



The Oriental Institute

News & Notes

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THE CHICAGO ASSYRIAN DICTIONARY: SCHOLARS' UNIQUE MULTIPLE TOOL

"It [the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary] is a great work of scholarship which will allow others, through learning from it and through its use, to participate not only in the continuing tradition of civilization, but to aspire to new levels of knowledge and of understanding the past and the history of humankind. And it is also a model that will inspire people to understand what rigorous and committed scholarship ultimately means and why it is valuable for its own sake." President of the University of Chicago, Hanna H. Gray, in her introduction of Erica Reiner, who delivered the 1980 Ryerson Lecture.

"Caught in a Wedge of Words" is the theme of the Oriental Institute's gala annual dinner this year on May 20, which will benefit the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary Project. The project began October 1, 1921 when James H. Breasted, founder and first director of the Oriental Institute, organized staff and headquarters in the basement of the old Haskell Oriental Museum of the University of Chicago.

The first thirty-five years of the project were devoted mainly to assembling the massive files and developing the complex methods necessary for the execution of the work. Publication began only in 1956 after A. Leo Oppenheim, Editor-in-Charge from 1954 to 1973, brought vigorous new leadership to the project. As his successor, Erica Reiner, the John A. Wilson Professor in the Oriental Institute, has the responsibility of supervising the completion of the project.

From its inception until 1976, the financing of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary—CAD for short—was borne almost exclusively by the University of Chicago. Occasional contributions, minor in monetary terms but valuable in terms of international recognition, were received from the International Union of Academies. Significant outside help began in 1976, when the National Endowment for the Humanities gave an outright grant of \$350,000 and an additional grant of \$160,540 (matched with a private donation) to support expenses from July 1, 1976 to June 30, 1980. Last year, a three-year outright grant of \$373,557 was given by NEH for work on the Assyrian Dictionary Project, with another \$186,779 available if private contributions are matched dollar-for-dollar. The "Caught in a Wedge of Words" benefit dinner will help considerably to raise these necessary funds.

CAD is the only comprehensive Akkadian Dictionary available. In fact, it is more than the ordinary bilingual dictionary. It satisfies the functions which are often fulfilled by separate types of work: CAD is both the thesaurus of the whole language, surveying its development through the

centuries, and an encyclopedia, providing an evaluation of information within its cultural context. As work on the Dictionary advances—sixteen volumes (covering thirteen of the twenty-one letters of the alphabet) are now in print—its ability to attract the interest and to serve the needs of students of various humanistic disciplines becomes more evident.

Aside from the Assyriologist, the Dictionary is an important tool for scholars in the fields of archaeology, anthropology, history of political institutions and law, history of art, social history, economics, biblical studies, linguistics, even musicology. The CAD has also begun to exercise a profound influence on studies in the history of technology, medicine, and the exact sciences. In the last, for example, it has contributed to the understanding of Greek and Indian mathematical, astronomical, and astrological texts, texts ultimately derived from Babylonian originals.

The first task of the CAD Project was not to collect words but to establish the text from which the words could be collected. Here too, philology had to precede lexicography. And texts often had to be put together from many fragments, with the cuneiform marks in clay or stone transferred to the two-dimensional pages of books either by reproducing their original shape in pen and ink or by transcribing them into the Latin alphabet. Only once thus transcribed could the words of the text be parsed and filed under convenient alphabetic headings. Further difficulties also intrude. More often than not, a particular cuneiform sign can stand for several different syllables, and this polyvalence sometimes permits several different readings of an entire word. The ambiguity is often compounded by the possibility of reading a sign or a group of signs, even in a good Akkadian text, in Sumerian as well as in Akkadian. These puzzles must be solved before dictionary writing can begin.

CAD entries are based on approximately 100,000 cuneiform texts, dating from ca. 2400 B.C. to ca. 100 A.D. During

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Daniel David Luckenbill
Editor of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
 1921–1927

part of this time Akkadian served as an international diplomatic language for Near Eastern kingdoms, from Egypt to Persia, even for those which did not otherwise use cuneiform writing. The source material is wide-ranging in content, and the quantity of written sources is ever increasing as a result of the publication of texts from ongoing excavations and from the far from exhausted reserves of tablets in the world's museums. The corpus of legal, administrative, and economic texts, including letters and memoranda that deal with the day-to-day record of social and economic life, is more extensive and detailed than the archives preserved in the Hellenistic papyri and is not equaled in quantity before the records of the later Middle Ages. The extent of the corpus of literary, historical, and scientific texts, the latter dealing with such a variety of topics as divination, medicine, astronomy, and chemistry, is similarly vast. It exceeds, with close to 200,000 lines, the Homeric epics and the Old and New Testaments considered together.

During most of its history Akkadian was but one language of a bilingual culture, and Sumerian was the other language in use. Although Akkadian ascendancy doomed Sumerian as a spoken language, it was preserved as a vital means of expression in Mesopotamian civilization as the language of religious, legal, and scientific texts, a situation that presents many analogies to the role and usage of Latin in the Middle Ages. Beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century B.C., native philologists created extensive bilingual lexical compilations—the oldest dictionaries known—in which Sumerian words are listed with their Akkadian translations. These native lexical works are an indispensable aid for establishing the meaning of many Akkadian words, particularly the more technical words in the vocabulary. There is, for instance, an encyclopedic compilation of ca. 10,000 entries covering flora, fauna, material culture, and geographic terms.

No proper dictionary of the Akkadian language existed before the publication of the CAD began in 1956. There is nothing that can legitimately be compared to the CAD. An *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, published by the German scholar Wolfram von Soden, presents the material in concise form and is convenient for quick reference; it is not intended to be exhaustive as to nuance or multiple meanings. By con-

trast, the CAD, in the words of one of its former editors, "aims, on the semantic side, to relate meanings to the social context and technological background in which the references occur, and strives toward a useful and revealing coordination of the Akkadian and Sumerian evidence (which is essential for the semantic history of many words), and attempts to present each reference in a small but meaningful section of its context. . . . It also cites difficult and corrupt passages in the hope that a fortunate accident or someone's ingenious emendation may bring about their elucidation," (A.L. Oppenheim, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 25, 1966, 144).

As early as the second half of the last century, soon after the decipherment of the masses of clay tablets discovered in the soil of Mesopotamia, scholars of various humanistic disciplines—at the time predominantly Old Testament scholarship and linguistics—realized the contributions of the new field of Assyriology to the understanding of the history and development of Western civilization. Today, it is ever more evident that antecedents of our civilization lie in the great early cultures of the Near East, antecedents whose intermediaries are the Judeo-Christian heritage and Greco-Roman tradition, and whose influence reached from mainland Greece to India, as contemporary discoveries in the area continue to attest. Yet, the information yielded by the cuneiform texts, by far the most abundant written sources of the two and a half millennia before the Christian era, is still in the process of evaluation, even as the grammar and lexicon of the Akkadian language—the common designation for the two dialects Assyrian and Babylonian—are being defined and refined.

The Assyrian Dictionary Project has a uniquely suited ideal environment in the Oriental Institute, since the Institute is a center for research in all aspects of the ancient Near East, including archaeology, Egyptology, Sumerology, Elamitology, and Hittitology, and is the home base for the Hittite and the Demotic Dictionary projects. The enterprise has always been

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Edward Chiera
Editor of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
 1927–1933



Arno Peobel
Editor of the
Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
1933 - WWII



Ignace J. Gelb
Editor of the
Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
1946 - 1954



A. Leo Oppenheim
Editor of the
Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
1954 - 1973



Erica Reiner
Editor of the
Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
1973 - Present

spectrum of Mesopotamian civilization, such as Benno Landsberger's The Date Palm and Its By-Products; A. Leo Oppenheim's Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East, and his Glass and Glassmaking in Ancient Mesopotamia; Erica Reiner's Linguistic Analysis of Akkadian; and above all, A. Leo Oppenheim's Portrait of a Dead Civilization, as he subtitled his Ancient Mesopotamia. These books, once commented Dr. Oppenheim, could hardly have been written anywhere but in the stimulating atmosphere of the Assyrian Dictionary Project of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

A fitting description for the dedication of all—past and present—scholars of CAD could be a Babylonian poem, which Dr. Reiner translated for her 1980 Ryerson Lecture:

*Scholarship is an exacting mother who keeps a close check on her disciples.
Scholarship is a beguiling woman, her bounties are boundless.
Scholarship is unfathomable, but espouse her and you have nothing to fear.
Cultivate her and she will bring you profit.
Be assiduous with her and she will make you rich.
If you spend your nights with her, she will reveal her secrets;
If you neglect her, you will be called a cad.
Scholarship is a career that leads to good fortune and immeasurable rewards.*

—Elda Maynard

NOTES FROM THE SUQ

The Suq has added a new postcard to its collection, in connection with the Islamic Bindings and Bookmaking exhibition. The card, which is currently on display in the Suq, is a reproduction of a beautiful 19th Century Persian lacquer bookcover from the Institute's collection.

The Suq will also be offering three relevant texts during the Alexander exhibition in May. Along with the exhibition catalogue THE SEARCH FOR ALEXANDER, a highly readable biography of the same title will be available. The third text, entitled THE GLORY OF GREECE AND THE WORLD OF ALEXANDER, contains numerous color photographs accompanied by descriptive text and a map of Alexander's Greece.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP OFFICE

Dear Members,

This past year the Members' Courses have been very successful, and the attendance increased over the previous year. In view of this, we will offer courses here at the Institute during the summer, and at present, are planning a course on Egyptian Hieroglyphs. We will not restrict the number of people allowed in the course. Other programs are also being planned. Please watch for our announcement at the beginning of June, or call the Membership Office for more information.

I have received several inquiries from out of town members asking whether cassette copies or video tape copies of lectures

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based on cooperation between a core of active participants and a supporting group of philological specialists both in the Oriental Institute and abroad. Participation in the project is an excellent introduction to the comprehensive study of an ancient civilization, and, therefore, young scholars have often considered it an important part of their training to spend a year or two as research associates at the CAD. There is a spirit of excitement in making and sharing discoveries around the CAD. The constant give-and-take of ideas and information has encouraged the publication of books and articles in addition to the volumes of CAD, and include among others, fourteen companion volumes of Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon, which contain editions of the Sumero-Akkadian bilingual dictionaries, and a number of books which cover the

From the Membership Office (continued)

and Members' Courses can be provided for them. Video taping, unfortunately, is not possible for us, due to the high cost of the necessary equipment. Cassette copies of the Members' Lectures are available from the membership office for cost (approximately \$5 plus postage and handling). By next year's program time we want to expand the service, and include a list/description of the slides used in the presentations. This should make those lectures which include slides more useful for the listener. We are also reviewing the possibility of taping lectures of Members' Courses. Several small problems still have to be worked out, such as the means for handling homework and reading assignments (if any). If these are resolved, we may offer Members' Courses through the mail. Cost for the by-mail courses would be higher; mailing, xeroxing and handling costs must be covered. Please watch for our announcements of the fall courses later this year.

The Institute will have a new membership brochure available this summer. The current edition with the Tutankhamun mask on the front is almost depleted. The new brochure will be an expanded version, and will update all of the programs and benefits available to the membership. All current members will be sent one when they become available. If you have any friends who aren't members, send us their names and we will be happy to send them a membership brochure.

In the February News & Notes, I made mention of several of our new members who were relatively young in age (10 and 11). I have since learned that I forgot to mention one other

new member, Jennifer Sol of Wheaton, Illinois. Miss Sol is 9 years old, and has been interested in Ancient Egypt since viewing the Tutankhamun show several years back.

Earlier this spring the U.S. Postal Service announced across the board postal rate increases for all overseas mail. This involved all classes used by the Membership Office. Because of these increases, due for all overseas members must be increased. Effective July 1, 1981, the new rates for overseas members will be five (5) US Dollars higher than dues for US members. Currently this means that foreign members will be asked to contribute \$20 when their membership dues need to be renewed. All overseas members will receive a separate announcement at the time of renewal.

I have just returned safely from the Oriental Institute tour to Egypt, and must admit to a desire for returning! The trip was extremely successful. Of particular note was the tour of the Temples of Karnak and Luxor guided by the staff of Chicago House. Lanny Bell, the director of the Epigraphic Survey, and his wife Martha were most gracious. The reception held for the tour at Chicago House was extremely delightful. My personal high point of the tour was viewing the sunrise while exploring the unexcavated ruins of the Temple of Nadura out at Kharga Oasis.

More news next month.

Sincerely,
Eugene Cruz-Urbe
Membership Secretary



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