

THE CALENDARS OF EBLA PART II. THE NEW CALENDAR

WILLIAM H. SHEA
 Andrews University

My preceding treatment of the Old Calendar of Ebla includes a translation of the month names of Ebla's New Calendar, which was adopted during the reign of Ibbi-Sipiš.¹ In that study the months of the New Calendar were aligned with the months of both the Old Calendar and the Julian calendar. For convenience, the transliteration and translation for the months of the New Calendar are reiterated here:

TRANSLITERATION	TRANSLATION	JULIAN EQUIVALENT
I. ITU <i>be-li</i>	Month of the Lord (Dagan)	Sept./Oct.
II. ITU (NIDBA _x -) ^d AŠ-TÁ-BI ₅	Month of the Sacrifice to the god Ashtabi	Oct./Nov.
III. ITU Ì-TÚM	Month in which he/it has come	Nov./Dec.
IV. ITU (NIDBA _x -) ^d à-da	Month of the Sacrifice to the god Hadad	Dec./Jan.
V. ITU ì-la-mu/er-me	Month of Hidden (Sun)	Jan./Feb.
VI. ITU ħur-mu/ħu-lu-mu	Month of Lighting	Feb./March
VII. ITU È	Month of Coming Forth	March/April
VIII. ITU KUR ₆	Month of Provisioning	April/May
IX. ITU ^d a-dam-ma-um	Month of the god Adama	May/June
X. ITU ŠE-GUR ₁₀ -KU ₅	Month of Harvesting	June/July
Xb. ITU ŠE-GUR ₁₀ -KU ₅ -MÌN	Month of Harvesting, II	Intercalary
XI. ITU ^d AMA-ra	Month of the goddess Asherah (?)	July/Aug.
XII. ITU (NIDBA _x -) ^d kà-mi-iš	Month of the Sacrifice to the god Chemosh	Aug./Sept.

¹Part I appeared in *AUSS* 18 (1980): 127-137.

The main New Calendar text, the 7-year record from the reign of Ibbsipiš, begins with the month of *be-li*.² By correlating the month names of both calendars with the climatological seasons of Syro-Palestine, that month can be located in the fall, probably in the lunar month of September/October. The philological study below of the names of the months of the New Calendar begins with this month.

1. *The New Calendar: Translational and Historical Notes*

I. ITU *be-li*—Month of the Lord (Dagan). G. Pettinato has connected this month name with the common Semitic word for "lord," *ba'al*. He suggests the lord in question was the god Dagan, head of the pantheon at Ebla. This identification is quite satisfactory from the linguistic point of view, since the letter 'ayin used in the word *ba'al* in later West Semitic scripts was not represented in the Sumero-Eblaite sign system. This title appears elsewhere in Eblaite referring to Dagan as ^d*be-ka-na-na-um* (and ^d*be-ka-na-im*), the "Lord of Canaan."³ In this case the title *bel* was abbreviated by writing it without its final *-l*, but it is preceded by the DINGIR sign (designated by a small ^d preceding the name), the determinative used for deities. Since the name of this month is written without the determinative, one might consider the possibility that it referred to a human lord, i.e., the king at the time he was established upon his throne at the beginning of each 7-year period of elective kingship. (This 7-year period of elective kingship will be treated further in Part III of this series.)

Given the thoroughgoing religious connections of various month names in the New Calendar, however, it seems preferable to connect even this month name with a god: Dagan, in this case, since he was head of the pantheon. Pettinato explains the final *-i* of *beli* to represent the first person pronominal suffix, identifying this month as that of "My Lord." I would prefer to interpret it simply as a marker of the genitive case, making this month that "of the Lord."

II. ITU (NIDBA_x)^dAŠ-TÁ-BI₅—Month of the Sacrifice to the god Ashtabi. The month name of Ashtabi has shown up at Alalakh and Ugarit, and Ashtabi appears as the divine element in personal names at Alalakh

²G. Pettinato, "Il Calendario di Ebla al Tempo del Re Ibbsipiš sulla base di TM 75.G.427," *AJO* 25 (1976): 34.

³M. Dahood, "Ebla, Ugarit and the Old Testament," *VTSup* 29 (1978), Congress Volume, Göttingen 1977, p. 99.

and Hattušaš.⁴ Pettinato considers him to have been a Hurrian god, and that the Hurrians transmitted him to the Hittites.⁵ By the time Ashtabi showed up at Hattušaš, he was identified as a warrior god.⁶ That does not tell us much about Ashtabi's relations and functions at Ebla, a millennium earlier than his Hurrian-Hittite appearance. He could have been transmitted to the Hurrians from an earlier pantheon.

Following Pettinato's interpretation, M. Dahood takes Ashtabi to be a Hurrian deity, but relates his name to the Hebrew root *šdp*, which occurs in Gen 41:6, 23, 27 with the meaning of "scorch, burn."⁷ Working from this root, Dahood suggests that the name of this god and his month should be connected with the winds which scorched the land in October. If the name is derived from a Semitic root, however, then its origins probably should be attributed to the Semites and not the Hurrians. As the name appears at this juncture between fall and winter, the question about Ashtabi is whether he was more involved with the last portion of the dry season, or the beginning of the rainy season. The name of the next month of the New Calendar suggests that the latter interpretation is more likely.

The Semitic root which lends some support to this relationship is *stw*. The final *waw* of *stw* should be taken as consonantal. It is a labial which could have developed through a shift from the final labial *b* in Ashtabi. In a comparison of Eblaite with the other Semitic languages, the shift in sibilants from *š* to *s*, and vice versa, appears to be common. This provides us with the following potential relationship between *stw* and Ashtabi: *štb* > *stb* > *stw*. *Stw* is a *hapax legomenon* in the Bible, occurring only in Cant 2:11. There it is paralleled poetically by the word for rain, *gešem*, which has been proposed as the basis for the name of the succeeding month of *gašum* in the Old Calendar. M. Pope has noted that *stw* "occurs in Old Aramaic, Judeo-Aramaic, and Syriac. Its Arabic cognate *šitā'* in the dialect of Jerusalem is the common word for rain as well as winter, a matter easily understandable to those who have experienced Jerusalem winters."⁸ The connections of *štb* > *stw* with rain suggest that Ashtabi should be identified as the god who brought these rains.

⁴Pettinato, "Il Calendario di Ebla," p. 29.

⁵H. A. Hoffner, Jr., "The Hittites and Hurrians," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford, 1973), p. 213.

⁶Ibid.

⁷M. Dahood, "Ebla, Ugarit and the Old Testament," *The Month* (August 1978), p. 276.

⁸M. Pope, *Song of Songs*, AB 7C (Garden City, N.Y., 1977), p. 394.

It may be objected that we should not attempt to determine an etymology for the name of this god as well as other gods at Ebla or elsewhere. However, the pantheon at Ebla was rather densely populated and Pettinato has already identified more than 500 individual gods there.⁹ As will become evident as soon as more Eblaite texts are published, many of the names of these gods are known as common nouns in the later West Semitic languages. In other words, the Eblaïtes or their predecessors deified many common objects. Therefore, attempting to determine an etymology for a god's name like that of Ashtabi appears to be a legitimate pursuit.

III. ITU Ì-TÚM—Month in which he/it has come. For this month name Pettinato's only suggestion, with a shift in dentals, is *i-du* or *yad*, the common Semitic word for "hand," which does not fit into this calendar context very well. At one time I considered relating this month name to Hebrew *'eth*, the word for plowshare that occurs five times in the Bible (1 Sam 13:20, 21; Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3; Joel 3:10). The logic behind this identification was that the preceding month of the Old Calendar had some connection with plowing, which would be appropriate in our case.

I now favor a verbal interpretation for *itum*, relating it to the root *'atâ*, "to come," which is common to the West Semitic languages. It could be either a perfect or an imperfect in the third person masculine singular with mimation. It may thus be translated as "he" or "it" "comes" or "has come." The question then is, what was it that came at this time? The name of *gasum* for the parallel month in the Old Calendar answers this question by indicating that the rains started at this time. Those rains, however, appear to have been under Ashtabi's control. It should ultimately be Ashtabi, therefore, who comes and brings his rains with him. The complete form of the preceding month name is "Month of *Sacrifice* to Ashtabi." If our calendrical correlations are correct, those sacrifices took place at the end of the dry season. Satisfied with those sacrifices, Ashtabi was to come, bringing his rains with him.

IV. ITU (NIDBA_x-)^d*ä-da*—Month of the Sacrifice to the god Hadad. Pettinato takes the identification of this god with Adad/Hadad as probable and he has noted that his name appears in Amorite personal names as ^dHaddu.¹⁰ The appearance of the name of this storm god in connection with the month of December/January is most appropriate. In the Old

⁹G. Pettinato, "The Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla," *BA* 39 (1976): 48; Dahood, *VTSup*, pp. 99-104.

¹⁰Pettinato, "Il Calendario di Ebla," p. 29.

Calendar this was the Month of Clouds, and it was upon those clouds that Hadad rode. The appearance of both the rain-god Ashtabi and the storm-god Hadad in the New Calendar of Ebla is not redundant, considering the fact that, as mentioned earlier, at least 500 gods are now known in the texts from Ebla. This plethora naturally led to their specialization. The same phenomenon is noticeable in Mesopotamia, where Enlil, Ninurta, and Adad all had different important functions in the realm of weather.¹¹

V. ITU *ì-la-mu/er-me*—Month of Hidden (Sun). When writing this month name, the Eblaite scribes did not differentiate sharply between the lateral phonemes *l* and *r*, and consequently both of these forms are attested. Pettinato translates this month name as the Month of the City, relating it to *’ir*. The city does not appear to fit the context of the rest of the New Calendar very well. By a 14:4 majority the texts favor reading this month name as *ì-la-mu*. Interpreting the initial *i-* of this month name as representing an *’ayin* suggests a relationship to the Hebrew verbal root of *’alam*, “to hide, be hidden, cover up.” In the Old Calendar this month was named the Month of Shadows, and it was the hiding of the sun during the shortest days of the year that produced those shadows. It is possible, therefore, to see a relationship between the names for this month in both calendars. This relationship runs from the effect of the shadows in the Old Calendar to the cause of those shadows—the hiding of the sun—in the New Calendar. This was not just the hiding of the sun’s orb physically, but in essence it was the sun-god Sipiš who was hidden at this time, perhaps as he travelled through the winter underworld.

VI. ITU *hur-mu/hu-lu-mu*—Month of Lighting. The name of this month also differs, according to the laterals with which it was written, both *-l-* and *-r-* forms being attested. Pettinato favors the *-r-* form, which appears twice as often in the texts, and he relates it to Hebrew *haram*, “to consecrate, ban, dedicate, devote to destruction.” The problem with this interpretation is that in other New Calendar texts from Ebla this month was named IZI.GAR in Sumerian,¹² and one would expect some correspondence between these two names. IZI.GAR refers to a “torch, lamp,” or “light” in Sumerian, and it was read as *nuru* in Akkadian.¹³ For a cognate one might look to Hebrew *harà*, “to be hot,” and *harôn* as the glowing

¹¹H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (New York, 1962), p. 33.

¹²Pettinato, “Il Calendario di Ebla,” p. 30.

¹³R. Labat, *Manuel d’épigraphie akkadienne*, 5th ed. (Paris, 1976), p. 111.

of God when he was angered. If this was the month of "glowing" or "light," who or what was lighted? Since the sun-god Sipiš was hidden or darkened during the preceding month, he seems to be a likely candidate for this lighting up as winter waned and the days lengthened.

VII. ITU È—Month of Coming Forth. The Sumerian logogram È means "to go out/come forth,"¹⁴ and it stands for *asù* in Akkadian, which is cognate with *yš'* in all West Semitic languages. Pettinato interprets this "going out" in an administrative sense, since the same word was used at the end of each annual account in the main New Calendar text. But in these instances È was never connected with the month of È, which came five to seven months earlier. In harmony with the general context of both of these calendars, it is logical to interpret the month name in the climatological sense, and this climatological sense is extended into the religious realm of the New Calendar. While other possibilities might be considered, this month name can probably be related to the name of the preceding month by suggesting that it was Sipiš, the sun-god, who came forth with even greater power at this time of the beginning of Spring.

VIII. ITU KUR₆—Month of Provisioning. Pettinato has treated the KUR₆ sign as the logogram which stands for "provisions, rations." The Sumerian KUR₆ represented *kurmatu* in Akkadian,¹⁵ but *kurmatu* does not have any close cognates in West Semitic. Thus the Eblaites probably read this sign in some other way. While they could have treated it as an ideogram which symbolized their word for rations or provisions, they may also have read it phonetically. Hebrew supplies the final weak verb *kārà* III which refers to providing food, but it appears to have become specialized to refer to providing food at a feast or banquet (2 Kgs 6:23). Also the *kor* as a unit in which grain was measured could be involved (1 Kgs 4:22; 5:11). Even the Sumerians used it, writing it with the sign KÜR instead of KUR₆,¹⁶ and besides Hebrew it is also known in Akkadian and Phoenician. Regardless of the interpretation chosen here, the meaning for this month name is essentially the same.

However, this was not yet the month for provisioning, since the storage of the harvest took place first in the two succeeding months, according to both calendars. This month came at the end of the previous agricultural

¹⁴Ibid., p. 175².

¹⁵Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 89.

cycle, when the provisions from the harvest of the preceding year were at their lowest ebb. Drawing upon those reserves was especially critical at this time, and it was important to have the storehouses well-stocked. From the religious context of the New Calendar one might expect that the Eblaites attributed this function to some god. In the recently published offering texts a god named Kura occurs, and he ranks 5th out of 57 gods, according to the number of sacrifices offered to him.¹⁷ Pettinato has noted that the nature and functions of this god are unknown. If the similarity between his name and the name of this month is significant—and it may not be—then the Eblaites may have thought of Kura as the god of the storehouse. If Kura served in that capacity, he would have been the one responsible for well supplied storehouses which could meet the need of the people during this critical period.

IX. ITU ^d*a-dam-ma-um*—Month of the god Adama. Without the mimation, the name of this deity is known from Hattušaš and Ugarit a millennium later. Pettinato assumes that it was transmitted there by the Hurrians, with whom it originated. Since a satisfactory Semitic etymology can be proposed for this god's name, it is not necessary to identify him as Hurrian. Neither is it necessary to hold that the *-m-* of this name was truly doubled, since the variant spelling of *a-da-ma-um* is attested,¹⁸ but the final *-a* vowel should be retained when the mimation is dropped. This yields the name of Adama which can be equated either with the Hebrew noun for “man,” *'adam*, on the basis of a loss of the final *-â* in Hebrew, or the related Hebrew word for “ground,” *'adāmah*, on the basis of retention of that final vowel. While the latter interpretation is more phonetically accurate, I prefer the former interpretation because it fits better the parallelism between the month names in both calendars.

New information from the texts which record the cultic sacrifices of the royal family at Ebla help to establish the gender of this god. The publication records the sacrifices offered during four months of the reign of Ibbi-Sipiš. Besides Adama, a deity named Adamtum appears in the list of 56 other gods that received sacrifices.¹⁹ Pettinato has analyzed the name

¹⁷G. Pettinato, *Culto ufficiale ad Ebla durante il regno di Ibbi-Sipiš*, *Oriens Antiqui Collectio* 16 (Rome, 1979), p. 22.

¹⁸Pettinato, “Il Calendario di Ebla,” p. 28.

¹⁹Idem, *Culto ufficiale*, pp. 99, 109, 115.

as a feminine form of Adama,²⁰ hence Adama should be masculine. This lends some support for the relating of this god's name to 'adam rather than 'adāmah, since the latter word looks like a feminine noun in Hebrew.

The parallel month in the Old Calendar was the month of 'iš or Man. This month was not named for man in general, however, but because of his task as a harvester at that particular time of year, and the following month was named for the harvesting itself. The same arrangement seems to be applicable to the New Calendar, since the Month of the god Adama is followed by the Month of Harvesting. This suggests that Adama served in the same capacity as 'iš or man did in the Old Calendar, and both 'iš and 'adam are known from Hebrew as words with essentially the same meaning, referring to man.

Adam occurs elsewhere in Eblaite with this meaning. Not only has the name of Adamu been found as the personal name of a governor of Ebla,²¹ but the word *adam* has appeared as the noun for "man" in the personal name of Adam-Malik, "man of the god Malik."²² In the present case it is unlikely, however, that Adama represents deified man in general, but should rather represent man's harvesting function abstracted from him and picking up his name when that function itself was deified. Thus the capacity in which I would see Adama functioning at Ebla is as the god of the harvest. Since the harvest started at this time, this month bore his name.

X. ITU ŠE-GUR₁₀-KU₅—Month of Harvesting.

Xb. ITU ŠE-GUR₁₀-KU₅-MÎN—Month of Harvesting, II (intercalary). The Sumerian signs with which these month names were written—ŠE-GUR₁₀-KU₅—were read in Akkadian with the verb *ešēdu*. Since *ešēdu* means "to harvest," this month name may safely be identified as referring to harvesting the grain crop.²³ The determinative for "second" (following the second of these two months) identified it as the intercalated month when it was used.

XI. ITU^d AMA-ra—Month of ^dAsherah (?). Pettinato has read this month name as a logogram followed by a phonetic complement. Sumerian AMA means "mother,"²⁴ so Pettinato has identified this goddess as Ishtar, the

²⁰Ibid., p. 17.

²¹Dahood, *The Month*, p. 274.

²²Pettinato, "The Royal Archives," p. 50.

²³Labat, *Manuel*, p. 169².

²⁴Ibid., p. 129.

phonetic complement representing the last syllable of her name. This is questionable in view of his comment elsewhere that Ishtar appears to have been a masculine deity at Ebla.²⁵ If another mother goddess is sought, then Asherah, the mother goddess and wife of El attested in the later Canaanite pantheon at Ugarit, probably is the best candidate, in spite of the problem with the final *taw* with which her name was written in Ugaritic and Phoenician.²⁶ The same problem applies to Ishtar-Astarte.

If this identification is correct, then why was her name connected with this particular month? The other use for her name in the OT may suggest an answer. The biblical information on this point has been conveniently summarized as follows: "When the goddess or her cult image is not meant, the word Asherah refers to a wooden pole or tree trunk which stood in Canaanite sanctuaries (Ex 34:13), dedicated to the goddess as a symbol of vegetation. The cult object was made (I Ki 14:15), planted (Dt 16:21), or set up (II Ki 17:10), could be burned (Dt 12:3, II Ki 23:6, 15), cut down (Ex 34:13, Dt 7:5, etc.), plucked up (Mic 5:14), or broken into pieces (II Chr 34:4)."²⁷

Besides being a mother goddess, Asherah was a goddess of vegetation. The above references suggest an identification with a particular type of vegetation, namely a connection with trees. The heat of summer had left the fields browned and scorched, but the trees still thrived and even brought their crops of fruit to maturity then. There is some reason to suggest, therefore, that Asherah may have been a goddess of the trees, whose function came to the fore at this particular time.

XII. ITU (NIDBA_x-)^dkà-mi-iš—Month of the Sacrifice to the god Chemosh. The name of the god of this month clearly is that of Chemosh, the later god of Moab (this illustrates how far he migrated in the succeeding centuries). His appearance in this Eblaite agricultural calendar suggests that he originally functioned rather directly with respect to agriculture. Since the parallel month in the Old Calendar was known as the Month of Heat, Chemosh may have had some connection with the heat and the scorching winds of late summer and early fall. Another possibility is that he was the god of the vineyard, since this was the time of the vintage.

²⁵Pettinato, "The Royal Archives," p. 50.

²⁶C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, AnOr 38 (Rome, 1965), p. 370; Z. S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language*, AOS 8 (New Haven, Conn., 1936), p. 83.

²⁷S. H. Horn, "Asherah," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington, D.C., 1960), p. 82.

2. *The New Calendar: Summary*

The etymologies of the month names of the New Calendar can now be summarized, as was done for the Old Calendar, by citing them in transliteration and translation along with their chief cognate evidence. Once again, cognates from biblical Hebrew have been emphasized in order to demonstrate the relationship between the Hebrew lexicon and that of Ebla.

Month Names Transliterated	Month Names Translated	Hebrew Cognates
I. <i>beli</i>	Lord (Dagan)	<i>b'l</i>
II. (NIDBA _x -) ^d <i>aštabi</i>	Sacrifice to the god Ashtabi	<i>stw</i>
III. <i>itum</i>	He (Ashtabi) has come	<i>'atâ</i>
IV. (NIDBA _x -) ^d <i>'ada</i>	Sacrifice to the god Hadad	Hadad
V. <i>ilamu</i>	Hidden (Sun)	<i>'im</i>
VI. <i>hurmu</i>	Lighting	<i>ḥarâ/ḥarôn</i>
VII. <i>Ë</i> (logogram)	Coming Forth	<i>yš'?</i>
VIII. <i>kur</i> ₆	Provisioning	<i>kor/kâra</i>
IX. ^d <i>a-dam-ma-um</i> / ^d <i>Adama</i>	The god Adama	<i>'adam/'adâmâ</i>
X. <i>ŠE-GUR</i> ₁₀ - <i>KU</i> ₅	Harvesting	— — —
XI. ^d <i>AMA-ra</i> (logogram)	The goddess Asherah (?)	Asherah
XII. (NIDBA _x -) ^d <i>kamiš</i>	Sacrifice to the god Chemosh	Chemosh

Names of gods were specifically used for five of the twelve month names in the New Calendar and the title of Dagan as "Lord" was used to name another month. Of these gods Hadad and Chemosh are known by name in the Bible, as is Asherah if her logogram in this calendar is interpreted correctly. Adama is also known in the Bible as the Hebrew word for "man," his function as harvester having been deified in the name for this calendar month. Ashtabi is not named among the foreign gods in the Bible, but his name may be related to the Hebrew root *stw* which refers to rain.

The name of the seventh month was written with the logogram that means "to go out/come forth," thus it probably was read as a verb in Eblaite. The name of the eighth month may have been written as a logogram, or it can be read phonetically. In either case it can be related to a Hebrew cognate. Including this month, cognates in Hebrew can be suggested for five of the six month names that were not derived from god names. The verb with which the Eblaites read the logogram for harvesting in the name of the tenth month is not yet known.

Grammatically five of these month names resemble the proper names of gods (II, IV, IX, XI, and XII), one appears to be a title of a god (I), and six look like verbal forms which predicate something about the actions of gods (III, V, VI, VII, VIII, and X). The subject of two of these verbs (III and X) has been interpreted as the god named by the previous months (II and IX respectively). The subject of three of these verbal month names in succession is taken as the sun-god Sipiš (V, VI, and VII). The god of the storehouse, possibly Kura, has been suggested as the subject of the month name which refers to provisioning.