

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: The University of Oxford</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UOA31</p>
<p>Title of case study: Widening understanding of the earliest written literature through The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL) is quoted and used in both schools and colleges across the world and read by people without any direct academic connection to the subject: widening access to, interest in, and understanding of Sumerian literature. Sumerian literature is widely known as one of the oldest literatures in the world, inspiring countless studies of world literature and history of religion. The ETCSL has made the bulk of canonical Sumerian literature (c. 400 compositions) available in prose translations and the original Sumerian to both specialists and informal learners for more than a decade.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) The literature written in Sumerian is the world's oldest poetry. The majority of the written sources date to the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC (1900-1600 BC), with a few forerunners from the 3rd millennium BC (as early as 2600 BC). The main 'classical' corpus can be very roughly estimated at 50,000 lines of verse, including narrative poetry, praise poetry, hymns, laments, prayers, songs, fables, didactic poems, debate poems and proverbs. The majority of this has been reconstructed during the past fifty years from thousands of often fragmentary clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform writing. However, relatively few compositions are published in satisfactory modern editions, and many are scattered throughout a large number of journals and other publications. Thus an acute need for a coherently and systematically published, universally available textual corpus was identified.</p> <p>In 1997, the late Dr Jeremy Black, a leading international scholar specializing in the Sumerian language and Sumerian literature, assembled a team in Oxford to start to gather electronic editions of all Sumerian literary compositions from world leading specialists. Dr Black and his team were hugely successful in creating this data resource, which in turn became the foundation for two monographs and a large number of scholarly articles by members of the team, and has transformed scholarship on Sumerian literature and the Sumerian language. In 2001, the project secured a five-year grant from The Arts and Humanities Board which made it possible to continue to expand and enhance the corpus and expand the project team.</p> <p>The compositions are organised according to the catalogue of Sumerian literature established by Chicago Assyriologist M. Civil. A composite Sumerian language text is given for each composition with lists of the manuscripts appended. For each composition, metadata is available as well as a translation into prose English and a link to a full bibliography. Within the corpus the translations are kept in English which is easily accessible and divided into conceptual units separated into paragraphs. Each paragraph is back-linked to a placeholder in the original Sumerian text. The entire corpus has been lemmatized and is searchable. It also provides the core linguistic corpus for the Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary of the University of Pennsylvania. The corpus is XML formatted and deposited with the Oxford Text Archive (OTA).</p> <p>The quality of the online material is very high. The list of contributors (for each individual composition) includes only the absolute best specialists. The team of Dr Black at The University of Oxford, including Dr Graham Cunningham, Dr Gábor Zólyomi and Dr Eleanor Robson, amalgamated, and streamlined these sources to produce a uniform and consistent corpus. The translations, although they follow published editions, are the work of Dr Black and his team.</p> <p>A majority of the scholarly work on Sumerian Literature conducted across the world currently either relies on the ETCSL, or relates to it. Project members have published dozen of articles and several books based on research conducted in connection with the project. Robson's 1995 study, for example, used the ETCSL dataset to enhance our understanding of education in ancient Babylonia by moving beyond a simplistic view of education based on self-referential literature to an empirical view of what was studied when. Black's 2004 article enhanced our understanding of one particular segment of a Sumerian literary composition (Dumuzi and his sisters) drawing on other texts in the</p>

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ETCSL, whereas the special volume of ASJ (Black and Zolyomi 2005) contained articles on various points of grammar using a corpus based approach.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Monographs:

Black, J.A., Reading Sumerian poetry. London: Athlone (1998). Available on request.

Reviewed by A.J. Ferrara (University of Pennsylvania) in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 61:4, October 2002. "[...] this is a welcome first attempt" given that "no book-length general survey of Sumerian literature has been written up to this point... Almost every page provokes thoughtful comment"

Black, Jeremy A., Graham Cunningham, Eleanor Robson and Gábor G. Zólyomi. *The literature of ancient Sumer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2004). Available on request.

Reviewed by A.R. George (SOAS) in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15:2, 2005.

"Sumerian literature is the world's oldest corpus of literary texts. The work of recovering it is still under way; the progress made so far is one of the greatest achievements of twentieth-century scholarship in the humanities, even if it has attracted little attention. Books like this are needed to make the pioneering work of Sumerologists better known. It represents a great leap forward for Sumerian literature, for it exposes to a new readership very many compositions that have hitherto been read only by a tiny number of specialists."

Reviewed by Martin Worthington, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2006.01.27: "It will be welcomed by all desiring closer acquaintance with the literary treasures of Ancient Mesopotamia, and can be warmly recommended as the standard new first port of call for those who approach Sumerian literature by medium of English."

Black, Jeremy A. and Gábor G. Zólyomi (eds.). *The Study of Diachronic and Synchronic Variation in Sumerian: Papers Presented at the 6th Meeting of the Sumerian Grammar Discussion Group, Oxford, 17th and 18th September 1999*. (Acta Sumerologica 22 [2000][Special Volume in Honor of Professor Mamoru Yoshikawa]) Hiroshima: The Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (2005).
<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/edition2/pdf/diachronsum.pdf>

Articles in leading journals:

Black, J.A., and Farouk N.H. Al-Rawi. 'A balbale of Ninurta, god of fertility'. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 90, 31-39 (2000). DOI: 10.1515/zava.2000.90.1.31

Robson, Eleanor. 'The tablet house: a scribal school in Old Babylonian Nippur'. *Revue d'Assyriologie* 95, 39-67 (2001). <http://www.cairn.info/revue-d-assyriologie-2001-1-page-39.htm>

Zólyomi, Gábor G. 'A manuscript of Ningišzida's journey to the Nether World from Kiš, Ingharra'. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 93, 70-81 (2003). DOI: 10.1515/zava.93.1.70

Black, Jeremy A. 'Dumuzid and his sisters'. *Orientalia* 73, 228-34 (2004).

The Corpus

Black, J.A., Cunningham, G., Ebeling, J., Flückiger-Hawker, E., Robson, E., Taylor, J., and Zólyomi, G., *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>), Oxford 1998–2006.

Research grants:

Pump-priming grant from the University of Oxford's Research and Equipment Committee (January to September 1997).

The Leverhulme Trust 1997-2000.

The Arts and Humanities Research Board 2001-2006: £472,162.

The British Academy and The Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2003–2006: £5,400.

Diachronic corpus funding (John Fell): £52,181

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The translation and presentation of the Sumerian text corpus as a searchable database available to anyone with a computer and internet connection has allowed not just scholars to be able to access and understand the Sumerian language and literature but opened up the subject to a wider

public audience. Both the act of translating and the studying of prose pieces has been used by schoolchildren, storytellers, hobby specialists and in undergraduate teaching.

Promoting greater understanding of Sumerian literature through story telling

Amongst the many pieces of translated Sumerian literature available on the ETCSL are several legendary examples such as the poems of Enheduanna (the world's first named poet) and the Epic of Gilgamesh (often considered the oldest written story on Earth). These are popularly used in storytelling activities to give a greater understanding of the times from which they originate. Dr Jeremy Black was the founding patron of The Enheduanna Society, whose aim is "popularising the literature of ancient Iraq through the art of oral storytelling". The society includes a group of 'Zipang modern Mesopotamian storytellers' who bring to life key Sumerian texts to a wide variety and number of audiences^[i]. Since 2008 their many activities have ranged from a multi-lingual cultural event organised by the Iraqi Association in Hammersmith in July 2009 (where the audience included representatives from the Iraqi Association in Canada and the event was filmed by two Iraqi TV channels) to a sold-out evening at the Oxford Story Museum with Michael Rosen November 2012; the audiences to their events are multi-cultural and multi-generational, with one workshop in September 2008 including "post-graduate students interested in storytelling as a psychotherapeutic tool, a science journalist writing for a Gulf newspaper, and Hungarians intrigued by similarities between their language and Sumerian"^[iii].

As part of the 2009-2012 *Discover Mesopotamia Through Storytelling* project, funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, 'Zipang Big Day Out' events were held which incorporated guided tours of the British Museum (finding clues to various stories through key artefacts), and follow-on poetry workshops integrating Mesopotamian history and literature and local and classical folk music. Print-outs of ETCSL translations were used as handouts at Zipang storytelling performances during this project^[1]. In August 2011 Badia Obaid, an Arabic-speaking Zipang storyteller, gave an oral storytelling performance in Arabic of the Huwawa story in a Moroccan forest as a special guest at a storytelling festival in Morocco. The main source for her performance was the ETCSL translation of this story^[1]. The Society was also closely involved with providing storytelling sessions during the British Museum's Babylon Exhibition in 2008-2009^[iii]. Thus the ETCSL has been instrumental both in conveying knowledge of early literature to diverse audiences and to help preserve the oral tradition and culture of storytelling which was prevalent when these texts were first transcribed.

Providing a resource for further publications for a general audience

The world of Sumerian literature has been made available to authors of popular books, both through early Mesopotamian stories, but also as a way of discovering and exploring the earliest known examples of various topics. Fran Hazleton from the Enheduanna Society has herself written various works on epic stories such as *Three Kings of Warka* published in 2012^[iii]: one of the stories retold is the Epic of Gilgamesh which was originally written in Akkadian, however, Fran Hazleton has incorporated Sumerian elements of this story found in ETCSL translations; the remaining two stories are originally Sumerian and translation was assisted by the ETCSL^[1].

Lennart Warring and Taina Kantola consulted the current Project Director prior to the publication of their 2011 Swedish book *Inanna - skymningens drottning* (Inanna - Queen of twilight)^[iv]. In a different vein, Valerie Frankel's 2010 book *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey Through Myth and Legend* "explores the universal heroine's journey as she quests through world myth" and directly cites the translation of *Inana's Descent to the Nether World* available on the ETCSL website^[v]. Similarly Amnon Altman's 2012 book *Tracing the Earliest Recorded Concepts of International Law: The Ancient Near East (2500-330 BCE)* does not re-tell a specific story but refers to various translations such as *Lamentation over the destruction of Ur* or *Gilgames and Akka* to investigate a wider theme of Law in early civilisations^[vi].

Providing an educational resource

The Enheduanna Society have also created several teachers packs for use in primary schools which contain numerous activities with specific lesson plans on cuneiform writing which contain links back to the ETCSL signlists^[viii].

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The current ETCSL Project Director frequently receives requests to use translation material published via ETCSL in a variety of course materials. Recent granted requests are for use of *The Exaltation of Inana*, *The Debate Summer and Winter* and *The Sumerian King List* as part of a Cengage course reader^[viii] [currently following up with publisher what use of course readers is for]; including *A hymn to Ninkasi (Ninkasi A)* as part of the free course History 126: World Civilizations with the Washington State Open Course Library Project and incorporating *A song of Inana*^[ix] and *Dumuzid and Enkimdu* in a course pack written by Professor David Miano of the University of California, launched in early July 2013 to purchase from the universityreaders.com website^[2].

Almost all taught programmes in Sumerian language and literature at undergraduate level in Europe and the United States rely on the ETCSL as a basis for their teaching. The importance of this resource has been attested to by numerous departments. Professor Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum from the Freie Universität Berlin feels that it is an important tool for students on their BA course, to establish an understanding of the current research on Sumerian Literature; allowing students to quickly and easily search for specific phrases and, as it is website based, use it to continue their studies when not on University premises^[3]. Dr T.J.H.Krispijn from Leiden University describes the increasing relevance of the ETCSL for his students: “Since the amount of Dutch and foreign students in Leiden without knowledge of French and German is increasing, ETCLS (sic) has become an indispensable tool for reading Sumerian literary texts. Our course Sumerian III: reading Old Babylonian Literary texts, scheduled for the third year BA Ancient Cultures of the Mediterranean World- track Assyriology in Leiden, would be almost impossible without ETCLS”^[4]. Dr Dina Katz from the Netherlands Institute for the Near East says “I think that there is not doubt that ETCSL revolutionized the study of ancient Babylonia...the search functions result in a full overview of the use of words and expressions in the literature, and a move of the cursor over the text which shows lemma and translation of the individual word makes an advanced search in the dictionary easier”^[5]. Bertrand Lafont, Research Director at CNRS History and Archaeology of the Orient Cuneiform in Paris adds “The field studies of Sumerian literature remains extremely specialized...complex and difficult to access. ETCSL offers the only easy and immediate access to the full text of Sumerian literary sources and that we can understand through the transliteration and translation of texts. It is clear that ETCSL is primarily a tool for teaching purposes, plus a real search tool (although it is still useful also in this area). In my own teaching, I often prepare a seminar recovering...the entire composite transliterations of a particular work.”

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Testimonials

- [1] Email correspondence with Chairperson, Enheduanna Society
- [2] Email correspondence with Project Manager, Cognella regarding David Miano course pack.
- [3] Email correspondence with Professor, Freie Universität Berlin
- [4] Email correspondence with Docent, Leiden University
- [5] Email correspondence with Staff Member, Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Other Evidence Sources

- [i] The Enheduanna Society: <http://zipang.org.uk/index.html>
- [ii] Past events: <http://zipang.org.uk/pastevents.htm>
- [iii] <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Three-Kings-Warka-Fran-Hazelton/dp/0955433029/>
- [iv] <http://www.atlantisbok.se/layout/detail.php?id=7679>
- [v] http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Cng0Z_i0GLQC
- [vi] <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=T3qOqTcOgsQC>
- [vii] Enheduanna's Teacher's pack: <http://zipang.org.uk/teachers/teachers.htm>
- [viii] Cengage course reader: email correspondence and http://www.cengage.com/search/productOverview.do?Ntt=coursereader|9781111345785&Ntk=all|P_Isbn13&N=+16#TableofContents
- [ix] Washington Library course: Email correspondence and <http://opencourselibrary.org/hist-126-world-civilizations-i/>