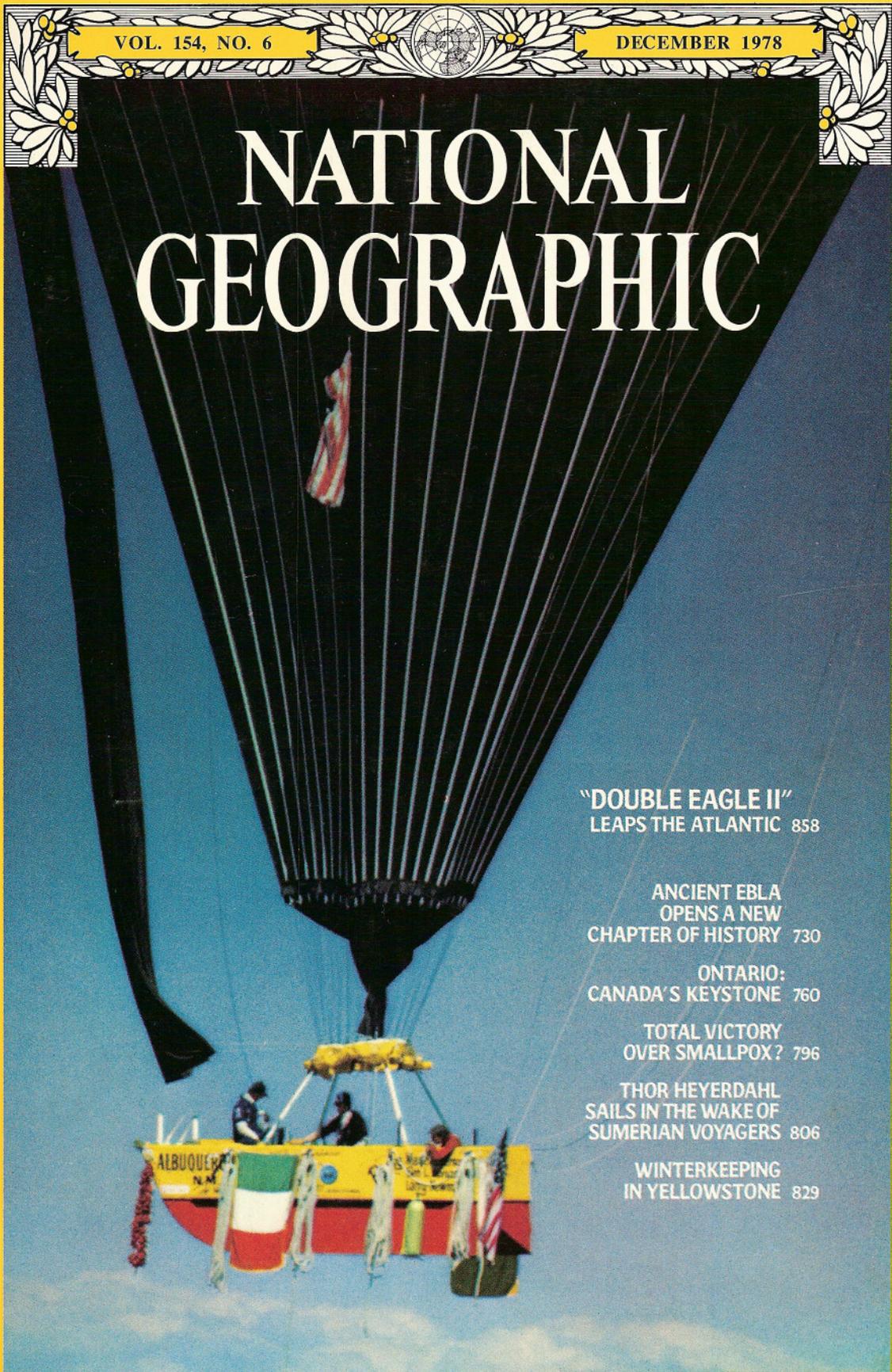


NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



"DOUBLE EAGLE II"
LEAPS THE ATLANTIC 858

ANCIENT EBLA
OPENS A NEW
CHAPTER OF HISTORY 730

ONTARIO:
CANADA'S KEYSTONE 760

TOTAL VICTORY
OVER SMALLPOX? 796

THOR HEYERDAHL
SAILS IN THE WAKE OF
SUMERIAN VOYAGERS 806

WINTERKEEPING
IN YELLOWSTONE 829

and fragments—commercial records, treaties, chronicles—whispered, through the mists of ancient and ambiguous syntax, of an unknown Semitic empire, with Ebla as its seat, that once dominated much of the Middle East. Since archeologists had long regarded Syria as little more than a buffer between the brilliant civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, this find struck the scholarly world like a thunderbolt.*

"These discoveries," says Dr. Ignace J. Gelb of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, "reveal a new culture, a new language, a new history. Ebla was a mighty kingdom, treated on an equal footing with the most powerful states of the time."

"How important are the Ebla tablets?" asks Dr. Giovanni Pettinato, former epigraphist of the Italian Mission (page 749). "Remember this: *All* the other texts of this period recovered to date do not total a fourth of those from Ebla."

Tablets Reveal Rich Details

The clay tablets with their intricately incised script attest that the craftsmen of Ebla gained renown for the quality of their metallurgy and textiles, ceramics and woodworking. One product was a cloth of scarlet and gold that apparently differed little from the brocade still manufactured in modern Syria.

The kings of Ebla signed treaties with Assur, on the Tigris River, and Khamazi, far to the east. Tribute poured into the royal coffers from all quarters.

In addition to the unsuspected magnificence of the empire, the texts bear witness to an astonishing density of population in the ancient world. More than five thousand geographic names appear on the tablets.

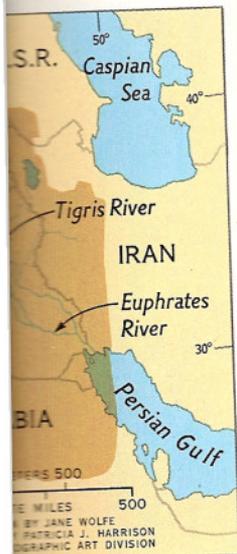
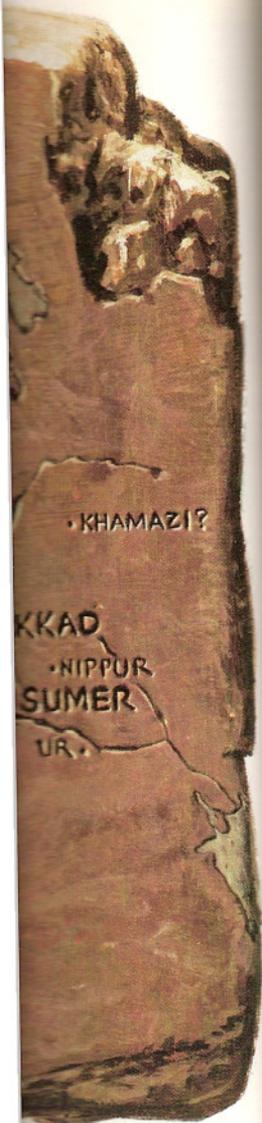
Reports Dr. Pettinato: "We encounter a swarm of small states even in the immediate vicinity of Ebla. . . . The enormous number of cities and villages presents an entirely new picture of the urbanization of Syria and Palestine in the third millennium."

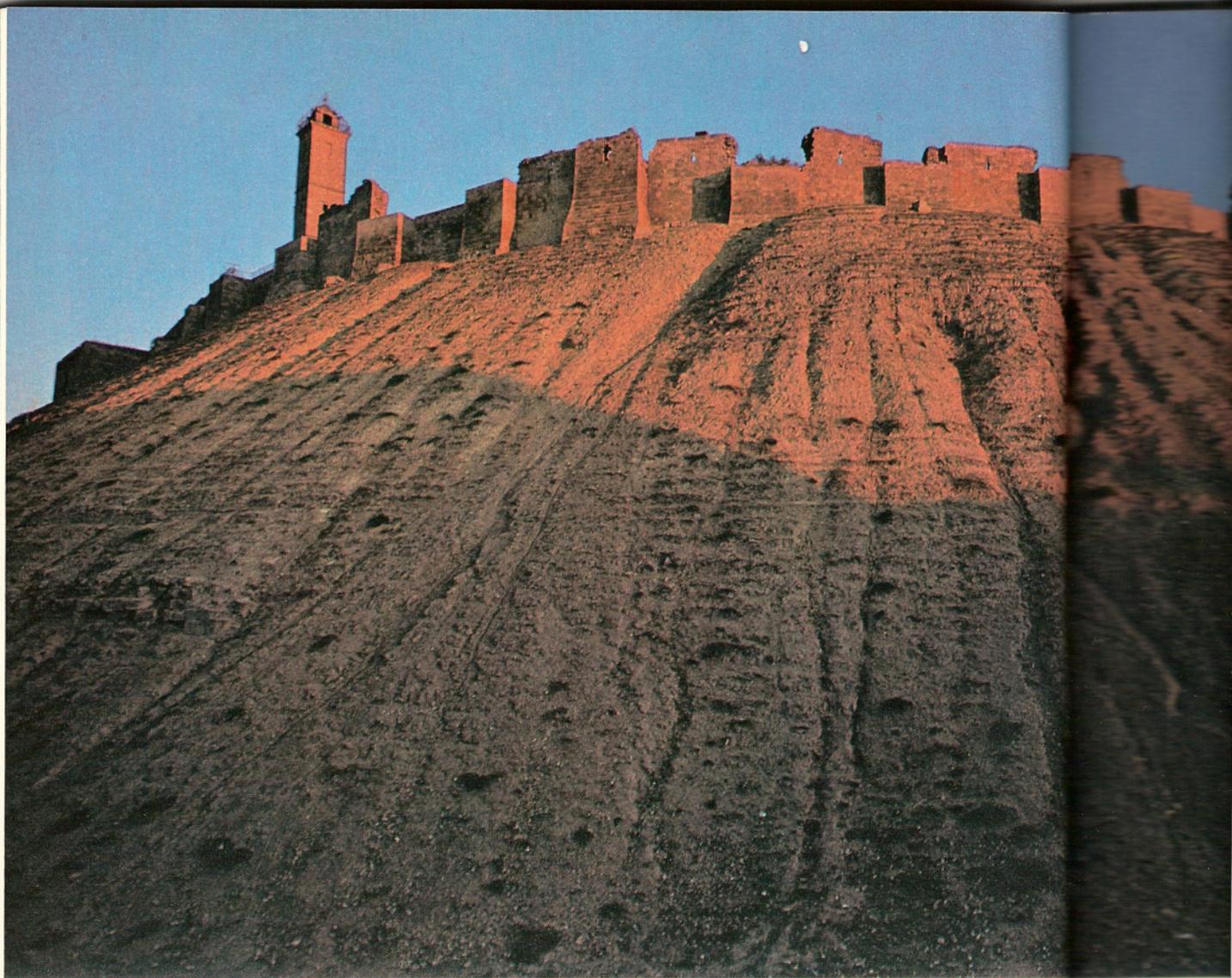
The names of cities thought to have been founded much later, such as Beirut and Byblos, leap from the tablets. Damascus and Gaza are mentioned, as well as two of

*See Howard La Fay's "Syria" in the September 1978 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, with the accompanying map supplement *Early Civilizations in the Middle East*.



16 CM (6.5 IN) TALL,
NATIONAL MUSEUM DAMASCUS





the Biblical cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah. Also included is Iram, an obscure city referred to in Sura 89 of the Koran.

Most intriguing of all are the personal names found on the Ebla tablets. They include Ab-ra-mu (Abraham), E-sa-um (Esau), and Sa-u-lum (Saul). Present as well is a name never found before in ancient literature, save for the Old Testament: Da-u-dum (David). Further, the name of a king, Ebrum, who reigned about 2300 B.C., bears an uncanny resemblance to Eber of the Book of Genesis, who was the great-great-grandson of Noah and the great-great-great-great-grandfather of Abraham, the Biblical progenitor of the Hebrews.

Three great religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—trace their historical origins to the Patriarch Abraham. The Book

of Genesis introduces him as a native of Ur of the Chaldees, in southern Mesopotamia. Scholars have always taken this at face value. Most of them believe that about 1800 B.C. Abraham and his followers migrated through the Fertile Crescent—north from Ur, across Syria, and down into Palestine.

Biblical Scholars Excited, Mystified

But we now encounter a Syrian capital, dating from five hundred years *before* the widely accepted date for Abraham—a place rich in patriarchal and Biblical names. Provocatively, the Ebla tablets mention a nearby Syrian city called Ur, while Deuteronomy refers to Jacob, Abraham's grandson, as a Syrian. Furthermore, Muslim scholars have long held that Abraham's epic journey occurred about 2300 B.C.

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