

📖 Topic Page: [Akkadian language](#)

Definition: **Akkadian** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

 [pronunciation](#)

(1869) **1** : an extinct Semitic language of ancient Mesopotamia **2** : a Semitic inhabitant of central Mesopotamia before 2000 b.c.

Akkadian *adj*



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Summary Article: **Akkadian language**
From *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*

Akkadian refers to the East Semitic language spoken and written in Mesopotamia from about 2400 bce to the Christian era (Huehnergard and Woods 2004). The modern name is derived from *Akkadu*. Old Akkadian covers a small corpus of evidence prior to 2000 (Hilgert 2002; Hasselbach 2005). Thereafter, Akkadian (reference grammar von Soden 1969; textbook Huehnergard 2005; linguistic description Reiner 1966 is divided into Assyrian and Babylonian dialects. Assyrian, centered on the city of Assur in upper Mesopotamia, is divided into Old (2000–1750), Middle (1500–1000), and Neo-Assyrian (1000–600). Babylonian is divided into Old (1900–1500), Middle (1500–1000), Neo- (1000–600), and Late (600 bce–first century ce). There were two literary dialects, both Babylonian in origin, the Hymnic-Epic dialect (1900–1500), and Standard Babylonian, from the mid-second millennium on. During the second half of the second millennium, Akkadian diffused throughout western Asia as a formal written language.

Akkadian was written using the cuneiform writing system, using polyvalent signs to write syllables, words, and semantic indicators, and thus required significant schooling to read (Walker 1987). The writing was impressed on clay tablets using a stylus, though inscriptions on stone, metal, and waxed writing boards are also known.

The phonology of Akkadian varies among dialects, with a tendency to reduce the core Semitic inventory of sounds owing to contact with other languages. Akkadian shares with the larger Semitic family a morphology based on irreducible nominal roots, such as *kalb* "dog," and inflected verbal roots, plus uninflected particles, such as certain prepositions. The majority of verbal roots consist of three consonant sounds and an associated vowel, such as *mqt* "fall." There are five marked grammatical cases, plus a vocative. Three prefixed forms of the verb broadly correspond to present, perfect, and present-future in European languages; a suffixed form has no time value but often denotes a state or condition. There is a base stem and three or more derived stems of the verb, corresponding to such notions as plurality, causation, and passivity, as well as two internal markers for kinds of action, such as mutual or medio-passive and repetitive. There are three moods: indicative, asseverative-subjunctive, and wish or command (Edzard 1973).

The most important linguistic contact with Akkadian was Sumerian, which contributed many loan words at all periods (Lieberman 1977, affecting morphology and syntax as well. With the internationalization of Akkadian came new loan words from West Semitic languages and Hurrian, and, during the first millennium, Akkadian was increasingly influenced by Aramaic, though Akkadian influenced these

languages in turn (Kaufman 1974. Aramaic gradually replaced Akkadian as the spoken vernacular of Mesopotamia, though Akkadian was maintained as a written language of learning and science until early in the Christian era.

The existence of Akkadian was forgotten until the decipherment of cuneiform writing in the nineteenth century, when it was often referred to as Assyrian. Because of this, the academic discipline focused on the Akkadian written tradition is referred to as Assyriology.

SEE ALSO:

Semitic languages.

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