ETANA, Electronic Tools and Ancient Near Eastern Archives

http://www.etana.org/

Maria de Fátima Rosa

ETANA's main scope is to provide scholars and students with a large set of tools designed to improve and facilitate the research and study of the ancient Near East (ANE). ETANA was launched in 2001 as a conjunct project of several societies and institutes specialized in the ANE studies. Currently, the ETANA supporters are: the American Oriental Society, the American Schools of Oriental Research, Case Western Reserve University, the Cobb Institute of Archaeology at Mississippi State, the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, the International Association for Assyriology, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, the Society of Biblical Literature, the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Vanderbilt University, and the Virginia Polytechnic and State University.

With the first financial grant, awarded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the project aimed for the development of two major areas: 1 – the transferring of the database named ABZU, a project that began in 1994 and was originally hosted by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, into a compound interface; 2 – gathering efforts

in the sense of digitalizing access restricted works. ETANA, currently hosted by the University of Vanderbilt, is divided in five different sections. The ABZU, a reference to the mythological freshwater ocean upon which the earth was thought to float, edited by Charles E. Jones, serves as a search engine that allows one to easily explore the contents of ETANA as well as the resources available on the Internet. The ABZU browser leads to a significant list of indexed electronic books housed on library sites or on web pages supporting online archives. All items are grouped by categories labeled as books, articles, websites, blogs and journals. Descriptions and summaries resuming all contents were made for each item offering an appreciable coherence to the database. Permission for authors to submit new information on free will, later reviewed by an authorized editor, is a welcomed feature, since it offers an easy update on the website. Also, there is a last entries link presenting a simple up-to-date view on ETANA to anyone who wishes. The second section, one we consider of unquestionable value to the ANE studies, is the "core texts". Certainly faced with a substantial problem in the field, ETANA emerged as an innovative venture proposed to digitalize ancient but essential works suitable for teaching and research purposes. In fact, the difficulty in accessing this information, often assumed to be fundamental as it affords an insight on the first thoughts and site descriptions, poses a problem to the scholar. Safe to say many of these works are outside of copyright and can only be found in a select number of libraries, often on a rather fragile state.

Dated from pre-1925, some even from the late 19th century, the volumes digitalized comprehend all extent historical and geographical areas of *Etana, Electronic Tools and Ancient Near Eastern Archives* the ANE world, including the lands of Mesopotamia, Iran, Anatolia, Egypt and Palestine. To the assyriological studies was given the most important part, considering the extent of works covered in this particular field. Among the now 363 digitalized books, the "core texts" displays entries from various renamed authors, including some of the first historians, archaeologists and cuneiformists. From these we highlight

François Thureau-Dangin, Stephen Herbert Langdon, Edward Chiera, Leonard William King and Ernst F. Weidner. This section proves to be indispensable for the scholar wanting to approach editions of original documents, the oldest autographed copies of cuneiform tablets or inscriptions (Sumerian, Akkadian, Cappadocian or Persian) and ancient monographs. The earliest translations of epics or mythologies, such as *The Seven Tablets of Creation* (a critical analysis of *enuma eliš* by S. King), the epic of Gilgameš, the deluge story or the interesting *Sumerian Liturgies and Psalms*, are among the texts available in this feature. On other historiographical areas, one finds volumes on political, cultural or economic history, such as Chiera's *Old Babylonian Contracts*. As for Egyptian studies we mention the translations of Griffith and Wallis Budge *The Petrie Papyri* and *The Book of the dead* respectively, and the five volume edition of *Ancient records of Egypt*. Not disregarding the importance of imagery information sources, ETANA also offers access to an interesting *corpus* portraying all types of artistic expression: boundary stones (*kudurru*), catalogues of glyptic art and works about sculptures, for instance from the palace of Ashurbanipal. Finally we mention the publications of archaeological excavation reports funded by museums (the British Museum, Harvard Museum, etc), like the excavations at Ur, at Teloh or at Samaria, as well as the first geographical descriptions. In this sense and related to the Biblical studies, the 19th century complete *Encyclopaedia Biblica* can be acquired through the website.

All works are recommended and reliable since a selection of the ones to be digitalized is previously made and reviewed by a committee established by the ETANA board. All are free and downloadable in PDF format. The creation of chapter links within the books, so the user can easily navigate through the contents included, is also positively remarkable.

Further, a section under the title "Archaeological Projects" contains a series of links leading to sites housing excavation projects information. Case Western Reserve University's pilot project called

Virtual Nimrin served as a first case study to the desired displacement of all data into a standardized system, but is now unfortunately a dead link. Additionally is the "Digital Library" (ETANA-DL), functioning as a compatible field tool and a database specifically designed for the recording, cataloging and online publishing of the archaeological data registered and exhumed on the ongoing excavations throughout the Near East. This repository is still under development. However some of the items supplied by the excavations at Megiddo, Madaba, Mozan, Bab edh-Dhra, Umayri or Lahav, are already available. In 2006 was created the most recent and final section of ETANA, e-TACT (electronic Translations of Akkadian Cuneiform Texts). This is a project edited by Jack Sasson and established in cooperation with the International Association for Assyriology (IAA). Largely set up on contributions, this section covers translations from published works by specialized authors, ranging from court poetry, to royal inscriptions, to epics and hymns, to cultic, legal or historical texts. All were made available for the common public, specialist or not. Akkadian was taken as a starting point to these translations but they'll hopefully expand to other languages. ETANA is a fine tool and a major advance on research. Its focus on the improvement of the ANE studies, by means of] decreasing the time for publishing scholars' works, and on making accessible texts otherwise unobtainable, is one of considerable importance. In the future, we hope to see the development and extension of the digital "core texts" feature to areas now badly represented, as the *Hittitological studies*, and the correction or elimination of the many dead links on ABZU.