Eblaite and Some Northwest Semitic Lexical Links

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Earlier articles in this series have pointed out interconnections between Eblaite and later attested Northwest Semitic languages, especially Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic.[1] In the present essay, I wish to put forward additional items for comparison, all from the realm of the lexicon.

As the reader reads the following information, I ask that he or she keep in mind my previously stated opinion that Eblaite is to be linked with Amorite and Aramaic in a *Sprachbund* to be called Syrian Semitic, part of the Northwest Semitic (or West Semitic) branch.[2] We will return to this issue at the end of the essay.

1. *ma-i-at* '100,000'

Most of my material will be drawn from the bilingual texts, but I wish to begin with an item from the administrative texts. Therein we learn that the Eblaite word for '100,000' is *ma-i-at* (attested three times in ARET 2 20: I 1, I 3, IX 1) presenting us with a hitherto unattested form in the Semitic languages. Clearly, the form

1. There is no need to present all the bibliographic particulars here. I refer in the main to articles by Cyrus Gordon and myself that appeared in the first three volumes of *Eblaitica*. Several are cited in the notes below.

2. G. A. Rendsburg, "Monophthongization of *aw/ay* > *ā* in Eblaite and in Northwest Semitic," *Eblaitica* 2 (1990) 91–126, especially pp. 113–16.

is based on the word for 'hundred' (Hebrew מאה, Eblaite *mi-at*, and others), but it is a distinct form in itself. Does it have any cognates? C. H. Gordon pointed to the form מאיות, which appears as the *Ketiv* in 2 Kings 11:4, 9, 10, 15, where it is used, perhaps hyperbolically, to refer to the mercenary troops of the Carites, Hebrew כרי.[3] The *Qeri* instructs the reader to read מאות 'hundreds', clearly the expected form.

Now in the Ugaritic Kret epic we encounter the word *miyt* as well. The text is *UT* 126:iii:4 (= *KTU/CAT* 1.16), where the term is used as a parallel to *mṭr bʿl* 'the rain of Baal'. Elsewhere in the Kret epic, soldiers are compared to raindrops in a hyperbolic fashion: *UT* Krt 92–93, 180–81 (= *KTU/CAT* 1.14), "Marching by the thousands, like raindrops; by the myriads, like the autumn rain." Recall as well that Hebrew and Ugaritic both possess the word רביבים/*rbbm* to mean 'rain', in particular 'copious rain'; no doubt this term derives from the same root as the word רבו/רבבה/ *rbt* 'myriad'.

If we combine all of this information, then the מאיות of 2 Kings 11 may be viewed as soldiers who are likened to hundreds of thousands, with the cognate Ugaritic term *miyt* used to describe the rain of Baal at full strength. In short, Eblaite *ma-i-at* '100,000' has cognates both in Hebrew מאיות (albeit attested only in the *Ketiv*) and in Ugaritic *miyt*. Note, incidentally, that the vocalization of the Ugaritic form conforms with the Eblaite form: the *i*-ʾaleph of the former matches the *-i-* of the latter.

Here I need to digress from Ebla for a moment, for it is apposite to discuss the identification of the people called כרי in 2 Kings 11:4 and 19 as soldiers in the employ of the Judahite monarchy. It is natural to identify this term with the Carians, the Anatolian people well known from Greek and Egyptian sources—especially given the ancient attestations to the Carians as mercenaries.[4] A demurral was raised by M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, who noted that in Near Eastern texts (Aramaic, Elamite, and Persian), these people are always referred to in a triconsonantal form, either *krk* or *krs*; "hence, from the linguistic point of view, the connection between Hebrew *kārî* and sixth-century Carians seems remote."[5] On the other hand, the ethnicon *kry* appears in two administrative documents from Ugarit (*UT* 2078:11, 2123:5 = *KTU/CAT* 4.371, 4.647). The latter text, moreover, is a list of persons owning or chartering ships (see the expression *bʿl any* in line 7),[6] suggesting a connection to the Mediterranean. So, while we cannot state without doubt that Ugaritic *kry* and Hebrew כרי are the Carians, there is at least some evidence to counter the objection of Cogan and Tadmor. At the very least, if we exclude the Carian connection here (and perhaps more to the point for our present purposes), we can correlate the Hebrew and Ugaritic terms and suggest that we are dealing with a group with some connection to north Syria. As such, the unique form מאיות in 2 Kings 11 might be a lexeme of

3. C. H. Gordon, "Eblaite and Northwest Semitic," *Eblaitica* 2 (1990) 127 n. 1.

4. For a recent discussion of the Carians, see J. D. Ray, "Soldiers to Pharaoh: The Carians of Southwest Anatolia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (4 vols.; ed. J. M. Sasson; New York, 1995) 2.1185–94, with reference to the biblical material on p. 1189.

5. M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings* (Anchor Bible 11; New York, 1988) 126.

6. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places* (Münster, 1995) 441.

north Syrian provenance. Regardless, *ma-i-at/miyt/*מאיות is attested in Eblaite, Ugaritic, and Hebrew, though in the latter with reference to a people with possible north Syrian links. The word may be a regional term retained only in the Semitic languages of northern Syria.

2. *é-mu* 'Fit, Proper'

We turn now to the bilingual texts, which I will cite according to the numeration system in the synopsis of G. Pettinato (MEE 4). Entry 100 is the Sumerian word nì-gig, one of whose meanings is 'taboo' (HR, 734), and which is glossed in one of three ways: *qá-di-šum, ni-qí-tum*, and *é-mu*. A well-known phenomenon in the intersection of the disciplines of religion and linguistics is that words for 'taboo, etc.', in one language often are cognate with words for 'holy, pure, etc.', in another language. The best example in Semitic is the root *ḥrm*: in Hebrew it means 'taboo, ban'; in Arabic it means both 'taboo, ban' and 'sacred, holy', depending on the context; in Geez it means 'consecrate'; and in Old South Arabian the nominal forms *ḥrm/mḥrm* mean 'sanctuary, temple' (Beeston, 70–71; Biella, 190; Ricks, 68).

With this information in mind, we are able to recognize the roots *qdš* and *nqy* quite easily in the first two Eblaite forms. The former is widespread in Semitic with the meaning 'holy' (though it means 'shine' in Akkadian). The latter means 'clean, innocent' in Hebrew and Ugaritic, without any religious signification necessarily, but in other Semitic languages it does carry the connotation 'purify, etc.', in a religious or cultic sense—for example, in Old South Arabian (Biella, 316 [though admittedly the sole attestation is in a broken text]).[7]

But what of the third form, *é-mu*? This gloss I propose to identify with Aramaic חמי 'proper, worthy' (Sokoloff, 205; Jastrow, 476), which in several instances carries the meaning 'ritually fit'. This lexeme, incidentally, derives from the verbal root חמי 'see'; compare Mishnaic Hebrew ראוי 'fit, proper', derived from the common verb ראה 'see'.[8]

7. Since the present article was written and submitted for publication, a superb new resource for the Aramaic lexicon has appeared, namely, A. Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic* (2 vols.; Leiden, 2000). Additional lexicographical information on a number of the items treated herein may be found in Tal's work. But I take the opportunity to mention one specific datum of particular relevance. In §2, I refer to Eblaite *ni-qí-tum*, derived from the root *nqy*, meaning typically 'clean, innocent', but also able to carry a religious connotation at times, though my example from Old South Arabian is admittedly somewhat far afield. Tal (pp. 546–47) now provides the best evidence for the religious connotation of the root *nqy* in a Northwest Semitic language. In Samaritan Aramaic texts, one encounters such expressions as טעו בעמי נקיא תתעמי 'the sin among the people shall appear as pure' and הן נקיא לכהנה ייכל יתה '(an offering that was allotted and given to the priest, if it was defiled by him or by another,) is it fit for the priest to eat?' This correspondence thus adds still another link between an Eblaite word attested in the bilingual texts and an Aramaic word attested millennia later.

8. The question remains whether or not חמי 'see' ('show' in the *Pael* conjugation) is related to the common verb חוי 'show, tell' (also in the *Pael* conjugation). I think that most scholars would believe the latter to be the original root and would derive the former from it, as a by-form with labial consonant interchange. The latter is certainly more frequently attested in Old Aramaic inscriptions (*DNWSI*, 353–54, 381). The Eblaite evidence, if I am correct in my interpretation of *é-mu*, now forces us to rethink

In sum, the Eblaite bilingual dictionaries present three equivalents for Sumerian nì-gig 'taboo', and all three have cognates in the various Semitic languages (in particular Northwest Semitic) meaning 'holy, purify, proper, etc.'.

3. *maš-ba-tum* / *maš-bí-tum* 'Military Encampment, Troops, etc.'

Entry 140 is Sumerian erén-ki-gar or ki-erén-gar, terms that suggest a stationed military, based on erén 'soldier(s), troop(s)' (HR, 277) and ki-gar 'sit on the ground (vb.), place (n.)' (HR, 547). The bilingual texts render this item with one of two Eblaite terms: *maš-ba-tum* / *maš-bí-tum* and *ù-ma-núm* (see below, §4, for discussion of the latter).

Two suggestions have been put forward to explain the first of these equivalents. One is to equate *maš-ba-tum* / *maš-bí-tum* with the root *ṣb'* 'army', known from Hebrew, Ugaritic, and other languages.[9] This proposal has two difficulties, however. One necessitates reading the MAŠ sign as *maṣ*, and the other needs to account for the feminine ending –*t* (and perhaps also the preformative *m*-). Neither of these problems is insurmountable, but the two remain minor difficulties nonetheless. The other proposal connects *maš-ba-tum* / *maš-bí-tum* with the root "*y/wšb*, 'to stay, reside' as adjectival formations, perhaps in the plural, 'resident, stationed people',"[10] which fits the Sumerian entry quite nicely. Moreover, there are occasions, at least in Hebrew, on which the root *yšb* conveys the sense of 'encamp' in a military context (1 Samuel 13:16, 1 Kings 11:16, etc.).

Of these two possibilities—connection with the root *ṣb'* or connection with the root *yšb*—I prefer the latter option. But there is still a third option that needs to be considered. A Semitic root with pure military sense is the root *šby* 'take captive', which in Old South Arabian (in which the root is *sb'*) means more generally 'undertake a military campaign (vb.), troops (n.)' (Beeston, 122; Biella, 324). This may be the best solution to analyzing *maš-ba-tum* / *maš-bí-tum* because both the phonetics and the semantics have a closer match. The forms of the nouns would be the forms of Hebrew מכלה, מקוה, etc., and Hebrew מרעית, משכית, etc., respectively—both feminine nominal forms derived from IIIy roots (nouns of this type occur in Aramaic too).[11]

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this matter. The two verbs may be unrelated, or the by-forms (without positing one as original and the other as derivative) may have developed at an early stage in the history of the Semitic languages of Syria. To further complicate matters, note also the root חזי 'see', though in this case the middle root letter is not a labial of course.

9. G. Conti, *Il sillabario della quarta fonte della lista lessicale bilingue eblaita* (Quaderni di Semitistica 17 = Miscellanea Eblaitica 3; Florence, 1990) 84–85.

10. F. M. Fales, "Formations with *m*- Prefix in the Bilingual Vocabularies," in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla* (ed. H. Waetzoldt and H. Hauptmann; Heidelberg, 1988) 206.

11. The vowel in the first syllable of the former group of Hebrew nouns is *i*, but this vowel was originally *a* and only later shifted to *i*, due to what scholars call "the corollary to Phillipi's law," that is, *a → i* in an originally closed, unaccented syllable (cf. the Masoretic vocalization of שמשון *šimšôn* with English 'Samson', derived from Greek and Latin renderings of the name).

4. ù-ma-núm 'Military Encampment, Troops, etc.'

The second gloss used to define Sumerian erén-ki-gar (see above, §3) is Eblaite ù-ma-núm, a term readily identifiable with Akkadian ummānu 'army'. But there is a Hebrew component to this discussion, too. In the Mishna, specifically Bava Batra 9:4, the term אומנות is used in a most unusual way, not in its usual sense of 'handiwork, artwork' but, rather, with the meaning 'government service'. Long ago Jacob Barth posited that this Hebrew usage is a borrowing from Akkadian ummānu 'army'.[12] This remains a possibility, but now we must reckon with another option. It is possible that the word ummānu 'army' was present in the west from the third millennium onward. That is to say, it was in local use at Ebla and presumably elsewhere in the West Semitic world, to resurface thousands of years later in one attestation in the Mishna. Scholars are well aware of words in the Mishna that are not attested in the Bible but do appear in Ugaritic. Now, perhaps, we may have to consider stretching the continuum back to the third millennium, with Mishnaic usages anticipated in Eblaite.[13]

5. é-ša-gú-um 'Emaciated, Sickly'

Entry 209 in the bilingual vocabulary has two Eblaite equivalents to the Sumerian KA.ḪAR: ší-na-tum é-la-um (or ší-na-ti é-la-um) and é-ša-gú-um. The former has been treated by F. M. Fales, who has correctly seen the words to mean 'teeth: to be sick',[14] the Hebrew equivalent of which would be שנים חולות. The word for 'tooth' of course is common to all Semitic languages. The root ḥly 'to be sick' is not so widespread in Semitic. It appears most commonly in Hebrew and rarely in Aramaic and Akkadian.

I would like to concentrate not on this issue, however, but on the alternative rendering, é-ša-gú-um. The root here is ḥšk, whose usual meaning 'to be dark' is attested in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. This definition nicely matches the idea of a 'sick tooth', since a dark or blackened tooth is a sign of disease.

But there is a second meaning for the root ḥšk that may be even more relevant—namely, 'emaciated, sickly', attested only in Aramaic (Sokoloff, 217; Jastrow, 510–11). For example, in Targum Neofiti the form חשיך is used to translate the Hebrew word רע in Genesis 41:21, referring to the appearance of the seven sickly cows of Pharaoh's dream. In the Targum to Job 33:21 the verb form איתחשך occurs, predicated of bones in a context dealing with wasting away and imminent death (the Hebrew term that it translates is שפי, a word of unsure meaning, though note Arabic

12. J. Barth, *Etymologische Studien* (Leipzig, 1893) 60. See also S. A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Chicago, 1974) 109 n. 391.

13. Compare Gordon's positing of the resurfacing of the Eblaite god Qura millennia later in Jewish and Syriac magical texts of late antiquity; see Gordon, "Eblaite and Northwest Semitic," 130.

14. F. M. Fales, "A Survey of Two-Word Eblaic Entries in the Bilingual Vocabularies," in *Studies on the Language of Ebla* (ed. P. Fronzaroli; Florence, 1984) 176.

safā IV 'become thin', Aramaic שפי 'crush, grind'[15]). In light of these usages, I am inclined to see in Eblaite *é-ša-gú-um* the equivalent of Aramaic חשיך.[16]

6. *du-ba-lu* 'Pasture'

Entry 277 equates Sumerian ù-síg with Eblaite *du-ba-lu* (or *du-ba-lu-um*), clearly the root *dbr* 'pasture'. The nominal form with prefixed *m-* is common in Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic (*mdbr*/מדבר).[17] The verbal root is best attested in Aramaic, where it means both 'lead, guide' generally and 'lead a flock to pasture' specifically (Sokoloff, 138–39; Jastrow, 278, Payne Smith, 82–83). Moreover, a nominal form without prefixed *m-* occurs in Aramaic and Syriac, in the form *dabrā*ʾ 'pasture, field' (Jastrow, 279; Payne Smith, 83).

7. *ša-ba-lum* 'Stalk of Grain'

One of the bilingual texts includes an entry, no. 304, that equates Sumerian ú-eden-dam with Eblaite *ša-ba-lum*. The Sumerian term suggests a plant of the steppe (the addition of dam notwithstanding), and there can be little doubt that the Eblaite equivalent is cognate to Hebrew שבלת, Akkadian *šubultu*, etc. But the closest parallel is forthcoming from Syriac, which attests to several forms without the feminine ending *-t*—for example, *šebbelā*ʾ (Payne Smith, 556–57).[18]

8. *si-ru$_x$-um* 'City, City Wall, Fortification, etc.'

Entry 316 is the Sumerian form é-dur, whose usual meaning is 'town, marketplace', but can also mean 'fortification outworks' (HR, 250). The Eblaite bilingual texts gloss this term with either *kà-pá-ru$_x$* or *si-ru$_x$-um*. The first word is clearly the well-known and widespread word for 'village, town': Aramaic כפר, Akkadian *kapru*, Arabic *kafr*, etc. The alternative gloss, which appears in the majority of the Ebla bilinguals, has not been explained as yet. The most likely candidate for a cognate is Aramaic-Hebrew שור, which typically means 'city wall' but can occasionally mean 'place of habitation' (Sokoloff, 542; Jastrow, 1541; Payne Smith, 568; Schulthess, 204; KB, 958, 1129). The word is especially common in Aramaic; it is used

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15. See R. Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York, 1978) 376.

16. I realize, of course, that teeth do not become emaciated like the rest of the body, but the same also can be said of bones. Since the Aramaic cognate can be used of bones, as in the Targum to Job 33:21, by extension it could be used of teeth as well. Or perhaps all that we need to presume is that the word means 'sickly' in general.

17. The form *madbaru* (with variants) occurs in Akkadian, but all agree that the word is a borrowing from West Semitic; see *AHw* 572. For a longer list of textual citations, though without reference to the West Semitic origin of the word, see *CAD* M/1 11–12.

18. Further afield, see Ethiopic *sabl*.

only rarely in Hebrew.[19] Thus, the usual meaning of Sumerian é-dur matches the rare meaning of Aramaic שור (that is, 'city, place of habitation') or, conversely, the rare meaning of Sumerian é-dur matches the usual meaning of Aramaic-Hebrew שור (that is, 'city wall, outworks'). Nevertheless, this should not prevent us from making the connection between the two.[20]

There is, of course, a discrepancy between the *i*-vowel of the Eblaite form and the *u*-vowel of the Aramaic-Hebrew form, but such interchanges are well known in Semitic. The Ebla bilinguals, in fact, provide several examples.[21] Furthermore, the form שרותיה in Jeremiah 5:10, which clearly means 'its walls',[22] demonstrates that the vowel in the Hebrew form is liable to change (the form in Jer 5:10 is more closely associated with the feminine שורה, not the masculine שור, but this has no effect on the point under consideration).[23]

9. *bu-rúm* 'Pit, Cistern'

Entry 520 equates Sumerian šu-a with two Eblaite words: *bu-rúm* and *mas-da-bí-nu-um* (or *-núm*). There are two potential cognates of the first word, which unfortunately are often confused in the study of Semitic languages and literatures. The two words are Hebrew בור 'pit, cistern' and באר 'well' and their cognates. These two items are distinct and should not be confused. The former refers to any pit (and can euphemistically mean 'prison' as well—for example, Genesis 40:15), but often is used for a pit dug specifically for the collection of rain water—that is, a cistern. A באר 'well' has a different purpose; it is dug deep into the ground in order to draw water from the water table. This is a rather simple lesson, and it may be unnecessary to remind the reader of this distinction, but I repeat that the two often are confused.[24]

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19. I take the opportunity to propose its presence in Psalm 92:12 ותבט עיני בשורי, where the word has not been recognized, as far as I can determine. I offer the following translation: 'my eye looks over my walls', with the emphasis on the single eye peering over the defense walls, looking at the enemies referred to in the remainder of the verse. I shall treat this passage in greater detail in a separate article in the future.

20. Are the rare Mandaic words *šar/šira* 'inhabited district' related as well? Usually, they are connected with the more commonly attested lexeme *mšara* (thus, e.g., E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* [Oxford, 1963] 279–80, 445, 463). Should the Eblaite evidence cause us to rethink this relationship?

21. A good example is entry 816a, where MI-an (= gi₆-an) is glossed as both *mu-šum* and *me-su*, and an alternative orthography of the latter occurs in ARET 3 189:v.I:3–5 as *me-šum* (see the interpretation of Conti, *Il sillabario della quarta fonte*, 196). The normalized forms of these words are /mūš-um/ and /mīš-um/; see P. Fronzaroli, "The Eblaic Lexicon: Problems and Appraisal," in *Studies on the Language of Ebla* (ed. P. Fronzaroli; Florence, 1984) 147.

22. Thus already Rashi and David Qimḥi in their comments on this verse.

23. To continue the example adduced in n. 21 above, a parallel to the variant form שרותיה appears in entry 816b, where Sumerian MU-an (= gu₁₀-an) is glossed as *ma-[s]a-a-um*, with still another vowel in the first syllable of this word.

24. As appears to be done in Conti, *Il sillabario della quarta fonte*, 146.

Now in the Ebla bilingual texts the word for 'well' appears, in entry 1343, where Sumerian a b - a is glossed with Eblaite *bù-la-tum* = the plural form, cognate to Hebrew באר ות (and also with *ti-ʾà-ma-tum* = Hebrew תהום).[25] In entry 520 the form *bu-rúm*, then, is the equivalent of Hebrew בור 'cistern'.

10. *mas-da-bí-nu-um* 'Supplier of Rain Water'

The identification of *bu-rúm* as 'cistern' (see above, §9) enables us to explain the alternative rendering of Sumerian šu-a, namely, Eblaite *mas-da-bí-nu-um* (or *-núm*). The form suggests the pattern of a Š-stem participle[26] of the root *ṭbn*, a nominal form of which appears in Ugaritic in the context of rain. In a famous scene in 1 Aqht 46 (= *KTU/CAT* 1.19.I.46), the hero Daniel curses the land with a drought, stating: *bl ṭl bl rbb bl šrʿ thmtm bl ṭbn ql bʿl* 'let there be no dew, let there be no raindrop, let there be no surging of the two deeps, let there be no rain of the voice of Baal'. The word *ṭbn* usually is translated 'goodness', and a connection with the root *ṭb* 'good' remains possible; but regardless of the derivation of the word, clearly it represents rain in some fashion. In light of this Ugaritic lexeme, I propose that Eblaite *mas-da-bí-nu-um* means 'supplier of rain water', an appropriate synonym of *bu-rúm* 'cistern'.

11. *sa-a-tum* 'Roasted Grain'

With entry 678 our attention is drawn not to Northwest Semitic parallels but to an Arabic usage. In this entry Sumerian še-sa 'roasted grain' is rendered by Eblaite *sa-a-tum*. The administrative texts provide the additional readings *sà-la-tum* and *sà-a-tum*.[27] Cognates for this form include Hebrew סלת, Akkadian *siltu*, etc., usually translated 'fine flour'. But in Arabic the cognate *sultu* has among its various connotations 'roasted grain' (Lane, 1401), a definition that fits Sumerian še-sa perfectly.

12. *za-núm* 'A Type of Vegetation'

Entry 692 is another example of a Sumerian word glossed by two different Eblaite terms, each with cognates in Northwest Semitic. The Sumerian term is še-sum, which means 'leek, garlic, onion' and which is equated with Eblaite *za-núm* and *da-su-um*. The latter term is easily recognizable as cognate to Hebrew דשא, Ara-

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25. For discussion, see R. R. Stieglitz, "Ebla and the Gods of Canaan," *Eblaitica* 2 (1990) 88. In the information conveyed by Stieglitz, note the interesting point that in Modern Hebrew 'well water' or the 'water table' is called מי תהום.

26. Notwithstanding the fact that the form begins with *ma-*, since *mu-* is expected for participles of derived stems; see E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (Leuven, 1997) 420. However, as a parallel, note MEE 4, VE no. 403, *ma-ša-dab₆-ti-nu* = Akkadian *muštaptinnu*, for which see Conti, *Il sillabario della quarta fonte*, 128.

27. For references, see F. Pomponio, "Peculiarità della grafia dei termini semitici nei testi amministrativi eblaiti," in *Il bilinguismo a Ebla* (ed. L. Cagni; Naples, 1984) 315.

maic דתא, and Akkadian *dišᵓu* 'grass' (compare also South Arabian [both ancient and modern] *dṯᵓ* 'spring herbage, spring rain, etc.'). Cognates for *za-núm* do not spring to mind straightforwardly; nevertheless, we may propose Aramaic זונין 'weed grass', especially as produced from wheat or other grain (Sokoloff, 174; Schulthess, 56). Of course, the terms represented here, 'grass, weed grass, leek, garlic, onion', are different vegetations, but they do have in common the distinctive tall green blades and stalks. In comparative lexicography, not only in Semitic but in the study of languages in general, one must allow for different types of semantic development (which in the present instance is represented most of all by the aforecited South Arabian evidence).

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I conclude this study with a few general observations. The items discussed above have been chosen, of course, not due to any scientific system of selection (as is done, for example, in glottochronological study), but due to the fact that my research into the Eblaite lexicon revealed these points of contact between Eblaite and Northwest Semitic. Accordingly, in what follows, I recognize that my comments are wholly subjective.

It is noteworthy that in the lexical items presented there is a high degree of coherence between Eblaite and Aramaic. The following Eblaite words have been explained based on cognates attested solely or most commonly in Aramaic:

> Eblaite *é-mu* 'fit, proper' = Aramaic חמי
> Eblaite *é-ša-gú-um* 'emaciated, sickly' = Aramaic חשיך
> Eblaite *du-ba-lu* 'pasture' = Aramaic דברא
> Eblaite *ša-ba-lum* 'stalk of grain' = Syriac *šebbelāᵓ*
> Eblaite *si-ruₓ-um* 'city, city wall, fortification' = Aramaic שור
> Eblaite *za-núm* 'a type of vegetation' = Aramaic זונין

As I stated at the outset, my previously expressed view on Eblaite is that it is to be grouped with Amorite and Aramaic to form a Syrian *Sprachbund*. The exact relationship among these languages cannot be described more specifically; we plainly lack the necessary data to state anything more specific. But the links between Eblaite and Aramaic, which have been pointed out both in my earlier study and in the present article, are not unexpected. The role of geography is important here, for the language that inherited the spatial domain of Eblaite 1500 to 2000 years later was Aramaic. It is only natural that this Semitic language should play an important role in the elucidation of the Eblaite vocabulary.

I realize, of course, that linguistic taxonomy should be based on grammatical issues, not lexical ones. Semitists well recall I. J. Gelb's rule of "grammar over lexicon," expressed in his still-valuable essay, "Thoughts about Ibla: A Preliminary Evaluation, March 1977."[28] The rule is correct in theory and in practice, but it may

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28. I. J. Gelb, "Thoughts about Ibla: A Preliminary Evaluation, March 1977," *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 1/1 (1977) 1–30, in particular p. 17.

be implemented only when the data allow. Since the Ebla texts provide only limited information of a grammatical nature,[29] the analysis of the Eblaite lexicon perforce plays a greater role in judging the place of the language within Semitic.[30]

Finally, I offer here a few thoughts on the term *Eblaite* in the light of this study. Obviously, what I and other scholars refer to as Eblaite is the totality of non-Sumerian lexical and grammatical attestations in the texts found at Tell Mardikh. But, as Gelb already realized, the appearance of a word in a bilingual Eblaite dictionary does not automatically mean that the word is part of the native vocabulary of the denizens of northern Syria in the third millennium B.C.E.[31] That is to say, the bilingual texts may be nothing more than a collection of words in use throughout different parts of the Semitic-speaking world then in contact with Ebla. They may have been collected by the scribes of ancient Ebla in order to facilitate correspondence and communication with the various trading partners. This might explain why one Sumerian word is glossed in two or three different ways in the different dictionaries. To be more specific, when one Sumerian word is defined in two different ways, it may be that one gloss represents the East Semitic equivalent, which would have been used in correspondence with the Akkadian speakers to the east, and that another gloss represents the Northwest Semitic equivalent, which would have been used in correspondence with speakers of these dialects in the near vicinity of Ebla. In a case where three different glosses appear in the Ebla bilingual texts, perhaps the third entry represents something closer to a Central Semitic or South Semitic form, as revealed through latter-day cognates in Arabic and South Arabian, which was used in dealings with the peoples of the Syrian Desert. Naturally, none of this is demonstrable, but it is a point to keep in mind as the study of the Eblaite language continues to progress in the years ahead.

29. On the other hand, the picture has been made much clearer with the appearance of Lipiński's magnificent magnum opus cited above in n. 26.

30. The most comprehensive work is Conti, *Il sillabario della quarta fonte*. For a recent effort of a more limited nature, but with greater attention to Northwest Semitic, especially Hebrew, see P. Artzi, "Tosafot ʾEblaʾiyyot la-Milon ha-ʿIvri," in *Meḥqarim ba-Lashon ha-ʿIvrit ha-ʿAtiqa ve-ha-Ḥadasha Mugashim le-Menaḥem Zvi Qaddari* (ed. S. Sharvit; Ramat-Gan, 1999).

31. I. J. Gelb, "The Language of Ebla in the Light of the Sources from Ebla, Mari, and Babylonia," in *Ebla 1975–1985* (ed. L. Cagni; Naples, 1987) 49–74. In particular, see p. 49: "What is really the language of Ebla? Are all the texts discovered at Ebla Eblaite? What kind of Ebla sources are best suited for the recovery of the Eblaite language?" And p. 71: "The evaluation of the lexical items would have been based, perforce, on the lexical texts whose ultimate origin is unknown. While they were actually written at Ebla, we do not know to what extent the local scribes utilized in their compositions foreign sources presumably borrowed from Babylonia."

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