

THE FIRST EMPIRES

Early Mesopotamian peoples had well-organized cities and governments, managed huge and complex trading networks, and produced amazing art and technology. However, this burst of activity also made the region unstable, as different peoples competed for power and land.

SARGON AND THE EMPIRE OF AKKAD

The land of Akkad lay to the north of Sumer. Although the people used the same writing as the Sumerians, they spoke a different language, known as Akkadian. Around 2370BC, a great leader called Sargon was born in Akkad.

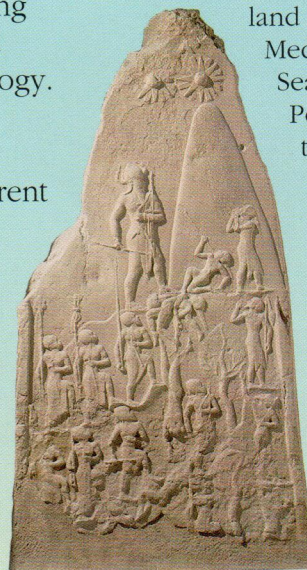
Legend has it that Sargon's mother put her baby in a reed basket and sent him floating down the Euphrates. Sargon was found and rescued, and grew up to become a powerful official in the city of Kish. But Sargon was ambitious. Soon he overthrew the king of Kish and seized power. He stormed through Akkad at the head of a huge army, conquering each of the cities in turn.

This bronze head may show the face of Sargon, but it could actually be his grandson, the great warrior Narâm-Sin.

GLORY AND DOWNFALL

Not content with this, Sargon set out to conquer Sumer too.

Soon, he ruled a vast area of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf - the world's first empire. Sargon's successors fought hard to keep their empire.



This is a stone carving showing Sargon's grandson at the head of Akkad's armies.

But trouble was brewing. The cities of Sumer began to fight back, and a fearsome mountain tribe called the Gutians invaded Akkad. Around 2230BC, the empire fell apart and the area was plunged into chaos and war.

