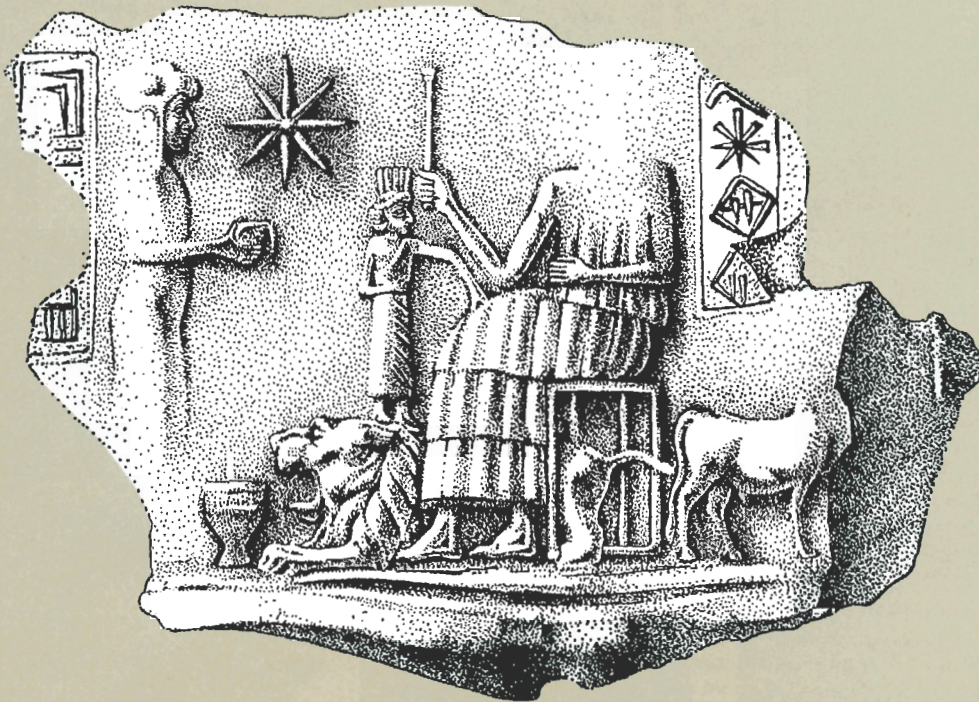


THE KINGDOM OF THE LION

W R I T T E N B Y P A T & S A M I R T W A I R



SEAL IMPRESSION OF TUPKISH, KING OF URKESH
(ROYAL STOREHOUSE, TELL MOZAN, CA. 2300 BC)

The discoveries of 150 years of scientific archeology have made such peoples as the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Akkadians and Hittites into familiar names. Caches of tablets up to 5000 years old found in ruins and in tells—the mounds that dot the Fertile Crescent, layered with the remains of successive settlements—have given an ever more complex and more complete picture of the history of early civilizations. ❁ But it was not until the 1920's, when translators of a Hittite tablet found a reference to a people in what is now northeastern Syria, that scholars became aware of the Hurrians. Discoveries and translations since then have shown that the Hurrians were an economic and military force, a people who left their mark on their contemporaries, most notably upon the Hittites.

Strategically built where the Euphrates River plain meets the foothills of the mineral-rich Taurus Mountains, the remains of the Hurrian capital city of Urkesh—once thought to be mythical—lie under Tell Mozan in Syria. Archeologists' test pits march up the slope of the tell.



Hurrian was one of several third-millennium languages that was written in cuneiform script. The inscription between the two seated figures on this seal impression (right) calls Uqnitum "the wife of Tupkish"—he is referred to as king on other seals—thus confirming her status as queen. Below, she appears with her distinctive hair braid on another seal-impression fragment. At lower right, a stela fragment showing a plowman turning his draft animal at the end of a furrow uses more sophisticated pictorial techniques, says Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, than did other societies of the late third millennium bc.



SEAL IMPRESSIONS OF UQNITUM,
THE WIFE OF TUPKISH



STELA FRAGMENT OF A PLOWMAN



Now, the discoveries of Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, a husband-and-wife archeological team, have extended knowledge of the Hurrians and their history back hundreds of years. No longer a footnote among ancient peoples, the Hurrians are now a full-fledged and fascinating chapter in Mesopotamian history.

According to cuneiform tablets of the 14th century BC, the Hittites, whose kingdom lay in what is today Turkey, dreaded the approach of Hurrian armies. In Egypt, pharaohs corresponded with Hurrian kings. Court musicians in the Syrian coastal kingdom of Ugarit performed Hurrian compositions. Other tablets tell us that Kumarbi, the chief god of the Hurrian pantheon, ruled from the Hurrian capital city of Urkesh. But after more than 70 fruitless years of searching for its remains, archeologists generally agreed that Urkesh had either been destroyed in antiquity, leaving not a trace, or had never been more than the mythical home of the Hurrian gods.

Then, in the summers of 1992 and 1993, their seventh and eighth seasons of digging at Tell Mozan in northeastern Syria, the Buccellatis found seal impressions that, after painstaking study, confirmed that the mound was in fact the site of ancient Urkesh. More than 650 impressions of stone cylinder seals, rolled onto vessels and jars to identify their owners more than 4300 years ago, provided abundant clues. Carbon dating further confirmed that the Hurrians were thriving around 2200 BC, nearly a thousand years earlier than experts had understood that they were a regional power. Though finding Urkesh has been compared to finding the Mount Olympus of Greek mythology, it is in fact more revealing, because Urkesh was also the Hurrians' political and economic capital.

"The importance of the discovery of Urkesh can hardly be overstated," says Piotr Steinkeller, professor of Near Eastern Languages at Harvard University. "It dramatically revises the picture of the historical geography of Mesopotamia."

Gernot Wilhelm, professor of oriental philology at Würzburg University in Bavaria, president of the German Oriental Society and the world's foremost authority on the Hurrian language, agrees that it is "beyond doubt" that Tell Mozan is indeed Urkesh. "After nearly 30 years of research on the Hurrian language and history I appreciate very much that the Hurrians now enjoy the wider attention they deserve," he says. "The discovery of Urkesh gives us good hope of solving the mystery of the Hurrians' origins and determining when they appeared in the Fertile Crescent."

When the Buccellatis began excavating in Syria in 1976, finding the lost Hurrian capital was not their goal. They worked at Terqa, a second-millennium BC site, and then at Qraya, a fourth-millennium site on the Euphrates River. In 1982 they went north toward the Turkish and Iraqi borders to study Mesopotamian remains in the region that, in ancient times, was the Fertile Crescent's gateway to copper and tin mines in the Taurus and Zagros Mountains.

Giorgio Buccellati began his archeological career in 1962 studying epigraphy at the site, in Iraq, of the Sumerian and Babylonian city of Nippur. Today he is one of the foremost experts in Akkadian, one of the languages of ancient Mesopotamia. A former professor of the ancient Near East at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), he is also founding director of the UCLA Institute of Archeology. Marilyn

Kelly-Buccellati has taught art history at California State University-Los Angeles for more than two decades. They are the coauthors of the chapter on Urkesh in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*.

Buccellati explains that Tell Mozan is a spectacularly large mound, rising 27 meters high (90') and covering 120 hectares (300 acres). "It is remarkable a tell of that size hasn't been excavated," he says.

The reason, he explains, is that British archeologist Sir Max Mallowan visited Tell Mozan for two days in 1937 while searching for prehistoric sites. He had three test trenches dug, but decided against a full-scale excavation. He mistook shards from the site for Roman ware, which led him to believe that the older layers he sought lay farther beneath the surface than they actually do.



When Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati and Giorgio Buccellati found these pottery shards near the surface of Tell Mozan, they concluded that the metallic finish linked the shards not to the Roman era, as Sir Max Mallowan had concluded 60 years ago, but to the third millennium BC. "It is remarkable a tell of that size hasn't been excavated," says Buccellati.

"The pottery recovered at Tell Mozan is very sophisticated, and does somewhat resemble certain Roman pottery," says Kelly-Buccellati. "No other sites excavated at that time had yielded this type, so it's not surprising that Mallowan associated it with Roman ware."

Mallowan's wife, mystery writer Agatha Christie, wrote in her memoir *Come Tell Me How You Live* that she was much relieved when her husband decided against excavating Tell Mozan, because of the mosquitoes and the lack of accommodation in Amuda, the nearest town. (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1990.)

"Three Tells compete for the honor of our attention," she wrote. "Tell Hamdun...Tell Chagar Bazar, and a third, Tell Mozan. This is much the largest of the three, and a lot depends on whether there will be much Roman deposit to dig through." But later she added: "Tell Mozan has been reluctantly erased from our list of possibles. There are several levels of Roman occupation and though the periods we want to dig are there underneath, it would take several seasons—that is to say, more time and money than we can afford."

Still, after digging at Chagar Bazar, Mallowan remained intrigued by Tell Mozan. "There was yet another important [cultural] element" in the area, he wrote in *Mallowan's Memoirs*, and "I have sometimes wondered if the massive and obviously rich mound of Mozan... is not an echo of it."

Nearly five decades later, the Buccellatis picnicked on Tell Mozan. Though the ubiquitous pottery shards had a metallic cast that, in the 1930's, was considered diagnostic for Roman manufacture, the Buccellatis nonetheless concluded that the shards belonged not to the Roman period but to the third millennium BC. There would be no Roman layers to dig through.

Since Mallowan, another hint had emerged that suggested that Urkesh was more than mythological. Two small bronze lions, each inscribed in cuneiform with the oldest known Hurrian inscriptions and probably from the third millennium BC, had been sold at Amuda in 1948; ultimately, the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired them. The text on each lion translates, "The king of Urkesh built the temple of the lion."

Though the lions had been sold in the marketplace of Amuda, there are no traces of third- or second-millennium occupation in Tell Shermola, the mound nearest Amuda. The Buccellatis reasoned that experts had mistakenly concluded that Tell Shermola was the origin of the lions simply because of its proximity to the Amuda marketplace. Tell Mozan, on the other hand, had no recent occupation layers, and it was the closest third-millennium site to Amuda. Villagers occasionally buried their dead in it, and it could have been during a burial that the bronze lions had been found. They would then have been sold at the nearest market. The Buccellatis became certain—at least certain enough to organize digging teams—that massive Tell Mozan was not only the source of the lions, but was in fact also Urkesh.

This, says Steinkeller, has proved "a brilliant hypothesis."

During the nine excavation seasons they have spent at Tell Mozan since 1983, the Buccellati team first demarcated an outer defense wall and a building, nine by 16 meters (29 x 51'), that they believe to be a temple. A stone ramp leads up to the interior, which is surfaced with a thick, cement-like pavement. Because there is no evidence of a drainage system, architects presume that the building had a roof; because there is no evidence of columns or post-holes, engineers have concluded that it was a pitched roof. The building's foundations are of roughly hewn limestone blocks, from which mud-brick walls probably once rose. A large stone block with a depression in its center appears to have been an altar, and it is this feature, more than any other, that supports the Buccellatis' assertion that the building was in fact a temple.

The Buccellatis have found evidence of four phases of the building's life. The earliest was destroyed by fire, and the resulting debris was piled in the back of the building. Amid the debris deposits was a small limestone statue of a lion, stylistically similar to the well-known bronze lions. The stone lion's mane, like the bronze ones', is depicted using deeply incised, irregular patterns, and the deeply cut eyes may have

been inlaid. Kelly-Buccellati points out that—also like the two bronze lions—this limestone figure is more realistic in its representation than other mid-third-millennium lion representations from the south. Because they found the lion in the altar area, the Buccellatis named the building "The Temple of the Lion"—and perhaps it will indeed prove to be the temple referred to in the inscriptions on the bronze lions found in 1948. But though they had named the building, the Buccellatis still could not name the city in which it stood.

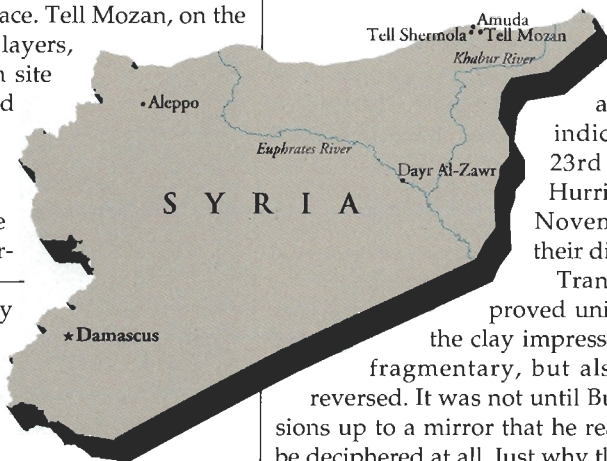
At any new Mesopotamian site, an archeologist's fondest hope is to uncover an archive: tablets or seals that will, in translation, positively identify the site and throw light on its history. In 1992 and 1993, the Buccellatis opened a structure near the city gate that they now believe was a storehouse. Here they found some 650 fragmentary impressions in clay of stone seals. It would have made their work far easier, explains Kelly-Buccellati, if they had found the seals themselves; as it was, the impressions had to be gingerly removed, photographed and drawn. Disappointingly, nearly all had been broken when the containers they sealed had been opened, or they had been partly crushed by human feet on the storeroom floor.

But when they found among those seal impressions one that read, "Tupkish, king of Urkesh," they felt vindicated. At last, they had the name of a Hurrian king linked with the name of the city, and the archaic script of the impression indicated he had lived around the 23rd century BC—well before any Hurrian rulers previously known. In November of 1995, they announced their discovery of Urkesh.

Translation of the seal inscriptions proved uniquely vexing, not only because the clay impressions are extremely delicate and fragmentary, but also because the script is often reversed. It was not until Buccellati held one of the impressions up to a mirror that he realized that the cuneiform could be deciphered at all. Just why the Hurrians at Urkesh produced their seals in reverse—unlike almost every other Mesopotamian cylinder seal for millennia—is, Buccellati says, "the million-dollar question. This is very odd, and, precisely because it is unique to Urkesh, it is important."

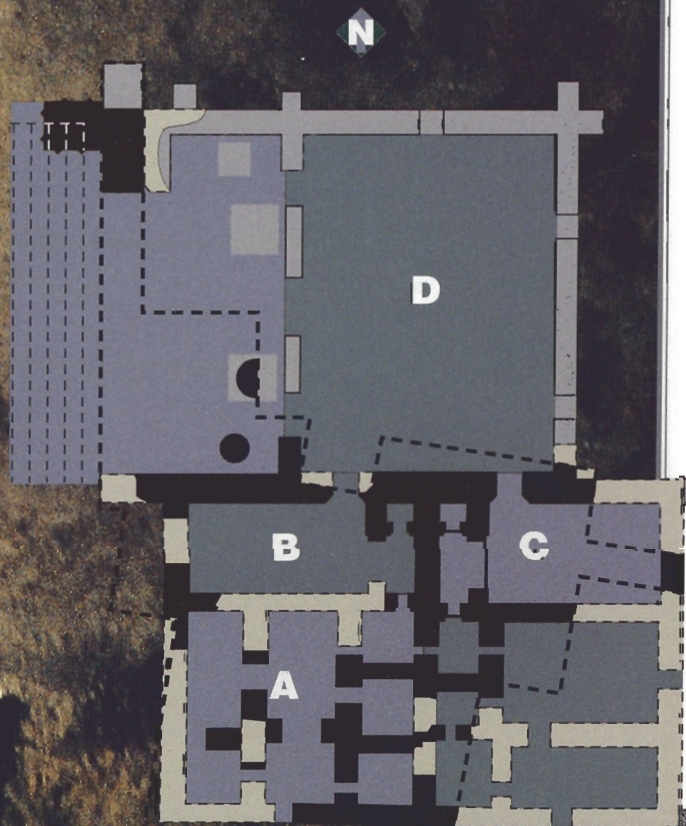
From the beginning of the third millennium, cuneiform was the script that the Sumerians, Akkadians and Hurrians used to write their different languages, just as Arabic script is used to write Arabic, Persian and Urdu today, or Roman letters to write languages as different as English, Turkish and Portuguese. It is largely cuneiform texts, recovered and translated progressively since the 19th century, that form the basis for the ever-growing body of knowledge about ancient civilizations.

Dr. Mirjo Salvini, director of the Institute of Mycenaean and Aegean-Anatolian Studies in Rome, explains that the Hurrians began to appear after 2500 BC in the vast fertile area among the foothills of the eastern Taurus and the Zagros mountains. Their earliest history, he writes, is known from historical accounts of the Sumerian-Semitic civilizations and the documents of local political entities of the area. Although both appear in Sumerian-Akkadian cuneiform, "at a very early date the Hurrians began to write their historical records also in their own language,"



UNCOVERING THE ROYAL STOREHOUSE

After nine digging seasons, the Buccellati team found in these trenches, amid a complex of buildings near the gate in the city wall, the 650 fragile clay impressions of stone seals that proved that the site was Urkesh. More than 120 of the impressions found on the floor of section **B** refer to the queen, and because of this and the vault-like closet in the room's northeast corner, the Buccellati team believe this room was used to store goods in jars and bundles, each sealed with clay into which was rolled the queen's seal. Section **A**, excavated earlier, is believed to be a temple. Section **C**, to be excavated this summer, may prove to be an adjoining storeroom—perhaps one belonging to the king. Section **D** appears, at this early stage, to be a room much larger than any other yet excavated; its contents and function remain in question.



When a local antiquities dealer sold this 12-centimeter (4 $\frac{5}{8}$ "") bronze lion in 1948, the Hurrian inscription on it, "The king of Urkesh built the temple of the lion," strengthened belief that the city had really existed, and was not merely the mythical home of the Hurrian gods. Below, a stone lion found by the Buccellatis near the altar of the temple at Tell Mozan was another appearance of the lion motif, which recurs frequently enough to lead the archeologists to conclude it may have been a totemic animal for the Hurrians.

BRONZE LION WITH
CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTION
(AMUDA REGION, LATE THIRD
MILLENNIUM BC)



STONE LION
(TEMPLE BA)
(TELL MOZAN, CA. 2300 BC)

Salvini notes. "Having entered the cultural sphere of the Mesopotamian civilizations, the Hurrians, from the very start, can be seen to have had a bilingual culture: Sumero-Akkadian and Hurrian. To this picture of the Old Akkadian period must be added the recent discoveries made by Giorgio and Marilyn Kelly Buccellati at Tell Mozan, with the first documents from the archive of "Tupkish, King of Urkesh."

Tupkish, it turns out, is a Hurrian name, whereas his queen's name, Uqnitum, is Akkadian and translates as "lapis-lazuli girl." The Buccellatis hypothesize that this may indicate a cross-cultural royal marriage with political consequences: Was a Hurrian king married to an Akkadian-speaking princess from the south?

So far, the Buccellatis have excavated only one section of the storeroom and have found that, so far, 123 seal impressions either read "Uqnitum, wife of King Tupkish" or otherwise indicate members of the queen's household. The Buccellatis conclude from this that goods belonging to the queen were stored in this area, and that the queen owned property in her own right. "Obviously, she wasn't busy sealing jars in her storeroom," Kelly-Buccellati says. "She had her own servants, and one, the nanny, is even named."

Produce from neighboring farms must have been shipped to the palace, and those goods destined for the queen's larder sealed with her name, much as we might address a package today. The emphasis on naming Uqnitum as the wife of the king leads Kelly-Buccellati to believe that special status was given to the consort of the king, as opposed to the practice in Ugarit, where the king's mother had special status. In fact, the Buccellatis have so far found no mention of a queen-mother, nor any evidence of royal polygamy. Because many of the other seal impressions depict people preparing meals or serving banquets, the archeologists presume that this was a work area, and that the queen's seal stones and her jewelry were stored elsewhere.

Who were the Hurrians? We know that they lived during the third millennium, at the same time as the Sumerians in the south and the Semitic Eblaites to the northwest, explains Buccellati. Linguists believe there are connections between the ancient Hurrian language—which was neither Semitic nor Indo-European—and contemporary Georgian. It is possible that the Hurrians emerged from the Caucasus region and crossed into the Anatolian plateau, a region Kelly-Buccellati calls "the outer Fertile Crescent."

"The Sumerians lived in the arid south and relied on mud-brick architecture, and the Eblaites lived on the plains of the Orontes River," says Buccellati. "The Hurrians at Urkesh had access to metals from the Anatolian mountains and used stone in their architecture." The semi-pitched roof of the Temple of the Lion, he adds, "is common for people of more northern climes."

Buccellati's examination of the themes of Hurrian mythology indicates that they seemed to identify psychologically with the mountains to the north. Kumarbi, the principal deity who lived in Urkesh, had a son, Ullikummi, whose nickname translates as "basalt," who is described as exploding and spreading out over the land: Basalt in fact covers the landscape, likely produced by the now-extinct Kaukab Volcano, whose double-coned caldera lies some 100 kilometers (62 miles) from Tell Mozan. Another myth describes a battle between Ullikummi and Teshub, the lightning deity. Buccellati suggests that this story may preserve a memory of a chaotic time when lightning struck the volcano as it erupted.

The name of another son of Kumarbi is "Silver," which reflects Hurrian metallurgical capabilities, Buccellati believes. In Hurrian myth, Silver searched in vain for his father, who reigned in Urkesh, but was preoccupied in the mountains to the north. Could this be an allusion to the transport to Urkesh of metals mined in the north? Spearpoints, daggers, a scraper and a pin of pure copper, as well as samples of low-tin bronzes and copper alloyed with arsenic, have all been recovered at Tell Mozan.

With an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 people populating Urkesh, a city set astride regional trade and mining routes, the Hurrians must have played an important economic role in the lives of the Sumerians and Eblaites. Urkesh must have prospered handsomely as trade brought gold and silver into its treasury while the fertile river valleys below filled its granaries.

Because there are no signs of cataclysm, nor accounts of devastating war, Buccellati believes that the abandonment of the city around 1500 BC was due either to climate change or depletion of the water table. But as it passed into history, Urkesh lived on in the cultures it influenced.

Historians have already documented the influence of Hurrian deities on the Hittite pantheon. Kelly-Buccellati believes that the Hittites also borrowed their idealization of dynastic succession from the Hurrians. From her study of the seal impressions recovered at Tell Mozan, she has identified traits heretofore unknown in third-millennium art.

"The Hurrians incorporated the names of the people they depicted in their seal impressions," she says. "We assumed this practice began much later. Furthermore, we can observe a clear dynastic succession from the sealings."

Pointing to a seal impression, she notes that the queen—distinguished by her single braid and hair ornament—holds a royal child on her lap while the crown prince—identifiable by his crown—places his hand on the knee of his father, the king. "It is unheard of for art of this period to indicate succession by a specific gesture like this," she stresses.

Kelly-Buccellati's voice rises with enthusiasm as she explains that Hurrian motifs seem to insist on naturalistic depictions of animals. One of her favorites is a stela (see page 4) on which a plowman moves himself forward by pushing on a diagonal with his leg—a new compositional technique, she says, centuries ahead of artists to the south and west.

Thanks to the seal impressions, says Buccellati, "the Hurrians now have names, faces. We know what they looked like—we know they existed. The crown prince has a very distinctive face, and it's not a very handsome face, either!"

In the coming season, the Buccellatis will dig in a section of the storeroom adjoining the queen's area, where they hope to find the king's storeroom and perhaps more illuminating finds. It remains to be seen whether this hunch will prove as fruitful as their earlier ones, but since only about one percent of Tell Mozan has yet been excavated, there is clearly much still to be learned about this new chapter of early human civilization. 🌐



Pat and Samir Twair met in 1977 at the Buccellatis' excavation of Terqa. There, Pat was a UCLA doctoral student in archeology, and Samir was the excavation artist.