

**SYRO-MESOPOTAMIAN STUDIES:**

**A PREFACE**

by

**Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati**

Discovery and integration are two major determinants of the dynamics and growth of scholarly research—discovery of new data and points of view, and their integration into a cohesive, overarching scheme. Every new piece of information, any valid rereading of the data occasioned by a shift in methodological approach, necessitates a reconsideration of the accepted scholarly framework—and a revision which will only slowly become in its turn accepted. The articulation of an appropriate scholarly reasoning which follows the moment of discovery is necessarily an even longer process when the pertinent data come from ongoing archaeological excavations from different sites, dug by different teams: then the commonality of features and the resulting new perspectives which begin to emerge on the historiographic horizon are more difficult to perceive because the information process is hampered by the very nature of its sources—spread out in origin, many in number, scattered in the manner of documentation.

It is the purpose of this new journal to contribute toward focusing the attention of fellow scholars on such an emerging historiographic horizon, the one which is expressed by the adjective used in the title—Syro-Mesopotamian. The finds at Tell Mardikh, ancient Ebla, are clearly the single most spectacular pointer in such a direction; but they are not the only ones, nor can they adequately be understood if seen in a vacuum. The overriding importance at Ebla of the cuneiform tradition in general, and of Sumerian in particular, are already a clear evidence of the strong and fundamental ties with Southern Mesopotamia. More indications of such connections between Northwest and Southeast are mounting especially as a result of the program of excavations in the area of the Tabqa dam. The picture of a Mesopotamian Syria as was already known from such classical sites as Mari and Tell Chuera can now in many respects be extended to Western Syria. It is not the picture of external importation as may result from military occupation (thus for instance at Tell Brak), nor that of a partial adoption of given cultural traits (such as with the use of cuneiform Akkadian in Syria in the time of Amarna). For the early periods of history, especially the third and early part of the second millennium B.C., we are beginning to see a firmer cultural unity among the regions from the Taurus and the Orontes basins down, along the middle and lower Euphrates, to the Gulf. In this framework, Syria is by no means an appendage or a provincial efflorescence, but a constituent part in a unitary development. If, in this sense, we want to think of Mesopotamia as the land of the two rivers, then Syria, at least in its northern part, may be conceived as Western Mesopotamia.

In so doing we do not intend simply to propose a new label, but rather to point to an important aspect in a unitary and organic development: the growth of the great urban culture of Southwestern Asia in the early historic periods was not limited to the southern

alluvium, but extended north and west up until the border of the sea and the higher mountain ranges—and if “Mesopotamian” is the term we choose for this cultural configuration, then its meaning must be taken to extend geographically to the entire area. It goes without saying that even, or precisely, as a constituent of a unitary development, Syria retains its own physiognomy, and that, in fact, within it, one can in turn find regional differences. The reason for stressing its relationship to north- and south-eastern Mesopotamia (i.e. the area corresponding to modern Iraq) is that they all share at the same time the same fundamental presuppositions and the same fundamental innovations of a growing urban civilization, even though actual formulas and details of application will vary from time to time. The term “Syro-Mesopotamian” is meant to reflect both the commonality and the differentiation: we refer by it to a tradition which includes ancient Syria (Western Mesopotamia) on the one hand and ancient Iraq (North- and South-eastern Mesopotamia) on the other. While the term does not carry in itself a chronological definition, it will be used here to refer to the ancient periods, i.e. generally from the Neolithic down to the time when the entire area is absorbed within the broader administrative and political framework of the Persian empire.

If the title underscores the theme of a newly perceived historical horizon and the internal relationships within its confines, it does not exclude that the journal may serve also as a forum for articles dealing with specific segments within that cultural continuum. Thus *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* will provide an outlet for (1) the primary publication of sources both archaeological and philological, which originate from the “land of the two rivers” in its broad, new acceptance; for (2) their analysis in the light of any well articulated methodology, whether it be the stratigraphy of cultural deposition, the style and iconography of representational artifacts, the historical interpretation of textual data or the like; and finally for (3) the presentation of interpretive essays on given phenomena, whether institutional or processual.

As a part of the system *Monographic Journals of the Near East*, the various contributions to *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* will be available on a selective basis. With the addition of this new journal the system becomes further diversified, and the modular concept which is its main characteristic more effective and functional. The various journals within *MJNE* are meant to serve as specialized, thesis oriented vehicles of communication, held together in virtue of their sharing a common cultural scope and methodological orientation as well as a practical link in the means of access to the published materials. Specifically, articles dealing with Assyria (including Nuzi) as a cultural area by itself, even within the Syro-Mesopotamian horizon, will be reserved for *Assur*. Articles applying general linguistics to the analysis of the Semitic languages of ancient Syro-Mesopotamia will be reserved for *Afroasiatic Linguistics*. Articles dealing with the technical aspects of electronic data processing will be reserved for *Computer Aided Research in Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (while substantive results of the same projects will best be reserved for the other journals).

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Volume 1

Issue 1

May 1977

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ISBN: 0-89003-050-2