Invited to reflect on the uniqueness of the Mari tradition, we were drawn to consider what are the limits of regional characterization in relationship to the northern horizon of that tradition. On the one hand, we know that in the early 2nd millennium the mātum elītum is an integral part of Mari mental geography, while on the other there are clear indications that cities like Urkesh are jealous of their perceptual distance from the “capital.” This distance is all the greater in the earlier periods inasmuch as Urkesh, for one, exhibits an even stronger sense of political and cultural identity, which sets it apart rather sharply from even its immediate great neighbor to the south, Nagar, and all the more so from Mari. We have, over the years, pointed at several traits that distinguish Urkesh in terms of architecture (the ābi) ¹, sculpture and glyptics (the strong realism) ², or religion (besides the ābi, such artifacts as the andirons) ³. For reasons that we have articulated in detail, we have also proposed to see this distinctiveness as rooted in the Hurrian nature of the cultural tradition of Urkesh ⁴.

In this article, we wish to deal with another distinguishing trait, the monumental Temple Terrace, referring to the architectural features of the ED III and the Mittani periods, which we have already published ⁵, and describing the most recent results that pertain to the 4th millennium predecessor of the Temple Terrace ⁶. The continuity of this large structure is extraordinary, and this reinforces even more the significance of its typological uniqueness. We will also highlight the strong orientation to the northern highlands, which represent the real hinterland of Urkesh and is marked by a sharp cultural boundary which can be placed to the immediate south of Urkesh, between it and Brak (ancient Nagar). Thus, the title of our paper is meant to emphasize this particular situation: the uniqueness of Mari is defined by the autonomous traits of its cultural tradition vis-à-vis not only east and west, but also north—at least the extreme north of the mātum elītum.

¹. KELLY-BUCELLATI 2002, 2005b. All of our publications are available as electronic offprints on the Urkesh website (www.urkesh.org). The ābi was also the subject of a Florence Master thesis by M. Lorenzon.
⁴. See especially Kelly-Buccellati’s articles cited in n. 3 and BUCELLATI 2010a and in press b.
⁵. F. BUCELLATI 2010; BUCELLATI 2005; 2010b; BUCELLATI & KELLY-BUCELLATI 2009. The Temple Terrace is also the subject of P. Camatta’s Berlin doctoral dissertation: she provides a fully detailed morphological documentation of the structure, and reviews a vast gamut of comparative material.

Syria supplément 2 (2014), p. 439 à 461
The monumental structure as preserved dates back to the ED III period, and it remained in use without modifications until the middle of the Mittani period, when it underwent a restructuring that altered significantly the details of the layout even while retaining, if in reduced form, the substance of the organization of the sacred space. The traces of the underlying 4th millennium structure as uncovered so far indicate that there was a substantial structural, hence presumably functional, continuity, in other words, that the 4th millennium Temple Terrace resembled closely the later one. Given the limited exposure obtained so far for the 4th millennium strata, it is important to review first the later formulation, which helps to connect in a unified picture the scattered fragments of the archaic version.

There are two major structural components that define the edge of the Terrace as it is bounded by the Plaza below it and as it rises towards the Temple at the top. They are a long revetment wall and, at its eastern end, a monumental staircase framed by an apron. In our view, these are structural elements not only in an architectural sense (the wall marks the edge of the glacis that slopes up towards the Temple, while the staircase bridges the distance between Plaza and glacis), but also for ideological purposes. The perception of the wall as a high vertical plane (fig. 1) emphasizes the distance between low and high, between, if you will, the human and the divine spheres: the wall is a barrier between the two. The perception of the staircase as a wide ascending swath, on the other hand (fig. 2-3), points to the way in which access can be negotiated between the two —and this, too, is further qualified by the distinction between staircase and apron. Together, they constitute a single oblique plane: the staircase itself offers a relatively narrow path, while the apron, with its very high steps, provides a transition between the easy access of the staircase and the vertical barrier of the wall.

Figure 1. Barrier as high vertical plane (J1). A view from the floor level of the Plaza, looking upwards, to emphasize the arresting verticality of the revetment wall.

7. On this see in particular F. Buccellati 2010, p. 75-78 and Buccellati 2010b, p. 102-106. In a similar way, the unifying power of the human representation of the divine is seen as the constitutive element of a temple in Margueron 2009, p. 46-51, fig. 1 and 3.
It should be stressed that the ED III formulation is extraordinarily well preserved in its two components, the wall and the staircase.

The revetment wall is extant in its integrity as it was first built, from top to bottom. What causes astonishment is precisely the fact that the top part of the wall is preserved, since this means that it remained in use for over one thousand years, from about 2600 BC to about 1400 BC. The reason we assume we have the original top is because the accumulations against the inside of the existing top have material identical to that found at its base. When the revetment wall went out of use it was because of a rapid filling in of the Plaza in front of it (see presently), so that the wall came to be protected in its original state, for us to find as originally built. No later intrusions damaged it, because the whole area remained in use as originally intended, for sacral purposes.

Figure 2. Access as ascensional oblique plane (J2). The staircase seen from the base, with the women climbing and the slightly oblique orthostats emphasizing the ascensional thrust (© IIMAS).

Figure 3. Panoramic view of Temple Terrace. This foreshortened view emphasizes the aspect that makes the revetment wall and temenos similar to the modern enclosures in the Tur-Abdin mountains (see below). © (F. Buccellati).
A similar case can be made for the staircase. The stairs as such and the flanking apron are two parallel structures which share a very unique orientation, through what we have called a phenomenon of “dis-axiality” (fig. 4). By this we mean that while the revetment wall is roughly parallel to the long axis of the Temple, and the side of the staircase is roughly orthogonal to the revetment wall, the longitudinal axis of the flight of steps is not parallel to the revetment wall, hence is not orthogonal to the sides of the staircase complex. This results in a curious perceptual phenomenon, whereby the staircase and the apron, seen from below as one faces the Temple Terrace from the Plaza, appear to have a trapezoidal shape. We

Figure 4. “Dis-axiality” of the Temple Terrace fronting the Plaza. Staircase and apron are not orthogonal in relationship to the revetment wall, and the steps in the staircase and apron are not orthogonal with the axis of the staircase, nor are they parallel with the revetment wall (© IIMAS).

8. The reconstruction given here renders only a broad outline. The details are more complex, not only because of the reworking of the higher portion of the staircase in Mittani times, but also because of slight differences throughout, e.g. with regard the alignment of the lowermost steps of the stairs (a phenomenon first noted by J. Omar). A full analysis will be possible as a result of P. Camatta’s doctoral dissertation, which will provide a full and exact architectural rendering of the entire complex.
cannot specifically say that we have the very top of the staircase/apron complex, partly because of the reshuffling that took place in the Mittani period (see presently). But since there is evidence that the surface of the glacis, also datable to ED III, consisted of mudbricks immediately to the north of the staircase, it would appear that indeed the staircase complex, like the revetment wall, is also preserved pretty much in its integrity.

**The Mittani twilight**

The classical formulation was put to the test during the Mittani period. By then, Urkesh had been vastly reduced in size, but it continued as a religious center, possibly as a royally sanctioned shrine between the two major cities of Wasshukanni to the west and Ta’aidu to the east. Half way through this period, a major shift occurred. The reason for placing this shift somewhere in the middle of the period is stratigraphic in nature. In the first half of the period we have regular accumulations to the east of the staircase, while the staircase itself and the Plaza remained unencumbered. Then, a major collapse occurred, and a vast brick fall was deposited in front of the staircase, coming from higher ground in the east becoming progressively lower towards the west. There is no evidence of attempts to remove it, and instead five significant phenomena can be noticed, for which our depositional interpretation is as follows.

The area east of the Temple Terrace, the one from where the brick fall comes, is abandoned. The filling in of the Plaza, started by the brick fall, continues with a series of very even accumulations, largely due to eolic and rainfall events: unattended, and presumably blocked by constructions to the south, these accumulations reach very quickly the top of the revetment wall and the middle of the monumental staircase.

The monumental staircase no longer serves its original purpose, which was to provide access to the upper glacis. Some of the stones are dislodged, and an extension of the apron is built to the west, much coarser than the original one. The purpose of this new arrangement is to frame the western boundary of the Temple Terrace, which is now flanked by an empty area, following events that are characterized especially by the brick fall.

A new staircase is built in the west, where the focus of activities has shifted. This staircase negotiates a much smaller difference in elevation, and thus it consists of only five steps.

The revetment wall is no longer visible as such, but its outline remains, marked by what we have called memory stones, i.e., stones that are placed roughly where the wall had been, still marking the ideological hinge between the slope of the glacis and the flat area in front. There is no longer a drop at the edge of the glacis, but the separation between the two spheres is still marked.

It is conceivable that the movement to the west had coincided with an earlier abandonment of the eastern sectors, and that the brick fall was subsequent to these two factors (abandonment and shift in focus). But, in any case, we may say that the “classical formulation” remained functionally active even in its latest stage, in spite of the considerable alterations in the organization of space. The two key components were safeguarded, separating and uniting the two distinct ideological and physical planes of the upper slope towards the Temple and the level surface in front of it: the revetment wall, reduced to a surface perimeter, retained the function of a hinge and the staircase, though moved and shortened, the function of a bridge. One might say that a virtual monumentality did still characterize the Temple complex of Urkesh. However reduced in size and importance, the broad space, articulated along the same outline, with a similar taste for asymmetry; a continued use of stone elements; and the presence of adjacent service quarters—all of this made it a still respectable shrine, not just an insignificant country

---

10. The scope and significance of this brick fall was first pointed out by P. Camatta.
chapel. And it seems to have been perceived as such by the incoming Assyrians, who did not take over
the shrine or, for that matter, the site itself. The main indication of this is that the Temple Terrace shows
no trace of any substantial intrusion, the Mittani veneer still resting immediately above the ED III layers,
and these in turn immediately above the LC3 layers. Urkesh was still, we might say, too specifically
Hurrian.

It is perhaps the very diminutive, yet faithful, adherence of the Mittani complex to its glorious pluri-
secular antecedent that sheds light on the distinctiveness of the tradition, and thus on its differential
nature vis-à-vis the rest of the Syro-Mesopotamian tradition. The potential parallel that immediately
comes to mind is of course the ziggurat. But the perception of volumes evoked by the two structural
complexes is completely different. The only element they share is the stress on an ascensional direction.
Otherwise, the strong symmetrical organization of the ziggurat, its coming to a narrow peak at the
summit, the polished appearance of its faces are quite at odds with the Urkesh Temple Terrace. The
difference could not be more marked: at Urkesh, the summit is a broad area, more like a plateau than
like a peak; the great wall façade as seen from the lower square is deliberately coarse, as if a mountain
cliff; the asymmetry of the staircase suggests more the unpredictability of a mountain pass than the
neat articulation of geometric volumes found in an urban context; the definition of the temenos limit
seems almost haphazard, and in its upper part it is no more than a low border separating it from the
adjacent service quarters. The perceptual impact is poles apart from what is conveyed by the southern
architecture.

**CERAMIC DISTRIBUTION FROM ED IIIa TO MITTANI**

In excavating portions of the plaza near the stone revetment wall we have been searching for
chronological and functional patterns in an effort to better understand the history of the Plaza fronting
the temple terrace (excavation units J5 to the west and J1 in the center).

The chronological situation is clear: after evidence for an ED IIIa construction of the revetment wall
and continuous use into ED IIIb, we have Mittani period evidence sitting right on top of ED III. For a
number of reasons, which we cannot develop here, we feel certain that the hiatus is not the result of
abandonment, but that it rather reflects a continuous exposure of the early floors with no accumulation
being deposited on top of them. Note in particular the following.

The same situation does not obtain to the east of the monumental stairway where we do have evidence
for the intervening time periods.

The site as a whole was not only occupied, but it reached its zenith in the intervening periods, and
the temple on top of the terrace continued in use.

There is no trace of erosion in the earlier levels: the late material sits on top and is at first partly
mixed with the earlier material.

There are no intrusions of any sort such as walls, pits, dumping, tannurs, graves.

The study of ceramic distribution along the chronological axis is of interest, and we will show
here only a sample of the results from ED IIIb and the Mittani period. The sample is based on a few
distinctive features, from both excavation units J5 and J1, and is limited to three basic shapes, which
are also distinctive: jars, bowls and cups. The total number of items in the sample is not inconspicuous
(1,702 shape sherds, out of a total of 37,000 sherds, including 6,775 shape sherds), sufficient in any case
to lend validity to the trend that emerges (the data are shown in tabular form in **fig. 5**).

The distribution is almost identical in both ED IIIb and early Mittani, the cups averaging 16.5%, and
jars and bowls sharing approximately the same range, around 40%. In J5, we have primarily structural
remains dating to the ED IIIb period, rather than accumulations. In J1, these accumulations are linked
with the second escarpment for the ED IIIb period, and, for the early Mittani period, with the deposits
that begin the filling in process of the Plaza by leveling the Plaza (**fig. 6**).
The situation changes substantially in the late Mittani period, including a transition moment that marks the full leveling of the Plaza in J1 and the first Mittani layers over ED IIIb structures in J5 \(^{11}\). The cups are almost non-existent, and bowls become largely prevalent over jars.

Given this chronological situation we asked ourselves if a functional analysis might explain this remarkable superposition over a hiatus of some ten centuries. In considering our evidence for function, one basic shape stands out: the cups. They can be recognized as status markers, as we know for example from the Urkesh royal iconography of the following Akkadian period, where the holding up of a cup in front of the face as if toasting or drinking is an important status symbol for the highest elites in the city \(^{12}\).

11. The tabulations for J5 in fig. 5 refer generically to strata 12 and 14 because in each there is a large number of features with small amounts of sherds.

We might then hypothesize that the large number of cup fragments in the ED IIIb and early Mittani would suggest that, in those periods, there was a greater ceremonial use of cups at the edge of the Plaza or very near it. Could this be interpreted to mean that the Plaza was in some way the locus of ceremonies directly connected with the Temple, as long as it served its function as a Plaza fronted by the revetment wall and the large eastern staircase? And that, in turn, the ceremonial activities ceased once the Plaza was filled in, the wall was obliterated, and the eastern staircase was replaced by the more modest western staircase? In other words, would we have here a witness of the shift in use of the Temple complex about which we spoke above?

Clearly, there may have been many depositional processes at work. The use of the vessels may have been in place, and served the needs of ceremonies such as stops on a processional itinerary. Our sherds may instead be the discard of a ceremonial use that was taking place elsewhere, for instance atop the glacis in the vicinity of the Temple itself. Or they may be the result of a dribbling effect that does not reflect use at any specific location. At any rate, while it would be naïve to draw quick conclusions from the data provided so far, it is clear that even simple tabulations of relatively large amounts of data can effectively contribute to a better understanding of complex stratigraphic situations.

The Fourth Millennium Terrace

It was already clear from earlier excavations that the Temple Terrace rested on an antecedent datable to the LC3 period. At first, in 2006, there were individual finds in unit J3 (ceramics and sealings), which we thought might possibly be no more than occasional pockets of earlier material as a secondary deposit within the later strata. Then, in 2008, an important structural component was exposed in unit J1, namely an earlier revetment wall located just to the south of the 3rd millennium wall: this, too, was dated to the LC3 period from unequivocal ceramic evidence found against its base.

In 2010, a crucial clarification of the 4th millennium situation emerged as a result of further excavations in unit J3 (fig. 7-9): immediately below the 3rd millennium glacis we found an LC3 glacis

13. We may then expect to find some evidence in the form of either installations or assemblages, such as in unit A14, next to the platform near the abi. Exposure in front of the lower portion of the wall is perhaps too limited to this end: but it should at least be noted that we have rows of stones that we have called “curtain walls” that seem to protect the revetment wall the same way the escarpment did in earlier times.
Figure 7. LC3 structure and the Temple Terrace (J3): stratigraphic situation. The photo shows the remarkable superposition of very early strata at the top of the mound. Floor J3J358 is at an average elevation 9150 (491.50), i.e. about 16 m above the estimated ancient plain level (© IIMAS).

Figure 8. Aerial view of J3 showing LC3 structure. The two small pits to the left (J3a10 and J3a6) were cut into the surface of the Mittani glacis, probably in the brief time period when the glacis had gone out of use, bringing up LC3 ceramics and glyptics from the lower strata (© IIMAS).

Figure 9. Wide kite view of LC3 structures connected with Temple Terrace. The wall at the base of the revetment wall marks the northwest corner of the Plaza in LC3 times. The material associated with it is the same as the one associated with the LC3 mud brick structure at the top (© IIMAS).
that exhibited the same contour as the later one, and this glacis in turn was seen to overlay the corner of a brick structure also solidly dated to LC3. These two facts are of great significance, for at least three reasons. The presence of an LC3 glacis, along with the retaining wall at the base, strongly suggest that the Temple Terrace had reached a configuration quite similar to what we have called the “classical” ED III formulation. The existence of a different set-up in the earlier part of the LC3 period, namely the structure for which we only have for now a corner, indicates that, stratigraphically \(^{16}\), there was a considerable chronological spread within that period, with two very distinct phases —and from the context as we see it now we can anticipate that future excavations should allow us to bring to light the full footprint of that earlier building. The elevation of the LC3 Temple Terrace is practically the same as in the ED III period, some 23 m above plain level at the base of the glacis. This means that the Terrace was already defined at such an early date by the same imposing outline that it had later and that, in fact, the mound still has today.

The implications are striking. The great height of the Terrace indicates that a major building effort had gone into this project. On the one hand, the morphological similarity between the LC3 and the later glacis implies a continuity of function and ideology, while, on the other hand, the brick structure of which so far we have only a corner implies a long and diversified prehistory. In other words, we have here, so to speak, the tip of an iceberg. The great LC3 accomplishment was most likely the final episode in a longer construction sequence, one that must have started much earlier —and one that we can only interpret as deriving from an urban infrastructure, capable of designing and supporting such a major enterprise.

We do not have evidence for LC3 material anywhere else on the site except in the area of the Temple Terrace. But then, we did not have evidence for it even in the area of the Terrace before we pierced through the great mantle of the ED III structural system. And everywhere, the ED III layers are at relatively high elevations, 6 m or more above virgin soil. It seems therefore quite likely that the settlement had reached a point when, well before ED III times, it covered the same area as the High Mound does today —between 30 and 35 ha.

**FOURTH MILLENNIUM GLYPTICS AND CERAMICS**

The 4th millennium layers have been so defined because they contained large quantities of exclusively LC3 ceramics \(^{17}\). They are for the most part coarse wares, but included were also a few examples of fine ware. The coarse ceramics are hand formed of clay that is densely tempered with lithic and some vegetal tempers. The large amount of lithics added to the clay makes the vessels heavy, even the smaller examples. In our study of the inclusions added to our LC3 ceramics calcite, quartz and feldspar predominate \(^{18}\). Most typical LC3 shapes of coarse vessels are well represented including a large number of casseroles, hammer rim bowls (fig. 10: 5-11) and platters and a few medium jars. The firing is low, usually leaving a wide carbon core; the surface color is a variation of orange to orange-tan. Many vessels are wet smoothed on the exterior with some jars instead burnished on the outside. Since they are so poorly fired, many coarse jars and bowls have a low fracture strength and provide evidence of use especially on the exterior of the rims but in some cases both the exterior and the interior rim portions (fig. 11). Lids are not common in this time period but we have found a small number in our LC3 deposits. In addition to fractures from the use of lids, use-ware is normally the result of stirring, mixing, and especially in more open forms, scratches and nicks resulting from the retrieval of the contents of the jars. Fine, wheel made

---

16. Even within the limited exposure obtained in 2010, there are three very distinct depositional moments. First, the mud brick structure and its use. Second, the jar interment of at least one burial sunk in the accumulations immediately adjacent to the building (and seals by the subsequent glacis). Third, the glacis itself that overlays both the building and the burial.


18. KELLY-BUCELLATI 2010b. The analysis and identification of the lithic tempering material was conducted by E. Frahm.
vessels have little or no temper, are thin walled and medium fired with no carbon core. The clay is buff to greenish-buff with a self-slip. The limited number and restricted range of shapes we have excavated in Urkesh are uniformly small with cups and bowls predominating (fig. 10: 1-4). In all likelihood these small vessels were imported given their greater numbers at other sites in the Euphrates area 19. A limited but interesting component of several of our LC3 features in J3 was the inclusion of LC2 gray burnished sherds; however no LC2 features have been excavated thus far. The coarse ware ceramics excavated in J1 and J3 have not so far exhibited any different morphological attributes over time 20. This may change

Figure 10. Typical LC3 ceramics from one J1 context. Few jars were found in LC3 strata with the majority of the shapes being open vessels including hammer rim bowls and casseroles. Potters marks are found on some bowls and platters. A 5 cm mark is placed on the vertical axis (© IIMAS).

19. At Zeytinli Bahçe, a small site in the Euphrates region, this type of fine ware exists in greater numbers and a wider variety of shapes. BALOSSI RESTRELLI 2006, especially p. 22-23.

20. In Zeytinli Bahçe the two stratified LC3 strata also did not exhibit any change between the strata, BALOSSI RESTRELLI 2006.
with the further excavations in J3 on top of the temple terrace with two securely sealed strata dating to LC3. In only one context, J3 feature 252, did we find sealings with impressions of cylinder seals used on containers 21. The seals were carved with figural designs in a style showing full-bodied figures with clearly defined contours, characteristic for the early Middle Uruk period. One group of impressions shows a complex scene with two apparently nude figures walking left in a procession scene (fig. 12-13). One of these figures holds a large standard of which the top is preserved while only the base is visible in front of the second figure. A second group of sealings shows an entwined snake (fig. 14) while a third group has a reclining animal as the motif (fig. 15). Seal impressions made from cylinder seals dating to the Middle Uruk period are rare in the north but have been excavated at Brak (areas CH and HS1) and Sheikh Hassan. Complex seal designs are not common in the south during this period but become more numerically important later. In HS1 at Brak a procession scene was discovered 22.

While in LC3 contexts at Brak, especially TW14-17, some beveled rim bowls are present, our LC3 deposits do not contain southern material. This would place the Urkesh stratified LC3 material in the early part of LC3 under the current scheme. However since we have no stratified Uruk material, the ceramics characteristic for an Urkesh production center may have been produced for a longer period of time with a ceramic chronology specific to the site.

Figure 11. Use ware evidence on an LC3 casserole rim. Some shapes have scraping lines on the top of the rim from lids while most of the use ware evidence consists in nicks on the interior or exterior of the rim. These are particularly prevalent in casseroles (© IIMAS).

Figure 12. Fragment of a cylinder seal impression with a complex iconographic scene. In unit J3 just under the 3rd millennium glacis a complex scene with at least two figures walking left, one and possibly both holding a large standard. A third figure may be frontally positioned (© IIMAS).

Figure 13. Composit drawing of the complex scene. The top of the standard is large semi-circle filled with small squares (© IIMAS).

22. FELLI 2003.
ECHOES OF THE MOUNTAIN HINTERLAND

In an earlier article it was proposed that the distinctive triangular pattern of the ED III revetment wall served a decorative and ideological purpose, as a graphic symbol for the mountains. But there is another possible explanation for this curious detail. It is based on an ethnographic parallel from the highlands to the immediate north.

Along the foothill slopes of the Tur-Abdin (the modern name of the mountain range immediately to the north of the plain where Tell Mozan is located), one sees open spaces that are bounded by stone walls. These walls are low, generally about one meter in height. The stones are very irregular and medium in size; there is no mortar, and the layering is quite irregular. In fact, and this is the feature that is of interest to us here, they seem to be piled up coarsely, without any real coursing and with no clear face on either side. It appears, in other words, that a wall is built by juxtaposing piles of stones, which often show a cusp at the top, and then filling in the interstices with more stones (fig. 16-20). This method allows for a speedy process, and the lack of regularity, in both the structure of the wall and the outline of the enclosure, does not affect its purpose or use.

The layout of the modern enclosure wall is just as irregular as is the construction technique (fig. 21-22). The line traced by the walls is uneven, and it adapts to the ground as it gently slopes up and down. The area enclosed is rather large, about one or more hectares. There seems to be no marked entrance, no opening with a gate, presumably because the casual construction method allows users to remove stones as needed to allow entrance or exit: this suggests that the use of the structures is relatively infrequent. Interestingly, some of these enclosures contain one (and possibly more) smaller enclosures, which protect a structure of a different kind, in particular a tomb or a shrine of some sort. Somewhat like desert kites, these structures are used as animal enclosures or as boundaries for gardens and groves.

Now, looking at the wall “faces” (rough as they are), there appears a triangular pattern that would result from the way in which the stones are piled up, rather than laid in courses. If so, the pattern would be, at its origin, quite unintentional, and rather more functional than decorative. There is, however, an interesting development that is quite noticeable in other structures found in the general area, both in the

23. Bucellati 2009; see also Bucellati 2012. P. Butterlin has kindly drawn our attention to a decorative triangular pattern in Uruk, Lenzen 1942, p. 18 and pl. 24 b.
Figure 16. Detail of pile style wall, with large boulders at the base, and rounded cusp at the top (near Dara, east of Mardin). The cusp matches neatly the oblique lines merging towards the center, and is further highlighted by the two depressions on either side (© IIMAS).

Figure 17. Detail of pile style wall, with single rock cusp (near Dara, east of Mardin). Just as in the preceding figure, the cusp matches the oblique lines of the stone pile, but in this case it is even more accentuated by the shape and position of the rock at the top (© IIMAS).

Figure 18. Detail of pile style without cusp (near Dara, east of Mardin). More often than not, the top of the pile is not marked by a cusp, and the depression is filled in to level evenly the top of the side wall (© IIMAS).
countryside and in the city of Mardin. The triangular pattern (or a lozenge pattern that may derive from it) is found on regular walls, whether serving a retaining or other function (fig. 23-25). As there is no apparent functional reason for this curious and unusual pattern, it would seem that it serves a purely decorative purpose, and one may assume that the walls in the open countryside served as its model.

We have no way to date any of these structures, which, as they stand, look at any rate quite recent. But it seems plausible that similar enclosures might have existed in antiquity as well, and that they may have served as a model for the ED III revetment wall of the Urkesh Temple Terrace. This would fit well with the two features of the triangular pattern and the irregular outline of the temenos wall, for which we would not otherwise have a plausible explanation. My earlier proposal, that the triangular pattern may have served a symbolic function, as an architectural “logogram,” is still reasonable, but it would emerge as a secondary development, an ideological explanation for a pattern that is otherwise not consonant with the linear and regular coursing of stone walls, as found, e.g., in the Urkesh Palace and in the ED III Temple foundations.

These observations derive from a cursory set of observations. A systematic survey of the relevant structures in the Tur-Abdin area would permit us to address issues of detail in order to define more clearly the structural and functional aspects of these features, such as the following.

A finer typology and a fuller documentation could easily be assembled.

If any of these structures are still being built, one should verify the operations while construction is taking place — in particular with regard to the assumption that the triangular pattern derives from a procedure whereby stones are erected as piles, juxtaposed one next to another.

One should then verify whether the use of the enclosures is indeed primarily intended as animal pens or garden groves, and whether there are any other uses associated with them.

Further, the question arises as to how frequent is the incidence of the smaller areas within these enclosures, reserved for special use such as burials or shrines, and whether there is a traditional lore associated with these pens.

One might also look for possible ways of dating at least some of them, though this possibility looks quite unlikely.

For our current interests, these considerations serve to highlight the difference from the southern traditions by pointing to a plausible northern model from which a highly distinctive feature of the Urkesh architecture may have been derived. Even the characteristic step-like appearance of the mountain slopes calls to mind the visual impression that the irregular Temple Terrace would have made, seen from the
Figure 21. Areas protected by pile style side walls (near Dara, east of Mardin). The precinct in the distance contains a tree grove, while the two in the foreground are empty (© IIMAS).

Figure 22. Small precinct within a large protected area (near Dara, east of Mardin). A grave and a tree are protected by a small enclosure within a larger protected area (© IIMAS).
Figure 23. Garden side wall with cement mortar (near Savur, north of Mardin). The oblique view shows the irregularity of the alignment, in contrast with the house walls in the background (© IIMAS).

Figure 24. Side wall and house between Mardin and Savur. The garden side wall is built in the pile of stone type, without mortar. The house imitates the pile style, but it necessarily uses mortar, and results in a diamond pattern (© IIMAS).
plain below. Conjectural though this is, it is worth considering that it may have served as a prototype of which the Urkesh construction would have preserved an echo.

**How north is North?**

The possible typological link just noted between Urkesh and the northern highlands is one among many, to which we have already alluded in our opening remarks. The significance of these distinctive traits means that the cultural “North” of Urkesh reflects an orientation that goes beyond the mere geographical “north.” Thus the distance between Mari and Urkesh is not really measured in kilometers, nor in the great difference in landscape. The real boundary is in the sharp contrast in material culture, the ideology that we reconstruct behind it, and, in our view, the ethnic affiliation that lies behind. We cannot here review the details. We would like instead to emphasize only one general point that seems relevant for an understanding of the basic presuppositions that condition current research in this area.

Our starting point is the terminology applied to the material culture of the northern cultures, defined as “local,” “indigenous,” “autochthonous.” With different tonalities, these terms reflect a conceptual subordination to an external paradigm against which the culture in question has to be measured, essentially the Sumerian paradigm. Reacting to this trend, Butterlin prefers to use the term “proto-urban community” 24, which does indeed retain a neutral attitude vis-à-vis geographical predominance of one area over another, and aptly describes a chronological stage when demographic expansion has not yet reached the level of social aggregation that justifies the term “urban.” The presumption, which we are advancing, that Urkesh may have been fully urban already at the time of the “proto-urban communities” sheds a different light on the question. The distinctiveness of this urban dimension is highlighted by some traits that would seem to have been present already at that early date. The terms “local,” “indigenous,” “autochthonous” acquire then a wholly different tonality.

Against this background, a consideration emerges that seems to condition the intellectual posture with which we face the problem. One reason for the asymmetry in the assessment of the larger picture is the identification of the southern urban phenomenon with a distinctive social group to which we can give a name, the Sumerians. Uruk is “Sumerian,” and thus, elsewhere, “local” comes to mean, in effect, “non-Sumerian.” The high literate culture of one pole accounts for the asymmetry in the evaluation of the other pole. In this light, a possible identification of Urkesh as Hurrian in the earliest stages of its history acquires an even greater significance. If this identification is borne out, then at least one early city (Urkesh), while contemporary with Uruk, and while different from it in terms of material culture, would also emerge as different in terms of its presumed direct link to a later important and distinctive culture. We are not implying, by any means, that all of the “proto-urban communities” belong in the same picture 25. But we feel we can seriously pose the question with regard to this one 4th millennium settlement, Urkesh. It is clear, just on the basis of the already excavated sites in the north, that a difference obtained from region to region, and also in some regions, from site to site 26. If we consider “pre-contact” architecture at Urkesh, Brak 27, Hammam et Turkman 28, and Hacinebi 29 their differences are just as striking as their similarities. We may call to mind in this respect Yoffee’s remarks about the notion of Great Tradition 30. Our proposal is that Urkesh is a center of a distinctive northern “great tradition,” i.e., one that goes beyond the limited horizons of local communities, with “a very specific and shared cultural sense” from which arose an “interregional interaction sphere,” in Yoffee’s terms.

This goes along with our remarks about ideological landscapes, which we advanced in an earlier publication 31. The northern highlands are conspicuously missing from the Mesopotamian “imaginarium” as reflected in the Sumerian and early Akkadian myths and epics. It is obviously not because the area was uninhabited. Nor was there a vacuum in terms of material culture, as the richness of the “local” developments well shows. If, besides, we can also see this richness as the antecedent of a well defined cultural cluster, namely the Hurrian tradition, then we may say that the Sumerians were facing a “civilization” parallel to theirs on all grounds, and yet quite different. It was a landscape that had already been shaped by a precise, and quite different, ideology, and as such was not amenable to being re-invented by the Mesopotamian imagination. If so, a new focal point emerges that can help us register the “proto-urban” phenomenon within a more comprehensive interpretive frame, one that shows us, at the same time, how the perceptual distance of the North looms as indeed ever greater and more significant.

28. Here the terrace and niched building are earlier (LC2) than any stratified contexts yet excavated in Urkesh, Meier 1988; Van Loon 1988.
BIBLIOGRAPHIE

BALOSSI RESTRELLI (F.)
2006 « The Local Late Chalcolithic (LC3) Occupation at Zeytinli Bahçe (Birecik, Şanli-Urfa): The Ceramic Production », Anatolian Studies 56, p. 17-46.

BECKER (J.), R. HEMPELMANN & E. REHM (éd.)

BUCCELLA TI (F.)

BUCCELLA TI (G.)
In press b « When Were the Hurrians Hurrian? The persistence of Ethnicity in Urkesh », for a volume edited by J. Aruz.

BUCCELLA TI (G.) & M. KELLY-BUCCELLA

BUCCELLA TI (G.) & M. KELLY-BUCCELLA
2006 « The Local Late Chalcolithic (LC3) Occupation at Zeytinli Bahçe (Birecik, Şanli-Urfa): The Ceramic Production », Anatolian Studies 56, p. 17-46.

FINCKE (J. C.) éd.

FRANGIPANE (M.)
2009 « Non-Urban Hierarchical Patterns of Territorial and Political Organization in Northern Regions of Greater Mesopotamia: Tepe Gawra and

**KELLY-BUCELLATI (M.)**


2010b « Mozan/Urkesh in the Late Chalcolithic Period », BECKER, HEMPELMANN & REHIN 2010, p. 87-121.


**McMAHON (A.), Ö TUNC & A.-M. BAGDO**


**MÖHNER (D. J.)**


**OATES (D.) & J. OATES**


**ROTHMAN (M.)**


**STEIN (G.)**


**VAN LOON (M.)**


**YOFFFFE (N.)**

MARI,
NI EST, NI OUEST

Actes du colloque « Mari, ni Est ni Ouest »
tenu les 20-22 octobre 2010 à Damas, Syrie

Pascal BUTTERLIN, Jean-Claude MARGUERON, Béatrice MULLER,
Michel AL-MAQDISSI, Dominique BEYER, Antoine CAVIGNEAUX (dir.)
# SOMMAIRE

## VOLUME 1

**Liste des contributeurs** ........................................................................................................................................................................ VII

**Avant-propos** ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 1

**Margueron (J.-Cl.), Introduction générale** ................................................................................................................................. 3

**Margueron (J.-Cl.), Al-Maqdissi (M.), Butterlin (P.), Caramelo (F.), Marquez Rowe (I.), Montero Fenollós (J.-L.) & Muller (B.), Pour une définition du moyen Euphrate** .......................................................................................................................... 5

### I – LA VILLE CIRCULAIRE ET SON ESPACE

**Margueron (J.-Cl.), Mari, ville circulaire** ........................................................................................................................................................................ 9

**Meyer (J.-W.), The Round Cities: Foundation and Development. A view from Tell Chuera** ............................................................. 13

**Al-Maqdissi (M.), IV-Matériel pour l’étude de la ville en Syrie. Propos sur la ville en Syrie aux époques anciennes** ................................. 27

**Muller (B.), La Ville I de Mari : un bilan 1933-2004** ................................................................................................................................................................. 43

**Butterlin (P.), Recherches au Massif Rouge, données nouvelles sur le centre monumental de Mari et son histoire** ........................................................................................................................................................................ 81

**Margueron (J.-Cl.), L’étrange stratigraphie de la Ville III** ...................................................................................................................................................................... 111

**Abu-Azizeh (W.) & Rey (S.), Fortifications et topographie urbaine à Mari : recherches archéologiques dans la Ville Est (chantiers N3, N4, N5 et V1). Résultats préliminaires** ........................................................................................................... 125

### II – ASPECTS GÉOPOLITIQUES

**Archi (A.), La situation géopolitique de la Syrie avant l’expansion d’Akkad** ........................................................................................................ 161

**Biga (M.-G.), Encore à propos des rapports entre les royaumes de Mari et d’Ébla à l’époque présargonique** .......................................................................................................................... 173

**Dolce (R.), The Language of Kingship at Mari and Ebla in the Third Millennium BC: A Comparative Approach** ........................................................................................................................................................................ 183

**Oates (J.), Mari, Nagar and Qatara/Karana** ................................................................................................................................................................. 207

**Gallet (Y.) et al., Exemples de chronologie archéomagnétique à Mari/Tell Hariri** ................................................................................................. 217

**Montero Fenollós (J.-L.), Mari et le verrou de Khanuqa : frontière politique et territoire aux IIIe et IIe millénaires av. J.-C.** ...................................................................................................................................................... 231

**Rouault (O.), Le moyen Euphrate vu depuis la région de Terqa au IIIe millénaire av. n. ère** ................................................................................................. 247

### III – ÉCONOMIE ET ADMINISTRATION PALATIALE

**Margueron (J.-C.), Mari, Ville II : Palais ou temple-manufacture ?** .............................................................................................................. 265

**Cavignaux (A.), Nouveaux textes de Mari Ville II (campagnes 1998 à 2007)** ................................................................................................. 291

**Sallaberger (W.), Urban Organizations for Offerings, Overland Traffic and the Euphrates Trade at Pre-Sargonic Mari** ...................................................................................................................................................... 341
COLONNA D’ISTRIA (L.) & CRIAUD (H.), Résultats archéologiques et nouvelles données épigraphiques :
Le chantier Palais Sud 2 (2006-2008)........................................................................................................ 355
CHARPIN (D.), « Si quelqu’un fait appel à toi, sois présent ! ».
Les interventions royales dans la vie économique et juridique à Mari............................................. 407
TARAQJI (A. F.), Tissage et marqueterie en Damascène au IIe millénaire av. J.-C. ......................... 421
VILA (E.), L’âne domestique en Syrie : réflexions sur les données nouvelles de Mari ...................... 425

VOLUME 2

IV – TEMPLES ET TOMBES

BUCCELLATI (G.) & KELLY-BUCCELLATI (M.), ... Nor North: The Urkesh Temple Terrace ............... 439
MARGUERON (J.-Cl.), Le temple-manufacture de Ville II :
Questions d’architecture et de stratigraphie .......................................................................................... 463
MATTHIAE (P.), Temples et palais d’Ébla protosyrienne et le problème de l’unité architecturale
de la Syrie au Dynastique archaïque final .............................................................................................. 483
BEYER (D.), Les temples de Mari. Bilan de 20 ans de travaux au chantier G (1990-2010) ............... 517
NASSAR (J.), Éléments pour une réflexion sur les espaces funéraires infra-urbains de Mari ............. 541
OTTO (A.), Les tombeaux en pierre du temple d’Ishtar et les relations de Mari
avec la section septentrionale du moyen Euphrate au DA III ............................................................ 587

V – APPROCHES CULTURELLES ET ARTISTIQUES

BUTTERLIN (P.) & LECOMPTE (C.), Mari, ni Est, ni Ouest, et les statuettes de la cachette du temple
du « Seigneur du Pays » ................................ ......................................................................................... 605
CLUZAN (S.) & LECOMPTE (C.), Le nu-banda Ebiḫ-Il. Nouvelles perspectives historiques.............. 629
PINNOCK (F.), The Image of Power at Mari between East and West................................................... 675
EVANS (J. M.), Beyond the Borders of Tradition: Dedicatory Sculpture at Mari ................................ 691

VI – RÉSUMÉS EN ARABE
Pascal Butterlin, Jean-Claude Margueron, Béatrice Muller, Michel Al-Maqdissi, Dominique Beyer, Antoine Cavigneaux (dir.), Actes du colloque Mari ni Est ni Ouest ? Damas, 20-22 octobre 2010

LISTE DES CONTRIBUTEURS

Wael Abu-Azizeh, UMR 7041 ArScAn-VEPMO (Du Village à l’État au Proche et Moyen-Orient), Maison Archéologie et Ethnologie, Nanterre, France.


Alfonso Archi, Former Professor Sapienza, Università di Roma ; Missione archeologica Italiana in Siria at Tell Mardikh / Ebla.


Maria Giovanna Biga, Professeur d’Histoire du Proche-Orient ancien, Sapienza, Università di Roma, Italie.

Giorgio Buccellati, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Dept. of History ; Director, Mesopotamian Lab, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology ; Director, IIMAS (International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies), UCLA, Los Angeles, Californie.

Pascal Butterlin, Professeur, UMR 7041 ArScAn-VEPMO (Du Village à l’État au Proche et Moyen-Orient), Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, Maison Archéologie et Ethnologie, Nanterre, France ; directeur de la mission archéologique française de Mari.

Antoine Cavigneaux, Professeur de langues et civilisation mésopotamienne, Université de Genève, Suisse.

Dominique Charpin, Professeur au Collège de France, UMR 7192 (Proche-Orient – Caucase : langues, archéologie, cultures), Paris, France.

Sophie Cluzan, Conservateur du patrimoine, département des Antiquités orientales, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

Laurent Colonna d’Istria, chargé de cours, Université de Liège, Belgique.

Hélène Criaud, archéologue, membre associé, UMR 7041 ArScAn-VEPMO (Du Village à l’État au Proche et Moyen-Orient), Maison Archéologie et Ethnologie, Nanterre, France.

Rita Dolce, Professeur de Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte del Vicino Oriente antico, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici (DSU), Rome, Italie.

Jean M. Evans, Postdoctoral Fellow, Graduate School Distant Worlds, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Allemagne.

Yves Gallet, Directeur de recherche CNRS, équipe de Paléomagnétisme, Institut de Physique du Globe de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, Université Paris Diderot, UMR 7154, Paris, France.
Agnès GENEVEY, Chargée de recherche CNRS, UMR 8220, Laboratoire d’Archéologie Moléculaire et Structurale, Université Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris, France.

Marilyn KELLY-BUCCELLATI, Professor Emerita, California State University ; Visiting Professor, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, Los Angeles, Californie ; Director, Mozan/Urkesh Archaeological Project.

Camille LECOMpte, Chargé de recherche CNRS, UMR 7041 ArScAn-VEPMO (Du Village à l’État au Proche et Moyen-Orient), Maison Archéologie et Ethnologie, Nanterre, France.

Maxime LE GOFF, Institut de Physique du Globe de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, Université Paris Diderot, UMR 7154, Paris, France.

Jean-Claude MARGUERON, Directeur d’études EPHE IV ; ancien directeur de la mission archéologique de Mari.

Paolo MATTHIAE, Professor Emeritus, Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Archeologiche e Anthropologie dell’Antichità, Sapienza, Università di Roma, Italie.

Jan-Waalke MEYER, Professor for Near Eastern Archaeology, Institut für Archäologische Wissenschaften, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt/M., Allemagne.

Juan-Luis MONTERO FENOLLÓS, Professeur, Facultade de Humanidades e Documentación, Universidad de Coruña, Campus de Esteiro, Espagne ; directeur du Projet Archéologique Moyen Euphrate Syrien (PAMES).

Béatrice MULLER, Directeur de recherche CNRS, UMR 7041 ArScAn, Maison Archéologie et Ethnologie, Nanterre, France.


Joan OATES, archaeologist, Fellow Girton College and McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge University ; Fellow of the British Academy.

Adelheid OTTO, Professor, Institut für Vorderasiatische Archäologie, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Allemagne.

Frances PINNOCK, Associate Professor, Dipartimento di Scienze dell’Antichità, Sapienza, Università di Roma ; Co-Director of the Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla.

Sébastien RAY, chercheur post-doctorant, Université de Liège, Belgique ; membre de la Mission archéologique française de Mari.

Erwan THÉBAULT, Chargé de recherche CNRS, Institut de Physique du Globe de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, Université Paris Diderot, UMR 7154, Paris, France.

Walther SALLABERGER, Professor, Institut für Assyriologie und Hethitologie, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Allemagne.

Emmanuelle VILA, Chargé de recherche CNRS ; Directrice de l’UMR 5133 Archéorient, Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée, Lyon, France.
Le colloque « Mari, ni Est ni Ouest » s’est tenu en octobre 2010 à Damas. Il a permis de commémorer un peu plus de 75 ans de recherches archéologiques à Mari, avec le soutien actif de la DGAMS, de l’Ifpo, de l’ambassade de France à Damas et de l’Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin en Yvelines. Vingt-six ans après le colloque du cinquantenaire des fouilles de Mari, cette rencontre a permis de mesurer le chemin parcouru par la recherche sur Mari, d’une part, mais aussi sur l’histoire de la Syro-Mésopotamie au Bronze ancien et moyen. Une part notable des participants au colloque de 1984 était présente en 2010, aux côtés d’une nouvelle génération de chercheurs européens, américains et syriens. Cette rencontre a été d’autant plus fructueuse que les résultats les plus récents des recherches sur le terrain, parfois acquis quelques jours à peine avant le colloque, à Mari, Mozan ou Ébla, ont pu être discutés par plusieurs générations de chercheurs, sur place à Damas, sous les auspices de la DGAMS qui a accueilli au Musée national la séance inaugurale, puis au Centre culturel français. Il est indispensable, avant de poursuivre, de remercier tous ceux qui ont rendu possible ce colloque hors normes, au premier chef Bassam Jammous et Michel al-Maqdissi, M. l’ambassadeur de France en Syrie, M. Éric Chevalier et le conseiller culturel, M. Patrick Durel, et enfin les directeurs de l’Ifpo, MM. François Burgat et Marc Griesheimer, pour le département Archéologie et Histoire de l’Antiquité, qui ont soutenu avec enthousiasme le projet depuis ses débuts. Sans leur chaleur amitié et patience, il n’aurait guère été possible d’organiser une telle rencontre.

Nul ne pouvait alors prévoir la tragédie dans laquelle le pays s’est enfoncé depuis. Un cycle de recherches sur le terrain en Syrie s’est achevé après ce colloque qui assurément offre un instantané saisissant sur une recherche en plein essor et remarquablement dynamique. On ne peut qu’espérer que ces recherches pourront reprendre rapidement sur le terrain, une fois pansées les plaies, tant les questions posées pendant ce colloque sont essentielles pour comprendre une histoire qui nous est commune. C’est celle d’une longue durée urbaine, ponctuée de crises à répétition et d’incessant efforts pour maîtriser un environnement contraignant, mais au potentiel considérable. Que soient ici remerciés tous ceux qui ont permis aux recherches archéologiques en Syrie de se développer, au premier chef nos collègues et amis de la DGAMS, dont l’hospitalité et la disponibilité ont été constantes. Un énorme travail de mise en valeur du patrimoine syrien s’est ainsi mis en place en Syrie et les contributions réunies pour la publication de ce colloque sont autant d’hommages à une recherche construite par plusieurs générations d’archéologues, formés souvent par les mêmes maîtres, notamment à Mari. C’est aussi un hommage à tout un peuple et à la richesse de son histoire, un geste que l’on espère tourné vers l’avenir.

Quelques jours avant le début de la 47e campagne de la mission, en 2010, Mohammed Meftah, qui a collaboré comme archéologue pendant de longues années, non seulement à la mission de Mari mais aussi d’autres missions en Syrie et ébloui toute une génération par ses talents de chercheur de briques, nous a quittés, cette publication lui est dédiée.
Le titre donné à ce colloque est le fruit de soixante-quinze années de recherche sur le site de Tell Hariri/Mari. Il rappelle que la situation géographique de Mari dans l’univers mésopotamien a toujours conduit à voir la cité comme dépendante d’une réalité extérieure et à ne pas lui accorder une personnalité autonome.

Ainsi l’appartenance de Mari au monde sumérien ou à l’univers sémitique fait-elle dès le début l’objet de prises de position liées principalement aux Écritures mais aussi à certaines productions de la culture matérielle ; bientôt se greffe la question d’une situation entre l’Est et l’Ouest, dominée par les découvertes de la Diyala et d’Ébla. Ces problèmes d’appartenance et de pôles d’influence dominent la recherche en général et particulièrement dans le cas de Mari, que l’on a trop souvent vue seulement comme une sorte de succursale de Babylone, sans prendre conscience que notre information réelle sur le premier tiers du IIe millénaire venait de Mari et non de Babylone. Mari payait ainsi le prix de sa position intermédiaire entre la Syrie occidentale et le pays sumérien, de la tradition biblique et du leadership accordé sans analyse préalable à Babylone, considérée comme le centre créateur par excellence de l’identité mésopotamienne.

C’est une opinion qui nécessite un réexamen approfondi. Car ni l’organisation géographique du bassin syro-mésopotamien, ni l’évolution des royaumes et des empires ne permettent de confirmer, ni d’expliquer cette prétendue suprématie. Si on laisse de côté les motivations supposées pour examiner les faits, on s’aperçoit qu’entre les périodes où un empire domine, de vastes royaumes occupent les espaces du Nord et du Sud, de part et d’autre du centre babylonien. La Mésopotamie se divise alors en deux pôles majeurs où, chaque fois, une métropole régionale d’envergure, entourée de villes actives souvent satellites, occupe le premier rang.

C’est ainsi que dominant au sud, entre les périodes impériales et successivement, Uruk, Ur (de part et d’autre d’Agadé), puis, après Hammurabi, le royaume cassite, tandis qu’au nord Mari apparaît comme véritable capitale pendant plus de douze siècles avec comme seule interruption la période agadéenne. Peu après, Hammurabi le Mitanni puis les Assyriens occuperont le devant de la scène.

Ainsi, une alternance de longues phases de bipolarisation entrecoupées de brefs épisodes d’empires centralisés marque l’histoire de l’univers mésopotamien. Mari a été l’un des pôles de ce système et c’est profonde originalité de la métropole de l’Euphrate syrien qui devrait faire l’objet de notre attention.
À la suite des IVe Rencontres syro-franco-ibériques d’archéologie et d’histoire ancienne du Proche-Orient, il a paru essentiel aux participants de proposer une normalisation de la terminologie utilisée par les archéologues au sujet de la vallée de l’Euphrate syrien. Il nous semble en effet que le terme de « moyen Euphrate » désigne aujourd’hui des réalités diverses qui ne rendent compte ni de l’unité de l’ensemble, ni de ses différents segments.

L’usage s’est en effet imposé, à la suite des intenses recherches conduites dans les secteurs de Tabqa et de Tishrin, de restreindre le moyen Euphrate à ces régions, les sections situées en aval devenant même une « basse vallée de l’Euphrate syrien ». C’est ignorer complètement toute la géomorphologie d’un fleuve dont on sait qu’il a modelé des paysages très divers, en traversant trois milieux différents : un haut pays montagneux, une région de plateaux puis l’ensemble formé par les plaines alluviales et deltaïques, en Iraq. Il nous semble que le terme de bas Euphrate doit être réservé à cette dernière partie du bassin du fleuve. Dès lors, le terme de haut Euphrate s’impose pour désigner la partie du fleuve traversant Taurus et Anti-Taurus.

On réservera donc le terme de moyen Euphrate, toujours sur des bases géographiques, à la portion de la vallée où le fleuve s’encaisse dans les plateaux allant des montagnes méridionales de la Turquie à la plaine alluviale, c’est-à-dire à Hit, dans l’extrême ouest de l’Iraq actuel. Dans cette section de la vallée, une série de verrous définissent des alvéoles qui constituent autant de milieux très spécifiques et il est possible de distinguer une variante septentrionale du moyen Euphrate d’une variante méridionale, le verrou de Halabiyé constituant assurément l’un des plus spectaculaires de ces resserrements.

Si l’on voulait détailler davantage, on pourrait opérer une division ternaire, avec une section septentrionale depuis la limite du Taurus jusqu’au resserrement de l’actuel barrage de Tabqa, une section médiane depuis la confluence du Balikh jusqu’au verrou de Hanouqa et enfin une section méridionale depuis le verrou de Hanouqa jusqu’à Hit (avec encore éventuellement une subdivision introduite par le verrou de Baghouz).


Syria supplément 2 (2014), p. 5 et 6
TEMPLES ET TOMBES