



Akkadian Rhythms

Setting

Millennia have passed since the mesopotamian empire was first brought together. Since this time the world has been changed and twisted by the power released when people have plundered artifacts. Artifacts are heavenly made objects of ancient magic that release a new power for the people to master and a strange curse that changes life itself. The taking of an artifact starts a new Epoch.

As the Epochs have come and gone, the Earth itself has changed to an unrecognizable place. The race of humans has been extinct for thousands of years, and their very form has been forgotten. From the edges of reality, new races, called Clans, have emerged as their descendants. Waging wars and laying conquest with the same mind and the same vigor as their human ancestors.

The beliefs of the mesopotamians have become lost to time. Their writings crumble, and with them, their beliefs. In their place, Magical Forces have emerged and began manipulating nature. The commoner knows of these forces, and have little knowledge of the Ancient Legends of the forgotten deities.

The physical plane is a person's primary experience. This is known as the Akkadian Realm. Named after the city of Akkad, and the first emperor Sargon. The dead walk the Nether plane and other spirits walk the Spirit plane. Behind it all, the deities remain locked firmly in the sky in their heavenly plane. Surviving in the physical world requires making peace with the other planes.

Spirits roam in the physical world. The forces indifferently control the fate of mortals. People wield great magical powers from many sources. Good and evil are embodied in omens. The world is a mysterious and dangerous place.

Akkadians

Clans in the Akkadian realm have glimpses of the ancient legends and the epochs. Their everyday lives are affected most often by the forces. The stories of ancient kings, of deities, and of the epochs belong to a select few. Mythical knowledge that a player's character has access to depends on whether that knowledge is common, what their status is in society, and skillsets they have chosen.

All people are brought up with stories about each force and have knowledge of them. When encountering one, characters should be

familiar with its name and what the force generally represents.

Belonging to a Cult provides a better chance of understanding the forces. Cults can provide more of a scientific knowledge of how a force works or can view it as a totally mystical phenomenon.

Commoners only know of the current epoch and a few major ones. Their access to libraries, a priesthood, or high society might increase how many epochs they know of and their background. City-states often have information on specific epochs on tablets, on recovered ruins, or in libraries. Only the rich, scribes, priests, and the politically connected get access to these resources.

Characters that choose a skillset in the Social skill focus will have access to more historical knowledge. They should know of the first epoch, the most recent, and a dozen major ones. They also tend to know what artifact was taken to begin the epoch, but will not have direct knowledge of how it affected the world.

Good and Evil

All of the realms live in a very twisted place where life after death is a reality, yet the living run from it as if their short existence bears more meaning. The concepts of Good and Evil are just as tangible while also just as twisted. For Akkadians, phenomena that bless life, learning, and longevity are Good as are actions from Ancient Legend and the heavenly plane. Phenomena that are spawned by death, spirits, darkness, the nether plane, and pestilence are Evil. Curses and illness are viewed the same, as both can be caused by these evil forces. There is a duality between the waking world of life and the sleeping world of death, they are good and evil.

Many things can be good or evil. Forces are either viewed as good or evil by the Akkadians. Their hand in an event is how it is seen as a blessing or a curse. Omens are also sources of either good or evil. They are loved and feared by the people and have a direct influence on life. Spirits are not always evil, but their interference without invitation is. Ancestral spirits are viewed as good while other spirits are not. Beings from the heavenly plane are seen as good even if they prove to be working for evil intent. The nether plane and its mirror world is evil but the city of fate is good.

Forces

Born from Epochs, forces are natural things that have gained power and drive every day life. They are unfeeling, yet living things, that all Akkadians try to earn favor from. Forces are good or evil as viewed by the Akkadian people, but they follow rules like other forces of nature and can be studied. Learning the lessons of each force helps people to grow and prosper. Their lessons are often learned through allegory.

Akkadian commoners learn of the forces as children. They will be taught simple lessons about each, but often refuse to accept them. Much like a conscience whispering in the back of their minds as they make mistakes. The most common example is the force of Alaku which teaches that suffering through pain is how we grow, yet is rejected by those who chase ill-gotten pleasures to escape from pain. These lessons are small bites of wisdom captured in the simple description of each force.

List of Forces

- * **Alaku** are the collective forces of pain that are seen as the inevitable sunset that follows life. Pain and death are not viewed as bad things. They are forces of good that move people forward. A force of pain is thought of like wisdom and experience. Most people are brought up being told that Pain is good, but still wince and attempt to avoid pain as a reaction. It is a lesson that most suffer through but do not actually learn. The common reaction to learning about Alaku is guilt for not following its teachings.
- * **Dullu** is the force of work and accomplishment. It is a force of Good. It presents itself as the feeling of success when work is done correctly.
- * **Waqu** is a force of good that brings fortune when the time is right. It shows itself in animals who hunt by waiting for prey to come along.
- * **Birqu** is a force of evil. When someone is blinded by a bright light or deafened by a loud sound, they are being cursed by Birqu. The world passes you by when you are blinded.
- * **Mehu** is a force of good. It is seen in monsoons and rain storms. It represents the washing away of the old and the renewal of the young.
- * **Massaru** is a force of evil. It is seen in dreams. Dreams are uncontrollable visions that enslave the mind. Though visions can be premonitions, the loss of control is seen as an evil possession.
- * **Gildu**, the will to survive, is viewed as a force of good. Both animal and people feel the need to thrive and stay safe. This force is seen through the thick hides on peaceful animals that protect them from the predators who wish for them to die.
- * **Ripsu** is a force of evil represented by fog. Clouds that block the sun from your eyes are viewed as good, but those that touch the ground and block your vision are considered bad omens and thought of as evil.
- * **Gillimu** is the inner need to provide compassion or to help others and is viewed as an outward force that acts upon us. Like the way cold touches the skin and gives a chill. The feeling of favor is viewed as a force of good.

- * **Pasalu** represents the bugs that crawl through the ground which are viewed as if they are all part of one large creature. They are the farmers who tend to the fields below the surface and are viewed as a force for good. A single bug is not Pasalu, but all of them working together is.
- * **Kibsu** is seen through tracks, footprints, and blood trails which are all evidence of past experiences. The force of Kibsu is like an impression that makes someone who they are. That impression leaves a track, and it is believed that all things that leave a memorable impression also leaves tracks and can be followed. This force is both Good and Bad depending on whether the tracks lead to safety or to danger. When a new experience is had that seems to point to good, it is viewed as a good sign. When an experience points to something bad it is thought of as a bad omen. Even if the good or bad endings do not come into reality, the expectation of their results is Kibsu.
- * **Resi** is honor and it is a force of good. This honor is about righteousness in the face of adversity. The belief that never succumbing to the temptation of evil has more value than seeking accolades by doing good. Being able to stand behind a shield of honor from an onslaught of attacks is more desirable than riches or power. Money disappears and power is taken, but Resi is a statue that stands for all time.

Cults

As the ancient legend has eroded through history, like a crumbling tablet, the worship of the Forces has overtaken everyday life. All people are aware of the forces, but some belong to cults that worship and study a small number of them.

Those that belong to a cult learn the wisdom that there is to be taught by their forces and try to share it with others. Much of their worship involves learning new lessons and allowing forces to simply act on their life. In turn, the worshipers in that cult become very aware of when a force is acting and strive to learn how it works. It is a blessing to have a force repeat its lessons in one's life over and over.

- * **Cult of the City-State** - Every city-state has a patron cult. They worship in temples of long forgotten deities with worn down statues. A single deity or force will be the patron subject of the cult of a given city-state. The oldest and most powerful worship a deity. Most worship a force. Citizens of the city-state are compelled to participate in regular temple festivals and service. Officials are known to pay cults of other city-states for blessings from their patron.
- * **Alaku's cult of Kalu** - Alaku are the collective forces of pain that are seen as the inevitable sunset that follows life. In their minds, death is real and everything else is the absence of death. The birth of a child is where pain doesn't yet exist, and aging is slowly accumulating pain in one's life. Death is the full measure of the forces of pain. Life is an empty jar, death is a full one. They view everything like the daytime, and that the pain of night is the natural state of things. The daytime is just taking away night for a little while.
- * **Dulli Simitti** - This is the three headed eagle that represents progress. Dulli Simitti demands hard work as worship, and smiles upon the completion of grand works. Labor is viewed as a mystic force for good. Followers worship by doing hard labor, and seek Dilli Simitti's blessing to finish.

- * **Waqu** - Animals who ambush their prey are patient examples of strategy in battle. The Waqu view patience and perseverance as a virtue that leads to victory. They train to have as many scenarios play out in their head as possible while still remaining singly focused on their opponent. Always waiting for the right time to strike or the best plan to win.

Waqu is not a cult like the others, but a title bestowed by villages to their best warriors. Those given the title are expected to train and master in the teachings and to let them guide their life. Their teachings are mostly taught through playing games on carved wooden boards.

They shun impatience, view luck as a type of failure, and find need in simply sitting and observing the world around them. Those who don't understand the Waqu often view them as childish or lazy, but quickly change their mind when they see them in battle.

- * **Misihu** - These bands of entertainers travel the lands looking for the best opportunity to make money. The people involved in the Misihu become as close as family, which becomes all that matters. Other cults, deities, and forces are viewed as distractions. The most devout Misihu see those other cults as empty teachings designed to control people, whereas Misihu take care of their family out of love and respect.
- * **Simtu** - Expressing the mind is difficult in word and always misread in deed. The Simtu cult believes that abstract ideas can be drawn through paints, especially when painted over nature itself. A sunset over a rock for mourning, a child across a tree trunk for the simple joys. These pictures represent who we are inside. Simtu believe that truth can be seen through art. That what is hidden in the mind can be drawn out with it. Prophets in the cult believe that they can see the past and present through their artwork, and can read a person's mind by how they perceive the art.

Planes

There exist 4 planes of existence encompassing the world of the living, the dead, and the heavens. A 5th dimension of featureless mire known as the Greylands, also leaks into the physical world, and appears and disappears like the tide.

Travel between the planes is difficult. Parts of the barriers between the planes that have thinned can be traveled through. Some beings cannot pass between planes. People cannot pass into the heavenly plane and deities cannot pass into the nether plane. The only passage for them to these realms is a hall of great gates that lead to every plane. The gates have been locked since the epoch of Isten and the secret to their opening is unknown.

List of Planes

- * **Heavenly Plane** - This plane is almost completely inaccessible to people. Even ancestor spirits go to a different place. It is the home of the deities and very little is known about it. It is believed to be filled with temples, gold, and treasures of untold value. The heavenly plane is believed to be visible from the physical world by looking up at the night sky.
- * **Spirit Plane** - A world made up of concepts, intentions, and emotions. Lies and truths are as real in the spirit plane as rock is in the Akkadian realm. Deities may interact with the spirit plane, but do not live in it. Honored ancestors reside in the spirit plane along with other ancient or lost spirits. Spirits from the mirror can be taken to the spirit plane, but how is not well known.

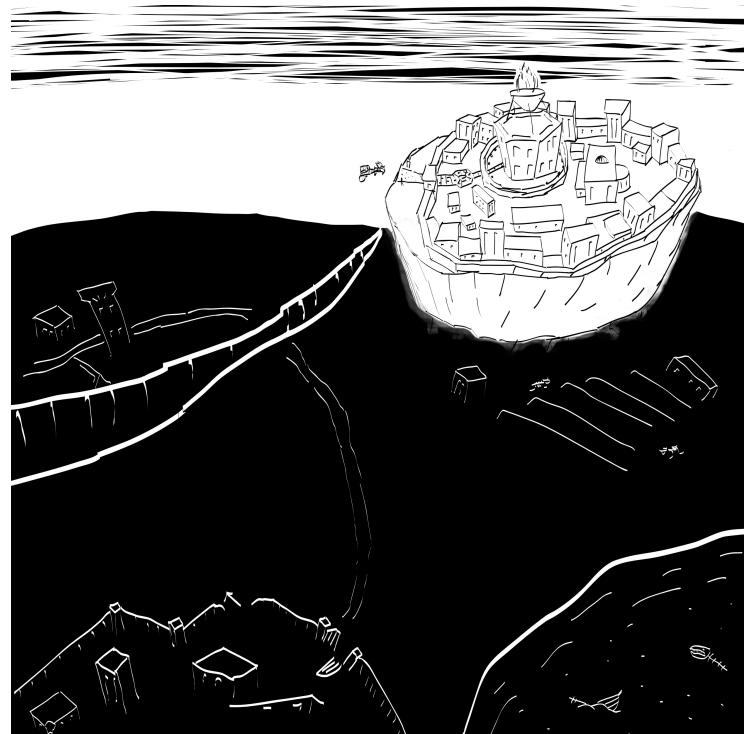
There are many different places in the spirit plane. Those that dwell in the place of the ancestors find ways to give favor and omens to the physical world. Other places do not affect the physical world.

- * **Akkadian Realm** - This is the plane of people. They live and die in the world and experience all of their emotions and pain here. Forces of nature and spiritual forces reside in the physical world, and do not normally affect the spiritual or heavenly planes. Spirits can often get trapped in the physical world.
- * **Nether Plane** - Known as the city of fate, the shadow, or the underworld. This plane is dark and quiet. It has the feel of a stale dusty tomb. Portions of the nether plane mirror the Akkadian plane. Hanging above the mirror is a great city called the City of Fate. Spirits that inhabit the mirror become evil and only the greatest of the good spirits are welcomed into the city.

Deities do not concern themselves with the Nether, only rarely assisting spirits from the mirror to the city. It is believed that they have no true power in the nether plane or else they would have conquered it.

People who have died enter the Nether plane but lose their identity. Only honored ancestors who have made it to the spirit plane can be easily sought out by name. In the nether plane, each soul is like a new creation of its former self. Spirits here are called Etemmu.

Deep underground in the Nether plane is the hall of great gates. There are doors that lead to the Heavenly, Spirit, and Physical planes. It's not known who may use these doors. A powerful force has locked the doors. Spirits, ancestors, and even deities are forbidden.



(City of Fate hangs over the Mirror.)

Ancient Legend

The deities of the ancient world are long forgotten. Only fragments of their stories still exist. Even if they had survived, the stories of beings in the heavenly plane were metaphors that were greatly misunderstood. What became legend was not as it was, and the true nature of the deities is often less concerned with the people of the Akkadian Realm than with themselves.

Commoners only have knowledge of some names, and no way to discern gods from simple heroes. Kings, like Hammurabi, are often elevated to gods, yet they existed as mere men. Their daily lives are affected only by the Forces, and knowledge of the heavens has little bearing on their life.

Scholars, lore seekers, and the highest in society gain more knowledge of the ancient legend. Their position places them in front of old stone tablets and carved reliefs. They will know of some of the deities, such as Tiamat, Sin and Shamash. They will have learned the traditional misunderstandings and incorrect allegories.

List of Deities

- * **Anu** - Thought to be the god of authority and father of all gods. Anu is the embodiment of a concept. He encompasses people's creativity and their need to rule over nature. Anu is one of 3 gods in the divine triad.
- * **Enlil** - The god of the horizon and the earth. He is said to be so holy that he cannot be looked upon. Like the horizon, Enlil separates the land from the heavens. He is one of 3 gods in the divine triad.
- * **Ea** - The god of water who is separated from the heavens by Enlil. Ea is feared as one who causes floods and was known for hating humans. He is one of 3 gods in the divine triad.
- * **Tiamat** is the mother of monsters, known as the great dragon. Tiamat invented monsters to wage war with humans. She birthed the 3 great dragons. Thought of as the mother of anger. It was believed that when Tiamat was conquered, her eyes became the source of the two great rivers which were taken in the first Epoch of Isten.
- * **Creature of War** - First of the 3 dragons. Has a scaly body, 4 legs and bird wings. It is described as a serpentine lion. Known as Usumgallu. Represents people's warring nature.
- * **Creature of Hunger** - Second of the 3 dragons. A seven headed serpent that devours all of the food in its path and strips the land of its animals. Known as Basmu. It represents people who deplete the land through hunting and destruction and the wrath that nature holds to cause famines in retaliation.
- * **Creature of Illness** - Last of the 3 dragons. Described as a lion with a snake head and stinging tail. When birthed it had poison instead of blood. Known as Masmahhu. It represents sickness and decay.
- * **Ishtar** - Queen of the heavens, goddess of storms, thunder, stores of food, war, and fertility. As an idea these concepts represent being prosperous. She was believed to exist only in the heavens, but could touch the physical plane through storms. Ishtar has an artifact, which is a great stone gate. It is known as "the storehouse gate" and behind it lies a great evil. Ishtar is one of 7 heavenly gods, visible in the night sky.

- * **Shamash** - God of the sun and of justice. He shines light on misdeeds and shows favor to honesty. Shamash is also judge of other gods, viewed as the ultimate authority. In the nether plane, Shamash is also the name of the blessing that allows a soul into the city of fate. It was once believed that Shamash was making this decision himself, but it is very difficult for deities to reach the nether plane. Shamash has 3 artifacts. The sun staff, the sun ring, and the knife of the sun. Shamash is one of 7 heavenly gods, visible in the day.
- * **Sin** - Moon god that is the father of Shamash and Ishtar. The concept behind Sin is that the darkness of night existed before light shined. Sin has 1 artifact, the great bull horn headdress. Sin is one of 7 heavenly gods, visible both in the day and night.
- * **Marduk** - The god of water's many forms. Marduk represents the idea of the changing of water, seen through salt water, not fit for drinking, which evaporates to become rain and create life. Marduk has an artifact known as Imhullu which is said to be a great arrow that attacks like the wind itself and tames the seas. One of 7 heavenly gods, visible in the night sky.
- * **Gibil** - Believed to be the god of fire, and one who blesses metal work. The fire is viewed as creating tools and refining them, not as destroying. Gibil is actually the god of knowledge and wisdom, with a mind so great it cannot be fathomed. The association with fire is unknown, but Gilgamesh takes his true name from Gibil. Gibil may have influenced Gilgamesh's blessing to "know all things." Gibil has also been known as Nabu and is one of 7 heavenly gods, visible in the night sky.
- * **Ninurta** - The hunter god of healing and farming. He is thought of in the life that springs up from the land and how it feeds the people. Ninurta's symbol is a mace which can speak, an artifact. He is one of 7 heavenly gods, visible in the night sky.
- * **Girunugal** - Known also as Nergal, Girunugal was believed to be the god of the underworld. War, destruction, and deadly heat from the sun was considered the domain of Girunugal. Girunugal was actually an emotionless power, much like one of the forces, that controlled passage between planes. In ancient legends ceremonies designed to please Girunugal were magical incantations that navigated properties of this force to allow passage. The easiest plane to pass is from the Akkadian plane to the Nether plane through death, and as such Girunugal was attributed to it specifically. Nergal is one of 7 heavenly gods, visible in the night sky.

Girunugal's lion headed scepter is an artifact. The removal of this scepter from a deep cave filled with sulfur vapor started the epoch of Erbe Me'at Sedis Sebet. The influence of the heavenly plane weakened, the greylands appeared more often, and openings to the spirit realm became weaker.
- * **Zaiquu** - God of dreams. This god was considered evil and knowledge of him was forbidden once the force of Massaru awoke. Since then, the name Zaiquu was given to mindless spirits that haunt ancient places. Zaiquu's seal, a wax seal made of marble, was an artifact that was stolen in an epoch which woke the force of Massaru.

* **Sargon** - Once believed to be the god of earthly kings, a distant descendant of Tiamat's children, and the protector of humans and civilization. Almost all knowledge of Sargon is forgotten. The legends of Sargon as a deity were myth. Sargon was a human king and founder of the city of Akkad. Sargon brought civilization to the nomadic people and invented many things. Of these things are the silver standard and its weights and measures, creating an empire from the various cultures, and building the first trade routes.

Sargon is responsible for the Epoch of Isten, the first Epoch, when he stole the Eyes of Tiamat. These two gems were the source of life at the two great rivers. Before the eyes were stolen, magical creatures could be found along the rivers, and people could drink from them and regain part of their youth. Many people would live for hundreds of years this way before the eyes were stolen. Sargon ordered the gems destroyed to prevent Tiamat from rising again and creating a new army of monsters. It is unknown if the gems were destroyed or were simply hidden. Rumor states that they are behind the sealed doors in the Nether Plane.

* **Gilgamesh** - Often confused with a god, he was the king of Uruk blessed with the prophecy to "see all things and to know all things." Not much is remembered about him. The poems of his exploits have long been destroyed. Existing records claim that he was the only god to rule over the people directly. Gilgamesh is responsible for the second and 3rd Epochs of Sina and Salas.

Gilgamesh died attempting to find the eyes of Tiamat, which were either lost or destroyed during Sargon's reign. Gilgamesh was obsessed with eternal life, and cursed the lands with his pursuit. Undead that seek out the blood of the living were born from these experiments. Gilgamesh's true name is Gish Gibil. Gish Mesh, and may have been influenced by Gibil, the god of fire.

* **Enkidu** - In the ancient poems of Gilgamesh, Enkidu is said to be a wild man who is tamed and then befriends Gilgamesh. This poem is long forgotten but the idea of Enkidu being the god of the wilderness survived. Enkidu was actually a scepter made of bone that was taken by Gilgamesh in the epoch of Sina. It gave Gilgamesh control over beasts and allowed the taming of wolves as dogs, lions as cats, and great bulls as cattle. One of the few surviving statues of Enkidu shows the taming of a lion.

Epochs

Years are measured by the ushering in of new Epochs, which span generations. When the people become hungry for a new ancient power to unleash upon the land, they seek out a mystical artifact created by the deities of ancient legend and take it for themselves. When an artifact is taken, the world begins to change and over the years new creatures emerge and new magical phenomena appear.

Since the first Epoch, the race of humans have disappeared, the deities of ancient legend no longer interact with the living world, the Forces have awoken with a life of their own, and the greylands have begun seeping into the Akkadian realm and unleashing evil intent.

Each major change in the world was introduced during an epoch. Stories that take place in earlier epochs will have a different setting, devoid of some of the changes and consequences that have since taken

place. A timeline of epochs that details when each part of the setting was introduced is available in the Game Master's Guide. This timeline could not be known by anyone living in the Akkadian realm.

Epochs are memorialized in the akkadian numbering system. The current epoch is Erbe Me'at Sedis Sebet, which is the 476th epoch since Isten. Isten is the first Epoch and was started by the taking of the Eyes of Tiamat from the source of the two great rivers.

Commoners only know of the current epoch and a few major ones. Their access to libraries, a priesthood, or high society might increase how many epochs they know of and their background. City-states have information on specific epochs on tablets, on recovered ruins, or in libraries. Only scribes, priests, the rich, and the politically connected get access to these resources.

Some skill disciplines provide access to some of the information on epochs from the city-states. Players with skillsets in the Magic or Society disciplines may have access to more information on epochs.

Timeline of Epochs

* **Isten**, the first epoch - Sargon, king of the city of Akkad, stole the gems called the Eyes of Tiamat from the source of two great rivers in an attempt to have eternal life. The taking of the eyes ended the healing properties of the rivers, and stopped a life-giving spring that restored youth. This change brought about the birth of the new Clans, starting with the Suttinu and began the end of the race of humans. The gems have since disappeared and believed to be destroyed in an attempt to save the humans.

* **Sina**, the second epoch - Gilgamesh, king of Uruk stole a scepter made of bone named Enkidu, which could control the thoughts of animals. This unleashed the power for people to tame animals for pets and livestock. It also started the appearance of the Greylands, from which monsters walk into the world.

* **Salas**, the third epoch - Gilgamesh also sought out immortality despite Sargon's failure from the first Epoch. This epoch lasted only one year. Gilgamesh failed to recover any artifacts, but stained the land with evil rituals that cut rifts into the spiritual realm. This caused the walls between the Akkadian Realm and the spiritual plane to weaken and for undead to step through while the moon was full. Spirits who could only speak, became able to harm the living and some began to thirst for blood.

* **Me'at Erbe Sessa**, 164th epoch - The seal of Zaiqu was stolen, awaking the force of Massaru. This gave people better control of their dreams, but also gave spirits and celestial beings the ability to grasp the living in their sleep through paralysis. Before this epoch, the deities of ancient legend gave messages to kings through dreams, but now the spirits chase away their power.

* **Erbe Me'at Sedis Sebet**, 476th epoch - The epoch that started the dark ages. Girunugal's lion headed scepter was taken from a deep cave filled with sulfur vapor. The barriers between planes have shifted. The heavenly plane became firmly closed, the spirit planes opened wide, and the greylands began to appear every night at dusk. Spirits now walk the living world for as long as they wish, bad omens have increased, and fear has overtaken many people. The stagnation of technology has become a result.

Epoch Naming

Epochs are numbered in order. Their names are derived from Akkadian numbers. Their numerals are assembled in the format of a digit, followed by “Limi” for thousands, a digit followed by “Me’at” for hundreds, followed by a one’s digit and, a word for the tens place.

The digits are Isten (1), Sina (2), Salas (3), Erbe (4), Hamis (5), Sedis (6), Sebe (7), Samane (8), Tise (9), and Eser (10).

Numbers in the teens are digits followed by “seret” for a place in the teens. Examples are Istenseret (11), and Sebeseret (17). Only two numbers have alternative spelling, Sinserset (12) and Salasser (13).

Multiples of 10 each have their own name. They are Esra (20), Salasa (30), Erba (40), Hamsa (50), Sessa (60), Sebet (70), Samana (80), and Tisa (90). Ones values are written before the tens value, such as Isten Esra (21).

Hundreds and thousands are written with the numeral first. An example of a number in the thousands is Sina Limi Salas Me’at Hamis Erba (2,345).