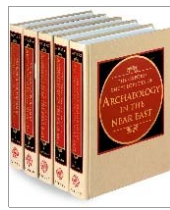


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Eblaïtes.

Scholars utilize the ethnonym *Eblaïtes* to refer to the people of Ebla, a major Bronze Age city-state in northern Syria. Discussions about the identity of peoples, especially in the Near East, typically rely on factors such as the identification of the language utilized and the gods worshiped. Thus, because the eblaïte language is Semitic and many of the gods worshiped at Ebla occur elsewhere in the pantheons of other Semitic peoples, it is generally accepted that the Eblaïtes were a Semitic people. However, a host of problems specific to refining this statement continues to be debated.

The classification of the Eblaïte language within the Semitic family of languages is the center of a sharp debate. Some scholars view Eblaïte as a dialect of Old Akkadian, in which case it would be proper to speak of the Eblaïtes as a branch of the East Semites (Akkadians, Assyrians, and Babylonians). Other scholars view Eblaïte as a branch of West Semitic, with an especially close relationship to other West Semitic languages utilized in Syria (in particular, the roughly contemporary Amorite and the later-attested Aramaic). The majority of the evidence favors the latter opinion. To cite one example, the Eblaïte first-person independent pronoun *I* is *ana*, exactly as in Amorite and Aramaic. It is thus preferable to speak of the Eblaïtes as West Semites. [See SEMITIC LANGUAGES.]

The deities attested at Ebla likewise share greater similarities with the West Semitic world than with the East Semitic world. Important gods are Dagan, Hadd/Baal, Rashap, Ashtar, Kamish, Malik, and Qura (as well as the sun and moon deities whose Eblaïte names are unknown because Sumerograms always are used). To illustrate connections with the West Semitic world, the god Kamish may be highlighted. This deity appears in the city name Kar-Kamish (Carchemish) in northern Syria; is attested in the pantheon of Ugarit on the Syrian coast; and appears much later as the national god of the Moabites (written almost always as Kamosh [Chemosh], but in one biblical passage as Kamish).

Although the Eblaïtes can be seen to have been West Semites, it is important to note that they had intimate connections with Mesopotamia. Because the Eblaïtes were based in a major urban center (unlike other West Semites, who may have been more rural or pastoral), the links with the large cities of Mesopotamia were strong. This will explain the fact that about fifty different Ebla texts (especially lexical texts) are duplicates of texts known from sites such as Fara and Abu Salabikh. Especially close cultural contacts appear to have existed with Kish; for example, it is known from one text that a mathematics professor from Kish worked or taught at Ebla. The city of Mari presumably served as the conduit through which much of Mesopotamian culture reached Ebla. [See FARA; ABU SALABIKH; KISH; MARI.]

In conclusion, the Eblaïtes were a West Semitic people, similar to other peoples of Syria (e.g., the Amorites). However, because their culture was urban based, there were strong influences from Mesopotamia.

[See also EBLA; EBLA TEXTS.]

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