

CHICAGO ASSYRIAN DICTIONARY (CAD)

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2010–11 saw the publication of the final volume of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary. The last detailed tasks occupied Manuscript Editor Linda McLarnan, Research Assistant Anna Hudson Steinhelper, and me for much of the year. Below is an edited version of the lecture I presented at the celebratory symposium for the completion of the project, held at the Oriental Institute on 6 June 2011. For more detailed histories, the reader is referred to I. J. Gelb's "Introduction" to CAD A/1 (1964) and Erica Reiner's *An Adventure of Great Dimension* (2002).

The CAD was ambitiously begun in 1921 under the guidance of James Henry Breasted, whose vision for collaborative projects launched the Oriental Institute, the University of Chicago's first research institute. Housed originally in the basement of Haskell Hall and under the direction of Daniel D. Luckenbill, the small staff of scholars and students began to produce the data set by typing editions onto 5 x 8 cards, duplicating with a hectograph, parsing, and filing. Luckenbill died unexpectedly in 1927 at the age of 46, and Edward Chiera was called to Chicago from the University of Pennsylvania to take over the project. The enlarged resident staff was augmented by some twenty international collaborators, and in 1930 the project moved into its current home in the new building, to a spacious room on the third floor that was specially reinforced to hold the weight of tons of file cabinets and books. Technological advances allowed the old hectograph to be replaced with a modern mimeograph machine for duplicating the cards. Alas, Chiera too died young, at the age of 48, in 1933, and the directorship of the project passed to Arno Poebel, who came to Chicago in 1930 also from the University of Pennsylvania. Collecting of data continued under each successive editor — Luckenbill, Chiera, Poebel — and by 1936 more than one million file cards were in the banks of cabinets, alphabetized and arranged by key word. With the onset of World War II, work on the Dictionary came to a halt, but after the war and the retirement of Arno Poebel in 1946, I. J. Gelb, who had come to Chicago in 1928 from the University of Rome, assumed the helm.

The post-war years were the boom years for the project: the University brought into our midsts a number of scholars displaced by the European disaster, and the Oriental Institute benefited enormously: in 1947 Benno Landsberger (who had been a Dictionary collaborator since 1932, working from Leipzig and then Ankara) and A. Leo Oppenheim from Vienna, and in 1952 Erica Reiner from Budapest and Paris. By this time, too, the editors had given up on the ambition to collect every single known cuneiform text and to fully parse every occurrence of every word in favor of excerpting; the project no longer aimed to be comprehensive and eternal.

In 1950, Gelb went to Europe to see if he could acquire the data sets that had been assembled before the war by Bruno Meissner under the auspices of the Prussian Academy of Sciences since the mid-1920s. Meissner had died in 1947, at the age of 78, and the project had been inherited by Adam Falkenstein, then at the University of Heidelberg, and Wolfram von Soden. The two projects, in Chicago and Heidelberg, attempted a formal collaboration, the

details of which were recorded in a document called “The Marburg Agreement” and formally ratified by the Union Académique Internationale in 1951. Alas, the projects and personalities could not be united and any formal collaboration quickly broke down, although informal contact and exchange of information continued until the completion of the German project, under the direction and almost the sole authorship of Wolfram von Soden, as a three-volume compendium, published in fascicles from 1965 to 1981.

Back in Chicago, the senior members of the faculty, Gelb, Jacobsen, Landsberger, and Oppenheim, jostled for dominance. The differences were, at this time, mainly theoretical and methodological: Gelb advocated for a highly rigid linguistic analysis and descriptive presentation, with each entry organized by grammatical categories; Landsberger insisted on a highly “semantic” approach. Oppenheim wrote in his comments to the differing proposals, “It is rather obvious that both these ‘systems’ reflect the individual psychological make-up of their originators; Landsberger prefers the dogmatic approach that is an adequate expression of his scholarly standing and temper, while Gelb wishes to follow the ‘objectivity’ of the American linguistic school” (quoted in Reiner 2002: 24). As Reiner wrote later in her history of the project, “It is quite clear that for Landsberger and Oppenheim the elucidation of the word’s *meaning* was of primary importance, whereas for Gelb the orderly presentation of the evidence was crucial” (ibid., 25).

The internal strife and personality conflicts occupied the energies of the Director of the Oriental Institute, Carl Kraeling, as well as the offices of the Dean, Provost, and President. Finally, Gelb resigned at the end of 1954 and never again participated in the production of the Dictionary. As he wrote of himself in the third person a decade later in 1964: “Gelb went on leave of absence for one year, which was prolonged indefinitely due to his inability or unwillingness to adjust to the new spirit prevailing in the Dictionary” (CAD A/1, p. xix).

Oppenheim now took the helm in 1955 and proceeded to do what no one else had been willing to do for the preceding thirty-five years: produce a volume of the Dictionary. The first volume, devoted to the words beginning with the letter H, was sent to press in October 1955 and the second, G, to press in July 1956, appearing in print within a few months of each other in 1956 and 1957. The two volumes were largely the work of Oppenheim and the junior members of the team Reiner, Hallock, and Rowton, and came in for much — and much deserved — harsh criticism from scholars throughout the world and especially in Chicago. As one might imagine from the speed with which the volumes were actually written, edited, and published — what Benno Landsberger famously called “insane haste” — the process of citation checking suffered. The subsequent finger-pointing devolved into a raging and vicious feud between Thorkild Jacobsen and Leo Oppenheim, and centered on the publication of the third volume, E. The details of the feud that irreparably severed personal and professional ties has been recounted in Reiner’s history of the project, *An Adventure of Great Dimension*. Volume E included several words key to Jacobsen’s evolving positions on Mesopotamian religion (such as the words *ēnu* and *ēntu*, “priest” and “priestess,” and *eršetu*, “earth” and “nether world”), and the volume was sent to press in August 1957 without Jacobsen’s input. Jacobsen prepared a long and detailed list of what he called “errors” in the volume and presented them to the voting members of the Oriental Institute along with an accusation directed at the Director of the Institute, Carl Kraeling, a biblical scholar, for dereliction of duty and an “inability to maintain the scholarly standards of the Institute.” In an eleven-page defense of his directorship, Kraeling perforce defended the Dictionary and Oppenheim, without fully smoothing over the antagonisms, however. By 1959, when Oppenheim was offered a position at Johns

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Hopkins and Reiner a position at Harvard, the two were tempted to leave and abandon the Dictionary. The University succeeded in retaining them, but, alas, with the consequence of further alienating Jacobsen, who resigned from the editorial board of the Dictionary. Once again, in 1960, Jacobsen prepared a detailed list of errors in the fifth volume, I/J. The director of the Institute then was the Egyptologist John Wilson, and he turned to Benno Landsberger to try to intercede, but to no avail. In 1962, Reiner again received an offer from Harvard. Edward Levi, then president of the University, in trying to retain her, downplayed the offer by telling Erica that “Everybody gets an invitation to Harvard.” When she added that it was her second offer, he replied “Everybody who is somebody gets two invitations to Harvard.”

With the strong support of the University administration and the appointment of Robert McCormack Adams to the directorship of the Oriental Institute, Reiner turned down the Harvard offer. Jacobsen promptly had the offer extended to himself and left Chicago in 1962.

The project was at that point forty years old, which calls to mind a first-millennium learned compendium from Sultantepe (STT 400) that outlines the following “ages of man”:

40, the prime of life

50, a short life

60, maturity

70, a long life

80, old age

90, extreme old age

The Dictionary was thus in the “prime of life” at 40: robust, vigorous, active. Indeed it is at this time that three of the current members of the team first came to Chicago: Bob Biggs, Tony Brinkman, and Miguel Civil all began their affiliations with the Dictionary in 1963. Thus began what Erica Reiner later called “a dozen years of peace and progress,” when the team worked and completed the volumes Z, Ş, A, B, K, and L. In 1970 Herman Hunger arrived in Chicago. By 1972, when Leo Oppenheim retired and left the Dictionary in the hands of Biggs, Brinkman, Civil, Hunger, and Reiner, eleven volumes had seen publication.

Oppenheim’s unexpected death in 1974 was traumatic for Reiner and for the project. She wrote later: “Oppenheim’s death occasioned a profound change in the life of the project as well as in my own relation to it. Gone was the reassurance.... No other senior Assyriologist was on hand to turn to when I needed advice. The attitudes of the members of the CAD staff were varied: Some, possibly resenting that a woman was in charge, offered [help] but their initiative soon petered out. At this juncture the importance of the contributions of Miguel Civil, not only in the field of Sumerian ... became evident. ... His expertise assured the quality of the Dictionary ... after Oppenheim’s death” (2002: 69).

After a somewhat shaky start as editor-in-charge, Erica Reiner became a fierce and formidable advocate and defender of the project. Under her leadership, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) began its invaluable support of the project. The NEH funded the Dictionary from 1975 through 2003. During this time of ample funding support, the project brought in dozens of junior and senior colleagues from institutions throughout the world. Among them were several who became more than transient visitors. I myself came to Chicago in 1979 on the NEH grant, a brand-new PhD from the University of Pennsylvania with experience on the Sumerian Dictionary project there. By now the Dictionary was sixty years

old — maturity — and Erica Reiner and Miguel Civil warned me that there was no long-term future here, that the project would be completed shortly.

The Assyrian Dictionary was by then, in its maturity, a well-established, highly respected, and indeed indispensable project. Today's students simply cannot imagine learning Akkadian without the tools. I vividly remember as a graduate student eagerly awaiting the publication of the M volume. We anticipated the appearance of each new volume with a true hunger for the insights and wisdom of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary team.

Although the people and operations of the Dictionary were not always smooth, the project never again experienced the turmoil and uncertainty of those years in the 1950s. Under Oppenheim's editorship, eleven volumes had been published, and under Erica Reiner's editorial eye and hand — trained by Oppenheim — five more volumes were published (M, N, Q, S, and Š) and one was in press (T). When Reiner retired in 1996 and I assumed the reins — similarly excruciatingly trained by Reiner — she continued to come to the office every day to work on the Dictionary and to look over my shoulder. It wasn't always easy or comfortable for me or any of us. We all, the in-house collaborators and editorial board — Bob Biggs, Tony Brinkman, Miguel Civil, Walter Farber, and Matt Stolper — had begun to move on to other projects, other intellectual pursuits. The Dictionary in 1996 when I assumed responsibility for the project, was, at seventy-five, in the terms of that Babylonian compendium, in the time of "long life" and "old age." It was, in other words, getting tired. It was time to move from a stance of keeping the project alive to one in which it would actually be finished.

One of my first tasks as editor-in-charge in 1996 was to retrieve the manuscript of the T volume from the publisher J. J. Augustin, based in Glückstadt, Germany, with its American office in Locust Valley, New York. Augustin was a distinguished publisher of some of the finest-quality technical humanistic books in the world, and had been the skilled compositor of every volume to date, first in "hot type" (molten lead cast into letters and lines of type) and then in "cold type" (typeset by computers and pasted up into pages). But the firm had run into financial difficulties and was holding up publication of the T manuscript, which we had sent to them in 1991. With the help of the University's legal office we succeeded in having the only marked-up copy returned to Chicago and sent then to Eisenbraun's for composition in 2000. Eisenbraun's became the compositor for every subsequent volume, and has been an outstanding partner.

The story is now drawing to an undramatic close. When I took over as editor-in-charge, the remaining volumes had all at least been started, to varying degrees. One by one, they have seen publication: R in 1999, P in 2005, T (belatedly) and T̄ both in 2006. As each cleared the "pipeline," the project came closer to completion. Over the last years, our attention was focused exclusively on completing the very last volume, U/W, which went to press in 2007 and finally appeared this winter, in 2010/11.

The ninety-year chain of editorial direction — Daniel Luckenbill, Edward Chiera, Arno Poebel, I. J. Gelb, A. Leo Oppenheim, Erica Reiner, Martha T. Roth — was unbroken. The project has engaged eighty-nine scholars over its ninety-year history, some coming to Chicago for short sojourns before going off to teach and research in universities and museums all over the globe. The final U/W volume alone involved some twenty colleagues at all stages, scholars who are now teaching in Madrid, Vienna, New York, Helsinki, Leiden, Brigham Young, Loyola, Johns Hopkins, and Cornell — taking their Chicago experiences and lessons and passing them on to yet future generations of scholars.

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Now, in 2011, the entire set of the Dictionary is available to the scholarly world, in print and online. After an initial thirty-five years of data-gathering, the teams of scholars here at the Oriental Institute produced twenty-six tomes over the next fifty-five years, a pace of publication of which we must all be extremely proud. I have had a hand in seven volumes: P, R, S, Š, T, Ț, and U/W — at the beginning as a first-draft writer, as a reader of galleys and proofs, as a critical-citation checker, as a first-run editor, as final editor with ultimate responsibility for the quality and accuracy of the published volume. Always, the University of Chicago seeks (in President Robert Zimmer’s words “to make discoveries of lasting impact and to define the modes of inquiry for the future.” We have engaged successfully in that task here at the Oriental Institute. Scholarship — enduring scholarship — progresses by the gradual accrual of knowledge over generations.

References

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Aage Westenholz and Johannes Renger (with backs to camera), Richard T. Hallock, A. Leo Oppenheim (by bookshelves), Jean Nougayrol, I. J. Gelb (with pipe), and Erica Reiner