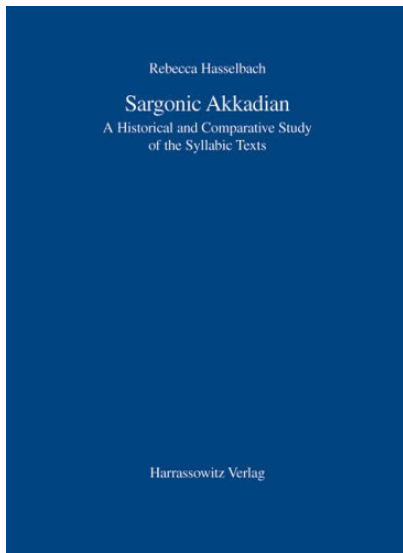


RBL 04/2006



**Hasselbach, Rebecca**

***Sargonic Akkadian: A Historical and Comparative Study of the Syllabic Texts***

Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005. Pp. xvi + 292.  
Hardcover. €78.00. ISBN 3447051728.

J. Cale Johnson  
University of California-Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, CA 90066

In recent years a number of important publications dealing with the Semitic languages attested at the end of the third millennium B.C.E. and the beginning of the second have appeared, notably Sommerfeld's edition of the Old Akkadian materials from Tutub (1999), which is part of a much larger project to re-edit the entire Old Akkadian corpus, Markus Hilgert's *Akkadisch in der Ur III-Zeit* (2002), and Michael Streck's study of the Amorite materials from the Old Babylonian period (2000)—not to mention half a dozen new studies of Old Babylonian. With the publication of Hasselbach's study of the Akkadian in use during the Old Akkadian or Sargonic period (ca. 2334–2193 B.C.E.), more or less comprehensive descriptions of the orthography, phonology, and morphology of all the major corpora of Akkadian leading up to the Old Babylonian dialect are now available in new, thoroughly researched volumes. If we were to add to these materials Fronzaroli's new edition of the diplomatic materials from Ebla (2003), which represents the largest corpus of narrative materials in Eblaite, it is a truly interesting time for those who investigate the earliest strata of the Semitic languages. Hasselbach's study will undoubtedly emerge as a standard reference for both comparative Semiticists as well as linguists attempting to make sense of the long history of the Semitic languages. As such it is a necessary purchase for any major research library or Assyriological institute despite its relatively high price.

After the introductory chapter, which I discuss in greater detail below, the three major components of the study are the traditional ones: orthography, phonology and morphology. Hasselbach thus adheres to a long tradition in the description of the so-called dialects of Akkadian; this approach facilitates the comparison of the different dialects and the day-to-day work on the editing and publication of newly discovered tablets. One of the most serious drawbacks of the traditional approach, however, is that it ignores several areas of linguistic structure, such as syntax and pragmatics, that are now generally thought of as crucial components in even the most descriptive of descriptive grammars. Particularly in light of recent discussions of relativization in Old Akkadian (Deutscher 2001; 2002; Gai 2002; Deutscher 2005), which have made relatively little appeal to particular examples, an extended discussion and exemplification of relative clauses in Old Akkadian would have been a welcome addition to the volume even if it had extended beyond the traditional framework. In fact, Hasselbach's volume is highly circumscribed in a variety of ways. Quite reasonably, the study limits itself to materials that are syllabically written; this alone reduces the corpus to 685 tablets out of the 6,187 tablets that the catalogue of the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI) currently assigns to the Old Akkadian period. Since many of the tablets from the Sargonic period are either written in Sumerian or are Akkadian texts written entirely or almost entirely using Sumerian logograms, Hasselbach's list of the texts that she includes in the corpus is a particularly useful appendix to the volume. That being said, Hasselbach also unfortunately denies nearly all significance to school texts (15), when in fact school texts often include emergent features of the language and should really be given special consideration and discussion. Most important of all, however, is Hasselbach's exclusion of the Ur III documents from the Sargonic materials, as already suggested by Hilgert's study of the Ur III material (2002). Note that older secondary literature, on the basis of Gelb's pioneering description of third-millennium Akkadian, regularly included Ur III materials under the rubric of Old Akkadian, a conflation of what should be distinct corpora that the publications by Hilgert and Hasselbach now correct.

Chapter 2, "The Sargonic Akkadian Syllabary," is clearly one of Hasselbach's most important contributions to the study of these materials, but it is also somewhat problematic. Building on Gelb's initial recognition of seemingly homophonous syllabic signs such as BI and BI<sub>2</sub> and his suggestion that some phonological contrast might underlie the use of each member of a sign pair, Hasselbach works her way through each of the known sign pairs and carefully elucidates the distribution of each member of a given sign pair in the corpus, previous proposals for the interpretation of a given pair, as well as both geographical and generic tendencies in their use. A particularly nice example of the differential use of BI and BI<sub>2</sub>, while not originally identified by Hasselbach (Sommerfeld 1999, 20 apud 41 n. 56), does provide a good picture of the kind of subtle

interactions between orthography, phonology and morphology that Hasselbach describes in the chapter: the final syllable of the verbal root \*qby “to speak” is written with both BI and BI<sub>2</sub>, but crucially, the preterite forms of the verb regularly use BI<sub>2</sub> (*dag-bi<sub>2</sub>* /taqbi/ “you said,” *ag-bi<sub>2</sub>-si-im* /’aqbi:sim/, “I said to her”; here and throughout I use a colon [:] to represent vocalic length), while the durative forms of the verb use BI (*a-ga-bi* /’aqabbe/ “I am saying,” *e<sub>3</sub>-ga-bi* /yeqabbe/ “he is saying”). This follows directly from the underlying form of the durative verb \*yiqabbay in that, as Hasselbach writes:

If we assume the same diphthong contraction as in Old Babylonian, that is ay > i:, the difference in the writing cannot be accounted for. If we follow the Assyrian diphthong contraction ay > e:, we can explain the different representation of the durative and the preterite in the Sargonic orthography [on the assumption that BI = /be/ and BI<sub>2</sub> = /bi/]. (41–42)

It is in passages like this that Hasselbach is at her best, elucidating orthographies, phonological rules, and morphological patterns that are, at best, known to a limited circle of Assyriologists. It truth, however, it should be noted that many of Hasselbach’s observations and descriptions represent—as she frequently acknowledges—refinements of ideas that have been developed over the years in the publications of, among others, Walter Sommerfeld, such as the fact that sign pairs show a contrast in vowel quality (/Ce/ versus /Ci/, where “C” represents any given consonantal phoneme) rather than the contrast in length, as Sommerfeld had originally proposed (40). In fact, Sommerfeld’s proposals have undoubtedly been further strengthened by a fascinating dialogue that has taken place over the years between Sommerfeld and Aage Westenholz, which I was privileged to observe on several occasions while preparing a catalogue of ED IIIb and Old Akkadian tablets for inclusion in the catalogue of cuneiform tablets maintained by CDLI.

While Hasselbach’s control of the comparative Semitic materials in the volume is very good—far superior to my own abilities in some ways—her treatment of those aspects of the Sargonic materials that touch on Sumerian is cursory at best and often quite problematic. Hasselbach briefly refers to Thomsen’s grammar in a discussion of Sumerian loanwords (37–38), occasionally notes when a variant reading may have affected the use of a particular sign (BI<sub>2</sub> = /bil/ [43]), and makes a few generic remarks at the beginning of the chapter, but on the whole the several partial and whole syllabaries in use for both Sumerian and Semitic in the several centuries prior to the Old Akkadian period are not dealt with in any substantive way. And this despite the fact that the ED IIIa materials, for example, have been dealt with in considerable detail in Krebernik’s section on “Syllabogramme” in his recent treatment of the ED IIIa materials (Krebernik 1998, 284–98), which Hasselbach includes in her bibliography and makes reference to elsewhere in the volume. Moreover, whatever the Assyriological community may think

of Whittaker's proposal that there are Indo-European loanwords in earliest Sumerian, he has presented precisely the kind of tables (based on Krebernik's study) listing syllabic repertoires for the Fara and Abu Salabikh materials that we might reasonably have expected in Hasselbach's chapter on the Old Akkadian syllabary (Whittaker 2001, 36–37, figs. 18 and 19). More generally, a reconsideration of the orthographic principles of the syllabic signs used in Sumerian would have been enlightening, particularly in that several of the signs that are used to code /Ce/ in Old Akkadian (BI = /be/, GI = /ge, ke, qe/, LI = /le/) show regular alternation between /Ci/ and /Ce/ in syllabic use in Sumerian, while the corresponding forms used to code /Ci/ in Old Akkadian (BI<sub>2</sub> = bil<sub>2</sub> = /bi/, KI = /gi, ki, qi/, LI<sub>2</sub> = lid<sub>2</sub> = /li/) show no such alternation in any phase of Sumerian that might have influenced the Old Akkadian syllabary. Lastly, note that “*má-lah<sub>4</sub>-e*” (36 n. 28) is a Sumerian logogram rather than a syllabic orthography (hence not a broken spelling, strictly speaking) and should be corrected to MA<sub>2</sub>.LAH<sub>5</sub>-*e* (the two DU signs are arranged horizontally rather than vertically in the copy, hence LAH<sub>5</sub> instead of LAH<sub>4</sub>) for /malahhe:/ with doubling of the final consonant of the Sumerian word in the Akkadian loan so as to preserve the Sumerian stress pattern.

In the third chapter, “Sargonic Akkadian Phonology,” Hasselbach provides a particularly good description of the Old Akkadian phonology, taking into consideration both important work on Akkadian sibilants carried out by Alice Faber (1981; 1984; 1985; 1986) as well as her own careful delineation of geographical differences in the orthographic representation of sibilants as well as other phonological categories. Faber argues that prior to the Old Akkadian period proto-Semitic S<sub>1</sub> (Hebrew *shin* not including etymological interdental fricatives) and S<sub>2</sub> (Hebrew *sin*, a lateral fricative) had already merged, yielding a three-way distinction in the orthographic representation of sibilants: S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub> are represented by the S-series of cuneiform signs, the interdental fricative (as typically found in the relative pronoun, for example) is represented by the *shin*-series, while the remaining sibilants, all affricates, are represented by the Z-series of cuneiform signs. Faber had argued that by the time of the Old Babylonian period, S<sub>1</sub>/S<sub>2</sub> had merged with the interdental fricative and that all three were represented by the *shin*-series, but Hasselbach identifies the innovation advancing at different rates in different geographical regions in the Sargonic period: in the south, the merger seems to be limited to “the environment of high vowels /i/ and /u/” (143), while in the texts from certain northern regions, namely, in the Diyala and Gasur, the merger seems to have been generalized throughout the texts from these areas. This kind of geographically informed study of subcorpora lays an important foundation for future work on these texts, but it also plays into an general theme of Hasselbach's study: innovation comes from the Diyala. As already stated in the introduction and repeated throughout the study, shared linguistic innovation as a diagnostic of language family grouping is the unifying theme of the work,

and time and again (as is the case with the sibilants) it will be the Diyala region that figures as the innovative center. One might also have hoped for a more expansive theoretical model such as Johanna Nichols's work (1992) on spread zones and refugia (where the presumptive movement of peoples across the northern plains would define the Diyala region and Gasur as a reasonable spread zone, with the southern fringe of Mesopotamia as a refugia) or perhaps even a map or two delineating proposed isoglosses, but, nonetheless, Hasselbach's tabulation of innovations according to geographical region and comparison of these results with the standard grammars of Babylonian and Assyrian provides a great deal of empirical heft and substance to the impressionistic descriptions in earlier studies.

The fourth and final chapter of descriptive material—the rest of the volume is made up of a brief conclusion, bibliography, and an index of words cited—consists of a description of “Sargonic Akkadian morphology” that should probably have been broken up into several thematically coherent chapters. Nonetheless, particular subsections are listed in the table of contents, allowing the reader to locate particular discussions relatively easily. There is little that is surprising or new in this section, but, as in the other parts of the work, Hasselbach does a nice job of delineating similarities and differences with the Babylonian and Assyrian dialects, while at the same time isolating geographical trends in both orthography and linguistic form. Hasselbach notes, for example, the relatively high frequency of the *purussa:ʾ*- stem in the Sargonic materials (188), and I am tempted to suggest that *bu<sub>3</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>-la-ti* “subjects, lit. those who are ruled” may even belong to this stem rather than the *paru:s*- stem that the Old Babylonian form would traditionally be assigned to—Hasselbach does not include the word in her survey of word stems. The absence of the Barth-Ginsberg Law from both Sargonic Akkadian and Eblaite is noted (190), a topic that Hasselbach has dealt with recently in a separate paper (2004). But by far the most useful feature in this section (and the volume as a whole) is the way in which cuneiform is transliterated and materials glossed. Hasselbach follows Gelb—rather than the tradition associated with von Soden—in using a relatively simple method of transliteration that mirrors the writing system rather than the language: thus *ga-ti-su* for /qa:ti:su/ “his hand” rather than the *qa<sub>2</sub>-ti-su* that one might find elsewhere. That is to say, Gelb's method represents the fact that the writing system does not code manner of articulation—hence GA standing for /ga/, /ka/, and /qa/—and avoids reading the information contained in the transcription, /qa:ti:su/, into the transliteration. Hasselbach has also updated and extended Gelb's system to include the advances in the understanding of the sibilants mentioned above.

To conclude, I would like to return to the introductory chapter and offer a more substantive critique of a fundamental assumption of the work that I find especially problematic. Several relatively minor problems in Hasselbach's survey of the history of cuneiform

writing in the first chapter as well as her conclusion make clear that Hasselbach treats these syllabically written texts as analogous to the kind of transcriptions that might be prepared by a linguist working in the field. In her description of the Kish tradition, for example, Hasselbach refers to Gelb's suggestion that early materials from Ebla, Mari, Kish, and Abu-Salabikh share a number "linguistic, literary and orthographic features" (3). It is clear that no attempt has been made to look at these features through direct examination of the texts themselves or any secondary literature other than Gelb's own papers on the topic (Gelb 1977; 1981). Thus, for example, "similarities in literary traditions" is supported by a footnote that reads "Gelb pointed out similarities between geographical lists found at Abu Salabikh and Ebla (Gelb 1977: 8)." What Gelb actually describes in his paper is the copying of the Early Dynastic List of Geographical Names (see now Frayne's edition [1992]) by scribes in Ebla: "[w]hat we have learned from Pettinato, for instance, was ... that a number of scholarly productions of Abu Salabikh, such as the great geographical lists (OIP XCIX pp. 71–78) were duplicated exactly at Ibla" (Gelb 1977, 8). Thus Gelb's rather precise description, which could then be supplemented with Frayne's edition and reviews thereof (see, e.g., Englund 1995), is replaced by the laconic phrase "similarities in literary traditions." Elsewhere, in a long footnote devoted to "non-Sargonic features ... found in OB [Old Babylonian] copies" (12 n. 62), Hasselbach includes the syllabic use of  $ru_4$ (URUxA) as characteristic of Old Babylonian copies (as well as an orthography found in Sargonic names), but unknown in nononomastic syllabic use in the Sargonic period. It should, first of all, be noted that  $ru_4$  is written URUxUD, not URUxA; no value /ru/ for URUxA is listed in Borger's recent signlist (2004), but Kienast and Volk transliterate the /ru/ value of URUxA as  $ru_{14}$ , (Kienast and Volk 1995, 169), which was presumably the source of the confusion. More important, however,  $ru_{14}$  does occur as a syllabic value in the Sargonic materials (*sar-ru<sub>14</sub>-uz-zum* "for kingship" MAD 1, 172, line 14), but it occurs in a school text, a genre that Hasselbach excludes from consideration:

The school exercises are only of limited value for the investigation of Sargonic Akkadian grammar. First of all, as is the case with all school exercises, they are far from being flawless and orthographic and linguistic features only found in these texts without any parallels in the rest of the Sargonic corpus should be evaluated as mistakes rather than dialect variations. (15)

I think a far more interesting way of thinking about a school-boy variant such as  $ru_{14}$  is that it is a little piece of either phonological or sociolinguistic variation breaking through the monotone of scribal uniformity. The avoidance of the complexities of local or variant syllabic and logographic traditions in combination with the absence of any extensive comparison of the Sargonic syllabary with earlier third-millennium syllabaries betrays a certain unease with the third-millennium orthographic and literary traditions in which the

syllabic materials arise. In the conclusion Hasselbach is equally dismissive of Sommerfeld's suggestion that, in Hasselbach's words, "the written language attested during the Sargonic dynasty [is] an official chancellery language based on the native language of the Sargonic kings that did not reflect the spoken language of Babylonia" (232 n. 3). Hasselbach's somewhat facile rejection of a chancellery language model seems to be based on the supposition that traces of dialects could only survive in the text-artifactual record if something analogous to linguistic transcription were at work in the syllabically written texts. In my view, however, the Sargonic materials are the very chancellery language that Sommerfeld advocates, hence the relative uniformity of a body of materials that covers the width and breadth of Mesopotamia. What Hasselbach provides in her meticulous and incredibly valuable delineation of orthographic and phonological variations is not a dialect map of Sargonic Mesopotamia, as she might have hoped, but rather a catalogue of features of local Semitic languages bubbling up through, as it were, the chancellery language of the Sargonic empire.

Minor errors and typos: page 1 (the Akkadian *or* the Ur-III period); page 7 (Steinkeller's argument for Akkadian words in Uruk III cannot be substantiated; cf. Englund 1998, 73, n. 144); page 8 (it is very unlikely that any of Gelb's Ancient Kudurrus date to the Uruk III period; cf. Englund 1998, 65 n. 123); page 22 (a *thorough* understanding); page 41 (The *preterite* on the other hand ... has to be reconstructed as *\*yiqabbay*); page 52 (*urin*); page 57 (the preterite *if* III-y verbs); page 85 (indicates the *beginning* of a > e); page 140 (*urin*); page 141 (*In* two occasions); page 141 (Note that two *if* these examples); page 157 (two *differet* dialects); page 187 (adjectives can also be used as predicates in the *nominative*); page 194 (in a text *fom* southern Babylonia); page 198 n. 140 (at the end of a *list/ text*); page 200 (for the internal *sub-rouping*); page 202 (*he shall not collect* rather than *cause to give*, as in the index); page 206 (*a-tu-mu-ni* not in index of words cited); page 208 (In the context of a discussion of the *\*yaqtul/\*yaqtulu* contrast in West Semitic, mention should be made of the relevant secondary literature, such as works by Moran and Rainey); page 211 (*ma-hi-ru-tum* = *they receive*); page 221 (*da-za-a-la* not in index); page 221 (*ni-ti-ku* < *ete:qu(m)* not in index); page 233 (since there is no substantial corpus of Early Dynastic materials in Akkadian prior to the Sargonic materials, the notion of shared retentions/innovations cannot be applied in a meaningful way to Sargonic Akkadian itself).

Borger, Rykle. 2004. *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon*. AOAT 305. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.

Deutscher, Guy. 2001. The Rise and Fall of a Rogue Relative Construction. *Studies in Language* 25(3): 405–22.

- . 2002. The Akkadian Relative Clauses in Cross-Linguistic perspective. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 92: 86–105.
- . 2005. Relative Clause in Old Akkadian. *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 2005, no. 30.
- Englund, Robert. 1995. Review of D. Frayne, *The Early Dynastic List of Geographical Names*. *OLZ* 90:162–69.
- . 1998. Texts from the Late Uruk Period. In *Mesopotamien: Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische Zeit* Edited by P. Attinger and M. Wäfler. OBO 160/1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Faber, Alice. 1981. Phonetic Reconstruction. *Glossa* 15:233–62.
- . 1984. Semitic Sibilants in an Afro-Asiatic Context. *JSS* 28:189–224.
- . 1985. Akkadian Evidence for Proto-Semitic Affricates. *JCS* 37:101–7.
- . 1986. On the Actuation of Sound Change: A Semitic Case Study. *Diachronica* 3(2): 163–84.
- Fronzaroli, Pelio. 2003. *Archivi Reali di Ebla XIII: I testi di cancelleria: I rapporti con le città*. Rome: Missione Archaeologica Italiana in Siria.
- Gai, Amikai. 2002. The Relationship between the Relative Clauses of Akkadian and Old Akkadian. *RA* 96:103–8.
- Gelb, Ignace. 1977. Thoughts about Ibla: A Preliminary Evaluation, March 1977. *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 1:3–30.
- Hasselbach, Rebecca. 2004. The Markers of Person, Gender, and Number in the Prefixes of G-Preformative Conjugations in Semitic. *JAOS* 124:23–36.
- Hilgert, Markus. 2002. *Akkadisch in der Ur III-Zeit*. *Imgula* 5. Münster: Rhema.
- Kienast, Burkhard, and Konrad Volk. 1995. *Die sumerischen und akkadischen Briefe*. FAOS 19. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Krebernik, Manfred. 1998. Die Texte aus Fara und Tell Abu Salabih. In *Mesopotamien: Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische Zeit*. Edited by P. Attinger and M. Wäfler. OBO 160/1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

- Nichols, Johanna. 1992. *Linguistic Diversity in Space and Time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sommerfeld, Walter. 1999. *Die Texte der Akkade-Zeit: 1. Das Dijala-Gebiet: Tutub. Imgula 3/1*. Münster: Rhema.
- Streck, Michael P. 2000. *Das amurritische Onomastikon der altbabylonischen Zeit*. AOAT 271/1. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.
- Whittaker, Gordon. 2001. The Dawn of Writing and Phoneticism. Pages 11–50 in *Hieroglyphen, Alphabete, Schriftreformen*. Edited by D. Borchers, F. Kammerzell, and S. Weninger. Göttingen.