INTRODUCTION

The cuneiform tablets published here were bought in two lots in 1976/7 and in 1983/4. Most of them are closely associated by prosopography, seal impressions and types of text with those excavated at Meskene, ancient Emar. In fact, two tablets of this group specifically mention the name of the city Emar: LÚ.MEŠ URU.E-mar “the men of the city of Emar” (no. 1:10) and NA₄ URU.E-mar.KI “the (standard) weight of the city of Emar” (no. 4:8). Further, there are two possible references to Emar in a more unusual spelling: (cult inventory of vessels belonging to) DINGIR I-ma-ri (no. 27:9) and (one sheep offered to) DINGIR Ha-ma-ri (no. 19:1).

From 1972 to 1976, the French Mission Archéologique de Meskéné-Emar undertook a salvage operation, revealing a Late Bronze Age city (see J.-Cl. Margueron, “Meskene [Imar*/Emar] B Archæologisch”, RIA 8 [1993] 84–93). Around 800 cuneiform tablets were unearthed in its midst (see J. Huehnergard, “Meskene [Imar*/Emar] A. Philologisch”, RIA 8 [1993] 83). After the construction of the Tabqa dam on the Euphrates River 147 km. east of Aleppo, the rising ground water brought more tablets to the surface, which were collected by local inhabitants and sold in the market. Hundreds more tablets surfaced in this manner and were acquired by private and public collectors.

The Late Bronze city of Emar was located at the modern site of Meskene on the middle Euphrates. It was one of the most important cities of the land of Aštata. The city lay on the frontier of the Hittite province of Syria, facing Babylonia to the south-east and Assyria to the north-east. The international use of the cuneiform script is demonstrated in the seal impressions, which bear “Hittite” hieroglyphic inscriptions but are accompanied by Akkadian labels.

The archives recovered from the city cover a very short period, extending over four generations. Most of the texts from Emar were written in the late thirteenth and very early twelfth centuries B.C.E. The city was destroyed in the twelfth century (1187, see Beckman 1996b: 5). Five generations of the royal family in a direct line have been established (Beckman 1996a: x). Generations III and IV are documented in text no. 5 and generations IV and V in text nos. 6, 7 and 11. Although the BLMJ tablets do not mention any new members of the direct line of the royal family, they do provide additional information on the collateral branches. Text no. 7 records the purchase of a house, another structure, a piazza near a gate and a vineyard by an otherwise unknown first cousin of generation IV. His genealogy is given in detail, covering three full generations back to the royal ancestor: 14IM-ma-lik DUMU 13-sur-4KUR DUMU 14IM-GAL LUGAL-ri. The document is witnessed by his nephew (the contemporary king Elli) and other members of the royal family including Elli’s son. In text no. 5, the members of the royal family are selling off a house, a vineyard and another building including a sizeable plot of land measuring some 30 hectares. The buyer Pušata, the son of Šadi-Dagan, is also a new addition to the collateral branch of the royal family.

The documents from this city in various languages (western peripheral Akkadian, Sumerian, Hurrian and Hittite) provide insights into the political, economic, social, cultural and religious life of the period. The Bible Lands Museum tablets are a representative group which relates to all these aspects. The political history of the region
is documented, as in text no. 9:19, which mentions the period of hardship at the time of the siege. The first three legal texts demonstrate the judicial hierarchy of the Hittite province of Syria: the three levels of jurisdiction under the “king’s sons”, the Overseer of the Land, and the local king of the city of Emar. The court of last appeal was always the Sun of the Hittite empire, the Hittite king, to whom Zū-Ba’Ia the diviner appealed his case, cf. no. 32. In text no. 17, the provincial governor, the Overseer of the Land, has freed certain individuals from prison. The reasons behind this action are not given. Could this be an example of the heavy hand of the Hittite administration interfering with internal Emar affairs?

The legal and economic documents illustrate various aspects of a society in the process of passing from a nomadic state to an urban way of life. Note the appearance of an expression for nomads ZI.MEŠ ša ZA.LAM.GAR “persons of the tent” (no. 20:7). Like the majority of Emar tablets, the BLMJ tablets reflect the private legal and economic activities of the cosmopolitan native population of a commercial emporium. The texts list large amounts of gold and silver as payments in cash, indicating the wealth of the city (see nos. 17 and 18). One text seems to be the inventory of a partnership agreement in a commercial enterprise (no. 21).

These legal and economic texts depict a multi-ethnic population. The local population was composed mainly of speakers of Northwest Semitic. They adopted certain customs of the Hittite ruling elite: one was the use of the Anatolian hieroglyphic writing system for inscriptions on their seals, and another was the observance of Anatolian rituals. Text no. 32 is a second Hittite letter written by the king of Carchemish on behalf of the Great King, concerning difficulties between an officer of the Hittite garrison and the head of the divination priests. Hittite females are also mentioned among other ethnic groups in the lower classes. Also listed in the inventories are Assyrian and Subarian women (nos. 20 and 21). A certain Paḥuru who bears an Egyptian name meaning “the Syrian” (no. 30:24) may have been born in Egypt and then returned home to Syria. An example of an Indo-Aryan name is Marianni (no. 8:27).

The texts with religious contents include cult inventories, descriptive rituals and dedications of votive offerings (see below).

Description of the Tablets

In consonance with the accepted designations developed by Arnaud and Beyer, the BLMJ tablets will be accorded the designations “Syrian” and “Syro-Hittite”. Accordingly, there are two scribal schools, a Syrian and a Syro-Hittite, with separate writing traditions. In the former, the writing runs parallel to the short side of the tablet and the seal impressions cover the edges and the margins. On tablets of the second school, the writing runs parallel to the long side of the tablet and the sealings appear on the obverse and reverse of the tablets. Further multiple and superimposed impressions are common on the latter. For a discussion on the sealings, see the appendices. These two schools have recently been more clearly defined on the basis of palaeography, legal phraseology and grammar; see Wilcke 1992.

Lines are used to divide the text into sections, in particular before the list of witnesses.
Palaeography, Orthography and Language

The script of the individual scribes of the local Syrian school is not consistent. Extra wedges appear (NIG with an extra vertical [no. 3]), or expected ones are missing (GI with one vertical [no. 25 passim]). Note the use of -gu- in no. 3:15, though the following line uses -gu-. The idiosyncrasies of the scribal hand of Is-Dagan appear in text nos. 5–7. First, there is a lack of consistency between the more common forms of the signs and his own peculiar forms, which alternate freely. His most peculiar are the TAR (see no. 5:5) and the QA signs (see nos. 5:38, 6:17, 26, 7:9), which are almost identical in form. In addition, he has a tendency to add verticals at the ends of signs such as zu.

The writing of homo-organic stops in these texts is similar to that found in other western peripheral areas. There is free alternation in the orthography: TE renders /di/, KA renders /ka/ and /ga/, KU renders /ku/ and /gu/, GU renders /gu/. Similarly, the use of the -ś- series of signs to render /ś/ is common, e.g. isniqiq instead of the expected ışniqiq (no. 1:3, no. 3:4) and ka-śi-ip for kasip (no. 4:11). For a more detailed discussion of the phonological system of the Emar texts, see Huehnergard 1983: 36–38, Arnaud 1991b: 26–30 and Ikedu 1995.

In regard to morphology, there is confusion in gender, case and number. In particular, the pronominal suffixes are confused. In text no. 3, the third feminine singular and plural suffixes on nouns are replaced by the masculine. The accusative -šī appears in place of the genitive -šā.

Verbal morphology exhibits a few peculiarities: the prefix of the third feminine singular is an initial t-. As frequently happens in other western peripheral texts, the subjunctive marker -u is usually omitted (e.g. no. 16:1). West Semitic formation pa‘il as passive participle replaces both the Akkadian stative and verbal adjective (no. 4).

Assyrianisms appear occasionally (text nos. 1, 2, 3): the accusative verbal suffix appears as the Assyrian -šunu rather than the Babylonian -šunati (no. 3:2).

There may be certain stylistic characteristics. A unique text contains a dedication in the first person to NIN.URTA, the city god of Emar (no. 24). The use of the first person in such a dedication is unknown in Emar but is found in other Northwest Semitic inscriptions.

Chronometry and Metrology

In regards to the measurement of time, the calendar is peculiar to Emar, while the system of reckoning years follows a year-dating system (MU) generally designated by personal names rather than by events which seems to reflect a local variant of the timu-system of Assyria. Although the majority of Emar texts are not dated, a few of our specimens are, including no. 4 and perhaps no. 10.

The unit of measurement for distances in Emar is the ikū “dike”, which is usually a unit of surface area in other cities. There seems to be more than one interrelated system of length measurements. One system is based on the length of the side of a square ikū, i.e., 1 ašlu rope = 20 Gilqanū reeds = 120 ammatu cubits (cf. M. Powell, “Masse und Gewichte”, RIA 7 [1989–1990] 472, 477). Houses are usually measured in cubits, while plots of land including vineyards etc. are measured in reeds and ropes. Text no. 8:2
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mentions a measurement of 15 reeds as the length of one side of a vineyard. References to the reed also occur in the iƙā-based system; see Tsukimoto (1992b: 313) and text no. 8.

There is also a hierarchy of units: the ašlu rope, composed of iƙū, composed of šiddu. Apparently, this ašlu rope unit can be of varied length; Arnaud 1991: 107, no. 62:2–3 gives examples of ašlu units consisting of 7 iƙū and of 6 iƙū. This undermines the suggested equivalency of iƙū and ašlu. References to šiddu occur in the iƙū-system, see Tsukimoto (1992b: 313). Tsukimoto suggests that šiddu would be the equivalent of 1/6 of an iƙū = kumānu in Alalakh and Assyria (cf. also Powell 1989–1990: 477) and that GIR (= purīdu, Powell 1989–1990: 476) would be a “stride”, a subdivision of the šiddu, possibly 1/6.

The unit of weight in Emar was standardized locally (no. 4). This is consistent with traditional Syrian autonomy in economic relations; see Archi 1987: 51. Apparently, the mina of 470 gm. was based on two different subdivisions in Emar – of 60 and 50 shekels; see Arnaud 1991: 13, n. 2. Evidence from Ebla from the third and the second millennia shows a system based on a mina of 470 gm. divided by 60 shekels, resulting in a shekel unit of 7.8 gm. for trade within its territory and for all of northern Syria as far as Mari (Archi 1987: 51). However, Ugarit apparently had a ratio of 50 shekels (9.4 gm.) to the mina (470 gm.); see M. Dietrich and O. Lorez, “Der Vertrag zwischen Šuppiluliuma und Niqmandu”, WO 3 [1964/66] 219–223, although this has been questioned). The word mnu is not found in the alphabetic Ugaritic texts. In Emar, there is no evidence of the Hittite mina of 40 heavy shekels (11.75 gm.); see Th. P. J. van den Huot, “Masse und Gewichte”, RIA 7 (1989–1990) 526, H. Otten, “Zum hethitischen Gewichtssystem”, AfO 17 (1954–56) 128–131. The system of weights in Late Bronze Emar may parallel the third millennium Ebla evidence, which seems to record three different systems for trade with Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant to Egypt; see Archi 1987: 47–89.

The unit of capacity measurement used most often in Emar is the parfṣu (commonly abbreviated GIš.pa, e.g., no. 15:21 and passim). This unit is found in Syrian sources beginning in third millennium Ebla (ba-ri-zu, see L. Milano, “Food Rations at Ebla”, MARI 5 [1987] 528f.) through second millennium Mari, Carchemish, Alalakh and Emar (Durand 1990b: 43, Lafont 1991: 278–279) as well as in Hittite sources. Although an apparent Akkadian word, it has been suggested that parfṣu was probably of Syrian origin and meant something such as “half-measure” of an uncertain “whole” (M. Powell, “Wine and the Vine in Ancient Mesopotamia”, in: P. McGovern, S.J. Stuart and S.H. Katz (eds.), The Origins and Ancient History of Wine, Philadelphia, 1996: 117). Evidence found at Mari suggest that the western Syrian parfṣu was reckoned at 50 sila while that in Mari region was that of 60 sila the equivalent of a half gur (Lafont 1991: 278 n. 19, 279 n. 23). At Emar, the “whole” would be reckoned at 100 sila, the equivalent of a homer, the “assload”. The parfṣu appears in the Old Hittite sources as well as in the Hittite Laws (see Th. P. J. van den Huot, “Masse und Gewichte”, RIA 7 (1989–1990) 525). In the Hittite laws, the size of a parfṣu has been reckoned as 30 litres according to its definition as a Babylonian jar (dug).
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Social Structure and Kinship System

The tablets bear witness to a patriarchal social structure with patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence pattern. The basis of the system is the extended patriarchal family. One tablet (no. 3) records the adoption of stepdaughters as sons so that the property continues in the family. The tablets demonstrate that the ownership of land continues in the patrilineage and is unalienable. Land is bought, sold and witnessed by “brothers”, members of the same patrilineage (cf. no. 3). On certain occasions, it is necessary for each of them to receive a token gift of one shekel to ensure the legality of the transaction. For the “eldest brother”, cf. no. 8:16. Further evidence of the clan structure may be seen in the authority of the elders of the city alongside the royal house. The extent of the responsibility for and representation of this community vis-à-vis the king is not clear. These elders were the co-proprietors of the common land together with the god dNIN.URTA. The elders originally enjoyed complete political and economic powers, but this control was slowly eroded over time. We find a number of real estate transactions that concern the sale by the elders of the property of the god dNIN.URTA to private individuals, especially those of the royal house. These transactions indicate the dislocation of the previous system of communal property and its takeover by the royal power.

Other texts also testify to the fact that the social structure in Emar was undergoing a transformation, and that immovable property which had originally belonged to the family/tribe was sold to outsiders in times of hardship. Like the Pentateuch, these texts make a legal distinction between transactions within the kinship group and those with “strangers” outside it (cf. “like a stranger”, no. 12:4).

The Gods of the Emar Region and Their Worship

The tablets provide an insight into Syrian gods similar and dissimilar to those known from other Syrian towns, such as Ugarit. In addition to the gods worshipped in Emar, deities worshipped in the cities of Wakat, Uri and Ešši are listed.

The name of the city god of Emar itself is unknown. It is written dNIN.URTA and he appears to represent the religious communal identity of the city. He appears in many of the legal texts in this volume. However, there is also a god written DINGIR i-ma-ri (text no. 27:9) and one written DINGIR Ha-ma-ri (text no. 19:1, possibly the same, see above), literally “the Emariote god”, who may or may not be identical to dNIN.URTA. Išhara of the city of Emar also appears in no. 19:3. She is usually paired with dNIN.URTA as in their mutual kissu-rite (Arnaud 1986: 385, no. 387). The god(s) (Šaššabitti), a set of unidentified divine beings who belong to dNIN.URTA’s temple, appear in the dedication to dNIN.URTA (no. 24:18).

The next pair of Emariote gods are Dagan and Ninkurra. However, in this volume, Dagan, considered the revered head of the Emar pantheon, appears after ‘Aštarte-of-Battle in text no. 30 and may belong to the city of Uri (see below). On the other hand, there is a cult inventory of the goddess Ninkurra (no. 26). The Storm-god who ranks after Dagan appears in one offering list (no. 19:4), where a sheep sacrifice is offered to his statue. Emar’s storm-god may have been called Ba’al but the evidence is ambiguous (Fleming 1993a: 89–94). Two gods listed in another cult inventory are
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Šaggār and ‘Aštart(-ḫaššī), the latter an unknown manifestation of ‘Aštarte (no. 25). Other gods mentioned in the inventories and the dedication are We’dā and Adammatēra who appear together with ˹Nin.urta˷ in the dedication to him. This is the only mention of the god We’dā in Emar (no. 24:16). The character of Adammatēra (nos. 24:17) is not well known, though she seems to have possible associations with the underworld and/or the storehouse.

Nergal apparently appears in two of his manifestations, as “lord of the horns” (no. 19:7) and as “lord of Šagma” (no. 29:14). The first manifestation is known from the various hierarchical offering lists from Emar. The lord of Šagma is a title mentioned alone (Arnaud 1986: 354, no. 373:128; 476, no. 490:3), as an epithet of Nergal (only here) and as an epithet of Erra (Arnaud 1986: 284, no. 289:6). Its meaning is obscure, and it is uncertain whether it relates to a topographical feature or is an appellative of some sort. There is also an Inanna of Šagma (Arnaud 1986: 353, no. 373:85’).

Text no. 28 gives us a cult inventory for certain gods in the town of Ešši Newtown. The gods mentioned here are Erra and Adammatēra.

Text no. 30 is also a cult inventory, but is exceptional in that it seems to be a list of the treasuries of all the gods of one city, Uri. The gods listed are ‘Aštarte-of-Battle, Dagan, Erra, Ninkurra and all the gods of Uri. Similar references to the collective gods of Emar are known, but this seems to be the first reference to the pantheon of Uri. ‘Aštarte-of-Battle is known from the offering lists of Emar itself. Ninkurra of the city of Uri is already known from Arnaud 1986: 284, no. 287:5 (also a cult inventory).

The reference to all the gods of Wakati comes in the middle of an offering list which appears to be dedicated to the gods of Emar (no. 19).

Evidence for the cultic calendar of the city of Emar is very meagre in the texts in this volume. There is one reference to the New Year’s festival at Emar (no. 19:3).

In the religious hierarchy, the Lú.hal is the most commonly mentioned position, but whether he was the administrative or the sacerdotal head of any temple is uncertain. The next in the hierarchy is probably the Sangā. The title Sangā ma-hi-ri-i appears in one text (no. 28:10) and should be compared to the title Nin.dingir ma-ḥi-ri-tu₄ “la prêtrèse-entu précédente” (e.g. Arnaud 1986: 328, no. 369:55). The relationship between the diviner and the sangā in the temple hierarchy is not clear. Judging from a diviner’s letter discussing the appointment of a šangū (Arnaud 1986: 264f., no. 268), it could be supposed that the diviner had the higher position. From other texts it can be seen that the diviner had both responsibility as a temple administrator and a cultic role to perform. It may be surmised from the sources that the diviner could or did serve all the gods of Emar, while the šangū served only one god; see Fleming 1992a: 91. Not only is it usual to append the name of the single god which he serves to his title, but he also seems to hold a rather undistinguished position, since Ereskigal (at least) is recorded as having more than one šangū in her service (Tsukimoto 1988: 160f., Text C 5‘, 9’).