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Massimo Forlanini (11 September 1944 – 9 September 2024)

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In exceedingly rare cases, someone with a career in a technical field is able to find the time and energy to diligently and professionally pursue the study of history or art because they are driven by a deep passion for that particular subject.

That was Massimo Forlanini. Even while working nearly fifty years as an engineer, reaching the highest levels of management as director of his company, he simultaneously pursued his keen interest in the history and geography of pre-classical Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia. His studies were based on Hittite and Old Assyrian texts, and on archeological evidence, with a special focus on toponymic survival in the later classical, Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman periods. He also devoted himself to Hittite studies, dealing with the complex issue of the formation of the Old Kingdom and more fully on the political and cultural continuity of those regions between the Late Bronze Age and the 1st millennium BC.

This passion was evident from a very young age, beginning in high school. Confined to home for a long period of time due to illness, he poured all of his energy into his studies as a way to cope and overcome a moment of adversity.

From a methodological standpoint, his research showed a definite personal touch by consistently prioritizing the importance of a direct, first-hand examination of the sources. Not only did he scrutinize the pertinent cuneiform texts, but also the later documentation in Greek, Latin and other languages. Just as important to his studies were maps, including the more modern ones, but from periods that conserved the traditional place names. All these sources were studied to arrive at possible identifications, and were then reverified on the ground.

Knowing how elusive a total reconstruction can be in this field of study, Forlanini refrained from providing a systematic magnum opus; rather, he produced a vast number of valuable contributions on historical and geographical problems, including specific data which, as mentioned above, were verified based on multiple sources whenever possible, spanning long periods of time.

All historical research is subject to revision, also because over the course of time different perspectives and methodologies are applied. The study of the toponyms recorded in the epigraphic sources of the ancient Near East is certainly one of the fields that can yield the most labile results. Yet the identifications suggested by Forlanini clearly stand out from others for their scientific rigor and the validity of the findings.

The diachronic organization of his interpretive solutions (presented here thanks to editing by Antonio Carnevale) provides a clear picture of the constant research and revision that were his lifework.

Finally, Massimo Forlanini, widely recognized as a true gentleman, will also be remembered as a true friend to all those who had the privilege of knowing him closer.