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5 Akkadian

Giorgio Buccellati

Akkadian is the oldest attested Semitic language (with Eblaite, which several Assyriologists consider a branch of Akkadian, though it is treated separately in this volume). The earliest period, known as Old Akkadian, dates to between 2350 and 2200: the major textual evidence consists of royal inscriptions. After a Sumerian resurgence, from which fewer Akkadian texts are found, the documentation resumes shortly after 2000 BCE and continues unbroken until about the time of Christ, with all major types of texts attested for most periods. It is also from that date that begins the distinction between Babylonian in the South and Assyrian in the northeast. Four periods may be distinguished, corresponding roughly to cycles lasting about five centuries each: Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian in the first half, Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian in the second half of the second millennium: Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian in the first half and Late Babylonian in the second half of the first millennium. It is generally assumed that Akkadian came to be no longer spoken sometime in the first half of the first millennium, when it was effectively replaced by Aramaic. In addition, Assyriologists speak at times of Classic Babylonian, referring to the Old Babylonian dialect and its survivals. The most important such survival is also known as Standard Babylonian, which describes the language used in the literary texts copied and in some cases written in the first half of the first millennium.

The best-known literary texts, such as Gilgamesh or the Creation Epic, are preserved in their most complete textual versions in tablets from the late periods written precisely in Standard Babylonian, but there are significant literary texts from all periods, including especially political texts (royal inscriptions). The Code of Hammurapi is in part a legal text and in part a document of political literature, thus providing the best example of Classic Babylonian. We are also fortunate in having several thousand letters from all periods, which give us the best evidence for spoken language.

Phonemics

Akkadian phonemes show a considerable reduction of the inventory from an earlier/archaic stage. In particular, all pharyngeals and laryngeals came to be realized (at least by the beginning of the second millennium) as glottal stop, and all inter-

dentals as sibilants. The only innovative element is the introduction of a vowel *e*, which in part was conditioned by the loss of pharyngeals and laryngeals (e.g., 'abār- > 'ebēr- 'to cross'). The full inventory is as follows:

Consonants

p	t			k	'
b	d			g	
	ṭ			q	
		s	š	ḥ	
		z			
		š			
m	n				
		l			
		r			
w			y		

Vowels

i	u
e	a

All vowels and consonants may occur either long or short; notation of length in cuneiform writing is for the most part irregular. Assyriological practice distinguishes two degrees of lengths, marked respectively by a macron and a circumflex, e.g., *bānū* 'builder'. There is however no indication that such a distinction obtained in actual phonemic reality, and it is generally applied according to historical criteria: contraction length is rendered by a circumflex, and morphological length by a macron. It seems best to avoid Assyriological use and retain a single length indicated by a macron.

Very little is known about stress, but it, too, appears to be non-phonemic.

Internal Inflection

The Root

Internal inflection is a system comprising two interdigitating sets of discontinuous morphemes, roots and patterns.

Structurally, a root can be isolated only when it interdigitates with at least two patterns. For example, the three nouns, *dunn-* 'power', 'umm- 'mother', and *tupp-* 'tablet', seem to be derived from the same pattern *purr-*. But while *dunn-* is part of a distributional array which includes *dann-* 'powerful', *dunnun-* 'to strengthen', there are no such forms as *'amm-, *'ummum-, *ṭapp-, *ṭappup- — hence we cannot isolate any such root as *'mm or *ṭpp. •

Properly, the term “nominal root” should be used for such roots from which multiple noun formations (and no verb formations) may be derived. In Akkadian, this obtains only with numerals. Otherwise, all roots are verbal-nominal, in that both verbal and nominal patterns may be derived from them. This means that all verbs imply a root, while nouns may or may not imply it. There are no roots from which only verbs can be derived.

Also lexical in nature is the “root vowel.” The term implies that this vowel is an element of the root, on the same level as the consonants and therefore a morphological element – but that is not so. The root vowel is a lexical determinant for appropriate patterns from finite verbal forms from any root, and will be treated below with patterns.

All Akkadian roots consist of three or four elements, called “radicals.” Each radical can be either (1) a simple consonant, or (2) a set of possible realizations, including length and Ø next to regular consonants. Only one realization occurs for the radical at any given time, and it is conditioned morphophonemically. The roots of the first type are called “strong” roots, those of the second “weak” roots.

There are limits to the combinations of consonants which can occur together to form a root. For example, two emphatics do not cooccur in the same root, and when comparative considerations would require them, one of them is realized as voiceless (e.g., Akkadian *šbt* for Semitic *šbt*).

Patterns

Formal Aspects

There is a difference in pattern formation between nouns and verbs. They fall in different groups characterized by special sets of markers. While the nominal patterns may be arranged in a unilineal sequence, with each pattern becoming progressively more complex, the verbal patterns are bidimensional, defined by a system of two coordinates.

The system of verbal and nominal patterns overlap with regard to their internal inflection in three instances: the infinitive, verbal adjective and participle. From the point of view of external inflection, all three behave like nouns, receiving endings for number, gender, case, but not person, tense or mood. These three patterns however, are fully integrated from the viewpoint of internal inflection, into the coordinate system of verbal patterns. In addition, these three types of nouns, alone among all nouns, can govern both the genitive case (like other nouns) and the accusative case (like the verbs). Because of this special relationship with the verb, these nouns will be considered throughout as part of the system of verbal patterns and called “verbal nouns.” The other nouns which are also derived from a verbal root, but do not fit into the coordinate system or govern the accusative, will be called “deverbal nouns.” The verbal patterns proper (aside from verbal nouns) will be called the “finite forms.”

The traditional paradigm is followed here (Table 5.1, p. 72), with some modification. Apart from minor points of nomenclature (e.g., *B* for the basic stem rath-

Table 5.1 Finite forms with affixes of external inflection

		Imperative	Preterite	Perfect	Present	
B Sg.	3c.		¹ -iprus	¹ -iptaras	¹ -iparras	
	2m.	purus	t-aprus	t-aptaras	t-aparras	
	f.	pur[u]s-ī	t-aprus-ī	t-aptar[a]s-ī	t-aparras-ī	
	Pl.	1c.		¹ -aprus	¹ -aptaras	¹ -aparras
		3m.		¹ -iprus-ū	¹ -iptar[a]s-ū	¹ -iparras-ū
		f.		¹ -iprus-ā	¹ -iptar[a]s-ā	¹ -iparras-ā
2c.	pur[u]s-ā	t-aprus-ā	t-aptar[a]s-ā	t-aparras-ā		
1c.		n-iprus	n-iptaras	n-iparras		
N Sg.	3c.		¹ -ipparis	¹ -ittapas	¹ -ipparras	
	2m.	napris	t-apparis	t-attapas	t-apparras	
	f.	napris-ī	t-appar[i]s-ī	t-attapas-ī	t-apparras-ī	
	Pl.	1c.		¹ -apparis	¹ -attapas	¹ -apparras
		3m.		¹ -ippar[i]s-ū	¹ -ittapas-ū	¹ -ipparras-ū
		f.		¹ -ippar[i]s-ā	¹ -ittapas-ā	¹ -ipparras-ā
2c.	napris-ā	t-appar[i]s-ā	t-attapas-ā	t-apparras-ā		
1c.		n-ipparis	n-ittapas	n-ipparras		
D Sg.	3c.		¹ -uparris	¹ -uptarris	¹ -uparras	
	2m.	purris	t-uparris	t-uptarris	t-uparras	
	f.	purris-ī	t-uparris-ī	t-uptarris-ī	t-uparras-ī	
	Pl.	1c.		¹ -uparris	¹ -uptarris	¹ -uparras
		3m.		¹ -uparris-ū	¹ -uptarris-ū	¹ -uparras-ū
		f.		¹ -uparris-ā	¹ -uptarris-ā	¹ -uparras-ā
2c.	purris-ā	t-uparris-ā	t-uptarris-ā	t-uparras-ā		
1c.		n-uparris	n-uptarris	n-uparras		
Š Sg.	3c.		¹ -ušapris	¹ -uštapis	¹ -ušapas	
	2m.	šupris	t-ušapris	t-uštapis	t-ušapas	
	f.	šupris-ī	t-ušapris-ī	t-uštapis-ī	t-ušapas-ī	
	Pl.	1c.		¹ -ušapris	¹ -uštapis	¹ -ušapas
		3m.		¹ -ušapris-ū	¹ -uštapis-ū	¹ -ušapas-ū
		f.		¹ -ušapris-ā	¹ -uštapis-ā	¹ -ušapas-ā
2c.	šupris-ā	t-ušapris-ā	t-uštapis-ā	t-ušapas-ā		
1c.		n-ušapris	n-uštapis	n-ušapas		

er than *G* for the German “Grundstamm”), and of sequence (*BNDŠ* instead of *BDNŠ*), the main difference is that the permansive is not considered here a “tense” of the verb, but rather a special form of nominal sentence (see p. 81–82, 87).

In contrast to the verbal patterns, the nominal patterns do not exhibit such a correlation of markers, and can only be listed in a unilinear fashion. When a pattern is closely correlated with a given stem, it is formally limited to just that particular stem, i.e., the characteristic marker is not carried over into other stems. For example, the pattern *tapris-* is characteristic of the *D* stem (it occurs frequently with roots which are attested only in the *D* stem, e.g., *teslūt-* ‘prayer’). But, the characteristic *t* in front of the first radical does not occur with this meaning for patterns connected with other stems.

Even though the system of nominal patterns is unilinear, it is nevertheless a true system because each pattern does have a specific meaning which is then integrated

with the semantic value of the root to form the word proper. In this the deverbal nouns are markedly different from non-interdigitating nouns (primary nouns and loanwords) which may be of the same shape but do not carry the meaning of the pattern. For example, all nouns of the pattern *mapras-* from verbal roots normally carry a meaning which can be placed under the category of noun of instrument (or place); but the word *mašmaš-* 'incantation priest', though outwardly of the same shape, does not have anything in common with that category, because it is a loanword from Sumerian.

Notional Categories

The formal system of coordinates outlined above has a close correlation with semantic categories and syntactic values. One set of forms include the infinite and finite forms, i.e., verbal nouns, moods and tenses. The two moods are the imperative to express positive command, and the indicative to express a statement. The indicative mood is divided into three tenses, i.e., forms which denote the temporal position of the action *vis-à-vis* the speaker: preterite for past action and present for present or future action. Traditional Akkadian grammar recognizes a third tense, the perfect, but a separate morphological status for this tense is doubtful, and it seems more likely that forms so understood should be treated as preterites of the *t*-stem. In this presentation, however, the perfect is retained as a separate tense.

The most important stems are the following:

- B* stem for the basic meaning of the root
- D* stem as factitive, intensive, pluralitive of *B* (lengthening of the middle radical)
- \check{S} stem as causative or relative of *B* (prefix \check{S})
- N* stem as passive or ingressive of *B* (prefix *N* or length)
- t* as reciprocal or separative of *B* and passive of *D* and \check{S}
- tn* as iterative of *B*, *N*, *D*, \check{S}

Here are some examples. For one set of forms, no relationship is involved: the infinitive ('*alākum* 'to go'), the stative participle (*damqum* 'good'), the active participle (*šābitum* 'the one who seizes'). Another set of forms does involve the relationship of time: the present-future refers to an action which is either contemporary or posterior (*iqabbī* 'he speaks' or 'he will speak'), the preterite refers to a past action (*iqbī* 'he spoke'), the imperative refers to an action contemporary with the speaker – command (*qibī* 'speak!'). If retained as a distinct verbal form, the perfect refers (in some periods of Akkadian) to an action which is following an earlier point in time, or which came before the speaker's utterance (*iqtabī* 'he then spoke', 'he will have spoken').

We have roots of condition (for which the term "stative" can be used), and of action ("fientive"). The infinitive is indifferent to aspect (*damāqum* is either stative 'to be good', or fientive 'to become good'), the first participle is stative (*dam[i]qum* 'good, endowed with the condition of goodness'), while the second

participle is fientive (*ṣābitum* 'the one who seizes at a given point in time'). However, all finite forms are punctual.

The attitude of the speaker refers to the stance taken *vis-à-vis* the process, depending on whether process is described in a statement, or solicited through a summons. The traditional terms used for this are 'indicative' in the first case, and 'imperative' in the second. Both are called moods. Note that this notional category is represented by two different types of formal categories, that is, the moods derived through internal inflection (described here) and those derived through external inflection (for which see below).

As indicated earlier, nominal patterns, or deverbal nouns, do not exhibit as complex a paradigm as the verbal patterns, because instead of a matrix, they have a more linear pattern. One major distinction obtains, on the notional level, depending on whether or not a reference is implied to the subject of the verbal process. In the first case we have subject nouns (*ṣabbātum* 'robber') and in the other description nouns (i.e., nouns which describe the process as such, without reference to a subject), for example, *ṣibtum* 'seizing'. In terms of the verbal nouns, the first category is parallel to the participles, and the second to the infinitive.

Patterns from Strong Triradical Roots

All verbal patterns (see Table 5.1, p. 72) include two to four vowels (except for the affixes which are elements of external, not internal, inflection). The vowels are always short except in two cases, the *B* infinitive and the *B* participle. Only the first and last vowels, however, are distinctive; the middle vowel(s), when present, is/are always, indistinctively, the same, namely *a* (which may have been realized as *ə*).

The function of the first vowel is to serve as auxiliary stem marker. It may be noted that a vocalic differentiation of the stems is often necessary, because consonantism by itself is not always distinctive – for example, in the *B* present (*pr:s*) and *D* present (also *pr:s*). The first vowel of the *B* and *N* stems is either *a* or *i*, with the exception of the *Bt(n)*, *N*, *Ntn* participle and the *B* imperative. The first vowel of the *D* and *Ṣ* stems is *u* throughout.

The last vowel serves as the main noun/tense marker. A differentiation of the nouns and tenses by vowel is generally necessary, because consonantism by itself is usually not distinctive, as in the *D* preterite (*pr:s*) and present (also *pr:s*). In the derived stems, the final vowel is as follows: *u* for infinitive and durative participle, *i* for punctual participle, imperative preterite and perfect and *a* for present.

The root vowel is determined lexically, and one will derive notations as to vocalism (*a*, *i*, *u*, and *u/a*) from the lexicon. The vocalism of the last syllable is, in the patterns of the *B* and *N* stems, dependent upon this lexical item for each finite form and most imperatives.

The root vowel is either a single phoneme (*a*, *i*, *u*) or a set of two alternating phonemes (*u/a*). When the root is single, the same vowel is found in all finite forms of *B(tn)* or *N(tn)*. When the root vowel is alternating, *a* is found in all the same finite forms except for the imperative and preterite *B*, where *u* is found. In

