**Sumer, Sumerisch**


**Sumer**

§ 1. Introduction. “Sumer” and “Sumerian” derive from Akk. *sumeru* (et syn. *sumer*), used by the ancients to translate Sum. *ki-en-gi(r)* “Sumer” (*sumeru, mat* *sumeru*) and *emi-ge-git(r)* “Sumerian (language)” (*sumeru, x x sumerum, lizan sumeru*).

§ 2. Discovery. The decipherment of Akk. cuneiform in the middle of the 19th cent. revealed a logoyysyllabic writing system in which a given cuneiform sign could be used as a logogram for an Akk. word that had no discernable relationship to the sign’s syll. reading(s), e.g. syll. *ki* as a logogram for *eretu* “earth”. E. Hincks* soon realized that this was because cuneiform had been invented to write an earlier non-Sem. language in which, e.g. the word for “earth” was *ki*, and Hincks’ intuition was confirmed when G. Rawlinson* in 1852 established the existence of bilingual texts among the tablets excavated at Nineveh. It was quickly seen that the non-Sem. language, Sumerian, was agglutinative and it was characterized by early scholars as Sthanean or Turanian, what today would be called Uralo-Altaic (Pallis 1956, 175–180; Cooper 1991; id. 1993; Daniels 1994; Parpola 2010; Cathcart 2011).

The ancient name of the language was controversial: Rawlinson and F. Lenormont called it Akkadian, as did F. Haupt, who used Sumerian to refer to the local dialect. J. Oppert was the first (1869) to divine the correct name, Sumerian, which would only prove correct in 1889, when C. Bezdol noted that *emegi*, was translated lizan *sumeru* “the Sum. language” on a bilingual tablet (Examenest Atest A) in the British Museum (Bezdol 1889; Pallis 1956, 175–183; Cooper 1999–2002).


**Sumer, Sumerisch (Sumer, Sumerian).**


Sumerian is a language isolate which is said to be a non-Semitic language. Its origins are unknown, and it is not related to any other known language. It was written in a cuneiform script and was used by the ancient city-states of the Sumerian civilization, which flourished in Mesopotamia from the 4th millennium BC to the 2nd millennium BC.

The language has not been deciphered, and the only remaining evidence is the cuneiform tablets that were written in it. These tablets are the only source of information about the language, and they are written in a variety of dialects and scripts.

The language is thought to have been spoken by people who lived in the region of Mesopotamia, which is now modern-day Iraq. The language is thought to have been spoken by people who lived in the region of Mesopotamia, which is now modern-day Iraq. The language is thought to have been spoken by people who lived in the region of Mesopotamia, which is now modern-day Iraq. The language is thought to have been spoken by people who lived in the region of Mesopotamia, which is now modern-day Iraq. The language is thought to have been spoken by people who lived in the region of Mesopotamia, which is now modern-day Iraq. The language is thought to have been spoken by people who lived in the region of Mesopotamia, which is now modern-day Iraq. The language is thought to have been spoken by people who lived in the region of Mesopotamia, which is now modern-day Iraq. The language is thought to have been spoken by people who lived in the region of Mesopotamia, which is now modern-day Iraq.
The only Presargonic use of the Semitic equivalent of ki-en-gi is found in two sections of a hymn to Nisaba from Ebla (ARET 5, 7) but surely originating in Babylonia: *Sa-im-ar-rim [b]a-ra kur-kur "Sumer and the rulers of the foreign lands" or "Sumer, ruler of the foreign lands"; Su-bur-kki *Sa-im-ar-rim Tilmun § 81 "Sumer, Sumer, and Tilmun" (9.5, 12.2, cited after Krebernik 1992, 89f.). The latter suggests a north-south progression: Upper Mesopotamia, Babylonia, and the Persian Gulf region, a clear indication that the Sem. term did not refer to the south of Babylonia only. Indications that ki-en-gi(r) refers to all of (sedentary) Babylonia can be found in Sum. literary texts known from OB mss.: goods arrive from ki-en-gi(r), Amorites, Meluhha, Elam and Subir in *Curse of Akkade* II.45-50; Enki determines fate for ki-en-gi(r) // kalam and Ur, then Meluhha, Elam and Mariash, ki-en-gur(r) of da-da is contrasted with kur = Tidnum, Gutium and Anshan in the *Sumer and Ur Lament* II.486-490.

Other Sum. literary texts use ki-en-gi(r) either for unspecified regions of southern and middle Babylonia, or for Babylonia as a whole. The Lamentation over Sumer and Ur, and the Ur Lament, for example, use only ki-en-gi(r), whereas the *Nippur Lament* uses only ki-en-gi ki-uri, and the Urkum Lament uses both. Significantly, ki-uri is never used alone in Sum. texts, and ki-en-gi(r) is contrasted only with kur = "foreign lands" or specific foreign countries, never with northern Babylonia.

In the 1st mill., the spelling ki-in-gi(r) predominates, and in addition to sumeru or müt sumeru = equated with just müt "land" (CAD s.v.) and rarely with the cities Nippur and Ur (MSL 11, 11; King, STC 1, 247 f.). The Sargonic kings of Assyria uniquely wrote *kereme-ge*li, [bo] for müt sumeru (always in müt sumer u akkadi; RGTC 7 and 8 s.v. sumeru).

S. and Sumerian were unknown to Classical authors (Klassische Auto), but S. appears in the Old Testament as Sin'ar, a name for Babylonia, recalling *um-ar-sum*

of the ED Ebla hymn (above). The argument of Zadok (1984) against the derivation of Sin'ar from S. is improbable (Coooper 1999-2002).

Falkenstein A. 1966: Die Inschriften Gudeas von Lagash (zum Ar. 36), - Krebernik M. 1992: Mesopotamian myths at Ebla: ARET 5, 6 and ARET 5, 7; in: P. Fronzolari (ed.), Literature and literary language at Ebla (= Quad. Sem., 18, 63-159, id. 1998: Die Texte aus Farra and Tell Abu Salabih, Annaherungen 3, 317-472 = RGTC 5-7, in: P. Fronzaroli (ed.), Literature and literary language in silence, a telling indication that it, and not Sumerian, was Sulgi's native tongue (Rubio 2006). When Sulgi bragged that during his youth in school the "ki-en-gi ki-uri ka nam-dub-sar-ra mi-zi-uzu "I learned reading and writing from the tablets of Sumer and Akkad" (Sulgi B 14), he meant that he was Syrian.

Likewise, the school curriculum that we know from the tablets of OB Ur and Nippur, and from the OB Sum. Edubba compositions set in the *Sibor* (Sjoberg 1976; Volk 1996; id. 2000; Veldhuis 1997, 241; George 2005; Schulte esp. § 11), is a Sum. curriculum in which Sum. literature is studied and the ability to write and speak Sumerian is valorized, but it is also clear that the Sum. language must be learned. The OB corpus of Sum. literature was certainly conscious of Bab: bilingualism:ême-ḫa-num ki-en-gi kur gal me nam-nun-na-ka / ki-uri kur me-te gā-lā "complementary tongued Sumer, great mountain proper in every way" (Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta II.58, see Vanstiphout 2003, 64; Mittermayr 2009, 122f., 169). These "complementary tongues" were juxtaposed in OB bilingual lex. lists (Lexikalische Listen), glosses (Glossen) and grammatical texts (Grammatik), but the Akk. language is hardly mentioned (lē e-me-gi-ra-ke e-me-uri bi-in-du, "The Sum. monitor (said): 'You spoke Akkadian!'" George 2005, 128). A more realistic portrayal of the bilingual nature of scribal education is found in a late northern OB fragment portraying an oral examination in which a teacher challenges his student to translate from e-me-uri "Akkadian" to e-me-gi-r(r) "Sumerian" and vice-versa (Civil 1998; Schulte § 11.3). Similar situations are evoked in the bilingual so-called Examination Texts of the 1st mill. (Sjoberg 1972; id. 1975; s. citations in CAD s.v. Sumeru), which may go back to late OB forerunners. See George 2009, 106-112 for the translation of texts from Akkadian into Sumerian, and his text No. 14 for a late OB example of such. Simāšt-Adda's son and viceroy at OB Mari, Jasmāšt-Addad, in a letter asked his fa-

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for e-me-gi(r) or *sumeru used to identify or refer to songs and incantations in Sumerian in the 1st mill., and for Assur­
banipal's claim to be able to read a text whose Sumerian was obscure (gullula) see CAD s.v. In the later 1st mill., *sumeru
"Sumerian" qualifies the owner of some Nippur tablets or his ancestor (Oelser 1982), but the suggested bit *sumeru "house/
temple of Sumeru" written E ū-me-ri-du (DU), is probably just the Ninnur temple E-šu-me-ša-du (DU).

"Sum. (language)" was used in the Sargonic period to describe a measure (šil-um gi1) Wi kelke 1974, 220f., 226f.; and in the Ur III period there were udu e-me-gi(r) "Sum. (language) sheep" and rarely sheep and goats qualified as ki-en-gi(r) "Sumeru" (Wi kelke 1974, 218f., 226f.). Presumably, such qualification referred to the southern Babylonian character of the measure or animal. A tree *mes-ki-in-gi(r), despite the spelling with gi(r), must be "Sumerian mes-tree" in tIb. III 1268 (1970, 367-371; Wi kelke 1974, 220f., 226f.).

There is general agreement that the elements /gi(r)/ in ki-en-gi(r) and e-me-gi(r)/gi(r) are identical, and identical also with the same element in dumu-gi(r) "noble, free citizen", ur-gi(r) "dog" and the PN Sul-gi(r) (Sulīgī) § 4. Steinkeller (1993, 2005) understands the element as meaning "native (tongue) native beast, native youth", but no-
ble fits as well and sometimes better (no-
ble beast, noble youth), and fits the lexical evidence (which Steinkeller 2005 dismisses as secondary) better as well. e-me-gi(r) is thus "noble tongue", but ki-en-gi(r) remains difficult. Steinkeller (2005; also Rö-
mer 1999, 9; Frye, RIME 1, p. 10) pro-
poses that /gi(r)/ is actually /gi(r)/, so that the EN in ki-en-gi(r) would just be expressing the nasalization of the initial con-
sonant, so that ki-en-gi(r) < *ki-gi(r) "no-
ble, Steinkeller 'native', Steinkeller 'land'). But the writing of a word with initial /y/ using the sign GI (regularly in ki-en-gi and Sul-gi, as an alternate orthography in e-me-gi(r) is incompatible with the norms of Sum. or-
thography.

It has been convincingly argued that the toponym written EN:Gɪ KI or EN:Gɪ KI in administrative texts at Fāra and ki-en-gi(r) at ED Girsu does not signify later ki-
en-gi(r) "Sumeru", but rather the city Ene-
gi(r), seat of the netherworld god Nin-azu.


Add to Steinkeller's suggestion that the burial place called gi1 EN:ki-ka in a Reform Text of In-
gagina RIMA 1.9, 14. vi 15, . 35 is a play on Enegi, the possibility that the place of royal burials at Ebla was
possibly Nin-azu (see above); this is confirmed by Archi 2009. EN GI KI in the archaic text CUSAS 1, 93 is probably not a toponym; see Monaco 2007, 30.

In the ED collection of hymns to various deities, the hymn to Ninazu of Enegi(r) (OIP 99 p. 50) is longer than any other save the introductory hymn to Enlil. If this indica-
tes a special early importance of Ninazu, Enegi(r) and the earthworld, possibly connected to the large-scale human sacrifice accompanying royal burials at contemporary Ur, perhaps a name for southern Babyl-
lonia was ki-enegi(r) "region of Enegi", written ki-en-gi(r), with the specific refer-
ce to Enegi(r) forgotten by the end of ED III (s. also Frye, RIME 1, p. 10). Other-
wise, there remains the implicit suggest of Wi kelke (1974, 220f.) that ki-en-gi(r) be et-
ymologized literally as "place, noble en", leaving open whether en is to be under-
stood as a priestly title, or as "lord, ruler".

Steinkeller (1993, 112) proposes a "highly speculative" but intriguing etymology for Akk.
 suedegi(r). Since, first encountered the Sumerians in northern Mesopotamia during the so-
called Urk Expansion (ca. 3400), and called by the name they used for that region, Subar > Semites, he reasons, first encountered the Sumerians in southern Babylonia, they continued to call them and the place they inhabited by the name de-

erived from the northern region of their earlier con-
tact. The argument: seems too clever; certainly, by the time we have the earliest evidence for Semites in northern Mesopotamia (ED III), S. and Subartu* are

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referred to the southern Semitic-speaking, Akkadian-speaking, groups as "Sumerians" as ethno-
groups or language families, which like Sumerian, are agglutinating (Römer 1999, 11-14, 44f. and bibl. on p. 29-31).

The main thrust of these attempts has been to establish whence the Semitic-speaking Sumerians arrived in Babylonia, although some have tried rather to use Semitic as the ancestor for an ethno-linguistic group of more recent pendi-
gree (e.g. Komoróczy 1976; Tuna 1990).

Most surprising has been Whittaker's at-
tempt to show that Sumerian (or a sub-
strate thereof) is Indo-European, a position that has long been held (Ruhl 1972; Whittaker 2005). Parpola (2010) has re-
vived the notion that Sumerian is Uralic, and imagines that the Semitic-speaking Sumerians arrived in Babylonia from a homeland in the Caucasus to the westward of the Late Uruk period. Streek (1998), arguing from struc-
tural convergence, and Civil (2007), studying loanwords, have concluded that Sumer and Akk. (or Sem.) speakers were in contact from very early times, but this says more about the early presence of Semites in Babylonia than about Sum. origins.

As just philology has so far failed to identify an extra-Bab. origin for the Sumeri-
s, so archeological arguments from con-
continuity or innovation have not been conclusive. The identification of groups of Sumerian words as vocabulary taken from earlier, autochthonous peoples (Landsberger 1974) is also no longer considered compelling (Rabino 1999; Steiner 2005). Many scholars, following Komorócz (1978), would see the Sumerians among the earliest settlers of the alluvium, with their identifiableSum. identifications that the earliest cuneiform (or proto-cuneiform writing) texts from several directions. Nissen (1999, 160f.), however, argues that the large increase in population in Babylonia during the Uruk period (5th mill.) can be accounted for only by immigration, and that the Sumerians may have been those immigrants.

An even later entry of the Sumerians has been suggested by England (1998, § 4.4), who argues that there is no compelling evidence for the Sum. language prior to the arcaic Ur texts of the early ED period (ca. 2700), and there are a number of indications that the earliest cuneiform (or proto-cuneiform) from the late Uruk and Gamdat Nasr periods (late 4th mill.) is not Sumerian at all. The Sumerians would thus have entered the alluvium only at the beginning of the ED period (England 1998, 81). Many arguments have been marshalled against this position (e.g. Cooper 1999–2002; Glassner 2003; Rubino 2005, and Wilcke 2005; Michalowski 2006), partial response by England 2009, p. 18), but the strongest argument in its favor remains unchallenged: Not a single Sum. PN has been identified on the many thousands of late 4th mill. tablets. England (2009) has bolstered this argument by isolating over 400 names of slaves on late 4th mill. tablets, none of which appears to be Sumerian.

Proponents of the consensus that Sumerians were in Babylonia by the late 4th mill. and were the inventors of proto-cuneiform must find compelling evidence to refute it. Until then, it can only be said that it is probable, though not certain, that Sumerians were (primary among) the creators of the Ur civilization of the 4th mill., and may well have been in Babylonia even earlier. Although it has not been established whence and when they entered the alluvium, it must be said, with Komorócz (1978), that whatever qualities scholars identify as Sumerian very probably developed within Babylonia itself, and not in some elusive extra-Bab. homeland.


Sumer, Geschichte.


§ 1. The concept of Sumer as an object of historical research depends on different linguistic, political or cultural approaches, which have changed through the last decades. On the other hand, the association of Sumerians with Sum. speakers, the identification of the Sum. language in proto-cuneiform texts, and the problem of "whence and when did the Sumerians arrive in Babylonia" are also issues contemplated in discussions (see Sumer*, Sumerisch § 6). All these matters are relevant to define the chronological and geographical frame where the history of S. developed. S. will be here identified with southern Babylonia (Babylonien), in a similar sense as the term ki-en-i(r) (Akk. ki-imiri) was used in cuneiform texts (Sumer*, Sumerisch § 3), and its history will be considered as the result of an evolution which began by the middle of the 7th mill. and ended with the fall of the Third Dynasty of Ur.

§ 2. The Ubaid period (Ubaid-Kultur*). The earliest known settlement of southern Babylonia was excavated at Tall al-Uwaih* and was dated to the 7th mill. in its lowest levels. Older settled life in this part of Mesopotamia could have been covered by alluvium, or was perhaps almost nonexistent due to difficult environmental conditions. Tall al-Uwaih belonged to the so-called Ubaid period (7th to 4th mill. also attested, e.g., at Tall al-Ubaid*, Ur* and Eridu*). Urbanization and agriculture significantly developed during its second phase, when an expansion—perhaps of commercial nature—to other areas of the Middle East preceded the Uruk period.

§ 3. The Uruk and Gamdat Nasr period. The Uruk (or Proto-urban) period, named after the city of Uruk*, lasted for about 1000 years (ca. 4100–3100). It witnessed important changes in southern Mesopotamia: cities increased in number and size, being particularly remarkable the growth of Uruk and its surrounding region during the Late Uruk period (ca. 3500–3100); the economic, social, and political structure of the city grew in complexity, leading to a deeper integration with the surrounding secondary settlements; and accounting techniques developed into the cuneiform writing system (Keilschrift*), first attested around 3200–3100 on the clay tablets found in the level IVA of the Eanna sequence at Uruk. People from this city, in ventures of probably commercial purposes, established deep cultural contacts with territories of southern Mesopotamia, Susiana, and Upper Mesopotamia, reached eastern Anatolia, northern and western Syria, and possibly Egypt, and even colonized the region of the Middle Euphrates (Habiba*; Iran*, Vorgeschichte § 4; Türkei*, Vorgeschichte). This so-called "Uruk expansion", which stimulated the urbanization process in the Middle East, extended from 3800 to 3100, when it collapsed (cf. Stadt* §§ 3.3, 3.6). During the Gamdat Nasr period (ca. 3100–2900), Uruk (layer III) and other cities of southern Mesopotamia reorganized and developed a different kind of political equilibrium. The city-state (for a definition see Stadt* § 6.5) thus became the basic