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## Foreword

*Still alive among the buried* is a heartfelt tribute to Maria Giovanna Biga, the teacher, researcher and friend we have had the joy of working with for so many years. The title alludes to the conference *Sepolti tra i vivi* (Buried among the living) held at the Sapienza University in 2006, where our colleague once again interpreted contexts, rituals and toponyms of the funerary customs of Ebla with great historical sensitivity and profound epigraphic knowledge.

Vanna began her extensive research in Ebla, the so-called Throne City in northern Syria and an archaeological site of extraordinary international scientific importance, which was discovered in 1975 by the Italian Archaeological Mission directed by Paolo Matthiae. During her career, she worked first as an assistant to Giovanni Pettinato, then as associate professor of History of the Ancient Near East under Mario Liverani, and finally as full professor at Sapienza in the same sector. The excellence of her studies on the ancient Near East has recently been recognised by the honorary title of corresponding member from the prestigious Academy of Sciences of Turin.

Vanna's career has been based on interdisciplinary dialogue and encouragement of her students. Over the years, she has consolidated a relationship of close cooperation, friendship and trust with the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid and fellow historians, archaeologists and epigraphists of the pre-classical Orient. She has been the pivot of fruitful scientific and academic collaboration and has often been invited to the UAM, where she has given lessons, workshops, conferences and interviews, and participated as commissioner in their evaluation processes. The continuous relationship has opened, maintained and encouraged new interchanges between these two large European public universities.

This volume in honour of Maria Giovanna Biga wants to pay homage to Vanna as a researcher and teacher, as a colleague and friend, with different articles and approaches that concern vast geographical areas and chronological segments of the ancient Near East. Here, we have highlighted the depth and the breadth of her research. Colleagues who have wished to thank Vanna in another way or by sending their articles to other journals have nevertheless wanted to express their gratitude in the *Tabula Gratulatoria* at the end of the volume.

Vanna has dedicated her life to the profession of historian, respecting ethical values and human rights. She is recognized as a leading scholar in Orientalism and as a protagonist in the reconstruction and communication of the ancient civilizations of the Near East.

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Isimu, like many other scientific journals, has always welcomed her contributions and the Isimu editorial board and the editors of this volume would like to thank Vanna and all the colleagues who wanted to contribute.

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