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FIGURINE AND PLAQUES FROM TERQA

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Figurine and Plaques from Terqa - Page 1

Since the excavations at Terqa were begun in 1976 a number of interesting clay figurines and plaques have been uncovered. (Numerous publications have appeared on the Terqa excavations in *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies*, *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica*, and *Annales Archeologiques de Syrie*; for a recent account of the Terqa excavations and a list of the Terqa excavation reports see G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, « Terqa » The First Eight Seasons, » forthcoming in *AAAS*) Thus far the excavations have concentrated on areas dating from the third millennium. The mid-second to millennium. At the beginning of the third millennium a large city wall about twenty meters wide was built. (G. Buccellati *Terqa preliminary Reports NO. 10 : The Fourth Season : Introduction and the Stratigraphic Record*, *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 10, 1979, pp. 42-83). Just inside the city wall on the northwestern side of (in SG 17) we excavated four meters of occupational strata continuing from the middle of the second millennium down to the construction of the city wall on virgin soil. A head of a female figurine (No. 1 below) was found in this area, locus 20, feature 17 dating to the

middle of the third millennium. A large number of similar figurines have been excavated in a third millennium contexts in Syria (for instance at Selenkhiye, H. Liebowitz, *Terracotta Figurines and Model Vehicles*, forthcoming in *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica*; Tell Hadidi, R. H. Dornemann, « Tell Hadidi : A Millennium of Bronze Age City Occupation, » *AASOR* 44 (1979) fig. 6 ; at Mari an analogous head came from the Ishtar Temple, M. T. Barrelet, *Figurines et Reliefs en Terre Cuite de la Mésopotamie Antique* (1968) No. 690, p. 358 and pl. LXIV These third millennium figurines emphasize the hair and the jewelry; similar ear treatment, probably denoting elaborate earrings can also be seen.

The remaining objects to be discussed here come from part of the second millennium excavations (Area F) where we are digging a Mari period public building. The plaque, No. 2, was found in a layer of fallen brick (Feature 45) just above a fill (Feature 28). In this same context we found a number of old Babylonian tablets and cylinder seals. Within the same building also connected with the old Babylonian strata came No. 4, a plaque depicting Ishtar. The plaque with a ritual scene, No.

5, was found on a floor Feature 329, which is connected with what we have described as a scribal installation of this building (AAAS forthcoming). Unfortunately No. 3 came from an Islamic pit dug into this building ; this pit contained mixed Islamic and Mari period pottery in addition to this plaque.

The presence of these four plaques might give us clue to the nature of the building which the architecture thus far has not . From the size of the building and the arrangement of the rooms it is clear that we are excavating a public building . The tablets thus far have not given a clue as to a more precise function . However the fact that we do have a scribal installation in it and have found tablets in all areas of it which have been excavated thus far , combined with the presence of these four plaques may indicate that the building served a ritual as well as administrative function and thus may be a temple. If this is true then we are excavating the service quarter of it and have not yet come to the ceremonial area . (Mary Stancavage is presently writing a dissertation on this building) .

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No. 1 Head and neck of a female figurine . L : 4cm . ; W : 2.4 cm . ; Th : 3.8 cm . ; backed clay ; Field Designation TQ4-120 .

The face of this figurine is dominated by her slit pellet eyes and a large protruding nose. On the forehead she wears a head band decorated with a single row holes . This band continues lower on the back of her head around her chignon type hair arrangement . Her right ear only shown in connection with an elaborate earring pierced by three perforations ; her left ear was similarly treated as indicated by

traces of holes . Around her neck is a tight undecorated band . Her head is perforated at the top , for either suspension or for the attachment of a head piece .

No. 2 Low relief plaque showing figure in a tiered skirt ; lower portion of the figure only is preserved. L : 7cm . ; W : 4.5 cm . ; Th : 1.9 cm ; baked clay ; Field Designation TQ7-88 .

Lower two - thirds of a molded plaque, flat except for the figure in low relief . The figure is female as indicated by her tiered garment (with four tiers visible) and counter weight extending down her back and ending at the hem of her garment ; this type of garment is usually reserved for deities in this period . The tiers of the garment are intentionally decorated with a series of horizontal lines . The figure is seen in profile with unshod feet pointing to the left ; a short ground line is visible under them .

No. 3 Low relief plaque showing an eagle holdiy two horned animals . L : 8,4 cm. W : 6.2 cm. (at widest portion at bottom) Th : 1 cm ; molded baked clay, pale yellow ; Field Designation TQ7 - 56 .

A tall eagle is shown with his wings outspread, head in profile and beak open ; in each of his talons he holds a horned animal with their heads turned back . The plaque itself has a trapazoidal shape and a rounded top .

This motif, so prevalent in the Early Dynastic period, is unusual in the old Babylonian period . In the Early Dynastic examples the relative proportion of the bird and his prey are about equal in the total composition ; in the Terqa example instead the eagle is much larger .

No. 4 Low relief plaque of Ishtar holding a double headed panther standard. L : 7.5 cm. w : 6.5 cm : Th : 1.5 cm ; baked caly ; Field Designation TQB - A24 .

The upper portion of a plaque in low relief shows Ishtar with arrows coming from her shoulder, a pointed hat with a brim and horns, straps on her upper body ending at a belt around her waist; she wears a skirt slit in front showing part of a bent leg (probably resting on an elevation). With her right arm she is holding a pointed standard with curved heads and necks of open-mouthed animals (usually described as panthers) ; one animal head faces Ishtar while the other faces the opposite direction. The shaft of the standard appears to be double with one portion decorated in a palm trunk pattern .

No. 5. Low relief plaque of a ritual scene. H : 8 cm. W: 7 cm. Th 1.5 cm. ; baked clay ; Field Designation : TQ8-A15.

This is a molded plaque in low relief with a design in two registers. The plaque excavated at Terqa has a duplicate in the Damascus Museum (III. 6 ; M2586 ; Damascus Museum No. 2115 ; I wish to thank the Director of the Damascus Museum for permission to publish this photograph ; see P. Amiet, *The Art of the Ancient Near East*, New York : Abrams, 1980, Fig. 442 ; I owe this reference to Daniela Buia Quinn. The small details of difference must depend on how the clay was molded. Since this type of plaque is made in a mold for serial production, we do have some examples of other plaques which have duplicates, both excavated and in museum collections. Six examples of a plaque made from the same mold were found in Mari

(A. Parrot, *Mission Archeologique de Mari*, Vol. II, *Le Palais: Documents et Monuments*, Pl. XXX ; see also a recently published example from the Lowie Museum by Yoko Tomabechi, *Catalog of Artifacts in the Babylonian Collection of the Lowie Museum of Anthropology*, *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 15 (1984), pp. 17,19 and pls. 13 and 15). What is unique, to my knowledge, is the fact that two examples from the same mold are found at two different sites- one excavated at Terqa the other from Mari.

In the Terqa plaque the upper register contains a seated god in a tiered garment facing a goddess also in a tiered dress with her hands in a worship position. On either side of this central scene are bearded figures in fringed mantles looking on ; the figure behind the goddess can be seen on the Damascus example and appears to be holding something in his hand . Above this scene are two, with the trace of a third, star disc in crescent symbols ; given the extremely symmetrical nature of the composition we can expect in the missing upper left corner there to may have been originally a fourth such symbol. An embrication pattern separates the two registers. The lower register has placed in the center two reclining bulls facing forward; the second bull is clearly seen on the Damascus example. Flanking both registers are two bull men holding standards topped by crescents containing sun discs. Next to the bull man on the right is a tall palm trunk without a top; a similar tree probably existed on the left but it is not preserved in either plaque. With the addition of the figures seen in the Damascus plaque it appears that the plaque is essentially complete

except for the upper left corner and a small portion of the left side.

The ritual subject of this plaque is unusual in a number of ways . The bull men each holding a sun in a crescent standard are rare in old Babylonian art where we have few of them performing any function (an example of a bull man holding cross discs in a crescent standard can be seen in E. Porada, corpus, No. 366; see also E. Porada, « Standards and Stools on Sealings of Nuzi and Other Examples of Mitannian Glyptic Art , » *Le Temple et le culte*, 1975, PP. 165 - 6 , especially fns 4-6). At Nuzi Porada had demonstrated the association of the sun and moon symbols with bulls and concluded that in her Nuzi examples they refer to the weather god (Ibid. pp. 168-9). It is possible that this may also be the case in the Terqa/Mari plaque . Another unusual feature is the placement of the design in two registers (see R. Opificius, *Das Altbabylonische TerrakottarelieF*, Berlin (1961), No. 283 from the British Museum for another example with two registers) .

The emphasis on symmetry in this composition is striking . The main deity and the goddess paying homage to him are flanked by two figures who are in turn framed by the upper portion of the two bull men . Below the recumbent bulls are Placed symmetrically underneath the

main figures . Both registers are framed by palm trunks ; the one on the left is obliterated but the traces are visible . The top of the plaque is emphasized by the horizontal element of the row of sun in crescent symbols . The bottom is missing in both examples . The emphasis in the overall design then, is the embedding of the principal deities in a composition which highlights the symbolic nature of this ritual . Contemporary ritual scenes in the Mari paintings also have this extreme emphasis on embedding . In the central part of the ritual scene found in courtyard 106 of the palace of Zimri Lim we find the figures placed in two registers; in this case the goddess in the upper register is in the center . The ritual act is emphasized also by the fact that below her figure there is an empty space flanked by two water goddesses (for a three dimensional interpretation of this scene see H. Al-Khalesi , *The Court of the palms: A Functional Interpretation of the Mari Palace*. *Bibliotheca Mesopotemica* (1978). In this case the embedding is accentuated by the frame around the central portion and the tall trees flanking it. While we have no other large scale evidence to compare in this period with the Mari painting, our Terqa plaque appeared to reflect some design aspects, especially a preference for symmetrical compositions and the embedding of ritual acts .





No.1



No.2



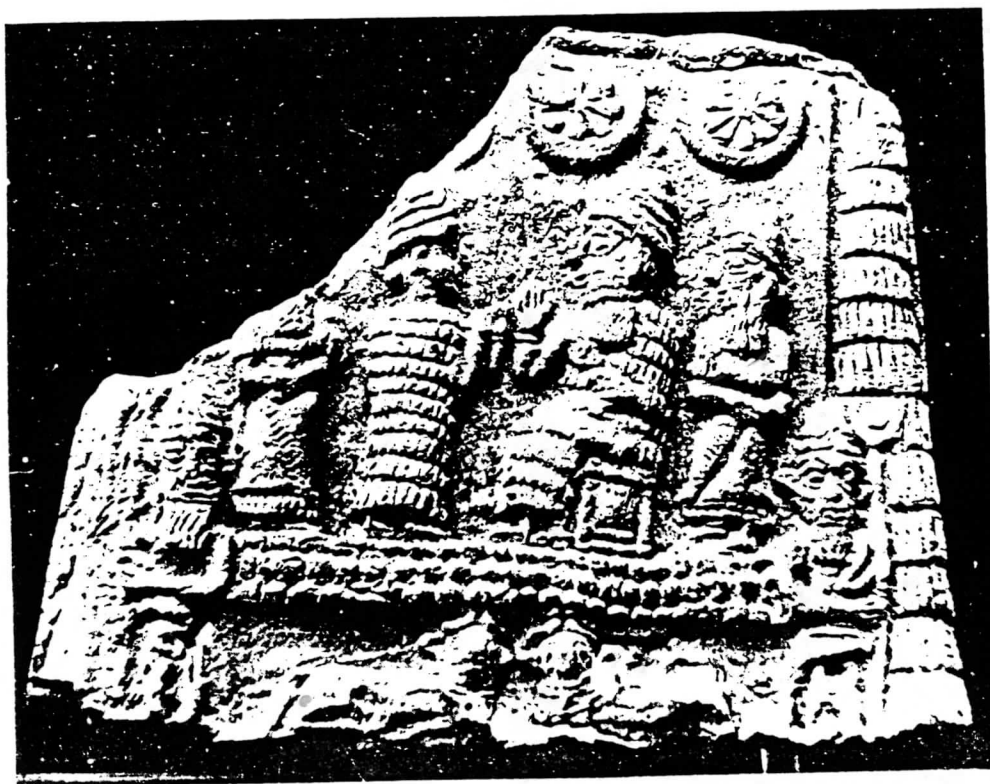
No.3



No.4



No.5



No.6

Plate II Two examples of a plaque with a ritual scene from Terqa (No.5) and Mari (No.6).