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LESSON ONE

1.1 The Sounds of Akkadian

Since there have been no native speakers of Akkadian for some two millennia, it is impossible to determine exactly how the language was pronounced. The pronunciation used by scholars is merely an educated guess, based largely on comparisons with languages related to Akkadian, such as Arabic, Amharic, and Hebrew.

(a) Vowels

There are four short vowels, *a, e, i, u*, and four corresponding long vowels. Long vowels are marked either with a macron, *ā, ē, ī, ū*, or with a circumflex, *â, ê, î, û*, depending on the origin of the length (see §6.1). The vowels may be pronounced as follows:

SHORT VOWELS		LONG VOWELS	
<i>a</i>	as in swap	<i>ā, â</i>	as in father
<i>e</i>	as in pet	<i>ē, ê</i>	as in rein
<i>i</i>	as in pit	<i>ī, î</i>	as in marine
<i>u</i>	as in put	<i>ū, û</i>	as in rule

The distinction between short *a* and long *ā/â* is basically one of duration.

It is crucial to know the length of a vowel, since a difference in length may mark a significant difference in meaning between otherwise identical words, as in

<i>mutum</i> 'husband'	vs.	<i>mūtum</i> 'death'
<i>dannatum</i> 'fortress'	vs.	<i>dannātum</i> 'fortresses'
<i>bēlum</i> 'to rule'	vs.	<i>belūm</i> 'to be extinguished'

(b) Consonants

Most of these are pronounced like their English equivalents:

<i>b</i>	as in bet	<i>m</i>	as in met	<i>š</i>	as <i>sh</i> in shot
<i>d</i>	as in dot	<i>n</i>	as in not	<i>t</i>	as in tot
<i>g</i>	as in get	<i>p</i>	as in pot	<i>w</i>	as in wet
<i>k</i>	as in kid	<i>r</i>	as in rot	<i>y</i>	as in Mayan
<i>l</i>	as in lot	<i>s</i>	as in set	<i>z</i>	as in zoo

Note that *w* does not occur before other consonants (except itself, as in *nuwwurum* 'to brighten') or at the end of words. The consonant *y* occurs, singly or doubled, only between vowels (as in *elīya* 'against me', *dayyānum* 'judge'); many scholars prefer to transcribe *j* rather than *y*, and the phoneme is counted as *j* for alphabetization in the modern dictionaries.

Five consonants require special comment:

The phonemes *q*, *ṣ*, and *ṭ* are usually referred to as "emphatic" consonants. The ancient pronunciation of these is not known, and most modern students of Akkadian pronounce *q* like *k*, *ṣ* as *ts* in *fits*, and *ṭ* like *t*.

The sounds corresponding to Akkadian *q*, *ṣ*, *ṭ* in the modern Semitic languages of Ethiopia and South Arabia are glottalized, that is, pronounced like *k*, *s*, and *t* with accompanying glottal closure and sharp ejection of air (*q* = [kʰ]; *ṣ* = [sʰ]; *ṭ* = [tʰ]). In Arabic the phonemes corresponding to the Akkadian emphatics are pronounced as follows: *q* is articulated farther back than *k* (at the uvula); *ṣ* and *ṭ* resemble *s* and *t*, respectively, but with a simultaneous constricting of the throat (pharyngealization).

Consider the following table (note: "voiced" consonants are pronounced with resonance of the vocal cords, "voiceless" without):

Voiced	Voiceless	Emphatic
<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	
<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>ṭ</i>
<i>g</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>q</i>
<i>z</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>ṣ</i>

One of the several difficulties with the Akkadian writing system is its frequent failure to distinguish voiced, voiceless, and emphatic consonants that have otherwise identical articulation. Thus, for example, the same sign is used to write both *za* and *ṣa*; another sign is used to write any of *ag*, *ak*, or *aq*. This problem will be considered in detail under "The Writing System," §9.2.

The phoneme *ḫ* should be pronounced like *ch* in German *ach* and Scottish *loch*. The student should be sure to include the "hook" when writing this consonant.

The remaining consonant, transcribed ʾ (or, conveniently, as a single close-quote mark: '), is referred to as "aleph" (after the corresponding Hebrew consonant). It is the glottal stop or catch, the sound heard between *n* and *i* in 'an iceman' when one wishes to distinguish carefully that phrase from 'a nice man', or the sound heard in some pronunciations of 'bottle' as [bɒʔl]. Like *w* and *y*, ʾ is of limited

distribution: it occurs only between vowels, either singly or doubled (as in *naʾādum* 'to heed', *ṣitaʾal* 'interrogate!'), and, rarely, at the end of a syllable (e.g., *naʾdum* 'attentive'; see §21.4). In modern Akkadian dictionaries, ʾ is ignored in alphabetization.

All consonants may occur doubled, as in *wuṣṣurum* 'to release', *libbum* 'heart'. Doubled consonants should be held longer (cf. [nn] in 'meanness' or 'penknife'; [dd] in 'bad day'; [tt] in 'hot tub').

Alphabetization in modern Akkadian dictionaries is as follows:

a, b, d, e, g, ḫ, i, j(y), k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, ṣ, ṭ, t, u, w, z.

As noted above, words containing ʾ are listed as though the ʾ were not present.

1.2 Syllabification

The cuneiform writing system, as adapted for Akkadian (see below, §9.2), was based on the syllabification of the language; that is, to "spell" a given word, the scribe thought in terms of the constituent syllables of that word. It is therefore important that the student be able to determine the syllables that make up Akkadian words. There are three essential rules:

- Every syllable has one, and only one, vowel.
- With two exceptions, no syllable may begin with a vowel. The exceptions are: the beginning of a word; the second of two successive vowels (note: some scholars prefer to write ʾ between any two vowels in a word: e.g., *kiʾam* rather than our *kiam*).
- No syllable may begin or end with two consonants.

Some examples:

<i>balāṭi</i> : <i>ba / lā / ṭi</i>	<i>ūtenepuš</i> : <i>ū / te / nep / puš</i>	<i>kiam</i> : <i>ki / am</i> (or,
<i>elūm</i> : <i>e / lūm</i>	<i>narkabtum</i> : <i>nar / kab / tum</i>	<i>kiʾam</i> : <i>ki / ʾam</i>)
<i>ṣabat</i> : <i>ṣa / bat</i>	<i>epištašu</i> : <i>e / piš / ta / šu</i>	

1.3 Stress (Accent)

For any Akkadian word, the position of the stress is completely predictable, according to the rules given below. To determine which syllable bears the stress in any given word, it is convenient to consider syllables as being of three different types:

- (a) Light: ending in a short vowel: e.g., -a, -ba.
 (b) Heavy: ending in a long vowel marked with a macron, or in a short vowel plus a consonant: e.g., -ā, -bā, -ak, -bak.
 (c) Ultraheavy: ending in a long vowel marked with a circumflex, or in any long vowel plus a consonant: e.g., -ā, -bā, -āk, -bāk, -āk, -bāk.

The syllable bearing the stress may be determined for any given word by applying the following rules, in order:

- (a) If the last syllable is ultraheavy, it bears the stress, as in
ibnū: *ib/nū*; *idūk*: *i/dūk*.
 (b) Otherwise, stress falls on the last non-final heavy or ultraheavy syllable, as in
iparras: *i/par/ras*; *tētenepušā*: *tē/te/nep/pu/šā*;
nidittum: *ni/dit/tum*; *itāršum*: *i/tār/šum*;
idūkū: *i/dū/kū*; *napištašunu*: *na/piš/ta/šu/nu*.
 (c) Words that contain no non-final heavy or ultraheavy syllables have the stress on the first syllable:
zikarum: *zi/ka/rum*; *ilū*: *i/lū*.
šunu: *šu/nu*;

EXERCISES

A. VOCABULARY 1.

Nouns:

abum 'father'.
ālum 'town, city'.
amtum 'female slave, woman-servant'.
bēlum 'lord, master, owner'.
hurāšum 'gold'.
iltum 'goddess'.
ilum 'god'.
kaspum 'silver'.

Conjunction:

u 'and'.

mārtum 'daughter'.
mārum 'son'.
qaqqadum 'head, top; person; principal (amount)'.
šābum 'gang, army, troops'.
šarratum 'queen'.
šarrum 'king'.
wardum 'male slave, man-servant'.

- B. How is *š* pronounced? *q*? *h*? *s*? *t*? the vowels? Pronounce the vocabulary words aloud.
 C. Which Akkadian consonants are voiced? voiceless? emphatic?
 D. Divide the nouns in the vocabulary into syllables, and mark the syllable with the stress: e.g., *abum*: *a/bum*.
 E. For additional practice, divide the following words into syllables, and mark the syllable with the stress:

- | | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. <i>mušallimum</i> | 5. <i>tabnianni</i> | 9. <i>tabnū</i> | 13. <i>paris</i> |
| 2. <i>išāl</i> | 6. <i>niqīaš</i> | 10. <i>iššiakkum</i> | 14. <i>išmeānim</i> |
| 3. <i>idin</i> | 7. <i>epēšum</i> | 11. <i>rēdūm</i> | 15. <i>pete</i> |
| 4. <i>iddinūniššum</i> | 8. <i>kullumum</i> | 12. <i>iqbi</i> | 16. <i>šūšū</i> |