West Semitic Lexicon in Sumerian

By

Letizia Cerqueglini

Tel Aviv University

S umer's conquest by Semitic-speaking peoples from the west is symbolized by the history of Sargon of Akkad. Assyrian sources report that he was the son of an unknown father, associated with hilly regions, born on the banks of the Euphrates, and defeated Lugalzagesi of Uruk (Liverani, 2013). This narrative has influenced both historical reconstructions and the perception of cultural and linguistic contact between the Semitic and Sumerian worlds. Indeed, while the absorption of syntactic, morphological, and lexical features from Sumerian into Akkadian and West Semitic languages has been studied extensively (Zólyomi, 2012), little has been said about Semitic influences in Sumerian. Certainly, until the early second millennium BC, Sumerian remained an evolving linguistic system rather than a frozen substrate, acquiring Semitic features (Streck, 1998). Yet before the Akkadian Empire's foundation, Semitic proper names appeared in the lists of Sumerian kings and the Sumerian presence extended north, west, and southeast in the Semitic-speaking space, beyond Mesopotamia. Neolithic 'tokens,' from which cuneiform writing originated, were widespread in the Levant, Syria, and Mesopotamia, attesting to the participation of the Fertile Crescent's western and northern regions in the writing revolution (Schmandt-Besserat, 2019). I analyze the West Semitic elements in the basic Sumerian lexicon in the formative phase of the language and writing system. I hypothesize that linguistic contacts took place between Sumerian and West Semitic speaking populations in the Late Neolithic, long before the rise of Akkad.

1. Semitic and Sumerian: State of the Art

Sumerian is considered a language isolate (Michałowski, 2004), most of whose attestations, starting in the 31st century BC (Jagersma, 2009), were discovered in Lower Mesopotamia, present-day southern Iraq. Sumerian-language documents have been found in the archives of several archaeological sites outside southern Iraq, considered the homeland of Sumer, in the political and/or trading colonies that the Sumerians established throughout the Fertile Crescent, and that would later be controlled by Akkad (Algaze, 2005). Sumerian linguistic records consist of inscriptions in syllabic cuneiform script, which would be adopted for writing Akkadian, an East Semitic language, and other Semitic and non-Semitic languages at later historical stages (Cooper, 2004; Geller, 1997; Kuhrt, 2013; Michałowski, 2003). According to the scholarly tradition, Akkadian gradually replaced Sumerian as a spoken language in Lower Mesopotamia around 2000 BC (Woods, 2006), but Sumerian continued to be used as a ceremonial, scientific, and literary language in Assyria and Babylonia until the first century AD (Michałowski, 2006; Oates, 1879). While Sumerian continued to be used as a written language, Akkadian and, starting from the eighth century BC, Aramaic, succeeded each other as written languages in Mesopotamia, while various Semitic dialects were spoken in different areas, with Amorite, certainly since the Middle Bronze Age, predominantly spreading along the Euphrates basin and in the south (George and Krebernik, 2022; Howard, 2023; Huffmon, 1965; Streck, 2000) and Aramaic progressively penetrating the southern regions from its ancestral northern homelands in the upper Tigris (Gzella and Folmer, 2008; Zadoq, 2021).

The decipherment of Sumerian began in the nineteenth century (Cathcart, 2011). From the start, Sumerian posed acute problems of interpretation and classification (Diakonoff, 1975). Various hypotheses of genetic affiliation were formulated, in the most disparate directions, and many of these were rejected as not demonstrable (Dewart, 1989; Parpola, 2010; Rubio, 1999). Several interpretations of Sumerian's grammatical system, often contradictory, have been provided (Edzard, 1971; Kaneva, 1965; Yoshikawa, 1968). However, the diversity of classificatory and interpretative hypotheses points to both specific challenges related to reading issues (Diakonoff, 1975) and, possibly, a complex, multifaceted, linguistic identity. It is no coincidence that Høyrup interprets Sumerian as a prehistoric creole (1992). This hypothesis does not seem to have been followed up.

2. Scope of the Present Work

In this article, I hypothesize that the formative phase of Sumerian was characterized by linguistic contact with Semitic. In particular, I offer lexical evidence to support the hypothesis that in its formative phase, Sumerian came into contact with a West Semitic linguistic facies. Scholarship in general accepts the idea that Sumerian loanwords penetrated Akkadian (Lieberman, 1977) and other Semitic languages, including West Semitic languages, through the mediation of Akkadian (Rubin, 2013; Salonen, 1979) and that, in the opposite direction, Akkadian influenced Sumerian starting from the conquests of Sargon and his dynasty, throughout the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods (Edzard, 2000; Emelianov, 2009, 2010, 2011; Falkenstein, 1960; Steiner, 2003; Streck, 1998; Zólyomi, 2007). Here, I demonstrate that West Semitic lexical elements are present in the most basic and archaic Sumerian lexical documentation. The contact between Sumerian and West Semitic in the formative phase of Sumerian brings into question both the accepted narrative of the Semitization of Mesopotamia as the abrupt result of Sargon's campaigns and the very identity of the Sumerian civilization, within which the presence and contribution of Semitic populations, languages, and cultures might have been more prominent than previously thought.

3. *At the Dawn of Sumerian: The Fertile Crescent from Tokens to Wedges*

From prehistoric times, the Mesopotamian civilizations, born around the Fertile Crescent, constituted a network crossed and united by common dynamics and phenomena, although each region expresses original and specific cultural features (Stein, 1999). This network model seems applicable to the origins of the Sumerian civilization and language. The lower Mesopotamian basin, the beating heart that radiated values, symbols, strategies, and technologies on the outskirts of the Fertile Crescent, could also have received cultural contributions from the same regional network. As far as the development of writing techniques and written communication is concerned, the strategy currently considered to be at the foundation of the development of cuneiform writing, the so-called 'clay tokens,' was known and practiced in similar forms throughout the Fertile Crescent, attesting to sustained contact and exchanges between the 'center' and the 'peripheries' from the eighth to the third millennium BC, throughout the Neolithic and Chalcolithic, until the Jemdet Nasr and Pre-Dynastic periods (Emberlig and Minc, 2016; Schmandt-Besserat, 2012). With the development of cuneiform writing in Sumer, the use of tokens was reduced in lower Mesopotamia and other areas until it quickly disappeared, while in some peripheral regions, it remained as an accounting system until the Neo-Assyrian period (MacGinnis et al., 2014).

The Mesopotamian cultural network of which the nascent Sumerians were part included populations that spoke various languages, from the Levant to Anatolia and Iran, including, predominantly, Semitic-speaking peoples. In this regard, the scholarship has focused its attention on some Semitic attestations stretching back to the Sumerian-writing Early Dynastic phase, as early as the 30th/29th century BC. One is an Akkadian inscription on a bowl, donated to the king of the first dynasty of Ur Mesh-ki-ang-Nanna by his wife Gan-saman, who probably was an Akkadian. Mesh-ki-ang-Nanna is thought to have ruled during the 27th century BC (Jacobsen, 1939). Other Semitic attestations consist of about half of the names that appear in the King List of the city of Kish, ancestral rules of the city belonging to the first local dynasty, and anthroponyms that appear in administrative texts from Adab, Tell Abu Salabikh, and Fara, among other sites (Biggs, 1967). The idea of the coexistence of Sumerians and Semites in both southern and northern pre-Sargonic Mesopotamia has long been accepted by both linguists and archaeologists (Bauer, 1998; Diakonoff, 1997; Edzard, 2003; Parrot, 1957; Steiner, 2003). But the hypothesis that the Semitic lexicon may be a constituent part of Sumerian has not received sufficient attention. The only remarkable exceptions are the works of Sommerfeld (2006) and Civil (2007). Sommerfeld investigates Early Semitisms in Sumerian from Protoliterate signs of Uruk to archaic texts from Ur, Ebla, and Fara, counting fourteen Semitisms of the Late-Uruk period (3200–3000 BC) and thirty-six words of probable Semitic origin in the texts of later ages (27th–24th centuries). Civil's contribution is mainly based on the lexical texts of the first to second millennia BC.

4. *East and West Semitic*

The subdivision of the Semitic linguistic family into two main branches, eastern and western, is a stable datum in the history of classifications (Huehnergard and Rubin, 2012). East Semitic includes Akkadian and its varieties and Eblaite, while West Semitic is the ancestor of Central Semitic, Ethiopian Semitic languages, and Modern South Arabian languages. Various features divide the two branches. Among these, the most important are the different morphological strategies used to restructure the verbal system and create a new form for the perfect tense (better, for the accomplished aspect), with the development of the form *iptaras* in East Semitic and the development of suffix conjugation in West Semitic. When and how the two branches split is

not clear. However, both from the morphological and lexical points of view, East and West Semitic have been well distinguished and defined from their oldest attestations.

5.   *East Semitic (Akkadian) in Sumerian*

As regards the presence of East Semitic lexicon in Sumerian, certainly the most up-to-date bibliographic review, lexical list, and morphophonological analysis of lexical loans is found in a series of works by Emelianov (2009, 2020, 2011). In them, the author arranges the lexical borrowings by eras: pre-Ur III, Ur III, and Old Babylonian. It should be emphasized that although Emelianov's aim is to investigate the Akkadian lexicon in Sumerian, in numerous cases the material is not recognized by the author as 'Akkadian' and is instead classified as 'Semitic,' and hence probably of West Semitic origin. I quote here some examples from Emelianov's works on Akkadian/Semitic borrowings in Sumerian from the pre-Ur III phase:

a. *ab-ba* < *abu* 'father' (Steiner 2003: 632);
b. *burud* < *būrtu* 'breach, hole, depth';
c. *garaš* < *karāšum* 'leek';
d. *gim (ginx)* 'like, just as' (equative case) < *kīma* (Steiner 2003: 633);
e. *gi(-n)* < *kên* '(to be) permanent, true' (Steiner 2003: 633; Sommerfeld 2006: 61);
f. *libir* 'old' < *labir* < *labāru* 'to be old' (Steiner 2003: 633);
g. MAŠ+GAN$_2$, *maš-gan$_2$* < *maškānu* 'settlement' (Steiner 2003: 633; Sommerfeld 2006: 52);
h. *nemur* < *nimru* 'leopard';
i. *rib* 'to be surpassing, outstanding' < *rabû* 'to be big, great';
j. *sam/sa$_{12}$-rig$_7$* 'to donate' < *šarik* < *šarāku* (Steiner 2003: 631);
k. *sam$_2$* < *šīmu* 'purchase price' < *šâmu* 'to buy' (Steiner 2003: 634; Sommerfeld 2006: 57);
l. *šeg$_9$-bar*, *šenbar*, *sa-bar* < *s/šapparu* 'a deer or mountain goat' (Kogan 2006: 278; Civil 2007: 21);
m. *silim* 'to be healthy; completeness; well-being' < *šalim, salīmu* < *s/šalāmu* (Steiner 2003: 634);
n. *sum* < *šūmu* 'garlic' (Steiner 2003: 634; Sommerfeld 2006: 64);
o. *uz$_3$* 'goat' < *enzu* (Steiner 2003: 642; Sommerfeld 2006: 66).

In his review of the Semitic material found in Sumerian in all the eras examined, Emelianov lists three hundred sixty-nine entries, of which ninety-two date back to the most ancient pre-Ur III phase, one hundred sixty-seven to Ur III, and the rest to the Old Babylonian phase. Many of these words constitute basic lexical items used to describe common domestic and wild animals, plants, utensils, kinship, and abstract concepts, and cannot be classified as cultural words related to specific uses.

6.   *West Semitic in Sumerian: Methodology*

In this article, I offer some West Semitic etymologies I found in the Sumerian lexicon that modify and expand Emelianov's lists. The lexical profile of Akkadian is now quite clear with regard to West Semitic varieties (Borg, 2021; Deutscher and Kouwenberg, 2006; Kogan, 2015), so I excluded from the potentially Semitic materials those words attested in Akkadian that showed phonetic evidence of Akkadian patterns. From a methodological point of view, I proceeded to screen the entire electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary (PSD), available online, identifying possible Semitic borrowings. In doing so, I kept in mind Emelianov's observations regarding the phonetic rendering of Semitic words in Sumerian phonetics and the Sumerian writing system, aptly systematized by the author for each phase. To represent West Semitic, I mainly report etymological parallels from Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew, languages

of venerable antiquity whose ancestors represent the West Semitic varieties that potentially existed in sustained contact with Sumerian, circulating to the west of the Sumerian homeland.

7. *West Semitic Lexicon in Sumerian*

I offer below four examples (a, b, c, d) of revisions of the lexicon previously identified by other authors as Semitic:

a. *ab-ba* 'father' is not attested in Akkadian, where the word for father is *abu*. The form *ab-ba* seems to reflect the vocative form *abba*, which spread in the Semitic West, as historically attested from Aramaic sources (CAL). For 'father' Sumerian shows the word *ad-da* (PSD);

b. *uz₃* 'goat' is not attested in Sumerian as such. Sumerian *uz* 'duck' is probably connected to the Akkadian word *ūsu*, with the same meaning. It is rather the word *uz-ud* 'female goat' that is attested in Sumerian. The second syllable –ud may reflect a Semitic feminine ending -t. It is important to note that Akkadian has *enzu* 'goat,' a cognate of Arabic ʿ*inz* 'goat', fem. ʿ*inz-a/ih* 'she-goat' that shows no assimilation of n to z. The assimilation of n to z appears in the Hebrew ʿ*ēz*;

c. *alam* 'statue' is from Akkadian *ṣalmu*, according to Steiner (2003: 643) and Sommerfeld (2006: 60). *Alam* may rather derive from a pharyngeal development (ġ>ʿ) of the first root consonant in *tʾ.l.m* ('obscurity'), as attested in Ugaritic (*ġlm* 'darkness') and possibly in Hebrew (ʿ.l.m. 'to disappear');

d. *ayalum* 'deer' is certainly a West Semitic word, similar in the form to the Hebrew *ayāl*, while Akkadian has *ālum*, without the initial ay- diphthong.

Below, I propose twenty West Semitic etymologies for Sumerian words (from e to x):

e. *abbun* 'grain': Arabic *ḥabb*^{un}, fem. *ḥabb-a/ih* 'grain' or 'pome', used in Levantine Arabic dialects to obtain the singuative form 'one unit of…' from singular mass nouns related to grains, fruits, and vegetables. The omission of the initial ḥ is a common phenomenon, as it is foreign to the Sumerian phonotaxis;

f. *abhir* 'dry, seasoned (of wood)': Arabic *baharāt* 'dried spices,' *bahara* 'to shine, to be clear'; Hebrew *bāhīr* 'clear';

g. *a-gud* 'ox': Arabic *jadd*, Hebrew *gadd*, with the same meaning;

h. *a-ĝar* '(part of) a garment': Hebrew *ḥāgōr* 'dressed with a belt' (Samuel I, 2: 18);

i. *alam* 'exclamation': Arabic *alam* 'pain,' also a word with a debated meaning accompanying the text of some suras of the Quran;

j. *ĝar* 'place', but *ga'ur* 'inhabitant': Arabic *jāra*, Hebrew *gār* 'to dwell';

k. *ad* 'voice': Hebrew *hēd* 'echo';

l. *adab* 'drum': Arabic *daff*, Hebrew *ṭoff* 'drum';

m. *addir* 'quay, port, crossing, ford': Hebrew *ḥaḏōr* 'to enter', *ḥɛḏɛr* 'room';

n. *agam* 'lake': thought of until now as a Sumerian loanword into Akkadian, this word may have a more western origin. Borg (2021) finds *ikn* in Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts as 'cup, jar,' paralleling Akkadian *agannu* 'large bowl' and Aleppo Arabic *laqən* 'basin';

o. *gu* 'force': Arabic *quwwah,* Negev (Bedouin) Arabic *guwwih* 'physical strength';

p. *gaba* 'chest': Negev (Bedouin) Arabic *gubbah* 'chest of bird; bib of female dress';

q. *i* 'hey!': Arabic *yā* 'O!', vocative particle (Hava, 1982). Ancient Egyptian *iȝ* (Borg, 2021);

r. *du* 'push': Arabic *daḥḥa* 'to push, to excite', Hebrew *dāḥ* 'push' and 'reject' (d.w.ḥ);

s. *tal* 'broad': Arabic *ṭawīl* 'tall', *ṭūl* 'distance' (ṭ.w.l);

t. *gabiri* 'mountain': Arabic *jabal* 'mountain', Hebrew *gəḇūl* 'boundary';

u. *gadala* 'fabric': Palestinian Arabic *ğaddūlih*, pl. *ğdādīl* 'braid, waive';

v. *aga'us* 'soldier': Hebrew *giyūs* 'conscription', Negev (Bedouin) and Palestinian Arabic *ğayš/ ğēš* 'army';

w. *ama'rin* 'workers' (plurale tantum): Arabic *ʿāmilīn* 'workers';

x. *andul* 'shade': Levantine Arabic *ʿal(a) ḏ̱ʿill* 'in the shade' (possibly, a noun phrase interpreted in Sumerian as a word, with partial assimilation of –l- in *ʿal(a)* to the following interdental ḏ̱).

8.   Discussion and Conclusion

This brief survey of lexical borrowings that can be considered of West Semitic origin attempts to demonstrate the depth of the contact that occurred between the West Semitic world and Sumer and signifies the striking openness of Sumerian to outside influences. Some of the listed items date back to the Old Babylonian phase, but most of them are found in the pre-Ur III era. The West Semitic types that came into contact with Sumerian were probably a more or less distinct group of varieties during the formation of the Sumerian civilization. They were reflected, in much later phases, in Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic languages, Ugaritic, Quranic and Classical Arabic, and different types of spoken Arabic. The linguistic ancestors of the nomadic and sedentary languages spoken in the Levant and Syria in various historical periods, including the Amorrite types, were already interacting with the southern Mesopotamian world at the dawn of the Sumerian civilization, as archaeological finds have shown. Among them were the ancestors of the spoken Arabic varieties, especially Bedouin ones, documented in later historical stages between Iraq and the Levant. Arabic dialects are confirmed as a living museum of the languages and civilizations of the ancient Near East. A systematic study of the phonetic processes that regulate interlingual transition, especially focused on the Sumerian representation of West Semitic short vowels, based on a larger corpus of chronologically organized examples, is necessary and will be conducted in the future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALGAZE, G., 2005: *The Uruk World System: The Dynamics of Expansion of Early Mesopotamian Civilization*, Chicago.

BAUER, J., 1998: "Der vorsargonische Abschnitt der mesopotamischen Geschichte", in J. BAUER, R. ENGLUND, M. KREBERNIK (eds), *Mesopotamien: Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische Zeit*, Freiburg, pp. 429-585.

BIGGS, R., 1967: "Semitic Names in the Fara Period Author(s)", *Orientalia, Nova Series* 36 (1), pp. 55-66.

BORG, A., 2021: *Rewriting Dialectal Arabic Prehistory. The Ancient Egyptian Lexical Evidence*, Leiden.

CAL: *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, Cincinnati (online).

CATHCART, K., 2011: "The Earliest Contributions to the Decipherment of Sumerian and Akkadian", *Cuneiform Digital Library Journal* 1, pp. 1-12.

CIVIL, M., 2007: "Early Semitic Loanwords in Sumerian", in M. ROTH, W. FARBER, M. STOLPER, P. VON BECHTOLSHEIM (eds), *Studies Presented to Robert D. Biggs*, Chicago, pp. 11-34.

COOPER, J., 2004: "Babylonian Beginnings: The Origin of the Cuneiform Writing System in Comparative Perspective", in S. HOUSTON (ed.), *The First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process*, Cambridge, pp. 58-59.

DEUTCHER, G., KOUWENBERG, N., 2006: *The Akkadian Language in its Semitic Context. Studies in the Akkadian of the Third and Second Millennium BC*, Leiden.

DEWART, L., 1989: *Evolution and Conscousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature*, Toronto.

DIAKONOFF, M., 1976: "Ancient Writing and Ancient Written Language: Pitfalls and Peculiarities in the Study of Sumerian", dans S. LIEBERMAN (ed.), *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen on His Seventieth Birthday June 7, 1974* (Assyriological Studies, 20), Chicago, pp. 99-122.

DIAKONOFF, M., 1997: "External Connections of the Sumerian Language", *Mother Tongue. Journal of the Association for the Study of Language in Prehistory* 3, pp. 54-62.

EDZARD, D., 1971: "Ḫamṭu, maru und freie Reduplikation beim sumerischen Verbum I", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 61, pp. 208-32.

— 2000: "Wann ist Sumerisch als gesprochene Sprache ausgestorben?", *Acta Sumerologica* 22, pp. 53-70.

— 2003: *Sumerian Grammar*, Leiden-Boston.

EMBERLING, G., MINC, L., 2016: "Ceramics and Long-Distance Trade in Early Mesopotamian States", *Journal of Archaeological Science* 7, pp. 819-34.

EMELIANOV, V., 2009: "Аккадские заимствования в шумерском (до III династии Ура)", in Индоевропейское языкознание и классическая филология–XIII: Материалы чтений, посвященных памяти профессора И. М. Тронского, St. Petersburg, pp. 171-183.

— 2010: "Аккадские заимствования в шумерском (III династия Ура)", in Индоевропейское языкознание и классическая филология–XIV: Материалы чтений, посвященных памяти профессора И. М. Тронского, St. Petersburg, pp. 296-312.

— 2011: "Аккадские заимствования в шумерском (Старовавилонский период)", dans Индоевропейское языкознание и классическая филология – XV. Материалы чтений, посвященных памяти профессора И. М. Тронского, St. Petersburg, pp. 165-177.

Fᴀʟᴋᴇɴsᴛᴇɪɴ, A., 1960: "Kontakte zwischen Sumerern und Akkadern auf sprachlichem Gebiet", *Genava* 8, pp. 301-314.

Gᴇʟʟᴇʀ, M., 1997: "The Last Wedge", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 87 (1), pp. 43-95.

Gᴇᴏʀɢᴇ, A., Kʀᴇʙᴇʀɴɪᴋ, M., 2022: "Two Remarkable Vocabularies: Amorite-Akkadian Bilinguals", *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 116 (1), pp. 113-166.

Gᴢᴇʟʟᴀ, H., Fᴏʟᴍᴇʀ, M., 2008: *Aramaic in its Historical and Linguistic Setting*, Wiesbaden.

Hᴀᴠᴀ, J., 1982: *Arabic-English Dictionary*, Beirut.

Hᴏᴡᴀʀᴅ, J., 2023: "Amorite Names through Time and Space", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 68, pp. 1-47.

Hᴜꜰꜰᴍᴏɴ, H., 1965: *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts: A Structural and Lexical Study*, Baltimore.

Hᴜᴇʜɴᴇʀɢᴀʀᴅ, J., Rᴜʙɪɴ, A., 2012: "Phyla and Waves: Models of Classification of the Semitic Languages", in S. Wᴇɴɪɴɢᴇʀ, G. Kʜᴀɴ, M. Sᴛʀᴇᴄᴋ, J. Wᴀᴛsᴏɴ (eds), *The Semitic Languages. An International Handbook*, London, pp. 259-278.

Jᴀᴄᴏʙsᴇɴ, T., 1939: *The Sumerian King List*, Chicago.

Jᴀɢᴇʀsᴍᴀ, B., 2009: *A Descriptive Grammar of Sumerian*, Leiden.

Kᴀɴᴇᴠᴀ, I., 1965: "Glagoly dvizenija", *Assiriologija i egiptologija*, Leningrad.

Kᴏɢᴀɴ, L., 2015: *Genealogical Classification of Semitic. The Lexical Isoglosses*, Berlin.

Kᴜʜʀᴛ, A., 2013: *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*, London.

Lɪᴇʙᴇʀᴍᴀɴ, S., 1977: *Sumerian Loanwords in Old Babylonian Akkadian*, Harvard.

Lɪᴠᴇʀᴀɴɪ, M., 2013: *The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy*, Bari.

MᴀᴄGɪɴɴɪs, J. ᴇᴛ ᴀʟ., 2014: "Artefacts of Cognition: The Use of Clay Tokens in a Neo-Assyrian Provincial Administration", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 24 (2), pp. 289-306.

Mɪᴄʜᴀʟᴏᴡsᴋɪ, P., 2003: "The Libraries of Babel: Text, Authority, and Tradition in Ancient Mesopotamia", in G. Dᴏʀʟᴇɪᴊɴ, H. Vᴀɴsᴛɪᴘʜᴏᴜᴛ (eds), *Cultural Repertoires: Structure, Function, and Dynamics,* Leuven-Paris-Dudley, pp. 105-129.

— 2004: "Sumerian", in R. Wᴏᴏᴅᴀʀᴅ (ed.) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*, Cambridge, pp. 19-59.

— 2006: "The Lives of the Sumerian Language", in S. Sᴀɴᴅᴇʀs (ed.), *Margins of Writing, Origins of Culture*, Chicago, pp. 163-190.

Pᴀʀᴘᴏʟᴀ, S., 2010: "Sumerian: A Uralic Language (I)", dans L. Kᴏɢᴀɴ ᴇᴛ ᴀʟ. (eds), *Language in the Ancient Near East. Compte rendu de la 53ᵉ Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, 23–28 July 2007, Moscow, pp. 181-210.

PARROT, A., 1957: "Acquisitions et inédits du Musée du Louvre, 6. Sculpture mésopotamienne", *Syria* 34 (3/4), pp. 223-231.

PSD: *Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary* (online).

RUBIN, A., 2013: "Sumerian Loanwords", in G. KHAN (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, vol 3, pp. 665-666.

RUBIO, G., 1999: "On the Alleged 'Pre-Sumerian Substratum'", *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 51, pp. 1-16.

SALONEN, E., 1979: "Loan words of Sumerian and Akkadian origin in Arabic", *Studia orientalia* 51 (7), pp. 3-16.

SOMMERFELD, W., 2006: "Die ältesten semitischen Sprachzeugnisse – eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme", in G. DEUTSCHER, N. KOUWENBERG (eds), *The Akkadian Language in its Semitic Context*, Leiden, pp. 30-75.

STEIN, G., 1999: *Rethinking World Systems: Diasporas, Colonies, and Interaction in Uruk Mesopotamia*, Tucson.

STEINER, G., 2003: "Akkadische Lexeme im Sumerischen", in P. MARRASSINI (ed.), *Semitic and Assyriological Studies Presented to Pelio Fronzaroli by Pupils and Colleagues,* Wiesbaden, pp. 630-647.

STRECK, M., 1998: "The Tense Systems in the Sumerian-Akkadian Linguistic Area", *Acta Sumerologica* 20, pp. 181-199.

— 2000: *Das amurritische Onomastikon der altbabylonischen Zeit* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament, 271/1), Münster.

WOODS, C., 2006: "Bilingualism, Scribal Learning, and the Death of Sumerian", in S. SANDERS (ed.), *Margins of Writing, Origins of Culture*, Chicago, pp. 91-120.

YOSHIKAWA, M., 1968: "On the Grammatical Function of -e- of the Sumerian Verbal Suffix -e-de/-e-da(m)", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 27, pp. 251-261.

ZADOQ, R., 2021: "On Aramaic Loanwords in Neo- and Late-babylonian Texts: Introduction and Semantic-Topical Taxonomy (Part One)", Israel Oriental Studies Annual 21, pp. 71-135.

ZÓLYOMI, G., 2007: "Structural Interference from Akkadian in Old Babylonian Sumerian", *Acta Sumerologica* 22, pp. 335-360.

ABSTRACT

Sumer's conquest by Semitic-speaking peoples from the west is symbolized by the history of Sargon of Akkad. Assyrian sources report that he was the son of an unknown father, associated with hilly regions, born in the west on the banks of the Euphrates, and defeated Lugalzagesi of Uruk (Liverani, 2013). This narrative has influenced both historical reconstructions and the perception of cultural and linguistic contact between the Semitic and Sumerian worlds. Indeed, while the absorption of syntactic, morphological, and lexical features from Sumerian into Akkadian and West Semitic languages has been studied extensively (Zólyomi, 2012), little has been said about Semitic influences in Sumerian, especially West Semitic. Certainly, until the early second millennium BC, Sumerian remained an evolving linguistic system rather than a frozen substrate, acquiring Semitic features (Streck, 1998). Yet before the Akkadian empire's foundation, West Semitic lexicon seems to have penetrated Sumerian, already in its formative period.

KEYWORDS