

News & Notes

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It was important that Babylonian civilization should be represented in the researches of the Institute from the beginning, even though we might not yet be able to begin operations on Babylonian soil. . . . It was agreed that . . . an Assyrian dictionary, based on all available cuneiform sources, was probably the greatest outstanding need. This vast project was therefore inaugurated in 1921.

So wrote James Henry Breasted in 1933. This summer, after more than 50 years of work, a milestone was reached: with the appearance of Volume *L* over one half of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary has been published. Also this summer A. Leo Oppenheim retired and Erica Reiner became editor-in-charge of this project. At this medial point we offer a brief review of the history and operation of the CAD project and a glance to the future.*

The cuneiform writing of Mesopotamia was read by 1850; the best-known pioneer in the field was the English adventurer-scholar Sir Henry Rawlinson. A few years after that achievement an Assyrian-French glossary of the earliest known inscriptions was published in the *Journal asiatique*. As the science of Assyriology grew, so did the need for larger and better dictionaries, and over the next 80 years at least 25 appeared. Some listed personal names. Some treated one or another of the branches of Akkadian, like Old Babylonian or Neo-Assyrian, that philologists had learned to recognize. Some attempted to include everything. Some are still used today. But every one of them was compiled by a single scholar. Even the most brilliant could not be sure of having included every pertinent bit of information; and some have been accused of allowing their pet theories to interfere with their presentation of facts.

Meanwhile, during all this time a group of lexicographers in England, under the direction of James A. H. Murray, was compiling an English dictionary on a new principle. They gathered examples of word usage from every stage of the English language. Every word, every meaning was cited *with its original context*. Only in this way could they be sure of indicating every nuance of meaning. Thirty years were required for the initial compilation of data, and a further fifty passed before the last volume of the *Oxford English Dictionary* was finished. A supplement covering the last forty years of the language's development is just now coming out, volume by volume. The contributions of the OED to lexicography were three: the ideas of a large-scale project, of recording historical development of words, and of publishing quotations exemplifying usage.

Thus when Professor D. D. Luckenbill took charge of the CAD in 1921 there was a model of dictionary-making to follow. The system set up then is essentially the one still used today. And how much more must the context of every citation be considered in an Assyrian dictionary than in an English one! For a living language, there is a continuous tradition of word meanings; speakers of English can be consulted to discover how a word is used. But there are no speakers of a dead language — the only way we can tell what any word means is by examining the record of how it was used.

This is an appropriate place for a digression on decipherment. After all, how do we know what the context means if we do not have a native to ask? We can only do it if we have something to take the place of an interpreter. We have been very lucky in the Near Eastern languages. The Rosetta Stone contains the same inscription in Greek and two forms of Egyptian. A brilliant young Frenchman named Champollion noticed that wherever a royal name occurred in the Greek, there was a group of hieroglyphics enclosed in an oval in a corresponding place in the Egyptian. These names provided the key to the pronunciation of the inscription, and the passage could be interpreted in light of the Greek. (Incidentally, France recently issued a postage stamp to honor the 150th anniversary of Champollion's achievement.) Deciphering Akkadian was more difficult. The key there turned out to be a trilingual inscription carved on the face of an almost inaccessible cliff at Behistun, Persia. Not the least of Rawlinson's accomplishments was the accurate copying of the writing without benefit of photography or helicopter. Furthermore, everyone knew that the Rosetta Stone was in Greek and Egyptian even though they couldn't read it. But the Behistun inscription and some inscribed objects from the ancient capital of Persepolis were in the hitherto unknown cuneiform. Scholars soon noticed that there were three different styles of writing, and that one — with about 40 recurring characters — was clearly an alphabet, while the other two were far more

<i>Some statistics about the CAD so far</i>	
cards in the files	ca. 2,000,000
published entries	7,603
pages	3,989
copies printed	1,250
present cost, 12 vols.	\$271.60

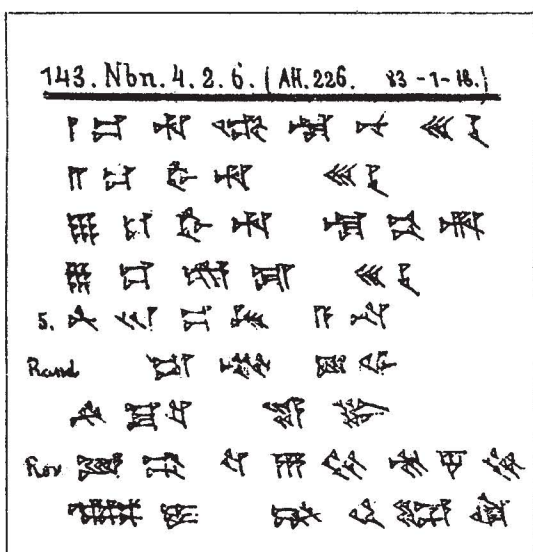
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*Miss Reiner discussed the present and future of the CAD in an interview; the history sketched here is taken from Dr. I. J. Gelb's introduction to Volume *A* and from Breasted's *The Oriental Institute*, already quoted above; and the story of decipherment comes from Johannes Friedrich's *Extinct Languages*.

2 varied. Names of kings again proved to be the clue. Herodotus speaks of Persian rulers who could be fitted into the alphabetic version, and philologists who had studied modern Persian and the Avesta could make sense of the inscription. They realized that it was in an ancestral form of Persian (much the way the language of Chaucer lies behind modern English). The second version turned out to be a different language, Elamite, written with a syllabic system, each sign standing for more than a single sound. The third column of the inscription was more puzzling. Researchers were amazed to find that it was not a language of Persia at all, but a Semitic language like Hebrew or Arabic. Imagine the shock of discovering a language, and then a civilization, and then several more, which could illuminate beyond measure the history and culture of Biblical days! The popularity of this find is evidenced by the Major-General's line in Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*:

Then I can write a washing-bill in Babylonian cuneiform.

(*Kyu-ni-form* is British and *kyu-nay-i-form* American). The first major collection of texts came from the library of Assurbanipal, well-known king of Assyria, so the language was called Assyrian. Later it was learned that both Assyrians and



The Major-General's washing-list, in cuneiform copy . . .

<i>is</i> <i>Kipau</i>		Strassmaier Nbn. 143 and 1
<p>1) 1 ^Whu-ul-la-nu eš-šu (2) 2 ^Wšal-ḥu eš- šu (3) 9 ^Wšal-ḥu la-bi-ri (4) 9 ^Wkib- su eš-šu (5) naphar 21 ¹ ^{pl} a-na ^{ki} ^š</p> <p>6) 1 ^{md}marduk 7-mu-kal-lim (7) ^{am}ašlaku nadin(in) (8) ^{arah}aiaru ūmu 6 ^{kam} [14:] šatti 4 ^{kam} (9) ^dnabû-nâ'id šar bâbili ^{ki}</p> <p>[144] 1) 7 ma-ši-ḥu ša sat-tuk 8 qa 2) še šamaššammu išten(en) mahritum(tum) 3) ina sat-tuk ša ūmi 15 ^{kam} mahritu(tú) 4) a-na ^{md}bêl-ētir nadna(na)</p>	<p>No translation.</p> <p>1) 7 measures of fixed offering, 8 qa 2) sesame, one the former 3) on the fixed offering for the 15th day, former, (4) given to B. 5) ^{arah}aiaru ūmu 10 ^{kam} 6) šatti 4 ^{kam}</p>	

dictionary card . . .

Babylonians called their language Akkadian, after Sargon the Great's city of Akkad. The CAD has kept the name "Assyrian" for traditional reasons, though of course it covers all of Akkadian.

Covering all of Akkadian is a very ambitious goal. The language was used for three millennia over all the Near East from Persia to Asia Minor and Egypt. This vast range implies great dialectal diversity. Hence it was imperative to collect every occurrence of every Akkadian word to avoid misrepresentation of any phase of the language. From the beginning completeness was the goal.

The mechanics of dictionary-making are as follows. Each transliterated text as it is received is divided into short paragraphs. Each paragraph with its translation is typed onto a large file card of which copies are made. Then each word is underlined on a copy of the card and entered at the top of it, and the cards are filed by word. Thus all the examples of a word are collected in one place with their contexts. For the first ten years all the translation as well as the preparation of materials was done exclusively in Chicago (in the basement of the old Haskell Museum) by a staff who, as Breasted proudly points out, with one exception were all doctors or students of the University of Chicago. Then non-resident scholars were asked to prepare texts in their special fields of interest; eventually some 25 outside Assyriologists contributed. By 1954, despite a 10-year interruption for the war, the files were substantially complete and article-writing and publication could begin. Producing a volume is done in three phases, each lasting about a year, and three volumes are in preparation at once, one in each phase. In the first step, three or four contributors write up the dictionary entries into articles. The manuscript they produce is read and carefully checked by each member of the editorial board; this comprises the second step. Then printing and publishing takes another year. Proofreading is done first by the non-assyriological assistants

to the editors, then by the editors; just before publication a couple of colleagues abroad are asked to comment on the work. Finally the volume goes to press. About half the copies go to libraries, individuals buy another third, and, surprisingly, one sixth are sold through bookstores. The sale price just about covers the printer's bill. The *H* volume was the first to appear, in 1956, because it is about average in size and complexity; new letters have come out at intervals of about 1½ years since then.

Dr. Reiner expects that the publication of the remaining letters will take about ten years more (but in 1947 they thought the whole thing would be ready for publication in ten years!) That will far from complete the dictionary, though. The staff will have been collecting and filing new texts for thirty years; these will be incorporated in a supplement. Computer-aided indices will round out the set: the citation index, for example, will gather all the discussions of a particular passage for easy reference. An English-to-Akkadian dictionary will help collect information by subject.

Even after publication is complete the CAD project will still exist. They are talking of a Sumerian Dictionary — the series *Materialen zum sumerischen Lexikon* has been in progress since 1937 — as a companion work. But still in the field of Akkadian, the CAD is not the last word: a multitude of entries read only “meaning uncertain” and even “meaning

kibsu B (*kibasū*) s.; (a piece of linen fabric); MB, NB; *kibasū* TCL 12 109:4; cf. *kabāsu*.

a) in MB: TUG *kib-su* HS 165, cited Aro, WZJ 8 p. 570.

b) in NB — 1' as part of the divine wardrobe: 1 GADA *kib-su ana ḫAḫunitu* Nbn. 179:8; 3 GADA *kib-su ša ūR.MEŠ ana ḫSamaš* Camb. 148:8, also Nbk. 312:24; 2 *kib-su ana su-ni-e* Nbn. 1121:4, 1 GADA *kib-su ša su-ni-e ša bit ḫAḫunitu* Nbn. 694:25, (for ḫAḫunitu and Adad) Camb. 148:9f., Nbn. 1121:14, 1 *kib-su eššu ana ḫSamaš* Cyr. 185:5, *kib-su ešše ša ḫGula* Nbk. 312:12 and *kib-su la-bir-ri* ibid. 19, also *ša Bēlet-Sippar* ibid. 11; often mentioned beside *šalḫu* linen fabrics: Nbn. 115:6, 137:4, 143:4, 146:8, 179:4, 507:5f., 848:5 and 10, but note 1 GADA *šalḫi eššu ana kib-su ana ḫSamaš* Nbn. 696:9, 10 GADA *šalḫu ša kib-su ana 1800 šu¹¹ ša kitē* Nbn. 164:10 and 16, (given for repair and cleaning) Camb. 415:2, (*ana bitga*) Nbn. 492:1, and cf. (referring to the same workman) Nbn. 146:1, 848:5 and 10, Camb. 148:8ff., (*ana PN ašlaki*) Nbn. 143:4, Nbk. 312:7 and 10, (*ana puššū*)

Nbn. 115:6, (*ana mukabbī*) Nbn. 507:5f. and Nbn. 1090:1ff.; note: blue wool given to the weavers *ana muttatu ša kib-su* Nbn. 349:3, 1-en GADA *kib-su ana u ša bitānu ša bit Bēlet-Sippar* Nbn. 125:1, 1 GADA *kib-su labīru ana taḫapšu ana ḫBanene* Nbn. 694:12.

2' other uses in the temple: 1 GADA *kib-su ša muḫhi paššūri ḫurāši ša ḫSamaš* Nbk. 312:23; 1 GADA *kib-su ša muḫhi šubtu ana ḫMarduk* ibid. 20f.; 1 *kib-su eššu . . . ana šubtu ša ḫAja* Nbn. 696:8; a white *mihšu*-fabric *ti-mu u ki-ba-su* of twined and *k*-yarn TCL 12 109:4.

The absence of any indications of size suggests that the *kibsu* was a standardized piece of linen fabric used either as such (for a loincloth-like undergarment (*sānu*), to cover objects, etc.) or to be decorated. Whether the designation itself refers to some technical process (probably called *kubāsu*) to which either the thread or the fabric was submitted cannot be determined, but the passage TCL 12 109:4 speaks for the former.

Ungnad, ZA 31 260.

- 1) 1 new linen blanket
- 2) 2 new linen girdles
- 3) 9 old linen girdles
- 4) 9 new undergarments
- 5) total of 21 linen garments
- 6) given to Marduk-mukallim
- 7) the washerman
- 8) 6th of Iyyar, year 4 of Nabonidus King of Babylon

corrected proof of the dictionary entry . . .

and translation.

unknown.” To Dr. Reiner this seeming failure is one of the strengths of the Dictionary. It stimulates research on every topic. Even a set of books as commodious as the CAD can't print every citation found in its files, so those files are always open to researchers studying particular subjects in great detail.

Here is a simple example of the usefulness of the CAD. We wanted to illustrate the Major-General's “babylonian washing-list.” Dr. Gelb suggested that we look under *ašlaku*, “washerman.” There we found a page and a half of quotations to choose from. When we picked the one we liked, we looked up the reference to the original publication of the text, and found the transliteration in the files. For the translation we consulted both the published volumes and the unpublished cards of the dictionary.

But what kind of person is qualified to write an article about washermen, priestesses, or any of the thousands of things discussed in the dictionary? There, says Dr. Reiner, lies the attraction of dictionary work. Miss Reiner came to the CAD as a research assistant in 1952. Here she met the great Benno Landsberger, a man who, she recalls, used to read for fun each new cuneiform volume as it arrived. There was nothing he didn't know: he began Assyriology in 1915, when very little was published; he had the opportunity to assimilate every advance as it was made. His was the Age of Discovery. Nowadays students must catch up on seventy and more years of study, and find it impossible to remain generalists. Yet that is what the dictionary requires. When a specialist joins the staff he joins a group of friends who freely admit they are not omniscient and gladly come to each other for advice — a quality not often found these days among scientists. This is the atmosphere that prevailed during Dr. Oppenheim's tenure — he was in charge for all the years of publication — and that should be the atmosphere for as long as the project lasts.

The place of Sumerian in Mesopotamia was similar to that of Latin in Mediaeval and Renaissance Europe. It was the language of church, court, and literature, but it was no one's native tongue. The projected Chicago Sumerian Dictionary was anticipated, like so much else, by the Babylonians. The Chicago Syllabary, illustrated here, is a segment of a Sumerian-Akkadian glossary. The first column of each half of the tablet gives the pronunciation of a Sumerian word, using common syllabic signs; the second column shows the Sumerian sign itself. (Sumerian was written like Chinese, with each sign standing for an entire word. Usually the Sumerian sign was taken into Akkadian with a phonetic value based on the Sumerian word, without regard for meaning; but frequently the sign came to stand for the whole Akkadian word translating the Sumerian. These word-signs, known as logograms, caused part of the difficulty in deciphering Akkadian.) The third column of the Syllabary provides the name of the sign in Akkadian, and the last column is the Akkadian translation of the Sumerian word. *The Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon* series includes the publication of these Sumerian dictionaries.



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