A preliminary sketch of Gutian grammar.

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In April of 2020, a series of cuneiform tablets at the Miskatonic University Library, of unknown provenance but dated to the 22nd century BCE, were determined to belong to a previously unknown language of early cuneiform culture. Due to its similarity in phonology to Gutian personal names, as well as the presence of common vocabulary with Elamite, the language has been termed "Gutian," though the connection with the Gutian people, who migrated from the Zagros foothills to southern Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium, is not completely certain.

This article presents as much as can be said about the phonology and grammar of the language based on the few extant tablets at the Miskatonic University Library, including a bilingual foundation tablet in Gutian and Sumerian, a hymn to a river-god, and several personal letters.

Phonology

Based on the cuneiform texts, the following phonemes can be reconstructed for Gutian. Their exact pronunciations cannot be determined for certain.

Consonants		Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasal		m	n			
Stop	Fortis*	p	t		k	3 <,>
	Lenis*	b	d		g	
Fricative			s	∫<š>		
Affricate			ts <z></z>			
Rhotic			r			
Approximant			1	j <y></y>		

^{*}The terms fortis and lenis are used as it has not been determined how the stops were distinguished, whether by voicing or aspiration.

Vowels	Front	Mid	Back
Close	i	(i)*	u
Mid	е		
Open		a	

*/u/ and /i/ are written variously as u, i, or ui in unstressed syllables. Thus is can be said that /u/ and /i/ are neutralized, not being distinctive phonemes in this environment.

This reduced vowel was probably pronounced something like [i].

The sequences <ae> and <au> are considered diphthongs.

Stress and Morphophonology

Gutian exhibits a fixed-stress system, with primary stress falling on the first or second This can be seen in the systematic use of different signs thought to have the same pronunciation in different verbal forms (see Verbal Morphology), along with the aforementioned centralization of /u/ and /i/. This lends credence to the theory that these different signs indicated tonal differences in Sumerian that were not retained in Akkadian.



gu-ti-u-meš

Gutumeš

['gutime[]

Gutium-GEN

Of Gutium

Morphology

Nominal Morphology

Gutian nominals are inflected for case but not number. The absolutive, genitive, ergative, and dative cases determine a noun's role in the sentence; the locative and comitative cases have different forms and also behave like cases, but other noun endings are considered postpositions. Case suffixes and postpositions are the same for pronouns and common nouns.

Case	Abbreviation	Forms
Absolutive	ABS	-Ø
Ergative	ERG	-(u)z
Genitive	GEN	-(m)eš
Dative	DAT	-(a)ya
Locative	LOC	-(i)k
Comitative	COM	-(r)em

The vowel in the ergative suffix forms a diphthong au with a previous /a/, meaning it must be /u/, while the vowel in the locative is elided after /a/, meaning it must be /i/.

There is also an adverbial suffix -(')is, probably related to Akkadian -iš in some way.

Both nouns and pronouns exhibit Suffixaufnahme, whereby the case suffix of a noun described by an adjective or heading a genitive phrase is also appended to the adjective or genitive, in the latter case after the genitive suffix. This can be seen as an unusual form of agreement, where both adjectives and genitives agree with their heads in case.

The following few pronouns have been identified in Gutian, with various usages:

Form	Usages	
al-	First person personal pronoun	
zum-	Second person personal pronoun	
lu-	Proximal demonstrative; refers to a previously-mentioned topic	
šen-	Distal or medial demonstrative; third person personal pronoun	
ida-	Interrogative pronoun; relativizer, complementizer	

The interrogative pronoun is also used to marvel at things:

i-da-i-is pa-er a-uš e-na-u

ida'is paer auš enáu

INT-ADV broad river COP\INDIC-IPF

How wide the river is! (River Hymn, 102)

Numerals are indeclinable. Nouns described by numerals are introduced using classifiers.

□ (四(口) 三) 图 (四) 图 (四) 图 (回) 图 (回)

5 sa-u šu-ul-za zu-mi-uz2 a-la-ia us-ri-le-ek

5-sau šulza zumuz alaya úsrilek

five-CLF copper 2-ERG 1-DAT send\IRR-PFV 1-ERG believe\INDIC-PFV

You would send me five copper ingots... (Letters, 15)

Verbal Morphology

Gutian verbs are inflected for mood and aspect. The stress on the stem is determined by the mood. When stress falls on the second syllable, the mood is indicative, the realis mood:

a-u-ši-uz2 i-da šen ši-ma-ak a2-u-ša-u-ši-ek ki-za-u aušuz ida šen šumak aušáušek kizáu

[ˈauʃɨt͡s ɨˈda ʃen ʃɨˈmak au̯ˈʃauʃek kɨˈt͡sau]

river-ERG COMP 3 sea-LOC flow\INDIC-PFV know\INDIC-IPF The river knows that it will flow to the sea. (*River Hymn*, 146)

šen mu-li-is e-za-ge-ek-sa

šen mulis ezágeksa

[ʃen ˈmulis eˈtsageksa]

3 soon(?)-ADV bring\INDIC-PFV-ANTIP

He will arrive [soon]. (Letters, 30)

When stress falls on the first syllable, the mood is irrealis, which is used for non-factive complement clauses as well as commands.

i-da 5 sa-u šu-ul-za zu-mi-uz2 a-la-ia us-ri-le-ek a-lu-uz2 a2-le-be-ek

ida 5-sau šulza zumuz alaya úsrilek aluz alébek

[i'da (???) sau 'ʃultsa 'tsumits 'alaja 'usrilek 'alits a 'lebek]

COMP five-CLF copper 2-ERG 1-DAT send \ IRR-PFV 1-ERG believe \ INDIC-PFV

I had thought that you were sending me five copper ingots. (Letters, 15)

■が囲まるでで記

zum en-te-i-is du-ma-ne-ek-sa

zum ente'is dúmaneksa

[tsum 'ente?is 'dumaneksa]

2 order-ADV write\IRR-PFV-ANTIP

Write you more neatly. (*Letters*, 37)

Verbs also end in a suffix that determines the aspect of the action.

Suffix	Meaning
-u	IPFV; imperfective, continuous action
-ek	PFV; perfective, action viewed as a single event
-(a)ta	ITER; iterative or frequentive, multiple

After the aspect suffix, the suffix -sa sometimes appears, probably a valency changing operator of some kind, glossed as ANTIP (antipassive).

Syntax

Typologically, the syntax of Gutian is similar to that of nearby languages, especially Akkadian: genitives and adjectives follow their heads, but the verb prototypically

comes at the end of the sentence. Numerals come after nouns and are introduced by a measure word (see Nominal Morphology).

Complement clauses and relative clauses are both headed by the pronoun ida.

画な縁町運ぎ囲ニ魚は見り上の金町

iš-ga zu-meš u-da-uz² dub šen e-za-ge-ek ka²-šu-le-ek
ušga zumeš idauz dub šen ezágek kašúlek
[iʃˈga ˈt͡sumeʃ iˈdaut͡s dub ʃen eˈt͡sagek kaˈʃulek]
servant.boy 2-GEN REL-ERG tablet DIST bring\INDIC-PFV leave\INDIC-PFV
Your servant, who brought that tablet, has gone. (Letters, 184)

a-u-ši-uz² i-da šen ši-ma-ak a²-u-ša-u-ši-ek ki-za-u
aušuz ida šen šumak aušáušek kizáu
['auʃit͡s i'da ʃen ʃi'mak auˌˈʃauʃek ki't͡sau]
river-ERG COMP 3 sea-LOC flow \INDIC-PFV know \INDIC-IPF
The river knows that it will flow to the sea. (*River Hymn*, 146)

Vocabulary

Much of Gutian vocabulary is native and not demonstrably related to any nearby language. However, it contains a sizeable amount of Elamite loanwords, implying it was spoken east of Mesopotamia.

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dingir.dingir-pi-uz² ia-ar-la-as te-em-tu-uz² dingir.dingir-pi-ši-uz² [na]puz yarláz temtiz [na]pešuz god-ERG great-ERG lord-ERG god-GEN-ERG ...by the great god, lord of the god(s)...

Gutian also contains a number of Sumerian loanwords, which must be loanwords and not Sumerograms, as they employ variant spellings in accordance with the merger of unstressed /u/ and /i/:

40百美三半倉庫

uš-ga-ia a-le-ša3-ia ušgaya alešaya [iʃˈgaja ˈaleʃaja] servant.boy-DAT 1-GEN-DAT To my servant...

里軍企工

iš-ga zu-meš ušga zumeš [iʃˈga ˈt͡sumeʃ] servant.boy 2-GEN Your servant... (*Letters*, 184)

The sequences šu and uš are often found in words related to water and are perhaps imitative in origin.

四三人中主 重 中土 自 四 工

šu a-u-šeš ri-in-tu-uz² ka²-ar-ka-ra-ta šu aušeš rintuz karkárata [ʃu ˈauʃeʃ ˈrintit͡s karˈkarata] water river-GEN sun-ERG shine\INDIC-ITER The sun makes the river's water glisten. (*River Hymn*, 121)

Kinship Terminology

Gutian kinship terminology is difficult to reconstruct. There seem to be multiple words for brother, one used more broadly, perhaps particularly denoting an older brother ($t\acute{e}ma$), and another denoting a younger brother or assistant ($\acute{i}ru$). The latter usage is probably a calque of the Sumerian term $\check{s}e\check{s}$ ($\stackrel{\bigstar}{\longrightarrow}$).