

10/21/74

Cuneiform Studies

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and Arabic and so on. Semetic languages - the consonants are what is important. In Egyptian they are. The vowels give the tense or mood etc, as a rule. But often you'll have two entirely distinct words that have the same consonants. In Egyptian you just have the consonants. So writing cuneiform is far harder than the Egyptian, but the lang. of the Egyptian is far harder than the Mesopotamian. One reason that is of importance is this, that if you are familiar with Heb., if you know Heb. well, you could take a grammar of Assyrian in which the words would be written not in cuneiform signs, but in Latin letters, the kind of letters we use for English, and you could from that learn the language fairly easily. The lang. has many similarities to Heb. There are a great many words that are almost identical with Heb. words. If you know Heb. fairly well, although the grammar has considerable difference from Heb., yet it is the same general type of thing. Where it differs from Heb. it is more like Greek or like our modern languages in those differences, while the Egyptian is an entirely different type of language.

The cuneiform lang. has been used to write at least 27 diff. languages that have been found written in the cuneiform. You could learn to read things in transcription fairly easily, to learn Babylonian in transcription. It is not difficult, but usually study of it is done directly in cuneiform. And the reason for that is because of the peculiar nature of the cuneiform, and that is ~~why~~ why I thought it would be helpful to give you something of an introduction too. (Question: Is Assyrian one of the 27 Mesopotamian languages . . . or are Assyrian and Mesopotamian interchangeable?) I am going to go into an aspect of that further, but --- I'm glad you raised it because I want to mention that Mesopotamia is a geographical term, strictly a geographical term. It is the area of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the modern Iraq. In Mesopotamia at a very early