

# Tell Mozan ancient Urkesh

A visitor's guide

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Arabic version by  
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Over the years, we have made a constant effort to preserve and present the site to visitors. Our goal is to explain the monuments and the history of this important ancient city that it is our privilege to be excavating. Our aim in this booklet is to help you share in our privilege. We address the occasional visitors through a format that allows focusing on the essentials, but also the colleagues by providing details that can be appreciated in the ground even more than through publications.

In the first place we want to present the *monuments* we have brought back to light. What you see are the remnants of a broken tradition, which we must reinsert in the mainstream of our cultural consciousness. This is true of all archaeological sites in Syria, but Tell Mozan offers a singularly spectacular example. We would like to show you how you can see ancient Urkesh by walking on modern Tell Mozan.

*Conservation* is a special dimension of our project. We protect the architecture as soon as it is exposed, and we are continuously experimenting with ways to make their fruition more rewarding. In the Palace, we construct individual shelters for each wall: when the curtains are drawn, you get a sense of the architectural volumes; when they are open, you can inspect the original document as it was when first excavated.

Our excavation strategy is such that a concern for *presentation* is inscribed into our work from the very beginning. This is particularly important at this site, where later intrusions are limited, and preservation of the more ancient levels excellent. We wish the coherence of the ancient urban texture to be closely reflected by the modern frame we place on it. Even for archaeologists, the visualization of the whole adds an enlightening dimension to the study of the detail.

Finally, we would like to introduce the occasional visitor to the *nature of archaeology* – explaining in particular the complexities of stratigraphy, which allows us to understand the chronology and the function of buildings long since abandoned. We are not treasure hunters – or rather, the treasure we hunt for is primarily the context within which the individual finds only make sense.

\* \* \*

Be mindful, during your visit, of the unmatched Syrian tradition of hospitality. You will find it in the character of the people, who will welcome you with their unique human warmth. Buy you will also find it in the way in which public policy makes such an enterprise as ours, and such a visit as yours, actually possible. We are privileged to be the guests of the Syrian people and the Syrian government. We want Tell Mozan to match the Syrian tradition and to welcome you in as meaningful a way as possible. For this reason we have prepared the site to serve as a rich experience, and we offer you this text to help you make the most of it.

You will normally find one of our local guards who will accompany you on your visit, and assist you at some of the key junctures. The one who is most knowledgeable about the site is Muhammad Omo, from the village of Mozan on the western side of the mound.

A printed version of this brochure, in English and in Arabic, is available at the site to all our visitors. In addition, there is a folder with some forty plates available for inspection during the tour. They are not referred to in this brochure, but they are arranged in the same sequence as the tour stops: separate sheets with captions will help understand how they relate to the narrative in the brochure. If you would like to prepare ahead of time for your visit, you will find online the full text of the brochure as well as of the folder, with all the photos given in full color. They are given as a single .PDF file that you can download and print if you so desire.

Please remember that it is strictly forbidden to remove anything from the site, not even the smallest sherds. Syrian law is particularly stringent on this score, and there are very severe penalties. We fully concur with the spirit and the letter of the law, which is aimed precisely at protecting a marvelous cultural heritage which is for all of us to share, but which is entrusted to Syria to protect.

We wish you a pleasant and instructive visit to our site.

Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, Directors  
Federico Buccellati and Jamal Omar, Assistant Directors

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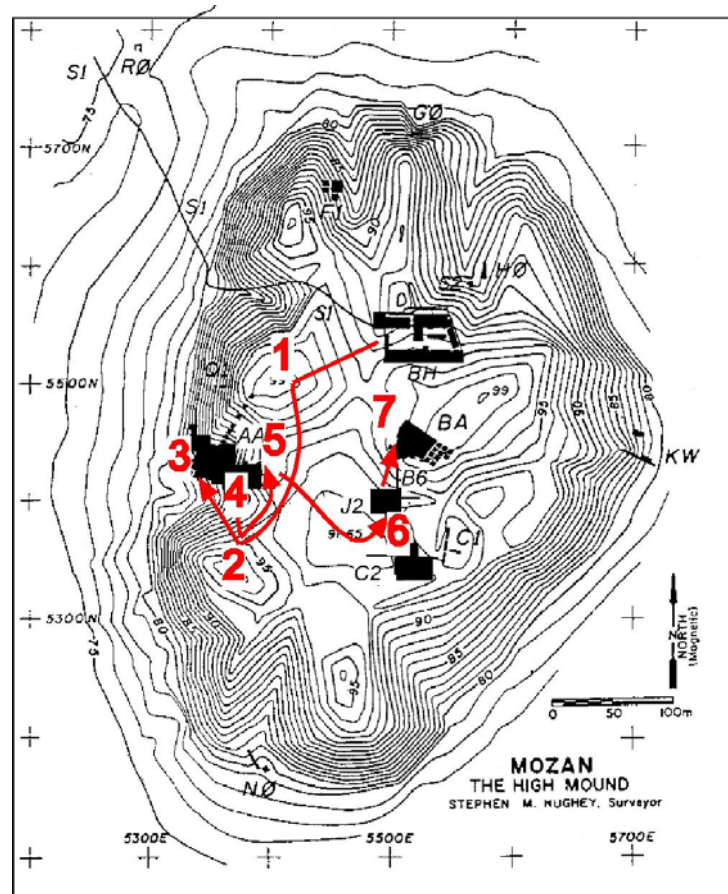
Note. If you are in a hurry, you can limit yourself to the brief tour in Part One. You may at any time go the corresponding portion of the full text for greater insight.

If you have enough time to *study*, and not just visit, the site, you will want to use the text of the full tour and the plates in the folder that the guard has for you.

# PART ONE

## THE EXCAVATIONS AT A GLANCE

The full tour for which the main body of this Guide is intended will require at least a couple of hours. For those in a hurry, here is a half hour version .



Stop 1. Walk to the highest point on the mound, marked by an iron tower. From here you can see the outer boundaries of the ancient city – the northern, towards the mountains, is marked by the high tension line.

Stop 2. As you come to a vista point marked by a metal trellis (called “panorama” locally), you see the Royal Palace dating to about 2250 B.C. You may review the arrangement of space by looking at the plan on p. 11.

Stop 3. You are welcome to enter the Palace (through a breach in the wall, because we have not yet found the entryway). Keeping the same plan in front

of you, you may walk through the various sectors, and as the guard draws some of the curtains, you will appreciate the excellent preservation of the mudbrick walls (especially in the kitchen).

Stop 4. The deep structure covered by a canvas dome is one of the most impressive monuments of ancient Urkesh: a necromantic pit where the spirits of the Netherworld were summoned through rituals known from later Hurrian texts. The antechamber and the upper part of the cylinder date to the time of the Palace, while the lower part is even earlier. At its full depth, the structure may well reach virgin soil, some 6 m. below the lowest point exposed.

Stop 5. Above the Palace there are up to seven meters of later deposition, the phases being marked on the section in front of you. In Phase 4 (about 2100-1900 B.C.) this was an open area serving (unexcavated) houses to the north. Phase 5 goes from about 1900 B.C. to about 1500 B.C.. At first (5a) large pits are dug into phase 4, and they are eventually abandoned and filled with ash. Then (5b) we have graves built like miniature houses. Finally (5c) a general collapse covers the area (the brickfall is clearly visible in the top part of the section). Phase 6 takes us down to about 1300 B.C., when the site was abandoned: small storerooms are visible in the east as you walk past them on your way to the Temple Terrace.

Stop 6. In the center of the tell there was a monumental Terrace, ringed by a stone wall which you see partly exposed to its base and partly visible only in the top courses. It is earlier than the Palace (about 2500 B.C.), and it stood undamaged for some 12 centuries until the site was abandoned. A large staircase, framed by a section with wider steps, allowed access to the top. This is one of the most monumental and best preserved architectural remains of third millennium Syro-Mesopotamia. When first built, it was visible from a wide Plaza about 2 meters lower than the base of the wall. Eventually the Plaza was covered by uniform accumulations which you can see clearly in the sections. You may walk down the steps to see the wall from its base, and then climb the platform top see it, and the staircase, from the top. Behind the wall, and below the slope that rises to the Temple, there is another Terrace, about 1000 years earlier than the one you see today.

Stop 7. The Temple was the first structure we excavated at Mozan, in 1984. It dates to the same time period as the (later) Terrace. Being immediately below the surface, only the stone foundations of the walls were preserved, with a stone ramp in front of the doorway. We believe that it is from this ramp that the famous lions of Tish-Atal came (now in the Louvre and the Metropolitan). We have reconstructed part of the mudbrick walls above the stone foundations. The floor level of the Temple was about 12 meters above the Plaza, and about 27 above the ancient plain level. Since the rises that encircle today the Temple Terrace are all from the second millennium, in the early periods the Temple would have been visible from great distances.

# PART TWO

## A TOUR OF THE EXCAVATIONS

Welcome to Tell Mozan! We have been excavating here since 1984, when we proposed that this might be the site of ancient Urkesh. We were able to prove this identification in 1995, on the basis of written evidence from the Royal Palace.

The site map shows the major areas where excavations have taken place on the High Mound. This is about 600 meters in length, and the Outer City almost a kilometer and a half, so that the ancient city reached an extension of some 130 hectares. The maximum height of the mound above virgin soil is about 28 meters. The site is accordingly one of the very largest of third millennium Syria.

This booklet is intended to help visitors on a self-guided tour, which follows the arrow shown on the map (p. 5). The stops along the tour are highlighted on the inside of this booklet. Points of particular interest are discussed in greater detail in Part Two below, which is devoted to special topics and to background information, and additional illustrations are contained on various posters and reading stands, as well as in a folder available for inspection from one of our guards, who will lead you through this tour.

### Tour stop 1. The Outer City

The highest point on the tell provides a good view of the surroundings, in particular the fertile plain in which the site is located, and the mountain range of the Tur-Abdin (today in Turkey), which was the major hinterland of ancient Urkesh. We are here at about 500 meters above sea level.

You can also see both to the north and to the south the Outer City wall, which today is visible as a slight rise above the plain level. To the north the perimeter is cut by the high tension power line (in red on the map) which was set in place shortly after the beginning of our excavations. We investigated the large holes that had been dug during our absence, and we could determine that the five holes within the perimeter did contain cultural material, while the others did not. This confirmed the notion that the rise did in fact correspond to a boundary delimiting the inside of the ancient city. Two soundings we made were inconclusive with regard to the nature of this city wall, but a geophysical survey has provided further verification of the existence of a con-

tinuous line that can only be interpreted as the stone foundations of the outer city wall.



The Outer City developed to its fullest extent about the middle of the third millennium. At that point in time, an earlier city wall which had been built around what is now the High Mound became inoperative, though it continued as a boundary between the inner and the outer areas of the city (and contributed to shaping the High Mound in such a way that it still shows a steep slope all around its perimeter). We have excavated the inner city wall in two locations, shown as **a** and **b** on the map.

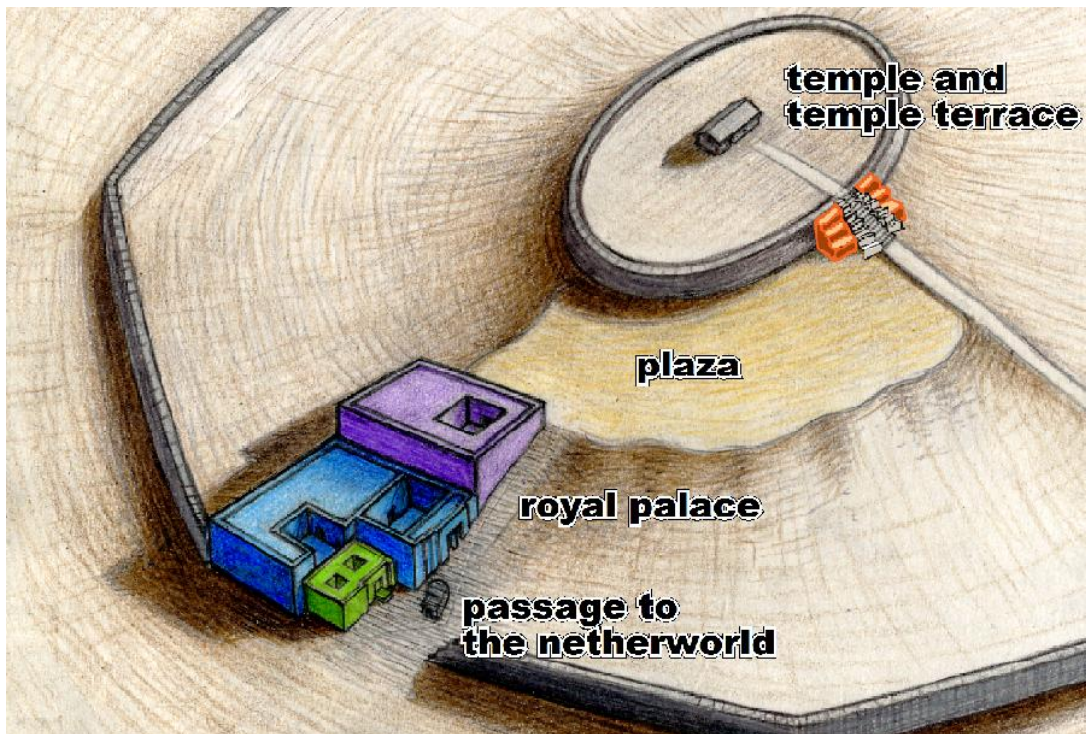
The Outer City was occupied only during the remainder of the millennium, while during the second millennium the city shrank and was reduced



to the High Mound. Various soundings in the Outer City have shown that it was used in a variety of ways – for houses and administrative buildings, for burial grounds, while in part it was also left empty.

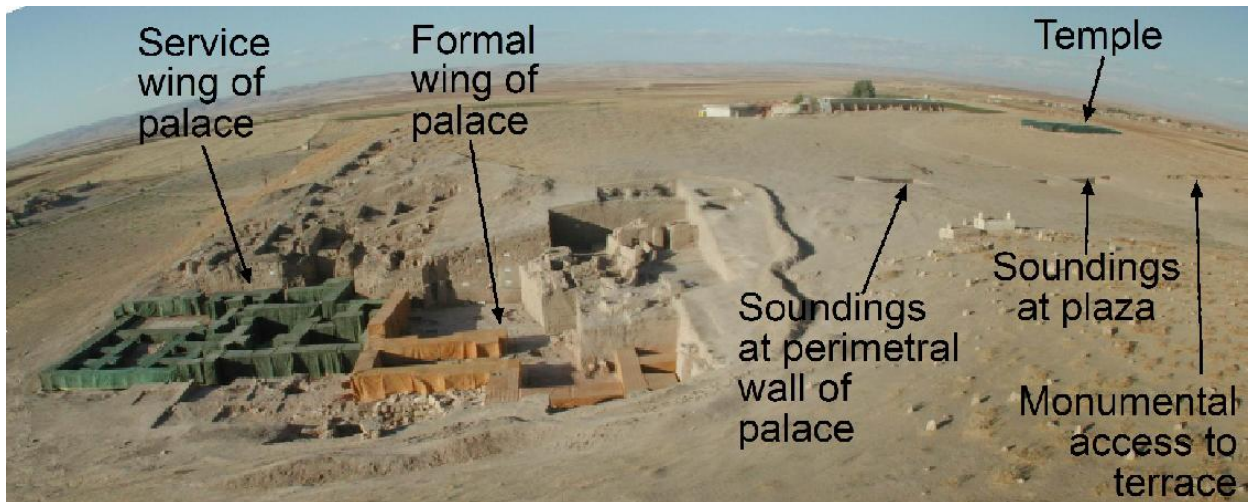
## Tour stop 2. The monumental urban complex

From where you stand, you gain a commanding view of one of the most extraordinary urban complexes of ancient Syro-Mesopotamia. Much of it remains to be excavated, so you need to use the eyes of the archaeologist to see the whole picture that will eventually emerge. You can also gain a good appreciation of what “stratigraphy” means – a fundamental concept that allows us to place seemingly unrelated ruins in a meaningful chronological sequence. Finally, you can see the effects of an ambitious conservation program that renders at its best the architectural volumes of the ancient buildings while at the same time preserving the evidence.



The Tупkish Palace (with the walls covered in green and yellow) was built around 2250 B.C. in such a way as to link two sacral structures that predated it. A lower sacral area consists of an open area (the excavations you see in the foreground) leading to a cave-like underground place (which we have covered with a cupola): this is the *âbi* where the king consulted the spirits of the

Netherworld. At your extreme right, a temple was standing atop a huge terrace. At the time of the Palace, there were no other hilltops as you see today, so that temple and terrace dominated the landscape, much as a ziggurat



would in the south.

A wide plaza linked the Palace and the Temple, so that the whole ensemble constituted an organic whole of vast proportions (almost 250 meters from west to east). While such a type of urban planning is by no means exclusive to Urkesh, the ambitious use of stone and the degree of preservation are indeed unique. If you come back in a few years, you should be able to see, from this same vantage point, a real wonder. Will it match our current expectations? We are as eager as you to find out... It is in this way, too, that you can share the feeling that dominates archaeological work – always being on the crest of discovery, and trying to visualize the potential whole on the basis of available clues. These guide us in the excavation, and lead us to constantly redefine our goals.

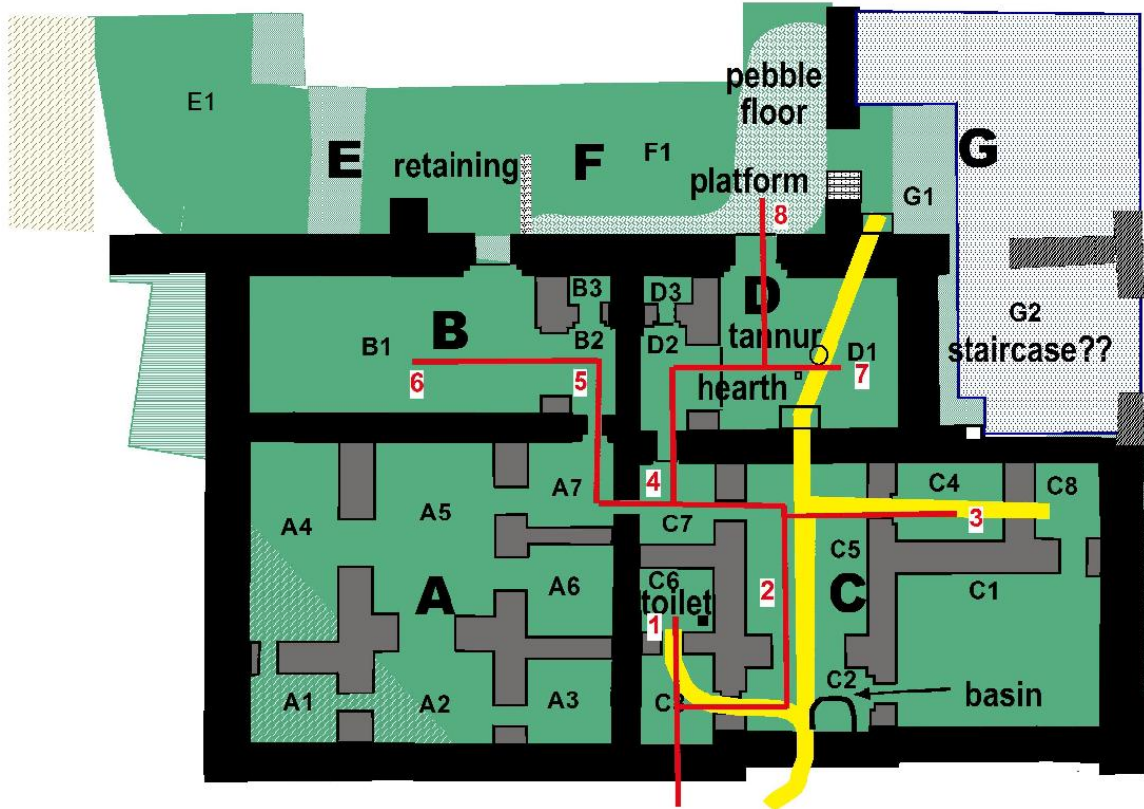
### Tour stop 3. The Palace of Tupkish

Before you go down to enter the Palace, have another look at it from here. You will see a larger version of the floor plan in the Folder (plate F6), together with several other overall views taken from the kite and while the excavations are in progress.

The Tupkish Palace has two levels, which you can see well from here. The lower level is shown in green, and corresponds to the service wing, which has been completely excavated. Here were housed the kitchen (sector D), the storage of important goods belonging to the royal family (B), and probably work areas for the care of the royal household (C). The fourth sector (A) was too eroded to allow any inference about its function.

The higher level, shown in yellow, was the formal wing of the Palace, where the king and his family lived and activities of government took place. It

is raised about 2.5 meters above the service wing. You see from here how much remains to be excavated, to the north and to the east – perhaps twice as much as we have exposed already. In the coming years we will concentrate on the eastern portion, after having excavated (and then removed) the higher levels with the houses of the later periods.



We have not yet found the entrance to the Palace, so we enter through a gap in the walls. We are in Sector C, and the first room we see is a toilet (**N. 1** on the plan). In the corner there is a shaft of baked bricks next to which there must have been a jar with water that was evacuated through the drain in the middle of the doorway.

In the next room (**N.2**) the main drain is exposed below the level of the earliest floor. It is made of large stones, that cover a channel made of mudbricks. It is bonded with the foundations of the walls, and it originates in the northern portion of the formal wing. This, together with the great symmetry in the layout of the building, indicates that the Palace was conceived as a unitary structure and built as a single operation.

Our next stop (**N.3**) is in a room where we found a cuneiform tablet that records good for “the governor.” Behind the protective tarps you see the mudbrick wall perfectly preserved as when first excavated (see N. 7 under Special Topics). Notice the different height of the stone substructure: to the east it is very low, because this only a partition wall, but to the north it is high because it serves to buttress the perimetral wall whose function it is to contain



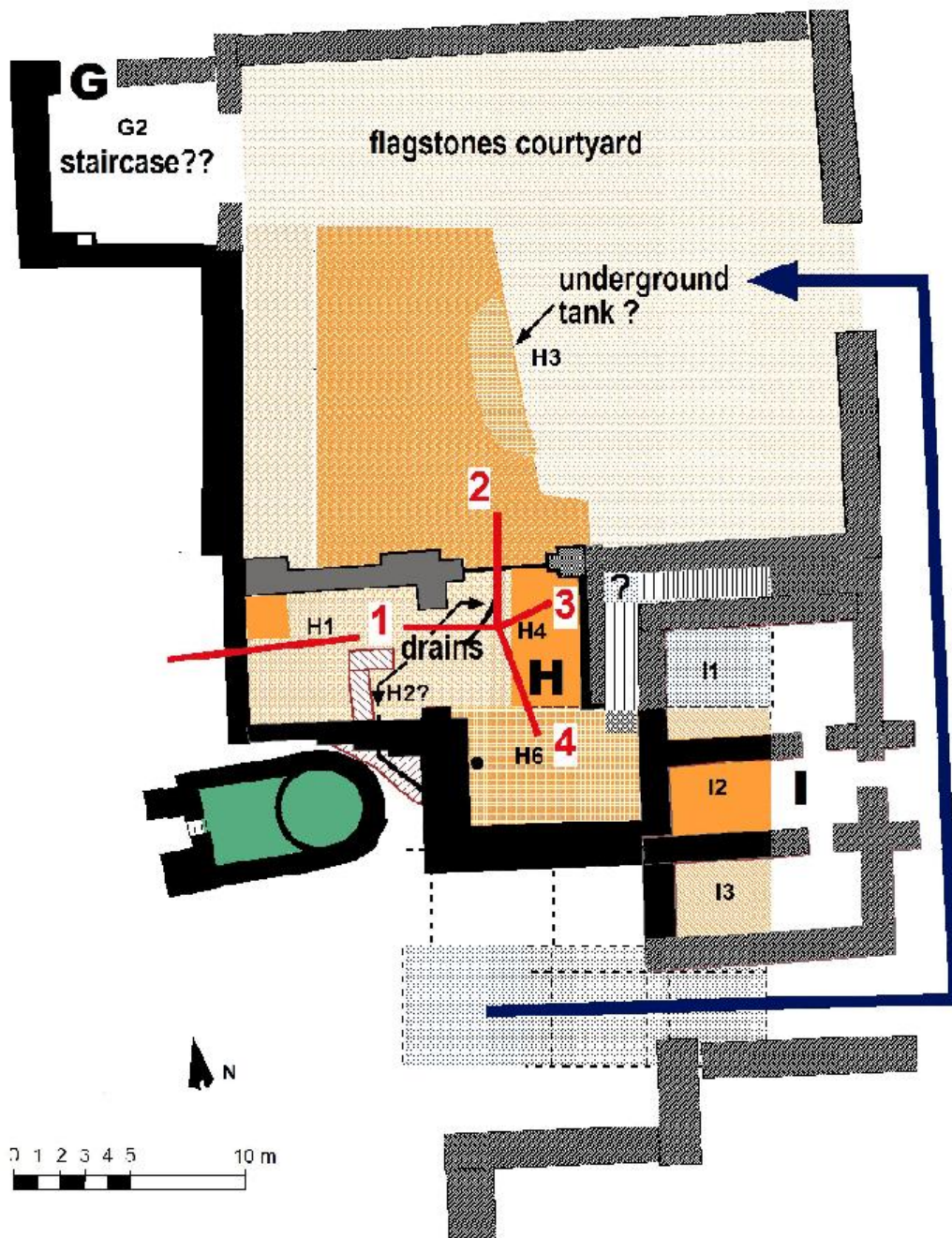
the thick packing on which rest the floors of the formal wing of the Palace (2.5 m higher than in this room).

Rooms A7 and C7 (N.4), very small and with three doorways, could not have allowed any activity but for a guard to control access to inner sectors of the Palace.

Stop N.5 is an *ivān* (B2), i.e., a narrow room with a large opening on the broad side: it is repeated in each of the other sectors (A2,C2,D2), thus highlighting the organic nature of the design.

We enter now the large storeroom (N.6), where the majority of the sealings of Tupkish and his court were found (see Special Topics, N. 6). They were used to seal containers with goods for the royal household, and were dropped when the container was opened. The wall that shows under the tarp is the oldest in terms of excavation, since it was exposed in 1990.

The kitchen (N.7) can be so identified because of the large tannur in the center, other cooking installations and the many impressions of two seals of Tuli, the “female cook of the queen.” The walls behind the tarps are among the best preserved in the Palace - and they were excavated between 1992 and 1997. Notice the difference between the red bricks in the lower courses and the grey bricks above. The red bricks belong to the first construction (phase 2), when large quantities were needed, and so were made from the red clay found in the fields. The grey bricks belong to the later phase 3b, when the accumulations in the Palace had risen to a point where it was necessary to raise the walls – and this was done with material from the tell itself. Keep this in mind – it will help explain a detail of the *âbi* history. And it is only because of the way the original walls have been preserved that you can follow this argument...



We retrace our steps and enter the formal wing through a gap in the wall, because here, too, we have not yet found the original entrance. (Presumably it is to the south, leading to the courtyard in the direction of the arrow.)

Stop **N.1** is a room that originally was plastered and with a good floor, but was badly damaged in antiquity. It is here (in the place marked by a small metal box) that we found the seal impressions of Tar'am-Agade, the daughter

of Naram-Sin (see Special Topics and Folder). The tannur under the other metal box shows that the later, non Palace use of the room began when no accumulation had taken place on the original floor.

The courtyard (N.2) has a beautiful stone pavement, of which only a small portion is visible under the metal box (see the Folder a full view). The exposed part is probably only about one fourth of the entire courtyard, which we expect to expose in coming years.

The small room (N.3) is also rather damaged, but in the northeast corner we found a tablet (see in the Folder) with the floor plan of three rooms that seem to match the three rooms I1-3 (N.4): it must have been an architect's plan drawn up for the crew of workmen responsible for the construction of this particular suite – another important detail that confirms our earlier conclusion that the Palace had indeed been built all at once over a relatively short period of time.

## Tour stop 4. The *âbi*

When you first enter the *âbi*, you may think of it as a well. That's what we thought at first, too. But then, several aspects militated against it. The most obvious was that the deposition inside it was very regular, as if within a house: if this were an abandoned well, we would find a dump, not evenly layered accumulations. (We have left a small witness of this in the southwest corner, to the right of the last step of the staircase.)

Its real nature became clear after a careful study of the animal bones – thereby proving how essential paleo-zoology is for any archaeological research. The majority of the animals were piglets and puppy dogs, a mixture that is not otherwise found in the excavations. It is, however, a mixture that is characteristic of a typically Hurrian ritual for the evocation of the spirits of the Netherworld. The texts relating these rituals are found in the Hittite archives dating some 1000 years after our structure, but there is no doubt that they refer to the same religious tradition. It is from these texts that we know the ancient name was *âbi*.

The ritual entailed digging a shallow pit (at times, it would have been only a circle drawn in the ground, since the tool used was a dagger or a pin), within which the animals would be sacrificed. Our structure, then, is like a monumental frame for such pits, of which many examples have in fact been found inside the circular portion of the *âbi* (one is visible at the level where the current excavations have stopped).

Besides the animal bones, the few artifacts we found confirm the interpretation. See in particular the little anthropomorphic jar and the spout of another jar in the shape of a pig's head (both in the *Folder* ).

In front of the *âbi*, excavations are currently in progress to elucidate how access was gained to it. In the long east-west section that we have left in the center you will notice a series of horizontal layers: from the nature of the deposition we know that they were outdoor accumulations, and from the pottery that they all date to phase 3 of the Palace. Many vessels were found whole: they may have served the purposes of the rituals conducted inside the *âbi*. Of great importance was also the find of a seal impression with the name of a new *endan* of Urkesh. These finds seem to suggest that there was some kind of enclosure that delimited the sacral area.

Such a possible enclosure may have contained another sacral element. Against the wall of the Palace you will notice a platform, partly cut by a later pit: in the southern wall of this pit there is a stone drain. We have hypothesized that this may be what is known from later Hurrian texts as a KASKAL.KUR, a Sumerian logogram that means “road to the Netherworld.” If so, it is the counterpart of the *âbi*: through the latter, the spirits of the Netherworld come to the surface, through the former humans send liquids down into the earth.

This complex reveals to us a notion of the divinity very different from southern Mesopotamia. There, god does not as a rule speak directly, but only through multiple signs that can be interpreted on the basis of their predictability. In our Hurrian context the deity is perceived as speaking directly and in a wholly unpredictable way, so as to require a medium who can interpret the sound of its voice.

In the Folder you will find a schematic rendering of the depositional history of the *âbi*. The earliest phase (before the Palace) was a plain pit, and only during Phase 3 was it covered with a roof and was made accessible through the square antechamber. Thus the *âbi* acquired the look of a cave-like structure that we see today.

## Tour stop 5. The later settlements

As you retrace your steps, you will climb up along the hill that is made up of houses built after the Palace was abandoned. Here you gain a good idea of how a tell was formed. What looks from the outside like a natural hill, is in fact an accumulation of ancient strata all covered in the end by soil and vegetation. But the pottery sherds visible everywhere in this topsoil told us, even before excavations, that this was a manmade tell, and during which periods it was inhabited. If you look at the chronological table, you can correlate what

you see in front of you to very specific dates and names that go back thousand of years.

The Palace was built under Tupkish and Uqnitum and used during the subsequent two rulers, Tar'am-Agade's husband and Ishar-napshum. By the turn of the third millennium, the Palace is abandoned and the settlements begin in this general area. At first, the houses are only to the north (remnants of some are preserved under the plastic covers you see in the distance), and the area above the Service Wing of the Palace (in green) became the ground where communal activities were performed and goods temporarily stored in an outdoor situation – much as you see to the left in the modern village of Mozan. This is Phase 4, from which time we have the name of three kings of Urkesh: Sadar-mat, Atal-shen and Ann-atal. The lower part of the large northern section shows regular surfaces marked by lines of pebbles.

The next settlements date to the first part of the second millennium, when the city was, at least nominally, under the control of the king of Mari, who installed here two governors whose names, Terru and Haziran, are no longer Hurrian. But the people most likely retained a strong sense of Hurrian ethnic identity, and several of the artifacts in the houses of this period bear witness to this. Some of these objects are illustrated in the Folder. The large northern section shows a deep cut that reaches all the way down to the floor of the Palace across the phase 4 accumulations. On top of the fills contained within these cuts are small house-like structures that served a funerary purpose. So this is like a small quarter of the dead, with a fairly wide open area separating it from a building whose wall you begin to see in the foreground. We will be excavating in full the eastern portion of this settlement before we descend to the Palace, and we want to keep the current structures in good shape to provide a good horizontal exposure of the settlement when excavations are completed. For this reason, the structures are covered and to see how they look like when uncovered you have to turn to the photographs in the *Folder*.

At the top of the large section you see the massive brickfall that marked the end of the Khabur period settlement, on top of which came, without any interruption, the settlement of the Mittani period, the last one of ancient Urkesh. Excavations of the 2004 season showed that this was more than a mere rural village, even though small in size. There is a stone pavement that served as a border to the houses (a portion of it is visible in the rectangular excavations on the way to the temple). Then a storehouse was built on top of this pavement, in which some 15 bronze objects were found, and some possible school tablets, suggesting the existence of a scribal school. None of this goes well with the idea of a simple village. The answer came with the excavation of the Temple terrace.



## Tour stops 6-7.

### The High Temple and its Terrace

You walk across a flat surface that is not very unlike the one that would have been here 4000 years ago, only some 8 meters below the current surface... It was then a plaza that linked the Palace with a huge Temple Terrace, of which we are beginning to see the outline. On top, stood a relatively small temple, which was the object of our very first excavations in 1984. It was clear from the beginning that the temple stood atop a huge man-made structure, because the temple dated back to about 2350 B.C. and it was about 27 m above the ancient plain level. A verification of this was made by an excavation made by our German colleagues Peter Pfälz-ner and Heike Dohmann-Pfälz-ner, who worked along-side us for a brief period. They excavated the area C2 (to the south) and linked it with the Temple to establish a stratigraphic link. In the process, they identified the terrace, bounded by stones. They brought in a team to do a geo-physical survey, that showed how the terrace formed a large oval. This we are currently in the process of excavating.

The Terrace is a massive construction, of which you see here only the very top. The architectural drawing on Plate is a projection based on solid evidence, and in a few years you should be able to see most of it exposed at least in the southwestern portion, which is the most significant one. The circumference wall is very high, 6-7 meters above the level of Palace and Plaza. Quite early on, perhaps even by the middle of the third millennium, the area to the east and the north came to be occupied by buildings resting on the Terrace and presumably servicing the Temple. Thus the monumental access remained intact only to the southwest.

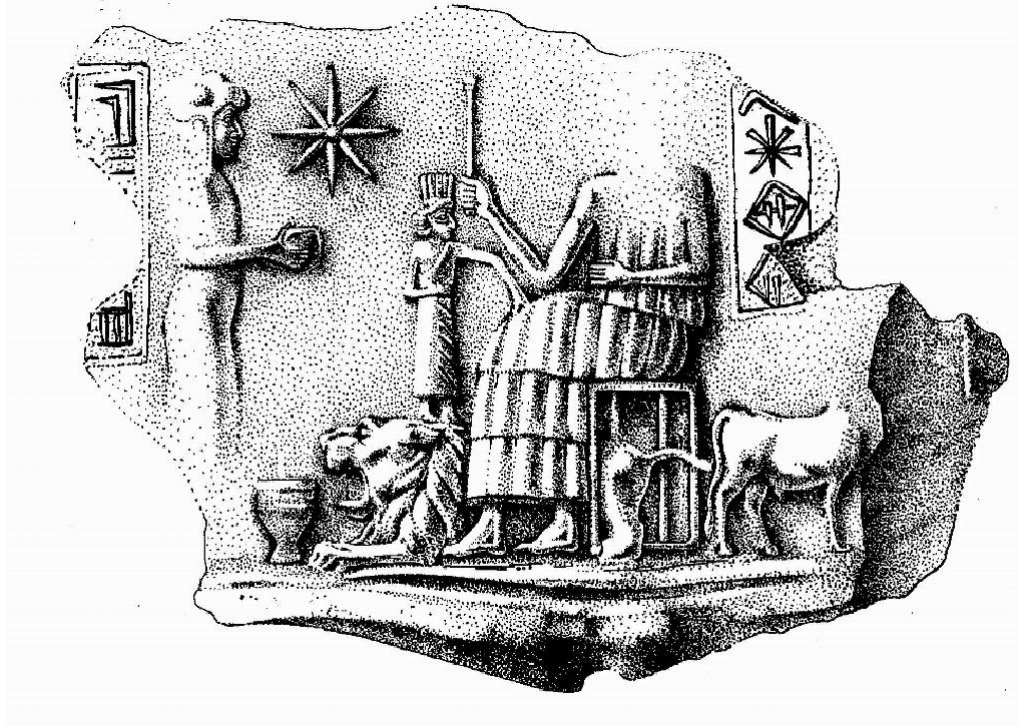
Of the temple at the top of the Terrace we have only the outline, but from the little preserved on the floor we can date it to between 2400 and 2300 B.C. We think it is from its foundation box that the lions of Tish-atal came (Plate ): there is no other place on the top of the tell where there would have been a third millennium structure, and the gap you can see in the stones of the access ramp may represent its original place. It may have come about when local villagers started digging a hole for a tomb: having encountered the heavy stones, they moved the cemetery to the north east, where it now stands. (See Topics for the ongoing conservation experiment.)

The reason why the Terrace walls are so well preserved is because they were in use until the very end of the occupation of ancient Urkesh. By Mittani times the settlement had shrunk to a very modest size, but it still remained a sacral center. The Mittani temple at the top is completely eroded, but the terrace stood to the same height that you see now – for the accumulations that we have removed all date to that period. This explains the anomaly noted earlier, namely that though small Urkesh could not have been a mere village.

Plate 40 in the Folder shows a reconstruction: it includes the oval as it stands today, though most likely only in the southwest, and a plaza still linking the terrace wall (barely showing at a height of 1 to 2 meters) to the houses: the stone pavement we noted earlier marked the edge between the houses and the plaza. This also provides a plausible explanation for the end of Urkesh. Once Mittani disappeared, and the Assyrians took over, there was no more constituency for a Hurrian cult. It had remained such since the beginning, clinging to a tradition most specifically embodied in the High Temple. But with the loss of Hurrian identity, Urkesh had no more reason to exist, and it vanished.

## PART THREE

### SPECIAL TOPICS



The site of Urkesh has yielded significant new information about a very important period in early Syrian history. The Hurrians built a civilization that proved to be very influential for the whole of the ancient Near East. And Urkesh is the only city of the third millennium that can safely be considered as a major religious and political center of the Hurrians.

In this flyer, we present some of the highlights that define this civilization, such as they have emerged from our excavations. It is in the nature of an archaeological project that every new turn of the spade yields new insights, on the strength of which we must redefine our earlier understanding. As a visitor to our site, you are privileged in sharing this sense of discovery: with us, the archaeologists, you, too, are on the crest of a wave that moves relentlessly forward. We hope you will enjoy being part, through your visit, of this exciting intellectual adventure.



## Topic 1. Urkesh and the Hurrians

The Hurrians were a small, but influential, population of the ancient Near East. Until our excavations, they were known primarily from the second millennium (most scholars assumed that that was when they first came into the region). The discovery of Urkesh has now pushed back the earliest evidence for the Hurrians well into the third millennium. This is no small feat: Urkesh is not just another city along the many we know from Syro-Mesopotamia; it is a window into a new civilization, in many ways alternative to that of the Sumerians, the Akkadians and the Amorites.

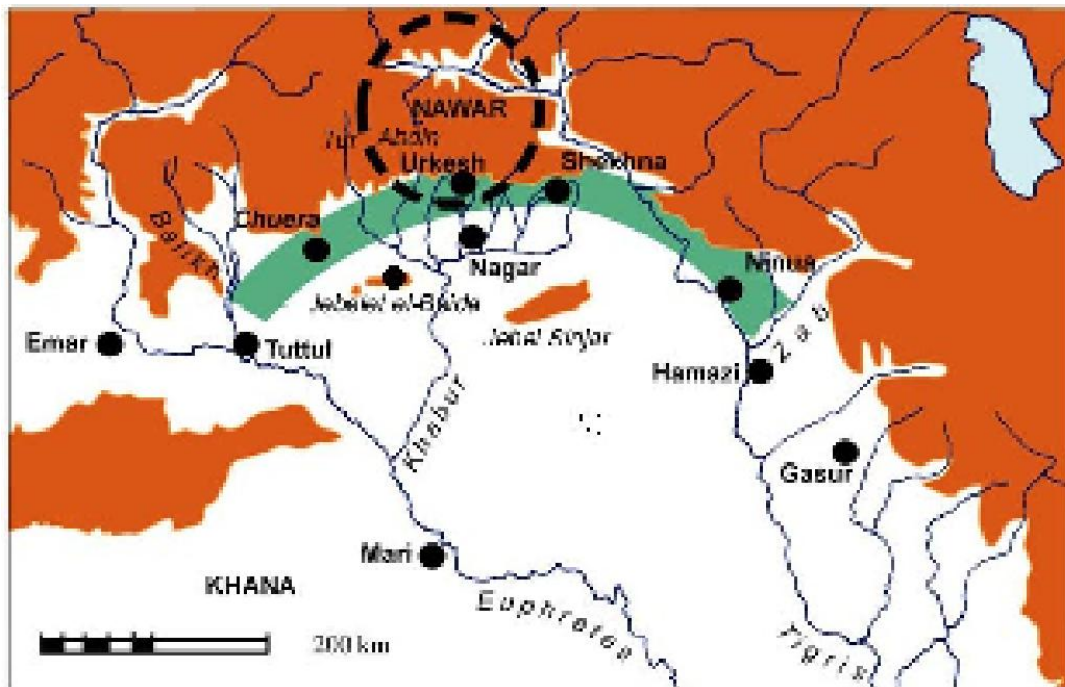
The most distinctive trait is their language, which is wholly unique, unrelated to any other known ancient or living language. We do not have many Hurrian texts as yet from Urkesh, but they are the earliest known in this language.

Also very distinctive is their religion. Their myths were preserved in later periods by the Hittites, and they reflect a mountain environment, with particular reference to volcanic phenomena that are, understandably, unknown in the southern mythologies. Urkesh plays a central role in these myths as the seat of the ancestral god of the Hurrian pantheon, Kumarbi. Even more important is the cult. The *âbi* is a wholly unique structure that gives evidence of necromantic rituals in clear contrast with the religious mentality of the Sumerians and the Akkadians (see Tour p. 4). Thus it is not just that the Hurrians had deities with different names: rather, they had developed quite an alternative conception of the divine world and of the means through which humans can get in touch with it.

Politically, it is significant that the rulers of Urkesh used a Hurrian royal title not otherwise known for any other Syro-Mesopotamian kingdom – *endan*. This amounted to an explicit affirmation of ethnic identity and political self-assertion, all the more significant since at that very moment the Akkadian empire was expanding throughout Syro-Mesopotamia. And the only full length third millennium Hurrian text known so far, the inscription of Tishatal, is a political text recording the building of a temple in Urkesh.

As of now, no other archaeological site can claim the same type of evidence for Hurrian identity as we have for Urkesh. To some extent, this is because there were probably only few properly Hurrian cities, distributed along the piedmont arc of what is now northern Syria – which we have called the Hurrian urban ledge. This points to the centrality of Syria in the history of civilization. It is more appropriate to think of it as a pivot, rather than a cross-road (as is often said), of civilizations. One does not go through Syria to get somewhere else. Rather, fundamental new patterns of political organization and ideological conceptualization originate here. And excavations like those

of ancient Urkesh are the only way in which we can understand this fundamental role of Syria in world history.



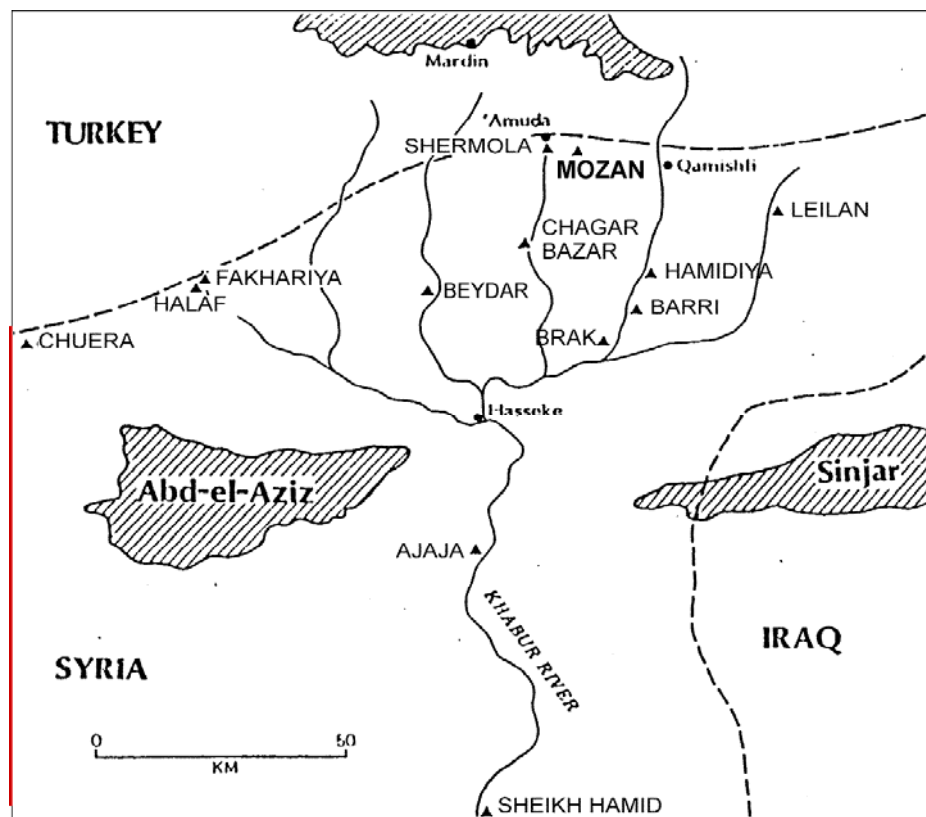
## Topic 2. The region

The Khabur plains of Eastern Syria played a major role in the development of early urban civilization. On some level they may have rivaled the high civilizations of the Sumerians in the alluvial plains to the south. *Agriculture* is one of the factors that accounted for this development. The area was as fertile in antiquity as it is today, and farming has always been possible by relying on rainfall alone, without the need for irrigation. This provided a rich hinterland for the growing new cities that reached very large sizes in the very first stages of urban history. The great sites of Chueira, Brak, Mozan and Leilan pay eloquent witness to this.

It is a safe assumption that one main reason for the rise to power of a city like Urkesh was its key position on the *trade* routes between the Anatolian highlands rich in copper and the great urban civilizations to the South. The saddle of Mardin, so visible today in the Mozan landscape, is symbolic in this respect. The large amount of bronze objects found in our excavations may also be due to the significance of ancient Urkesh as a major gateway for the metal trade in ancient Syrian history.

The regional role of Syria has often been described with reference to its neighbors. In this perspective, Syria is viewed typically as a crossroads of civilization. That is a valid assessment, in that it addresses the historical dyna-

mism of the country and its people, but it is quite incomplete if from it we deduce that Syria was primarily a stepping stone to some other more important reality. In fact, Syria has typically been not so much a crossroads as a *pivot of civilizations*. And nowhere else is this more applicable than in the case of Urkesh. In the third millennium, the Hurrians of Urkesh developed an alternative model to the southern urban experiment of the Sumerians, a model based on ethnic identity more than on territorial contiguity. The cultural uniqueness of Urkesh is in part the result of its geographical uniqueness: against the backdrop of the mountains, it combined the urban potential of the plains with the ability to exploit less easily accessible resources of the highlands. This contributed to shape its unique religious and political traditions, and to safeguard it from the aggressive expansionism of the empire of Akkad.



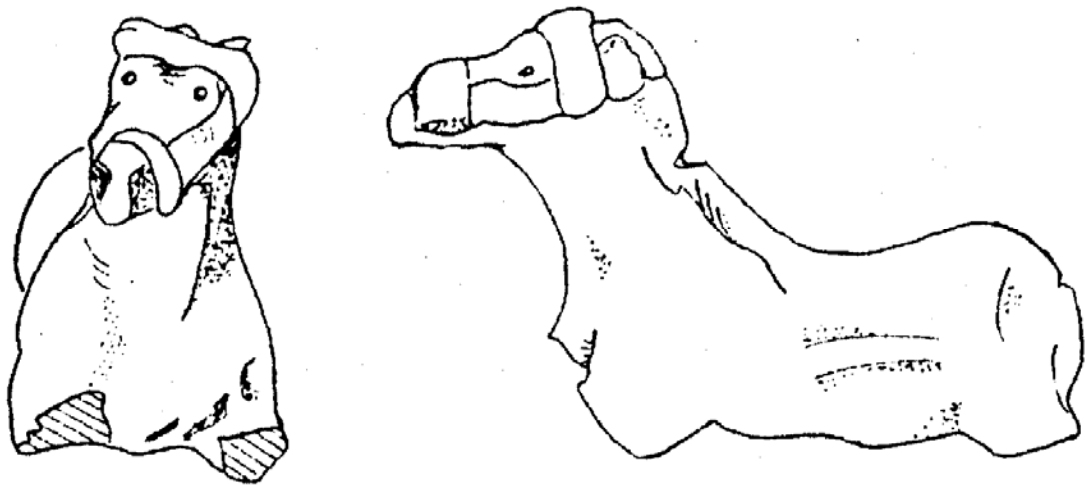
### Topic 3. Figurines

The figurine corpus from ancient Urkesh is large. These small figures made of clay are remarkable for a straightforward realism that documents the fauna of the area. They are made by people who know animals. A paleozoologist can identify many species by body type and anatomical detail. Whether a knee joint is expressed or not, for example, distinguishes carnivore

from herbivore. The way animals behave is accurately observed. A sheep in a flock holds its head high so as not to get caught in brush; an equid brays, muzzle thrust up and out.

Some of Mozan's figurines represent wild species (bones have been found of at least 24) – wild sheep, as well as bears and other carnivores – lean and muscular cats, hyenas with striped pelt. Domestic species can also be recognized – bulls and fat-tailed sheep and goats and curly-tailed dogs.

Less certain as to species but also present among our figurines are the equids, probably three or four members of the genus – wild horses and hemions and asses. Stratified material remains can not put the date of domestication of equids much beyond the beginning of the second millennium. Among the figurines of Mozan, we have preliminary evidence of earlier domestication of equids and likely of the horse itself. While gestural reality can startle (a stallion's head caught in half-turn to the right, as example), it is the detail which we take as diagnostic, changes which came with taming – long mane lying along the neck on rider's left, forelock, well-defined eye-ridges, sharp breast-line. An analysis of stance has also contributed to the identifica-



tion of domesticated animals. And, at Mozan, a number of equid figurines have harnesses – small circular marks or more realistic gear.

Technical characteristics – color, medium, manufacture – may hold clues to function. Size, too, must be important, for a large number of the Mozan figurines are quite small, miniatures in effect. Domestic objects – bowls, jars, beds – are also represented in miniature.

By contrast with animal figurines, human representations in clay are rare at Mozan. While recognizable, most are simple and highly stylized, as if they were defined by function – gaming pieces, perhaps, or tokens. [R. Hauser].



## Topic 4. Ceramics

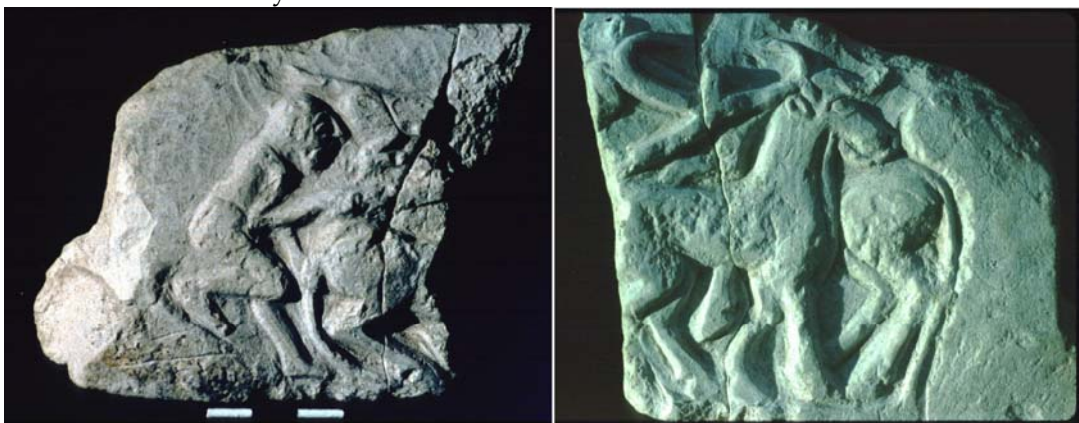
Excavations in the palace have yielded rooms and courtyards with large numbers of ceramics in situ. From the permanent installations within rooms and courtyards and the large quantity of sherds and whole vessels excavated in them we have been able to determine the function of several of these spaces. Generally long term storage is done in large shouldered jars with flat or convex bases (A15. 253, 246). Since they had a narrow neck they may have been used for storing either liquids or solids. Large wide mouth jars were convenient for scooping out solids and are often decorated with rope decoration (A15.244). Short term storage vessels are smaller and have restricted entry because the contents (either liquid or solid) can easily be poured out. They usually have a rounded base (A15.311) and may have occasionally been placed in a stand as we do find a few in the ceramic record. While there are few large serving trays found at the site, we do have a large number of medium and small bowls (A15.304) that could have been used for the serving of food. Often the bowls are quickly made and cut off the wheel leaving string marks on the base. Conical cups predominate in the palace strata; most were thrown quickly and also cut from the wheel with a string (A15.305). Experiments we have conducted show that if the clay is prepared ahead, a single potter can produce 500 conical cups a day. One of these storerooms of the formal wing of the palace, dating to Phase 3, contained all of the vessels just discussed, so we are certain that the ceramic assemblage was in use during the same period.

Some ceramic vessels are rare in the excavations and may have been imported or only used in a ritual context. Two such vessels come from the strata near the entrance of the *âbi*. They have a short neck, globular body and round base. What makes them unusual are the two vertical handles with horizontal holes pierced in them, attached to the widest part of the body (A14.122). Even more striking is the fact that dark brown paint is applied to the body and base and then the firing was such that a darker horizontal line appeared between the lower part of the vessel and the unfired bright orange neck and rim. This type of paint and firing has only been found previously in shallow bowls.



## Topic 5. Sculpture

In a burnt level above and slightly behind the main altar of temple BA we discovered a small statue of a lion dated to the last quarter of the third millennium on the basis of stratigraphic evidence. While lions are found in the sculptural repertoire of the Sumerians, whose artistic tradition is contemporary with our lion, the style is however quite different. The Sumerians depict lions with highly patterned manes which look more like a medieval ruff than a lion mane. Their eyes are also very stylized. It is almost as if they had never seen a lion! Our Urkesh lion may not look as neat as its southern counterparts, but it does look much more like a real lion. The overall impression of the Urkesh lion is one of a combination of unsophisticated charm, in part due to his fuller proportions, and a sturdy vitality quite lacking elsewhere in this time period. The only possible comparisons for our lion are the two Urkesh lions, now in the Metropolitan and the Louvre. These bronze lions are more realistically rendered and are created by a more sophisticated artist, but their liveliness and vitality are the same as the one excavated at the site.



Also from the area of the temple came a small stone stela carved on both sides. This freestanding monument depicts on one side a group of animals with the unusual feature that all the animals are shown in movement. On the other side all the animals are depicted in a naturalistic composition that gives the feeling of a milling animal herd. On the opposite side of the stela the theme is even more striking. A plowman is shown holding his plow behind a draft animal while his dog is placed above him. The plowman is positioned at one end of the scene with a diagonal line behind him. Dramatically the plowman has his right foot against this line as if he is pushing off, as it were, from the diagonal. This forward thrust is accentuated by the forward bend of the body and head of the plowman and the movement shown in the legs of his draft animal. This emphasis on movement is not found in Sumerian art but appears in battle reliefs of the Akkadian period.

From a later stratum dating to the last years of the third millennium came a clay statuette, 29cm tall, of a nude female with a bowl-like depression on the top of her head. She wears a necklace, has pierced ears and double lobed earrings. This type of earring is found in gold at other third millennium sites such as in the Royal Cemetery at Ur. The depression on top of her head may have been the anchor for a headdress or may have contained another object during certain periods of time, as would possibly be necessary for cult functions. Two other heads are striking, one of stone with deep holes for eyes) and a second painted example of a man with painted moustache and kafiah-like headdress.

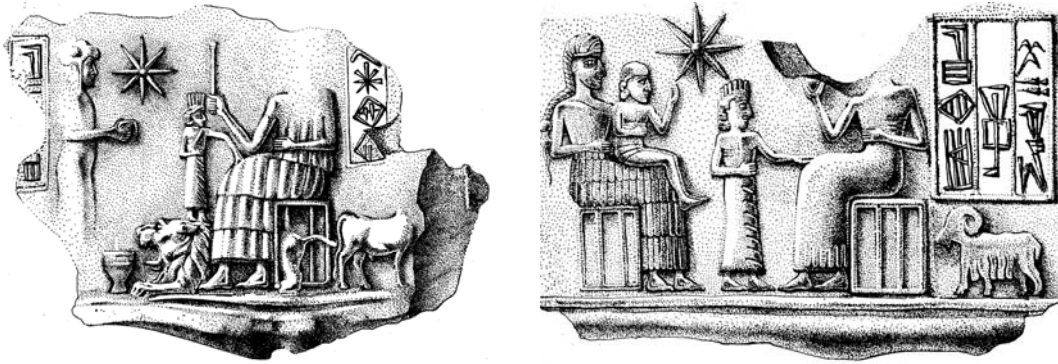


## Topic 6. seals

## The

The Urkesh/Mozan excavations have yielded a large corpus of seal impressions, mostly fragmentary, which in antiquity sealed boxes, jars, or baskets. Some of these impressions were used to seal doors of buildings or individual storerooms. At this point over a thousand impressions from rollings of over 100 different seals have been found. Of these impressions about 150 contain seal inscriptions. In addition a number of cuneiform tablets from the Old Akkadian period have been excavated; they include for the most part admin-

istrative texts, but also school texts, one with a portion of a Sumerian dictionary (a list of professions), also found at Ebla.



Five seals belong to one of the kings of Urkesh, named Tupkish, eight belong to his queen, Uqnitum, and five more belong to courtiers connected with their household. These scenes emphasize the royal family as the figures of the family appear in them. In addition to the family, scenes from the royal court are depicted. For instance, in some scenes Queen Uqnitum is surrounded by her daughter and female servants while a lyre player and singer entertain them. Other kings of Urkesh have seals represented in our corpus, the latest found in the 2004 season. This new *endan*, (the Urkesh kings identified themselves with this Hurrian title for king), takes up a theme found in the Tupkish seals of a lion at the court. In both, the lion reclines before a basin into which liquid is being poured in what appears to be a recurrent court ritual. The scene in the new *endan* seal is striking in that the small figure standing with the deity is not facing the deity (as in all other Akkadian seal iconography) but rather faces the ritual enactment. In other words the small figure is equated with the god! Who is this figure? Certainly a human and more than likely the *endan* whose seal it is. So it appears that our new *endan* is equating himself with a god!!

We know that the Akkadian king, Naram-Sin, considered himself a god and from Urkesh we have door sealings of one of his daughters, Tar'am-Agade. She is more than likely in Urkesh as a queen because she has a combat scene on her seal related to the political expression of Akkadian power in the south. In the same cache as the seal impressions of Tar'am-Agade were impressions on door sealings of a Hurrian official; he, too, has a combat scene, only the second non-Akkadian known to be granted this privilege! Included in this cache too are impressions of an official with an Akkadian name, Ishar-beli. His scene is unique in that it shows a prancing equid before a seated deity. We do have a number of equid bones from our excavations as well as a large number of equid figurines. The presence of the daughter of Naram-Sin's daughter in the Urkesh court, probably as its queen, is evidence, we think, that he had an alliance with Urkesh – which would indicate that he did not

conquer it in the same way he conquered Ebla and Nagar (Tell Brak). Urkesh was the only major third millennium Syrian city not conquered by him, and if this is indeed the case it indicates that this city had an independence not accorded to the rest.

## Topic 7. Conservation

By nature, archaeology is destructive, in the specific sense that we must “ex-cavate” – i.e., we must draw out of the earth what is hidden. But the cover that “hides” the goal of our search cannot be removed the way we lift a blanket. For it is itself part of our goal: this “blanket” consists of later accumulations, which we also must understand. And most of what we retrieve from the grip of the soil is itself fragile and highly perishable. It is a shame for us to make such an effort at the excavation, and then to loose the excavated!

Thus conservation becomes an integral part of our job as archaeologists. At Mozan, we have made since the beginning a great effort at protecting what we have recovered. As a result, we are today better equipped than most to deal with the imperative needs of conservation. The objects are treated in a special three room lab inside the Expedition House, before they are sent to the Museum in Der ez-Zor where our objects are housed at the moment.

The conservation of the architecture, on the other hand, is something you will directly appreciate during your visit. This is because our goal has been not only to protect the original walls as documents that preserve the evidence, but also to give a good idea of what the ancient buildings looked like. In the Mozan approach, we place a metal trellis over the wall, and then to cover it with a tailored tarp. As a result, you see the walls in their original dimension, much as you would through a reconstruction done on the computer in virtual reality... If we were able to do all of this as you see it, it is because of the great skill of the local craftsmen, in particular Sabah Kassem, a master smith from the nearby town of Amuda who has spent countless hours in making this project a reality.

As a result, we have, as it were, two sites in one. You see it now all covered. But it is easy to lift the tarps and see the original walls – if you are accompanied by our guard, he will do that for you. But it is also possible to remove the entire metal structure and to see the whole building as it was when first excavated, some of it going back fifteen years ago! You will see how the Palace looks without its protective covers in a couple of pictures (taken with the kite).



Our system is still evolving, and you will see some new experiments on your

current tour. They address two problems. The first is that the tightly fitted tailored tarp as we have it now can easily rip in strong winds, on account of both the resistance that the tarp makes to the wind and the fact that the tailored whole can more easily act as a sail. The second is that the current system of opening the tarps by pulling them up is awkward and slow. Hence, we have introduced three design changes: (1) the "roof" is now an independent unit, in either metal or cloth; (2) the cloth can be pulled sideways, just like a curtain; (3) the material lets more air through. In the Palace, we have two such experimental areas, in room B1 and D1. As for the Temple, we have built two experimental walls (where none was left from antiquity), and have placed on them different types of cover: the fact that the walls are oriented in two different directions will provide an excellent test of the effect of rain and wind during the winter season.



# PART FOUR

## APPENDICES

### General Chronology

<i>middle chron.</i>	<i>Mesopotamian periodization</i>	<i>finds from Urkesh</i>
5000	Halaf period	limited stratified finds in S2 isolated finds in excavations and surface finds
2900	Early Dynastic I	probable urban beginnings of Urkesh, but no evidence of Sumerian presence here
2650	Early Dynastic II	great Temple Terrace construction of inner city wall (KW) burials in lower city (ED II to early ED III)
2400	Early Dynastic III	temple BA abandonment of inner city wall construction of external city wall administrative complex OH2 in Outer City structures and seal impressions in B3-5, C2
2300 tum	Akkadian	construction of AP palace : Tupkish and Uqni-  Tar'am-Agade, daughter of Naram-Sin in Urkesh Ishar-napshum F1 residential complex continued use of temple BA
2150	Post-imperial-Akkadian /Ur III /Isin-Larsa	private houses and graves above AP palace possible favissa in A12 seal impressions and Puššam building in C2 renewal and continued use of temple BA
1900	Old Babylonian ("Khabur" pottery)	private houses and graves above AP palace possible public buildings in A17, A9 structures and graves in C1 and C2 structures above temple BA
1500 -1400	Mittani ("Nuzi" pottery)	private houses and graves in BH, A4, C2, A17 storehouse in A17-18

final use of Temple Terrace in J2  
abandonment of Urkesh

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A comprehensive website is in preparation. An interim website can be found at the address [www.urkesh.org](http://www.urkesh.org).

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Urkesh Founders:

*in memory of Mario Buccellati and Maria Buccellati*

*anonymous*

*Mario Buccellati Inc.*

*Gianmaria Buccellati*

*Claudia Buccellati*

*Evelyn Kieffer*

*Norma Kershaw*

*Luca Buccellati*

*Jay and Brenda Jarmakani*

