

Akkadian language

ancient language

Akkadian language, also spelled Accadian, also called Assyro-Babylonian, extinct [Semitic language](#) of the Northern [Peripheral](#) group, spoken in [Mesopotamia](#) from the 3rd to the 1st millennium BCE.

Akkadian spread across an area extending from the [Mediterranean Sea](#) to the [Persian Gulf](#) during the time of [Sargon](#) (Akkadian Sharrum-kin) of the [Akkad](#) [dynasty](#), who reigned from about 2334 to about 2279 BCE. By about 2000 Akkadian had supplanted [Sumerian](#) as the [spoken language](#) of southern Mesopotamia, although Sumerian remained in use as the written language of [sacred literature](#). At about the same time, the Akkadian language divided into the Assyrian dialect, spoken in northern Mesopotamia, and the Babylonian dialect, spoken in southern Mesopotamia. At first the Assyrian [dialect](#) was used more extensively, but Babylonian largely supplanted it and became the [lingua franca](#) of the [Middle East](#) by the 9th century BCE. During the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, [Aramaic](#) gradually began to replace Babylonian as the spoken and written language; after that Babylonian was still used for writings on mathematics, astronomy, and other learned subjects, but by the 1st century CE it had completely died out. Scholars deciphered the Akkadian language in the 19th century.

Akkadian, written in a [cuneiform script](#) developed from that of the Sumerians, contained about 600 word and syllable signs. The sound system of the language had 20 consonants and 8 vowels (both long and short a, i, e, and u). Nouns occurred in three cases (nominative, genitive, and accusative), three numbers (singular, dual, and plural), and two genders (masculine and feminine); the feminine was distinguished from the masculine by the addition of the suffix -t or -at to the stem. The verb had two tenses (past and present-future).

In 1921 scholars at the Oriental Institute of the [University of Chicago](#) began to compile a standard dictionary of the Akkadian language, then represented by the now-dated name “Assyrian.” The first volumes were published in 1956. After more than five decades of [continuous work](#), The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (or the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, as it is better known) reached 26 volumes (consisting of 21 numbered volumes, some of which were

published in separate parts); the final volume was released in 2011, and [the dictionary as a whole was made available online](#) . The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary contains some 28,000 words and spans the years 2400 BCE to 100 CE.