

# The Kingdom and Period of Khana<sup>1</sup>

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*For a number of years before the discovery of Mari, the tablets of Khana were the only cuneiform texts from Syria known to Assyriologists. Incremented considerably in number by the ongoing excavations at Terqa, they shed light on an important period of ancient Syrian history, corresponding to the Late Old Babylonian period. But more important than the philological construct conveyed by the Khana tablets is the historical construct of the kingdom of Khana, of which first Mari and then Terqa was the capital. This article outlines the unique and hitherto unrecognized geopolitical configuration of the region of Khana, and it shows why Khana after the fall of Mari did not become a petty local kingdom. Documentation is given for a proposed sequential order of the 11 kings who ruled Khana in the second quarter of the second millennium B.C., based on stratigraphic and textual considerations. Finally, a case is made for a pattern of urban-rural interaction, that was unique to Khana society within the whole ancient Near East.*

## THE TABLETS

Tablet for tablet, the epigraphic harvest in Syrian archaeology has been extraordinary; Mari, Ugarit, and Ebla are the key points of reference. Not only are the size and archaeological setting of those archives unique in each case; they are also astonishingly complementary in their cultural and linguistic import. In contrast with eastern Mesopotamia, these epigraphic finds come primarily from palace archives, recovered in fairly recent years. The 50th anniversary of the discovery of Mari has only recently been celebrated. Thus, the philological study of western cuneiform is relatively young, compared to the almost century-and-a-half of the study of eastern cuneiform.

It is in this perspective that the so-called Khana documents acquire special significance. The Khana documents came to scholarly attention during the first part of the 20th century as a steady trickle of finds and acquisitions. In fact, the first Khana tablet was published in 1897 (GC 1,1).<sup>\*</sup> This ~~may~~ <sup>is</sup> be the first document to mention both Khana and Terqa. But it is also the first published cuneiform tablet found in Syria.<sup>2</sup> Thus, long before excavations started at Terqa, the site produced the first epigraphic discovery of Syrian archaeology. This discovery has gone unnoticed in part because the

text was acquired through purchase and because it was published with a group of Babylonian texts.

Several other texts of the same type were published subsequently. Many of them were contracts; they shared some special characteristics and they all came from Syria or, more precisely, from Khana, as indicated by the titles of the kings mentioned in the texts. Though relatively few, the texts were unusual enough in both content and origin to gain the interest of a number of scholars, an interest that led eventually to one of those curious archaeological ventures of years past. Thureau-Dangin, who published the first Khana text in 1897, ~~had~~ <sup>knew of</sup> several more unpublished tablets of the same type when he decided to excavate at Terqa, the site from which most, if not all, of the tablets were supposed to have come. He teamed up not with an archaeologist, but with another philologist, Paul Dhorme, and with the French Foreign Legion (the Earthwatch of the time!). For five days they dug at Terqa, going through a deposit some 18 m thick to reach virgin soil, but they found no tablets. Thureau-Dangin's involvement with Terqa gave rise to one of those rare pages of philological poetry to appear in the journal *Syria*: "We will always have in our mind

<sup>\*</sup>The abbreviations and the publications to which they refer are listed at the beginning of the bibliography.

that deep and sparkling sky of the Euphrates and the Tigris, those constellations which trace, through their golden impression, the mythical images and fantastic animals the Babylonians saw in them, and whose names are so familiar to us" (Thureau-Dangin and Dhorme 1924: 293).

On that note the early chapter on the Khana tablets ended. The disappointment of Thureau-Dangin's expedition and especially the discovery of Mari, which came right afterward, gave a new dimension to Syrian cuneiform philology. But nonetheless, for some 30 years the Khana tablets had been the major body of tablets from Syria. Their significance is due to more than the fact that they came from what corresponds to the territory of modern Syria. The tablets of Khana were significant to Thureau-Dangin, as they are to us, because they represent a modern philological construct, because they stem from a distinctive, ancient political unity—the kingdom of Khana—and because they cover the period from about 1750 B.C. to somewhere in the 16th century B.C., a time span that otherwise is little documented. The discovery of Mari, which understandably pushed Terqa completely into the background, has in reality added further significance to Terqa and its kingdom: the kingdom of Khana was the successor to Mari and it continued as a major independent political unit that controlled essentially the lower basin of the Khabur and the corresponding portion of the middle Euphrates. Thus Khana is more than a small collection of tablets, it is an important territorial region and chronological segment of ancient Syro-Mesopotamian history.

Our excavations have added a total of almost 150 tablets and fragments to the 22 Khana tablets known up to 1976. Thirty-two of them have been published (*TPR* 4, *TPR* 7, *TFR* 1, *CMT* 1) and almost all of those belong to the Khana period. The remaining tablets also include several documents from the periods of Zimri-Lim and the *shakkanakku*. In light of the major finds at Mari, as well as the finds at Terqa,<sup>3</sup> and as a result of a fuller understanding of the historical development of the region, we can now speak of Khana not only as a philological entity, but as a full-fledged historical reality.<sup>4</sup>

### THE REGION

The region known as Khana—the region of which Mari and Terqa were successively the capi-

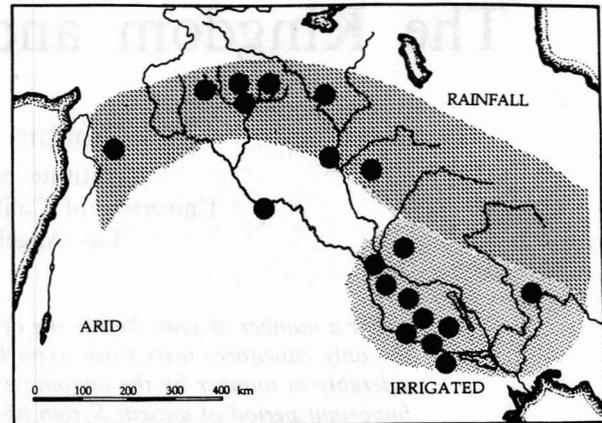


Fig. 1. Syro-Mesopotamia: regional patterns of water access.

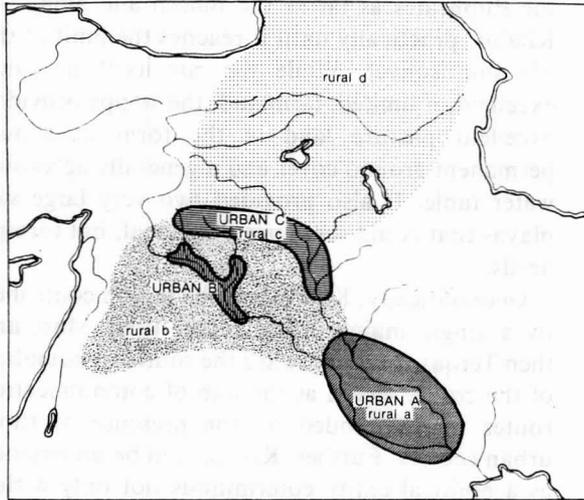
tals<sup>5</sup>—was distinct in geographical and geopolitical terms. At first glance, the “region” does not appear to have a separate geographical identity. Although one can clearly perceive that it is different from the south in geomorphological terms (the south is a broad alluvial plain, while the middle Euphrates is not), this region is viewed essentially as a northern extension of the irrigated south with rivers, canals, and steppe playing equal roles. The real situation, however, is quite different. The river has cut a deep trough that is too narrow to allow the development of vast irrigated areas like those in the south, and the steppe is inaccessible for large-scale irrigation, except for minor and ephemeral wadis and the very limited area served by a few oases. The climate, on the other hand, is similar to that in the south, and, like the south, this region gets an annual rainfall of less than the 250 mm necessary for dry farming (fig. 1). ~~The~~ effective amount should, in fact, be considered as 200 mm (Oates and Oates 1976: 114). Since there are no other natural resources, this region of the middle Euphrates seems to have the worst of both worlds—not enough water from the sky, and too little land to enable inhabitants to take advantage of the water from the river.

The disadvantages give the region its geographical characteristics, and gave it a unique geopolitical configuration in the past. At any time the entire area could only support a single major urban center—from Mari, Terqa, or Dura-Europos in succession in antiquity to Der ez-Zor in modern times: the relative proximity of major urban centers is much higher in both the alluvial south and the rain-fed north (fig. 1).

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**Fig. 2.** Rural and urban zones in Syro-Mesopotamia (third to early second millennium). Environmental zones: A-arid, irrigable; B-arid, irrigable in narrow strip only; C-rainfed, rolling plains; D-rainfed, mountainous.

Yet the area responds to the challenge in classical Toynbeean terms. Human intervention on the landscape was much more decisive and wide-ranging than is generally recognized, and as a result a distinctive geopolitical entity emerged, which identified itself precisely as "Khana." In the process, the people responsible for that transformation were able to reap considerable economic advantages from an otherwise barren environment. At the same time, they brought about a major sociotechnical revolution, largely ignored in our accepted historical reconstructions: the industrialization of the steppe and the concomitant development of pastoral nomadism.

The nature of those events is described elsewhere (see n. 1, particularly the second article) and needs only to be summarized here. The rural classes who inhabited the irrigated trough of the middle Euphrates and lower Khabur (*ah Purattim* in Akkadian and *zor* in Arabic) discovered that they could harness the steppe for their herds by developing a network of wells. Initially, the need for the wells was stimulated by the need to secure adequate pasture for the herds, which could not graze in the alluvial trough during the fall through spring growing season, when it was under cultivation. But since the ground cover is sufficient for pasture even in summer, the development of watering points effectively meant that the herds and their shepherds could use the steppe for as long as

they wanted throughout the year (except when protracted drought lowered the water table). That gave the rural populations of the *zor* an independence from state controls that no other rural population enjoyed in Mesopotamia (below). The state had no direct interest in controlling the steppe militarily or otherwise, and it appears from the textual evidence that all the contacts between the state and the shepherds took place in the *zor* (fig. 2). That was the logical policy since the herders used the steppe as needed but otherwise remained essentially homebound in the *zor*. This policy began to founder when the herders developed political muscle, as it were, and opted not to return to their home bases, thus avoiding taxation and conscription. To the extent that they could remain in the steppe, the state was powerless to control them. That period may have seen the birth of full-scale pastoral nomadism; the texts of Mari documented not a process of sedentarization or of conflict between nomads and sedentaries, but rather a process of selective nomadization of the rural class of the *zor*.<sup>6</sup>

The newly developed means of exploiting the high steppe on either side of the *zor* gave the region an immense economic resource, one that provided the single urban center in the *zor* (Mari first, then Terqa) with vast capital for ~~exportation~~ *exploitation*. Thus Mari (and Terqa) controlled perhaps the largest territorial hinterland of any city-based state in the third and early second millennia, at least in the sense that no other major urban center ever developed within their boundaries (see below). If we consider this hinterland an unexploitable steppe, its significance is obviously nil. But once we recognize its potential—and actual—*exploitation* in terms of incipient pastoralism, specifically in the form of an agropastoralism that originated under state controls, then our ~~viewpoint~~ *perspective* changes.

We may presume that another major resource—salt—was available in this region and that it was exploited for commercial uses. Qraya may have developed during the protoliterate period because of the need to supply salt to the large urban areas of the north, such as Tell Brak and Hamukar (note 1, article 1). Salt was available in the Sumerian south but not in the north during the early period. But we may assume that salt procurement also was important in the period of Mari and Terqa as well, when both the playas of Bouara in the Jazira and those near Palmyra may have been exploited by the urban state that had

developed in the *zor*. Except for the salt playas in the Jabbul, in fact, these are the largest sources of salt in Syria and therefore they would have been of critical importance for the development of the large urban settlements to the north. (For a major recent study on salt procurement in ancient Mesopotamia see Potts 1984.)

Yet another element of great significance in establishing the economic role of the Khana region was its centrality in the developing network of overland routes. Their location at or near the mouth of the Khabur makes both Terqa and Mari key places in the roads linking the south with the north along the Khabur and with the northwest along the Euphrates. Similarly, the taming of the steppe by the developing class of agropastoralists opened a new overland route to the west along the foothills of the Bishri and the Shaar mountains, over the main oasis of Palmyra but also over the network of wells that alone could make organized travel by donkey possible. Also significant is the fact that effective large scale shipment of goods along the southern course of the Euphrates probably would have been impossible without the presence of a major urban center in the location of Terqa and Mari. From this perspective we may also understand the position of the two cities vis-à-vis the rest of their territory: they are located closer to the southern border because they control both the access of goods from the Khabur—at Terqa, 10 kilometers below its confluence with the Euphrates—and the navigation along the Euphrates and its canals—at Mari, at the southernmost end of the canal network. (Geyer [in press] presents a very interesting discussion of the ~~Nahrwan~~ canal, which is presumed to have been dug primarily for navigation rather than for irrigation.) Not far south of Mari, the *zor* becomes constricted into a much narrower trough that leaves no room for canals for either navigation or irrigation and hence no room for full-fledged urban centers all the way to Rapiqum and Sippar. Therefore Mari was in an ideal position to exact taxation on river commerce, since all river channels converged there, just as Terqa controlled not only the confluence of the Khabur into the Euphrates but also the midpoint or the beginning of some of the canals.

Geographically, then, Khana consisted of the “river oasis” or alluvial trough (*zor*) of the middle Euphrates and lower Khabur, and the seemingly limitless steppe on either side. The *zor* effectively ends just below Mari, but it extends north along

the Euphrates as far as the Balikh and along the Khabur practically until it reaches the limit of the 250 mm isohyet. While the *zor* itself provided excellent, if limited, farmland, the steppe provided excellent pasture land in the form of almost permanent ground cover and a generally accessible water table. It also provided two very large salt playas that could serve not only local, but foreign needs.

Geopolitically, Khana was the region controlled by a single major urban center (first Mari and then Terqa), located toward the southern boundary of the *zor*; it served as the hub of communication routes that depended on the presence of those urban centers. Further, Khana is to be understood as a political entity coterminous not only with a specific and geographically discrete territory, but also with a given population that had developed a sense of ethnic affinity and solidarity (see note 1, particularly the second article). The “Khaneans,” as they called themselves, are probably the original rural population; they underwent a process of transformation by taking to the steppe in a semi-organized way, while fully retaining their association with the farmland, and eventually the urban centers, in the *zor*.

#### THE KINGDOM

After the initial period of interest for the Khana tablets, when they represented the only sizable cuneiform corpus from Syria itself, attention was understandably deflected to Mari and its incomparable epigraphic finds. From these texts it became clear that, during the ascendancy of Mari, Terqa was the capital of one of its provinces, perhaps one of particular economic and political significance, but still a province. Even though it is generally assumed that Terqa “replaced” Mari as the capital of the region after Hammurapi’s conquest, Terqa’s provincial status during the period of Mari is carried over, as it were, in the perception of Terqa as the capital of the newly independent kingdom.<sup>7</sup> Terqa’s Khana is perceived as a provincial kingdom, unlike Mari’s fully cosmopolitan Khana. It is worth considering this question in some detail, both on the basis of what we know about the region from outside sources, and from the vantage point of our excavations at Terqa itself.

The territorial extent of Khana under Terqa included at least the central region of the Mari

and Monchambert  
1987: 313 f.  
Nahr Daourin

kingdom, the middle Euphrates basin and the lower Khabur. At the northern end of the kingdom, Terqa controlled the Khabur basin, at least south of the Khabur triangle. Both Dur-Yaggid-Lim and Qattunān belonged to Terqa's territory. Qattunān is the city from which one of the Khana texts originates (*GC* 1,22) and Dur-Yaggid-Lim (half way to Qattunān, if it is to be identified with Durkatlimmu and therefore with Tell Sheikh-Hammid) is the endpoint of a canal built by a Khana king (Buccellati 1984: xvii). Closer to Terqa, but still north of the confluence of the Khabur with the Euphrates, was Sagarātum, an important provincial capital in the Mari period; a year name of Šunuhru-ammu indicates that it was under Terqa's control, ~~and thus was~~ rather early in the history of independent Terqa (see n. 17).

To the south, Terqa's Khana directly bordered the kingdom of Babylon. We know about the latter from an important epigraphic correlation that also establishes a synchronism with Samsuiluna of Babylon, first recognized by Rouault (1984: 4). The latter king named one of his regnal years after a battle with king Yadikh-Abu. This king was unknown for Khana until our excavations, but he figures prominently in our tablets. Since his own various regnal year names attest to the continued independence of Khana, it is reasonable to assume that the conflict to which Samsuiluna refers was a border skirmish. The French excavations at Khirbet Diniyah in Iraq provide a closer approximation of the location of this border. The site has yielded tablets of the period of Abi-Ešuh, which show that the city was named Haradum and was under Babylonian control. Since Haradum has all the marks of a planned settlement, established sometime before Abi-Ešuh, it may have been first founded by Samsuiluna as a result of his conflict with Yadikh-abu. In the Mari period it seems to have extended farther south, as far as modern Hit (Anbar 1975) but from both the evidence in the Mari texts and the lack of an archaeologically documented Mari presence in the Haditha region survey, it is probable that the stretch of Euphrates south of Mari was neither particularly settled nor especially significant either economically or politically (although it may have been important militarily, especially if Haradum had been established as a border station against Khana). Certainly the overwhelming impression gained from the texts is that Mari was, in effect, placed at the southern border of the kingdom,

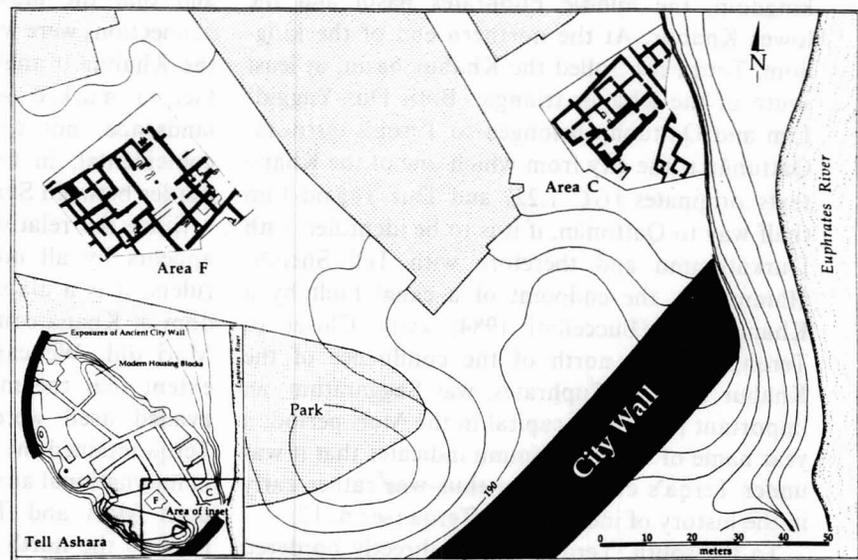
and that the most important and far-reaching connections were with the northern regions, toward the Khabur triangle and the Balikh. There is, in fact, a marked geographical difference in the landscape, not too far south of Mari, rather coincidental, in fact, with the modern political border between Syria and Iraq.

Since the relatively long ~~time~~ of Terqa kings appears by all odds to consist of independent rulers, it is a plausible conclusion that the kingdom of Khana controlled the same core region as Mari did. We can further assume that, to the extent that the major resources of which Mari availed itself were also under Terqa's control, Terqa retained the basis for a position of influence in international affairs. Specifically, Khana—under both Mari and Terqa—controlled the Khabur road to the north, the middle Euphrates road to the northwest, the steppe road along the southern slopes of the Bishri and Shaar toward Qatna over Tadmor, the large pastoral reserve of the steppe on either side of the Euphrates, and the salt playas of Bouara and possibly Tadmor.

But if that is so, a skeptic would reasonably ask why we have no prominent reference to Khana or Terqa in the texts from the south, and why nothing has been found in the excavations to suggest a position of more than provincial status for Terqa. The answer is mixed. On the one hand there are reasons that can explain on both points this lack of positive evidence for an international status of Terqa's Khana. And yet, at the same time, there are explanations that justify a historical reconstruction whereby Terqa's Khana represents the beginning of a decline vis-à-vis Mari's Khana, which will reach its climax in the middle of the second millennium—as a result of conjunctures that were to dramatically change the entire political configuration of ancient southwestern Asia. In other words, Hammurapi's destruction of Mari did not mean a total destruction of Khana as well: such a sudden and grand scale collapse of a complex territorial reality would be hard to imagine within the span of a few years and as the result of an ephemeral period of foreign occupation. The eventual collapse of Khana seems to have been the result of more far-reaching transformations throughout southwestern Asia toward the middle of the second millennium (see n. 1, article 6). Nonetheless, neither the lack of external references to Terqa nor the nature of the archaeological finds from the site, should be taken as evidence

line

**Fig. 3.** Major areas of horizontal exposure at Terqa. Area C includes private houses and the Temple of Ninkarrak; Area F is an administrative area. Notice the imposing size of the city wall, whose width matches that of the temple.



of an inferior political status for Terqa and Khana in the period following the destruction of Mari.

The textual evidence from Babylon and from the south in general does not necessarily presuppose particular references to foreign countries. The southern texts do not depict any rich international scene from which only Terqa and Khana are absent; rather those texts revolve more directly around broad local issues, and do not give special emphasis to long distance international contacts. Thus there are no archives, like those of Mari or later of Amarna, that vividly and directly portray the international scene and the main actors in it. The founding of Haradum as a northern border town is one of the few pieces of evidence for such a perspective. In fact, it is perhaps just as significant that there are no references to Terqa and Khana, which implies that the spheres of action of the two regions were quite independent of each other, that Terqa's Khana was not a satellite of Babylon. This emerges also rather convincingly from the excavations, which show practically no evidence of Babylonian presence, either in the artifactual record<sup>8</sup> or in the epigraphic documents.

This leads to the question of the evidence from our excavations at Terqa. The epigraphic documents from Terqa, though not public or international in character, have nevertheless allowed us to establish rather convincingly an almost continuous line of 13 kings, whose significance

should not be underestimated. In addition, the artifactual evidence indicates several lines for conclusions.

First, with the exception of the city wall, the nature of the buildings excavated is generally rather modest. They include a medium-sized temple, a residential quarter, and a fairly large, but not central, administrative complex (fig. 3).<sup>9</sup> The city wall, erected first at the beginning of the third millennium as one of the most massive defensive systems in Syria, remained in continuous use through the Khana period; however very little material is associated with the wall, and even a city gate has not been found.

It would, however, be a mistake to generalize from the lack of spectacular finds from confirmation of a presumed provincial status of Terqa and its kingdom in the Khana period. Three important considerations must be kept in mind. First, the excavations have been limited to the peripheral area of the ancient tell because ~~many people are living today~~ over two-thirds of the ancient site. In particular, the central and highest point of the tell is inaccessible, and that area seems extremely promising not only because of its location but also on the basis of what little can be seen of its remains (TPR 10). Our choices over the years have been explicit and conscious in this regard. The research strategy was not aimed at testing the importance of the site, nor was continued work

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there predicated on the discovery of spectacular finds.<sup>10</sup> Excavating in the central part of the ancient city was impossible; but nonetheless pursuing the work in the less important, peripheral area allowed for development of a keen interest in methodology. The stratigraphic situation at Terqa is extremely difficult, which provides a unique challenge to present a full picture of its tortured depositional history. Furthermore, developing a full-scale stratigraphic sequence over a broad horizontal exposure would eventually allow excavations through to early second and even third millennium strata during the next several years.<sup>11</sup> The relevance of these considerations for the argument at hand is that there was a deliberate effort at pursuing a slow, method-intensive course; and this, coupled with the limitations imposed by the terrain, has drastically affected the nature of the finds. This approach may have been responsible for ~~discovery~~ of the majority of the cuneiform documents (found, as they were, mostly in or immediately below brick collapse and brick packing and in areas severely pitted by a scanty but devastating medieval occupation). Yet, while this is clearly a positive and gratifying result, it should not be used as a standard for assessing the historical significance of the site. It is clearly a matter of sampling that must be carefully weighed to avoid an inopportune conclusion. Since the strategy could not have been aimed (for extrinsic but inescapable reasons) at elucidating the question of the regional significance of the ancient city, the results must be viewed with that presupposition in mind. While Terqa, even as a capital, may not have enjoyed the splendor of Mari, this should not be argued on the basis of excavations conducted at a deliberately slow pace and at the periphery of the ancient city.

\* The second major consideration/assessing the results of our excavations at Terqa is that in the areas where full horizontal exposure was accomplished, remains of the Khana period are disappointingly limited. The fullest Khana exposure is represented by the Temple of Ninkarrak and the house of Puzurum—and the strata uncovered represent already the earliest, and lowest, phase of the Khana period (see discussion about the kings, below). In the administrative complex in Area F, there are only traces of Khana period strata; most of the area uncovered seems to belong to the Mari period, and a fair number of earlier texts found

there suggests that the strata of the Shakkanakku period are fairly close at hand. While this might at first be interpreted as an indication of reduced importance for the site during the Khana period, it would again be unjustified to draw such a conclusion on the basis of the evidence available. The Khana period buildings were probably left exposed when the site was abandoned toward the middle of the second millennium<sup>12</sup> and underwent severe erosion and destruction, which has effectively left a disproportionately smaller image of the ancient city. The nature of the traces we have seems sufficient to lend validity to this interpretation. Testing this interpretation will have to wait until some future date, since the central portion of the tell, which is also the highest, may contain the remains of more massive Khana period buildings, preserved somewhat better because of their size. (Analogously, one may reflect on the fact that the limited presence of Akkadian period remains in the archaeology of southern Mesopotamia is a very deceptive indicator of its importance—and should be attributed instead to the Guti destructions and to the massive rebuilding during the Ur III period.)

Finally, from all indications the present extent of the site corresponds to a relatively small portion of the ancient city, perhaps only half. The sharp and high vertical profile of the tell along the modern banks of the Euphrates strongly suggests a massive process of erosion, which continued until very recent times, when construction of the various Euphrates dams upstream from Terqa effectively eliminated the spring flooding of the river. If that is so, the relatively limited size of Terqa today (some 20 hectares), may not be at all indicative of its potential significance in antiquity.

One might argue that these considerations are of limited use without direct evidence to document positively the international role of Terqa and its kingdom, and that the case presented here is only inferential. The latter may be true, nonetheless the argument presented here is valid and meaningful. Given the lack of direct evidence pointing to Terqa's Khana being under outside controls, given the major significance of the region as a whole in the geopolitical configuration of ancient southwestern Asia, and given the clear evidence of a continued line of kings after the fall of Mari, Khana's continuing international importance ~~seems indisputable~~. *should not be excluded a priori*.

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