front matter at the end

see also bookmarks

The Digital Itinerary of the Texts of Ebla

Giorgio Buccellati

It took some 4,500 years for the texts of Ebla to come back to light in their physical embodiment as clay tablets, unearthed by archaeology. And it took some 35 years for these texts to acquire a new identity in a digital embodiment. I was actively involved in the itinerary that made this possible, and Lucio was a close companion on the road we traveled. I am delighted to have here the opportunity to recall this itinerary, and to thank him for all that this entailed in terms of a growing scholarly collegiality and a deepening human friendship. There is an important intellectual dimension to the chronicle of this itinerary, and it is this that I want to underscore in this paper, which Lucio and I might as well have written together.

The itinerary goes beyond the scope of a chronologically oriented documentary sequence. Having started with an approach that followed closely the conceptual dimension of a card filing system, the project matured to where the greater potential of digital grammaticality could be properly identified and exploited. This happened early on, and it has remained as a central feature of the system, which has not yet effectively been duplicated. The emphasis was never on technical innovation and state of the art hard- or software, but rather on the conceptual dimension, one that could lay a claim to greater durability than that of computers and programming languages.

In 1977, as a member of the Committee for the Publication of the Texts of Ebla, I was charged with the task of working on the computerization of the data. Between 1968 and 1975 I had worked on one of the first large scale digital projects dealing with cuneiform texts. Known by the acronym OBLAP (Old Babylonian Linguistic Analysis Project), and devoted to the letter corpus that was just being published by F. R. Kraus, it had been funded through one of the first grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities in the area known then as “computer aided” research. It was this same approach that I suggested be used for the proposed new task relating to Ebla. I had elaborated a comprehensive encoding manual for two major aspects of linguistic analysis, graphemic and morphemic, and so in 1977 and 1978 we worked on the data entry of the texts of Ebla according to those criteria. I will give here two examples of the results achieved before starting our work on Ebla: they are indicative both of the technical limitations under which we were operating, and of the already solid conceptual framework within which the system was designed.

The first example is the encoding manual in the 1973 version (Fig. 1). Not only was there no graphic interface, we could not even format the page or use lower case letters. As a result, the manual was handwritten. Also, we were tied

to the size of a punch card, which had 80 columns, so that the input was all in fixed format, without any tabs or cells. This is reflected in the numbering of the columns, which were all nested, meaning that the variant given in any given column conditioned the content of the variables that followed. Thus, in the example given here, the letter V in column 12 conditioned the values of all successive columns: B in column 13 had a different value if it came after V in column 12 than if it came after another code in the same column.

The second example, also from 1973 (Fig. 2), gives evidence of what was then a major breakthrough. Not only did the printout produce upper and lower case (which could still not be shown on a monitor), we also had developed a full set of graphic images representing the individual cuneiform signs. For 1973, this was quite innovative (the program was written by Sal J. Fallone, and the coding to produce the cuneiform set was by Yoshitaka Kobayashi), even if the procedure was rather cumbersome.[1] Unfortunately, the results were never used (not even for the Ebla project), because we were overtaken by technology, which would soon make graphic interface the norm. But the effort is well worth recalling, in that it shows the direction we felt digital analysis would take at a time when hardly anyone in the humanities used computers.

The work was intensive, and it required the purchase of a keypunch machine, which at that time was the only device available for data input. The boxes of keypunched cards would be brought to the central computing office at UCLA, where the data would be processed by the mainframe computer, an IBM System/370. We had to wait for a turnaround time of several hours, generally overnight, and then the output would come through in the form of long fanfold paper outputs, which were spewed out of a slit in the wall on this side of the large computer rooms, inaccessible to the rest of us. Each printout was carefully coded, and it included the cost to be charged to a grant: the ARET 4 concordance, for example, cost $9.99. Cards and paper outputs provided the only means to relate to data processing, without any direct interface on a screen.

The paper outputs were bulky and cumbersome: they would run into thousands of pages: the full concordance of the Old Babylonian letters ran upwards of ten thousand pages, and that of ARET 4 alone was 961 pages (Fig. 3). Under such circumstances, no thought could be given to any sort of regular distribution, with but few exceptions. Thus a copy of the Ebla concordance was given to the Ebla Expedition, and a copy of the concordance of the Amarna letters (a by-product of our project on Old Babylonian and Ebla texts) was delivered respectively to Bill Moran and Anson Rainey for their research on the translation and the linguistic analysis of the texts. It was on the basis of these results that two of

[1] It is described in detail along with the other technical aspects of the project at this stage, in Buccellati 1977, 385–404. The full text of this and all my other publications cited here is available online at www.giorgiobuccellati.net.

my students completed their doctoral dissertations at UCLA on the graphemic analysis of Old Babylonian letters.[2]

But it was serious data processing nevertheless. In fact, it may be said that, precisely because the interface was so opaque and the output so unwieldy, the conceptual relevance of the results came across as being all the more significant, and led to an ever increasing concentration on the substance of the process rather than on the technical dimension. The programs, which were also "compiled" as batches of punch cards, delivered results that were clearly on an altogether different qualitative plane than what could ever have been obtained before. I was thus thrust into designing formats that would take advantage of this newly found power of analysis. The first major program, written by John Settles, produced triadic sign concordances in the so-called *kwic* format ("key word in context"), and this offered substantive insights into the graphemic nature of cuneiform writing that were unimaginable with standard file cards (Figg. 4–5). Four types of indices gave totals and percentages for signs arranged according to shape (Figg. 6–7) and reading (Figg. 8–9). These frequencies gave us ways to establish what I called "graphemic profiles", an important new concept that I used especially in comparing different corpora.[3]

This led to significant new insights into the nature of graphemics. Particularly important was the realization that the polyvalence of the cuneiform signs practically disappeared once a sign was seen in the contextual setting of a three sign cluster. In other words, within a given triad, any given sign retained only one value, with extremely few exceptions. The example given in Fig. 2 shows one such exception: in the second triad on the page, the signs are read differently depending on a wider context: it would be sufficient to extend the context to a four sign cluster to eliminate polyvalence even in this case. I was able to develop these insights in various studies devoted to graphemics, which brought out not only a more rigorous understanding of the nature of graphemics from a theoretical point of view, but also to elucidate several important aspects of the various corpora to which I was applying the same method of analysis.[4]

In 1978 we "migrated" to a microcomputer with a CP/M operating system, and work progressed steadily on the transfer of the data, which had been stored on tapes used by the mainframe. David A. Holzgang reworked the programs; John L. Hayes, Matthew L. Jaffe, Yoshitaka Kobayashi, Judith R. Paul, James H. Platt, and Joseph M. Pagan worked on the textual data.

---

[2] Kobayashi 1975; Gaebelein 1976.

[3] Buccellati 1979, 89–100; *id*. 1984, 1–20.

[4] Besides the articles cited in the previous notes, see my other articles Buccellati 1982, 39–74; *id*. 1990b, 7–26; *id*. 1996, 5–7, and, for the notion of morphographemics, 27, 37, 262.

It is worth mentioning that, in the same year, we also brought a microcomputer to our excavations at Terqa: it was still very bulky hardware, with two large 8 inches floppy disks, but it marked the beginning of a parallel experience where the reflection on method turned from texts to stratigraphy. In both instances, philology and archaeology, my interest in computers was looked at by colleagues with benign condescension, because the intellectual dimension of the enterprise seemed minimal at best. Instead, the difficulty inherent in the whole process helped me look more and more in the direction of the conceptual dimension of "digitality", beyond the lure of "state-of-the-art*ness*".

The more immediate leap forward was in the way in which the data were to be made available. Floppy disks could now be distributed where large printouts could not.[5] In 1987, on the occasion of the Meeting at UCLA of the American Oriental Society, I prepared a floppy disk, now reduced to 3.5 inches in size but still with a capacity of only 1.2 MB, which contained the concordances of AR-ET 2 (Fig. 10). Most people who received it would still not have familiarity with computers, so the gesture was perhaps more symbolic than substantive. But part of the message was that the data, and the results of their analysis, could be made available at no cost. It was not something that could pass unobserved. Paper outputs and sorts could now be printed directly (Fig. 11).

With these data, graphemic analysis of the Ebla texts was developing even further.[6] I was also pursuing the morphemic analysis of the Semitic of Ebla, along the lines of what I had done for Old Babylonian.[7] In the case of Ebla, this was limited to the Semitic personal names. I described the methodological scope of the research[8] and in 1994 one of my doctoral students completed his dissertation on this subject, which was published as part of the official series of the Ebla archives.[9] It contained a diskette with the digital data base: the physical size of the medium had now shrunk to a mere 3.5 inches, from floppy it had become rigid, but the capacity was still rather low, at only 1.44 MB (Fig. 12).

Between 1982 and 1987 I had the good fortune of having Lucio Milano come to UCLA, and in 2000 I visited him at the University Ca' Foscari of Venice for a brief research period. It was an intense and most fruitful collaboration that was decisive for the continuation and conclusion of the project. Lucio's essential contribution was in overseeing the quality of the input data and in steering us

[5] For an early description of the project goals, especially as they relate to distribution disks, see my article Buccellati 1990b, 23–32.

[6] See the UCLA doctoral dissertation by Platt 1993, and his earlier article Platt 1988, 245–248.

[7] We applied the same approach to western Akkadian, and this found its best outlet in the important UCLA doctoral dissertation by Hayes 1984.

[8] Buccellati 1992, 107–128.

[9] Pagan 1998. My preface is on pp. ix–10.

towards new publication outlets. The research on the Semitic of Ebla had been pursued by another doctoral student at UCLA,[10] and this led to the production of the newer version of an external storage device, a compact disk. With a capacity of 700 MB, this represented a clear qualitative jump in the way in which digital content could be distributed. The result was the publication of ARED 1, in 2011. This was the result of a collaborative project with a large number of contributors who, over the years, had worked on this project: we owe this accomplishment to Lucio's initiative and determination. The production of this CD (Figg. 13–14) was made possible through the institutional collaboration of the Research Technology Group at Brigham Young University. It contained the full extent of the textual data for nine volumes of the Royal Archives of Ebla, and a variety of search functions.

This led to the final stage, which is the online version of the data. A preliminary version was opened in 2012, and the site is currently being prepared for final release. Following in the footsteps of his teacher Lucio Milano, it is now Massimo Maiocchi who is playing a central role in the project. Access to the Ebla material is through the website www.cybernetica-mesopotamica.org. In addition to the texts in sequential order, it reflects the two major areas that I had covered since the beginning: graphemic and morphemic analysis (Fig. 15).

Maiocchi has rewritten the graphemic programs that were used earlier, and they offer a new version of the triadic index for all the texts, along with indices (Figg. 16–17): the visual quality is vastly enhanced and the flexibility of the system on an altogether different level from what it was at the time of paper outputs.

The morphemic analysis of the Semitic personal names reproduces, in a different format suited for a browser presentation, the content of the diskette distributed earlier as part of the volume ARES 3 (see note 90). The coding system is quite different in appearance from the one elaborated forty years earlier, as a comparison of the section on verbal inflection will show (Figg. 1 and 18). But the substance of the formalization was not substantially different. As for the data, one will find first the complete list of personal names, in alphabetical order, and then a number of different sorts by clusters of morphemic categories, where one can find the full list of attestations for given combinations of morphemes (Fig. 19; I should stress that the initial tagging is all merit of J. M. Pagan). By exporting the data onto any current spreadsheet program, one can produce any other sort by any desired cluster of morphemic features, as exemplified by the printout given as Fig. 20.

The longevity of the substantive results that were first obtained with the early experiments back in the seventies is indicative, because in practice nothing simi-

[10] Szink 2005.

lar has as yet been attempted.[11] There has indeed been an explosion of text publications,[12] but the analytical approach to both the graphemic and the morphemic aspects of the data has been lagging behind.

Thus the digital itinerary of the texts of Ebla reflects a long standing confrontation with new techniques that have deeply impacted our modes of thought, in general as well as in the humanities. But we can also see how the conceptual dimension of the effort overrides the technical properties, and ultimately gives greater depth to the very potential of the technique. It is, perhaps, one of the distinguishing traits of the humanities, which, even when becoming digital, retain the dimension of value and permanence that lie at their core.

Bibliography

Buccellati, G. 1977: The Old Babylonian Linguistic Analysis Project: Goals, Procedures and First Results. In: A. Zampolli – N. Calzolari (eds.), Computational and Mathematical Linguistics. Proceedings of the International Conference on Computational Linguistics (Pisa 1973). Firenze, 385–404.

Buccellati, G. 1979: Comparative Graphemic Analysis of Old Babylonian and Western Akkadian. Ugarit-Forschungen 11, 89–100.

Buccellati, G. 1982: Studies in Ebla Graphemics, 1. Studi eblaiti 5, 39–74.

Buccellati, G. 1984: Introduction. In: C. Saporetti (ed.), The Middle Assyrian Laws (Graphemic Categorization Vol. 2). Malibu, 1–20.

Buccellati, G. 1990a: The Ebla Electronic Corpus: Graphemic Analysis. Les Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syrienne 40, 7–26.

Buccellati, G. 1990b: Cybernetica Mesopotamica. In: E.M. Cook (ed.), Sopher Mahir: Northwest Semitic Studies presented to Stanislav Segert. MAARAV, 5–6. Santa Monica, 23–32.

Buccellati, G. 1992: The Ebla Electronic Corpus: Onomastic Analysis. Eblaitica 3, 107–128.

Buccellati, G. 1996: A Structural Grammar of Babylonian. Wiesbaden.

Charpin, D. 2014: Ressources assyriologiques sur Internet. Bibliotheca Orientalis 71, 331–357.

Gaebelein, P.W. 1976: Graphemic Analysis of Old Babylonian Letters from Mari. PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Hayes, J.L. 1984: Dialectical Variation in the Syntax of Coordination and Subordination in Western Akkadian of the el-Amarna Period. PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Kobayashi, Y. 1975: Graphemic Analysis of Old Babylonian Letters from South Babylonia. PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Pagan, J.M. 1998: A Morphological and Lexical Study of Personal Names in the Ebla Texts. Archivi reali di Ebla, Studi, III. Roma.

[11] The only exception is the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Royal Inscriptions (ECTSRI), which contains full morphological tagging for Sumerian; no systematic indices have been produced for this corpus.

[12] For a recent comprehensive overview see Charpin 2014, 331–357.

Platt, J.H. 1993: Eblaite Scribal Tendencies: Graphemics and Orthograph. PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Platt, J.H. 1988: Notes on Ebla Graphemics. Vicino Oriente 7, 245–248.

Szink, T.L. 2005, Computer-Aided Analysis of the Semitic of the Ebla Tablets. PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Figures

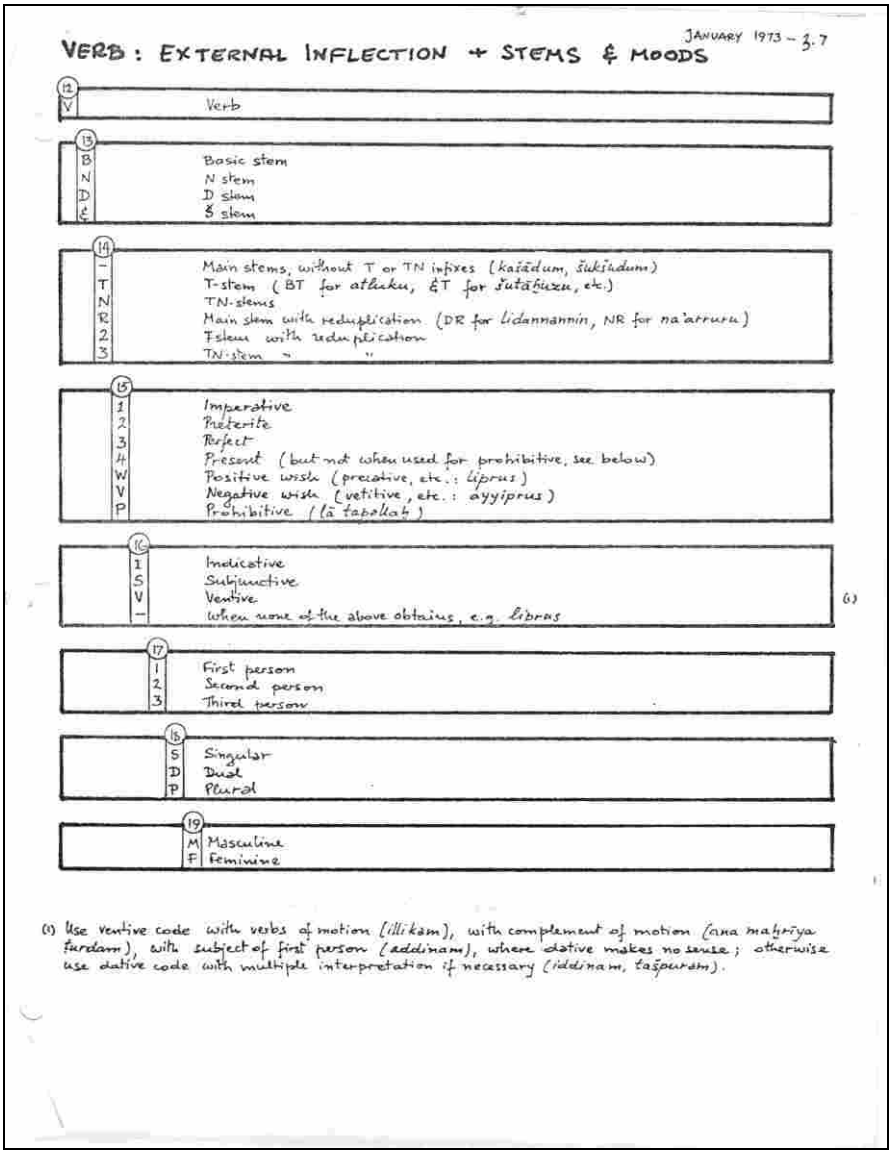
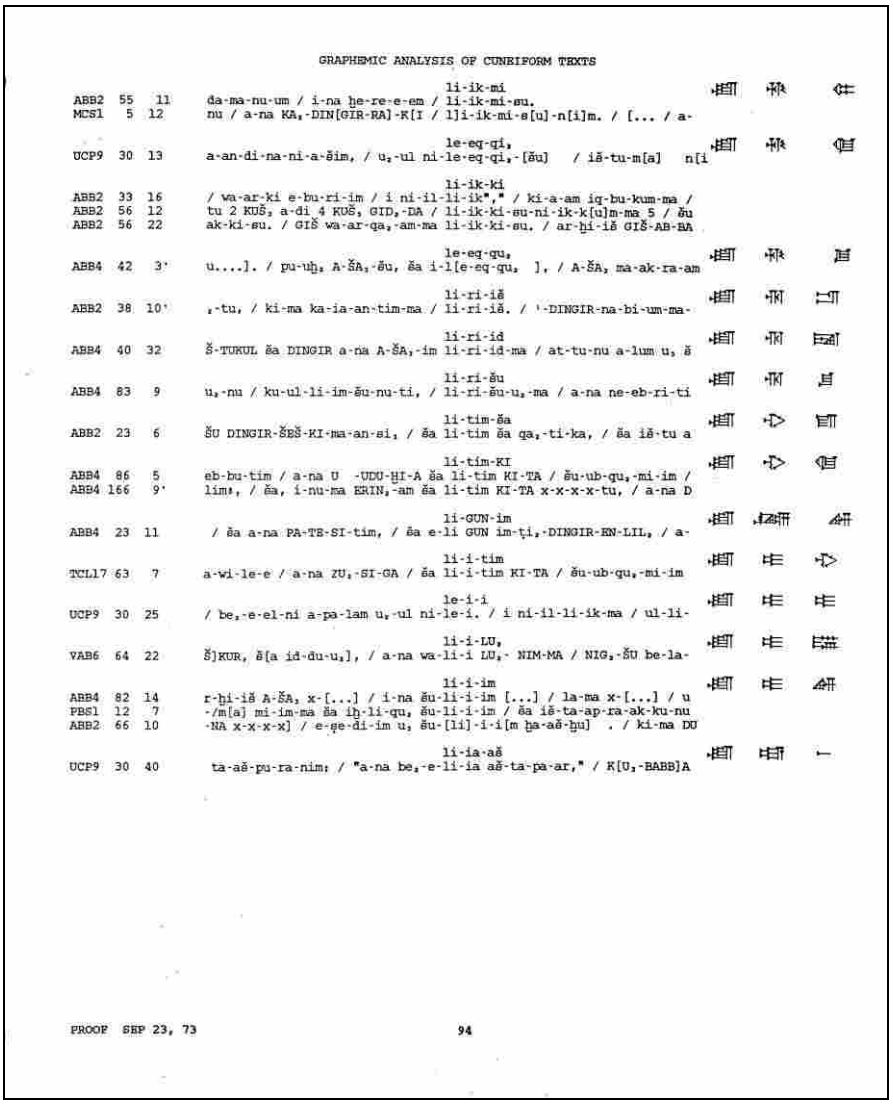


Fig. 1. Morphological encoding manual (1973). Long before computers could display upper and lower case letters and offer any type of graphic formatting, the text had to be handwritten


GRAPHEMIC ANALYSIS OF CUNEIFORM TEXTS

li-ik-mi
ABB2 55 11 ša-ma-nu-um / i-na ḫe-re-e-em / li-ik-mi-šu.
MCS1 5 12 nu / a-na KA₂-DIN[GIR-RA]-K[I / l]i-ik-mi-š[u]-n[i]m. / [... / a-

le-eq-qi,
UCP9 30 13 a-an-di-na-ni-a-šim, / u₂-ul ni-le-eq-qi₂-[šu] / iš-tu-m[a] n[i

li-ik-ki
ABB2 33 16 / wa-ar-ki e-bu-ri-im / i ni-il-li-ik"," / ki-a-am iq-bu-kum-ma /
ABB2 56 12 tu 2 KUŠ, a-di 4 KUŠ, GID,-DA / li-ik-ki-šu-ni-ik-k[u]m-ma 5 / šu
ABB2 56 22 ak-ki-šu. / GIŠ wa-ar-qa₂-am-ma li-ik-ki-šu. / ar-ḫi-iš GIŠ-AB-BA

le-eq-qu,
ABB4 42 3' u....]. / pu-uḫ₂ A-ŠA₃-šu, ša i-l[e-eq-qu,], / A-ŠA, ma-ak-ra-am

li-ri-iš
ABB2 38 10' ₂-tu, / ki-ma ka-ia-an-tim-ma / li-ri-iš. / '-DINGIR-na-bi-um-ma-

li-ri-id
ABB4 40 32 Š-TUKUL ša DINGIR a-na A-ŠA,-im li-ri-id-ma / at-tu-nu a-lum u, š

li-ri-šu
ABB4 83 9 u₂-nu / ku-ul-li-im-šu-nu-ti, / li-ri-šu-u₂-ma / a-na ne-eb-ri-ti

li-tim-ša
ABB2 23 6 ŠU DINGIR-ŠEŠ-KI-ma-an-si, / ša li-tim ša qa₂-ti-ka, / ša iš-tu a

li-tim-KI
ABB4 86 5 eb-bu-tim / a-na U -UDU-ḪI-A ša li-tim KI-TA / šu-ub-qu₂-mi-im /
ABB4 166 9' lim₂, / ša, i-nu-ma ERIN,-am ša li-tim KI-TA x-x-x-x-tu, / a-na D

li-GUN-im
ABB4 23 11 / ša a-na PA-TE-SI-tim, / ša e-li GUN im-ṭi,-DINGIR-EN-LIL, / a-

li-i-tim
TCL17 63 7 a-wi-le-e / a-na ZU,-SI-GA / ša li-i-tim KI-TA / šu-ub-qu₂-mi-im

le-i-i
UCP9 30 25 / be,-e-el-ni a-pa-lam u,-ul ni-le-i. / i ni-il-li-ik-ma / ul-li-

li-i-LU,
VAB6 64 22 Š]KUR, š[a id-du-u₂], / a-na wa-li-i LU₂- NIM-MA / NIG,-ŠU be-la-

li-i-im
ABB4 82 14 r-ḫi-iš A-ŠA, x-[...] / i-na šu-li-i-im [...] / la-ma x-[...] / u
PBS1 12 7 -/m[a] mi-im-ma ša iḫ-li-qu, šu-li-i-im / ša iš-ta-ap-ra-ak-ku-nu
ABB2 66 10 -NA x-x-x-x] / e-ṣe-di-im u, šu-[li]-i-i[m ḫa-aš-ḫu] . / ki-ma DU

li-ia-aš
UCP9 30 40 ta-aš-pu-ra-nim; / "a-na be,-e-li-ia aš-ta-pa-ar," / K[U,-BABB]A

PROOF SEP 23, 73 94

Fig. 2. Triadic concordance of Old Babylonian letters (1973).
An early experimental printing with upper and lower cases and graphic rendering of cuneiform: the output could only be printed, not displayed on the screen

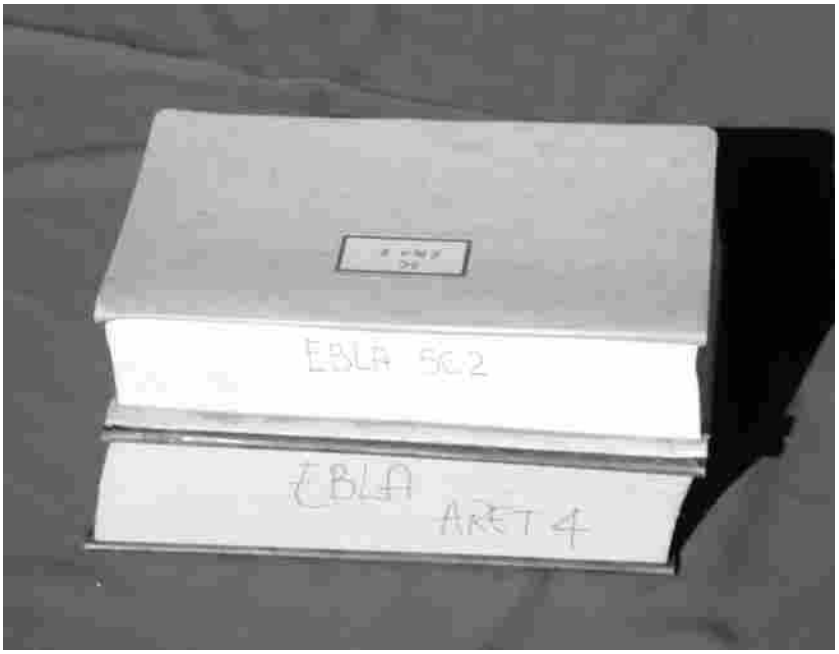


Fig. 3. The printouts (1980) of the sign concordances of ARET 4 (for a total of 961 pages) and of a selection of texts and personal names from Ebla (for a total of 845 pages)

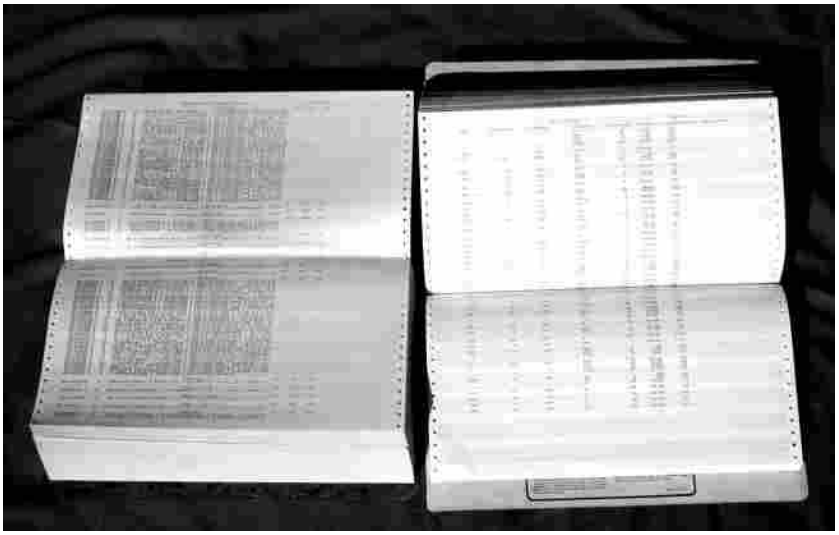


Fig. 4. A view of relevant pages of the two concordances (1980)

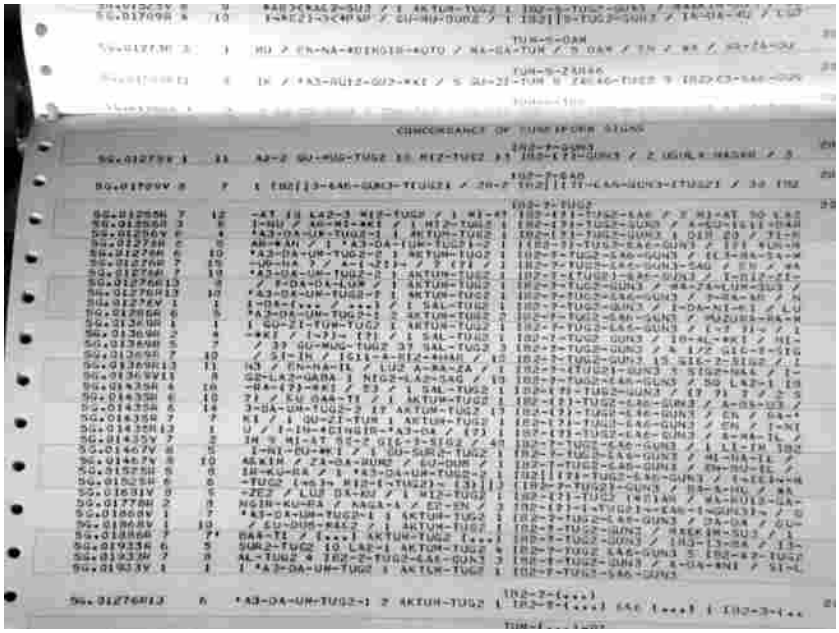


Fig. 5. A detail of the sign concordance (1980)

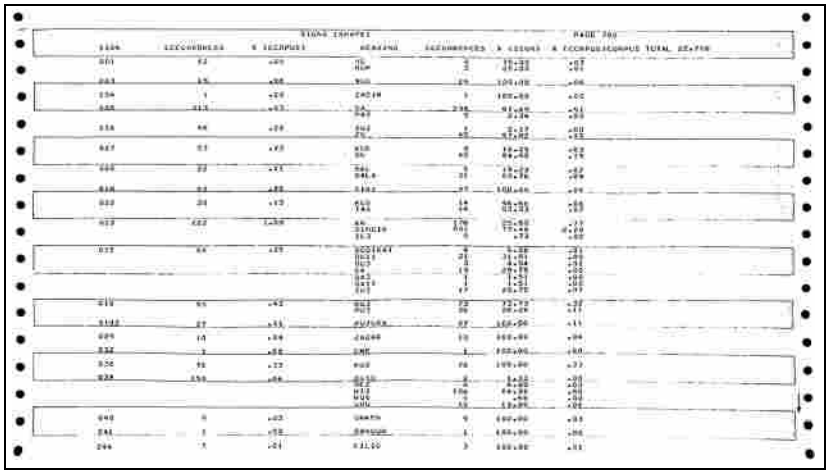


Fig. 6. Index of sign shapes in ARET 4, by sign number (1980)

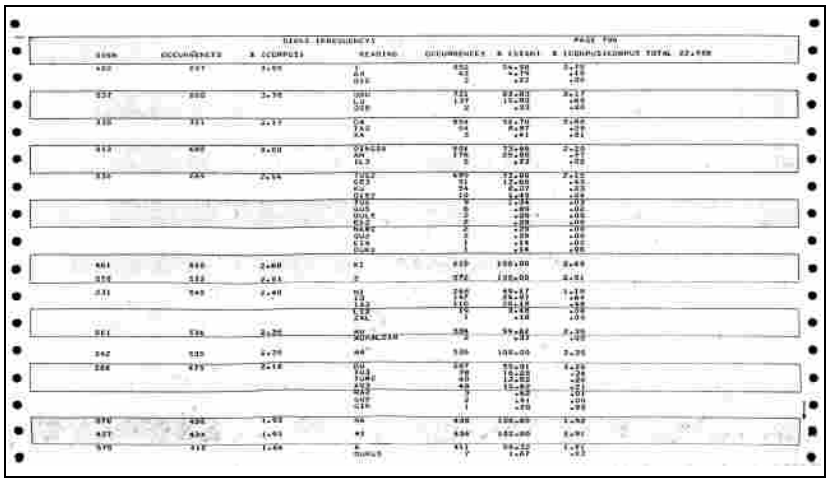


Fig. 7. Index of sign shapes in ARET 4, by frequency (1980)

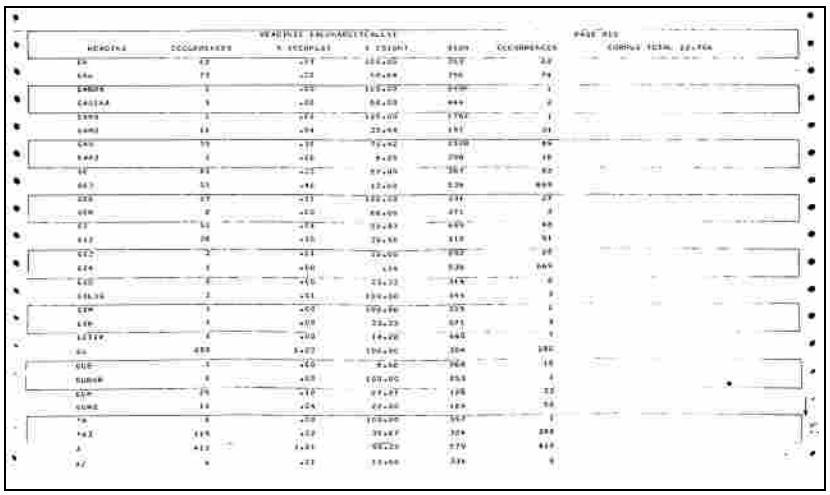


Fig. 8. Index of sign values in ARET 4, by reading, alphabetically (1980).
The ampersand sign (&) stands for shin, which in the ASCII sequence occurs at the beginning

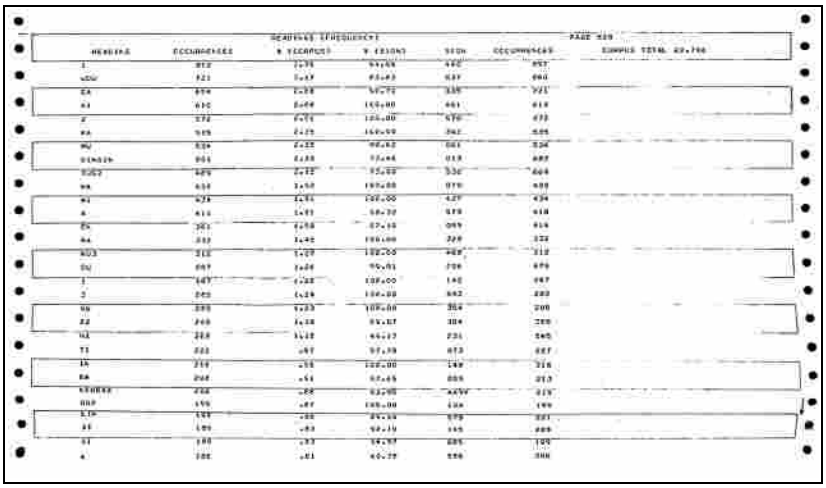


Fig. 9. Index of sign values in ARET 4, by frequency (1980)

Fig. 10. The 5.25 inches floppy disk of ARET 2, distributed at the AOS meeting (1987)

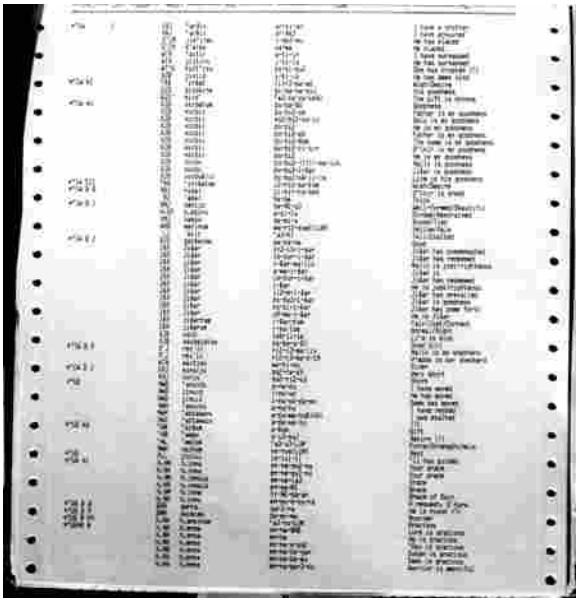


Fig. 11. Printout from micro-computer, with lower case characters (1980es)

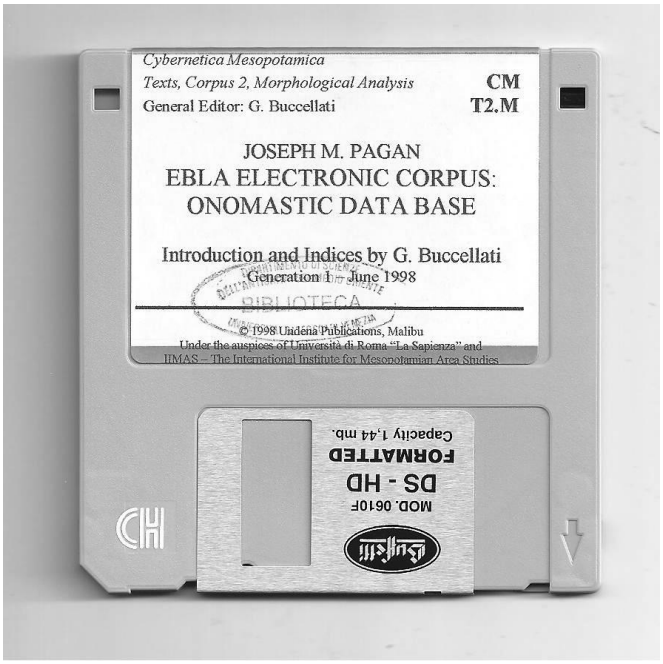


Fig. 12. The 3.5 inches diskette accompanying the volume by Pagan (1998)

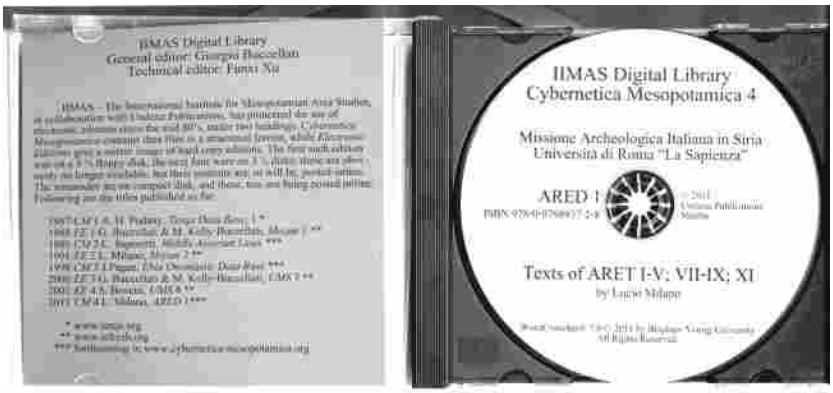


Fig. 13. The CD of ARED 1 (2011)

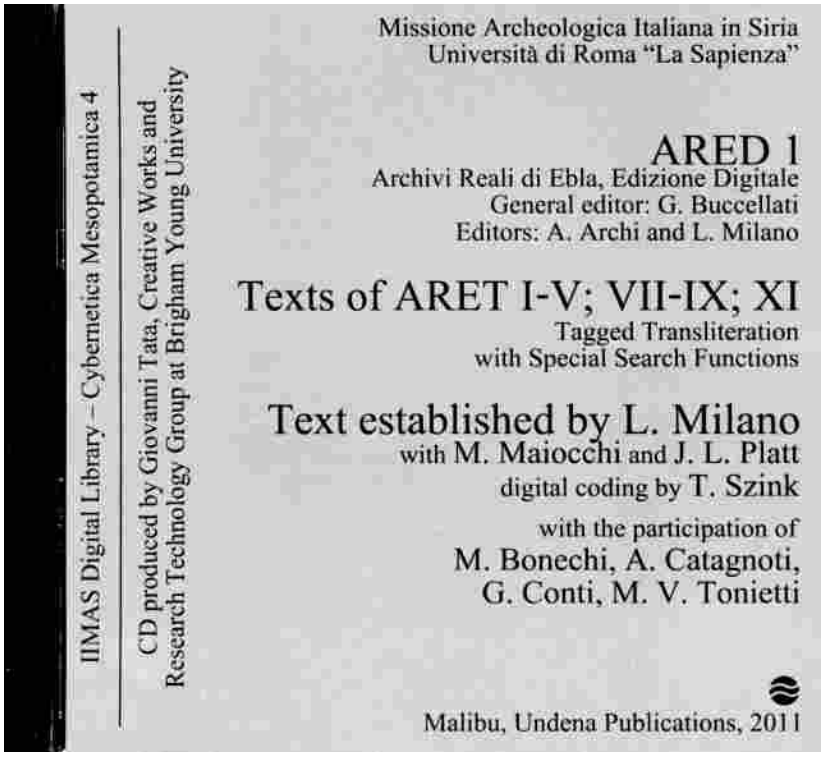


Fig. 14. The case of ARED 1 (2011)

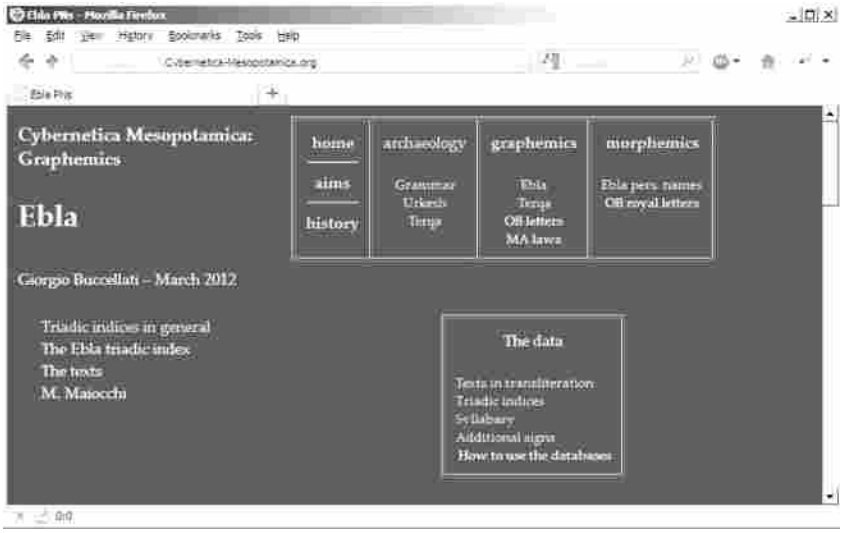


Fig. 15. Online digital edition of Ebla texts, home page (current)

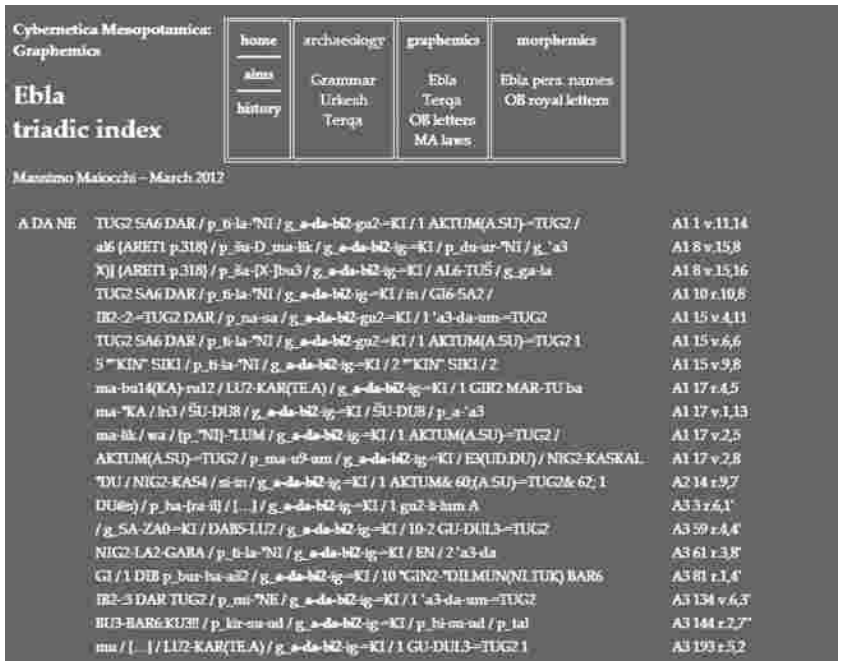


Fig. 16. Online triadic sequence (current)

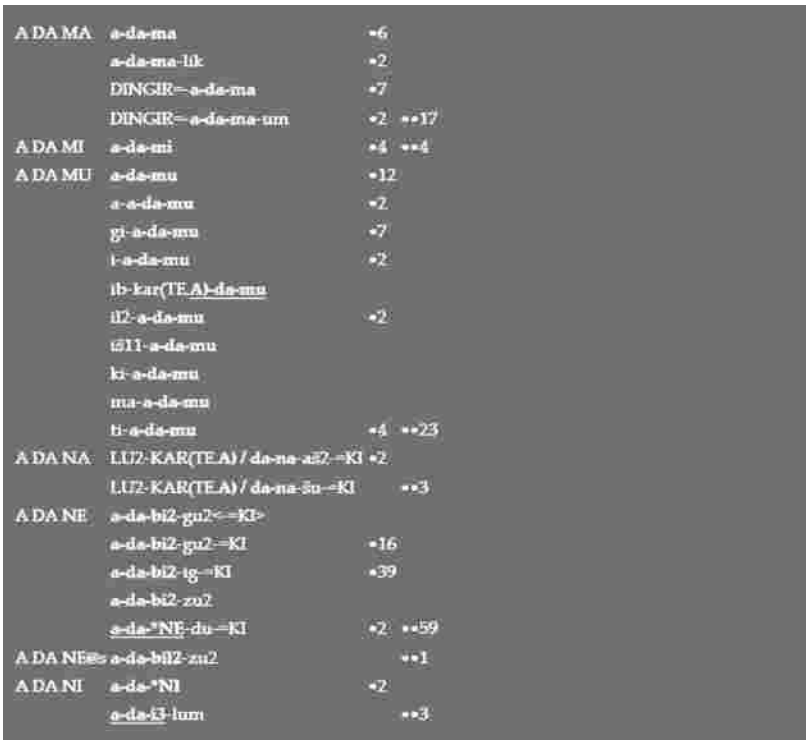


Fig. 17. Online index to the triadic sequence (current)

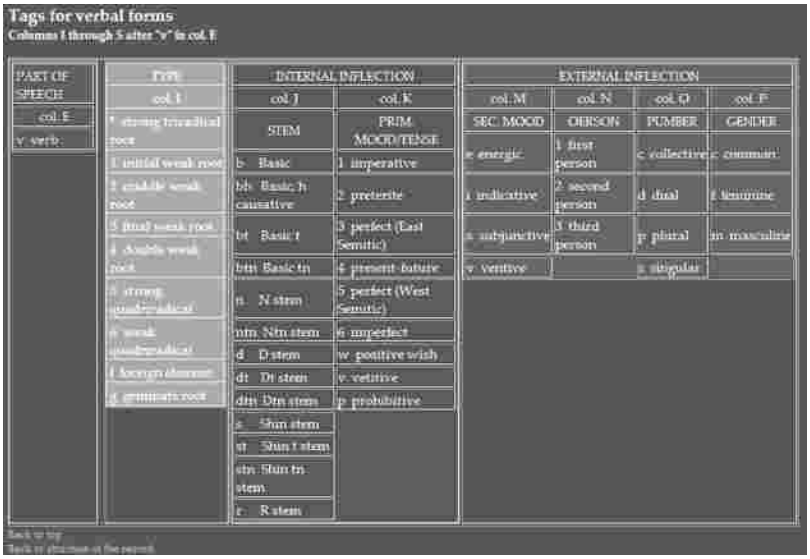


Fig. 18. Online morphemic tagging for verbal forms (current). Compare with the equivalent page of the 1973 encoding manual in Fig. 1

Fig. 19. Online index of a given morphological category (current)

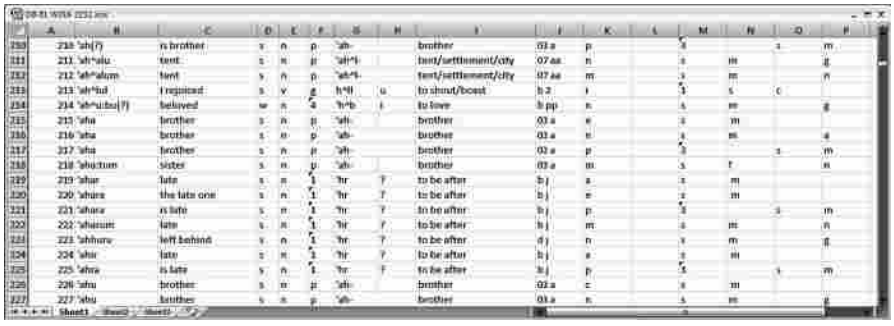


Fig. 20. Printout from the online version of the texts in spreadsheet format, sorted alphabetically by word (current)

Libiamo ne' lieti calici

Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Lucio Milano on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends

edited by
Paola Corò, Elena Devecchi, Nicla De Zorzi,
and Massimo Maiocchi
with the collaboration of Stefania Ermidoro
and Erica Scarpa

Alter Orient und Altes Testament

Veröffentlichungen zur Kultur und Geschichte des Alten Orients
und des Alten Testaments

Band 436

Ugarit Verlag

Libiamo ne' lieti calici

Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Lucio Milano on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends

edited by
Paola Corò, Elena Devecchi, Nicla De Zorzi,
and Massimo Maiocchi
with the collaboration of Stefania Ermidoro
and Erica Scarpa

2016
Ugarit-Verlag
Münster

Paola Corò, Elena Devecchi, Nicla De Zorzi, and Massimo Maiocchi (eds.)
with the collaboration of Stefania Ermidoro and Erica Scarpa:

Libiamo ne' lieti calici

Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Lucio Milano on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends

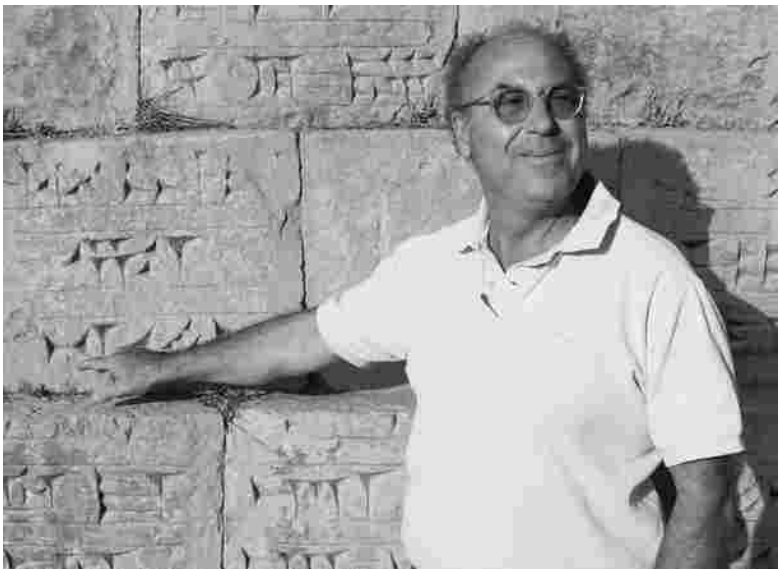
Alter Orient und Altes Testament Band 436

Printed in Germany

ISBN 978-3-86835-197-2

ISSN 0931-4296

Printed on acid-free paper



Lucio at Jerwan (October 2013)

Table of Contents

Section III. Administration and Social History

Section IV. Political History

Section V. Landscape, Archaeology and Material Culture

Foreword

This book celebrates Lucio Milano's many scholarly achievements in the field of Ancient Near Eastern studies. As former pupils of his who have all greatly benefitted from his wide-ranging scholarship, guidance and support, we felt it was time for us to reciprocate by presenting him with this collection of essays from pupils, friends, and colleagues, as a token of our gratitude and affection on the occasion of his 65th birthday. On the other hand, we could also imagine his reaction: "*Oh ragazzi!*… what are we celebrating? It's too early for my retirement!". Our excuse is that in offering the present volume to Lucio at this time, we arbitrarily picked his 65th birthday as one occasion among the many special events that could have been chosen instead. We have no doubt that there will be many other celebrations for our dear friend Lucio in the future.

Although Lucio's Assyriological interests are manifold, we sought to narrow the scope of this volume to topics that over the course of his career have grown particular close to his heart.

Lucio's wide-ranging work and interests reflect his intellectual formation. He studied Classics at "La Sapienza" University in Rome and graduated *summa cum laude* in 1975 with a thesis on "Viticultura e enologia nell'Asia anteriore antica", written under the supervision of Mario Liverani. Appointed in 1977 to the Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Studies ("Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente") in Rome, he continued to work at "La Sapienza" University as "ricercatore universitario confermato" (1981–1993) at the Department of History, Archaeology and Anthropology ("Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Archeologiche e Antropologiche dell'Antichità") and as Professor of History of the Ancient Near East (1984–1987) for the post-graduate course in Oriental Studies ("Corso di Specializzazione in Studi Orientali"). In 1993 he moved to "Ca' Foscari" University in Venice as Associated Professor and since 2001 he has held at that university the chair of History of the Ancient Near East as Full Professor.

Lucio's research focuses on the social, economic, and political history of the third millennium BC, with special focus on Syria and northern Mesopotamia, especially Ebla and Tell Beydar, an area on which he has published extensively. His scholarly publications include several text editions and studies on a wide range of topics, which he explores through a multi-faceted approach, ranging from linguistics to prosopography, to digital tools for the study of the Ancient Near East. He is a leading scholar in the history of palaeonutrition, to which he has contributed articles and congress volumes, as a director of research projects and as a supervisor of doctoral theses. Since the early part of his career he has been heavily involved in archaeology as well, participating as an epigraphist in the expeditions to Ebla, Tell Ashara, Tell Mozan, Tell Leilan and Tell Beydar. In addition, he was active between 1997 and 2010 as director of the "Ca' Fosca-

ri" team at the Syro-European archaeological mission of Tell Beydar. Always ahead of his time, he has worked in digital humanities since the early 1980s, taking part in 1982–1983 in the "Project in the Computer Analysis of the Ebla Texts" initiated by G. Buccellati at the University of California, Los Angeles. Since 2010, he has been the chief editor of the project "Ebla Digital Archives" at "Ca' Foscari" University.

Lucio has not only been a prolific researcher. Over the years, he has invested an enormous amount of time and energy in activities aiming at the divulgation of knowledge on the Ancient Near East to a wider audience, stimulating at the same time pertinent research. All of the undersigned – and many besides us – have benefitted from his inspirational teaching, from general courses for undergraduates to specialized seminars for doctoral and post-doctoral students. He has succeeded in establishing his own "school" of Ancient Near Eastern studies at "Ca' Foscari" University. The defining characteristic of our "Venetian school" is not a single theme – far be it from Lucio's mind to impose a single area of specialization on those who study with him – but is rather its *spiritus rector*'s historical methodology and openness to different approaches to elucidating the multifaceted realities of the Ancient Near East. This attitude is exemplified by Lucio's endeavours under the auspices of the "Advanced Seminar in the Humanities: Literature and Culture in the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece, Rome and the Near East" at the Venice International University, which he has co-organized since 2005. A volume recently published under his editorship, *Il Vicino Oriente antico dalle origini ad Alessandro Magno* (2012), is on its way to becoming a standard manual for Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian history in Italian universities. Mention must also be made of the journal *Kaskal*, founded in 2003, of which Lucio is co-director, and which has grown into an internationally recognized and increasingly influential forum for the multi-disciplinary study of Ancient Near Eastern cultures.

International recognition for Lucio's scientific achievements is reflected in his activities, under various titles, at "Ca' Foscari" University, as well as at universities outside Italy, such as UCLA, Cornell University, and the École Pratique des Hautes Études.

Lucio's contagious enthusiasm, gentleness, and wit immediately captivate all those who work with him. Only he – as students, colleagues, and friends have learned – could turn brisk walks with him through the Venetian *calli* towards Venice's railway station into unique opportunities to discuss Assyriology and the vagaries of life. Moreover, his advice is delivered not only in this peripatetic form, but also in the many toasts offered during the numerous informal dinner parties held at his home for welcoming visiting scholars, or for celebrating shared successes.

All this is clearly reflected, we believe, in the contributions to this volume, which stand as a token of appreciation, certainly of Lucio Milano as an out-

standing scholar, but also, and perhaps more significantly, of Lucio as a *Mensch*.

Thus, once more, let us stand and raise our glasses to celebrate Lucio's 65th birthday. *Salute*!

Venice, Turin, Vienna
March 30th, 2016

Paola Corò
Elena Devecchi
Nicla De Zorzi
Massimo Maiocchi