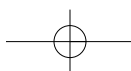
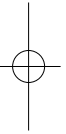
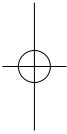


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Piotr Bieliński, Michał Gawlikowski,
Rafał Koliński, Dorota Ławecka, Arkadiusz Sołtysiak
and Zuzanna Wygnańska

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TERQA CERAMIC CULTURE
DURING THE 3RD MILLENNIUM BC.
MATERIAL FROM 18TH-26TH
EXCAVATION CAMPAIGNS

JULIETTE MAS¹

ABSTRACT

Terqa, an important Syrian Bronze Age site located in the Lower Middle-Euphrates region, benefited from a key position which provided the settlement with the opportunity to gain from exchanges and innovations arriving from both the north and south, while developing its own identity and culture.

A new study on pottery has just been carried out on 3rd-millennium material from eight excavation seasons. The recovered material has been used to specify Terqa's chronostratigraphy with greater accuracy, comparing it with the neighboring site of Mari and other contemporary ones but also providing us with a preliminary overview of Terqa's ceramic culture during the Early Bronze Age.

Terqa (modern al-Ashara) is located in the Lower Middle Euphrates region, on the right bank of the river, approximately 80 km south of the modern city of Deir-ez-Zor and 70 km north of Tell Hariri-Mari. It represents a key site because of its geographical position and its long sequence of occupation. The site had been excavated by an American mission directed by G. Buccellati between 1975 and 1986. Since 1987, a French mission led by O. Rouault has been working at the site. Terqa is best known for its 2nd-millennium levels. The Royal Archives of Mari provide us with very interesting data concerning the site during the Old Babylonian period. We know from the texts that Terqa was an important regional religious center, linked to the cult of the god Dagan. The site is also very important for the period following the fall of Mari, when it became the capital of the region, the 'Kingdom of Hana' during the Middle Bronze Age II/III and the Late Bronze Age (Rouault 2004b: 51-54).

Concerning 3rd-millennium levels, the site yielded data mainly from area B ('City Wall') excavated by the American mission (Buccellati 1979: 42-83), and from area F (Fig. 1), which is the main area of excavation (around 4000 m²) of the French mission (see notably Rouault 2004a; 2005; 2006; 2007). In area F, the archaeological exploration of levels from the second part of the 3rd millennium has almost been completed and revealed a domestic quarter. Excavations are now focusing on the most ancient levels which follow the site's foundation (Rouault 2009; *in press*).

¹ PhD student, Université Lumière Lyon 2, Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée Jean Pouilloux, Archéorient – UMR 5133, France.

Third-millennium pottery from Terqa represents important evidence which could improve our understanding of the site and of the surrounding region. A first evaluation of 3rd-millennium ceramic found by the American mission was published by M. Kelly-Buccellati and W.R. Shelby. It was however based on a quite limited sample (Kelly-Buccellati and Shelby 1977 and 2007). Recent pottery research on the 3rd-millennium material exclusively concerns area F, Phases III and IV, mainly dated to the EBIII and IV.² A study of all the complete vessels and profiles discovered between the 18th and the 26th excavation campaigns has just been carried out.³ It provides us with a preliminary overview of Terqa's ceramic culture during the Early Bronze Age. This systematic study helped to reconstruct the site's chronostratigraphy (Fig. 2) and allowed us to better situate the latter in the general archaeological landscape of the region, thus clarifying its role in the economic and political dynamics of the period.⁴

The studied assemblage is composed of material mainly from EB IIIb-EB IVa levels (Phases III.1 to III.3). It revealed that common pottery reached a high degree of standardization during this period. From a technological point of view, the pottery is of a rather good quality. The paste usually has a medium to fine texture, is mineral-tempered and high-fired. The open shapes predominate within the assemblage (Fig. 3a), even if they are represented only by a few types.⁵ Closed shapes are mostly spherical (with globular bodies and round bases), and we can observe just a few examples of ring bases. The ceramic production is characterized by a high degree of specialization, since some shapes correspond to specific fabrics. Moreover, the vessels belonging to the fine category are those which show the most important morphological variability. This could be easily explainable because, in opposition to vessels belonging to the common category, they are less influenced by the functional needs.

The more ancient levels of Phase IV⁶ are characterized by a specific morphological repertoire. We could notably recognize this discontinuity by a complete change in the cooking pots. During Phases III, the cooking pots have globular bodies, a restricted neck, a rounded rim with triangular lugs with a well smoothed surface (Fig. 4: 17).⁷ In opposition, during Phases IV, hole-mouth cooking pots with small lugs and possible crescent-shaped lugs on the body were the norm. This shape is typical for Central and

2 For a general view of the chronostratigraphy of Terqa, according to new C14 dates, see Rouault *in press*

3 This study will be published soon by the author.

4 The reconstruction of Terqa chronostratigraphy is work still in progress and more precise information will be provided in forthcoming studies.

5 In fact, the main part of the assemblage is composed of low bowls with curved walls and pointed rims as well as low truncated conical bowls, both with a flat string-cut base.

6 More ancient levels, Phase V, have been recognized through architectural remains but with very little ceramic evidence (see Rouault *in press*). This material still has to be studied.

7 This type of cooking pot is well attested in the Upper Middle Euphrates region (Sconzo *in press*: type 75, pl. 14.12-13 and 21.12, EME-3-4; Munbaqa, IV-Ku-1 – Czichon and Werner 2008: taf. 28.5173) and mainly in the Syrian Jezirah (Rova 2011: 74, type 73, Pl. 12.3-6, EJZ 3a-4; Tell Brak, Area ER, Level 5 – Oates 2001: fig. 466.1677) and Middle Khabur area (Tell Melebiya, Chantier G, Niveau 2 – Lebeau 1993: pl. 178.2; Tell al-Raqa'i, Level 2 – Curvers and Schwartz 1990: fig. 4.3).

Eastern Jezirah,⁸ but also well attested at Mari.⁹ On the other hand, a linear evolution of the shapes during the second part of the 3rd millennium (between Phases IV.0 and III.2) is observable (Fig. 5). The transition towards Terqa Phase III.1 is characterized by two aspects. In fact, a persistence of the most common shapes, inherited from the earlier phases is noticeable. This is mainly observable in the common pottery belonging to Central and Southern Mesopotamian ceramic tradition. The most obvious examples are the truncated conical bowls (Fig. 4: 21-24).¹⁰ This kind of vessels, which are descendants of the conical bowls from the Uruk period (Thalmann 2003: 50), are well attested from EBIII to EBIV. In fact, morphological differences between the vessels of the two periods are not easily visible (see the examples from Phases III.2 and III.3: Fig. 5: 25-28).¹¹ On the other hand, this transition also reveals the appearance of numerous new shapes (Fig. 4), a phenomenon which has also been observed at Mari (Pons 2007: 303). These new shapes are generally made in fine wares, as Metallic and Grey Wares (e.g. small spiral-burnished bottles: Fig. 4: 6;¹² hemispherical bowls: Fig. 4: 11,¹³ or small jars with globular bodies, flattened bases, thickened rims and vertical pierced lugs: Fig. 4: 14¹⁴) or fine lime tempered ware (e.g. spiral-burnished small jars ring-based, with globular bodies, high everted necks and outer and inner grooved rims: Fig. 4: 8, largely attested in the Upper Middle Euphrates region¹⁵). These new types also correspond in their main part to vessels with geometrical incised decorations (e.g. Fig. 4: 7, corresponding to a fruit stand¹⁶ and a pedestal neckless medium jar with an incised pattern consisting of waves and concentric lines: Fig. 4: 33¹⁷). For the Old Babylonian period, a complete change of profiles and technological features is visible, in the absence of any transitional material.¹⁸ The shapes are now more ovoid; the paste

8 See for instance, Rova 2011: 67, type 12, pl. 4.5-6, EJZ 0-2; Tell Barri, Area G, Strati 39-40 – Valentini 2005: 182 and 185 N.i 16 and 68; Tell Leilan, Operation 1 – Schwartz 1988: fig. 35.1.

9 Chantier B, Couche 13 (Lebeau 1987: pl. I.8); Tombeau 300 (Lebeau 1990: pl. IV.1 1474).

10 Compare Larsa, Bâtiment B33, Phase IIIB (Thalmann 2003: fig. 30.3), Tell Asmar, House I (Delougaz 1952: pl. 168.C.001.200b), Abu Salabikh, Grave 165 (Moon 1987: n°17), and Nippur, Area WF, Level XVb (McMahon 2006: pl. 123.11). This type of bowl is also very common at Mari (for instance, Chantier B, Couche 5 – Lebeau 1985: pl. XI.7).

11 It seems anyway that EBIV bowls were deeper (Pons 2007: 305), larger with less curved walls (Lebeau 1985: 134) and more open (Thalmann 2003: 50).

12 Attested in the Upper Middle Euphrates region, notably at Jerablus Tahtani, Area IV, Tomb 1518 (Peltenburg *et al.* 1997: fig. 8).

13 Compare Tell Chuera, Steinbau 1, Schicht 3 (Kühne 1976: abb. 2) or Tell Brak, Area FS, Level 3 (Oates 2001: fig. 393.39).

14 Compare Tell Brak, Area CH (Oates 2001: fig. 396.144) or Tell Melebiya, Chantier B, Niveau 2 (Lebeau 1993: pl. 173.13).

15 See notably Sconzo *in press*: type 104, pl. 19.16-19, EME 4-5; Selenkahiye, Tomb III, Local Phase B1.2 (Schwartz 2001: pl. 5A.25a) or Tell Banat, Period III (Porter 1999: fig. 3).

16 Compare Selenkahiye, Area 37, Level 11, Local Phase B1 3a-b (Schwartz 2001: pl. 5A.30d).

17 Compare Khafadjah, Houses 2 or 1 (Delougaz 1952: pl. 193.D.526.371).

18 This feature could be explained by the scarcity of the material yielded by III.0 levels probably corresponding to EBIVb. In fact, during this phase, Area F seems to have been a marginal zone. Furthermore, it was strongly erased before the establishment of the Old-Babylonian settlement.

is of a lesser quality, vegetal-tempered and fired at lower temperatures (Masetti-Rouault and Poli 2007). Given the contrast between 3rd-millennium and Old Babylonian ceramic production, one has the impression that there was actually a regression from the technological level attained during the 3rd millennium.

The ceramic assemblage from Terqa shows that during the 3rd millennium the site maintained very strong links both with Northern Mesopotamia and the Upper Middle Euphrates region, as well as with Central Mesopotamia (Fig. 4-5).¹⁹ The presence of Syrian bottles,²⁰ Euphrates Banded Ware,²¹ several varieties of Metallic and Grey Wares²² can be connected with a Northern or North-Western tradition (Rova 1996: 24; Pruss 2000: 196-197; Finkbeiner 2007). The main part of the 'Northern types' belongs to fine wares; furthermore, by carefully looking at their context, we can point out that most of them have been found in funerary contexts, which are particularly ritual contexts. These high quality wares were obviously not used for daily purposes, but were quite well distributed within the households composing the quarter in which they were discovered. Anyway, when analyzing this occurrence of imported items, we may wonder whether they were imported for themselves or for their contents, considering that these fine vessels, usually of small dimensions, seem to have been manufactured for

- 19 The international character of the material from sites which benefited from a key geographical position have already been pointed out, as for instance for Tell Brak or Mari (Rova 1996: 28).
- 20 The so-called 'Syrian bottles' correspond to small ovoid, narrow-necked vessels. Even if this kind of bottles is mainly represented in the Upper Middle Euphrates region, it is also distributed in Northern Levant, in Southern Anatolia and in the Jezirah (Sconzo *in press*: type 99 description; about the occurrences in the Jezirah, see notably Rova 2011: 76, type 66, pl. 15.14-5, EJZ 3b). To see some examples of 'Syrian bottles' from Terqa: Fig. 4: 1 (compare Sconzo *in press*: type 99, pl. 19.1, EME 4), Fig. 4: 2 (compare Tell Brak, Area FS, Level 5 – Oates 2001: fig. 399.199; Selenkahiye, Tomb II, Local Phase B3.2 – Schwartz 2001: pl. 5A.23g), Fig. 4: 3 (compare Sconzo *in press*: type 99, pl. 19.2, EME 4), Fig. 4: 4, Fig. 4: 5 (compare Tell Brak, Area FS, Level 3 – Oates 2001: fig. 399.198) and Fig. 5: 4-5.
- 21 As it is mainly the case in Upper Middle Euphrates settlements, Red Euphrates Banded Ware is exclusively attested at Terqa in funerary context (see Porter 1999: 313 and Sconzo *in press*) where the orange and buff variants are mostly represented. To see some examples of Red Euphrates Banded Ware: Fig. 5: 3, Fig. 5: 6 (compare Munbaqa, Raubgrabung – Czichon and Werner 2008: taf. 10.4800; Selenkahiye, Tomb III – Schwartz 2001: pl. 5A.26a; Tell Banat, Tomb I – Porter 1999: fig. 2; Sconzo *in press*: type 62, pl. 12.12, EME 3-4), Fig. 5: 7-8 (compare Tell Banat, Tomb I – Porter 1999: fig. 2; Sconzo *in press*: type 62, pl. 12.13, EME 3-4).
- 22 The so-called 'Metallic Ware' fabric, of which the core area of distribution is the Jezirah, has already been recognized in the Lower Middle Euphrates region (Lebeau 1985: 94; about Metallic Ware, see notably Kühne 1976: 33-72 and Pruss 2000). It is in fact well represented in Terqa 3rd-millennium ceramic assemblage. On the other hand, a grey ceramic, here dubbed 'Grey Ware', rather soft, less clinky, probably produced with calcareous clay and fired at a lower temperature is also attested in the corpus, especially in Phase III.1 levels. Different labels have been attributed to this secondary fabric. It has notably been called 'Jazira Grey Ware' (Pruss 2000: 199), 'Near Stone Ware' (Oates 2001: 154) or 'Metallic Ware imitations' (Rova 1996: 24; Rova 2011: 57). To see some Metallic and Grey Wares examples from Terqa: Fig. 4: 1-6 (*comparanda* notes 9 and 12), Fig. 4: 11 (*comparanda* note 9), Fig. 4: 13 (compare Tell Brak, Area FS, Level 3, Oates 2001: fig. 442.1225; Tell Melebiya, Chantier B, Niveau 2 – Lebeau 1993: pl. 163.1; Tell Chuera, Steinbau 3 – Kühne 1976: abb. 57), Fig. 4: 14 (*comparanda* note 9), Fig. 4: 16 (compare Tell Melebiya, Chantier B, Niveau 2 – Lebeau 1993: pl. 174.1), Fig. 5: 4 (*comparanda* note 12), Fig. 5: 17 (compare Tell Brak, Area FS, Level 4/5 – Oates 2001: fig. 395.109), Fig. 5: 18 (compare Tell Melebiya, Chantier B, Niveau 2 – Lebeau 1993: pl. 174.1).

the transport of precious substances such as perfumes, oils and balms. In any case, the presence of these fine ware vessels bears witness to the existence of some strong economic ties with the Upper Middle Euphrates region. However, we can also distinguish many types which can be attributed to a Southern tradition, in particular of the Diyala region. By studying the corpus we have been able to point out that the main part of the common vessels in Standard Ware, i.e. those which should have been produced locally, typologically belong to a Central Mesopotamian tradition. The influence of this ceramic tradition seems to have been the strongest also in Mari, as the study of the 3rd-millennium ceramic assemblage from this site have already shown, even if the site also preserves an international nature.²³ The pottery corpus of Terqa reveals that the site belonged to the Central Mesopotamian ceramic province during the second part of the 3rd millennium BC, even though it maintained strong links with the Upper Middle Euphrates region. Concerning the first part of the 3rd millennium BC, as has also been observed in Mari, the material culture seems to have been closer to the one of the Northern sites (Lebeau 1990: 352-353; Rova 1996: 24-25). Nevertheless, the study should be extended to the material of the latest excavation campaigns, and archaeological exploration should be continued to the most ancient levels to confirm this trend. On the other hand, during the 2nd millennium BC, especially during the Old Babylonian period, the repertoire tends nearly exclusively to belong to Central and Southern Mesopotamia. In Mari, the disappearance of the previous links with the Upper Middle Euphrates region has also been observed.²⁴

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23 According to M. Lebeau, contacts with the Diyala region were made possible since the end of the Early Dynastic period by way of sites in the Hamrin region which were then under Eshnunna control (Lebeau 1990: 352).

24 'En effet, les deux grandes périodes couvertes par ce matériel sont celle des Shakkanakku, dont la période relève plutôt d'une tradition du Moyen-Euphrate syrien et celle des "Lim" où les profils sont plus souvent comparables à ceux de la plaine alluviale' (Pons 2000: 1).

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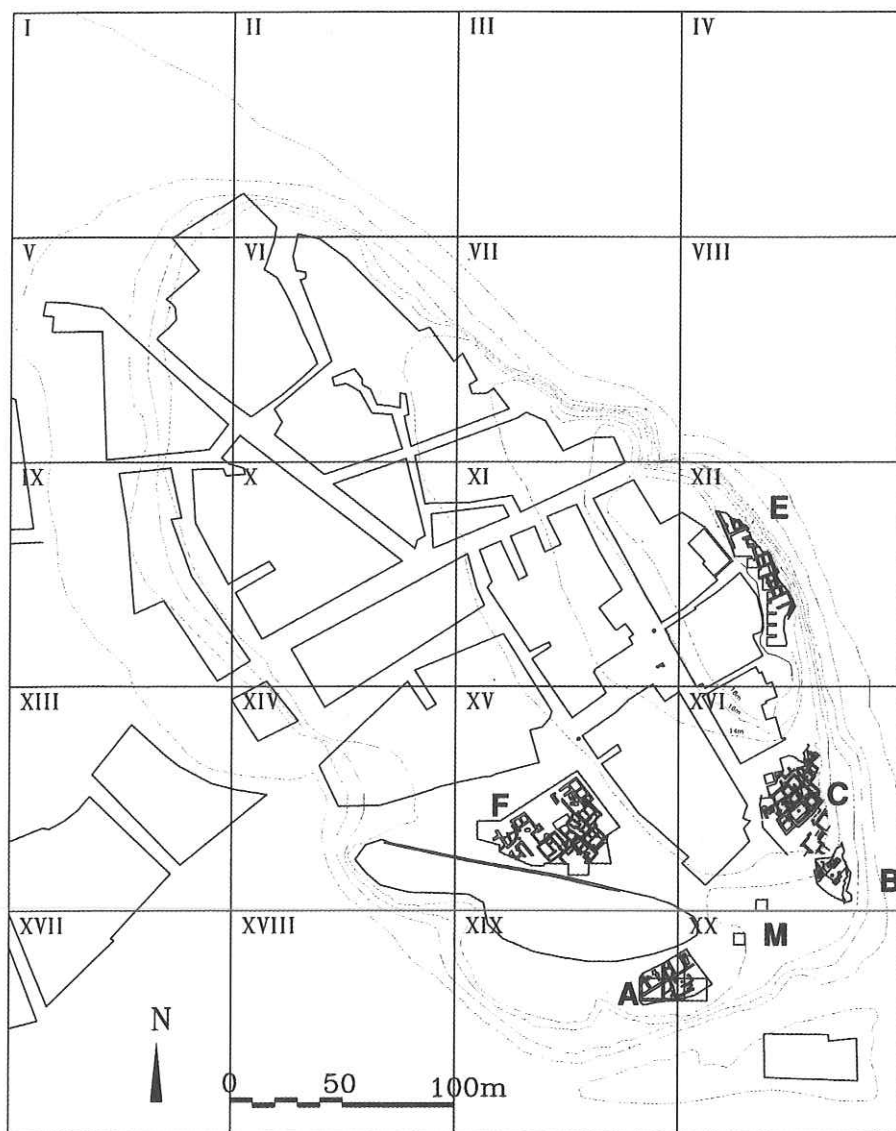


Fig. 1: Topographic map of Tell Ashara-Terqa with excavations areas.

Phase	Remains	Dating
V	Some architectural remains and large open areas with fireplaces and tannurs	End of EB I ? – EB II C14 datings c. 2893-2759 BC; 2879-2639 BC; 2901-2696 BC and 2912-2877 BC
IV.2	Some constructions and open spaces with remains of fireplaces, ovens and tannurs for food preparation	End of EB II – Very beginning of EB IIIa
IV.1	Architectural structures with a heavier occupation and subdivision of the spaces. Fireplaces and tannurs	EB IIIa C14 datings c. 2656-2466 BC and 2624-2473 BC
IV.0	Level of abandonment with important graves (notably stone hypogeum) and leveling of the area for the preparation of the construction of III.3 quarter	End of EB IIIa – Beginning of EB IIIb C14 dating c. 2572-2462 BC and 2581-2338 BC
III.3	Private houses quarter (construction, first phase of occupation) + Building k221-k222	EB IIIb
III.2	Reconstruction of the private houses quarter and first phase of occupation linked to the reconstruction. Destruction of the Eastern part of the quarter (fire)	EB IVa
III.1	Sporadic reoccupation of some of the houses	EB IVa C14 dating c. 2470-2212 BC
III.0	Large open area with pits, fireplaces, numerous grinding stones, remains of a probable large construction with corbelled vault tombs	EB IVb – MB I

Fig. 2: Area F Chronostratigraphy.

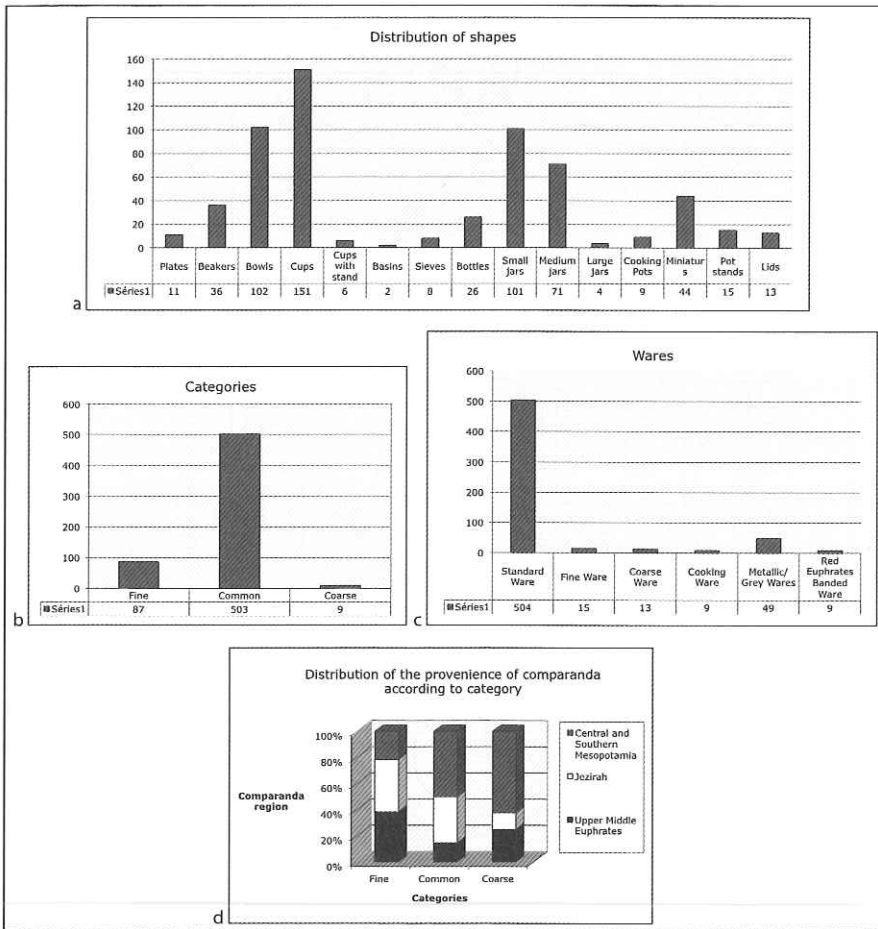


Fig. 3: Distribution of shapes, categories, wares and comparanda regions within the corpus.

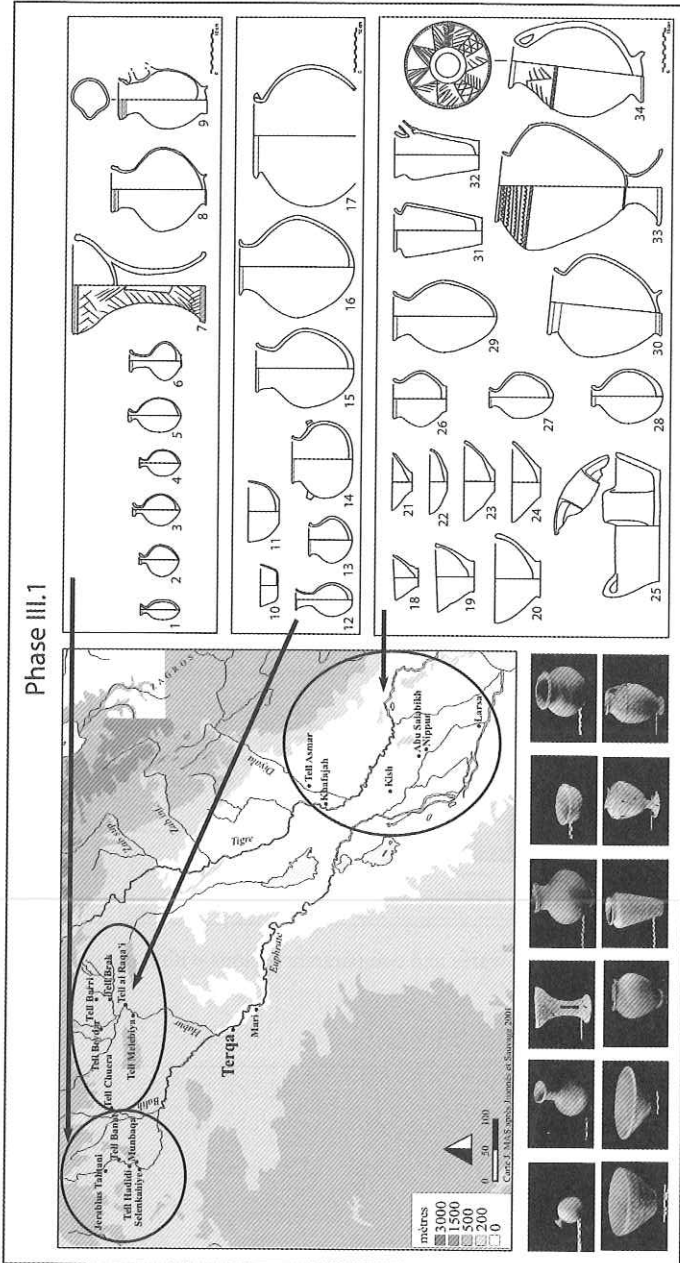


Fig. 4: Selected Phase III.1 Vessels from Terqa and location of their main comparing sites (Standard Ware: 7, 12, 15, 18-34; Fine Ware: 8-10; Cooking Ware: 17; Metallic and Grey Wares: 1-6, 11, 13-14, 16).

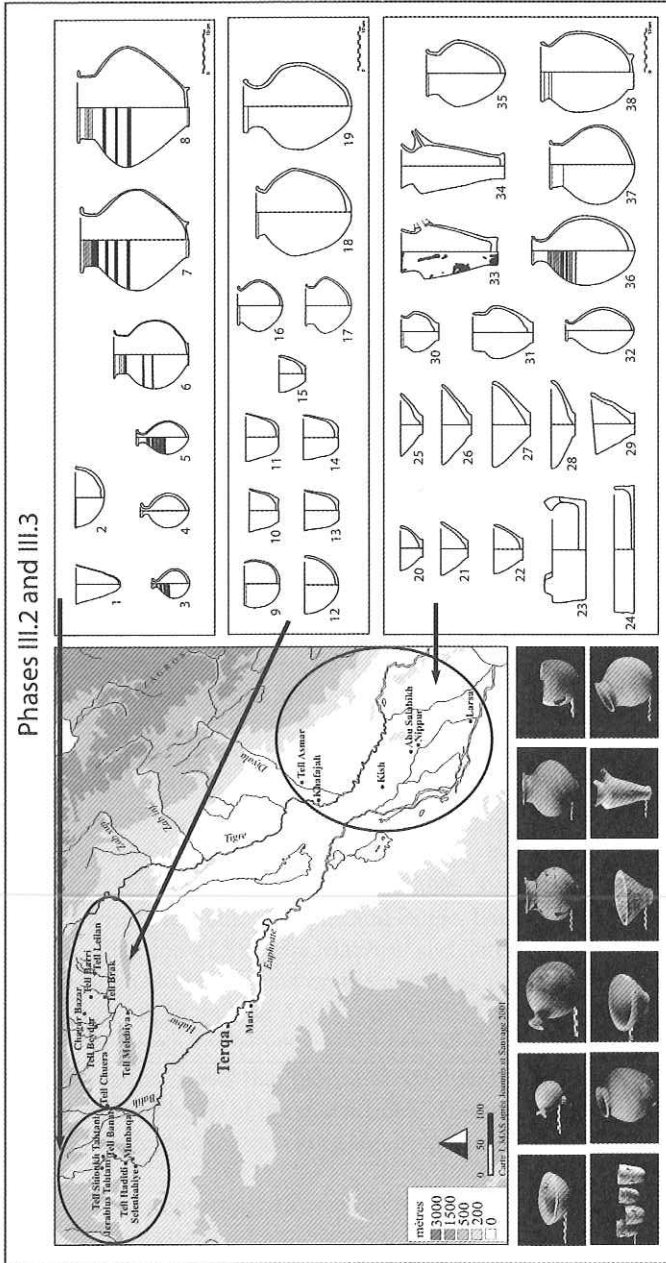


Fig. 5: Selected Phases III.2 and III.3 Vessels from Terqa and location of their main comparing sites (Standard Ware: 1-2, 9-16, 19-38; Metalic Ware: 4, 17-18; Red Euphrates Banded Ware: 3, 5-8).