Archaeologies of Empire

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Archaeologies of Empire

LOCAL PARTICIPANTS AND IMPERIAL TRAJECTORIES

Edited by Anna L. Boozer,
Bleda S. Düring, and Bradley J. Parker

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We dedicate this volume to our colleague,
friend, and influential empires scholar
Bradley J. Parker (1961–2018)

First and foremost, we wish to thank the exemplary staff at the School for Advanced Research who facilitated our time at SAR and helped to move the publication forward: Michael F. Brown (president), Paul Ryer (director, Scholar Programs), Maria Spray (program coordinator, Scholar Programs), Sarah Soliz (director, SAR Press), Leslie Shipman (director, Guest Services), and Doug Dearden (director, Information Technology). Jill Seagard (Field Museum, Chicago) prepared our map illustrations for publication. We have benefited enormously from the many excellent empire scholars who came before us. In particular, Carla M. Sinopoli and an anonymous referee provided us with invaluable suggestions and expertise as we prepared this book for publication.

Figure 0.1. Bradley J. Parker presenting at the Advanced Seminar at the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, May 2017. Photo by Anna L. Boozer.

BLEDA S. DÜRING AND PATRICK RYAN WILLIAMS

On January 5, 2018, Bradley J. Parker passed away at the age of fifty-six (Figure 0.1). His death was a shock to all of us who had participated at the Santa Fe seminar in May 2017, and for many of us, it meant the loss of a friendship that spanned many years, in some cases even decades. He was full of energy, cheerful and with a joke up his sleeve, and always kind. We lost a great person.

Bradley's academic interests were diverse, and he has made significant contributions on topics such as ethnoarchaeology (focusing on beer and bread production); household archaeology (producing one of the key volumes on the topic); survey archaeology (numerous reports on the Upper Tigris, the Araxes River, and in the upper Nasca headwaters of the South-Central Andes); the Ubaid period (which he excavated at the site of Kenan Tepe); and archaeology and politics (on which he published a volume with Ran Boytner and Lynn Schwartz Dodd).

Bradley's most sustained and continuous academic interest, however, was no doubt on archaeologies of empire. Here we highlight why his work on empires was innovative and thorough; we follow with a list of the publications he produced on this specific topic.

As a PhD student at UCLA, Bradley chose to work on the archaeological imprint of Assyrian imperialism in the peripheral region of southeastern Anatolia. He wanted to analyze survey data gathered in the extensive surveys executed by Guillermo Algaze in the Upper Tigris region in advance of dam projects that would flood much of the region. This was an audacious plan. At that time, empires were almost exclusively studied on the basis of textual and iconographical data, and archaeological contributions to the study of empire were primarily relegated to the excavation of imperial palaces, fortifications, and temples. The idea that survey data might reveal how landscapes and societies were transformed as a result of imperial expansion was, at least in the archaeology of the Near East, a new one.

Bradley's choice was also bold for another reason. As he was well aware, the survey data he was using as his main dataset were far from unproblematic. Ceramic chronologies were poorly known, hampering the dating of sites and their association with particular groups of people present in the imperial encounter of the Upper Tigris in the Iron Age. Moreover, the representativeness of the survey data obtained by Algaze and his team clearly was an issue. Instead of being dismayed, Bradley overcame these problems by adopting an interdisciplinary approach that combined textual and archaeological data to arrive at a more comprehensive reconstruction of what happened in the Upper Tigris region.

In the course of his PhD research, Bradley produced a series of eloquent and hard-hitting publications that quickly made him a household name in Near Eastern archaeology. These were followed by his magisterial monograph, *The Mechanics of Empire: The Northern Frontier of Assyria as a Case Study in Imperial Dynamics*. This volume contained detailed reconstructions of imperial strategies in various regions of Upper Mesopotamia and the dynamics of the relations between the Assyrians and their adversaries. In this study, Bradley also showed his skills in the fields of modeling and theorization. The book contains various innovations in how empires are conceptualized, including new adaptations of the territorial/hegemonic model and network models of empire. For the first time, Bradley demonstrated how the Assyrian Empire was not a homogenous system with different modes of domination in a series of concentric zones, but rather exemplified the highly variegated and dynamic nature of imperial power.

The Mechanics of Empire was a game changer in the study of the Assyrian Empire, and if its effects on the field were delayed, the conservative nature of Near Eastern archaeology was to blame, as Bradley was clearly ahead of his time. It is only in recent years that scholars such as Timothy Matney, Jason Ur, and Daniele Morandi Bonacossi have started to address the agenda first articulated by Bradley in 2001.

Meanwhile, Bradley was already moving to even broader levels of analysis, as indicated by his subtitle, *The Northern Frontier of Assyria as a Case Study in Imperial Dynamics*. He was particularly interested in the dynamics and processes occurring in frontier regions, on which he produced an interdisciplinary volume with Lars Rodseth in 2005 with studies from anthropology, history, and archaeology, which he followed up with various articles. Further, he took up the topic of comparing empires in the Near East and the Andes and addressed this issue in his most recent contributions. Throughout these studies, Bradley was

interested in developing new models for better describing and understanding ancient empires, and though he took his efforts very seriously, he also described his efforts as tools rather than ends.

Notwithstanding his great contributions in modeling empires and frontiers, it would be disingenuous to portray Bradley primarily as a theoretical archaeologist. He was an avid fieldworker, loving all aspects of fieldwork, which he did throughout his career, first in the Upper Tigris region, where he directed the Kenan Tepe excavations; then in Naxçivan in the Araxes River valley; and finally, over the last years of his life, in the Central Andes, where he collaborated on projects in Moquegua and Chicama and codirected a new research program in the Nasca headwaters. Months prior to his death, he received a large ($200,000) grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to continue archaeological work in the Nasca headwaters in the Ayacucho Region, Peru. Like much of his fieldwork, this money was to map out the effects of imperialism, in this case of the Inka and Wari empires, on the ground.

Bradley had just begun a new chapter in his research career, and he was pursuing it with the infectious vigor that characterized his two decades of research on Assyrian imperialism. He had embarked on a new, truly comparative framework for assessing empire cross-culturally. It is unfortunate that he was not able to further develop his exciting research on Andean empires and the comparative frameworks of empire.

Bradley Parker's Publications on Empires

Parker, Bradley J. 1997a. "The Real and the Irreal: Multiple Meanings of Maşi in Neo-Assyrian." *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 11: 37–54.

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Parker, B. J., and L. Rodseth, eds. 2005. *Untaming the Frontier in Anthropology, Archaeology and History*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

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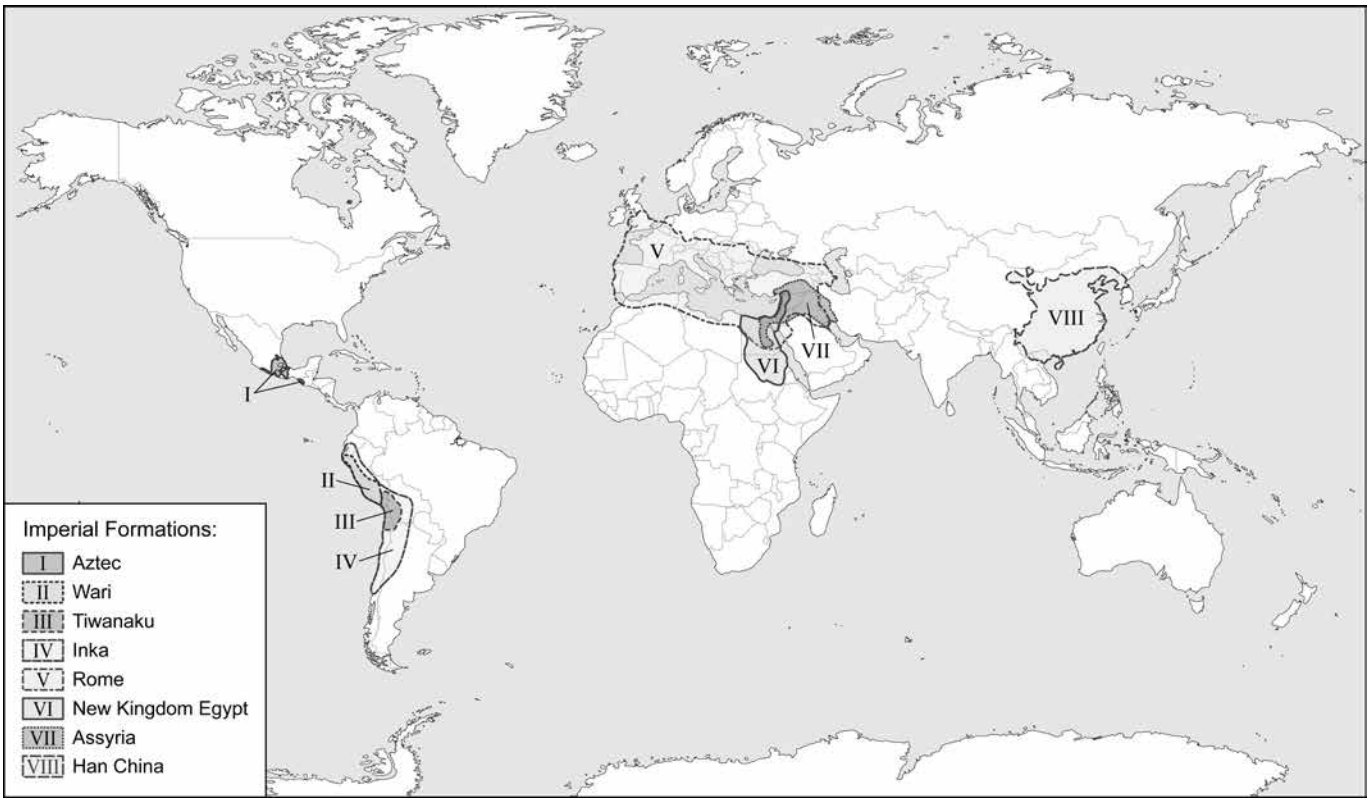

Figure 1.1. World map showing imperial formations discussed in this volume. Produced by Jill Seagard.

CHAPTER ONE

Archaeologies of Empire
An Introduction

BLEDA S. DÜRING, ANNA L. BOOZER, AND BRADLEY J. PARKER

Why Empires?

A large portion of the population throughout world history lived, and some would argue continue to live, under imperial rule (Goldstone and Haldon 2009; Burbank and Cooper 2010, 3). Although scholars do not always agree on when and where the roots of imperialism lie, most would agree that imperial configurations have affected human history so profoundly that the legacy of ancient empires continues to structure the modern world in many ways (Hardt and Negri 2000; Maier 2006; Bernbeck 2010). It is therefore not surprising that empires have been the focus of sustained investigation in academe and have resonated in art and popular culture, such as in movies and video games.

In recent decades we have witnessed a resurgence in academic studies of empire. These studies have focused primarily on colonial British, Spanish, and Portuguese imperialism (e.g., Wilson 2004; Stoler et al. 2007; Howe 2010; Benton 2010; Burbank and Cooper 2010). Historians who are part of what has been called the new imperial history have given voice to subaltern voices and the multifaceted ways in which empires were constructed in imperial peripheries, and in doing so, they have refocused our understanding of how empires were constituted. For example, Kathleen Wilson (2011) has demonstrated the profound impact that colonial rule had upon family structure, sexual practices, and gender roles. Scholarship on empires has thus shifted from the assumption that these were more or less homogenously run centrist states to the view that empires are best described as heterogeneous and dynamic patchworks of imperial configurations in which imperial power was the outcome of the complex interaction between evolving colonial structures and various types of agents in highly contingent

relationships. This new perspective effectively dissolves the distinction between ancient and modern empires, which was often held to revolve around greater control in modern empires (Bang and Bayly 2011, 5–8).

For the most part, the study of ancient empires has been bypassed by these new historical perspectives on empires. Especially in the old world, descriptions of ancient empires continue to characterize them as a neatly ordered set of institutions, which can be summarized through a discussion of the actions of key rulers (e.g., Morris and Scheidel 2009; Cline and Graham 2011; Barjamovic 2013; Karlsson 2016).

Numerous exceptions to this institutionalist model of ancient empires can, of course, be mentioned. Interestingly, archaeological studies that foreground the heterogeneity of ancient empires and the importance of bottom-up, agent-centered studies of imperialism have been best developed in regions with limited historical evidence. Thus, for example, the archaeological study of Andean and Mesoamerican empires has highlighted diversities of imperial practices and how they affected non-elites for decades (e.g., Schreiber 1987; Brumfiel 1991; D'Altroy 1992). This research initiated avenues of investigation that dovetail remarkably well with the new imperial history (see also the conclusions to this volume). By contrast, in Europe, Asia, and Africa, where textual sources are almost invariably more abundant, reconstruction of ancient empires has traditionally been dominated by institutionalist perspectives put forward by historians. By contrast, archaeologists have demonstrated the heterogeneity and local effects of ancient empires in India, Egypt, Anatolia, and the Mediterranean (Sinopoli 1994; S. T. Smith 1995; Morrison 2001; Parker 2001; Glatz 2009; Mattingly 2011). However, these studies have remained relatively marginal in the study of ancient empires in the Old World. These Old World empires continued to be studied predominantly as more or less coherent and homogeneous states best illuminated through the investigation of elites, royal courts, and imperial institutions. Although the limited corpus of textual data available for many ancient empires may have contributed to this homogenizing perspective, the fundamental bias comes from the persistent view that empires are best understood as an elite affair. For example, Tilly (1994, 7) influentially characterizes empires as "concatenating central military organizations, thin regional administrations, trading networks, and organizations of tribute in which local and regional rulers—often maintaining cultural identities distinct from that of the empire's center—enjoyed great autonomy in return for collaboration in the collection of tribute and support in the empire's military campaigns." Overall, it is striking that the study of ancient

empires has been predicated on perspectives that are radically different from those dominating the historical analysis of colonial ones. We cannot blame this predicament entirely upon the "tyranny of the text." There is a persistent view even within archaeology that non-elite groups were not dramatically affected or had little or no agency under imperial rule.

It is precisely this dominant institutionalist and elite-centered focus of ancient empires that has kept archaeologists from realizing the potential of their data. Archaeologists have often studied empires by exploring elite assemblages, monumental architecture, fortifications, and other substantial signs of imperial overlay (see also Khatchadourian 2016). The local specificity that archaeologists find on the ground is often aggregated into rigid imperial models, which obscure the complex and dynamic configurations that occur in specific places. Unwittingly then, archaeology has been a collaborator in the perpetuation of traditional centrist views since it has often been used as an illustrative device for "known" imperial histories.

As has already been mentioned, numerous archaeologists, as well as historians such as Terrenato (2011, 2014), have moved on to study more bottom-up and agent-centered aspects of ancient imperialism. To date, these studies have not yet led to a fundamental shift in the ways that archaeologists approach ancient empires. We can explain this lack of impact in two ways. First, these studies were presented as isolated case studies, and the comparative potential of the results was not foregrounded. Thus, it is relatively easy to ignore such studies as relevant only to a specific empire or region. Second, these studies did not pursue an explicit programmatic agenda with the aim of changing the models we apply to ancient empires and how these empires were constituted. In order to better understand ancient empires, as well as modern ones, archaeologists must join broader conversations on empires that crosscut regions and time. This volume takes a major step toward harnessing the momentum of these previous studies and furthering them to demonstrate the local and dynamic constitution of ancient empires.

Why Archaeology?

Because empires are more or less omnipresent in historical contexts with substantial written archives, they are often regarded by historians as self-evident and universal entities whose structures and dynamics merit little critical investigation. Given these rich written sources, why is archaeology necessary for the study of ancient empires?

First, imperial archives were written by a miniscule percentage of the population, usually elite males living in imperial centers and often belonging to, or beholden to, a dominant ethnic group (Harris 1989). Most of this literate group was also supportive of the imperial project, since empires, like state societies, predominantly serve the needs of the elites. The very creation of these textual sources therefore makes them problematic for an accurate appraisal of many questions fundamental to an understanding of ancient empires. Archaeology can tell us about peoples, places, and times that were unrecorded or were only obliquely recorded, for example in bureaucratic documents of imperial institutions.

Second, as archaeologists, we know that empires are far from self-evident. Even if we limit ourselves to regions with complex urban civilizations, such as Mesopotamia or China, a number of problems become clear. For example, empires often appear several millennia after the consolidation of urbanized and socially complex societies. Why and how does this transformation from states to empires take place, and in what sense do empires differ from other complex polities?

Archaeology can help to address these questions. Many states embark on trajectories toward empire and develop several imperial repertoires that facilitate their success at creating and maintaining imperial power. In this volume, we use the term *imperial repertoires*, or simply *repertoires*, to denote the dynamic packages of technologies, institutions, cultural practices, and religious and ideological ideas harnessed by empires (compare to "repertoires of rule" in Burbank and Cooper 2010). Imperial repertoires include a wide array of practices, ranging from agricultural, administrative, and logistical technologies, to particular types of social and legal arrangements that define much of the context in which people live out their lives, to embodied and normatively charged ideas on how one should eat, dress, defecate, have sexual intercourse, and be buried, to religious and ideological justifications of imperialism, often cast as divinely sanctioned or a mission of spreading civilization. Many of these repertoires exist in pre-imperial states, and empires typically combine, rework, and intensify preexisting repertoires for their imperial needs. Thus, for example, destruction of enemy settlements and abduction of people as slaves is a practice that can be documented in deep history, but many empires develop this into a systematic practice of social engineering, in which the demographic composition of targeted regions is completely altered through combinations of colonization

and deportation practices and the use of both force and positive incentives for settlers (see Smith, Yao, Alconini, Boozer, and Düring, this volume).

With these imperial repertoires, empires embark on pathways of economic, social, ideological, or political power (Parker, this volume; also, Mann 1986). Many states do not manage the transition to more durable or consolidated forms of empire, or in the terminology of Mann, to successfully develop infrastructural power (Ando 2017, 9). For this reason, most empires were brief affairs only—short-lived entities that might best be termed "conquest empires." From Hammurabi to Attila, we see instances of sudden conquest of large swathes of territory followed by equally abrupt collapse. For example, the polity created by Alexander the Great is the quintessential example of an empire that never moved into the critical phase of consolidation—its life course consisted entirely of conquest and fragmentation. Perceived from an Achaemenid perspective, Alexander was a spectacular failure, managing to undo what had been consolidated over centuries.

Why were some empires more successful at making this transition to consolidation, sometimes characterized as the "Augustan threshold," than others (Doyle 1986, 93; see also Düring, this volume)? What are the means by which successful empires achieved lasting domination? The answers to these questions are not easily addressed on the basis of imperial archives given their focus on the dealings at court and propaganda. Instead, we argue that we need to investigate the dynamics and interactions that occur in myriad places on the ground, and we ask how imperial agents transformed societies, landscapes, and economies, as well as what prompted enough people from various backgrounds to make it work. Archaeology is ideally positioned to investigate such questions because we can map out landscape changes, agricultural regimes, economic activities, and the myriad ways in which objects are implicated in a variety of imperial encounters.

To some extent, these first two points emanate from the same fundamental problem: one can only understand how empires arose and how they were sustained if one understands how highly diverse actors made and remade empire across varied regions and social settings. Archaeology is uniquely positioned to expose what might be termed hidden histories. That is, archaeology can highlight the lives of people who neither wrote nor were the subjects of historical texts. In this sense, archaeology enables the subaltern to speak—something that is in most cases impossible on the basis of historical documents. For example, James C. Scott (1998) has convincingly argued that the failure of powerful

imperial polities, such as the USSR, can be at least partially explained as a result of passive resistance by ordinary people. Archaeology can provide comparable examples of agency within ancient empires. Crucially, archaeologists have the toolkit to unlock the lives and circumstances of such people by documenting where they lived, what types of objects they used, what they ate, what they produced, and how all these things both transformed and were transformed by imperial dynamics. Archaeologists can recover the things people did not want to or think to write about, as well as those they could not record. Archaeology offers the opportunity to investigate the diverse contexts out of which imperialism emerged and the variegated outcomes that imperialism produced. Archaeologists can therefore explore the social and ecological conditions that allowed empires to take root and flourish (Rosenzweig and Marston 2018).

Third, once trajectories of imperial consolidation have been developed, imperial traditions often prove to be remarkably enduring and versatile, endlessly reworked by successor states and empires, in some cases after centuries of political fragmentation. The case of Rome, starting as a polytheistic republic and ending as a Christian autocracy centered on Constantinople, is well known, although it is less commonly acknowledged that the final descendant of the Roman Empire was the Muslim imperial formation of the Ottoman Empire. Much later empires, such as the British Empire, continued to self-consciously model themselves after Rome (Dietler 2005). Similarly, long-lived chains of empires developed in the Near East, where Assyrian imperial repertoires were taken over by the Neo-Babylonians, the Achaemenids, the Seleukids, the Parthians, and the Sasanians; in the Andes, where Wari and Tiwanaku imperial traditions were taken up by the Inka; and in China, where we have the sequence of the Qin, Han, Jin, Sui, Tang, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Empires, we also find the persistent sequence of imperial formations. This tenacity of imperial practices, once established, is remarkable and requires scrutiny (also Motyl 1999, 2001; Stoler 2016), as does the shift of imperial cores from one region to the next and the reworking of imperial residues of the deep past (Covey 2014; Williams et al., this volume).