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Dennis Pardee

Since last reporting in these pages, **Dennis Pardee** has been awaiting the publication of his edition of the Ugaritic ritual texts: the manuscript has been accepted for publication by the editorial committee of *Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations* in Paris and he is awaiting the copyeditor's corrections in order to do the final printout of camera-ready copy.

Pardee's English translation of the major Ugaritic mythological texts, along with a selection of ritual and divinatory texts in the same language and, for good measure, the Punic-language sacrificial tariff discovered in 1844 in Marseilles, France, appeared in late 1997 in *The Context of Scripture*, Vol. 1, *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, edited by W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, Jr. (Leiden: E. J. Brill).

The edition of the Ugaritic letters on which Pardee reported in the *1995/96 Annual Report* has progressed, but more slowly than he would have liked. With additions from the 1994 and 1996 excavations, the total number is now at 113. All but four of these texts have now been copied and twenty-two of these copies have been inked and are ready for publication. But the commentary has been completed for fewer than a third of the texts, and it is this explanation of the meaning of the text that is the time-consuming part of the job.

Part of Pardee's museum time in Damascus and Paris this year was spent doing the basic work of copying and collating for the next edition of texts on his agenda, that of the Ugaritic administrative texts. The number of these texts is now in the neighborhood of a thousand, so this will be an even longer project than that dealing with the ritual and epistolary texts. He was able this year to copy a total of twenty-two texts, and the collation has produced some new readings on which he intends to report in advance of the full-scale publication. These texts deal with the nitty-gritty of everyday life in ancient Ugarit because they report on all kinds of administrative, economic, and legal activities. In a sense, they are the most boring of texts because they can consist of only lists of names or commodities; but, coupled with the artifactual evidence, they are also our closest contact with the realities of everyday existence in this Late Bronze Age city and thus are, in their own right, of great importance for socio-economic history. Because of their jejune nature, they have too often in the past been given inadequate attention, both in their initial publication and in subsequent treatments. The hope is at the very least to provide a more reliable textual basis than that with which specialists have had to deal in the past.

The exciting discovery of a new archive at Ras Shamra by the *Mission Archéologique Française de Ras Shamra – Ougarit*, for which Pardee serves as one of the epigraphers, also reported in the *1995/96 Annual Report*, has gained in importance in the last two years. In the 1996 excavations, another lot of tablets was discovered, smaller than that of 1994, but belonging to the same archive, from what is

known as the House of Urtenu. Not only was the excavation in the very same architectural unit, but one of the six Ugaritic texts discovered in 1996 is a fragment that joins with fragments from 1994. There can now be little doubt that Urtenu was connected with the queen's household because several letters to and from the queen have been discovered in this house, including one in which the queen writes to Urtenu reporting on upcoming stages of a trip that she is taking: she writes from a ship ("today we are on the sea") on its way to Cilicia ("tomorrow [I'll be] in Adanya"). Unfortunately, the letter does not state precisely why she is traveling. The only letter among the 1996 discoveries is also from the queen but addressed this time to a certain Yarimhaddu. It deals with a servant who passed from Yarmihaddu's service to that of the queen and whom she claims to have gone back to Yarimhaddu without her permission — she wants the servant back and will take the matter up with the king if necessary. In addition to the six Ugaritic texts, which have all been copied and on which preliminary study is well advanced, there are some two-score Akkadian texts about which less is presently known.

Because Marguerite Yon, director of the *Mission de Ras Shamra* since 1978, retired on 1 January 1998 from the directorship, excavations, which are normally semi-annual, were not undertaken this year. The new director, Yves Calvet, plans to continue the excavation program in 1999 and, of course, on into the twenty-first century. The 1999 campaign may uncover the limits of the House of Urtenu — the circumstances that led to this excavation dictated that it start in the middle of the house — as well as the last remnants of the archive located in the house. If such is the case, it will be possible to foresee the reasonably rapid publication of these texts that are of capital importance for the history of the final decades of the Late Bronze Age.

Pardee's activity in 1997/98 that attracted the most media attention was the joint-authored publication of two previously unknown Hebrew ostraca which probably date to the late seventh century BC. He became one of the authors of the publication almost by accident. His colleague Pierre Bordreuil from Paris happened to be in Chicago in February 1997 and he gave a lecture at the Oriental Institute on the two ostraca, of which he was preparing the publication with an Italian colleague, Felice Israel of the University of Genoa. In the process of translating Bordreuil's lecture from French to English, Pardee made some suggestions for the interpretation of the texts. After consultation, Bordreuil and Israel were generous enough to add Pardee's name as third author for the *editio princeps* that appeared later in the year, in French, in the journal *Semitica*. His participation in the project subsequently facilitated the production of an English version, which appeared in early 1998 in the journal *Near Eastern Archaeology*. What captured media attention was the phrase *byt yhwh* "the house of Yahweh" in the first text. Though the texts were not discovered in regular excavations (they are from the collection of Shlomo Moussaieff), the script shows that they belong to the pre-exilic period, while repeated physical tests have shown that the hypothesis of modern forgeries is not a plausible one. All this being the case, *byt yhwh* in all likelihood refers to the First Temple, commonly known as Solomon's temple. It is the first such reference in a well-preserved extra-biblical text and it for a brief time captured the imagination of the media (*New York Times*, Associated Press, etc.). The unfortunate side of this attention was that the

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second text, longer and no less interesting than the first, was hardly mentioned. It contains the plea of a widow to a local official, addressed only as *ʾdny hśr* “my lord the official,” for a special ruling in her favor regarding use of her deceased husband’s property. According to biblical law, the husband’s blood relations inherit his property, not his wife; here, if the text has been correctly understood, the widow is asking that she be allowed to continue benefiting from a part of her husband’s property. She states explicitly that her husband had no sons, that his brother has already received a certain field, and, again if the text has been correctly interpreted, that her husband had, before his death, proposed to the official that she be allowed to live from his property. It is intriguing, from a biblical perspective, that no mention is made of the possibility of the so-called levirate marriage, whereby the dead husband’s brother would take the widow as wife and have children in the deceased man’s name (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10). Any number of explanations for this omission are possible, from literary (e.g., the law of Deuteronomy might have been of late origin) to socio-legal (e.g., the law might have been geographically restricted) to purely practical (e.g., the widow might have been beyond childbearing age). On the other hand, the general notion of a law of inheritance not being applied in the strictest manner finds a biblical precedent in the famous case of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1–11). Finally, the texts are in standard Classical Hebrew of the pre-exilic period and as such cast doubt on the theory, which may be said to have been receiving too much attention in recent years, that Biblical Hebrew was not the general language of expression in the pre-exilic period, but a post-exilic construct devised for the purpose of writing religious texts such as the Hebrew Bible.
