

SEMITICA 61

REVUE

PUBLIÉE PAR L'INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES SÉMITIQUES
DU COLLÈGE DE FRANCE



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Sous la direction de Thomas Römer

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« Babel und Bibel ». The Scientific Work of Luigi Cagni

Giancarlo Toloni

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Brescia

Résumé. Le colloque « Vingt ans après la mort du Pr. Luigi Cagni, barnabite, assyriologue et hébraïsant de Brescia », tenu au siège de l'Université Catholique à Brescia, nous donne l'opportunité de rappeler ici les grandes lignes des recherches de l'éminent orientaliste italien (1929-1998), qui émergent aussi de son œuvre. Un séminaire d'étude sur le Proche-Orient et la Méditerranée a été mis en place et dédié à sa mémoire, pour poursuivre ses recherches sur la Bible hébraïque dans le contexte historique et culturel dans lequel elle s'est formée et a été transmise.

The Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (UCSC) recently held a commemoration, in its campus in Brescia, of the Barnabite scientist Luigi Cagni, an internationally-famed scholar in Assyriology and Hebrew studies, who was particularly well-known for the conferences he promoted at the Istituto Universitario Orientale (IUO) in Naples on the language of the tablets found in Tell Mardikh/Ebla. Twenty years after his passing, the “Francesco Vattioni” Archive for bibliographical and documentary sources on the Ancient Near East and the “Felice Montagnini” Library, dedicated to historical and philological studies of the Bible, both research centres within the History and Philology Department at UCSC have decided to celebrate the memory of this philologist, historian and archaeologist, whose research spanned from the world of Babylon to the Hebrew Bible. The commemoration consisted in the organization of a conference and in the publication of a collection of writings by colleagues and friends, who retrace the main research paths explored by Cagni (*L'opera di Luigi Cagni: 1929-1998*, a cura di Giancarlo Toloni, Paideia, Torino, 2018), as a sign of continuity and a reminder of his precious scientific teaching.

Cagni was one of the most prestigious names in Italian Oriental Studies. Born in Toline (Brescia) on 4 March 1929, Cagni joined the Clerics Regular of Saint Paul Barnabites at just eleven years old. He then continued on the path of religious formation and after being ordained as a priest, he carried out important duties for the Order's government, ultimately serving as General Vicar. By that time, he had also graduated in *Re Biblica* at the Pontifical Biblical Institute (PBI) and in Classics at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" under the guidance of Giorgio Castellino. Prior to his graduation, he also frequently studied abroad in Heidelberg under Adam Falkenstein and Burkhardt Kienast. He taught History of the Pre-Islamic Near East at the IUO and was later a full professor in Assyriology and Chair of the Asian Studies Department, responsible for the publication of its *Annali*.

The commemorative volume opens with the editor's introduction and a brief note by **Mario Taccolini**, Pro-Rector of UCSC that explains the main aims of the initiative; then, **Filippo Lovison**, the legal representative of the Clerics Regular of Saint Paul Barnabites, traces a religious profile for Cagni. The other essays focus on different aspects of his scientific work, highlighting its original contribution to the research. Finally, the volume includes a biographical note and the full bibliography of all of Cagni's writings curated by the volume's editor.

1. The Scientist and the Man

The commemoration was led by **Simonetta Graziani**, Cagni's first student to graduate under his guidance at IUO, who followed in his teachings, collaborated with him in the study of Sumerian-Akkadian Epigraphy and eventually succeeded him in the full professorship in Assyriology. In her contribution, she highlights several aspects of her professor's work, from his scientific and academic teaching "in Naples and at the *Oriente*" to a more personal portrait of the man she knew.

Cagni started teaching in 1971 as a professor in History of the Pre-Islamic Near East at IUO. Once the chair in Assyriology was es-

established (1975), he received the full professorship in 1980. However, the subject had always been part of his courses, since his teachings combined history, philology and historical-religious studies, encompassing Sumerian, Akkadian and Biblical Hebrew. Cagni's courses reflected his vast knowledge in numerous fields, which he perfected during the years he spent studying in Rome and Heidelberg. Thus, he would gradually reconstruct the history of the Ancient Near East in its cultural complexity through the combined use of archaeological, textual, artistic-historical sources and geographical maps, extracts of excavation reports, Sumerian and Akkadian literary texts, Hebrew Bible books, or Assyrian and Hittite royal inscriptions. His dedication to teaching further spurred him to accept the professorship in Biblical and Medieval Hebrew Language and Literature from 1991 to 1998.

His scientific activity was similarly intense. When Cagni arrived in Naples, he had already numerous publications to his name, among others the complete edition of the *Erra Epic* (1969), which he published in a critical edition of the cuneiform text in 1970 and later translated into English in 1977. Cagni was extraordinarily productive: to promote the field of Assyriology in Naples, he would participate in numerous conferences where he was invited as a speaker, while simultaneously taking the lead in organizing many memorable conferences like the three meetings on Ebla held in Naples (1980, 1982 and 1985). These were a testament to his courage, given the quarrel that, at the time, was dividing the international scientific community regarding the ancient Syrian city. In the mid-1970s, Cagni's *curiositas* and scientific intelligence led him to conceive and design his large project on the history and economy of Achaemenid Mesopotamia. The project, which would soon extend to encompass the Neo- and Late-Babylonian periods, was ambitious from the outset, because its aim was the processing—in terms of transliteration, translation, prosopography reconstruction and archival context—of thousands of economic-administrative texts housed in the main European and Non-European museum institutions, which, for the most part, were only available as cuneiform texts, partially edited or even still unpublished. In 1984, Cagni published a synthesis of the issues he had encountered in *History, Administration and Culture of Achaemenid Mesopotamia: Status of Current*

Studies. Yet, the turning point for his research and method was the publication of *Typology and Structure of Mesopotamian Documentation during the Achaemenid Period*, which cemented his already vibrant collaboration with M. A. Dandamaev, M. Stolper, and F. Vallat.

Cagni held many important academic positions; he first managed the *Annali* (1981) and other publications of the Asian Studies Department at IUO, taking over from Giovanni Garbini, and later headed the section on “Mesopotamian Literatures” for *Paideia’s Testi del Vicino Oriente Antico*. Relying on his experience working as a copy editor for *Orientalia* from 1974 to 1978, Cagni took upon himself the complex editing work of the four annual volumes as well as of the corresponding *Supplementi* [appendixes]. In light of his extraordinary productivity and commitment, his reputation in the Neapolitan academic circle grew rapidly; indeed, in 1991 he was unanimously elected Chair of the Asian Studies Department, a position he held until 1997.

Cagni’s multifaceted persona matches his versatile activity; however, the quality that most distinguished him was his great humanity, which arose not only from his own origins but also from his direct interaction with the suffering peoples of Pakistan and his many years serving as priest in the Church of San Carlo ai Catinari in Rome. These experiences led him to make himself available to everyone, from colleagues to students; he would commit his time, listen and pay attention to anyone who was in need, despite his innumerable academic and ecclesiastical commitments, because he would always privilege and prioritize human relationships. Furthermore, thanks to his listening skills, he was naturally inclined towards mediation; he would always seek to learn the causes at the root of a conflict with the purpose of finding a balanced solution, of reaching a pacification, both in his academic and daily life.

2. Assyriology

Francesco V. Pomponio traces the profile of his colleague and friend as an Assyriologist. Cagni’s career in this field started at the Institute of Ancient Near East Studies at the University in Rome, “La Sapienza,” thanks to the encounter with Castellino who, in

1956, succeeded Giuseppe Furlani in the full professorship in Assyriology and Oriental Archaeology, first established in 1940. It was upon his recommendation that Cagni moved to Heidelberg, one of the main centres in the world for the teaching of Assyriology; for the next three years there, he followed the courses taught by Sumerologist Falkenstein. He returned to “La Sapienza” in 1966 and graduated in Classics with a thesis in Assyriology, which consisted of his edition of the *Erra Epic*; after graduation, he started working as an assistant to his professor. His courses in Rome focused on reading and translating official inscriptions and Akkadian literary texts, starting with the first paragraphs of Hammurabi’s Code and the poem of the *Enūma Eliš*. For his seminars, Cagni also published a teaching aid, *Crestomazia accadica* (1971), which included almost 400 pages of transliterations and translations of different categories of Assyrian-Babylonian texts together with a dedicated glossary and a list of logograms; this was to supplement Castellino’s own text *Grammatica accadica introduttiva*.

Cagni continued to teach a seminar at the University of Rome within the discipline of Assyriology during the first year Giovanni Pettinato taught there, after the latter took over from Castellino in 1973, although he had already started in his teaching position at IUO and, from 1973 to 1978, at the PBI in Rome as well, where he worked alongside J. Van Dijk, who taught Sumerian. Together with Van Dijk, Paolo Matthiae and Pettinato, Cagni was one of the organizers of the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (RAI) in Rome (1974). In 1976, its proceedings were published: *Études sur le Panthéon systématique et les Panthéons locaux. Compte rendu de la XXXI^e RAI*. Relentless, in 1977-78, Cagni also inaugurated the professorship in Assyriology at the Università di Bologna, which would later be held by Sergio Angelo Picchioni.

His first important work was the *Erra Epic* (1969), an edition of his graduation thesis. It was Falkenstein who first directed Cagni to the study of this poem, which presented an enormous interpretative challenge. The text is yet to be fully reconstructed; it consisted of five tablets of around 700 lines, but only three of them have survived almost in their entirety (I, IV and V), re-assembled from 35 or 36 fragments, which were almost all retrieved from public or private Neo-Assyrian collections (from Assur, Niniveh, and

Sultantepe), with just 2 or 3 manuscripts from Babylon or Ur. Cagni's monograph is the most complete edition of the *Epic*; indeed, his translation was the basis for the one J. Bottéro and S.N. Kramer proposed in their fundamental volume on Mesopotamian mythology, *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l'homme*.

Worth a special mention among Cagni's many works is also the IV volume in the series *Materiali per il Vocabolario Neo-Sumerico* (MVN), where he published the cuneiform copy and the catalogue of 185 administrative tablets belonging to the PBI collection; they date back to the Neo-Sumerian period and originated in Girsu, Nippur, Puzriš-Dagan, and Umma. Another of his contributions can be found in *La Collezione Schollmeyer* by G. Pettinato and H. Waetzoldt, i.e. 265 tablets edited in cuneiform copy (1974), 39 of these were edited by Cagni. Additionally, Cagni was responsible for the editing and collation of hundreds of other tablets from the same period: *Tavoletta economica neo-sumerica di proprietà privata* (1970); *Miscellanea Neo-Sumerica I. Collazioni a G. Reisner, Tempelurkunden aus Telloh* (1974); *Collazioni a N. Schneider, Die Drehem- und Djokha-Texte im Kloster Montserrat* (1983). Fundamental, in this context, was his collaboration with Pettinato for the MVN series, which comprised 22 volumes and thousands of edited cuneiform tablets.

Religion, Sumerian and Babylonian Literature are the focus of most of Cagni's Assyriological essays, where he would privilege cosmogony and anthropogony. Additional important works of a historical-religious nature are the 22 entries in the *Dizionario delle Religioni* by Giovanni Filoramo (1993); the 13 entries in the *Grande Dizionario Enciclopedico UTET* (1985-91) on Sumerian and Assyrian-Babylonian gods; *La religione assiro-babilonese*, in Castellino (ed.), *Storia delle religioni* (1971), and *La religione della Mesopotamia*, in Filoramo (ed.), *Storia delle religioni. I. le religioni antiche* (1994). Turning to a completely different field, volume VIII of the series *Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung: Briefe aus dem Iraq Museum* (1980) should also be mentioned, which includes the transliteration and translation of 151 Paleo-Babylonian letters of often uncertain and diverse origin.

3. History of the Ancient Near East and Eblaite Studies

Carlo Zaccagnini, who followed Cagni at IUO in the professorship in Ancient Near East History, explores Cagni's contribution to the development of this discipline. He starts out by providing a general framework to understand the teaching of Oriental History within Italian academia in the early seventies, when only one professorship in Ancient Oriental History existed, namely at "La Sapienza." In 1971, a second one was established at IUO, specifically in History of the Pre-Islamic Near East, which Cagni was called to teach from 1971 to 1990.

As a member of Mario Liverani's "Roman School," Zaccagnini was formed by his professor's work, *Introduzione alla Storia dell'Asia anteriore antica*, the first manual on the topic in Italian bibliography, which appeared in the series of teaching materials "Sussidi didattici," designed by Sabatino Moscati. In 1978, Cagni published the first volume of his *Storia del Vicino Oriente preislamico. Il Vicino Oriente dalle origini alla fine del III millennio a.C.*, a "didactic aid for internal circulation," then re-edited in 1991. In 1983, the second volume, *Dal II millennio all'avvento dell'Islam*, came out, written in collaboration with Simonetta Graziani and Grazia Giovinazzo. This volume was also revisited and extended: the second volume—*Il Vicino Oriente nel II millennio a.C.* (1989)—comprised chapters 1-17 and the third—*Il Vicino Oriente dalla fine del II millennio all'avvento dell'Islam* (1990)—chapters 18-25.

What distinguishes his *Storia* is the inclusion of archaeological and artistic-historical records as a supplement to written sources, for the purpose of providing a comprehensive view of the various phases in the history of the Near East. The three volumes dedicated ample space to Egypt and ended with a long chapter on Pre-Islamic Arabia. It was the first time that these documentary sources were taken into consideration in a general historical essay on the History of the Near East.

Five years after Cagni's second volume, Liverani published his book, *Antico Oriente. Storia società economia* (1988), which marked a clear turning point in the popularizing approach to the study of ancient Oriental civilizations. The three volumes of Cagni's new

edition of his *Storia*, published immediately after Liverani's work (in 1989, 1990, and 1991), were receptive of the main novelties the latter had introduced, while maintaining unaltered the original framework as an introductory tool to the understanding of the Pre-Classical Orient. Ultimately, the organic and detailed illustration of three millennia of Near Eastern History represented the premise as well as the supplement to Liverani's own dense synthesis. The fact that Cagni's *Storia* was designed as a "sussidio didattico," a teaching aid, has prevented it from becoming widely known outside of academia. Yet, it still represents a vivid and fertile record of Cagni's teachings in the History of the Ancient Near East for anyone who, for whatever reason, came to own a copy.

Maria Giovanna Biga recounts Cagni's efforts and commitment in organizing the three conferences on Ebla that he convened at IUO, just five years after the discovery of the first tablets (1974) and archives (1975) at the Tell Mardikh/Ebla site in Syria. He wanted to ignite a scientific debate over these texts, which introduced extraordinary novelties in terms of the linguistic, political, cultural, social and religious history of Syria in the IIIrd millennium B.C. The speakers were the most knowledgeable Assyriologists, linguists, Semitists and Sumerian scholars on the languages spoken in Mesopotamia. The proceedings (1981, 1984, and 1987) of these conferences are still essential reading for Eblaite Studies today.

First conference (Naples, 21-23 April 1980): *The Language of Ebla*. Cagni had understood that Assyriologists, philologists, linguists, Semitists and Indo-European scholars were mainly interested in determining what type of language it was. I.J. Gelb suggested ties between Ebla and the *Kish civilization*, which became increasingly evident in the following years. The debate is still ongoing; some believe it to be an Akkadian dialect, while others see it as a new Semitic language, which could perhaps be defined as *Northern Early Semitic*.

Second conference (Naples, 19-22 April 1982): *Bilingualism in Ebla*. Early on, Cagni had identified the problem posed by the numerous logograms found in Ebla's Sumerian texts, which were clearly written by scribes who spoke a Semitic language; thus, he set out to study this written—and not spoken—bilingualism.

Third Conference (Naples, 9-11 October 1985): *Ebla 1975-1985. Ten Years of Linguistic and Philological Studies*. Cagni wanted to convene again most of the speakers of the previous conferences for a first assessment of Eblaite Studies. The essay that triggered an enormous progress in the field of Eblaite Studies was Francesco Pomponio's contribution, which marked the beginning of the chronological classification of Eblaite materials and their systemic placement in the appropriate chronology. The bibliography on Ebla was growing exponentially and, for this reason, Cagni decided to include in the proceedings the bibliography compiled by Pomponio and M. Baldacci. This was the beginning of Eblaite bibliography.

The *in memoriam* volume republishes **Luigi Cagni's** introduction to the third conference, which offers a glimpse in the extraordinary effort he put in its organization and highlights the scientific scope of its relations and discussions, primarily thanks to his disciplined and far-sighted guidance.

4. Semitic Linguistics and Biblical Philology

Riccardo Contini investigates Cagni's contribution to the field of Semitic Linguistics. An expert in Akkadian and Biblical Hebrew, Cagni was not particularly interested in Semitic linguistic comparisons: his main contribution was the organization of the three large international conferences in Naples dedicated to the language of Ebla, together with the sample scrutinizing of lexical and bilingual texts. Although Western Semitic languages were never the direct object of Cagni's investigations, as a versatile Assyriologist with wide-ranging interdisciplinary interests, he always put the historical study of the civilizations that employed these languages at the centre of his research and teaching. It is not surprising that an Assyriologist, especially one who was simultaneously a reputed Biblical scholar, would pay attention to Phoenician, Moabite and especially Aramaic sources; however, the wealth of information Cagni was able to collect on Pre-Islamic Arabia deserves special praise, since it does not have any comparison in any other historic manual on the Ancient Near East.

The reasons behind this overture toward the Southern side of the Semitic world lie in the synergy Cagni shared with his colleagues, who specialized in historical-geographical fields of studies that were somewhat contiguous, particularly Alessandro de Maigret, a prominent scholar in Italian archaeology in Arabia, especially in Yemen. A steadfast advocate of the need to integrate the Arabic peninsula in the study of the Ancient Near East, de Maigret provided first-hand news on the results of research conducted on Ancient Arabia. The more than 70 pages Cagni dedicated to Pre-Islamic Arabia in the second edition of his text on Ancient Near East History bear witness to that collaboration. Thus, he was among the first to broaden the extension of the Ancient (and Middle-to-late) Near East to the Arabic peninsula, a position that was later actively reinforced by his colleagues at IUO, first Garbini and then, predominantly, de Maigret.

The writer of this paper, instead, draws the picture of Cagni as a scholar of the Hebrew Bible. In this field of study, he first emerged as a translator and commentator of *Jeremiah*, *Baruch*, *The Lamentations* and *The Letter of Jeremiah*; he also edited the Latin text of *Job* in *Neo-Vulgata*. For an appropriate assessment of Cagni's contribution to Biblical studies, one needs to consider his efforts to contextualize the Hebrew Bible in the Ancient Near East, thus highlighting the role played by neighbouring cultures in its formation. His sense of humanity and his openness to dialogue stirred him away from taking sides in the discussions dominating among comparatists, tensely divided between those who rejected the authenticity of the Biblical Word, favouring Mesopotamian archetypes, and those who continued to reject, as in the past, any analogy between motives and genres found in the Hebrew Bible and those of surrounding cultures. Such was the legacy of "Panbabylonism," which also formed the basis for Friedrich Delitzsch's positions at the beginning of the XXth century, as presented at the conference *Babel und Bibel*, according to which Biblical stories of Creation and Flood were mere re-writings of traditions originating in Mesopotamia (i.e. the poems *Enūma eliš* and *Gilgameš*). Yet, the new discoveries of Ras Shamra and the literary analysis of the Bible, developed during Vatican II, soon laid bare how simplistic it was to claim Babylon as the sole source for Biblical stories of origins. The

new cultural climate was the inspiration behind Cagni's ability to mediate with caution and balance, as evidenced in *L'uomo secondo la Bibbia a confronto con le culture contemporanee* (1993) and in a review (1992) for *L'Antico Testamento e le culture del tempo*. Promoting the dialogue between Hebrew Bible scholars and Assyriologists, he was keen to avoid any prejudice and extremism, which would have frozen the critical debate, encouraging, instead, to respond wisely to the excitement of new discoveries, without foregoing the best of tradition.

In *L'uomo e il sacro nel mondo prebiblico* (1993), Cagni points out that even in Mesopotamian Theogonies the origin of the world and of man is attributed to the gods, yet there is no trace of a *creatio ex nihilo*: in fact, it was believed that a "creative evolution" led from an undifferentiated universe to the diversification of reality. Clear analogies to the Biblical story of creation seem to indicate a contamination of Sumerian and Akkadian mythology. *Il mito babilonese di Atrahasis* (1975) deals with the Flood as a form of punishment for the human revolt against their destiny, which according to the gods' original plan was to work and replace the gods in agricultural activities (*Creazione e destinazione dell'uomo secondo i Sumeri e gli Assiro-Babilonesi* [1975]). A comparison with the Hebrew Bible (*La destinazione dell'uomo al lavoro secondo Genesi 2 e secondo le fonti sumero-accadiche* [1974]) reveals a clearer theological foundation.

In studying the relationship between the Oriental codes and the Bible (*I codici orientali e la Bibbia* [1969]), Cagni observes that there might exist some proximity between the legal norms of the Hebrew Bible and those of the Oriental codes, which are similarly presented in the conditional. However, Biblical norms are often marked by their apodictic nature. Finally, in *Le profezie di Mari* (1995, now re-edited with a critical update by Simonetta Graziani), Cagni discusses the extra-Biblical origins of Israel's prophecy, studying 52 prophetic texts by Mari, updated in the edition of the *Archives Épistolaires de Mari I/1* by J.-M. Durand. Despite the undisputable analogies, Cagni lists the many differences from the Biblical prophecy, stressing that Mari's prophetism is "practical, utilitarian, 'functional,' devoid of any moral or theological concern, contrary to what distinguishes the Biblical world."

5. Languages and Cultures of the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean

Following these critical premises, the Department of Historical and Philological Studies at UCSC dedicated the Studies Seminar in Languages and Cultures of the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean to the memory of Cagni, aimed at promoting studies on the Hebrew Bible that investigate it within its natural context of formation and transmission. The *Seminar*, which is open to the collaboration of scholars belonging to other universities, will thus coordinate two important research facilities such as the Vattioni Archive and the Montagnini Library, which house the book collections of Cagni's two friends from Brescia, in addition to the personal library of another great Semitist, and friend, Giovanni Garbini, who passed away recently.¹ Hopefully, research in this scientific field will, thus, continue with the same passion and zeal that Luigi Cagni often displayed.

¹ Cf. G. Toloni, « “Biblica et Semitica” : L'œuvre scientifique de Francesco Vattioni », *Semitica* 58, 2016, p. 297-305; Id., « “Linguistica, Epigraphica et Philologica”. The Scientific Work of Giovanni Garbini », *Semitica* 59, 2017, p. 415-423.