

= Ebla =

Ebla (Arabic : عبل , modern : تيل ماردikh) , was one of the earliest kingdoms in Syria . Its remains constitute a tell located about 55 km (34 mi) southwest of Aleppo near the village of Mardikh . Ebla was an important center throughout the third millennium BC and in the first half of the second millennium BC . Its discovery proved the Levant was a center of ancient , centralized civilization equal to Egypt and Mesopotamia , and ruled out the view that the latter two were the only important centers in the Near East during the early Bronze Age . Karl Moore described the first Eblaite kingdom as the first recorded world power .

Starting as a small settlement in the early Bronze Age (c . 3500 BC) , Ebla developed into a trading empire and later into an expansionist power that imposed its hegemony over much of northern and eastern Syria . Its language , Eblaite , is now considered the earliest attested Semitic language after Akkadian . Ebla was destroyed during the 23rd century BC ; it was then rebuilt and was mentioned in the records of the Third Dynasty of Ur . The second Ebla was a continuation of the first , ruled by a new royal dynasty . It was destroyed at the end of the third millennium BC , which paved the way for the Amorite tribes to settle in the city , forming the third Ebla . The third kingdom also flourished as a trade center ; it became a subject and an ally of Yamhad (modern @-@ day Aleppo) until its final destruction by the Hittite king Mursili I in c . 1600 BC .

Ebla maintained its prosperity through a vast trading network . Artifacts from Sumer , Cyprus , Egypt and as far as Afghanistan were recovered from the city 's palaces . The political organization of Ebla had features different from the Sumerian model . Women enjoyed a special status and the queen had major influence in the state and religious affairs . The pantheon of gods was mainly north Semitic and included deities exclusive to Ebla . The city was excavated starting in 1964 , and became famous for the Ebla tablets , an archive of about 20 @,@ 000 cuneiform tablets found there , dated to around 2350 BC . Written in both Sumerian and Eblaite and using the cuneiform , the archive has allowed a better understanding of the Sumerian language and provided important information over the political organization and social customs of the mid third millennium BC 's Levant .

= = History = =

A possible meaning of the word " Ebla " is " white rock " , referring to the limestone outcrop on which the city was built . Ebla was first settled around 3500 BC ; its growth was supported by many satellite agricultural settlements . The city benefited from its role as an entrepôt of growing international trade , which probably began with an increased demand for wool in Sumer . Archaeologists designate this early habitation period " Mardikh I " ; it ended around 3000 BC . Mardikh I is followed by the first and second kingdoms era between about 3000 and 2000 BC , designated " Mardikh II " . I. J. Gelb consider Ebla as part of the Kish civilization , which was a cultural entity of East Semitic @-@ speaking populations that stretched from the center of Mesopotamia to the western Levant .

= = = First kingdom = = =

During the first kingdom period between about 3000 and 2300 BC , Ebla was the most prominent kingdom among the Syrian states , especially during the second half of the 3rd millennium BC , which is known as " the age of the archives " after the Ebla tablets .

= = = Early period = = =

The early period between 3000 and 2400 BC is designated " Mardikh IIA " . General knowledge about the city 's history prior to the written archives is obtained through excavations . The first stages of Mardikh IIA is identified with building " CC " , and structures that form a part of building " G2 " , which was apparently a royal palace built c . 2700 BC . Toward the end of this period , a

hundred years ' war with Mari started . Mari gained the upper hand through the actions of its king Sa?umu , who conquered many of Ebla 's cities . In the mid @-@ 25th century BC , king Kun @-@ Damu defeated Mari , but the state 's power declined following his reign .

= = = = Archive period = = = =

The archive period , which is designated " Mardikh IIB1 " , lasted from c . 2400 BC until c . 2300 BC . The end of the period is known as the " first destruction " , mainly referring to the destruction of the royal palace (called palace " G " and built over the earlier " G2 ") , and much of the acropolis . During the archive period , Ebla had political and military dominance over the other Syrian city @-@ states of northern and eastern Syria , which are mentioned in the archives . Most of the tablets , which date from that period , are about economic matters but also include royal letters and diplomatic documents .

The written archives do not date from before Igrish @-@ Halam 's reign , which saw Ebla paying tribute to Mari , and an extensive invasion of Eblaite cities in the middle Euphrates region led by the Mariote king Iblul @-@ II . Ebla recovered under King Irkab @-@ Damu in about 2340 BC ; becoming prosperous and launching a successful counter @-@ offensive against Mari . Irkab @-@ Damu concluded a peace and trading treaty with Abarsal ; it is one of the earliest @-@ recorded treaties in history .

At its greatest extent , Ebla controlled an area roughly half the size of modern Syria , from Ursa 'um in the north , to the area around Damascus in the south , and from Phoenicia and the coastal mountains in the west , to Haddu in the east . Half of kingdom was under the direct control of the king and was administered by governors ; the rest consisted of vassal kingdoms paying tribute and supplying military assistance to Ebla . One of the most important of these vassals was Armi , which is the city most often mentioned in the Ebla tablets . Ebla had more than sixty vassal kingdoms and city @-@ states , including Hazuwan , Burman , Emar , Halabitu and Salbatu .

The vizier was the king 's chief official . The holder of the office possessed great authority ; the most powerful vizier was Ibrium , who campaigned against Abarsal during the term of his predecessor Arrukum . During the reign of Isar @-@ Damu , Ebla continued the war against Mari , which defeated Ebla 's ally Nagar , blocking trade routes between Ebla and southern Mesopotamia via upper Mesopotamia . Ebla conducted regular military campaigns against rebellious vassals , including several attacks on Armi , and a campaign against the southern city of Ibal ? close to Qatna . In order to settle the war with Mari , Isar @-@ Damu allied with Nagar and Kish . The campaign was headed by the Eblaite vizier Ibbi @-@ Sipish , who led the combined armies to victory in a battle near Terqa . The alliance also attacked Armi and occupied it , leaving Ibbi @-@ Sipish 's son Enzi @-@ Malik as governor . Ebla suffered its first destruction a few years after the campaign , probably following Isar @-@ Damu 's death .

= = = = First destruction of Ebla = = = =

The first destruction occurred c . 2300 BC ; palace " G " was burned , baking the clay tablets of the royal archives and preserving them . Many theories about the cause and the perpetrator have been posited :

High (early) dating hypothesis : Giovanni Pettinato supports an early dating for Ebla that would put the destruction at around 2500 BC . Pettinato , while preferring the date of 2500 BC , later accepted the event could have happened in 2400 BC . The scholar suggests the city was destroyed in 2400 BC by a Mesopotamian such as Eannatum of Lagash ? who boasted of taking tribute from Mari ? or Lugalzagesi of Umma , who claimed to have reached the Mediterranean .

Akkadian hypothesis : Both kings Sargon of Akkad and his grandson Naram @-@ Sin claimed to have destroyed a town called Ibla , The discoverer of Ebla , Paolo Matthiae , considers Sargon a more likely culprit ; his view is supported by Trevor Bryce , but rejected by Michael Astour .

Mari 's revenge : According to Alfonso Archi and Maria Biga , the destruction happened approximately three or four years after the battle of Terqa . Archi and Biga say the destruction was

caused by Mari in retaliation for its humiliating defeat at Terqa . This view is supported by Mario Liverani . Archi says the Mariote king Isqi @-@ Mari destroyed Ebla before ascending the throne of his city .

Natural catastrophe : Astour says a natural catastrophe caused the blaze which ended the archive period . He says the destruction was limited to the area of the royal palace and there is no convincing evidence of looting . He dates the fire to c . 2290 BC (Middle Chronology) .

= = = Second kingdom = = =

The second kingdom 's period is designated " Mardikh IIB2 " , and spans the period between 2300 and 2000 BC . The second kingdom lasted until Ebla 's second destruction , which occurred anytime between 2050 and 1950 BC , with the 2000 BC dating being a mere formal date . The Akkadians under Sargon and his descendant Naram @-@ Sin invaded the northern borders of Ebla aiming for the forests of the Amanus Mountain ; the intrusions were separated by roughly 90 years and the areas attacked were not attached to Akkad . Archi accept that the lbla mentioned in the annals of Sargon and Naram @-@ Sin is the Syrian Ebla but do not consider them responsible for the destruction which ended the Archive period . By the time of Naram @-@ Sin , Armi was the hegemonic city in northern Syria and was destroyed by the Akkadian king .

A new local dynasty ruled the second kingdom of Ebla , but there was continuity with its first kingdom heritage . Ebla maintained its earliest features , including its architectural style and the sanctity of the first kingdom 's religious sites . A new royal palace was built in the lower town , and the transition from the archive period is marked only by the destruction of palace " G " . Little is known about the second kingdom because no written material have been discovered aside from one inscription dating to the end of the period .

The second kingdom was attested to in contemporaneous sources ; in an inscription , Gudea of Lagash asked for cedars to be brought from Urshu in the mountains of Ebla , indicating Ebla 's territory included Urshu north of Carchemish in modern @-@ day Turkey . Texts that dates to the seventh year of Amar @-@ Sin (c . 2040 BC) , a ruler of the Ur III empire , mention a messenger of the Ensí (" Megum ") of Ebla . The second kingdom was considered a vassal by the Ur III government , but the nature of the relation is unknown and it included the payment of tribute . A formal recognition of Ur 's overlordship appears to be a condition for the right of trade with that empire .

The second kingdom disintegrated toward the end of the 21st century BC , and ended with the destruction of the city by fire , although evidence for the event has only been found outside of the so called " Temple of the Rock " , and in the area around palace " E " on the acropolis . The reason for the destruction is not known ; according to Astour , it could have been the result of a Hurrian invasion c . 2030 BC , led by the former Eblaites vassal city of Ikinkalis . The destruction of Ebla is mentioned in the fragmentary Hurro @-@ Hittite legendary epic " Song of Release " discovered in 1983 , which Astour considers as describing the destruction of the second kingdom . In the epic , an Eblaites assembly led by a man called " Zazalla " prevents king Meki from showing mercy to prisoners from Ebla 's former vassal Ikinkalis , provoking the wrath of the Hurrian storm god Teshub and causing him to destroy the city .

= = = Third kingdom = = =

The third kingdom is designated " Mardikh III " ; it is divided into periods " A " (c . 2000 ? 1800 BC) and " B " (c . 1800 ? 1600 BC) . In period " A " , Ebla was quickly rebuilt as a planned city . The foundations covered the remains of Mardikh II ; new palaces and temples were built , and new fortifications were built in two circles ? one for the low city and one for the acropolis . The city was laid out on regular lines and large public buildings were built . Further construction took place in period " B " .

The first known king of the third kingdom is Ibbit @-@ Lim , who described himself as the Mekim of Ebla . A basalt votive statue bearing Ibbit @-@ Lim 's inscription was discovered in 1968 ; this

helped to identify the site of Tell @-@ Mardikh with the ancient kingdom Ebla . The name of the king is Amorite in the view of Pettinato ; it is therefore probable the inhabitants of third kingdom Ebla were predominantly Amorites , as were most of the inhabitants of Syria at that time .

By the beginning of the 18th century BC , Ebla had become a vassal of Yamhad , an Amorite kingdom centered in Aleppo . Written records are not available for this period , but the city was still a vassal during Yarim @-@ Lim III of Yamhad 's reign . One of the known rulers of Ebla during this period was Immeya , who received gifts from the Egyptian Pharaoh Hotepibre , indicating the continuing wide connections and importance of Ebla . The city was mentioned in tablets from the Yamhadite vassal city of Alalakh in modern @-@ day Turkey ; an Eblaite princess married a son of King Ammitaqum of Alalakh , who belonged to a branch of the royal Yamhadite dynasty .

Ebla was destroyed by the Hittite King Mursili I in about 1600 BC . Indilimma was probably the last king of Ebla ; a seal of his crown prince Maratewari was discovered in the western palace " Q " . According to Archi , the " Song of Release " epic describes the destruction of the third kingdom and preserves older elements .

= = = Later periods = = =

Ebla never recovered from its third destruction . It was a small village in the phase designated " Mardikh IV " (1600 ? 1200 BC) , and was mentioned in the records of Alalakh as a vassal to the Idrimi dynasty . " Mardikh V " (1200 ? 535 BC) was a rural , early Iron Age settlement that grew in size during later periods . Further development occurred during " Mardikh VI " , which lasted until c . 60 AD . " Mardikh VII " began in the 3rd century AD and lasted until the 7th century , after which the site was abandoned .

= = Organization = =

= = = City layout = = =

Ebla consisted of a lower town and a raised acropolis in the center . During the first kingdom , the city had an area of 56 hectares and was protected by mud @-@ brick fortifications . Ebla was divided into four districts ? each with its own gate in the outer wall . The acropolis included the king 's palace " G " , and one of two temples in city dedicated to Kura (called the " Red Temple ") . The lower city included the second temple of Kura in the southeast called " Temple of the Rock " . During the second kingdom , a royal palace (Archaic Palace " P5 ") was built in the lower town northwest of the acropolis , in addition to temple " D " built over the destroyed " Red Temple " .

During the third kingdom , Ebla was a large city nearly 60 hectares in size , and was protected by a fortified rampart , with double chambered gates . The acropolis was fortified and separated from the lower town . New royal palace " E " was built on the acropolis (during Mardikh IIIB) , and a temple of Ishtar was constructed over the former " Red " and " D " temples (in area " D ") . The lower town was also divided into four districts ; palace " P5 " was used during Mardikh IIIA , and replaced during Mardikh IIIB by the " Intermediate Palace " .

Other building included the vizier palace , the western palace (in area " Q ") , the temple of Shamash (temple " N ") , the temple of Rasap (temple " B1 ") and the northern palace (built over the " Intermediate Palace ") . In the north of the lower town , a second temple for Ishtar was built , while the former " Temple of the Rock " was replaced by a temple of Hadad . Beneath the western palace , natural caves constituted a royal burial ground ; it includes many tombs such as the " Tomb of the Lord of the Goats " and " Tomb of the Princess " .

= = = Government = = =

The first kingdom government consisted of the king (styled Malikum) and the grand vizier , who headed a council of elders (Abbu) and the administration . The central administration was located

in the acropolis . The queen shared the running of affairs of state with the king , the crown prince was involved in internal matters and the second prince was involved in foreign affairs . Most affairs , including military ones , were handled by the vizier and the administration , which consisted of 13 court dignitaries ? each of whom controlled between 400 and 800 men forming a bureaucracy with 11 @, @ 700 people . Each of the four quarters of the lower city was governed by a chief inspector and many deputies . Smaller cities were governed by governors , each of whom was under the authority of the grand vizier . Women received salaries equal to those of men and could accede to important positions and head government agencies .

The second kingdom was a monarchy but little is known about it because of a lack of written records . The third kingdom was a city @-@ state monarchy with reduced importance under the authority of Yamhad .

= = = = Kings of Ebla = = = =

The Eblaites worshiped dead kings as gods . For the first kingdom monarchs , tablets listing offerings to kings mention ten names , and another list mentions 33 kings . No kings are known from the second kingdom and all dates are estimates according to the Middle chronology .

= = People , language and culture = =

= = = The first and second kingdoms = = =

Mardikh II 's periods shared the same culture. the population of Ebla during Mardikh IIB1 is estimated to have numbered around 40 @, @ 000 in the capital , and over 200 @, @ 000 people in the entire kingdom . The Eblaites of Mardikh II were Semites . Giovanni Pettinato said the Eblaite language was a West Semitic language ; Gelb and others said it was an East Semitic dialect closer to the Akkadian language . Academic consensus considers Eblaite an East @-@ Semitic language which exhibits both West @-@ Semitic and East @-@ Semitic features .

Ebla held several religious and social festivals , including rituals for the succession of a new king , which normally lasted for several weeks . The Eblaite calendars were based on a solar year divided into twelve months . Two calendars were discovered ; the " old calendar " used during the reign of Igrish @-@ Halam , and a " new calendar " introduced by vizier Ibbi @-@ Sipish . Many months were named in honor of deities ; in the new calendar , " Itu be @-@ li " was the first month of the year , and meant " the month of the lord " . Each year was given a name instead of a number .

The Eblaites imported Kungas from Nagar , and used them to draw the carriages of royalty and high officials , as well as diplomatic gifts for allied cities . Society was less centered around the palace and the temple than in Mesopotamian kingdoms . The Eblaite palace was designed around the courtyard , which was open toward the city , thus making the administration approachable . This contrasts with Mesopotamian palaces , which resembled citadels with narrow entrances and limited access to the external courtyard . Music played an important part in the society and musicians were both locals , or hired from other cities such as Mari . Ebla also hired acrobats from Nagar , but later reduced their number and kept some to train local Eblaite acrobats .

= = = The third kingdom = = =

The Mardikh III population was predominately Semitic Amorite . The Amorites were mentioned in the first kingdom 's tablets as neighbors and as rural subjects . They came to dominate Ebla after the destruction of the second kingdom and formed the bulk of its population . The city witnessed a great increase in construction , and many palaces , temples and fortifications were built . The Amorite Eblaites worshiped many of the same deities as the Eblaites of earlier periods , and maintained the sanctity of the acropolis in the center of the city . The third kingdom 's iconography and royal ideology were under the influence of Yamhad 's culture ; kingship was received from the

Yamhadite deities instead of Ishtar of Ebla , which is evident by the Eblaite seals of Indilimma 's period .

= = Economy = =

During the first kingdom period , the palace controlled the economy , but wealthy families managed their financial affairs without government intervention . The economic system was redistributive ; the palace distributed food to its permanent and seasonal workers . It is estimated that around 40 @,@ 000 persons contributed to this system , but in general , and unlike in Mesopotamia , land stayed in the hands of villages , which paid an annual share to the palace . Agriculture was mainly pastoral ; large herds of cattle were managed by the palace . The city 's inhabitants owned around 140 @,@ 000 head of sheep and goats , and 9 @,@ 000 cattle .

Ebla derived its prosperity from trade ; its wealth was equal to that of the most important Sumerian cities , and its main commercial rival was Mari . Ebla 's main articles of trade were probably timber from the nearby mountains , and textiles . Handicrafts also appear to have been a major export , evidenced by the quantity of artifacts recovered from the palaces of the city . Ebla possessed a wide commercial network reaching as far as modern @-@ day Afghanistan . It shipped textiles to Cyprus , possibly through the port of Ugarit , but most of its trade seems to have been directed by river @-@ boat towards Mesopotamia ? chiefly Kish . The main palace G was found to contain artifacts dating from Ancient Egypt bearing the names of Pharaohs Khafra and Pepi I.

Ebla continued to be a center of trade during the second kingdom , evidenced by the surrounding cities that appeared during its period and were destroyed along with the city . Trade continued to be Ebla 's main economic activity during the third kingdom ; archaeological finds show there was an extensive exchange with Egypt and coastal Syrian cities such as Byblos .

= = Religion = =

Ebla was a polytheistic state . During the first kingdom , the pantheon had three genres of deities ; in the first and most common there were pairs of gods , such as the deity and his female consort , or divine couples such as the deities that cooperate to create the cosmos , as in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian pantheons . The second genre included single deities , while the third genre consisted of divine pairs who were actually a single deity that had two names . Eblaïtes worshiped few Mesopotamian deities , preferring northern Semitic gods , some of which were unique to Ebla .

The first genre included the eastern Semitic chief god Dagan , and his consort , Belatu (" his wife ") . The patron gods of the city were Kura , who was unique to Ebla , and his consort Barama . Other major deities included Hadad (Hadda) and his consort Habadu , and Rasap and his consort Adamma .

The second genre included the Syrian goddess Ishara , who was the goddess of the royal family . Ishtar was also worshiped but was mentioned only five times in one of the monthly offering lists , while Ishara was far more important , appearing 40 times . Other deities included Damu ; Nidakul , who was exclusive to Ebla ; the Mesopotamian god Utu ; Ashtapi ; and Shipish the goddess of the sun who had a temple dedicated to her cult .

The third genre included the artisan god Kamish / Tit , Kothar @-@ wa @-@ Khasis and the planet Venus represented by twin mountain Gods ; Shahr as the morning star and Shalim as the evening star . Eblaïtes also practiced the deification of dead kings . The four city gates were named after the gods Dagan , Hadda , Rasap and Utu , but it is unknown which gate had which name . Overall , the offering list mentioned about 40 deities receiving sacrifices .

During the third kingdom , Amorites worshiped common northern Semitic gods ; the unique Eblaïte deities disappeared . Hadad was the most important god , while Ishtar took Ishara 's place and became the city 's most important deity apart from Hadad .

= = Biblical connection theories = = =

At the beginning of the process of deciphering the tablets , Pettinato made claims about a possible connections between Ebla and the Bible , citing an alleged references in the tablets to the existence of Yahweh , the Patriarchs , Sodom and Gomorrah and other Biblical references . However , much of the initial media excitement about a supposed Eblaite connections with the Bible , based on preliminary guesses and speculations by Pettinato and others , is now widely discredited as " exceptional and unsubstantiated claims " and " great amounts of disinformation that leaked to the public " . In Ebla studies , the focus has shifted away from comparisons with the Bible ; Ebla is now studied as a civilization in its own right . The change came after a bitter personal and academic conflict between the scholars involved , as well as what some described as political interference by the Syrian authorities .

= = Discovery and library = =

In 1964 , Italian archaeologists from the University of Rome La Sapienza under the direction of Paolo Matthiae began excavating at Tell Mardikh . In 1968 , they recovered a statue dedicated to the goddess Ishtar bearing the name of Ibbit @-@ Lim , mentioning him as king of Ebla . That identified the city , long known from Lagashite and Akkadian inscriptions . In the next decade , the team discovered a palace (palace G) dating from c . 2500 ? 2000 BC . Finds in the palaces include a small sculpture made out of precious materials , black stones and gold . Other artifacts included wood furniture inlaid with mother @-@ of @-@ pearl and composite statues created from colored stones . A silver bowl bearing king Immeya 's name was recovered from the " Tomb of the Lord of the Goats " , together with Egyptian jewels and an Egyptian ceremonial mace presented by pharaoh Hotepibre . Ebla 's first kingdom is an example of early Syrian centralized states , and is considered one of the earliest empires by scholars including Samuel Finer and Karl Moore , who consider it the first @-@ recorded world power . Ebla 's discovery changed the former view of Syria 's history as a bridge between Mesopotamia and Egypt ; it proved the region was a center of civilization in its own right .

About 20 @,@ 000 cuneiform tablets consisting of 2 @,@ 500 well @-@ preserved , complete tablets and thousands of fragments , were discovered in the site . About 80 % of the tablets are written using the usual Sumerian combination of logograms and phonetic signs , while the others exhibited an innovative , purely phonetic representation using Sumerian cuneiform of a previously unknown Semitic language , which was called " Eblaite " . Bilingual Sumerian / Eblaite vocabulary lists were found among the tablets , allowing them to be translated .

Ebla 's close link to southern Mesopotamia , where the script had developed , further highlights the contemporaneous links between the Sumerians and Semitic cultures . The tablets provide many important insights into the cultural , economic and political life in northern Mesopotamia around the middle of the 3rd millennium BC . They also provide insight into the everyday lives of the inhabitants and containing information about state revenues , Sumerian @-@ Eblaite dictionaries , school texts , an archive of provisions and tribute , law cases , diplomatic and trade contacts , and a scriptorium where apprentices copied texts . The tablets also contain writings on Ebla 's hymns , legends , scientific observations and magic .

= = = Library = = =

The tablets constitute one of the oldest archives and libraries ever found ; there is tangible evidence of their arrangement and even classification . The larger tablets had originally been stored on shelves , but had fallen onto the floor when the palace was destroyed . The locations of the fallen tablets allowed the excavators to reconstruct their original positions on the shelves ; they found the tablets had originally been shelved according to subject .

These features were absent from earlier Sumerian excavations . Sophisticated techniques of arrangement of texts , coupled with their composition , evidence the great antiquity of archival and library practices , which may be far older than was assumed to be the case before the discovery of the Ebla library . A sizable portion of the tablets contain literary and lexicographic texts ; evidence

seems to suggest the collection also served ? at least partially ? as a true library rather than a collection of archives intended solely for use by the kings , their ministers , and their bureaucracy . The tablets show evidence of the early transcription of texts into foreign languages and scripts , classification and cataloging for easier retrieval , and arrangement by size , form and content . The Ebla tablets have thus provided scholars with new insights into the origin of library practices that were in use 4 @,@ 500 years ago .

= = Current situation = =

As a result of the Syrian Civil War , excavations of Ebla stopped in March 2011 , and large @-@ scale looting occurred after the site came under the control of an opposition armed group . Many tunnels were dug and a crypt full of human remains was discovered ; the remains were scattered and discarded by the robbers , who hoped to find jewelry and other precious artifacts . Digging all around the mound was conducted by nearby villagers with the aim of finding artifacts ; some villagers removed carloads of soil suitable for making ceramic liners for bread @-@ baking ovens from the tunnels .