

THE ASSYRIAN DICTIONARY

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Within two years of the time of its foundation, the Oriental Institute began work on what it knew would be a long and difficult undertaking, the writing of the first comprehensive Assyrian Dictionary ever undertaken by and for scholars. Ever since the last half of the nineteenth century, clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform texts had been brought to light in Mesopotamia and adjacent parts of the Near East in huge quantities. But the only tools available for their interpretation were small dictionaries compiled by individual scholars from a limited body of material. "It was evident," wrote Dr. Breasted himself, "that the work of a single scholar, such as had produced the Assyrian dictionaries of the past, must be expanded and carried on by

Annals of Sennacherib. 7th century B.C.





Ancient dictionary on clay tablet

a permanent central staff." Hence, what the Oriental Institute undertook to do was to produce a dictionary that would provide access to the vocabulary of the great body of the material and to the several dialects of the Akkadian language, so that the designation "Assyrian Dictionary" is maintained only for tradition's sake. The range of cuneiform studies expanded greatly while the Dictionary was in progress; it ranges now from the Old Akkadian texts of the late third millennium to those of the Late Babylonian period dating from the first century of our era and comprises dialects spoken in areas outside Babylonia and Assyria proper, such as Susa, the region to the east of the Tigris, Mari, Syria, and Asia Minor. Due consideration is being given to the Sumerian background, to the information contained in Hittite and Old Persian cuneiform texts, to the use of foreign words within the Akkadian vocabulary, as well as to the spread of Akkadian and Sumerian words into other languages.

Since the project began, the staff has compiled a word catalogue of over two million cards. More are being added as new texts are published, but the major work of assembling the material has been brought to an end, and the staff is now engaged in writing the articles that deal with the meanings of the individual words. The volumes D, G, E, H, I-J, S, and Z have been published; three more volumes are in preparation, and ten others are planned at not more than yearly intervals. Each will be welcomed as a milestone along the path of Assyriological studies wherever they are cultivated. Currently, the staff of workers includes, besides the members of the Editorial Board, Michael B. Rowton and A. Kirk Grayson, Research Associates.

An important project related to the publication of the Assyrian Dictionary deals with (Sumero-Akkadian) dictionaries on clay tablets (see figure on page 20). Eight volumes of a critical and systematic edition of all extant ancient examples have been published since 1937 by Professor Benno Landsberger and his assistants in the series "Materialien zum Sumerischen Lexikon" by the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, lately with a subvention from UNESCO. Currently Professor Landsberger's assistant is Mrs. Anne Draffkorn Kilmer.

*Relief from palace
of Sargon II of Assyria.
722-705 B.C.*

