

INTRODUCTION TO SUMERIAN

Ancient Western Asian Studies 1400 (AWAS1400)

Brown University

SPRING 2014

Location: J. Walter Wilson 201

Day & Time: MWF 11:00–11:50 a.m.

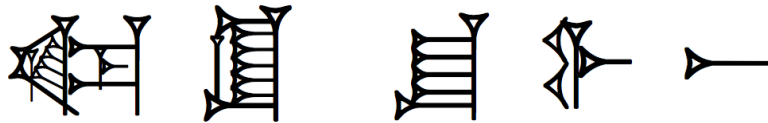
Office hours: MW 3:00–4:00 p.m.*

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Office: Wilbour Hall room 204

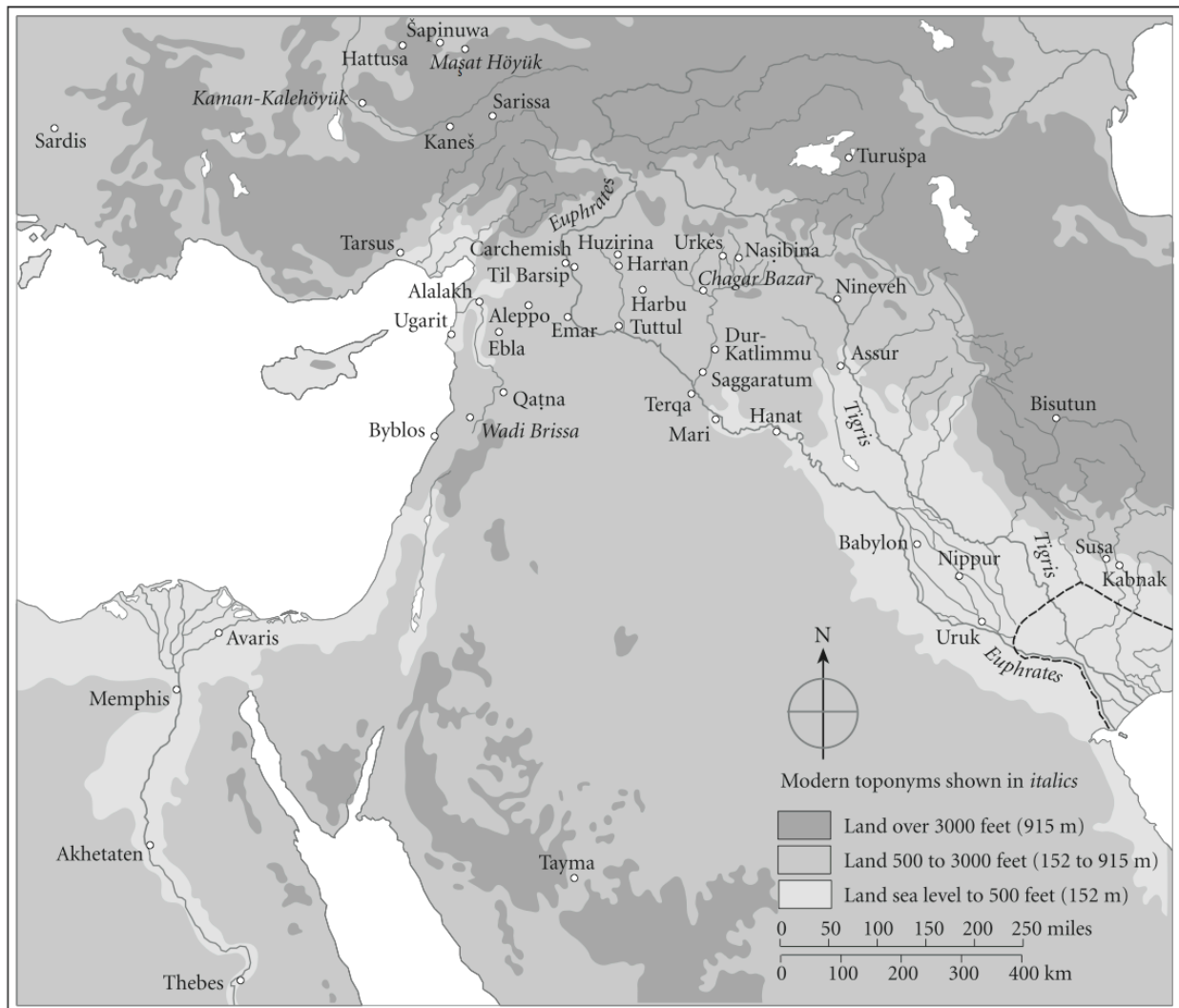


COURSE DESCRIPTION, AIMS, AND OBJECTIVES

Over five thousand years ago the first cities emerged in southern Iraq, and around that same time writing was invented, most likely to record the language we now call Sumerian. Even after it was no longer spoken, Sumerian became a powerful conduit for the region's cultural heritage, preserving its literature and religious traditions for millennia. In this course students will learn the fundamentals of Sumerian grammar, develop a basic working vocabulary, and explore the cuneiform script through weekly readings in original texts. Selections will come from royal inscriptions, court cases, myths, magical incantations, and even ancient schoolwork. No prerequisites.



* Or by appointment. My office is on the second floor of Wilbour Hall (2 Prospect Street), which is located on the northwest corner of Prospect and George Streets next to the Rock.



Throughout the semester students can expect:

1. To gain insights into the cultures of ancient Mesopotamia through an in-depth exploration of one of its principal languages as well as read Mesopotamian texts in the original.
2. To grapple with the intricacies of the cuneiform writing system and learn about how scholars use tools such as syllabaries and sign lists to decode, reconstruct, interpret, and translate a lost language.
3. To master the fundamentals of the phonology, morphology, and grammar of Sumerian and read a variety of sources in the original language and script.

COURSE MATERIALS

Texts

The primary **required** textbook is available at the Brown University Bookstore as well as on reserve in the Rock.

- Volk, Konrad. *A Sumerian Chrestomathy*. With the collaboration of Silvano Votto and Jessica Baldwin. Subsidia et Instrumenta Linguarum Orientis 5. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012. (ISBN13: 9783447067829)
[= Volk, *Sumerian*]

The following book will be necessary for the course; however, it is not necessary to purchase it, since it will also be found on reserve in the Rock:

- Thomsen, Marie-Louise. *The Sumerian Language: An Introduction to its History and Grammatical Structure*. Mesopotamia 10. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1984. [Thomsen, *Introduction*]
ROCK RESRV PJ4010 .T5x 1984

NOTE: I repeat, *not for purchase*: on Amazon this book sells for as little as \$499 (and as much as \$4,214.88!?). For better or worse, this will be our main grammar resource.

Additional materials will be distributed in class and/or posted to the course website or OCRA online reserves including the following supplemental readings:

Course website: <https://canvas.brown.edu/courses/844248>

OCRA reserves (password: **eme-gi**): <https://library.brown.edu/reserves/>

Books, Readings, and Resources

The following titles may provide useful background or supplementary perspectives on topics presented in class. The dictionaries in particular are vital research tools that we will encounter and use this semester.

General

- Black, J. "Sumerian." Pp. 5-30 in *Languages of Iraq, Ancient and Modern*, ed. J. N. Postgate. London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2007.
- Michalowski, P. "Sumerian." Pp. 19-59 in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*, ed. Roger D. Woodward. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. [Michalowski, "Sumerian"]
- Römer, W. H. Ph. *Die Sumerologie: Einführung in die Forschung und Bibliographie in Auswahl*. 3rd edition. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 262. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012.
- Rubio, G. "Sumerian Morphology." Pp. 1327-1379 in volume 2 of *Morphologies of Asia and Africa*, ed. Alan S. Kaye. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007.

Grammar

There are many specialized treatments of different aspects of Sumerian grammar, but two attempts at systematic description are:

- Jagersma, Bram. *A Descriptive Grammar of Sumerian*. Ph.D. dissertation, Universiteit Leiden, 2010.
<http://hdl.handle.net/1887/16107>
Few (*very* few) doctoral dissertations make the cut for an introductory language course's syllabus, but welcome to Sumerology! Very technical, but good for more elaboration and/or examples.
- Edzard, D. O. *Sumerian Grammar*. Handbuch der Orientalistik 71. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
<http://josiah.brown.edu/record=b6385227~S7>
A short overview by an expert in the field, but use this book with care: some sections are excellent and clear, others are idiosyncratic or worse. If it confuses you, put it down and look elsewhere.

Dictionaries

For most assignments the glossary in Volk, *Sumerian* should be sufficient; Thomsen, *Introduction* also contains a list of verbs and their meanings that may be useful when grappling with verbal forms. If these tools do not meet your needs (they are glossaries, not research dictionaries), you will need better resources. There is still no complete Sumerian dictionary in any modern language (compare the *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* and the *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* for the major Semitic language used in ancient Mesopotamia Akkadian). The following, all of which have various strengths and weaknesses and thus should be used with care, are attempts to grapple with Sumerian lexicography. They are list in descending order from most to least scholarly:

- *The Sumerian Dictionary of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania* (PSD). 4 volumes: B, A/1, A/2, A/3, 1984–1998.
ROCK REF 1-SIZE PJ4037 .S57 1984
- Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary (ePSD):
<http://psd.museum.upenn.edu/>
- The Electronic Text Corpus for Sumerian Literature (ETCSL):
<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>
An amazing respository for Sumerian literature with a useful search engine for looking up individual lexemes; lists attestations in compositions and links with ePSD.
- *Leipziger Zettelkasten*: Sumerian-German glossary put together by various scholars (often students) in the field at different times. Still incomplete and not formally published, but useful and sometimes more current or complete than other tools.
- Halloran, J. A. *Sumerian Lexicon: A Dictionary Gudies to the Sumerian Language*. Los Angeles: Logogram Pub., 2006.
Not recommended in most cases, this book was assembled by a hobby Sumerologist.

Sign Lists

The sign list in Volk, *Sumerian* will be sufficient for most of your assignments, but you should be aware of these core tools (others are listed in Volk, *Sumerian* or are electronic resources found below):

- Labat, René. *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne: signes, syllabaire, idéogrammes*. Revised and expanded by Florence Malbran-Labat. 6th edition. Paris: Librairie orientale P. Geuthner, 1995. [Labat, *Manuel*]
ROCK RESRV 1-SIZE PJ3193 .L3x 1988

- Borger, Rykle. *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon*. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 305. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004. [Borger, MZL]

ROCK RESRV PJ3223 .B67x 2004

Digital Resources

The following are among the reliable Web-based resources for the study of Sumerian/cuneiform:

- Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI) http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/sign_lists
- Cuneiform Revealed <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/sao/knpp/cuneiformrevealed/>

The first link is to a repository for standard sign lists, many of which are accessible in a digital format, with an emphasis on the earliest periods of cuneiform writing. Also accessible by simply exploring the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, <http://cdli.ucla.edu/>.

As with all content on the WWW, use good judgment when exploring digital cuneiform, Sumerian, etc.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

Each class will generally consist of two parts: (1) a lecture introducing new material; (2) a review of homework assigned for the week. Class time will be spent reading, analyzing, and translating primary sources mainly found in Volk, *Sumerian*. You are responsible for reading each chapter or background reading before the lecture. Each lecture is intended to complement and explicate the reading, so consistent attendance will be crucial for attaining mastery of the material. Your grade for the course will be determined in the following way:

Attendance/Participation	10%	<i>Every class!</i>
Homework/Preparation	15%	Weekly as assigned
Quiz #1	10%	Week 4 (Fri., Feb. 14, in class)
Midterm Examination	15%	Week 8 (Mon., Mar. 10, in class)
Quiz #2	10%	Week 11 (Wed., Apr. 7, in class)
Project	15%	TBD (analysis of a Sumerian text at Brown)
Final Examination	25%	Wed., May 14, 2:00 p.m., location TBD

COURSE SCHEDULE

The course schedule and assignments will inevitably be subject to some modification as we progress through the material. Students are expected to have completed the reading assignment or done the background preparation for class on the day it is assigned (marked READ or PREPARE). Unless I indicate otherwise, homework assignments are due on the dates indicated below (marked DUE).

*****NOTE***:** Readings and assignments are subject to change at my discretion. All additions, modifications, and deletions of readings/topics will be posted on the course website and/or announced via email, so be sure to check both on a regular basis. **Expect short exercises (distributed in class) to be added to the course schedule homework as needed.**

Week 1: Jan. 22–24

Wednesday ~ Welcome! What is Sumerian and how do we know what we know?

Friday ~ What is Sumerian (cont.); introduction to the cuneiform script

- READ: Michalowski, “Sumerian,” 19–24
- PREPARE: look at CBS 4821 <http://cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P229050.jpg>, our first Sumerian text (to be prepared together in class)!

Week 2: Jan. 27–31

Monday ~ Sights and sounds: the cuneiform script and Sumerian phonology; conventions for representation

- READ: Michalowski, “Sumerian,” 24–30
- PREPARE: PBS 12 19 rev.; cf. TIM 9 85 col. i

Wednesday ~ Nominal forms: Types, Gender, Number, Possessive Suffixes

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§1–34
- DUE: PBS 12 20 rev.

Friday ~ Nominal forms (cont.)

- DUE: exercises

Week 3: Feb. 3–7

Monday ~ Genitive Constructions and the Ergative Case Marker

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§35–155
- PREPARE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 1

Wednesday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 2

Friday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 3

Week 4: Feb. 10–14

Monday ~ Nominal Case Endings

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§156–173
- PREPARE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 4

Wednesday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Texts 5–6

Friday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 7
- **QUIZ #1** in class

Week 5: Feb. 19–21

Monday ~ Long Weekend – **NO CLASS**

Wednesday ~ Verbal Forms — Types and Intransitive Verbs

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§174–220
- PREPARE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 8

Friday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Texts 9–10

Week 6: Feb. 24–28

Monday ~ Transitive Verbal Forms

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§272–279
- PREPARE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Texts 11–12

Wednesday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 13

Friday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 14

Week 7: Mar. 3–7

Monday ~ Basic Verbal Forms

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§280–301
- PREPARE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 15

Wednesday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 16

Friday ~ Review

Week 8: Mar. 10–14

Monday ~ **Midterm Examination in class**

Wednesday ~ Compound Verbs, Causatives, and *marû* Conjugations

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§528–534

Friday ~

- PREPARE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 19

Week 9: Mar. 17–21

Monday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Texts 18, 20

Wednesday ~ Verbal Infixes

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§221–271
- PREPARE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 22

Friday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 23

Spring Break: Mar. 24–28

Spring Break

Week 10: Mar. 31–Apr. 4

Monday ~ Modal Prefixes

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§423–482

Wednesday ~

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§353–422
- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 24

Friday ~

- READ: M. Civil, “Modal Prefixes,” *Acta Sumerologica* 22 (2000): 29–42.
- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 25

Week 11: Apr. 7–11

Monday ~ Conjugation Prefixes and the Copula

- **QUIZ #2** (in class)

Wednesday ~

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§305–352, 535–547
- PREPARE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 27

Friday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 28

Week 12: Apr. 14–18

Monday ~ Subordinate Clauses, The Imperative, and Non-Finite Forms

- READ: Thomsen, *Introduction* §§483–526
- PREPARE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 32

Wednesday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 36
- READ: C. Huber, "Some Remarks on Focus and Relative Clauses in Sumerian," *Acta Sumerologica* 22 (2000): 89-111.

Friday ~

- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 37

Week 13: Apr. 21–23

Monday ~ Review

- READ: G. Gragg, "A Class of 'When' Clauses in Sumerian," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32 (1973): 124-134.
- DUE: Volk, *Sumerian*, Text 38

Wednesday ~

- PREPARE: BM 106527

Friday ~ Reading Period

READING: Apr. 25–May 6

FINAL EXAM: 05/14/2014, 02:00 PM, location TBD

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