

AKKADIAN is a Semitic language which was spoken from the early 3rd to the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, in the area corresponding to modern Iraq and Syria and some neighboring regions. [See Semitic Languages.] The term subsumes two major dialects, **BABYLONIAN** and **ASSYRIAN**. These underwent three broad stages of development, labeled Old (ca. 2000–1500 BCE), Middle (1500–1000), and Neo- (1000–500); their forerunner is known as Old Akkadian (2500–2000 BCE). Some scholars consider Eblaite as a form of Old Akkadian, with which it is contemporary.

1. History. Old Babylonian is generally viewed as the classical stage of the language, because of a convergence of cultural and diachronic factors: it is the earliest stage of the language for which we have a large, differentiated, and culturally significant body of written documents. That Old Babylonian had a certain normative value is suggested by the fact that later cultural manifestations of the language were consciously modeled on it—especially Standard Babylonian, a literary ‘dialect’ used in the mid-1st millennium BCE, when Akkadian as a spoken language had begun to disappear.

During the second half of the 2nd millennium, Akkadian came to be used as a lingua franca over all of southwestern Asia. Through its use as a shared medium of expression by speakers of different languages, it developed into a scribal lingo rather divorced from the natural linguistic development which it underwent separately in the core area of Babylonia and Assyria.

External influences are important in the study of Akkadian. Because of its cultural primacy, Sumerian [q.v.] seems clearly to have played a significant role in shaping