

Paragraph	Quotation/ Paraphrase
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	

Answer questions for “King Sargon of Akkad”:

1. How did his name help King Sargon rule his people?
2. How is King Sargon similar to another leader? Make sure to name the leader and explain the similarity.
3. In what way were the Akkadians a model for future societies?

KING SARGON OF AKKAD

REIGNED CIRCA 2330 TO 2279 B.C.

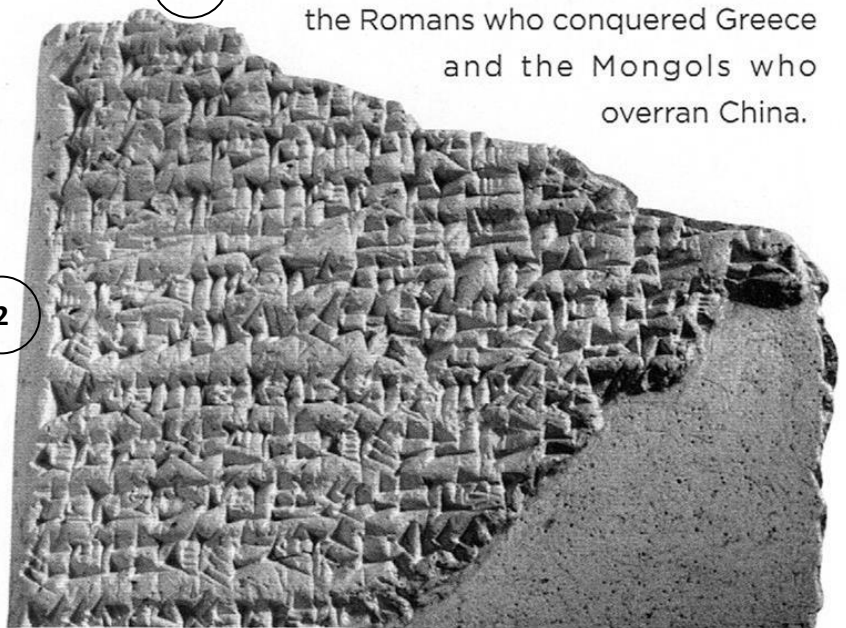
1 **H**is name meant “true king,” and Sargon of Akkad (unknown-2279 =.>.) took advantage of that presumed legitimacy to establish the world’s first empire around 2330 =.>. in Mesopotamia, the fertile land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. He and his successors bequeathed to the world a concept of power that involved more than military strength. They commanded obedience not simply by winning battles and striking fear in their foes, but also by imposing order, dispensing justice, and serving as earthly representatives of gods their subjects dreaded and revered.

According to legend, Sargon of Akkad was born in secret to a priestess mother who set him adrift on a river, where he was found by the common laborer who raised him. In his youth, Sargon was visited by Ishtar—goddess of desire, fertility, storms, and warfare—who loved him. Inspired by her, he rose from obscurity and took the world by

storm. The story seems clearly intended to show that Sargon was entitled to rule Mesopotamia, however humble his origins.

Akkadians had long been understudies of the Sumerians, whose civilization just south of Akkad in Mesopotamia had been thriving for a millennium. They learned much from the Sumerians before emerging first as their rivals and ultimately as their rulers. That process, in which ambitious people at the margins of an established society became its masters, would be repeated throughout his-

3 tory by great empire builders, including the Romans who conquered Greece and the Mongols who overran China.



OPPOSITE: Founder of the world’s first empire, Sargon of Akkad upheld order and justice.

RIGHT: A cuneiform tablet tells of Sargon’s birth.

4 Before Sargon took power, the prominent Sumerian city-states of Ur and Uruk contended with Kish to their north, in Akkad, near modern-day Baghdad. Sargon began his rise as a cup-bearer to the king of Kish, whom he eventually overthrew. He then led troops against the great rival ruler to the south, Lugalzagesi, who commanded all of Sumer. Animosity among Sumerian city-states may have hampered Lugalzagesi in his fight against Sargon, who captured him and placed a yoke around his neck. A celebratory inscription later boasted that Sargon triumphed in 34 battles on his march to the Persian Gulf, where he “washed his weapons in the sea.”

CREATION OF AN EMPIRE

5 Sargon sent Akkadian governors to rule Sumerian cities and tear down defensive walls. He left the Sumerian religion in place but made Akkadian the official language of all Mesopotamia. By lowering physical and linguistic barriers and unifying his realm, he promoted commerce both within Mesopotamia and well beyond. A thriving trade with India brought pearls, ivory, and other treasures to Mesopotamia in exchange for goods such as wool and olive oil. Precious metals including copper and silver served as currency for the traders. Societies had not yet devised coinage; instead, the metal was weighed on a scale to determine its value. Sargon used taxes he collected from the merchants to pay his soldiers and support royal artists and scribes, who glorified his deeds in sculptures and inscriptions.

6 King Sargon ruled for more than half a century and founded a dynasty that held firm through the reign of his grandson, Naram-Sin. Sargon’s legacy endured far longer, as a string of later emperors emulated his example. ♦

OPPOSITE: Syria’s Tell Brak is one of Mesopotamia’s oldest cities. RIGHT: A calcite disk depicts Sargon’s daughter, Enheduanna, high priestess of the temple in Ur.

SUPPORTING PLAYER

ENHEDUANNA, ROYAL DAUGHTER

7

After conquering Sumer, Sargon made his daughter, Enheduanna (2285–2250 B.C.), the high priestess of the goddess Inanna in Ur. It was an important position. Nanna, the moon god, was the patron deity of that city-state; his revered daughter Inanna—known to Akkadians as Ishtar—was the goddess of sexual love and war. Like other Mesopotamian deities, she was a volatile figure; she brought fertility and bounty as well as death and destruction. Enheduanna composed hymns to Ishtar, making Enheduanna the first author whose name is known to history. One of her hymns praises the goddess as “that singular woman the unique one / who speaks hateful words to the wicked / who moves among the bright shining things / who goes against rebel lands / and at twilight makes the firmament beautiful all on her own.”

