

# Mesopotamia

A glorious past in a troubled present

For an NGS conference in Guatemala City

Giorgio Buccellati

Cotsen Institute of Archeology, UCLA

Abstract, March 16, 2013

It is from Mesopotamia that we have the earliest record of the momentous transformation that brought large human groups together – the urban revolution. Reflecting on this early evidence helps us to understand the very nature of the state as we have inherited it in the five millennia that followed. This is because the beginning of the city did not happen in a vacuum, nor did its impact end once the settlements were established. It rather continued with a dynamic development that led to its logical conclusion – the universal state or empire. The first part of the paper will trace the history of the political growth of the Mesopotamian state.

The second part will deal with a particular test case, the site of ancient Urkesh in Syria. Here, an extensive approach has been underway to showcase not only the archaeology, but also the historical implications of the excavations, motivating the local stakeholders to become the guardians of their territory. This has been severely tested by the current unrest, and the results are extremely positive, a bright light in the darkness of the moment.