

PERSISTENCE OF TRADITION AT URKESH. THE TEMPLE TERRACE FROM PROTOLITERATE TO MITTANI

Abstract. The Temple Terrace of Urkesh had an extremely long history, spanning over more than two millennia. This is surprising because the structure, while monumental in scope, presents several features that are relatively ephemeral in nature, and could have been preserved only through special care and maintenance. The article outlines the configuration of the Temple Terrace, highlighting its structural make-up and coherence, which allowed for incidental changes in its component parts – until the moment, in its final century, when the structure itself was affected by a more radical change. Possible reasons are suggested that may explain this cultural phenomenon.

Keywords: Urkesh; Hurrians; Temple; Mesopotamian architecture; ziggurat; Protoliterate; Late Chalcolithic; Early Bronze Syro-Mesopotamia; *longue durée*; structural analysis; perceptual analysis.

The season of excavations we had planned for 2011 was intended to fully excavate a building of which we had only uncovered the southwest corner and which seemed certain to be a much earlier version of the great ED III temple at the top of the tell. This corner of a building was one of the most surprising finds we had ever made in Mozan. The reason for the uniqueness was that it predated by a millennium the ED III temple, even though it was immediately below the level of the glacis that led up to the later temple. In other words, this structure, dating to about 3500 B.C., stood at a height of some 25 meters above the ancient plain level, and only half a meter below the glacis dating to about 2600 B.C.

The beginning of the war that engulfed Syria in March 2011 prevented us from returning to the site, and, while from year to year we were hoping that we might be able to resume excavations, the sad circumstances we all know too well made it impossible. Looking back at it now, from the distance of the long time the war has lasted, it seems useful to offer an overall review of the history of the Temple Terrace. This is all the more timely as the last few seasons of excavation had yielded the most unexpected results at the two ends of the chronological spectrum. Besides the evidence for a mid fourth millennium stratum so high in the stratigraphy of the mound, we had also exposed a more complex sequence than we had imagined for the last two centuries of occupation (1500–1300 B.C.). The structural configuration of

the complex, as best known from the third millennium, emerged with a much clearer definition at both ends of the spectrum, documenting a dominant asymmetry that was just as surprising.

To offer this to Rauf Munchaev holds a special meaning. We were close in the field, as we exchanged many a visit between Tell Khazna and Tell Mozan. And we remained close after the beginning of the war, with a memorable visit to Moscow and to his Institute. Rauf Munchaev and his staff would invariably share with us all the insights they had developed over the years, as they would share the conviviality of their expedition house and of their Institute. It is in this spirit that I share with him now these thoughts on the great Urkesh Temple Terrace.

This article has been long in the making, and I have referred to it already in some papers that have appeared in the meantime, where I have developed from a different point of view the basic concept I am taking up here. In 2009 we published a first outline of the overall structural layout of the Temple Terrace (Buccellati, Kelly-Buccellati, 2009. P. 33–69), and suggested the lions of Tish-atal may have been part of the foundation deposit of the Temple. In 2010 (Buccellati G., 2010. P. 87–121; see also: Buccellati F., 2010. P. 71–85) I considered the relationship between function and perception, focusing on how a reconstruction based on perceptual and distributional analysis (Buc-

cellati G., 2017. P. 275–77, 325–26, 330–32) can yield an insight into the function of an architectural structure such as our temple complex. Also in 2010 M. Kelly-Buccellati presented the ceramic and glyptic evidence for the dating of the Temple Terrace in LC3, with a beginning at least in LC2 (Kelly-Buccellati, 2010. P. 262–290). In 2012 I applied the notion of structural coherence to what I had called the monumental urban complex of Urkesh, looking at how different components of the urban built environment can interrelate in a very organic manner over a vast space and over a long period of time (Buccellati G., 2012. P. 21–33). In 2014 M. Kelly-Buccellati and I emphasized the distinctiveness of the Urkesh tradition vis-à-vis Mari, stressing the continuity even in the face of what we called the “virtual monumentality” (p. 445) of its later and much more modest incarnation (Buccellati G., Kelly-Buccellati, 2014. P. 441–461). Finally, in 2016, I wrote about the analogical correlation between the Urkesh Temple Terrace and the mountains (Buccellati G., 2016. P. 117–135), claiming for this a special Hurrian distinctiveness, while M. Kelly Buccellati showed how the extraordinarily long continuity of the Temple Terrace can in part be explained with reference to the long traditions of the Kura-Araxes culture in the extreme north (Kelly-Buccellati, 2016. P. 97–115).

In this article, I will give an overview of the historical development, with the aim to highlight the significance of the long chronological spectrum which was first brought to light as a result of the 2006–7 seasons and which documents an astonishing persistence of a religious tradition with important implications for cultural history (one will find the essential documentation in the articles just cited). The goal is to highlight the fully organic dimension of a development where continuity and change blend together, affirming at the same time the lasting identity of a coherent system on the one hand and, on the other, the strong vitality that allows for it to undergo modifications without altering its inner nature. It is in this sense that we can see in this persistence of tradition a paradigmatic application of the concept of *longue durée*: not the long duration of a fossilized entity, but the long life of an organism that changes while remaining itself.

1. A case of *longue durée*

The 2006 excavations first made us aware of the astounding and unsuspected continuity of the Temple complex, and the subsequent excavations of 2008–2009 and 2010 further confirmed it, pointing to a surprising phenomenon of persistence. And yet, there was nothing frozen about it. For we can see, in the coherence of the

process, a subtle sequence of morphological changes which can be interpreted as re-organizational moments of the built environment, resulting in the adaptation of deeply rooted institutions to new realities. It is, as we understand it, a classical example of *longue durée*, the long history of the Temple Terrace of Urkesh, from Protoliterate¹ to Mittani² seen as a test case of structural continuity and change at the same time.

The situation presents some extraordinary aspects. It is not only the longevity of the structural complex and not only its excellent state of preservation, but also the evidence of how the open space of the Plaza remained privileged and unsullied for the full time span of over two millennia – except for a few occasional episodes when its base level rose quickly by several meters in a short period of time, especially at the end. Only a few transformational moments affect this longevity, giving evidence of a relatively minor evolution of forms within the persistence of single focal points.

The structural elements that serve as guideposts to continuity are as follows (see Fig. 7).

It is likely that the organization of the urban space in function of the Temple Terrace continued further down slope and even outside the urban context, as at Chuera, but we have for now no indication of this at Mozan.

This organization of the space resulted in a stage-like orientation that privileged the approach from south to north with the mountains in the background (rather than privileging an isolated centrality). This is especially evident because of the difference between the southern part of the temenos wall represented by the revetment wall, and the rest of the temenos, which does not mark any difference in elevation between the inside and the outside space.

The variations have to do with the way in which these elements interact with each other, i.e., the syntax, so to speak, of these structural components of the complex seen as an organic whole. This alternation in the organization of the constituent factors is the result of both the general growth of the settlement and the changes in fortune of Urkesh as a religious center. We will look at these major transformational moments in the over two millennia of history of the structure (2–5), and will then conclude with some general methodological considerations (6–8).

¹ I revert to a term now in disuse, because I find it useful to avoid the geographical associations inherent in the more current “Uruk” terminology.

² To speak of a “Nuzi” period seems less appropriate, since it refers to the accident of discovery rather than to the by now well known political configuration.

The SUMMIT: temple and other structures	1. The core is a high central rise with the temple at its summit; 2. Other buildings flank the temple at the summit of the rise: the summit was not, therefore, a cusp on which the temple sat in isolation, but rather a wide area, where activities, presumably related to the cult, would take place
The INCLUSION: an open area contained by a perimetral wall ³	3. A sharp definition of the southern edge of the rise ⁴ , by means of a stone revetment wall, present only on the southern side of the rise, serving as a proscenium for the top part of the terrace; 4. A low temenos wall along the eastern, northern and western sides of the rise, with a minimal difference in elevation, if any, vis-à-vis the space outside; 5. A glacis that is unencumbered by other structures and slopes up gently towards the temple at the top;
The FRONT: an open area fronting the rise to the south	6. The plaza, i.e., a large reserved open space to the south of this revetment wall, which emphasized, through its open space, the frontal dimension of the central rise with its revetment wall;
The ASCENT: access across the hinge of the perimetral wall and of the glacis	7. A monumental staircase that provided a link across the revetment wall seen as a barrier; together, staircase and wall are like an ideological hinge, that can close and open the passage to the higher ground of the divine world; 8. Intermediate structures along the ascent on the glacis from the staircase to the temple (this element is found at Chuera; at Urkesh, it may be evidenced by the LC3 niched building, 2.1, and by other unsubstantial remains from the ED III period).

2. At the wellsprings of urbanization:

3500–3300 B.C.

We have only a fragmented view of the fourth millennium situation at Urkesh, in the LC3 period. But two factors make these “fragments” particularly important: first, they cohere over a considerable distance in space within the tell, and, second, their great elevation has significant implications for the early history of the site.

2.1 The structural elements

The individual elements that emerge like the tip of an iceberg from under the massive evidence of the third millennium complex can be seen as organically linked in ways that remain operative in the later architectural realization. This means that there was already in place, at this extremely early date, a vast monumental complex, with essentially the same structural elements that

define the later system. The elements or “fragments” are as follows.

2.1.1. Intermediate structure (or Temple). – The corner of a structure has been exposed just below the third millennium glacis, and dates firmly in the LC3 period (Fig. 1), while material found next to it points already in the LC2 period (Kelly-Buccellati, 2010. P. 267, 275). It is a niched, mud brick structure, resting on a mud brick platform, and because of its layout and location it may be assumed to have been an intermediate structure on the way to a temple located further up, in the general location of the ED III temple (a situation such as we have in Chuera). It is less likely that this may be the temple itself, because in this case there would be no room for a glacis leading up to it.

2.1.2. Staircase. – If we project the perimeter of the building as shown in Fig. 2, we see that its alignment matches that of the ED III staircase. Given the disaxiality of the alignment in the third millennium complex between the staircase and the revetment wall (Buccellati G., Kelly-Buccellati, 2014. P. 444), we may reasonably argue that this curious incongruity may depend on the earlier alignment of the presumed LC3 staircase. Lurking underneath the ED III staircase there is, in effect,

³ The clear presence of occupational levels at the same elevation as the Temple and to its immediate north and east (service structures in excavation units B3 and B5), makes it impossible to accept a reconstruction of a “Temple Oval” and a ziggurat as suggested by P. Pfälzner, “Das Tempel Oval von Urkeš. Betrachtungen zur Typologie und Entwicklungsgechichte der mesopotamischen Ziqqurra in 3. Jt. v. Chr.”, *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie*, 1 (2008) 396–433; Alice Bianchi, Heike Dohmann-Pfälzner, Eva Geith, Peter Pfälzner, Anne Wissing, *Die Architektur und Stratigraphie der zentralen Oberstadt von Tall Mozan/Urkeš*. Studien zur Urbanisierung Nordmesopotamiens, Vol A1, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014. From at least the third millennium on, the Temple Terrace was simply not a free standing, ziggurat-like, structure.

⁴ The 2008–2009 excavations have brought into even sharper focus the structural elements of this edge, to the southwest and the southeast corners respectively. My 2010 article in the Meyer Festschrift (Buccellati, 2010. P. 87–121) develops in detail the structural and ideological aspects. Here the emphasis is on the element of substantive continuity within the formal variations.

an earlier stone structure (Fig. 3): it cannot be dated yet because we have not reached its base, but it could very likely be the beginning of the LC3 staircase.

2.1.3. Revetment wall. – At the base of the higher slope of the terrace there was already an antecedent of the revetment wall (Fig. 4): it had collapsed in antiquity, possibly because, conceived as a retaining wall, it had not been sufficiently reinforced for the lateral push from within the core. Placed just a little over a meter in front of the later ED III wall, the LC3 wall is closely aligned with the later one, and would have abutted the staircase at the same distance from where the ED III wall meets the ED III staircase.

2.1.4. The plaza. – The space that we have exposed in front of the revetment wall (Figs. 4 and 5), however small in size, is suggestive of the wide open space that characterized the complex in the third millennium. The import of the revetment wall seems sufficient to indicate that it served already then as the northern limit of a space that would have mirrored the one of the ED III period we know so well.

It must be noted that there is, in the fourth millennium, no evidence as yet for five of the eight elements that I have listed in section 1 as characteristic of the Temple Terrace complex: (1) a temple if we interpret the niched building as an intermediate structure; (2) a glacis leading up to the temple and (3) the low temenos wall; (4) the presence of other structures flanking the temple outside the temenos wall, and (5) what shape this central rise would have taken on the back side, i.e., in the north, and more generally at the top. But given the overall configuration of the structural elements as I have described them, it seems likely that the situation would have been very similar.

2.2. The elevation of the niched building

The high elevation of these LC3 levels (some 23 meters above the plain level) means especially two things. First, there must already have been by the early fourth millennium an impressive stratigraphic build-up on which the Temple complex could rest, as was the case in the third millennium. Second, the massive construction project that this would have entailed was clearly indicative of a fully organized urban infrastructure, back at the very beginning of the urbanization process of which we know well its southern counterpart. Fig. 6 gives a conjectural projection of the possible extent (east-west) of the settlement in the LC3 period: purpose of this image is only to emphasize the assumption that such a structure required a large settlement to support it.

We know from the small sounding S2 (Buccellati G., Kelly-Buccellati, 1995; Buccellati G., Kelly-Buccellati, 1997. P. 60; Buccellati G., 1998. P. 12, 15, 19),

which reached virgin soil near the center of the High Mound, that there were, at this particular location, occupational strata all the way down to the original plain level, about 2 meters below the current plain level. Hence the rise which we must suppose beneath the third millennium Terrace was not, even in the fourth millennium, due to a pre-existent natural hill. In other words, the height of the earlier mound would then have been, already in the fourth millennium, some 23 meters above the ancient plain level, and completely artificial. This was the core on which the fourth millennium Temple complex already stood. It was a “terrace” because it had platform-like effect with a flat surface at the top, while the term “glacis” refers properly to the slope surface.

2.3. An early distinctiveness

From the point of view of our considerations about the *longue durée*, it would appear that there is already at this early stage a clear definition of the sacred space organized along the lines of what we see later. Because of its very monumentality, the cohering of the individual elements into a unitary whole is all the more impressive. Instead of a small structure that grew into a larger complex, we seem to witness, from at least the middle of the fourth millennium, a grandiose and fully articulate conception of the Temple Terrace, along the same lines that apply for the third millennium configuration, the one we know best because it is almost fully exposed.

Given the great height of the mound, it seems likely that this early date is not the one of the beginning of the construction. In other words, it is plausible to assume that the lower levels must contain an even earlier version of the same complex. The small size of the third millennium revetment wall, and the total lack of foundations, imply that the wall did not serve the purpose of containing a massive fill, set in place in the third millennium specifically in order to create the core of the rise on top of which a new temple would be erected. We may rather infer that there was already a compact and solid mass, i.e., an earlier glacis, on top of which the third millennium glacis directly rested, at the base of which an earlier revetment wall would presumably have been built as well.

It is true that the niched building has its close counterpart with the southern temples, as in Eridu. But the overall architectural formula (i.e., the very high elevation and the shape of the supporting terrace) is quite at variance with that of the Sumerian south, besides being earlier, and it is this formula that remains true to itself throughout the centuries, in fact the two millennia, that follow. Its originality is striking, especially in view of the great influence that the southern formula did otherwise have throughout history. As already mentioned

(section 1, under point 2), the Urkesh Temple Terrace is not conceived as a free-standing centralized structure with a narrow cusp: this is the southern formula, where there was no mountainous backdrop to the ziggurat. In Urkesh, the Temple Terrace is construed with such a backdrop very much in mind. The landscape plays a major role in the articulation of space, resulting in a perfect blend between built and natural environment.

3. The maximal expansion: 2600–2000 B.C.

3.1. The classical formulation

We have, at this point, minimal evidence for the intervening periods with regard to the Temple Terrace, but there can be no doubt that the complex remained in use: we can safely assume that the reason for the relative lack of evidence is to be found on the one hand in the stability of the structural elements at play, and on the other on the careful maintenance through which the open spaces were kept clean. The close correlation in space between the structural elements we have described for the fourth millennium and their equivalent in the third speaks to this effect. In any case, the organization as we have it for the third millennium, illustrated in Figure 7, represents the most complete configuration we have to date for the Temple Terrace complex.

The only element for which we have no clear evidence is that of intermediate structures along the glacis (number 8 in figure 7), a function that the niched mud brick building may have served in the LC3 period (2.1). There are so far only possible but unsubstantial traces in the form of extensive mud brick debris to the left of the top of the staircase (see Figure 8), and unclear structural elements in a small sounding in unit B7.

It must also be noted that, while the fourth millennium Temple complex seems to have closely anticipated, in scale and in the articulation of its constitutive details, the third millennium complex, the same is not true of the urban infrastructure. From all indications, the city underwent a major expansion in ED III times, which culminated in the construction of the Outer City wall. That, in spite of the major change in the urban landscape, the Temple Terrace should have remained very close, in its main characteristics, to its immediate precursor is indicative of the great importance the structural and ideological configuration had achieved. It could not be changed – at a time when everything else seems to have been changing (it was certainly growing).

One change that took place with the construction of the ED III complex was the placing of a high escarpment along the revetment wall, and possibly the construction of the western flank wall of the monumental staircase. Both hide part of the revetment wall, and may have be-

come necessary for reasons of stability. This long life of the complex must have required a great deal of care, not only active in terms of maintenance and cleaning (though we do not see traces of repairs), but also passive in the sense that nothing was undertaken that would have intruded in the integrity of the system.

3.2. Remarks regarding the revetment wall

The proscenium function of the revetment wall is emphasized by the presence of a triangular pattern that runs across the face of the revetment wall (Fig. 9, see also Fig. 8.1) (Buccellati G., 1998; Buccellati G., 2009, P. 23–29). Curiously, the escarpment in front of the wall covers the lower portion of the wall, to a height of 1.5 meters, thus hiding a good portion of this subtle decorative motif. The same is true of the wall that flanks the monumental staircase in J2. Both can be dated to within a century of the construction of the wall, which made us puzzle as to the why. The answer came in 2009 when it emerged that a lower escarpment, contemporary with the original construction of the wall, had failed in its protective function against floodwaters. The new, higher escarpment was then deemed necessary enough to justify hiding a good portion of the revetment wall. This is the only change that affected the structural makeup of the Temple Terrace (as we know it so far) in the twelve centuries of its existence.

A remarkable fact is that we have the *original top* of the revetment wall that encircled the Temple Terrace. This conclusion rests on two considerations. (1) The glacis that slopes up towards the temple clearly dates to the same time period as the floors at the base of the wall; now, the lower part of this glacis is aligned with the extant top of the wall, and given the narrow size of the wall and its function as a revetment wall we cannot assume that it would have been higher when first constructed. (2) The integrity of the triangular motif along the face of the wall shows that there were no additions or alterations made to the original wall.

The care that went into maintaining this wall over some twelve centuries is a good reason for assuming that great significance was attributed to it in antiquity. This is remarkable for two reasons. First, the wall is not particularly well built and, in fact, one may assume that it was intentionally so constructed as to emulate the rough appearance of the mountain landscape to the north and more specifically of animal enclosures built by piling rocks instead of laying them in even rows. This construction style is in contrast with the more polished look of the stone work of the Temple staircase or of the Tupkish Palace walls. Second, the revetment wall did not serve a structural function in the sense of retaining the lateral thrust of a massive fill behind it. It is too

thin for this, it has no foundations, it is not built as a solid counterfort wall, and, most importantly, there is clear evidence for the existence of an earlier solid mass behind it (an earlier terrace), which did not need containment. Hence the wall serves, as it were, a decorative purpose in architectural terms and a symbolic function in ideological terms.

This function can be interpreted in terms of it serving as an ideal hinge. It is a vertical barrier that arrests the access to the Terrace and, in the measure in which one approaches it, even the view of the Temple at the top. But it is also a link between the lower ground of the Plaza and the upslope of the glacis. In this sense, it is a hinge that acts as both a dividing line and a suture between the visual planes, level and oblique, and between the two domains of the divine at the top and the human at the bottom. The persistence of this hinge, in the form of what I have called “memory stones” (see below, 5.3), is one of the most interesting aspects of this persistence of key structural elements (Buccellati F., 2010. P. 71–85).

4. Urban retrenchment: 1800–1400 B.C.

4.1. From plaza to basin

For the Akkadian, Ur III and early Old Babylonian periods we do not have at present evidence of occupation in the Temple Terrace area – a situation that mirrors that of the period between 3300 and 2600 B.C., and which must be explained with the same reasons: not interruption, but continuation of use with very effective maintenance.

What we know about the site as a whole has great importance for an understanding of the development of the Temple Plaza, even though the argument is primarily inferential in nature. The lower city was abandoned and there was, from the beginning of the second millennium, a retrenchment of the settlement to the High Mound. The main evidence for this is the total lack of second millennium material in the Outer City and the density of such material in the hilltops surrounding the Temple Terrace.

The very significant inference that can be drawn for the Temple complex is that the new constructions to the south of the Plaza eventually formed a barrier that overlooked the Plaza at its southern end and blocked the flow of water and detritus towards the lower plain. This marked the beginning of the filling in process of the Plaza which thus became a large hollow set at a lower elevation than the surrounding settlement, turning from a Plaza to a basin. This new situation eventually caused the resulting basin to be irremediably filled in, in the last century of its history (Fig. 10, and see below, section 5.2).

4.2. Evidence of occupation

There is limited evidence of occupation in the Temple Terrace in the middle to late Old Babylonian periods. In J4 a large bin (a2, f93) can be dated to this period. It marks a distinct use area in the service wing to the east of the monumental staircase, and may have served a similar purpose to that of the similarly shaped bins attached to the ED III Temple BA.

While there is no indication of structural changes dating to this period, we have evidence for its use in the form of accumulations in the Plaza (especially in unit J1), with both Khabur and early Mittani sherds. These accumulations overlay directly third millennium strata.

The Khabur levels in J1 are lower than those in J4, and this is significant because it supports my general understanding of the sacral use of the area. In the east (J4) we envision a service area that had built up even before the ED III Temple Terrace (the one currently visible) had come into existence, and at a faster rate. In the west (J1), on the other hand, the Plaza was kept clean throughout the third millennium, and only started to build up beginning precisely with the Khabur period.

A very small fragment of a cuneiform tablet (Z1.544) was found on the surface in the general area where the western temenos would have been located. In spite of its diminutive size, it is worth mentioning because it is our first epigraphic find that can be attributed to the Old Babylonian period.⁵

5. Between two capitals: 1400–1300 B.C.

5.1. A structural change

The first and only set of structural changes took place at the very end of this time period, during the last century of the use of the complex. By repositioning its elements, they in effect reconfigured the system.

There remains, as it were, a muted monumentality that we still witness in this final incarnation of the sacral complex. The adaptation is still not piecemeal and anecdotal, because the Temple Terrace maintains its function as a single complex. There is still a sense of almost grandeur, because the greatness of the classical formulation has not imploded on itself and caused the complex to shrink into a small village shrine, translated into a vernacular form of architecture.

I attribute this to the continued role of the Urkesh high temple in the service of a political function that

⁵ This fragment is being published by Massimo Maiocchi in a forthcoming article and within the framework of the Urkesh Global Record. The Urkesh letters addressed to Zimri-Lim by his governors in Urkesh, Terru and Haziran (Kupper, 1998), were of course found in Mari and do not seem to have been sent from Urkesh.

transcended the greatly limited scope to which the settlement had been reduced by then (Buccellati G., Kelly-Buccellati, 2005. P. 27–59). It continued to serve as a “national” sanctuary, placed as it was between the two major political centers of Mittani, i.e., Wasshukanni in the west and Ta’idu in the east (assuming the identification of, respectively, Tell Fakahariya and Tell Hamidiya with these two ancient cities). I also attribute to this very marked Mittani (in fact, Hurrian) trait of its physiognomy the for us fortunate lack of interest on the part of the Assyrians to settle at the site,⁶ leaving it in its abandoned state for us to explore, with no intervening intrusions, more than three millennia later.

The major new addition is a new staircase (Fig. 11), which no longer served to bridge the barrier of a high vertical wall, but simply marked the transition from the outside to the interior of the temenos: this I have described already in an earlier publication (Buccellati G., 2010). Here I will mention a few other details that are pertinent to our argument.

5.2. The loss of the original monumental access

What we had originally considered to be a secondary apron of the Temple Terrace entryway, we can now better understand as a structure serving a very different purpose, and conceived *after* the staircase and the revetment wall were no longer visible, hence independent of them (Fig. 12). The evidence is as follows.

The wide band of stones which at first appears as a wing connected to the monumental staircase is in fact separated by a gap (Fig. 13), both to the east and to the south. The triangular effect (with the acute angle to the west), which seemed to support the interpretation as a wing or secondary apron, may be explained instead as a frame element that marks the eastern end of the surviving glacis, defining closure rather than access (see also below, 7.1).

In fact, the top steps of the old staircase were removed and access was blocked by a mud brick wall that marked the new, very superficial, perimeter of the temenos (Fig. 14). Such blocking would have redirected any access to the temenos towards the new western staircase of the Temple Terrace, now at the level of the outside spaces.

5.3. The “memory stones”

When the sediments above the Plaza reached the top of the revetment wall, there was no attempt at raising the wall itself. It should be noted that while the level of the Plaza had risen to the top of the wall, the glacis behind the wall had not similarly risen. Under these cir-

cumstances, raising the wall would have either changed its nature (it would no longer have served for revetment, but would have been a freestanding structure that would have blocked the view of the glacis), or caused the erection of a new glacis, at great costs.

Instead, once the flat surface of the Plaza came to coincide with the base of the slope of the glacis, individual stones were placed in a loose row just within the perimeter of the revetment wall (Fig. 15). They marked the boundary between the flat area and the slope, continuing to serve as a symbolic hinge that retained the ideological, if not the structural, valence of the boundary between the two spheres that had obtained in the third millennium. These I have called “memory stones,” referring to the memory of the ancient revetment wall.

Eventually, even the memory stones were covered by the sedimentation generated by wind and rains, and the tell assumed a shape not very dissimilar from the modern one. The hinge between the ancient Plaza and Terrace was now represented simply by the difference between the sloping and the flat area. The Terrace was now simply the topmost hill on the tell, and there was no longer any sacred meaning attached to it. But – for our good fortune – the situation that followed was such that no intrusion ever took place. The whole site was simply abandoned, and abandonment did for the site after 1300 what sacrality had done for it before that date.

6. The persistence of tradition

The continuity of the Temple Terrace over two millennia is very significant not only on account of its long duration, but also because of the nature of the physical elements which we have found in the ground: the whole complex was relatively fragile from an architectural point of view. It was not built to last like, say, the Giza pyramids. It was physically ephemeral. But not ideologically. It was in this respect that it was meant to last – and last it did, through the care and maintenance that it required. We may say that this ephemeral architecture survived over such a long period of time not because of absence or inertia on the part of the users, but because its continuous use kept the whole coherent for over two millennia.

This is all the more remarkable as the rest of the city changed dramatically in those two millennia, including the areas in the immediate vicinity of the Temple Terrace (Buccellati G., 1998. P. 11–34). Only the history of the *abi* is potentially analogous: as excavated, it dates from ED III to Mittani, but the stratigraphic situation is such that a beginning in the Protoliterate period seems quite plausible. The one structural change that took

⁶ There is an early Middle Assyrian presence at Urkesh, but it is limited, and does not intrude into the earlier levels.

place was the introduction of a roofed cover in the time of Naram-Sin, abandoned again in later times. But the persistence of tradition is here remarkably the same as with the Temple Terrace complex.

What is, then, the inner motor that made it possible for the outer form to retain such structural coherence intact? We should revisit the concept of *longue durée* (above, section 1) as an organic developmental history not just of a building, but of an institution that maintained its identity while undergoing formal changes.

7. The outer form

7.1. Structural coherence

The continuity is structural in the specific sense that, while rebuilding activities took place, they affected only the individual pieces, not their systemic interconnection.

At its core, then, the structure remained unchanged for the full duration of the life of the city – except for the very last century. Only then is the structural integrity of the whole lost, in the following manner. (1) The frontality of the rise, so strongly marked by the revetment wall and the monumental staircase, disappears. (2) The high wall becomes a tenuous string of stones that extends to the south the function of the superficial *temenos* wall found on the other three sides. (3) Access is moved to one side, where one loses the sight of the mountains in the background, until then the ultimate stage to which the Temple Terrace itself served like a proscenium.

It is interesting to see how the elements continue as such, while being deconstructed to the point of losing the meaning they received from their correlation. It is in fact a new correlation, one that proposes a different structural integrity, not only much more modest in its claim to monumentality, but also endowed with a different sense of the orientation of the whole. The transfer of the staircase to the west is in function of the reduction of the urban environment, with the abandonment of the city quarters in the east and the filling in of the plaza in the south. The perimetral wall continues where the revetment wall had been, but it is now only, through the “memory stones”, the marker of a boundary, not a barrier to be seen from below (5.3).

What I have called a “secondary apron,” i.e., the Mittani period scatter of stones next to the top of the monumental staircase of the ED III period (5.2), may be seen, in this light, as another attempt to retain the memory of a preexisting intermediate structure, as suggested on the basis of the LC3 niched building (2.1) and possible traces in ED III (3.1). The scatter served a similar function as the memory stones: they marked a special place where a building no longer stood.

These modest survivals of an earlier monumentality, i.e., the memory stones and the secondary apron, confirm, at the very moment that they suggest continuity, that this continuity is no longer there. The structural coherence of the Temple Terrace had been altered, after more than two millennia, and its very modest successor lasted for only about a century.

7.2. Topology

Using a linguistic concept, we might say that the deep structure remains unaltered through the more than two millennia during which the Temple Terrace stood in its original form, even while accepting, at set intervals, notable variations in the surface structure. The deep structure rests on the functional correlation of essential components, while the surface structure consists of the adaptive variations that arise in response to specific situations, but always faithfully respecting the essential correlation that exists among the same components.

We may describe this phenomenon in terms of topology, using the concept evocatively, in a purely analogical fashion. The key nodes of the system remain invariant in their functional properties all the while they undergo a transformational pull in their outward appearance. It is especially the fixed correlation among these nodes that defines the continuity of the system *qua* system, regardless of the partial differentiation of the morphology of each individual component. This would seem to be a most apposite description of one of the best possible examples of a *longue durée* state of affairs.

The situation is similar to the one that obtains for a language. I have made the case (Buccellati G., 1996) for the validity of dealing with Babylonian as a single structural whole over a period of about one and half millennium: in this case, too, it is the structural integrity of the system that retains its coherence, in spite of formal changes that affect single aspects of the language as a living structural whole.

This image can also help us in defining the limits and merits of a comparison of the Urkesh Temple Terrace with that of Chuera. In spite of the differences (in particular, the size and shape of the *temenos*), the correlation of the elements and the asymmetry of the whole, besides of course the nature of the building material, are strikingly similar, highlighting again the “deep structure” correlation between the two.

8. The inner motor

8.1. Ideology: the mountains as a symbol

Given the essentially ephemeral nature of the architectural components, the question arises as to what made the persistence of tradition possible (section 6).

One factor was religious ideology, in our particular case the ideology of the mountains.

I have discussed the triangular pattern of the revetment wall (see Buccellati G., 2009) has having the double effect of recalling an actual feature found in the perimetral walls of the animal pens in the northern highlands on the one hand, and, on the other, to offer a symbolic rendering, what I have called an “architectural logogram,” that framed the larger urban space within which the Temple Terrace was found (3.2). This framing is all the more significant in that the triangular frieze, as it were, mirrors that of the actual Tur-Abdin mountains seen in the background: the revetment wall frames both the rise of the Temple Terrace and the rise of the landscape in the distance.

The concept of “framing” has been aptly developed by M.G. Micale (Micale 2019; see also Alexander 1970), who applies it specifically to the element of crenellation as documented in iconography and (more sparsely) in the architectural record. Particularly relevant are three example from Mari (pp. 425–27), where an angular and a rounded motif appear together as symbols for the mountains. The mace fragment shown here in Figure 16 is very significant. The deities of rivers and mountains are framed by a rectangular motif at the top and, in Alexander’s reconstruction, by a wavy motif at the bottom. The ovoid element on the skirt of one deity and the pointed rectangular motif in the top frieze refer to the mountain, just as the wavy lines refer to the rivers.

What is significant for us is not so much the presence of the mountain motif, in ovoid and rectangular form in analogy with the triangular motif of our revetment wall, but the very fact of framing. The idealized sketch in Figure 6 gives us an idea of the perceptual response that a view of the Urkesh Temple Terrace would have had when approaching it from the south: a single central rise with at its base a stone frieze (the revetment wall) that mirrored the actual mountains in the background. The growth of the settlement around the Temple Terrace in the second millennium progressively reduced the impact of this ideological landscape, until it eliminated it altogether (as it is still the case for us today). We can only picture it. And the effect would be similar to that represented in the Mari mace, or, in a different setting, by the Urkesh sealing (Fig. 17) which represents a deity walking in the mountains (whom we assume to stand for Kumarbi, according to the Hurrian myth). The millennial care of the Temple Terrace was intended to preserve in its pristine state this grand ideological framing of nature and architecture. If so, Micale’s thesis, that the “materiality of real architecture” followed the initial symbolic framing (p. 432), is strengthened by the role

that the natural environment would have played in defining this framing.

8.2. *Ethnicity: Hurrians and the highlands*

Working with the assumption that the Hurrians came from the highlands to the north of Urkesh, and that Urkesh was one of their major centers in what I have called the Hurrian urban ledge where the Taurus meets the plain, I propose that the ethnic identity was another major factor for the persistence of tradition which I have highlighted.

I wish to propose as a working hypothesis that the fourth millennium complex lurking below the third millennium Temple Terrace reflects the earliest known testimony of Hurrian history. The rungs on the inferential ladder are many, and they must be seen for just what they are. But it seems worthwhile considering them seriously. I list them below in decreasing order of verisimilitude, including data from outside the Temple Terrace.

1) The Palace of Tupkish can safely be associated with Hurrian ethnic identity, for reasons that have been detailed elsewhere. This dates early in Naram-Sin’s reign or slightly before.

2) The underground structure next to the Palace (*abi*) may also be closely linked with Hurrian cultic practices as known from later texts. It dates to before the Palace. How much earlier, we cannot say (because excavations inside it have not been completed), but it is quite possible that the structure may descend to virgin soil, and that its cultic use may have remained the same for many centuries before the period of Tupkish. The uniqueness of the ritual suggests that its very nature is rooted back in these earlier periods – in other words, that the Hurrian nature of the later ritual reflects an early Hurrian nature of the same.

3) The Temple Terrace of the third millennium is incorporated within a coherent urban landscape that includes the Plaza, the Palace and the *abi*. As such, it seems inevitable to assume that the whole complex, and in particular the Temple at the top, were also well integrated in a larger Hurrian perspective, coherently with the Hurrian nature of the Palace and the *abi*. My further assumption, that the lions of Tish-atal belong with this Temple and speak of the god Kumarbi (Buccellati G., Kelly-Buccellati, 2005. P. 58–63), are in line with this inferential argument.

4) The history of the sacral use of the Temple Terrace in later times suggests that Urkesh was a religious center of such a specifically Hurrian character that the Temple Terrace and the Plaza remained highly privileged (hence untouched) until the very end. The newcomers in the area, the Assyrians, did not take over the shrine because it was (as I understand it) too incompatible with their religious customs.

5) A number of architectural features link stylistically the Urkesh Temple Terrace with sites that do not belong to the classic Mesopotamian tradition of the south, from Tell Chuera to Haji Nebi and all the way to Mokhra Blur. This suggests a functional and ideological distinctiveness which may well reflect ethnic identity across this large area.

If the hypothesis built on these inferences proves to be correct, it would have a remarkable impact on our understanding of early Near Eastern history, because (a) it would push back the beginning of Hurrian history to the early part of the fourth millennium, (b) it would give evidence of a well-established Hurrian sacral center at such an early date, (c) it would give evidence for a full grown urban settlement capable of supporting such a shrine, and consequently for (d) an alternative model of early urbanism to that of the Sumerians in the south.

The persistence of tradition in the case of the plaza in front of the Urkesh Temple Terrace has been forcefully brought to light by M. Kelly-Buccellati, who speaks of the “enigma of the Temple Plaza,” which she describes as follows:

“What comes to mind, when looking at this extraordinary stratigraphic situation, is Derrida’s “sous rature”, under erasure. The situation is different from what he meant, but, this idea goes to the heart of the matter. What is here erased, in the Urkesh Plaza, is almost a millennium of human activity, not erased because it was first there and then obliterated, or because it defies definition. It is rather that the constant and never interrupted human presence in the Plaza kept erasing itself at the very moment that it was happening. Through a prodigious display of discretion, century upon century of human presence carefully avoided leaving a trace of its passing. And yet the trace is there. Under erasure!” (Kelly-Buccellati, 2016).

Her solution of this “enigma” adds one final argument in the search for an explanation of this phenomenon. She identifies another trend for a long living tradition in the Kura-Araxes culture, of which Urkesh can be understood to have been in some way the heir. And this, too, speaks to the impact that the potential correlation in ethnic identity would have had on the remarkable persistence of tradition we witness in Urkesh.

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Дж. Буччеллати

ПОСТОЯНСТВО ТРАДИЦИИ В УРКЕШЕ. ХРАМОВАЯ ТЕРРАСА: ОТ ПРОТОПИСЬМЕННОГО ПЕРИОДА ДО МИТТАНИ

Резюме. Храмовая терраса Уркеш имеет чрезвычайно длинную историю – более двух тысяч лет. Факт поразительный, поскольку ряд относительно эфемерных конструктивных элементов этого монументального здания можно было сохранить, только обеспечив особый уход и защиту. В статье описывается конфигурация храмовой террасы, в частности, особенности структуры и взаимосвязи всех ее элементов, которые позволяли периодически проводить замену ее составных частей. Так продолжалось до тех пор, пока в последнее столетие своего существования сама терраса не изменилась радикальным образом. В статье предпринимается попытка объяснить этот культурный феномен.

Ключевые слова: Уркеш; хурриты; храм; архитектура Месопотамии; зиккурат; протописьменный период; поздний халколит; Сиро-Месопотамия раннего бронзового века; длительный период (*longue durée*); структурный анализ; анализ восприятия.



Fig. 1. The corner of a niched mud brick building, dating to the LC3 period and located immediately below the ED III glacis

Fig. 2. Projection of the possible extent of the niched building, understood as an intermediate structure, aligned with the ED III staircase which presumably mirrors an earlier LC3 staircase

Fig. 3. The lower steps of the presumed LC3 staircase immediately below the ED III staircase

Fig. 4. The collapse of an LC3 wall in front of the ED III revetment wall. The remnants of the cross wall show what may have been either a turn in the wall or a large buttress or counterfort

Fig. 5. Relationship between the LC3 revetment wall and the LC3 mud brick building, presumed to be an intermediate structure. The alignment of the LC3 revetment wall maybe slightly askew vis-à-vis that of the ED III wall, and parallel to the southern wall of the niched building

Fig. 6. Projection of possible extension of LC3 settlement

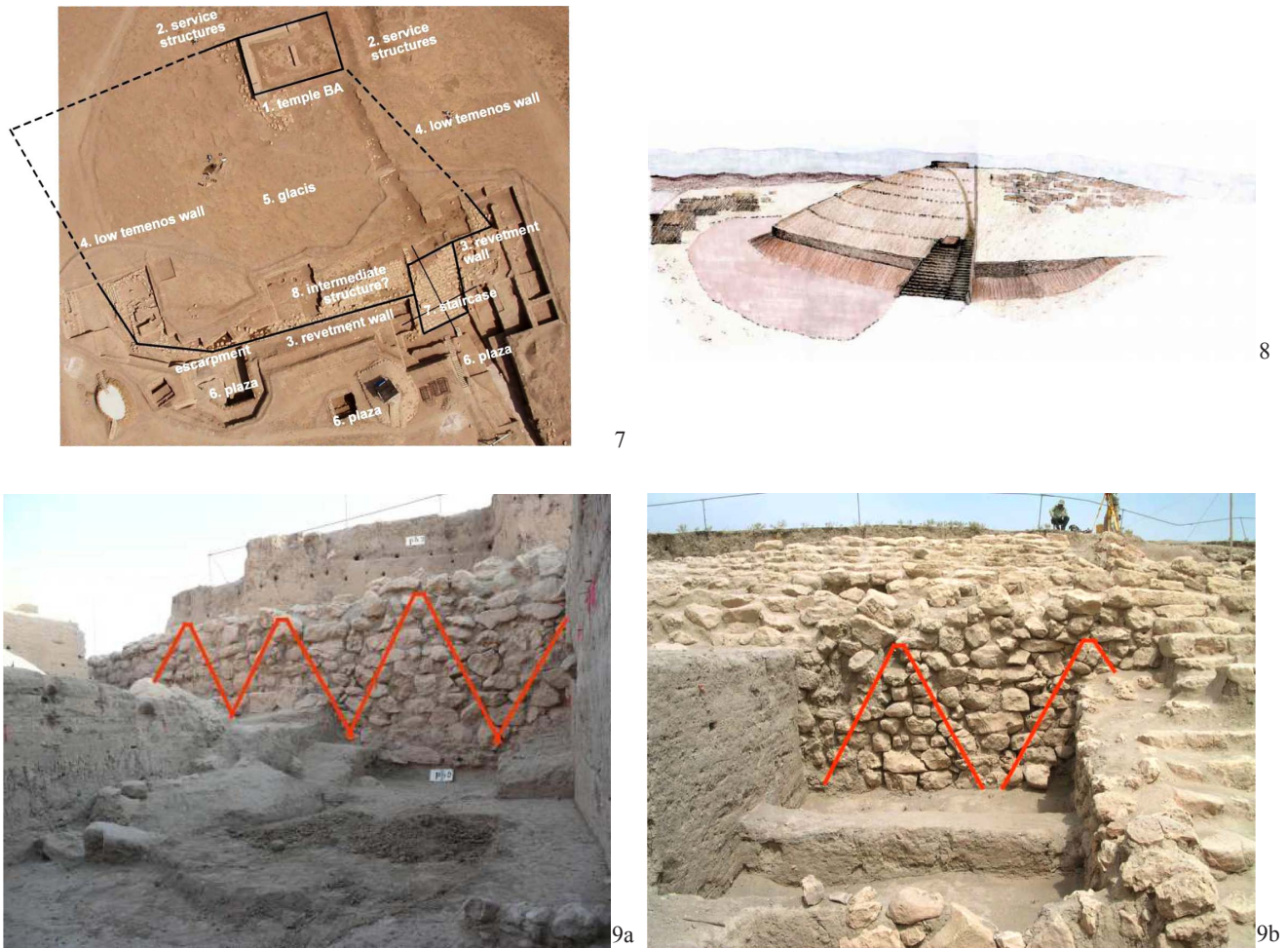
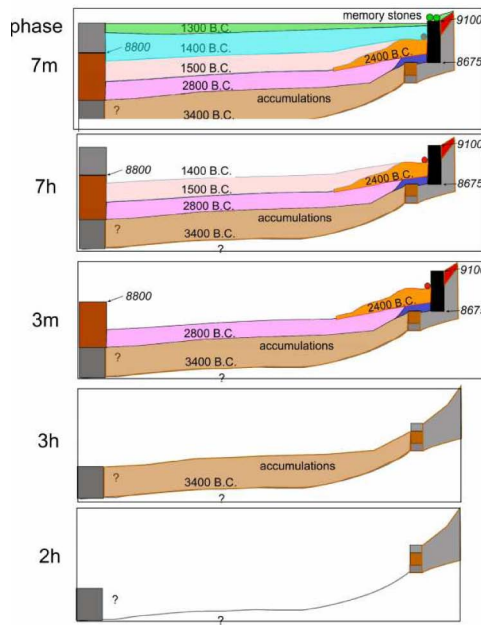


Fig. 7. The organization of space in the ED III period. The numbers correspond to those given in section 1 of the article as the major structural elements of the complex

Fig 8. An early reconstruction (Paola Pesaresi) with a suggested structure at the upper left of the staircase

Fig. 9a. The revetment wall in unit J1, with the triangular pattern (notice the lack of foundations and the escarpment that covers the lower part of the revetment wall)

Fig. 9b. The revetment wall in unit J2, with the triangular pattern (notice that it is covered at its extreme right hand by the subsequent flanking wall of the staircase)



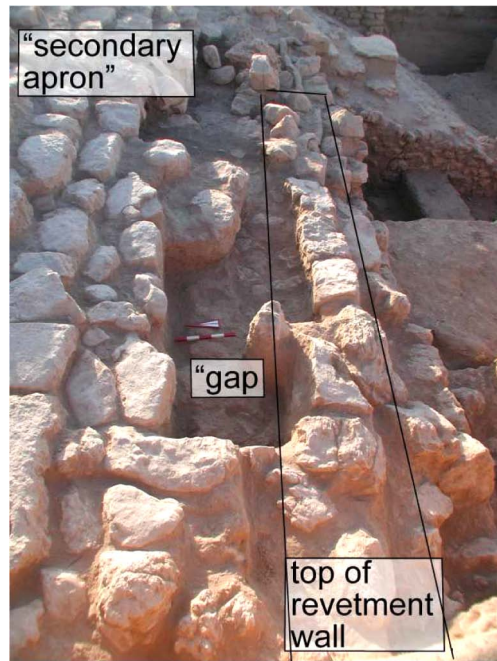
10



12



11



13

Fig. 10. From Plaza to basin: sketch of Plaza depositional history as seen in J1 (looking west). (First published in G. Buccellati 2010 “Perception and Function” as Fig. 8.)

Fig. 11. The Mittani period staircase to the west

Fig. 12. The “secondary apron”: possibly a memory marker of an earlier structure that would have been operational in the early periods as an intermediate station between the lower and the upper parts of the Temple Terrace

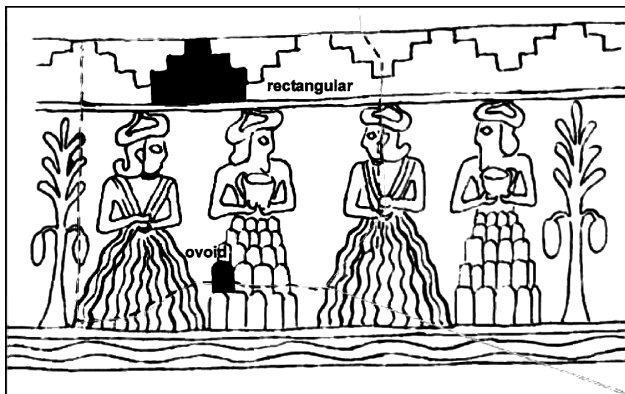
Fig. 13. The gap shows the surface of the original (third millennium) glacis, which was covered by the sloping stone surface in the Mittani period. This occurred when the revetment wall was no longer visible because of the accumulations filling in the basin that had formed above the Plaza



14



15



16



17

Fig. 14. Removal of the top steps of the early monumental staircase and superficial wall blocking access to the inside of the temenos

Fig. 15. "Memory stones" in J3 along the top of the revetment wall

Fig. 16. Mari vase, in which the deities are framed at the top by a rectangular pattern representing the mountains, which is echoed in the ovoid pattern on the skirt of a deity

Fig. 17. Urkesh sealing (AKc21) showing a deity walking in the mountains

РОССИЙСКАЯ АКАДЕМИЯ НАУК
ИНСТИТУТ АРХЕОЛОГИИ



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CAUCASIAN MOUNTAINS AND MESOPOTAMIAN STEPPE

ON THE DAWN OF THE BRONZE AGE

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РОССИЙСКАЯ АКАДЕМИЯ НАУК
ИНСТИТУТ АРХЕОЛОГИИ

ГОРЫ КАВКАЗА И МЕСОПОТАМСКАЯ СТЕПЬ НА ЗАРЕ БРОНЗОВОГО ВЕКА

Сборник к 90-летию Р. М. Мунчаева



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ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕ

23 сентября 2018 г. Рауф Магомедович Мунчаев отметил свой 90-летний юбилей. Такая неординарная веха жизненного пути важна для каждого человека независимо от его профессиональных занятий, но для ученого, обладающего высокой международной репутацией, она особо весома. Для археологического сообщества имя Рауфа Магомедовича Мунчаева прочно связано с важными достижениями археологии в изучении поздней первобытности (неолит и бронзовый век) Западной Евразии – от Кавказа до Ближнего Востока. Многолетние полевые исследования, проведенные экспедицией Института археологии РАН под его руководством, стали эталоном исследований первобытной археологии Месопотамии.

Воздавая должное заслугам Рауфа Магомедовича в исследовании первобытных древностей Кавказа и Месопотамии, коллеги, по академической традиции, подготовили сборник статей, посвященных проблемам, изучением которых на протяжении всей своей профессиональной деятельности занимается юбиляр.

Понятно, что название сборника «Горы Кавказа и Месопотамская степь на заре бронзового века» представляет собой парафраз одной из наиболее известных книг Р.М. Мунчаева, посвященной эпохе палеометалла Кавказа, и опубликованной в 1975 г. Соответственно название этого сборника определяет, как географические, так и хронологические рамки представленных в нем статей, которые близки научным интересам юбиляра и тематически охватывают проблематику от докерамического неолита до рубежа ранней-средней бронзы на территории от Предкавказья до Южной Месопотамии. Издание дополняют воспоминания и разделы, посвященные истории науки.

В некоторых случаях статьи публикуются в авторской редакции.

В подготовке этого сборника приняли участие коллеги, друзья и ученики Р.М. Мунчаева. Поскольку авторитет Рауфа Магомедовича является общепризнанным как у нас в стране, так и за ее границами, то и сборник получился по-настоящему международным. Помимо отечественных исследователей в нем участвовали коллеги из государств Южного Кавказа, Европы и Америки. Мы выражаем глубокую благодарность всем, кто работал над этой книгой.

Редакционная коллегия

INTRODUCTION

On September 23rd 2018 Rauf Munchaev celebrated his 90th birthday. Such a date in life would be considered unique for any person, regardless of his or her profession. But for a scholar with an impeccable international reputation it is of special importance. For the archaeological community Rauf Munchaev's name is bound to the most important discoveries of the Late Prehistoric Periods (the Neolithic and the Bronze Age) of Western Eurasia – from the Caucasus to the Middle East. Numerous field research, conducted under his supervision by the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, became the touchstones of prehistoric archaeology in Mesopotamia.

Paying homage to Rauf Munchaev's achievements in the study of prehistoric antiquities of the Caucasus and Mesopotamia, his colleagues – in accordance with the academic tradition – prepared a collection of articles on the subject, to which the acclaimed anniversary celebrant dedicated his professional life. To a scholar it will be obvious that the miscellanea's title *The Caucasus Mountains and the Mesopotamian Steppe on the Dawn of the Bronze Age* is a paraphrase of one of R. Munchaev's best-known books, dedicated to the Paleo-metal Era of the Caucasus and published in 1975.

Accordingly, the title of the given publication firmly establishes the geographic and chronological boundaries of the research, contained in its articles; all of them are in the frameworks of the celebrant's academic interests and are dedicated to various aspects – from the pre-ceramic Neolithic to the boundaries of the early-middle Bronze Age, in the region between the Ciscaucasia to Southern Mesopotamia. The publication is supplemented by memoirs and sections dedicated to the history of science. Several articles are published with the author's editorials.

Rauf Munchaev's colleagues, friends and students took part in the preparation of this book. Since Rauf Munchaev's name commands respect not only in Russia, but in the entire world, this miscellanea truly became an international project. Besides Russian scholars, it includes the works of our colleagues from the Transcaucasian Countries, Europe and America. We sincerely thank everyone who took part in the work on this book.

Editorial board