

STAGES OF MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION-III

DYNASTIC PERIOD, THE AKKADIAN DYNASTY AND THE RISE OF BABYLONIA

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EARLY DYNASTIES



The term was coined by Orientalist [Henri Frankfort](#) (l. 1897-1954 CE) to mirror the Early Dynastic Period in Egypt, a similar period of development. It should be noted, however, that the advances of Mesopotamia's Early Dynastic Period differed from Egypt's in significant ways, notably in that Mesopotamia – even under the rule of Sargon or later empires – was never the cohesive ethnic or political entity Egypt was and the kinds of cultural development cited for this era **were not as uniform** as they were in Egypt.

The city-states of Sumer were, for much of their history, each independently governed – not united under the reign of a single king as in the case of Egyptian government – and so a city like Uruk or Ur might have developed some important cultural advance which was not shared – at least not readily – with others.

The dynastic era is divided by archaeologists into three sub periods:

- Dynastic I – 2900-2800 BCE
- Dynastic II – 2800-2600 BCE
- Dynastic III – 2600-2334 BCE



These are considered arbitrary divisions by some scholars and historians as there is no clear demarcation line separating one from the next. Even so, there is enough of a subtle difference that division is considered justified.

The Early Dynastic Period of Mesopotamia is the modern-day archaeological term for the era in Mesopotamian history – **2900-2334 BCE** – during which some of the most significant cultural advances were made including **the rise of the cities, the development of writing, and the establishment of governments.**

This era was preceded by **the Uruk Period** (4100-2900 BCE) when the first cities were established in the region of Sumer (southern Mesopotamia) and succeeded by the **Akkadian Period** (2334-2218 BCE) when Mesopotamia was conquered by Sargon of Akkad (r. 2334-2279 BCE) and ruled by him and his successors as the Akkadian Empire.



Early Dynastic I

- Between the Uruk Period and the Early Dynastic Period, the rivers around the region of the city of **Shuruppak** overflowed, causing severe flooding from the southern plains up through the north. This event, which severely disrupted the society, is considered the origin of the Great Flood story as reimagined as the **Gods' wrath** in the **Eridu Genesis and the Atrahasis**, the Mesopotamian works now recognized as the inspiration for the famous tale of Noah and his ark from the Bible. The exact date of the flood is contested but most scholars set it at c. 2900 BCE.

The cities which existed before the flood were:
Eridu, Bad-tibira, Larsa, Sippar, Shuruppak





- Early Dynastic II
- The Dynastic II Period saw the development of these earlier advances as the individual cities expanded.
- Technology was improved and the household paradigm maintained a cohesive structure for the developing culture.



Early Dynastic III

- ▣ The Early Dynastic III Period witnessed the rise of **Kish** in the north and **Uruk** in the south as the two dominant political powers.
- ▣ This is the era in which the kings are best historically/archaeologically attested but, still, the dynasties of some cities, like Lagash, are not included in the Sumerian King List and the dates of that list for other kings often do not correspond to dates in other documents or the archaeological record.



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- ▣ The great kings of Uruk, for example, such as Meshkiangasher, Enmerkar (who was said to have first founded Uruk), Lugalbanda, Dumuzi, and the great hero-king Gilgamesh are all listed toward the beginning of the **Early Dynastic III** Period c. 2600 BCE but are also associated with earlier rulers such as Enmebaragesi and later kings like Eannatum (c. 2500-2400 BCE). There seems to be no reconciling these differences in chronology.



- ▣ The first king of the First Dynasty of Lagash, Ur-Nanshe, established Lagash as a strong political presence and his son **Eannatum** would expand on his policies and conquer all of Sumer.
- ▣ Eannatum, calling upon Enlil (patron god of Lagash) and Ninurta (god of war) led his armies against the other city-states and conquered all of Sumer – including Uruk and Kish – and then moved against the Elamites and took large portions of their territory. By the time his campaigns were over, he had created the first empire in Mesopotamia, largely comprised of the city-states of his former-fellow-monarchs. His empire was challenged shortly after his death, however, and his successors could not maintain power.



Stone pebble of prince eannatum of Lagash



- At about this same time, the king of the city-state of Umma, **Lugal Zagesi**, embarked on a campaign of conquest to reunite Sumer under a single ruler – himself – just as **Eannatum** had earlier.
- **Ur-Zababa**, the ruler of Kish sent **Sargon** as an emissary to Lugalzagesi, who was on the march toward Kish, possibly with terms, but according to legend, with the request that the king of Umma kill the messenger.
- Sargon so impressed Lugalzagesi, however, that the king ignored the request and asked Sargon to join him. They marched on Kish together and took it; Ur-Zababa fled the city and nothing more is known of him.



- Shortly after this, Sargon turned on his benefactor and defeated him, dragging him in chains, with a rope around his neck, to the city of Nippur where he was publicly humiliated in being marched through the sacred gate of the God Enlil – in whom **Lugalzagesi** had trusted for victory – and then, presumably, executed.
- **Sargon** then proclaimed himself king and went on to conquer all of Mesopotamia and founded the Akkadian Empire, the first multi-national political entity in history.

SARGON
Of AKKAD



- **The Akkadian Empire under Sargon** brought the Early Dynastic Period to a close but, contrary to Sargon's later boasts and the legends that grew up around him, he could not have established his empire without the foundation laid by his predecessors.
- Sargon's greatest strength, in fact, was learning from the mistakes of the earlier conquerors and **placing people he could trust in positions of authority** throughout his empire – including his daughter **Enheduanna** (1. 2285-2250 BCE), **high priestess of the temple of Inanna** at the city of Ur and the first author in history known by name – as well as **routinely sending trusted officials** throughout his realm to maintain order.

Sargon's example was followed by the later Assyrian Empire and the Roman Empire in terms of cohesive government.

The model of that government, however, was set down by the Sumerian kings of the Early Dynastic Period. These monarchs established a society which, in spite of its weaknesses and rivalries, allowed for the development of many of the most fundamental aspects of civilization so often taken for granted in the present day.



- One of the most interesting – and mysterious – of the monarchs who are said to have freed their cities from the empire of Lagash is **the only female ruler** on the Sumerian King List: **Kubaba** (also given as **Kug-Bau**), who founded the Third Dynasty of Kish.
- The Sumerian King List describes her briefly as “the woman tavern-keeper who made firm the foundations of Kish”. Who she was, where she came from, and how she came to power is unknown. Her son, Puzur-Suen, and grandson, Ur-Zababa, were both successful kings and Kubaba herself **was deified** after her death.
- Her cult, in fact, would inform the later Goddess of the Hurrians (Hepat) and, famously, the Phrygian mother goddess **Matar Kubileya** (“Mother Cybele”) who was worshipped by the Ionian Greeks of Anatolia/Cilicia as Cybele.

The earliest mention of Babylon (then a small administrative town) appears on a tablet from the reign of Sargon of Akkad in the 23rd century BC.

The Amorite dynasty established the city-state of Babylon in the 19th century BC. Over 100 years later, it briefly took over the other city-states and formed the short-lived First Babylonian Empire during what is also called the Old Babylonian Period.

Akkad, Assyria, and Babylonia all used the written East Semitic Akkadian language for official use and as a spoken language.

By that time, the Sumerian language was no longer spoken, but was still in religious use in Assyria and Babylonia, and would remain so until the 1st century AD.

The Akkadian and Sumerian traditions played a major role in later Assyrian and Babylonian culture, even though Babylonia (unlike the more militarily powerful Assyria) itself was founded by non-native Amorites and often ruled by other non-indigenous peoples, such as Kassites, Arameans and Chaldeans, as well as its Assyrian neighbors.



- ▣ The Akkadian Empire (2335–2154 BC) became the dominant power in the region, and after its fall the Sumerians enjoyed a renaissance with the Neo-Sumerian Empire. Assyria was extant from as early as the 25th century BC, and became a regional power with the old Assyrian Empire (c. 2025–1750 BC).
- ▣ **Babylonia:** Babylonia rose to prominence in the Bronze Age around 1900 B.C., in present-day Iraq. Its capital, the city of Babylon, was first occupied by people known as the Amorites.

The Amorite King Hammurabi created one of the world's earliest and most-complete written legal codes. The Code of Hammurabi helped Babylon surpass the Sumerian City of Ur as the region's most powerful city.