

**AVM 1 Transcript**  
**by Ann Tsueng (January 2010)**

Time	Dialogue
0	<p>Terqa, an ancient city, buried beneath the modern town of Ashara in Eastern Syria. Its location on the Euphrates about 60 km north of the Iraqi border, and of the ancient city of Mari in the province of Derazor. Across the desert from the Syrian capital, Damascas.</p> <p>A new feature on the Syrian landscape, the Tabka dam, to the east of Elepo. One of its magnificent effects has been to bring under control what used to be, downstream in Ashara,</p>
1	<p>a very damaging river at flood station.</p> <p>The mound is characterized by a sharp escarpel on the east, rising some 18 meters over the river, in contrast to the gentle slope on the opposite side.</p> <p>Until the Tabka dam was built, the water rose high against the mound, therefore much of the ancient city has eroded away—possibly half, if a symmetrical slope may be presumed to the east of what is today the highest point of the mound. Only geomorphological studies would yield some concrete evidence about the ancient course of the river, and the total configuration of the site.</p> <p>For now, let us look at the skyline of Atel, seen here in its North-South profile from across the river, against the setting sun. Still from the east, but with the sun behind us now, we gain a better view of the details- the contemporary structures of the top, and the ancient deposition levels below.</p> <p>The same superimposition of new on old can be seen from the north, and from the south.</p>
2	<p>A close up of the escarpment will serve to demonstrate how effectively the river cuts through the heart of the mound.</p> <p>On a resulting vertical face, the archaeologist can read this stratographic history of the site.</p> <p>Debris, a butting of vertical face, this contemporary refuse which serves the archaeologist by protecting the section.</p> <p>Now, to the top of the mound. A vanish point for the panoramic view of the river, the fields, the trees, and in the distance, the high cliff of the valley edge. Cut into the desert floor by the meandering force of the river over the centuries.</p> <p>A close-up view of the cliffs show them in contrast to the cotton fields.</p> <p>The town of Ashara, shown in light brown, extends in part over the Tel, to the south</p>

	<p>in the area free of the houses, there is ample room for archaeological excavations. The current ones being identified in red.</p> <p>The present area of the Tel is about 25 acres, approximately ten of which are</p>
3	<p>readily available for investigation. Thus archaeology at ancient Terqa is carried out against the background of modern Ashara.</p> <p>The life of the past being echoed by the life of the present—through its public buildings, its park, its market, its streets, its people, its houses-- all in a sort of organic interaction of bygone and ongoing life ways that which the Tel has been and remains the permanent witness over the centuries.</p> <p>The first archeological report about the site goes back to 1914, by chance, [Hedsfeld], during a forced pause on a reconnaissance trip, came to Ashara and found an inscription which identified the site as Terqa.</p>
4	<p>The first regular archaeological work was undertaken in 1923, by Tu Ro Dange and Thorm. Their brief season with a handful of legionnaires as workman yielded evidence for a very interesting stratographic sequence—showing that the occupation of the site extended back into the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC.</p> <p>Their published report gives a good documentation of the finds, but does not report the location of their two field operations. On the basis of inferential evidence, their soundings was probably located as shown on the map, Sounding 01 to the north, and Sounding 02 to the south, designations which have been introduced by the American expedition. These two soundings are adjacent to the American operation, as shown here as 5.</p> <p>Sounding 01 would then be what appears today as a semi-circular shaft on the upper face of the escarpment.</p> <p>Sounding 02 would be a hump,</p>
5	<p>known locally as the Sheikh's tomb. It is shown here at the moment when a mother has come to pray for the health of her baby, on which occasion she distributes candies to the ever present children.</p> <p>From a different angle, the same location is shown here, at the edge of the American excavations.</p> <p>On the one hand, there are no structures associated with the Sheikh's tomb. And on the other, Tor de Gan and Thorm describe having found in their second Soundings the remains of an important 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium grave.</p> <p>Therefore, it is possible that their discovery gave rise to a folk tradition lending special significance to the spot.</p> <p>It wasn't until 50 years later that regular excavations were resumed at Terqa. In 1974,</p>

	<p>Teresa Carter of John Hopkins University obtained a permit to work there. And in the following year, [Delba Hillers], from the same university, directed a brief season of Soundings, referred to as The First Season. During a short period of 10 days,</p>
6	<p>in the spring of 1975, Hillers was able to show that the Islamic occupation at the site was limited to the top meter or so, and that immediately below, there was already material from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.</p> <p>The two squares opened by Hiller, SG1, near the eastern edge of the mound, was in the path of one of the dirt roads of the town.</p> <p>The Second Season lasted 6 weeks in the fall of 1976, and was directed by Giorgio Buccellati, of the Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, and Mary-Kelly Buccellati, California University of Los Angeles. The enlarged university participation in the work is reflected in the title of “Joint-American expedition to Terqa.”</p> <p>Linking our operations with those of our predecessors, we opened up a square, SG4, on the edge of the cliff, near the highest point of the mound, at</p>
7	<p>the southern end we continued the square started in The First Season, SG2, next to which we opened another one of the same size, SG3. The third operation consisted mostly of surface cleaning in SG5. In addition, to control the excavations, there were important chance finds shown by dots made by the local townspeople.</p> <p>A cuneiform tablet came from the surface a bit north of our sounding SG4. Some 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium pottery was discovered at a depth of about 2 meters below the floor of a courtyard near the northernmost portion of the mound. Second millennium pottery, with [burgeoning pub] marks was found in the course of gardening on the west side. These finds are important in that they are all of an early date and were made at or near the</p>
8	<p>surface, at widely scattered points throughout the mound. This suggests that most of the occupational debris at Terqa dates to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia. Other excavations resulted from a municipal sewer project.</p> <p>As shown by the color codes, the upper trench was mostly Islamic at its right end and mostly 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium at its left end. The lower trench, outside the main perimeter of the Tel, is exclusively Islamic. The trenches were of uniform dimensions, one meter wide and two meters deep. We collected a large sample of artifactual remains from the debris, which had been heaped on either the side of the trench by a bulldozer. Since stratigraphic information was lost, only the horizontal position could be recorded. With</p>
9	<p>this we can still establish some meaningful distribution of patterns as reflected in a preliminary way by the color scheme on the map. The lower trench revealed an interesting Islamic glaze in kiln, with tripods and [firedogs] still in place.</p> <p>We will now still concentrate on the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium structural remains. Before the last season in 1976, the only clue to 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium occupation at the site came from the French soundings of 1923. Given the nature of stratigraphic deposition, we did</p>

	<p>not expect to find remains of this early period in the initial early phases of our work. But, it was to be otherwise. What first caught our attention was the wide depression in the profile of the mound, to a point just 3 meters above the plain level.</p>
10	<p>There were vertical lines marking sharp projections in the face of the cliff which appear to be due to the presence of solid brick work. This impression was corroborated by the observation of deep undercuts at the base of the projection, obviously resulting from the action of the water in times of flood. This too implies that the mass above was highly compact much as one would expect from structural brick work. The area, SG5, is located on the southeastern end of the mound, and is 25 meters long.</p> <p>When excavations started, the top of the area was covered with the modern refuse of the town which, shows up distinctly through its dark colors against the lighter brown of the ancient cultural deposit. It was a</p>
11	<p>relatively flat area, as illustrated here, first in the south, and then the north. Our intention was to clean away the modern refuse, thereby exposing the lower surface. As it turned out, the refuse accumulation was piled high – the depths of its layers is well-evidenced by the sharp interruption of the slope caused by our excavations. The thickness of the contemporary refuse is also apparent in the section as seen from the front, where we can best notice its soft consistency. The massive refuse was contained by the higher vertical face of the mound on the right.</p> <p>Our original expectations were simply to gain some clues as to the date of the remains below the refuse by</p>
12	<p>connecting them stratigraphically with the cultural levels on the right. But, we were more fortunate.</p> <p>As the cleaning progressed, the brickwork emerged with an obvious articulation revealing some features such as a well. By the end, we had found a single brick structure of massive proportions.</p> <p>The top surface of the brick work was very irregular as the result of erosion and recent human activity, so that it had hardly any relationship to the shape or function of the original surface. Even for the well, we could not determine whether it was contemporary with the brickwork or cut into it later. Similarly, the outside face of the wall, in spite of its geometric articulation which caught our attention from the first,</p>
13	<p>did not correspond to the original façade of the building. But, inside the walls, on the lower right in this view, we were able to trace its interior space to a depth of about half a meter. As it turned out, the space continued all around and thus delineated a small room of about 2 by 4 meters in size. It had a good floor, sloping inward toward the right of the picture, a narrow doorway, and one rock kern on either side of the doorway. From these kerns, several rocks had tumbled down along the sloping floor. Only very few shards were found on the floor, but a more important find was awaiting us within the walls itself, on the western side of the room.</p>
14	<p>Cut into this wall was a burial. The skeleton of a woman was lying on its side with its</p>

	<p>back against the side of one of the rock kerns. Her legs were flexed, and one hand was touching a nearby vessel, on the upper right. On the humorous were two toggle pins which had obviously served to fashion her garments on her shoulder, together with a white shell ring and the black beads which were found next to the pins. The jar which the hand was still touching, and the small bowl uncovered next to it, provided a terminal [ceniclam] for the large brick structure into which the burial cut was cut, the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. After the objects had been taken out of the ground and cleaned, we could determine even better that they all showed good parallels with similar objects from same date from</p>
15	<p>[bazaar], [brack], [field], and as far afield of the [caban area] area as eastern Turkey.</p> <p>The function of the room of the kerns, or indeed, of the large wall itself is left unexplained for now. But the very scale of the remains is sufficient to indicate the monumental character of the original structure. Prospects for future research are good, since the brickwork seems to extend further west under the refuse heaps, and since additional floors are likely to be found sealed below the one uncovered at present in the room.</p>
16	<p>For now, one more word about two interesting chance finds relating to the early periods of Terqa. A twin jar, of the type we uncovered in the burial in SG5 was found by a lady digging in her courtyard at a distance of some 400 meters in the northwest of the monumental building. And it was found, together with another jar also typical of the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, giving a good indication of the considerable extent which Terqa had reached at that early period.</p> <p>A second, important chance find is a tablet of a type identical to the ones from Mari dated in the period of the [shakanakuhs], the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, and recently published by [Le Me.] Our tablet contains a list of three personal names [Theadado, Coman, Kadzu],</p>
17	<p>qualified as workmen, and identified as being sick. The reverse gives the day, the 21<sup>st</sup>, and the month, [Abierto]. The fine spot of the tablet was shown to us as being some 100meters to the north of our operation SG4, along the edge of the cliff facing the river. Since this came at the very end of the season, it was impossible to probe the area—a task which is left for the coming season.</p> <p>The most important findf of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium fall into two categories: several burial complexes and a residential unit. The burials were found in SG 2-3, on the southern side of the mound, in what seems to have been an open area, and in SG 4 in an area</p>
18	<p>of an abandoned house. In both operations, the top levels showed evidence of an Islamic occupation. Structural remains from the Islamic period were only modest: such as a bread oven, of which a portion is shown here as preserved in a [book]. In SG 2-3, a total of ten burials were found, in large jars, such as the one shown here, in the center, and in the right corner. Some were cut by later floors, as seen in this picture, where the yellow rope marks the level of a floor, and the white rope, the outline of a later wall. Discovery of the skeleton inside the jar was predictable. Typically, the large burial jars were covered by a lid, the reuse of a broken vessel. At times, smaller vessels presumably for offerings, were placed next to the larger jar, as</p>

	in the case of this, the largest burial
19	<p>jar uncovered, more than a meter and half in height. Once again, the contents included no more than the skeleton, save in this exceptional case for a small vessel found together with a bone. The burials in SG4 were found inside the walls of an abandoned house. Here, most of the burials, five in number, consisted of infant skeletons contained in medium-sized jars with a small, shallow bowl used as a lid. Some of these burial jars had been repaired with [stichment] in antiquity. Others were wasters which could never have been used for utilitarian purposes. A typical shape consists of a large jar, with a small, perforated base. With the jars were normally found several goblets, also used for offerings. The most important single object discovered next to these burials</p>
20	<p>was a stamp seal with the representation of a quadruped in a rampant position. The closest parallels are from old [Hitype] levels in old [Anatolian] sites, where the animal is normally identified with a hair.</p> <p>The lower levels of the house, within which these burials were found, yielded a rich inventory of utilitarian artifacts, in spite of the limited size of the area exposed. Portions of two rooms, on the right, and an open area, on the left. The walls were standing at a considerable height, more than two meters, and showed ample evidence that a fierce fire had caused the roof to fall in (several roofing pieces were found on the floor). This fire had scorched in places not only the size of the walls, but had also heavily burnt the artifacts and [sprawled] the stone tools.</p>
21	<p>However, it preserved the contents in C2, as they were at the moment of the fire. The most interesting selection of artifacts was found in what appeared to be a storage area, of which only a little more than three square meters were preserved. This floor was covered with more than 70 artifacts. On the left of the diagonal, one sees the sharpness of the cliff, best appreciated from this angle.</p> <p>The artifacts seem to cluster naturally into functional categories—such a small goblet, nested together next to a pitcher-like container, which might have been used for pouring by the ancient householder. Here is a large [oval] jar still sitting in a stand, and a large bowl used to store a pitcher. One of the most interesting shapes is a so-called [bicid] jar,</p>
22	<p>approximately spherical and made curiously of three different pieces stuck together. This is a distinctive type, otherwise found in [Mari and Bago]. The inventory of this storage room reflects the general inventory of the site in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium. Combining the finds from old operations at the site, it appears that this stage of the excavations, that the most common vessels were goblets, elegant and diversified in shape, and generally with a small button-like base. Other types included bottles, small jars, and small bowls. Besides the vessels, the ceramic assemblage includes figurines. In addition to ceramics, we find objects of stone, as with this grinding tool, of bone, as with</p>
23	<p>this [aul], of metal, copper or bronze, as with displayed, or another piece, possibly an armor scale. Many of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium artifacts have close parallels in sites like [mari and nuzi]. A typological [seriation] based on these parallels correspond neatly to a stratographic [seriation]. Thus, one of the most important results which we may</p>

	hope from future excavations of Terqa is to be able to bridge, with continuous stratigraphic documentations, going from [Mari]-like to [Nuzi]-like artifactual assemblages what is otherwise a gap in our understanding of the Near Eastern chronological sequence. Terqa, as the main center and perhaps the capital of the Kingdom of [Hana], which is known to have flourished in precisely that period, is one of the most promising sites in this respect.
24	It will be for future seasons to bear this out.