

# The Rise of Sumer

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. The Sumerians created the world's first advanced society.
2. Religion played a major role in Sumerian society.

### The Big Idea

The Sumerians developed the first civilization in Mesopotamia.

### Key Terms and People

rural, p. 60

urban, p. 60

city-state, p. 60

Gilgamesh, p. 61

Sargon, p. 61

empire, p. 61

polytheism, p. 62

priests, p. 63

social hierarchy, p. 63



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TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on the Sumerian civilization.

## If YOU were there...

You are a crafter living in one of the cities of Sumer. Thick walls surround and protect your city, so you feel safe from the armies of other city-states. But you and your neighbors are fearful of other beings—the many gods and spirits that you believe are everywhere. They can bring illness or sandstorms or bad luck.

**How might you protect yourself from gods and spirits?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** As civilizations developed along rivers, their societies and governments became more advanced. Religion became a main characteristic of these ancient cultures. Kings claimed to rule with the approval of the gods, and ordinary people wore charms and performed rituals to avoid bad luck.

## An Advanced Society

In southern Mesopotamia, a people known as the Sumerians (soo-MER-ee-unz) developed the world's first civilization. No one knows where they came from or when they moved into the region. However, by 3000 BC, several hundred thousand Sumerians had settled in Mesopotamia, in a land they called Sumer (soo-muhr). There they created an advanced society.

## The City-States of Sumer

Most people in Sumer were farmers. They lived mainly in **rural, or countryside**, areas. The centers of Sumerian society, however, were the **urban, or city**, areas. The first cities in Sumer had about 10,000 residents. Over time, the cities grew. Historians think that by 2000 BC, some of Sumer's cities had more than 100,000 residents.

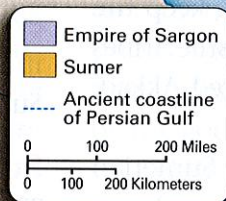
As a result, the basic political unit of Sumer combined the two parts. This unit was called a city-state. **A city-state consisted of a city and all the countryside around it.** The amount of countryside controlled by each city-state depended on its military strength. Stronger city-states controlled larger areas.



## Sargon's Empire, c. 2330 BC



### ASIA MINOR



### BIOGRAPHY

#### Sargon

Ruled 2334–2279 BC

According to legend, a gardener found a baby floating in a basket on a river and raised him as his own child. This baby later became

the Akkadian emperor Sargon. As a young man, Sargon served Ur-Zababa, the king of Kish. Sargon later rebelled against the Sumerian ruler, took over his city, and built Akkad into a military power. He was among the first military leaders to use soldiers armed with bows and arrows. Sargon gained the loyalty of his soldiers by eating with them every day.

### GEOGRAPHY SKILLS

#### INTERPRETING MAPS

**Location** How far west did Sargon's empire stretch?

City-states in Sumer fought each other to gain more farmland. As a result of these conflicts, the city-states built up strong armies. Sumerians also built strong, thick walls around their cities for protection.

Individual city-states gained and lost power over time. By 3500 BC, a city-state known as Kish had become quite powerful. Over the next 1,000 years, the city-states of Uruk and Ur fought for dominance. One of Uruk's kings, known as **Gilgamesh**, became a legendary figure in Sumerian literature.

### Rise of the Akkadian Empire

In time, another society developed along the Tigris and Euphrates. It was created by the Akkadians (uh-KAY-dee-uhns). They lived just north of Sumer, but they were not Sumerians. They even spoke a different language than the Sumerians. In spite

of their differences, however, the Akkadians and the Sumerians lived in peace for many years.

That peace was broken in the 2300s BC when **Sargon** sought to extend Akkadian territory. He built a new capital, Akkad (A-kad), on the Euphrates River, near what is now the city of Baghdad. Sargon was the first ruler to have a permanent army. He used that army to launch a series of wars against neighboring kingdoms.

Sargon's soldiers defeated all the city-states of Sumer. They also conquered northern Mesopotamia, finally bringing the entire region under his rule. With these conquests, Sargon established the world's first **empire**, or land with different territories and peoples under a single rule. The Akkadian Empire stretched from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea.

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#### ANIMATED HISTORY

Sumerian City-States, 2300 BC



## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**role** a part or function

Sargon was emperor, or ruler of his empire, for more than 50 years. However, the empire lasted only a century after his death. Later rulers could not keep the empire safe from invaders. Hostile tribes from the east raided and captured Akkad. A century of chaos followed.

Eventually, however, the Sumerian city-state of Ur rebuilt its strength and conquered the rest of Mesopotamia. Political stability was restored. The Sumerians once again became the most powerful civilization in the region.

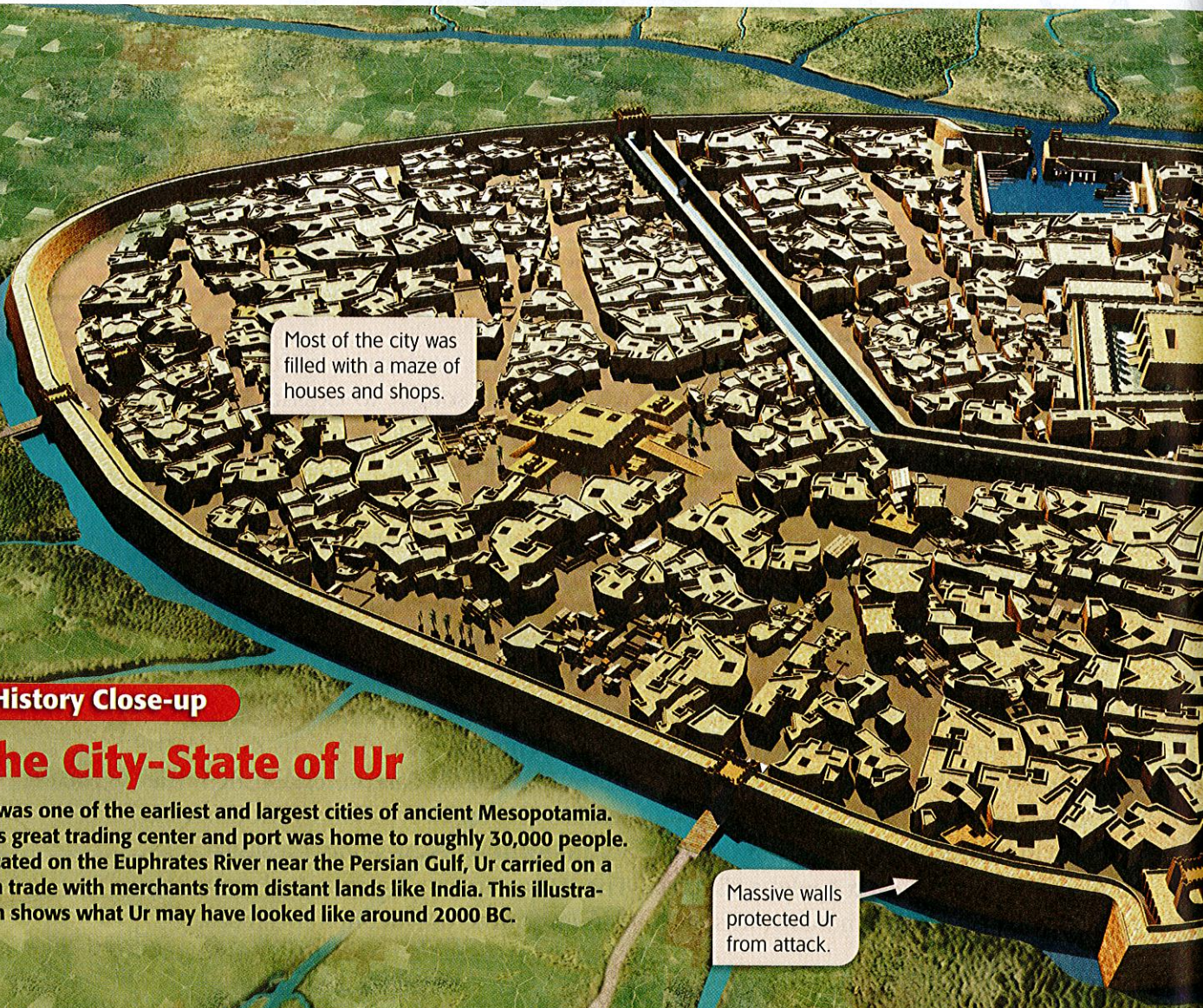
**READING CHECK** Summarizing How did Sargon build an empire?

## Religion Shapes Society

Religion was very important in Sumerian society. In fact, it played a **role** in nearly every aspect of public and private life. In many ways, religion was the basis for all of Sumerian society.

### Sumerian Religion

The Sumerians practiced **polytheism**, the worship of many gods. Among the gods they worshipped were Enlil, the lord of the air; Enki, god of wisdom; and Inanna, goddess of love and war. The sun and moon were represented by the gods Utu and Nanna. Each city-state considered one god to be its special protector.



Most of the city was filled with a maze of houses and shops.

### History Close-up

## The City-State of Ur

Ur was one of the earliest and largest cities of ancient Mesopotamia. This great trading center and port was home to roughly 30,000 people. Located on the Euphrates River near the Persian Gulf, Ur carried on a rich trade with merchants from distant lands like India. This illustration shows what Ur may have looked like around 2000 BC.

Massive walls protected Ur from attack.



The Sumerians believed that their gods had enormous powers. Gods could bring a good harvest or a disastrous flood. They could bring illness, or they could bring good health and wealth. The Sumerians believed that success in every area of life depended on pleasing the gods. Every Sumerian had a duty to serve and to worship the gods.

**Priests**, people who performed religious ceremonies, had great status in Sumer. People relied on them to help gain the gods' favor. Priests interpreted the wishes of the gods and made offerings to them. These offerings were made in temples, special buildings where priests performed their religious ceremonies.

## Sumerian Social Order

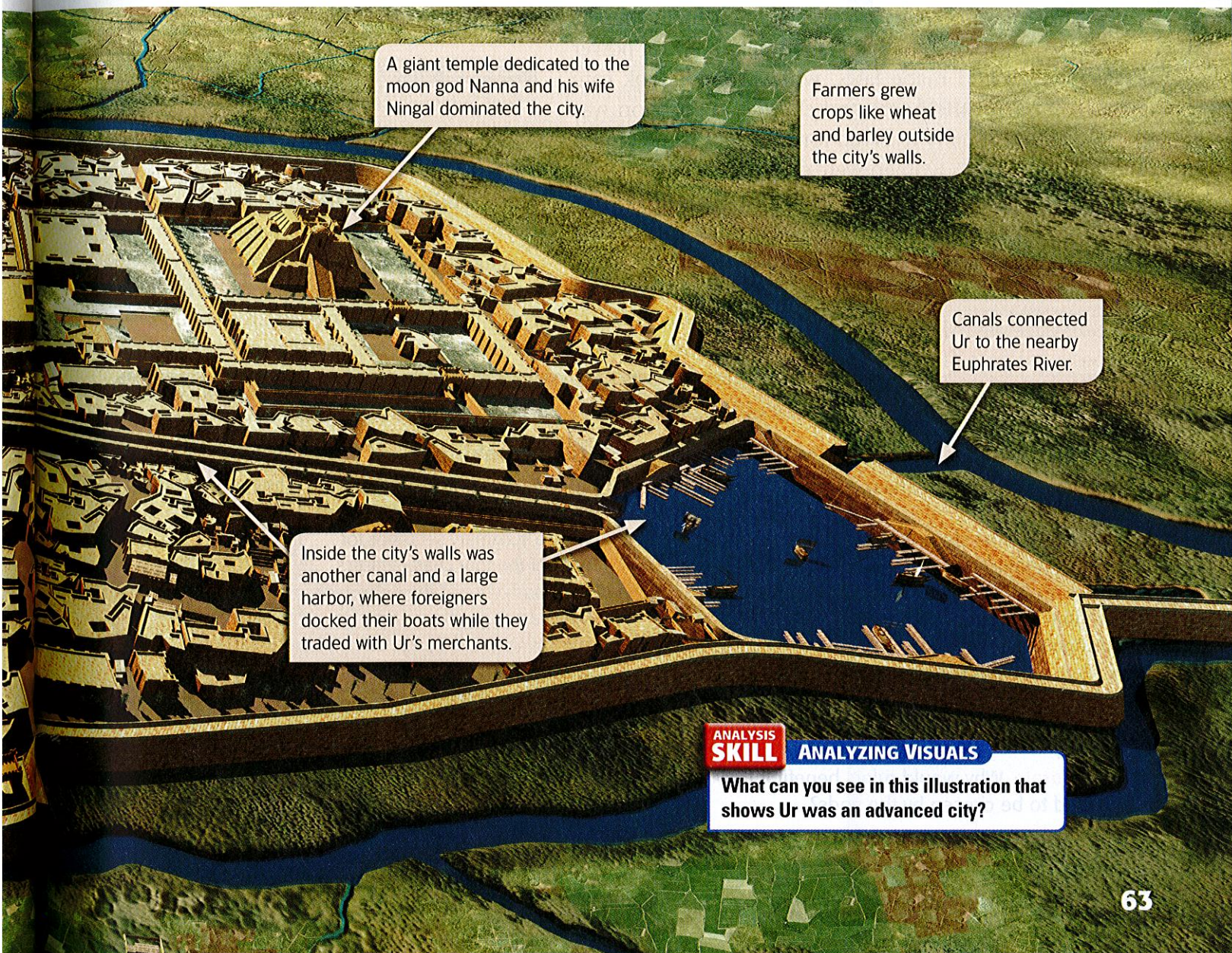
Because of their status, priests occupied a high level in Sumer's **social hierarchy**, the **division of society by rank or class**. In fact, priests were just below kings. The kings of Sumer claimed that they had been chosen by the gods to rule.

Below the priests were Sumer's skilled craftspeople, merchants, and traders. Trade had a great **impact** on Sumerian society. Traders traveled to faraway places and exchanged grain for gold, silver, copper, lumber, and precious stones.

Below traders, farmers and laborers made up the large working class. Slaves were at the bottom of the social order.

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**impact** effect, result

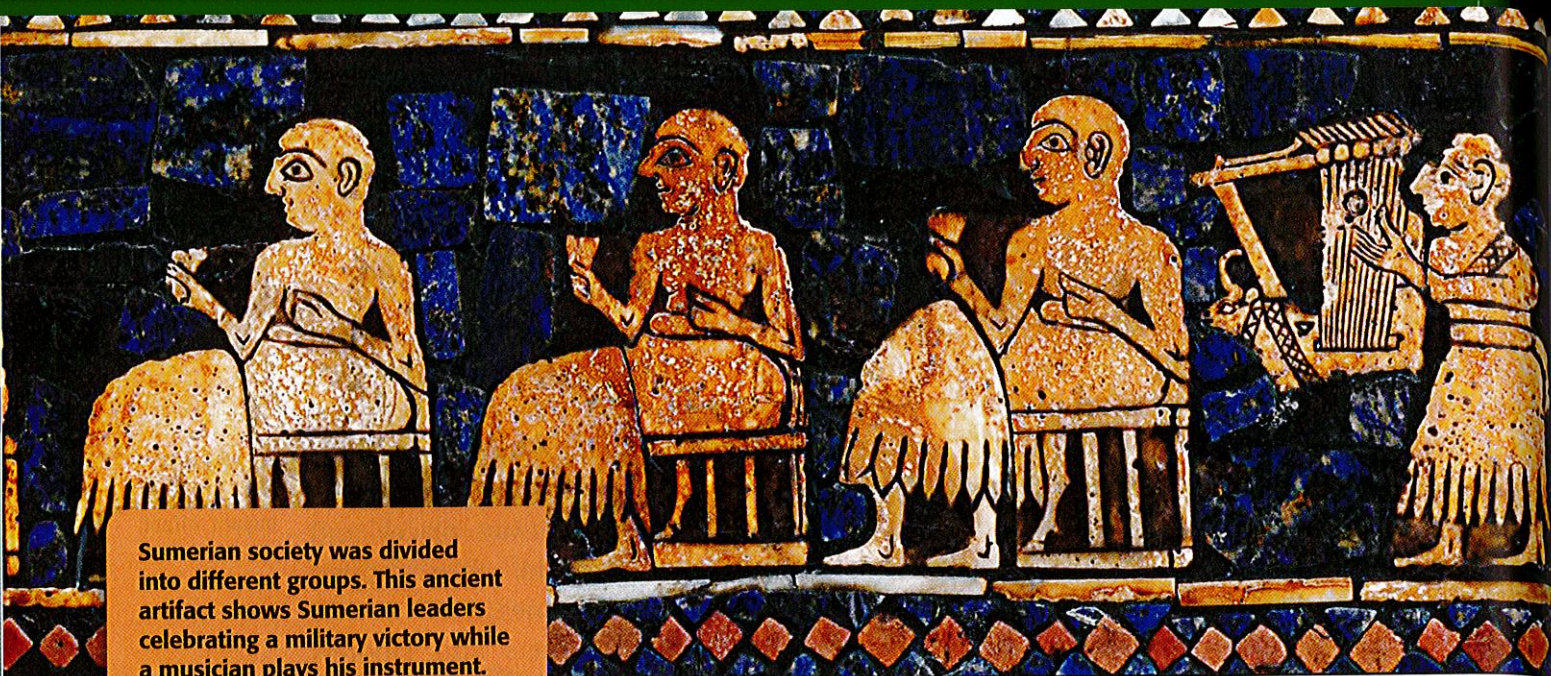


ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING VISUALS

What can you see in this illustration that shows Ur was an advanced city?





Sumerian society was divided into different groups. This ancient artifact shows Sumerian leaders celebrating a military victory while a musician plays his instrument.

### Men and Women in Sumer

Sumerian men and women had different roles. In general, men held political power and made laws, while women took care of the home and children. Education was usually reserved for men, but some upper-class women were educated as well.

Some educated women were priestesses in Sumer's temples. Some priestesses helped shape Sumerian culture. One, Enheduanna, the daughter of Sargon, wrote hymns to

the goddess Inanna. She is the first known female writer in history.

**READING CHECK Analyzing** How did trade affect Sumerian society?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** In this section you learned about Sumerian city-states, religion, and society. In Section 3, you will read about the Sumerians' achievements.

## Section 2 Assessment

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ONLINE QUIZ

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. Recall** What was the basic political unit of Sumer?

**b. Explain** What steps did **city-states** take to protect themselves from their rivals?

**c. Elaborate** How do you think Sargon's creation of an **empire** changed the history of Mesopotamia? Defend your answer.
- a. Identify** What is **polytheism**?

**b. Draw Conclusions** Why do you think **priests** were so influential in ancient Sumerian society?

**c. Elaborate** Why would rulers benefit if they claimed to be chosen by the gods?

### Critical Thinking

- 3. Summarizing** In the right column of your note-taking chart, write a summary sentence for each of the four characteristics. Then add a box at the bottom of the chart and write a sentence summarizing the Sumerian civilization.

Characteristics	Notes
Cities	
Government	
Religion	
Society	

↓  
Summary Sentence:

### FOCUS ON WRITING

- 4. Gathering Information about Sumer** What aspects of Sumerian society will you include in your letter? What important people, religious beliefs, or social developments do you think the students should learn?