

Chapter 11

A NEW THIRD MILLENNIUM SCULPTURE FROM MOZAN

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The nature of the third millennium B.C. urban tradition in northeastern Syria has been in the forefront of our interest and research strategy in the excavations at Mozan in the Khabur triangle. Soundings conducted during the first two seasons (1984 and 1985), and regular excavations in the subsequent seasons (1986 and 1987) have revealed a remarkably homogeneous third millennium occupation characterized by exceptional architectural and artifactual remains. I wish to present here the most significant sculptural object discovered thus far, a small double-sided stele (pl. 26). It is a great pleasure for me to publish this original and important work in honor of Helene Kantor who first introduced me to the world of ancient Near Eastern art; through her insights and enthusiasm she sparked my interest in the third millennium which now has led me to Mozan. In order to place the Mozan stele in its archaeological context, I am first describing briefly the scope of our work there.

An initial surface survey was conducted on both the High Mound and the Outer City of Mozan.¹ A survey also was made in the first two seasons of sites in the Wadi Darah.² A survey in this area was of particular interest for two reasons: 1) it is in the section of the Khabur triangle most likely to be the location of Urkish, the major Hurrian city in this area, and 2) it is on the strategic trade route via the Mardin pass into the ore rich Ergani mining area and the main route to the Keban and surrounding districts. It is also in one of the principal water courses in northeastern Syria, the Wadi Darah, and thus was a focal point for the east-west trade route from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean coast. While the Wadi Dara had previously been surveyed,³ our survey turned up a number of additional sites in this area. Further it was determined that in this

1. The Outer City survey was conducted by Dr. Judith Thompson-Miragliuolo.
2. This survey was conducted by Guy Bunnens and Arlette Roobaert now of the University of Melbourne. I wish to thank Giorgio Buccellati for his many perceptive suggestions in our discussions of this monument both in Mozan and afterward. He and William Shelby both read and contributed to various drafts of this manuscript; I also benefitted greatly from discussions of this stele with Pauline Albenda.
3. T. E. Davidson and H. McKerrell, "Pottery Analysis and Halaf Period Trade in the Khabur Headwaters Region," *Iraq* 38 (1976): 45-56.

geomorphological zone no other sites exist of the size and importance of Mozan during the third millennium.⁴

Previous to our work, Max Mallowan, in his survey of the Upper Khabur, had made some soundings at Mozan before he finally decided to excavate at Chagar Bazar. While these are not published, Agatha Christie mentions that he thought that the site of Mozan had a heavy cover of late material.⁵ Unpublished notes on these soundings, now in the British Museum, show that he was excavating third millennium levels with pottery comparable to what we have uncovered in our own excavations at the site.⁶

The topography of Mozan is clearly differentiated into a High Mound and an Outer City. The High Mound, over 18 hectares in area and over 25 meters above the present plain level, is distinguished by a configuration of five rises surrounding a depressed central portion; this central portion had relatively few sherds on its surface. The five rises appear to be the consequence of extensive occupation on each, possibly resulting from the accumulated remains of five large public buildings surrounding a central open area. On the north are two other rises, one of which may incorporate the earliest occupation strata of the High Mound.⁷ Around this entire High Mound is an imposing city wall made of mudbricks. Our excavations on this wall show that it was at least eight meters wide, and more than seven meters in height. The Outer City is much lower than the High Mound and is delimited on its outer perimeter by a rise. Investigations of this rise are still continuing with a particular view toward ascertaining whether there is evidence for an Outer City wall. The area of the Outer City is approximately 135 hectares with only its extent to the northwest being uncertain.

From the surface surveys of both the High Mound and the Outer City it is clear that the major occupation of Mozan occurred throughout the third millennium. Some Halaf sherds on the southern edge of the Outer City may indicate the initial period of occupation of the site.⁸ During the Khabur ware period the tell was occupied; remains dating to this period however were not found as extensively distributed over the site as they had been in the third millennium.⁹ Some Nuzi pottery seems to represent the period of latest use of the site, although it may not have been for permanent settlement.

In addition to soundings by the city wall in Area K, excavations have been carried out on the High Mound on one of the rises surrounding the central open area, called by us Area B. This rise was chosen both for its position in respect to the central depression and because of the fact that an extensive area of red clay, not characteristic of other areas of the site, could be seen there showing through the sod layer covering the surface of the mound. What we initially thought was burning, turned out instead to be the decomposed remains of mudbricks. In addition, just under the surface we encountered a significant number of stones which were part of an architectural plan. After further excavation it became clear that we were excavating an impressive

4. Excavations at Mozan started in 1984 and have continued regularly since under the direction of the writer and Giorgio Buccellati. Funding for this excavation principally comes from the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation and from the National Endowment for the Humanities, RO-21543-87.

5. Agatha Christie, *Come Tell Me How You Live* (London, 1977), pp. 72ff (first published in 1946).

6. I wish to thank Terence Mitchell of the British Museum for permission to consult these records, and Joan and David Oates and Dominique Collon for copies of them.

7. For a report on the first two seasons see Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, *Mozan 1* (forthcoming).

8. The Wadi Darrah is one of the most important and heavily occupied of the Halaf occupation zones. Dr. Ismael Hijarah will publish the ceramics found in the Wadi Darrah survey.

9. Cf. *Mozan 1* for distributional maps of the surface ceramic finds from all periods represented.

temple with mudbrick walls resting on stone foundations. The temple was entered by a stone ramp leading up to what appears to be the main room. This room is rectangular, measuring 10.5 meters by 11.5 meters and is covered by a hard white plastered floor about 10 cm thick. A large stone altar or offering table measuring 1 meter by 1.5 meters was placed near the center of the room. Three building phases have been distinguished at present. In the earliest phase excavated thus far, this temple resembles to some extent the stone buildings at Chuera, especially Steinbau III¹⁰ with its stone steps and Steinbau I¹¹ with its altar (although this is located in a small side room and the Mozan example is positioned near the center of what appears to be the main room; as the excavations of the Mozan temple are not completed, the Mozan example may be either an altar or an offering table). While neither of these buildings is exactly like the Mozan temple, their similarity points to the likelihood of a coherent architectural tradition in northern Syria unlike the examples of religious architecture in the south.

Outside the northern edge of this main room of the temple were a series of open-air paved use-areas; the portion next to the temple wall was covered with a reed mat roofing. A walkway made from small stones and medium to small flat sherds ran parallel to the northern wall. The sides of this walkway were delineated by the placement of rims of large jars upright along the edge. It is not clear what relation this series of pavements had to the temple, since no doorway connecting them has thus far been found in the excavations. They may be part of a courtyard connected with the temple or may be an area used by the temple but not architecturally part of the building. For this reason also we do not know with what phase of the temple the walkway and pavements are contemporary. The pavements are truncated near the western end of the building because of the slope of the mound. It is in this disturbed and eroded area that we found in 1986 a small stone sculpture (pl. 26). While the date cannot be precisely determined since the pottery of the late third millennium from the Upper Khabur is not sufficiently well known as yet, it was found in a context with artifacts dating to the late ED III and Akkadian period.

The sculpture is of white calcareous stone carved on a piece which is triangular in section and measuring 11.2 cm wide by 9 cm high.¹² The sides of the stone are narrow and have been flattened by chiseling; the stone is flat on the bottom so that it is free standing. The top is rounded on the sides but flat on the top. The general shape then is similar to examples of early round topped stelae found elsewhere, but not identical to them.¹³ The type of stone is readily available on the nearby southern slopes of the Tur Abdin and continues to be quarried in the vicinity of Mozan today. A similar kind of stone is used in the foundations of the architecture and as linings in the third millennium graves in the Outer City. The piece is free standing and carved in low relief on both sides. Traces of chisel marks can be seen both on the flattened bottom and top. One end is preserved and has chisel marks three quarters of the way down the side while the bottom portion of this end remains unfinished. The other end has been broken off but from the design it appears that about half of the piece is preserved. I am calling it a stele for lack of a better term even though its size is not comparable to larger stelae from other sites. This piece cannot be a surviving portion of a composition carved on a larger stele

10. Anton Moortgat and Ursula Moortgat-Correns, *Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien: Vorläufiger Bericht über die Sechste Grabungskampagne 1973* (Berlin, 1975).

11. Anton Moortgat, *Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien: Vorläufiger Bericht über die Zweite Grabungskampagne 1959* (Wiesbaden, 1960).

12. This small stela was excavated in the third season of Mozan: field number B1.19.

13. See Jutta Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und Vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, *Baghdader Forschungen*, vol. 4 (Mainz am Rhein, 1982), especially the Early Dynastic inscribed stele from Ur, number 15 on p. 123.

— of which we have a number from the late Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods — since the Mozan stele has its top and bottom well preserved as well as one side (evidenced by the deliberate carving and the chisel marks still present). On the first side of the Mozan stele to be discussed, Side A, (pl. 26a), the theme of cattle is carved with one pair of animals apparent and the head of a third animal barely visible behind the horns of the second animal. This third animal is especially intriguing since the portion of his head behind the horns of the second figure is carved in very low relief in order not to interfere with the pattern of the horns of the second bull figure. The portions of this head visible between these horns (i.e., the ear and neck) are carved in relief of the same height as the first two animals. No horns are carved for this third animal. One figure, the animal in the front, is shown in profile so that its horns are seen as curving forward and then back. The hindquarters of the figure in back are seen in profile; the sculptor has used an almost three quarter view for his face. The horns of this second animal are presented in front view, that is, in a contrasting pattern with the first animal. Unfortunately the head of this figure is damaged because the stone is broken down the face. Both animals appear to be bulls because of their horns, but their hindquarters are slimmer than one would expect for bulls if shown realistically. Each of these animals is characterized by cloven feet, short ears, and large eyes. The hindquarters of the second animal are visible and indicate the presence of a long tail. The front-most animal does not seem to have been finished since an uncut portion of the stone extends from the top of his snout down his chest.

Both the animals of the crossed pair are shown in movement. The animal in front has three legs visible and all are shown almost as if prancing. The second bull, placed behind the first, has the one front leg somewhat off the ground; his leg position appears to show him as if ready to spring or jump. Clearly this animal is not standing on his hind legs as is so often the case in late Early Dynastic or Akkadian art. The general positional relationship of the animals too is not the same as the crossed animals in southern examples; rather they are shown in a more naturalistic rendering, as if the artist was trying to present a herd. The general body position of both animals is quite different from southern examples of crossed animals; in the south crossed animals are shown either as standing straight up or as standing on their hind legs with their bodies diagonally placed in the composition. In other words their bodies are stressed by the artist as part of a two dimensional pattern and not principally as animal bodies. On the other hand, in the Mozan relief the animals are conceived as on a three dimensional plane whereby their bodies are overlapping in a very natural manner. The front animal has all feet on the ground while the rear animal is seen only slightly off the ground so that its head is barely showing above the back of the first animal. This may explain why the artist then had trouble with the composition in carving the third animal. This animal's head is placed above the hindquarters of the front animal and thus overlapped with the horns of the second animal. Neither of the two animal bodies preserved gives the static, motionless impression of the posture of the usual southern animals during this time period. Furthermore the Mozan relief is carved on the stone in such a way that a space was left at the preserved end. It does not appear as if the artist meant to carve anything there, but as it is unfinished (the background has not been cut away) this is not absolutely certain. However, the placement of the figures so that there is a small border at both the top and bottom of the stone is in harmony with the idea of a border at the end.

On Side B of the stele (pl. 26b) is a scene of a plowman with the hindquarters of his draft animal preserved. Above him are the hindquarters of a dog with a straight tail extending over the plowman's head. The dog is positioned on the stone so that there is a wide border above it but little room between it and the head of the plowman. The dog appears to be in a resting position. Only the hindquarters of the draft animal are

preserved, but the fact that he is moving can be clearly seen. The plowman is depicted with a long nose, large eye, small mouth, short pointed beard, close fitting cap, and is wearing a short skirt. He is holding with his left hand a long curved implement which ends at his foot; this must be a plow of a different type than the seed plow used in the Akkadian period. His right is near the back of the animal probably holding the reins which, however, cannot be seen. As the plowman is depicted in profile the artist was not able to resolve the problem of how to carve his shoulder and left him with an awkward folded over shoulder.

The composition of this plowing scene is remarkable. The plowman has been positioned toward the end of the stone with ample empty space behind him. This empty space was intended since the background has been cut away in this area. The unfilled area emphasizes the diagonal line toward the bottom of the stone made more dramatic by the fact that the right foot of the plowman is pushing off, as it were, from this diagonal. The forward thrust is accentuated by the forward bend of the body and head of the plowman and the movement shown in the legs of the animal. Traces of chisel marks can be seen near the head of the plowman and the dog, making it appear as if this side was not completely finished, even if only the smoothing of the background had to be completed.

Plowing scenes appear in southern Mesopotamia in the Uruk period and then again in Akkadian times. In Syria, a recent relief found at Halawa should be mentioned along with the Mozan stele.¹⁴ The Halawa stele is a portion of a larger stele divided compositionally into registers of which parts of three are preserved. Here we are especially interested in the lowest register which depicts a man with a whip and a pair of reins behind a draft animal. As shown, the reins droop very low and are held by the man at the level of the animal's legs. Orthmann mentions the possibility that the man may be in a cart or chariot.¹⁵

Indeed in the Mozan stele the dramatic movement made possible by the diagonal connected with the liveliness in postures expressed in both the plowman and his draft animal are impressive. At the same time it is noteworthy that this innovation in composition is associated not with a scene of rulers or deities, nor does it appear to represent a part of myth or secular power but rather with an outwardly simple act of daily life in this region: plowing. While a heightened sense of drama is noticeable in Akkadian art, it is not until late in the Akkadian period that the diagonal comes in as a compositional device,¹⁶ and even then, not as a conveyor of forward movement as it does here. This then is a new aspect of third millennium art not seen before.

While the subject matter of the Mozan stele appears to be a simple statement of country life, in reality I think that it can be connected with those monuments of the Protoliterate period which stress the fruitfulness of the fields and herds, of which the Inanna vase is the best example. Although the composition of the Inanna vase is much more static, the analogy between the Inanna vase and the Mozan stele can be seen in the depiction of grain and animals. As shown at the bottom of the Inanna vase the register filled with grain would correspond to the more dynamic depiction of a plowing scene in the Mozan relief. The animals too, depicted in rows on the Inanna vase, can be discerned in their more naturalistic representation as a herd in the Mozan example.¹⁷ The Mozan stele never had the human offering bearers or deities shown on the Inanna vase and

14. Winfried Orthmann, "Tall Halawa 1982," *AJO* 31 (1984): 142-46.

15. G. Buccellati has suggested that this may be an example of a threshing vehicle.

16. The use of diagonals in the Naram Sin stele immediately comes to mind, see especially the exemplary analysis of this stele in H. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement* (London, 1951), pp. 163-66.

17. For a discussion of the representation of herds and their symbolism see P. P. Delougaz, "Animals Emerging from A Hut," *JNES* 27 (1968): 184-97.

indeed the animals are cattle, not sheep and goats. However there are parallels for the representation in which only appear cattle and plants in both the fourth millennium¹⁸ and in the Early Dynastic period.¹⁹ With this as a background it is possible to view the Halawa stele in the same way: a threshing scene on the bottom with feeding animals both young and old in the central register and human offerings at the top, thus duplicating the relative positions of the figures in the Inanna vase in a similar register format. The Halawa example has two larger men on the right who fill the space of two registers. While this type of composition was not used on the Inanna vase it is a compositional device used during this time period. Both the Halawa and Mozan examples were found associated with temples.

In her classic article on landscape in Akkadian art²⁰ Helene Kantor summarized succinctly the most important stylistic qualities of Akkadian art. She characterized it as tremendously vital and fresh in its approach, expressing often the physical detail and unity of individual figures. She contrasted this by saying that Akkadian figures “are not conflated or even interwoven so as to become mere subservient elements of a design, as often in Early Dynastic art.”²¹ The Mozan stele should now be considered in light of her assessment of Akkadian art. Clearly the cattle on Side A are not carved with the same awareness of the physical presence of the individual since the musculature is not shown and indeed internal aspects of the bodies are not stressed. What we can say about these animals is that they have the clear outline and fullness of body and general heaviness of appearance characteristic of ED III art. This can also be noted for the draft animal on Side B. The plowman is shown as thin but with the large and long straight nose typical of ED statues; his right shoulder is carved awkwardly. In this case too there is no stress on individual body parts or musculature. We can see on the other hand that our figures are not viewed by the artist as subservient to the pattern; the individuality of each figure is accentuated by the amount of space given in the composition to it and by the placement of the bodies in the naturalistic position of movement. This movement is never exaggerated but rather stresses the characteristic flow of that figure. This concern for the individual expressed by showing the bodies in natural and typical poses may be a general characteristic of Mozan art since the emphasis on the individual bodies in a naturalistic stance is also found on the seal impressions found near the city wall and dated to ED III.²² The vital and fresh aspects of the Mozan stele can be discerned in this naturalism combined with the dynamic design of the plowman. The Mozan stele then can be placed in an intermediary position between those stylistic characteristics of ED III art and those of the Akkadian period and as such present us with fresh and innovative aspects of northern Syrian art in the third millennium.

18. Pierre Amiet, *La Glyptique mesopotamienne archaïque* (Paris, 1961), 396–99 and 746.

19. Henri Frankfort, *Sculpture of the Third Millennium B.C. from Tell Asmar and Khafajāh*, OIP 44 (Chicago, 1939) pl. 106, no. 186. This is a plaque from the Single Shrine of the Abu Temple at Tell Asmar. Its lower register depicts two reclining cattle with a plant motif.

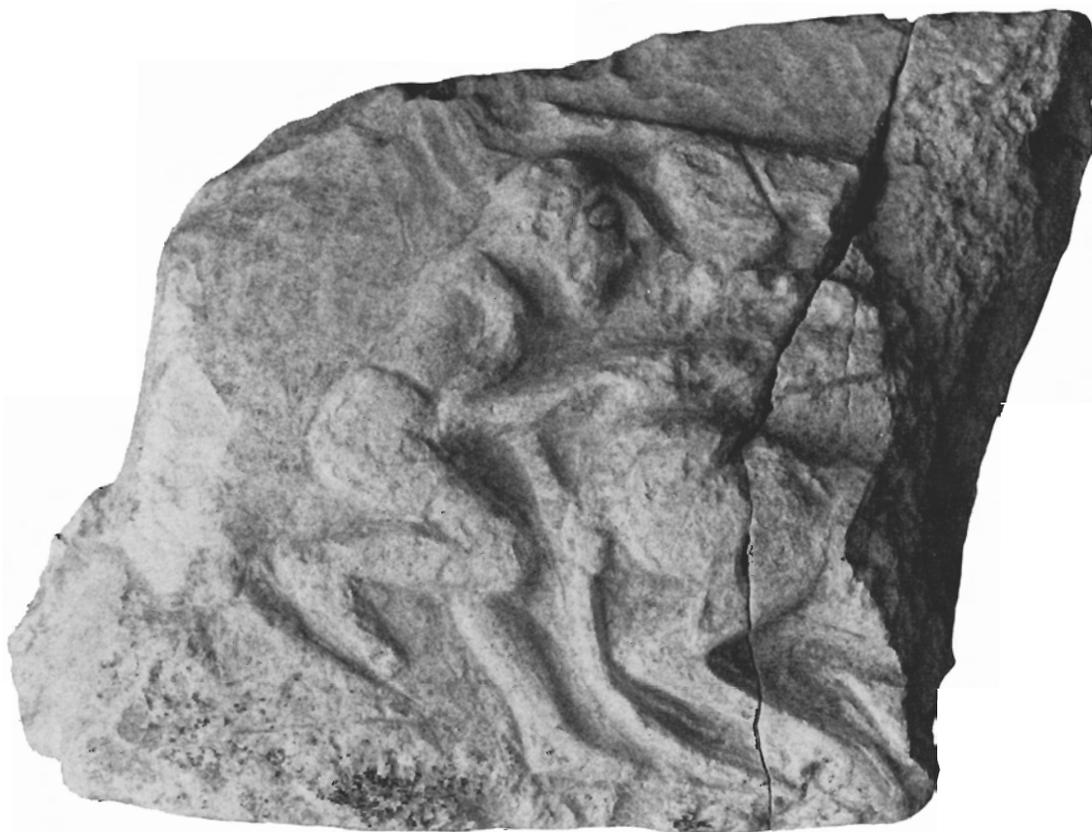
20. H.J. Kantor, “Landscape in Akkadian Art,” *JNES* 25 (1966), pp. 145–52.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

22. See Mozan 1.



a



b

Mozan Stele, B1.19: (a) Side A and (b) Side B.