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This article is divided into two parts, the first covering the periods before 1500 B.C., that is, Sumerian, Old Babylonian, and Old Assyrian studies, and the second covering the periods after 1500 B.C., studies of the Middle Assyrian, Middle Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and Neo-Babylonian periods.

Part 1: It All Started with Fifty Sumerian Tablets

Tohru MAEDA*

Sumerian

Yomokuro Nakahara was the pioneer and founder of Sumerian studies in Japan. His most important pre-war work in the field was the publication in 1928 of fifty cuneiform tablets housed in Kyoto Imperial University (Nakahara 1928). After World War II, he realized the need to find scholars to carry on the study of Sumerian in Japan, and for this purpose went to the University of Kyoto. There his hopes were realized. He had the opportunity to teach a group of dedicated students, Mamoru Yoshikawa, Shigeru Yamamoto, Setsu Onoyama, and Kazuya Maekawa. Nakahara also continued during this fruitful period to write papers which are still worthy of note (Nakahara 1965, 1966, 1968).

During the 1960’s the “temple state” theory dominated Sumerian studies in Europe and the U.S. Even scholars who did not agree with the “temple state” theory at least accepted the existance of a conflict between priest and king or between secular and religious powers as the guiding historical principle. However, Nakahara took a completely different view. He stressed that it was the secular kingship whose power dominated the political history of Sumer from the earliest period. He proved that a system of kingship was formalized in the late Uruk period and that this kingship continued throughout the history of Sumer, although the socio-political form of the kingship changed in the course of

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history.

The second contribution Nakahara made to the study of Sumerian society was the need to connect the methods of the socio-political and socio-economic study. He criticized the many scholars who explained Sumerian society with speculative theories borrowed from Sumerian literature. He emphasized that it is necessary to analyze the contemporaneous Sumerian socio-economic tablets, which are the most important historical material sources. Needless to say, the students who studied under Nakahara were influenced by his perspective on Sumerian studies.

In 1973 Yomokuro Nakahara founded the Japanese Sumerological Society. The meetings of the Society have continued till present under the leadership of Mamoru Yoshikawa and now under Kazuya Maekawa. Sumerologists and other Assyriologists in Japan gather three times every two years for meetings. Since 1979 the Society has further contributed to studies in the field with the annual publication of *Acta Sumerologica* (abbreviated *ASJ*). The first issue of this journal was dedicated to Prof. Yomokuro Nakahara on the occasion of his seventy-ninth birthday. The establishment of a permanent society and publication seems to underscore the maturation of Sumerian studies in Japan during the 1970’s.

Among the four students instructed by Prof. Nakahara, Mamoru Yoshikawa went on to establish his reputation as a world-class Sumerian linguist. His achievements in Sumerian linguistics will be referred to in J. Ikeda’s article in this volume.

Shigeru Yamamoto studied the organization of the é-mi (the queen’s household) in pre-Sargonic Lagash (Yamamoto 1958, 1960). Then he examined the land texts of the é-mi and proved that the agricultural calendar in pre-Sargonic Lagash extended over two years. He also brought to light the fact that cultivation was done in alternate years, using a system in which some fields cultivated one year were left fallow the next agricultural year (Yamamoto 1979-80). This agricultural system, that is, the use of the biannual calendar and the setting aside of fallow fields, continued up to the Ur III dynasty.

Setsu Onoyama, an archaeologist, studied the “royal cemetery of Ur” in his early work (Onoyama 1965) and now more recently has returned to this subject. He will publish his theory of the segmentation of the royal tombs in the near future. Another subject of his research is archaeological artifacts, such as pottery and cylinder seals. He reported that in Mesopotamia there was a regular
alternation between periods when the drawing style was "geometric" and periods when it was more natural, and he supposed this phenomenon reflected "Zeitgeist," the differences in the socio-religious thought of each period (Onoyama 1975, 1999). He also argued for the presence of influences from Egyptian culture (Onoyama 1996).

The papers Kazuya Maekawa published can be divided roughly into two subjects: Sumerian agricultural skills and the organization of the Sumerian city-state. For his study of Sumerian agriculture, he examined the pre-Sargonic Lagash texts and proved a high yield for crops in Sumer (Maekawa 1974). Sumerian agricultural productivity relied on well-developed agricultural techniques: using plows, making furrows, and other techniques. He examined these agricultural techniques using the Sumerian economic texts from both the Early Dynastic and the Ur III periods (Maekawa 1981-97, 1984, 1985, 1987a, 1990). For example, he made clear the meaning of the Sumerian term gis-gabat-tab. Maekawa also researched the Sumerian terms for equids (Maekawa 1979). He concluded that ANŠE-BAR+AN was the tamed onagar, and ANŠE-DUN-GI, which was replaced by ANŠE-LIBIR in the Sargonic period, was the domesticated ass. In one paper, he assumed the term amar-KUD denoted castrated animals in the texts of pre-Sargonic Lagash and then deduced that the people indicated by the term amar-KUD in the Ur III period were castrated persons (Maekawa 1979-82).

With respect to the organization of the Sumerian city-state, Maekawa published an important paper on the development of the é-mi from the reign of Enentarzi to that of Urukagina (Maekawa 1973). He concluded that the prototype of the é-mi in the reign of Enentarzi was rapidly enlarged and more systematically organized in the beginning of the reign of Lugalanda. This tendency continued up to the reign of Urukagina. He also established that Urukagina’s reform actually took effect in the first year of his ensishhip, but that his efforts had failed by the second year of his reign. He also proved that the so-called “temples” in Ur III Lagash were the administrative organizations organized by the king of Ur for the purpose of managing domain land (Maekawa 1999).

Maekawa realized that é-dul-la refers to the “confiscation of private properties” of city-rulers, high officials and generals (Maekawa 1996). This interpretation is useful for understanding the differences in the political background between the kingship of Ur and the city-states in the Ur III dynasty.
His work highlights the importance of using contemporaneous administrative texts as the primary source materials for historical studies.

From the 1970’s on, many other scholars have become involved in Sumerian studies.

Tohru Gomi examined the Drehem tablets and reconstructed the system of the royal distribution of cattle centering on Puzurish-Dagan (Gomi, 1973, 1975, 1976). His important study of Drehem texts was on the Puzurish-Dagan calendar (Gomi 1977, 1979). He concluded that the Puzrish-Dagan calendar was amended to the Ur calendar in the fourth year of the reign of Shu-Suen, the fourth king of the Ur dynasty.

Gomi also studied the texts from Ur and researched the economic crisis at Ur in the reign of Ibbi-Suen, the last king of Ur (Gomi 1985a).

It is worth noting that Tohru Gomi published thousands of cuneiform texts of the Ur III period of Sumer, and that he co-edited the useful catalogue of the Ur III economic texts (Gomi & Sigrist 1991).

Tohru Maeda researched various topics both in the pre-Sargonic and Ur III periods. With respect to pre-Sargonic Lagash, he studied the breeding of cattle (Maeda 1977), maintenance work of irrigation canals (1984a), agricultural festivals (1975, 1979), and allocation of kur6-land (1982-3); with respect to Ur III Drehem, he studied the bal duty of Sumerian city rulers (1994b), and gû-na and mu-tûm obligations (1989, 1992a). With respect to Sumerian historiography and history, he studied the historical reliability of the Sumerian King List (1982), the chronology of Lagash in the Gudea period (1988), and reconsiderations of the history of both the late Akkadian period and the period of change from Ur III dynasty to the Isin dynasty (1992b, 1992c, 1994c). He also argued that the Sumerian kingship went through three progressive stages (1981, 1984b, 1985, 1994a, 1995). He also published a unique interpretation of lines 100-115 of “Gilgamesh and Agga” (2000).

Setsuko Oh’e studied judicial processes in the Ur III dynasty (Oh’e 1980, 1983) and pointed out the difference in function between lû-ki-inim-ma and lû-inim-ma (1979). She noticed differences among the judicial systems in each of the cities Nippur, Umma, and Lagash, and assumed that these differences corresponded to the different stages of the governmental system in each city. Oh’e also dealt with Sumerian social problems and researched Sumerian marriages and inheritances (1987, 1988a, 1988b).

Tateo Yagi also dealt with Sumerian society. In particular, he categorized
the loan contracts of Ur III Nippur (Yagi 1975).

Toshiko Kobayashi examined offerings for the statue of Entemena in pre-Sargonic Lagash in order to study the difference between statues of royal figures standing before gods to pray and royal statues which were the objects of prayer (T. Kobayashi 1984). She also inspected the relationship between personal gods/goddesses and netherworld gods/goddesses (T. Kobayashi 1983, 1985, 1989, 1995).

Akiko Okada studied the development of the Eanna temple of Uruk, considering its relationship to the establishment of Sumerian kingship (Okada 1969, 1979, 1982).

Izumi Yoda examined the formulae of the curse and the oath using the king’s name during the Ur III period (Yoda 1984, 1995).

Akemi Horioka stated an argument for the chronology of the Shuruppak texts, that the date of the texts is doubtful. She proposed that they were dated in the Early Dynastic IIIb, that is, the period of Ur-Nanshe or his successors, not in the Early Dynastic II and IIIa (Horioka 1997).

Yukiko Kuga researched the cylinder-seals in the Atarashi collections and reconsidered the so-called Old Akkadian “classic styles” (Kuga 1992, 1995).

Shigeo Iwata analyzed statistically 185 Mesopotamian standard weights dating up to the Old Babylonian period (Iwata 1983). He concluded one mina was constantly about 500 grams throughout these periods, refuting the claim that there were several standard weights used concurrently.

Hiroshi Ogino studied the Persian Gulf trade during the third Millennium B.C. (Ogino 1979, 1984).

Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian

Kazuhiko Kuroda studied the military organization of the first dynasty of Babylon, and the abuttum of the Babylonian merchants (Kuroda 1963, 1974). For twenty-four years after the publication of Kuroda’s paper, there were no papers on socio-economic texts of Babylonia in the Old Babylonian period. In 1995, Miki Yokoyama published a paper on the corvée in Hammurabi period (Yokoyama 1995). It is truly regrettable that there are still very few studies of these administrative and economic texts.

Ichiro Nakata studied what are known as Mari “prophesy reports,” commenting on the texts in detail as well as translating them into Japanese (Nakata 1981, 1982, 1982-3). In addition, he also engaged in a study on the
popular pantheon and official pantheon in Mari (Nakata 1976). The official pantheon carried on the traditional composition of the Sumero-Babylonian pantheon, while the popular pantheon was oriented to West Semitic deities. He concluded that this “discrepancy” can be explained by the double structure of the Mari population consisting mainly of the Akkadian population and the new Amorite population. Recently, Nakata translated the Laws of Hammurabi into Japanese (Nakata 1999a). Until then the only dependable Japanese translation was that published by Keikichi Harada in 1947 (Harada 1947).

Shigeru Muto wrote a unique paper in which he compared the Old Babylonian edicts with the laws of moratorium of debt (Tokusei-rei) in medieval Japan (Muto 1993). He indicated accurately that the basic principle behind manumissions in both the Ancient Near East and Japan was “restoration (modori),” a returning to man’s original (= righteous) condition.


Sakae Shibayama studied Mari and Ugarit texts. He wrote several papers on the Mari texts: on the Akkadian wasāru concerning freedom in Mari (Shibayama 1972), the tin trade centered in Mari (1978), the politico-economic relationship between Mari and Aleppo (1976), and the ration system in Mari (1974).

Keisuke Fujimoto studied the organization of textile workshops in Mari, examining the Mari economic texts published recently (Fujimoto 1992).

Yasushi Kawasaki introduced the study of the Old Assyrian Kanesh tablets into Japan. He analyzed the Kanesh tablets, and examined the mechanism of international trade (Kawasaki 2000a), tin mining in Anatolia (1996), activities of Assyrian traders (1986,1988,1998) and the status of women in Old Assyrian society (1996).

Takeshi Sugiyama published a paper on perdum trading in the Old Assyrian Kanesh texts (1999). Hiromichi Oguchi also studied the trade routes in the Old Assyrian period, applying his archaeological knowledge of the area (Oguchi 1999).

Kumi Makino studied the Nuzi adoption contracts and deduced that the unique contracts of false adoption at Nuzi reflected social change (Makino 1991).

On Old Babylonian literature, Junko Kikuchi published a paper on the
“Gods of the Night” (Kikuchi 1988).


Lastly it is worth mentioning that a study of the Diyala texts is currently in progress (Nakata 1999b). This project is being coordinated by Ichiro Nakata and Yasushi Kawasaki.

Part 2: Contributions of the Younger Generation

Kazuko WATANABE*

I. General view

Since Assyriology has come to depend more and more on international cooperation, it may be meaningless to underline the contributions made by Japanese Assyriologists. We do, however, owe a great deal to the efforts of those pioneers who labored to establish Assyriology in Japan given the fact that Japan might not be considered the most likely environment for such a field. These pioneers, in particular one group, contributed vigorously to Sumerology, as reviewed by Tohru Maeda in the preceding part. In the branch of Assyriology which covers the period after 1500 B.C., the substantial studies based on original clay tablets and new texts began in the 1980’s. This is somewhat later than the beginning of comparable Sumerology research. The specialists studying the period after 1500 B.C. can still be considered part of the younger generation of Japanese Assyriologists.

Given the significant progress in the field, the extent of the development has not been uniform. Geographically, the studies on the period ca. 1500-1000 B.C. have not concentrated on Mesopotamia itself (i.e. Babylonia and Assyria), but rather on the surrounding regions such as Syria (especially Emar and Ugarit), Palestine and Anatolia (especially Hittite). Particularly, the number of Japanese scholars who have contributed to the studies of the texts from Emar

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(Meskene) since 1984 (see below) is remarkable. A study embracing various disciplines (e.g. history, politics, economics, linguistics, religion, literature, ...) confined to Japan is hardly possible. However, because of the welcome increase in international cooperation, such a study is not even necessary. In fact, several international symposiums have been held in Japan with fruitful results.

In the following paragraphs we glance at some recent Japanese contributions. Most can be roughly classified according to historical periods or other themes such as literature, religion and iconography, but some of them defy precise classification. Contributions on linguistics and archaeology are treated in separate articles.

II. History

Some books on the general history of the Ancient Near East have been recently published in Japanese. They show the result of cooperation of a number of Japanese specialists and may come to be regarded as the standard works in the field for some time (Ogawa & Yamamoto 1997; Onuki et al. 1998; Maekawa et al. 1998; Maeda et al. 2000). Previous books on Ancient Near Eastern history written in Japanese did not cover all periods, nor all relevant regions.

(1) Studies on the period ca. 1500-1000 B.C.

Among the contributions on this period, those on the texts from the Emar region are the most outstanding:


Satosi Ono (1997) studied loan contracts from Emar.

Mamoru Yoshikawa and Eiko Matsushima (1981) published the bilingual lexical tablet from the region which is owned by the University of Tokyo.

Kazuko Watanabe (1987) published the monolingual lexical tablet on exhibit in the Museum of Folklore, Freiburg, Germany. Its provenance was easily identified after the publication of D. Arnaud, *Recherches au pays d'Aštata*, Emar VI, 1985-1986.

For linguistic studies in Emar Akkadian, see J. Ikeda’s article in this
A. Tsukimoto contributed some important publications of Middle Assyrian texts (Deller & Tsukimoto 1985; Tsukimoto 1992c; Tsukimoto & Röllig 1999b).

Shigeo Yamada (1994, 1998) successfully analyzed the political background of the Assyrian King List.

(2) Studies on the period ca. 1000-500 B.C.

Assyria in this period attracted much interest:

Yutaka Ikeda (1982, 1984, 1993, 1999) analyzed the political situation in the western region (Syria, Palestine) with relation to the Assyrian Empire.

S. Yamada (1999) studied the political history of Shalmaneser III’s reign (839-824 B.C.) and his recently-published dissertation (2000) offers an elaborate study of the western campaigns of Shalmaneser III.

K. Watanabe’s dissertation (1987) is a new edition of the “Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon” (672 B.C.). She (1992c, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995a, 1999b) also discussed eunuchs in Neo-Assyrian period from a philological and an iconographical viewpoint:

A. Tsukimoto (1990b) published a new fragment of a prism of Esarhaddon.

Studies on Babylonia in the same period (Neo-Babylonian period) have been quite scarce:

K. Watanabe and David I. Owen (1983) published a real estate sale document dated in the reign of Esarhaddon to which series of traditional curse formulae were attached.


K. Watanabe (1995) studied some inscribed Neo-Babylonian seals.


III. Literature

Isamu Sugi et al. (1978) edited the Japanese translations of many myths and epics as well as other literary works. Fumio Yajima’s translation of the Gilgamesh Epic and Koichiro Goto’s translation of the Enuma Elish are included in this edition.

Hittite and Hurrian versions of the epic are included (Nakamura 1996b).

IV. Religion

The field of religion is relatively well studied. K. Goto, A. Tsukimoto and K. Watanabe came to the study of Assyriology with backgrounds in religious history and Biblical studies (especially studies on the Old Testament).

K. Goto’s various works on religious history and Biblical archaeology are collected in one volume (Goto 1993).

A. Tsukimoto (1985a) discussed funeral offerings (kispum) in his dissertation. His other contributions to the field of religion overlap with his works on the literary texts mentioned above (For his contributions to the Old Testament, see Y. Ikeda’s article in this volume).

K. Watanabe (1983, 1984, 1987a) analyzed Akkadian oaths and curses. She used the method of “Uberlieferungsgeschichte” to elucidate the tradition of curse formulae.


Hittitology is also one of the fields to which Japanese scholars have been contributing substantially. Especially, the religious complexity in the Hittite state was elucidated by Daisuke Yoshida (1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1999a, 1999b) and M. Nakamura (1996a, 1997, 1998, 2000).

D. Yoshida’s dissertation (1996) brought the various aspects of the sun-gods into relief. For the linguistic studies on Hittite texts, see Jun Ikeda’s article in this volume.


Two international colloquia were held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Tokyo) on themes from the field of religion. The theme of the first was “Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East” (Matsushima ed. 1993a). The theme of the second was “Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East” (K. Watanabe ed. 1999a).

V. Iconography

Keiko Ishida (ed. 1991) organized an exhibition of Ancient Near Eastern
seals housed in museums and private collections in Japan. A number of new pieces are incorporated in the catalogue.

Masako Omura (1993, 1995) published some stamp seals dated in the 1st Millennium B.C. which were excavated in Kaman-Kalehöyük, Turkey.

K. Watanabe (1993c) analyzed the motif of the so-called ‘tree of life’ in all periods of Ancient Mesopotamia and interpreted its symbolical meaning. She pointed out that the appellation ‘tree of life’ has no philological reference in Ancient Mesopotamia, but was derived from the relevant phrase in the Bible (cf. esp. Genesis 3:22-24). The animals standing on either side of the tree are not guardians, as had been supposed, but herbivores feeding on the tree or the plant for sustenance. The tree and the animals compose one unit which may symbolize a fertile land.

She (1999b) also classified the Neo-Assyrian seals based on the figures of bearded and beardless worshippers as well as the gods and the goddesses worshipped.

Chikako E. Watanabe (1997b, 1998) discussed the meaning of the royal lion hunt depicted in Neo-Assyrian reliefs. She argued from the religious point of view that the hunt was performed as a cult-drama based on Ninurta’s myths. From the anthropological point of view it meant that only the king in the society was in the position to control the wild forces symbolically represented by lions.

There is still no department for Assyriology at any university in Japan. But we can expect universities to produce Japanese Assyriologists, especially in the field of the period after 1500 B.C., as S. Yamada and J. Ikeda have recently begun to teach at University of Tsukuba, in the Departments of History and Linguistics respectively.

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