

AN ASSYRIAN MANUAL

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*FOR THE USE OF BEGINNERS IN THE STUDY
OF THE ASSYRIAN LANGUAGE*

BY

D. G. LYON

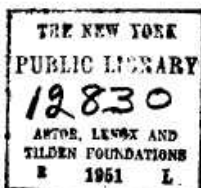
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PREFACE.

THIS book is designed to meet the needs of those who desire to become acquainted with the Assyrian language but who cannot easily have access to oral instruction. It is believed that this class is not a small one and that it will rapidly grow. The Assyrian remains are so rich in the most valuable materials that the language is no longer a luxury to be enjoyed by the few, but has become a necessity to the specialist in Semitic history, religion and linguistics. The points of contact with the Hebrew language and literature in particular are so numerous and of such interesting character that no Old Testament exegete can ignore the results of Assyrian study. Two great obstacles have stood in the way of those who desire to become acquainted with the language, the lack of suitable books for beginners and the large demand made on the memory for the acquisition of the cuneiform signs. It is the task of learning the signs which constitutes the chief difficulty. Indeed, apart from this, the language is not very difficult. But for this, one who is fairly well acquainted with Hebrew, might read ordinary prose Assyrian with much less labor than it costs to learn Hebrew. That is, Assyrian written in Hebrew or in Latin letters, is one of the easiest of the Semitic languages. No student, of course, can ever be an independent worker unless he also acquires the cuneiform signs, and that for the reason that the values of many of the signs are variable. But supposing the signs to be correctly transliterated, it is possible to have a good acquaintance with the language without learning any of the signs. It is true of the Assyrian as of all languages, that it lies not in the characters which

represent the sounds, but in the sounds themselves. The recognition of this fact constitutes the chief peculiarity of the *Assyrian Manual*. The author has learned by several years' experience in teaching, that the best beginning is made by the use of transliterated texts. Thus by the time the student has learned the most necessary cuneiform signs, he has already gathered a small vocabulary and begins to appreciate the grammatical structure of the language. Each step in this direction increases his interest in the study and lightens the task of committing the signs to memory. Some persons will content themselves without the signs. Those who have more time, or who wish to be independent of transliterations made by others, will not fail to acquire the signs, however irksome the task may be.

The central feature of the *Assyrian Manual* is the collection of transliterated texts, pages 1-52. The originals to these texts are nearly all found in volumes I and V of "The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia," and the suspended figures represent in each case the line, so that the original can be readily consulted. There is perhaps no more satisfactory method of learning the cuneiform signs than by reading inscriptions with the aid of transliterations. It is to be observed that in the transliterated texts in this book words in smaller type represent determinatives, words divided into syllables represent such as are written syllabically, and those not so divided represent such as are written by an ideogram; cf. pp. xxv-xxvi. Ideograms about whose reading I am in doubt have been indicated by **bold-face** type. Groups of signs have also been sometimes thus indicated, some of which may turn out to be ideograms and others syllables. In the case of words ideographically written and also in the glossary, I have undertaken to indicate the length of the vowels, though I have not in all cases done so. This task is a difficult one, and the decision must in many cases be based upon analogy. The texts selected, excepting those of Nabonidus and Cyrus, all fall within what might be called the classic Assyrian period.

For the transliterated texts the chronological order has been followed, except that it seemed desirable to place the translated passage, with which the student should first begin (pp. 42-49), near the cuneiform original (pp. 53-57). Pages 50 and 51 are intended for study immediately after the foregoing section, while page 52, which is not in chronological order, is placed where it is because its contents are essentially unlike those of the other transliterated texts. The system of transliteration adopted here is essentially that in use among German students of Assyrian. In the case of words containing the signs *ki* (*kí*) or *ka* (*ká*), I have generally written *ki*, *ka*, these being the most frequent values of the signs. The student must therefore bear in mind that *k* sometimes corresponds to a *p*.

The texts have not been divided into sentences and paragraphs as fully as might have been done. The Assyrian, it must be remembered, indicates but rarely such divisions.

The selection of *cuneiform* texts, besides the original of the Egyptian Campaign, had special reference to the intrinsic interest of the passages chosen. It is believed that these passages, excepting a few difficult words, will be within the reach of those who have mastered the syllabic signs (pp. xiii-xvi) and some pages of the transliterated texts.

The *notes* (pp. 65-94) are not intended as a commentary, but only as brief suggestions to aid the student's progress. They are fullest on the passage for beginners (pp. 42-49). It has not seemed necessary to comment in each case on words of whose meaning I am in doubt, that doubt having already been sufficiently expressed in the transliteration or in the glossary. Notes on pp. 53-57¹⁵ have not been given, because those on pp. 42-49 cover this passage. The references with § before them are to the outline of grammar (pp. xxv-xlv). I have in the notes rarely divided into syllables the words commented on, because the student knows from the transliteration in each case whether a word is an ideogram or is written syllabically. Nor have I ordinarily divided into syllables Assyrian words quoted in the comments.

In the *glossary* the etymological arrangement has been followed, but for ease of reference most words with formative prefixes have been twice entered. In the case of weak stems, there are, of course, many instances in which a doubt exists about one or more letters. In such cases the provisional stem indicated by Hebrew letters is only intended to aid in using the glossary. Progress in the study will undoubtedly make many corrections in any attempt to assign to each word its tri-literal stem. The first word in **bold-face** type after the Hebrew letters is in the case of verbs the infinitive of the form I 1 (Qal), the Hebrew letters, however, being regarded as sufficient in cases where I was in doubt as to the Assyrian form of the infinitive. In the case of other words than verbs the word in **bold-face** type represents the absolute form of the noun, etc. Only those forms which are followed by a reference to page and line actually occur in this collection of texts. The division of the word into syllables is the same as explained above. Words for which I have no definition are followed by five dots (.). I have tried to make the references complete in the case of words occurring but few times, but this course did not seem necessary in the case of those which occur with great frequency.

A list of the proper names which occur in the texts has not been added, because in a book for beginners such a list does not seem to me necessary.

The *list of signs* includes an almost complete list of the phonograms (pp. xiii-xvi), together with a full list of the ideograms (pp. xviii-xxiv) occurring in the cuneiform texts (pp. 53-64) and in the originals on which the transliterated texts (pp. 1-52) are based. In case of the texts written in Babylonian characters (pp. 23, 24, 35-41), the Assyrian form of the sign is given. A complete list of phonetic values is not yet possible, but the one here given is sufficiently full for all practical purposes. A complete set of ideograms and ideographic values is also impossible and lies outside of the scope of this book. The signs are arranged in the order of complexity, reference being had in each case to the first wedge or

wedges on the left of the sign. Thus *zu*, No. 5, though composed of more wedges than *is*, No. 135, comes before it, because *zu* begins with only one horizontal wedge, while *is* begins with two. The order is first those signs beginning with horizontal wedges, then those with oblique wedges, afterwards those with the double wedge and lastly those with perpendicular wedges. These groups are further subdivided on the basis of the number of wedges with which each sign begins.

The *outline of grammar* (pp. xxv-xlv) is intended as a bare sketch, yet it is believed that the important facts of the grammar are here presented. A reference has been given for nearly every word quoted as an illustration, and so far as possible the reference is to texts in this book. The student can thus easily turn to the passage and see the word in its connections. In the treatment of the weak verb, §§ 25-32, an attempt has been made to refer existing forms to the original forms from which they come, though it must be admitted that in most cases such original forms were no longer in use when the language entered on its literary stage.

The plan to be pursued in the use of this book will depend on one's methods of study. For those who have no teacher I would recommend the following plan: Read the outline of grammar two or three times. Then read several times the *Egyptian Campaigns with the translation* (pp. 42-51). Much of the grammar will at once be clear and many Hebrew equivalents will present themselves. Then go over the same passages in connection with the notes and glossary, looking up all the grammatical references. At the same time commit to memory each day a few of the most common phonograms (pp. xvi-xvii), and practise those learned, by writing them and by pointing them out in the cuneiform texts. After the *Egyptian Campaigns* the selection beginning on page 21 may be studied, then the one on page 27, after this the *Syrian Campaign of Sennacherib*, pp. 10-12. The student may then read the remaining selections in order, the most difficult being those