

over a wide area, wherever it was convenient to use clay tablets.

3. Akkadian.

The language that is most commonly written in cuneiform, and from which we have the greatest number of tablets--hundreds of thousands in fact--was at first called Assyrian. Later it was realized that Assyrian is a dialect of Babylonian with certain special peculiarities; therefore the name Assyrian has been given up as a designation for the language, and is retained only for one of its dialects. Many of the tablets written in this language come from Babylon and the cities associated with it, but others are from a period before the founding of Babylon, and come from people who had as their leading center the city of Akkad, or Agade. From this name modern scholars have formed the term Akkadian (or Accadian), which is today used to designate the language as a whole. Akkadian was used for over 2500 years in writings by people spread over quite a wide area. The language is a Semitic language, that is to say, it is related to Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and Ethiopic, and shares many of the peculiarities of these languages. Anyone having a good start in one of these languages will easily recognize many Akkadian words. As a language it is probably easier than the Egyptian, particularly with the advantage that is secured through having the vowels represented as well as the consonants, and this to some extent makes up for the greater complexity of the signs, and the greater difficulty of memorizing them. Many scholars in various countries have busied themselves with studying the Akkadian language. Its extensive literature is extremely varied, including detailed historical texts, lengthy law codes, magical texts and incantations, legal texts, contracts, lists of all sorts of property, and a tremendous variety of personal letters.

There are a number of periods in which the Akkadian language varies considerably. The earliest, which preceded the rise of Babylon, is designated as