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BI-LINGUAL DICTIONARY OF THE SUMERIAN AND BABYLONIAN LANGUAGES COMPILED BY PIONEER LEXICOGRAPHERS IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA.—The language of the Sumerian gradually died out as a living tongue and its place was taken by the Semitic tongue of the Babylonian conquerors, but the culture of the land was embodied in the ancient texts, and these the now dominant race, read and studied. In this way they kept alive and spread the old learning which they used and added to.



In taking over and assimilating the civilisation of the Sumerians, the Semites needed that their scribes should compile explanatory lists of ideograms and words. They adapted the cuneiform writing to their language. Many Assyrian documents are written in the two tongues, "Syllabaries," or dictionaries of which the one here reproduced is an example, enabled the ancient Mesopotamians (and ourselves) to read the early language. The present example has two divisions of four columns each. The second column contains the sign to be explained; in the first the Sumerian meaning is given, the corresponding Babylonian meaning being found in the fourth; the third contains the name of the sign. If the meaning of the Babylonian word is known, that of the Sumerian becomes clear. Cuneiform came to be a system of phonetic writing even in Sumerian times, for each sign was made to represent not an *idea* as with the old ideograms or pictures, but a *sound*—a phonogram. In this way, man's power of expressing his ideas in writing increased infinitely, for he could now write anything that he could speak. The system of writing invented by the Sumerian Mesopotamians was adopted throughout Western Asia; it was the medium of administrative correspondence between towns and provinces on the Mediterranean, and in the fifteenth century B.C. the Egyptian kings wrote letters in cuneiform to the rulers of Western Asia and Syria. It was used continuously from about 4500 B.C. to the first century B.C.! Date: Sumerian Characters, circa 4000 or 3000 B.C.; Babylonian Characters 700 B.C. (the present tablet made 700 B.C.).

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