

Sargon of Agade Biography

Sargon of Agade

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Biography

Sargon of Agade (ca. 2334-2279 BC) was the first Semitic king of Mesopotamia. He founded the Akkadian dynasty and was the first ruler in history to win and hold an empire. He became a heroic figure of literature.

Sargon was born, according to legend, in the city of Saffron on the banks of the Euphrates. His father was a nomad, his mother a temple votary who set him, like Moses, afloat in a basket. He was found by a peasant who adopted him and brought him up. He became cupbearer to the king of Kish, and later he himself became king. He founded Agade, or Akkad (the site of which is not known), as his new capital and, by defeating the paramount ruler of the Sumerian city-states, became master of all Mesopotamia. In 34 battles he conquered "as far as the shore of the sea."

In the first year of his rule Sargon marched northwest up the Euphrates to conquer Hit and Mari (near Deir ez-Zor), and in the eleventh year he reached the Mediterranean coast, claiming dominion over the Cedar Forest (Lebanon or Amanus, the latter now called Alma Dag) and the Silver Mountain (perhaps the eastern Taurus). Legends credit him with the conquest of the land of Tin and the island of Crete and also with a successful expedition to central Anatolia. The text relating this incident, called the "King of Battle," may be based on stories handed down by trading colonies established by the Akkadians in this rich mining area. Whether or not Sargon went as far as the Salt Lake (Tuz Lake, or Tuz Gölü), he undoubtedly reached the Mediterranean and could with right claim territories "from the Lower Sea [the Persian Gulf] to the Upper Sea" and from the rising to the setting sun.

In other remarkable campaigns, Sargon went east to conquer the lands of Elam and Barakhshe, in the Plain of Khuzistan and the Zagros Mountains, and north to Assyria. The king lists say that he reigned for 56 years. In later ages his name was synonymous with success, and his adventures became legend. An itinerary which survives in a late Assyrian version credits him with further conquests, including the lands around the Persian Gulf and Bahrein and, perhaps, the coast of Makran.