



**THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA IN THE 24TH CENTURY BCE
ACCORDING TO THE TEXTS OF THE CITY OF EBLA, SYRIA**

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ABSTRACT

While studying the types of materials exchanged between the kingdoms of Ebla and Dugurasu, Biga proposed (2012) that Dugurasu could be identified as a place in the Delta of the Nile. She also proposed to identify the city of DULu— from which almost the same materials came to Ebla and had a role of intermediary between Ebla and Dugurasu— with Byblos, as already proposed by Pettinato at the beginning of Eblaite studies. These proposals, positively received by some scholars, were questioned by Archi, who argued that Dugurasu is to be sought in Iran and DULu in Anatolia. These issues are important for the history of the relationships between Syria and Egypt; for this reason, Biga and Steinkeller recently (2021) offered a systematic examination of the data bearing on the question of Dugurasu's identity and location. The present paper presents a synthesis of the main points in Biga and Steinkeller's article. The recently proposed identification of the presence of monkeys among the goods arriving in Ebla solely from Dugurasu and DULu is another strong point in favor of the proposed identifications. Thus, monkeys must be studied in much detail in the Ebla texts. This is the topic of a new article (Biga and Steinkeller, in preparation), with all the data pointing to the identification of DULu with the city of Byblos.

KEYWORDS

Lapis lazuli; tin, silver; Dugurasu; DULu; linen; elephant ivory; hippopotamus ivory; monkeys

**I. THE GEOPOLITICAL HORIZON OF THE EBLA TEXTS
OF THE 24TH CENTURY BCE AND THE SUPPOSED
ABSENCE OF EGYPT**

Clay tablets from the archives of the city of Ebla, present-day Tell Mardikh in northern Syria, about 60 km southwest of Aleppo, were found in the Royal Palace G, mainly in the years 1974–1976. Written in cuneiform writing and a previously undocumented Semitic language and dated to the 24th century BCE, they allowed to begin writing the political, diplomatic, economic, and commercial history of Syria in that period of the third millennium BCE, totally unknown before Ebla's discovery. In particular, the texts found in

1975 in the main archive revealed the relations of the Eblaite kingdom with a large number of other kingdoms of the time during a period of about 45 years. The texts documented that the city had been an important trade center in the region with an extensive commercial network (Archi 2015, 163–179; Biga 2015, 181–190; Michalowski 2020; Sallaberger-Schrakamp 2015, 96–104; Steinkeller 2021).

Ebla's relations with states both near and far were reconstructed after the texts were placed in their relative chronology (Biga 2003). The Eblaite kingdom had many political-diplomatic relations with some prominent contemporary kingdoms such as Mari, present-day Tell Hariri on the Middle



FIGURE 1: Map of sites mentioned in the text.

Euphrates; Nagar, the present Tell Brak in the Khabur river plain; and Kiš, an important Semitic kingdom in central Mesopotamia.

The reconstructed geopolitical horizon of the kingdom of Ebla went from Hamazi to the east of the Tigris river, Assur and Gasur in the Tigris area, and Erbil in present-day Iraqi Kurdistan. To the west, it reached Karkemish on the Euphrates and Kharran (now in southern Turkey) and the Syro-Palestinian coast, with the center of Alalakh, now in southern Turkey, about 30 km from the Mediterranean coast. It also had many close relations with a series of kingdoms in upper Syria and along the river Euphrates: these are the kingdoms of Burman, Nirar, Dub, Ra'ak, Lumnan, Kakmum, Emar, the closest allies of Ebla, and many others. Except for Emar (identified with Tell Meskene on the Euphrates), all the other kingdoms are hard to identify with current *tells*. Some of them, such as Nirar, were possibly not too far from Ebla.

Even after 40 years of study, Egypt was the great absent entity within this vast geographic horizon, despite the fact that archaeological evidence from Ebla itself and other Syro-Palestinian cities such as Byblos demonstrated close relationships between Syria and Egypt already in the third millennium

BCE. In the palace of Ebla, many Egyptian objects, including diorite and alabaster cups and vase jars, and especially two important pieces with the names of two great pharaohs, Chephren (fourth pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty) and Pepi I (the third pharaoh of the Sixth Dynasty), were found (Scandone Matthiae 1979, 1981, 1997). The presence of a diorite oil lamp engraved with the title of Chephren has been considered by Scandone Matthiae as possibly resulting from the pillaging of a town, taking into account that we do not know the history of Ebla's relationships before the period of the archives. However, we cannot exclude the existence of relations between Ebla and Egypt already from the time of the fourth dynasty taking into account that relations between Egypt and Byblos flourished during that period. Perhaps at the time of the fourth dynasty, different diplomatic rules were applied, and the evidence should be considered as linking the brother of Chephren, Hardedef, to lapis lazuli (Luft 1973: 111–112).

Pepi I was undoubtedly a contemporary of the last king of Ebla, Išar-damu. A lid of an alabaster jar with the cartouche of Pepi I, commemorating his *sed*-festival, was found in the Royal Palace G of Ebla. It is admitted by Egyptologists that Pepi I himself sent

these types of jars with ointments to his ruler friends. Thus, he sent a vase to king Išar-damu of Ebla and to the king of DULU/Byblos since such vases have also been found there (Diego Espinel 2002: 110–112). Moreover, it becomes increasingly clear that Pepi I was a great ruler who had diplomatic relations with many regions (see below).

It is impossible to recognize in the Ebla texts a word indicating Egypt, probably because there was no word for Egypt used by Egyptians themselves at that time.

Egypt was the great absent, and the quotation of the city of Byblos as DULU, proposed by Pettinato (Pettinato 1983, 107–118; Pettinato 1986, 245–250) at the beginning of Eblaite studies, had been considered improbable by some scholars and rejected by others.¹

Byblos was an important city already closely related to Egypt from the early third millennium BCE; it was the major harbor where Egyptians came to buy precious wood, especially cedarwood and other products from Syria, Anatolia, and the east, for which Syria was an important trade center. In the archaeological excavations of Byblos were found many important and precious objects of the kings of the Third, Fourth, Fifth, and mainly the Sixth Dynasty. Pepi I is documented by a number of objects found at Byblos (Scandone Matthiae 1994, 37–48). It seems highly improbable that the kingdom of Ebla did not have any relationship with Byblos, undoubtedly very important at that time and not too far away. Thus, there is no better candidate for Byblos in the Ebla texts than DULU, as suggested by Pettinato.

II. LAPIS LAZULI IN EBLA TEXTS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA FROM EBLA PALACE G; THE BIOGRAPHY OF INY

At the beginning of the 1980s, the present author collected, for years, references to lapis lazuli (and other stones of different colors) in the Ebla texts, because it was surprising to find several quotations of raw lapis lazuli—a precious stone that was surely imported from far away giving the fact that lapis lazuli mines are in Badakhshan, a region of Afghanistan. In the Royal Palace G of Ebla, at least 43 kg of raw lapis lazuli, mostly in small pieces roughly worked, were found by the excavators, who supposed that “most of the lapis was traded in preworked pieces of ca 1 mina” (Peyronel and Vacca 2013, 443).² They prove that Ebla was a

commercial center for this stone. From the Ebla texts, it is evident that lapis lazuli arrived in Ebla via Mari, which was an important stop on the long route of lapis lazuli from Afghanistan to Babylonia and then to the Mediterranean. This stone was sent as a gift by Mari’s royal court to the Ebla king and queen; it was brought to Ebla over several years by different stewards (heads of diplomatic delegations), especially by the steward Šugadu who for years came to Ebla with precious gifts of lapis lazuli and other objects (Archi 1999). It has been calculated (Archi 2017a, 38) that during the first thirteen years of Ibbi-zikir as vizier, the deliveries of lapis lazuli from Mari to Ebla amounted to 153.35 minas (72.184 kg). While collecting texts mentioning lapis lazuli, it was easy to realize that this precious stone was sent by Ebla as a gift only to one kingdom, that of Dugurasu. Although several gifts sent by the Eblaite court to different kingdoms are often mentioned, it is surprising that gifts of conspicuous quantities of lapis lazuli (as well as tin and silver) from the Ebla court were sent only to the king of Dugurasu, a king who never came to Ebla to swear allegiance in the temple of the god KUra.

In 2010, Marcolin published a very important inscription³ that he joined from fifteen pieces he found in several museums and private collections in Japan, Spain, and the United States and that he recognized were all parts of the same text. In this text, a biographical inscription possibly from his mastaba originally in Saqqara, an Egyptian official named Iny, who was active during the reigns of the Sixth Dynasty’s rulers Pepi I, Merenra I, and Pepi II, narrated his business trips to the Levant. He had come to Byblos by ship and, from there, had reached various places in Syria and Anatolia by land (Roccati 2015b), searching not for timber but lapis lazuli, tin, and silver, exactly the products that were sent from Ebla to Dugurasu. He went back to Egypt with lapis lazuli, tin, silver, bitumen, “Asiatic” men and women, and “Byblos” ships. This important text proves the existence of a direct trade relationship between Syria and Egypt at the time of the VIth Dynasty.

III.1. THE PROPOSAL DUGURASU=EGYPT AND DULU = BYBLOS

The identity of the materials that Iny was seeking with those sent from Ebla only to the kingdom of Dugurasu was surprising. For this reason, considering the types of materials exchanged

between Ebla and Dugurasu, an identification of Dugurasu with a city in Egypt, possibly in the Nile Delta, has been proposed; and the identification of DULu with Byblos, already suggested by Pettinato, was put forth once again because DULu was an intermediary trade center between Dugurasu and Ebla (Biga 2012).

In the appendix to Biga's article, Roccati tried to demonstrate that the city of *R-ḥ3t* from which Iny started his trips to Byblos could have been written in cuneiform as Dugurasu, and proposed an etymology as "the mouth(s) of the river (Nile)" (Roccati 2012a, 2015a); between 2012 and 2021, Biga continued to study the toponyms Dugurasu and DULu in a number of papers.⁴ Several scholars accepted both proposals, that is, Dugurasu=Egypt and of DULu =Byblos.⁵

III.1.1. ARCHI'S REACTION

Archi (Archi 2016a) rejected this proposal arguing that Dugurasu is the land of Tukriš, which, according to him, was located in "the mountainous regions east of the Tigris" in northwestern Iran (Archi 2016a, 30–33). He maintained his position in a number of subsequent publications (Archi 2017a, 39; 2017b, 167; 2020, 28). But he ignored, in fact, that in 2014 Steinkeller offered a very extensive study on Tukriš in which he demonstrated that mentions of Tukriš are essentially limited to literary and lexical sources of the Ur III period (2100–2000 BCE), of the Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian period (first half of the second millennium) into the first millennium BCE. These texts identify Tukriš as a distant exotic land, a source of lapis lazuli and gold; it is cited together with the exotic lands of Makkan, Meluhha, Marhaši, and Aratta, all of which were located east of Babylonia. In his article, Steinkeller examined all the other sources on Tukriš and hypothesized that Tukriš designates at least some components of the Bactria-Margiana-archaeological complex that must have extended as far as Tepe Hissar and Gorgan to the west.

The name Tukriš does not appear in the documentation from Babylonia and Iran before the beginning of the second millennium BCE.

In the Ebla texts, it would seem that, to the east, Ebla had many contacts with the Khabur Valley, and some contacts with Assur, Gasur, and Erbil; the most distant place to the east with which Ebla had at least one contact was Hamazi. Dugurasu and Tukriš were two different places. The similarity between these

two words indeed is remarkable. One could envisage that Tukraš, the original third-millennium term for Egypt, had become a term (Tukriš) for another distant land famous for its precious materials, located in the east. Such terminological shifts are not uncommon: Meluhha, the third-millennium Babylonian designation for the Indus Valley, later and already in the el-Amarna correspondence, denotes Nubia. This observation has also been proposed by J.-M. Durand (personal communication).

III.2. BIGA AND STEINKELLER'S ARTICLE IN THE JOURNAL OF CUNEIFORM STUDIES 73 (2021)

The question of the contact between Egypt and northern Syria during the late third millennium BCE and the nature of international trade during that time is of great importance for the history of both the ancient Near East and Egypt. For this reason, Biga and Steinkeller, following Archi's article, decided to offer a systematic examination of the data bearing on the question of Dugurasu's identity and location and the location of the kingdom of DULu, often mentioned with Dugurasu, studying in detail the materials traded between Ebla and Dugurasu.

The most important results of Biga and Steinkeller's study will be summarized here, with reference to the article and the bibliography cited in it for further details and the discussion of philological problems. Fifty-one mentions of Dugurasu in Ebla sources have been identified by Biga and Steinkeller (Archi cited forty-two of them), and another one has recently been found in a monthly account of deliveries of textiles. This new text mentioning Dugurasu will be studied together with the texts on DULu and monkeys in a forthcoming article (Biga and Steinkeller, in preparation).

The exchanges of various precious materials between Ebla and Dugurasu are described by the Ebla scribes as "gifts" (*nig₂-ba*) or "deliveries" (*mu-DU*).

The data on the commercial contacts between Ebla and Dugurasu are insufficient to gather how often these exchanges took place. However, it is evident that while the exchanges between Ebla and DULu were regular, occurring as many as four times in one year and documented from the beginning of the archives, those between Ebla and Dugurasu were fewer and irregular and began at the time of the penultimate king Irkab-damu of Ebla, increasing under his successor Išar-damu, particularly under his second vizier Ibbi-zikir.

The precious materials supplied by the ruler of Dugurasu to the ruler of Ebla and often to his queen and his queen mother were elephant and hippopotamus ivory, *kirnanu* linen textiles, beads of gemstones, gold, and copper. The Ebla texts do not offer much information about the transportation of Dugurasu goods to Ebla; in some instances, the goods were physically delivered by a Dugurasu emissary while, in other instances, the goods of Dugurasu were brought to Ebla by DULu representatives together with the goods of DULu. DULu had an intermediary role in these exchanges. The emissaries to Ebla received some textiles as a gift.

III.2.1. LAPIS LAZULI, TIN, SILVER FROM EBLA TO DUGURASU

The gifts sent by Ebla to Dugurasu consisted essentially of three materials: lapis lazuli, tin, and silver. The most important product sent by Ebla to Dugurasu was lapis lazuli, sometimes also sent to DULu. The texts from Ebla leave no doubt that lapis lazuli was obtained from the kingdom of Mari (see II, above). Archaeological data from Ebla Palace G confirm that Ebla was a place on the long road of lapis lazuli from its ultimate source, the Badakhshan mines in Afghanistan, to the Mediterranean. From Afghanistan, in subsequent stops, lapis lazuli reached Mari.

Lapis lazuli was exceedingly coveted in ancient Egypt and was imported throughout its entire history, the usual suppliers being northern Syria and Babylonia. In his inscription, Iny explicitly says that he went to Byblos and then to three places, quite probably in Syria or Anatolia (Roccati 2015b), and obtained lapis lazuli and other goods.

The identification of Dugurasu with a place in Iran as proposed by Archi is quite unlikely; it is hard to suppose that Ebla exported lapis lazuli to a place fairly close to its origins (Afghanistan).

Tin was exported by Ebla to Dugurasu and DULu. Information on the sources of Ebla tin is sparse and somewhat conflicting. In one instance, Ebla obtained tin from Mari; another tin supplier to Ebla was Kakkaban, a site located in the Khabur Valley. Both Mari and Kakkaban were intermediaries for tin originating in the east, either in Afghanistan or Central Asia (Steinkeller 2014, 2016). However, there are strong indications that an alternative source of tin existed in Anatolia. Two ancient mines of tin have been identified in the central Taurus. It is quite

probable that tin was mined in Anatolia during the second half of the third millennium BCE.⁶ Tin was not found naturally in Egypt and therefore needed to be imported.

Silver was delivered from Ebla to Dugurasu and also exported to DULu. It was available in great quantities at Ebla, and all the data from these texts confirm that silver originated in Anatolia (Yener 2015; Steinkeller 2016; Archi 2017b).

From Ebla, silver was also exported to Mari, Nagar, and Kakkaban. Steinkeller (2016) emphasized the fact that prior to the Sargonic period, the Babylonians obtained most of their silver indirectly from Ebla via Mari.

Iny's inscription mentions these three examined materials exported by Ebla to Dugurasu because he went to Syria to look for these materials.

III.2.2. GOODS EXPORTED BY DUGURASU TO EBLA

The materials exported by Dugurasu to Ebla consisted of linen, elephant and hippopotamus ivory, gold, copper, bronze, an assortment of objects made of stone and other materials, and an animal called KA.MA. Except for elephant ivory and gold, all these items were also exported to Ebla by DULu. The most common item sent regularly and in great quantities from Dugurasu and DULu to Ebla were linen textiles; among them, the *kirnanu* textiles were the most valuable (Biga and Steinkeller 2021, 32).

Almost all the linen used in Ebla came from Dugurasu and DULu. When linen textiles arrived in Ebla, they were distributed to the members of the court. Linen was the Egyptian product *par excellence* and in no other place in the ancient Near East was it used more extensively for garments, underwear, ship sails, bandages, and wrappings of all kinds. Egypt sent linen textiles to Babylonia in all periods, including the Amarna period. Archi's proposal that these linen textiles were produced in northwestern Iran (Archi 2016: 16) is most unlikely since there is no evidence of production of linen in Iran.

Another type of merchandise sent by Dugurasu to Ebla consisted of two types of animal teeth or tusks. The first is *si:am*, which may be identified as an abbreviated variant of the Sumerian *zu₂-am-si*, literally "the tooth of a horned wild bull," normally translated "elephant ivory." Ebla obtained elephant ivory only from Dugurasu. So far, eleven mentions of elephant ivory have been found in Ebla texts.

Despite the repeated claims that during the second and first millennium BCE, northern Syria

and, in particular, the Ghab Valley north of Hama and the Euphrates region near Aleppo supported a native elephant population, there is no convincing proof from the archaeological data to the presence of these animals. The elephant tusks found somewhere in Syria might have been imported. The many Old Babylonian (first half of the second millennium BCE) sources from important sites of Syria like Mari, Terqa, Tell Leilan, and even Alalakh (a city situated in the middle of the Ghab Valley) do not mention elephants. No contemporaneous visual representations of elephants are known from that region either.

No mention of elephants or their ivory can be found in the Middle Babylonian (second half of the second millennium BCE) texts from Alalakh, Ugarit, Qatna, and Emar, and also in Hittite sources on the interactions of the Hittite empire with northern Syria and the Levant or the Amarna letters. If elephants had indeed lived in the Ghab Valley or the region of Aleppo, we would have had more references to their ivory in the Ebla texts, yet these references to ivory are extremely rare, and all refer to ivory sent to Ebla by the kingdom of Dugurasu. All these facts seem to signify that there were no native elephants in northern Syria and the Khabur Valley during the third millennium and the first half of the second millennium BCE. Later on, the Asian elephant was imported into Syria.⁷

For all these reasons, it can be concluded that all the elephant ivory mentioned in the Ebla texts as coming from Dugurasu came from Egypt/Africa. From the biography of Harkhuf, of the Egyptian VIth Dynasty, we learn that elephant ivory arrived in Egypt as a gift to it from Nubia (Roccati 1982: 205).

Teeth of another animal, zu₂-AN.A.ENGUR,⁸ arrived in Ebla from both Dugurasu and DULU. It was more easily obtained and also cheaper than elephant ivory; it was defined as “hippopotamus ivory,” popular in the ancient Near East. Archaeological data from many places in the Mediterranean show that hippo ivory was used more often than elephant ivory. The attestations of zu₂-AN.A.ENGUR in Ebla sources are much more common than those of elephant ivory. This material is commonly mentioned as forming the decoration of “Amorite” daggers, sometimes made entirely of gold or decorated with gold, and with inlays for their handles or sometimes even to form the handle. It is well known that hippo ivory was used

more commonly than elephant ivory in the ancient Near East and the eastern Mediterranean. In many museums (for example, in those of Heraklion in Crete and Aleppo in Syria), wonderful objects (and daggers among them) are decorated with hippo ivory; the inlays made of hippopotamus ivory were very common in Middle Bronze Ebla (Peyronel 2015, 191–192).

Archi considered the possibility that zu₂-AN.A.ENGUR meant hippopotamus ivory but rejected this, preferring a translation as “the longest teeth of the crocodile.” (Archi 2016a, 25). This identification is most unlikely, and no mention of the use of crocodile’s teeth is found in Egyptian texts. There is no ancient or modern evidence of the use of crocodilian teeth to inlay objects. From archaeological data, we know that extensive remains of hippopotamus bones were unearthed at sites such as Tell Qasile and Tel Dor in Palestine, but the evidence from northern Syria is much less convincing. The fact that no visual representation or textual references to hippopotami survive from ancient northern Syria argues strongly against the presence of native hippopotamus populations in that region.

All the evidence from the Ebla texts points to Egypt as the ultimate source of Ebla’s zu₂-AN.A.ENGUR, considering the significant presence and importance of hippopotamus in Egypt.

Gold was also delivered from Dugurasu to Ebla but in small quantities; Ebla imported huge volumes of gold from Anatolia. Some Eblaite golden objects from Palace G have been analyzed, but, for several reasons, “any attempt to identify the provenance of gold should be discarded” (Felici and Vendittelli 2013, 351). Dugurasu also sent Ebla some amount of copper and a copper type or alloy called a-gar₅-gar₅, and some axes of bronze. From the data in the texts, it is certain that Ebla obtained most of its copper from Anatolia. Unfortunately, this conclusion cannot be confirmed by the archaeometric analysis of metal objects from the Royal Palace G conducted some years ago (Palmieri, Hauptmann 2000, 1259–1282; Felici and Vendittelli 2013, 347–356). Gold and copper were easily obtainable in Egypt. For this reason, we can suppose that some copper came to Ebla also from Egypt. There is no evidence of deliveries of copper from Iran.⁹

Dugurasu and DULU supplied Ebla with an assortment of finished objects, including strings or necklaces of beads made of gemstones. Ebla

obtained this type of jewelry only from Dugurasu and DULu. Among the gemstones,¹⁰ all difficult to translate, are :

- si_4 , perhaps “carnelian;”
- $\check{S}E_3.LI$, a stone of green or bluish color that could be identified as “amazonite” or “turquoise.” A green amazonite gemstone was excavated in the EBA IIIb palace at Khirbet al-Batrawy (Nigro *et al.* 2020, 7, 23; fig. 15). Egyptian turquoise was mined in the Sinai Peninsula. It is noteworthy that a turquoise mine was identified near the Dakhla Oasis in the Western Desert, where rock inscriptions record an expedition sent by Chephren (Roccati 2012b);
- nab-hu, for which an identification (far from certain) as “rock crystal” has been proposed, and other gemstones of different colors that come to Ebla only from Dugurasu/ Egypt and arrived in Egypt probably from Nubia; some of them are also known from the Eastern Desert areas of Egypt.

Ebla obtained from Dugurasu and DULu several necklaces (gu) made of all these gemstones of different colors. These necklaces are described in some already published Ebla texts (Archi 2002; Biga 2018). It can be supposed that the necklaces looked like the necklace excavated in the EBA IIIb palace of Khirbet al-Batrawy in the southern Levant (Nigro 2012b); it is composed of 660 individual pieces of carnelian, olivine, transparent rock crystal, smoky quartz, and amethyst, copper, bones, frit, and seashell. From Dugurasu (and DULu) arrived in Ebla also several other objects whose identities need further study.

III.2.3. MONKEYS

Finally, among the items sent to Ebla by Dugurasu and DULu, and only by these two kingdoms, there is an item called KA.MA. This word can be found in the texts detailing the deliveries to Ebla (mu-DU texts) and in some monthly accounts of deliveries of textiles, especially those of the period of the last sovereign, Išar-damu, and his last vizier, Ibbi-zikir; fabrics intended for someone defined as hi-mu-DU 1 KA.MA or hi-mu-DU 2 KA.MA appear.

The Eblaite term KA.MA has remained unexplained until recently. However, thanks to a brilliant recent guess by Steinkeller (Biga and Steinkeller 2021, 45), interpreting KA.MA and

reading it as KA-peš₃, the translation of KA.MA as “monkey” and hi-mu-DU as “the handler” of one or two monkeys has now been proposed.

Steinkeller, studying the Early Dynastic lexical source “List of Animals B,” in which KA.MA appears before az, “bear,” and before ur, “dog,” concluded that KA.MA denotes an animal, and that it is an Eblaite term for “monkey.” It is likely that KA.MA, to be read KA-peš₃, is a variant of the later KA-peš, which likewise designates an animal. In a lexical list [K]A-peš-tur = *ḫu-um-bi-bit-tú*, “the one looking like Humbaba / the one of Humbaba.”¹¹ The identification of KA-peš as *ḫumbabītu* is of particular interest because Humbaba is sometimes depicted with simian features and dancing, a representation that undoubtedly goes back to the Egyptian depictions of dancing dwarfs or pygmies. Moreover, Humbaba is associated with monkeys in Tablet V of the Gilgameš Epic, where a band of monkeys dances daily before Humbaba: “[monkey mothers] sing aloud, a young monkey shrieks, [like a band] of singers and drummers, daily they clamor in the presence of Humbaba” (Al-Rawi, George 2014, 76–77, ll. 24–26).

Steinkeller based this interpretation also on the fact that the KA.MA animals, as they appear in the monthly accounts of deliveries of textiles, are commonly associated with “dancers” (NE. DI) and “dwarfs” (ba-za), as well as other types of entertainers, such as “flute players” (lu₂-gi), singers (nar), and “acrobats” (HUB₂.HUB₂). Also, there are records of several Ebla individuals who appear to have been KA.MA handlers. Two of them were the dancers *Ir₃-am₆-ma-lik* and *Zi-kir(-ra)-a-ba₄*, designated in several sources as lu₂ KA.MA, “the one (in charge) of the KA.MA.” These data strongly argue that the KA.MA were used as part of the merrymaking activities held at the court of Ebla.

Monkeys that danced to the sound of tambourines and flutes are well documented in various periods throughout the history of the ancient Near East. In the Mediterranean, in Egypt, and on the island of Thera¹² are figures of monkeys dancing and playing. Dancing monkeys are depicted in some tombs in Egypt. Some Egyptian texts, also of the Vth and VIth Dynasties, speak of monkeys and dwarfs who danced for the god Bes or the goddess Hathor. For Hathor, acrobats of different types, especially women, are also attested. The monkeys were trained to dance and play instruments and were an exotic element. They were funny and amused the court

parties. Many centuries later, dwarfs and monkeys were still present in European and Italian courts as funny and exotic elements and appeared in several paintings of Tiepolo, Veronese, and Carpaccio.

The origin of the monkeys is not mentioned in the texts detailing deliveries of textiles but, in the texts of deliveries of goods to Ebla (mu-DU texts), they are quoted as coming only from Dugurasu and DULu.

Biga and Steinkeller decided to collect further evidence of DULu and monkeys in the unpublished Ebla texts and are preparing an article on this topic.

IV. DULU/BYBLOS AND MONKEYS

The kingdom of DULu was one of Ebla's most important political and trading partners and one of the most quoted in the Ebla texts during the whole period covered by the archives. It is also evident that DULu was an intermediary between Ebla and Dugurasu.

Even if we do not have itineraries in the administrative documents because the scribes did not register the outgoing deliveries in geographical order, many texts always cite Dugurasu and DULu one after the other, so it is quite probable that the two kingdoms were connected. The role of DULu in the exchanges was very important. DULu imported products from Dugurasu and then exported them to Ebla. DULu merchants made trips to Dugurasu on their own: DULu also traded directly with Ebla exporting merchandise obtained from Dugurasu.

The relationships between these two polities was cemented by at least one dynastic marriage (Biga 2014c), and several members of DULu's royal family paid official visits to Ebla at different times.

Monkeys are very well documented archaeologically at Byblos. All the tributes to Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian kings include monkeys coming from cities of the Mediterranean, including Byblos (Dunham 1985). Some scholars proposed that monkeys arrived in Mesopotamia also from the Indus Valley and Iran, but all the evidence from Ebla strongly supports a provenience of monkeys to Ebla from Egypt and Byblos, at least in the third millennium BCE. Cattle also came to the Levant from Egypt, as suggested by Sowada (Sowada 2016–2018).

Monkeys came from Dugurasu/Egypt to DULu / Byblos, a city where many monkey-shaped objects from the third millennium BCE are attested. In fact, in the temple of the goddess Ba'alat Gubal in

Byblos, monkey-shaped vases were preserved in far greater numbers than in other cities. Only in Byblos have so many vases and monkey-shaped objects been found. Monkeys were offered to the goddess of Byblos, who was assimilated to the Egyptian goddess Hathor (Diego Espinel 2002, 103–105).

As Pinnock (2018, 498 and nos. 13, 14,15) recently noted, some seals in *Karum* II of Kanish in Anatolia, dated to the beginning of Middle Bronze I (beginning of the second millennium BCE), have north Syrian characters and not Egyptian characters “con l'unica eccezione della presenza di figure di scimmie, sedute e con la zampa anteriore levata davanti al muso, in stretto collegamento con figure rilevanti nel partito figurativo. Tali immagini dovrebbero essere riconducibili alla presenza, a Biblo, di oggetti votivi con questa forma, inviati dalla corte menfita al santuario della Baalat Gebal.” In no. 14, Pinnock notes that in the foundation deposit of the so-called *Temple Syrien* (as named by P. Montet) were found several alabaster vases in the shape of monkeys with their young dated to the Ancient Kingdom. The same deposit also contained a jar (Jarre Montet) with some monkey-shaped objects.

Thus, people from Egypt and Byblos came to the court of Ebla with their trained monkeys and made them dance or perhaps even play music to enliven the banquets at the court. This information strongly suggests that DULu cannot be located in Anatolia, as Archi has proposed.

Archi (2016: 4) locates DULu “at Titirish (approximately 45 km north of Urfa)” and thinks that it “must be located ... in roughly the same geographical direction as Armi, *not the opposite direction*” (2016 28); “Dulu [located] at Titirish Höyük, about 30 km southwest of Samsat” (2020: 28).

The data in the texts, including those quoting monkeys, strongly suggest that DULu is Byblos (or Gubla, as it was known in antiquity). The only reasons preventing from accepting this identification outright are philological considerations; the value gub of DU (which would permit a reading *Gub-lu^{ki}* of the toponym in question) is not otherwise attested in the Ebla syllabary, a problem still unresolved.

In a recent article (Biga and Roccati, 2022), Roccati studies the writing of the foreign name of the town of Byblos in Egyptian sources, showing a fundamental change, by the second millennium BCE, in favor of hieroglyphs closely corresponding with the cuneiform writing of DULu.

As one might expect, relations between DULu/Byblos and Ebla are much more frequent than those between Ebla and Dugurasu/Egypt. There are a few hundred attestations of relations between DULu and Ebla, and many of them are in the still unpublished texts that Biga and Steinkeller are studying for their article “More on the Locations of Dugurasu and DULu.”

The city-state of Arhadu (*Ar-ha-du*) was undoubtedly close to that of DULu/Byblos, taking into account that even if no itineraries are specified in the Ebla texts, when two cities are cited with the conjunction *wa* “and,” they can be considered as close to each other, as is often the case with DULu and Arhadu (*DU-lu wa Ar-ha-du*). The citations of Arhadu will also be studied in Biga and Steinkeller’s forthcoming article (in preparation).

V. CONCLUSIONS

The textual and archaeological data from Ebla and Iny’s inscription lead strongly to the conclusion that Dugurasu must be identified as Egypt and that at the time of the Ebla archives, northern Syria and Egypt were engaged in commercial exchanges, as already documented by the archaeological finds in the Levant (Sowada 2009).

Indeed, the toponym Dugurasu cannot be connected with any Egyptian term designating either Egypt itself or any of its provinces and cities. Therefore, we can assume that Dugurasu is an Eblaite exonym for Egypt, completely unrelated to the Egyptian self-designations. DULu is Byblos. An alternative solution, yet improbable, would be that DULu refers to some intermediate place between Egypt and Ebla that served as a transshipment point of the materials sent from Egypt to Ebla. There are some candidates from the coast of Palestine into the southern Levant, all important urban and commercial centers during the Early Bronze Age: Tell es-Sakan in the Gaza strip (de Miroschedji 2015); Tell Keisan, on the coast between Haifa and Akko; and Khirbet al-Batrawy to the east of the Jordan River, in Jordan (Nigro 2012a, 2012b, 2015; Nigro *et al.* 2020).

Ebla was located in a particularly strategic position at the crossroads of various commercial routes, which made it strategic for trade to and from the Mediterranean, as would occur later for the city of Aleppo, which is about 60 km from Ebla. For this reason, Ebla controlled the main trade routes of the region that led to Egypt (south), Anatolia (west), and Babylonia (east).

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NOTES

- ¹ Archi 1980, 3 rejected the identification of DULU with Byblos proposed by Pettinato. Archi, Piacentini, and Pomponio (1993, 206–211) mention the possibility of such an identification but reject it. Bonechi (1993, 111–112) mentions it too without rejecting it altogether.
- ² For the finds of unworked lapis lazuli at Ebla, see Pinnock 1985a,b, 1986, 1988, 2006; Peyronel and Vacca 2013, 442–443.
- ³ Marcolin 2010; Marcolin and Diego Espinel 2011; Diego Espinel 2015–2016; Diego Espinel, this volume.
- ⁴ Biga 2012; 2014a,b,c; 2016; 2017, 2021a,b.
- ⁵ Roccati 2012a; 2015a; Durand 2014, 1–5; Schneider 2015, 445–446; Miroschedji 2015, 1035; Diego Espinel 2015–2016, 125–126; Steinkeller 2016, 128; 2021; Peyronel 2016, 185; Bonechi 2016, 30 no. 3; Matoian 2016, 179 nos. 35 and 38; Matthiae 2018, 348 no. 2; Moreno Garcia 2019, 190.
- ⁶ Yener et al. 2015; For the analysis of Eblaite tin objects, see Palmieri-Hauptmann 2000, 1264–1265; Biga and Steinkeller 2021, 26–28 and no. 64.
- ⁷ For a complete discussion of these points and bibliography, see Biga and Steinkeller 2021, 33–36.
- ⁸ The item is written in various ways; for a discussion (by Steinkeller) of the word in the Eblaite lexical sources and its translation and

a possible explanation of its spellings, see Biga and Steinkeller 2021, 36–38 and note 103.

- ⁹ About Eblaite silver and gold, Peyronel and Vacca (2013, 441) wrote that “the two precious metals arrived in Ebla from different geographical areas ... the silver coming from the Taurus mountains in eastern Turkey, and the gold from sources located either in Egypt or in Middle Asia (at the moment it is not possible to identify the provenance).”

- ¹⁰ For a discussion of these gemstones, see Biga and Steinkeller 2021, 39–45. These gemstones deserve a detailed study, which was not our purpose in the JCS article.

- ¹¹ For ḥumbabītu/ḥumbibītu, see CAD U 234.

- ¹² For monkeys playing instruments documented at Thera, see Biga, Fs M.Negri, in print.