

Notes on Quiz #1: Semitic Mesopotamia

1. Who was Sargon? What did he create? What were the benefits of this creation?

Sargon was a king of Akkad, one of the Semitic cities that rose in Mesopotamia after the Sumerians, during the Bronze Age. He's credited with creating the first multinational empire, after conquering or absorbing many of the lands and peoples of the Fertile Crescent.

For Akkad, empire had the benefit of direct control of distance resources that would otherwise been gotten through traders. This meant a stronger and more stable economy, allowing Akkad to become wealthier—though that wealth would have been offset by the expenses of ruling over a vast empire, suppressing its subjects, and crushing rebellions.

For the subjects of Akkadian rule, empire would have meant broader distribution of previously hard-to-get goods, as the empire developed a larger overall economy; over time this can raise the standard of living throughout the empire. Migration within the empire meant greater contact with unknown peoples and ideas; in general, a potential for broadening beyond the local. Improvements in the empires that benefitted the Akkadian overlords would have helped locals as well, such as bridges and roads. — However, subjects of empire were liable to the tribute and taxes, to misrule by alien governors, and to military service in the emperor's wars.

2. What was the Code of Hammurabi? What kinds of things did it deal with? Why was such a Code important?

It was a law code, one of the earliest known in history, issued by Hammurabi, a king of the Old Babylonian empire during the 18th century BCE. For the most part it dealt with applying justice to conflicts between individuals, often having to do with property or commercial transactions, with different provisions depending on class.

In an empire consisting of many different peoples and traditions, the Code imposed a unified law that overrode varying and conflicting local customs. Its publication meant that law and justice were fixed, rather than being subject to the whims and avarice of officials. A unified law code was one way to help bring about trust in an empire controlled by alien rulers from far away, because locals could now be sure what to expect from their rulers.

3. For today you read Tablet 5 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which involves Gilgamesh and Enkidu's encounter with Humbaba. What happens in this encounter? What do you think Humbaba might represent in the story?

Gilgamesh and Enkidu defeat Humbaba, the cedar-forest guardian. The prize cedar is cut down and sent to Uruk to be used as doors to the great temple there.

The fight represents Gilgamesh's desire for glory, which is starting to be about Uruk and not just himself, and the value of companionship, even when there is disagreement. More generally, the fight represents humanity's assertion of power over the natural world and the taking of the resources of the wild for the purposes of civilization, a second stage of humanity's transition from nomadic to civilized acted out by Enkidu. The gods come from the wild power of nature and so this is also an assertion of mortal power over the gods.

EC1. All of the following are true of Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon, EXCEPT:

- (a) She was commemorated on a disc made translucent alabaster from 2200 BCE, found at Ur
- ✓ (b) She was priestess of the goddess of blacksmithing
- (c) She is the earliest known author of any writing in cuneiform
- (d) She called down a curse on the king of Uruk

EC2. Who were the Hittites, and where did they come from?

The Hittites were an Indo-European people, who migrated into the Mediterranean world from the Indo-European homelands to the north of the Black Sea. Like the rest of the Indo-Europeans they were original pastoral, decentralized, nonurban, and tribal, but on encountering the prosperous city-states of the Mediterranean World they sought to emulate their stability and success, building city-states of their own. — They settled in Anatolia and, merging with the indigenous peoples there, built one of the first Bronze age industrial trade empires.