

ALLOCATION DE REPRÉSENTANT DES PARTICIPANTS

DR GIORGIO BUCELLATI

Your Excellency

Dr. Attar , Mr. governor , Dr. Bahnassi , Ladies and Gentlemen

The Symposium of Der ez-Zor will be for the next few days the focal point of our attention. Beyond the next few days, it will certainly remain for time to come the focal point of collective scholarly reflection on this remarkable region. We are happy and privileged to be a part of it, and to help celebrate all that it stands for . People and institutions take stock of their development by singling out special thresholds along this line of development which we call « anniversaries » : we aim toward them as a target, then look back at them as standards of measurement . The Symposium of DeZ is one such important threshold . It celebrates much, and it holds much in store for the future. As we look back, we wonder about the extraordinary growth of this region; as we look forward, we feel all the exhilaration of a new frontier .

We reach back, officially, to a point in time 50 years removed when ancient Mari began to stir : almost literally, the Cabana statue seemed to rise from the ground and beckon to us from its spot in the sand . That stretch of desert was to be such no more : it has become indeed a standard of measurement for our understanding of

ancient history . Hence it is fitting that new beginning be now the occasion for the celebration which has brought us together. Far as Mari was from the byways of modern geography, French scholarship has succeeded in making this city and its history central and accessible . Rapid excavations were followed by rapid publication, a pattern which, established by Parrot (and Dossin) is now continued with new vigor and exemplary expertise by Margueron (and Durand) . For this they have our admiration and gratitude . Because of its very richness, this anniversary is also a challenge, a threshold on to the future . We want to understand the wider context of which Mari has begun to give us an insight . And thus we have come to probe the ground at more and more sites in the Mid Euphrates and the Khabur basin, this region which centers today around DeZ and which the Symposium is helping to identify historically and to define culturally . It is a privilege indeed to be a part of the endeavor, and we want our Syrian friends to know we are not taking this challenge lightly .

As foreign archaeologists we have been

so regularly the recipients of Syrian hospitality that we have come to take it almost for granted . It is a pervasive and infectious hospitality: it evokes the best human feelings in us, - and it provides the most conducive setting for a free and vigorous intellectual pursuit . The prodigious number of foreign expeditions in Syria is a tribute to our modern hosts as well as to the richness of the history of which they are the guardians . We all realize that the liberality with which we are received and in fact encouraged in our work is not just a matter of natural inclinations, it is also the result of a clear policy, which we are grateful indeed to the responsible authorities . Intellectually this policy recognizes, courageously, that history and culture are a continuum, almost as if there were no « foreign » archaeologists . Logistically, and just as courageously, this policy stretches to the utmost the human resources of the Directorate of Antiquities in order to accommodate practically without limits this apparently insatiable interest more and more of us have been developing for Syria . We can never underestimate this, and I trust our Syrian friends and colleagues will never have reason to underestimate our gratitude .

Nor, I hope, will they have reason to regret the policy which makes all this possible . Syrian archaeology is one of the most vital disciplines in our field today and this is due in some measure to the wide range of projects which are allowed and encouraged to develop here . What we can contribute in terms of a deeper understanding for the past is all we can give in return for the human and intellectual hospitality we re-

ceive . In this way all come to feel that we grow in our knowledge a common past partly because we are privileged to share so happily in a common present . As an extension of this, I think we all take pride in sharing our Syrian experience with our audiences back in our respective home countries. In some small but significant way I think we do represent Syria and her interests, because of all we have come to appreciate in our work here .

The Symposium of DeZ is one more instance of this . We are guests here today in a very real and concrete sense, and for this too we want to register our gratitude . The local authorities, especially the Governor of Der ezZor, have taken an enormous interest in the planning of this event., and this will help secure its success . Their interest in our work, I know from personal experience, is always more than formal and official and will be reflected as such in the ambiance in which we will be able to work here in the next few days . - The explosion of excavations and surveys is changing the archaeological landscape of Eastern Syria, just as the opening of the new highway from Damascus makes it possible to have a wider fruition of the treasures found here. But the new Museum is the real focus of this new movement : a center for display and research which will transform indeed our scholarly landscape . What will remain the same, we know, are the men behind the institution, our dear friend in the Directorate . especiaelleAdnan Bunni, Kassem tower and As'ad Mahmoud . The respect they have won from all of us is rooted in a type of expertise and dedication which

are hard to match . We all place so many demands on them and we always get more than we even ask . Of all the many ways in which we have been saying thank you, this of the Symposium is perhaps the most meaningfull, and I am sure that you will find a rare unanimous scholarly consensus on this .

Far from the picture one may have abstractly of a Director General, Dr. Behnassi is so directly involved in everything within the Directorate that we all recognize the mark of his personal attention for all our activities . Switching gears from the

lofty to the mundane, whether it be a large international Exhibit or a phone call to customs, he is always there to take part personally in the activites of the Directorate . I am confident that the pride he takes in the diffusion of ancient Syrian culture will be well served by the events of the next few days : the Symposium and the new Museum are major achievements indeed in that direction . We want you to know, Dr. Behnassi, how much we share in your pride, and how happy we are to be able to contribute to the grand design you have for Syrian archaeology .

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(R. A. S.)