

TERRA

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY

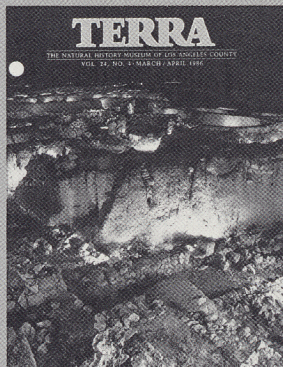
VOL. 24, NO. 4 • MARCH / APRIL 1986



TERRA

THE MEMBERS' MAGAZINE
OF THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY
AND THE PAGE MUSEUM
OF LA BREA DISCOVERIES

VOL. 24, NO. 4 • MARCH/APRIL 1986



COVER: The Moon over Tell-Mardikh. In 1975 Italian archaeologist Paolo Matthiae uncovered archives containing clay tablets dating from the third millennium B.C., allowing him to identify the remains of the lost city of Ebla. Photograph by James L. Stanfield, National Geographic Society.

EDITOR

Robin A. Simpson

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Harry J. Pack/Kathy Talley-Jones

DESIGN

Armin Krumbach

EDITORIAL BOARD

Craig C. Black/Greg P. Byrd/
Daniel M. Cohen/Kenneth J. Daponte/
Joan Grasty/John M. Harris/Peter C. Keller/
Harry Kelsey/William A. Mingst/Harry J. Pack/
Robin A. Simpson

ADVERTISING SALES REPRESENTATIVES

Heide Thorntenson • Francis Strazzulla
Western Media Sales
50 West Hillcrest Drive, Suite 215
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360
805/496-3500 Telex: 182640 WKVG

TERRA is published bimonthly by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and is sent as a benefit to museum members. Single copy price: \$2.50. Subscriptions: \$12 per year. For membership information, visit the Membership Office at the Natural History Museum or call 213/744-3426. All other inquiries can be referred to the Publications Office, Natural History Museum, 900 Exposition Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90007, or call 213/744-3330.

Printed by North Hollywood Printing Co., Inc.

Color separations by Computer Color Corp.

Typography by RSTypographics

All Rights Reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

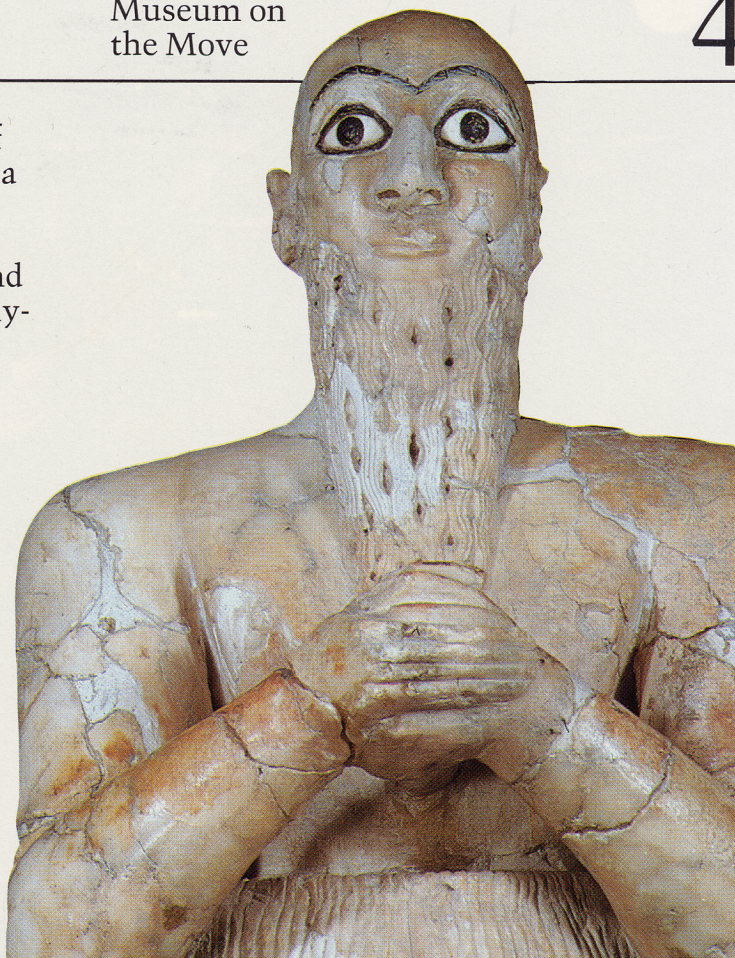
ISSN 0040-3733

Museum on the Move

4

The Glory of Ancient Syria

by Giorgio
Buccellati and
Marilyn Kelly-
Buccellati



6

Preserving Images from the Past

by John
Cahoon



15

The Glory of Ancient Syria

EBLA TO DAMASCUS, PART I

by GIORGIO BUCCELLATI and
MARILYN KELLY-BUCCELLATI

One of the most impressive artistic achievements anywhere in the Near East, small animal statues (like this hedgehog) were produced at Bouqras in eastern Syria some



eight thousand years ago. They are now stored in the new regional Museum of Der ez-Zor in eastern Syria. Photograph courtesy of the Denver Museum of Natural History.

Suppose that shortly after the beginning of the last century Los Angeles hosted a major international exhibit dedicated to the most important archaeological discoveries of the time. In the wake of Napoleon's campaign in Egypt and Champollion's interpretation of the Rosetta Stone, that exhibit would clearly have been devoted to Egypt.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century—although Los Angeles was still a city smaller than the first Sumerian cities had been 5,000 years earlier—the same type of exhibit would have been dedicated to Mesopotamia. The glories of the Assyrian capitals had just begun to dazzle visitors to the Louvre and the British Museum, and the first American expedition had begun to uncover the great remains of Sumerian civilization in Nippur.

In the late twentieth century the logical focus for a major archaeology exhibit clearly has to be Syria. For in recent years Syria has been yielding harvests of archaeological treasures comparable in significance only to those momentous discoveries in Egypt and Iraq during the last century.

Let us use another analogy to explain the importance of the Syrian discoveries. Suppose that you were studying medieval Europe and that you knew all there was to know about Italy and Spain. Then, suddenly, you discover that an-

other major region existed in the middle of the crescent that arches its way from Gibraltar to Sicily: France! Would it not be a major discovery indeed to learn about Paris?

So it is with the Near East in the period that marks the beginning of civilization as we know it. Syria is a pivotal urban civilization, a major actor on this early stage, contemporaneous with that of southern Mesopotamia and of Egypt, and it is only recently that we have come to appreciate its impact and originality.

To emphasize this we must consider that there are at present only three major foci of early literate civilization known to archaeologists, all three in the Fertile Crescent: Sumer, Akkad, and Elam in the southeast; Syria in the north; and Egypt in the southwest. Nowhere else in the world do we have sizable and consistent evidence of the use of writing as the basic pillar of social intercourse and of personal expression as early as the third millennium B.C.

IN THE BEGINNING... Literate civilizations do not spring full-blown out of nowhere. The early prehistoric cultures of Syria stretch back into the Old Stone Age, but appropriately the exhibit Ebla to Damascus begins with the late prehistoric cultures, which provide the immediate antecedents of early city life. These early human settlements show remarkable similarities with those found else-

where in the Near East in terms of their material culture and of what we can infer from it as to their lifestyle.

The small statues from Bouqras in eastern Syria (see the hedgehog on this page) are among the most impressive early artistic achievements anywhere in the Near East. They provide the aesthetic and emotional backdrop to the later unfolding of Syria's history. There is a bold stylistic characterization of the animal world, a secure technical skill and craftsmanship that affirm a new kind of human control over nature.

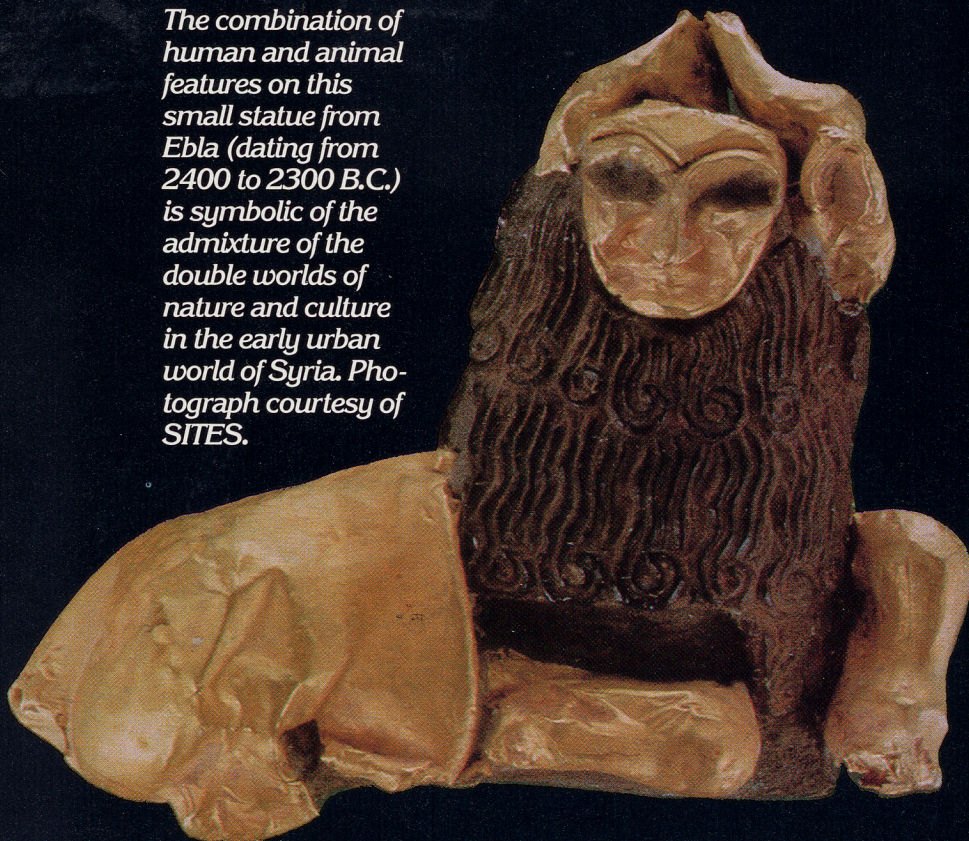
Think of it: humans had just begun to hem in their visual horizon within dark rooms, cramped inside small houses, confined in turn by narrow alleyways within settlements. Why all this crowding when the open spaces loomed large everywhere beyond the settlement? As scholars have begun to observe, it is almost a wonder not that humans "invented" city life, but that, once invented, they stuck with it!

In this light the wonderfully refined animal representations crafted by these early Syrian artists acquire a new flavor. It is almost as though they began to look at nature in a crystallized artistic embodiment much as we look at their vision under glass in our exhibit of their material culture. There is, in other words, a sharing of vision that is so typical of the human being, which is in fact the essence of culture. Think of how some of

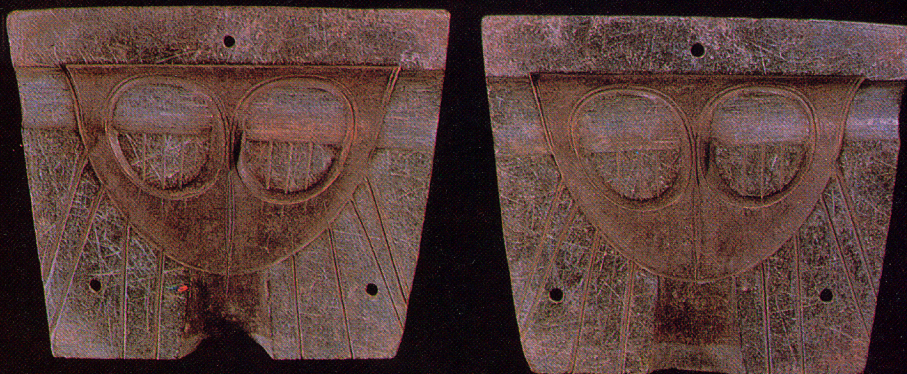
Initially a utilitarian object, the mace (ca. 1775 to 1750 B.C.) soon developed into a symbol of royal power. This mace also symbolizes the important relations Ebla had with its neighbors, in this case Egypt, where it was crafted for an obscure pharaoh (Hornedjherytet) of the Thirteenth Dynasty. Photograph courtesy of SITES.

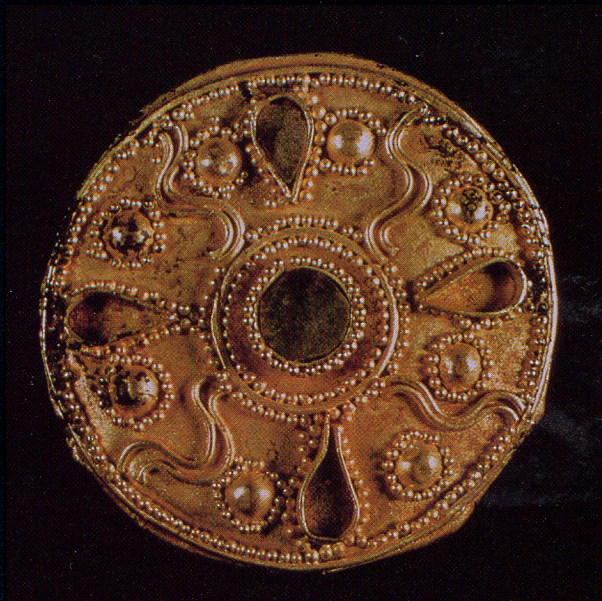


The combination of human and animal features on this small statue from Ebla (dating from 2400 to 2300 B.C.) is symbolic of the admixture of the double worlds of nature and culture in the early urban world of Syria. Photograph courtesy of SITES.



Highly developed technology is characteristic of early urban society and of ancient Syrian civilization in particular. Besides metal technology, Syria developed a diversified technical tradition in such areas as glass manufacturing, the training of horses, and, especially, in the field of what we would call communication technology, the earliest widespread use of the alphabet. This axe mold (ca. 1850 to 1750 B.C.) is from Ebla. Photograph courtesy of SITES.





The luxurious combination of gold and lapis lazuli was one that fascinated Eblaite craftsmen. This example of a round lid (ca. 1760 to 1700 B.C.) came from a royal tomb where it probably covered a jar for precious items. Photograph courtesy of SITES.

This delicate sculpture from Mari of an eagle with the head of a lion is exquisitely carved both on the lapis lazuli body and the gold portion of the head and tail (ca. 2500 B.C.). Note particularly the emphasis on the lion's whiskers and ears. Photograph courtesy of SITES.



Emphasis on large inlaid eyes in this statue is typical for votive statues of this period (2600 to 2350 B.C.) and indicated, with the reverently folded hands, the praying attitude of the figure. These statues were set up in the temple at Mari to pray for the life of the donor and his king. Photograph courtesy of the Denver Museum of Natural History.

Ebla to Damascus is not just a tale of two cities, but a tale of an ancient culture symbolized by two major and distinctive cities at the two ends of the chronological spectrum.



the most glorious Renaissance landscape painting (Giorgione, for instance) coincides with the building up again of cities in Europe after their breakdown during the Middle Ages: it is as if human imagination took on its own embodiment in artistic expression and offered itself up almost as a counterpart to the experience of nature.

THE DISCOVERY OF EBLA. No matter how cramped the early urban spaces were, it became the new standard of living. For the first time in human history we have the dichotomy between urban and rural landscapes—both molded by human initiative and closely bonded by a mutual relationship. Syria offers the richest diversity of such landscapes: from the coastal regions of the Mediterranean to the desert; from the river basins that allow large-scale irrigation projects to the steppe with its localized water sources such as wells and springs; from the plains that support rain-fed farming to the mountains rich in timber.

In the fertile and very colorful setting of the gently rolling hills south of Aleppo, Tell Mardikh is one of Syria's largest tells, which are ancient mounds that are composed of remains of successive settlements. In spite of its size and its favored geographical location, the tell had long been ignored by archaeologists until... well, for once a great archaeological discovery was not the result of an accidental stroke of luck by some unsuspecting nonarchaeologist. The dis-

covery of Ebla—such is the ancient name, which we know from documents found during the excavations, of the city buried at Tell Mardikh—was the result of a well-laid-out scientific research project.

Paolo Matthiae, in the mid-1960s a very young archaeologist at the University of Rome, had been focusing on the significance of early Syria, a significance that had, one must say frankly in retrospect, escaped the attention of archaeologists and historians alike. This is so true that even after Mardikh first began to yield archaeological results of the first magnitude, scholarly appreciation of the fact remained scarce; it was only the recovery of the archives that finally broke the impasse and suddenly brought Ebla, and with it third-millennium urban Syria, to the limelight. It took Matthiae and his staff ten years of work before he had the satisfaction of such general recognition on the part of his colleagues and the public. He had laid down the hypothesis that ancient Syria was a major civilization parallel to the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian and set out to work at Mardikh to prove it. When it turned out that Mardikh was Ebla, Matthiae could claim to have done for Syria what Austen Henry Layard's Nineveh had done for Assyria and Leonard Woolley's Ur for Sumer.

THE ANCIENT URBAN CULTURE OF SYRIA. The exhibit Ebla to Damascus documents the incredible new vista

Ebla opened for us. On display are cuneiform tablets discovered at Ebla; these are a closed book to all but the most experienced epigraphists—nonetheless, they hold a fascination for even the most casual of viewers. Whether it is the aesthetic quality of their calligraphy or our awed awareness of their age and content, we can almost sense here the pulse of history. The silence of an age heretofore unknown is suddenly broken by the roar of an avalanche of new information. We learn about taxes and contracts, about men and women, about trade and goods. And we learn—about learning: the first known dictionaries anywhere were found at Ebla, and they show us the care the ancient scribes took in preserving the key for the understanding of the languages they either spoke or wrote.

The particular significance of the Ebla lexical tablets is that they presuppose that the scribes themselves needed these texts as reference tools. They wrote down the equivalents between Sumerian terms and their own language, which we call Eblaite. This is, in effect, the language of ancient urban Syria because it was obviously spoken not just at Ebla but also in the other cities. It is a Semitic language, closely related to the Akkadian of its time but with many special features of its own.

The art of Ebla also gives us a view of its people. This is possible because much of its sculpture and cylinder seal designs focus on human aspects, from the ele-



gant hair pieces fashioned in stone to the gold human-headed bull (see page 7). Notice also the extreme refinement of the pieces: a great stylistic mastery is apparent in the craftsmanship with which the diverse parts are unified into the harmonious, finished piece.

THE RURAL CULTURE OF ANCIENT SYRIA: THE AMORITES. The reason we assume that Eblaite was the language of urban Syria is that we know of another Syrian language, Amorite, that was spoken in the countryside. This rural language was not written down (rural societies are less literate or not literate at all), but it has been preserved through a wealth of proper names dating back to the same time as Ebla. These names are for the most part complete sentences or noun phrases and as such they allow us to reconstruct practically the entire grammar of the language. The names are recorded in the documents of the urban archives at Ebla, Mari, and elsewhere, and in this way too the ancient city becomes a window to the larger landscape of Syria as a whole, not only urban Syria.

There is one aspect of the ancient Syrian rural landscape that makes it very special and that correspondingly sets it apart from the Sumerian south: the steppe on either side of the Euphrates, while too high for irrigation, is dotted with wells and springs, which made it possible for the rural population of the

kingdom to take their flocks over great distances, grazing on the light green cover of the winter steppe, and relying on the widespread system of water sources.

As a result of this mobility, the peasants of ancient Syria enjoyed a certain autonomy from the city that their Sumerian counterparts did not; their pastures in the steppe were too broadly scattered and generally too unimportant (except precisely as pastureland) to be closely controlled by the urban power structures. Thus they developed a degree of political leverage that was not enjoyed by other peasants in the rest of the Near East. The texts of Mari give us especially wonderful insights into this unique strand of ancient Syrian society. Among the most interesting tablets from the royal archives of Mari are letters exchanged between the palace in the capital and the provincial administration in a number of towns and cities scattered along the river dealing most often with their relations with the Amorites.

So independent were the Amorites, in fact, that from their ranks rose certain individuals and families that retained their sense of Amorite origin at least in the names that they used for themselves. These are the Amorite dynasties, which extended from Syria to the southeast and of which Mari offers one of the most brilliant examples.

THE SECOND URBAN CULTURE OF ANCIENT SYRIA: MARI.

MARI. Next to Ebla, Mari stands out as the most important Syrian city of the early periods. The statues, the gold, and the frescoes of Mari, well represented in the exhibit, give a good idea of the opulence not only of this ancient capital of eastern Syria but also more generally of the sophistication of this most ancient Syrian culture. These artifacts are somewhat closer to the Mesopotamian tradition of the Sumerian south. In recognition of this similarity, Mari has the unique honor of being the northwesternmost city to be mentioned in the venerable Sumerian kinglist as the seat of a "canonical" Sumerian dynasty.

One difference, noticeable especially in the statuary, is the emphasis on the humanity of the individuals portrayed. The sculptors accentuated certain physical characteristics that indicate wealth and prosperity: we meet here with the same fat-cheeked, double-chinned individuals we see in sculptures of first-millennium Assyrians who wished to have themselves portrayed with the same indications of abundance.

Mari continued to play a major role into the early second millennium as one of the great capitals of the time. The great royal archive of Mari dates to this period, and it is written in pure Akkadian (Akkadian was one of the earliest Semitic languages of Mesopotamia), ex-



cept for minor variations. This gives evidence of a second major urban tradition of Syria, one that is more closely linked to the south and of which Mari gives the best documentation. This is somewhat later than the major period of Ebla, and it shows a considerable cultural unity from the west of Syria to southern Mesopotamia: we refer to its regional scope as Syro-Mesopotamian and to the period as that of the Amorite dynasties.

The unity expressed by this term is not to be understood as "Mesopotamian with a Syrian appendage." It is quite the opposite, as intimated by the term "Amorite dynasties" current in modern historiography. The Amorites were rural classes of Syria, out of which several clans and individuals rose to power in the urban states not only of Syria but also of the Mesopotamian south. It was generally acknowledged by its contemporaries, including the Babylonians themselves, that the greatest power of the times was in the western regions of Syria—the kingdom of Aleppo, which had by then overshadowed Ebla. Ancient Aleppo—one of the most tantalizing sites of the entire Near East—is absent from the exhibit because it remains to be excavated.

SEARCHING FOR A THIRD URBAN CULTURE OF ANCIENT SYRIA: THE HURRIANS. Ebla and Mari are two signposts in the historical development

of the ancient Near East as a whole. They also delimit the area where a major new frontier of Syrian—and, in fact, ancient Near Eastern—archaeology is being explored in our own time: the Hurrian civilization in the northeast. Two major sites from this region and period have been known for some time—Chuera and Brak.

More than a dozen major excavations are currently underway in the region, one of the common interests being the search for some city that might be for the Hurrians what Ebla has been for the Semitic urban civilization of ancient Syria. Our own excavations at Mozan in this region have pointed to a city that may well be the largest in the Khabur region. It is extremely uniform in its depositional history: circumstantial evidence suggests that it may correspond to the site of ancient Urkish, the major Hurrian city in the third millennium, and if so, much indeed can be expected from the site.

The historical reason behind the rise to power of the Hurrians is their control of the piedmont area: it is from here that the natural resources of the mountain ranges in the north came to supply the needs of the new urban civilization. The material evidence of Hurrian cities was probably much like that of western Syria or of the Mesopotamian south, since they all shared in a rather uniform pattern of urban culture: that is why we

Aleppo is one of the most intriguing sites of the ancient Near East—but very hard to excavate because it was built up in the Middle Ages as a formidable defensive citadel. At the time of Hammu-rapi of Babylon, Aleppo was acknowledged by its contemporaries as the most powerful kingdom of south-western Asia. Syria is one of the richest archaeological grounds anywhere: it boasts a number of major capitals of the ancient world, many of which remain to be excavated. Photograph by James L. Stanfield, National Geographic Society.



The large documents from the royal archives of Ebla belong to one of the oldest collections of written texts anywhere in the world. This particular text (2350 to 2300 B.C.) is a large ledger that includes summaries of a number of administrative transactions. Some of the earliest library texts known to date also come from Ebla and western Syria. Photograph courtesy of SITES.

cannot identify any Hurrian city or Hurrian artifactual style from the excavations in what is most likely Hurrian territory (much as in the case of western Syria before the discovery of the archives of Ebla). It is only from their language, which we know from tantalizingly few and important bits of evidence, that we can postulate a Hurrian urban sphere. So the search for Hurrian cities means a search for Hurrian archives. The earliest known Hurrian text, dating to a period still in the third millennium, only slightly later than Ebla, was found on the surface in the area of Mozan, and that is one reason why excavations there are so full of promise.

SYRO-MESOPOTAMIAN EQUILIBRIUM. The large territorial states governed by Amorite dynasties had developed a network of reciprocal relationships at a level of sophistication and awareness that rivals that of the contemporary international scene. The various dynasties controlled distinct geopolitical regions, all roughly equivalent in size and importance, and all closely related in material culture, sociopolitical customs, and, to some extent, ethnic affiliation.

An occasional departure from this hard-won equilibrium turned out to be but a temporary adventure: in the second half of his reign, Hammu-rapi of Babylon conquered practically all of Syro-Mesopotamia except for western Syria and assumed the historic title of King of

the Four River Banks, that is, both banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, which is the ancient way of saying "Mesopotamia." (Hammu-rapi's title is traditionally understood as meaning "king of the four quarters of the world," which seems, however, less appropriate both linguistically and historically.) But it was a short-lived phenomenon: under his successor, the various territorial states regained their independence with only some relatively small changes.

One such change affected Mari. Destroyed by Hammu-rapi in the eighteenth century B.C., Mari was not rebuilt; instead, its role as capital of the Khabur region was taken over by the city of Terqa, which for two centuries ruled the region with its own dynasty of Amorite kings. Our own excavations at this site have concentrated on the residential quarters at the periphery of the ancient city (the ancient palace is presumably under the houses of the modern town of Ashara): here we have brought to light a number of written documents that depict the various aspects of life in a middle-class setting but also give us ample insight into the unfolding of the larger issues of political history. Thus we know of some thirteen Khana kings who, ruling from Terqa, followed the dynasty of Mari whether in building canals and palaces or in waging war and administering justice. In Terqa we also found—and remember, this is outside of a palace context—artifacts attesting to Egyptian and Hittite influence.

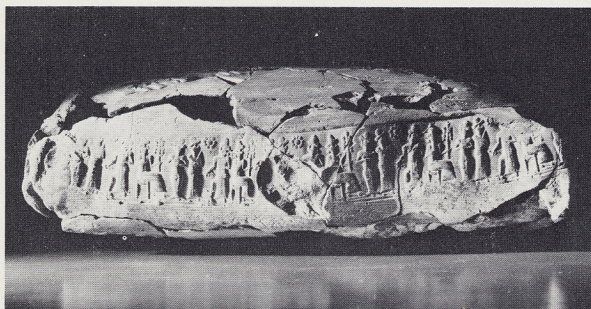
In fact, the first cuneiform tablets ever to be found on Syrian soil were found (long before our excavations) at Terqa: coming from the surface of the tell and largely bought in the antiquities market, they were mostly published between the end of the last century and the first decades of this one.

That contacts were far-flung indeed is shown by our find of a small cluster of cloves in a pantry room. Since cloves are known to have been cultivated only in the Far East (Indonesia and the Moluccas), this provides evidence for the most far-reaching trade contacts ever suspected for any ancient Near Eastern city.

Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati are a husband and wife team who have worked together for many years in the Near East, especially in Syria, Iraq, and Turkey. They are at present codirectors of three expeditions operating concurrently in Syria—at Terqa, Qraya, and Mozan. They have published widely in the field of history, archaeology, art, literature, and languages of ancient Syria and Mesopotamia. Dr. Giorgio Buccellati is Professor of the Ancient Near East and of History at UCLA, and Dr. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati is Professor of Art History and Archaeology at California State University Los Angeles.

In the next issue of Terra we will continue our exploration of the more recent history of ancient Syria by way of the exhibit Ebla to Damascus.

This tablet (about 1700 B.C.) excavated recently at Terqa has the rolling of an ancient cylinder seal on its side. The exquisite carving can still be seen in the rolling. Photograph courtesy of International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies.



White marble, mother-of-pearl, and lapis lazuli were used to make this face, which belonged to a statue that would have been assembled out of additional materials (2600 to 2350 B.C.). This example from Mari emphasizes the finely sculpted nose, cheeks, and mouth, which offset the large inlaid eyes. Photograph courtesy of SITES.



Seated on a carved throne, this woman wears a tufted shawl over a high polos-type hat and a tufted garment (Mari, 2600 to 2350 B.C.). These clothes were probably made from a woven material resembling sheep fleece; it is also possible that instead of being woven, the tufts were made of tassels. Photograph courtesy of SITES.

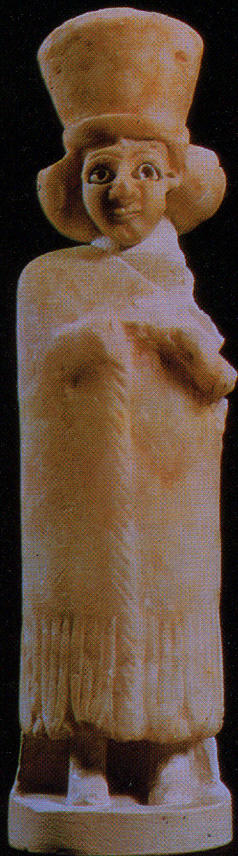
EBLA TO DAMASCUS

Ebla to Damascus: Art and Archaeology of Ancient Syria, on display at the Natural History Museum from March 15 to June 1, 1986, is an unprecedented exhibition of nearly 300 archaeological and artistic treasures from the National Museums of Syria representing 10,000 years of cultural developments. Ebla to Damascus tells a tale of this unique culture symbolized by ancient Ebla at one end of the chronological spectrum and modern Damascus at the other. This exhibit is cosponsored by Occidental Petroleum Corporation and the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum Foundation.

TICKETS

Each museum membership receives 2 free tickets to Ebla to Damascus. Additional tickets are \$4 for adults and \$1 for children (5-12) and senior citizens. Tickets purchased at the museum's Membership Office have no handling charge; there is a \$1 handling fee for each ticket order processed through the mail and a \$1 service charge for each purchased ticket. Tickets may also be obtained through Ticketmaster outlets at the May Company or Music Plus or charged by phone. Tickets entitle holders to visit all museum exhibits. Special exhibit hours are 10 to 5 Tuesday through Thursday, 10 to 8 on Friday, and 10 to 6 on Saturday and Sunday. The museum is closed on Mondays. Entrance to the exhibit will be through the East (Rose Garden) doors.

This beautiful goddess was set up at the entrance to the important ceremonial rooms of the Mari palace (1800 to 1750 B.C.). Note the lightly carved fish swimming in the flowing streams depicted on her skirt. Photograph courtesy of SITES.



Among the many statues found in the temples at Mari, this statuette (2500 to 2340 B.C.) shows us a good example of contemporary dress. The woman's high polos-type hat and long capelike robe draped over one shoulder are also seen on other examples from this period. Photograph courtesy of SITES.



We know that music played an important role in the life and culture of the ancients partly from representations of musicians as in this statue but also from more direct evidence: the Syrian city of Ugarit has provided the first musical score known anywhere in the world (it dates to about 1400 B.C.), and it is written in cuneiform on a clay tablet. This seated figure of the singer Ur-Nanshe comes from Mari (2600 to 2350 B.C.). Photograph courtesy of the Denver Museum of Natural History.