READING FIGURINES from Ancient Urkesh (2450 BCE)
A New Way of Measuring Archaeological Artifacts
with Implications for Historical Linguistics

I mean this paper to be preliminary to an extended essay on the ways classification in archaeology might contribute to the study of language.

David Anthony, who has co-authored some of the most provocative material on the domestication of early equids, characterizes the void between the two disciplines as a chasm most Western archaeologists feel cannot be crossed.

> Many would say that language and material culture are completely unrelated, or are related in such changeable and complicated ways that it is impossible to use material culture to identify language groups or boundaries. (Anthony 2007, 101)

As it turns out, my work on the figurine corpus from Royal Building AK—a storehouse—at Urkesh was caught up in this discussion almost three decades ago.

In the case of animal figurines, at least, I believe that we have ignored one of the most useful and obvious diagnostic tools—measurement of given body parts and their ratio and proportion to other parts of the animal anatomy. These measurements have become for me primary characteristics.

The methodology has led to the identification of at least six different genera, and informs the study of domestication at Urkesh—a program that met with enduring success as demonstrated by recent figurine finds in post-Palace strata.

V.V. Ivanov, the noted linguist, came one day to see me. He had followed with great interest the various discoveries of animal representations at Urkesh, particularly the equids. In these terra-cotta representations, Ivanov saw one part of a "missing archaeological link . . . [in] . . . the chronology of the domestication of horses (starting with the fourth millennium [BCE, and] of the spread of early Indo-European dialects." (Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1985, 75; Ivanov 1998, 157)

When Dr. Ivanov and I first met, I did not at that time realize how controversial was his assessment of my work.