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MANE 1/7

Old Canaanite Cuneiform Texts of the Third Millennium
by Giovanni Pettinato

Before the discovery of the major royal archive of Ebla in 1974, a much smaller archive of 42 tablets, also from the royal palace, was uncovered. This article by Pettinato gives a comprehensive review of the grammatical data known from the small archive — and as such became the first (and remains so far the only) grammar of Eblaite. The present English translation is thus useful both because of its historical importance and its documentary value. Pettinato's main conclusions are: 1) These cuneiform documents can be dated to the period of Sargon of Agade and his dynasty, ca. 2350-2250 B.C.; 2) Ebla was a leading redistributive center in Syria with connections to the Middle Euphrates valley, especially Mari; 3) the tablets are written in a hitherto unknown Northwest Semitic language, Eblaite, with possible connections to Canaanite languages; 4) conventional understanding of the history and significance of Syria in the Third Millennium must be readjusted.

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PREFACE

The great epigraphic finds of Ebla consist of the two large archives discovered in 1975 in two small enclosed areas adjacent to the large audience court of the Third Millennium palace: the "library"[1] (designated by the excavator with the number L.2769) and some 1000 tablets and fragments from a storeroom (L.2712). Already in 1974, however, a smaller archive of some 42 tablets had been found, still within the palace, but outside the Audience Court: they came from a storeroom (L.2586) where they were found scattered on the floor next to the base of a jar which was still set in the ground.[2] In the excavator's opinion,[3] this does not represent the original emplacement of the tablets; rather, he surmises that they were brought there to be consulted shortly before the conquest of the Palace and its subsequent destruction. It is this smaller archive which constitutes the basis of the article by Pettinato published here for the first time in English. The content was first presented as a paper in Rome at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in April 1975, and was promptly published in the fall issue of the journal *Orientalia* edited by the same Institute.[4]

It is a tribute to Pettinato that he was able to give so lucid and accurate a description of Eblaite in so short a time, and that his basic interpretation of the 1974 data was so demonstrably confirmed by the much larger amount of evidence which became available in 1975. Thus it is that the present translation can still serve a double function, four years after the publication of the original. First, the article maintains a classical value (as in the case of Matthiae's counterpart article[5]) as representing the first confrontation with a startling new body of evidence: it gives us a sense of what the discovery meant to the scholars who first experienced it, and it details the background against which it first acquired its meaning. Second, the article still provides a good overall documentary presentation of the language, however limited this initial body of evidence may have been.

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Pettinato alludes to the rather scanty evidence for the identification of Tell Mardikh as Ebla in his discussion of finds prior to the 1974 season. Until that time a stele of king Ibbiṭ-Lim, dedicated to the goddess Ištar, and fifteen Amorite Age tablets were all the epigraphic material found. With the discovery of forty-two tablets in Building G, the oldest cuneiform documents

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[1] See Fig. 1 for a schematic rendering of the findspots. For more details on the architectural setting see P. Matthiae, *Ebla: Un impero ritrovato*, Turin 1977, pp. 161-171. Id., "Preliminary Remarks on the Royal Palace of Ebla," in *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 2/2 (1978) with Ills. 13-15 and figures 2, 5-6.

[2] See Fig. 1; Matthiae, *Un impero ritrovato*, p. 161-171 and *SMS* 2/2, Ill. 12 and Fig. 2.

[3] Matthiae, *Un impero ritrovato*, p. 161.

[4] "Testi cuneiformi del 3. millennio in paleo-cananes rinvenuti nella campagna 1974 a Tell Mardikh=Ebla," *Orientalia* ns 44 (1975) 361-374. Translated by permission.

[5] P.Matthiae, "Ebla in the Period of the Amorite Dynasties and the Dynasty of Akkad: Recent Archaeological Discoveries at Tell Mardikh," *MANE* 1/6 (1979).

attested in Northern Syria (excluding possibly those of Tell Brak and Tell Chuera) were brought to light. These tablets Pettinato tentatively dates to the period between 2350-2250 B.C., based on comparison with the shape and usage of certain signs and a parallelism with the syllabary of cuneiform then in use in the Old Akkadian period. The preliminary examination of the tablets allowed for the identification of officials, month and year names, and industries practiced at Ebla. The latter included metallurgy, textiles, ceramics, and lumber which undoubtedly made Ebla the chief manufacturing town of Syria. It was also possible to conclude that Mari, long thought to be the paramount urban center of the Euphrates, was ruled by Ebla's kings.

More startling than the discovery of the tablets themselves was the positing by Pettinato of a new Northwest Semitic language, Eblaite, which used Sumerian writing but was different from Old Akkadian. The reading of Eblaite is facilitated, as Pettinato shows in detail, by an onomasticon (Tablet 120) composed by a student scribe. These first few tablets contained enough textual material to outline the nominal, pronominal, and verbal system in Eblaite. According to Pettinato, because the lexicon and verbal systems of Eblaite are different from Old Akkadian and the pronominal and verbal systems are dissimilar to Old Amorite, there is justification for calling this language Old Canaanite, based on its affinities with Canaanite and Phoenician languages.

Besides the linguistic definition of Eblaite, a number of new questions are raised in the article. The author accentuates the fact that (1) the understanding of the Ancient Near East in terms of geography and history must be changed; (2) the division of proto-Semitic and Semitic languages must be rethought; (3) the expansion of Sumerian cuneiform will have to be reassessed; and (4) many "firsts" attributed to Mesopotamia properly belong to Northern Syria.

Pettinato's background had prepared him well for facing the philological demands presented by the new texts. He had published extensively in the broad field of Mesopotamian philology, including Akkadian[6] and history[7] but specializing above all in Sumerian.[8] It is in this field that he began editing in 1974 (the same year the first archive was discovered at Ebla) a major series of data pertaining to Neo-Sumerian,[9] of which seven volumes have appeared to date. Given the important connections between the culture of Ebla and that of the Sumerian city-states in Southern Mesopotamia, Pettinato's qualifications were of special value by the time he began the initial interpretation of the epoch-making finds at Ebla. This will be clearly borne out by the text which follows.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Of the several articles published by Pettinato in the years intervening since the first appearance of his *Orientalia* article translated here, the most detailed one in terms of overall information is from 1977 in *Rivista Biblica Italiana*.[10] First the author gives an extenisve review of the types of texts found, from the statue of King Ibbiṭ-Lim found in 1968 (226f., with transliteration and translation of the text) to the 1975 archives, which include economic-administrative texts (228-230), historical and juridical texts (230f.), lexical texts (231), literary texts including 20 myths (231f.), and finally grammatical texts, including 114 tablets of three major vocabularies (232). The texts of 1976 fall into the same categories (233).

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[6] *Die Ölwahrsagung bei den Babyloniern*, 2 vols., Rome 1966.

[7] *Das altorientalische Menschenbild und die sumerischen und akkadischen Schöpfungsmythen*, Heidelberg 1971; "Il commercio con l'estero della Mesopotamia meridionale nel 3. millennio av. Cr. alla luce delle fonti letterarie e lessicali sumeriche," *Mesopotamia* 7 (1972) 43-166.

[8] See especially *Untersuchungen zur neusumerischen Landwirtschaft*, 2 vols., Naples 1967 and *Texte zur Verwaltung der Landwirtschaft in der Ur-III Zeit*, Rome 1969.

[9] *Materiali per il vocabolario neosumerico*, Rome 1974.

[10] "Gli archivi reali di Tell Mardikh-Ebla: Riflessioni e prospettive," *RBI* 25 (1977) 225-243.

As for the historical dimension, the author revises his earlier dating of the texts, which he places now around 2500 B.C. (The previous readings for Sargon and Akkad should be abandoned, and the major explicit links are instead with Kish and Abu Ṣalabikh, 233f.). The sequence of the kings is also readjusted (234f.) and the geographical scope of Ebla's far-flung connections is briefly described (235f.).

The systematic additions to the grammar (236f.) pertain especially to the pronominal system which adds the following elements to the ones already given in the *Orientalia* article for the personal pronoun:

nominative:	1.	sing.		*an-na*
	2.	sing.	m.	*an-tá*
	3.	sing.	m.	*šu$_{11}$*(SU)*-wa*
	2.	plur.	m.	*an-tá-nu*
oblique:	2.	sing.	m.	*ku-wa-ši*
	3.	sing.	m.	*šu$_{11}$*(SU)*-wa-ši*
accusative:	2.	sing.	m.	*ku-wa-ti*
	3.	sing.	m.	*šu$_{11}$*(SU)*-wa-ti.*

In addition see the indefinite pronoun *mi-nu-ma* "whatever," on pp. 239 and 240.

Also the following prepositions are listed:

in	locative
lí-na	dative
áš-tù	ablative
ší-in	direction toward
al	direction above
ka	comparative
a-dè	final

The author also notes (238) that only about 20% of the texts are written in Eblaite, while the remaining 80% is in Sumerian.

The article continues (238-242) with the transliteration, translation and commentary of an interesting letter apparently written by a minister of the king of Ebla to a minister of the king of Hamazi, a city which may be located as far afield as northern Iran. The letter stresses the good relationships between the two kingdoms, and refers to commercial exchange between them.

In the conclusion (242f.), Pettinato warns against the dangers of Paneblaitism, which would be as negative an influence as Panbabylonism and Panugaritism.

August 1979   Matthew L. Jaffe
                                                        Institute of Archaeology
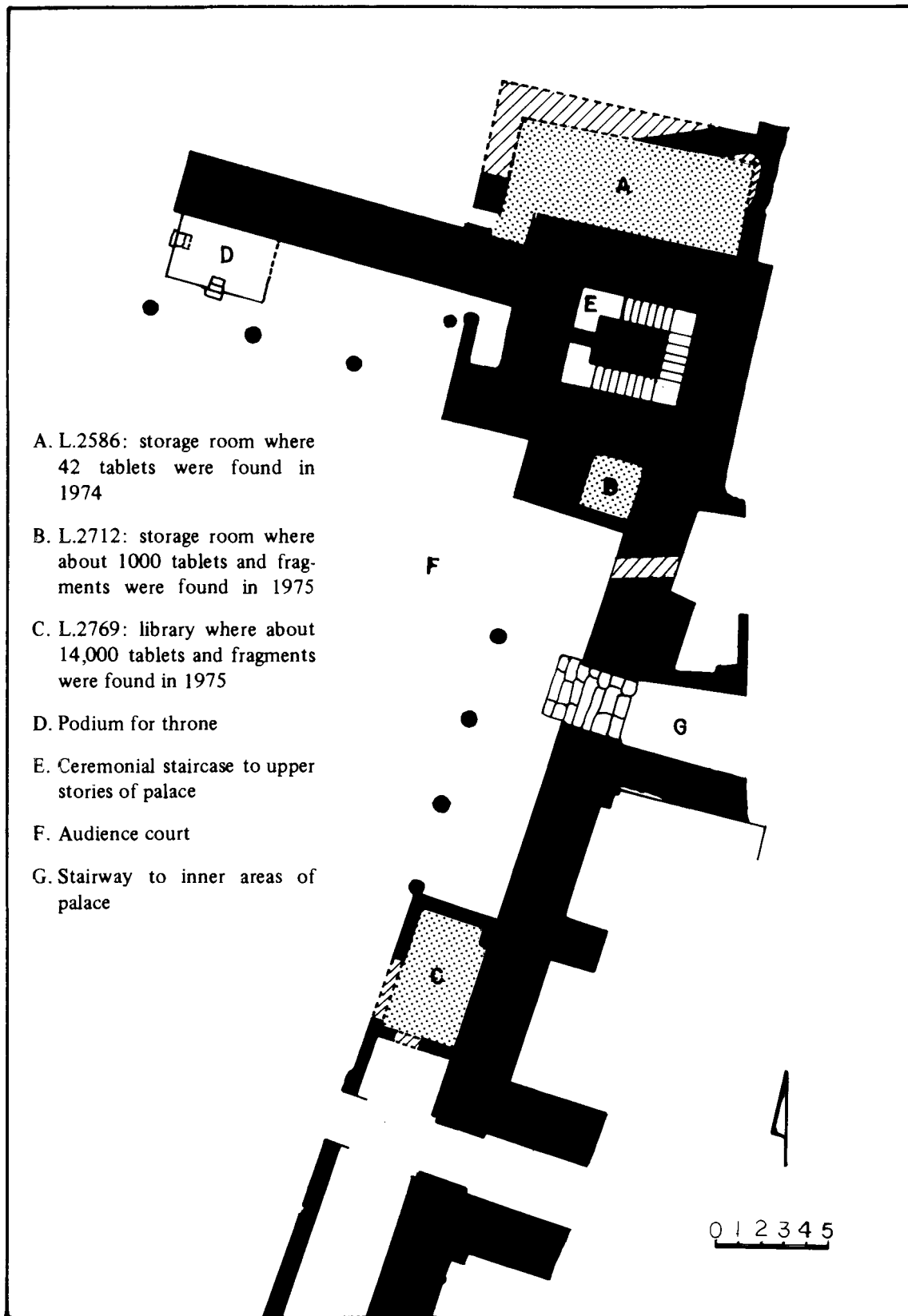   University of California, Los Angeles

A. L.2586: storage room where 42 tablets were found in 1974

B. L.2712: storage room where about 1000 tablets and fragments were found in 1975

C. L.2769: library where about 14,000 tablets and fragments were found in 1975

D. Podium for throne

E. Ceremonial staircase to upper stories of palace

F. Audience court

G. Stairway to inner areas of palace

Figure 1. Schematic View of Palace G at Ebla with Areas of Major Epigraphic Finds (　　　　).

OLD CANAANITE CUNEIFORM TEXTS
OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM
RECOVERED DURING THE 1974 SEASON
AT TELL-MARDIKH = EBLA*

Giovanni Pettinato
Rome

Introduction

The ancient Near East, the area of the Fertile Crescent, is still today, with regard to its history and geography, like a painting poorly executed, in which the artist has not succeeded in producing with his colors that balance of shadows and of light which is the expression of a perfect harmony. Whatever the merit of the simile, this is exactly the situation in which we find ourselves as scholars of the Ancient Near East—for next to areas which are brightly lit there are areas still left in complete darkness; hence the continuous effort to reclaim from obscurity new geographical areas, new historical periods, so as to reconstruct events and to allow ancient civilizations to rise from the slumber of the dead. Yet, however attractive such a mission might appear, requiring as it does the maximum collaboration among archaeologists, philologists and historians, one does not always have the good fortune to come out a winner from the struggle with the hard and arid terrain of excavation.

Northern Syria constitutes an example of the state of our studies. While Mesopotamia and Egypt have revealed to us their secrets so that we are able to follow their development for 5000 years, from 3000 B.C. onward, Northern Syria has remained till now an inexplicable mystery, above all in regard to the period of the Third Millennium B.C. If one excludes, in fact, the frontier zone such as, for example, Mari on the Euphrates and Chagar Bazar and Tell Brak in the valley of the Habur, which were touched directly by the expansion of Mesopotamian civilization, the center of Northern Syria has for long remained virgin soil. Hence, the decision of Professor Paolo Matthiae to undertake the excavation at Tell Mardikh, a tell with an area of 56 hectares situated 70 km south of Aleppo, with the precise purpose, in his own words, "to illuminate those important phases of the history of Syria" and in the hope that "those sites might throw some light precisely on the origins of urban civilization in those regions of Syria and on the nature and extent of their relationship with the remaining / Northern Syrian sphere and with that of Mesopotamia and Palestine."[1]

Yet, in spite of these excavations, H.S. Drower could still write in 1971 that nothing is known as yet with certainty as to the ethnic make-up and spoken language of the inhabitants of Northern Syria in the Third Millennium.[2] With no certain information to be had from direct local documentation, one had resorted to hypothesize either the presence of non-Semitic peoples[3] or else, at the opposite end, to identify such possible people with the Amorites attested several centuries later especially in the Mesopotamian sources which refer to Northern Syria.[4]

Up until 1973, the excavations at Tell Mardikh had yielded very little in the way of written documents: in the ten campaigns from 1964 to 1973 the only texts brought to light were the statue of Ibbit-Lim, king of Ebla, a fragment of a letter, and some administrative documents—15 altogether. Of these epigraphical documents belonging for the most part to the Amorite age of Ebla, i.e. the period from 2000 B.C. on and written in the Akkadian language, I have published only the statue.[5] The inscription of 26 lines, engraved transversally to the torso of the depicted person, records among other things the emplacement of a stele of the king Ibbit-Lim, son of Igriš-ḥepa, with a dedication to the goddess Ištar and with vows for his life and for the life of his son. The importance of such a discovery is twofold, at both the linguistic and the historical level. First, the language in which the inscription is written is late Old Akkadian, but presents several morphological ‘peculiarities which made it plausible for me to advance the hypothesis that it might as yet be possible to come up with a new dialect of Akkadian, like, for example, that of Mari.[6] Second, the mention of a king of Ebla, the city conquered by Sargon and by Narâm-Sîn and mentioned by Gudea and later sources, especially and frequently in documents of the third dynasty of Ur,[7] led Prof. P. Matthiae to propose the identification of Tell Mardikh with ancient Ebla,[8] with which I fully concurred.[9] Yet, such a proposal had aroused serious doubts:[10] for Ebla / in fact, several localizations have been proposed which have as a common denominator a 500 km distance from Tell Mardikh. Thus, it did not surprise us when, in 1974, D.O. Edzard and G. Farber were still skeptical with regard to the proposed identification Tell Mardikh=Ebla.[11]

[1] *MAIS, Rapporto preliminare della Campagna 1964*, (Rome 1965), 17.

[2] *CAH*, I/2 (Cambridge 1971), 319-321.

[3] S. Moscati, *I predecessori d'Israele*, (Rome 1956), 40-41.

[4] M. Liverani, "Per una considerazione storica del problema amorreo," *OrAn* 9 (1970), 5-27.

[5] G. Pettinato, *MAIS, Rapporto preliminare delle campagne 1967-1968*, (Rome 1972), 16-37 (advance offprint).

[6] *Ibid.* p. 17.

[7] For the epigraphical documentation on Ebla see G. Pettinato, *MAIS, Rapporto preliminare delle campagne 1967-1968*, 29-37; D. O. Edzard-G. Farber, *TAVO, Beiheft Reihe* B/7, *Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes*, Band 2, Wiesbaden 1974, 39; H. Helzer, *AIUON* 35 (1975) 298 ff.

[8] P. Matthiae, "Tell Mardikh (Syria). Excavation of 1967 and 1968," *Archaeology* 24 (1971) 60-61; "Mission Archéologique de l'Université de Rome à Tell Mardikh, Rapport sommaire sur la quatrième et la cinquième campagnes, 1967 et 1968," *AAAS* 20 (1970) 14-17.

[9] *MAIS, Rapporto preliminare delle campagne 1967-1968*, 37.

[10] M. Astour, "Tell Mardikh and Ebla," *UF* 3 (1971) 9 ss.

[11] *TAVO, Répertoire Géographique*, p.39

I. The Archive of Room 2586

But then came the 1974 excavation season; having reached a structure of Early Bronze IV, to be precise room 2586, at a 4 meter depth, there appeared a group of cuneiform tablets, which was to constitute the first complete archive uncovered *in situ* at Tell Mardikh. The archaeological context was clearly of the Third Millennium and more precisely 2300-2200 B.C.[12]; this allowed an approximate dating of the texts and gave proof of our having uncovered the most ancient cuneiform documents attested in the heart of Northern Syria.

1. Number and Form of the Tablets.

The archive consists of 42 tablets, including the fragments. They are of sun dried clay material. The fire of the palace has contributed to their hardening as they were baked and, in fact, they exhibit evident signs of burning; several have even become totally black. Notwithstanding this, or rather perhaps thanks to this, the major portion of the tablets were found in an excellent state of preservation.

With regard to the external form, the tablets are either round, more precisely of lenticular shape, or rectangular, but always with roundish edges. The size of the round tablets varies from a minimum of 2.6 cm to a maximum of 6 cm in diameter; the rectangular ones are mostly larger, reaching, like tablet TM 74 G. 120, the length of 8x9 cm on the side. Normally the writing is placed on both the obverse and the reverse of the tablet. Each side is divided into many columns varying in number from two to six; every column is further subdivided into registers, within which are incised the cuneiform characters. The order of the characters in the various registers normally corresponds to the direction in which they are read; there are however, frequent cases in which the scribe has not followed the direction of the reading when impressing the characters. /

2. Dating of the tablets

The fact just mentioned, besides the external shape of the tablets known in Mesopotamia in the pre-Sargonic periods, raises the question of their date. We have reported that the archaeological context suggests a date around 2300 B.C., more precisely, to the period of Narãm-Sîn as *terminus non post quem*: but this date is in the Sargonic period. What, then, do the internal arguments say?

In order to give an answer, we may for the moment use only the paleographic and linguistic criteria. If one studies the shape of the cuneiform characters attested in our tablets, one can readily see that the major part corresponds perfectly to those in use in Mesopotamia in the pre-Sargonic periods; among the various elements we point to the fact that the vertical wedge of the signs ŠU and DA always goes up from the base rather

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[12] For the archaeological context, see P. Matthiae, "Ebla nel periodo della dinastia amorrea e della dinastia di Accad. Scoperte archeologiche recenti a Tell Mardikh," *Or* 44 (1975) 337-360, tav. XXIX-XXXVIII [= *MANE* 1/6].

than the other way around, as happens instead in the texts of the Sargonic period. Passing next to the syllabary, the constant use of the prefix ba₄ may be noted in the verbal form šu ba₄-ti[13] in use in the texts from Fara and from Abū Salābikh. These elements would suggest a dating of the archive that would be in contrast with archaeological data, but other arguments such as the use of the verbal prefix i in the form i-na-sum[14] and the fact that the syllabary which is used is the one used in Mesopotamia starting from Sargon onward, permits us to date our tablets between 2350 and 2250 B.C., which corresponds to the Mesopotamian Old Akkadian period.[15]

3. Content of the Tablets

With the exception of tablet no. 120, to which we shall return later, the remaining 41 tablets form part of a unified palace archive regarding various types of industrial activity.

The texts are redacted according to the well known patterns of Sumerian administrative texts / even as to style: first, the name of the item, then the person who consigned it, the official of the state who received it and, sometimes the addition of the month and the year in which the transaction took place. We have cases in which the pattern is simpler in that items and persons, or even the items alone, are mentioned without any verb.

The industrial activities carried out at Ebla, based on our documentation, are those pertaining to metals, textiles, ceramics, and lumber. Very important is the first, documented in 16 texts, from which we learn about the processing of gold, silver, copper and other kinds of metals. Of the various objects in gold we cite rings,[16] an emblem and a scepter,[17] goblets,[18] nails,[19] etc.; whereas silver items include gazelles,[20] vases,[21] objects defined as "fish eyes."[22]

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[13] TM 74 G. 101 Rev. 1 2; 107 Obv. II 2; 111 Obv. I 3; 121 Rev. I 4 and *passim*.

[14] TM 74 G. 102 Rev. I 1; II 3; 113 Obv. I 2, 128 Obv. III 4' and *passim*.

[15] If the use of archaic characters at Ebla can be easily explained with reference to the well known phenomenon of the cultural retardation of provincial zones, this on the other hand does not exclude that such type of writing had already reached Syria much earlier than 2300 B.C. It is very probable indeed that the cuneiform writing was introduced in North Syria towards 2600 B.C. The expansion of Mesopotamian Sumerian civilization in the protodynastic period did not stop, therefore, in the Syrian zones across the Euphrates and the Habur, but certainly extended up to Ebla in the heart of North Syria.

Another observation seems to us even more earth-shaking; the syllabary used in our texts is identical to that used in Mesopotamia in the Sargonic period; thus one has to ask oneself whether the adaptation of the logographic Sumerian system to express a Semitic language (i.e. its transformation into a syllabic system) did not occur precisely in Syria and not in Mesopotamia as the common opinion of the Assyriologists would have it. See note 107.

[16] TM 74 G. 112 Obv. 1; 2 *má-ḫu ḫu-tá-mu* guškin "2 (measures of) *Maḫu*—weight of rings of gold"; Obv. II 1: 2 *má-ḫu ḫu-tá-mu* mušen guškin"2 (measures of) *Maḫu*—weight of rings of gold for birds."

[17] TM 74 G. 101 Obv. I 1: 1ᵍⁱˢ Pʊ̀-2 guškin maš-maš gibil *wa* ᵍⁱˢgidri "1 double ᵍⁱˢPu - measure of gold (for the) new emblem and a scepter.

[18] TM 74 G. 124 Obv. I 3: 1 *mi-at* 53 ᵟᵉ guškin "153 goblets of gold".

[19] TM 74 G. 119 Obv. 1 1: 10 kak-kak *kuₓ-tim* "10 studs of gold".

[20] TM 74 G. 65 Obv. I 1: 2 *á-al* ku-babbar "2 gazelles of silver".

In second place is the textile industry: we find attested woven goods made on a loom or woven by hand, especially linen.[23] Such cloths are of varying quality and of diverse color: it will be interesting to note the mention of cloth qualified as ni-su$_4$ "red", which cannot but remind us of the purple of the First Millennium.[24]

The ceramic industry deals above all with the manufacture of vases of various types and the lumber industry with decorative objects and agricultural instruments.

Even these succinct remarks will give an idea of the extraordinary richness of the city of Ebla in the Third Millennium, but from the same texts, above all from those which concern messengers, we learn that Ebla was a commercial center which imported raw material on the one hand and exported manufactured goods on the other; the various objects mentioned above did not serve, in fact, solely for the city, but were explicitly destined (ni-kas$_4$)[25] for trade with cities such as Mari[26] Tuttul,[27] Nahur,[28] Uršum,[29] Zašilu,[30] etc.

/ Finally, I must mention two texts: a tag of the type affixed to a basket where the tablets were kept,[31] and the text TM 74 G. 133 which lists rations of bread, wheat and barley for deities, priests, functionaries, messengers and soldiers. Now text no. 120, which does not form part of the administrative archive, remains to be examined.

II. Historical Data Contained in the Texts from Ebla

1. Identification of Tell Mardikh with Ebla.

I have mentioned above the perplexity aroused by the proposed identification of Tell Mardikh with ancient Ebla, and, to tell the truth, we too were curious to know whom the texts would have proven correct: well, in our archive Ebla is mentioned twice, and in different texts.[32] It is especially the mention in text no. 120, containing a list of names of persons attested at Ebla, which leaves no room for doubt or skepticism. At this point we cannot help having to revise the political geography of Northern Syria.

Unfortunately, we know little or nothing about the structure of the state of Ebla in the period of our archive: it is certain that all the industry and trade were in the hands of the sovereign, but this does not constitute a new fact in the area of the Ancient Near East. From the texts we learn only the name of the king of Ebla, Ibbi-sipiš[33] which

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[21] TM 74 G. 117 Obv. II 4: 1 ^{gis}qu tu$_x$-ru-pu kù-babbar "1 vase (of the type) Turupu of silver."

[22] TM 74 G. 117 Obv. II 3: 1 igi-ku$_6$-bil-ga kù-babbar "1 eye of Bilga-fish of silver."

[23] Cf. TM 74 G. 103 Obv. 1 3: 5 gada-túg "5 materials of linen."

[24] TM 74 G. 132 Obv. 1 2.

[25] TM 74 G. 104 Obv. II 4; 114 Obv. II 3; 121 Rev. II and *passim*.

[26] TM 74 G. 102 Rev. 1 5.

[27] TM 74 G. 110 Rev. 2.

[28] TM 74 G. 109 Obv. 1 3.

[29] TM 74 G. 129. Obv. 1 2.

[30] TM 74 G. 113 Obv. II 2.

[31] TM 74 G. 130.

[32] TM 74 G 109 Obv.II 1; 120 Obv. IV 5.

[33] TM 74 G. 102 Obv. II 3; 128 Obv. III 2?; 135 Obv. III 3.

means "(the god) Sipiš has called."[34] Very interesting from a historical point of view is the title attributed to Ibbi-Sipiš, i.e. EN = *mālikum* "sovereign, king." It was not that Ebla was ignorant of the term lugal common in Mesopotamia, inasmuch as they used it to designate the "king of Mari" (lugal-ma-rí[ki]). [35] If it is permissible to advance a hypothesis, I would like to see in the use of en for sovereign an evident reference to the traditions of Uruk in Mesopotamia and consequently an influence of Uruk on the terminology of Ebla.

2. Year Names Attested and Historical Consequences.

The three year names attested in our tablets begin with the indication DIŠ mu which is well known from the Mesopotamian dating of the Old-Akkadian period.[36] Of these, two refer to events that concern the / city of Mari. Especially interesting for its historical consequences is the dating of text no. 101:

> DIŠ mu *šu-ra* lugal-ma-rí[ki]
> "Year in which Šura became king of Mari."

Šura is, in fact, the name of the brother of Ibbi-Sipiš, sovereign of Ebla, so that in the name of the year we find preserved the recollection of the enthronement of a prince of Ebla as king of Mari.[37] The significance of this remark is truly sensational, for it allows us to catch a glimpse of the political game of the two strongest centers of Syria in the period: Ebla and Mari. Mari, which in the pre-Sargonic period had been a powerful center, appears from the excavations to have been in a state of inexplicable decline in the Old Akkadian period, while it flourished again in the Old Babylonian period. And now here is perhaps the explanation of such a fact: the predominance in Syria in the Old Akkadian period was held by Ebla, as our date formula informs us.

III. The Language of the Tablets from Ebla.

1. Bilingualism and Decipherment.

It is not possible to begin even a succinct summary of the grammar of our texts without mentioning briefly the key that allowed me to decipher this new Semitic language. It is necessary to emphasize that it was not a question of deciphering the script, but rather of identifying the language rendered by the cuneiform writing.

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[34] *Sipiš* is none other than the sun god, the Mesopotamian *šamaš*, the Ugaritic *špš*; the vocalization *si-piš* that is necessary for Ugaritic, recalls the Hebrew name *Simšôn* and the same *šemeš* from *šimš*.

[35] TM 74 G. 101 Rev. II 3.

[36] TM 74 G. 101; 102; 126.

[37] This fact has been ascertained thanks to the epigraphical discovery of 1975 (see note 107). At first I had proposed the translation "year of the defeat of the king of Mari" on the basis of the correspondence šu-ra = *maḫāṣum*. The historical conclusions which are drawn here have even greater value with the new translation.

On the basis of both the paleographic character and the archaeological context, the languages I expected to find were only two: Sumerian and Old Akkadian. Other languages written in cuneiform in so ancient a period were as yet unknown to us. Now while the texts fully confirmed the use of Sumerian, they showed no trace of Old Akkadian. On the other hand, given the particular type of the texts, written by scribes who handled both languages with equal ease, it was almost impossible to fully understand one particular tablet, where Sumerian words alternated with words written in this language which still remained incomprehensible.

But it was precisely the distinct bilingualism of the scribes themselves that offered me the key for deciphering the language of Ebla: several tablets carried at the end the Sumerian notation dub-gar which means "written tablet, / redacted document";[38] now in two other tablets we found in the same position two cuneiform characters with the Sumerian values gál and balag,[39] which however do not make any sense. These same two characters have, however, the well-documented values of *ig/k* and *d/túb* which constitute, when joined together, the verbal form *ik-túb* from the West Semitic root *ktb* "to write," which cannot but express the same idea as dub-gar. The identification of a verbal root unknown in East Semitic, i.e., Akkadian, and typical of West Semitic, has permitted me to direct all my endeavors toward this area, with the gratifying result of finding attested in cuneiform a Northwest Semitic language in such an ancient period, so as to truly constitute a revolution parallel to that of the discovery of Ugaritic in 1930.

I especially noted the ease with which the scribes of our tablets pass from the use of Sumerian to that of the language of Ebla; for we have 115 Sumerian terms as opposed to 100 Eblaite, but it is a question, in my judgement, of a merely apparent bilingualism: I am convinced that Sumerian terms are in reality logograms which the scribes, at the time of reading, changed without any difficulty into their own language. The Sumerian verbs, in fact, like the already cited dub-gar, and also gi_4, íla, etc., are used without conjugation prefixes, something inconceivalble if the texts had been read in Sumerian. But also those verbal forms like i-na-sum "he had given to him," where we find the prefixes and the infixes, betray their nature as fossilized and stereotyped forms: precisely in this tablet, in fact, where í-na-sum appears, the normal phrase lacks the terminative. For such reasons I maintain that our tablets were read in the Eblaite language.

2. Old-Canaanite terms in the texts from Ebla.

It is impossible to review here all the terms encountered in our texts, hence I shall limit myself to citing only a few examples, beginning with words which recur outside of personal names:

    wa   "and" (conjunction)[40]

[38] TM 74 G. 101 Rev. I 3; 123 Rev. II.
[39] TM 74 G. 105 Rev. II 4; 114 Rev. II 4.
[40] TM 74 G. 65 Rev. I 1 4 and *passim*.

ḫu-tá-mu	"ring"[41]
še	"goblet"[42]
lu-bù-gu	"awl"[43] /
kuₛ-tim	"gold"[44]
má-ḫu	"weight"[45]
qà-šù	"bow"[46]
ši-in	"gift?"[47]
ši-ti	"drink"[48]
tam-mim	"perfect"[49]

It behooves us now to examine, however briefly, tablet no. 120, already mentioned. I have pointed out that it constitutes something unique, containing as it does only personal names in use at Ebla, as revealed by column IV of the recto. It is certainly a school text— clearly the exercise of a student, who had not only to write names but also to compose them. The tablet is divided into two parts: the first contains a series of names actually in use in the onomasticon of Ebla; even though there are interruptions, it seems that they are sorted on the basis of the second element which is a divine name.[50] Here are a few examples:

     a)   names with the god Damu:

             lam-re-ši-Da-mu[51]
             en-àr-Da-mu[52]
             ši-ga-Da-mu[53]
             i-bí-Da-mu[54]
             lam-en-ut-Da-mu[55]

     b)   names with the god Lim:

             a-dar-Li-im[56]

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[41] TM 74 G. 112 Obv. I 1, II 1; cf. the Hebrew *ḥôtām* "seal."
[42] TM 74 G. 105 Rev. I 1; 114 obv. I 1, Rev. I 1; and *passim*; cf. Ugaritic *ṣ* "goblet".
[43] TM 74 G. 108 Obv. I 1 2; cf. the Akkadian root *lbk* and Arabic *lubġat*.
[44] TM 74 G. 119 Obv. I 1; cf. Hebrew *ketem*.
[45] TM 74 G. 112 Obv. I 1; II 1; 108 obv. I 1.2 and *passim*; cf. Phoenician *mlḥr*.
[46] TM 74 G. 101 Obv. II 1 and *passim*; cf. the root *qšt* in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew, *qws* in Arabic.
[47] TM 74 G. 110 Rev. 1, 114 Rev. II 3 and *passim*; cf. the root *šin* in Ugaritic.
[48] TM 74 G. 121 Obv. I 1; cf. common Semitic *šty*.
[49] TM 74 G. 121 Obv. I 1; cf. Hebrew *tāmîm*.
[50] TM 74 G. 120 Obv. I 1-IV 5.
[51] TM 74 G. 120 Obv. I 1.
[52] *Ibid.*, Obv. II 1.
[53] *Ibid.*, Obv. II 2.
[54] *Ibid.*, Obv. II 3.
[55] *Ibid.*, obv. III 3.
[56] *Ibid.*, Obv. II 4.

a-bur-Li-im[57]
ri-da-Li-im[58]
i-bí-ni-Li-im[59] /

The first part concludes with a phrase which refers to the provenience of the names which precede:

sí-alu
[a-]mi-ú
iš₁-ú-nu
kul-ši-nu
eb-la[60]

for which I propose the following (word by word) translation: "we name these men all of Ebla," meaning that these are the names typical of the men of Ebla.

The second part follows the compositional canons of the Mesopotamian list of personal names; here the formative element of the personal name precedes the names with which they are formed:[61]

a)   names with the element *ṭù-bí*   "my goodness"

ṭù-bí-TI
ṭù-bí-Da-mu
ṭù-bí-AB[62]
ṭù-bí-BE
ṭù-bí-Da-lu[63]

b)   names with the element *du-bù-ḫu* "feast"

du-bù-ḫu-ma-lik
du-bù-ḫu-ia
du-bu-ḫu-ù[64]

c)   names with the element *en-na*   "he bestows grace"

en-na-i-lí
en-na-Da-lu
en-na-Ma-lik[65]

d)   names with the element *en-ṣi*   "my protection"

en-ṣi-Ma-lik

[57] *Ibid.*, Obv. II 5.
[58] *Ibid.*, Obv. II 6.
[59] *Ibid.*, Obv. III 4.
[60] *Ibid.*, Obv. V 4ff.
[61] *Ibid.*, Obv. V 4.
[62] *Ibid.*, Obv. V 5-7.
[63] *Ibid.*, Rev. I 2-3; this section continues up to line 6.
[64] *Ibid.*, Rev. II 2-4.
[65] *Ibid.*, Rev. II 7ff.

en-ṣi-[ ][66]

e)   names with the element *eb-du*   "servant"

eb-du-Ma-lik
eb-du-ᵈRa-sa-ap[67]

f)   names with the element *ip-ḫur*   "he has gathered"

ip-ḫur-ᵈKUR-RA
ip-ḫur-ᵈè-da
ip-ḫur-Ma-lik[68]

This tablet reveals to us the existence at Ebla of a school tradition, which cannot but make us hope for other discoveries of written documents.

3. Structure of the language of Ebla.

Having quoted some examples, drawn from both the economic and the onomastic context, I will attempt to describe the structure of the new language, in respect to its main traits, with special attention to morphological elements.

a) *The noun and the nominal formations*. The types attested are: qal,[69] qil,[70] qul,[71] qīl,[72] qūl,[73] qall,[74] qill,[75] qull,[76] qatl,[77] qitl,[78] qutl,[79] qatāl,[80] qitāl,[81] qitīl,[82] qutil,[83] qutul.[84] Of the types of formations with preformatives, I cite: aqtal,[85] aqtul.[86] As afformatives, one finds *-ūt* (for abstracts), *-ān* and *-ayum*. For the sake of completeness, I also record the afformative *-at* for the feminine and *-ūnu* for the plural.

[66] *Ibid.*, Rev. III 6 f.
[67] *Ibid.*, Rev. V 1ss.
[68] *Ibid.*, Rev. V 4-6.
[69] *'ab* (> *a-bù*); *'ad* > *a-da-núm* and passim.
[70] *yid* (> *i-di-lum*); *'l* (> *i-lí*).
[71] *ṭup* (> *ṭuₓ-pu*).
[72] *'yš* (> *iš₄*).
[73] *ṭub* (> *ṭù-bí*); *dwm* (> *du-mu*).
[74] *hann* (> *hann* + *ūt* > *en-ut*).
[75] *ziqq* (> *zi-qà*).
[76] *lupp* (> *lu-pù*).
[77] *'bd* (> *eb-du*).
[78] *šity* (> *ši-ti*).
[79] *puzr* (> *puzur₄-ra-lí*).
[80] *'ayāl* (> *á-al*).
[81] *išār* (> *i-šar*).
[82] *'zīl* (> *i-zi-lum*).
[83] *kutim* (> *kuₓ-tim*).
[84] *dubuḫ* (> *du-bù-ḫu*).
[85] *aḫ'ay* (> *a-ḫa-a*).
[86] *arkuḫ* (> *ár-ku-ḫu*).

Still with regard to noun morphology, we must note the absence of noun declension: as many as 26 nouns end in zero, 22 in -*u*, 7 in -*um*, while we have only four nouns in -*a* (of which two are uncertain) and finally none in -*i*. This would seem to confirm the hypothesis that final -*u* does not express so much the nominative in this period, as rather, the emphatic state as has been proposed.

b) *The pronominal system.* The following personal pronominal suffixes are attested:

1.	sing.	m:	-*i*[87] -*ni*[88] /
3.	sing.	m:	-*šu*
3.	pl.	m:	-*šinu*

As for the demonstrative pronouns we have *ammiu*, while for the determinatives *ši* is attested, and *mī* "who" for the interrogatives.[89]

The following prepositions may be noted: *in* for the locative, *ka* for the comparative and -*iš* for the terminative. I have already quoted earlier the conjunction *wa* to which we may add the asseverative particles *lam* as well as emphatic *l*-.

c) *The verbal system.* Up till now, the conjugations attested in our tablets are the following:

I	Basic	*qatal/qatul*	(=qal)
II	Intensive	*qittil*	(=pi''el)
III	Causative	*šiqtil*	(=šifil)
IV	Passive II	*quttal*	(=pu''al)

The tenses[90] of the various conjugations documented are the stative, the preterite, the participle and the infinitive for the first conjugation; the stative for the second; the stative and the participle for the third; and the stative for the fourth. Here are some examples:

I Basic	stative	3	sing.	*a-dar*[91]
				é-da-š-(u)[92]
		2	sing.	*ša-bu-tá*[93]
	preterite	3	sing.	*ik-túb*[94]
				ik-šu_{ll}-ud[95]

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[87] Attested with nouns and prepositions.

[88] Attested with verbs.

[89] In the personal name *mi-kà-ia* "Who is like Ia?"

[90] With regard to terminology I call here Stative the perfect tense of the Semitic language or the tense without prefixes; the preterite corresponds to the present-future of the Semitic languages or prefixed tense.

[91] < '*dr* "to be strong," attested in the personal name *a-dar-Li-im*.

[92] < *hdš* "to be new," attested in the personal name *é-da-šù*.

[93] < *šbw* "to shout" personal name.

[94] < *ktb* "to write," attested outside of personal names.

II	Intensive	stative	3	sing.	*ši-ga* (<*šigga'*)[98]
					ri-da (<*ridday*)[99]
			2	sing.	*sí-lim-ta* (<*sillimta)*[100]
III	Causative	stative	3	sing.	*sin₇-pi₅-l(a-nu)*[101]
		participle			*ma-ši-ù-du*[102] /
IV	Passive II	stative	3	sing.	*su-na*[103]

At this point some considerations of a general nature are necessary, which I consider fundamental for an understanding of the verb and the eventual reconstructions of Semitic, especially Northwest Semitic of the Third Millennium:

1) First of all one must emphasize the presence of the prefix *i* in the preterite, as attested in Akkadian and as different from Amorite, where there is *ya*. This fact confirms Barth's rule.

2) In the conjugations *qittil* and *šiqtil* the prevalence of the vowel *i* as well as the presence of *š* in the causative conjugations; hence we have the *š* of East Semitic and the vowel *i* of West Semitic.

3) The value of the tense with prefixes which I have called preterite is in effect that of the past just as in Akkadian and Amorite and not that of present-future.

4) Finally the lack of final *-a* must be pointed out both in the form *qatal* as well as in the form *iqtul*, which renders useless so many reconstructions of proto-Semitic based almost exclusively on Arabic.

4. The Position of the language of Ebla among the Semitic languages

The description of the verbal system, presented here, however schematically, together with the remarks on the nominal and pronominal system, permits us to incorporate the language of Ebla into the West Semitic group. The hypothesis advanced by W. von Soden that one day one would perhaps find a "*Westakkadisch*" in Syria in the Third Millennium has not been substantiated. But the eminent scholar has had the merit of having singled out in the Amorite material the presence of elements which only poorly fit the structure of that language: he had in fact rightly written that it was hardly thinkable that in the same verb the verbal prefix was at one time *-ya* and at another *i-*. It is certainly necessary to recognize that von Soden had come very close to isolating the elements of our language both in the Amorite and the Old Akkadian material, but he had not been fortunate in proposing to call such elements Old

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[97] <*'ḥz* "to take," attested outside of personal names.

[98] <*šg'* "to be great," attested in the personal name *ši-ga-Da-mu*.

[99] <*rdy* "to govern," attested in the personal name *ri-da-Li-im*.

[100] <*slm* "to be in good health," personal name.

[101] <*npl* "to fall," personal name.

[102] <*'wd* "to be curved," attested as a name of an object.

[103] <*sn'* "to be quiet," attested in the personal name *su-na-a-lí*.

Amorite,[104] for, as Buccellati has demonstrated, Old Amorite is not very different from classical Amorite.[105]

The language of Ebla as attested in our texts is distinguished clearly both from Old Akkadian (for the lexicon and the verbal system) and from Old Amorite (pronominal system and verbal system); for such a reason, besides its strict relationship with the language of Canaan of the First Millennium, above all with Phoenician and Hebrew, I propose to define it as Old-Canaanite. /

With the language of Ebla we thus confront the most ancient language of Northwest Semitic, parallel to Old Akkadian in East Semitic. As a result, Amorite is reduced, as my colleague Garbini rightly maintains, to its true dimensions of an innovative and later language.[106] Finally, I am convinced that thanks to this new language not only can certain phenomena of Ugaritic such as the use of *šafel* be better explained, without recourse to distant Akkadian, but also Phoenician and Hebrew can be much better understood.

I cannot conclude this contribution without stressing once more the revolutionary and explosive character of the archive of Ebla: if, as I hope, the hypotheses and interpretations advanced above are substantiated, it is clear that many historical facts will have to be reviewed and that the geography of the Ancient Near East will have to be written anew—this time, however, with more foundation and seriousness; also, all the proposed reconstructions for proto-Semitic and the same division of the Semitic languages will have to be revised; and finally the problem of the expansion of the Sumerian cuneiform system in the area of the Near East will have to be studied again, in depth, as well as the adaptation of the same for expressing the Semitic languages. It should not astonish us, I believe, if many "firsts" attributed to Mesopotamia may not in fact turn out to belong to Northern Syria.[107]

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[104] W. von Soden, "Zur Einteilung der semitischen Sprachen," *WZKM* 56 177-191.

[105] *The Amorites of the Ur III Period*, Naples 1966.

[106] G. Garbini, *Le Lingue semitiche*, Naples 1972, 66.

[107] This completely new note (see the date at the end) will inform the scholars of the discovery of two archives of cuneiform texts clearly dating to the period corresponding to Mesopotamian Old Akkadian, for a total of about 15,000 inventory items. The archives which constitute part of the royal library of Ebla comprise, based on a glimpse of the first 10,000 items, the following categories of texts: economic (of an administrative and commercial type), historical, literary, lexical and among these the most ancient bilingual vocabulary (Sumerian- Eblaite) known so far. We are glad to announce that all the hypotheses advanced in this contribution, which goes back to April 1975, and which is based on data obtained from the archive uncovered in 1974, have been fully confirmed: 1) Tell Mardikh is now securely and definitely identified with Ebla; 2) Mari was in this period under the domination of Ebla, whose political control clearly extended a great deal beyond Northern Syria; 3) the language of Ebla, thanks especially to the vocabulary and to the historical and literary texts, belongs to the Northwest Semitic group and can be conventionally defined as Old Canaanite (October 30, 1975).

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