

# THE ROYAL PALACE AT URKESH AND THE DAUGHTER OF NARAM-SIN

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## Abstract

*A gauge of how significant were the results of the 12<sup>th</sup> season of excavations at Tell Mozan may easily be found in a comparison between what can now be said about Urkesh and what could be said before our excavations. It was common opinion that Urkesh was a petty, peripheral kingdom that emerged following the fall of the dynasty of Akkad. This common opinion must now be radically revised: Urkesh was a major political center at least by the time of Naram-Sin, so much so that his daughter was present in Urkesh, most likely as its queen. She also postdates the royal building of king Tupkish and queen Uqnitum, which we know now to have been a full-fledged palace, one of the largest and best preserved in ancient Syro-Mesopotamia. It appears then that Urkesh was a leading player in the geo-political scene of third millennium Syria, perhaps allied through a dynastic marriage with the very king who boasts to have destroyed Ebla; and that even before that time the local endan had sufficient political and economic power to build a palace of major proportions.*

The seal of *Tar'am-Agade*, the daughter of Naram-Sin, was impressed on a number of door sealings that had been discarded and were found together with other door sealings, a total of about 200. A composite drawing is given here as (Fig. 1). The scene is a typical animal contest, with a bull-man fighting a lion and a hero fighting a water-buffalo. In other seals relating to members of the royal house of Akkad, such a contest scene denotes individuals who hold a political or administrative position, whereas seals belonging to princesses who

serve as priestesses have other scenes. This is a strong element in support of the conclusion that *Tar'am-Agade* was not in Urkesh as a priestess, but as a political figure, hence most likely as queen married to an *endan*. The inscription on her seal does not indicate this, as it only refers to her as daughter of Naram-Sin. Such an omission may be explained on the assumptions that the seal belongs to her early years and/or that she retained sufficient autonomy in Urkesh to be identified simply by her filiation.

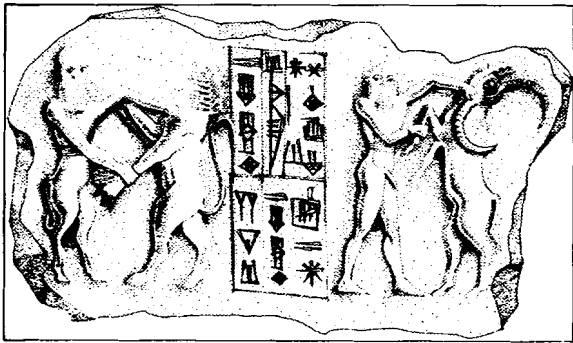
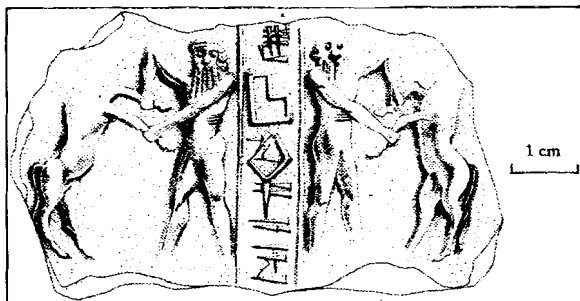


fig. 1 : Composite from impressions of seal of Tar'am-Agade, daughter of Naram-Sin (drawing by Pietro Pozzi)

A second seal in the *cache* is that of *Ewrim-Atal* (Fig. 2). His name can be explained as a good Hurrian name, and this is quite remarkable when considering both the scene of the seal and the context in which it was found. First, the seal bears another animal contest scene with two symmetrical pairs showing a hero fighting a bull. This kind of specular arrangement, albeit with different figures, appears in two important Akkadian seals connected with sons of Naram-Sin, Ukin-Ulmash and Bin-Kali-Sharri. Second, the fact that the seal impressions of *Ewrim-Atal* were discarded together with those of *Tar'am-Agade* implies that they were used within a similar, possibly even the same, administrative function. Such a close association of an individual residing in Urkesh and one bearing a Hurrian name with the

Fig. 2 : Composite from impressions of seal of *Ewrim-atal*, found in the same cache with the seal impressions of *Tar'am-Agade* (drawing by Pietro Pozzi)



royal house of Akkad is obviously not accidental. It suggests a correlation of ethnic and not merely onomastic identities, that also goes to support the notion that *Tar'am-Agade* is in Urkesh as its queen and that *Naram-Sin* chose a policy of alliance with this kingdom.

A third important seal is that of *Ishar-beli* which is an Akkadian name (Fig. 3). (It should be noted, that an important functionary of the royal house of Akkad with the same name is known from various documents that place him in Umma and Akkad: it is therefore not inconceivable that he may be the same person in our case as well.) But while the name

fig. 3 : Composite from impressions of seal of *Ishar-beli*, found in the same cache with the seal impressions of *Tar'am-Agade* (drawing by Pietro Pozzi)



is Akkadian, the iconography of the seal places it squarely in northeastern Syria. It shows an equid prancing towards a seated god who seems to be presenting the animal with something that has three prongs. A standing god leads another towards the main seated god. The last god on the left carries in his arms a small quadruped. Below the inscription, a water buffalo has its head raised towards the foal. The scene is exquisite in the details of craftsmanship and mastery of design. The three animals are all in movement, with diagonal lines contrasting sharply with the static horizontality and verticality of the gods. Also the wide empty space around the two larger animals highlights their centrality in the overall scene, as does the tensional link between buffalo and foal, prancing equid and seated god, each staring directly at the other.

The door sealings just described belong to a *cache* found in room H2 of the Royal Palace. By *cache* we refer to a homogenous group of objects found in a single and primary discard, i.e. a batch of expended sealings which had been gathered together and then thrown out all at once in the very place where we found them. The fact that they are very fragile and yet relatively well preserved is the main reason why we conclude that they were not moved from place to place after having been dumped. This is important in that the *cache* so understood, serves to date the floor on which it was found. It is a damaged floor of the residential wing of the palace, i.e., an area which had recently been abandoned. We infer that the door sealings were used to seal a door of the palace in an area which had not been damaged and abandoned, and then dumped not far from where their original emplacement near to where the door had been. Since the Tar'am-Agade *cache* was deposited on the damaged surface of a floor, whereas the Tupykish/Uqnitum seal impressions were part of a regular accumulation on top of the floors of the same palace (albeit in a different wing), the conclusion is inescapable that the Tupykish/Uqnitum accumulations predate the Tar'am-Agade *cache*.

It is also important to note the following about stratigraphy. While the formal wing AF of the palace was abandoned following the events of which we have evidence in the damaging of the floors, the service wing AK continued to be used, although without any of the functions that characterized it as a part of the palace. This is deduced from the fact that none of the installations found in the first floors continue in the higher strata. It is on the other hand

certain that AK was regularly inhabited, in other words, that the deposits within it are the result of regular accumulation within a roofed and inhabited building rather than the result of dumping. Since the height of these deposits reaches 2 ms, we can conclude that the period of non-palace use of the building was fairly long. This situation is summarized in the chart on fig. 4.

fig.4 : Stratigraphic sequence A for Area AA : Phases

		Approximate calendrical dates (B.C.)	
		middle chronology	
		middle chronology	middle chronology without Gulf
Khabur ware tradition	<b>Phase 6 Modern</b> surface wash and erosion topsoil and disturbed upper layers removal of stones modern burials		
	<b>Phase 5 Second post-Palace settlement</b> houses and graves in A7, A2, A11, A8 (2 m) scattered occupation in A10, A8, A12, A13 "brickmelt" in A9	1800 2000	1800 2000
Bitumen use tradition	<b>Phase 4 First post-Palace settlement</b> houses and graves in A7, A2 (2 m) scattered occupation in A1, A5, A10, A8, A12, A13 "brickmelt" in A9	2000 2100	2000 2050 (***)
	<b>Phase 3 Non-Palace occupation of AK</b> accumulations within AK walls, no installations (2 m) accumulations within AR? debris from destruction in A9, A11, A10 (?)	2100 2240	2050 2150
Late Simple Ware tradition	<b>Phase 2 Palace</b> <b>2b Tar'am-Agade</b> destruction of parts of AR accumulation in H2 (very thin)	2240	2150 (**)
	<b>2a Tupykish endan</b> first floors throughout AK and AR installations in F, C, D, H and X accumulations throughout AK (40 cm)	2260	2175 (*)
Early Simple Ware tradition	<b>Phase 1 Pre-Palace</b> accumulations packing (red and cement like) walls in A5 pit platform X2 absidal structure W	2290	2200

(\*\*\*\*) Based on Ur III tablet from A7  
 (\*\*\*) Based on a date late in Naram-Sin's reign assuming that Tar'am Agade is either a priestess (as a result of an Akkadian conquest) or queen (as a result of marriage). If she is the queen mother, dates might be lower. Tablets in A1 and A10 support an early date  
 (\*) Four C14 determinations have given consistently lower dates for Phase 2a, with 2175 as the average middle date

The resulting chronological sequence and the synchronism with Naram-Sin have had a major impact on our assessment of the vast amount of finds from the Palace. This is particularly significant with regard to the *ceramic data*, since

we have at present a total of some 125,000 sherds that have been analysed and about 25,000 still that remain to be processed. The seriation of these sherds shows a considerable degree of continuity within the third millennium as is illustrated by way of example in the chart in fig. 5. Here the bar histograms in the shape of the so-called “battleship curves” highlight the progressive proportional increase of wares in the straw-tempered family and conversely the progressive decrease of the fine buff wares – which may be as much an indication of the change in function of the building as of progression through time (One of the writers (MKB) is preparing a full publication on this data).

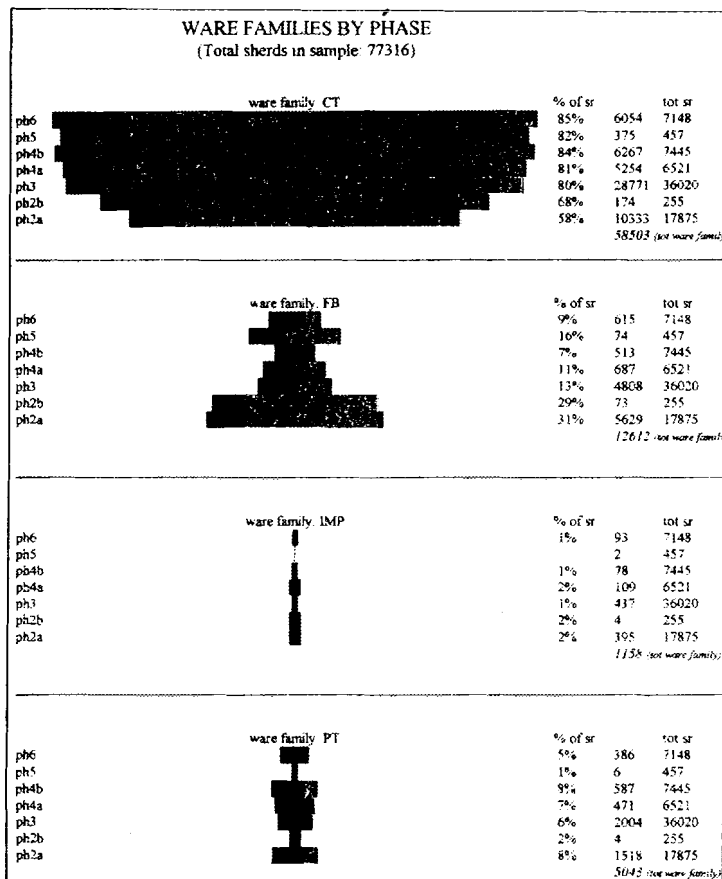


fig.5 : Seriation of ceramic wares by families and phases CT=clay tempered ; FB=fine buff. IMP=imported ; PT=pebble tempered

We feel that we can now safely consider the large royal building in Area AA a *Royal Palace*. The presence of the many impressions of royal seals have shown from the beginning that this was a royal building and the discovery of the seal impression of Tar'am-Agade reinforces this interpretation. It was clear that we were digging in a building that was very large in size and very organically designed and constructed. But we refrained from considering it a Palace until more specific evidence should come to light. We feel that this is the case now as a brief analysis of the floor plan of the building (Fig. 6) will show. The building which we have almost completely excavated to date is the service wing (AK) of a much larger complex. The other components of the building which have begun to appear in the excavations are three: (1) the large courtyard to

the north in sector F. (2) The formal wing to the east, sector H. (3) Some important structures just outside the palace proper but possibly linked with it, sectors X and W. We will speak briefly of each of these three areas and will also present the main results of the excavations within the service wing AK in sector C.

1. The *courtyard* to the north of AK, labelled sector F, is known only along its southern and eastern sides. We have not found yet its limit to the north though a symmetrical arrangement as projected on the ground plan would suggest that the northern wall should be about 16 m. from the southern wall of the courtyard. We have uncovered a good pebble floor that seems to serve as a walkway along the exposed walls. Indications are that this pebble floor is already the beginning of the non-palace phase 3. Below the pebble floor, there is a baked brick pavement which has been exposed only to a very limited

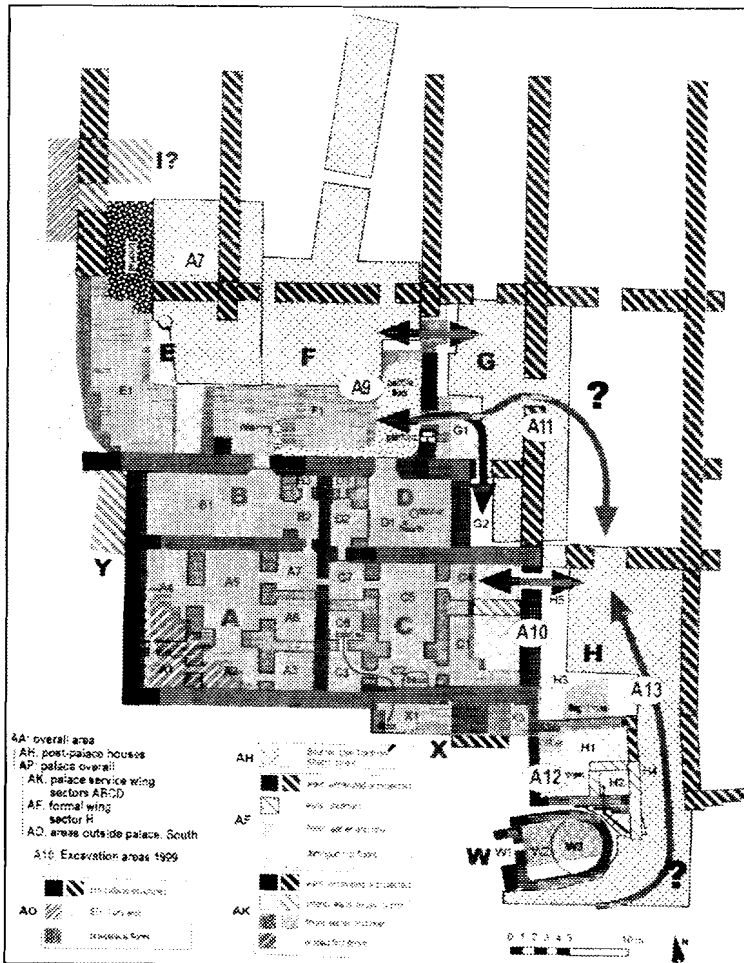


fig. 6 : General plan of Royal Palace and Area AA.

extent and which seems to match the overlaying pebble floor. This baked brick pavement is certainly the first floor of the building and thus goes with phase 2. The large doorway between sector F and room G1 would have served the same function as the large doorways leading to rooms B2, A2, D2 and C2 in the service wing: they would not have had door panels and would have served as entrances to a covered porch-like room in the style of an *iwān*. The large doorway between F and G1 had a beautiful baked brick platform which flanked the southern wall as if to support a particular object. It was very surprising not to find a wall on the western side of the courtyard, between sectors F and E, that would match the wall between sectors F and G. From our excavations to date, there

is not even a trace of such a wall such as would presumably have remained had the wall been removed in antiquity.

2. Of the new wing to the east we know so far only *sector H*. We assume that it is part of the formal wing of the palace because of the better quality of its floors and because it is raised by some two meters above the level of the service quarter AK. We use the term “formal” to refer to the ceremonial, residential and administrative functions that were housed in the palace; the term has a generic valence which is juxtaposed to “service” wing and is meant to leave open the determination of which of the three specific categories may qualify in this particular portion of the palace. Sector H was built together at the same time as the service wing AK. This is inferred from (1) the fact that the wall between sectors C and H is a party wall shared

by both sides of the building; (2) the similarity in composition of the packing below the floors in sector H and the whole service wing AK; (3) the fact that the southern wall of sector C and the western wall of room H1 share the same pavement at their base on the outside of the building. The floors in the area excavated so far are of a much higher quality than those in the service wing AK. In room H3 the pavement consists of beautiful flagstones, white room H1 had a cement like calcareous layer, some 15 cms thick, both pavements were damaged in antiquity. It appears as though the southern wall of rooms H1 and H2 becomes wider towards the east however, as we are here very near the surface of the tell very little remains of the walls hence it is not clear at this time whether this was simply a widening to accommodate the pre-existent apsidal structure W or whether the wall was meant to serve a special

visual purpose, possibly encasing a monumental entrance. This question ought to be resolved through further excavations to the East.

3. A *platform and an apsidal structure* to the south are just outside the palace but appear to be linked with it. One reason for this assumption is that both structures pre-existed the palace and have conditioned its layout. The platform (sector X) is set in a shallow niche which has caused a recess in the southern wall of sector C. In fact, there is another inset in the wall and both insets match a corresponding wall inside the building (the eastern walls of rooms C3 and C2). We know that the platform is earlier than the Palace, because the floor that abuts its base is lower than the drain that exits the AK building from room C2. Hence it appears that the AK southern wall was so built as to respect the platform which must have held a special ideological function. The level of this early floor seems to coincide in terms of absolute elevation with the earliest floors of the apsidal structure W (the lowermost floor of which has not been reached yet, hence the uncertainty). It is thus possible that the platform X2 and the apsidal structure W coexisted in time and served a parallel ceremonial function. The apsidal structure is of a type that is unique, as far as we know, in third millennium Syro-Mesopotamian architecture and we do not know at this point what its function may have been (we should find out as we reach the lowermost floors). But it too seems to have conditioned, by, the organization of the walls of the Palace for the extension of the southern perimetral wall between AK and AF is at a slight angle so as to match the orientation of the apsidal structure; and the insets of the southern wall of H1 follow the outline of the apsidal structure as well. If the entrance to the Palace is indeed in room H4 as proposed tentatively on our plan, then the platform and apsidal structure may have been along a ceremonial access route to the palace and beyond, even to the temple BA on top of the tell. But this remains for now a mere speculation.

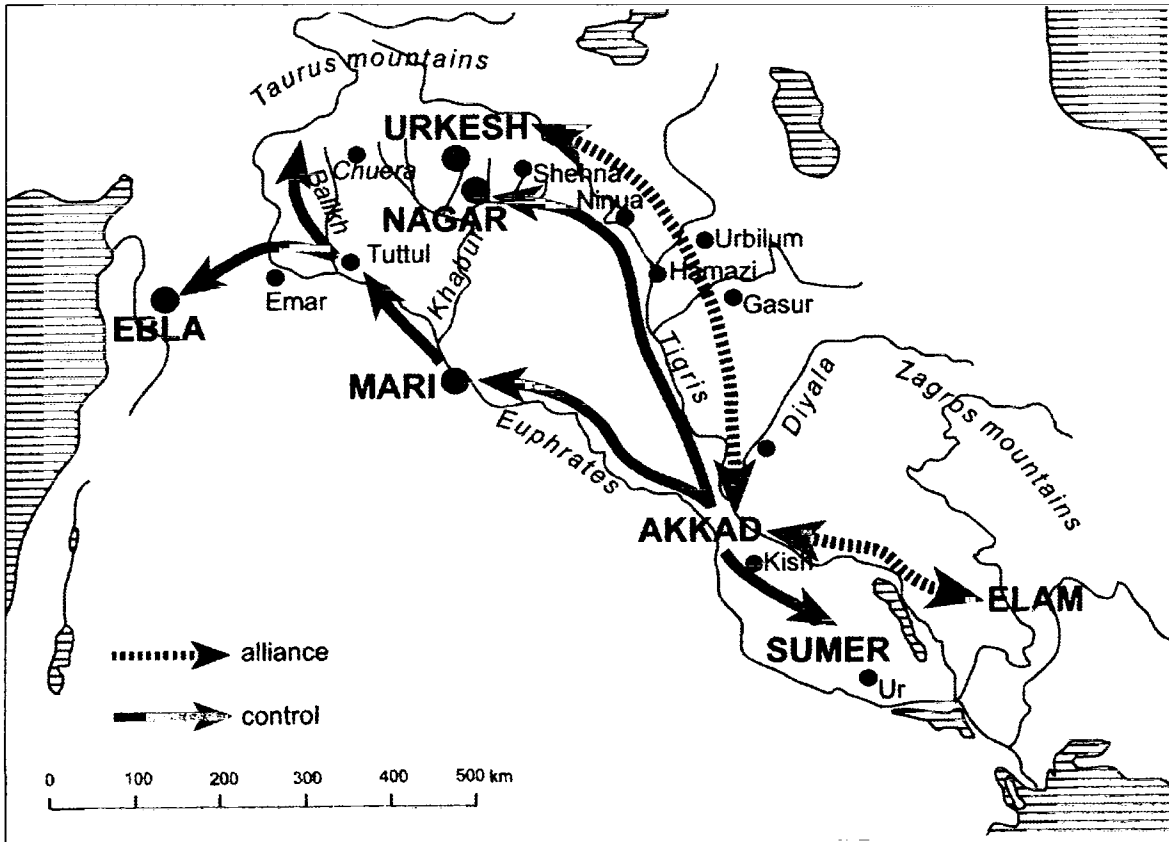
4. Within the service wing AK, there remains to excavate a portion of sector C. Having found the perimetral wall somewhat further east than we had anticipated, and having to extend the excavations of unit A10 to sector H, we were not able by the end to reach the first floors throughout rooms C1 and C2. One of the questions that remains open is the possibility of a doorway between rooms C4 and H5. We are indicating one on the floor plan, because there is a break in the brickwork and more importantly, in the stone substructure as well. If so, there would have to be a stairway bridging the difference in elevation between the two rooms but this does not seem likely since the doorway would be in the middle of room C4. It also seems doubtful that there should be another doorway in sector C, entrance to which is otherwise so rigorously guarded by the nodal room C7. The question will be easily settled as we excavate further in room C4 and reach the first floors. An interesting hypothesis seems likely with regard to the function of this quarter. In room C2, we found a basin which was lined with layers of very pure clay. These layers reached over the interior sides and were smoothed along the exterior. There was no trace of seeds, and no trace of grinders within the basin or in its immediate vicinity, so that the possibility of it having been used for culinary purposes seems excluded. West of the basin there is a small platform (on top of the drain). An analysis of the clay in the basin showed that it was identical to that of sealings and tablets found elsewhere in the Palace. Half of a tablet was also found next to the basin (though in this case the composition of the clay was different). Also, the position of the basin in the *iwān* C2 is significant. In the first place, it is next to a room where water was used (on account of the drain) while the deep baked brick shaft in C6 is most likely a toilet, the presence of the drain may indicate that water was used for other purposes as well. Second, the basin is in an *iwān* which has a perfect northern exposure i.e. one that favors an even light. Finally, the basin is so placed that it limits access to room C1, especially since the door opened precisely in the direction of the basin. This may suggest that the basin is of rather central importance for the use of the

space. From all this we infer that the basin may have been used as part of a *scribal installation*. If so, the basin would have held the clay used to prepare tablets and sealings, the clay would have been kept moist in some sort of burlap bags (of which there may in fact be a trace in the various layers of the basin) and would have been used by scribes sitting on the platform next to the basin.

As we said at the beginning, the historical consequences of our 1999 excavations in the Royal Palace of Urkesh are indeed momentous for a new understanding of ancient Syrian history. Urkesh emerges as the first Syrian kingdom to have been allied with Naram-Sin. In different ways and from different sources, we know that Mari, Nagar (Brak) and Ebla were subject to his rule (see Fig. 7). Not so Urkesh – if our understanding of Tar'am-Agade as a queen married to an *endan* will be borne out. In our reconstruction of the geo-political situation in general, and of Naram-Sin's strategy in particular,

Urkesh was a city in the northernmost Syrian plain that controlled the mountain regions to the north where no full urban centers had developed yet. It was on the grounds of its Hurrian background that Urkesh was able to control the highlands and Naram-Sin apparently felt that a conquest of this region would not have been as feasible as those directed at cities which were based on a lowland hinterland. As an alternative to conquest, he chose an alliance sanctioned (as we know he did under similar circumstances with Elam) by a dynastic marriage. This historical understanding of events, we wish to stress once more, is predicated on the assumption that Tar'am Agade is indeed in Urkesh as its queen, which may still be disproved by further finds. Even in that case, the net gain of the 1999 excavations in the Palace is that Urkesh is now clearly established as a major political center at the very height of the Akkadian period and of the expansion of the dynasty of Akkad to the North and the northwest.

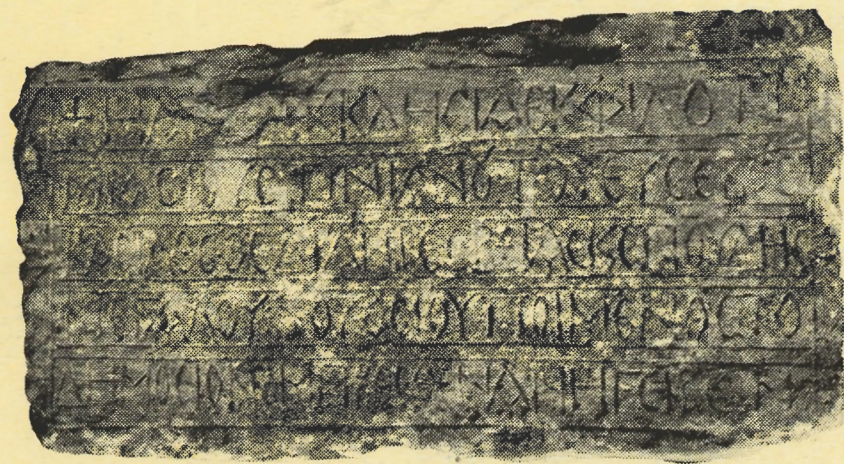
fig. 7 : Military campaigns and alliances of Naram-Sin of Akkad





# LES ANNALES ARCHÉOLOGIQUES ARABES SYRIENNES

REVUE D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ET D'HISTOIRE



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RÉPUBLIQUE ARABE SYRIENNE



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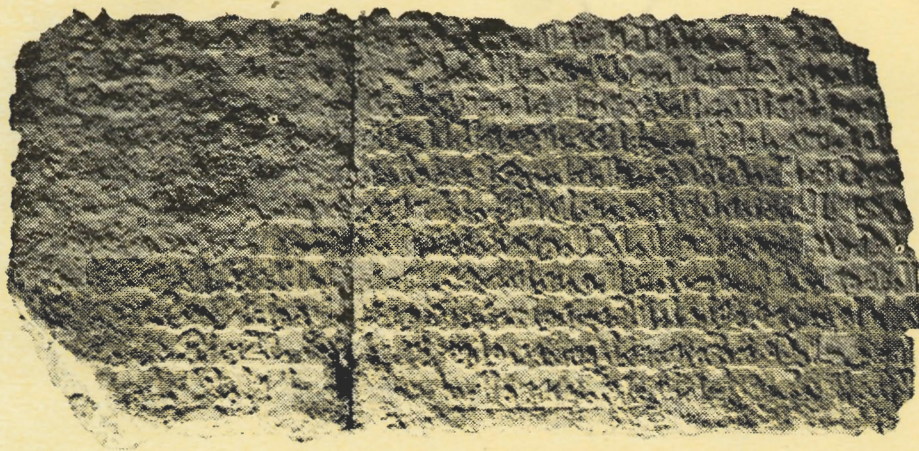
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# الدراسات العربية السورية

مجلة تبحث في آثار الوطن العربي وتاريخه



تصدرها

وزارة الثقافة

المديرية العامة للآثار والمتاحف

في الجمهورية العربية السورية

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المجلد الرابع والأربعون

٢٠٠١

## قصر أوركيش الملكي وابنة نارام سن

جورجيو بوتشلاتي ومارلين كيلبي بوتشلاتي

UCLA جامعة كاليفورنيا - لوس أنجلوس

الذي كان للملك توبكيش والملكة أوكنيتوم، وهو المعروف اليوم على أنه كان قصرًا مجهزًا بشكل كامل، وأنه أحد أكبر القصور في منطقة سورية الرافدية القديمة وأجودها من حيث الحالة الفنية. ويبدو أن أوركيش كانت طرفاً أساسياً على مسرح الأحداث السياسية في سورية في الألف الثالثة، وربما تكون قد ارتبطت بتحالف عن طريق الزواج مع الملك الذي تبجح بأنه هو الذي دمر إبلا. كما يبدو أنه كان للحاكم المحلي، حتى قبل هذه الفترة، نفوذ سياسي واقتصادي لبناء قصر بهذا الحجم الكبير.

يمكن التعرف بسهولة على مدى أهمية نتائج موسم التنقيب الثاني عشر في تل موزان بمقارنة المعلومات التي أصبحت بين أيدينا اليوم عن أوركيش بما كان معروفاً قبل بدء تنقيباتنا. لقد كان الرأي السائد في السابق أن أوركيش ليست سوى مملكة صغيرة ثانوية نشأت بعد سقوط الأكاديين، لكن هذا الرأي يجب أن يتغير بشكل جذري. فأوركيش كانت مركزاً سياسياً هاماً، على الأقل في زمن نارام سن، طالما أن ابنته كانت موجودة في أوركيش بصفتها ملكتها على الأغلب. ويبدو أنها عاشت في المبنى الملكي