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MISSIONE ARCHEOLOGICA ITALIANA IN SIRIA

ARES III

A MORPHOLOGICAL AND LEXICAL STUDY
OF PERSONAL NAMES IN THE EBLA TEXTS

by

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PREFACE

It is emblematic of Pagan's work, if I may single out one distinctive aspect of his very thorough treatment of Ebla onomastics, that he accepted the challenge to fully and systematically translate the names and their constituent elements. He points this out in his introduction; but it is worthwhile to dwell for a moment on the wider methodological significance that is implied. The element of risk in such a commitment is immediately apparent; but perhaps for the wrong reasons.

The risk one may think of at first is that our knowledge of the semantic dimension is too limited to allow for the development of a sustainable argument; the risk envisaged in this case is, then, that one may be forced to venture wild hypothesis with little basis for verification. This would be a brazen risk to run. And it is not the one that Pagan intends to face.

Rather, his commitment is to provide the reader with an easy gauge with which to check and control his interpretation. It is not the semantic, much less the semiotic,¹ dimension of the names that he has in mind in his translations. Instead, the translations aim at providing a consistent and transparent rendering of the morphological and lexical categories as coherent distributional classes. The risk, therefore, is that he sets up clear standards by which the internal consistency of his understanding may best be evaluated and, where necessary, criticized. He was undaunted by the vastness of the material, which only increased the risk: and thus he has proceeded to articulate explicitly the understanding which would otherwise have simply been retained as an undercurrent, allowed to surface in a somewhat arbitrary fashion. The danger with such a procedure is greater than the risk of full disclosure: for an implicit understanding is no less operative than one made explicit, but is left inarticulate and thus impervious to proper critical analysis. In other words, his translations are glosses which make apparent, in a consistent and thorough way, his morpho-lexical choices. That one might argue with specifics, it goes without saying. That there may be more to argue about because the data is so voluminous, is also self-understood. But what remains is the merit of having provided the full articulation of the elements on which the very argument can be developed in the first place.

I am personally grateful to Pagan for having accepted this challenge. It has entailed the development of a special kind of discipline, over and beyond the philological control of the texts. To the latter he devoted a large measure of his time, to an extent which is not reflected in the present work. His long term research on

¹On this distinction see briefly my contribution on "Eblaite and Amorite," in E. Eichler, G. Hilty, H. Loeffler, H. Steger, L. Zgusta (eds.), *Namenforschung. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Onomastik / Name Studies. An International Handbook of Onomastics / Les noms propres. Manuel international d'onomastique*. Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 1995, 856-860.

Ebla graphemics went hand in hand with that on Ebla onomastics,² and has contributed greatly to the solidity of his understanding of the medium through which the linguistic reality of the names is transmitted to us. For, if I have spoken of the risk, I must also speak of the gain: there is a fundamental sobriety in Pagan's approach that validates to a very large extent the important new insights he has contributed.

The personal dimension of my recognition of Pagan's effort has to do with the many years that have found us working together, and the many vicissitudes through which we have walked, personal and academic. One that bears relating on this occasion pertains to the multiple adaptations that the electronic component underwent over the years. Some of the vicissitudes had, in fact, to do with the perennial alterations of electronic systems, passing as we did through various generations of hardware configurations and operating systems. Besides demanding a continuous measure of patience, for which I am most grateful to Pagan as to my other students, there was also a significant intellectual result that made the constant realignments worth the delay, namely the need to focus on the elements of permanence. These were to be found primarily in the development of a proper categorization, rigorous and yet flexible in representing the data not as an open-ended string of data, but as a structured whole, shaped by an all-encompassing grammatical understanding; the development of such a system of analysis was my personal contribution to the project, which still remains to be published. The data base as provided in the disk attached to the present volume by Pagan can be properly and fully utilized against the background of such a categorization, for which the brief Appendix A in the present volume can only serve as a preliminary approximation. A fuller explanation of the system, and the distribution of programs for the utilization of the data base, remains one of the goals which I hope to achieve in the near future. For the time being, the data base in plain ASCII format will be accessible on any type of word processor or data base management system, and may already be utilized to a certain extent for limited search and sort functions.

Finally, I wish to add my own to Pagan's acknowledgments of the contribution of the members of the Ebla team. From the earliest meetings of the Ebla Committee, Paolo Matthiae, Pelio Fronzaroli and Alfonso Archi expressed their interest and their support for the project out of which this volume has derived. In later years, Lucio Milano became a central factor in the philological supervision of the work on the data, especially through his services as a Visiting Professor at UCLA. Together with Alfonso Archi, he also provided a series of collations which helped to provide the most solid textual basis for Pagan's analysis. For all of this, they have our warm expression of gratitude.

Giorgio Buccellati
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²Both aspects were part of a long term research project devoted to the linguistic analysis of cuneiform, carried out under the terms of grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and from the Packard Humanities Institute, whose assistance is hereby gratefully acknowledged.