

The field of Assyriology has always lacked an adequate elementary textbook. This is so despite a series or excellent grammars and chrestomathies which have been written during the past seventy years.¹ There have been, nevertheless, jejune attempts to write such a textbook. Perhaps the earliest was that of John Dyneley Prince, Professor of Semitic Languages at Columbia University (1902-1915). While the primary goal of his Assyrian Primer (New York, 1909) was to introduce the student progressively to the reading of cuneiform signs, it was arranged in the manner of an elementary textbook. Thus, it contains brief lessons which include short grammatical notes, and exercises involving translation from and into Akkadian cuneiform. The author appended some brief Standard Babylonian² texts. Prince's work, however, received little notice.³ A similar textbook was written in 1921 by Samuel A. B. Mercer, entitled Assyrian Grammar (London). Although somewhat more detailed, it differs little in approach from Prince's Primer. It, too, had little success.⁴

¹ Cf. R. Borger, Babylonisch-assyrische Lesestücke (Rome, 1963), pp. 1f.

² Note that the following abbreviations will be used: OB - Old Babylonian, SB - Standard (literary) Babylonian.

³ Thus, for example, it was not included in Borger's list, see n. 1.

⁴ A similar book is J. Rosenberg's Assyrische Sprachlehre und Keilschriftenkunde für das Selbststudium (Wien, n.d.). The major objections to these works are the inadequate amount of grammar presented and the puerile exercises. Furthermore, the presentation of grammar in cuneiform script is quite inconvenient.

The need for an elementary textbook which would introduce the grammar gradually and which would provide adequate exercises is patent.⁵ With rare exceptions, the student today must learn from a rationally ordered reference grammar of Akkadian.⁶ As such, it contains few examples. To add to the trials of the American student, there is no such grammar in English.⁷ Starting to learn grammar with phonology is uncomfortable for many, if not most students. The present-day student starts to read cuneiform--from a chrestomathy such as Bauer's⁸--almost from the beginning of his studies. Without a background in Semitics and a strong initial motivation, he can easily become lost when deciphering words or text in an unknown language. It is also discouraging to be faced with the necessity of quickly memorizing at least one hundred unconnected signs. This is particularly distressing if he is taught by the inductive method and is confronted early in his studies with a SB text having its attendant multiplicity of signs and values.

Dr. Riemschneider has written a textbook which would be a boon to teachers and students alike, even if it did not possess as many excellent qualities as it does. The text is well thought out and presents the grammar in a clear and simple--but by no means simplistic--manner. The author begins, naturally enough, with a brief introduction to Akkadian and to the reading of the texts. The lessons follow.

The core of the book, nineteen lessons in OB prose grammar, is quite complete, leaving out only the most minor of details. The grammar is integrated, i.e., rules concerning the noun, the verb, and syntax are presented from the very first lesson rather than being relegated to separate sections.

For the exercises, the author avoids inventing Akkadian sentences. Instead, he chose to present OB omen texts. These texts have the advantage of being uncomplicated grammatically, and in general consistent in their structure. Following each exercise is a vocabulary ordered according to

⁵ Note the apposite comments of Richard Hallock, JNES 27 (1968), pp. 74-75.

⁶ Such as A. Ungnad, Grammatik des Akkadischen, ed. Lubor Matouš (München, 1964). Note that a new Akkadian grammar by D. O. Edzard is due to appear this year.

⁷ The grammar of Erica Reiner reviewed by Dalia Matison, ANES I/1 (1968), pp. 61-66, is merely an attempt to describe Akkadian in accordance with modern linguistic techniques, and not meant for serious study of the language itself.

⁸ Theo Bauer, Akkadische Lesestücke, vols. I-III (Rome, 1953).

the first appearance of the word. This was perhaps done to make the use of the exercises during class more feasible.

To supplement the exercises, the author has added added readings, which begin in chapter twelve. These consist almost entirely of OB letters. To these are added some paragraphs from the laws of Hammurabi and one legal document. The readings are not accompanied by a vocabulary, but require the student to use the glossary.

The remaining lessons cover, in turn, OB Hymnal-Epic Dialect, Middle Babylonian, Neo-(and Late) Babylonian, Standard Literary Babylonian, Old Akkadian, Old Assyrian, Middle Assyrian, and Neo-Assyrian. The grammar of each is presented as a variation of OB. Each lesson is preceded by a summary of the major differences, and a brief description of the scribal peculiarities with regard to such things as doubled letters and lengthened vowels. The detailing of the grammar follows. Finally, some representative texts are given to illustrate the grammar. On the whole, the texts are well selected.

In order to aid those attempting to learn Akkadian on their own, the author adds translations of all the exercises and readings, as well as normalizations of the exercises. He also lists the sources of all the texts he uses. In this list, he frequently indicates where other translations may be found. The author, of course, gives a complete glossary and a list of all names. All the names of gods and of places are identified; those of people are frequently translated. The book is, finally, rounded off by a good set of paradigms. To further enhance its usefulness, the textbook contains a short introduction to the omen literature (pp. 24-27), a brief analysis of Akkadian names (pp. 113f.),⁹ and an explanation of the introductory formulae of letters (pp. 98f.).¹⁰

The lack of cuneiform

Perhaps the controversial aspect of this textbook may be its lack of cuneiform. As the author explains in his preface (pp. 6f.), he avoided cuneiform not because of typographical difficulties, but rather, because he deliberately eschewed introducing cuneiform script into his grammar. He believes, basing himself on the method commonly

⁹ Cf. J. J. Stamm, "Die akkadische Namengebung," MVAG 44 (Leipzig, 1939).

¹⁰ Cf. Erkki Salonen, St. Or. 38.

used to teach Hittite, that a foundation in grammar is vital before cuneiform is attempted. In that way, much of the early difficulties can be avoided. Indeed, it may enhance the student's ability to learn the script. As an example of this, let us take line eleven of the famous Chicago Taylor Sennacherib prism: (šarrūt lā šanān) ú-KUR-li-ma-an-ni-ma. The sign list in Bauer lists nineteen possible readings of the sign KUR. A student who is hazy on grammar might not recognize this as a verb and may divide it into two or more sections. On the other hand, if that student has a good command of grammar, he will immediately see that a Š (or III) form of the verb is required, a D (II) form being impossible as there is no value of the sign KUR which ends in l. After a search in the glossary, he will find only one verb possible, talāmu, the translation being "he the god Ashur conferred upon me (unequaled kingship)." The delay in teaching cuneiform script can result in a more efficient understanding of them, and a quicker retention later, thereby easing the transliteration of texts.

The teaching of cuneiform cannot, of course, be delayed indefinitely. Realizing this, Dr. Riemschneider plans to compile a companion to his textbook in the form of an OB cuneiform reader. This would be particularly valuable, because only one chrestomathy contains a small variety of OB texts in the original script.¹¹ In lieu of this planned reader, the author advised the use of A. Goetze's Old Babylonian Omen Texts,¹² or the Mari letters. The last suggestion is unfortunate in the light of the strongly Amorite character of the vocabulary, despite the comparatively few grammatical peculiarities.

Because of the lack of cuneiform, the textbook is eminently flexible. It should be kept in mind that for many potential students Akkadian is a peripheral subject. For those interested in such fields as history, economics, law, and comparative religion, the ability to read a transliterated text may be paramount. Thus, they will be enabled to check the sources of others upon whom they necessarily rely. While serious research is decidedly hampered by a lack of knowledge of cuneiform, for many it may not be a serious handicap. If Assyriology is to expand, it must attract just those students who are repelled at the thought

¹¹ Franz M. Th. Böhl, Akkadian Chrestomathy, vol. I (Leiden, 1947). Unfortunately, the promised second volume containing sign lists, glossary, and notes never materialized.

¹² YOS 10 (New Haven, 1947).

of mastering the complicated cuneiform script. Under certain conditions, the omission of cuneiform signs might better serve a majority of students.

The presentation of the grammar

The manner in which the author presents the grammar may not be fully appreciated at first. He avoids the traditional approach in which a grammar book is simplified and divided into manageable sections, to which exercises are appended. This is still the method used for Biblical Hebrew and for modern Arabic.¹³ Not only is it discouraging to begin by learning the phonology of a language which you do not know, it is difficult to remember individual facts without being fully aware of what they are referring to. By quickly introducing simple forms of the verb, more interesting sentences may be used by the exercises. This technique is not only used in some modern Latin textbooks,¹⁴ but also in Sir Alan H. Gardiner's monumental Egyptian Grammar.¹⁵ Furthermore, personal experience has shown that when syntax is delayed to the end of the course, it is often never reached. As Franz Rosenthal noted, "few beginning students of a language ever take the trouble of reading that portion of a grammar dealing with syntax."¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is helpful for a student when taught in this manner to have his knowledge ordered in a systematic manner. To this end, the author has appended a grammatical appendix (pp. 244-251). It would, however, be helpful if a regular grammar is used in conjunction with this textbook.

The exercises and readings

Dr. Riemschneider has avoided inventing Akkadian sentences for his exercises. This is all to the good, for it gives students a sense of achievement to read actual Akkadian sentences from texts which they might eventually read. The author's choice of omen texts, however,

¹³ Compare David Cowan, Modern Literary Arabic, (Cambridge, 1964); Farhad J. Ziadeh & R. Bayly Winder, An Introduction to Modern Arabic (Princeton, 1957); J. A. Haywood & H. M. Nahmad, A New Arabic Grammar of the Written Language (Cambridge, Mass., 1962).

¹⁴ For example, Frederic M. Wheelock, Latin: An Introductory Course Based on Ancient Authors (New York, 1963).

¹⁵ Oxford, 1961.

¹⁶ A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic (Wiesbaden, 1963), p. 1.

is not altogether happy. The apodoses are interesting, particularly when they impinge upon the social and political life of Babylonia. Their relevance to both social and political history has been remarked upon by both Edzard¹⁷ and Oppenheim.¹⁸ The use of the protases may be questioned. While the primary aim of exercises is to illustrate the grammar, they should not throw a student into a complex and little understood aspect of Assyriology. The students must learn a series of technical terms, such as kakkum, pillurtum, padānum, abullum, or bāb ʔkallim, whose meaning is either totally unknown, or which require a knowledge of anatomy to be fully understood. Despite the fact that the author is particularly attracted to omen literature,¹⁹ the use of somewhat obscure material for exercises has its disadvantages. The author would have been wiser to have relied more heavily on selected sentences from the law codes and from letters, rather than on omen protases. It would have been helpful if the author had included some practice in translation into Akkadian. Although his translation of the exercises may be used for that purpose, a more formal presentation--even involving inventing Akkadian sentences--would have been desirable.

On the whole, the readings are excellent. One can only make minor comments. For example, his reading of UET V 9, 21 (on page 121, no. 4): ina hitaššulim, though accepted by von Soden and Oppenheim,²⁰ should be corrected to ina hitallulim, after the collation of F. R. Kraus.²¹ The reason for his omission of two words in this letter is not clear, since they offer no difficulty in grammar or vocabulary. Considering the importance of Hymnal Epic Dialect and Standard Babylonian, it would not have been out of place if the author had added a minimum of four pages of supplementary readings. While this seems like a rather

¹⁷ In Fischer Weltgeschichte II, Die Altorientalischen Reiche I: vom Paläolithikum bis zur Mitte des 2. Jahrtausends, edd. Elena Cassin, Jean Bottero, Jean Vercoutter (Frankfurt am Main, 1965), pp. 172-74. English translation - Delacorte World History, The Ancient Near East: The Early Civilizations (New York, 1967), pp. 186-89.

¹⁸ Ancient Mesopotamia (Chicago, 1964), pp. 206-07.

¹⁹ Note his new book Mittelbabylonische Geburtsomina in hethitischer Übersetzung (Studien zu den Bogazköy-Texten, vol. 9), Wiesbaden, 1969.

²⁰ AHw., p. 333a; Oppenheim, Letters from Mesopotamia, p. 91.

²¹ JEOL 16 (1964), p. 28. Note that ina plus an infinitive is usually equivalent to a temporal clause. Furthermore, hitaššulum is a unique form.

small amount to add, it would help give the student more practice before beginning cuneiform, and would introduce him to the variety of texts extant.²²

The grammar

The author gives a good presentation of the grammar. Because he details each dialect separately, he often gives more material in less space than the Ungnad-Matouš grammar. Of course, it is in many aspects less detailed, particularly in phonology and syntax. The amount of facts given in the sections devoted to the individual dialects is occasionally a function of what is represented in the readings. There are, further, some novelties in the grammar. Thus, the author explains the phrase šiqil kaspim in 2 šiqil kaspim as a compound noun, rather than as a noun in the absolute (šiqil) plus a genitive (kaspim). This runs into difficulty when the second element, kaspim, is omitted, unless one assumes that it is unexpressed. Also, he would explain those forms of some verbs (isû, idû, izzuzzu, kullu, and the Assyrian udā'u) which use the present or preterite as a stative, as a "prefixed stative." While there is no such tense in Akkadian, it may help to explain these anomalous forms to a student.

None the less, Riemschneider follows the latest studies in Akkadian grammar. For example, the phonetic shift of st to št is fully operative in the grammar (p. 34).²³ The section on Neo-Assyrian benefited not only from the work of Karlheinz Deller,²⁴ but also from his personal advice (p. 8). Thus, the Lehrbuch has a degree of independent value as a grammar.

The Lehrbuch des Akkadischen is an excellent work for the teaching and study of Akkadian, and the widest possible dissemination is recommended. Translations of this work should be made in order to benefit students everywhere. Despite minor reservations with regard to the use of the technical sections of the omina, they do perform their major function, that of illustrating the grammar.

If Assyriology is to expand and to flourish, it needs books such as Riemschneider's to help beginning

²² It is equally possible, of course, to add readings from the transliterated texts in Borger's Lesestücke.

²³ Cf. M. Held, JAOS 79 (1959), pp. 169-76.

²⁴ K. Deller, Or. NS 26 (1957), pp. 144-56; 36 (1962), pp. 194-96; idem, Lautlehre des Neusyrischen (unpublished dissertation).

students. Further aids, in the form of collections of transliterated and translated texts²⁵ are a desideratum.²⁶ We congratulate Dr. Riemschneider on his new book and eagerly await the publication of his projected OB cuneiform textbook.

²⁵ Individual efforts have been made by Wilfred Lambert for literary texts and F. R. Kraus & R. Frankena on OB letters.

²⁶ Cf. Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia, p. 382.