Lecture 5  Akkad and Empire

Akkadian Empire
2334-2193 BCE

- Semitic Dynasty
  - three generations
  - stretched from “Elam to the Mediterranean sea,” including Mesopotamia, parts of modern-day Iran and Syria, and possibly parts of Anatolia and the Arabian peninsula.

- New capital, (Agade) Akkad

- world’s 1st military dictatorship
Sargon of Akkad

2334-2279

- Reigned 56 years
- Numerous legends
  - set adrift as baby in basket of reeds and pitch
  - royal cupbearer to the King of Kish
- conquers the last Sumerian King and led him through the streets in a dog collar
- conquers the Elamites

Sargon’s Mythical origins

- of humble beginnings
- despite Šarru-ken-u (“the king is legitimate”)  
- Story of him being exposed in a reed basket
- found a raised by a gardener’s wife
- won the love and attention of the goddess Ishtar

Birth Legend of Sargon

- [http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/2300sargon1.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/2300sargon1.asp)
Successful in War

• “5400 men ate in his presence”
  – standing army
• Sargon marches up the Euphrates
• conquers Mari and Ebla
• continues up to “Cedar Forests and Silver Mountains
• much of Sargon’s “Legend” comes from later Assyrian sources
  – claims to have captured 50 governors (ensi) including Lugalzagesi of Umma and Uruk (coalition leader)

Sargon Quells Dissent

Sumerian South angered at occupation
Sargon makes new “double office”
• makes his daughter high priestess of:
  – moongod Nanna at Ur
  – Heavengod An at Uruk
• these offices would continue for 500 years
Syncretism between:
• Sumerian Inanna (love and fertility)
• Ishtar (Akkad’s warlike deity)
  – Becomes “Queen of Heaven”
Political Innovations

First “Empire” in history
• appoints Akkadian governors to rule in Sumerian cities
• centralized authority
• Sumerian cities must tear down defensive walls
• Culture slowly becomes Sumero-Akkadian – Mesopotamian

Changes in the conceptualization of Kingship

• Sargon establishes his daughter Enheduanna as the priestess (entu) of Nanna at sanctuary at Ur.
• Object’s function is not clear.
• One single register
  – A ziggurat is restored in the left hand side of the scene
  – possibly representing the institution of the Entu-priestess.

Not Everyone Bought the New Regime

Sargon’s son assassinated
• Naram-Sin of Akkad (2255-2218 BCE)
  – grandson of Sargon
  – “King of the four quarters”
• aggressive on battlefield
• considers himself “divine”
• created high civil posts for his children
  – His reign and his son’s considered the “Classical” Akkadian period
Naram-Sin
2254-2218 BCE

• grandson on Sargon
• quelled rebellion in his territories
• conquered new lands
  – NE Mesopotamia
• centralized and improved bureaucracy
• deified himself late in his reign

Naram-Sin on the battlefield

• Facing revolts from the start of his reign

Naram-Sin:
  – conquers Ebla in Syria
  – defeats a coalition led by Kish
  – defeats another coalition led by Uruk
  – all the major cities of Mesopotamia
  – attacks Nippur and the Hatti.

Victory Stele of Naram-Sin
(Susa, Iran)
2254-2218 BCE, pink sandstone

stele to commemorate victory
• hierarchical proportion
• organization of figures
• incorporates landscape
Deification of Naram-Sin
“secured the foundations of the city in times of trouble”
• great rebellion that killed his father
• Naram-Sin was victorious
Only king to be represented with the horned crown of deity
• horned helmet is “divine” determinant in Akkadian language
• seated with Ishtar
Revolts after Naram-Sin’s death

The Akkadian Dynasty
• Sharru-kin (Sargon): 2334-2279 BCE
• Rimush: 2278-2270 BCE
• Manishtusu: 2269-2255 BCE
• Naram-Sin 2254-2218 BCE
• Sharkalisharri 2217-2193 BCE

New Economic Policies
• Standardized barter within the Akkadian Empire
  – had been in barley
  – Each item had a corresponding weight in metal (silver)
• Silver ingots used for long-distance trade
  – NOT money in the monetary sense
  – traded for manufactured (nonperishable) goods
Increased Trade Contacts

Uniform weights and measures
- developed under Naram-Sin
- Akkadian gur – a measure of 300 liters of barley
- uniform accounting system
- Akkadian becomes the official language of bureaucracy

Land Confiscation
- Obelisk of King Manishtushu (2269-2255 BCE)
  - records the “transfer” of 8 large fields to the royal household of Akkad in N. Mesopotamia
  - King gave $ for it, but under market value = 3.5 sq. kms.
Akkadian as a language

Sumerian and Akkadian are vastly different languages

• Sumerian is a more agglutinative language
  – phonetically unchanging words and particles are joined together to form phrases with increasingly complex meaning

• Akkadian is inflectional
  – basic form of a word, called a root, can be modified in a myriad of ways to create words of related but different meanings
  – the basis of Semitic languages is the triconsonantal root: sequence of three consonants representing the most basic and abstract form of a word.
Imperialism in Art

• The ideology and power of the empire was reflected in art that first displayed strong cultural continuity with the Early Dynastic period.
• 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.