Ebla and Ur: Relations, Exchanges and Contacts between Two Great Capitals of the Ancient Near East
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Source: *Iraq*, Vol. 68 (2006), pp. 85-97
Published by: British Institute for the Study of Iraq
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EBLA AND UR: RELATIONS, EXCHANGES AND CONTACTS BETWEEN TWO GREAT CAPITALS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

By FRANCES PINNOCK*

After the discovery of Royal Palace G at Ebla in 1974, several contributions, particularly by the writer and by P. Matthiae, addressed specific aspects of the artistic and architectural cultures of Early and Old Syrian Ebla. Many of these aspects revealed contacts and comparisons with Ur. It was not, however, possible to build up a coherent picture from these random and unrelated aspects. Such a picture may still elude us, but in the presence of a varied documentation relating to different periods, we think it is now opportune to review the evidence.

1. *The artistic culture*

a) *Stone bowls.* The first aspect examined concerns some elements of decoration found on stone bowls from Royal Palace G (Pinnock 1981, Fig. 1) and, more specifically, on the base of one of them, a herringbone border (Fig. 2 *left*), probably surrounding a rosette (Pinnock 1981: 62–4, Fig. A: 2).[1] A similar herringbone border was also recognised on another fragment (Fig. 2 *right*)[2] which, however, was too small to preserve any trace of a possible rosette (Ibid.: 63–4, Fig. A: 3). A motif including, in part, parallel oblique linear incisions and, in part, a herringbone pattern in combination with a rosette, was better preserved on the flat upper surface of the rim of a third vessel.[3] Later, a join was made between the first bowl (Fig. 2 *left*, TM.76.G.632) and a second, much larger fragment (TM.87.G.270), which allowed the complete reconstruction of the incised pattern on the base, and of one third of the bowl, up to the rim, decorated with a lion's head in the round, with inlaid eyes, of exquisite workmanship (Fig. 3).

At the time of the first presentation of the evidence, a typology of stone vessels was formulated, including a type of small hemispherical bowl with an open shape, disc base, incised decoration, generally with a herringbone pattern on the flat rim and on the outer edge of the base (in the middle of which there could also be a star, or rather a flower).[4] The most immediate comparison was a white stone bowl from Mari (Fig. 4; Parrot 1956: 117, Pl. XLIX), which bore the herringbone incision on the rim, as well as a border with incised oblique lines on the base, in combination with a stylised flower with eleven petals, instead of eight as on the best-preserved specimen from Ebla. The bowl from Mari had two lion-heads and paws emerging from the rim and partly worked in bas-relief, which led the writer to propose that this might either be a trait specific to Mari, or that it was also characteristic of Ebla, thus enabling the reconstruction of lion-heads on Ebla bowls (Pinnock 1981: 68). This second hypothesis was confirmed by the discovery of fragment TM.87.G.270, where a preserved lion's head was worked in the round and projected from the rim of the vase, and may have been accompanied by a second head in antithetic position (Fig. 3).

The comparison between these products from Mari and Ebla is even more compelling in view of the proportions of the best-preserved bowls — 19.7 cm in diameter and 5.0 cm high for the vase from Mari, and 12.0 cm in diameter and 3.3 cm high for TM.77.G.692+725+881. However, two further parallels were then identified (Pinnock 1981: 67, fn. 5): a composite pattern, painted (not carved), was found on the base of a fragmentary vase from Tell Khuera (Kühne 1976: 153,

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[1] TM.76.G.362, fragment of the base with part of the body, translucent light green calcite, from L.2769, Archive Room.

[2] TM.76.G.351, translucent light green calcite, from L.2984, Throne Room of the Administrative Quarter. At the time of the discovery it could be proposed that the two fragments, both quite small, might belong to the same bowl, though the style of the incision did not support this hypothesis; on the contrary, subsequent finds, as will be specified later on, proved definitely that TM.76.G.362 and TM.76.G.351 belong to different bowls.

[3] The bowl is reconstructed from two major fragments, TM.77.G.692 and TM.77.G.725+881, in chalky alabaster-limestone with black dots, and comes from L.2913, the inner court of the Administrative Quarter (Pinnock 1981: 62–3, Fig. A: 1).

[4] A bowl in the Brooklyn Museum, acquired on the antiquities' market, displays similar characteristics (Pinnock 1989).

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Fig. 1. Ebla, TM.75.G.491+, light grey limestone.

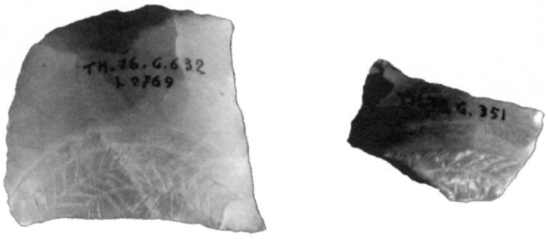

Fig. 2. Ebla, fragments of bowls, TM.76.G.632 and TM.78.G.351, green calcite.

Fig. 3. Ebla, TM.76G.632+TM.87.G.270, green calcite.
Fig. 4. Mari, limestone bowl (after Parrot 1956: 117, Pl. XLIX).

Pl. 32: 5) and, most importantly, on a precious object from the furnishings of the Royal Cemetery of Ur, namely a gold bowl that can be compared with the Ebla objects in several respects. In fact, the vase (Fig. 5), which was found in PG/800 (Woolley 1934: 563, Pl. 162), has a hemispherical shape, herringbone decoration on the outer surface near the rim, and further herringbone decoration on the outer edge of the base, which surrounds a flower with twelve petals. The bowl could be suspended by wire threaded through two small attachments consisting of double-tubes pierced vertically (cf. Woolley 1934: Pl. 161), which can be compared with the vertically pierced handle of a small cup from Ebla (Fig. 1).[5] The body of the Ur bowl has broad vertical flutings, a decorative zigzag pattern immediately below the herringbone incisions at the rim, and another immediately above the herringbone band at the bottom. A second comparison (Fig. 6) was correctly proposed by R. Dolce (Dolce 1996: 5, Fig. 5): a silver bowl (Woolley 1934: Pl. 170b),[6] very similar to the gold vessel (Fig. 5), with the exception of the presence of a long horizontal trough spout; moreover, the central flower has eight petals, exactly like the Ebla example, while

[5] TM.75.G.491+TM.76.G.806+TM.77.G.276, in greyish limestone, from L.2764, the north store of the Administrative Quarter (Pinnock 1981: 64–5, Fig. B, 4).

[6] The bowl is defined "lamp" by Woolley, but in consideration of the fact that it is made of silver, which does not seem suitable for this use, it is probably more appropriate to define it simply as a container.

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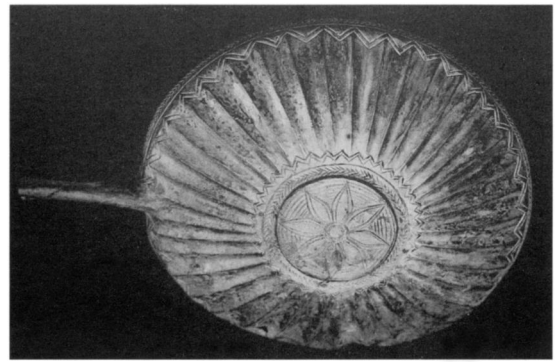

Fig. 5. Ur, gold bowl (after Woolley 1934: Pl. 162).
Fig. 6. Ur, silver bowl (after Woolley 1934: Pl. 170b).

the flower of the gold bowl has twelve petals, and compares more closely with the eleven petals of the vessel from Mari.[7]

To summarise, the Early Syrian bowls produced at Ebla are small containers of medium to high quality, probably for cosmetics; they are well attested in palace and temple contexts in inner north Syria (Ebla and Hama), are sporadically present on the coast (Byblos), and more frequently in Upper Syria/Upper Mesopotamia (Tell Brak, Mari), with the very important exception of the presence of a similar decorative motif on precious metal bowls from the Royal Cemetery of Ur.[8]

b) *Lapis-lazuli inlays.* Another element of particular interest is to be found in several fragments of inlaid panels, found in Royal Palace G in almost all the rooms thus far brought to light, but with a special concentration in the rooms of the Administrative Quarter. Among them some locks from beards or hair (Fig. 7*a–d*) are made of lapis lazuli, in individual pieces, and include a lock with wavy lines and a curl at the end. The end of the lock, when it is preserved, is modelled on the underside so that it can be applied onto a base of a different material, possibly wood; it is slightly convex on the outer surface so that it can be placed below another similar element. The majority of the inlays of this kind were found during the 1976 and 1977 seasons, with a huge increase in their number during the 2003 excavations, when the second south store of the Administrative Quarter was excavated.

The locks are of three different types: single locks; one double lock; one lock above the other but slightly offset, each ending in a curl. Some pieces include two superimposed locks, with the curl, in quite high relief, placed near the middle of the element. No trace was left of the objects to which the locks originally belonged, so it is difficult to understand how they were put together, and if and how other locks were placed over or below them; furthermore, these objects were not only suspended from the main object from one side as they not only have cylindrical holes on the

[7] This problem is dealt with by Dolce (1996), taking as a starting point a limestone lid found at Ebla in 1987 (TM.87.P.612), not in Royal Palace G, but in Area P2. It probably belonged to a building called P4, contemporary with the archives, that specialised in the preparation of food, and where workshops were also located. The latter were engaged in the production of pieces of shell for inlaid panels, and also of stone objects (Marchetti/Nigro 1995–6: 13–18). Dolce's proposal to relate the lid and the bowl seems unlikely, not only because the two kinds of object are different — lid and bowl — but also because of the type of decoration. In fact, all the objects she mentions for comparison — a stone plaque and the stone bowl from Ebla, and a stone bowl from Tell Brak — have on the surface, or on the base, a flower with eight well-spaced, double-outlined petals, surrounded by a single or a double circle, in one case with oblique or herringbone incisions. However, in the centre of the lid from Ebla there is a flower with nineteen partly overlapping petals, within a border that includes a broad band divided into sections, with groups of three vertical lines alternating with a motif consisting of a lozenge with a dot in the centre, with a kind of double frame at the top and bottom. In our opinion, the concept and graphic rendering of this motif bears no relation to the so-called eye-idols from Tell Brak, as proposed by Dolce, but rather belongs to a fully Syrian milieu where it finds exact comparisons at Hama and Byblos (Pinnock 1981: 69–70 and Fig. B3c606). We also wish to point out that Dolce, though apparently aware of our article concerning the stone bowls, made no reference to the fact that the comparison with Ur had already been proposed there (Pinnock 1981: 67, fn. 5).

[8] For the nature and chronology of the relations between Early Syrian Ebla and Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, see Matthiae 1989a: 208–18, 1980a and 1980b.

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Fig. 7*a*. Ebla, complete and fragmentary locks, lapis lazuli.
Fig. 7*b–d*. Ebla, complete and fragmentary locks, lapis lazuli.
Fig. 8. Ur, front part of lyre (after Woolley 1934: Pl. 110).

back in order to help fix them, but sometimes they have holes pierced along their sides, possibly in order to fix the locks one to the other.

When we presented the evidence found before 2003 (Pinnock 1985; 1986)[9] we found that the only comparisons were with Mari (Parrot 1967, 266, M.2716) and Ur (Woolley 1934: Pl. 110, U.10412). At Ur the locks belong to the beards of the well-known bull heads (Fig. 8), which decorated the front of the lyres from the Royal Cemetery. It is quite likely, therefore, that the smaller number of locks found at Mari, and the larger number of pieces found at Ebla (ten complete or fragmentary locks, some of which were double) were used in the same way. The question has already been raised as to whether musical instruments were made at Ur and traded to Syria, or whether local craftsmen copied the Sumerian instruments. The different quality and technique of the Ebla locks, some of which were more cursory, with shallower incisions and slightly irregular contour lines, would favour the second hypothesis as being the more likely. Thus, the objects would have been made locally in the presence of an imported lyre, rather than modelled on the evidence of banquet scenes accompanied by music as depicted on cylinder seals and relief plaques. It seems that at least one specimen of lyre must somehow have been brought to Mari or Ebla, and that it was copied by local craftsmen, or that they had, at least, the possibility to study the originals closely.[10]

[9] The writer will be devoting a study to the entire corpus of lapis-lazuli objects and the important group of raw lapis-lazuli fragments (nearly 36 kg of material).

[10] At the time of the first discoveries of these lapis-lazuli inlays, the relation between Ebla and Mari seemed to be the main explanation for the presence at Ebla of locks so closely similar to those from Ur. In fact, Mari is mentioned several times in the Ebla archives as a political and economic counterpart of Ebla (Archi 1981; Fronzaroli 2003, *passim*). The culture of Early Dynastic Mari was strongly influenced by that of Mesopotamia; for instance other fragments of inlaid panels, besides those examined here, have thus far

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c) *Inlaid panels.* Matthiae made similar observations, but indicating influence in the opposite direction, concerning other fragments of inlaid panels (Matthiae 1993a). These elements consisted of small figures, often made of shell, cut in silhouette, with details incised. They were applied to a base, generally made of wood, using bitumen. They are attested in the major centres of Early Dynastic Mesopotamian culture — Ur, Kish and Mari. Panels of this kind were certainly also made at Ebla, as is proved by the great Victory Standard (Matthiae 1989c: 32–43), as well as by fragments of figures belonging to smaller inlays (Matthiae 1984: Pls. 38b, 47), made more frequently of stone than of shell.[11] These represented, as far as we can tell, traditional scenes similar to those of the Mesopotamian repertory, with fights between wild and domestic animals standing on their hind legs, and humans wearing tiered sheepskin garments.

However, the type of panel most frequently attested at Ebla depicted processions of officials, marching or turned towards the figure of the king, who was usually depicted at a larger scale. These panels were almost certainly mounted on a wooden support that was carved to represent the naked parts of the figures, which were then covered in gold leaf. The hair and headdresses were usually made of lapis lazuli and steatite, and the clothes — skirts, cloaks, and belts — were made of limestone. The wooden bases have, of course, decayed, and very few fragments of the gold leaf, with which the bodies were covered, have survived. Some still keep the shape of the part of body they covered,[12] but others no longer have any recognisable shape. In contrast, the limestone skirts, and the parts of composite figures, are quite numerous in the collapse and destruction levels of Palace G. The skirts, usually depicting sheepskin garments (*kaunakés*), are made up from the juxtaposition of modular elements, consisting of curved pieces (Fig. 9), with four flounces of wool tufts; these were fixed by means of short cylindrical pegs, as is proved by the presence of holes cut into their backs. Very simple graffiti — usually short parallel or criss-crossing multiple lines — were probably the marks made by craftsmen in order to indicate the exact placement of the pieces.

Matthiae found only one comparison for these Ebla characteristics: a shell plaque with six flounces, found at Ur on the floor of the late Babylonian temple of Ningal (Woolley 1955: 171, Pl. 44, U.3278), but already correctly dated by Woolley to the Early Dynastic period (Fig. 10). Matthiae thus proposed to identify the composite panels with figures of officials as a peculiarly Eblite artistic genre (Matthiae 1993a: 18) and he attributed the fragment from Ur to an artist from Ebla. Matthiae accounted for the problem of the presence at Ur of a composite inlaid panel from Ebla, by proposing the presence of Syrian craftsmen in the capital of Sumer, or the removal of the object as a consequence of the sack of the north Syrian capital during Sargon of Akkad's campaigns (Matthiae 1993a: 19).

d) *Bitumen.* A similar problem can be raised with regard to a peculiar piece of evidence, apparently not very clear, found on the floor of the Audience Court: two lumps of bitumen — TM.77.G.486a–b (Fig. 11) — on which minute lapis-lazuli lozenge-shaped tesserae had been applied (Pinnock 1985b: 135, 138, Abb. 5). The two lumps no longer have a recognisable shape, but the only possible comparison seems to be with the manes of the lower row of lion heads on the sides of Puabi's sledge-chariot from the Royal Cemetery of Ur (Fig. 12; Woolley 1934: 78–80, Pls. 123–4, 126a). Woolley describes the materials of the manes of these lions as shell and lapis lazuli, "crushed out of shape" below the gold heads of the lions (Ibid.: p. 79, 9, Pl. 126a); they survive on the restoration in the British Museum as "no attempt was made to restore them". The tufts of the

been found only at Mari and Ebla; or elements of horse harness, made of lapis-lazuli at Ebla, and of shell at Mari (Pinnock 1985a). Now, on the contrary, in the light of the different pieces of evidence examined, we can also propose a direct connection between the great town of north inner Syria and the most prestigious capital of the Mesopotamian south.

[11] The stone used is a local limestone, white-pink in colour, with a very fine grain, and quite soft to work. It was easy to find, as Ebla was built on a limestone layer. Shell had to be imported, for instance from the Red Sea, where shells of large size can be found. These provide raw material of a good quality, suitable for this kind of production. The trade of tridachna shells from the Red Sea is attested at Ebla by some specimens of moderate size (Matthiae, Pinnock, Scandone 1995: 150–1), and a workshop for the working of shell inlay elements was identified in Building P4, as mentioned above (Marchetti/Nigro 1995–6). These objects, in particular skirts and parts of human bodies (such as feet, or heads) were not made by the technique more often employed in Mesopotamia for pieces of this kind, namely the silhouette.

[12] Some pieces of foil in the shape of human feet can be easily recognised: Matthiae 1984: tav. 36b.

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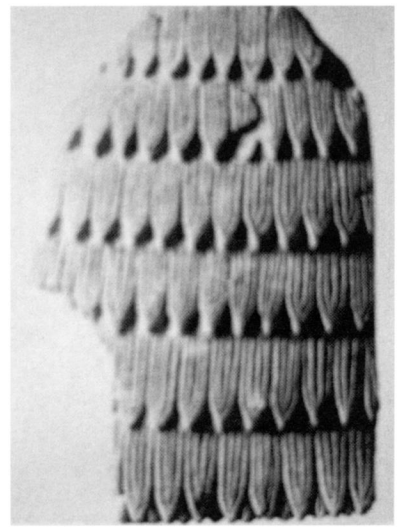

Fig. 9. Ebla, fragments of inlaid panels, limestone and lapis lazuli.
Fig. 10. Ur, fragment of skirt, shell (after Woolley 1955: Pl. 44, U.3278).

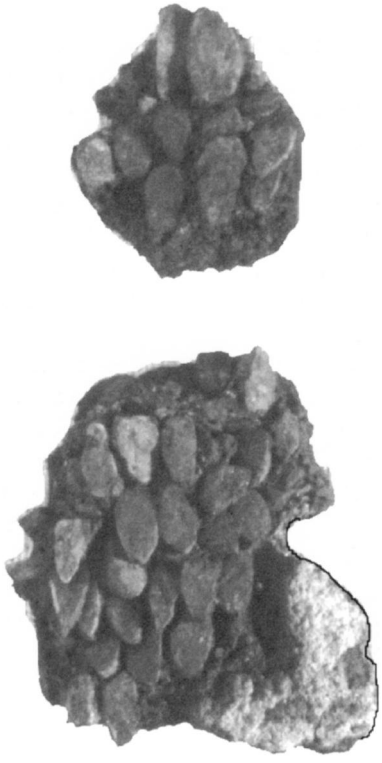

Fig. 11. Ebla, probable fragments of lion's mane, bitumen and lapis lazuli.
Fig. 12. Ur, lion's head from Pu-abi's sledge (after Woolley 1955: Pl. 126a).

manes consist of irregular lozenge-shapes applied to bitumen which, with a length of up to 1.55 cm, are twice as large as those from Ebla (0.8×0.4 cm). In this instance, the use of bitumen, which is not present in the Ebla region, makes the hypothesis of the import of a complete object from Mesopotamia more likely.

On the basis of these elements it is certainly difficult to draw sound conclusions, but, as was the case with the lyres, we are dealing with rare pieces, as concerns their manufacture as well as their destination: specially-commissioned furniture of the highest value, certainly not widespread,

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which combined elegance of shape with refinement in the use of different materials, all coming from distant regions, and destined for palaces and temples, probably created for an extremely important occasion.[13] Certainly the fact that objects of this kind are so rarely found is a consequence of their extreme fragility — they always had a wooden base, and a combination of different decorative elements. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that the only reconstructed specimens come from funerary contexts, like the Royal Cemetery of Ur, whence they were recovered in a good state of preservation. In the light of these considerations, it seems all the more meaningful to us that the only comparable evidence for this category of object, though very fragmentary, comes from Mari and Ebla. Although the presence of such objects is easier to explain at Mari, the Ebla evidence testifies to the north Syrian town's wide range of international contacts and, in our opinion, also to the special character of its relations with Ur.

e) *Column.* Evidence of relations of the kind highlighted above is probable also for the Old Syrian period. Temple D stood on the western edge of the Ebla acropolis. It was dedicated to the goddess Ishtar in her aspect as patron deity of the ruling dynasty (Matthiae 1986: 352–6), and located in a cult area that certainly stretched to the south, with some lesser installations reserved for aspects of the cult, such as haruspicy. This area was heavily disturbed during the final destruction of Old Syrian Ebla around 1600 BC, as well as, and to an even greater extent in much later periods, particularly in Iron Age I–II, when a large number of rubbish pits were dug on the acropolis. For this reason many of the temple area's furnishings were found out of context, and their original location is not easy to reconstruct.[14] For the most part, the original context of objects such as stele, statues, clay votive figurines and liver models, can be identified as the cult area of Temple D. One case, in contrast, is unique. A kind of column (Fig. 13), nearly 1.70 m high and 54 cm in diameter, was found in a sector in which buildings of some importance had probably once stood, but of which only the drains and remains of imposing stone foundations were preserved. This column, which was probably set in the ground to a depth of approximately 20 cm, was made of fairly coarse basalt, has a hollow nearly 30 cm deep at the top, in the centre of which there is another hollow, nearly 10 cm in diameter. The larger hollow is slightly smaller in diameter than the column, and its edge, only 2 cm thick, is much eroded and, in some parts, lost. The body of the column is heavily eroded, partly due to the pitted grain of the stone; however, the upper hollow is carefully smoothed, and so are the edges of the inner hollow.

Apart from its peculiar shape, this Ebla fitting is characterised by the presence of a shallow relief, now very difficult to see, which, upon examination in different lighting conditions, seems to represent a front-facing male figure with short curly hair, or wearing a skull-cap, with a pointed beard, long skirt, arms folded at the waist, and holding a dagger with down-turned point, and a curved staff pointing upwards. This figure apparently fills the entire height of the column (with the exception of the 20 cm at the bottom which would have been buried in the ground) and seems to be placed in a kind of niche or chapel shallowly carved in the column's surface (Pinnock 1993).

It is difficult to suggest any function for this object, particularly because it was found in a disturbed context and was probably not *in situ*. Because of its size (1.5 m high) it cannot have been a support, and it is not even clear whether it was placed inside or outside a building. To our knowledge only one other object has similar characteristics: a limestone pillar with a square

[13] Lyres of a very similar kind, sometimes identical to those from the Royal Cemetery of Ur, are, as is well known, frequently present in banquet scenes depicted on Early Dynastic seals (Selz 1983: 69–70, 119–22, 191–3, 308–12, 405–6). For the interpretation of these scenes, see also Pinnock 1994: 24–5. The representation of sledge-chariots is, in contrast, quite rare, but the vehicle seems to be connected with religious ceremonies, probably in conjunction with agricultural cycles, on seals dating from the Uruk period (Frangipane 1996: 250, Fig. 76).

[14] One of the most fortunate cases is that of the Ishtar stele, of which the uncarved base (TM.85.G.350), preserved *in situ* in the vestibule of Sanctuary G3, was found in 1985. A larger fragment, TM.85.E.85, was found the same year in an area of rubbish pits near the north edge of the acropolis. Several years earlier, in the same area, a smaller fragment (TM.67.E.227) had also been found, and this allowed the larger fragment to be joined to the base. Thus the whole stele could be reconstructed, with the exception of the curved top that probably showed the king, which is why it was probably smashed (Matthiae 1987: 451–2). Moreover, the cult area of Temple D probably included some basalt figures of kings and priestesses, in particular the bust with Ibbit-Lim's inscription, and a female figure, found reused in the wall of a Byzantine monastic structure built on the north-east corner of the Western Palace, near the foot of the acropolis, not far from Temple D (Pinnock, in press a).

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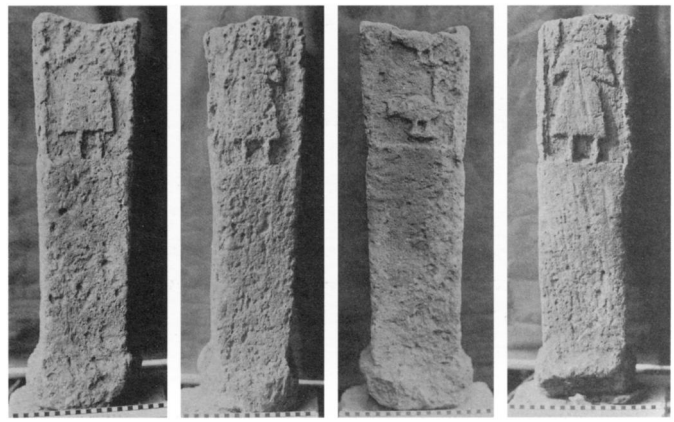

Fig. 13. Ebla, column from Area D, basalt.
Fig. 14*a–d*. Ur, pillar from Khendursag's chapel (after Woolley and Mallowan 1976: Pl. 57).
Fig. 15. Ur, the *Giparku*, Court C7 (after Woolley and Mallowan 1976: Pl. 7a).

section, found at Ur in the residential quarter of the Larsa Period, in the court of Hendursag's chapel (Fig. 14*a–d*). Despite its different shape and much smaller size (0.74 m high, with sides 0.20 m wide), certainly in proportion to the building in which it stood, the Ur pillar is similar to the Ebla column in terms of concept. Both were probably placed outside, have a short unworked section at the bottom, in order to fix them into the ground, and, above all, both have a hollow at the top, and relief decoration which, on the Ur piece, covers all four faces. There are three female figures and a pair of geese, one above the other on the Ur pillar; all the figures are placed in shallow niches, into which they fit perfectly (Woolley-Mallowan 1976: 127, Pl. 57). Lastly, as concerns the quality of workmanship, both pieces are of low quality, and were certainly not produced in temple or palace workshops of the highest level.[15] Moreover, another similar fitting was found at Ur (Fig. 15), standing in court C7 of the *Giparku* of the same period, close to a mud-brick basin, near the side opposite the entrance to the temple (Ibid.: 54, Pl. 7a): a cylindrical limestone column, standing nearly 0.80 m above ground, also with a hollow at the top (0.37 m in diameter and 0.45 m deep).

Because of their shape, particularly the presence of the hollow at the top, simpler at Ur and better cut at Ebla, and their placement, the two Ur pillars may have been used to burn perfumed substances; however, the Ebla column shows no trace of burning. Alternatively they could have been bases for other objects, possibly of perishable material, such as a standard with a wooden

[15] This is not the only example of a low-quality piece of furniture in Temple D, where some small basalt statues and images of the so-called stone spirits were also preserved.

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pole, in which instance the double hollow in the Ebla column might have offered greater stability. When commenting on the pilaster from the *Giparku*, which does not have relief decoration, Woolley proposed identifying it with the support for a metal basin. In contrast, for the object from Ebla, a use similar to that documented on contemporary seals could be proposed: a small column, proportionately as high as the real specimen but definitely thinner and with a more elaborate base and top, is used as a perch for a bird, and appears with figures of an enthroned king in presentation scenes (Porada 1948: Pl. CXXXVII, 911–12).

It is not possible to be certain as regards the interpretation of the figure, because of the poor state of preservation of the surface. He could be identified as a king, if the objects he holds are a dagger and a curved staff, or with a priest, if he holds only the curved staff.[16]

2. Architecture

Recently, Matthiae studied the problem of the origins of the peculiarly Old Syrian reception suite, and proposed a close connection with a group of rooms in the *Giparku* at Ur (Matthiae 2002). As is known, the typical Old Syrian reception suite includes a main room in the centre, usually divided by a pair of columns, with bent-axis approach, and two wings of secondary rooms along the longer sides; the dais for the throne is usually placed near the short side furthest from the entrance, according to the classic scheme of rooms with bent-axis approach.

The classic form of this audience suite can be identified at Ebla in the Western Palace (Fig. 16), at Alalakh, in the Level VII Palace, and at Tilmen Hüyük, while a variant of the model is present in the Northern Palace at Ebla.[17] Matthiae (2002: 196–8) identified this same arrangement of rooms, fulfilling the same function, in a group of rooms A 20–24 in the *Giparku* at Ur (this was dated to the Third Dynasty, to whose kings the foundation of the building is attributed); and rooms B 10–13 (Fig. 17) in the phase dated to the dynasties of Isin and Larsa. The block includes a central room, in this instance without inner divisions, with a dais against one short side, multiple bent-axis approaches, and two wings of smaller rooms that also have multiple approaches. This may have represented dual use of the rooms, by both priestesses and visitors who could enter it from the residential quarter via A 16/A 11, as well as from the area of Ningal's sanctuary. In addition to the overall plan, there were also strong similarities in the proportional ratios of the different sectors composing the two suites — the Mesopotamian and the Syrian — namely the proportions of the central room and the side wings, and the lack of symmetry of the minor rooms (Matthiae 2002: 199).

3. *Textual evidence*

The written evidence concerning the relations between Ebla and Ur in the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur is well known (Owen 1990: 117–21). The texts mainly concern Puzrish-Dagan's kingdom and the region of Drehem, and deal with commercial and diplomatic relations, which while not perhaps particularly close, yet remained fairly constant. Predominant were exchanges, apparently on a base of reciprocity, of cattle for food, gifts or cult (Ibid.: 116). Even more relevant is the evidence from the beginning of this period, when the inscription on Gudea's statue B recalls the acquisition of precious wood, for the erection of Ningirsu's temple, from the town of Urshu

[16] For the identification of these characters see Matthiae, Scandone and Pinnock 1995: 421–2; Pinnock 1992.

[17] In the North Palace, which was probably used for collective ceremonies, and the consumption of communal meals, the central room is not divided by means of columns, and the side rooms can be more easily identified on the north side. Behind the side against which the royal dais lies, there are two long store-rooms for storage jars, which were certainly used in connection with events taking place in the throne room (Matthiae 2002: 199, Fig. 6). An evolution of the Old Syrian audience suites was also identified in Palestinian palace architecture of the Middle Bronze Age (Nigro 1994a: 376–7; 1994b). An audience suite has not been identified in Royal Palace E, the king's real residence, but taking into consideration that one was found in all the other palatial buildings of Ebla, and also in other palatial residences, such as Alalakh and Tilmen Hüyük, it is quite likely that there was also a suite of this kind in Palace E. Recently a variant of the suite was also identified in the Southern Palace at Ebla, almost completely excavated during the 2003 campaign; it was probably the residence of an important member of the central administration, who was charged with the organisation of diplomatic missions and caravans. This palace is definitely smaller than the Western Palace, the Crown Prince's residence and the Northern Palace, used for communal meals in ceremonies related to Ishtar's cult area nearby. It was not, therefore, the seat of a member of the royal family or someone directly linked with functions of kingship. However, receptions played such an important part in this official's activities that he too needed an audience suite, built according to the model of the royal suite, but with some changes.

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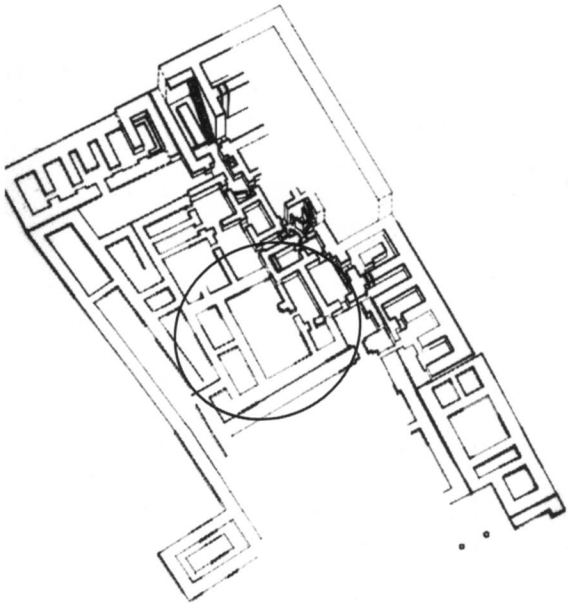

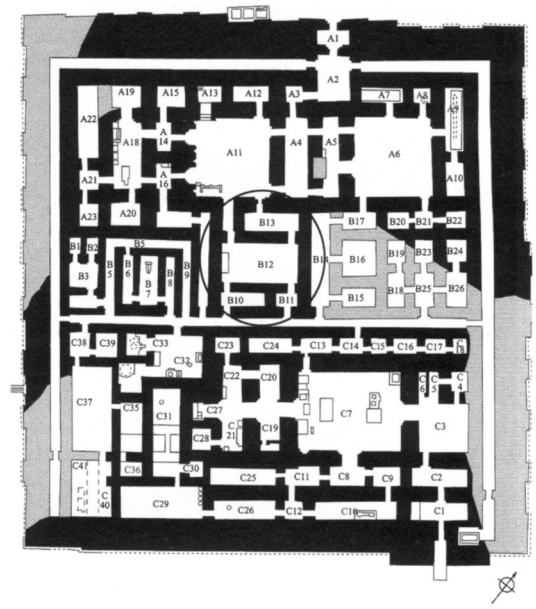

Fig. 16. Ebla, Western Palace.
Fig. 17. Ur, the *Giparku* (after Woolley 1974: Pl. 57).

in the mountain of Ebla. This evidence was interpreted as a wish by Gudea to make his people understand precisely which part of the world was involved: Ebla was probably no longer the capital of inner Syria, as in the previous phase of Mardikh IIB1, but was certainly still better known in southern Mesopotamia than Urshu.

4. Conclusions

The documents concerning the mature Early Syrian period could be interpreted on the basis of commercial relations concerning luxury goods, not necessarily running directly between Ebla and Ur, but possibly indirectly through Mari. It is becoming increasingly clear that contact between Ebla and Mari, on the middle course of the Euphrates, was not limited to the economic sphere, but was also political. The evidence as a whole, also taking into consideration the data about the late Early Syrian period and evolution in the archaic and mature Old Syrian periods, paints a slightly different picture, which does not exclude, but rather integrates the first hypothesis. The relations between the two centres, therefore, may have been continuous between the mature Early Syrian period (=Early Dynastic IIIb in Mesopotamia) and the Third Dynasty of Ur. However, although they were probably never very close, judging by quantity, yet they involved the highest levels in state administration.

Perhaps Ebla was renowned at Ur as a production centre for luxury pieces of furniture made from inlaid wood, suitable only for the king's residence.[18] Meanwhile, Ur was probably seen as the place where royal ideologies were created. These were characterised by spectacular displays of wealth, that can still be appreciated through the furnishings of the Royal Cemetery,[19] and, in the sphere of royal and religious ceremonial, the royal ideologies are demonstrated through the

[18] In this sense, in the relations between these two great centres of northern Syria and southern Mesopotamia, a long tradition seems to have begun. It was to continue into the Assyrian empire, when precious products made by Syrian craftsmen were brought to the Assyrian courts as booty, and visual models of the archaic Syrian tradition were introduced into Assyrian royal iconography (Matthiae 1989b).

[19] This is not the place to deal, yet again, with the difficult question of the identity of the occupants of the Royal Cemetery. Generally speaking, we agree with the analysis proposed by Moorey (1984), who believed that the burials of the kings of Ur should be looked for below the floors of their palaces, perhaps even at Kish. The wealth of the furnishings, and the placement of the tombs inside the settlement and close to the cult area, seemed to point to the fact that the large number of people buried in this important cemetery, and in particular in the sixteen major tombs, played a significant role and were linked to particular rituals characterised by their complexity, including human sacrifice (about these problems see Winter 1999).

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monumental lay-out of the Third Dynasty cult precinct,[20] which was probably planned in its entirety and largely built by Ur-Nammu, and completed by his successor Shulgi.

From this point of view, we cannot rule out mediation by Mari in the age of the Early Syrian state archives. However, at an earlier time there was apparently a peer exchange of luxury pieces of furniture, made of wood and inlaid panels, from Ebla to Ur, and musical instruments from Ur to Ebla. In a more recent phase, which was, for Ebla, a crucial period of political, religious and social renewal,[21] it is quite likely that Ebla looked to Ur, a very ancient town and, above of all, a great cultural centre, for inspiration, and for architectural and figurative models connected with royal ideology.

In this context it seems meaningful that, in order to create the most important sector of the palace, namely the audience suite, the Eblites did not choose the model presented, for instance, by the *Ekhursag*; this, with a large room as central element, parallel to one long side of a court, was later to become the prototype for classic Mesopotamian architecture. Instead, the Eblites chose as their model the *Giparku*, the residence of the great priestesses of Nanna. In fact, the choice of the *Ekhursag* model would have implied a kind of subordination to the Mesopotamian world, which the Ebla court certainly did not wish. Their preference for the *Giparku* model underlined a relation with cult, or at least with rituals for a great deity, which could be adapted to the ideology of the kings of Ebla in the archaic Old Syrian period. When they seized power, these kings engaged in a massive reconstruction of the town, which can certainly be compared with the erection of the cult area of Ur. However, it also promoted a religious reform which made the goddess Ishtar head of the pantheon and patron deity of the ruling dynasty.[22]

In light of recent discoveries, therefore, the relations between Syria and Mesopotamia, already schematically outlined by Henri Frankfort, now look now more multi-faceted and complex, based more on ideological and political elaboration than on simple mechanisms of trade, exchange and imitation.[23] It seems, increasingly, that the prevailing mechanism was that of peer-polity interaction on a large scale, and of a reciprocal acknowledgement of roles, where Ebla, whose foundation was certainly more recent than that of Ur,[24] was nevertheless also capable of playing a relevant and widely recognised role in the elaboration of royal and religious ideologies.

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[20] We refer in particular to the placement and plan of the *Giparku*, on the one hand, and of the *Ekhursag*, on the other hand, in which the royal residence is not, apparently, the primary element. The buildings seem to be linked in a hierarchical relationship with the ziqqurrat terrace, and with each other, possibly related to religious rituals (Pinnock 1995: 77–80).

[21] About these subjects see Matthiae 2003; Pinnock 2001.

[22] It is, moreover, fascinating that the model which inspired the Old Syrian audience suite descends from the *Giparku*, the great priestesses' residence, when we consider the very relevant role of some female figures at Ebla, possibly also in a ritual and ceremonial context (Pinnock in press b).

[23] A particularly interesting aspect of Ebla's political and ideological development, which also seems relevant in the choice of the *Giparku* (rather than the *Ekhursag*) as a model for the reception suite, relates to the special position of women at the court of Ebla. This may also have played a part in the adoption and development of a particuliar iconographic type — a woman with long flowing hair, which probably had its roots in the Uruk period (Pinnock in press a, b).

[24] For the phenomenon of later urban civilisation at Ebla, see Matthiae 1993b.

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