

Studies on the Archaeology of Ebla 1980–2010

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Paolo Matthiae

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1980–2010

Edited by
Frances Pinnock

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FOREWORD

During His long activity as a scholar, several lines of research characterized Paolo Matthiae's scientific work: certainly side by side with His interest for the artistic accomplishments of the Assyrian empire, His studies about the Ebla culture, and more in general about Syrian cultures held a preeminent position, as is quite obvious, due to His prolonged engagement in the field in a site so extraordinarily fruitful. When Paolo left active teaching at the Sapienza University of Rome, where He was Lecturer since 1963, and Full Professor since 1974, He became Professor Emeritus, and we decided to collect in one volume a large choice of His most meaningful studies about different aspects of the Ebla culture, published during a time span of thirty years between 1980, and 2010, in Italian and international journals, and in volumes in honour of His Colleagues, because we believe they are still actual and valid. We collected studies about individual architectural, and artistic monuments, about aspects of material culture, problems of interpretation, chronological, and historical matters, issuing from a continuous excavation activity lasted for nearly fifty years. We believe that these contributions, presented now all in English and French, might still urge, and promote further reflection, and deepening.

Collecting articles published in different places, and also at a long time span one from the other, we decided not to change the footnotes, and the bibliographies, which therefore appear in their original forms, but for some necessary, albeit limited updating. On the other hand, we thought it might be opportune, in order to avoid pointless repetitions, and to present an organic documentary picture, to unify the illustrations. Thus, all the illustrations appear at the end of the volume, and are ordered according to chronology, and subject. Though we are aware that this decision might bring to some difficulty in consultation, we anyhow chose to present a more organic and homogeneous apparatus, almost endued of an autonomy of its own, which also allowed, in more than one instance, to increase quantity, and to improve quality in the images provided for the reader.

It is quite likely that this volume would not have appeared without Licia Romano's careful, and enthusiastic work: she followed, and often directly accomplished, the complex process of scan, correction, and paging of the articles, as well as the choice, and scan of images. In this hard task she was helped by Andrea Fanciulli, and most of all by Andrea Lombardo, who followed the volume composition to its final accomplishment. To all of them goes our deepest gratitude.

In this period when Syria, a Country we all love, is upset by tragic events, which deeply affect us, the members of the Archaeological Expedition to Ebla huddled together, engaging perhaps even more than usual in the everyday work of study, and organization of the Expedition archives, without letting the huge amount of documents overcome them. Even if they were not directly engaged in the preparation of this volume, they have always been there to help, for a last-minute scan, to look for a picture, to read the proofs, and lastly to relax together with a smile. Our deepest gratitude is also for them all: Davide Nadali, Marta D'Andrea, Maria Forza, Mohammed al-Khalid, Ahmed Kzzo, Maria Gabriella Micale, Sara Pizzimenti, Andrea Polcaro, Melania Zingarello, and the "Lab guys".

Last but not least, a heartfelt thanks to Harrassowitz Verlag, who accepted with enthusiasm to publish this collection

Frances Pinnock

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological exploration of Tell Mardikh started in 1964, and, since the first campaigns, some of the most influential archaeologists of the time - from William F. Albright to Roland de Vaux, from Anton Moortgat to Edith Porada, from Claude F.A. Schaeffer to Barthel Hrouda - believed it was one of the most promising excavations started in the Levant. In 1968, the discovery of a basalt bust bearing the dedicatory inscription of Ibbit-Lim, king of Ebla, nowadays in Damascus National Museum, allowed to propose that the large archaeological site were ancient Ebla, usually located north of Aleppo, sometimes to the West or East, but never to the South. Since then, the program of investigations on the Acropolis, and in the Lower Town went on, in order to bring to light the most meaningful structures of the Old Syrian town, while a growing effort was made in order to reach, in regions where the settlement might be well preserved, levels dating from the final centuries of the third millennium BC, namely from the period when the Syrian town was mentioned in inscriptions of Sargon of Akkad, Naram-Sin of Akkad, and Gudea of Lagash. From one of this attempts, made in 1973 on the south-west slope of the Acropolis, started in 1974 the excavation of the Royal Palace G, which brought, in 1975, to the spectacular, and revolutionary discovery of the well known Royal Archives of Early Bronze IVA.

After 1975, the enlargement of the excavation in the preserved regions of the extended Royal Palace G of the high Early Syrian period went on for several years, while we started the systematic exploration of large areas of the Lower Town West, North-West, and South, of the fortified buildings on the earthenwork ramparts, of quarters of private houses, and of the City Gates of the great Old Syrian town. The publications of the texts, and of the archaeological discoveries led Ignace J. Gelb, the late dean of Assyriological studies, to say that the Italians had discovered at Ebla “a new history, a new language, a new culture”. Between 2004 and 2010 the excavations at Tell Mardikh, besides some lesser operations, concentrated on two important cult buildings of Early Bronze IVA, the Temple of the Rock, and the Red Temple, and on the excavations in the North, and West regions of the Acropolis, in order to reach, by means of an accurate exploration of the superimpositions of Late Bronze I-II, Iron Age I-III, the Persian and Hellenistic Period, the Middle Bronze II levels. The tragic events, which overwhelmed the Country, since March 2011, stopped the activities on the ground.

The excavation reports about the yearly campaigns at Tell Mardikh have been usually published in the *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-*

Lettres of the Institut de France, Paris, while the writer published, since the beginning of the research, studies about aspects of material culture, artistic productions, architectural, and urban structures, and about chronological, and historical matters concerning Ebla. These studies appeared in Italian, and international scientific journals, as well as in miscellaneous volumes, and *Festschriften*, and are therefore scattered, and sometimes not easy to access. For this reason, it seemed proper to-day to choose, and collect some of these contributions, published between 1980, and 2010, and print them all in English, apart from one in French, in order to present them to the scientific world in one volume, easily accessible. Harrassowitz Verlag, of Wiesbaden, agreed to publish this collection, and to accept it among their prestigious collections: to them goes my most sincere gratitude.

The results of a number of exceptional excavation campaigns at Ebla are due to the exemplary engagement of three successive generations of students of the school of Oriental Archaeology of the Sapienza University of Rome. The activities on the field, in the research, and for the studies, of the Archaeological Expedition to Ebla, with the exceptional results, met in several occasions with difficulties so much bitter as unusual, and they cannot be cancelled from the author's mind; yet, they have been overcome for the clever, and enduring engagement of a group of scholars of the Roman school of excellent intellectual, and ethic integrity, as well as for the effective co-operation, never failing, even in the most difficult circumstances, of the Syrian colleagues. If this collection is published to-day, the credit goes most of all to Frances Pinnock, who took the hard duty of the editing of the volume, and followed it in every moment of its accomplishment, and to Licia Romano, Davide Nadali, Marta D'Andrea, and Andrea Lombardo who co-operated at their best for the accomplishment of the initiative. The author wishes to express the most warm-hearted gratitude to all of them, and last but not least to Gabriella Scandone Matthiae.

The publication of this collection of studies, all dealing with the discovery of one archaeological site, which not only deeply changed the history and archaeology of ancient Syria, but also gave to modern Syria a central, and meaningful role in the most ancient history of the great civilizations of the ancient Orient, appears when contemporary Syria is living one of the most troubled, and dramatic pages of its recent history. The author of these pages, who loves Syria as he loves his own Country, is fully aware that the discovery of Ebla could not have taken place without the total, and enthusiastic co-operation of the workmen and villagers of Mardikh, of the colleagues of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Damascus, Aleppo, and Idlib, and of all the Authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. To them all we wish to express our fervent thanks, remembering how much I owe to the beloved people of Syria, and heartily wishing that the Country will find, in the shortest term the civil concord, and the rightful peace they deserve.

Paolo Matthiae

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