

A Hurrian Passage to the Netherworld

Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati

1. Introduction

As the Urkesh excavation team explored, during the 1999 season, the exterior southern wall of the Akkadian palace in the hope of tracing its principal entrance, an underground stone structure came to light. In the following two seasons, just as the monumental nature of the structure was becoming more and more apparent, so was the puzzle about its function becoming more and more daunting. Why would there have been such a regular build-up, almost as if resulting from domestic occupation, in a structure that was of such difficult access and totally devoid of natural light? Why would the structure be so monumental when the accumulations seemed so normal? Why was it felt to be so important as to condition the layout of the Palace, whose walls were slanted in order to respect the pre-existing orientation of the underground structure?

An interpretation as a burial chamber was quickly excluded because of the total absence of human remains. Two other alternative possibilities were proposed, but with many caveats since neither could account for all the variables present in the architecture and the stratigraphy: (1) a well containing ritually pure water or (2) a *bīt mātim*, a structure in which a ritual meal (*kispum*) was celebrated by the king and queen in honor of their ancestors.¹

The new interpretation that I am proposing here accounts well for all the questions that were left unsolved by the earlier interpretations. The convergence of so many points of detail would seem to leave little doubt as to the function of this unique structure. And since this function is in turn uniquely linked to the Hurrian tradition, the historical implications that can be drawn are all the more significant.

I will first review the evidence, then present my interpretation, and finally draw some of the more important historical conclusions.

[p. 133]

2. The monumental underground Structure W²

Two factors were immediately apparent: that the stone structure was at a different orientation than the palace, and that the palace must have been built after the structure since the palace is stepped back to accommodate the northeastern part of the circular chamber. The ancient mound must have risen sharply between the structure and temple BA, which is located some 150 m to the east, near the center of the site. Later this change in height allowed a steep wadi to form, which eventually washed the upper stones of the structure down the wadi. It also had the effect of depositing a considerable layer of a mixed deposit above the structure.

¹ *MDOG* 132 (2000) p. 146 and Illustr. 5; *MDOG* 133 (2001) pp. 64-71. . I wish to thank a number of colleagues, in addition to family members, who gave me generously of their help: Gernot Wilhelm, Stefano De Martino, William R. Shelby and from our excavation team, John Lynch, and Laura Ramos.

² The label W refers to the structure as a sector of the Palace AP (even though it is just outside it). The label A12 refers to the excavation unit within which the structure is placed.

The use of the structure as excavated so far spans chronologically the period from Phase 2 through Phase 4, dating from ca 2300 to ca 2100 B.C.³ During this time a gradual accumulation built up inside so that the interior floor space was becoming higher and higher. In Phase 5 the beginning of the abandonment occurred.

2.1. Architecture

The stone structure consists of two chambers: the circular one, constructed first, and the square chamber added later to the circular portion by removing a part of the stone wall on the western side of the circle. The resulting structure has a keyhole shape. Presumably the perimeter of the circle, which was later removed for the construction of the square, contained the original stair since it is not present in the excavated portion of the circular structure. The square portion did have a preserved entrance through a very narrow doorway and steep stone steps. The final structure, including both the circle and the square, is over 7.5 meters in length near the top of the walls as preserved. The width of the circular chamber is about 4 meters in diameter near the top. At this point the excavated depth of the circle is almost 6 meters, but the base of the stones has not yet been reached.

2.1.1. *The circle*

The original circular underground structure was built of large stone blocks, roughly rectangular in shape. The blocks were set into the mound lengthwise so that the surrounding soil retained the blocks in place. The circular structure was originally vaulted by a corbelling technique whereby each of the upper tiers of stones projected into the interior, forming, at the top, a complete domed roof.

[p.134] Traces of coarse mud plaster were preserved in some areas around the eastern side of the circle. This plaster had separated itself slightly from the stones of the circle and a red granular deposit had fallen in to fill the resulting space. Nevertheless the gray, compact plaster followed the shape of the circle and must have separated from it because of the differences in surface texture, mass and humidity between the two types of material.

2.1.2. *The square*

The square chamber was added by removing at least three meters along the perimeter of the western section of the circular wall. The square addition must also have been roofed. Inserted in the western wall of the square chamber was a steep, narrow stairway accessed through a short stone-lined passage. This entrance is asymmetrically placed as it is nearer the northern perimeter of the structure, that is slightly nearer the palace. Six steps led down to the earliest floor of the chamber, a depth of about 2 meters. Traces of plaster were found in the northwestern corner of the square chamber.

The floor of the square chamber was raised above the lowest portion of the circle, which was presumably accessed by a ladder. Through use (resulting from the ritual

³ See this volume and *MDOG* (2001) 133, pp. 63-71; the ceramics from several of the strata are published *ibid* pp. 78-86

practices described below), the accumulations inside both the square and the circle grew at a regular pace, though compaction was minimal.

2.1.3. *The nature of the stratigraphic deposit*

The strata within both the circle and the square were deposited through a very regular and even build-up. In the square chamber the deposits were cleaner than in the circle and were composed, for the most part, of a fairly clean fill especially in the lower strata. In the circular portion there are occasionally shallow depressions. It appears that the level of the accumulations in the square chamber was intentionally raised with fill in the measure in which the floor in the circular chamber rose resulting from activities that were periodically taking place in it. In the square chamber the gradual build up meant that slowly the steps of the stairway were covered by the accumulations and that the roof was getting lower. The situation during Phase 4 was similar to Phase 3 but now a point was reached whereby the stairs were no longer needed since the floor level was so high. The doorway must have been only slightly higher than the level of the floors. The abandonment period during Phase 5 meant that there was no longer a roof on the structure; at this level the deposit was mixed with the later wadi material and it is not clear if the original function of the structure continued.

2.2. Artifacts

A number of complete and fragmentary artifacts have been recovered in this structure. Especially noteworthy are the numerous artifacts found in the circular chamber in features 343, 342, 331. Included among them are various metal objects, especially a deposit of five silver rings, lithics, comprising one obsidian blade, a number of obsidian flakes, and some fragments of flint blades. [p.135]Clay artifacts, in addition to the two objects discussed below, included animal figurines eight of which came from these features. In the remaining features of the structure seven copper/bronze pins were found and in the lowest strata of the square 17 small oval clay objects, usually identified as sling balls, were discovered.

2.2.1. *Anthropomorphic vessel*

One vessel discovered in the structure has obvious ritual connections. It is a small anthropomorphic jar⁴ depicting a nude female. The vessel is a small round-bodied jar with a tripod base. The female body is represented by an incised pubic triangle; the remaining portions of her figure are in relief and include short arms whose over-larger hands are cupping her applied breasts. The head is shown in relief on the neck of the vessel; she has large eyes, a wide but well formed nose with nostrils indicated, and a large but distorted mouth. Since it is the only element of the vessel which is so distorted, one wonders if this might have been intentional, in order to symbolize a distorted type of speech. Her over-large ears have no holes for earrings, which are otherwise a characteristic of many contemporary Urkeshean figurines. She has long braided hair extending down her back. She carries a small jar on her head that serves as the tiny opening of the vessel itself.

⁴ A12.108 from feature 343 and dates to the Post-Imperial Akkadian period, see *MDOG* 133 (2001), pp. 78-80. See also J. V. Canby in press.

This vessel is the only anthropomorphic artifact clearly connected with the structure. Feature 343 contained two incised and highly burnished cups made of a particularly fine Simple ware fired green.⁵

The capacity of the vessel is small and the fact that it is a container is emphasized by the similar shape carried on her head. The stylistic emphasis on her eyes, ears, and mouth can be correlated with ritual texts using pits, discussed below.

2.2.2. *Inscribed seal impression*

One fragment of an inscribed seal impression was found in the structure.⁶ The iconography shows a seated god facing left wearing a tiered garment; the rays coming from his shoulders identify him as Shamash. Only a portion of the inscription [p.136] is preserved with the ending of what appears to be a personal name (-*tup-šè-er*). Stylistically the seal can be dated to the Post-Imperial Akkadian period. This date coincides with the date given this stratum. The few other seal impressions found were very fragmentary, uninscribed, and had no clear iconography.

2.3. **Animal bones**

Paleo-zoological analysis conducted by Dr. Silvia Di Martino⁷ of over 1000 bone lots gave us the results that most directly led to a new interpretation of the function of the structure. She showed that the greatest number of animals in the structure were piglets (over 60). There were also a large number of puppy dogs (20). Other animals found in quantity were sheep, goats and evidence for 10 donkeys. The animals were butchered with great skill as evidenced by the precise nature and placement of the cuts. It was very interesting to find that the puppy dogs were not butchered. Another unexpected result was the fact that in many cases the entire animal was present, even the parts that were not eaten, indicating that they were butchered at that location and then left there.

3. A Hurrian *āpi* and its Ritual Use from Hurrian-Hittite Texts

3.1. **Sources**

A number of Hittite ritual texts heavily influenced by Hurrian religion are concerned with rituals used to communicate with the Netherworld by means of a pit. One

⁵ *Ibid.* Abb. 18:7-8. Cups are used in the rituals for holding the blood of the sacrificed animals, see KUB 10.63 I 17-28. For a cup similar to the Urkesh examples see Oates, Oates, and McDonald, *Excavations at Tell Brak, Vol. 2 Nagar in the Third Millennium BC*, 2001 Fig. 414:513, Phase N.

⁶ A12.82 feature 328 in the square chamber of the building.

⁷ Of the Bio-Archaeological Laboratory of the Musei Civici di Como, Italy.

of the terms used for these ritual pits is the Hurrian word *āpi*,⁸ a [p.137] Hurrian *terminus technicus* for the pit itself. The sources refer to both *āpi* and ^d*āpi*. The ^d*āpi* is listed among the gods of the Underworld.⁹ It is clear that the primeval gods in these texts belong to Hurrian ritual practice from the fact, pointed out by Archi, that portions of these rituals are in Hurrian.¹⁰ Archi calls the ^d*āpi* a “sacrificial pit” that was employed as a passage “through which the Underground deities have been summoned.”¹¹ Collins also believes the term does not indicate the divine status of the pit itself but rather its supernatural power in the communication between the human world and the netherworld.¹² It is through this pit that the deities of the Netherworld are summoned and also through it that the causes of evil are lured into the underworld where they will be held. In these Hurrian-Hittite rituals the king personally plays a role in one text where he invokes the gods, and places the weights on the scale used in judgment by the primeval gods.¹³ In the mythological portions of the texts connected with these same rituals the god Kumarbi is sometimes listed among the chthonic deities although in them he is not specifically associated with the pit.¹⁴

In these Hurrian-Hittite texts the netherworld deities themselves are called forth, never the spirits of the dead. This indicates that the rituals are not necromantic in nature. The rituals are centered on the passage of the deities of the Underworld for purposes of purification and the giving of offerings. While there are no regular cultic practices connected with the chthonic deities in the Hurrian-Hittite texts, we are fortunate in that these texts describe the ritual practices connected with the pits in detail.¹⁵

3.2. Description of the pits

In the texts that specify the time of day, the rituals were carried out at night or began at sunset.¹⁶ [p.138] Interestingly for us, a number of these rituals describe the choosing of the spot and the digging of the pits; in other words they are freshly dug as a

⁸ Previously this Hurrian term was read *ayyabi*. Most scholars agree with Hoffner that it is connected to Hebrew *’ōb*, see H. A., Jr. Hoffner “Second Millennium Antecedents to the Hebrew *’ōb*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967) pp. 385-401. Jaan Puhvel “*āpi*” *Hittite Etymological Dictionary* Vol. 1 (1984), pp. 99-102; he notes (p. 101) that *āpi* is sometimes taken as being derived from Sumerian AB.LĀL. Schmidt believes that the Hebrew term refers not to the pit but to the dead called up through it, see Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead*. Tübingen, 1994, pp. 151-4. A number of different words are also used to designate a pit in these texts. The rituals where the term for pit is ARAH are of a different character than those of the *āpi*, see Billie Jean Collins, “Necromancy, Fertility and the Dark Earth,” in Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer, eds. *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. 224-241. I owe this reference and many other suggestions to Stefano De Martino.

⁹ Alfonso Archi, “The Names of the Primeval Gods,” *Orientalia* 59 (1990) pp. 114-129.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 116-7.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.117.

¹² Collins 2002.

¹³ Archi 1990, p. 116.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 117-9.

¹⁵ Pits are also associated with necromantic rituals in later texts from Mesopotamia and Syria, e.g., Giorgio Castellino, “Rituals and Prayers against ‘Appearing Ghosts’,” *Orientalia* 24 (1955), pp. 240-274. For a discussion of necromancy and similar rituals, including these texts, see Josef Tropper, *Nekromantie: Totenbefragung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*. AOAT 223, 1989, pp110-17

¹⁶ KUB 29.4+ for translation and references see Hoffner 1967, p.389 and Collins 2002, p. 228-9, KUB 24.9 ii 17’-30’ ; *Ibid* p. 233.

part of the enactment of the ritual.¹⁷ Some are dug with tools that, while appropriate for these rituals, do not lend themselves to the excavation of very deep shafts; two daggers,¹⁸ a hoe and a pin,¹⁹ a shovel²⁰ and a knife²¹ are mentioned. In some cases, especially where daggers or pins only are indicated, this probably was limited to making a circle on the ground.²² The choice of the exact spot could be incorrect as evidenced by the rejection of some of the pits; in one text²³ the officiating priests open up first seven pits, which turn out to be unfavorable. None of the rituals seem to indicate that the digging of the pits lasted a number of days and so the conclusion must be that these were very shallow and ephemeral. As to the number, they can range from one to nine; in one case first eight pits are opened up and deemed favorable for the ritual and then nine more are also opened and also deemed favorable. Even when there are a large number of these pits, they all have offerings connected with them.

At the conclusion of the ritual, the hole is sealed up in some way (bread or a cloth covering) presumably so that the spirits descend again and do not continue to disturb the human inhabitants.²⁴

These pits are seen from the texts as ephemeral but there was one stone lined pit excavated at Boghazköy with ritual objects inside.²⁵ This pit is two by two meters in size and two and a half meters deep. While it did not have the type of offerings found in the rituals, it did contain two miniature votive axes.²⁶ [p.139]

3.3. Offerings placed in the pit

The offerings vary but what interests us here is the type of animal sacrificed and especially that in many cases the ritual specifies that the killing of the animal takes place down in the pit: “They offer one sheep to the deity for *enumaššiya* and slaughter it down in the pit.”²⁷ In one case however the sheep offering is brought up out of the pit for

¹⁷ For a recent study of some stone pits in Phrygian Anatolia and earlier literature see Hatice Gonnet, “Systemes de Cupules, de Vasques et de Rigoles Rupestres dans la Region de Beyköy en Phrygie,” in M.J. Mellink, E. Porada, T. Özgüc, *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and Its Neighbors Studies in Honor of Nimet Özgüc*. Ankara 1993, pp. 215-224. She thinks that some of these monuments are originally Hittite and connects them with Hurrian *āpi* (p. 219).

¹⁸ Hoffner 1967 text 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 3; originally understood as a pectoral ornament. The interpretation as “Gewandnadel” was proposed by Harald Klein “Tudittum,” *ZA* 73 (1983), pp. 255-284. (I owe this reference to G. Wilhelm). See also his *Untersuchung zur Typologie Bronzezeitlicher Nadeln in Mesopotamien und Syrien*. Saarbrücken 1993.

²⁰ Hoffner 1967 text 3.

²¹ *Ibid.* text 6.

²² KUB 29.4 rev iv 31-36 for a translation see Hoffner 1967 p.389. and Collins 2002 p.228.

²³ KUB XV 31 obv ii 6-26, see Hoffner 1967 p. 390 and Collins 2002, p. 227.

²⁴ KUB X 63 obv (i) 17-28, Hoffner 1967 p. 391; KUB VII 41++ iii 13-20, *ibid* and pp. 398-9.

²⁵ Peter Neve, “Die Ausgrabungen in Boghazköy-Hattusha 1991,” *Archaeologischer Anzeiger* 1992, Heft 3, pp. 316-319.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

²⁷ KUB XXIX 4 rev iv 31-36, see Hoffner 1967 p. 389. Collins 2002 p. 228 translates this passage as “They offer one sheep to the deity for *enumaššiya* and slit its throat downward into the pit.” Puhvel translates this similarly, (1984), pp. 99-100. This translation does not match our evidence from the Urkesh

butchering.²⁸ The animals offered include sheep and lambs, birds, but piglets and puppy dogs were the preferred sacrificial animals in these texts. In Yazilikaya a ritual piglet burial contained four bronze pins apparently holding down the piglet.²⁹

Ordinarily water, milk, wine, oil, beer and honey are included among the offerings. In one text we find the offering of a small amount of perfumed oil.³⁰

A silver ladder as well as a silver ear model are placed in the pit in one text presumably to aid the dead in ascending and the diviners to hear the dead respectively.³¹ Silver is a preferred metal in these offerings.

4. The monumental underground structure as a Hurrian *āpi*

The correlations between the Urkesh underground structure and the rituals connected with the *āpi* are striking. The shaft with its steep, narrow entrance facing the setting sun was blocked when we first discovered it. The time of day for these rituals is either the time of the setting sun or at night; both are mentioned in the texts.³² The architectural emphasis on a very difficult type of narrow entrance and steep stairway reflects the fact that it was used by few people (the necromancers and perhaps at times the king or queen). Because the entrance was difficult to access, it was also easily blocked, a desirable characteristic when the aim [p.140] was to keep the spirits of the dead from roaming the world.³³ The architectural evidence shows that the structure was originally roofed with a vault made by corbelling techniques. One of the later ritual texts from Mesopotamia mentions a vaulted structure.³⁴ The Urkesh shaft was originally deep but grew less so with use. It may have been originally thought that the depth was important in communicating with the dead. Some rituals require that the animals being offered be slaughtered down inside the pit, which means that they were of a certain size. However many of the texts reflect an immediacy in the digging of the pits; that is, they were dug as part of the ritual. In some cases the pits had to be dug again because the place of the initial ones turned out not to be auspicious for the rituals. Our evidence for the Urkesh shaft is monumental and showed continued use over a long period. Our shaft dates to about a thousand years earlier than the Hurrian-Hittite ritual texts. It is therefore logical that there would be some changes within an overall similar ritual tradition. For example, the shallow depressions observed within the circular portion of our structure

shaft while the translation of Hoffner better fits the animal bones we have excavated; see section 2.2.3 above.

²⁸ KUB X 63 obv (i) 17-28, Hoffner *ibid* p. 391.

²⁹ Harold Hauptmann, "Die Architektur: Die Felsspalte D." in K. Bittel, et al *Das hethitische Felsheiligtum Yazilikaya*.1975, pp. 62-75.

³⁰ KUB XXIX 4 ii 3-8, Hoffner 1967, p. 389.

³¹ KUB XV 31 obv ii 6-26, see Hoffner, *ibid* p. 390 and Collins *ibid*, p. 227.

³² KAR 234, line 13; CT23:15-18, line 17.

³³ The calling up of the dead spirits implies a removal of the barrier between the living and the dead. That this is to be dreaded in Mesopotamia is shown by the threat to raise up the dead to devour the living in the Descent of Inanna, Gilgamesh and the story of Nergal and Ereshkigal. For a discussion of these texts and a very insightful treatment of the whole topic of the living and their relationship with the dead see Robert Wexler, *The Concepts of Mortality and Immortality in Mesopotamia*. PhD dissertation Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, UCLA, 1993.

³⁴ CT23, 19-21, line 5.

may correspond to what the later texts describe as “pits” ceremonially traced with daggers, pins or the like.

Architectural evidence for the interpretation of the Urkesh structure as an *āpi* is supported by the stratigraphy and the artifacts found within it. The strata show a regular build-up. This is also reflected in the artifacts. While in some strata there were more artifacts (especially features 331 and 343), all strata contained similar faunal evidence. A large number of piglets and puppy dogs were found in the shaft. Piglets and puppy dogs are often mentioned in the texts and were preferred offerings for these rituals. Many of the bones reflected the presence in the shaft of the whole animals; characteristic for a number of these texts is the fact that the animals were slaughtered down inside the pit. The paleobotanical evidence is also striking. The texts often mention bread offerings but on occasion grains were given as offerings. If bread had been offered in our shaft, no evidence would be preserved. However our shaft did contain a number of unsorted grains; mixed grains that could be used in making bread useless chaff.

While the two very fine cups found in the same feature as the small ritual vessel may have also been used in the ritual, [p.141] we do find them in our excavations in other contexts, but rarely. The small nude female vessel has certain characteristics that we can identify through the texts.³⁵ The vessel is a small jar with an opening that is in the shape of a small jar held on the nude woman’s head. The capacity would reflect the texts that mention an offering of a small amount of perfumed oil. Her large ears and distorted mouth may reflect the passages in the rituals concerned with the need to hear the dead and the fact that the speech of the dead is difficult to understand because it resembles the chirping of birds.

It should not be surprising that there are variations within the ritual practice connected with pits since the texts represent a long chronological period and a widespread geographical area.³⁶ So for instance in many texts the animals slaughtered within the pits are left there, while in others they are explicitly taken out.³⁷ Variations occur as to the time of day the rituals take place. The most important variation for our evidence is in the size of the pit. The Urkesh example is monumental, while many others are small, ephemeral pits. It may well have been that the Urkesh shaft was rare even in third millennium Hurrian cities (of which Urkesh at present is the only one securely identified as such).

³⁵ While we have no evidence connecting this vessel with the diviner performing the ritual, the role of women as diviners in later texts should be kept in mind, see K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1986 p. 254, fn 3; M.-C. Trémouille, “La religione,” in *La civiltà dei Hurriti. La parola del passato*, 55 (2000), esp. p. 156. This is also the sense of 1 Sam. 28:7, where Saul asks for a woman necromancer.

³⁶ The continuation of the necromantic rituals connected with pits in the Greek, Etruscan and Roman worlds is well known. See Puhvel (1984), p. 101 with references. I wish to thank Alex Martin for sharing his thoughts on the role of pits and springs in other areas of the Mediterranean. “L’Accès À L’Au-Delà, A Susa,” in *Collectanea Orientalia Histoire, Arts de l’Espace et Industrie de la Terre, Etudes offertes en homage à Agnès Spycket*. edited by H. Gasche and B. Hrouda, Paris: 1996, pp. 329-348.

³⁷ KUB X 63 obv I 26-8.

5. The Historical Significance of the Urkesh Ritual Shaft

Few Mesopotamian texts point toward the practices of necromancy in Mesopotamia and even fewer rituals are carried out by means of a pit.³⁸ Because of the scarcity of the textual evidence it has been commonly thought by scholars that calling on the dead spirits [p.142] was considered dangerous by the Mesopotamians since the rituals did not guarantee that the spirits would return to the Netherworld thereby avoiding their return in dreams and to spread afflictions of various kinds.³⁹

The Hurrian-Hittite texts reflect rituals employed in calling deities of the Netherworld, not spirits of dead ancestors. Evidence for the summoning of dead ancestors comes from Syria (Ebla and Ugarit) and Mesopotamia. We cannot establish the object of the rituals carried out in the Urkesh underground shaft although future excavations in the shaft may give us evidence for this. Notwithstanding a few considerations may be given here, even if firm conclusions cannot be drawn. It is well known that the chthonic Hurrian god Kumarbi lived in Urkesh. While no rituals using pits are connected with him, he is present in a mythological section of such ritual texts.⁴⁰ Nergal is associated with Urkesh through the Tish-atal inscription.⁴¹ One of the main temples in Urkesh was dedicated to him.

The position of the shaft within the city of Urkesh is an important consideration. We know that it predated the construction of the palace since the southern exterior wall of the formal wing is stepped back to accommodate it. The ritual texts connected with pits sometimes do speak of the participation of the king and queen and one explicitly states that after participating in the rituals the king is to proceed directly back to the palace.⁴² The palace architecture accommodates another structure in its plan. Farther to the west, but always connected with the southern palace wall is a mudbrick platform (labeled as Sector X of the Palace area, see above in this issue p. 110ff). It was standing when the palace was constructed and a long shallow niche within the southern wall was constructed to frame it. The platform was regularly surfaced with reeds. Built into the platform (though damaged by a later pit) was a beautiful stone drain. It is not certain, but it is possible, that the monumental shaft and the platform were part of the same ritual complex next to the palace. That same street may have extended as far as the base of the temple terrace higher up in the city.⁴³ If this is the case then the palace, the platform, the underground structure and the temple were all connected by a ritual roadway.⁴⁴

[p.143] A related line of inquiry concerns the recently published inscribed chamber in the Sacred Pool Complex of the Südburg at Hattusa dated to Suppiluliuma

³⁸ Schmidt 1994, and especially pp. 215-6 is doubtful of the connection of many of the Mesopotamian texts usually associated with necromantic practices including an Old Assyrian letter (TCL 4,5) where two women report on their inquiring of *etemmū* (ghosts) concerning one of their relatives.

³⁹ Irving L. Finkel, "Necromancy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *AfO* XXX 1983/4, pp. 1-17. Contrarily, Tropper has concluded that knowledge of necromancy was widespread in Mesopotamia even if not found frequently in the texts, 1989, pp. 47-109.

⁴⁰ Archi 1990, pp. 117-9.

⁴¹ Gernot Wilhelm, "Die Inschrift des Tišatal von Urkeš," in G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, *Urkesh and the Hurrians Studies in Honor of Lloyd Coatsen*. Malibu 1998, pp. 117-143.

⁴² This in a late Assyrian text, KAR 146.

⁴³ *MDOG* 131, pp. 17-46.

⁴⁴ In this case then in some respects similar to the roadway that was the entrance to Chuera.

II.⁴⁵ The chamber is vaulted and built into the mound but open on one end. At the interior end a shallow pit was dug just in front of the relief of the Sun God. It is somewhat wider at the opening and narrows toward the back where both the pit and the relief of the Sun God are located. The short building inscription at the end of a long historical text refers to the monument as a (DINGIR) KASKAL.KUR which Hawkins interprets as an entryway into the Netherworld (“divine earth-road”).⁴⁶ He goes on to connect the (DINGIR) KASKAL.KUR with the Hurrian-Hittite ^d*āpi* discussed above. Both are means of connecting to the Netherworld, but the (DINGIR) KASKAL.KUR is associated with water and in some texts appears to be related to natural springs that disappear into the earth.⁴⁷ Given the presence of the stone drain with its inlet set in the platform X along the side of Palace AP, one may venture the hypothesis that the platform X with its drain served a function similar to that of the later (DINGIR) KASKAL.KUR, and that it was connected with the rituals taking place in the monumental ^d*āpi*.⁴⁸

Necromancy and the calling of chthonic deities, through the use of ritual pits, are characteristically Hurrian ritual practices. The interpretation of the Urkesh monumental shaft as a focal point for such rituals is another indication of the strong Hurrian cultural identity of the city of Urkesh. It ties in well with other evidence of a significant Hurrian cultural presence in the city in marked contrast to the Syro-Mesopotamian orientation of the culture in other cities in the Khabur region (most notably Nagar/Brak) during the last quarter of the third millennium.

⁴⁵ See the sections by Peter Neve “Kammer 2 und der “Heilige Teich”” and J.D. Hawkins in J.D. Hawkins *The Hieroglyphic Inscriptions of the Sacred Pool Complex at Hattusa (Südburg)*. Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten 3, Weisbaden 1995; P. Neve, “Die Ausgrabungen in Boğazköy-Hattusa 1988,” *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1989, pp. 1-332, especially pp. 313ff; P. Neve, “Die Ausgrabungen in Boğazköy-Hattusa 1989,” *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1990, pp. 267-286; J. D. Hawkins, “The New Inscription from the Südburg of Boğazköy-Hattusa,” *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1990, pp. 305-314.

⁴⁶ Ibid 1990, p. 314.

⁴⁷ Edmund I. Gordon, “The Meaning of the Ideogram ^dKASKAL.KUR=“Underground Water-Course” and Its Significance for Bronze Age Historical Geography,” *JCS* 21 (1967), pp. 70-88. Puvhel (1984), p. 100-1 connects what he terms “chthonian cavities” with wells.

⁴⁸ A ^dKASKAL.KUR has been identified at Troy, see Manfred Korfmann, *Studia Troica* 8 (1998), pp. 58-61.