

# Ancient Mesopotamia

## The Akkadian Empire



The first Empire to rule all of Mesopotamia was the Akkadian Empire. It lasted for around 200 years from 2300 BC to 2100 BC. An **empire** brings together many different people and lands under control of one ruler. The person who rules is called an **emperor**.

### How it Began

The Akkadians lived in northern Mesopotamia while the Sumerians lived in the south. They had a similar government and culture as the Sumerians, but spoke a different language. The government was made up of individual city-states. This was where each city had its own ruler that controlled the city and the surrounding area. Initially these city-states were not united and often warred with each other.

Over time, the Akkadian rulers began to see the advantage of uniting many of their cities under a single nation. They began to form alliances and work together.

### Sargon the Great

Around 2300 BC Sargon the Great rose to power. He established his own city named Akkad. When the powerful Sumerian city of Uruk attacked his city, he fought back and eventually conquered Uruk. He then went on to conquer all of the Sumerian city-states and united northern and southern Mesopotamia under a single ruler.

## **The Empire Expands**

Over the next two hundred years, the Akkadian Empire continued to expand. They attacked and conquered the Elamites to the east. They moved south to Oman. They even went as far west as the Mediterranean Sea and Syria.

## **Fall of the Empire**

In 2100 BC the Sumerian city of Ur rose back into power conquering the city of Akkad. The Empire was now ruled by a Sumerian king, but was still united. The empire grew weaker, however, and was eventually conquered by the Amorites in around 2000 BC.

# **The Babylonian Empire**

After the fall of the Akkadian Empire, two new empires rose to power. They were the Babylonians in the south and the Assyrians to the north. The Babylonians were the first to form an empire that would encompass all of Mesopotamia.

## **Rise of the Babylonians and King Hammurabi**

The city of Babylon had been a city-state in Mesopotamia for many years. After the fall of the Akkadian Empire, the city was taken over and settled by the Amorites. The city began its rise to power in 1792 BC when King Hammurabi took the throne. He was a powerful and capable leader who wanted to rule more than just the city of Babylon.

Not long after becoming King, Hammurabi began to conquer other city-states in the area. Within a few years, Hammurabi had conquered all of Mesopotamia including much of the Assyrian lands to the north.

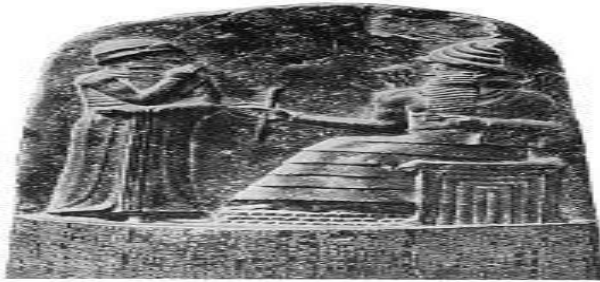
## **The City of Babylon**

Under Hammurabi's rule, the city of Babylon became the most powerful city in the world. Located on the banks of the Euphrates River, the city was a major trade hub bringing together new ideas and products. Babylon also became the largest city in the world at the

time with as many as 200,000 people living there at its peak. The city was also the cultural center of the empire. It was here that art, science, music, mathematics, astronomy, and literature were able to flourish.

### **Hammurabi's Code**

King Hammurabi established firm laws called Hammurabi's Code. This was the first time in history that the law was written down. It was recorded on clay tablets and tall pillars of stones called steles.



Hammurabi's code consisted of 282 laws. Many of them were quite specific, but were meant as guidelines to be used in similar circumstances. There were laws governing commerce such as wages, trade, rental rates, and the sale of slaves. There were laws governing criminal behavior describing the penalties for stealing or damaging property. There were even laws governing adoption, marriage, and divorce.

### **Fall of Babylon**

After Hammurabi died, his sons took over. However, they were not strong leaders and soon Babylon grew weak. In 1595 the Kassites conquered Babylon. They would rule for 400 years. Later, the Assyrians would take over. It wasn't until 612 BC that Babylonia once again rose to power as the ruler of the empire over Mesopotamia. This second Babylonian Empire is called the neo-Babylonian Empire.

### **Interesting Facts About the Akkadians**

- Many people in Mesopotamia at the time spoke two languages, Akkadian and Sumerian.
- There were many good roads built between the major cities. They

- even developed an official postal service.
- The Sumerians believed that the Akkadian Empire collapsed because of a curse placed on them when Naram-Sin conquered the city of Nippur and destroyed the temple.
  - The kings maintained power by installing their sons as governors over the major cities. They also made their daughters high priestesses over the major gods.
  - Sargon installed the first dynasty. He came up with the idea that a man's sons should inherit his kingdom.

### **Fun Facts About the Babylonians**

- Nebuchadnezzar had a moat built around the city of Babylon for defense. That must have been quite a sight in the desert!
- All that remains of the city of Babylon is a mound of broken mud buildings about 55 miles south of Baghdad, [Iraq](#).
- [Alexander the Great](#) captured Babylon as part of his conquests. He was staying in the city when he got sick and died.
- The city has been rebuilt or reconstructed in [Iraq](#). The actual ruins and artifacts are likely buried under the reconstruction.