Ebla: The World's Oldest Library

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Almost all present descriptions of ancient libraries consider the library of Ashurbanipal, dating from the seventh century B.C. and discovered in the 1850s, as the oldest organized collection of records. Chiefly based on the tablets found in this library and on those unearthed by many later excavations in southern Mesopotamia it was known that such archives were at least some 2,000 years older, beginning with the collections of the Sumerians, who quite probably were the inventors of writing sometime in the late fourth millennium or early third millennium B.C. But the evidence for the existence of such archives was largely indirect. It could only be assumed that both the original Sumerian tablets (dating from the first quarter of the third millennium B.C. to about 2300 B.C.) and copies made more than a thousand years later by Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian scribes before and until the time of Ashurbanipal must have been kept in some orderly manner so as to make them retrievable, but the methods of such archival storage were largely a matter of speculation.[1]

Our knowledge of ancient libraries has now suddenly been extended back in time to the middle of the third millennium B.C. through the excavations by a team of Italian archeologists at Tell Mardikh in northern Syria—the site of the ancient city-state of Ebla—which began in 1964 and are still continuing. These excavations were initially, like so many other archeological expeditions in the Middle East, of interest only to professional archeologists. They became a sensational event second in importance, perhaps, only to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls when the excavators in 1974 discovered a number of clay tablets in cuneiform script,

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followed the next year by the discovery of a vast archive of thousands of clay tablets dating from about 2600 to 2300 B.C. There were several reasons for the world-wide interest aroused by this find. First, the number of tablets and fragments discovered in a few days was very large and a substantial part of the documents was perfectly preserved and intact. Second, the tablets were written in what was soon recognized as a hitherto unknown Semitic language with apparent close affinities to Hebrew. Third, many names of persons and places in the Bible also seemed to appear in the texts found at Ebla. And fourth, the archives or library constituted an orderly collection of records at least 500 years older than any other that had been found anywhere before.

The following account, which is based mainly on the first comprehensive scientific report[2] and on several articles by the director of the expedition, Paolo Matthiae,[3] publications of his former colleague, the paleographer Giovanni Pettinato,[4] and the description and critical evaluation of the events by Chaim Bermant and Michael Weitzman,[5] will focus only on those aspects of the Ebla finds that are of particular interest for the history of libraries. First, however, the archeological facts must be briefly summarized to set the scene.

Ebla and Its Excavation

The city of Ebla is mentioned in various Sumerian and Akkadian inscriptions, but when the Italian archeologists set out to excavate a large tell (mound) in northern Syria near the main road from Damascus to Aleppo, some 50 miles south of that city, they did not know that Tell Mardikh covered the remains of this ancient city. For ten years, from 1964 until 1974, the excavations on this large site covering some 56 hectares (about 140 acres) did not yield objects of outstanding importance other than the usual large quantities of pottery, a few statuettes (one of which made it possible to identify the place as the ancient Ebla), ornaments, and weapons, and the remnants of a temple, a palace, and fortifications dating to the middle of the third millennium B.C. It was only in 1974, when the remains of the royal palace were slowly emerging from the dig, that the first collection of 42 clay tablets written in cuneiform script was found. When the excavations continued the following summer, a large courtroom with an elevated dais (which may have served as an audience hall) was discovered, and in two of the smaller rooms adjacent to that hall, some 17,000 clay tablets were found, several thousand of them intact or almost so.[6]

The tablets had survived the destruction of Ebla by the Akkadians sometime around 2250 B.C. because they apparently were not deemed to be of any importance or were simply overlooked. The very fact that Ebla was set to the torch (probably by Naram-Sin [2291-2255 B.C.], the grandson of Sargon the Great) seems to have preserved a large part of the clay tablets, not all of which had been baked or fired prior to their deposition in the archives but which were made almost indestructible by the conflagration that followed the capture of the palace. The evidence so far discovered does not make it entirely clear whether Ebla at the peak of its power was a large city-state (one of many such city-states in the area) or the capital of an empire possibly stretching east to Upper Mesopotamia, or perhaps itself only a large outpost on the western perimeter of an Akkadian state. After its destruction by the Akkadians, it rose again and existed until about 1600 B.C., when it was finally destroyed by the Hittites, not to be permanently settled again, and forgotten for three and a half millennia.

Archives or Library?

It has often been pointed out that all ancient collections of written records until the foundation of the Alexandrian library in the third century B.C. were essentially archives intended solely or chiefly for the use of kings, their ministers, and their bureaucracy, and not libraries in the sense that those collections were brought together for the benefit of scholars who wished to study the documents. This may also be true to a large extent for the royal archives of Ebla, which in the days of its greatest prosperity seems to have had a population of some 250,000 people, ruled by a bureaucracy of 11,700 (according to one tablet); these government officials, like their successors through the ages, preferred to have everything in writing and duly filed away in archives. Yet a sizable part of the tablets contains literary and lexicographic texts, and internal evidence (discussed in more detail below) seems to indicate that the collection also served at least partially as a true library.

Arrangement of the Tablets

The organization of the tablets in the archives of Ebla had already reached a fairly high level of sophistication, and it stands to reason that it was based on techniques and experience gained in yet earlier archives, of which we have no tangible evidence so far.

The storage of the tablets adjacent to an audience hall indicates that they were intended as documentation for the business of state conducted there. The smaller of the two storage rooms, situated north of the audience hall, contained more than a thousand tablets, all of which dealt with economic affairs. Its ceiling had collapsed in the destruction, and many tablets were broken as they fell from the shelves on which they were stored. Those shelves were built into the walls and were 80 cm deep; at height intervals of 50 cm they were apparently divided by wooden slats that were supported in the four corners by wooden poles, of which only the rectangular postholes in the ground remain. Nothing can be said about the internal arrangement of the tablets on the shelves since they were all found strewn about on the floor of the room. However, the more than 15,000 tablets found in the larger room, situated on the south side of the great hall and measuring 5.10 x 3.55 m, were originally all neatly stacked around the walls on three levels: the nethermost group of tablets rested immediately on the floor while two others were stacked on wooden shelves supported by wooden poles. Here, as in the smaller room, both shelves and poles were consumed by the flames. When the wooden shelves gave way, the tablets stacked upon them fell down on the layer of tablets on the floor in almost exactly the same order in which they had been stored, very much like a deck of cards. In the event, some of the lower-level tablets were broken, but their internal order was for the most part preserved.

The tablets are of varying size: those found in the first season (1974) were mostly rather small, round ones measuring from 2.6 to 6.0 cm in diameter, and some square or slightly oblong tablets of 20 to 21 cm length and width. Most of the tablets found in 1975 are square, measuring about 18 x 18 cm; some are rectangular, reaching sizes of about 20 x 35 and 20 x 40 cm. They are inscribed in up to 30 columns of nearly 50 lines on each face—that is, almost 3,000 lines on both sides—and even the smaller tablets hold as much as 1,000 lines. The shape of the tablets seems to have had a definite connection with the subject matter recorded on them: round tablets contain only economic and administrative texts, whereas the square tablets contain texts of all kinds. Moreover, the round tablets were always stored on the floor, while square and oblong tablets were invariably stacked on the middle and upper shelves. It is obvious that this arrangement must have served some definite archival ordering purpose. One must, however, remember that this was the arrangement found in just one room, which seems to have served as both archives and library,

and that future discoveries in other rooms may reveal different ordering principles.

The arrangement of the tablets on the shelves also followed a strict principle with a practical purpose. Each tablet was positioned with its recto toward the inside of the room and leaning at a slight angle toward the wall in such a manner that the first line of a text was just visible over the edge of the tablet in front of it, thus making it possible for the archivist to find a particular tablet without first having to move any of the rather heavy and fragile tablets in the stack. To make such movement easier if a particular tablet had to be retrieved, small wedges made from discarded fragments were put between adjacent tablets. In addition to showing the first line of the text, a concise description of its contents was also written on the edge of each tablet, not unlike our modern spine titles.

Script and Language

The tablets are written in cuneiform script, the writing system that developed from the logographs originally invented by the Sumerians sometime in the late fourth millennium B.C., and which remained in use throughout the Middle East and beyond for more than 3,000 years. The cuneiform signs written by the scribes of Ebla show a mature and well-developed style that may have been based on several hundred years of scribal traditions. The writing system itself is a hybrid: it consists partially of characters that stand for Sumerian words (i.e., logographs) and partially of characters that express syllables in the local vernacular. This turned out to be a Semitic language, but scholars differ on whether it is more closely related to Akkadian, Ugaritic, or (as was initially thought) Old Phoenician and Hebrew; it now seems doubtful whether it influenced the latter two languages, in which written records appear only about a thousand years later. The language was at first called Palaeo-Canaanite by its decipherer, Prof. Pettinato, but is now known as Eblaite, the most ancient member of the Northwest Semitic language family. A small part of the tablets (perhaps those written in the latest period just before the destruction of the archives) may contain only Eblaite syllables without any admixture of Sumerian signs, but this is also still uncertain.

Both Sumerian logographs and the cuneiform signs for Eblaite syllables were, however, *pronounced* in the language of Ebla. The writing system thus is also the first known instance of the use of a script invented for one language but adapted for the writing of

another, quite different, language. In other words, this is the earliest known use of transcription (the rendering of the sound of a language in a foreign writing system) coupled with the use of logographs, that is, signs that stand for concepts and that can be pronounced in various ways in different languages, conveying the same ideas.[7]

This is also the earliest instance of a paedography, that is, a writing system designed for teaching purposes and more particularly one for the indication of pronunciation (such as that used in practically all English dictionaries).

The decipherment of Sumerian logographs (which make up about 80 percent of the texts) is exceedingly difficult, often ambiguous, and frequently no more than inspired guesswork, because there are large numbers of homographs, many of which have multiple pronunciations. Also, the script lacks signs for prepositions and conjunctions, as well as word dividers or spaces between words. Add to this the difficulty of its signs being used for a completely different language, partly in their original sense and partly to write the words of that language syllabically, and it will be evident that any decipherment may be open to different interpretations.[8] The initial transcriptions and translations of the Ebla texts by Pettinato have therefore later been amended and reinterpreted both by himself and even more by others who vigorously disputed his findings,[9] especially concerning names of persons and places, on which the alleged connection between the Ebla texts and the Bible hinges. Nevertheless, it is now on the whole fairly well known what subjects the tablets deal with.

Subjects

Only about a thousand of the more than 17,000 documents found so far have been studied, and fewer than three dozen of them have been fully deciphered and published.[10] It is estimated that the full decipherment of all the tablets will take many years or even decades, and many of the questions posed by the discovery must await an answer until such time. From the material so far studied, it is evident that the majority of the tablets deal with administrative, legal, and commercial matters, as would be expected of an archive kept by a large bureaucracy. These are daybooks, ledgers, and inventories, recording the far-flung trade of Ebla, mainly in textiles, metals, ceramic wares, and wood. Others contain lists of the kings of Ebla, the first of whom is named Igrish-Khalam (possibly the founder of the royal archives and a con-

temporary of known Sumerian kings at Lagash and Uruk around 2400 B.C.), royal ordinances, edicts, statutes, official correspondence, and treaties and trade agreements with other cities and states. There are also many gazetteers that altogether list several thousand place names. Especially important among these is a list of 289 cities and states, an exact copy of which was discovered earlier at Abū Salābikh (a site in central Iraq, possibly the ancient Akkadian city of Eresh), dating from about 2600 B.C. The place names in that earlier list could not be fully identified at first, but the Ebla tablets (which may be copies of still older lists, from which the Abū Salābikh tablets were also derived) seem to indicate that these were places in the area of what is now Syria, Jordan, and Israel.[11] Except for one account of a campaign against Mari, a city in Akkad, there are almost no texts on military matters, which are otherwise so prominent in inscriptions from that era. The Eblaites seem to have been peaceful merchants, busy bureaucrats, and literary scholars. Their keen interest in literature and particularly in linguistics is documented in hundreds of tablets containing literary texts and dictionaries. Most of the literature represents Sumerian culture, which at that time and for more than 1,500 years thereafter played a role not unlike that of Latin and Greek in medieval and Renaissance Europe. The texts consist of hymns, incantations, epics, mythological themes, and proverbs, of which only a small part—and even that only in fragments—was known until now. Here, for the first time, many of the texts were found complete and often in several copies.

Perhaps the most important part of the texts is a collection of thirty-two bilingual dictionaries, most of which seem to be copies of three basic word lists that together comprise about 3,000 words of Eblaite. Some of the dictionaries are arranged by similarity of form of the cuneiform signs, while others are arranged by similarity of sound (as pronounced in Eblaite); even more important, there are syllabaries listing Sumerian words (generally consisting of one or at most two syllables) together with their pronunciation in Eblaite (see table 1). The varying pronunciation of Sumerian logographs was hitherto one of the greatest obstacles to a correct interpretation of Sumerian texts. The Ebla syllabaries now make it possible to solve many riddles of that as yet largely unknown language, because the syllabaries were written at a time when Sumerian was still a living language, whereas all texts found so far that give a clue to the pronunciation (and therefore to the meaning) of Sumerian texts were from periods when Sumerian had already been a dead language for more than a thousand years.

TABLE 1
Examples from Sumerian-Eblaite Syllabaries

Sumerian logograph	*Eblaite syllables*	*Semitic root*	*Meaning*
NAM-MI	ù-nu-šum	[ʾnš]	womanhood, femininity
ZÌ	nu-pù-uš-tu-um	[nfš]	soul, breath of life
KÚ	akà-lum	[ʾkl]	to eat
NAM-EN	ma-li-ku-um	[mlk]	king

All dictionaries and syllabaries were shelved in one place, along the northern wall of the room, not mixed up with tablets on any other subject; there was thus some kind of shelf classification. The internal arrangement of the syllabaries also shows that the scholars of Ebla employed a systematic ordering principle. In one list, the Sumerian syllables are arranged in fifty groups according to their sounds: first all logographs pronounced *NÌ* are listed together, then all those pronounced *KA* are together, and so on. This system, known as the acrophonic principle, was employed at Ebla some 700 years before it was used in Babylonian dictionaries (which followed the same order), and it is an important step toward true alphabetization, a principle that evolved about a thousand years later, probably also in the same area.[12]

Several syllabaries were found in as many as eighteen copies, which points to their probable use as textbooks in a school for scribes. Some show clearly that they were exercises written by pupils who had to copy the examples written by their teachers, who also made correction marks in the margins. Moreover, the Ebla collection also seems to have served as a reference library for an academy. This may be concluded from a note at the end of two lexical texts that were compiled "when the young scribes came forth from Mari,"[13] an Akkadian city with which Ebla maintained close trade and cultural contacts. It would therefore seem that the Ebla library was also open to visiting scholars who compared texts and compiled their dictionaries cooperatively, perhaps under the guidance of a general editor. Thus, the scientific conference to which scholars travel from afar seems to have quite ancient roots, and one might perhaps consider those compilations as the earliest conference proceedings.

In addition to bilingual dictionaries and syllabaries, the Ebla tablets also contain a large number of monolingual grammars of

the Eblaite language, especially showing the conjugation of verbs (which, as in all Semitic languages, are the basic building blocks of the language and the source for most nouns and adjectives).

Classification

The tablets also contain large numbers of lists of items, and these, too, exist in numerous identical copies. The making of lists was a typical feature of Sumerian culture, and some fifty texts found at Ebla are actually identical with known Sumerian texts written at the same time or copied later in Akkad, Babylonia, and Assyria. The texts so far deciphered contain lists of gods, kings, stones, objects of metal and wood, animals, fishes, birds, and professions, the latter arranged by rank. From a librarian's point of view, these lists are interesting because the items are often listed in order of precedence or importance, and may be considered as rudimentary classification tables, albeit as yet without a notation (a device invented only in the late Renaissance).

The Significance of Ebla

The excavation of Ebla and the discovery of its archives have so far resulted not only in highly important archeological discoveries, but, unfortunately, also in many controversies. As already mentioned, paleographers of cuneiform script dispute some of the original interpretations of the texts. The chief archeologist did not agree with his compatriot, the epigrapher, on the exact dating of the finds, and the latter has now disassociated himself from the whole enterprise (or, according to another version, was "ousted"), after having doubts about his own earlier identification of Eblaite names with those found in Genesis[14] (see table 2). These similarities between names in the Ebla texts and in the Bible had been prematurely considered as corroboration for the veracity of events as told in Genesis, both by biblical scholars[15] and by Christian fundamentalists.[16] The connection between the Ebla texts and the Bible is, however, now seriously doubted on scientific (mainly linguistic) grounds,[17] but it is also furiously denounced by the Syrian authorities as a sinister "Zionist plot" intended to diminish the alleged importance of an ancient "Arab empire." It seems that they may attempt to prevent or at least to delay the publication of the tablets bearing the disputed texts.[18] Some or all of these often quite acrimonious disputes will probably rage for some time until they can be settled by a better understanding and full decipher-

ment of a larger number of tablets, one that is open to judgment by independent scholars.

TABLE 2
Names of Persons and Places in Eblaite Texts and in the Bible

Eblaite	*Hebrew*	*English form*
ab-ra-mu	ʾabraham	Abraham
da-u-dum	dawid	David
iš-ma-il	yišmaʿeʾl	Ishmael
iš-ra-il	yiśraʾel	Israel
mi-ka-ia	miḵah	Micah
mi-ka-il	miḵaʾel	Michael
si-da-mu	sᵉdom	Sodom
e-ma-ra	ʿamorah	Gomorrha
ad-ma	ʾadmah	Admah
si-ba-i-um	ṣᵉboyyim	Zeboiim
be-la	belaʿ	Bela

The table shows some of the most striking resemblances between Eblaite and biblical names of persons and places, as originally deciphered by Pettinato and subsequently accepted by Dahood and Freedman. Pettinato also stated initially that the names of the "Five cities of the plain" (the last 5 names in the table) appeared in an Eblaite text in exactly the same order as listed in Genesis 14:2. Later, he conceded that (a) those names did *not* appear in one text, but in different and perhaps unrelated ones; and (b) the identification of the third and fourth names was not sure, and he had doubts even about the first two ones. Freedman duly reported this and later discussed the implications for biblical research.[19]

In addition, future excavations at the large site of Tell Mardikh as well as at other yet-undiscovered sites may possibly bring to light even more documents. Quite literally, the surface has barely been scratched, and the finds at Ebla are perhaps only a fraction of what is still buried in the countless mounds that dot the landscape of the Levant. The onomastic lists found contain the names of many places whose exact location is not known. It stands to reason that their archives must have held the counterpart copies of the many treaties with other city-states found at Ebla. Perhaps some of these will also be discovered more or less intact.

While this is still a matter for conjecture, we are on safer ground as far as libraries and the invention of writing are concerned. One can already state that the tablets of Ebla constitute the oldest archives and library hitherto found, because not only have thousands of documents from the middle of the third millennium B.C.

been unearthed, but there is also tangible evidence of their arrangement and perhaps even classification (features that were absent from earlier Sumerian excavations). Such sophisticated techniques of arrangement of the texts as well as their composition point to the great antiquity of archival and library practices, which may indeed be far older than was assumed to be the case before the discovery of Ebla. Given the rather slow development of technical innovations in that age, the invention of writing may also be much older, irrespective of whether it is attributed to the Sumerians or the Egyptians, for both of whom the earliest instances of written records so far found are dated to the beginning of the third millennium B.C. Probably much more than five or six hundred years elapsed between the first attempts to record human thought for posterity, the inscription of signs on more or less permanent materials (the earliest of which almost certainly disappeared without leaving a trace), their collection in repositories, and, finally, the invention of archival storage and retrieval methods. It is perhaps not unreasonable to assume a period of perhaps a thousand years for these successive developments, which would mean that the invention of writing might date back to the middle or even the beginning of the fourth millennium B.C., although it is unlikely that records from that time will ever be found or that, if found, they could be reliably dated.

Thus Ebla provides us with new insights into the origin of library practices that were in use 4,500 years ago: the transcription of texts in foreign languages and scripts, classification, cataloging, the provision of incipits and spine titles for easy retrieval, an orderly arrangement on shelves by size, form, and content, as well as the function of a library as a focal point for education and scholarly studies.

Notes

1. P. R. S. Moorey, *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), who deals with tablets found not only at Kish but also at Ur, Uruk, Jamdat Nasr, and other Sumerian sites, notes the "rarity of any good archival context for archaic tablets found at Uruk" and mentions that the "archaic texts from Ur were scattered in rubbish heaps" (p. 157). For a concise introduction to Sumerian tablets, their chronology, and decipherment, see S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Culture and Society* (Menlo Park, Calif.: Cummings, 1975) and also his *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

2. Paolo Matthiae, *Ebla: Un impero ritrovato* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1977).

3. Paolo Matthiae, "Ebla in the Late Early Syrian Period: The Royal Palace and the State Archives," *Biblical Archeologist* 39 (1976): 94–113; idem,

"La biblioteca reale di Ebla (2400-2250 a.C.)," *Rendiconti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 48 (1976): 19-45; idem, "Tell Mardikh: The Archives and Palace," *Archaeology* 30 (1977): 244-253; idem, "Tell Mardikh: Ancient Ebla," *American Journal of Archaeology* 82 (1978): 540-543, which contains new evidence for the dating of Ebla.

4. Giovanni Pettinato, "Testi cuneiformi del 3. millennio in paleo-cananeo rinvenuti nella campagna 1974 a Tell Mardikh = Ebla," *Orientalia* 44 (1975): 361-374; idem, "I testi cuneiformi della biblioteca reale di Tell Mardikh: Notizia preliminare sulla scuola di Ebla," *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 48 (1976): 47-57; idem, "The Royal Archives of Tell-Mardikh-Ebla," *Biblical Archeologist* 39 (1976): 44-52.

5. Chaim Bermant and Michael Weitzman, *Ebla: An Archaeological Enigma* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979).

6. The number of tablets found, though indeed large, has been much exaggerated in the popular press. What has been discovered so far consists of 1,800 complete tablets, 4,700 large and small fragments, and about 10,000 tiny fragments, containing only one or two signs. The complete archives seem to have held about 4,000 documents. See R. Biggs, "The Ebla Tablets: An Interim Perspective," *Biblical Archeologist* 43 (1980): 76-87.

7. In modern terms: the name *Khrushchev*, written in Roman script, is a transcription of that name—originally written in Cyrillic—intended to convey an approximation of the Russian pronunciation; the numeral *3* is a logograph, written (and pronounced) *three* in English, *trois* in French, *drei* in German, and *tri* in Russian, and so are Chinese characters, pronounced entirely differently in various parts of China and in Japan but having exactly the same meaning.

8. See Bermant and Weitzman, *Ebla*, chap. 4, "Cuneiform without Tears"; and Biggs, "Ebla Tablets," p. 77-78.

9. A. Archi, "The Epigraphic Evidence from Ebla and the Old Testament," *Biblica* 60 (1979): 556-566. See also "New Ebla Epigrapher Attacks Conclusion of Ousted Ebla Scholar," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 6 (3) (1980): 55-56.

10. Giovanni Pettinato, *Catalogo dei testi cuneiformi di Tell Mardikh-Ebla* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1979). Biggs, "Ebla Tablets," p. 87, gives a list of "Published Texts from Ebla" comprising thirty items that either have been published in transliteration or have been shown in legible photographs.

11. Giovanni Pettinato, "L'atlante geografico del vicino oriente antico attestato ad Ebla e ad Abū Salābikh," *Orientalia* 47 (1978): 50-73.

12. The inscriptions found at Ras Shamra, the ancient Ugarit, only a short distance from Ebla, are the oldest extant record of single letters in alphabetical order (although the script is still cuneiform). Almost the same order is still used in the Hebrew alphabet and has to a large extent been preserved first in the Greek and then in the Roman alphabet.

13. Bermant and Weitzman, *Ebla*, p. 158.

14. Letter from Mitchell Dahood in *Biblical Archeologist* 41 (1978): 143.

15. Mitchell Dahood, "Ebla, Ugarit and the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum*, Supplement 29 (1978): 81-112; David N. Freedman, "The Real Story of the Ebla Tablets: Ebla and the Cities of the Plain," *Biblical Archeologist* 41 (1978): 143-164.

16. Clifford Wilson, *Ebla Tablets: Secrets of a Forgotten City* (San Diego: Master Books, 1977).

17. ". . . in my opinion, the Ebla tablets will have no *special* relevance for understanding of the Old Testament," Biggs, "Ebla Tablets," p. 85 (emphasis in the original). See also P. C. Maloney, "Assessing Ebla," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 4 (1) (1978): 4-11.

18. H. Shanks, "Syria Tries to Influence Ebla Scholarship," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 5 (2) (1979): 36-47, contains the full text of a "Declaration" apparently forced upon Matthiae by the Syrians, in which he repudiates any connection between Ebla and the Bible (p. 38). This is followed by a reprint of an interview with Matthiae from the Syrian journal *Flash*, in which he denounces the "Zionist plot" (ibid., pp. 48-50).

19. David N. Freedman, "The Tell Mardikh Excavation, the Ebla Tablets, and Their Significance for Biblical Studies," *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin* 13 (1979): 9.