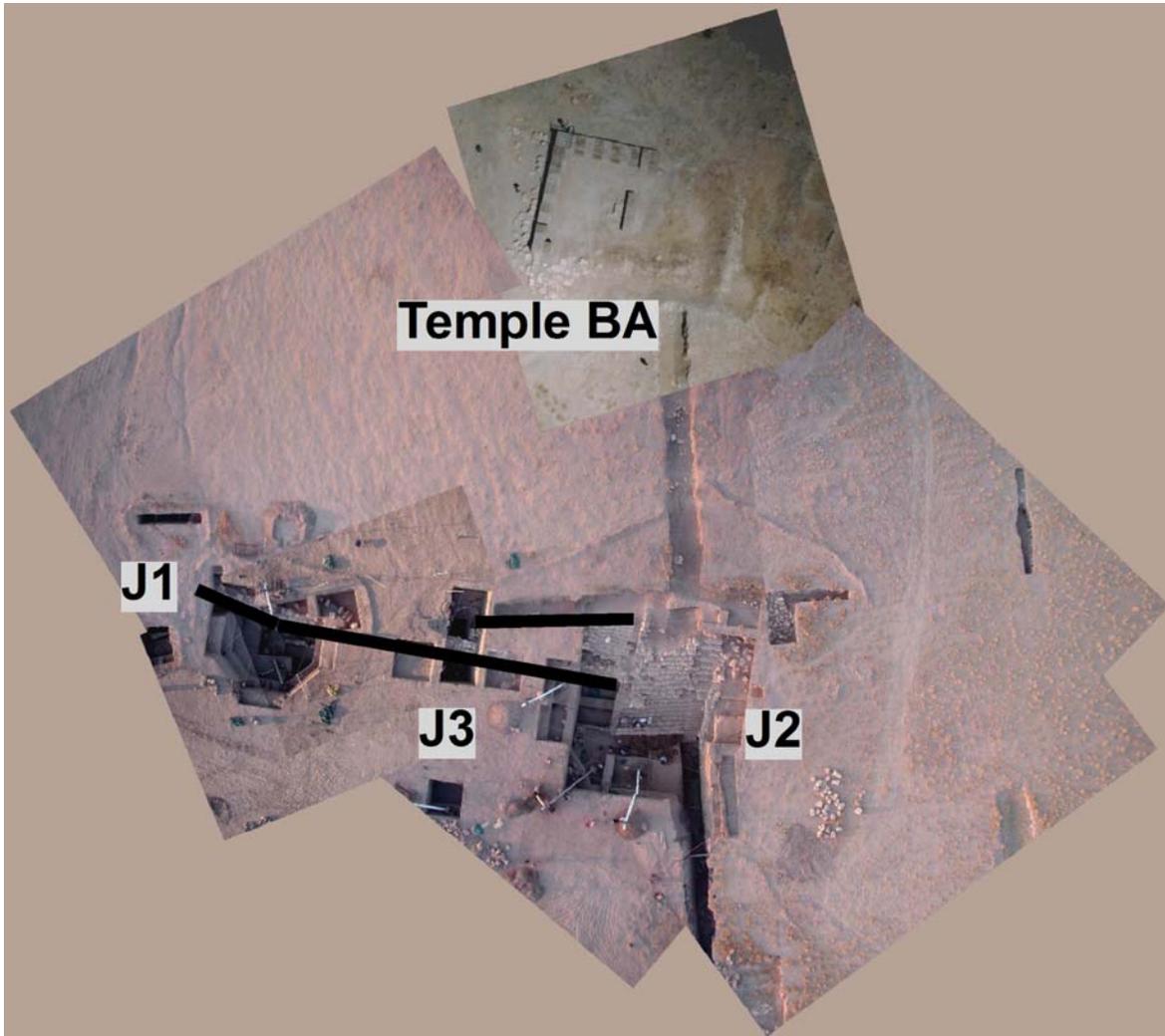


The 2005 season of excavations at Tell Mozan

An update to the visitor's flyer
G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati – September 2005
Arabic version by Rasha Endari



Goals

The 2005 season lasted from July 26 to September 19. We concentrated our work on the Temple Terrace and the Plaza in front of it – for two main reasons. (1) We had concluded during the 2004 season that the Mittani period strata (1500-1350 B.C.) were more important than we had expected, because it demonstrated the continued significance

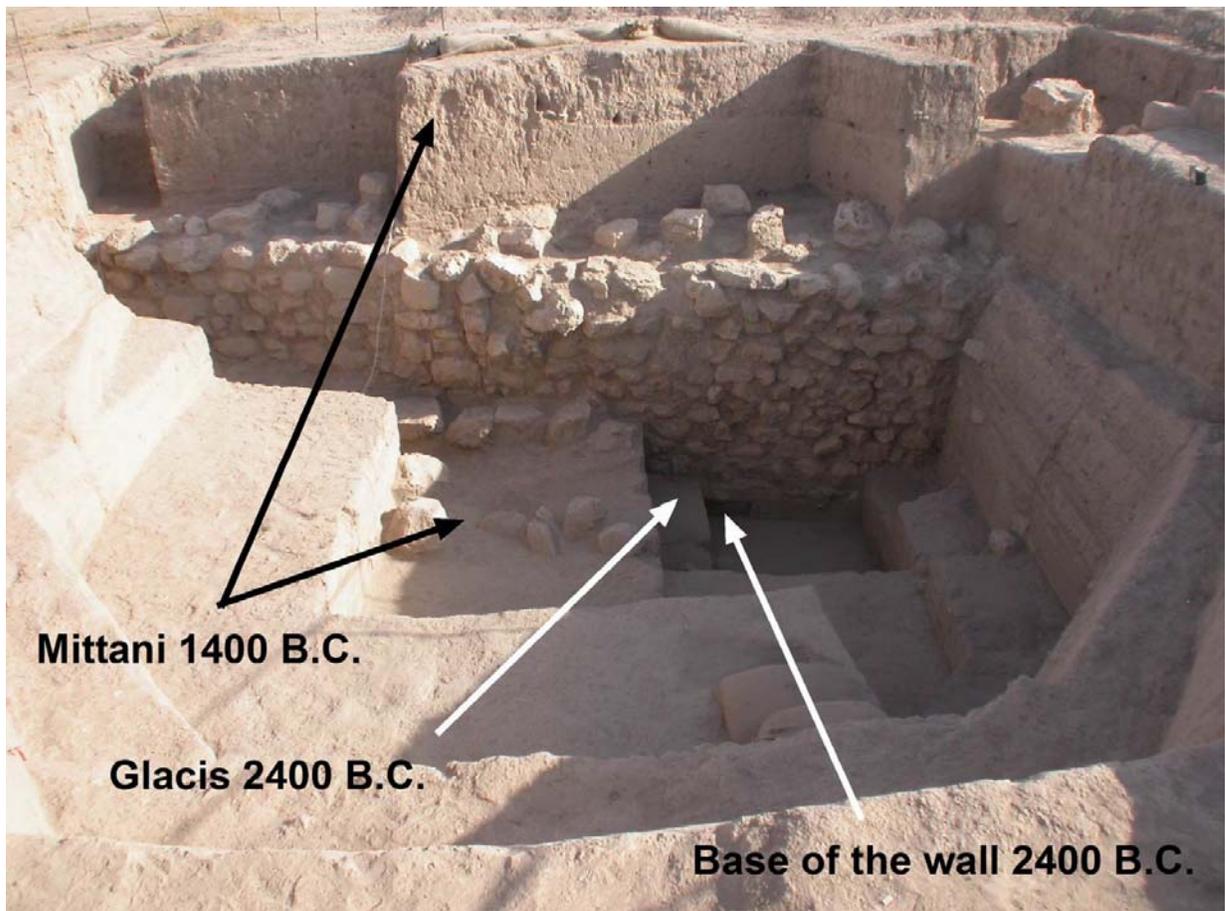
of the Temple as a Hurrian religious center: the houses to the west were not a rural village, but rather a service center for the functioning of the Temple. What was, then, the nature and extent of the Mittani period Temple Terrace system which seemed to be the only reason for the continued existence of Urkesh?

(2) We knew that the Terrace and its perimetral wall had to date to an early period, on account of the fact that the Temple on top (which we excavated in 1984-1986) dated to about 2400 B.C. However, all the strata associated with the wall itself, and excavated last year, dated to the Mittani period. Where were the third millennium strata?

The excavations were extremely successful, in that they gave us a full, and surprising, answer to these questions, and revealed one of the most astounding structures of all of Syro-Mesopotamia.

The photo on the first page shows an aerial view of the area of the Temple Terrace, with the Temple at the top, and the three excavation units of 2005). A gravel path will take you in sequence to J1, J3 and J2. For each unit, you will find below an explanation of the major results.

J1: The foundations of the Terrace wall



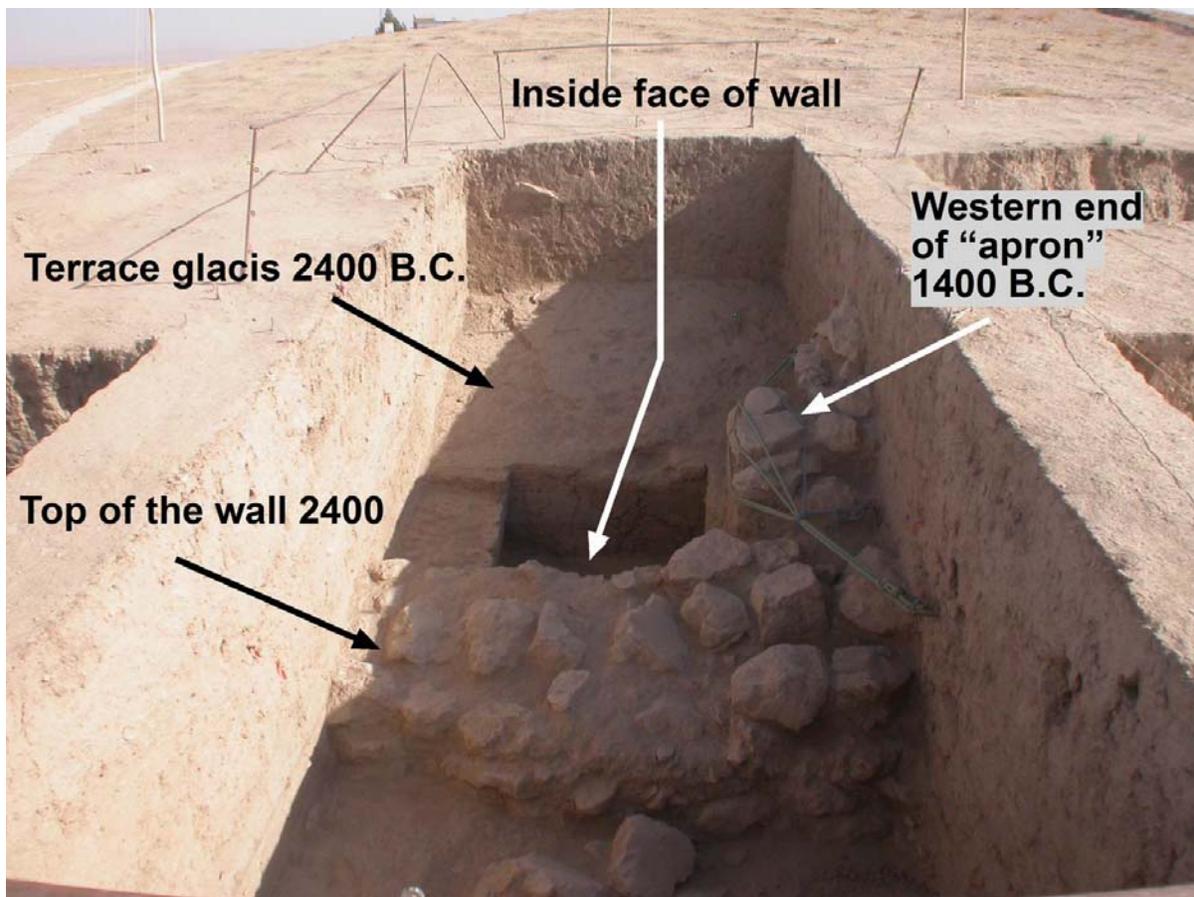
The purpose of the first unit was to open a window onto the wall down to a sufficient depth so as to learn how high the wall was and when was it built. We did reach the base, and we could date it firmly to 2400 B.C., on the basis of the pottery found in the lowest deposits that abut it.

The wall is a little over 3 m high, but in front there is a hard surface that slopes sharply downwards. This meant that the plaza was at a lower level, from which the top of the wall was probably a good 5 m high.

The sides of our excavations are cut in an unusual way, with slopes and ledges, in order both to increase protection from the winter rains and to provide an added measure of safety.

J3: The top of the Temple Terrace wall

The aim of the next excavation unit was to give us a view of the inside face of the wall. We wanted to determine the degree of structural stability of the wall in case we could in the future expose fully the wall.



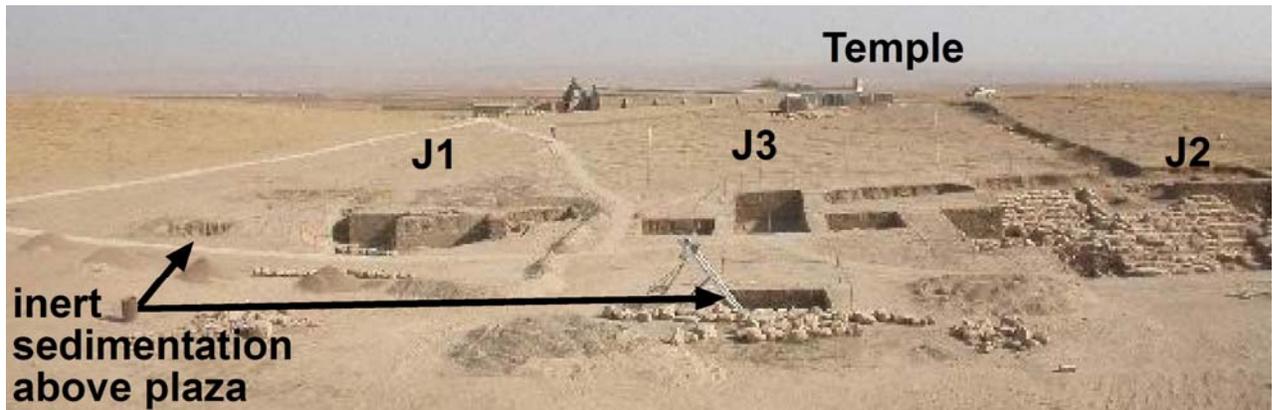
You can see the results by walking to the northern end of the unit. The stones are laid in a material typical of this area, a hard reddish clay with large limestone nodules, called locally *baqaya* and still used today as packing below floors. The same material coats the top of the glacis. This shows great engineering sophistication, in that it allows the water, streaming down from the top of the Terrace, an even flow that would not cause breaches in the wall.

Below this top coating there is normal accumulation, which allowed us to date the glacis and therefore the top of the wall – to 2400 B.C.! This is astounding, because it means that we have the wall exactly as it looked when first built, four and half millennia ago!

On the other hand, the stones you see to the east are part of a later addition, of which you will see the major part in the excavations to the east, J2.

J1 and J3: The plaza as sacred space

Two seemingly unimportant squares (to the west and to the south) are in fact quite meaningful. They are at a distance of a few meters from the wall, and they tell us that the sedimentation on top of the plaza which flanked the wall was totally inert, i.e., without any structures such as we find everywhere else in open areas (bread ovens, pits, burials).

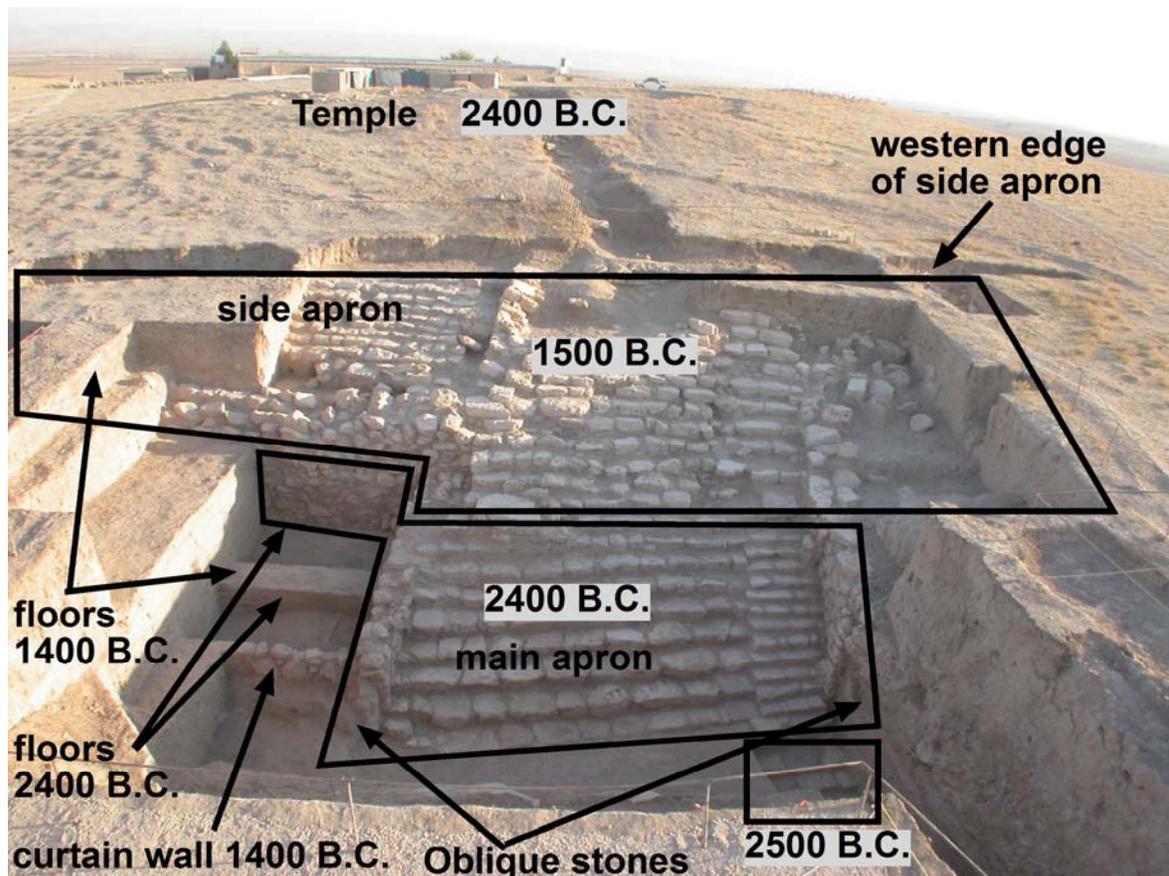


From this and other evidence we draw the conclusion that the plaza continued in use throughout the lifespan of the Terrace, i.e., until the site was abandoned about 1350 B.C. Because of its sacrality, it remained privileged until the end, and nothing ever happened to change its character of an open space next to the Temple Terrace! If it will be possible to excavate down to the level of the third millennium plaza, you will have the opportunity, in one of your future visits, to look up (rather than down...) at one of the best preserved and most spectacular third millennium structures anywhere in Syro-Mesopotamia!

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J2: The monumental access

You come now to the most monumental part of the whole complex, the staircase that allowed access from the plaza to the top of the Terrace and the Temple. We can distinguish three major building phases.



The lower part of the staircase and the corresponding portion of the apron and of the perimetral wall date to the same time period as the Temple at the top, about 2400 B.C.

Even from a cursory look you can see the difference in the construction style between this earlier and the higher, and later, portion. But our knowledge of the dates rests on the pottery found in association with these walls. Below the side apron (in J3) we have pottery of the Mittani period, whereas on the floors abutting the perimetral wall and the main apron we have late Early Dynastic/early Akkadian pottery.

On the lower right you see some steps which are set more deeply in the ground, and have a different appearance. The associated pottery is little, but there does not seem to be a major difference from the one of the main phase (the date of 2500 B.C. is purely indicative).

Immediately above the 2400 B.C. floors we have a thick deposit dating to the very end of the occupation of the site, from 1500 B.C. to 1350 B.C. When this period began, the full staircase was in view, except for the bottom couple of steps. This means that the monumental Terrace had remained in use for about 1000 years, and was still fully functional when the Mittani period began. Such degree of continuity, and of structural stability, is stunning. All the more so since the Temple at the top must, instead, have been rebuilt several times: the one we excavated in 1984 dates exclusively to the early phase (2400 B.C.)

Historical significance.

Because of the orientation of the various elements, and in particular because of the presence of a perfectly symmetrical western edge of the main apron (you can see it in the small sounding on the upper right), we assume that what you see is only half of the monumental access structure. If so, the full structure would look as in the architectural reconstruction below.



The full view of the entire structure with its massive access, the glacis and the high perimetral wall above it, makes it one of the most impressive architectural achievements of ancient Syro-Mesopotamia, and certainly one of the best preserved. It is breathtaking to think that most of what you see is in its pristine state as when it was first built 44 centuries ago, and that it was used without alterations (in its lower part) for some 10 centuries!

The great gap – 2400-1500 B.C.

The immediate superposition of mid second above mid third millennium material is puzzling at first – especially since we have deposits of that period some 7 m thick to west, in the area of the Palace. Why is it that we have in front of the Temple Terrace no evidence of material contemporary with the Palace, which dates to a period of great importance of Urkesh?

The answer can be gauged from the stratigraphic situation as summarized in the sketch below. When first built, the Temple Terrace was towering over a high glacis. From the level of the plaza at the base of the glacis up to the floor of the Temple there was a difference in elevation of some 15 meters. The plaza was open to the south, so that there was room for the run off water to flow down to the surrounding plain. In the second millennium, however, the plaza began to be blocked to the south by new constructions, and sedimentation began to occur above the plaza. The lower levels were at the base of the glacis, and only as the sedimentation grew did it reach as far as the base of the wall – where we have found laying directly upon the earlier floors!

