

Ebla: A Third-Millennium City-State in Ancient Syria

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EVER SINCE ITS third-millennium palace and its rich archives of cuneiform tablets were uncovered, the ancient city of Ebla has provided exceptional information on the development of urban culture in the ancient Near East. The discoveries took place at a site called Tell Mardikh, lying some 40 miles (65 kilometers) south of Aleppo in Syria, and they have energized today's research on antiquity in ways paralleled during the twentieth century only by the recovery of Mari (Tell Hariri) and Ugarit (Ras Shamra). Ebla's impressive architectural remains and its use of a heretofore unknown Semitic language in the writing of documents are yielding new data on the history and population of the third millennium in Syria, revolutionizing our appreciation of how urbanization took place there and in adjacent areas, deepening our knowledge of the formation of states, and challenging our perception of how writing spread throughout western Asia. Yet because the Ebla archives and now those of Tell Beydar (near Hassake) remain unique in Syria of the third millennium, until we find other archives of equal antiquity in the same area, any conclusion or paradigm that we propose is for the time being valid only for Ebla and useful only provisionally for comparative purposes.

An attempt will be made in this essay to focus on some of the most meaningful mechanisms of cultural interaction and adaptation that are documented at Ebla in a variety of aspects of social and institutional life—from the use of

writing to the organization of labor, from cultic practices to the management of power. As typical in most societies, the original features of Ebla emerge from a complex mixture of borrowings and local traditions, whose significance and import can be better perceived from a diachronic perspective: some of these features, as we will see later, disappear quite abruptly with the eclipse of the city-state that flourished in the Early Bronze Age IV period, while some others survive through the major changes affecting the history of the Syrian kingdoms in the second millennium BCE.

URBANIZATION

The building of the Royal Palace G on the acropolis of Tell Mardikh marks the culmination of a process that can be framed in the context of a widespread cultural trend commonly labeled as "Secondary Urbanization." It refers to the intense urban growth during the middle of the third millennium BCE, happening in areas heretofore not affected (or only slightly affected) by urbanization. While we still debate the socioeconomic conditions responsible for it, the trend is recognizable at a number of archaeological sites in Syria and upper Mesopotamia where major changes in the scale and complexity of individual settlements demonstrate a transition to urbanized society.

An appreciable stretch of time separates this

secondary urbanization from the expansion of "Uruk" culture of around 3200–3000, in which Sumerian colonies were scattered along trade routes linking the ancient Near East. Ephemeral though they may have been, these colonial outposts affected local cultural developments: west of the Euphrates, in central and northern Syria, where the Late Uruk influence had been somewhat sporadic, urbanization developed at a lower speed and displayed some cultural fragmentation. In northeast Syria, in the upper Khabur and Balikh river basins and as far as the upper Tigris region, Uruk culture influenced the development of a more cohesive system of territorial organization.

We should keep this outline of regional development in mind when comparing the situation documented at Ebla with what has been learned from other sites located in upper Mesopotamia, where extensive surveys and excavations have shown a similar pattern of urban growth. East of Jebel (Mount) Sinjar and in the Khabur River region, the trend toward new urbanization affected some communities with shared and homogeneous traditions. The transition to full urban characteristics (dramatic increase in size, fortifications, "public" buildings, and evidence for a specialized bureaucracy) occurred as early as about 2600 BCE, equivalent to the beginning of the Early Dynastic III in Mesopotamia. At the same time an intense cultural, and probably political, interaction developed between these northern areas and southern Mesopotamia, re-establishing a link that had been interrupted for many centuries. Tell Leilan (ancient Shekhna/Shubat-Enlil), Tell Brak and Tell Mozan in the Khabur "triangle," and Tell Taya on the Wadi Tharthar all participated in this development, although evidence from these sites shows that they did not all do so at the same time nor to the same degree.

EBLA AND SECONDARY URBANIZATION

Even when it participated in the secondary urbanization, Ebla followed its own path, differing in the timing, the rhythm, and the cultural framing of the process. The initial phases of the occu-

pation of Tell Mardikh (Early Bronze I–II) are very poorly documented. Although Uruk pottery is found in other parts of Syria (not only in the Sumerian colonies along the Euphrates, but also in the Amuq region and at Abu Danneh, some 20 miles [32 kilometers] east of Aleppo), it is absent from Tell Mardikh and thus any direct influx from southern Mesopotamia in such an early period appears to be excluded. At Ebla, the trend toward urbanization seems to have developed basically on local ground, as well as in the wider context of northern and central Syria (Amuq, Hama), which share one and the same sequence of cultural phases.

The Royal Palace G, built on the acropolis of Tell Mardikh, gives evidence of a complex shift from the proto-urban collection of structures of the Early Bronze III to a city spreading over 56 hectares (140 acres) by the Early Bronze (EB) IVA (circa 2400–2200 BCE). The shift is steady and involves a preadaptation stage (EB IVA₁) that is reflected by a series of superimposed floors, north of the Ceremonial Staircase, where food was processed. The poor structures of the building G₂ (EB III) are replaced by the store-rooms and workshops of a new palace that is constructed in several phases. By the end of the process (Mardikh IIB₁), the building reflects well the individual pattern of the city's growth, where the service sectors of the palace were set at the core of the EB III settlement, while the ceremonial quarters, including the Audience Court and the Royal Apartments, were located at the periphery, on the western slope of the tell. Two rooms set aside for the palace archives were included in the reshaping of the original court, indicating that the redistribution of palace space paralleled the increasingly complex administrative specialization, with a broader role assigned to administration and accounting.

On archaeological grounds, the urban development of Mardikh IIB₁ and that of other sites belonging to the same ceramic horizon (the so-called calciform culture of northern Syria) started a little later than in the sites of the upper Khabur area. It is not easy to identify the factors that account for this gap, given the fact that in both cases the development has a local ("endogenous") basis, and is framed in the context of analogous economic organization (dry farming, extensive animal rearing). Technological

changes might be a clue to the problem, but that is yet to be investigated. It is clear, however, that the speed of the urbanization process at Ebla, once it was initiated, increased very rapidly: the introduction of writing cannot antedate the brief phase of proto-urban adaptation of the EB IVA₁, and yet in a span of about two hundred years a good deal of the Sumerian literary and school tradition had been assimilated by the Ebla scribes, who also adopted the cuneiform script to write original works in their own language.

The rise of Ebla as a state formation possibly can be viewed in terms of adaptation to a socio-political trend taking place in the Early Dynastic period. Ebla was one of a number of local cities that were affected by the emergence of a new "Mesopotamian frontier" (with the formation of Early Dynastic city-states and long-distance trade) that aimed to present themselves as independent political powers. Its rise as a state was based on a particular form of territorial control that, to fulfill its "capital city" expectation, required it to create a peripheral, administrative network. Moreover, because of the low yields of rain-dependent agriculture and the necessity for a vast area to pasture flocks that are characteristic of north Syria, Ebla could not easily match the economic growth, and hence also the political system, of contemporaneous Mesopotamia. Ebla's power, therefore, depended on its political hegemony over a territory dotted with autonomous minor urban centers that were nevertheless forced to cede to the main center (Ebla) grazing rights for its flocks and free circulation of its goods.

KINGSHIP AND SOCIETY

During the period reflected in the palace archives, there were three kings of Ebla: Igrish-Khalam, Irkab-Damu, and Ishar-Damu (see Table 1). The first two are cited as EN Ebla^{ki}, "King of Ebla," in administrative texts, while Ishar-Damu occurs at the beginning of one document, a school exercise, that records the name of Ebla's preceding rulers in reverse order (TM.75.G.120). According to this, Ishar-Damu is likely to have been the final king of Ebla before the city was

set on fire (circa 2350 BCE): his name is rarely found in the record because the ruling king was simply called "king" (EN), omitting his personal name. There is also a document (ARET 7, text 150) that records the sacrifice of sheep at a town named Darib (also attested as Darab) to the divinized memory of Irkab-Damu, Igrish-Khalam, and eight earlier kings listed by name. The cult of dead kings seems to be linked to the Eblaeen notion of kingship, and this is why some of the names of previous rulers are occasionally mentioned in the texts as recipients of offerings.

It is risky to give the two documents cited above one and the same value with regard to the true succession of the Ebla kings. Actually, the document that cites Ishar-Damu is simply a list of personal names, with no practical purpose, and contains more than seventy names, most of which are never found in the administrative records. This list may be reliable as concerns the most recent group of rulers (particularly those occurring in the same order in the list of sacrifices), while for the rest it is likely shaped by ideology rather than by any attachment to historical accuracy. It can be argued that when kingship became consolidated at Ebla, a canonical sequence of kings was set up, chosen from the names of tribal chiefs who were buried and traditionally worshiped at various locales in the kingdom.

Darib was such a place, and Binash was likely another; during ceremonies accompanying the enthronement of an Ebla king and his spouse, offerings and sacrifices were presented there to three of the dead kings in the dynasty.

KINGSHIP AT EBLA

About the nature of kingship and the prerogatives of kings, the Ebla tablets give few insights. EN and LUGAL, respectively, are the Sumerian titles for kings and for high-ranking administrators, exactly reversing the usage that is found in Mesopotamia. Speculating why this is so is not fruitful. More valuable for us is to appreciate the family ties linking the king to "elders" and other administrative officials, among whom were the LUGAL.LUGAL, the "lords." All our information about the economic and institutional roles of this

TABLE I
Synchronism Among Kings of Ebla, Mari, and Other Mesopotamian Cities

	Uruk	Ur	Lagash	Akkad	Mari	Ebla
2500					Ikun-Shamash Ikun-Shamagan	Abur-Lim Agur-Lim Ibbi-Damu
			Ur-Nanshe			
		Mesannepada	Akurgal		Ishki-Mari	Baga-Damu
			Eannatum		Anubu*	Enar-Damu
			Enannatum I		Saumu* Ishtup-Ishar*	Ishar-Malik Kun-Damu Abub-Damu
					Iblul-II*	
2400	Lugalkingeshdudu		Entemena			Igrish-Halam
			Enannatum II		NI-zi*	
	Lugaltarsi		Enentarzi		Enna-Dagan*	Irkab-Damu
2350			Lugalanda		Ikun-Ishar*	
	Lugalzagesi		Urukagina		Hida'-ar*	Ishar-Damu (?)
				Sargon		

* Kings of Mari cited in the Ebla documents.

After Alfonso Archi, "La formazione di uno stato del III millennio a.C.," *La parola del passato* 46 (1991).

elite group supports our impression that Ebla kingship had a low profile. While urban consolidation speeded centralization, thus preparing cities to compete politically, a different tempo for social development in Syria helped institutionalize a power system typical of a kinship-based society. Not surprisingly, two important manifestations of royal prerogatives known early in Mesopotamian history are missing so far from Ebla. There are no "royal inscriptions" (as a literary genre) to legitimate the sovereign and to glorify his power as derived from the gods. We also do not find "year names" by which kings titled a whole year after the main achievement of the previous year. The "year names" that do occur at Ebla do not form a consistent system, and often attract attention to officials other than the king, for example to Ibrium, a prominent "lord."

The ideology and character of Ebla kingship

cannot be traced back to the transition from a seminomadic to an urban society, as some scholars have tried to do. In fact, Ebla sources register neither the presence of ethnically distinct pastoral nomads nor their interplay with the Ebla population. Animal breeding is conducted for the royal or elite families and remains an activity run by the state. The name Martu, which in Mesopotamian documents was applied to West Semitic groups, occurs in Ebla as the name of a city whose subjects bear personal names that cannot be linguistically differentiated from those of Ebla citizens. (See also "Amorite Tribes and Nations of Second-Millennium Western Asia" later in this volume.)

Ebla's political, economic and social institutions reflect the adaptation sustained by village communities coping with an emergent central power. The major role played by tribal institutions, such as the group of the "elders"

(ÁBBA.ÁBBA), and by members of leading families with state responsibilities (LUGAL.LUGAL) is best explained when set against this background of social change. Moreover, the transition to an administrative system where many features (to begin with, writing and accounting procedures) are borrowed from Mesopotamia does not undermine the persistence of a local stamp on the bureaucratic organization of the state.

ARCHIVES AND ADMINISTRATION

The most sizable area for the storage of cuneiform material was prepared during the later periods of Ebla as a shelved room (L.2769) with an adjacent vestibule (L.2875) in the already existing Audience Court. It contained some 2,100 tablets with information on topics relevant to an administration that was experiencing rapid growth and achieving a relatively unsophisticated specialization: textile and metal accounting, tax deliveries, temple offerings, letters, state reports, scribal exercises. The palace archives were likely once stored in a small room (L.2712) that was created out of a niche at the northeast corner of the court, about 15 meters (16 yards) from the royal podium. Eventually, the archives kept in this room were homogeneous documents concerned with daily and monthly expenditures of grain to sustain the royal family and the palace personnel. These records were kept on file for no more than three years, and were periodically destroyed to make room for new ones.

The archival system and the bureaucratic organization were apparently less sophisticated at Ebla than in contemporaneous Mesopotamian cities. The Ebla scribes imitated the book-keeping techniques that were developed in the Sumerian world and used the same inventory of terms, for example ŠU.BA₄.11 "delivery," MU.TUM "remittance," È "outgoing." But they applied them in a less coherent way than in Mesopotamia. For example, in the same document they combined terminology Mesopotamians used for texts that were typologically different. The general impression is that the administrative bureaus were not very specialized, and it is sometimes difficult to identify the range of activ-

ity of a single bureau. Yet the Ebla scribes did develop their own accounting tradition, discarding the Mesopotamian system of number notation, developing an original system of measures, and adapting to their own Semitic tongue a number of Sumerian formulaic expressions.

The administrative structure of the city also shows a mixture of borrowed and original features, typical of a society where palace and temple are distinct institutions, both in nature and functioning, as opposed to what existed in Mesopotamia. The hierarchy of power reflects administrative functions: at the top of the scale were the king and his family; at the bottom were the ranks of palace officials (UGULA) in charge of the labor force. The king's sons and daughters were no less involved in bureaucratic duties than were the officials in managing the palace and its resources.

The documents about food allotments for the palace detail the various sectors of the administration, locate them topographically in the city, and disclose the scope of the centralized mechanism of redistribution. It is striking that in Ebla, again unlike what occurred in Mesopotamia, the supervision of workers and activities was relatively undeveloped. The Sumerian UGULA, for example, is the generic term for a palace "overseer," whether responsible for skilled workers in the palace workshops (smiths, carpenters, etc.), or for nonspecialized menials assigned to labor in the fields. Specific terms are used for a limited group of overseers (Ú.A, A.AM, IB.IB; about one hundred people in all), attached to the king's household (É EN), who in particular coordinated the work of women.

The relationship between the overseers and their subordinates reflected a centralization of labor that emulated aspects of "militarization" we know from third-millennium southern Mesopotamia. Every UGULA was in charge of several teams of workers (GURUŠ), organized in units of twenty people each (É-DURUŠ^{ki}), and had to provide them food supplies and rations on a regular basis. The distribution of such teams apparently corresponded to the Ebla "districts" or "gates" (KÁ.KÁ, possibly given also as *iranum*). In fact, territorial units in Ebla were often known by the names of officials in charge or by a place name. In administrative terms, there were work units "belonging to Ebla" and others "belonging to Saza."

With SA.ZA^{ki} being a technical designation for the palace as a bureaucratic organization, the two phrases are differentiating, respectively, between the Ebla "districts" located in the countryside and the "palace."

The common notion of "royal palace" does not fully convey the perception local scribes had of this institution. In accounting records we find the term "household," among which most frequently occurs that of the king (É EN). We cannot tell whether each one of these "households," such as that of the king, the queen, the queen mother, high officials (Ibrium, Ibbi-Zikir, or his son Dubukhu-'Ada), had its own archives in the palace. The royal "household" itself was a vast organization that included an extended family, the court, "elders" (ÁBBA.ÁBBA), and several gangs of workmen (at least fifty; that is, one thousand men according to a figure of twenty men per gang). Food rations assigned to the household included, among other entries, deliveries of cereals to "the gods" (DINGIR.DINGIR.DINGIR), implying that some allocations of food to the temple did come from the royal family.

In administrative accounting, women belonged to a social category not included in the royal household. The royal harem was structured like its equivalents in Old Babylonian Mari. It included DAM EN, "women of the king," who lived in their own building and who were assisted by a group of officials. These women were ranked by status, and if the varying order in which they were recorded in a series of documents is significant, the hierarchy altered over a period of time, perhaps depending on the affections of the ruler. These women were sometimes placed in charge of important sectors of palace work, especially the manufacture of textiles.

Women of the royal household held a significant position in Ebla society. Both the king's primary wife, the *maliktum*, and the biological mother of the king (AMA.GAL EN) had full access to the palace goods and to their management, enjoying an autonomy that remained stable in Canaanite and Hebrew societies during the succeeding millennia. Ebla princesses were married to foreign leaders and thus helped consolidate blood ties among dynasties. If later

examples of such marriages are comparable to those at Ebla, such as those revealed in the Mari texts, the arrangement also confirmed acceptance of a delicate hierarchy of power that depended on whether the foreign husbands were given daughters born to the *maliktum* or to concubines of differing ranks.

In registering the issue of rations to palace personnel, no systematic labeling scheme was used at Ebla, even though the workers receiving such rations were certainly supported by the central administration, including those who served the royal residence (dancers, musicians, wet nurses, and physicians) or who labored in palace workshops (smiths, carpenters, fullers, and dyers). Such personnel played a role in the complex redistributive system run by the palace, but in the ration lists in which they are cited they were lumped together simply as "men" (GURUŠ) or "women" (DAM). We have more detail than usual about women working in the milling and textile installations (DAM KIKKEN, DAM-TÚG.NU.TAG); but this is because their jobs could be filled by a variety of workers for temporary periods, or for parts of the day, requiring that scribes be more informative about why unusual amounts of rations were being dispensed.

PALACE ECONOMY AND ROLE OF THE TEMPLES

At Ebla, the palace was responsible for the economic organization of the city. It could be argued that we have this impression because our archives come from the palace. While it is not impossible that the temples also kept archives to track the movement of donations, such as metal objects, furnishings, and fabrics, made by the royal family and high-ranking officials, there is little doubt that religious institutions did not fill a major active economic role in the city. We find no reference in our archives to real estate owned by temples, or to labor that depended on them. This feature clearly contrasts with the role of the temple institution in Mesopotamia, but anticipates the typical character of the temple in the Syro-Palestinian society of later times.

In managing resources, temples seem to have

been restricted to carrying out the sacrifices and to disbursing the sacrificial meat. It was the palace, however, that accounted for the animals that were used and that kept a record of their move toward the altar. The administrative terminology distinguishes between "inside" and "outside" destinations of the cattle. The animals to be sacrificed in the city temples (UDU NÍDBA É.É DINGIR. DINGIR.DINGIR) were labeled "receipt of the central administration" (CABA.RU SA.ZA_x^{ki}). Animals qualified as KASKAL.KASKAL were destined for "dispatch" to peripheral sanctuaries in the various cities of Eblaite territory. Ritual texts, such as the instructions for the enthronement of the royal couple, inform us about cultic events of institutional importance taking place at Ebla and at peripheral sanctuaries; these occasionally required the court to travel from one shrine to another.

The temple buildings so far excavated at Tell Mardikh belong to Ebla of the second millennium (Mardikh IIIA–B, around 2000–1600 BCE). However, one among them, Temple N in the Lower City, was certainly built upon older structures of the EB IVA period. In contrast, the archives we have mention several deities to whom temples were dedicated in the third-millennium city. Some of these gods had Semitic names, such as Dagan, Ishtar, and Hadda (³Ada), while the names of other gods were either of Hurrian (Ishkhara and Ashtapi) or of an as yet linguistically unidentified language (Nidakul and Kura). The most important temple was certainly that of Kura, the tutelary god of the royal family, in association with Barama, a goddess attached to his cult. To make a vow before Kura (DU₁₁.GA GABA ^dKU.RA) and to take an oath (NAM.KU₅) in his temple were common procedures to validate state agreements or private deeds, such as dividing up an inheritance and donating real estate.

While information on temple organization is somewhat limited because it is derived from state documents, what we do have on the economic role of the palace is direct and extremely rich, although the bulk of it is more concerned with the distribution and circulation of goods than with the organization of production. The evidence is that the palace owned property and managed its own farms, scattered over a wide

area, especially northeast of Ebla. A series of texts, registering both the amount of seed given out for the sowing and its expected yield, show how quality and location of the fields affected crop productivity: yields were higher in the case of barley and lower in emmer or wheat. These yields, averaging three to four times the investment in seed, are typical for dry-farming agriculture. Olive and grape growing could sometimes be associated with raising cereal crops, and this too is a constant during the history of Syro-Palestinian agriculture.

In a landscape characterized by a high density of rural settlements—hundreds of villages are named in the archives—it is difficult to establish how much of the land belonged to rural communities or how much was held by the palace. There is evidence, however, that the king could grant plots of land to members of the royal family or to palace officials (as is documented in the so-called royal verdicts). Sometimes whole villages (URU.URU) could be either transferred or given in inheritance under approval of the state authority: a situation that seems to have a clear parallel in the second-millennium documentation from Alalakh and Ugarit.

Animal husbandry, and in particular sheep rearing, was a major component of the Ebla economy. Some herds owned by the king could have as many as 67,000 head, a number about one-tenth of the sheep the state owned. To graze, these large flocks roamed beyond the limits of Ebla and its territory, in the hill country (KUR) to the north and south. The need for regulating grazing rights and regulations with bordering states must have been evident.

The quality and productivity of the wool industry at Ebla was high and would not be matched until the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur developed an intensely focused and centralized industry very late in the third millennium BCE. The Ebla palace ran the textile workshops as a highly specialized enterprise, and this is evident from the broad range of female personnel (DAM TUG.NU.TAG) working at the loom who were issued rations. Along with the manufacture of fabrics, metalwork played a major role in the craft-oriented economy of Ebla, but unlike textiles, which were redistributed through trade and as gifts to workers and marketed as textile products,

metal objects circulated less widely. Jewelry and containers made either of pure metal or of alloys were produced according to standard weights and hoarded by the state. As such, they were used for payments (taxes paid by the "lords" often included metal cups), or distributed as gifts to officials and members of the court, or donated to the temples. Metal objects of standard weight also occur in the item list of the dowry of an Ebla princess. When some of the objects deteriorated, the raw material was recycled to make ingots or other items to be kept in the state treasury.

The quantity of gold and silver available to the state was extremely large, especially when compared with the amounts mentioned in other near eastern archives of the third and second millennia. Two different sets of data are particularly instructive in this regard. The first concerns the amount of tribute Ebla paid Mari, a rival state that dominated the middle Euphrates region. In one such text, more than 1,000 kilograms (2,200 pounds) of silver and 63 kilograms (almost 140 pounds) of gold were delivered to Mari during the reigns of Iblul-Il, NI-zi and Enna-Dagan (see Table 2).

These deliveries (MU.TUM) were directed to the king, the elders, and other high officials of Mari (E.GI.MAŠKIM), but other gifts of precious metals accompanied them also. Large though they may be, the figures presented above are not contrived. They can be justified by the second set of data, the gold, silver and copper that came into Ebla itself according to a number of documents that record the delivery of precious metals by the Ebla "lords" (LUGAL.LUGAL) to the state.

The data given in Table 3 cover a period of twenty-six years: In the first sixteen, Ibrium was

TABLE 3
Taxes Delivered by Two Ebla Viziers to the State Treasury over Twenty-Six Years

<i>Ebla "lord"</i>	<i>Silver</i>	<i>Gold</i>	<i>Copper</i>
Ibrium	3731 kg	86 kg	—
Ibbi-Zikir	5561 kg	179 kg	4929 kg

a vizier, thus holding the most prominent position among the "lords." During the remaining ten years, his son Ibbi-Zikir took over the post. Since Ebla was not likely to have had political and economic relations with Anatolia, where copper and silver were mined in antiquity, it is probable that its metal revenues were based on large-scale commercial enterprises.

Because of archival testimony for Ebla's wealth, there was a tendency among scholars, especially when Ebla tablets were first read, to declare it a "commercial empire." Reassessments of Ebla's trading activities have underscored the lack of long-distance ventures; rather, most of the recorded receipts and disbursements of large amounts of metals or textiles from state coffers pertain to taxation and to redistribution of resources. Nevertheless, the many references to "merchants" and "emissaries" (LÚ.KAR. U₅), especially those coming from Mari and others from other towns on the middle Euphrates (Manuwat, for example), make it clear that Ebla profited from its strategic position at the cross-road of major trade routes controlled by the capital cities of upper and central Mesopotamia. Moreover, in the palace archives there are "balanced accounts" (such as TM.75.G.1353) that reveal how accounting procedures at Ebla were developed to suit the needs of an elaborate state-run commercial enterprise.

TABLE 2
Deliveries of Silver and Gold to Mari

<i>Mari ruler</i>	<i>Silver</i>	<i>Gold</i>
Iblul-Il	761.97 kg	48.99 kg
NI-zi	132.19 kg	9.60 kg
Enna-Dagan	134.14 kg	4.56 kg

TM.75.6.1953

EBLA AS A REGIONAL POWER

When the third-millennium palace archives were functioning, Ebla was a large settlement of about 56 hectares (140 acres) and it had about 15,000 to 20,000 people sustained by the palace.

The King of Ebla Grants Property to the King of Emar

In this document (TM.75.G.2396) Irkab-Damu, king of Ebla, grants property located in his kingdom to the king of Emar, a city east of Ebla on the Euphrates River. Merchants of Ebla are not allowed to trade with people in these villages, and the same applies, reciprocally, to the merchants of Emar.

All the fields acquired at the villages of Irpesh and Gurakul, Irkab-Damu (the king of Ebla) has given to Tisha-Lim (king of Emar).

Moreover, from today onwards, he gives them according to his decree.

Moreover, if the landowner undertook to provide the

people (residing there) with food, he will deliver what is his due.

Moreover, as regards the king, the people of Emar dependent on Tisha-Lim have been decreed to be resident in Emar.

Moreover, the representative (MAŠKIM) of the (Ebla) king will keep (his own) merchants out of the villages (belonging to) Tisha-Lim.

Moreover, the representative of Tisha-Lim will keep (his own) merchants out of the villages (belonging) to the king (of Ebla).

Moreover, the king (of Ebla) gave the fields; as for the people of Tisha-Lim, the king will transfer (them).

Its political influence extended southward to the area near the modern Hama and eastward to the Euphrates. Port cities on the Mediterranean littoral to the west, traded with Ebla, but were not politically dependent on it. The same could be said of the rich region of southeastern Anatolia north of Carchemish (Karkamish).

Yet we have administrative texts that demonstrate that some cities located between the Euphrates and the Balikh rivers (on the Carchemish-Harran axis) actually belonged to the Ebla kingdom. To have pockets of territory some distance away from the center of the kingdom and not adjacent to a city's own frontiers is a phenomenon known to antiquity. Ebla probably sought to expand its control in these areas, so causing a territorial dispute with Mari that broke into a prolonged war. According to a document dubbed the "letter of Enna-Dagan," the dispute was over land east of the Euphrates bend, but it dragged in some independent cities, for example Imar (Emar), that lay on the opposite side of the river (see box above). This region was dotted with city-states whose political fates were tied to the ebb and flow of their opponents' fortunes. Most of the details of what went on during the conflict are unknown, but it seems that Mari kept control over the main trading outposts on the Euphrates, as far as Tuttul (Tell Bila), upstream on the Balikh. Further north, however, a series

of cities continued friendly relations with Ebla, exchanging gifts and goods on a regular basis. Evidence for these transactions can be found, for example, in a coherent set of administrative records dealing with the delivery of textiles (*ARET* 1, texts 1–10). By retaining influence along a whole line of trading centers from Carchemish to Harran to the upper Khabur area, Ebla maintained profitable connections with other commercial networks in upper Mesopotamia, bypassing territory under Mari's control.

Against this background we can establish a context for a commercial treaty with Abarsal (see box below), a town probably in the upper Khabur area. The written agreement recognizes territorial borders between Ebla and Abarsal by listing cities that are under the control of each. It also acknowledges trade, rather than political, spheres of interest for each of the two powers.

Another document allows us to reconstruct a political crisis that involved Ebla and an as yet unlocated city called 'Adu, exposing overlapping and competing political strategies. Located between the Euphrates and the Balikh, 'Adu, in fact, was a buffer state caught up in the rivalry between Ebla and Mari. How it was forced to throw in its fortunes with Mari at the conclusion of an international diplomatic crisis is told in a document (TM.75.G.2040) that summarizes the main terms of the affair.

A Treaty Between Ebla and Abarsal

The following passages are excerpted from the "treaty between Ebla and Abarsal," a city probably in the Khabur area. Some scholars read this place name as "Asshur," the famous city on the Tigris. The "treaty" deals with a variety of topics concerning mutual relationships between the two cities. The translation follows the interpretation and the German translation given by Dietz O. Edzard in *Literature and Literary Language at Ebla*, edited by Pelio Fronzaroli (1992).

The text (TM.75.G.2040) opens with a long list including the names of cities belonging to (literally, in the hands of) Ebla and those belonging to Abarsal. Then it goes on as follows:

Whoever curses the king, or the gods, or the country, shall die.

If someone from the border of (literally, opposite to) Abarsal tries to take the place of (a subject of) Ebla; if he himself, from the border of Abarsal, is (a subject of) Abarsal, [he shall die]. If someone from the border of Ebla tries to take the place of (a subject of) Abarsal; if he himself, from the border of Ebla, is (a subject of) Ebla, he shall die.

If anyone among the ten overseers (?) pronounces a curse, he shall give fifty rams as fine.

(. . .) Arriving messengers will stop as long as ten days

and will eat their travel provisions. But if you want them to stay (longer), you will give them travel provisions.

(. . .) Messengers receiving a gift will not be given travel provisions: they will come back without travel provisions.

(. . .) So speaks the king of Ebla to the king of Abarsal: "Without my permission you won't let anyone travel in the land; if you [let someone travel], you will not escape (the punishment); (but) if I order it, they will (be allowed to) travel."

(. . .) As concerns bad words that you (happen to) hear, you will make it known.

As long as you are on a long trip [you don't need to give any information (?)]; but (if) you are present (and) you hear bad words, and you don't give any information, then you will not escape (the punishment).

Ebla can carry on trade vis-à-vis Abarsal, (but) Abarsal cannot carry on trade vis-à-vis Ebla.

(. . .) As concerns the merchants of Ebla, Abarsal will let them come back (safely). As concerns the merchants of Abarsal, Ebla will let them come back (safely).

(. . .) If (during a festival) in the month Isi someone from Abarsal has a fight with someone of Ebla (and) kills him, he shall give fifty rams as fine. If someone [from Ebla has a fight with someone from Abarsal] (and) kills him, he shall give fifty rams as fine.

(. . .)

CONCLUSION

Sometime between 2400 and 2350 BCE, at the end of military events about which, unfortunately, we know little, the city of Ebla was set on fire. Scholars have offered many theories to explain this event, the most plausible of which involves Ebla in a conflict with Sargon of Akkad. In any case, Ebla's destruction must be viewed as one episode in a series of events that resulted in the collapse of a Syro-Mesopotamian political system based on the existence of regional powers. A major effect of this crisis was the disappearance of a cultural and linguistic horizon linking Ebla to pre-Sargonic Mari and to many cities in northern Babylonia, dubbed the "Kish Civilization," after a city in Mesopotamia, Kish, where scholars first encountered its main features.

But this was not the end of Ebla. In the Ur III documents from the end of the third millennium,

several individuals are said to come from an obviously rebuilt Ebla. Within a couple of centuries, during a period equivalent to Old Babylonian times in Mesopotamia, Ebla was flourishing once more, its new fortunes documented by archaeological remains of the Old Syrian period (1800–1600 BCE) excavated at Tell Mardikh. The final destruction of the city was caused by a military raid that the Hittite king Murshili I carried out in upper Syria around 1600 BCE. After this fatal event Ebla survived as a small village, but was deprived of any political role. Yet, its reputation remained such that in the middle of the second millennium Hurrian poets used it as the setting for a series of myths involving its chief god, Teshub. (See also "The Kingdom of Mitanni in Second-Millennium Upper Mesopotamia" later in this volume.)

The features of Eblaic language and institutions that we have encountered in the written and archaeological documents of third-millennium

archives were not lost in the process of cultural change. There was, for example, continuity in the types of names chosen by Ebla citizens through the Ur III period. An inscription of Ibbit-Lim, prince of Ebla in the early second millennium, reflects the spread of Akkadian into the region, but also the persistence of the previously attested local, non-Akkadian, dialect.

The legacy of third-millennium Ebla is also evident in diverse facets of Syrian society as known from later sources: the structure and management of the rural communities, where entire villages could be inherited or sold; the limited reach of the ration system; the organization of the royal harem; the prominence of women in the royal family; the system used for measures, especially of capacity. All these are elements that play a role in the making of a distinctive Syrian cultural tradition. At this moment, our interpretations draw heavily on hypotheses based on the study of very ancient documents that do not easily yield their secrets. We still have much more to learn from them.

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