

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT TELL MARDIKH

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Authoritative information about the startling discoveries at Tell Mardikh in Syria has been slow in reaching the United States.¹ Since the preliminary reports are in Italian (and one in French), I have undertaken to summarize here the salient facts. For this report I am relying largely on the articles by the principal archaeologists, published in a recent issue of *Orientalia*² (a publication of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome). The excavations at Tell Mardikh have been carried out since 1964 by the Italian Archeological Mission in Syria of the University of Rome, with the cooperation of the Director General of Antiquities at Damascus. The chief archaeologist is Paolo Matthiae, and the chief epigrapher is Giovanni Pettinato.

Tell Mardikh is a large tell of 56 hectares (140 acres), located 70 kilometers (43.5 miles) south of Aleppo. The imposing mound is 1,100 meters (about 3,600 feet) in diameter and rises sharply from the surrounding area. It is one of the largest and most impressive mounds in northern Syria, and indeed in the Middle East. Unfortunately the tell is not noted in any atlas, geography, or travel guide that I have consulted.

Excavations between 1964 and 1973 uncovered the remains of a city from the period of the Amorite dynasty, Middle Bronze (MB) I and II, ca. 2000-1600 B. C. In 1968 the torso of a male figure was found. It was carved in basalt and had a 26-line inscription, of which lines 18-26 are incomplete. The text was in Akkadian, but the formulae were entirely new. The statue had been dedicated by Ibbi-Lim son of Ikriš-Ḫepa, king of Ebla. An unusual date-formula dated it in the eighth year of the goddess Ishtar, and it is assumed that the statue was dedicated to her. Only one city is mentioned—Ebla—and that is named twice. Tell Mardikh was thereupon identified as Ebla. Although the identification was challenged by M. C. Astour,³ later discoveries support it.

Ebla was known by name, since it occurs in Old Akkadian texts as one of the two or three main centers on the way from Mari to the Mediterranean. It had been conquered by Sargon and by Naram-Sin.

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¹A major published source of data is G. Pettinato, "The Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla," in *Biblical Archeologist* 39/2 (May, 1976), pp. 44-52; see now also W. S. LaSor, "Tell Mardikh—the Latest Archeological 'Greatest,'" in *Theology, News and Notes* 23/4 (December, 1976; Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary), pp. 19-23.

²P. Matthiae, "Ebla nel periodo delle dinastie amorree e della dinastia di Akkad: Scoperte archeologiche recenti a Tell Mardikh," in *Orientalia* 44 (1975), pp. 337-360; G. Pettinato, "Testi cuneiformi del 3. millennio in paleo-cananeo rinvenuti nella campagna 1974 a Tell Mardikh=Ebla," in *Orientalia* 44 (1975), pp. 361-374.

³M. C. Astour, "Tell Mardikh and Ebla," in *Ugaritische Forschungen* 3 (1971), pp. 9-19.

Gudea of Lagash records that he imported wood from the mountain of Ebla. A governor had been appointed in Ebla during the Third Dynasty of Ur. Ebla is mentioned in Alalakh texts from Level VII (ca. 1750-1650 B. C.) and again from Level IV, and in texts from Boghazkoi and Cappadocia. The last reference to Ebla is in a list from Karnak (Egypt) in the days of Thutmose III (1490-1436 B. C.). Because of Gudea's reference to "the mountain of Ebla" (ḪUR-SAG IB-LA-TA, Gudea, Statue B, V 54),⁴ plus the fact that this is mentioned in connection with "the city of Urshu" (URU UR-SU^{ki}, line 53), it was previously thought that Ebla was on the upper Euphrates, north of Carchemish.

By the end of the 1973 season, excavations on the acropolis, the lower city, and the wall had gradually revealed that Ebla was one of the major urban centers of Syria, that it flourished between 2000 and 1600 B. C., and that it was destroyed sometime prior to 1600. Excavations in 1974 threw unexpected light on the third millennium in northern Syria, and 1975 provided the most startling finds yet.

To give some idea of how rapidly our knowledge of that part of the world is expanding, we need only look at the recently-published *Cambridge Ancient History*. There Margaret S. Drower is able to say that we have no certain knowledge of the ethnic makeup of the inhabitants or of what language or languages they spoke,⁵ and J. Bottéro can state, "Nevertheless we can regard it as almost certain that among the whole population of ancient Syria the Semites were the latest comers." The Semites at the time of Ur III, he tells us, were semi-nomads, "wandering about the fringes of the desert in unstable groups," and of those Semites who settled in towns he says that "it is not clear whether they formed any kind of ethnic or linguistic unit among themselves."⁶ The results of the 1974 and 1975 campaigns at Tell Mardikh indicate that there was a western or northwestern group of Semites with a well-advanced cultural level and a well-defined language. In 1974 the remains of a large building were uncovered; it belonged to the initial phase of Early Bronze IV (sometimes called EB-MB Intermediate). Other parts of the mound provided other evidence of the Paleo-Akkadian period of Ebla. Carved wood figures were uncovered that were of the same period. Then in two rooms in the southern area were found cuneiform tablets in Paleo-Canaanite. The style of writing is derived from a scribal tradition from the late Protodynastic period of Mesopotamia. Architectural and other elements support a date of 2250 B. C. for the destruction of the palace.⁷

The evidence leads to the conclusions that the inhabitants were Proto-Canaanite, that Ebla was certainly the major center of inland Syria in the third millennium B. C., and that our knowledge of the ancient Near East, which has long thought in terms of two centers of civilization, namely Egypt and Mesopotamia, will have to undergo some adjustment. Matthiae distinguishes two phases of this culture: Proto-Syrian I (ca.

⁴CF. G. A. Barton, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sumer and Akkad* (1929), 1.184.

⁵M. S. Drower in *CAH*³ (1/2, 1971), pp. 319-321.

⁶J. Bottéro in *ibid.*, pp. 565 f.

⁷For details of cf. P. Matthiae, *art. cit.*, pp. 356 f.

3000/2900-2400/2350 B. C.) and Proto-Syrian II (ca. 2400/2350-2000 B. C.).

Excavations in 1975 made possible the definitive identification of Building G as the royal palace of EB IV A. In two small rooms were found two archives containing about 15,000 clay tablets. Pettinato's study of the texts led to certain conclusions: (1) that the foundation of the royal palace (G) was four or at most five generations before the destruction, hence between 2400 and 2350 B. C.; (2) that G was destroyed by Naram-Sin of Akkad between 2250 and 2225 B. C.; and (3) that the ruins of G were abandoned after the destruction, while a new palace complex was developed on the northern side of the acropolis.

The 42 tablets found in the 1974 campaign, complete and broken, were sun-baked clay, either round or rectangular. The round tablets were from 2.6 centimeters (1 inch) to 6 centimeters (2 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches) in diameter, while the rectangular tablets were 8 x 9 centimeters (3 x 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches), written on both sides. The rectangular tablets were divided into from two to six columns, and each column was divided into registers between which were inscribed the cuneiform characters. Certain peculiarities, such as the writing of the vertical wedge of ŠU and DA from bottom to top, the use of *ba* in *šū-ba-ti*, and the use of the verbal prefix *i* in *i-na-šum*, plus the fact that the syllabary was the one in use in Mesopotamia from Sargon on, permits the dating of the tablets between 2350 and 2250 B.C.

Forty-one of the tablets formed a unitary archive of the palace concerning various trades of industry. The form included the name of the object, the person who consigned it, the state official who received it, and in some cases the month and year in which the transaction took place. The following industries are attested: metallurgical items, textiles, ceramics, and items of wood. Sixteen texts inform us about manufacture of gold, silver and other metals, including seals, an emblem and a scepter, cups, nails, and—in silver—gazelles, vessels and an object called a "fish-eye." Textile materials were for the loom or manufactured, particularly flax, but of various materials and colors. The mention of "red" material is interesting since it reminds us of the purple of the first millennium. The ceramic industry was especially occupied with the manufacture of vessels of various types and agricultural instruments, as well as decorative items. It becomes clear that Ebla was a commercial center, because the items mentioned were not for the city's own use but were explicitly intended as commerce with cities such as Mari, Tuttul, Naḥur, Uršum, Zašilu, and so forth. All industry and commerce was in the hands of the sovereign.

Ebla is named twice in two different tablets, and the king, Ibbi-Sipis, is called EN=*mālikum* ("king"), not LUGAL (as was the King of Mari). The name Ibbi-Sipiš means "called (*nb'*) of Sipiš," who is the sun god, better known to us as Shemesh. The form *špš* is known from Ugaritic. Pettinato, however, is not correct in suggesting that Hebrew *šemeš* is now to be identified as deriving from **šimš* rather than **šamš*. He brings into his reasoning the name Samson (*šimšōn*, but both Septuagint and Vulgate indicate that the vowel was originally *a* in the Hebrew text and that

attenuation of *a* to *i* occurred in Hebrew sometime after A.D. 400, i.e. after Jerome translated the Vulgate.

The three year-names that are attested begin with *DIŠ m u*,⁸ well known from the Paleo-Akkadian period. Text 101 reads *DIŠ m u ŷu-ra l u g a l - m a - r i k i*, "year in which Shura became king of Mari." Shura is the name of the brother of Ibbi-Sipiš, king of Ebla, and Pettinato says that the import is truly sensational, for a prince of Ebla was made king of Mari.

The date-formula points out a significant fact, namely that Sumerian logograms (signs representing words) or ideograms (signs representing ideas) were used in Eblaic texts, just as they were in Assyrian and Babylonian texts. This bilingualism of the scribes indeed provided a key for deciphering the language. (A more extensive bilingual key was provided by the 1975 excavation when Sumerian-Eblaic dictionary lists were discovered.) A number of tablets contained at the end the Sumerian words *d u b - g a r*, while two other tablets had at the same place the characters with the Sumerian values of *g á l* and *b a l a g*, which made no sense. These signs, however, were known to have the phonetic values of *ig/ik* and *dltúb*, respectively, and the word *ik-túb* obviously had the same meaning in West Semitic as the Sumerian *d u b - g a r*, namely, "written by" (followed by the name of the scribe). But in Akkadian (Assyrian and Babylonian), the verb *ištur* would have been used, for East Semitic uses the root *štr* ("to write") where *ktb* is used in West Semitic. Pettinato reports that in the tablets from 1974 there were 115 endings that were Sumerian and 110 that were Eblaic, which led to the conclusion that the Sumerian endings were in reality Sumerian logograms and should be read with Eblaic values. Indeed, Sumerian verbs are used without conjugational prefixes, which would be meaningless if the texts were to be read in Sumerian. The logograms were obviously stereotypes and fossilized forms.

Some of the words identified are:

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| <i>ku₈-tim</i> | "gold" | cf. Heb. <i>ketem</i> |
| <i>má-ŷu</i> | "weight" | cf. Phoen. <i>mḥy</i> |
| <i>qà-šú</i> | "bow, arc" | cf. Akk.-Ugar.-Heb. <i>qšt</i> |
| <i>šì-ti</i> | "drinking" | cf. Sem. <i>šty</i> |
| <i>tam-mim</i> | "perfect" | cf. Heb. <i>tammim</i> |
| <i>ŷu-ta-mu</i> | "seal" | cf. Heb. <i>ḥôtām</i> |
| <i>še</i> | "bowl" | cf. Ugar. <i>š⁶</i> |
| <i>wa</i> | "and" | cf. Arab.-Heb. <i>wa</i> |

Tablet 120 contains a list of names. We find theophoric names ending with the divine elements *-Da-mu* and *-Li-im*. The first part concludes with the clause *sí-a-lu [a-]mi-ú iš₄-ú-nu kul-šì-nu eb-la*, "We call these men all of Ebla," which Pettinato takes to mean that all men of Ebla are named in such a manner. The second part contains names with the preformative sign for a proper name, and then names compounded with

⁸We mention for those not familiar with Sumerian that SMALL CAPS and i n t e r s p a c e d words, though significant to Sumerologists, need not concern us here.

the following elements: *tù-bi-*, *du-bù-hu-*, *en-na-*, *en-ši-*, *eb-du-*, and *ip-hur-*.

The following morphological developments of nouns occur: CaC, CiC, CuC, CiC, CûC; CaC², CiC², CuC²; CaCC, CiCC, CuCC; CaCâC, CiCâC, CiCiC, CuCiC, and CuCuC; with preformative *a-*: aCCaC and aCCuC; with sufformative *-ût*, *-ân*, and *-ayum*. The feminine morpheme is *-at*, the plural *-ûnu*.

Case appears to be unused, and the endings are sporadic. Twenty-six nouns have zero-ending, 22 end in *-u*, 7 in *-um*, 4 in *-a*, and none in *-i*. It appears that *-u* indicates not only the nominative case but also the emphatic state. If Eblaic was a mimmativ language (endings in *-m* as Akkadian, rather than in *-n* as Arabic), it appears that mimmation was disappearing.

The following personal pronominal suffixes are attested: 3ms *-šu*, 1cs *-i* (with nouns and prepositions) and *-ni* (with verbs), and 3mp *-šinu*.

According to Pettinato, the "conjugations" or stems that are attested are: G (qal), D (pi'el), Š (sip'il) [!], and "IV Passiva II" (quttal), which is, of course, the D-passive. Since almost all of his reconstruction comes from personal names, it leaves something to be desired. In no case is there gemination in the D-stem, and only the *i*-vowel after the first radical indicates that the form is *qittil*. The "tenses" (*tempi*) or aspects attested are: stative, preterite, participle and infinitive. The only "stative" that furnishes a clue is *ša-bu-tá* (which occurs in a personal name), from *šbw*. It could be like the Akkadian stative or the Hebrew perfect. The preterite forms *ik-tûb* and *ik-šu₁₁-ud* are similar to Akkadian *iprus* and Hebrew *yiqtol*. If correctly identified, this adds further support to the theory that there was an original *yqtl*-preterite in West Semitic—which probably underlies the form used with (conversive) *wāw* in Hebrew. The only G infinitive listed is *ha-zu-um*, taken to be derived from the root *ḥz* with apheresis of the initial *'āleph*.

The Š participle *ma-ši-ú-du*, from root *'wd* ("to be curved, bent"), offers at least three interesting points. (1) Eblaic is a Š-, not an H-, language, with pronominal suffixes and the causative stem in *š*. In this respect it is like Akkadian and Minean, rather than Hebrew and Sabean. Since *h* and *š* are found side by side as dialectal variants in Old South Arabic, we need not be offended to find them side by side in Canaanite. Indeed, Ugaritic also has the *šap'el*. (2) The vowel of the *m*-preformative element is *a*, not *u* as in Akkadian. (3) The syllabogram *ú* serves as an aleph after the *i*-vowel of the preceding syllable. The form *šim₄-piš-l(a-nu)*, which occurs in a personal name, provides evidence for Pettinato to posit a *šip'il* (like Hebrew *hip'il* rather than Aramaic *hap'el* and Arabic *'af'ala*). This would lend support to my position that the *i*-vowel is original in many if not all Hebrew hiphil forms. However, the evidence presented so far by Pettinato is rather small to support any theory.

Pettinato notes the absence of final vowels in the stative and preterite forms of the verb and cautions (as I have been doing for a quarter-century) against reconstructions of Proto-Semitic based entirely on Arabic. Akkadian in the third millennium B. C. had no short-vowel

endings in indicative, suggesting that it is possible that such endings developed in South Semitic (Arabic, Ethiopic) by analogy to the subjunctive as over against the jussive. The subjunctive ending is found in Akkadian. It will be interesting to see whether it appears in Eblaic.

Ebla certainly is a discovery of tremendous importance. Best of all, the more than 15,000 tablets of the 1975 season which are now being studied will certainly provide many more details to add to our knowledge of the peoples and languages of the ancient Near East and, hopefully, to our understanding of the Old Testament.