ASSYRIAN PRIMER: AN INDUCTIVE METHOD OF LEARNING THE CUNEIFORM CHARACTERS

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OF LEARNING THE CUNEIFORM CHARACTERS

BY

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Foreword

The need of a series of progressive lessons for beginners in Cuneiform has long been felt in the Columbia University Semitic Department. The object of the present work is to lighten the labours of the English speaking Assyrian student, who has hitherto been compelled to learn, by sheer force of memory, the ninety-eight simple signs before he could proceed to read the most ordinary text. In the following lessons an attempt has been made to grade the acquisition of the signs and the learning of the main features of the grammar, so that the student may proceed, inductively and with comparative facility, to master simultaneously both the intricacies of the characters and the most salient facts of Assyrian grammatical structure.

My especial thanks are due to my friend Dr. Robert J. Lau of Columbia University for the great care and skill with which he has autographed the sign-lists and exercises.

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Part I.

The Assyro-Babylonian system of writing is not alphabetic, but syllabic and ideographic. This work is devoted mainly to the exposition of the purely syllabic signs which are divisible into two categories: viz., simple syllables, or those which contain only one consonant, as ba, ab, treated in Part I., and compound syllables, or those which contain two consonants as bab, giš, treated in Part II. The following Signlist I. of 97 signs, arranged for mnemonic purposes according to similarity in form, gives all the simple syllables, which must be thoroughly learned in the first nine graded lessons before proceeding to the study of the compound and ideographic characters in Part II.

The student should observe the following system of transliteration based on the Hebrew alphabet:

$א_1 = א = ʾ$; $א_2 = ה = ʾ$; $א_3 = ח = ḫ$; $א_4 = ע = ʿ$; $א_5 = ḫ = gḫ$; $ב = b$; $ג = g$; $ד = d$; $ז = z$; $ט = ṭ$; $כ = k$; $ל = l$; $מ = m$; $נ = n$; $ס = s$; $פ = p$; $צ = ṣ$; $ר = r$; $ש = š$; $ת = t$.

Rules for reading

I. A strict rule was followed in syllabic writing which was rarely departed from: viz., in cases where one of the syllabic signs has a varied consonantal value (as ad, aṭ, at) and is followed by a sign with a fixed consonantal value, the fixed consonantal value prevails for both signs. Thus in , the sign may be read alone as ad, aṭ, or at, but, as it is followed here by the fixed consonantal value ta, the word must be read at-ta and not ad-ta, nor aṭ-ta.

Again, the word ug-ga-tu = must be read thus, and not uk-ga-tu, nor uṣ-ga-tu, because the fixed value ga follows = ug, uk, uṣ.

II. Furthermore, a syllable ending in a vowel at the beginning of a word is apt to be followed by a syllable beginning with the same or a kindred vowel: e.g., ga-aš-ru, but si-i-šu must be read šêšu, since the vowel-combination i-i was used to denote long ê.

III. When in the sign-list a value is enclosed in parentheses, as = bu (pu), this indicates that the value in question is not

to be chosen, unless especially demanded by an adjacent fixed consonantal value, or by the word-root given in the glossary.

IV. It will be observed that several signs are identical in value, in which case the transliteration differentiates between them by arbitrarily affixing accents. Thus, - šu, but - šú; - su; - sú; - sù. This does not imply a difference in pronunciation.

V. Every new sign in the graded lessons is numbered in accordance with the enumeration in the tables, in order to facilitate a speedy identification. The reverse table in Part I. must be used in translating the exercises from English into cuneiform. The grammatical references are all to the English edition of Delitzsch's Assyrian Grammar = D. Gr.

VI. The student should constantly refer to the glossary at the close of this work, where all the Assyrian words used in the primer are arranged in Roman transliteration in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. For example, in determining the values of such a word as , which may be read da-a-

bu or *ṭa-a-bu*, a reference to the glossary under דוב will show that there is no word *da-a-bu* in this list. The next alternative is of course to refer to טוב = *ṭa-a-bu* 'good'. Again, [illegible] may be read *ab-lu* or *ap-lu*, but the latter word alone is indicated in the glossary, so also with [illegible] = *as-ku-up* from סכת and not from סכב, etc. In fact, this principle *of choice by exclusion* is the chief feature of this decipherment, until the student has become sufficiently familiar with the Assyrian vocabulary to tell the value of a doubtful word at a glance, by his knowledge of the root.

Sign-List I.

Signs with simple values.

1.		*a*	24.		*ra*
2.		*e*	25.		*ši*
3.		*ba*	26.		*ri*
4.		*gu*	27.		*ar*
5.		*su*	28.		*ku*
6.		*zi*	29.		*lu*
7.		*gi*	30.		*ù*
8.		*ni*	31.		*qi*
9.		*ir*	32.		*ib, (ip)*
10.		*sa*	33.		*ur*
11.		*az, iz, iṣ*	34.		*ṭu*
12.		*pa*	35.		*il*
13.		*ma*	36.		*ùr*
14.		*aš*	37.		*qu*
15.		*la*	38.		*be*
16.		*ad, aṭ, at*	39.		*bi*
17.		*ṣi*	40.		*ti*
18.		*i*	41.		*še*
19.		*ṣa*	42.		*bu (pu)*
20.		*du*	43.		*mu*
21.		*uš*	44.		*ta*
22.		*iš*	45.		*hu*
23.		*si*	46.		*uz, uṣ*