

ANCIENT TERQA AND ITS TEMPLE OF NINKARRAK:  
THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE FIFTH AND SIXTH SEASONS

by

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Introduction

The historical record of an ancient region can be traced archaeologically by artifactual, archival, linguistic, artistic, architectural and ceramic records. In the developments of the past few years at, for instance, Tell Mardikh in northern Syria, a single resource, such as a grammatical element or mention of a foreign ruler, can provide the basis or a clue for a new interpretation of the material. The excavations at Terqa are intended to incorporate all manner of data into a reconstruction of the historical record of the Mid-Euphrates region. This article provides a brief overview of the recent archaeological discoveries, which, applied to the many facets of research surrounding the ancient city of Terqa and its environs, will produce a solid understanding of a particular region at various crucial times in the history of ancient Syria. Ongoing contributions to this goal include philological research, particularly involving onomastics and applied computer technology, sphragistic (cylinder seal) analysis by an encoded computer data base, particularly of the Old Babylonian and Khana periods, chronological assessment of ceramic types, partly by atomic absorption sourcing techniques, and a continuing development of an advanced methodology, especially stratigraphic analysis, again applying computer technology.

Associated projects also include innovations in archaeological equipment, tested on-site at Terqa, such as an instrument for overhead aerial photography. Most recently, an important organic geochemical study conducted on ancient samples of asphalt from Terqa /Nature, Vol. 295, No. 5849 (Feb., 1982), 517-19/ revealed significant contamination in Carbon 14 dates. The Terqa samples, well-documented stratigraphically, gave conflicting C-14 dates. UCLA researchers (Inst. of Geophysics & Planetary Physics) verified the ancient contamination and are now applying this study to Carbon 14 samples from Jericho and Jarmo, where later dates may now be assessed, and Near Eastern chronology revised.

Such research, along with new discoveries, will in time create a better understanding of western Mesopotamia and, hence, the entire ancient Near Eastern world.

Historical Background

Terqa (modern Tell Ashara) is located 40 miles north of ancient Mari on the Euphrates River (Plate 1, Fig. 1), the contact route between northern

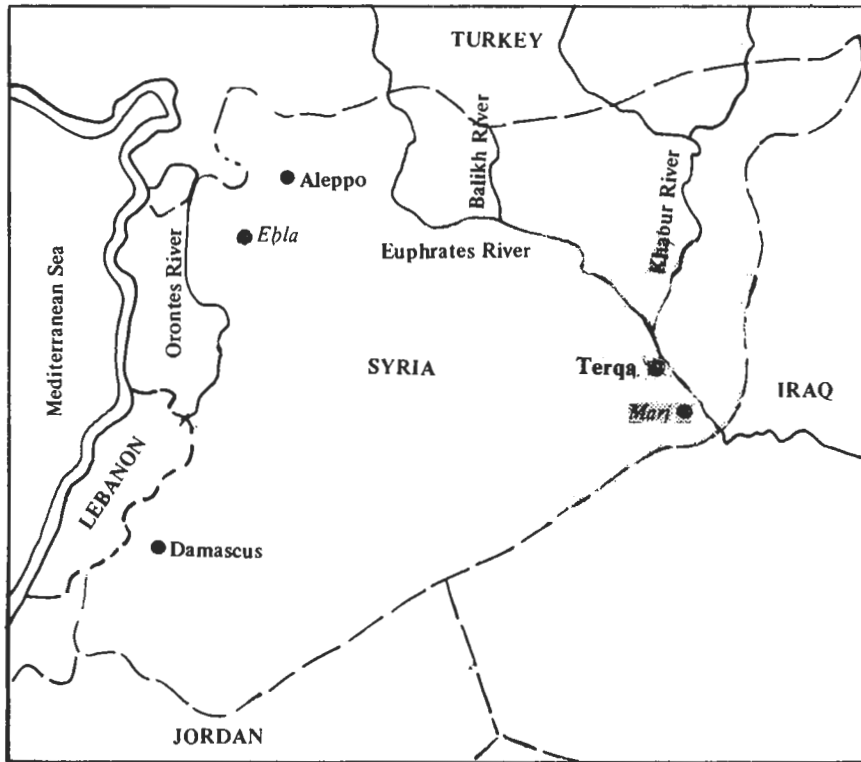


Fig. 1. Map of modern Syria, showing location of Terqa along Euphrates trade route.



Plate 1. View of Tell Ashara, ancient Terqa, from east bank of the Euphrates River at night.

Syria and traditional Mesopotamia, halfway between Akkad and Ebla. The recent discoveries in northern Syria, especially with the archaeological and archival documentation of the ancient kingdom of Ebla (Tell Mardikh), have revised our conception of ancient Mesopotamia. Now, we see the autonomous kingdoms of the north linked culturally with those of the southern alluvial plains, hence the designation "western Mesopotamia." Terqa on the Mid-Euphrates documents a crucial station on this route between West and East. This ancient city played many roles throughout several millennia, serving as a model of the power fluctuations of Mesopotamian historical periods.

Third millennium Terqa provides extensive evidence for a major urban settlement already in the early part of the millennium. In fact, a massive defensive wall system (Plate 2) is the largest known from this Syro-Mesopotamian area. This city wall, including towers, sally ports and moat (Fig. 2), suggests the possibility of rivalry or dominance over Mari until perhaps the second quarter of the third millennium.

With the onset of the second millennium, Terqa was a major province of the Kingdom of Mari. Archaeological documentation at the site hopes to correlate the extensive epigraphic evidence at Mari with similar data from Terqa to produce a record of the internal structure of this administrative region. With Terqa acting as a subordinate city of the Kingdom of Mari, and yet still an urban center, excavations should produce enlightening information on the hierarchy within the power structure and the growth of large urban configurations.

At this time, the Terqa district also contained several Amorite nomadic groups. Therefore, the relationship between the central government and the pastoralists, is of prime importance in the archaeological research of the early second millennium at Terqa.

With the mid-second millennium, Terqa functioned as the major power in the area after the destruction of the Kingdom of Mari. Power is centralized as the Kingdom of Khana, with Terqa most probably the capital. Until now, the Khana period (1750-1500 B.C.) has been regarded as a gap in Near Eastern (Old-Babylonian - Middle-Babylonian) history, and Terqa stratigraphically and epigraphically fills that gap. Leading from this research, other historical questions, such as the Kassite and Hurrian roles in the Mid-Euphrates regions, may be answered.

The first millennium Terqa region sheds light on possible nomadic occupation, as evidenced from mention in the Assyrian Annals. Lack of stratigraphic evidence, even after a surface survey of the entire district, of first millennium occupation supports the theory of Terqa as a nomadic center, although an Aramaic burial was discovered. Finally, to round out the historical context, medieval (12th century) Terqa shows extensive Islamic occupation, possibly as a craft center.

#### The Previous Seasons



Plate 2. Third millennium city wall remains—Area B.

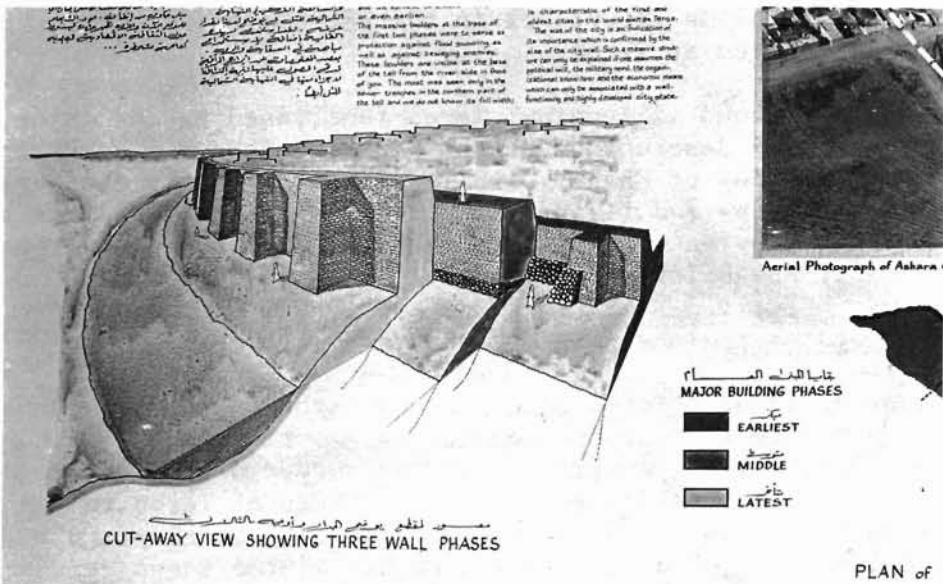


Fig. 2. Reconstruction of second and third millennium defensive system with moat.

Excavations carried out from 1976-1978, under the direction of Dr. Giorgio Buccellati (UCLA) and Dr. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati (Cal. State Univ. Los Angeles), revealed the presence of the massive defensive system mentioned above (fourth-second mill.), a large industrial area (third mill.), and a residential quarter (Khana period), which included houses with rooms destroyed by fire, preserving an archive and a pantry area. The archive-storage room yielded interesting artifacts pertaining to the business transactions of the owner, including many contracts and a beautiful, hematite weight carved in the shape of a duck (Plate 3). On the floor of the pantry room, many storage vessels, grinders, and pieces of fine dinnerware were found. Of special interest was a small jar containing carbonized cloves, possibly transported from the Moluccas (Plate 4, 5). More detailed accounts of these excavation seasons can be found in Terqa Preliminary Reports and Terqa Final Reports (Malibu, 1977-82), and Reimer, "Terqa," Near Eastern Archaeological Society Bulletin, nos. 15-16 (1980).

### The Fifth and Sixth Seasons

In 1979, the fifth season of excavations at Terqa concentrated on three main excavation areas, Areas C, D, E and H (Fig. 3). Area H, was excavated in hopes of clarifying the early third millennium or earlier occupation levels. This sounding proved, in fact, to reach virgin soil. The excavations in Area E, located right on the edge of a cliff, where the river has cut the tell (Plate 6), are difficult not only due to position, but also due to the deep medieval deposit overlying the first and second millennia strata. Nevertheless, the excavations here have been fruitful, producing evidence of monumental architecture and thick floors, even some of which are paved. This leads us to expect a public building in that quarter, perhaps an administrative center. Area C had the most extensive operations, involving excavation of a public building (see below) and further work on the residential quarter, specifically on the house of Puzurum (the archive owner). Here, the individual house excavation was completed by digging the courtyard of the house and a room adjacent to the archive room. As with the other rooms of this quarter, these were destroyed by fire and hence, well-preserved. Large amounts of burnt roofing debris were lying on the occupation floor of the courtyard, sometimes to a depth of one-half meter. In this debris, many artifacts were found, particularly a large amount of clay bullae and tags. These objects served to mark or seal containers with the owner's stamp (Plate 7). Some bullae were unmarked, except for the impression on the back of the cloth and string which had bound the ancient container. Also attesting to the activity area of the courtyard was a small hearth, formed to fit a cooking pot, an oven and a bin. Perhaps most interesting, were two construction techniques discovered here in the course of excavation. The bin was formed by packed mud which contained an unbaked tablet, obviously an inclusion in the clay dug from elsewhere in the ancient town. Another baked contract text had been dropped into the bin. Also the outdoor courtyard walls, although plastered, had eroded by rain during use of the house. These had been repaired by mud, with more tablet inclusions, and with rows of sherds shoring up the packed mud.

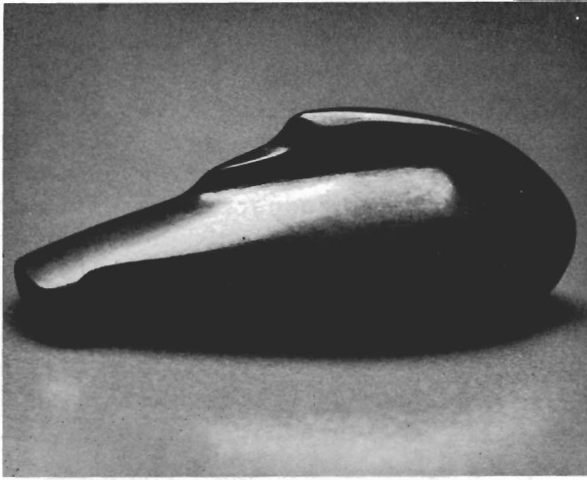


Plate 3. Hematite duck weight (ca. 2 cm.).



Plate 4. Floor of the pantry room of the house of Puzurum. Grinders, storage vessels and serving ware cover the ancient surface, which was destroyed by fire in antiquity.



Plate 5. Carbonized spices found in a jar in the pantry room. These second millennium spices included cloves which were possibly traded from the Moluccas.

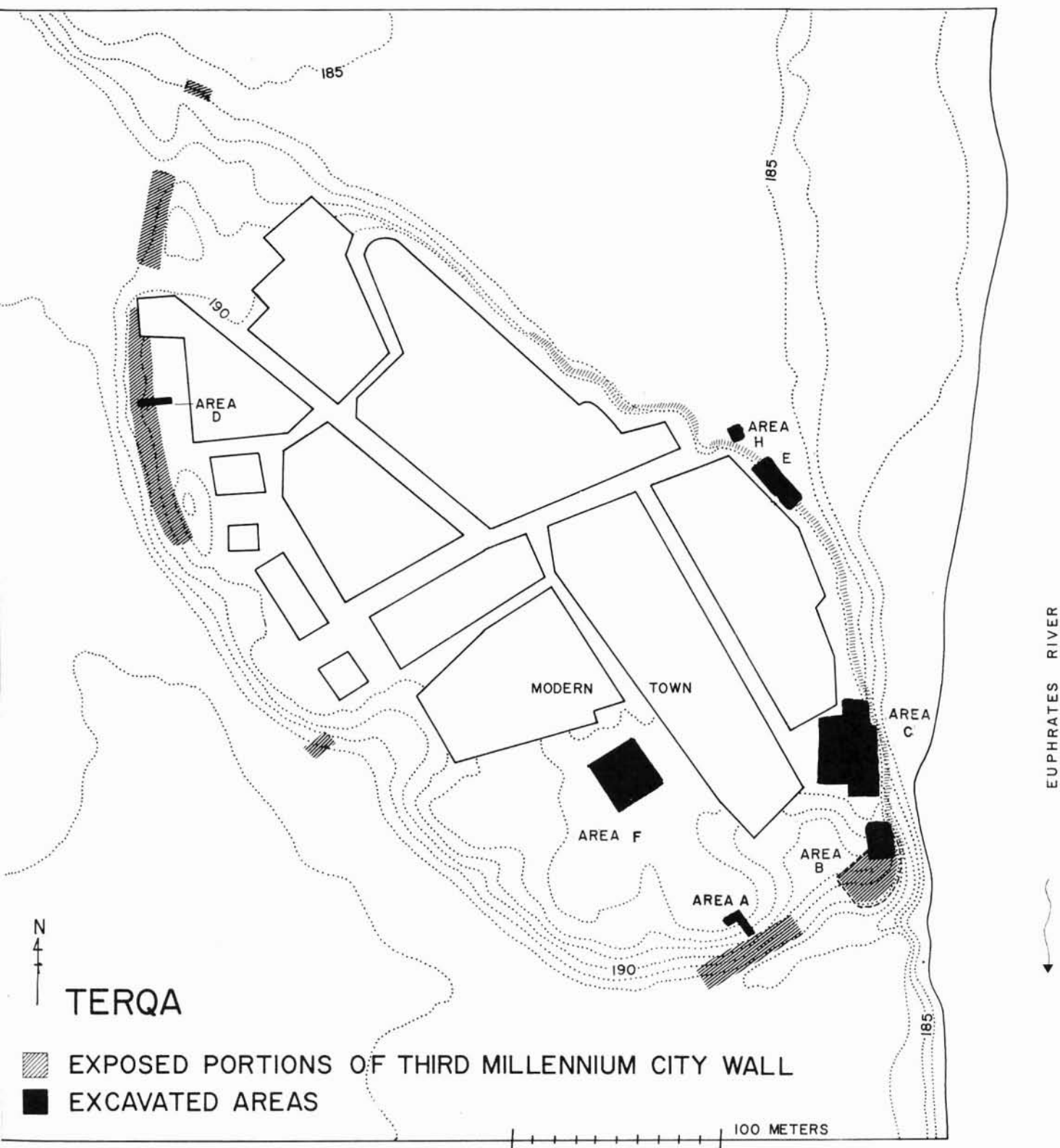


Fig 3. Plan of the tell, with excavation units marked.



Plate 6. Aerial view of Tell Ashara, looking south. The Euphrates River and Areas B, C, E, H are on the east side of the modern town. At the top of the picture is a park; Area F is shown prior to excavation just below the park. Here, the circular mound has clearly been cut to the northeast (where fields are now cultivated) by earlier action of the river.





Plate 7. A modern reconstruction of the ancient usage of clay bullae, rolled with cylinder seal impression. Here the ancient bulla and second millennium jar are closed and sealed for sale or transport. These are compared with a modern bag of goods, sealed with a Syrian customs tag.

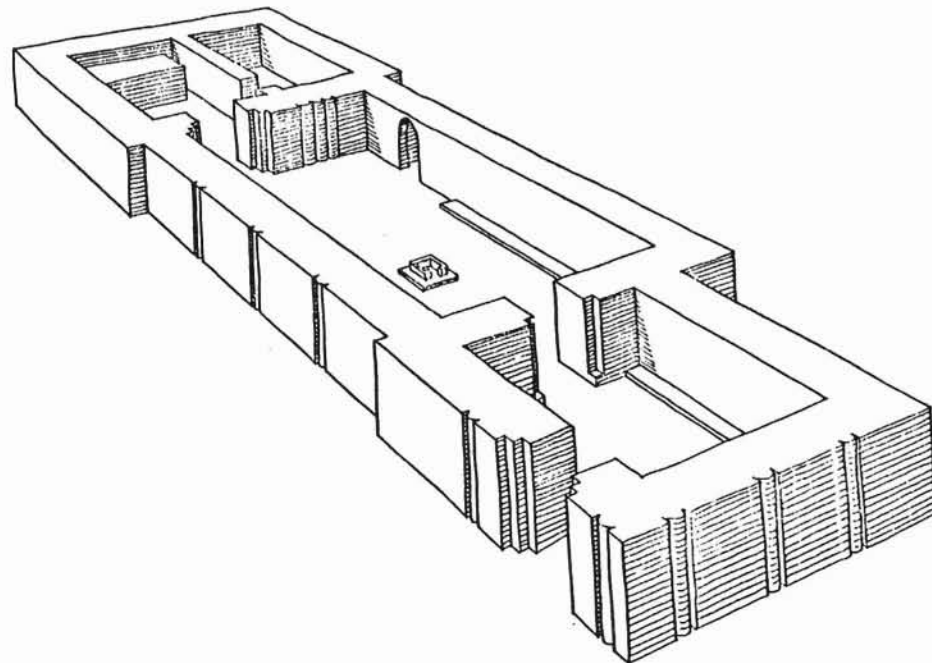


Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the ceremonial rooms of the Temple of Ninkarrak. Note columnar decor, benches, hearth, arched door into service rooms and altar of the goddess. (Drawing by T. Seymour)

In the adjacent room, a large bin served for storage and a door socket and threshold marked the entrance off the courtyard. A small, beautifully inscribed tablet was found here, a letter written "To my brother." Across a street from this residential quarter, the public building mentioned above was excavated through the medieval Islamic period, which consisted of a few residences and a large number of storage pits, causing a great deal of damage to the underlying second millennium deposit. This building later proved to contain the ceremonial rooms of a temple (Fig. 4), which was excavated in 1979, and the administrative or service quarter of this temple, excavated in 1980 (see below). Finally, the fifth season closed with discovery of a sally port in Area D. In an area which had previously revealed much about the defensive wall, including a tower structure, a small scale excavation was undertaken. Here, a sally port, a narrow passageway into the wall structure was defined, characterized by stone construction, with an overhead lintel piece (Fig. 5).

In Area F, previous work had begun on what proved to be a street and residential quarter from the second millennium. This operation was expanded, revealing a broad expanse of second millennium deposit, with some sort of public building and much occupation, as evidenced by usage of floors. A small tablet was found here in an ancient street, relating to the 'shakkanaku' period, which may date this occupational level to the Mari period, rather than the Rhana.

#### The Temple of Ninkarrak

The fifth and sixth seasons brought to light an important building - the temple structure mentioned above. This bent-axis structure, consisting of four ceremonial rooms and an administrative sector, was dedicated to the goddess of good health - Ninkarrak - as evidenced by several factors. First, epigraphic evidence supports the theory of the goddess (the Akkadian 'Gula') with two finds of clay bullae rolled from the same cylinder seal and both found in context within the ceremonial entry room. The inscribed sealing includes mention of a personal name with the element "divine Ninkarrak." The seal itself was perhaps one of significance, or an 'antique', as it had been recut (note the cut cuneiform signs) and decorated with granulations, probably of metal (Plate 8). Second, a small tablet listing personal names was found on the floor (Phase III) before an arched doorway. This list, possibly of offerings, names the first recipient as the goddess Ninkarrak, and second lists 'LUGAL' - king. This tablet was an important object, even during temple usage, as it had two perforations at the top, possibly to hold wires, from which the list could be suspended for reference. Third, a small bronze figurine of a dog was found in the cella (altar room) of the temple. As the representation of the goddess Ninkarrak is precisely a dog, this statuette may be an idol of the benefactress. The seated dog wore a collar and was affixed to a spike which could be inserted onto a base.

#### The Ceremonial Rooms and Service Quarter

Fig. 5. Sally port in the defensive wall - Area D. Stone portal for passage into city topped by large, stone lintel.

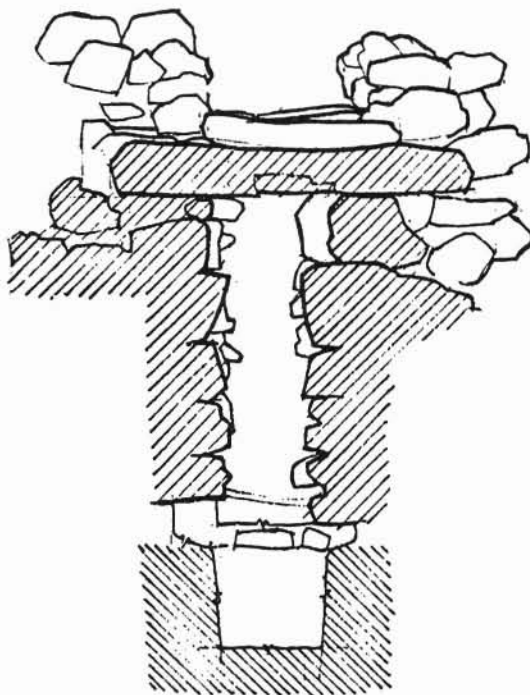


Plate 8. Two clay bullae (right) rolled with the same inscribed seal, containing the name 'Ninkarrak'. The perforations are the marks of granulated decorations. The tablet at left was found on the floor before an arched doorway and lists the goddess Ninkarrak as the first recipient of what is, most likely, an offering.

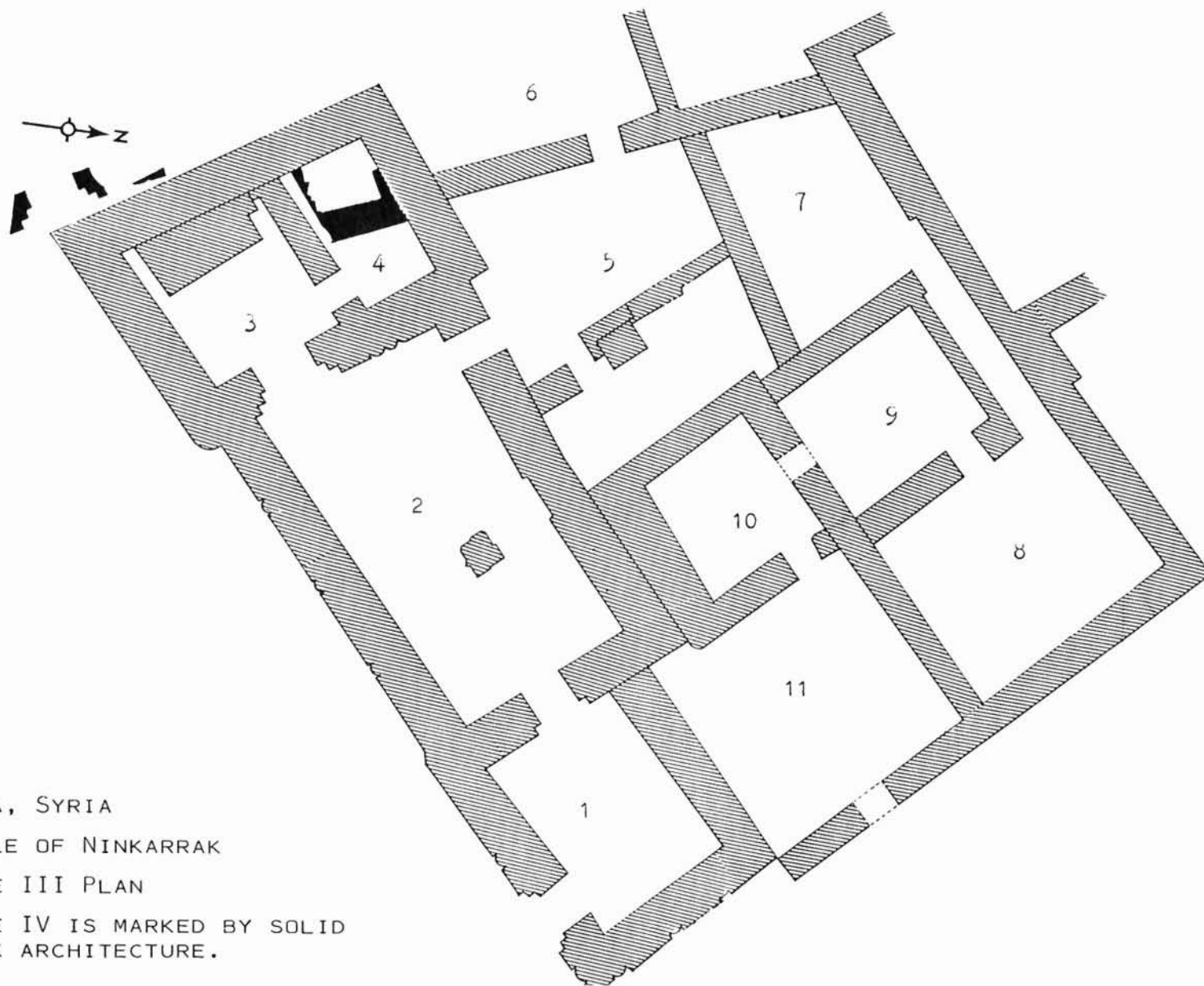
Phases and Stratigraphy: Phase III - Early

Both ceremonial and service quarters of the temple were reused and remodelled over successive generations during the Khana period. We have detected four phases in the current excavations - designated I - IV. Some evidence of the Phase IV plan is just beginning to appear and is marked on the plan (Fig. 6) by solid black, where we see a rabbeted door and recessed columns. The more excavated early phase plan, Phase III, is marked by diagonal lines on Figure 6. To the southeast, shown in lower right of the plan, the entry room (1) of the temple is decorated on the outside by round, semi-engaged columns, built with mold-made half-circular bricks. This room and the next room, the large courtyard (2), are approached through rabbeted doorways, signifying the importance of the chambers. The courtyard is also decorated on the exterior by the rounded columnar constructions, and inside, a hearth stands in the center of the ceremonial court. Both the entry room and the courtyard had low benches along the walls. Inside, to the west, the cella (3) with its large altar for the statue of the goddess is approached through another rabbeted doorway, set off on the right by more semi-engaged columns (Plate 9). The altar, rabbeted door and recessed columns were plastered and whitewashed. A subsidiary room (4-'sacristy'), adjacent to the cella served probably as a priest's room. In these two chambers, the Phase III material included several tablets, some practice mathematical texts and, interestingly, many blank tablets, suggesting some scribal training activity.

The most spectacular of the fifth season was a large cache of beads buried beneath the floor of the altar room. This hoard of nearly 7,000 carved, semi-precious stones, had been stashed, probably in a cloth bag, in a corner and represented an offering to the goddess Ninkarrak. The individual drilled beads were of carnelian, agate, lapis lazuli, rock crystal, gypsum and hematite and included several animal shapes, such as whimsical frogs, a cow and a duck (Plate 10). In addition, several scarabs were found in the cache (Plate 11).

All the rooms of the ceremonial quarter (rooms 1-4) in the early phase had a common occupation floor--a thick made, plastered surface. This same floor was the initial use surface of the service (rooms 5-11) quarter during the early phase. Access to the service quarter can be seen in Figure 6 from the courtyard through a doorway into a large chamber (5). This doorway was unique, as it was a beautiful, corbelled archway, which was discovered sealed and bricked up in the fifth season, when the courtyard of the ceremonial section was already dug (Plate 12).

This large chamber off the main temple courtyard may have served as an important ancillary room to the ceremonial sector. In it was discovered some built-in mud brick 'furniture'. Two square tables stood about 80 cm. high east of the arched door. They were plastered, one with a step which connected to a narrow partition running into the north wall. This created a small alcove behind the tables, and floor surfaces at this stage indicated less usage than over the more accessible parts of this room (Plate 13).



TERQA, SYRIA

TEMPLE OF NINKARRAK

PHASE III PLAN

PHASE IV IS MARKED BY SOLID  
BLACK ARCHITECTURE.

Fig. 6. Phase III and IV plan - the Temple of Ninkarrak. (Plan by Motevali)



Plate 9. View west from the ceremonial entry room through the courtyard with hearth in center, towards the rabbeted door in rear which leads to the cella. The altar, damaged by medieval pitting can be seen through that door, and three semi-engaged columns grace the wall to the right of the door.

Plate 10. The entire bead cache of the altar room. Here, the thousands of carved, semi-precious stones are strung for recording ease. They were, most likely, strung and buried in a cloth bag beneath the cella floor as a hiding place.

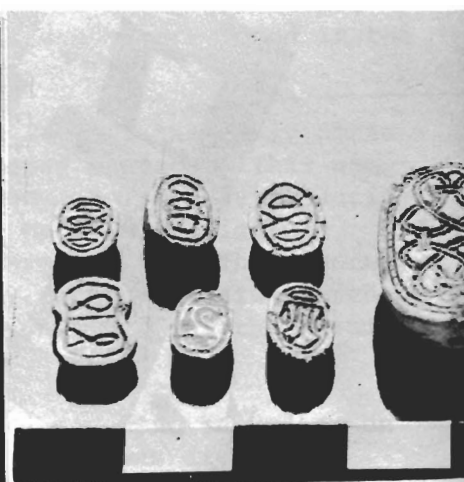
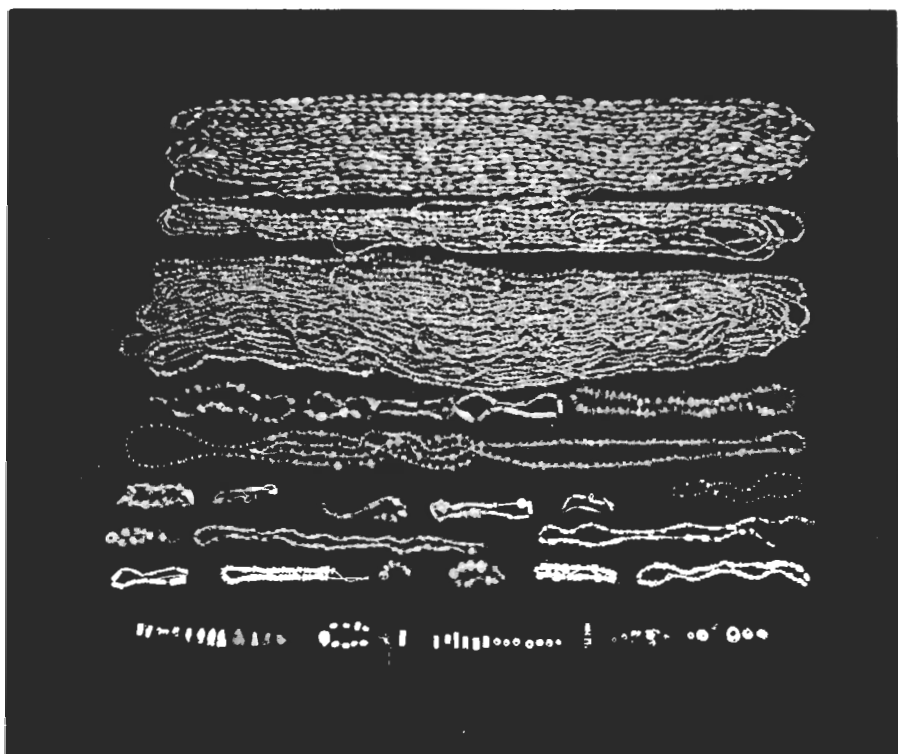


Plate 11. The undersides of several Egyptian-type scarabs found among the cache of beads.



Plate 12. View of the arched passageway from the ceremonial rooms to the service quarter. Here, the door is viewed from the temple courtyard, still sealed by the brick packing. The north arrow points to the tablet mentioned as bearing the name Ninkarrak.

Plate 13. Viewing the Temple of Ninkarrak from the west. The Euphrates is in the rear and the large chamber with the tables and a partition is in front center. In this photo, the ceremonial sector is to the right, the service quarter with outer rooms and corridor on the left.



Other interesting features included a large, covered vessel supported against a grindstone just outside the arched door. This jar was reused during the entire early phase with several successive floor build-ups (right to its rim). An oven stood against the west wall, and a bench partially limited use of the archway during the latter part of Phase III (Plate 14).

From this room passage was effected through a doorway into a small room (6) which showed many floor laminations, signifying a circulation area. A large second millennium infant burial had all but destroyed this room - it consisted of a large vessel for the body and several small offering jars. The western boundaries of this room of the service quarter and the one adjacent to it, are not completely delimited.

The next complete room (7) was preserved only in this early phase. This room may have been used in some sort of animal preparation context, as a large heap of sheep and goat bones and several bronze tools were found there. Also, two tablets with envelopes were discovered here.

One passed from this area via a narrow corridor into a long room (8, 9) divided in this phase into two smaller chambers. Of interest here was a large grindstone and a stone offering vessel (Plate 15). Other common offering vessels found in the temple are small, flat, round, shallow dishes (Plate 16). Two other rooms completed the service quarter of the temple (10, 11). The smaller room (10) was linked to the larger (11) and passage was effected from both by means of door which led out onto a street. The aforementioned residential quarter stood directly across this street.

#### Plan and Stratigraphy - Phase II and I, Middle and Late

What is of particular interest in the Phase II and I temple structure is an overall remodelling of the early Phase I building. Probably due to crumbling walls and floor build-up (1/2 meter), the service and ceremonial sectors were packed with a mud brick and debris packing and some new walls were added. Basically, however, the same plan was adhered to, with walls built or elevated directly on top of or next to, pre-existing walls. To bring the height of the new floors up over the foundations of the newer walls, and to level the building, the tops of the early walls were knocked down, the mud brick rubble falling more deeply from the higher ceremonial room walls into that sector. In the service quarter, the remaining brick rubble was supplemented by nearly one meter of a green and red debris layer, full of objects and sherds. The temple floors themselves had been left fairly clean, and therefore relatively few objects were recovered. After this rubble, packing from the wall destruction was levelled, new floors were built and the temple reused (Fig. 7). An oddity was a large elephant rib found in the packing of the service quarter (room 10). The blocking of the arched doorway took place at this time, when it was sealed and plastered over, before the packing of the room.





Plate 14. The ancillary chamber in the service quarter during excavation. The two tables and stationary vessel are at center. The arched passage, obstructed by a bench and damaged by pitting, is at the top. The oven is partially visible at the far right.



Plate 15. Stone, tripodic offering bowl from the Temple of Ninkarrak.



Plate 16. Shallow, ceramic offering bowls.

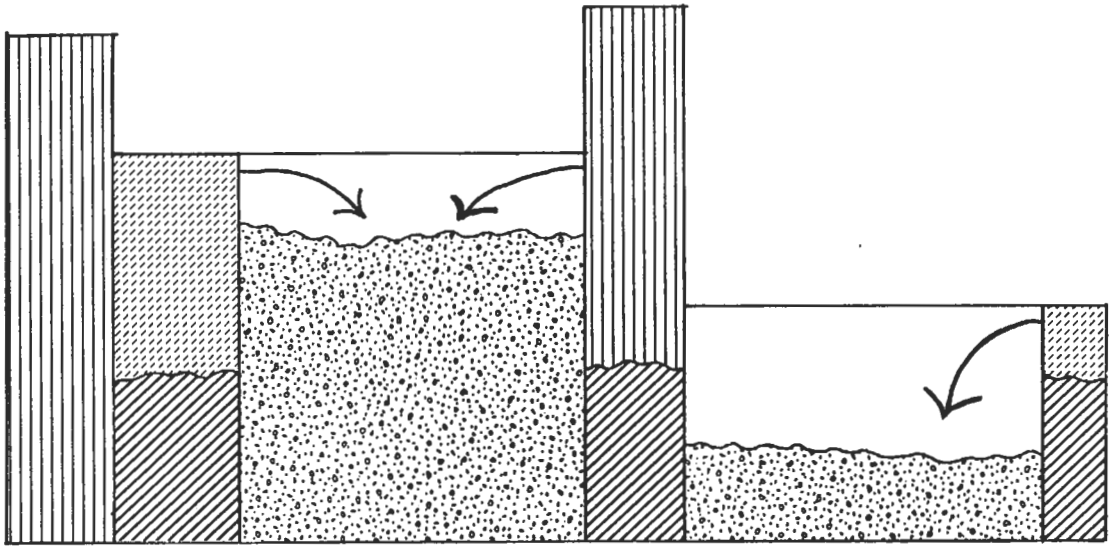


Figure 7. Diagram of Phase II packing of temple by wall destruction. The diagonal lines show Phase I (early) walls of ceremonial (left) and service (right) quarters. The dotted diagonals indicate fallen (arrows) wall rubble, creating the thick packing layer atop early floors. Plain white area shows other packed debris, with new, (middle) Phase II floor on top. New Phase II walls are represented with vertical parallel lines.



Plate 17. Bronze saw with antler handle found in second millennium rubble above the Phase I abandoned rooms of the Temple service quarter.

In Phase I, the last phase we have evidence of, some new walls were added in the ceremonial section and a new floor also. The service quarter in this period however, seems to have been limited to usage of just the room off the main courtyard (since Phase III was without furniture) and the westernmost rooms. We know this from the fact that rubble above the Phase II (Middle) occupation in the rooms nearest the street (8-11) was second millennium, not medieval. In fact, this rubble deposit shows abandonment of that portion of the service area. A beautifully made bronze saw with an antler handle was found in this second millennium rubble (Plate 17).

### The Kings of Terqa

From the epigraphic evidence, thirteen kings are named at Terqa. Some discrepancy between kings and fathers of kings may be present, thereby reducing the total. We know, however, by correlation with a year date of Samsuiluna, grandson of Hammurapi of Babylon, that the earliest known Terqa king, Yadikh-abu; was defeated by him in Samsuiluna's 28th year. We reconstruct, therefore, a date of 1721 for Yadikh-abu. Two other kings are Kashtiliash and Shunuhru-ammu, who may be dated at 1690 and 1650 B.C., respectively. These three kings are important to the present report, as they can be correlated stratigraphically with the temple and the houses across the street. Stratigraphic placement of dated tablets in the residential archives and the temple shows the early, Phase III, temple deposit to align with the reign of Kashtiliash, while the residence overlaps chronologically the reigns of all three kings. Phase II, the middle occupation of the Temple of Ninkarrak, corresponds to the reign of Shunuhru-ammu of Terqa.

### Conclusion

By first establishing an historical background, and determining, through excavation and other research, where the accumulated data will apply, the excavations at Terqa continue to contribute to the reconstruction of western Mesopotamia throughout several millennia. On a smaller scale, the data recorded and analyzed through various means during the fifth and sixth seasons have given a picture of, among others, a temple structure. Such material will be added to past and future research to create, on a grander scale, a greater comprehension of ancient Syria and the ancient Near East as a whole.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express gratitude to the Directors of the Joint Expedition to Terqa for generous use of photographs and data. The 1982, seventh, season of the Expedition is under way at Terqa at this writing, with excavations concentrating on the Phase IV Temple of Ninkarrak and the Area F residential and public buildings.

## THE SEVENTH SEASON, MAY-JUNE, 1982

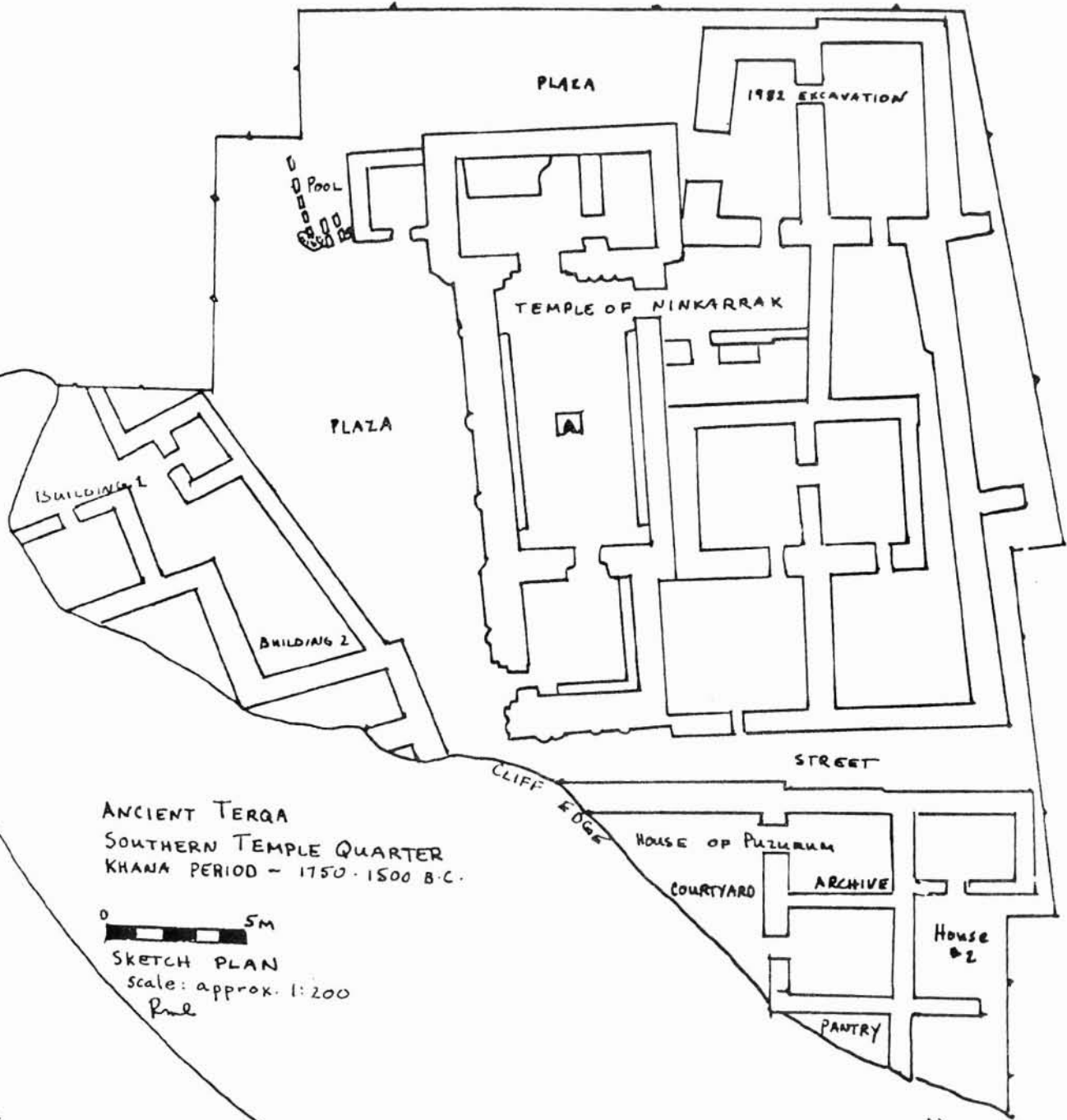
## AN UPDATE ON TERQA

Since the writing of this article, some interesting new material has come from our 7th season of excavations. First, we have in Area F, two large, public buildings with stone pavings, thick, gypsum floors, stone bins and huge storage jars standing in situ over one meter high. The precise nature of these buildings is not clear, although we have, among about 15 cuneiform tablets, a letter to Kibri-Dagan, the famous governor of Terqa under Zimri-Lim of Mari. An inscribed, sealed bulla and another dated tablet place an earlier level of the same building to the reign of Shamshi-Adad. We therefore assign a date of the early 18th century B.C. to these structures, and to the street and alley associated with them.

In Area C, further work on the Temple of Ninkarrak has added to the western side of the service quarter one large room, and has given us the completion of another there. Two buildings, probably of a public nature, have been partially excavated along the cliff edge. In these two buildings were found a beautiful, ceremonial, double axe with handle and a bronze scimitar with an inscription of the goddess. Possibly dedicated also to the service of Ninkarrak, these structures face the temple across an outdoor, open plaza area. This plaza, or Akkadian sūqum, was characterized by a thick, green organic deposition filled with sherd material which surrounds the western and southern temple. In the plaza, a public trough or pool is built into a wall which may belong to the early temple phase also. The trough drains towards the west slope of the tell, where we assume a city gate in the massive defensive system and moat. We can imagine the ancient Terqa residents entering the city from this southern gate, possibly the Mari gate, and gathering near the temple in the open market area. We began, in fact, a clearing operation of the city gate area this season, and immediately a wide expanse of brick was revealed! This investigation of the city gate must wait until the eighth season, however. For now, we are pleased with the successful excavation of the entire southern Khana period city, with the temple quarter, and the link with the earlier period under Mari rule, in Area F.

CITY GATE AREA

SECOND AND  
THIRD MILLENNIUM  
DEFENSIVE WALLS



ANCIENT TERQA  
SOUTHERN TEMPLE QUARTER  
KHANA PERIOD - 1750-1500 B.C.

0 5M  
SKETCH PLAN  
scale: approx. 1:200  
Pml



**NEAR EAST**  
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NEAR EAST ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN

New Series, No. 19

Spring, 1982

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## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

In the 1980 issue of the Bulletin (Nos. 15-16) Stephen Reimer reported on excavations at Terqa on the Euphrates River, giving special attention to the 1978 season of digging. In this issue Renata Liggett continues the description of the work at Terqa, covering the 1979 and 1980 seasons of excavation and adding a last minute update on the results of the 1982 season. (Ms Liggett is the Assistant Director of the Terqa dig.) The reader will appreciate the abundance of pictures (12) and figures (7), which help to bring the site to life.

The article by John Lawrence entitled "Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Attitudes Towards Foreigners and Their Religion" reveals numerous Old Testament connections. For example, the section on Deportation and Resettlement helps to put the deportations of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah into their proper historical perspective. It is also helpful to know that Rab-shakeh (II Kings 18:17-37) was one of the many officials in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian governmental bureaucracies.

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### Call for Volunteers

Anyone who would like to read an illustrated paper on archaeology for the NEAS sectional meetings at the December 1982 Evangelical Theological Society meetings is asked to contact Dr. W. Harold Mare. His address is Covenant Theological Seminary, 12330 Conway Road, St. Louis, MO 63141.