

Response to G. Zólyomi's review of J. A. Halloran's *Sumerian Lexicon. A Dictionary Guide to the Ancient Sumerian Language* in *AfO* 52 (2011) 239.

From the start of this review, Gábor Zólyomi takes an extremely aggressive tone that in many places goes beyond the bounds of scholarly criticism. Dr. Zólyomi evidently has the wrong background for reviewing a dictionary. He is a theorist of Sumerian grammar. Unlike the other reviewers of the *Sumerian Lexicon*, he has never compiled an index or glossary of Sumerian vocabulary. As a theorist, Dr. Zólyomi directs the majority of his criticism at certain of the book's etymologies, although at the bottom of page iii of the book's introduction, it says, "These suggested etymologies are not the source of the word definitions, which derive from usages in context and Akkadian lexical correspondences."

Dr. Zólyomi's disparaging review completely overlooks the substance of the lexicon, its 6,400 definitions, which I laboriously assembled over twenty years by going through almost all of the lexical works that Sumerologists have published since the year 1950. For the crime of indiscriminately including all of the defined terms that I found in these works, I am a "dilettante" who lacks lexicographical or Sumerological guiding principles. Adam Falkenstein in 1957 included *ab-ba-mu*, "my father", as a glossary subentry for his *Die neusumerischen Gerichtsurkunden*. I transformed it into the modern *ab-ba-gu₁₀* (which Dr. Zólyomi singles out for criticism) and included it because it helps to explain the idiom *ab-ba-ga₂*, "of my father", where *ga₂* is a contraction of *gu₁₀* and the possessive *-a(k)*. From the obsequious way in which Dr. Zólyomi refers to "distinguished" periodicals and Sumerologists, I suspect that the tone of his review would be dramatically different if he were reviewing Professor Falkenstein, whose book Daniel Snell called "the very beginning of modern systematic lexicography of Sumerian."

If I had a guiding principle, it was to be as useful to outsiders or beginners as possible. Over the years, many students and translators who have used my website and now my published book have thanked me for its usefulness, saying that for their purposes it was the best available. Dr. Zólyomi could have tested my book's completeness and value with students since he says that he teaches university-level Sumerian. A reviewer in England, Mark Geller at University College London, did just that by using it for a year in class with his Sumerian language students. Dr. Geller's more learned, thoughtful, and balanced review appeared in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 71 (2008) (3) 561-563. He has his own criticisms, particularly of my presumptuous use of the title *Sumerian Lexicon*, but he acknowledged that

"Halloran has managed to collect an impressive range of Sumerian words, and the brief definitions make sense for most of the texts one reads with students." Thomas E. Balke in Germany rose to the challenge of criticizing particular lemmas and even listed two lexicographical sources that I had missed. His review appeared in *OLZ* 104 (2009) (6) 634-643. While I do not agree with all of his reservations, unlike Zólyomi he concludes his review respectfully, "Trotzdem gebührt dem Autor und Kompilator Dank und Respekt dafür, auf dem diffizilen Feld der Sumerologie ein solches Unterfangen begonnen und - vor allem - abgeschlossen zu haben."

Some other reviewers also left their review copy on the shelf, not trying to use it with students, and did not know why anyone should take a chance on a work by a nonacademic when the trusted University of Pennsylvania has now put on-line a range of Sumerian words from A to Z. In July 2005, Miguel Civil, speaking from the audience at the Oriental Institute in Chicago, criticized the on-line Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary for having one-word definitions and for being the product of a computer program instead of human lexicographers. However, we all learn from each other, so I am not going to criticize the PSD or its editors, who are actively adding references and working to improve the next release of their product.

I frequently refer inquirers to the PSD, especially when they want to visually see the cuneiform sign(s) that correspond to a particular Sumerian word. Some members of the public have criticized my lexicon for lacking cuneiform signs, thinking that they would be able to read the clay tablets if only my lexicon included cuneiform signs. To such critics, I can only say that in Assyriology a sign-list such as Labat's *Manuel* is necessarily a different tool from a dictionary. Although the Akkadian language was written in cuneiform, dictionaries of Akkadian do not include cuneiform signs either.

The richness of my word definitions comes from the way in which I accumulated definitions from a variety of Sumerological publications. An older Sumerologist has criticized my book as a premature snapshot of a moving target, but it has been a big time-saver for many Sumerology students. An article was recently published on-line by Dr. Richard Firth of the University of Bristol, UK, discussing the Sumerian term *im-babbar₂*. Dr. Firth was forced to try to bring some coherence to this term by the hodgepodge of conflicting definitions that I had collected in my lexicon: "chalk, lime; gypsum; lime whitewash; an alkali cleansing agent like fuller's earth, an oil-absorbing clay used to remove hair and fat from hides." I did not have enough information to make an executive decision about *im-babbar₂*, so its entry did accumulate conflicting definitions, and it is certainly not the only

entry with conflicting Sumerological opinions. However, I know that the Sumerian vocabulary is characterized by strong polysemy, which is the association of one lexical item with a range of different meanings, so I am not closed to a word having multiple meanings.

I have entertained the idea of producing a version of my Sumerian Lexicon that is free of all etymological speculation, as I do know that those speculations are what some scholars are most allergic to. The etymologies are in a smaller font, so they could be eliminated with a single global replace command. For an example of what would be lost, however, consider these entries:

ilduma_(2,3), ildum_(2/3), ildu_(2/3): family group, clan, lineage; band, group, pack, crowd, team (loan from Akkadian illatum; cf. Orel & Stolbova #2540 *wiled- 'give birth'; cf. ki-ulutum) [ILDUM archaic frequency: 5; concatenation of 2 sign variants].

illat[KASKAL.KUR]: help; reinforcement (Akkadian tillatu(m) I, '(military) support, reinforcements'; cf. ilduma).

Everything inside the parentheses would disappear. There would then be little left for people like Gábor Zólyomi to criticize, although a lot of value and effort on my part would be lost.

Instead of trying to be loved by the current senior generation of Sumerologists, the answer probably lies in the younger generation, who are more open to what I have tried to do. Reaction to my lexicon appears to be split along age lines, with Sumerologists who were exposed to my website as students embracing the information that I provide. The positive review that appeared in *Orientalia* was by such a Sumerologist. I have seen a couple of analyses recently published by senior Sumerologists that were faulty because the scholars clearly had not consulted my dictionary, which really just gathers together in one place what other Sumerologists have already discovered, so that the

wheel does not need to be reinvented, but these senior scholars have not yet added my book to their arsenal of lexical tools.

When it comes to Sumerian etymologies, it appears that I have a colleague or a master in a Chinese Sumerologist, Prof. Wu Yuhong of Northeast Normal University. He prepared a study of select etymologies for the Jacob Klein Festschrift, which study was one of my ninety-six sources. When I needed help understanding the etymology of the Sumerian sign for wheat, I wrote to him and received a very helpful reply, as acknowledged in the one-page paper at my website, Origin of the Sumerian Name and Sign for 'Wheat'. It may not be a coincidence that skill in decomposing and analyzing the constituent sources of Sumerian words exists in a scholar of Chinese background, on account of how composite ideographs make up many Chinese characters. Just as native speakers of Hungarian may have an advantage in decomposing Sumerian grammar, Chinese scholars in the future may have contributions to make in etymologically decomposing Sumerian vocabulary.

On the subject of useful Sumerian books which were criticized by established Sumerologists when they first appeared, I would like to acknowledge Marie-Louise Thomsen's 1984 book *The Sumerian Language: An Introduction to Its History and Grammatical Structure*. It is said that there are as many Sumerian grammars as there are Sumerologists - this may account for the frosty reaction to Thomsen's book. Theorists of Sumerian grammar seem to be an especially irascible lot. I have corresponded with Thomsen, and if she was embittered by the reaction to her book, that is a shame because she produced what is still the most highly organized, thorough, and useful reference book for learning Sumerian.

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