

## ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF EPIGRAPHIC FINDS AT TERQA

*By Giorgio Buccellati*

One of the interesting aspects of the epigraphic finds at Terqa is the distribution which they exhibit throughout the site. This phenomenon deserves special attention, particularly when our finds are compared to those of the great archives of other ancient Syrian capitals.

Much of the ancient site of Terqa is covered by the modern town of Ashara, hence the area affected by our excavations is relatively restricted, in terms of both the total size available and the type of ancient settlement accessible. We have only about ten acres in what was the southern periphery of the ancient city. We know that there were important public buildings at Terqa, which for some two hundred years after the fall of Mari was the capital of the Kingdom of Khana, comprising essentially the (lower) basin of the Khabur and a portion of the middle Euphrates. In particular, we know from the texts of the existence of the royal palace and the temple of Dagan, but these are not in the accessible area: several indications point to the east-central portion of the modern town archives in the area where excavations are possible.

In addition we have found no trace of widespread destruction and consequent burning, so that the state of preservation of unbaked tablets is often very poor, and makes their discovery a very laborious and slow process indeed: they have often been retrieved in heavy brick-fall or brick-fill, where it is difficult to distinguish them from the rubble in which they came to be embedded.

In spite of these difficulties, the epigraphic harvest at Terqa has been rich, and especially very diversified. It should be remembered that Terqa has the distinction of being the first site where cuneiform tablets were found in Syria, and that in fact until the discovery of the Mari archives Terqa was also the site in Syria that had yielded the largest number of tablets: although a small group in itself (some 20 texts) they were important enough to stimulate the archaeological foray of Thureau-Dangin and Dhorme in 1923, and to establish itself as a well-known epigraphic genre in Assyriology -- the so-called 'Khana texts.'

Our excavations over a period of 8 seasons have added some 79 tablets (plus a couple of hundred small fragments), bringing the total of known epigraphic finds from Terqa to about 100 items. This is a small number by comparison to other sites, but it is significant in many respects. For one thing, they contain much historical information about the period between the fall of Mari and the fall of Babylon, a period for which very little information is otherwise available; from the texts of Terqa we know now of some 13 kings of Khana, five of whom we have been able to place in chronological sequence. We have acquired much information about the internal history of Khana, including onomastics and prosopography (some 300 personal names are known so far), legal customs, land and water tenure, and so on.

But the aspect which I wish to illustrate here is the widespread distribution of the epigraphic finds. Tablets found in the excavations (which to date amount, as mentioned, to 79) come not only from almost every excavation area opened in the southern part of the tell, but also from every corner of these excavation areas. The largest concentration of tablets is only a dozen documents, known as the 'Archive of Puzurum' now published by the Chief Epigraphist of the Expedition, Olivier Rouault. Otherwise, cuneiform texts have often been found isolated, scattered in every conceivable setting. In particular we have found them in a temple (Ninkarrak), in two administrative complexes (Area C and F), in two private houses (one of them the house of Puzurum) and in two streets (Area C and F). In addition we have also found them in later fills, especially in medieval and recent pits, which have cut deeply the entire southern area of the tell. One tablet was even found on the surface (in Area E).

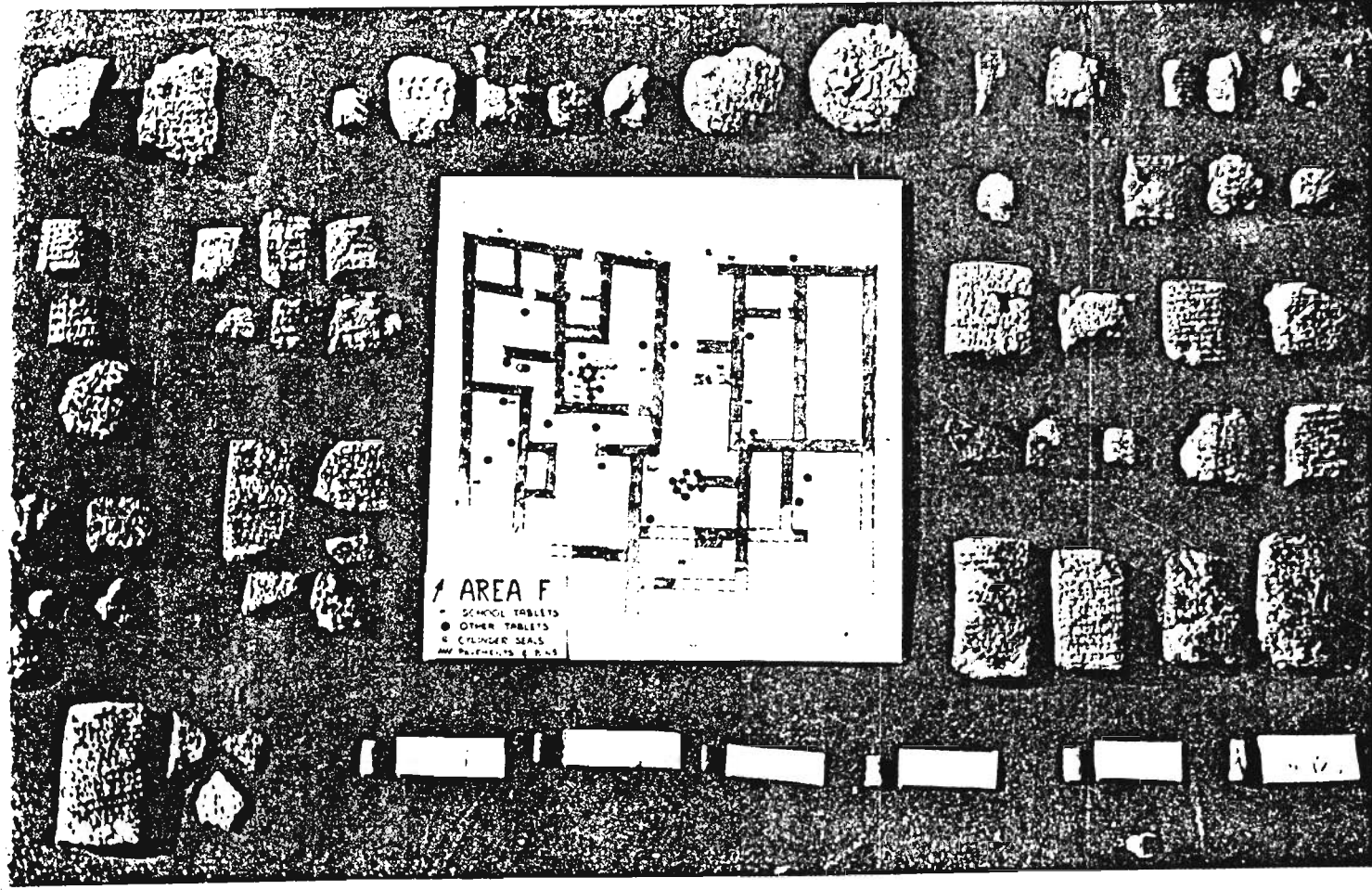
The typology of the texts is as varied as their stratigraphic setting. Figure 1 gives a list of the texts sorted by type as well as by period and provenience on the site: it is apparent from it that there is a great typological differentiation that cuts across boundaries of both time and space.

Figure 2 gives a finer chronological classification by approximate years as derived from the sequence of kings, and correlates this distribution to the location on the tell from where the tablets came.

Finally, Plate 1 illustrates the distribution of one particular epigraphic inventory, that of Area F, which represents an administrative complex of the period of Mari. The dots on the floor plan show the location of the individual tablets, which are also photographed as a typological assemblage next to the floor plan itself. Except for a few clusters (in particular the one in the center of the complex, which corresponds to an interesting scribal installation), it is apparent that tablets are scattered quite evenly throughout the entire complex.

The significance of this situation is rather apparent. At Terqa, the distribution of epigraphic finds is very widespread over an area which is relatively large in size and quite heterogeneous with regard to the nature of the settlement. What is common to the various settings is that they all belong to the peripheral area of the ancient city, i.e. to what appears to be a middle class neighborhood, without imposing public structures. But apart from this, the dispersion of the documents throughout the entire area is greater than their clustering in any single major location. Apart from statistical considerations (for which the total sample available is still rather limited), this means that at Terqa in the Mari and Khana period there was, if not of course widespread literacy, then at least a widespread use of the literate communication medium, which reached deeply and widely into the fabric of Terqa society.

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TERQA 2-8: DISTRIBUTION OF TABLETS BY PERIOD AND TYPE

PERIOD	Type	Area F	Puzurum	Ninkarrak	later fill, surface	total	
KHANA	administr.		3	4	1	8	
	contracts		12	4	1	17	
	letters			4		4	
	-----						
	school			7		7	
	mathem.			2		2	
	library						
	-----						
	commemor.						
	miscell.			1	1		2
blank			3			3	
MARI	administr.	14				14	
	contracts	2				2	
	letters	4				4	
	-----						
	school	2				2	
	mathem.	2				2	
	library				1	1	
	-----						
	commemor.					1	1
	miscell.	2					2
blank	3					3	
EARLY	administr.	4			1	4	

79

DATE	STRATIGRAPHY	NAME AND TYPE OF EVIDENCE
(2000)	surface Area F	shakkanakku period archaic administrative texts
(1800)	Area F	Shamshi-Adad: bulla Yasmakh-Addu: month name
	Area F	Zimri-Lim: year name Kibri-Dagan: addressee
(1750)	Puzurum	Isi-Sumu-Abu: onomastics Yapakh-Sumu-Abu: year name
1721	Puzurum	Yadikh-Abu: several year names carbon 14
(1700)	Puzurum Ninkarrak (early) surface	Kashtilashu: year names prosopography
(1650)	Ninkarrak (middle) surface	Shunuhru-Ammu: year name
(1625)	surface	Ammi-Madar: filiation
(1600)	surface	Abi-Lama: filiation
(890)	surface	Tukulti-Ninurta II (Aleppo stela)

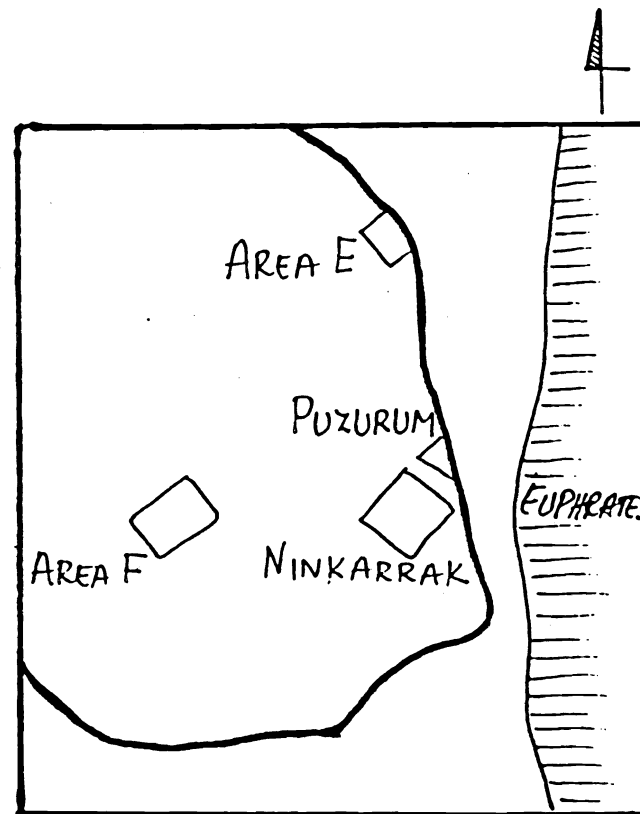
Other Khana king names from unstratified context:

(Iddin-Kakka)  
Ishar-Lim

Igid-Lim

(Zitri-Dagan)  
Ish-Dagan

Yassi-Dagan  
Hammurapi



EPIGRAPHIC FINDS AT TERQA

TERQA  
EPIGRAPHIC FINDS:

CHRONOLOGICAL  
AND SITE  
DISTRIBUTION

A-56

# LES ANNALES ARCHEOLOGIQUES ARABES SYRIENNES

REVUE D'ARCHEOLOGIE ET D'HISTOIRE



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