PREFACE

According to UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing*, 230 languages became extinct between 1950 and 2010. The number of languages that have disappeared during the last 4000 years must then be staggering. One of those languages is Sumerian, which disappeared as a vernacular about 4000 years ago, surviving mainly in Mesopotamian religious observances and in scholarly settings for another 2000 years. From then on, until about 150 years ago, the Sumerian language was unheard of, not mentioned in any known source, seemingly leaving no trace.

If Sumerian is indeed just another "dead" language, why then, other than for curiosity's sake, should we devote much effort to its study? To answer that, imagine a world in which all knowledge of the existence of Latin and its literature had disappeared 2500 years ago and has just recently come to light. Suddenly we would be able to learn of and fully appreciate 2500 years of European history and culture. In much the same way, the rediscovery of the Sumerian language enables us to better reconstruct and appreciate 4000 years of Ancient Near Eastern history and culture, of a civilization that gave rise to so many of the vital aspects inherent in Western Civilization. The Sumerian language, in some ways, was as central to Ancient Near Eastern culture as was Latin to European culture.

Until about the close of the first century BCE, the Sumerian language was still being used in religious literature, its antiquity providing those texts with a veneer of original authority, just as Latin and Hebrew do today in their liturgy. Ancient scholars in Anatolia, Syria, Assyria, Iran, and Babylonia studied the Sumerian language long after it had ceased to be spoken. They studied long lists of Sumerian words, sometimes adding a translation in their vernacular. So too, some Sumerian literary compositions were provided with interlinear translations. Even the Bible may show traces of Sumerian influence. It has been posited that the Garden of Eden derives its name from the Sumerian word edin, "steppe," and it has even been suggested that the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib is based upon a Sumerian word play. And when the author of Kings I 4:33 writes of King Solomon that he could "speak of trees ... animals, birds, reptiles, and fish," one is reminded of the education process in which students and scholars throughout the Near East down through the Early Classical period studied Sumerian lists of trees, mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish.

Sumerian is the oldest or one of the two oldest preserved written languages in the world, first appearing in the latter part of the fourth millennium BCE. These earliest attestations of writing come from Jemdat Nasr in central southern Iraq and from the ancient city of Uruk, situated near the Euphrates River in the very south of Iraq. In fact, a later Sumerian literary composition ascribed the invention of writing to a ruler of Uruk who devised it as means to ensure that his messenger would properly convey his lengthy messages.

The earliest attestation of the name for that language is Emegir, which means "local or native language/tongue." The Akkadian term used to translate the Sumerian term Emegir was *šumeru*. As we know from written texts, when referring to themselves, the native speakers of the Sumerian language had called themselves the people of kengiř, a term Akkadian speakers translated again as *šumerû*. Based on this Akkadian rendering, scholars in the last half of the nineteenth century CE applied the name "Sumerian" to the language and to the population for whom it had been the native tongue.

Early Sumerian writing is attested on administrative clay tablets, on which were etched drawings with a reed stylus depicting the animals and other products being delivered, received, and so on, as well as marks to indicate quantity. Dragging the stylus through wet clay was a relatively slow process and eventually the scribes realized that it was faster to simply impress short lines and wedges onto the wet clay using angles of the reed stylus rather than to etch curves with the stylus point. Thus, for example, instead of etching a circle, four short lines were quickly impressed with angles of the reed stylus, though

resulting in a square instead of a circle. The effect of this "impressionist" approach was that over the almost 3500 years of their evolution, the signs less and less resembled the original etched drawings. Today, this method of writing is called cuneiform, from Latin *cuneus* "wedge." The use of cuneiform spread throughout the Ancient Near East, being adapted to convey many other languages, such as Akkadian, Elamite in Iran, Eblaite in Syria, Hurrian, Hittite and other Anatolian languages, and Ugaritic with its thirty alphabetic cuneiform signs.

When, in the nineteenth century, scholars began to decipher the Semitic Akkadian language (with its Assyrian and Babylonian dialects) in the cuneiform inscriptions and tablets being unearthed by archaeologists, they discovered that these same cuneiform signs sometimes created what seemed to be gibberish, at least certainly not Akkadian. Eventually this "gibberish" was identified as a language, Sumerian. Since that time, translation has been facilitated by ancient "dictionaries" on clay tablets or prisms, that is, scholarly lists of Sumerian words accompanied by an Akkadian (or Eblaite or Hittite) translation and sometimes including a syllabic pronunciation. So too, some Sumerian literary compositions contain an interlinear Akkadian translation. However, even today, there is a significant number of Sumerian words whose translation or even pronunciation we do not know. Sometimes, if one of these terms occurs in a sentence, we can determine its meaning from context. Or, if a noun, the word may have a determinative, that is, a cuneiform sign appended to it that informs whether the term denotes a stone, a bird or fish, a tree, a wooden or metal object, and so on, so that, though we still may not know the exact meaning, we at least know the nature of the object. Sometimes we can even narrow the possibilities, such as with terms for parts of the body, which tend to follow an anatomical order in the word lists. Lastly, there are many instances in which, although we have an Akkadian or perhaps Eblaite translation of the Sumerian, we still do not know the meaning since we do not know the meaning of the Akkadian or Eblaite word used in the translation.

Worthy of note is the very high frequency of birds and fish sharing a name, though sometimes the orthography varies, which may afford a glimpse, though unclear, into the Sumerians' perception of the natural world.

As previously noted, some ancient dictionaries provide a syllabic pronunciation of the Sumerian word. In other contexts, the scribe may append a gloss to the term, that is, additional cuneiform signs that are a syllabic pronunciation or a guide to the pronunciation of the sign or signs in the text. There are also texts that are totally or almost totally syllabic, which enables us to reconstruct the original Sumerian being syllabically expressed. However, many signs have multiple meanings and pronunciations, even multiple pronunciations for the same meaning, such as /im/ and /tumu/ for the sign IM when meaning "wind." In sum, there are many Sumerian words whose pronunciation we are unsure of, even when we do know the meaning. In this dictionary Sumerian words (or part of words) whose pronunciation is likely in question will appear in Roman capital letters in the transcription and transliteration. However, though a word may appear in lowercase letters, it does not necessarily indicate that its pronunciation is absolutely assured.

METHODOLOGY

An overarching issue when compiling a Sumerian dictionary is the establishment of a rule governing the selection of words to be included. Languages utilize vocabulary from other languages. In the case of the Sumerian language, many of the terms for spices, animals, vegetation, and so forth not native to southern Mesopotamia may have been adopted from other languages. So too, in a multilingual society one language may utilize the words of the other. This situation is apparent in administrative texts from the Old Akkadian period that are constructed within a framework of Sumerian vocabulary and syntax, yet abound in terms that are clearly Akkadian. Some of these terms continued to be used within a Sumerian context after the Old Akkadian period or appear in later lexical lists of Sumerian words. In this work we include all words found within texts created within a framework of Sumerian vocabulary and syntax, even if the term is clearly taken from another language. So too, Sumerian nouns occurring in Babylonian and Assyrian texts are included.

In addition to words occurring within context, whether literary, administrative, or historical, we have included many words attested only as lexical entries. There are many words listed in lexical texts, particularly from the Early Dynastic period and from Ebla, whose meaning and sometimes pronunciation are unclear. These words, for the most part, have not been included here. So too, proper nouns, including the names of months and festivals, are not included.

At the outset, when setting the parameters for compiling this dictionary, compromises were necessary. This meant utilizing the work of reliable scholars rather than checking every source text ourself (unless there appeared to be a problem). We worked under the assumption that any reader interested in more-in-depth understanding of a Sumerian word would be able to avail him- or herself of the online resources, since there could be no way this dictionary could replicate all the information contained in those sources. Thus, for example, if a reader wants to know all the variant orthographies for a term or the orthography and use based on historical period or location, or all the lexical sources for a particular term, or more examples of a word's usage, often that information can be found in those online resources.

Since all 21 volumes of the *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (CAD) are readily available to all, free for downloading, we often cite the page of the CAD where a literary passage—usually bilingual—is quoted, rather than citing the original cuneiform publication, which is often unavailable to the reader. In some instances we disagree with the reading of the CAD and present the transliteration with our change. When translating the bilingual passages cited from the CAD, we translate the Sumerian text, unlike the CAD, which translates the Akkadian. When citing a lexical passage, we cite either the page of the CAD where the entry is quoted or the text citation according to the online Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts.

The transliteration of Sumerian literary passages is based, whenever possible, upon published critical editions. When such an edition was unavailable to us, we utilized the transliteration of the Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, some of whose texts are in critical edition form, or the composite texts of the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.

The translation in this dictionary of a Sumerian term in the vast majority of instances has already been established through the meticulous research of cuneiform scholars, so many of whom are no longer with us—colleagues, teachers, and teachers' teachers. In most instances we do not cite their names or the place of publication, for to gather and list this information would be a major undertaking in its own right. However, for difficult terms more recently discussed, we do cite the scholar and place of publication. Those unfamiliar with the Sumerian language should be aware that there is much about the language that is still unknown, uncertain, or open to an alternate interpretation and, therefore, some of the definitions and passage translations presented here may differ from those of some scholars.

A major area of subjectivity in this work is the transcription and transliteration of signs that can have the vowel sound /e/ or /i/. Historically, scholars have opted for /i/ over /e/ in their transliterations. If a lexical text indicates the vowel, such as ge-e GE "reed," then we follow the lexical text despite the common reading /gi/. Note that sometimes one lexical entry supports /e/ and another /i/. We fully appreciate that the pronunciation given in a lexical entry may simply reflect the tradition, location, time period, or even the influence of the native language of the scribe, for whom, in almost all cases, Sumerian was not the vernacular. Our choice of consonant within the same linguistic category can also be somewhat subjective, such as with the consonants *g* and *k*, or *s* and *š*.

Another area of subjectivity is the identification of a determinative, a sign not intended to be read aloud by the scribe that informs the scribe as to the nature of the accompanying noun, such as whether the noun denotes clothing, pottery, a bird, a wooden object, and so forth. However, it is not always clear whether a sign is a determinative or, in fact, part of the pronounced term. This dilemma occurs most often with the signs ge "reed" and ĝeš "wood."

Subjectivity occurs also in our separate treatment of homonyms that have the same orthography, but different meanings. Where we believe the meanings to be related, they are placed under one main entry; where we believe unrelated, under separate main entries. Also, sometimes our determination of primary versus secondary meaning within a main entry can be subjective.

Homonymous unrelated transcribed entries are listed separately (e.g., ḫar "ring" and ḫar "seedling"). Sometimes they can be distinguished by the part of speech (e.g., ḫar (v) "to spoil" and ḫar (s) "ring"). For these homonymous entries, verbal main entries (v) are listed first, followed by substantive (s), then adjectival (adj), and so on. If there are multiple homonymous entries of the same part of speech but with different orthographies, they are distinguished by a Roman numeral sequence indicator (e.g., inda (s) I "father," inda (s) II "bread," and inda (s) IV "oven").

What we conclude to be the basic orthography, that is, the orthography (not including glosses) most often used by scribes to convey

the meaning, occurs at the beginning of each main entry. Variant orthographies are not listed but are fully listed in the online Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary. However, some variants can be found in the lexical, literary, or administrative passages cited.

Under each main entry, all parts of speech and compound forms utilizing that Sumerian base term are brought together. There, each part of speech is individually presented, with the verbal usage (if present) always treated first. So too, nouns and other parts of speech that are formed using the base term are presented there. Therefore, when searching for a term in the dictionary, if it is not found as a separate main entry, it will be located under the base term, e.g., a–sila₃ "amniotic fluid" is listed under the base term A "water"; niĝ₂–ki–luḫ "broom" under LUḪ "to clean"; nam–sikil–la "purity" under SIKIL "to purify." Homonymous nouns may be found under different main entries, depending on the meaning of the base term. For example, a₂–tuku "powerful one" occurs under A IIa "(protrusion)" whereas a₂–tuku "profit" occurs under A IIb "fee."

When citing lexical attestations of a term, we do not list all occurrences. Rather, we cite a selection that indicates the Akkadian equivalences and variant syllabic renderings. When citing literary and administrative passages containing a specific Sumerian term, we do not cite all occurrences if there is a great number, only a meaningful sample.

TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLITERATION

Following standard practice, Sumerian words appear in Roman typeface, Akkadian and Eblaite words in italic typeface.

The dictionary utilizes transcription, rather than transliteration, in the heading to each main entry. Because of the widespread use of variant orthographies by the scribes, we have found this organization more helpful when trying to decipher a syllabic text or to understand a term with an unusual orthography.

The alphabetization of consonants and vowels throughout the dictionary is:

a b d r̂ e g ĝ ḫ i k l m n p r s š t u w y z

For those unfamiliar with Sumerian transliteration, r̂ represents /dr/, ĝ /ng/, ḫ /kh/, and š /sh/. There are certain Sumerian words written with consonant variation: b or g, d or z, g or ḫ, s or š, and n or z (e.g., –num/–zum, na₄/za, ḫabantum/ḫabazatum, niĝgunnu/niĝguzum). These variant orthographies may well reflect scribal tradition rather than being the result of an attempt to express yet another Sumerian consonant. Note that in the transcription of Akkadian we utilize the letter *y* where the CAD utilizes *j*.

Sumerian transliteration attempts to convey both the pronunciation of a cuneiform sign and the identification of the particular cuneiform sign appearing on the tablet or inscription. Since several cuneiform signs can have the same pronunciation, each sign with that pronunciation has been assigned a number, standard throughout all Sumerian and Akkadian publications, according to Rykle Borger's *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon*, 2nd ed, 2010. Thus, for example, if four signs share the pronunciation /gu/, then the signs are labeled as gu (*not* gu₁), gu₂, gu₃, and gu₄, enabling the reader to know which particular sign with a reading /gu/ appears on the tablet. However, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon* does not include the consonant r̂(=dr), since its recognition as a separate Sumerian consonant, at least by some, is relatively recent. Some of the more often used signs in our transliteration with the consonant r̂ and its corresponding sign in *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon* are:

bar̂	bad
dar̂a₂	dara₂
r̂a₂	ra₂
r̂e	re
r̂e₆	de₆
r̂u₃	du₃
ĝir̂u	gidru
kar̂a	kadra
mur̂a₃	mudra₃
par̂	pad
sukur̂	sukud

Scribes at times added glosses as guides to pronunciation or determinatives to indicate the nature of a noun. In standard transliteration these glosses and determinatives appear raised above the line and in a smaller font size, though, on the actual tablet, determinatives appear alongside and in the same size as the noun being elucidated. So too glosses originally were written in the same manner as determinatives, but beginning around the early second millennium BCE these glosses were sometimes written with smaller-sized cuneiform signs, still alongside, but above or below the line. Presumably, when the scribe read the text aloud, glosses and determinatives

were not pronounced, but remained silent indicators for the reader. In this dictionary, following standard practice, determinatives and glosses appear in a smaller font above the line.

Many Sumerian words are of the form $C_1V_1C_{1,2}$ (e.g., KUR "to enter") or $C_1V_1C_2V_2C_3$ (e.g., SIPAD, "shepherd"). In general, in the dictionary, final consonants do not appear in the transliteration of the sign. However, the final consonant does appear in the main entry header transcription in parentheses, e.g., ku(r) and sipa(d).

STRUCTURE OF THE MAIN ENTRY

The main entry contains all parts of speech utilizing a specific Sumerian term, as well as other terms in which the term of the main entry occurs, for example pap-ḫal "man" under the main entry term pap "male relative."

The structure of a main entry is as follows:

transcribed Sumerian term (part of speech) sequence indicator [determinative]

BASIC WRITTEN FORM: *(transliteration)*

EMESAL: *(the Emesal equivalent, if different)*

> *(optional comment)*
> "*primary meaning*"
> *lexical attestations*
>> (If the pronunciation is present, it is in lowercase Roman, the Sumerian sign(s) in small caps Roman, and the Akkadian rendering in italics. If not present, the Sumerian sign is in lowercase Roman.)
> *Examples of usage*

B SECONDARY MEANING

> B.*n* "*meaning*"
> *examples*

C COMPOUND USAGE

> C.*n* (*Sumerian compound*) "*meaning*"
> *examples*

D USAGE AS/IN NOUN

> D.*n* (*Sumerian term*) "*meaning*"
> *examples*

E ADJECTIVAL USAGE

> E.*n* (*Sumerian term*) "*meaning*"
> *examples*

F ADVERBIAL USAGE

> F.*n* (*Sumerian term*) "*meaning*"
> *examples*

G PREPOSITIONAL USAGE

> G.*n* (*Sumerian term*) "*meaning*"
> *examples*

H CONJUNCTIVE USAGE

> H.*n* (*Sumerian term*) "*meaning*"
> *examples*

I INTERJECTION

> I.*n* (*Sumerian term*) "*meaning*"
> *examples*

J NUMBER

> J.*n* (*Sumerian term*) "*meaning*"
> *examples*

The transcribed Sumerian term in the heading of the main entry is in a large bold font. If part of the term occurs in only some attestations, that part may be in parentheses, e.g., šerti(um) "rag." If a vowel may vary, the varying vowels may be separated by a slash (/), e.g., bunga/u "small child." If there is an Auslaut, the Auslaut is in parentheses, e.g., e(g) "dike." If the reading of the transcription, or one of its components, is questionable, the questionable part is in caps, e.g., geLI, an aromatic.

Part of speech:

The heading of the main entry includes in parentheses the part or parts of speech presented within the entry. The follow abbreviations are used:

adj	adjective
adv	adverb
conj	conjunction
interj	interjection
interr	interrogative
num	numeric
prep	preposition
s	substantive
v	verb

Sequence indicator:

If there are homonymous main entries with the same part of speech, but each is written using a *different* cuneiform sign or group of signs (e.g., the verbal entries mu_2 and mu_4), then each homonym is assigned a sequence indicator in

the form of a Roman numeral (e.g., mu (v) I and mu (v) II). The sequence indicator bears no relationship to the sign numbering in Borger's *Zeichenlexikon.*

If there are homonyms with the same part of speech and each is written using the *same* cuneiform sign or signs, but with unrelated meanings, then following the Roman numeral sequencing number is an alphabetic to distinguish them. In the following example for a$_2$ the sequential number is II (because I is a "water"), thus: a (s) IIa "(something extending from the main body)"; a (s) IIb "fee," "rental," "wages," "work"; a (s) IIc "moment in time." If there are homonyms with the same part of speech, but with *unrelated* meanings and only one attested occurrence of each, then the entry is marked with the letter x after the Roman numeral sequence indicator, e.g., Ix or IIx.

Determinative:

The heading of the main entry includes in brackets any determinative occurring with the noun as part of its standard orthography. Some of the most common determinatives are: dug "vessel," ge "reed," ĝeš "wood," ku$_6$ "fish," mušen "bird," tug$_2$ "garment," urudu "copper."