

TERQA

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Before becoming personally involved in field archaeology, a person may find the somnolence produced by reading expedition reports to be an unavoidable problem. If the following survey causes the reader to be drowsy, it must be the fault of the writer, for the excavations and consequent information at Terqa are anything but monotonous.

The tell, about two thirds of which is presently occupied by the modern Syrian village of Ashara, has unequivocally been identified as the Babylonian city of Terqa. This representation of past and present is located some forty miles north of Mari and sixty miles south of the province capital, Deir ez-Zor. The tell lies on the west bank of the Euphrates River and spreads over about twenty-two acres. The shifting course of the river has left an eroded cliff on the east edge of the tell, suggesting that the original site may have been much larger, perhaps twice what is now extant.

Formal excavations are presently in their fifth season under the aegis of the Joint Expedition to Terqa, a joint effort of UCLA and Cal State LA, with the cooperation of Johns Hopkins University, the University of Arizona, and the University of Poitiers. The project is directed by Giorgio Buccellati and Marylin Kelly-Buccellati, with whose permission the present article has been prepared.

The first season, consisting of one week during the spring of 1975, was carried out under the direction of Delbert Hillers of Johns Hopkins University. In the fall of 1976, UCLA joined Johns Hopkins and the leadership changed to the present directors. Subsequent excavations in the fall of 1977 and 1978 marked only an increase in the size and production of the team. Before discussing the results of these seasons, let us briefly examine the background of the earliest discoveries and identification of Terqa by archaeologists.

In 1897, a tablet (AO 2673) concerning Terqa was published by Thureau-Dangin. The text referred to the registration of a parcel of land "in the new city of Terqa (i-na URU. GIBIL. KI. ša URU. tir-qa KI.)" by Išar-Lim, king of Khana.

Condamin published a tablet (AO 4628) in 1908, which had been submitted by a local citizen who reported that the tablet had been found

at Ashara. The tablet is a foundation tablet of Šamsi-Adad which records the building of Dagan's temple at Terqa.

The first known visit of an archaeologist, which led to the subsequent identification of the tell, was by E. Hertzfeld in 1910. Reportedly, Hertzfeld had stopped at the castle of Rahaba, while enroute from Aleppo to Baghdad, when his horses escaped. By the time the horses were recovered, Hertzfeld had walked to Ashara, a village one hour's ride east of the normal caravan route. He remained in Ashara for two days and collected several artifacts, the most significant being a foundation tablet of Zimri-Lim which mentions the name Terqa.

In 1923 Thureau-Dangin and P. Dhorme conducted a short one week excavation of Ashara. In this brief period of time, two soundings were made, one of which began at the highest point of the tell and proceeded to the lowest levels. The results were published the following year and reported the three major occupational periods at Terqa: Islamic, second millennium B.C., and third millennium B.C. But it was to be more than fifty years later before excavations were resumed at Ashara.

Survey of '75-'77 seasons

The findings of the first three seasons will be briefly summarized here in order to provide the uninformed reader with a background for the 1978 season report. In the three excavational seasons, '75-'77, the original suggestion of the three major eras found at Terqa was confirmed and elucidated. Evidence for the Islamic period was found primarily in terms of pottery, burials, and storage pits. Structural remains were then virtually absent. Furthermore, the depth of the Islamic level is shallow, ranging from approximately one to two meters. Typical artifacts consisted of glazed sherds, glass bracelets, tripods, and fire dogs. The only structural remains found consisted of a kiln, evidently used for glazing. These discoveries suggest that Terqa may simply have been a craft center during the Islamic period. Hopefully further seasons will shed more light on this possibility.

The bulk of the excavations carried out in the '75-'77 seasons involved the second millennium period, specifically that of the Old Babylonian Khana kingdom (1750-1500 B.C.). The evidence can be summarized in three general categories: burials, residential units, and artifacts.

That burials be discussed separately is appropriate because of the frequency and style of the second millennium burials found during these three seasons. In the 1976 season alone, no less than eighteen second millennium burials were found in two excavational units. Eleven were found in what is designated SG 2-3, an area on the northern edge of the tell. Seven more were found in SG4, an area on the eastern side of the tell. All of the burials in SG 2-3 were adults whereas all but one in SG 4 were infants. Several more burials were found in the 1977 season. The common denominator of all of these second millennium burials is that they were buried in large ceramic jars, usually capped by another vessel. Only rarely were any artifacts found with the burial.

Besides burials, the '75-'77 seasons also produced a large amount of second millennium residential units. The residential structures found during this period are more plentiful than in other periods, since the Islamic period has virtually none and because excavations have not yet reached third millennium levels in any significant volume. The second millennium residential units appeared well laid out and showed extensive reuse and rebuilding. Walls stood about two meters in height and were built with sun-dried bricks. A street between residential units was also found and is approximately two meters wide.

Artifacts were also abundantly found, too many in fact to provide a satisfactory report. Particularly noteworthy was a large discovery of artifacts found in SG4. In this small room with approximately three square meters of floor space, seventy-six artifacts were uncovered. Most of the objects were ceramic vessels although some stone tools were also found.

Epigraphic evidence consists of an Old Babylonian tablet found in the last week of the '76 season--a list of sick workmen on a particular day. In the '77 season a somewhat enigmatic tablet was found, perhaps being a school text. Even more significant, a contract tablet was found which clearly represents the Khana period. Fragments were also found in this season, two were Khana contracts and one referred to an ice house.

Third millennium evidence is not yet as plentiful as that from the second millennium era but there was excavated, during the 1975-1977 period, a large area in the southeast section of the tell, which dates to the third millennium B.C. This area (area B) was originally a sunken area and was covered by modern garbage. Once the refuse was removed, a single large third millennium brick structure was found. It appears that this structure was originally the city wall but later became used for storage and even later for burials. Two burials were found in this structure and were distinct from the second millennium burials in that they were not buried in large jars and also they contained various artifacts, e.g. bottles, jewelry, an ostrich egg, etc.

Highlights of the 1978 season

The 1978 season was not only the longest period of excavation in the history of the tell (lasting from the second week in September to the first week in December), but also utilized the greatest number of excavators (averaging a staff of thirty-five with about thirty local workmen.)

Perhaps the most appropriate characteristic by which this season could be concisely depicted is that of unanticipated events. This was first experienced when, upon arrival, the tell was found to be under excavation by the municipal sewer project which had cut several hundred meters of sewer trenches in the southwest area of the tell. But it was also somewhat unforeseen that in the last week of the season we should be

digging with lights at night in order to complete a particular level of a room containing several tablets or that we should be closing the last unit on the day before leaving. Though these events were unforeseen, they certainly were not unprofitable.

The examination of the trenches dug for the sewer lines occupied the entire season, a considerable inconvenience which was graciously tolerated by the people and city officials alike. As a result of this unorthodox method of excavation, a tremendous amount of valuable information has been gained which otherwise may have taken several seasons to obtain. This information can be, with a bit of oversimplification, classified under three headings: (1) chronology, (2) the city wall, and (3) general occupational configuration.

The trenches confirmed, in every instance, that Terqa was occupied during the three eras of Islamic, second millennium B.C., and third millennium B.C. The trenches also added information regarding a possible first millennium B.C. or Aramaic occupation. In this instance a burial was found with the deceased wearing a gold nose ring and bronze bracelets, a procedure known to exist in the first millennium B.C. Admittedly this suggestion of Aramaic occupation is tentative and awaits further confirmation. Finally, the trenches produced evidence that dates the city wall as early as 3000 B.C.

Besides providing information regarding the chronology of the site, the trenches also provided a great amount of information about the city wall. The findings here duplicated what had been found in area B, that being, a city wall constructed in several phases--the first stage being five meters in width with a stone retaining wall at the base, the second stage consisting of eight meters in width with another stone retaining wall, and the third stage being primarily an outer ring with an open space on the inside. Once again the trenches provided additional information and revealed the possibility of a moat outside the city wall. Only one of the trenches extended past the city wall and revealed a series of stratigraphic levels descending away from the wall until the contemporary water table was reached. This represents a moat or channel which surrounded the city wall system on the outside.

Other than this, the trenches provided information pertaining to the general occupational configuration of the tell. An example of this is a third millennium residential unit found containing pottery and a stone laid floor.

The excavation of the trenches was paralleled by the opening of eight new squares plus the continuation of some previously excavated units. A single square, opened in the northeast section of the tell (area E), produced several bits of previously unrecorded information. In this square located on the highest part of the tell, the first possibility of an Islamic dwelling was found. Also discovered were artifacts and residential units which seem to date to the late second millennium, a period previously unrecorded at Terqa.

In the southeast section of the tell (area C) where several squares had been opened in the previous seasons, four new squares were added, besides continuing to dig a room left unfinished from the previous season. That it was left unfinished refers to the fact that a particular cultural level had been left unfinished. This had been done advisedly because of the fact that a tablet portion had been found in this room in the closing days of the previous season when sufficient time was not left for continuing proper excavations. Our anticipation was not unwarranted here though, as the remaining portion of the tablet was recovered in addition to several other tablets. It was only in the closing days of the season that the floor to this room was finally reached. The tablets date to the Khana period and are all economic in nature. The tablets and the rest of the contents of the room (mostly ceramic vessels), were found to be in a seeming state of disarray, suggesting that this room may have been a storage room, comparable perhaps to a modern day attic.

Historical Implications

Now that the concepts of Mesopotamian history have been shown to be in need of revision by the discoveries at Tell Mardikh, excavations in Syria are becoming increasingly valuable in the reshaping of our understanding of Mesopotamian culture. Terqa, with significant second and third millennium occupation, is and will be important in aiding this process. Yet because excavations at Terqa have only quite recently begun, the site often seems to invoke more questions than it answers.

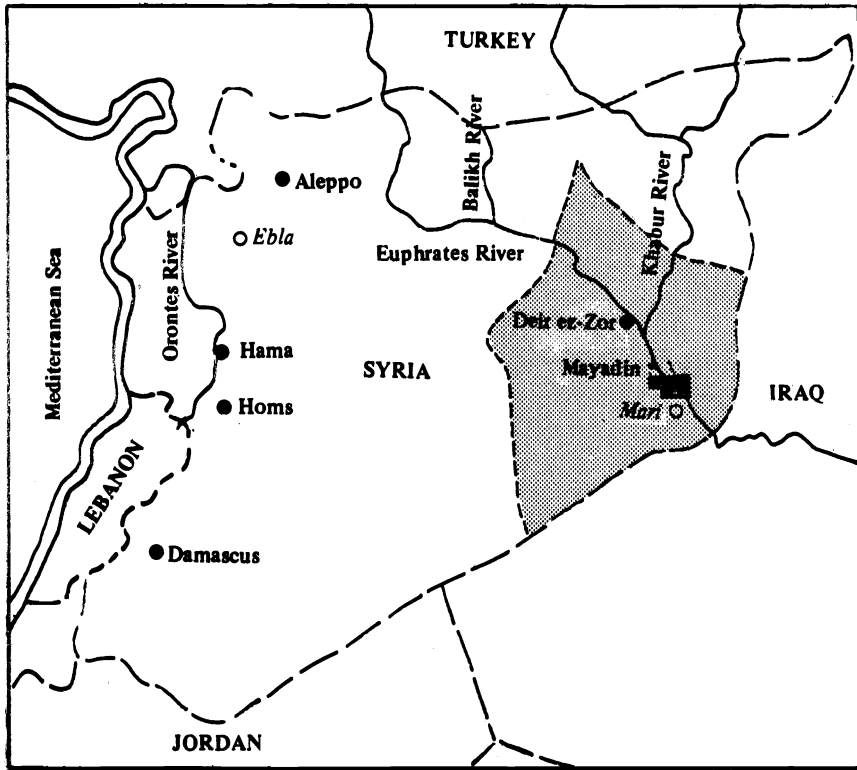
One of the more important historical questions concerning the excavations is, "What was the relationship between Mari and Terqa during the third millennium B.C.?" Considering the size and age of the city wall, it seems undeniable that Terqa was a major city in the third millennium. That it played a dominant role in regards to Mari at the beginning of the third millennium is a probability. Situated halfway between Akkad and Ebla, Terqa must have been influenced by both cultures and contributed to their reciprocal contacts. It is known that Terqa was the main center of Dagan worship, and it may thus have been the last station for the kings of Akkad in Dagan territory.


What happened in Terqa that allowed Mari to rise above it in the mid-third millennium remains uncertain. Nevertheless, we do know that Terqa played a dependent role under the rule of Mari until the destruction of Mari by Hammurapi. At that time Terqa evidently replaced the vacuum left by the fall of Mari. We do know that Terqa was an important center during the Khana kingdom, 1750-1500. The epigraphic evidence found to date has been helpful in illuminating the role of Terqa during this era. There are 13 Khana kings mentioned in the tablets found at Terqa. Architectual evidence also points to the fact that Terqa was probably the capital of the Khana kingdom, or at least a major city.

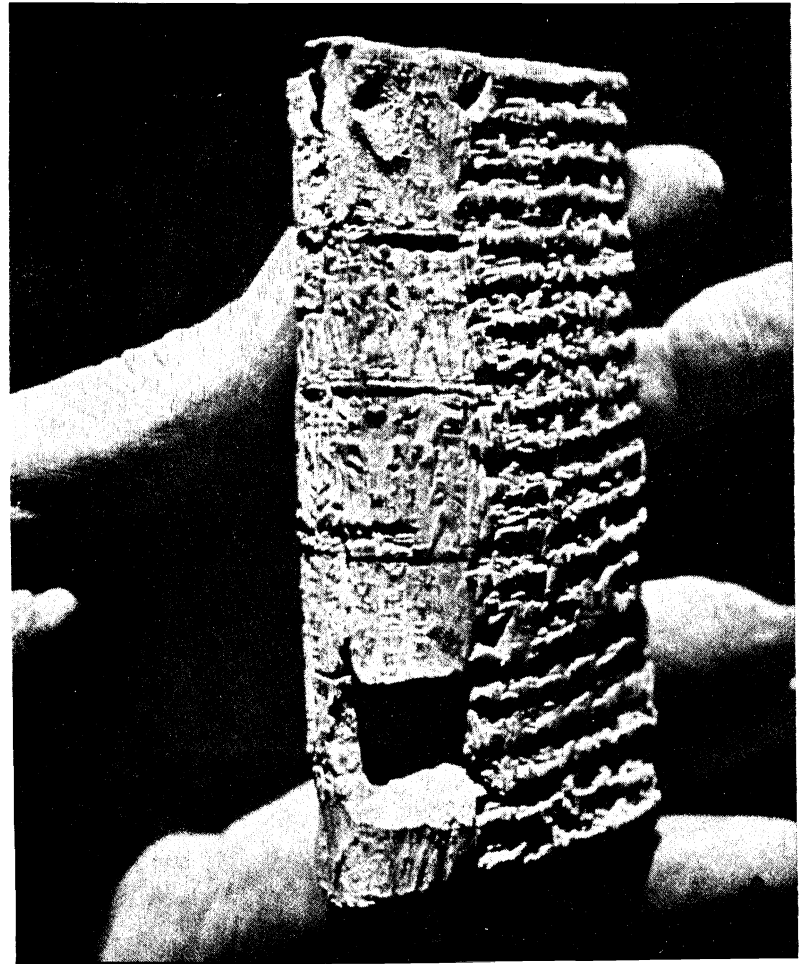
Other issues remain which hopefully can be enlightened by continuing excavations at Terqa; e.g. the extent and nature of the Khana

kingdom, the possible nomadic culture during the Mari period (Terqa was geographically closer to the Amorite peasant/nomads, and at least half of the more than 300 personal names in tablets found at Terqa are Amorite), the relationship between Terqa and the Hurrians (it seems that Terqa was the southernmost province of the Mitanni kingdom), etc.

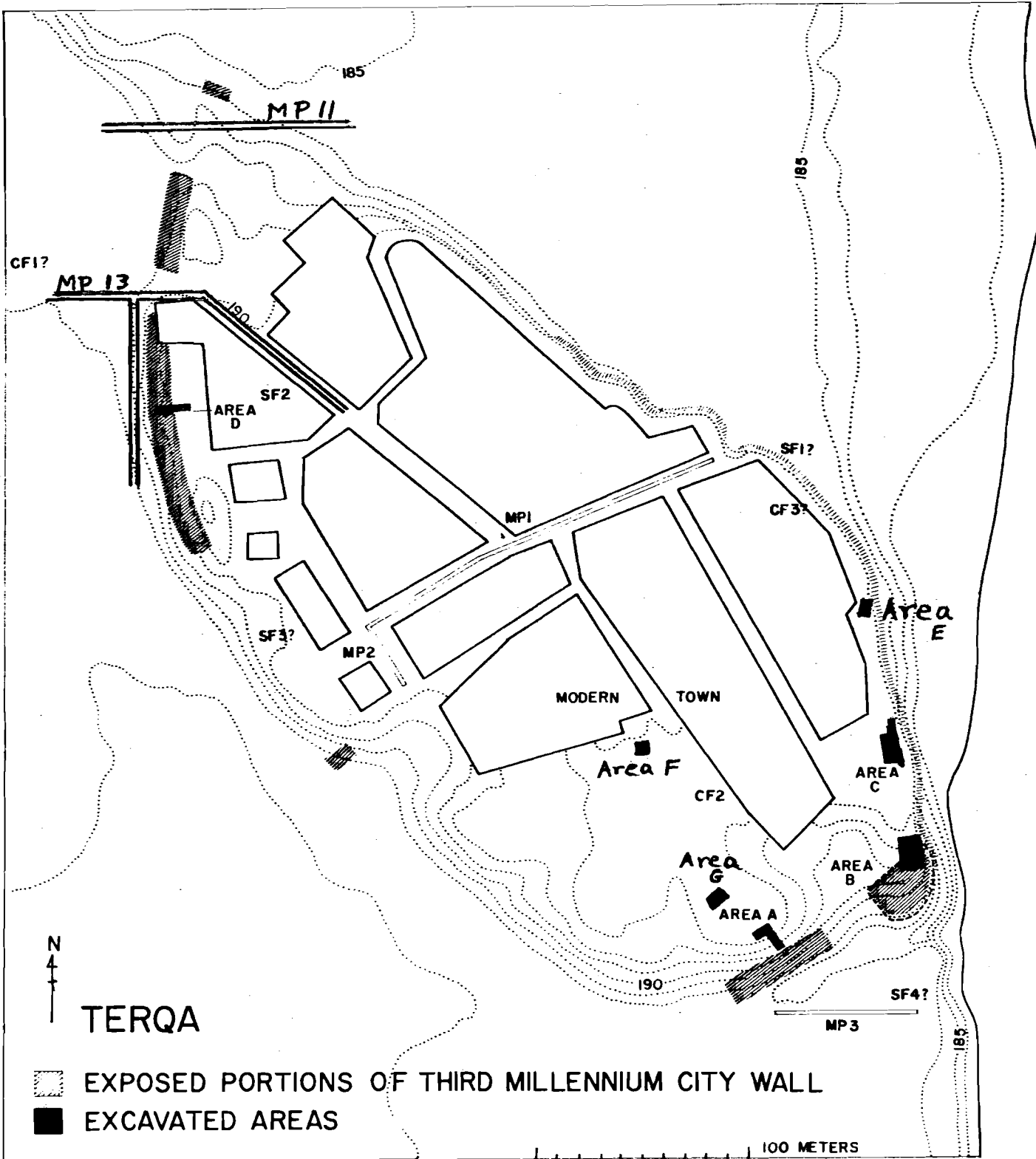
Hopefully this article has provided an appropriate overview of the excavations at Terqa. The more interested reader is referred to a series of publications which have been timely issued by the excavators under the title, Terqa Preliminary Reports, numbering already eleven different titles, plus three audiovisual modules with ample documentation (all available from Undena Publications in Malibu California).



 Deir ez-Zor Province

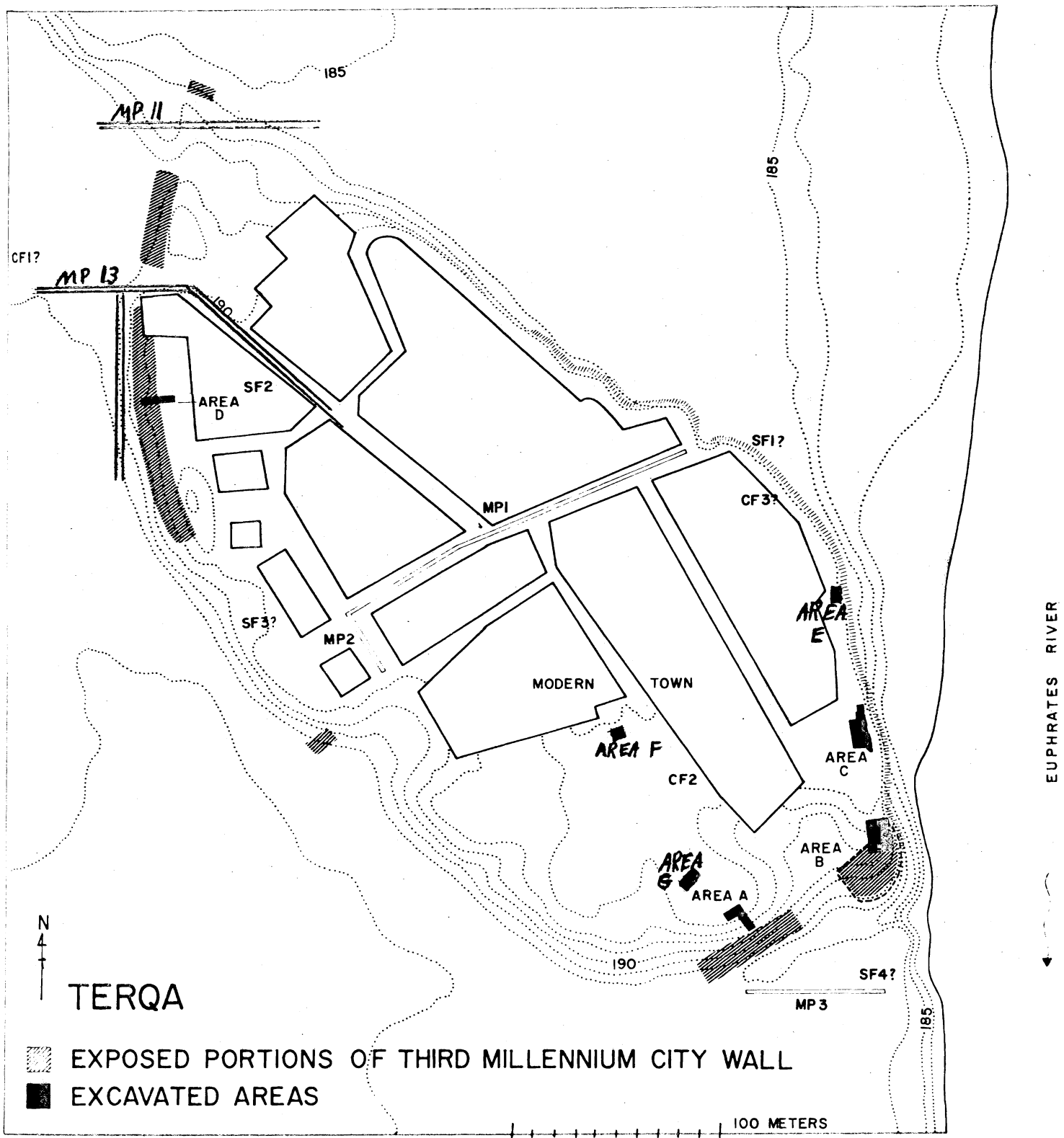


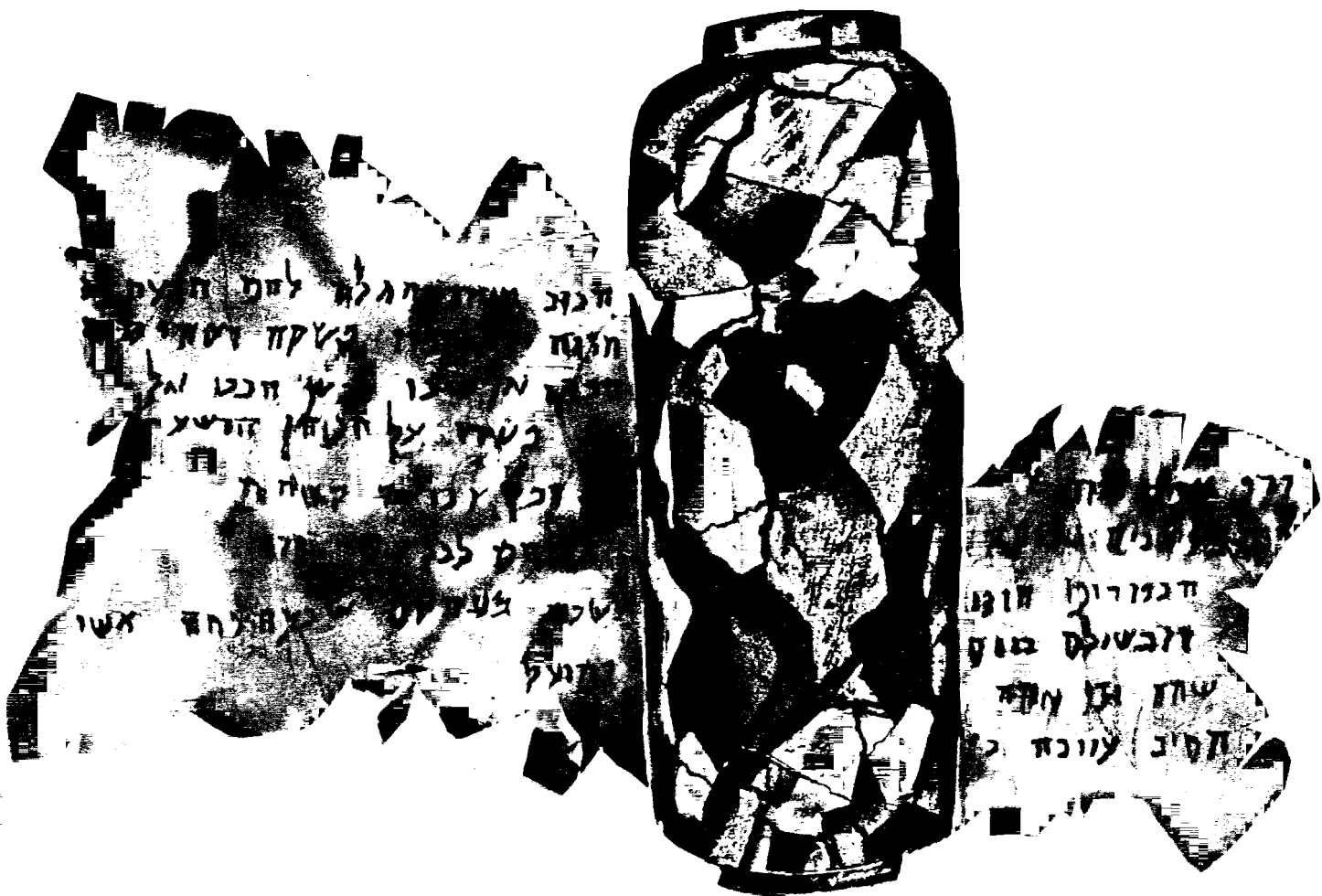
Clay tablet of the age of Hammurapi from Terqa



TERQA

-  EXPOSED PORTIONS OF THIRD MILLENNIUM CITY WALL
-  EXCAVATED AREAS





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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Archaeology is not an end in itself; instead it is a servant of various other disciplines. For example, it serves to provide both primary and background information for the general historian. More particularly the archaeology of Bible lands renders invaluable service to the biblical scholar. His understanding of cultural backgrounds is enhanced; details of biblical history are supplied or confirmed; word meanings are clarified; chronology is corrected--to mention but a few of the services rendered in the biblical field.

Such contributions are apparent in the papers which make up this issue of the NEAS Bulletin. Monty Mers' study of sacrificial terminology and practice draws upon archaeological finds in Ugarit to point up the similarities and the marked distinctiveness that exists between the pagan sacrificial system of Ugarit and the sacrificial practice of ancient Israel.

Stephen Reimer's article on Terqa may at first appear to be only of interest to the student of general history, but the Terqa excavation is helping (along with Mari and Ebla) to develop a more detailed understanding of the culture that lies behind the Old Testament record.

Gerald Mattingly's discussion of Neo-Assyrian influence at the site of ancient Yurtza shows how "secular archaeology" has served biblical studies, revealing a wealth of information concerning "the conditions of Philistia in the seventh century B.C." and the environment of Judah during that same period.

And John Lawrence, in his study of Graeco-Roman sacrificial divination, by drawing on archaeological findings from Nineveh to Mari to Ugarit to Hazor, illumines the Old Testament rejection of pagan sacrificial divination.

Thus, gradually but steadily, patient excavators of many ancient sites continue to expand our understanding of the biblical world, its life and its practices.