

The Akkadian Period (ca. 2350–2150 B.C.)

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The period from approximately 2900 to 2350 B.C. in southern Mesopotamia (Sumer) is known as the Early Dynastic. During this time, Sumer was divided politically between competing city-states, each controlled by a dynasty of rulers. The succeeding period (ca. 2350–2150 B.C.) is named after the city of Agade (or Akkad), whose Semitic monarchs united the region, bringing the rival Sumerian cities under their control by conquest. The city of Agade itself has not so far been located, but it was probably founded before the time of Sargon (r. ca. 2340–2285 B.C.), the dynasty's first king. Tradition credits Sargon with being the “cupbearer” of the king of Kish, at a time when Kish was an important and powerful city in the northern part of lower Mesopotamia. The name Sargon is a modern reading of Sharru-ken (“the king is legitimate”). Usurping power and assuming for himself the title of king, Sargon went on to conquer southern Mesopotamia and lead military expeditions to conquer further east and north.

Sargon was succeeded by two of his sons, Rimush and Manishtushu, who consolidated the dynasty's hold on much of Mesopotamia. The Akkadian empire reached its apogee under Naram-Sin (r. ca. 2260–2223 B.C.), and there are references to campaigns against powerful states in the north, possibly including

[Ebla](#)

. At its greatest extent, the empire reached as far as Anatolia in the north, inner Iran in the east, Arabia in the south, and the Mediterranean in the west.

The ideology and power of the empire was reflected in art that first displayed strong cultural continuity with the

[Early Dynastic period](#)

. When fully developed, it came to be characterized by a profound new creativity that marks some of the peaks of artistic achievement in the history of the ancient world. A new emphasis on naturalism, expressed by sensitive modeling, is manifested in masterpieces of monumental stone relief sculpture. Although little large-scale art of the period remains, a huge corpus of finely carved Akkadian seals preserves a rich iconography illustrating interactions between man and the divine world.

Control of the empire was maintained under Naram-Sin's successor, Shar-kalisharri (r. ca. 2223–2198 B.C.), though at the end of his reign there appears to have been a power struggle for the throne. A number of city rulers reestablished

their independence in southern Mesopotamia, and the territory ruled over by the last kings of Agade (Dudu and Shu-Turul) had shrunk back to the region directly around the city.

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