

Time	Dialogue
0	<p>From the desert terraces, the broad expanse of the green below seems even greener. Just as it seems fresher where small canals bring the smile of water to the trees, over the great river lapses at its banks gently and remittently. Out of this landscape grew a civilization which impressed its own mark on the plain. An accumulation of debris and treasures, which is the stratified record of a chunk of human experience stretching back to a point almost five thousand years ago. As if consciousness could be imprinted into the mute registers of the soil, the mountain of debris has been telling us about itself,</p>
1	<p>beginning with its own name which also dates back some fifty centuries, Terqa. We dig here to extricate this age-old self-awareness and we heighten thereby our own cultural consciousness.</p> <p>Syria is a land with a deep and rich cultural hummus. In its eastern regions on the banks of the Euphrates, Terqa has grown out of distribution, and it is both the city and the tradition, which we have been eliminating through an undying series of excavations. This year, we zeroed in on the macrocosm of the ancient city as a whole, and on the microcosm of a single house.</p> <p>The self-identity of a human group is brought out primarily by its institutions and sense of history.</p>
2	<p>These are ideological components. The corresponding physical components are important. The solidarity of the group is favored by the physical proximity of its members within the settlement. The edge of the settlement is also the edge of solidarity. And both came to be signified very emphatically an antiquity by means of low walls which define sharply the physical perimeter of a society. The walls of Terqa are the largest uncovered so far in the Near East for the earliest periods of its history. Their sheer massiveness attests to the awakened purpose of Terqa—a busy post, the political role, the technical scale, the economic means, and yes, unfortunately, the defensive need which are [collactorously] the highest of civilization. However massive,</p>
3	<p>the walls of Terqa came to be hidden under the later accumulation, and no trace was left of them. It is as if the Tell, which is clearly visible from the surrounding plain, had an invisible border which contains from underneath the steep rise of cultural deposition. Unlike other famous land parts of antiquity, the walls of Terqa can only be viewed either from above, where we have exposed the top through its roof, or from the inside, where they have been cut through by means of deep mile trenches. Only in one place can we obtain a visual approximation of the imposing sea which the walls must have propped in antiquity. The view here is from the ancient plain level, which through a trench, [] to the top of the walls as preserved today.</p>
4	<p>There, a man is standing silhouetted against the sky, while the main ridden horse is standing on the present plain level. The portion preserved here stands to a height of some fifteen to twenty feet, but in antiquity the top must certainly have reached much higher.</p>

	<p>But mostly, the walls are known to us from cuts made below the present surface. These trenches are part of a sewer system built to serve the modern town of Ashara. They are visible here, on the right, in the center of the streets, and it was through the cooperation of the city [] and the patience of the people of Ashara that we were able to halt for three months the public works in the middle of town and piece together an unexpected puzzle from the darkness of trenches three feet wide and up to fifteen feet in depth.</p>
5	<p>The great surprise was in the bate of the structure. We knew from previous seasons that the inner core of the defensive ring, marked here as Number One, was at least as early as 2500BC. But, we could not give the very earliest date because we had not reached virgin soil unaware, nor could we say how early were the successive defensive rings, especially Number Two, because there had been no dateable material associated with the walls.</p> <p>The deep trenches of 1978 gave firm answers to these questions. There were three major defensive rings, built shortly one after the other, and contiguous, one to the other. Virgin soil was reached by us inside and out, and in per evidence of artifactual material, was found in connection with each ring. They are dated from the first part</p>
6	<p>of the Third Millennium, from perhaps as early as 2800BC, down to about 2500BC. The total width of the three defensive rings, taken together, is upward of sixty feet, and the wide moat of a similar width, circle the walls on the outside. This makes the walls of Terqa some of the earliest of Syria and the Near East, and certainly the largest known so far for this period. The total perimeter is not known, because much of the site has been eroded by the river. But on the business of the projection shown here, the low estimate is that it was at about a mile. Since our tests were down at various parts of the site, and since the structural details found in these tests are all quite similar, we may conclude that the walls were built as unitary structures.</p>
7	<p>This is an indication of a highly centralized and organized governmental system. Undoubtedly Terqa was a major station along the cultural corridor which linked the south of Mesopotamia with the west. It may even have been, in the earliest periods, <i>the</i> center of the middle of the Euphrates region. Perhaps even more important than [Mari] by which it was then surpassed at the time of [Ebla], about 2400BC. The documentary evidence we can deduce from this historical recollection is exquisitely archaeological in nature, that is to say, it is based on a variety of arguments which are all purely stratigraphic. In the trenches, we are confronted with sections which had already been laid out for us vertically, by the long hand of the mechanical shovel.</p>
8	<p>The painstaking job of meeting the exposed sections, to a maximum depth of fifteen feet, for a total length of about 900 feet, resulted in extremely deteriorated rags and photographs of square inch after square inch of cultural deposition. This sample is a diagram of a photomosaic showing the downward slope of the moat. The slope could be seen vividly in the sharp change of colors and soil textures which our geologists recorded in detail. Where necessary, we dug below the bottom of the machine cut, and followed the natural contours, as in this view of</p>

	<p>the moat from its bottom up toward the wall. The figures are standing at distant junctures. The white figure on the right, stands at the bottom of the moat, the figure in the middle, stands on the ancient plain level, just outside the city wall,</p>
9	<p>and the third figure is on top of the ancient city wall, as preserved. From there we look down here toward the bottom of the moat. The stratigraphic configuration itself suggests that we are dealing with a moat. But we also found direct evidence, such as clusters of snails typical of slow-moving water.</p> <p>Though smashed by the mechanical shovel, several vessels could be reconstructed, and provided the initial bases for our archaeological considerations. Evidence of this site has been found at various points around the site, marked by the solid red line, but especially at the northwestern end of the Tell. It is here that we were able to uncover the evidence we have just discussed. The means of consumer project made it possible for us to have dig in areas which would</p>
10	<p>normally have been left suitable for excavation, given the density of the settlement. Over coverage was especially useful in order to obtain an overall view of the site, and the visual representation of configuration of ancient times. We used three simple systems of air-static photography in 1978, of which the airfoil was the most spectacular. An oversized kite, the airfoil carried a small platform with a camera. To increase the carrying power, two airfoils made the link, one to the other. But even a single airfoil can rise to considerable height, as visible here over the skyline of the Tell, on the upper left. Retrieval can be hazardous and series of times, the launching. For lower altitude, we used the bipod, which we brought from the States,</p>
11	<p>and a crane-like device which we built at the site, and christened "Jeriah." Very easy to assemble and to set in place, it is sturdy enough to allow the photographer to climb it. Most of our activities on the city wall were concentrated on the northwestern end of the Tell, where once there our activity in 1978 was at the southern end, where we came up with a remarkable concentration of written texts in a single room. The biblio-archive got stored in a single fashion, as we shall see. We knew from earlier excavations that we were bound to find an archive. In 1976, this much of a house had been exposed, and while we had found no tablets, we had uncovered an interesting collection of vessels on the floor of the main room excavated, a fancy ring. In 1977, we extended the aerisental exposure</p>
12	<p>and were able to reconstruct a plane of three houses with a sheet between them. In 1978, we expanded this even further and we began to uncover the remains of a large public building. The excavations had been carried down deeper in the private houses on the left where the ancient walls are standing up to six feet, whereas the public building on the right had its floor levels of a somewhat higher elevation. The many holes seen on the right are pits which were dug for storage in medieval times. This residential quarter is situated on the edge of the cliff, and it belongs entirely to the Hana period of about 1700BC.</p> <p>We see here in relationship to the city wall, in are associated installations on the right, which is about one thousand years older, and some twenty feet lower in elevation.</p>

13	While the remains of the public building are impressive, and very promising for the future, it was especially in one room of the private houses that we concentrated our efforts. One wall up the left had been gouged deeply by a medieval pit. The doorway was well preserved, lower left. It was a small room, some six by nine feet, and we knew that it had been involved in a fire, and that after the fire, it had been reused. The left half of the floor as exposed here, resulted when native inhabitants compacted the debris left by the fire. The right half shows discompacted debris during excavation. From the very beginning, the top of the debris yielded tablets of a type which is normally associated with an archive. This was Room A1. From the elevation in the adjacent rooms excavated earlier, we knew we had to dig to a depth of about eighty centimeters, some two feet of debris, before
14	reaching the original living floor of the room. Sealed as it was between the original floor and the reused floor, this debris was extremely well stratified and very important because of the tablets we expected to find in it. We wanted to find out what the original placement of the archive might have been, and to this end, we needed a conceptual model. The original placement was probably characterized by vessels on the floor and on shelves. The tablets may have been inside containers or lined up on the shelves. The collapse resulting from the fire would have caused the breakage of many objects, which would in turn be shattered but remained together. Before reused, the top debris was then leveled and compacted, causing the dislocation and further shattering of the objects on top. This model served us well, but the actual configuration of the archive
15	turned out to be quite different from our expectation. As we dug with extreme care a few centimeters at a time, recording every parture , two basic discoloration patterns began to appear. The very black was the charred residue of organic material, such as wood. The bright orange was burnt clay or mud which made up the most of the roof. A detail of the roof in piece with impression of a casting, is seen here next to a document from the archive. Here is how a contemporary mud roof looks like, certainly quite similar to its counterpart some four thousand years older. As our micro-excavation progressed on either side of a small bulk left in the center of the room, we continued to find tablets from the archive, big chunks of bricks and often, entire bricks, but hardly
16	any complete vessels or shards that could be reconstituted into a vessel. At this conclusion then, in terms of our model, was that leveling had been minimal, that is most of what we had was the result of the initial collapse, with hardly any later intrusion. No one in antiquity, for instance, had bothered to search for the documents through the debris. By the time we were close to the living floor, throughout the entire room, the situation had not changed. The amount of the intact bricks in the debris was hard to explain it by a fall in the roof or walls. As we finally came to the living floor, we had more of the same. The two basic discolorations were even more sharply defined. With the black confined especially to a rectangle in the center, possibly a door panel, and the broad area on the left, surrounding two
17	small half-like structures. There were hardly any objects resting on the floor. But several bricks had clearly been stuck there prior to the collapse, some laying flat

	and broken through impact from the top. Had the fire started from the hearth, we had no way of saying, but as we look again at the room with the major items in place, including the main tablets and blue cloths suspended at the elevation where they were found, and the blue springs linking the main fragments of the same tablets, we may generalize on the nature of the room. It was an attic, not in an architectural, but in a functional, sense. A room for [left] storage of all sorts, whether important or not. The archive consist of thus of all files, discarded together with brick paths and broken vessels. They were probably too old to have current value, which would be one reason why nobody bothered to retrieve them after the fire. Before we look at the content of the tablet, we must now review briefly the other items found in the room. Two small precious items were a silver crescent and a tiny weight in the form of a duck, used for weighing silver, an anchor, and then mostly brass soot Italian vessels, some large (here the difference in burning patterns indicates that the vessel the size of a bath tub was broken before of the fire), and the shards scattered in different parts of the room, some small. But anyhow, all broken and often, incomplete. All in all, the total inventory of complete objects from the room, excluding only the tablet, is small, especially in comparison to the large number of shards also in the room, from which no complete vessel
18	could be reconstructed, suggesting that they were initially stored as shards. This is in marked contrast with the adjacent country room we have discovered in 1976. The term “archive” may seem too dignified for a room with so many bricks and broken pottery, and the care taken in photographing it, protecting it from the rain, and allowing the work to continue into the night; all of this would have been hardly justified, except for the yield in tablets which proved to be so important. They came, mixed with shards sometimes preserved in a pristine state, sometimes hard to distinguish from the soil in which they were embedded, but we had our reward. This is the total inventory of documents from
19	the archive, some two hundred in number, many of them are in a badly fragmented state, but quite a few are in excellent shape. They are mostly documents for the sale of land and in most cases the buyer is a man by the name of Puzurum, who was obviously the owner of the house. A typical tablet would begin in the front, with the description of the property and the definition of the sale price, continue on the back with the names of witnesses, some of whom would roll their cylinder seal on the edge in lieu of a signature. When a seal were not available, the hem of a garment would do, as the seller by the name of “Hasibum” did on this tablet. Here it is a certain “Yassi-el” who sells Puzurum in his house. The date reads, “Year in which King [] smote his enemies.” And the beautiful long seal impression rolled on the side of the tablet shows just such a scene. Thirteen
20	kings are already known from the [birth] of document, and this is the only evidence that we have so far of this important dynasty of Syrian history. This deed of soil from [Yesmah-Dagan] to Puzurum was witnessed by as many as twenty-six individuals, all of whom are mentioned along with their fathers’ names, which brings the inventory of Terqa personal names up to a total of four hundred already. The witnesses served to guarantee the validity of the contract, and so did
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	<p>the envelope, a layer of clay, which was placed over the tablet, and which one could be found repeated as in this case, the entire text on the right, the envelope is here seen over a cast of the tablet. In this case, a barely-new practice has been documented. A double envelope, where the outermost one only has seal impressions. By breaking the envelope in front of a judge, the contents could be verified</p>
22	<p>and the authenticity of the land title confirmed. The dire penalty of breaching a contract was a heavy fine, payable to the state, and a dose of hot asphalt poured over the head of the transgressor. Most of the envelopes found in our archive were broken. On the inside they show, in the negative, the text of the tablet upon which the clay of the envelope had been pressed, and on the outside they often preserved beautiful seal impressions. The fact that the envelopes were broken before being discarded, in terms of the conclusions reached earlier, that these were old files which might, as it were, have been audited already. And there were other documents as well. This was inscribed on one side only, and were only some details describing the nature of the property to be sold. Apparently, it was a rough draft,</p>
23	<p>to be used later on by a scribe in drawing up the formal contract. This contains a list of commodities given to individuals among whom is mentioned the son of Puzurum. A small tablet was found, broken length-wise, the two halves in different parts of the room, hence each burnt a different color. The magnitude in the break is almost impossibly accidental, and in fact, the two halves here could be shown to not only match perfectly, but also to exhibit the percussion point where the tablet had been broken deliberately with a tool. It was, we know from the content, a document registering the loan of silver from the temple to Puzurum, and when Puzurum had repaid the debt, the tablet was broken and returned to him. The other documents in the archives included bullae that is, lumps of clay which had been placed around the opening of a container, to guarantee its contents,</p>
24	<p>and had been rolled over with cylinder sealing impressions, or with fingernail impressions, another substitute for a seal when one was lacking. Finally there are tags, which are flat pieces of clay, also covered with seal impressions, placed around square objects, such as boxes. The overall distribution in the room of these archival materials can be mapped in relationship to level, shown by color and file location, that are clearly found scattered throughout the entire room, except that they are in general at some distance from the doorway. An isometric rendering of where the main tablets were found shows the same information in a trigomentional representation. As we kept on digging in the house of Puzurum, we begin to identify with his economic concerns</p>
25	<p>and to empathize with his lifestyle, we also begin to muse and wonder if what we saw outside his house, whether in the ancient street, or looking out toward the river, was as beautiful a view in his lifetime as it is in ours.</p>