

Eblaite *ḥa-rí* and Genesis 40,16 *ḥō-rî*

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From G. PETTINATO's description¹ of IM.75.G.557 one garners the following information: the tablet is an administrative text dealing with shipments of cereals to Ebla during the reign of king Ibbi-Sipiš, and that among the intelligible Sumerian terms is the phrase *še ninda saġšu*, rendered by PETTINATO "a saġšu measure of barley bread". Some of the professions listed by PETTINATO are *lú-î-giš*, "merchant of vegetable oil"; *lú ḥa-rí*, and *lú-ninda* (?), "baker".² On p. 31 of the *Catalogo* PETTINATO writes *ḥa-ri* with the letters spaced, which means that he understands the word to be Sumerian, but in the index of personal names on p. 269b the word is italicized (hence Eblaite), but followed by a question mark: *ḥa-rí* (?). However, in the index of "Autorità, Professioni e Mestieri" on p. 274a, *ḥa-rí* is again italicized but this time without the following question mark.

The great uncertainty manifested by PETTINATO with regard to *ha-rí* can be eliminated by citing Gen 40,16 where the chief baker tells Joseph:

w^ehinnēh š^elōšāh sallē ḥōrî 'al rō'šî

And behold, three baskets of white bread upon my head.

Being hapax legomenon, *ḥō-rî* has naturally being translated in various ways, though the variations are not as great as in other cases of hapax legomena. The Torah³ translates Gen 40,16, "three open-work baskets on my head", with the note, "Others, 'baskets with white bread' or 'white baskets'; meaning of Heb *ḥori* uncertain". The Jewish Publication Society Version of 1917, which The Torah undertook to revise, rendered the phrase "three baskets of white bread", and this now appears to be the

1 *Catalogo dei testi cuneiformi di Tell Mardikh-Ebla (Materiali epigrafici di Ebla 1; Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, 1979)* 31.

2 On p. 31b PETTINATO puts a question mark after *ninda*(?), but in the index on p. 274a the question mark is missing.

3 Edited by H.M. ORLINSKY; The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia 1962.

correct version. In other words, not every revision is necessarily an improvement! The latest scientific Hebrew lexicon translates *ḥōrî* by "Gebäck aus weissem Mehl"⁴, citing Arabic *ḥuwwara*, "weiss, weisses Mehl", and the New English Bible (1970) also correctly offers "Three baskets of white bread".

In the Ebla tablet the translation of *lú-ḥa-rî* as "baker of white bread" makes good sense when set alongside *lú-ninda*, "baker of bread". It would appear that the *lú-ḥa-rî* specialized in products baked from white flour, whereas the *lú-ninda* would have turned out bread made from unrefined grains, such as barley. What seems certain is that *ḥa-rî* does not signify "wicker"⁵ or "reed", as suggested by the "open-work" rendition of The Torah; in an administrative document dealing with grains, *ḥa-rî* would be expected to refer to something in this category. Moreover, there is the Semitic root *ḥāwar*, "to be white" (cf. Jes 29,22), so that the understanding of *lú-ḥa-rî* as "baker of white bread" appears to be reasonable. This, then, would be an instance of mutual elucidation: biblical *ḥōrî* shows that *ḥa-rî* in the Ebla tablet is Semitic, not Sumerian, while the context of the administrative document excludes the meaning "wicker" or "reed" for biblical *ḥōrî*.

Given that long -a- in Eblaite becomes long -o- in Hebrew,⁶ the shift from *ḥa-rî* to biblical *ḥōrî* is just what one would expect. For example, the *qal* active participle in Eblaite follows the *qā-ṭil* pattern which becomes *qōṭēl* in Hebrew; thus *wa-ti-nu*, "giver"; *wa-ṣi-ru*, "potter"; *wa-ri-šū*, "heir"; *za-ni-ḥi ma-ri^{ki}*, "those who repulsed Mari"⁷.

After a recent discussion of some unusual words in the Joseph Cycle I concluded: "As several rare and difficult terms in these accounts are now fin-

4 W. BAUMGARTNER, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, Leiden 1967, p. 339a, who cites Egyptian Aramaic *qmh hwry*.

5 The New American Bible, New York 1970, renders "three wicker baskets on my head".

6 I consider Eblaite to be Old Canaanite, an ancestor of Biblical Hebrew. The reasons for this classification I set forth during the congress on the language of Ebla held in Naples 21-23 April 1980, and will appear in the Proceedings (1981, so one hopes) to be edited by L. CAGNI.

7 In a tablet published recently by PETTINATO in *Materiali epigrafici di Ebla 2*, one reads: 3 aktum-túg ti-túg *za-ni-ḥu ma-ri^{ki}*, "Three aktum robes, a supply of clothing for those who repulsed Mari". The plural *qal* participle *za-ni-ḥu* contains the root of Hebrew *zānaḥ*, "to reject, repulse". This interesting detail reveals that the victors in the war with Mari were recompensed with clothing.

ding satisfactory answers in the Ebla archives, one begins to suspect that while Joseph made his career in Egypt, the stories about him were composed elsewhere in Old Canaanite⁸. This new equation of Eblaite *ḥa-rí* with biblical *ḥōrî*, "white bread", shows that this suspicion was not unfounded, and that we in future would be well advised to look first to Canaan and its tablets for solutions to lexical and philological problems in the Hebrew Bible.

8 See M. DAHOOD, *Le scoperte archeologiche di Ebla e la ricerca biblica*, Civiltà Cattolica, Quaderno 3118 (17 May 1980), pp. 319-333, especially 329. This article has recently appeared in English in *The Month*, August 1980, pp. 275-281.