakamp, 553.

¹²⁸⁹ Michalowski, 626.

¹²⁹⁰ Ibid, 596.

¹²⁹¹ Schrakamp, 531.

¹²⁹² Weiss et al, 998.

¹²⁹³ Liverani (1993), 80.

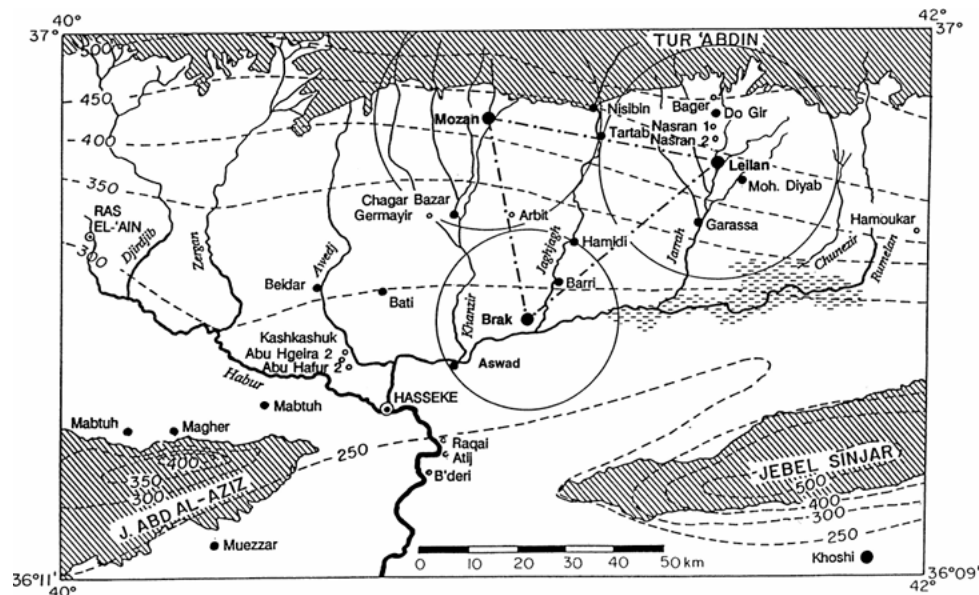
¹²⁹⁴ Ur, 410.

¹²⁹⁵ Ibid, 410.

¹²⁹⁶ Liverani (1993), 94.

areas far from central authority in Akkad and to disperse populations which could threaten stability if kept united.¹²⁹⁷ There is evidence of elites and landowners being expelled from recently conquered polities, with the land being given to Akkadian elites.¹²⁹⁸ At the same time the movement of people from the Akkadian Empire into these settlements worked both as a way to spread the Akkadian administration as well as dilute population majorities that were not of Akkadian origin either in culture or birth.¹²⁹⁹ Trade was another important part of the Akkadian administration, with the expansion of trade occurring during the conquests of Sargon the Great.¹³⁰⁰ These trade routes went as far east as the Indus Valley in the east and Cyprus and Anatolia in the west.¹³⁰¹ Materials which were imported into Akkad included goods from the Elamite region such as stone and wood but also cedars from modern Lebanon.¹³⁰² Lapis lazuli and copper were also brought into the Akkadian Empire through modern Afghanistan and Oman, called Magan at the time, respectively.¹³⁰³

SECTION II: The Akkadian Empire in the Syrian Euphrates



(Figure 2: Map of Northeast Syria showing settlement system [Weiss et al, 996]).

The furthest northward portion of the Akkadian Empire was located within modern day Eastern Syria.¹³⁰⁴ This region where the Akkadian Empire was at its furthest limits

¹²⁹⁷ Weiss et al, 998.

¹²⁹⁸ Ibid, 998.

¹²⁹⁹ Ibid, 998.

¹³⁰⁰ Liverani (1993), 84.

¹³⁰¹ Michalowski, 600.

¹³⁰² Ibid, 601.

¹³⁰³ Ibid, 617-618.

¹³⁰⁴ Lenzi, 123.

correlates with the furthest extent of the Euphrates river.¹³⁰⁵ This does not mean that this was the furthest the Akkadian Empire went into Syria, however, as there were expeditions done by the Akkadians that went to the modern Syrian coast.¹³⁰⁶ More specifically, the city-state of Ebla was recorded as having been a site of conflict involving the Akkadians.¹³⁰⁷ Propaganda from the Akkadian Empire seen in steles and other epigraphic sources claim conquests by Sargon the Great which went as far as Lebanon with references to a “Cedar coast.”¹³⁰⁸ Another point is the capture of Elba by the Akkadians, meaning that the Akkadians were also present on the Levantine coast.¹³⁰⁹ Cyprus has also been mentioned in epigraphic sources as being conquered however physical evidence is lacking for this and may be more legendary in nature.¹³¹⁰ What is known is that the territory of modern Syria along the Euphrates was part of the Akkadian Empire since its initial expansion by Sargon the Great.¹³¹¹ The Syrian Euphrates, as a part of Northern Mesopotamia, was different from the rest of the Akkadian Empire in some major ways. The first is that Syria did not have as prominent of an irrigation system as Southern Mesopotamia.¹³¹² This meant that rain-fed agriculture was more common.¹³¹³ This rainfed agricultural dependency also meant changes to the climate in the region were potentially more damaging than in Southern Mesopotamia.¹³¹⁴ The second is that with the dominance of rainfed agriculture, there were also more pastoral and nomadic groups within this portion of the Akkadian Empire.¹³¹⁵ During post-harvest seasons in this region, water resources were shared with pastoral groups who moved into more settled areas.¹³¹⁶ During seasons where agricultural output was lower, pastoral groups were allowed to feed their livestock in the area and allowed for relative peace.¹³¹⁷ During the Third Millennium BC, Akkadian Syria was highly urbanized with large

¹³⁰⁵ Watanabe et al, 1.

¹³⁰⁶ Michalowski, 618.

¹³⁰⁷ Ibid, 619.

¹³⁰⁸ Foster, 257.

¹³⁰⁹ Ibid, 76.

¹³¹⁰ Ibid, 292.

¹³¹¹ Liverani (1993), 55.

¹³¹² Ibid, 131.

¹³¹³ Zettler, 17.

¹³¹⁴ Ibid, 17.

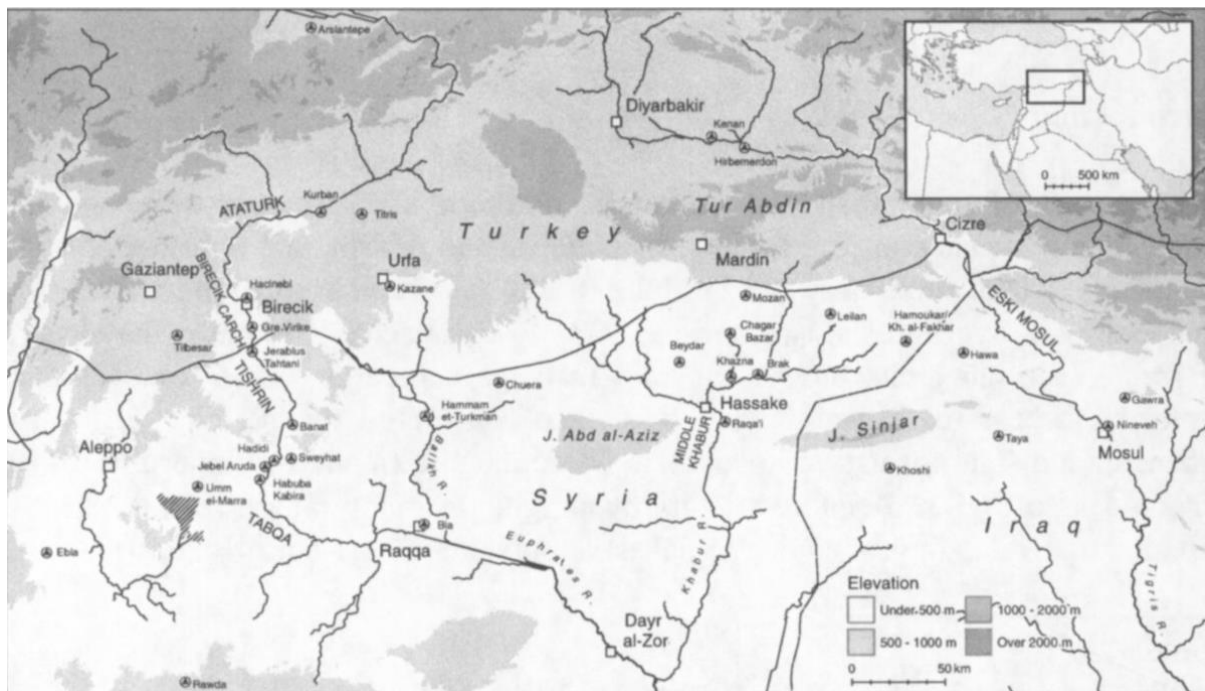
¹³¹⁵ Michael D. Danti, (2010), “Late Middle Holocene Climate and Northern Mesopotamia: Varying Cultural Responses to the 5.2 and 4.2 ka Aridification Events,” in *Climate Crises in Human History*, 142-143.

¹³¹⁶ Evangeline Cookson, Daniel J. Hilla, Dan Lawrence; (2019), “Impacts of long term climate change during the collapse of the Akkadian Empire,” *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 106, 7.

¹³¹⁷ Danti, 143.

settlements located relatively close to each other.¹³¹⁸ These cities were typically around twenty to thirty kilometers apart and on average 800 square kilometers in size.¹³¹⁹ Pastoral groups are also known to have existed within Akkadin Syria as referenced by prior Elblite sources.¹³²⁰ These pastoral groups were referred to as Martu, which is another name for the Amorites.¹³²¹ Akkadian Syria during the end of the Third Millenium BC saw a decline in the urban centres and the resultant collapse of both the Akkadian Empire in the south as well as the settlements under Akkadian control in Syria.¹³²²

Geography



(Figure 3: Geography of Northern Mesopotamia [Ur, 388]).

For the Syrian portion of the Akkadian Empire, there is a complexity for where the borders started and ended within this region.¹³²³ The biggest problem being where Sargon the Great had military campaigns versus where the administration of the Akkadian Empire solidified.¹³²⁴ According to military campaign accounts, Sargon the Great went as far as the Lebanese coast with references to the cedar trees in the record.¹³²⁵ The areas which are

¹³¹⁸ Weiss et al, 995.

¹³¹⁹ Ibid, 995.

¹³²⁰ Zettler, 25.

¹³²¹ Ibid, 25.

¹³²² Gibbons, 985.

¹³²³ Michalowski, 622.

¹³²⁴ Ibid, 600.

¹³²⁵ Ibid, 607.

known to have been under Akkadian control that were in Syria are mostly in the northeastern portion of the modern country.¹³²⁶ This is important to note as Eastern Syria even during the time of the Akkadian Empire was divided between mostly deserts in the southeast and the Khabur river valley in the northeast.¹³²⁷ What can also be assessed from the known long-term conquests are the locations of the cities, specifically how these cities were all along the route of the Euphrates river, meaning these cities were all along fertile land for agricultural production.¹³²⁸ There is however the exception of Ebla, which was located near the Latakian coast and gave the Akkadian Empire more direct access to the Mediterranean Sea.¹³²⁹

One of the major areas of Akkadian civilization in Syria was in the Northeast around the Habur Plains.¹³³⁰ This area was also along the Khabur river drainage, meaning that there was a direct supply of water for agriculture.¹³³¹ Syria under Akkadian rule was not monolithic in its geography and climate.¹³³² Firstly, Northern Mesopotamia is where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers originate, with the portions within modern Syria being easier for irrigation despite the region being reliant on rain-fed agriculture.¹³³³ Northern Mesopotamia sees these rivers cut into varying elevations, with a pattern of downcutting, creating a series of floodplains in the region.¹³³⁴ Downcutting meant that the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were deeper due to riverbed eroding. These deep cuts also made canal excavations more difficult, meaning irrigation was harder to perpetuate, with the exception of Khabur.¹³³⁵ Rainfall in Northern Mesopotamia was also more frequent than other areas on Western Asia, with average rainfall being around 300 millimeters a year.¹³³⁶ This made rain-fed or dry agriculture a sustainable means of cultivation for the agrarian populations and allowed for less complex urbanization patterns.¹³³⁷ Areas within Northern Mesopotamia with this high rainfall were infrequent in the region, with cultivable soil for agriculture being found almost

¹³²⁶ Zettler, 25.

¹³²⁷ Michalowski, 634.

¹³²⁸ Ur, 405.

¹³²⁹ Michalowski, 604.

¹³³⁰ Weiss et al, 995.

¹³³¹ Zettler, 17.

¹³³² Weiss et al, 997.

¹³³³ Ibid, 997.

¹³³⁴ Ibid, 1000.

¹³³⁵ Zettler, 17.

¹³³⁶ Cookson et al, 2.

¹³³⁷ Ibid, 2.

exclusively in the river valleys.¹³³⁸ Outside of these river valleys, Northern Mesopotamia was mostly steppe with lower rates of rainfall that could not sustain rain-fed agriculture.¹³³⁹

Interestingly, the sites for major urban centres in Northern Mesopotamia were not around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.¹³⁴⁰ Instead, settlements were located mostly around alluvial plains and basins in the northern portion of Northern Mesopotamia.¹³⁴¹ The areas with the most prominent settlements were the upper Khabur basin, the northern Khabur River, the plains along the Jebel Sajur in Iraq, the Sanjur basin in the western Euphrates, and the plains north of Jabbul Lake.¹³⁴² These areas were at the time places with deep cultivable soils and reliably high amounts of rainfall.¹³⁴³ Places along the Zagros Mountains were also home to similar conditions but did not see the same high pattern of settlement.¹³⁴⁴ The steppe regions were home to pastoral groups which during the summer months moved towards areas with rivers and high water content during the winter months or times of drought.¹³⁴⁵

Administration & Civic Structure

The administration of Syria under the Akkadian Empire was unique due to the previous actions of the Akkadians in the region.¹³⁴⁶ Syria during the rise of the Akkadian Empire was part of the later conquests by Sargon the Great.¹³⁴⁷ The polities which were located within this region, however, were not integrated directly into the Akkadian Empire.¹³⁴⁸ Instead, these polities were razed and looted first with the settlements then rebuilt by the Akkadians.¹³⁴⁹ This act of reconstruction after warfare not only helped to create polities in the image the Akkadians wanted, but also may have created a form of goodwill within the reestablished polities.¹³⁵⁰

Within Syria, examples of these pillaged and rebuilt polities include Mari, Ebla, and Tell Brak.¹³⁵¹ All three of these settlements predate the Akkadian Empire and were rebuilt

¹³³⁸ Weiss et al, 998.

¹³³⁹ Weiss, 446.

¹³⁴⁰ Weiss et al, 996.

¹³⁴¹ Zettler, 17.

¹³⁴² Ur, 390.

¹³⁴³ Ibid, 390.

¹³⁴⁴ Ibid, 390.

¹³⁴⁵ Ibid, 390.

¹³⁴⁶ Liverani (1993), 79.

¹³⁴⁷ Ibid, 79.

¹³⁴⁸ Ibid, 83.

¹³⁴⁹ Ibid, 82.

¹³⁵⁰ Schrakamp, 529.

¹³⁵¹ Ibid, 529.

after their conquests by the Akkadians.¹³⁵² To help with knowing how the administration of Syria worked in the Akkadian Empire, all three cities during this period will be looked into separately. Administration in Syria was different from the administration of the Akkadian Empire in Southern Mesopotamia.¹³⁵³ Archives have been found in an administrative building located in modern-day Khafajah in Iraq.¹³⁵⁴ The governor of this city was a member of the royal family, being a son of Naram-Sin, named Nabi-Ulmash.¹³⁵⁵ Other members of the royal family held major estates within the governorate.¹³⁵⁶ This archive shows how many people were employed by the governor. There were around eleven thousand who were employed to deal with agricultural, pastoral, and industrial affairs.¹³⁵⁷ The number of people employed also shows how close the court was to the royal court in Akkad proper.¹³⁵⁸ Furthermore, the city where this was found was not only the capital of the governorate but was also an outpost for the Akkadian Empire.¹³⁵⁹ Tell Leilan, a settlement fifty kilometers southwest of Tell Brak, is an example of a settlement which was overhauled by the Akkadians.¹³⁶⁰ Prior to the conquest of Northeastern Syria, the settlement was an agricultural village with only a small-scale administration.¹³⁶¹ With the arrival of the Akkadians, the entire system was replaced with a new system for the collection and redistribution of grain.¹³⁶²

Kingdom of Ebla

For the city of Ebla, it was the centre of a major polity called the Kingdom of Elba with its first iteration lasting for around seven hundred years starting around the year 3000 BC.¹³⁶³ The city of Elba was destroyed for the first time around the year 2300 BC, with the date for the destruction of Ebla coming from the destruction of the royal palace.¹³⁶⁴ The destruction of the palace is evidenced by fire damage which resulted in the preservation of

¹³⁵² Ibid, 529.

¹³⁵³ Watanabe et al, 1.

¹³⁵⁴ Schrakamp, 539.

¹³⁵⁵ Ibid, 539.

¹³⁵⁶ Ibid, 539.

¹³⁵⁷ Ibid, 539.

¹³⁵⁸ Liverani (1993), 122.

¹³⁵⁹ Schrakamp, 539.

¹³⁶⁰ Liverani (1993), 139.

¹³⁶¹ Liverani (2011), 57.

¹³⁶² Cookson et al, 5-6.

¹³⁶³ Cyrus Herzl Gordon, Gary Rendsburg, & Nathan H. Winter; (1987), *Eblaitica: Essays on the Ebla Archives and Eblaite Language*, Eisenbrauns, 218.

¹³⁶⁴ Ibid, 168.

clay tablets in the royal archives of the palace.¹³⁶⁵ This destruction of Ebla has been debated in regard to both the exact time and by whom.¹³⁶⁶ The early dating hypothesis puts the destruction between 2500 and 2400 BC with the later dates being more accepted in this context.¹³⁶⁷ In this case, the destruction was not done by the Akkadians but instead a different Mesopotamian ruler.¹³⁶⁸ Two rulers, Eannatum of Lagash and Lugalzagesi of Umma are speculated in this hypothesis as both rulers refer to tracking tribute from Mari or fighting as far as the Mediterranean Sea respectively.¹³⁶⁹ For the Akkadian hypothesis, both Sargon the Great and Naram-Sin are credited with the destruction of Ebla.¹³⁷⁰ Naram-Sin has multiple mentions involving the destruction of Ebla.¹³⁷¹ Two other proposals are also given with one being the result of a natural catastrophe.¹³⁷² This hypothesis comes from the lack of evidence of looting and destruction being relegated to the royal palace.¹³⁷³ The last hypothesis involved Mari which was the other major Syrian kingdom during the time of the Akkadian Empire.¹³⁷⁴

Kingdom of Mari

Mari was under the direct control of the Akkadians following its destruction around the year 2300 BC.¹³⁷⁵ Mari prior to its destruction by the Akkadians was one of the major Amorite kingdoms in Syria.¹³⁷⁶ Around a decade before the Akkadian destruction was a conflict between the Mari and Ebla kingdoms, which resulted in the destruction of Ebla.¹³⁷⁷ While there are arguments on whether Ebla was destroyed by the Mari Kingdom or the Akkadian Empire, the destruction of Mari is credited to the Akkadian Empire.¹³⁷⁸ Knowledge of this destruction comes from a year name used by the Akkadians called “Year in which Mari was destroyed.”¹³⁷⁹ An inscription about Sargon the Great also gives political context which shows Elam was already under Akkadian suzerainty, with Mari also becoming a

¹³⁶⁵ Ibid, 60.

¹³⁶⁶ Liverani (2011), 117.

¹³⁶⁷ Ibid, 117.

¹³⁶⁸ Ibid, 117.

¹³⁶⁹ Gordon et al, 148.

¹³⁷⁰ Foster, 88.

¹³⁷¹ Michalowski, 623.

¹³⁷² Gordon et al, 168.

¹³⁷³ Ibid, 110.

¹³⁷⁴ Foster, 88.

¹³⁷⁵ Liverani (2011), 13.

¹³⁷⁶ Ibid, 13.

¹³⁷⁷ Foster, 76.

¹³⁷⁸ Ibid, 76.

¹³⁷⁹ Ibid, 78.

tributary state.¹³⁸⁰ Mari was not restored until Manishtushu, who ruled the Akkadian Empire from around 2270 BC until 2255 BC.¹³⁸¹ Direct control over the city is evidenced under the reign of Naram-Sin as he appointed two of his daughters as priestly officers in Mari.¹³⁸² There was also a governor appointed to the city of Mari by the Akkadians.¹³⁸³ This governor, or “Shakkanakku,” became the name of the ruling dynasty of Mari under Akkadian rule.¹³⁸⁴ The reason for this dynastic claim is due to familial succession after the appointment of the first Shakkanakku Ididish.¹³⁸⁵ During this period, a new palace was built on the location of the original palace in Mari, with a second one constructed in the eastern part with royal burials.¹³⁸⁶ Other acts of reconstruction occurred including the reinforcement of the old defences and the rebuilding of some of the old temples.¹³⁸⁷ The Shakkanakku dynasty did survive past the reign of the Akkadians, becoming a de facto independent polity under the vassalage of the Third Dynasty of Ur.¹³⁸⁸

Tell Brak, the Kingdom of Nagar

Tell Brak was a polity which was settled according to earliest material records around the year 6500 BC.¹³⁸⁹ Tell Brak was located in the modern Al-Hasakah Governorate in Syria, about fifty kilometers north east of the capital city Al-Hasaka.¹³⁹⁰ Prior to the conquest of the polity by the Akkadian Empire, Tell Brak saw itself become the Kingdom of Nagar.¹³⁹¹ Nagar was the name of Tell Brak in antiquity.¹³⁹² This is believed to be connected to the rise of the Kish civilization, which included the Proto-Akkadian settlements, Ebla, and Mari.¹³⁹³ During this period, Tell Brak, called Nagar, was a major polity encompassing multiple other city states and was equal in power to Ebla.¹³⁹⁴ Around the year 2300 BC, the settlement was destroyed with both Mari and Sargon the Great being credited with the destruction.¹³⁹⁵

¹³⁸⁰ Zettler, 22.

¹³⁸¹ Kramer, 59.

¹³⁸² Liverani (1993), 82.

¹³⁸³ Trevor Bryce, (2014), *Ancient Syria: A Three Thousand Year History*, OUP Oxford, 18.

¹³⁸⁴ Ibid, 18.

¹³⁸⁵ Ibid, 18.

¹³⁸⁶ Foster, 77.

¹³⁸⁷ Ibid, 77.

¹³⁸⁸ Bryce, 18.

¹³⁸⁹ Liverani (2011), 83.

¹³⁹⁰ Ibid, 84.

¹³⁹¹ Ibid, 116.

¹³⁹² Ibid, 116.

¹³⁹³ Zettler, 25.

¹³⁹⁴ Ibid, 25.

¹³⁹⁵ Jason Ur, Philip Karsgaard, & Joan Oates; (2011), “The Spatial Dimensions of Early

In either case, the Akkadian Empire is credited with the rebuilding of the settlement, becoming a provincial administration centre.¹³⁹⁶ During this period, Tell Brak saw construction of buildings by the Akkadian Empire in the FS and SS portions of the city.¹³⁹⁷ Regions FS and SS in Tell Brak refer to the southwesternmost and northeasternmost sections of the settlement respectively.¹³⁹⁸ In area FS, a building complex was constructed with a caravan inn for visiting merchant traders and a temple dedicated to Šamagan.¹³⁹⁹ Šamagan was the god of animals and the steppe in Syrian and Mesopotamian mythology, being associated with mules, sheep, and donkeys.¹⁴⁰⁰ In this context, the temple was likely erected for local agricultural communities rather than for travelling merchants.¹⁴⁰¹ These buildings being located in area FS were also near the main gate to the city, meaning these were the first buildings those from outside the settlement would see.¹⁴⁰²

One interesting aspect of how Tell Brak was administered is the use of native people from the polity in the collection of taxes.¹⁴⁰³ This was likely done during the early phase of Akkadian administration to help streamline the process of integrating the polity into the empire.¹⁴⁰⁴ At one point after the conquest of Nagar, the polity was abandoned until the reign of Naram-Sin who constructed a “palace.”¹⁴⁰⁵ The Palace of Naram-Sin was less so a palace and more a fortress which was used to protect tribute which was deposited in the polity.¹⁴⁰⁶ It was after this return to Nagar by Naram-Sin that the local autonomy was replaced with a mass movement of Akkadians which replaced the original local power and as a means to avoid a similar abandonment happening again.¹⁴⁰⁷ Lastly, the reason for the abandonment of Tell Brak before Naram-Sin is associated with a stratigraphic layer of soil found underneath the Palace of Naram-Sin.¹⁴⁰⁸ This layer showed evidence that the region was affected by a

Mesopotamian Urbanism: The Tell Brak Suburban Survey, 2003-2006,” *Iraq*, 1.

¹³⁹⁶ Ibid, 12.

¹³⁹⁷ Liverani (2011), 137.

¹³⁹⁸ Liverani (1993), 80.

¹³⁹⁹ Foster, 79.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Wilfred G. Lambert, (2013), *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 513.

¹⁴⁰¹ Foster, 78.

¹⁴⁰² Liverani (1993), 79-80.

¹⁴⁰³ Ibid, 81.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Schrakamp, 529.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Ur et al, 11.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Liverani (1993), 81.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Weiss et al, 998.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Ur, 407.

long period of drought which made the settlement temporarily uninhabitable for permanent settlement.¹⁴⁰⁹

SECTION III: Climate Change, Migration, & The End of the Akkadian Empire

The collapse of the Akkadian Empire came with a series of crop failures followed by migrations by neighboring communities, specifically the Gutians.¹⁴¹⁰ The fall of the Akkadian Empire was followed by a “Dark Age” in Southern Mesopotamia.¹⁴¹¹ The region did not see a major polity for another one hundred years with the Third Dynasty of Ur.¹⁴¹² The date for the end of the Akkadian Empire is estimated to be around the year 2154 BC.¹⁴¹³ Shar-Kali-Sharri, the fifth ruler of the Akkadian Empire, was the last before a series of internal conflicts plagued the polity, with four kings taking power in the span of approximately four years.¹⁴¹⁴ It was during this period that the southern Sumerian city states began to assert themselves as independent from Akkadian rule.¹⁴¹⁵ It was this weakening in Southern Mesopotamia which enabled groups surrounding the Akkadian Empire in this region to move in.¹⁴¹⁶ Reasons for these migrations can vary, however there is correlation with the decline of the Akkadian Empire with climatic shifts and declining crop output.¹⁴¹⁷ The last king of the Akkadians, Shu-turul, along with his predecessor Dudu are credited with attempting to recentralize the Akkadian Empire.¹⁴¹⁸ Something to note about these later kings is that neither have direct evidence of their reigns.¹⁴¹⁹ Instead, much of the evidence comes from later artefacts which reference their reigns.¹⁴²⁰ The problem is that polities during this period were heavily reliant on the agricultural output of the population.¹⁴²¹ If agricultural yields were low, then taxes and tribute were not being paid, meaning the polity had to rely on alternate means of producing funds such as raiding.¹⁴²² With a lack of means to maintain their

¹⁴⁰⁹ Weiss et al, 998.

¹⁴¹⁰ Liverani (1993), 101.

¹⁴¹¹ Liverani (2011), 578.

¹⁴¹² Weiss et al, 1002.

¹⁴¹³ Danti, 156.

¹⁴¹⁴ Frayne, 209.

¹⁴¹⁵ Roux, 158.

¹⁴¹⁶ Danti, 156.

¹⁴¹⁷ Cookson et al, 7.

¹⁴¹⁸ Frayne, 210.

¹⁴¹⁹ Roux, 158.

¹⁴²⁰ Frayne. 210.

¹⁴²¹ Schrakamp, 528.

¹⁴²² Michalowski, 614.

own hegemony, the Akkadian Empire naturally devolved politically from a centralized polity back to the original style of governance.¹⁴²³ In this context, the Akkadian Empire was unable to adapt to a long-term shift in the climate of Western Asia and with it the polity slowly contracted until formerly frontier peoples were able to overwhelm the polity and conquer it for themselves.¹⁴²⁴ Another problem was that the agricultural practices during the Akkadian Empire were intended to maximize output without a lot of long term planning.¹⁴²⁵

The 4.2 Kiloyear Event

The 4.2 Kiloyear event was the most significant climactic shift during the middle to late Holocene period.¹⁴²⁶ During this period, the heightened aridity and intensification of dust atoms led to the collapse of the Akkadian Empire.¹⁴²⁷ In the case of crop failure, the Akkadian agricultural system was dependent both on irrigation and rainfall.¹⁴²⁸ The fall of the Akkadian Empire correlates with a long period of drought.¹⁴²⁹ More specifically, this was the 4.2 kiloyear event, which lasted for around one hundred years.¹⁴³⁰ This climactic event was an aridification event leading to large scale drought conditions across much of the world.¹⁴³¹ There were portions of the world which saw large-scale flooding as well, such as in Balochistan, however in the case of Western Asia the entire region saw large scale dust storms and drought conditions.¹⁴³² These drought conditions started around 2200 BC and ended after the collapse of the Akkadian Empire.¹⁴³³ The 4.2 kiloyear event is credited not only with the end of the Akkadian Empire, but also the Old Kingdom of Egypt, the Liangzhu Civilization in China, the Indus Valley Civilization, and the migration of Indo-Europeans into India.¹⁴³⁴ The latter movement of Indo-Europeans into India also helps in understanding the migrations of people across modern Iran which was a factor for the collapse of the Akkadian

¹⁴²³ Danti, 157.

¹⁴²⁴ Ibid, 156.

¹⁴²⁵ Cookson et al, 7.

¹⁴²⁶ Áslaug Geirsdóttir, Gifford H. Miller, John T. Andrews, David J. Harning, Leif S. Anderson, Christopher Florian, Darren J. Larsen, & Thor Thordarson; (2018), "The onset of neoglaciation in Iceland and the 4.2ka event," *Climate of the Past*, 15, 25.

¹⁴²⁷ Danti, 156.

¹⁴²⁸ Gibbons, 985.

¹⁴²⁹ Ibid, 985.

¹⁴³⁰ Bassem Jalali, Marie-Alexandrine Sicre, Julien Azuara, Violaine Pellichero, & Nathalie Combourieu-Nebout; (2019), "Influence of the North Atlantic subpolar gyre circulation on the 4.2kaBP event," *Climate of the Past*, 15, 701.

¹⁴³¹ Kerr, 326.

¹⁴³² Gibbons, 985.

¹⁴³³ Jalali et al, 701.

¹⁴³⁴ Cookson et al, 1.

Empire.¹⁴³⁵ With a climactic shift, migrations also become much more likely as when there is an instance of climatic change, people in more volatile environments who can move will move to areas with more resources.¹⁴³⁶ While Iran had more resources which Western Asian polities wanted, Mesopotamia and Khurzestan had more arable land for both agriculture and pastoralism.¹⁴³⁷ Much of the evidence for the fall of the Akkadian Empire is credited to a chronic series of crop failures which the empire could not adapt to.¹⁴³⁸ Mesopotamia during the 4.2 kiloyear event was one of the worst affected by the drought conditions.¹⁴³⁹ This was because of not only the drier conditions directly affecting the area, but also the lack of irrigation infrastructure to maintain agricultural outputs.¹⁴⁴⁰ Instead, Northern Mesopotamian agriculture was reliant on seasonal rainfall to maintain crop yields, making the region more reliant on a stable climate.¹⁴⁴¹ The eruption of Helka 3 in Iceland may also have caused this climactic shift.¹⁴⁴² There have also been pollen samples which were found in Lake Zeribar in Iran which confirms that soil quality during this period degraded.¹⁴⁴³ Specifically, pollen from *Sanguisorba Minor*, a drought tolerant plant, was found in a core dating to the Akkadian Empire.¹⁴⁴⁴

¹⁴³⁵ Speiser, 100.

¹⁴³⁶ Cookson et al, 5.

¹⁴³⁷ Weiss et al, 1002.

¹⁴³⁸ Ibid, 326.

¹⁴³⁹ Danti, 156.

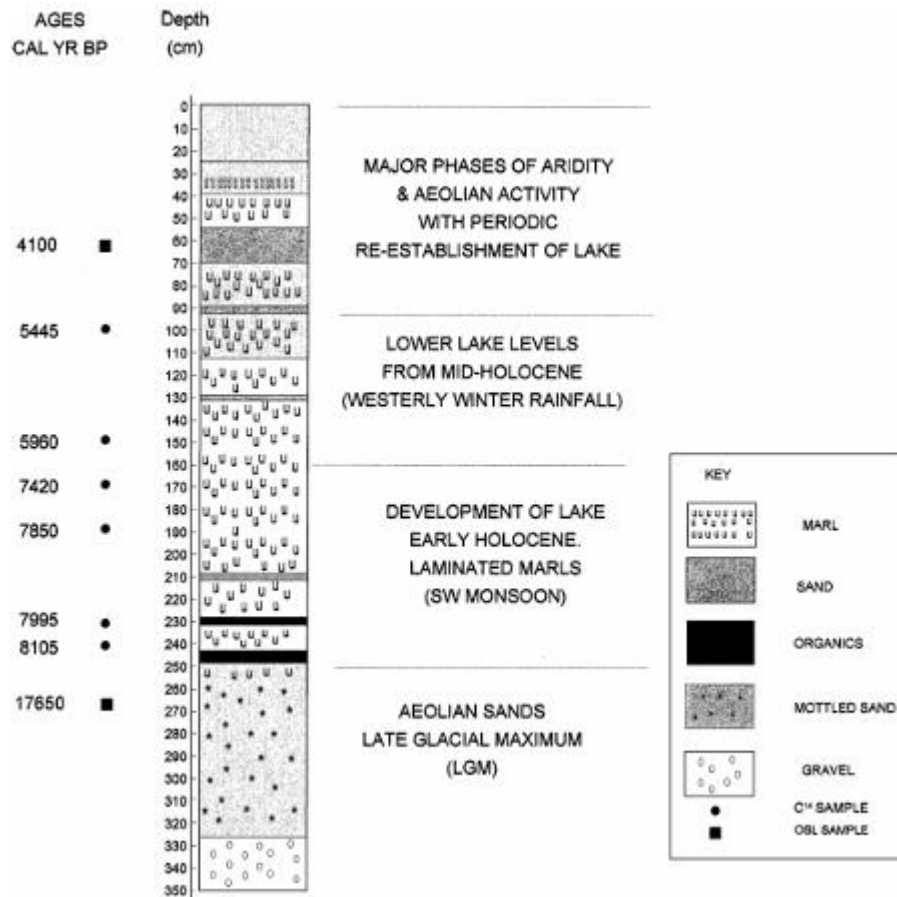
¹⁴⁴⁰ Gibbons, 985.

¹⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 985.

¹⁴⁴² Geirsdóttir et al, 26.

¹⁴⁴³ Cookson et al, 4.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Zettler, 17.



(Figure 4: Awafi sediment profile showing material shifts in stratigraphic layers [Parker et al, 469])

Collapse of Agriculture

This collapse in the Northern Mesopotamian agricultural industry meant that the Akkadian Empire now did not have enough food to provide for the Southern Mesopotamian population.¹⁴⁴⁵ Furthermore, areas which needed irrigation had the problem of lowering water levels in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, with the two rivers falling around 1.5 meters since 2600 BC.¹⁴⁴⁶ For Western Asia, the 4.2 kiloyear event was a period of rising aridity which was the result of Bond event 3.¹⁴⁴⁷ Bond event 3 was the cooling of surface temperatures in the Northern Atlantic ocean.¹⁴⁴⁸ Cooler temperatures in the Northern Atlantic result in less

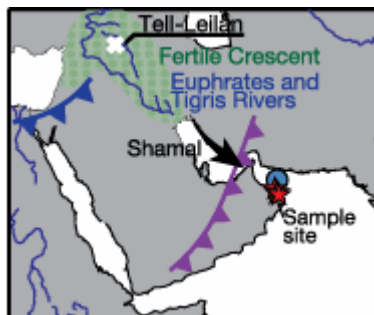
¹⁴⁴⁵ Michalowski, 626.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Watanabe et al, 4.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Monica Bini, Giovanni Zanchetta, Aurel Perșoiu, Rosine Cartier, Albert Català, Isabel Cacho, Jonathan R. Dean, Federico Di Rita, Russell N. Drysdale, Martin Finnè, Ilaria Isola, Bassem Jalali, Fabrizio Lirer, Donatella Magri, Alessia Masi, Leszek Marks, Anna Maria Mercuri, Odile Peyron, Laura Sadori, Marie-Alexandrine Sicre, Fabian Welc, Christoph Zielhofer, & Elodie Brisset; (2019), "The 4.2kaBP Event in the Mediterranean region: an overview," *Climate of the Past*, 15, 561.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Jalali et al, 703.

water capture for the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which rely on rainfall from the Mediterranean.¹⁴⁴⁹ The settlement of Tell Leilan in Northeastern Syria has been used to show that this climactic shift was abrupt rather than a gradual change.¹⁴⁵⁰ Lasting approximately 250 to 300 years, Northern Mesopotamia saw a rise in aridification combined with cooling temperatures.¹⁴⁵¹ These changes alone made large scale agriculture more difficult especially in a region which the Akkadian Empire heavily relied on consistent harvest outputs.¹⁴⁵² Other effects included potential shifts in seasonality and an increase of dust storms and deforestation.¹⁴⁵³ Northern Mesopotamia, where a large amount of agriculture was practiced that the Akkaiaans relied on, was not predominately fed through irrigation systems.¹⁴⁵⁴ Instead, the agriculture in the region was dependent on rain-fed systems.¹⁴⁵⁵ Hydroclimate simulations showed that the precipitation rate in the Tigris and Euphrates river basins were at their lowest during the fall of the Akkadian Empire.¹⁴⁵⁶ These precipitation rates also correlate with an increase in temperatures in the Syrian Euphrates.¹⁴⁵⁷ With these factors, the Akkadian Empire with its centralized power being based around agriculture and the distribution of these goods to the population may have seen a heightened rate of taxation followed by the abandonment of settlements.¹⁴⁵⁸



(Figure 5: Map showing the site of Tell Leilan, the coral & sediment sample sites in the Gulf of Oman, and the location of cold fronts which create a shamal event [Watanabe et al, 2]).

Evidence from Oman Corals

¹⁴⁴⁹ Bini et al, 569.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Liverani (1993), 141-142.

¹⁴⁵¹ Ibid, 143.

¹⁴⁵² Gibbons, 985.

¹⁴⁵³ Ibid, 985.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Liverani (1993), 146.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, 146.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Cookson et al, 2.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Schrakamp, 550.

What is known about this climatological event comes from evidence found in the Gulf of Oman.¹⁴⁵⁹ This evidence varies within the Gulf of Oman, and in the case of coral fossils, this came through carbon dating and analysis.¹⁴⁶⁰ The reason for using coral fossils is because coral can be used to show climactic shifts in a region.¹⁴⁶¹ Further points of evidence The results of the test showed that the regression of coral in the Gulf of Oman correlated with the prolonging of winter winds called shamal.¹⁴⁶² The Gulf of Oman is where other pieces of evidence have been found for drought conditions in Mesopotamia.¹⁴⁶³ A sediment core which was excavated from the Gulf of Oman reaching two meters was used to find evidence of drought conditions in Northern Mesopotamia.¹⁴⁶⁴ In this find, researchers from the University of Kiel analyzed the core for dolomite, quartz, and calcite which are found in shamal.¹⁴⁶⁵ The results showed that a portion of the core dated via C-14 to around 2000 BC plus or minus 100 years saw rates of these materials at double to sextuple the average for the core.¹⁴⁶⁶ This high concentration of materials found in the core lasted for around 100 years after the initial spike was recorded.¹⁴⁶⁷ The reason for the Gulf of Oman showing this evidence is because the winds from Northern Mesopotamia move these materials down towards Southern Mesopotamia and into the Gulf of Oman.¹⁴⁶⁸ This event evidenced in the Gulf of Oman does not only show a severe drought and climatic shift in Mesopotamia, but also one which affected areas as far west as modern Greece and as far east as modern Pakistan.¹⁴⁶⁹ Other places where evidence has been found include lakes in Arabia as well as in Iceland and Greenland. In the case of the former, this comes from geochemical analyses in southeastern Arabia, specifically around the modern United Arab Emirates.¹⁴⁷⁰ The results from sedimentary research found that from the time of the Akkadian Empire, there were major phases of aridity and aeolian activity.¹⁴⁷¹

¹⁴⁵⁹ Kerr, 325.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Watanabe et al, 1.

¹⁴⁶¹ Lauren T. Toth & Richard B. Aronson, (2019), "The 4.2ka event, ENSO, and coral reef development," *Climate of the Past*, 106.

¹⁴⁶² Parker et al, 467.

¹⁴⁶³ Watanabe et al, 1.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Parker et al, 468.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, 472.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 468.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Bini et al, 556.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, 568.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Jalali et al, 708.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Parker et al, 472.

¹⁴⁷¹ Watanabe et al, 1.

Evidence from Tell Brak & Tell Leilan

From excavations at a settlement found in the Al-Hasakah Governorate in Syria, Tell Leilan, there was construction of a large wall to protect the city from around 2200 BC.¹⁴⁷² The settlement of Tell Leilan was already a major trading site and was part of a larger expansion of the settlement.¹⁴⁷³ Evidence from the site has been found due to a one meter layer of sediment which showed no evidence of human habitation.¹⁴⁷⁴ This layer of sediment contained wind-blown sand with no evidence of faunal activity.¹⁴⁷⁵ The sediment layer shows that there was a mass abandonment of the site by people due to the drastic climactic shift.¹⁴⁷⁶

This correlates with what has been found at Tell Brak and Tell Leilan with the layer of wind-driven sand and a lack of faunal activity.¹⁴⁷⁷ What this layer also showed was a remission of bodies of fresh water with occasional returns, which helps to confirm the Tell Brak abandonment.¹⁴⁷⁸ Tell Leilan also has evidence of this extreme rise in dust sediments as a layer of soil was found which showed a sudden spike in aridity around 2200 BC with the layer showing approximately 300 years of aridity.¹⁴⁷⁹ Contents in the soil included a lack of earthworm holes and wind-blown pellets of dust.¹⁴⁸⁰ Another piece of evidence found in this soil was volcanic ash which is found just below the arid layer.¹⁴⁸¹ While it is true that the Akkadian Empire was able to react to environmental changes such as a rise in salination in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, this shift correlated with larger-scale climactic shifts and human migration resulting from said shifts.¹⁴⁸² This meant that not only did this weaken the internal production of the Akkadian economy and administration, but also the trading partners which the Akkadians had as far away as the Indus River Valley.¹⁴⁸³ This internal weakening was also in the main centre of agricultural production for the Akkadian Empire, Northern Mesopotamia.¹⁴⁸⁴ With a lower output meant movements of sedentary populations which is evidenced from abandonment layers found in settlements in Northeastern Syria.¹⁴⁸⁵

¹⁴⁷² Ibid, 995.

¹⁴⁷³ Ibid, 1000.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Zettler, 17.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Watanabe et al, 1.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Kerr, 325.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Kerr, 325.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Weiss et al, 1002.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, 1002.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Kerr, 325.

¹⁴⁸¹ Ibid, 326.

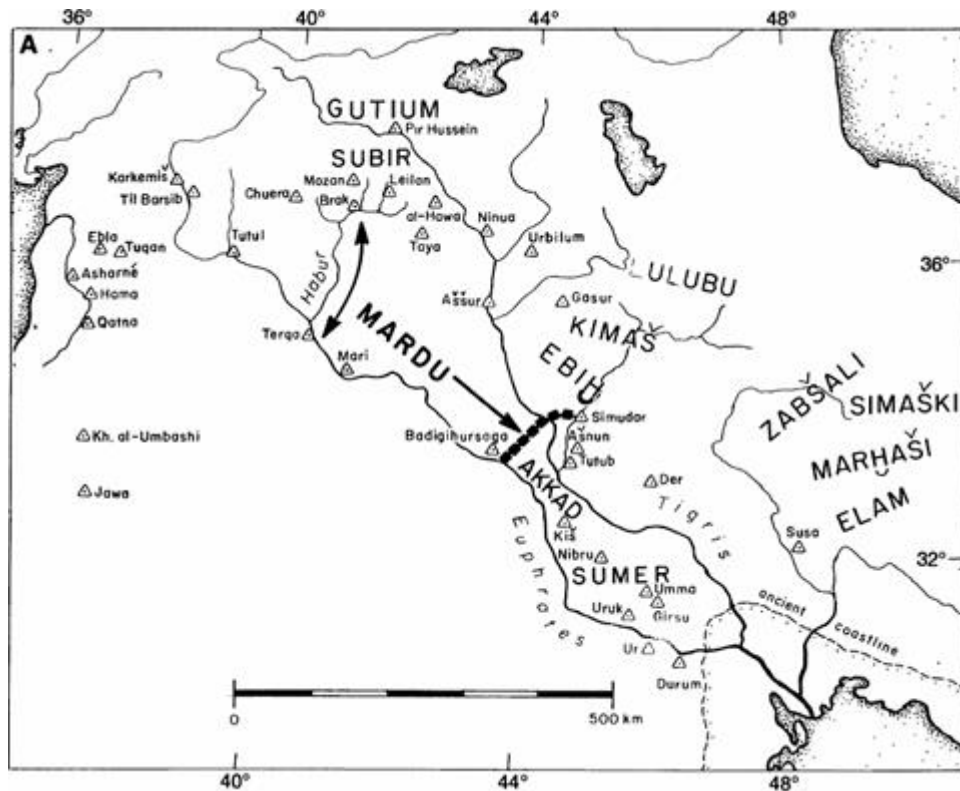
¹⁴⁸² Weiss, 451.

¹⁴⁸³ Zettler, 17.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 17.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, 17.

Furthermore, there is evidence of the migration of other peoples into this region such as the Hurrians and Amorites.¹⁴⁸⁶ A lack of available resources for these pastoral and semi-nomadic populations to share with the agrarian populations meant competition and conflict between the two groups.¹⁴⁸⁷



(Figure 6: Map of Syria & Mesopotamia [Weiss et al, 995]).

Migration of Peoples

Another aspect of the fall of the Akkadian Empire came in tandem with the 4.2 kiloyear event. A final aspect, which was a reaction to the 4.2 kiloyear event, was the migration of peoples into Mesopotamia.¹⁴⁸⁸ This migration was neither unprecedented in Western Asian history nor the last time this occurred as the Akkadians were Semitic in origin and culture with their arrival replacing the previous Sumerian population.¹⁴⁸⁹ In the case of the Akkadian Empire, there were two main movements of people which correlated with the collapse of the polity.¹⁴⁹⁰ These were the Gutians, which migrated into Mesopotamia, and the Elamites who conquered portions of Mesopotamia but remained largely in their traditional

¹⁴⁸⁶ Liverani (1993), 75.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Cookson et al, 7.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Kramer, 233.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Gibbons, 985.

territory.¹⁴⁹¹ These migrations, unlike others from similar areas in Western Asia, did not see a long term shift in demographics or political power.¹⁴⁹² Instead, these migrations were either temporary conquests or the cause of minor polities.¹⁴⁹³ In the case of the Gutians, their power in Southern Mesopotamia lasted for around one hundred years.¹⁴⁹⁴ After this, the region returned back to being under the rule of the Sumerians.¹⁴⁹⁵ For Elam, the conquest of Southern Mesopotamia did not see significant change to the politics of the region, with the Gutians later conquering the Elamites.¹⁴⁹⁶ Compared to other migrations, such as the Akkadians and Kassites, these had less effect on the region in the long term.¹⁴⁹⁷ Instead, the collapse of the Akkadian Empire came with the rebounding of the Amorite kingdoms in Syria.¹⁴⁹⁸ Amorites during the collapse of the Akkadian Empire did move into Akkadian territory in Northern Mesopotamia and Syria as well.¹⁴⁹⁹ The main reason being the decline in accessible sources of fresh water in the region.¹⁵⁰⁰ During this period, the Akkadian Empire erected a wall in Northern Mesopotamia called the “Repeller of the Amorites” which was approximately 180 kilometers long.¹⁵⁰¹ While the Amorites were a major group which migrated into Mesopotamia, they did not become the dominant group in Mesopotamia until after the end of the Third Dynasty of Ur.¹⁵⁰²

The Elamites

The Elamites were one of the two major groups which invaded and destroyed the Akkadian Empire along with the Gutians.¹⁵⁰³ Elam, unlike the Gutians, have a lot more documentation, with the polity of Elam originating around the year 3200 BC and lasting until its conquest by the Achaemenid Empire around 539 BC.¹⁵⁰⁴ As a civilization, the Elam was around for the emergence of the Sumerian civilization and was not a single polity, but instead

¹⁴⁹¹ Zettler, 23.

¹⁴⁹² Ibid, 23.

¹⁴⁹³ Ibid, 23.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Frayne, 219.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Kramer, 37.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Liverani (2011), 142.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Liverani (1993), 141.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, 1002.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Zettler, 23.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, 17.

¹⁵⁰¹ Weiss et al, 1002.

¹⁵⁰² Ibid, 1002.

¹⁵⁰³ Schrakamp, 528.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Liverani (2011), 193.

a collection of small kingdoms.¹⁵⁰⁵ The kingdoms were located from Khurzestan to the northernmost region of Persis.¹⁵⁰⁶ Elam was also unique in its language, with Elamite having no known related languages, making it a language isolate similar to Sumerian.¹⁵⁰⁷ The conquest of Elam by Sargon the Great was not the first subjugation of the Elamite people, as the king of Kish, Enmebaragesi, had conquered the region during his reign around 2750 BC.¹⁵⁰⁸ The conquest of Elam by Sargon the Great occurred during the Awan dynasty, which lasted from around 2350 BC to around 2150 BC.¹⁵⁰⁹ These dates show that the polity existed from its conquest by the Akkadians until a short period after the fall of the Akkadian Empire.¹⁵¹⁰ The Awan dynasty was the first Elamite dynasty recorded in history, which may come from both the Akkadian conquest and the desire for resources in the region by people in Mesopotamia.¹⁵¹¹ These resources were wood, stone, and metal, all of which were sparse in Mesopotamia.¹⁵¹² The conquest of Elam came during the reign of Luh-ishan, the eighth known king from the Awan Dynasty.¹⁵¹³ As with other conquests by the Akkadians, the capital of Awan, the namesake of the Awan Dynasty, was plundered.¹⁵¹⁴ Full control by the Akkadians did not fully come to fruition until the reign of Rimush, the son and successor of Sargon the Great.¹⁵¹⁵ The conquest occurred during the reign of the Elamite king Emahsini who is not mentioned in the Awan king list.¹⁵¹⁶ During the rule of the Akkadian Empire, administrative reforms included the change of the administrative language from Elamite to Akkadian as a means of centralizing power.¹⁵¹⁷ Despite this centralization, the rulership of Elam under the Akkadians was done through the Elamite kings.¹⁵¹⁸ Another point about the administration was that despite the de facto vassalage of the Awan Dynasty, it was the westernmost parts of the Elamite region which was under Akkadian control.¹⁵¹⁹ The administration of the Elamites under Akkadian control was Susa, however the capital was

¹⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, 142.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 142.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Woodard, 47.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Michalowski, 606.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Liverani (2011), 142.

¹⁵¹⁰ Ibid, 142.

¹⁵¹¹ Ibid, 135.

¹⁵¹² Kramer, 62.

¹⁵¹³ Liverani (2011), 142.

¹⁵¹⁴ Ibid, 142.

¹⁵¹⁵ Michalowski, 610.

¹⁵¹⁶ Liverani (2011), 142.

¹⁵¹⁷ Speiser, 101.

¹⁵¹⁸ Liverani (2011), 142.

¹⁵¹⁹ Ibid, 142.

Anshan, which was never under Akkadian control.¹⁵²⁰ This lack of full control of the Elamite kings meant that the region remained a fairly unstable region of the Akkadian Empire until the collapse of the empire.¹⁵²¹ It was during the decline of the Akkadian Empire when the Awan Dynasty under Kutik-Inshushinak, also called Puzur-Inshushinak, overthrew the rule of the Akkadian Empire.¹⁵²² Puzur-Inshushinak was the governor of Susa as well as the head of the Awan Dynasty, being the last known king from the Awan Dynasty.¹⁵²³ The initial uprising and separation from the Akkadian Empire was not the end of the actions he committed against the Akkadians, as Puzur-Inshushinak continued his conquest westward.¹⁵²⁴ This conquest occurred in tandem with the Gutian migrations into Southern Mesopotamia.¹⁵²⁵ First The result of these conquests was the regaining of Anshan, the capital of the Elamite kingdom, and the destruction of the Akkadian Empire with the conquest of Akkad itself.¹⁵²⁶ An interesting point about the conquest of Akkad by Puzur-Inshushinak was that he declared himself “King of the Four Quarters,” a term used for the Akkadian rulers.¹⁵²⁷ These conquests by the Elamites were short-lived as the Gutians and the Lullubi, a group of people from the Zagros Mountains around the modern Sulatamaniyah Governorate of Iraq.¹⁵²⁸ From this point the Elamites became subjects of the Gutians until around 2112 BC.¹⁵²⁹

The Gutians

The main group which is credited with the destruction of the Akkadian Empire were the Gutians.¹⁵³⁰ Not much is known about the Gutians as a people with sparse records from other polities and cultures.¹⁵³¹ The Gutians were one of the peoples which the Akkadians were able to subjugate after conflict with the Akkadian king Sharkalisharri.¹⁵³² They, along with the Elamites, were able to break free from Akkadian control due to the failed attempts to recentralize the empire in the Zagros Mountain region.¹⁵³³ The Gutian people were not related

¹⁵²⁰ Michalowski, 612.

¹⁵²¹ Liverani (1993), 71.

¹⁵²² Liverani (2011), 142.

¹⁵²³ Ibid, 142.

¹⁵²⁴ Ibid, 142.

¹⁵²⁵ Speiser, 100.

¹⁵²⁶ Ibid, 100.

¹⁵²⁷ Liverani (2011), 142.

¹⁵²⁸ Michalowski, 621.

¹⁵²⁹ Foster, 267.

¹⁵³⁰ Zettler, 17.

¹⁵³¹ Liverani (2011), 153.

¹⁵³² Speiser, 100.

¹⁵³³ Ibid, 100.

to any other ethnic or cultural group in the area, which was similar to the Elamites and Lullian people.¹⁵³⁴ The Gutians during the reign of the Akkadian Empire were able to move into Mesopotamia, with their capital being the city of Adab, the modern city of Bismaya in Iraq.¹⁵³⁵ Around the year 2220 BC, the Gutians overran the Akkadian Empire, overthrew the recently independent Sumerian city-states, and established themselves as a hegemon in Southern Mesopotamia.¹⁵³⁶ The exact amount of time when the Gutians controlled Southern Mesopotamia is not known, however estimates place the time from as little as forty years to around a century.¹⁵³⁷ A king list of the Gutians claims there were twenty-one kings who reigned for a combined ninety-one years and forty days.¹⁵³⁸ From the little textual evidence available about the Gutians, they are treated as incompetent or as a ravaging horde destroying the structure of the old city-states.¹⁵³⁹ Examples from cuneiform sources showed the Gutians as attempting to impose their way of life onto the Sumerian, Elamite, and Akkadian populations.¹⁵⁴⁰ One alleged case from cuneiform sources include the Gutian administration forcing agricultural populations to transition to nomadic and pastoral lifestyles by releasing farm animals, which is the possible cause of famine in the region.¹⁵⁴¹ Despite these administrative overhauls, the Gutian rulers used the Akkadian title of “King of the Four Quarters,” again showing the influence the Akkadians had on political legitimacy and power.¹⁵⁴²

SECTION IV: Conclusion

The collapse of the Akkadian Empire is an example of an inability for a system to adapt. The Akkadian Empire went from the first empire in the world to a legacy in the span of a few generations. This was not because of one singular event, but multiple events building up on each other, leading to the polity being unable to adapt in a fast enough manner.

Power Politics

One major aspect which led to the collapse of the Akkadian Empire was its instability once a ruler died. With the death of Sargon the Great there were attempts by regions within

¹⁵³⁴ Liverani (2011), 153.

¹⁵³⁵ Liverani (1993), 144.

¹⁵³⁶ Liverani (2011), 153.

¹⁵³⁷ Kramer, 66.

¹⁵³⁸ Frayne, 219.

¹⁵³⁹ Kramer, 64.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Liverani (1993), 157.

¹⁵⁴¹ Ibid, 157.

¹⁵⁴² Liverani (2011), 153.

the empire to leave.¹⁵⁴³ Pretenders, family members who claimed rulership, also rose up to assert themselves as the legitimate ruler.¹⁵⁴⁴ These are seen in the victory steles for later rulers such as Naram-Sin in the aftermath of the Great Revolt¹⁵⁴⁵. This problem of succession was never fully resolved, with the collapse of Akkad coinciding with a series of four kings in the span of around thirty years. This instability led to both a reduction in the size and power projection of the empire. In some ways, similarities can be found between the collapse of the Akkadian Empire with the start of the Syrian Civil War.

Migrations

In both cases there were regional identities with differing ways of life trying to assert themselves. In the case of the Akkadians there were the Gutians, who went beyond succession and became the new rulers of Southern Mesopotamia. Their attempts at forcing a new way of life onto the people of Southern Mesopotamia is also similar to the actions taken by the Islamic State. The Islamic State during their occupation of Syria and Iraq forced communities to live under their interpretation of Islamic law and their own way of life.¹⁵⁴⁶

Climate Change

Climate change also led to the fall of the Akkadian Empire, with the 4.2 kiloyear event resulting in dryer conditions and stunting crop production. This reduction came from a reliance on rain-fed agriculture, specifically wheat in Northeastern Syria.¹⁵⁴⁷ What this also meant was there was damage to the economy as irrigated crops were mostly barley due to high salinization.¹⁵⁴⁸ Barley being less valuable than wheat meant less taxes and less economic power for the Akkadian Empire.¹⁵⁴⁹ What the collapse of the Akkadian Empire has shown is that even with some reforms, there is always a requirement for failsafes in a system.

¹⁵⁴³ Frayne, 85.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Zettler, 20.

¹⁵⁴⁵ McKeon, 239.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Florence Gaub, "Syrian Separation: Why Division Is Not the Answer." *Federal Academy for Security Policy*, 2016. 2-3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep22211>.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Gibbons, 985.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Cookson et al, 5-6.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Gibbons, 985.

Conclusion

When beginning this thesis paper, the original intention was to simply compare the migrations of peoples during the Late Bronze Age Collapse with those during the 2011 Syrian Arab Spring. With this, the plan was to find evidence which could prove the theory of Mario Liverani correct. This theory being the destruction of Ugarit and other polities in the Late Bronze Age were not due to a “Sea Peoples” but instead from local migrations and movements of people. As research into both scenarios grew, so did the correlations which were found between not only these two events of societal collapse, but also with the collapse of the Akkadian Empire. These correlations were summarized with the first chapter which looked at a theory by Thomas Homer-Dixon. This theory explained how polities and societies can collapse due to changes in the natural world. More specifically, with a decline in available resources, societies enter periods of stress which can lead to the gradual disintegration of interconnected systems. Inevitably, this leads to either a polity adapting to these changes or collapsing, leading to a power vacuum which is filled by other groups. From here the three examples which were used all show this process occurring. In each of the three, the end result is a societal collapse with a new system overtaking the old. In the first one, the collapse of the Syrian Arab Republic in 2011, there was a period of similar events which saw the government adapt to both environmental and societal changes. With the events of the 2011 Arab Spring in Syria, however, Syria saw a collapse and civil war between the government under Bashar al-Assad and various anti-Assadist groups across the country. The reason for this collapse was a combination of climatic shifts leading to long-term droughts, rural populations migrating into urban centres, and rising dissent against the Syrian government. The end result of the collapse was the establishment of a new Syrian government in 2023, though as of the writing of this thesis conflict is still ongoing. For Ugarit, there was a similar pattern of climate change leading to internal, in this case Levantine, migration which then resulted in rising dissent and a collapse in the social order. From the collapse of Ugarit came the rise of the Arameans and the Syro-Hittite polities. The final example used is the collapse of the Akkadian Empire. With the Akkadian Empire, a similar pattern occurred with a climatic shift being followed with internal migration. The end result for the Akkadian Empire was the rebellion of the Elamite and Gutian peoples in the south along with the movement of the Amorites in the north. What makes this final collapse more interesting is that the succeeding Elamites and Gutians continued using the titles that the Akkadian emperors used. Furthermore, the collapse of the Akkadian Empire did not end the influence of Akkadian, becoming instead a model for later polities in Western Asia.

The similarities between the three examples for Syria also showed how vulnerable polities are to unexpected changes. Even in an environment where the risk of drought is known, there were still points where this known risk was too much for the polity to sustain. This led to either an attempt to adapt to this new condition or the collapse of the polity entirely. One interesting point also is how at least two of the polities had three similar factors to their collapses. The first is that there was a reliance on other polities for basic resources leading to dependency. The second was an extreme exploitation of resources which led to a lack of safeguards for when conditions changed against the favor of the polity. The third was internal migration leading to societal collapse. All three polities shared a basic political system as well. This being an authoritarian, if not totalitarian, centralized system of power led by a leader with a cult of personality. It was this third factor which all three polities shared that led to the total collapse of the polity rather than a lesser change such as a political revolution or broad reforms. In this context, a revolution means a continuation of the institutions of the previous polity but with a new administration in charge.

For the first case with reliance on other polities, we see this with the city-state of Ugarit and the Syrian Arab Republic under Bashar al-Assad. Ugarit was arguably more justified in its reliance due to the size of the polity requiring some form of protection by another power. This need for protection is even greater with Ugarit being a major trading hub not only for trade within Western Asia but also for the Eastern Mediterranean. With protection from larger powers within Western Asia came reliance on these powers for food and other goods. When these powers started to have their own problems due to drought conditions, specifically the Hittites and Egypt, this led to Ugarit having not only a lack of protection but also not enough resources to provide for its population. Combined with the vassalage of Ugarit meaning a duty to protect its overlord, Ugarit was vulnerable to outside forces. The end result was the reliance on outside powers meaning an inability for Ugarit to protect itself both from environmental changes and later migrating communities.

The case of the Syrian Arab Republic is less about being under the influence of another power, but the pursuit of economic power. For Bashar al-Assad, there was a desire for Syria to become more integrated into the greater global economy of the 2000s and 2010s. This included the production of water-heavy cash crops such as cotton. The problem is that with this production also came the drawbacks of no longer pursuing economic autarky. This meant Syria was now reliant on other countries for resources such as food. With cotton also being a water-heavy resource, this meant there was less water available for times of drought. Bashar al-Assad also pursued economic neoliberalization and partial privatization, including

joining the World Trade Organization, to help make Syria an exporter economy. The end result was when a drought did occur, Syria did not have the ability to both preserve food security and its economic standing. By 2011, internal migration led to a rise in unemployment and pushes for reforms which ended with the Arab Spring and subsequent Civil War.

The second case of overexploitation of resources was seen with both the Akkadian Empire and the Syrian Arab Republic. For the Syrian Arab Republic this is shown with the reliance on other polities for food for their population. Farmers within Syria were no longer being supported by the government. Instead, the government of Bashar al-Assad began to prioritize cash crops to help increase the amount of money the Syrian government could have. This resulted in an increased use of the limited water supply which Syria had and diversion of this water from agricultural communities. This combined with neoliberal reforms and pursuing cheaper food imports led to farmers losing their livelihoods. With the onset of drought, Syria did not have enough water to support their agricultural community. The overreliance on cash crops also meant the government of Bashar al-Assad prioritized cotton production over agricultural relief. In the end, the agricultural industry collapsed with farmers migrating to the cities and being spurred to support anti-Assadist groups.

For the Akkadian Empire, this exploitation came with the promotion of irrigation in Mesopotamia as well as the push for greater agricultural output in Northern Mesopotamia. Northern Mesopotamia was not an area with large-scale irrigation, nor was the main cereal barley like Southern Mesopotamia. Instead, the dominant form of agriculture was rain-fed with wheat being produced more than barley. This meant that Northern Mesopotamia was where a larger amount of the food supply of the Akkadian Empire was located. The lack of large-scale irrigation combined with the already vulnerable state of the region to drought meant that when drier conditions came to Western Asia, the breadbasket of the Akkadian Empire was severely affected. The end result was a decline in wheat production, an abandonment of Northern Mesopotamian cities, and a weakening of the Akkadian Empire. Amorites, Gutians, and the Elamites then destroyed the Akkadian Empire, leading to a return of the prior city-states system in Mesopotamia.

The third of internal migration can be summarized with internal meaning within the confines of Western Asia. The Syrian Arab Republic saw the most internal with communities already within the confines of the Syrian government moving from agricultural centres to urban centres. Ugarit saw internal migrations by groups such as the Arameans and Anatolian groups pillage the polity. Lastly the Akkadians during their collapse saw the Amorites in the

north move into Mesopotamia while the Gutians and Elamites who were under Akkadian suzerainty rebelled and conquered the southern portion of the polity.

All three polities shared a system where the leader of the government had near absolute authority over all aspects of governance. The Syrian Arab government was ruled by a political dynasty, this being the Assad family. Both Hafez al-Assad and his successor Bashar al-Assad ran the country with near absolute authority. Economic, military, and other governmental affairs were conducted by them with no checks or balances on their power. This meant every action committed by the government could be attested to the family. Economic reforms such as the transition from a planned economy to a more privatized system and the change from agricultural autarky to the importation of food could all be placed at the hands of Bashar and Hafez al-Assad. The Assad family also had a cult of personality which portrayed themselves as the saviours of Syria and the culmination of Syrian history. For Ugarit, it was the same political power which the king had. Taxes, administration, and trade were done with the consent of the king with every action being a personal interaction between the king and either an equal or subjects. The transfer of property had to be approved by the king and any binding document required the consent of the king. Diplomatic affairs were more interpersonal between the king and the rulers of other polities. For the Akkadian Empire, the ruler not only had absolute authority but was also treated as a god after the declaration by Naram-Sin. The power which the Akkadian rulers had included the ability to overhaul the agricultural industry of the empire, such as the transition from wheat to barley in irrigated areas. The Akkadian rulers were able to appoint new priests and priestesses to legitimize their rule, including the appointment of female family members to these positions.

All three of these polities in Syria shared noticeable similarities which gave me a sense of perspective on not only the study of history, both natural and political, but also of international relations and the modern world. Looking at how these polities collapsed and their aftermaths, there is a cycle which I could see in all of them. The cycle begins with a polity that has a government with an authoritarian leader with no checks to their power. This is followed by reforms which push the economy of a polity towards a specific goal, usually a form of maximum output or exploitation. This maximization leads to a decrease in failsafes as short-term output is prioritized over long-term stability. Outside pressures, either a desire for resources or the power of other polities lead to a greater integration of the polity into an interpolity system. Later a natural event, even one that is wholly predictable, results in a need for adaptation by the polity. The natural event, such as a drought or natural disaster, then leads to actions such as migration of peoples and failures of supply chains. This event, and

the later immediate effects leads to one of two situations, either the polity will successfully survive the crisis or the crisis will lead to a collapse of the polity. The collapse of the polity leads to a power vacuum which then leads to either a new similar power taking over or a decentralization of the original system. Whether the polity is successful or not will lead to a repetition of the cycle in perpetuity.

From my previous background in international relations, this cycle is something which is seen up to the modern day, hence my reasoning for using the Syrian Arab Republic as one of the examples. The integration of the Syrian Arab Republic into the international market did not lead to continued prosperity but instead becoming reliant on the economies and whims of other polities at the time. The transition from autarkic economics to the prioritization of luxury goods left Syria vulnerable, especially with the choice of cotton as their cash crop in an already drought-vulnerable region. In the case of natural history, there was no surprise that climate change caused the collapse of polities. Even in the modern age, polities are reliant on the natural world for resources and stability. Climate change throughout history has led to humans adapting to the new conditions. The transition from the Pleistocene to the Holocene saw humans change their food sources from large game to marine life and smaller terrestrial game. In a similar way the transition from wheat to barley in the Akkadian Empire was an adaptation on a smaller scale due to the warming of Western Asia at the time. In a historical context, the fall and decline of polities is part of a natural cycle of human history. Polities have a rise and fall and no system will last forever. Systems may last for nearly one thousand years only to suddenly be replaced by a new system. The Holy Roman Empire lasted for almost a thousand years until its dissolution in 1806. China was under the rule of emperors seen as divinely appointed until suddenly it was replaced with a republican system in 1911. For history, this sudden change can be summarized with the quote "There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen." This brings me to a question of what can be done, and how can polities survive in a world of volatility and constant need to adapt? The simplest answer is that there is no absolute solution for how polities can survive. There were warning signs for the collapse of these polities mentioned, however they came initially in small changes. If there is an answer it is that polities should have failsafes for any decisions which are done. Globalization of economies should come with the caveat of maintaining a self-reliant internal economy. Having power should come with the requirement to work within certain confines with checks and balances. However, reality will see this cycle continue as even the most fool-proof plans can still lead to societal and polity collapse. In this way, nothing truly is new under the sun.

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