

# Nuzi Viewed from Urkesh, Urkesh Viewed from Nuzi Stock Elements and Framing Devices in Northern Syro-Mesopotamia

MARILYN KELLY-BUCCELLATI

California State University, Los Angeles

Newly excavated inscribed seal impressions have led to the identification of Mozan with the Hurrian city of Urkesh. One of the artistic styles preserved in the non-inscribed seal impressions from the same floor deposit is characterized by the inclusion of stock elements and framing devices. Seal impressions excavated at Brak (probably ancient Nagar) exhibit similar stylistic features. Centered in northern Syro-Mesopotamia in the third millennium, this style is viewed as having an influence in the region still in the Nuzi period, exemplified here by the Nuzi painting.

The recently excavated Akkadian seal impressions from Mozan, located in the Khabur Region of northeastern Syria, have led us to identify the site with the ancient third-millennium Hurrian city of Urkesh (Fig. 1). In the excavations on the western side of the tell just inside the city wall and near a presumed city gate a large building was discovered between 1992 and 1994 (Fig. 2). Over 600 seal impressions were found *in situ* on one floor of a large room in Sector B of this building which we can now identify as a Royal Storehouse (Fig. 3). This identification of Mozan as Urkesh came from our study of both the iconography and seal inscriptions, as over 170 of the rollings were inscribed. In this excavated corpus six seals could be attributed to *Tupkish endan Urkesh*, "Tupkish king of Urkesh." The queen, Uqnitum, had eight seals; on one she is called DAM Tupkish, on the others NIN or simply DAM.<sup>1</sup> While the queen has an Akkadian name, both the king and a member of the queen's household, the nurse Zamena, have Hurrian names. The king's title is *endan*, well known from the inscription on the bronze lions of Tiš-atal. In two instances members of the queen's household have scenes depicted on them which are directly connected with their professions. The nurse has two seals on both of which she is represented holding the hands of a royal child sitting on the lap of the queen. One other seal shows a

---

<sup>1</sup> Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1995 and 1996a; all the Urkesh drawings published here were made in the field by Cecily J. Hilsdale. Lily Tsai produced the line drawings in Figs. 11-14.

kitchen scene with a woman churning and a man about to butcher an animal. This seal belonged to the female cook of the queen; unfortunately her name is not preserved in the very worn inscription box reserved for it.<sup>2</sup>

The scenes on the seals belonging to the king and queen are an embodiment of royal power and dynastic succession, as seen later in Hittite art. In the seals the king, queen and probably four royal children are depicted. The older children (a boy and a girl) are shown touching the lap of either the queen or the king. Two smaller children are sitting on the lap of the queen. The intimate touching gesture of the older children is interpreted as a dynastic act of dependence and continuity.<sup>3</sup>

An even larger number of unscribed seals could be reconstructed from the seal impressions. The unscribed sealings are divided into two major categories: those which are closer to southern models and those which are in a style characterized by the inclusion of stock elements, with a special emphasis on the placement of discrete heads of animals, and geometric frames. In this article, I will concentrate on this second style represented in the Urkesh corpus. In fact, I think they are particularly appropriate for a volume dedicated to Richard F.S. Starr since these sealings are part of a northern style found not only at Urkesh but on sealings excavated at Brak by Mallowan and also found in the recent excavations of David and Joan Oates and those of R.J. Matthews. This style was influential as late as the Nuzi period and is most spectacularly seen in the reconstructed portion of the Nuzi painting which emphasizes the positioning of discrete heads within complex geometric frames. Although unsuspected this parallelism can be seen clearly in the iconographic and the formal aspects of the art of both Urkesh (and other northern third-millennium art) and Nuzi. Given the preliminary nature of the research, I will emphasize the presentation of the data from Urkesh, as yet unpublished, and will suggest a line of inquiry in the way of comparative and stylistic analysis, leaving for a later date a fuller study along the same lines.<sup>4</sup>

---

2 See Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1996c.

3 For a fuller discussion of this topic see Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1996b.

4 The evidence for this third-millennium northern art is found for the most part in seal impressions excavated in a stratified context from Urkesh/Mozan and Nagar/Brak. The Mari seal is from a pit while the seal impression from Khafaje is from the surface. Thus the basic evidence comes first of all from the stratigraphic context and subsequently from the style. What we have then is a major corpus of well stratified evidence from modern excavations for this third-millennium art. The Urkesh/Mozan stratigraphic evidence and precise distributional patterns will be published along with all the seal impressions from the Royal Storehouse in the Mozan series. For a recent summary of the status of Nuzi and Hurrian studies, see Owen and Wilhelm 1995.

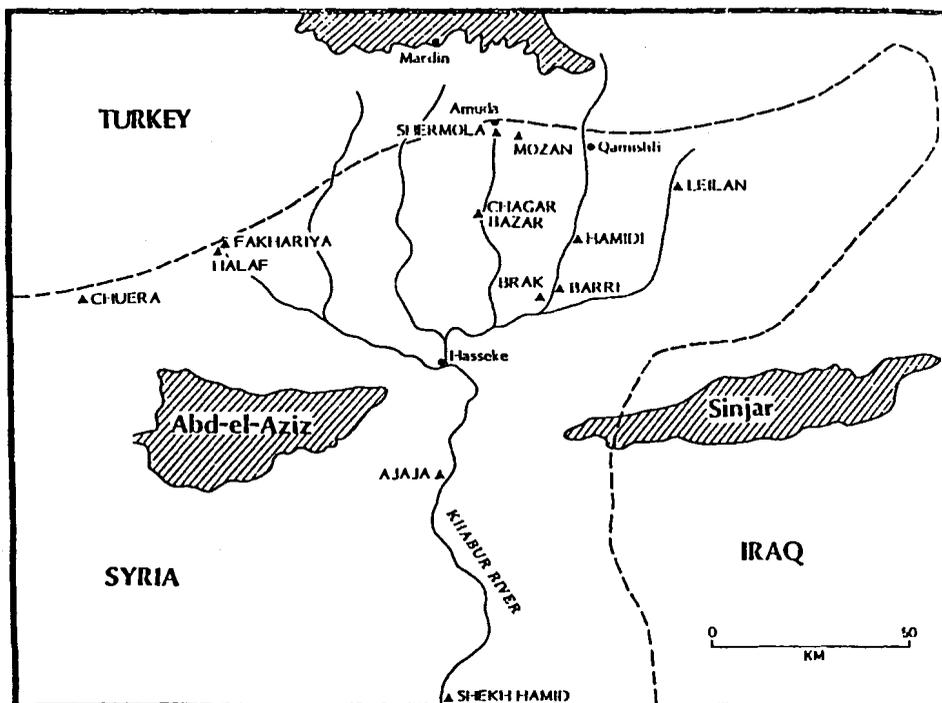


FIGURE 1  
*Map of the Region of Urkesh/Mozan*

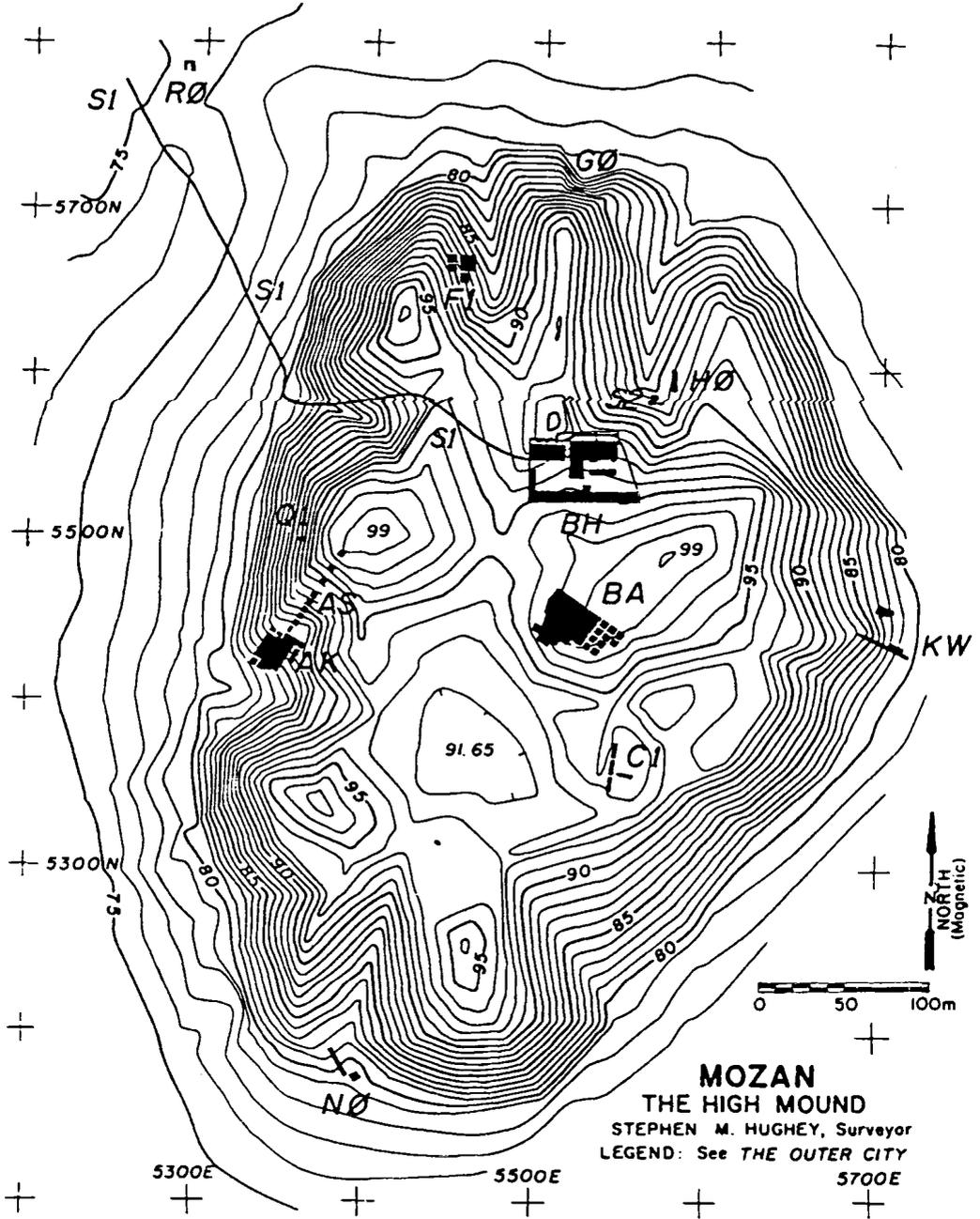


FIGURE 2

Urkesb/Mozan: Topographic Map of the High Mound

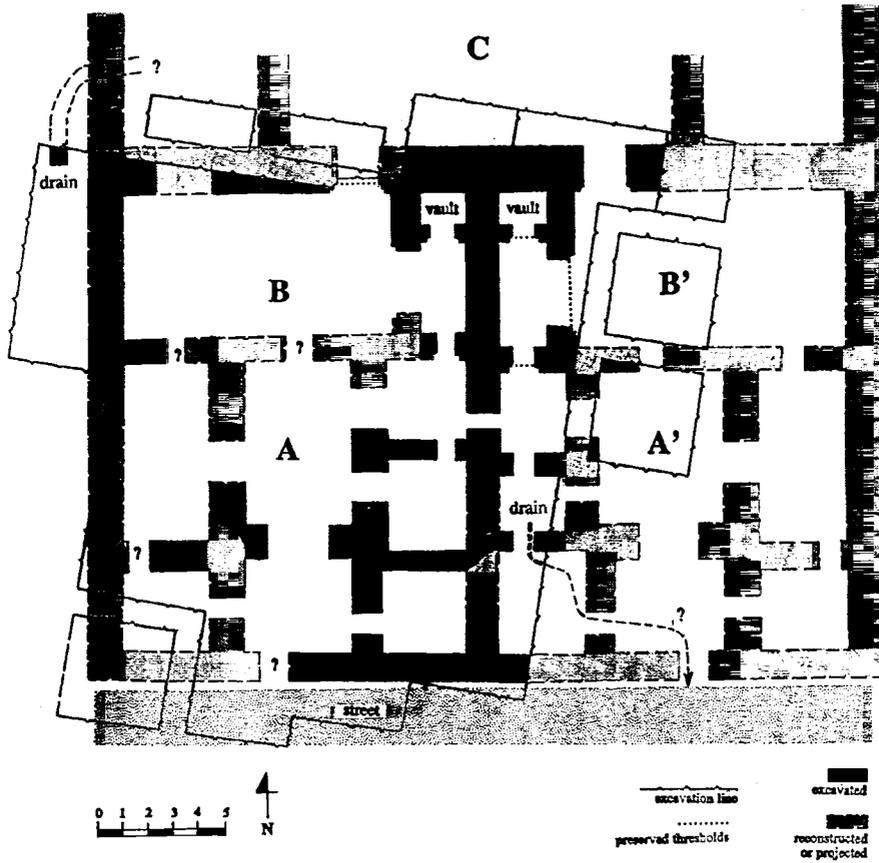


FIGURE 3  
*Urkesh/Mozan: Plan of the Royal Storehouse (Building AK)*

## THE URKESH EVIDENCE

The group of stratified seal impressions from the Royal Storehouse under discussion represents a seal style characterized by small seals with a number of figurative elements including humans, animals, trees and other natural elements carved in a simple, somewhat schematic style including short lines and sharp angles. Individual parts of the animal figures can be articulated with long naturalistic lines but other portions of the same animal are shown with geometric-type patterns achieved through the use of short incisions creating segmented forms, as for instance in the faces of most of the animals. In most of the figures large eyes fill the heads. The bodies show little emphasis on details such as hair patterns. The designs include large figures which fill the space but are differentiated in that some of these are interacting with other figures in the composition, while others are more in the nature of static elements placed there for reasons other than the course of the action, somewhat after the fashion of filler motifs. The figures can be arranged in a variety of ways, including the placement of reclining elements below a scene which is otherwise filled with standing figures or figures placed at right angles or even reversed with respect to other elements in the design. Particularly important is the fact that framing devices composed of geometric patterns take on a major compositional function.

Some motifs are in the category of animal combat scenes with human participants. This is the case of A5.180 (Fig. 4) which shows on the far right a human wearing a patterned hat holding a long spear near a lion attacking a bull. On the left there is a seated person wearing a round patterned cap.



FIGURE 4

*Urkesh/Mozan Seal Impression (A5.180). Scale 3:1*

In a second scene, A5.178, with two rollings (Fig. 5), two short skirted figures face right toward a horned animal which is clearly depicted on his back. Above this portion of the scene is a geometric design with rectangular panels. Beyond the horns of the bull is an unknown geometric pattern.



FIGURE 5

*Urkesh/Mozan Seal Impression (A5.178). Scale 3:1*

A1q1048.9 (Fig. 6) is a small sealing which depicts a short skirted figure with a triangular shaped head behind a standing horned animal.<sup>5</sup> The figure does not appear to be holding a weapon but a large oval object is placed in front of him. Above the animal is a scorpion while a short stylized tree is shown behind the man.

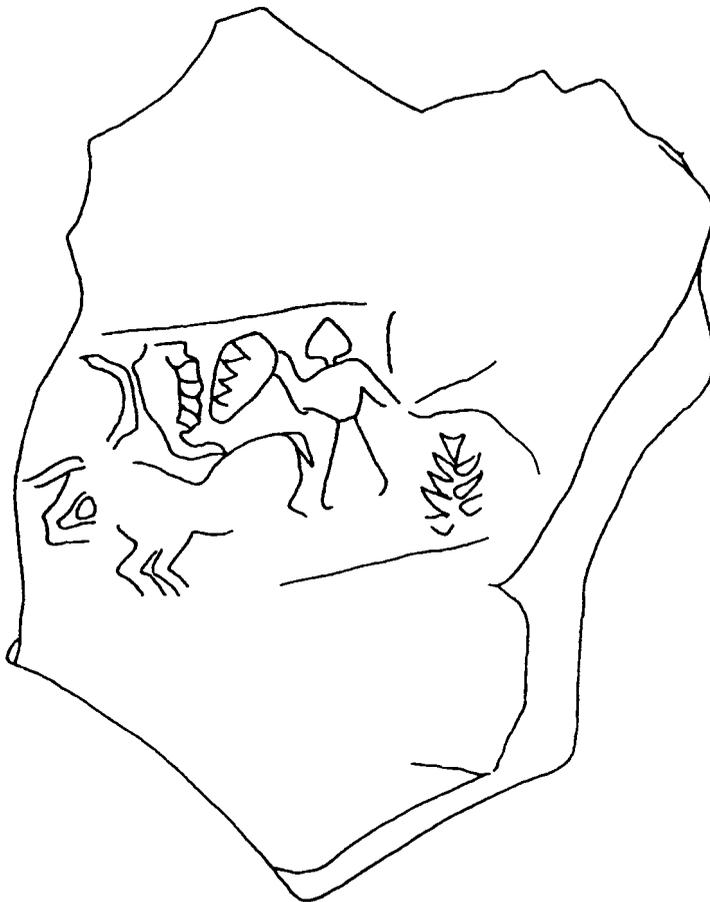


FIGURE 6

*Urkesh/Mozan Seal Impression (A1q.1048.9). Scale 2:1*

<sup>5</sup> A thin, elongated figure with a rounded triangular head can be seen as one sealing from Brak, Buchanan 1966: 757, which came from a context dated to the Akkadian period or later by Mallowan; his body is rectangular in form while ours is constructed of two triangles as in Fig. 7.

A human with a triangular shaped head is also represented in Fig. 7 (a composite from 4 rollings: A1.500, A5q923.6, A5q939.9, A1.486). In addition, this figure has a triangular torso with the articulation of his arms and body depicted as attached on the exterior. He holds a long sword; beyond him, may be an animal whose front hoof he grasps. The second figure in the scene is a human carved in a more rounded style with a large eye in the middle of his head which is shown in profile; this style of head is characteristic for some of these seals. He may be nude and has one arm raised.<sup>6</sup>

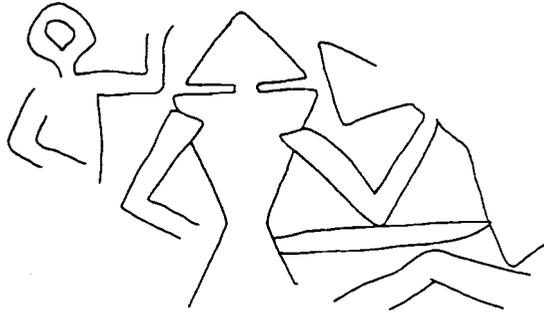


FIGURE 7

*Urkesh/Mozan Seal Impression (A1.500+). Scale 3:1*

The next scene, A1. 380 (Fig. 8), is also connected with this group in the way the profile head is shown with a large eye in the center, the large geometric object next to him (possibly the same type of object as in Fig. 5), and the emphasis on the two triangles (flowers?) protruding from a large unknown shape decorated with a geometric pattern.<sup>7</sup>

The two remaining seal impressions from the Royal Storehouse to be discussed here are connected both on stylistic and iconographic evidence to other sites in the area. One impression, A1q704.1 (Fig.9), contains a discrete head and the other (Fig. 10, for which we had three rollings: A5.153, A5.165, A5.115) contains a geometric border separating two seated figures, perhaps part of a banquet scene. In Fig. 9 the scene is generally an animal combat scene

<sup>6</sup> The extreme difference in the depiction of the two figures in this scene appears to single out the triangular headed man as a special figure. In one of the Brak impressions (Buchanan 1966: 756, the context of which is dated by Mallowan to the Akkadian period but by Buchanan to ED I) all four figures have a triangular head although the articulation of the arms and bodies is shown differently in the published drawing.

<sup>7</sup> The shape is too large to be a basket but the pattern is similar to one.

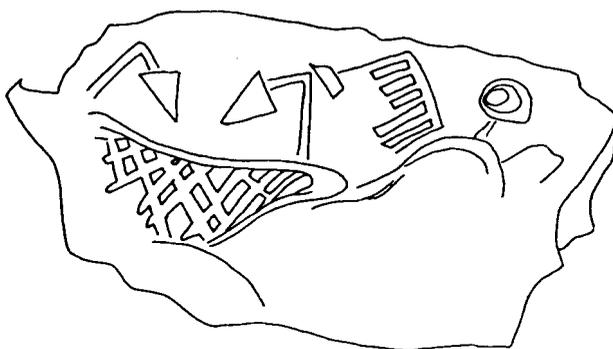


FIGURE 8

*Urkesh/Mozan Seal Impression (A1.380). Scale 2:1*

representing in the upper rolling a figure, with a head depicted similarly to those in Figs. 7 and 8, standing with an outstretched arm before a horned animal. Isolated in the field is a large bird which by its position does not appear part of the animal combat portion of the design.<sup>8</sup> Below is a second rolling representing another section of the design: a human is placed behind a standing animal with a long tail. Above this animal is the isolated head, neck and a portion of the front leg of a horned animal. This can be compared with a row showing similar parts of a horned animal published by Buchanan<sup>9</sup> and discrete heads and legs in a row dating to the Akkadian period from Brak.<sup>10</sup> Another group in the seal impressions dating to the Akkadian period have discrete heads which occur in connection with geometric borders<sup>11</sup> but also occur

<sup>8</sup> See the head of a bird in the Mari bone seal with large discrete head (Parrot 1956c: Pl. LXV: 329), discussed below. Detached heads already appear in ED III (see Porada 1948, No. 85, human-headed bull, *ibid.* No. 75 horned animal head in profile; Buchanan 1966, No. 202 horned animal head in profile).

<sup>9</sup> 1966: 811, from an Ur III context in Brak.

<sup>10</sup> Matthews *et al.* 1994: Fig. 13:3, see also no. 11 and Matthews 1991: Fig. 1:1, impressions of a seal with a number of heads of a horned animal perhaps indicates an animal herd: this was used to seal triangular docketts and also dates to the Akkadian period. See Frankfort 1939: Pls. X:h, XI:e.

<sup>11</sup> Buchanan 1966:808; Mallowan called the context Akkadian or later. Buchanan published these seal impressions in his chapter on peripheral Early Dynastic styles and dated them on stylistic grounds to ED III. However in some cases Mallowan had dated the archaeological context to the Akkadian period, noted here. The recent finds of excavated seal impressions at Brak dating to the Akkadian period and some of the Urkesh seal impressions from the Royal Storehouse, published here, make it clear that many of these impressions excavated by Mallowan can be attributed to the Akkadian period.

without them.<sup>12</sup> In the last several years, the Brak excavations have found a number of Akkadian seal impressions of this type which can be considered along with Mallowan's excavated corpus. The new impressions have both elements among the motifs represented in the seal impressions: geometric borders,<sup>13</sup> a guilloche,<sup>14</sup> and strikingly arranged discrete heads showing a stylized horned animal, a lion and a human headed bull each repeated a number of times.<sup>15</sup> The human headed bull and lion heads as discrete elements, the

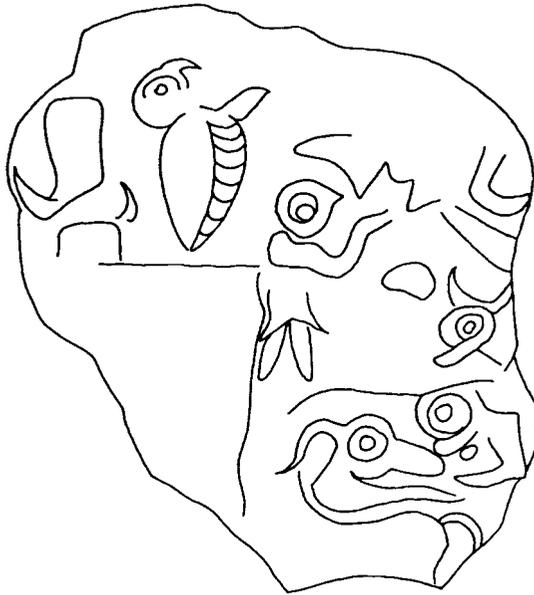


FIGURE 9

*Urkesh/Mozan Seal Impression (A5q704.1). Scale 3:1*

<sup>12</sup> Buchanan 1966:807 where there are 3 lion heads placed sidewise; Mallowan called the findspot an Ur III context; 806 also shows discrete heads of lions and a bearded man, possibly with horns; there is no geometric border in the scene.

<sup>13</sup> Matthews 1991: Fig. 1: 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Fig.1:4; in this seal impression the guilloche runs through the middle of the design with two rows of discrete heads above and below showing lions and two scorpions.

<sup>15</sup> Matthews 1991: Fig. 1: 15 and Matthews *et al.* 1994: Fig. 13: 10, 13. While carved in a different style, the Ebla seal impressions contain geometric borders as well as one seal with the same stock elements of a cat head, human-headed bull, female with long curls, and profile views of horned animal heads. These isolated heads along the upper and lower borders repeat the heads of some figures in the main portion of the design, Matthiae 1977, Fig. 18.

geometric borders, and the guilloche had already been known from the impressions excavated by Mallowan.



FIGURE 10

*Urkesh/Mozan Seal Impression (A5.153+). Scale 3:1*

From the Temple of Ishtar at Mari, Parrot published a bone cylinder seal, found in a pit in cella 17, with a mask (Fig. 11).<sup>16</sup> The large frontally positioned bearded head, with bull ears and horns, large eyes, long braided hair<sup>17</sup> and what may be a feathered crown is another third-millennium example of the prominent use in a larger composition of a discrete head.<sup>18</sup> The smaller frontal lion head above the "mask" in the Mari seal is also represented on a seal impression found on the surface at Khafaje<sup>19</sup> and in the Brak sealings.<sup>20</sup> In addition the Mari seal has a frieze of animal heads below wearing what appears to be a type of feathered crown consisting in three feathers(?). This is paralleled on lion heads from Brak<sup>21</sup> and appears to be the same crown as shown on some

<sup>16</sup> Parrot 1956: pp. 187-88 and Pl. LXV: 329.

<sup>17</sup> Braided hair is the usual hair style of the queen of Urkesh, Uqnitum, and her daughter.

<sup>18</sup> The ends of the bull's beard are curled; a seal impression from Brak showing a similar head appears from the drawing to also emphasize these curls, Matthews *et al.* 1994: Fig. 13:10.

<sup>19</sup> Frankfort 1955:Pl. 35:362; Buchanan 1966: p. 151 says of the Khafaje seal impression "it was probably made by a seal imported from the north."

<sup>20</sup> Buchanan 1966: 8067; Matthews 1991: Fig. 1:2,4,5; Matthews *et al.* 1994: Fig 13:13.

<sup>21</sup> Buchanan 1966:806; he notes this comparison between the Brak example and Mari. Amiet pointed out that the heads below the mask in the Mari seal can be viewed in reverse as lions' heads, Amiet 1985, pp. 477-78. Reversals are a prominent feature in the Urkesh royal seal impressions. For Chuera the central large head on the Mari seal was cited in connection with the seven-goddess relief, see Moortgat and Moortgat-Correns 1976, p. 53.

examples of the woman's head in the later Nuzi painting.<sup>22</sup> Parrot notes a large discrete head on a seal impression from Nuzi.<sup>23</sup> The inclusion of dots in filling empty spaces also is characteristic of this northern style.<sup>24</sup>

Fig. 10 renders a seated figure on the right with a second figure on the left raising his arm; this second figure is characterized by the typical large dotted eye. Between them is a double v-shaped geometric border which may have originally been inspired by a palm trunk; this border appears to continue into the upper portion of the design. On the left the frame, a horizontal geometric pattern extends above the head of the figure; there may have been a similar horizontal extension of the frame above the figure on the right but this part of the design is not preserved. The function of the frame is fundamental to the overall design of the seal and can be seen as such even if we do not have the whole of the figural motif. The frame in this case serves as a major geometric element in itself and therefore gives a geometric focus to the design; it also serves to encase the figural portion of the design, thereby pointing up the fundamental difference between the figural portion of the design and the geometric one. In addition, given that the figures are shown in such a way that their bodies are indicated by a segmented line (as is the case for many of the human and animal figures in this style), they, too, mirror the geometric pattern in their own way.

In the excavations of Mallowan at Brak, a group of seal impressions were discovered which emphasize a horizontal geometric border placed at the bottom, top or in the middle of a design which is otherwise figurative. In some cases this horizontal frame was purely geometric<sup>25</sup> or represented a guilloche.<sup>26</sup> In the more recent excavation this style of seal impressions continue to be found with examples of both geometric borders<sup>27</sup> and the guilloche.<sup>28</sup> From an Akkadian stratum at Tell Chuera an animal combat scene is framed on three sides with a V-shaped geometric border.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Starr 1937 and 1939: Pl. 128.

<sup>23</sup> Parrot 1956:185; Starr 1937:p. 444 and Pl. 119:B. Starr notes in his description: "a seal impression from early Nuzi, and appears as an interesting combination of Ga.Sur and Nuzi traditions."

<sup>24</sup> Both this Mari seal and the seal which was used to make the Khafaje impression must be from the north as are Frankfort 1939: Pls. X:h, XI:e. An example from Tell Taya shows in two friezes separated by lines a series of dots and isolated animal heads, Reade 1973, Pl. LXXII:a.

<sup>25</sup> Buchanan 1966:808 Mallowan described the context as Akkadian or later.

<sup>26</sup> Buchanan 1966: 803; Mallowan called the context possibly Akkadian.

<sup>27</sup> Matthews 1991: Fig. 1:7,8; Matthews *et al.* 1994:Fig. 13:4,5,10.

<sup>28</sup> Matthews 1991:Fig. 1:4; Matthews *et al.* 1994:Fig. 13:6 (similar to a dotted guilloche) and 16.

<sup>29</sup> Moorgat 1960, Fig. 14; Amiet 1963, Fig. 32.

## URKESH AND NUZI

However, it was the discovery in our corpus from the Royal Storehouse of the two scenes shown in Figs. 9 and 10 which made me think of the Nuzi painting (Fig. 12). Wall paintings at Nuzi were found both in the private houses and in the palace. In the private houses only one wall of what was usually the most important room in the house was painted. The most common type of decoration was a wide panel of solid red color between panels of gray; a vertical guillothe could be used as a divider.<sup>30</sup> While none of the painted designs were found still adhering to the walls, a large painted section with the designs preserved came from the floor of a palace corridor, L15B of Stratum II.<sup>31</sup> From the number and preservation of the fragments, Starr reconstructed the painting as having gone around the whole room above the height of the doors.

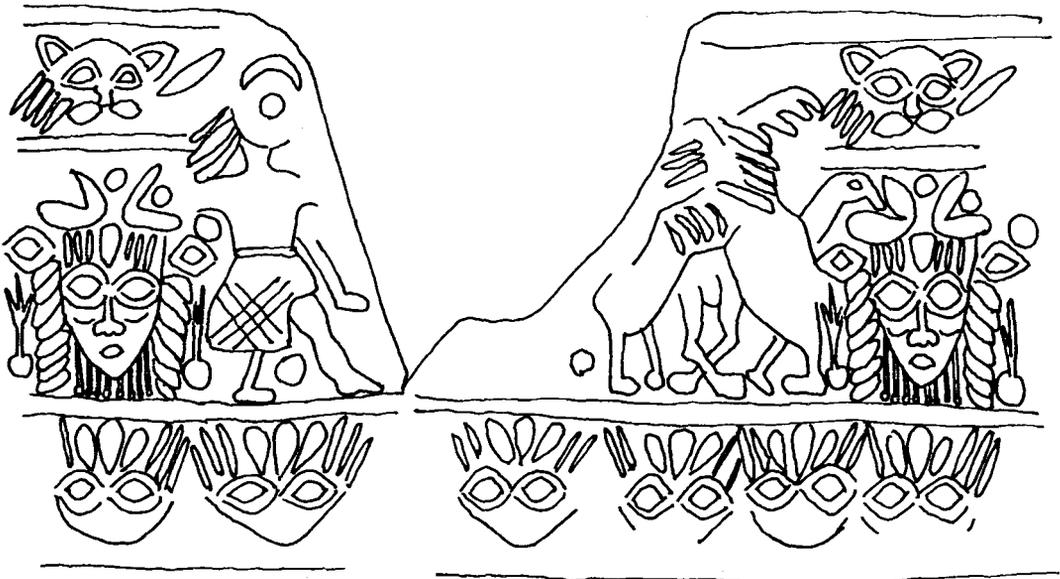


FIGURE 11

*Drawing of scene from Mari seal rearranged to emphasize the composition*

Early Dynastic/Old Akkadian. Scale 1:1.

Cf. Parrot 1956: PL. LXV:329.

The "mask" (with horns above a headdress consisting of a single large tuft in the center, and three small tufts on either side, shown as a band around the forehead) and a cat-like lion head above are interpreted as a vertical element encasing a figurative scene (hero and animal combat). A row of stylized heads can be viewed as reversed lions' heads or as heads with three large tufts in the center, and two or three small tufts on either side, in lieu of the forehead, serves as an horizontal border at the base; scattered dots in the field.

<sup>30</sup> Starr 1937-39: 57-59; 186-87; 217-18 and Plan 23.

<sup>31</sup> Starr 1937-39: 143-44, Pl. 128-29, and Plan 13.

In his description of the Nuzi painting Starr writes: "It is of interest to note the extreme formality and conventionalization of all the designs, and the tendency toward geometrical patterns both in the detail and in the arrangement into vertical and horizontal panels."<sup>32</sup> While elements of the design do occur in the Nuzi seal impressions and to some extent in the painted ceramic designs (he noted the guilloche and the tree), it is the combination of geometric patterns with the discrete heads which is of interest to us here.

Small fragments of geometric design decorated with a number of dots placed in the empty spaces of the design<sup>33</sup> occur in the panels of the stylized tree and discrete heads. These dots appear arbitrarily placed since they are present at times but missing in other panels. Single dots are also seen in the middle of triangles (usually in red on white triangles and in black on the red examples) and in the center of the white rectangles in the alternating black and white borders. The center of the guilloche can also be dotted.<sup>34</sup> Large triangles in a red field are dotted and have a large black dot in the spaces between triangles. They make up a portion of a larger pattern which may be an imitation of a building facade as well as the top of a half oval next to them.<sup>35</sup> These dots then are an

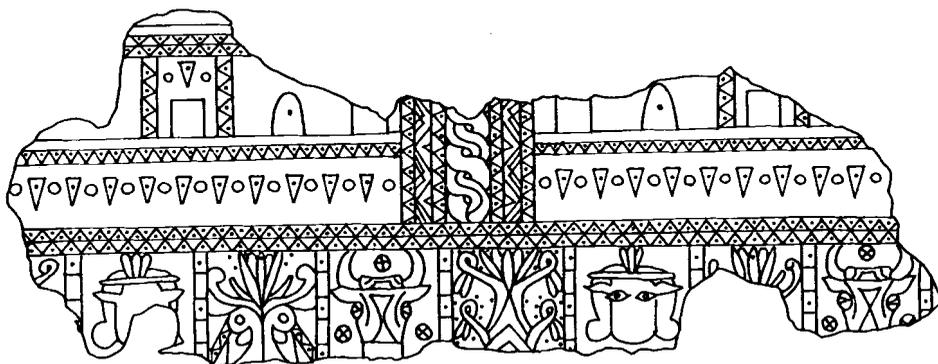


FIGURE 12

*Drawing of frieze from Nuzi wall painting*

15th century. Scale 1:10

Cf. Starr 1937-39: Pl. 128.

Portions of a frame with geometrical patterns, a guilloche, and rows of stylized bull heads and masks(?) with a crown of three large tufts emerging from an horizontal band around head, bull ears, and long curls. Scattered dots near floral motifs and crossed circles near the bull heads.

<sup>32</sup> Starr 1939: 492.

<sup>33</sup> Starr 1937:Pl. 128:A,E and around the floral motif and bull head in Pl. 129:D.

<sup>34</sup> Starr 1937:Pl. 129D; see Matthews *et al.* 1994: Fig. 13:6 for an Akkadian period guilloche with circles in the center.

<sup>35</sup> Starr 1937:Pl. 128:H.

integral part of even the smaller patterns in the elaborate geometrical scheme and at times partially fill the field of the discrete heads and floral motifs. In Buchanan's description of the seal impressions from Mallowan's excavations from Brak he notes that one of the iconographic characteristics of what he called the "ED III style distinctive of Brak" is the use of filler motifs composed of dots.<sup>36</sup> A triangular tag from Brak was rolled on both faces with a scene of a row of figures placed above a row of reversed rams' heads; notable about this design is that twelve dots are interspersed between both the figures and the row of discrete rams' heads.<sup>37</sup>



FIGURE 13

*Drawing of scene from Nagar/Brak seal*

"From pre-Akkadian rubbish." Scale 2:1.

Cf. Buchanan 1966, p. 151

A human-headed bull's head, lion's head with three large tufts above the forehead (placed sideways) and a T-shaped geometrical pattern behind the browsing quadrupeds serve as a vertical frame, encasing a figural scene which is also highly symmetrical.

The Urkesh sealings published here belong to a larger third-millennium style characteristic of the north. In this style the original seals were small and uninscribed; they have prominent geometric aspects, compositions with many figures filling the space, and compositions which are more varied in the arrangement of figures. Iconographically, the choice of the figures and groups come from a limited range of scenes, including some which are well known in the south, such the human and animal combat scenes, and perhaps banquet scenes as well.

<sup>36</sup> Buchanan 1966: 146, no. 783.

<sup>37</sup> Buchanan 1966: 787; dots are also a feature of the design in the Mari seal, see Fig. 11.

But what is most characteristic of this style are two particular features: first, the use of discrete elements which are taken out of a figurative context, and second, a veritable delight for repetition, resulting in sequences which acquire a compositional value of their own. We may briefly address both points in turn. (1) The discrete elements include lion heads, a type of cat head different from the lions (which may represent a lioness), bearded bull heads, the head and foreparts of horned animals, scorpions, dots, various types of the guilloche pattern, and a wide variety of geometric borders. The heads of both humans and animals depicted in profile exhibit a strong outline and a single large dotted eye in the center; those animal heads viewed from the top or shown frontally also place a strong emphasis on the eyes. (2) These stock elements are combined in a somewhat organic manner through repetition by means of linear patterns, as in the case of rows of discrete heads. This fluid arrangement of stock elements is held together additionally by the emphasis on geometric frames which are, in

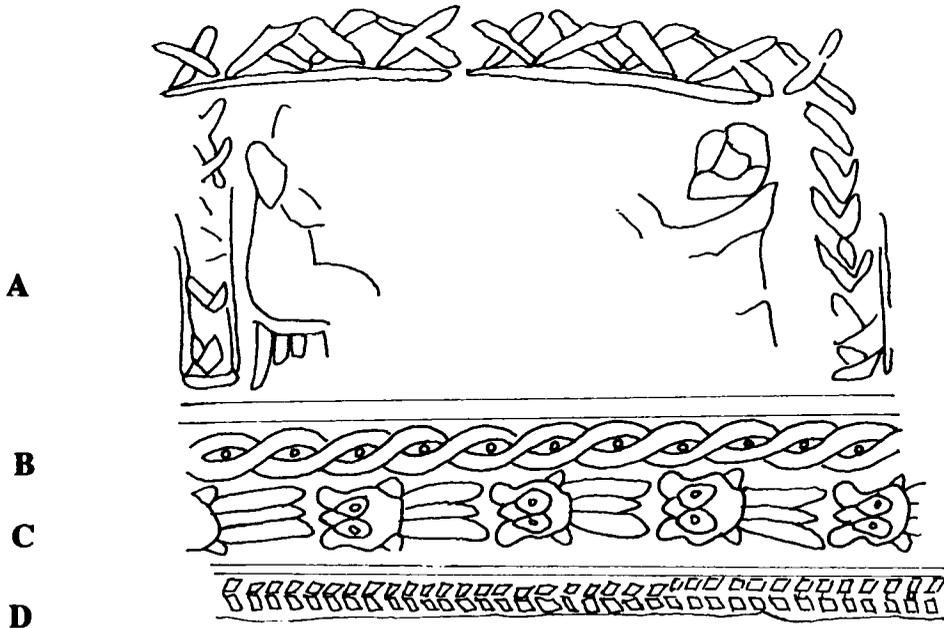


FIGURE 14

*Projected scene from late third-millennium Khabur region*

Scene A from Mozan/Urkesh, see above, Fig. 10. It is encased by a geometrical pattern which may be meant to resemble a palm log (column?).

Element B a guilloche (as found in Brak seals and Nuzi painting).

Element C a row of lion heads with tufts as found in Brak seals (sideways). See also Mari seal and Nuzi painting.

Element D a geometrical frieze as found in Brak seals and similar to those in Nuzi painting.

It is proposed that such a composition might have been used for wall paintings in the late third-millennium Khabur region.

this style, raised to the status of major compositional elements. In themselves these borders are extremely varied in their geometric patterns and as frames give a limit to both the space and the number of stock elements included. While the figurative scenes can be more varied compositionally, they can also reflect the geometric emphasis found in the borders and the positioning of discrete heads through the use of symmetry (as shown in Fig. 13).

The basic characteristics of this northern style are still influential as late as the Nuzi period. Compositionally the Nuzi painting is a monumental representation of those formal and compositional characteristics already seen in the third-millennium. The emphasis on the guilloche and geometric patterns serving as frames were multiplied at Nuzi to include a number of nested frames in intricate geometric patterns with complimentary color combinations.<sup>38</sup> The emphasis on discrete heads of figures seen already in the third-millennium is striking. While the long expanse of the Nuzi wall paintings provide the largest compositional evidence for the characteristics of this style, many of these characteristics also occur in the Nuzi seal impressions. Given that we do find this style in both Nuzi painting and seal carving, it seems possible to speculate that there are also third millennium wall paintings in this style.

The presence in the north of this type of seal carving style during the third-millennium did not preclude the coexistence of other carving and painting styles. While this has been clearer in seal carving, (and will be even more so when the inscribed seals from Urkesh are published) it is now beginning to be evident in wall painting. The recently excavated wall paintings from Halawa and Munbāqa emphasize very distinctive large eyed, oval headed figures which either can be placed in a composition as oversized figures in the middle of a group of smaller figures painted in a different style, or can be shown in the composition as smaller figures in the area of this larger figure (Halawa).<sup>39</sup> The Munbāqa figures are placed in a panel having a geometric border<sup>40</sup> but are distinctive in their details from the Urkesh and Brak examples cited and have

---

<sup>38</sup> I have not included here the evidence from the Nuzi seal impressions. Many elements seen in the Nuzi paintings, such as the dotted guilloche, the mask-like heads and the friezes of discrete heads, are also found in the seal impressions. I am also not discussing here the evidence from seals or the Mari painting which would provide connecting elements over this time span, just as I have not discussed southern parallels for single elements or the wider question of the role of the south in the formation of this northern art. When the Akkadian cylinder seals first began to be excavated at Brak, D. Mathews (1991) called this style "provincial." With my current reassessment of the material, including the new evidence from Urkesh/Mozan and Nagar/Brak, it is now clear that this style cannot be considered provincial because it is a dominant northern style in the third-millennium, with its influence lasting into the later periods.

<sup>39</sup> Lueth 1989. The stela from Halawa has geometric decoration on a register band, Orthmann 1985.

<sup>40</sup> Machule *et al.* 1986.

a different overall effect. In fact these oval headed figures are closer in tone to the later Mari figure of a bearded man with an amorphous body in a single panel surrounded by dots.<sup>41</sup>

In my reconstruction of a hypothetical third-millennium Urkesh painting (which I think is not specific to Urkesh but rather could be found throughout the northern area symbolized by the two poles of Urkesh and Nuzi), I have tried to project back from the Nuzi composition and iconographic motifs onto what is now known from the seal impressions of Akkadian Urkesh/Mozan and Nagar/Brak. (Fig. 14). There are two assumptions behind this suggestion. The first is that wall paintings and seals may share similar stylistic and iconographic features. This is supported by the recurrence of stock elements and of special framing devices in both art forms, and is based, for the wall paintings, only on the later evidence from Nuzi. The second assumption is that seals might occasionally be a representation of scenes which are also shown on wall paintings, and that such might be the case with the seal impression published here as Fig. 10.

In any case, what unites the northern artists over the span of about a thousand years, roughly from the prominence of Urkesh to Nuzi, and singles them out from their southern counterparts, is their innate appreciation for strong geometric designs and the possibility of using disarticulated human and animal heads as part of the overall compositions. Geometric frames and borders are basic to their sense of design just as their arrangement of the frontally positioned discrete heads more often falls into a geometric pattern. Their inclusion of certain types of discrete animal and human combinations more than likely reflects other elements in their culture such as northern mythological figures and events which we have still to recognize.

In pointing out parallel features in the third-millennium art of northern Syro-Mesopotamia and second-millennium Nuzi, I am at this point not addressing, nor attempting to address obliquely, a more fundamental question of who

---

<sup>41</sup> Parrot 1958: Pl. XVII. The widespread presence of wall painting in northeastern Syria in the third-millennium is indicated by fragments from Tell Gudeda, level 1 (Fortin 1990: p. 573, Fig. 35) and Tell al Raqa'i, level 4 (Dunham 1993: p. 128, Fig. 1). Painted figures placed in rectangular panels are also seen in the early third-millennium in the Scarlet ware tradition. Scarlet ware was known and probably produced in the north but only with geometric designs on vessel stands. At Urkesh/Mozan we excavated a number in a tomb (Ob1) in the Outer City dating to the ED II period. See the description of the Scarlet ware, late Ninevite V and early Metallic ware from this tomb in Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1991. However the composition of the Scarlet ware designs is very different than the later third-millennium painting now being discovered in Syria. Figures in framed geometric panels existed in the north in the painted Ninevite V tradition (for a collection of these designs, see Numoto 1992). The emphasis on frames is also seen in the Akkadian period "Tigris Group" of cylinder seals published by Boehmer 1965 Nos. 33, 527-28, 664, 665-66 (Wilajeh), 690, 691 (Wilajeh) all Akkadian Ia; Nos. 467 (Susa), 468, 469 (Khafaje), 470-72, 600, 601 (Wilajeh) all Akkadian Ib.

made this art, of whether we can connect the seal impressions at Urkesh/Mozan with an ethnic group, namely the Hurrians. We do know that the king of Urkesh contemporary with the use of the seals discussed here is called Tupkish, a Hurrian name; also we have determined that an important figure in the household of the queen is the nurse Zamena who has a Hurrian name. The royal titulary is also Hurrian. Finally, the two lions of Tiš-atal can now be connected with our site. The queen however has an Akkadian name, Uqnitum, and one of the other important individuals whose goods were kept in the Royal Storehouse is Innin-Šadu, an Akkadian name known from the south.<sup>42</sup>

Attempting to attribute art, or indeed any aspect of material culture, to a specific ethnic group,<sup>43</sup> needs to be approached with a great deal of caution and with theoretical awareness. This question will be taken up later, after we publish our primary data on which it will be based.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Any attempt to reconstruct the history of northern Syria in the third millennium must take into account the relations between Urkesh and Nagar, which is presumably to be identified with Brak. The seal impressions I have published here are shown to be very similar in style to some early Akkadian sealings from the Brak excavations. However, from the viewpoint of the wider historical situation it should be noted that Nagar plays a role in the Ebla tablets while Urkesh does not. Also Brak is very much connected at a slightly later period in the third millennium with Naram-Sin. Geographically there is no physical obstacle between Urkesh and Brak, but Brak appears to have been throughout its history close to the south. From what we know thus far, Urkesh was not. This may suggest that there was some kind of political boundary between Urkesh and Brak, at least in the Akkadian period. See also Archi, 1996, forthcoming.

<sup>43</sup> More than thirty years ago, in a seminal article on Syrian glyptic, Pierre Amiet (1963) gathered the small amount of material then available of this type of Syrian art and reached conclusions which pointed in the same direction I have taken here. More recently, he considered again the possible connection of this material with Hurrian art, specifically thinking in terms of the Nuzi painting (1985).

<sup>44</sup> See Mellink 1975, a fundamental early survey of Hurrian art.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Amiet, Pierre  
 1963 "La glyptique Syrienne Archaïque," *Syria* 40, pp. 57-83.  
 1985 "La glyptique de Mari: Etat de la question," *MARI* 4, pp. 475-85.
- Archi, Alfonso  
 1996 "The Regional State of Nagar According to the Texts of Ebla." *Subartu* 4, (forthcoming).
- Boehmer, Rainer Michael  
 1965 *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik während der Akkad-Zeit*, Berlin.
- Buccellati, Giorgio and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati  
 1991 "Introduction," in Lucio Milano *et al.*, "The Epigraphic Finds of the Sixth Season," *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 5/1, pp. 3-9.  
 1995 "The Identification of Urkesh with Tell Mozan (Syria)," *Orient Express* 1995/3, 67-70.  
 1996a "The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh: First Preliminary Report," *AfO* (forthcoming).  
 1996b "The Seals of the King of Urkesh: Evidence from the Western Wing of the Royal Storehouse AK," *WZKM* (forthcoming).  
 1996c "The Seals of the Royal Household," *Subartu* 4 (forthcoming).
- Buchanan, Briggs  
 1966 *Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum*. Vol. I *Cylinder Seals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Dunham, Sally  
 1993 "A Wall Painting from Tell al-Raqa'i, Northeast Syria," *Levant* 25, 127-43.
- Fortin, Michel  
 1990 "Rapport préliminaire sur la 3<sup>e</sup> campagne de fouilles à Tell 'Atij et la 2<sup>e</sup> à Gudedda, sur le Khabour (Automne 1988)" *Syria* 67, pp. 535-77.
- Frankfort, Henri  
 1955 *Stratified Cylinder Seals from the Diyala Region*. Chicago: OIP 72.  
 1939 *Cylinder Seals*. London.
- Lueth, F.  
 1989 "Tell Halawa B," in W. Orthman, ed. *Halawa 1980-1986*. Saarbrücker Beiträge zur Altertumskunde, Band 52. Bonn, pp. 85-100.
- Machule, D. *et al.*  
 1986 "Ausgrabungen in Tall Munbaqa 1984," *MDOG* 188, pp. 67-145.
- Matthews, Donald  
 1991 "Tell Brak 1990: The Glyptic," *Iraq* 53: 147-57.
- Matthews, R.J., W. Matthews, and H. McDonald  
 1994 "Excavations at Tell Brak, 1994," *Iraq* 56: 177-94.

## Matthiae, Paolo

1989 *Ebla. Un impero ritrovato. Dai primi scavi alle ultime scoperte.* Torino.

## Mellink, Machteld

1975 "Hurriter, Kunst," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 4, 514-19.

## Moortgat, Anton

1960 *Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien. Vorläufiger Bericht über die zweite Grabungskampagne 1959.* "Schriften der Max Freiherr von Oppenheim-Stiftung, Heft 4." Berlin.

## Moortgat, Anton and Ursula-Correns

1976 *Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien. Vorläufiger Bericht über die siebente Grabungskampagne 1974.* "Schriften der Max Freiherr von Oppenheim-Stiftung, Heft 9." Berlin.

## Numoto, Hirotooshi

1992 "Painted Designs of the Ninevite V Pottery — Part 2," *Al-Rafidan* 13, 105-37.

## Orthmann, Winfried

1985 "Art of the Akkade Period in Northern Syria and Mari," *MARI* 4, pp. 469-74.

## Owen, David I. and Gernot Wilhelm

1995 "Preface," *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians, Volume 7: The Edith Porada Memorial Volume.* Bethesda: CDL Press, pp. v-viii.

## Parrot, André

1956 *Le Temple d'Ishtar.* Mission Archéologique de Mari, Vol. I. Paris.

1958 *Le Palais: Peintures murale.* Mission Archéologique de Mari, Vol. II. Paris.

## Porada, Edith

1948 *The Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library, Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections, I,* the Bollingen Series XIV, Washington.

## Reade, Julian

1973 "Tell Taya (1972-73): Summary Report," *Iraq* 35, 155-87.

## Starr, Richard F.S.

1937 *Nuzi. Vol. II Plates and Plans.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

1939 *Nuzi. Vol. I Text.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.