Nowhere has the process of recording and collection been more assiduously pursued than at the site of Urkesh, at Tell Mozan in northern Syria. The Urkesh Global Record stands as a model of analytical rigor, making available every conceivable aspect of an object or a structure to researchers in a format that can be easily cross-referenced. The Urkesh website continues and extends this tradition of open access.

Films on the Urkesh website

There are a good many films that have been made about the excavations at Tell Mozan and that inform the Global Record. There will be more as time goes on and we develop a consistent template for the shooting and editing of such on-site documents. Recognizing that this is an ongoing process and that we will refine our production process over time, we pose here a number of concepts that inform this work.

A new way of looking

In a way, and from my own point of view, we hope to cultivate a different kind of *self-awareness* in researchers and observers as they apprehend dynamic visual content on this website. At first glance, it may appear that this would detract from a full apprehension of the content of the film, deflecting attention from perceived to perceiver.

On the contrary.

We ask that researchers and observers ("readers") be alive to nuance and the contradictory vitality of dynamic thought, captured as it is in a web of links, hypertext, as well as linear perception. **(see Chapter 4 of the <u>Digital Monograph</u>: <u>The digital dimension</u> Non-linearity/multi-linearity 1. Mechanisms).** And this, as the "reader" is herself implicated in the process; or, rather more to the point, insofar as the reader creates a new sense of self as related to the visual content that plays out before her.

As Giorgio Buccellati implies in his remarks on what he characterizes as "digital thought" **(see Reading & Digital Reading)**, when we engage with the web page, we shall have to call back certain habits of study that may seem to belong to a calmer, less distracted time—" . . . <u>We reflect on</u> (an author's point of view)—. . . we go back and read it more than once", in order fully to grasp the purport of what is being said. This method of thoughtful consideration is a far cry from "surfing the web", a kind of dipping into and out of content as

it may pass us by in momentary flashes. When we skim webpages as on a mental surfboard, we are "progressively *drawn away* from reflection," as Buccellati fears.

This is the very opposite of the attitude we seek to cultivate in "readers" of this website **(see User vs. Reader** and, particularly, **The Posture of the Reader)** and particularly those who find film and dynamic visualization compelling. "I'm a visual person," such a reader might be heard to aver, as if words—precisely—*static* words, themselves the concretization of language and speech, could not encompass full experience of dynamic thought.

FILM AS ASSET

Artifacts that are recovered during archaeological excavations are successively logged, cleaned, described and finally housed among expedition records or in museum collections to await scholarly analysis that will place them in context for the field. This is a time-honored procedure.

Exhaustive photographic documentation has of course been an integral part of the excavation strategy since the Buccellatis first found an archaeological home in Syria. Film followed shortly thereafter, creating a precious resource that extends over decades of innovative and influential fieldwork. There is now an extensive archive of such footage continuing to be shot as excavations proceed at Urkesh. Some of this material has been integrated into broadcast films about the site (*Uncovering Urkesh*, produced for Radio-Televisione Svizzera, as an example), thus reaching a wide and popular audience. In this manner, film serves as *guidepost*, much as do the placards in the archaeological park envisaged for the region surrounding Urkesh, providing understanding at crucial junctures in the visitors' experience of a singularly complex historical site.

We propose to make this collection of still and moving images more readily available by editing this archival footage into a series of single-concept films that relate to excavation strategy and scholarly inquiry surrounding the excavations at Tell Mozan. Each would accompany a section of the website, illustrating concepts that would benefit from close analysis of archaeological process (the *chaîne opératoire*, given new life and dynamic presence) and positioning significant questions about culture and meaning currently under investigation by the excavators.

The archive is vast, comprising five-ten hours of footage for each recent excavation season. Every significant discovery or archeological conundrum has been documented on film by the expedition team. Footage from early seasons reaches easily thirty-forty hours of

documentary material in a variety of electronic media. Original footage is preserved, of course, but for the most part has been transferred to present-day standard for editing.

Documentation addresses all research areas at Urkesh—

- chronology of third-millennium ceramics (selected comparative examples; the most complete such catalogue ever assembled)

- stratigraphy, diachronic/synchronic relationship of excavation units (the relationship of the monumental staircase to the third-millennium temple atop the mound and its relationship to the residential structures of the Tupkish palace)

- ethnographic reconstruction of manufacture (as, the kilns of M'saq, a practicing Syrian potter from nearby Q'amishli)

- excavation technique, demonstrated in practical terms (as, problems of stratigraphic relationship are considered in each excavation unit)

- iconographic analysis of imagery (epitomized by a rich cross-cultural collection of sealings recovered in the Royal Storehouse and Residence)

- methodology (the meticulous analysis of the figurines, comprising a new typology and a practical method of analysis that can be applied in differing contexts)

- conservation methods (from minute sealings no bigger than the nail on your little finger to the walls of the palace itself, constructed in fragile mud brick).

The film material documenting these subject areas is in hand. Professional editing of this material into film modules that illustrate and elicit significant archeological inquiry has yet to be accomplished. That is, the archive is *an untapped resource.*

Some films have, however, been completed. They include—

- Sealing recovery and analysis of iconography (Tupkish series)

- Sealing conservation and preservation (the Ishar-Beli sealing)

- Wall conservation (on-going experimentation in the residential sector)

- Wall conservation (in the storehouse)

- Invention and innovation in field techniques (the "little train", used for efficiently disposing of excavation detritus)

- Figurine analysis (a new methodology based on measurement, ratio, and proportion of individual artifacts and of different corpora)

- Aerial photography at Urkesh (a practical method for the field)

- Evocation of mythology and heroic narrative (using film special effects and dramatic narration)

Each of these films is *in the first-person*. Excavators speak directly to the camera, in their own voice. Special effects are used rarely—as, above, for a special dramatic purpose. Each illustrates a significant aspect of the excavations at Urkesh, to be determined upon the recommendation of the Expedition Co-Directors.

"Snapshots on film" are equally valuable, as the remarks that follow make evident. These short clips are necessarily quick and casual, about a minute each in length. These films provoke thought and point to future study in depth.

Film & Video
Although staff would rarely have reason to comment on the usage of video as a documentation tool at Urkesh, they might well be given pause when they see references to "film" as opposed to "video." They would find the former term in any of my commentaries on the documentation that I regularly perform and/or oversee at the site. The term "video" would most regularly occur in other contexts.

Are the terms in fact equivalent? One and the same? Does one "film" an event or a process in an excavation unit? Or does one "video" (as I have heard) it? Does it make a difference what one calls the documentation process, so long as the process is in fact documented?

I would be first to say that terminology does in fact make a difference, that committing something to video invites a kind of laxity or even cavalier approach that cannot contribute to meaningful documentation in an environment that values scientific rigor. If you film an event or process, you *perforce* take more care, pay attention to multiple levels of meaning and differing strength of emphasis that could easily be overlooked when documenting as if for the evening news, on television. Whether or not this is an actuality is not so very much to the point. The care that is taken is the point.

In a recent study on The Press, a *rapporteur* for the FOCAS series published by the Aspen Institute (Communications and Society Program. Of the Press: Models for

<u>Transforming American Journalism</u> [2010]) included a recommendation that spoke directly to media and journalism:

> Expand local media initiatives to reflect the full reality of the communities they represent. (The Report, 5)

This recommendation of course is rather easy to implement when resources are great, as is often the case in broadcast television. Documentation on an archaeological site, where resources are necessarily limited, and rightfully directed to the business of excavation itself, operates within different confines. Nonetheless, the aim of our documentation and that of the very best broadcast journalism is exactly the same – our first obligation is to tell the truth. My point being that slapdash methods associated with video photography may in fact *obscure* the very process that we wish to explain. This obfuscation is invidious; sometimes we think that because the subject moves and talks and that we see the subject on the screen/in the frame, then necessarily we must be reporting accurately on the event that we mean to document.

That is not the case.

When I use the word "film", I mean that the technique used in documentation arises more naturally from a filmic vocabulary than it does from the perspective of video. In practice, what this means is that during filming the process is often broken into discrete units and filmed separately, then reassembled in an editing process that is subsequent to actual filming. This means that the process receives a kind of double view – a second chance to evaluate what is important in the process and how best to present it to the viewing public. Experienced filmmakers will of course make some of these editing decisions on-site, during the process of filming. Random "video coverage" will require more time in the editing process, necessitating as it does a culling of long, undifferentiated stretches of movement that must of necessity, in the real world, require time. It's not practical to document it all, for the amount of information to be gleaned from the entire process documented in real-time must be deemed less useful than a heightened, informed and intelligent reconstruction of the process for the viewer who needs to learn and who already is alert to the different stages of the process.

The second edition of the critical edition of the classic study in communications theory, Marshall McLuhan's "Understanding Media: the extensions of man" (Gingko Press, 1994) recently provided me with the occasion to review some concepts that were introduced when I was beginning my work in media, and that eventually became something akin to holy writ –

Cubism, McLuhan tells us, gave us "the inside and outside, the top, bottom, back, and front and the rest, in two dimensions, drop(ping) the illusion of perspective in favor of instant sensory awareness for all" (25). He extended this observation into the world of popular culture, characterizing all media as alternatively "hot" or "cold", depending upon the amount of involvement that the medium required of the viewer and/or user. Much has been written on the subject. I raise the matter here, not in the interest of trendiness, but rather to remind us that the act of recording is important, that it contributes to our understanding of the subject that it purports to convey, and that it requires an effort, extensive or of passing interest, as the case may be, in order to be apprehended.

This, to say that we take documentation very seriously at Urkesh. We are all of us beneficiaries of the UGR – the universal global record that brings documentation – *thorough* documentation – within reach of all excavators and access to this information to the widest of publics, both scholarly and popular. The filmed messages that support the UGR and that are integral to it, are no less seriously conceived.

The films we make at Urkesh are complex, requiring attentive initial viewing and review, in an effort to master certain processes, but just as important, to grasp the larger context of excavating and the larger excavations at Urkesh.

Some Observations about Observing
I hope that you will look at the film documents in each unit as an invitation to participate in the ongoing process of excavation at Urkesh. I ask that you stay alert to what is happening in all parts of the frame not just with the prime subject that is being documented.

Two examples suffice – I find them both equally interesting and amusing, having come upon them by chance rather than by design.

One: In a sequence filmed in the unit J6, which documents the very heavy activity of one morning in the excavations, we see workmen pushing a mechanical screw that will lift dirt into a unit below. Captured, *exactly* as it occurred by the cameraperson who was shooting this action, is a foreground process – the making of a plumb-bob by a workman, totally oblivious to the hefting of the enormous machinery behind him. The contrast and the scale of the two actions verges on the ironic, but both processes are part of the ongoing process of excavation; they took place side-by-side, each oblivious to the making of the other.

Two: A foreground sequence documents the frenetic and rather hectic activity of excavation in a square; our attention is obviously meant to be drawn to this activity. What we

may not notice is that in the upper left frame, very tiny, we see *another* excavation team, excavating yet another square that is no less important. If we were to document it in close-up, we would be equally engrossed and glean just as much information as from the present action. As we watch, we see the team leader gesture, descend and disappear into the square. How it relates in the particular instance to the activity we have just been watching is unknown – except insofar as it speaks to the complexity of the excavation process itself.

This enlarged visual and intellectual sense informs what is perceived in the field of view encompassed/framed by the small screen on the page. Mere *watching* is not called for; rather we expect to cultivate an interactive mode of experiencing the image, a way of perceiving that requires acknowledgement on the part of the viewer/reader that he or she grasps the full meaning of what is being presented to his/her gaze and is thereby incorporated *into* that moment.

As he situates the idea of "self" in archaeological style theory, Carr tells us that

> " . . .[t]he concept provides a focal point for understanding interaction, information exchange, symbolic uniqueness, and individuality in stylistic behavior as parts of the same process." (1995, 95)

Just so. The engaged reader will of necessity place what he sees in a larger cultural context that links the past to this present time. Take as an example the restored necklace retrieved from the Royal Residence/Service Sector. At one and the same time, the necklace is an artifact from an ash matrix in A15, an exemplar of styles of personal adornment as encountered in the Khabur, the object of impressionistic conservation efforts, a link to the Hurrian élite and Urkesh palace life, and the product of a detailed exercise in skilled artifact retrieval. Each aspect of the object is deserving of its own hyperlink, each integral to a full understanding of import and place in the ancient lifeways that will come to characterize the inhabitants of ancient Urkesh. Each will also call to mind personal experience and understanding in a personal present (or a re-called immediate past) that will allow the object to assume its full relevance to our ongoing investigations.

Involvement and Absorption

One cannot dis-engage from such "seeing"; rather, one is absorbed and carries away from the experience a knowledge that will inform other events. That is, information will have been imparted to the viewer; learning, not to say *enculturation*, will have begun.

For a provocative formulation of this idea, invoking Gadamer and Lacan, see Hurst, "Self-Formation and the Speculative" [The South African Journal of Philosophy. 2002, 21/4]). The author describes this enlarged cultural moment thusly:

> A strict division between subjective and objective has fallen away, [bringing to mind] an alternative tradition of philosophical complexity, which implicates environmental systems (culture, ideology, institutions), embedded in language, in the constitution of human subjectivity. (Hurst 2002, 258)

Gadamer's model (referenced in the citation above), as Hurst would have it, suggests that "humans are obliged to think themselves as always in a living relation to a communal and historical world" (Ibid., 272). For performative aspects of this model in an ancient urban setting, see Hauser, "Gudea's Inscribed States and the Enculturation of a Work-Force" (*in* "The Materiality of Writing: Substance, Surface and Medium". Cambria Press, forthcoming).

The viewing grid

We ask for patience and for attention to detail—the ability to look at the screen and see what is happening *everywhere* in the frame. Think again about the last shot in the "dirt removal sequence"—Field Supervisor James Walker and his crew are visible (should one choose to isolate this part of the frame) in the upper-left corner of the field of vision throughout. Just before the last shot fades to black, he disappears from view into the square. Thus do excavations proceed—multiple activities that do not contradict one another, but in fact do contribute to a multi-faceted view of the recuperation of the past through archaeological means.

The analysis of complex motion

Other discrete observations of complex processes (as, digging) have much to teach, provided they are attended to—provided, I mean, that the viewer is not "just watching television."

The same involvement would inform a mechanical process, such as the operation of the little train that carries dirt away from the excavation unit, or the jackhammer that cuts through rock-hard layers of deposition. Or documentation of a natural phenomenon, such as a sandstorm that whips through the excavations, a real happening that brings to mind other viewing experiences we may have had in popular culture.

This way of seeing may be particularly significant when the subject of a given film is an archaeological process that requires a measure of skill, such as scraping a surface to reveal

differential patterning, disengagement of minute artifacts from a soil matrix, scoring a stratigraphic section, and so on.

Integral nature of film

I don't see these sequences, brief and apparently simple as they are, as "throwaways." I see them as study aids/companion pieces that should spark recollection both of specific instances of excavation technique, practice, and experience; and of instances drawn from a large cultural context that might inform the present practice.

Different types of information at once

In the same way a different way of looking is necessary in excavation when viewing a given matrix, so is the film frame a matrix that contains many different types of information for the person that knows/cares how to "read" it.

As Carr has made the case,

> As a process of the self, stylistic behavior involves re-creation. On the one hand, re-creation implies active participation rather than simple copying. In expressing oneself stylistically, the individual assesses the social context, evaluates personal abilities, behaves in accordance with motivations and desires, and may indeed employ idiosyncratic nuances. On the other hand, recreation implies sociocultural constraint. The individual is doing again, perhaps in a modified form, something [that] has been done previously. The individual has learned from others the types of styles, the appropriate contexts for style use, the values and meanings attached to styles, and the significance of stylistic conformity. Therefore, stylistic behavior both expresses individuality and marks the social constraints upon the same. (1995, 95)

This special sense of re-creation pertains in the analysis of the visual field presented to us by film and in this instance circumscribed by the frame on the webpage.

Application: "Document"

Obviously, when the lens cap is off and a camera is "running", *something* will be recorded, either on film (less frequently, these days) or as digital files on tape or disc. If there is no selecting "eye" behind the lens, then every moment of the recording is worth every other moment. Only subsequent editing can give priority or (by juxtaposition with other segments) narrative cohesion to the visual material as it was originally recorded.

This basic type of recording is valuable for the very reason that no value judgements have been applied from outside. Nor, probably, has any technical manipulation occurred that would obscure the meaning of the original recording ("footage," in standard film parlance).

Now, what may occur with amateur video is that the operator does indeed obscure "meaning" by attempting to give some personal "shape" to the footage—think of your fathers's wild, if well-intentioned panning of the camera to right and to left or precipitate zooming in and out in order to capture amusing but disparate moments of the family Memorial Day outing.

We may be thankful that the view that spectator Magruder had of the tragic Kennedy assassination was at the fullest extension of his lens range—a wide shot that captured, as it happened, a very complex event as it was happening. Had he had more "control", it is likely that the accurate recording of the event would have been compromised. As it was, the focal length itself meant that some aspects of the ensuing action were unclear, either because they were out-of-focus or not central to the frame.

If the camera operator's technical skill is not in evidence, then the editor is obliged subsequently to impose meaning/structure after carefully examining the materials in order to determine a coherent sequence of events as they may have occurred (if indeed such are discernible) before the camera. This process introduces perforce a subjective element. The "documenting" nature of the recording must therefore be held open, and will always be subject to question.

This necessary invitation to become an alert viewer/spectator is a good thing. It engages the intelligence; viewer reaction must thenceforward be considered as part of the "reality"/actuality of the recording. However, viewers more often than not accept "footage" *tel quel*, seldom questioning the accuracy of vision or the extent to which the recording ("coverage", in industry parlance), faithfully reports on the events or processes that have been recorded. This is particularly true if the footage is paraded as "documentary"—in whose eyes?

Application: "Feature"

Once edited and placed in a larger context, the short film clip can be taken as a powerful teaching and learning tool. Even apart from the specific context of the Urkesh excavations, such a document can be useful. It serves then as a contrast with other excavation techniques in other settings.

That such clips should be easy to download in a readily identifiable format, and playable in multi-platform context is self-evident.

Used in this manner, the archived film documents from Urkesh take on special meaning

and assume their full importance for the field at large. They are "features," commentary that targets specific techniques and archaeological theory. In this sense, they have been "published," and can stand alone.

Again, the special power of the end user is paramount. This multi-usefulness as manipulated by an agent with special needs distinguishes anecdote from substance.

Application: The Weblog

We should attempt to provide a forum—a sort of archive—for such viewer reaction/interaction, so that the larger (eventual) audience may gauge and test personal response to the materials. This may be particularly important in the setting of the archaeological excavation, where much work is collective; and final analysis progressively defined by numerous parties.

The weblog is an ideal medium for the archival storage of such secondary original material that is called into being by the film document itself and facilitated by excavation staff.

Such commentary takes on added importance when the coverage is "undifferentiated", as I would call it; as with the sandstorm footage on this website (V21m1013 -ls S824 dM sandstorm.MOV). Without commentary, the footage is anecdotal; at most, one "event" can be seen here—the storm grows in intensity and the view is progressively obliterated as it does so. The link to "loose materials" is of interest, of course. Yet this commentary is generic; useful in the abstract, but perhaps less meaningful in the present instance. The only way the clip might have been more useful would have been for each visual occurrence inside the frame to have been linked to specific textual (or spoken?) analysis by staff. Something like "on the street" newsgathering.

In spite of the above commentary (or because of it) the very aleatory nature of the random occurrence so documented may have value that we little suspect—or that we may have been unwilling to acknowledge. The web is the perfect home for such materials, particularly as we may address the successive iterations of the recorded materials as fashioned into a coherent narrative.

This observation addresses the specific nature of web documentation—a research commentary that takes on meaning as it is seen in context of other documents, either immediately juxtaposed or accessed by hyperlink.

The key, of course, to such documentation that looms as voluminous, is *indexing*.