TERQA AND THE KINGDOM OF KHANA

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THE DISCOVERIES OF MARI, UGARIT, AND EBLA HAVE DONE FOR OUR century what the discoveries of Nineveh, Nimrud, and Khorsabad did for the last: they have riveted the attention of scholars and laymen alike on monumental buildings, on impressive works of art, and—perhaps most important—on vast epigraphic archives. Now that the limelight has shifted to Syria, and the special character of its early urban tradition is emerging in full splendor, we may wonder why such a realization has been so long in coming. It was late in the last century when the first cuneiform tablets of demonstrable Syrian provenance were found at Amarna in Egypt. Where, we may ask, were the first tablets found on Syrian soil? The site was Terqa, about 60 kilometers north of Mari near the juncture of the Habur and Euphrates rivers.

Still in the last century, shortly after the discovery at Amarna, F. Thureau-Dangin published the text of a contract which had been bought on the market but could be shown, on internal evidence, to have come from Terqa. Shortly after the beginning of the century a German archaeologist, who had stopped by accident at the site of Terqa, picked up on the surface a cuneiform document of greater significance: the foundation deposit of the temple of Dagan. Epigraphic finds from Terqa continued to trickle in over the years and came to constitute the group of Khana texts, so-called from the name of the kingdom of which Terqa was the capital. Until the discovery of Mari, the Khana texts, although few in number, represented the major single body of texts from Syria, and as such they were given their due attention by Assyriologists. With the recent excavations at Terqa, the total epigraphic collection reaches about a hundred items, a slender amount numerically but significant in other respects. Not only is the Terqa epigraphic inventory the third oldest in Syria, it is also quite diversified in its provenance (private houses, streets, a temple, and a large administrative building) and in its typology (royal

inscriptions, contracts, legal documents, letters, school texts, administrative texts, and a religious/literary text).

Excavations at Terqa are entering their ninth season—the longest American participation in an archaeological project in Syria. What is emerging is the picture of a city which was the successor of Mari on the mid-Euphrates. This much was anticipated on the basis of the Khana texts. Unexpected, on the other hand, was the discovery of massive third-millennium strata, including a large city wall. Also surprising was the extremely scarce evidence of Aramaic presence. Briefly the history of Terqa and its kingdom may be outlined as follows:

(1) It started out as a full-blown city around 3000 B.C., without any evidence of earlier strata at the site itself (there are important fourth-millennium strata at a nearby site, Qraya). The formidable defensive ring was established *ex novo*, indicating perhaps that the city was planned as such rather than having evolved organically and gradually from earlier settlements.

(2) While the defensive system remained in use for some 1,500 years, there is little evidence that Terqa enjoyed major political power in the second half of the third millennium. We may project back to this period the situation of the time (immediately following) when Terqa functioned as a provincial capital in the reign of Mari. Some indirect evidence points, however, to a possible role of Terqa as a religious center of unique significance *vis-à-vis* the capital, Mari. It may also be that the royal family of Mari was in fact originally from Terqa.

(3) Whatever the situation was, Terqa became the capital of the kingdom once controlled by Mari—the Habur and Middle Euphrates basin. (The evidence for Terqa's political position as a capital is circumstantial but compelling.) The territory bordered on Babylon to the south and the Habur triangle to the north, which placed the kingdom of Khana territorially on a par with the other major kingdoms of the Syro-Mesopotamian area, after the short-lived expansionist policies of Hammurabi were replaced by the more traditional patterns of regional distribution of power. We know of thirteen kings ruling the new Khana kingdom from Terqa, and five of them are associated with specific buildings that have been found in the excavations.

(4) The Aramaeans were present at Terqa from 1500 B.C. on, but they left behind very little, perhaps because the site was essentially uninhabited and served the tribe of Laqe only as a ceremonial center. If so, the presumed ancient distinction of Terqa as the center of

Dagan's cult survived after Terqa itself was abandoned as a regularly functioning urban center.

The most important architectural find at Terqa is the city wall. A solid mud-brick structure some 20 meters thick and 1.6 kilometers long, it was built in three stages beginning shortly after 3000 B.C. The impetus for its construction was perhaps danger from the rising Euphrates as much as from military incursions.

Going from the cyclopic dimensions of the city wall to a smaller scale, another discovery at Terqa which deserves special mention is an office-like area in which a scribe sat to conduct his business. Located in a room of a sprawling building, perhaps administrative in nature, this ancient office included all the elements of its modern counterpart. A platform of baked bricks set in a dirt floor corresponds to what we would call a desk. Instead of drawers, there were two jars within reach of the scribe as he squatted on the platform: one contained plain clay, ready for writing, and the other held six tablets. On one side a narrow bin set in a wall served most likely as a filing cabinet where the scribe probably kept his reference works. But as these were precious, he seems to have taken them with him as he left one day, leaving only a small tablet of little consequence. Seven more tablets were scattered on the floor, and just outside the door was a basket, well preserved but empty; if it had been used as a briefcase, then the scribe had filed all its contents away.

The single most important group of artifacts from Terqa are the cuneiform documents, some dating from the period of Mari but most from the Khana period. About 100 in number, they are diversified in content. A well-known document is an official royal inscription which records the dedication of an "ice house." The contracts are very characteristic, showing great concern for the preservation of certain obligations. For example, large numbers of witnesses were present at each transaction, and their names, filiation, and profession are inscribed on the documents. Several witnesses affixed their seals on the documents in lieu of signatures (only scribes could write in cuneiform). The tablets were encased in clay envelopes, which repeated the text of the tablet almost like a carbon copy. In case of a controversy about the authenticity of the contract, the envelope would be opened in front of a judge and only the text inside was considered to be juridically binding. In one rare case well documented at Terqa, not one but two envelopes were placed around the contract.

The punishments for breach of contract were imaginative. For breach of sale, hot asphalt was to be poured on the head of the

transgressor. In the case of a will made by a husband with his wife as beneficiary, the punishment envisaged in case the husband were to file for divorce calls for him to leave the house "empty handed" and to go tend the palace oxen. Should the wife file for divorce, she too would have to leave the house "in her nakedness" and be exposed from the roof terrace of the palace. As a guarantor of the juridical order, the palace (i.e., the royal administration) would receive for every case of breach of contract a substantial monetary fine.

While serving the purposes of a legal transaction, the seals are also the embodiment of an important artistic tradition. The corpus of Terqa seals and seal impressions is significant for several reasons. Artistic monuments, especially well-dated ones, are scarce from this period in Syro-Mesopotamia, and Terqa thus provides well-stratified documentation to fill in the gap. This enables us to securely determine the stylistic developments during the approximately 200 years that Terqa was a major power in the region. The Khana style, named after the kingdom, is characterized by a blending of Mesopotamian and Syrian elements, syncretized into a uniquely harmonious whole. The seal carvers chose to depict their figures in such a way that the initial drillings used in the cutting of the stone are still quite obvious. They often placed the principal deity on the left side of the seal, as opposed to the prevailing right-hand orientation of Mesopotamian and Syrian seals. Taking full advantage of the whole area of the seal to display the principal figures, Khana seal carvers did not clutter up the background with a number of smaller figures, which is so often the case in seals carved in the surrounding areas. (See Fig. 49.)

Since many of the seal owners are named in the tablets, we are also able to reconstruct up to three generations of the families living in the city as well as their activities. This is especially the case during the reign of one of the Khana kings, Yadikh-Abu (ca. 1720 B.C.). In one instance we can even determine the economic status of an individual, Puzurum, along with that of his family.

A rich find was made in a corner of the altar room of the temple dedicated to Ninkarrak, the goddess of healing. A total of 6,637 beads were found clustered tightly together in what must have been a bag which had disintegrated (see Fig. 50). The beads were mostly of semi-precious stone, from lapis and carnelian to agate and chalcedony. From religious texts we know that these were the kinds of precious amulets which were given to patients who sought relief from bad omens. Thus it is plausible that a pouch once contained these stones which were to be given to patient-worshipers by a priest.

What at first seemed like a more modest find turned out to be of

Figure 49
Seal impression on the side of a clay envelope from Terqa, dating to ca. 1720 B.C.

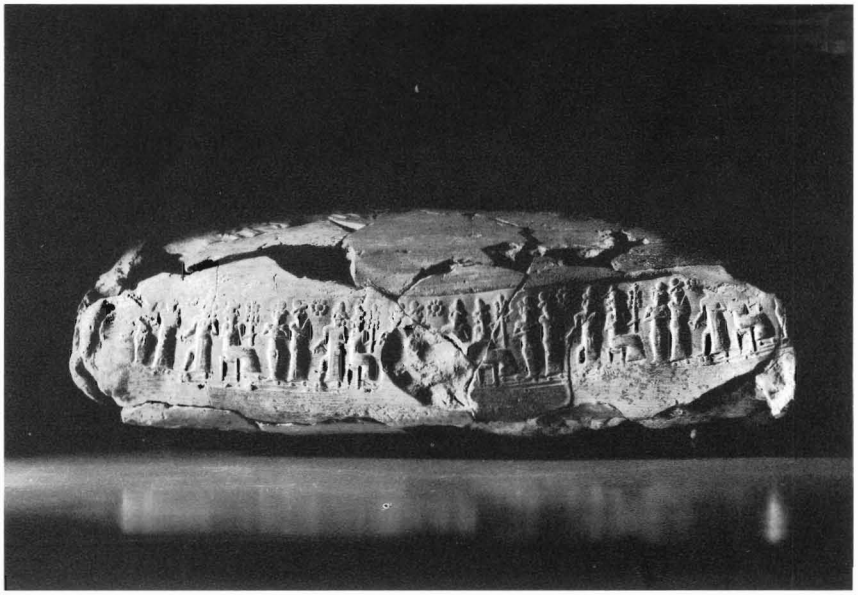
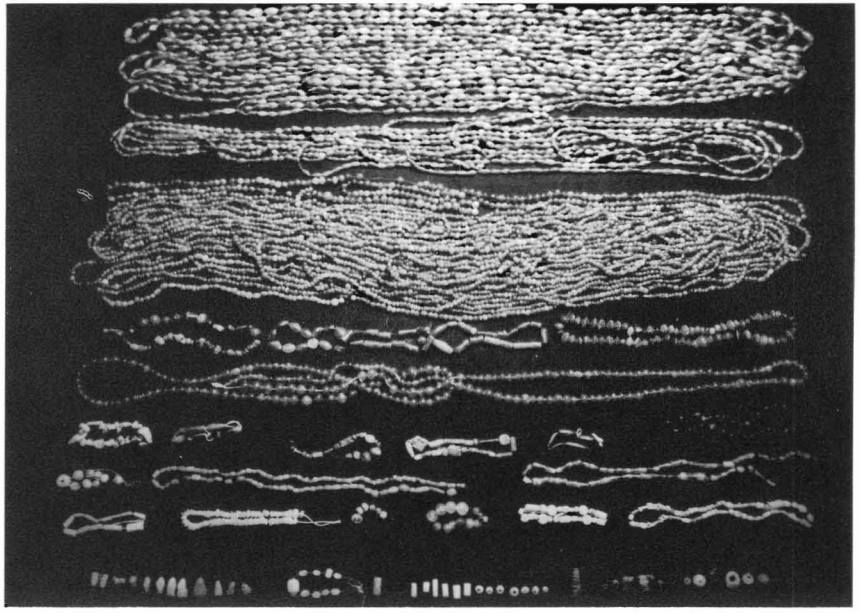


Figure 50
Hoard of beads found in the Ninkarrak Temple at Terqa.



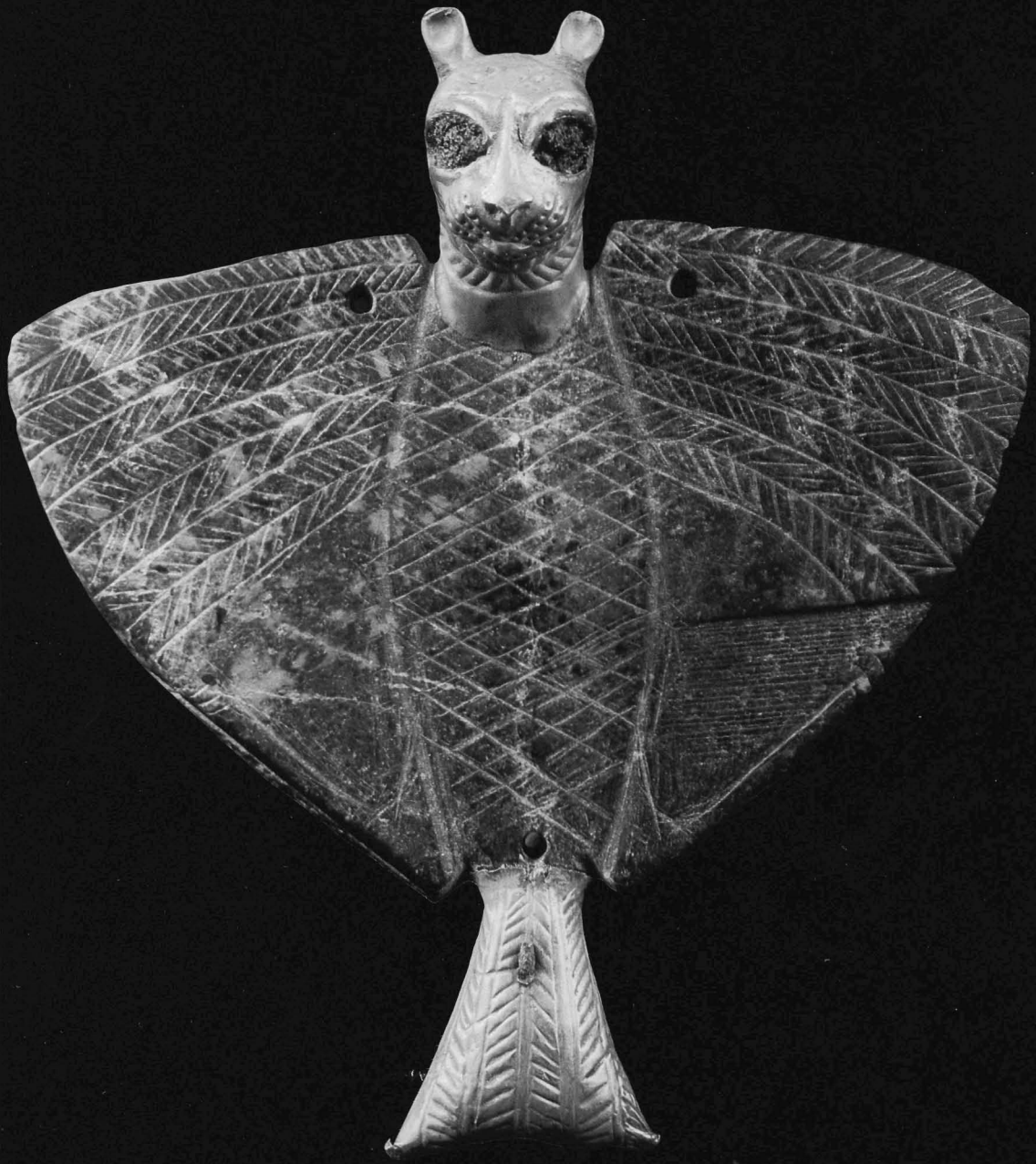
great historical significance. A few carbonized cloves were found in a jar in a pantry room of a middle-class house. What is remarkable about these cloves is that they originated in the Far East and in fact were not previously known to have been in use in the West before Roman times. Our find extends back in time by almost 2,000 years and out in geographical area by some 6,500 kilometers the range of cultural connections between Terqa and the Mesopotamian area on the one hand and the Eastern trade routes on the other.

Recommended Reading

G. Buccellati et al. "Terqa Preliminary Reports, 1–12." *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 1 (1977)–3 (1983).

O. Rouault. *L'archive de Puzurum*. Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 16 (Malibu: Undena, 1984).

EBLA TO DAMASCUS



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