

Chapter 8

Sargon

Who is Sargon?

Sargon as a baby. His mother threw him in a basket and threw him in the river, he was unwanted and never knew his father (mother a high priestess)

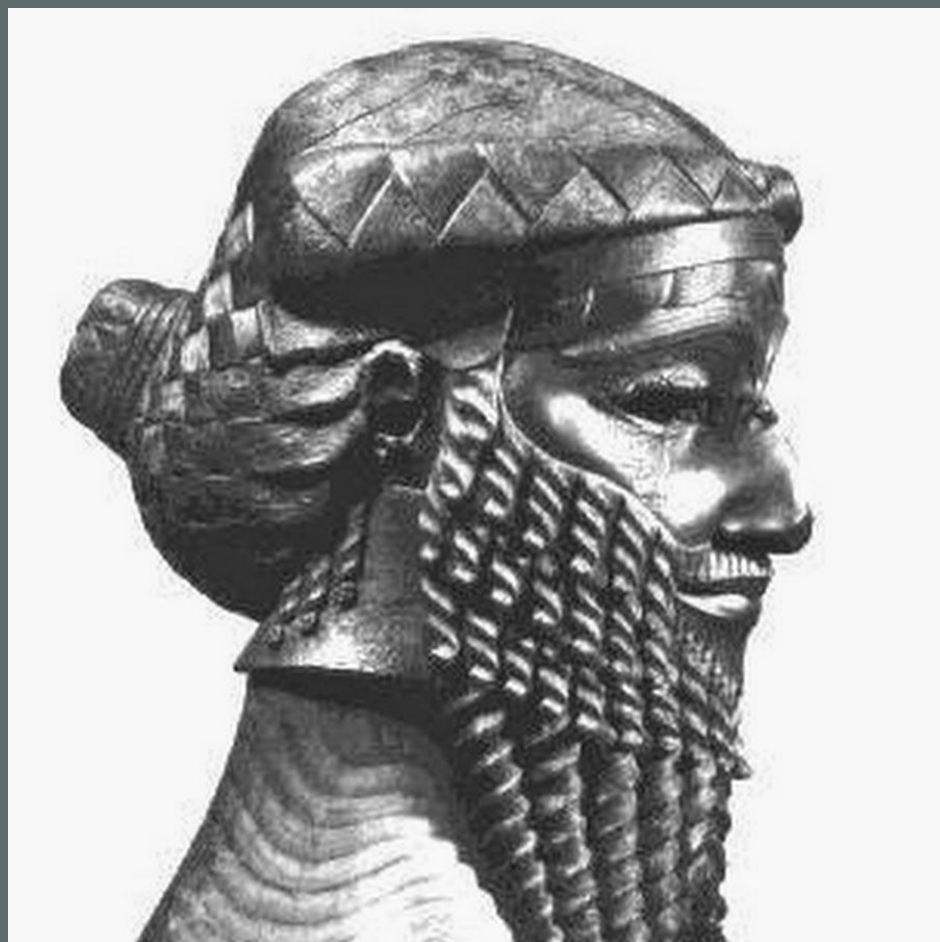
“Legend of Sargon” an Akkadian story recorded on clay tablet in 1st millennium BCE

Baby Sargon was found by laborer Akki (simple man, filed canals of rich man's garden with water) and raised him like his own son

Goddess of Ishtar takes a “liking” to him, he becomes king over “black-headed people” (Mesopotamians referred to themselves and mankind as this)

Stories of Sargon written hundreds of years after his reign

These are legends, not history; however Sargon did become king in 2340 BCE according to royal inscriptions and reigned 56 years (one of the longest reigns)



What do we know about Sargon?

He grew up to the North (Akkadian is a Northern dialect, was his native language). He may have overthrown a king to become king and stole his throne (he chose city of Agade as his capital which supports this idea).

During his reign: conquered all of Mesopotamia from Lower Sea to Upper Sea; created the first empire in history. He was famous for “tearing down a city's walls” which basically meant that Sargon destroyed the city's independence and safety (conquered it)

Also a famous trader (ships had a presence in far-away lands, helped spread Mesopotamian culture)

Sargon prayed to his enemy's gods as well as his own victory in battle which meant the foreign gods must've been on his side

City of Agade

Agade: has never been found

Many cities that Sargon conquered, however, have: Ebla, for example, is a “treasure trove” of info for historians

A fire at Ebla's palace ironically saved 17,000 clay tablets by baking them into brick

This is the clearest picture historians have of life in ancient Mesopotamia at this time

Many tablets are lists (comparable to a phone book), some list clothing given out to people, food, etc.

Most of kingdom “depended” on king for provision, work, etc.



Tira-il's Letter

He was a scribe and a palace steward, was summoned to write to Ebla king's representative in distant town of Hamazi

Contents: emphasizes friendship between cities (“like brothers”)

Tira-il probably delivered letter personally (king of Hamazi probably didn't learn how to read, depended on scribes to read to them)

Messengers like Tira-il: world's first diplomats; his message is the first evidence of diplomacy in history of world

Fate of Elba

A wealthy city until it was destroyed, grew rich from trade and taxes (well-known city on well-travelled trade route from Mesopotamia to Mediterranean Sea)

No one knows who destroyed it (destroyed quickly around 2300 BCE)

Sargon brought his army to the region but we can't be sure if he is the one who did so

“Curse of Agade”: archaeologists found a more than 30 fragments that describe the wealth of Sargon's capital of Agade (pg 64)