

THE SCARABS FROM THE NINKARRAK TEMPLE CACHE AT TELL ʿAŠARA/TERQA (SYRIA): HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT, AND CHRONOLOGY

By Alexander Ahrens¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Though already known to Assyriologists through cuneiform documents from the end of the 19th century, the ancient city of Terqa – identified with the village of ʿAšara on the Middle Euphrates since 1910 and briefly excavated in 1923² – archaeologically only re-emerged during the 1970s, when regular excavations began at the site under a joint expedition led by Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati of the University of California at Los Angeles (Fig. 1).³ The excavations, which since 1987 continue under the direction of Olivier Rouault of the University of Lyon (Université Lumière, Lyon II), have yielded important archaeological and historical results concerning the history of the Middle Euphrates region and Mesopotamia in general.⁴

Among the 6,637 beads found within the cache in the cella of the Temple of Ninkarrak at Tell ʿAšara/Terqa in 1979–80 (Area C), nine scarabs were discovered.⁵ Although the scarabs were already published in a preliminary excavation report as early as 1983, they hardly received scholarly attention and were never included in a chronological or typological assessment. The

scarabs from Terqa represent the easternmost archaeological attestation of this specific type of object found in a sealed deposit dating to the later part of the Middle Bronze Age (i.e. late Old Babylonian period or “Khana Period”) discovered so far. It is in this perspective that the scarabs acquire special chronological significance.

2. TELL ʿAŠARA/TERQA AND THE TEMPLE OF NINKARRAK

The temple of Ninkarrak at Terqa, the goddess of good health (the Akkadian “Gula”),⁶ is a typical Mesopotamian bent-axis structure, consisting of ceremonial rooms and an administrative sector also used for living (Fig. 2). The temple area yielded several cuneiform documents, not only identifying the temple and its goddess, but also naming a number of kings apparently ruling at Terqa. The temple was reused and remodelled over successive periods and a total of four phases (*phases I–IV*) could be distinguished.⁷ To the south of the temple, the so-called “House of Puzurum” – named after the individual attested in most of the documents found there and thus probably its owner or an earlier owner⁸ – also

¹ German Archaeological Institute, Damascus. This contribution is based on a paper held at the “Workshop on Mesopotamian Chronology”, organized by SCIEEM 2000, Vienna, 15–16 January 2010. I am indebted to Giorgio Buccellati (Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles) and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati (California State University, Los Angeles), the excavators of the Temple of Ninkarrak, for their kind invitation and permission to work on the scarabs. The English manuscript was proof-read by Federico A. Buccellati (Institute of Near Eastern Archaeology, University of Frankfurt). The present article is a preliminary report of the research conducted on the scarabs, a final report with a complete and thorough presentation as well as chronological and typological analysis of all scarabs will be published as part of the final publication of the Temple of Ninkarrak currently prepared by G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati (see AHRENS *forthc.* a; BUCCELLATI – KELLY-BUCCELLATI *forthc.*).

² THUREAU-DANGIN 1897; 1908; 1909; HERZFELD 1910; THUREAU-DANGIN – DHORME 1924.

³ For a detailed historical presentation of the site’s exploration see BUCCELLATI – KELLY-BUCCELLATI 1977a; 1977b; 1983; BUCCELLATI 1988; BUCCELLATI – KELLY-BUCCELLATI 1997, 188–190; ROUAULT 2004, 51–53.

⁴ ROUAULT 1991; 1992, 1994; 1998; 2001; 2004; ANONYMOUS 2007.

⁵ For the finds of temple cache, see LIGGETT 1982, 18, pl. 11 (scarabs); BUCCELLATI – KELLY-BUCCELLATI 1980; 1983, 57, figs. III.6 (displaying all beads and scarabs found in the cache, the scarabs are shown on the lower left) and III.7 (displaying seven of the nine scarabs); CHAVALAS 1996, 97; STANCAVAGE *in prep.*

⁶ See FRANKENA – SEIDL 1957/71, 695–697.

⁷ BUCCELLATI 1988, 50–51; for the pottery, see KELLY-BUCCELLATI – SHELBY 2007, 120, 123–124.

⁸ Since the contracts found in the house were all opened, i.e. they no longer had current value, Puzurum may no longer have been active at the time the documents were kept in the storeroom, but presumably one of his sons.

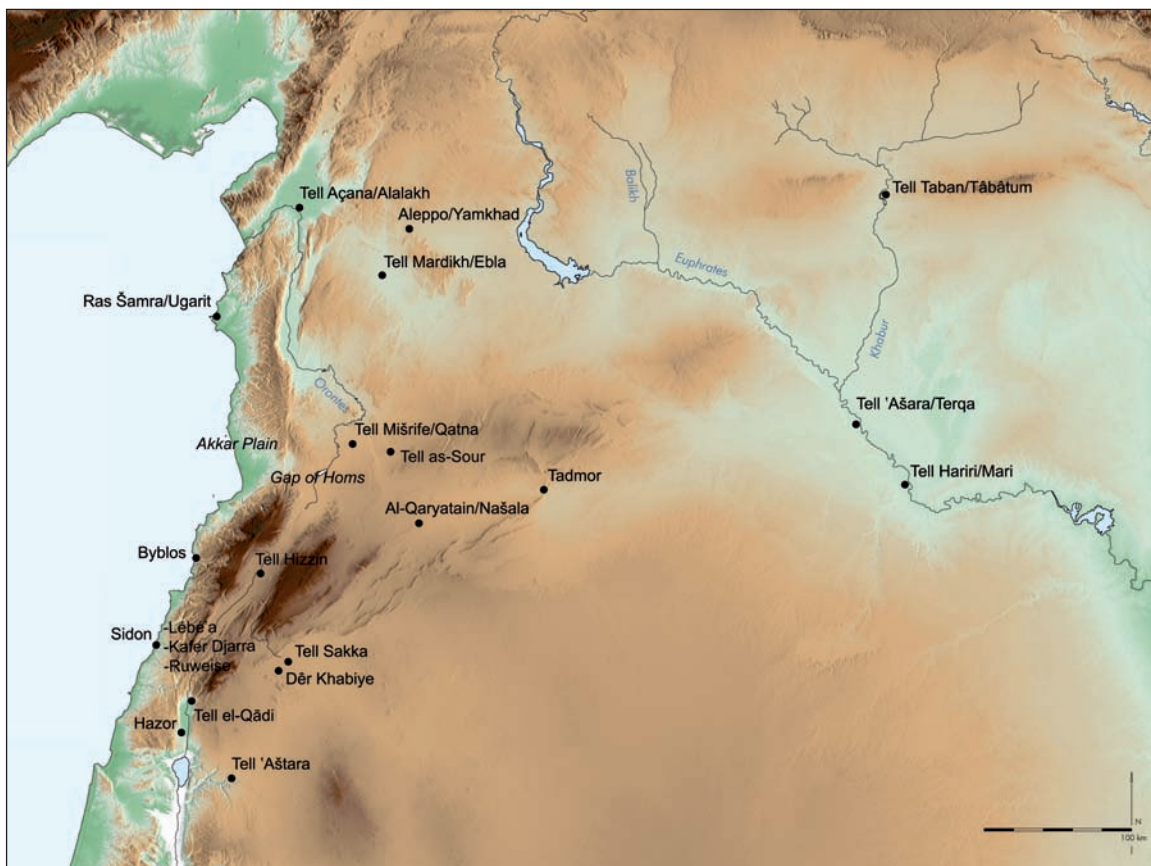


Fig. 1 Map of the northern Levant and northern Mesopotamia showing principal sites mentioned in the text (DAI Damascus, A. Ahrens)

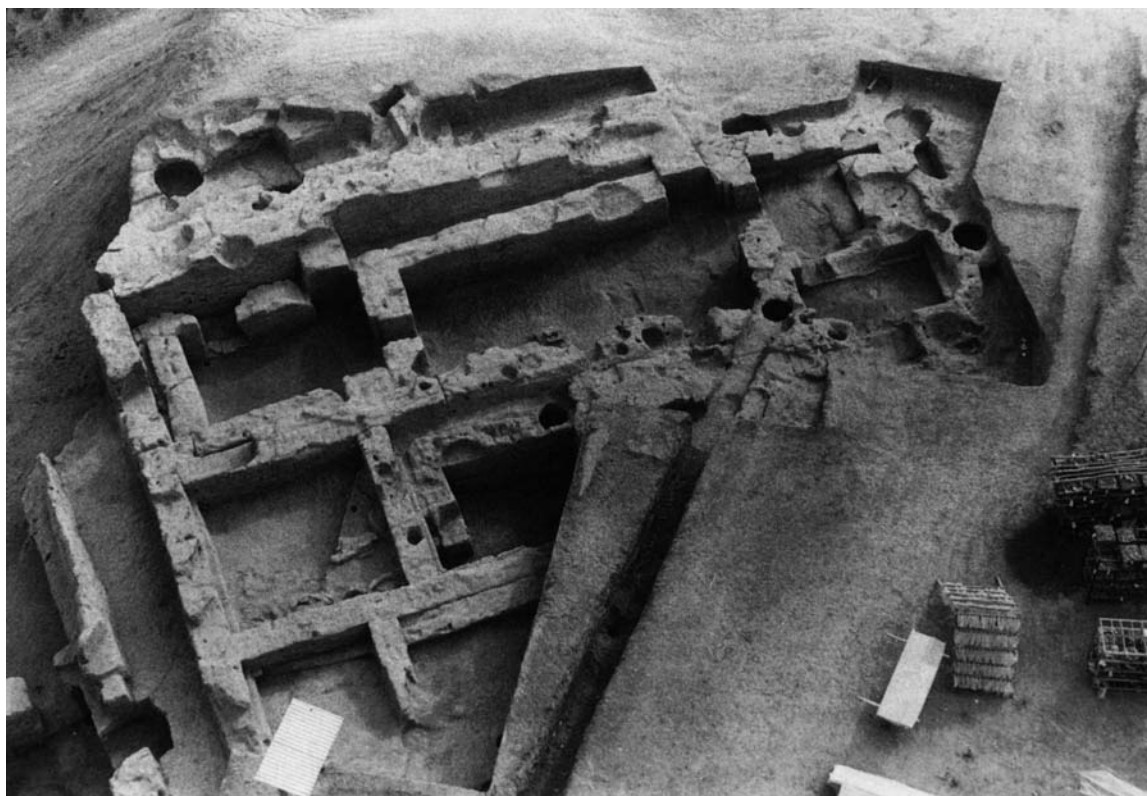


Fig. 2 Aerial view of the Temple of Ninkarrak/Tell 'Ašara during excavation (after BUCCELLATI 1988, 53, fig. 5)

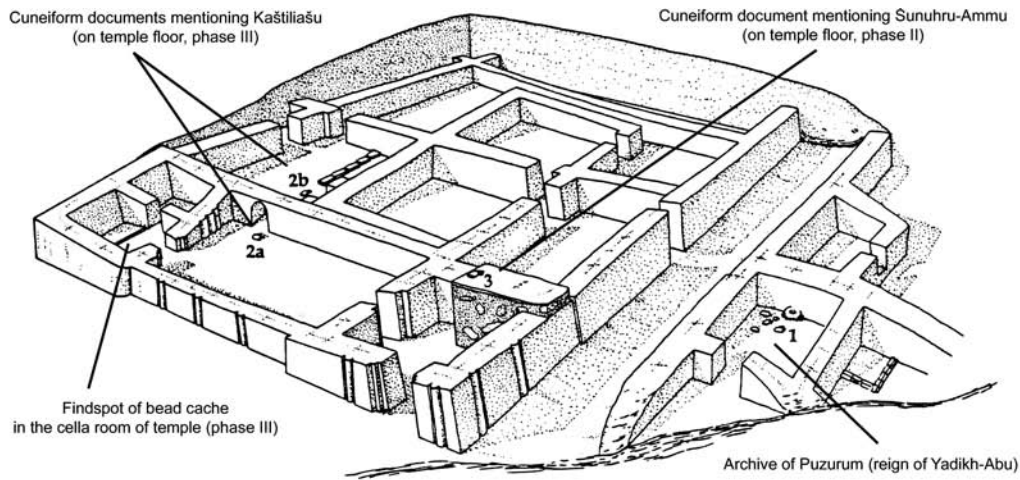


Fig. 3 Isometric reconstruction of the Temple of Ninkarrak and part of the “House of Puzurum” at Terqa/Tell ʿAšara, numbers 2a and 2b indicating the findspots of cuneiform documents mentioning Kaštiliašu on the floor of the phase III temple (after BUCCELLATI 1988, 50, fig. 4, with additions by the author)

yielded several cuneiform documents, which seem to be the earliest dated tablets in this area, dating to the reign of king Yadikh-Abu(m), probably the same king Yadikh-Abu who was defeated by Samsu-iluna of Babylon.⁹ According to the twenty-eighth regnal year name of this king, Samsu-iluna of Babylon defeated Yadikh-Abu of Terqa in a military campaign – an event of such importance that it was used to name three successive years. This synchronism thus provides a good basis for the overall reconstruction of the list of kings ruling at Terqa during the so-called “Khana period,” the period immediately following the destruction and fall of the regional capital Mari by Hammurabi of Babylon. Terqa on the other hand probably became the new political center of the region,¹⁰ its territorial extent in the north including the central region of the Mari kingdom, the Middle Euphrates basin as well as the lower Khabur up to the Khabur triangle;¹¹ to the

south, the Khana kingdom at that time certainly bordered the kingdom of Babylon.¹² Chronologically, the documents from Terqa thus cover the periods not covered by the Mari archives. Recent excavations conducted by the French team have led to the discovery of even more cuneiform texts in various areas of the site, confirming the identification of the Temple of Ninkarrak as such and also giving additional new names of hitherto unknown kings ruling at Terqa, thus substantially adding to the list of kings attested at Terqa.¹³

Among the kings mentioned in the texts from the Temple of Ninkarrak is a king with a Kassite name Kaštiliašu, who is attested in two stratified cuneiform documents and two further seal impressions coming from phase III of the temple, as well as three unstratified cuneiform texts (Fig. 3).¹⁴

In the list of kings from Terqa, Kaštiliašu seems to follow some time after kings Yapah-Sûmû-Abu(m),¹⁵ Isi-Sûmû-Abu(m) and Yadikh-Abu(m),

⁹ ROUAULT 1984, 4; BUCCELLATI 1988, 50. According to the Middle Chronology to have reigned 1749–1712 BC, according to the Low Chronology 1676–1639 BC, see discussion in MEBERT 2009.

¹⁰ CHARPIN 2004 (356–360) considers the possibility that the city of Mari maintained its political importance.

¹¹ This extent of the Khana kingdom in the north is now also supported by the recent finds of late Old Babylonian cuneiform documents at Tell Taban (Old Babylonian Tâbâtum) located in the Middle Khabur region. Some of the documents found at Tell Taban are dated by the year names of kings Isi-Sûmû-Abu(m) and Yadikh-Abu(m), hitherto only known from texts

found at Terqa; the documents seem to prove that the city was under the hegemony of these kings, see YAMADA 2008, 54–58; SHIBATA – YAMADA 2009; SHIBATA 2010, 217–218, 230.

¹² BUCCELLATI 1988, 46–48; PODANY 2002, 12; CHARPIN 2002, 68; 2004, 387–391.

¹³ ROUAULT 1998; 2001; 2004; also BUCCELLATI 1988; PODANY 1991/93, fig. 1; 2002; CHARPIN 2002; 2004.

¹⁴ ROUAULT 1984; BUCCELLATI 1988, 51, tab. 1; CHARPIN 2002, 71–72; 2004, 372–373; RECULEAU 2010, 208.

¹⁵ Possibly to be identified with an individual of the same name mentioned in a legal document dealing with a large-scale land transaction from Alalakh level VII also

the first kings attested at Terqa after the fall of Mari¹⁶ (Podany's "Early Khana Period"¹⁷). As phase III of the Temple of Ninkarrak can be stratigraphically and chronologically linked with the reign of king Kaštiliašu,¹⁸ the scarabs' deposition within the cache must thus be dated to his reign or slightly earlier to the reign of one of his immediate predecessors.¹⁹ Following the – albeit ambiguous and in part highly problematic – chronological order of kings attested at Terqa thus far, king Kaštiliašu then possibly would seem to have been a contemporary of the Babylonian kings Samsu-iluna (i.e. at the very end of his reign), or – more likely – Abi-ešuh and/or even Ammi-ditana.²⁰ Kaštiliašu²¹ was in turn succeeded by kings Šunuhru-ammu and Ammi-madar (son of Šunuhru-ammu), the last kings of the "Early Khana Period."²²

3. THE SCARABS FROM THE CACHE²³

One of the most spectacular finds of the fifth and sixth seasons was a large cache of beads buried in a small pit dug beneath the floor of the altar room or cella. Among the beads, the nine scarabs were discovered. From the findspot of the beads and scarabs it is apparent that the scarabs were conceived as amulets and thus one can say with a high probability that they were not being used for

administrative purposes. Perhaps the cache can be best understood either as a repository ("*favis-sa*") in which material related to the cult of the goddess Ninkarrak was deposited at the end of its use, or as a storage space in which the beads were kept as part of the cultic practices carried out. The scarabs and beads were probably clustered in a cloth bag that had completely disintegrated at the time of the cache's discovery.²⁴

The scarabs themselves fall into two distinctive typological and chronological groups: the first group consisting of eight smaller scarabs displaying (partly) misrendered hieroglyphic signs of the common and well-known repertoire of such signs on their bases,²⁵ the second – albeit comprising only one specimen – featuring a rather fanciful variation on the well-known "coiled and woven" pattern on its base (Fig. 4).²⁶

All scarabs from the cache are made of steatite (enstatite) and are clearly Levantine in origin, not Egyptian imports. Unfortunately, however, it is not possible to further define their place of manufacture, since the parallels for the specific types attested at Terqa can be found at numerous sites along the Levantine littoral.

The eight smaller scarabs belonging to the first group, measuring approximately 1.0×1.0

naming kings Abba-El of Yamkhad/Aleppo and Yarim-Lim of Alalakh; see ROUAULT 1984, 44–47 (TFR 1 8:20); BUCCELLATI 1988, 50–53; CHARPIN 2002, 65; see also NOVÁK 2007, 395–397, figs. 9 and 11.

¹⁶ BUCCELLATI 1988, 51; PODANY 1991/1993, 56, fig. 1; 2002; CHARPIN 2002, 64–66; ROUAULT 2004, 54–55. Kings Yapah-Sûmû-Abu(m) and Isi-Sûmû-Abu(m) at the moment being the first kings attested at Terqa after the fall of Mari, thus probably ruling immediately before Yadikh-Abu(m). That Isi-Sûmû-Abu(m) was indeed the predecessor of king Yadikh-Abu(m) is now proven by the cuneiform documents from Tell Taban, see YAMADA 2008, 54–58; 2010, 247–252; SHIBATA – YAMADA 2009, 89–91; SHIBATA 2010.

¹⁷ PODANY 2002, chapter 2. The fall of Mari dating 1664 BC according to the Low Chronology, or 1760 BC according to the conventional Middle Chronology.

¹⁸ An offering list naming the king was found on the floor sealing the cache, see BUCCELLATI 1988, 50, fig. 4.

¹⁹ New documents found at Terqa refer to a king named Zimri-Lim, son of Idi-Abu. Should this Idi-Abu (also written Yadi-Abu) indeed be identified with Yadikh-Abu(m), his son Zimri-Lim would then probably have ruled directly after his father. Furthermore, according to the prosopographical data (summarized in ROUAULT 2004), the probable rulers Kasapan, Kuwari and Hanaya (under

control of a certain Ya'fusa) might also have ruled before Kaštiliašu, in this scenario also substantially lowering the date for Kaštiliašu in terms of relative and absolute chronology. The evidence supporting this chronological order of kings, which was refuted by PODANY 2002 (43), is still ambiguous and remains to be confirmed; for a summary of the problems pertaining to the chronological order of kings and a discussion, see CHARPIN 2002, 70–72; ROUAULT 2004, 53–56; PRUZSINSZKY 2009, 97–98, table 26.

²⁰ CHARPIN 2002, 71–72; 2004, 372–373; RECULEAU 2010, 208; see also COLBOW 2000, 123–124. According to the Low Chronology 1637–1610 BC (Abi-ešuh) and 1609–1573 BC (Ammi-ditana), see MEBERT 2009; for the kings, see PIENKA 1998.

²¹ CHARPIN (2002, 71) is of the opinion that "Kaštiliašu régna sans doute environ une décennie après les textes les plus récentes de Yadih-Abum (...)." ²² BUCCELLATI 1988, 51, tab. I; PODANY 1991/93, 56, fig. 1; 2002; CHARPIN 2002, 72; ROUAULT 2004, 54.

²³ See AHRENS forthcoming a for a more detailed and thorough presentation of the scarabs.

²⁴ BUCCELLATI – KELLY-BUCCELLATI 1980; BUCCELLATI – KELLY-BUCCELLATI 1997, 190.

²⁵ BEN-TOR 2009.

²⁶ Typological features referred to in the text according to TUFNELL 1984.



Fig. 4 The scarabs from the Temple of Ninkarrak/Tell ʿAšara
(Photo courtesy of International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies, IIMAS)

× 0.5 cm, all share distinctive typological features which altogether make it highly plausible that they were manufactured in one workshop and suggest a short time span of production (belonging to this group are also two hitherto unpublished scarabs from the cache²⁷). Among the scarabs from this group, one peculiar “double scarab” is also of interest.²⁸ The small size of these scarabs, almost half of the general “stan-

dard” size of scarabs, might additionally underline their amuletic character, possibly used for funerary contexts. The hieroglyphic signs on the scarabs are poorly executed and sometimes apparently misunderstood, also emphasizing their Levantine manufacture.²⁹ According to their typological features – almost all with variations of “type B” (B2) heads, e9–e11 sides and plain backs (O)³⁰ –, these scarabs seem to date to

²⁷ See AHRENS forthcoming a.

²⁸ Parallels of this specific type of scarab are found at Byblos, see DUNAND 1937/39, 94, pl. CXXX: nos. 1382, 1383 and 1384 (levels I/II), dating to the 13th–15th Dynasty; see KEEL 1995, 61–62, chapter IV.A.1.1.5 (§ 131).

²⁹ BEN-TOR 1997, 171–175; see BEN-TOR 2009 for a compilation of these misrendered hieroglyphic signs.

³⁰ The double scarab from this group exceptionally features a unique horizontal and vertical line dividing the pronotum and the elytra.

the MB IIB period³¹ (roughly contemporary with the 13th–early 15th Dynasties).³² Among others, parallels for these specific scarabs are attested at the sites of Sidon,³³ Byblos,³⁴ Ugarit³⁵ in the northern Levant, and Tell el-ʿAjjul³⁶ in the southern Levant.

The larger design scarab from the cache, belonging to the second typological group, measures 2.1 × 1.45 × 1.0 cm, and clearly dates later than the group of smaller scarabs.³⁷ The scarab's base design shows a distinctive version of the so-called "coiled and woven pattern" (convoluted coils with two ropes and two central x-crosses)³⁸ with balancing elements repeated at each side of the base design. A "twisted" or "barred strand" ("rope border") encompasses the convoluted coil pattern.³⁹ Altogether, its typological features – B6 head, d5 side, plain back (O), and the base design – chronologically place it not earlier than ca. 1650/40 BC, i.e. the MB IIB/C period (roughly contemporary with the 15th Dynasty in Egypt).⁴⁰ Parallels of this specific type are also attested at other sites, e.g. at ʿAmman,⁴¹ Tell el-ʿAjjul,⁴² and Gezer.⁴³

³¹ The chronological system adopted here, primarily for reasons of better applicability to the terminology used by current scarab research, is that of the southern Levant generally following Albright's terminology (ALBRIGHT 1965; 1966; 1973), with periods MB IIA and MB IIB/C roughly correlating with MB I–II (and related subdivisions) in the northern Levant (Syria); see MATTHIAE 1981; GERSTENBLITH 1983, 2–3, tab. 1; NIGRO 2002; 2009, tab. 2; BIETAK 2002, fig. 15.

³² The scarabs typologically vaguely resembling scarabs from the so-called "B2-head-group" recently put forward by KEEL 2004, 81–98 (§ 4), figs. 33–62; see also BEN-TOR 2007, 151.

³³ CONTENAU 1924, pl. XXXIV: c (from Kafer Djarra); GUIGUES 1937, fig. 42 (from Lébéʿa); TUFNELL 1975/76, 8: no. 5 (from Ruweise); MLINAR 2004, 153 (.3, scarab no. 4077/870; measurements: 1.0 × 0.7 × 0.4 cm); LOFFET 2003, 28; 2004, 150; see also MLINAR 2009, 40–42, fig. 18 (with further parallels).

³⁴ DUNAND 1937/39, 94, pl. CXXX: 1382 and 1384 (from levels I/II, ~13th Dynasty).

³⁵ SCHAEFFER 1932, pl. XI: 2 (from niveau II, "Middle Bronze Age"); SCHAEFFER 1939, 70, fig. 59: 9710.

³⁶ KEEL 1997, 374–375: 794, 386–387: 827.

³⁷ See BEN-TOR 2007, 170, pl. 88: 7, 27, 31, 40, 41, 44, 50; pl. 89: 1, 4 ("Late Palestinian Series").

³⁸ Tufnell's design class 6B2a (TUFNELL 1984, 125–127, 306, pl. XXIV, "Convoluted – coils"; "Convoluted – knot-like, central X-cross"). Given the many variations of this specific pattern, Tufnell points out that "the infi-

4. AMULETIC FUNCTION AND MEANING OF THE SCARABS

It is quite obvious by the findspot and the context in which the objects were actually found at Terqa that all of the scarabs discussed here were not used as actual seals within an administrative context, but were rather conceived as amulets with a "protective" character. With all probability, even before the scarabs reached Terqa they were used as such.

Although exact comparisons are elusive, the hieroglyphic signs used in some of the scarabs' base designs clearly display an assorted arrangement of (partially misrendered) signs generally pertaining to "happiness," "beauty" or "good fortune" (*nfr*, Gardiner sign list F 35) and "protection" (*s3*, Gardiner sign list V 17) within the context of ordinary life. Coupled with the sign *nb* (Gardiner sign list V 30, lit. meaning "all" or "every") the arrangement of these signs thus could also well be read as meaning "all protection" (*s3 nb*) and "all health" (*nfr nb*) and the like in a pious or devout

nite variety of detail in these designs makes them difficult to classify and to describe" (TUFNELL 1984, 125).

³⁹ See Tufnell's base design classes 8A and 8B (TUFNELL 1984, 131, pls. XXXIV–XXXV, "Rope borders – twisted/barred strand"), BEN-TOR 2007, 146, pl. 62: 9–22; 174, pl. 94: 4–40; FISCHER – KEEL 1995, 141.

⁴⁰ HORNUNG – STAEHELIN 1976, 358: 856, pl. 95 (cowtoid, Hyksos period); PETRIE 1925, pl. VIII: 145/146 (head, back, and sides not depicted); ROWE 1936, pls. II: 82, III: 88 (Hyksos period), from museum collections.

⁴¹ WARD 1966, 10, pl. XX: J 9377; EGGLER – KEEL 2006, 28–29: 31. The scarab comes from the late Middle Bronze Age "Cave II" in the area of the citadel of ʿAmman (Ġabal al-Qalʿa, Group B). Apart from the base design, also the scarab's typological features are almost identical to the scarab found at Terqa.

⁴² Unfortunately, the back and side of the scarabs are not depicted. Also, the stratigraphic sequence of the site is problematic. For the scarabs, see PETRIE 1931, pl. XIII: 62 (from level I/II, probably 15th Dynasty, see KEEL 1997, 104–105); MACKAY – MURRAY 1952, pl. 10: 149; TUFNELL 1984, 306–307, pl. XXIV: 2102 (two ropes), pl. III: 1096; PETRIE 1934, pl. IX: 296, photo pl. 68 (with three ropes); KEEL 1997, 136–137: 94; 396–397: 857; 503: 1175 with a description of the scarabs' findspots and further references.

⁴³ MACALISTER 1912, pl. 205a: 1; pl. 209: 1. The date of the context is highly problematic. Among the parallels, the two scarabs show the convoluted coil pattern with two x-crosses together with a twisted rope border.

sense.⁴⁴ Other signs and motifs used on the scarabs are clearly only to be seen as “decorative fillings” or misrendered signs of Levantine origin.⁴⁵ As even in Egypt these specific hieroglyphic signs were almost exclusively used for the base design decorations of scarab amulets during the entire Middle Bronze Age, the presence of such hieroglyphs and motifs on the scarabs found at Terqa is hardly surprising and thus reflects the common and well-known repertoire of signs used for these amulets. However, it may seem too far-fetched to actually believe that the hieroglyphs as such were correctly understood at Terqa, given the scarce evidence of Egyptian imports (and therefore knowledge of the signs’ actual meaning) in this region during the late Middle Bronze Age. The findspot of the scarabs, on the other hand – amidst thousands of other amuletic beads deposited within a temple of the goddess of well-being –, may suggest that this was not the case and that the hieroglyphs were in fact understood correctly. Maybe the scarabs’ actual “meaning” and “function” was somehow transmitted and conveyed to Terqa by the place of origin of the objects (probably via direct connections with the west, see below, § 6).

Nonetheless, apart from the amuletic value of the scarabs, the “exotic character” of these foreign objects certainly additionally enhanced their value and added to their worth. As the scarab seal as such was not part of the indigenous material culture of Middle Bronze Age Mesopotamia, to which Terqa clearly culturally belonged, these objects must have stood out among the other objects deposited in the cache. Also, the fact that only a mere nine scarabs among the thousands of

beads were found, attests to their singularity in the region during the period.

5. THE CHRONOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCARABS

It is evident, of course, that the scarabs cannot be used to securely prove or reject any of the chronological systems currently debated and in use on the basis of their chronology and typology alone. However, given the results of the current scarab research conducted in Egypt and also the Levant during the last decades – especially pertaining to typological and chronological questions as well as absolute dates⁴⁶ – the scarabs from the cache may, after all, also be used to at least scrutinize the use of a certain chronology. In this regard, the scarabs from the cache, especially the large design scarab with the “coiled and woven” pattern, may support a low chronology, since it – taking into account the dating of other parallels of this type⁴⁷ – most probably cannot date *before* ca. 1650/40 BC and thus gives a *terminus post quem* for the deposition of the objects inside the cache, dating king Kaštiliašu to at least the middle, if not the end of the 17th century BC (i.e. ± 1600 BC). Obviously, in this scenario Kaštiliašu could also have reigned even later than 1600 BC, since the scarabs may have been of some age when they were finally deposited in the cache of the temple.⁴⁸ Accepting this, the Middle Chronology – placing Kaštiliašu more or less conveniently around ± 1700 BC – could not be supported any longer, not to speak of the High Chronology, although this is still largely hampered by the uncertain number and sequence of kings between Yādikh-Abu(m) and Kaštiliašu.⁴⁹ However,

⁴⁴ KEEL 1997, iv (“Introduction”).

⁴⁵ BEN-TOR 1997, 171–175; BEN-TOR 2009.

⁴⁶ For the results of the recent scarab research, see KEEL 1995, 31–35; 2004; WEINSTEIN 1996; MLINAR 2001; 2004b; BEN-TOR 1997; 1998; 2003; 2004a, 20–22; 2004b; 2007; 2010.

⁴⁷ See above, § 3; see also AHRENS forthcoming a.

⁴⁸ This is also demonstrated by the group of smaller scarabs which seem to predate the large scarab. It is possible, though by no means proven, that all scarabs reached Terqa together as a group, thus consisting of scarabs of at least two different production periods. A second possibility could be that the scarabs reached the site at different periods and only later were deposited together in the cache. Given the date of the large scarab and its *terminus ante quem non* for the scarabs’ deposition, the chronological implications of the

scarabs for the reign of Kaštiliašu remain the same. A further problem is the unknown length of his reign; see CHARPIN 2002, 71–72.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, additional support for a low chronology was also put forward on the basis of the glyptic evidence from Terqa, see GUALANDI 1997; 1998; see also COLBOW 2000, 123–125. Also arguing for a low chronology is DIETRICH 2003, 643–644; see also BEN-TOR 2004. PODANY (2002, 1, footnote 4) uses the Middle Chronology, although she thinks “it is almost certainly wrong;” see, however, also the doubts expressed by CHARPIN 2002, 73–74. For the chronological implications of the glyptic material from Terqa also see PODANY 1991/93, 55–56; COLBOW *apud* PODANY *et al.* 1991/93, 40–45; for a recent review and thorough compilation of the problems pertaining to Mesopotamian chronology in the 2nd millennium BC, see PRUZSINSZKY 2005; 2009. In this regard, a

which of the many “Low Chronologies” currently debated or in use then must be considered the most likely candidate, of course, cannot be decided on the basis of the scarabs alone.

6. QUESTIONS OF ORIGIN

Although it is a moot point to try to track down the exact place of origin and route by which the scarabs may have reached Terqa, some general considerations and new archaeological evidence might shed new light on the existing networks of the late Middle Bronze Age, connecting Mesopotamia with the Levantine littoral and beyond (Fig. 1).

New historical and inscriptional evidence now links the Middle Euphrates region with the region of Damascus, in the Old Babylonian period (Middle Bronze Age) known to have been part of a political entity or region referred to as “Apum.”⁵⁰ In spring 2008, a cuneiform tablet in Old Babylonian script was found in a Middle Bronze Age palatial building at Tell Sakka,⁵¹ some 18 km south-east of modern Damascus, mentioning king Zimri-Lim (apparently that of Old Babylonian Mari,⁵² although a late Old Babylonian ruler with that name now also seems to

be attested at Terqa⁵³). Unfortunately, an ancient name for the site of Tell Sakka is apparently not given or preserved in the cuneiform letter. However, the mere fact that the letter was sent to Tell Sakka/Apum from the region of the Middle Euphrates valley highlights the importance of the Damascene Basin as a potential trading post and passageway for goods coming from the west to the regions farther east and vice versa, connecting the Euphrates region and Mesopotamia with the west. Furthermore, the palatial building at Tell Sakka also features highly Egyptianizing wall paintings, clearly indicating knowledge of Egyptian iconography and motifs that were probably transmitted to the site via the Levantine littoral.⁵⁴ From the Damascene Basin westwards, one route would have followed the Barada river upstream, turning westwards into the Beqa‘a Valley. From here, routes would then have continued via the “Pass of Ğezzin” located at the southern end of the Beqa‘a Valley, reaching Tyre and Sidon along the coast, or directly southwards via Tell el-Qādi (Tel Dan), the Hule Basin and Hazor⁵⁵ into northern Palestine. From the Beqa‘a Valley, a further route westwards over the Lebanon mountain range (via Tell Hizzin?)⁵⁶ would have

short mention should also be made of the famous “Byblos synchronism,” i.e. the relief naming, in hieroglyphs, a Byblite ruler named Entin (= probably Yantin-‘Ammu) and Neferhotep I of the 13th Dynasty. As this Yantin-‘Ammu (buried in royal tomb IV at Byblos?) is with all probability also mentioned in a letter from Mari during the reign of Zimri-Lim, this would provide evidence for the contemporaneity of king Zimri-Lim of Mari with the Egyptian 13th Dynasty. The period following the fall of Mari would then be roughly contemporary with the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt, see ALBRIGHT 1945; 1964, 39–42. However, while the relief generally does not negate a proposed low chronology, it also cannot help to refine it further since Zimri-Lim could have been either an older or younger contemporary of Yantin-‘Ammu. The relief therefore could then support either a middle or a low chronology, see already KITCHEN 1967; GERSTENBLITH 1983, 102; WARBURTON 2000, 63 (note 14).

⁵⁰ The region apparently being mentioned in the corpus of the late Middle Kingdom Execration Texts from Saqqara (~late 12th/early 13th Dynasty), see POSENER 1940, 81–82; E 33/E 34; ALBRIGHT 1941; PITARD 1986, 73–77; 1987, 36–42; Apum possibly also including parts of the Beqa‘a Valley as early as the Middle Bronze Age (in the Late Bronze Age referred to as Upe/Ubi and variations), see ZIEGLER 2007, 314–315, 3.8.

⁵¹ The information on the cuneiform tablet from Tell Sakka and its content was kindly provided by Ahmad F.

Taraqji (DGAMS Damascus), the excavator of Tell Sakka. Additional information on the tablet and its find-spot was also given at the conference “*Qatna and the Networks of Bronze Age ‘Globalism’*” held at Stuttgart, 17–20 October 2009. For the site of Tell Sakka and its wall paintings, see TARAQJI 1999; 2008; see also NICOLLE 2002.

⁵² Concerning Zimri-Lim’s relations with the Levant, he is known to have visited Ugarit, and also received a gold bowl from the Byblite ruler Yantin-‘Ammu, see DOSSIN 1939, 109–111; ALBRIGHT 1945, 9–10; 1964, 41; VILLARD 1986, 39 (ARMT, 25, 48). Diplomatic relations between Mari and Byblos during the Old Babylonian period existed, but were probably only of sporadic nature. However, as even Hazor in northern Palestine is frequently mentioned in the Mari archives, the far-flung diplomatic relations of Zimri-Lim would thus certainly not preclude connections with the Damascene Basin during his reign, see VAN KOPPEN 2007.

⁵³ ROUAULT 2004, 54–55 (see also footnote 19 in the present article).

⁵⁴ TARAQJI 1999; 2008; BIETAK 2007; see SADER 2009 for the wall paintings from coastal Tell el-Burak.

⁵⁵ MAEIR 2000; BEN-TOR 2004; VAN KOPPEN 2007.

⁵⁶ CHÉHAB 1949–50; 1968; 1983; SADER 2010; GENZ – SADER in press; see AHRENS forthcoming b for a reassessment of the Egyptian finds from the site, including a late Middle Bronze Age scarab of the “anra-type.”

reached the other important northern Levantine cities along the coast, i.e. Beirut and Byblos. Additionally, further routes connecting the region of the Damascene Basin with the southern Levant and Palestine certainly existed, e.g. via Tell ʿAšara in southern Syria and the Yarmouk Valley.⁵⁷ In this light, the scarabs found at Terqa may well be seen as goods coming from the Levantine littoral and reaching the site via the Damascene Basin.⁵⁸ However, a northern route, connecting the coastal regions of the northern Levant with the Middle Euphrates region via the Akkar plain, the “Gap of Homs,” Qatna,⁵⁹ Tell as-Sour⁶⁰ and Tadmor, or perhaps even via Ras Shamra/Ugarit, Aleppo/Halab and then downstream the Euphrates river⁶¹ – thus altogether bypassing the Damascene Basin – would certainly also seem plausible for the scarabs’ arrival at Tell ʿAšara/Terqa.

That connections between Egypt and southern Mesopotamia actually existed during the Hyksos period may now be proven by the small fragment of a late Old Babylonian cuneiform tablet that was recently found within the filling of a well connected to a late Middle Bronze Age palace of the Hyksos rulers at Tell el-Dabʿa/Avaris, probably the palace of Khayan,⁶² in the eastern Nile Delta (late 15th Dynasty).⁶³ The fragment of the tablet apparently seems to originally have come from southern Mesopotamia (i.e. Babylonia), according to its paleography,⁶⁴ and may thus link together the two regions more closely than previously hypothesized for this early stage in history.⁶⁵ It is also clear that the tablet, coming from southern Mesopotamia, would have passed the regions of inland Syria and the Levantine littoral first before reaching Egypt, therefore also connecting the Levantine regions with both Mesopotamia and Egypt during at least

the Hyksos period, and possibly even earlier. In this scenario, the region of the Eastern Mediterranean, especially the important ports along the coast, would have served as a “mediator” between Egypt and Mesopotamia.

7. SUMMARY

The scarabs from the cache in the Temple of Ninkarrak represent a rare group of *aegyptiaca* in a Mesopotamian context dating to the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. They were most likely manufactured in the Levant, probably somewhere along the Levantine littoral – although this is without definite proof. Apart from their general amuletic value, which is clearly stressed by their findspot among thousands of beads and other “good luck charms” found in the cache, the scarabs probably also were conceived as “foreign” and rather “exotic” objects in the eyes of the inhabitants of late Old Babylonian Terqa which – according to the material culture – was clearly deeply rooted in a Mesopotamian tradition, thus additionally enhancing their value. Recent excavations in Egypt, the different regions of the Levant as well as Mesopotamia have shed new light on the intercultural connections between these regions and may attest to the far-reaching exchange of both objects and ideas that took place as early as the late Middle Bronze Age.

The scarabs found in the cache of the temple of Ninkarrak at Terqa therefore may give a small additional example of this exchange of goods that took place between the regions of Mesopotamia, the eastern Mediterranean and ultimately also Egypt during the end of the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. Future discoveries may show whether these contacts were only of sporadic or permanent nature.

⁵⁷ For the site of Tell ʿAšara, see ABOU ASSAF 1968; 1969.

⁵⁸ From the Damascene Basin (“Apum”) eastwards, this route would then probably also have touched Našala (modern al-Qaryatayn, see JOANNÉS 1997, 402; ZIEGLER 2007, 313–314, 3.3) and the oasis of Tadmor (Palmyra, see JOANNÉS 1997) before finally reaching the region of the Euphrates. See DOSSIN 1954/55 for an Old Babylonian cylinder seal found at Dêr Khabiye (south-west of Damascus) also attesting to an apparent exchange of goods that took place between the Euphrates region/Mesopotamia and the Damascene Basin. For the Old Babylonian trade routes in general, see also VAN KOPPEN 2007; JOSEPHSON HESSE 2008, 40–41; PODANY 2010.

⁵⁹ For scarabs and scarab impressions from the site, see AHRENS 2003.

⁶⁰ TALLON 1956; MOUSSLI 1985; BURKE 2008, 219–220.

⁶¹ For this route, see VILLARD 1986, 395.

⁶² BIETAK – FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2009, 93–106, figs. 1–4; SARTORI 2009; see also BIETAK 2010.

⁶³ For the findspot of the fragment, see BIETAK – FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2009, 106–108, figs. 21, 22.

⁶⁴ VAN KOPPEN – RADNER 2009 (*apud* BIETAK – FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2009), 115–118.

⁶⁵ The lion of Khayan sold at Baghdad may now also be seen in a different light, see STOCK 1963, 75–76.

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