

U R K E S H

The First Hurrian Capital



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AN EARLY HURRIAN MYTH, PRESERVED IN A HITTITE VERSION, tells the story of a young god, Silver, who lives with his mother somewhere in the countryside away from the cities. He has a quarrel with his friends, who taunt him because he has no father. Prompted, his mother tells him that his father lives in the big city:

Oh Silver! The city you inquire about, I will describe to you. Your father is Kumarbi, the Father of the city Urkesh. He resides in Urkesh, where he rightfully resolves the lawsuits of all the lands. Your brother is Teshup: he is king in heaven and is king in the land. Your sister is Sauska, and she is queen in Nineveh. You must not fear any of them. Only one deity you must fear, Kumarbi, who stirs up the enemy land and the wild animals (adapted from Hoffner 1990:46-47).

Let us consider a possible etiology. We may assume that the story's original setting is in the mountains, where silver, the metal, is actually mined. There are contrasts among the small groups of mountain people. A group that controls silver establishes contacts with the cities of the plain, claiming ethnic affiliation (the chief god of the city, Kumarbi,

A view of the Tur Abdin (the southern edge of the Taurus range) from Tell Mozan (the surface of the tell is visible in the foreground). The large saddle in the mountain range marks the location of the modern city of Mardin, where a strategic pass leads to rich copper mines (Ergani) to the North. (All illustrations courtesy of the International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies.)

is the *father* of Silver); accepting the urban rule of law (Kumarbi administers justice); and paying allegiance in return for defense (Kumarbi is in control of enemies, both human and animal).

Urkesh

All told, this myth would seem to provide a rather transparent idealization of the relationship between mineral resources and their commercial exploitation! At any rate, *se non è vero, è ben inventato*: this scenario may not be true, but it describes well the broader geo-political situation in northern Syro-Mesopotamia as we can reconstruct it in the early historic periods. Metals (especially copper) were being mined in the Taurus, where urbanization proper had not yet developed, and were shipped to the urban markets in the plain. Some of these cities, in the piedmont area, were more likely than others to serve as gateways for this trade. Urkesh holds a privileged place in the myth. Its location at the site

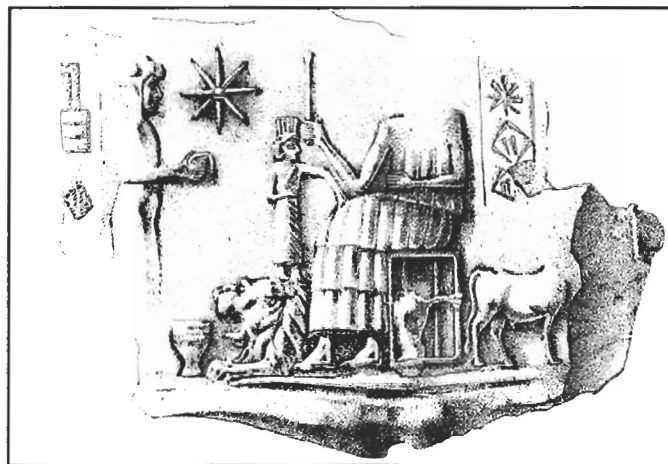
impressions enabled us to identify the site as ancient Urkesh. The seals belonged to the reigning Hurrian dynasty: the king, Tupkish; his queen, Uqnitu; and several royal courtiers. The king and the royal nurse, Zamena, have Hurrian names while the queen and one courtier have Akkadian names.

The total number of inscribed seal impressions from the floor of the palace AK reached about 170, out of a total corpus of some 1000 impressions. These 170 impressions were made from a total of only 17 seals. This does not mean, however, that we have a mathematical proportion of 10 seal impressions for each seal. Far from it: the statistical dispersion is much greater. What emerges from these statistics is that very few seal impressions belonged to the king, namely 11, even though as many as 5 seals were used. In other words, few objects were stored on behalf of the king, and almost each object was sealed with a different seal. Many more objects (72, to be precise) were sealed on behalf of the queen; however, only one of her seals was frequent (with 34 rollings). The majority of containers, namely 81, were sealed on behalf of the courtiers, and specifically 28 with two distinct seals of the queen's nurse (totalling 17 rollings for one seal and 11 for the other); 27 with the seal of the queen's chief cook; and 26 for an individual whose title was not given. From what we have so far, then, it appears that the storehouse was used primarily for the benefit of the queen and her household.

The Seal Impressions

Inscribed Seals and the Urkesh Dynastic Program

The royal seals from Urkesh offer a new phenomenon in third millennium art: that is, the use and repetition of visual images to give expression to dynastic concerns. This dynastic program is carried out through the seal designs of the king, queen, and two of the royal courtiers. Illustration of their power and the succession to the throne are paramount in the iconography of these Urkesh dynasts (B&K-B 1996a; 1996b). The seals convey the more abstract of the two concepts, that of depicting power, through a juxtaposition of the king vis-à-vis a powerful wild animal, the lion, which is also the symbol of an important god, Nergal.¹ A scene of presenting gifts and a warrior are also motifs indicating power (B&K-B 1996b:77). The queen's seal (q1)—with her inscription carried on the backs of two servants—conveys the same concept with different modalities. The other major theme centers around the royal succession. In one of the king's seals (k2), reconstructed from three fragments, he is seated on the right with the crown prince, shown as a child, touching his lap in a gesture of filiation and dependence. The engraver placed a star behind him in the field. The prince stands on the head of a lion reclining at the foot of the throne of the king. This lion is rendered in realistic detail, especially noticeable in the way his mane is shown. A vessel stands directly in front of the lion; it may be connected with the overflowing bowl held by a standing figure facing the scene. This figure, with its finely articulated profile, may be human, but the formality of the pose and the rigidity of the stance must be viewed in the context of the overall scene. The



△ Seal of King Tupkish with a lion reclining at the foot of his throne. The crown prince stands on the lion's head and touches the lap of the king in a dynastic gesture of dependence and filiation.

▽ Seal of the king (whose name and Hurrian title *endan* appear in the inscription) showing two attendants one of whom is holding a ball of thread (wool?) on the outstretched palm of the hand.



bull under the inscription box faces the figure rather than the king.² The figure then may be interpreted as that of a deity. If this is true, the lion shown being fed by a deity emerges as a dynastic emblem, linking figuratively and symbolically the ruling king and the crown prince.

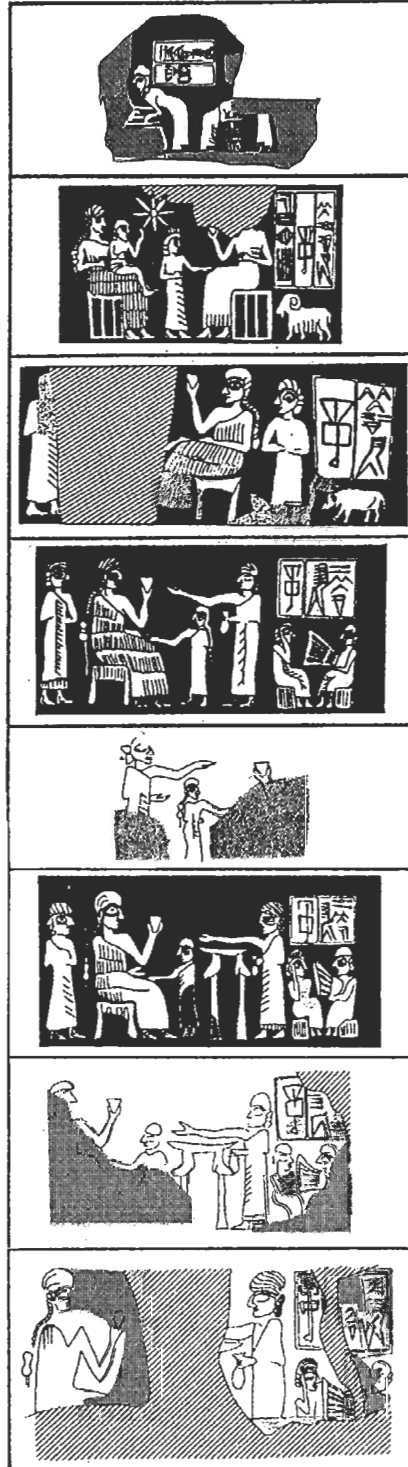
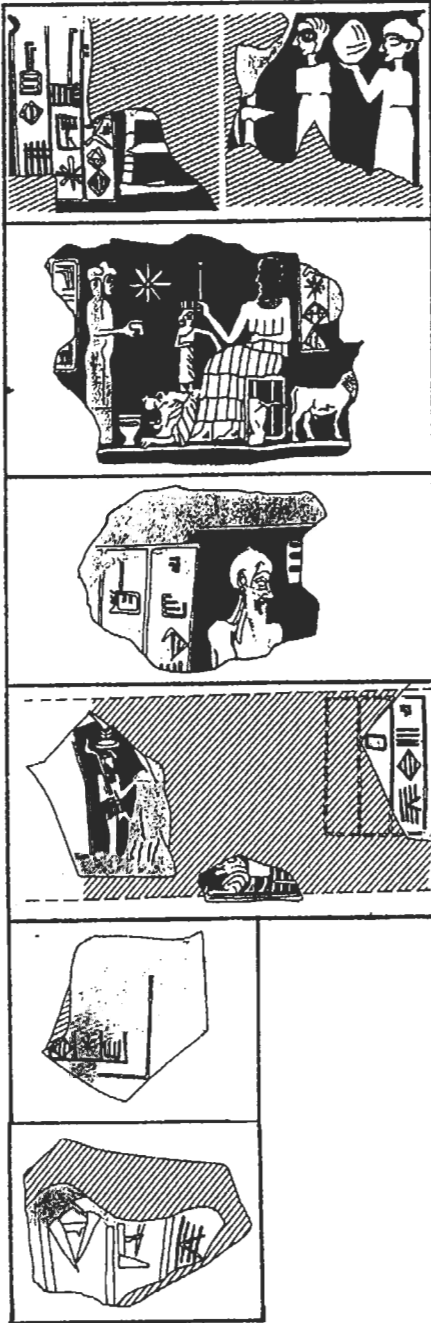
Another of the king's seals (k1), reconstructed from four rollings, depicts two attendants, one of whom is carrying what probably is a ball of wool or thread on the palm of an outstretched hand. On the left of the seal there may be a table and a seated figure, probably the king. The hat of one of the figures and the shape of the table leg can be paralleled with an uninscribed Urkesh sealing from the same floor. While a ball of thread may appear to be a strange iconographic element on the seal of the king, the role of textiles in the wealth accumulation of the city of Ebla is well known. On the much later Apadana at Persepolis, the final two

Inscribed Seals of the Royal Court

King
(k1-k6)

Queen
(q1-q8)

Queen's Court
(h1-h4)



Corpus of inscribed seals belonging to the king and to the queen of Urkesh, and to members of the queen's court, showing the number of seals belonging to each. The seals depicted in this chart are identified in the text by their owner (e.g., k = king) and numerical position in the columns (e.g., k2 = the second seal in the king's column).

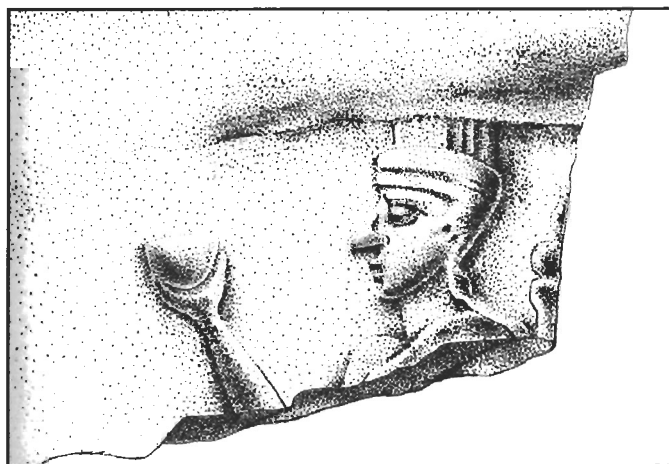
figures of the twelfth delegation also carry thread (Walser 1966:pl. 19). Both these seals fit into the Urkesh dynastic program because they stress filiation and power. The theme of succession, on the other hand, is explicitly depicted in the eight seals of the queen identified thus far.

In one seal of the queen (q4), she is shown on the left with a distinctive braided hair³ style decorated with a braid ornament toward the end. A small girl, with the same hair style and braid ornament, touches her lap. Another seal of the queen (q6) offers a very similar scene with the addition of a table. In the corpus of queen's seals from this single floor, there are seven variations of this scene exhibiting her concern for dynastic continuity. A different seal of the queen (q2) has a number of members of the royal family including the same crown prince depicted on the seal of the king (with the same lap touching gesture) as well as a small child held on her lap. With this scene we now have three royal children among the figures: the prince, a princess, and a smaller child. Children are important symbols of the continuity of the dynasty both through the succession to the throne of the son and the consolidation of power through the daughters; for example, the daughter of Sargon, Enheduanna, became the *en*-priestess at Ur.⁴ A smaller child appears on two seals of the nurse of Uqnitum, who has the Hurrian name of Zamena. In this case Zamena is holding onto the child seated on the lap of the queen. In the field is an eight-pointed star, shown also on the royal family seal, which may indicate the royal male children.

The physical intimacy shown through the queen's holding the small child in her seal and those of her nurse is one of the most striking aspects of these royal seals. Touching gestures also link the older children to the king and queen, mirroring in effect the tie through the royal line or in the case of the nurse, through the royal hierarchy. While the Urkesh king, queen, royal children, and courtiers are themselves depicted on these seals, as clearly indicated by the setting in each case, what we have are "portrait-like" representations of these individuals (B&K-B 1997b:196-99). Their depictions in very specific iconographic settings, with some variation in physical characteristics, were sufficient for their immediate identification even by those who could not read the names of the seal owners in the inscriptions. In the seal of the queen showing the royal family, the head of the king is missing. One head of a figure seated in a similar fashion shows a small crown similar to the feathered crown worn by the crown prince. In the corpus of over 1000 seal impressions, this is the only head which is a possible portrait of king Tupkish.

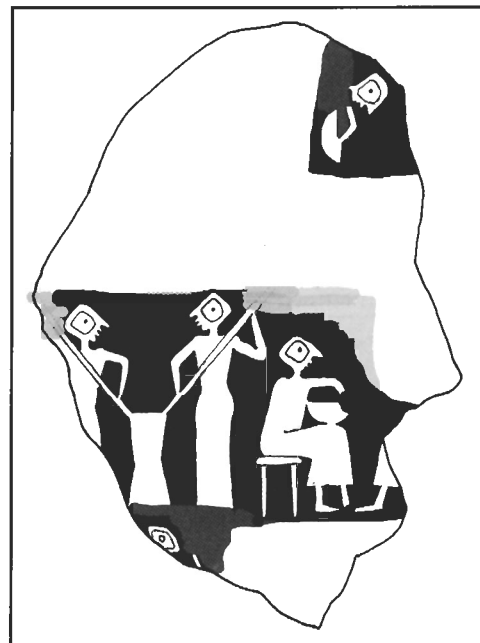
The Uninscribed Seals

In the uninscribed seals, a number of scenes render common activities, either being performed singly or in pairs. In one of these scenes, two standing figures engage in an activity connected with a tall container while a third makes something in a bowl. Notably, the upturned elbow holds the prominent position in the design.⁵ One inscribed docket—sealed with an uninscribed seal showing a figure with an



(top) The Urkesh royal family (q2) with queen Uqnitum and a small child on the left and Tupkish and the crown prince on the right.

(center) Drawing of a portion of an impression made by the same seal as above. During the initial phase of our research we had not been able to identify any seal impression giving the face of king Tupkish. A fragment discovered at a later date seems to fit this scene, and is now tentatively identified as providing just such a portrait.



(bottom) Urkesh impressions show people engaged in a variety of simple, every day activities. Here two individuals are making something in a tall vat while a third stirs a bowl.



Seal of the cook of the queen (h3): the name of the female cook was probably written in the inscription box above the young animal at the far right of the impression. Depiction of the professions of the seal owners is one of the hallmarks of Urkesh glyptic. The churning woman represents the cook; the butcher on the right holds a knife and a hornless victim.

arm extended over a table facing a seated figure holding a cup—may indeed refer in some way to the iconography of the queen's seals. The emphasis on the details of the gestures and also in some cases the iconography of the hat and dress links these types of unscribed seals with those of the monarchs. It is also possible, given the example of the royal seals, that some themes on the unscribed seals reflect the professions of the seal owners.

While a number of the unscribed seals do render themes common from the south, as in the Shamash and the Etana seals, most of them are new, either of the dynastic and related types just discussed or a more schematic style. In this category belong scenes that emphasize the geometric frame around the figural scene or contain a number of discreet elements which can be the disarticulated heads of animals (D. M. Matthews, 1997:136-37, his Brak Style). These motifs have links with the same types of motifs found on the later Nuzi style seals and painting from Nuzi itself. The continuity in the visual arts extended to the architectural traditions, discussed below. It is now clear that there was a distinct type of northern art and architectural tradition existing at least from the middle of the third millennium.

Urkesh Glyptic Styles

From the iconography and style, it appears that the seals of the queen, the nurse Zamena, and the cook were carved in the same workshop, if not by the same seal carver. In them, there is an emphasis on fitting the inscription box within the overall design. This is clearest in a queen's seal where her title is simply NIN, Queen (q1). Here two servants literally carry the inscription and therefore her name and title, on their backs. On Zamena's seals (h1 and h2), two cases of the inscription box are shortened to accommodate the

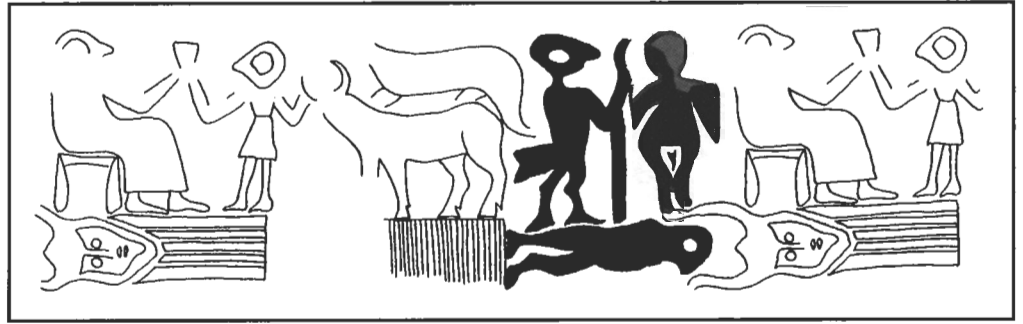
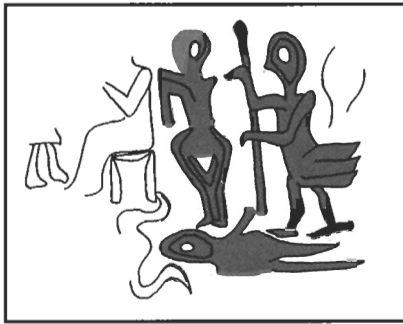
head of the human-headed bull. The cook's seal (h3) boasts the two servants, the woman churning and the butcher, facing the inscription box where she is described as the female cook of Uqnitum. While the integration in the seal design of text and iconography is one of the characteristics of Akkadian art, the Urkesh emphasis on the integration of the cultural meaning, as well as form, is rare.⁶

In the seals of the queen and the two courtiers connected with her, the figures are more expressionistic than those of the king, with the proportionately large eyes, heads and hands, narrow faces with long chins. They possess an emphasis on gestures, as in the outstretched and elongated arm of the attendant above the table, the nurse holding the child by the wrist while touching the lap of the child, or the hands of the woman churning shown in the up-and-down motion by depicting the hands at different heights. This workshop produced new variations of body positions best exemplified by the bending figures in q1 and h3. All the seals of the queen and her nurse Zamena, except q1, have motifs which are more specifically oriented toward the concept of succession. In fact, q3-8 are all variations of the scene whereby the queen is shown receiving homage from her daughter. This scene includes an attendant holding a bag or jar with an elongated arm extended toward the queen, also possibly an exaggerated gesture of homage.

The seals of the king are in general of a higher quality as they are more finely carved and, from the meager evidence for his seals from our corpus, appear to have a more varied content. The dramatically rendered prince standing on the head of the lion in the best preserved of the king's seals reflects the same intense interest in gestures to convey the deeper symbolic meaning as the queen's seals. However, the whole scene goes beyond the seals of the queen in showing a very dramatic royal setting. The seal carvers working for the king certainly were aware of the style of the queen's seals; the two figures in k1 have similar characteristics in the rendering of the heads.

In terms of style, all the royal seals emphasize realistic details as shown in the carving of the horns and wool of the goat in the royal family seal or the boar under the inscription of one seal of the queen. The rendering of the lion on two seals of the king emphasizes the details of the lion's mane. Baskets are depicted in the seal of the queen's cook and in one seal of the queen herself. The rendering of realistic details also marks Old Akkadian seals from the south, but in the Urkesh royal seals the imagery is very different.

There is another striking aspect of the seal iconography of Urkesh: the motifs of the inscribed seals reflect the professions of the seal owners. In the cook's seal, a woman bends over a basket in which are placed two jars; she is churning.⁷ The profession of the cook is rendered through the action of this bending woman. The butcher with a kid and a knife stands on either side of the inscription naming the cook's profession. The nurse, too, had seals that visually indicated her profession as named in her inscriptions.



On these two seals the theme includes the birdman, holding a staff, and a nude woman, both standing above a supine human figure. Two distinct seals contain the same scene, except that one is a mirror image of the other. Such reversal of identical iconographic motifs was our first indication that Urkesh iconography could include such variations.

Function of the Seals

Our evidence for all these seals comes only from their rollings on clay which are in most cases small and incomplete. Thus far we have excavated over 1000 impressions from a single floor of the building; a rough estimate of the total number of identifiable original seals represented in this corpus is around eighty. The seals were rolled on clay used to seal boxes, jars, bags, and baskets. The seal impressions give us a glimpse of part of the Urkesh administration, especially that of the queen since the greatest proportion of the inscribed seals were hers. Officials of the queen (and administrators directly connected to her) must have had the authority to seal goods in her name. These officials probably performed their duties elsewhere in the city or in surrounding farms where they sealed the containers. In this building, however, the containers were opened by breaking the clay sealings, most likely because the goods in the containers were redistributed for use within the building itself. Only one sealing had traces of two rollings: one of the cook and one of the queen. The number of seals belonging to the king are limited, so this does not appear to have been a principal area connected with bureaucrats linked to him directly.

It is clear that seal carvers working for the dynasts carved all the inscribed royal seals in Urkesh. Only one inscribed seal may have been carved in the south; it resembles ED III and early Akkadian southern models. The seal owner has an Akkadian name, Innin Shadu. He certainly is an important official in the Urkesh court given the large number of his seal impressions excavated from the floor of this building. Other sealings probably arrived on containers from outside the administration of the city; this is most certain in the case of the only sealing showing the typically Akkadian motif of Shamash rising.

Seal cutters working in Urkesh must have been familiar with Akkadian art. Akkadian art influenced some characteristics of the dynastic art of Urkesh such as the emphasis on details. If we take into consideration the round-topped stele found, unstratified, near Temple BA, then we can say

that the artists of Urkesh also considered the rendering of movement an important aspect of their art (Kelly-Buccellati 1990). The stele renders an everyday scene with an extraordinary movement of the plowman impelled forward by his own action of pushing from a diagonal line in the composition (see above, p. 79). There is no comparable scene in Akkadian art. Thus, while there are some superficial similarities between Akkadian art and that of Urkesh,⁸ the differences are so profound as to indicate that the spirit which enlivened the art of Urkesh was generated by local concepts and ideas and was not an imitation of southern models. The reappearance of these concepts in the first millennium art of the Neo-Hittite states in northern Syria offers a further indication of its original autonomy and continued dynamism.

What can the Urkesh dynastic program tell us about Akkadian art in the south? This type of visual communication could certainly have a place in the strong imperial concepts which were central to late Akkadian art. However no hints of this type of art can be found in Akkadian cylinder seals.⁹ In all probability, the Hurrian court at Urkesh itself developed and employed this dynastic pictorial vocabulary.

Hurrian Artistic Style

In summing up the characteristics of this art, it is clear that artists from Urkesh developed a new visual language. Their art stresses two aspects of the internal vision of the Hurrian dynasty. Foremost is the concern for the royal succession as shown in the seals of the queen, but also in those of the courtier who was most interested in the succession, the royal nurse. In addition, on at least one of the king's seals there is a very clear statement of this same concern.

The other aspect of the dynastic program indicated on these seals is the power of the dynasts as shown through images of internal harmony and strength. In our corpus, this is not as widely indicated as the first emphasis. On one of the queen's seals, her servants are literally carrying her name and title on their backs. The king, by portraying himself seated on his throne with a reclining lion, connects himself with the



All the Urkesh glyptic evidence has been pieced together from over 1000 tiny sealings the size of which is indicated in this photo. The seal shown is one of the fragments from which the composite scene was derived that is shown here on page 82. Only the most meticulous excavation and the individual examination of thousands of clay lumps could hope to salvage such ephemeral material culture.

power of the lion, but more importantly with the deity symbolized by the lion. A presumably later king, Tishatal, also associated himself with a lion.

Other characteristics of this art include its naturalism, especially in the rendering of specific details, the emphasis on gestures to communicate the important message in the seal designs, the expressionism of the queen's workshop seals, and the connection of the profession with the iconography of the official's seal design.

Even when artists of Urkesh employ subjects prevalent in the south, they can construct the designs in a different manner, and, notably, sometimes carve them both in the positive and the negative as is the case with the birdman and the nude woman.

These new data help us place the question of "Hurrian art" on a new footing. Whether or not this art can be described as "Hurrian art" is too long of a discussion for this forum. Much of what is new in the dynastic program is art developed for a Hurrian dynast, his queen, and the royal courtiers connected with her. A number of uninscribed seals, too, exhibit similar characteristics, so that evidence for a body of artistic works connected with this dynasty is now being built up. How widespread this art is in the north in the third millennium is unclear. However, the idea of a visual vocabulary used to express dynastic concerns still existed in the first millennium in the north Syrian city states of the Neo-Hittite period, a weighty indication of the power of this idea in the north.

Schematic style seals represent a different style, one to

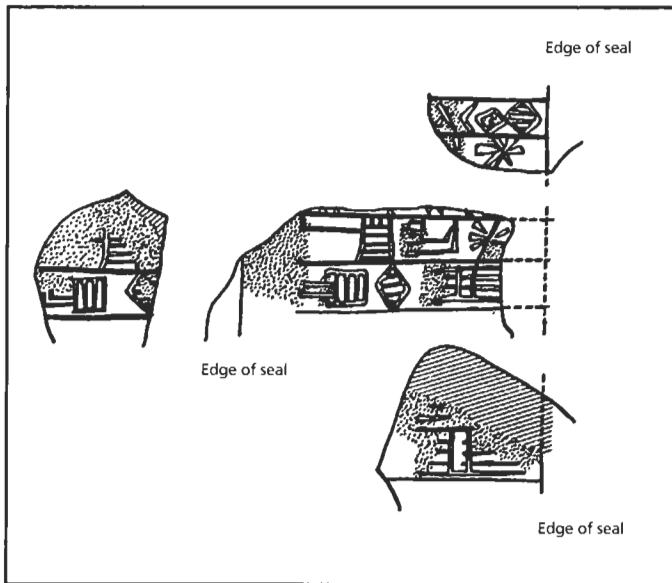
this point unconnected with the royal seal designs. These seals were more widespread in third millennium northern art. They had a resonance which was more continuous in the north as it existed still in the art of the Nuzi period which in turn influenced later art. We find examples of the schematic style prominently utilized at Urkesh and Brak, but also to some extent outside the northern area at Mari. A sealing from Ebla contains a border of disarticulated heads shown full-face, while geometric frames also turn up there (Kelly-Buccellati 1996). In other words, the northern schematic style emphasizing stock elements and geometric frames was at home in the north but is reflected in third millennium sites elsewhere.

While the Hurrian presence at Urkesh is strong and politically powerful, there is as yet little third millennium Hurrian evidence from Brak. Therefore we cannot connect, on the basis of our present evidence, the schematic style with Hurrian artists or Hurrian patrons in the same way that we can connect the dynastic art of Urkesh with its Hurrian royal patrons. Based on present evidence, the emerging picture of art in late third millennium northern Syro-Mesopotamia presents at least two styles first clearly indicated in the stratified context of the AK building at Urkesh. The first is the dynastic art linked to the Hurrian dynasty and at this point not found outside Urkesh. The second is a more widespread schematic style which had its roots in ED III glyptic but was more important in the Akkadian period. This style continued to dominate in the north into the Nuzi period. It cannot be linked specifically to Hurrian artists or patrons, although at least in the Nuzi period, it was probably also employed by artists who were Hurrian.

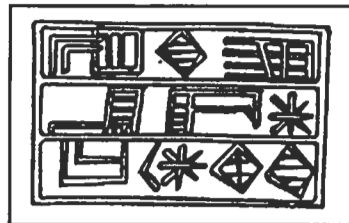
The Identification of Urkesh as Mozan

The most important epigraphic data consist of the inscriptions found on the impressions of cylinder seals: from these we have been able to identify ancient Urkesh with the site of Tell Mozan. This is all the more remarkable as the fragments that give us these inscriptions are very tiny, in a poor state of preservation, and so fragile that their very recovery was extremely difficult. One thing is certain: given the nature of the evidence, the identification of Urkesh could only have happened as the result of methodical and controlled excavations. Such an identification would in fact have been possible if the bronze lions of Tish-Atal had been traced immediately to Mozan; but no chance discovery would ever have brought to light the minute fragments of seal impressions with which we have been dealing in our excavations.

Even upon recovery, the reading of the pertinent inscription boxes proved very difficult. There are only three very



The fragments of an inscription box from different rollings of the same seal of king Tupkish, and a normalized rendering of the same inscription, based on all available fragments.



small fragments on which the name Urkesh is found. Two of them belong to the inscription box of the king's seal with the bearer of a globular object. The sign *kèš* presents the curious anomaly of being written with a sequence of strokes which is unusual, though not unattested. Finally, the fact that the inscription has to be read as a mirror image to make sense (see below) made the initial reading even more difficult. The third fragment belongs to the inscription box of the seal with the lion. There are four other inscribed seals of the king, but in none of them does the name Urkesh appear. The reconstructed rendering of the legend with the royal name and title shows that part of the name of the city is still missing, a gap which might be rendered in English transcription by square brackets as follows: U[r]kesh. However, the cuneiform writing for this geographical name is so distinctive that there is no doubt about the restoration and therefore about the identification of the site.

Epigraphy and Glyptics: The Positioning of the Inscription Box.

One of the unexpected features of Urkesh glyptics is the striking correlation between scene and inscription. This is shown in the nuances of the dynastic program as portrayed in the seals of the king and the queen and in the representation of pertinent figurative elements in the seals of the cook and of the nurse. But there is more. For just as unexpected is the way in which the cuneiform inscription box is handled in many of these seals. We will illustrate here

the two most interesting examples.

In its early stages, cuneiform was written from top to bottom. We can verify this mode of writing on large monuments, which have an unequivocal right side up (e.g., the so called Obelisk of Manishtushu), and/or whenever the inscribed portion is combined with a figurative scene, as with the Code of Hammurapi or with seals. Assyriologists visiting the Louvre and looking at the Code are more likely to turn their head than to flip the stele *sideways*! But with small items like tablets or seal impressions we generally hold the object in such a way that we can read from left to right. Accordingly, an epigraphist's view of a seal is regularly *sideways*.

The practice of top-to-bottom writing on seals is so universal in the third millennium that our seal of the queen reference (q1) came as a real surprise, since it was obviously read from left to right already in antiquity. It is the seal that spells out the title queen after her name, Uqnitum. Given the special interest of Urkesh glyptic artists in incorporating the legend with the scene design, it seems tempting to suggest that such an innovation in legend carving, unique within the third millennium and rare later, was intended for a special effect, which is underscored by the marked horizontality of the box. Let us contrast the seal of the queen with the others, where the inscription box serves as a vertical element which terminates on either side the sequential order of figures in the main composition. In most cases, the inscription box is linked with a minor compositional motif, which completes the vertical effect of the box, especially when the two are made to dovetail with each other, as in the case of the nurse's seals. In the seal impression of the queen, however, the frame is placed horizontally as if it were to be *read* at the same time that one looks at the scene. The horizontality of the inscription box is emphasized by the fact that there is no secondary motif beneath the legend. This absence of a secondary motif may itself have a specific connotative function, namely, to stress the burden that the rank of the queen places on her female servants, who are made to carry on their back the frame with her name and title fully legible.

The seal of the cook (h3) presents yet another variation in the way in which the inscription boxes are integrated in the scene. We have, in fact, two distinct halves of the box. One is tall, and it occupies the entire field. In this case, however, the verticality of the box may serve a different connotative function than that of framing the scene on either side. It may in fact convey the exact opposite meaning: it gives the impression of a stele, centrally positioned so as to serve as the focal point faced directly by the two servants of the cook, the butcher and the churning woman. The two vertical framing elements, on either side of the composition, are provided by the smaller half of the box, which was abraded on the seal but must have contained the name of the chief cook. The box, placed vertically, sits on the back of the bent woman, without a minor compositional element, as if imitating the position of the inscription box on the seal of the queen!



Queen's seal (q1) where her official title is given with the Sumerogram NIN, "queen." The imagery seems to emphasize her official status, in that two female servants carry her inscription on their backs. The unity of idea and artistic design, the correlation between inscription and scene, represents a notable feature of glyptic style at Urkesh.

The Figurines of Urkesh

More than 300 small terra cotta sculptures have been found in the Royal Storehouse and in adjacent areas of building AK at Urkesh. Third millennium floors have yielded both animals and human-like figures.

The anthropomorphic figurines can be grouped typologically according to the way they are terminated. A good number share the characteristics of the "gaming pieces" found in early strata at Tepe Gawra, Tobler's "hitherto unknown anthropomorphic type." A different type of torso, outside this typology, but from the Royal Storehouse, has parallels at Tell Chuera. These pieces—and most of them are broken—are modelled in consistent manner. Most are made from the same local clay and baked. Surface finishing techniques include scraping with a sharp instrument and pinching and smoothing with fingers. A variety of incisions in the clay represent pelt, orifices, and the separation of body-parts. Dots provide decoration or indicate body-parts and are applied with blunt or pointed sticks and reeds.

The animal figurines are remarkable for their realism, indicating that the figures were sculpted by artisans who were familiar with the way these animals looked and behaved. Herbivores hold their heads high above the grasses of the steppe; a bridled stallion turns his head to the right, refusing to pose for an official portrait. There are many animals represented in the Urkesh storerooms. The relationship of body-parts within each animal genus is consistent and permits identification. As might be expected, the animal figurines at Urkesh include equids, dogs, sheep, and goats. Given that panthers roamed the steppe in the third millennium and that seals represent Tupkish, king of Urkesh, enthroned with a lion by his chair, we may not be so surprised to find many felines in the figurine corpus. What is startling, however, is the realism of these small creatures. We can distinguish among the various species of equid represented; and we can trace the signs of domestication.

The Urkesh figurines were all found in the same third millennium strata in the Queen's Storeroom or adjoining rooms. We have, then, an ideal single context to speculate responsibly about how the Urkesh figurines were used. We are working on this puzzle—using the available textual clues—as of this writing.

Rick Hauser

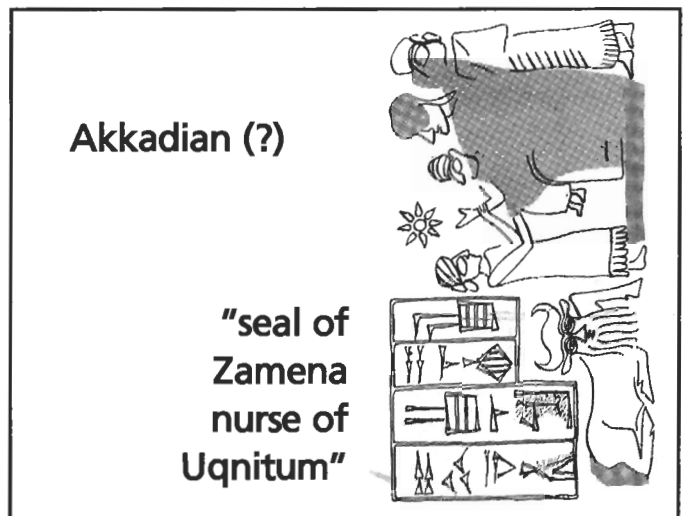
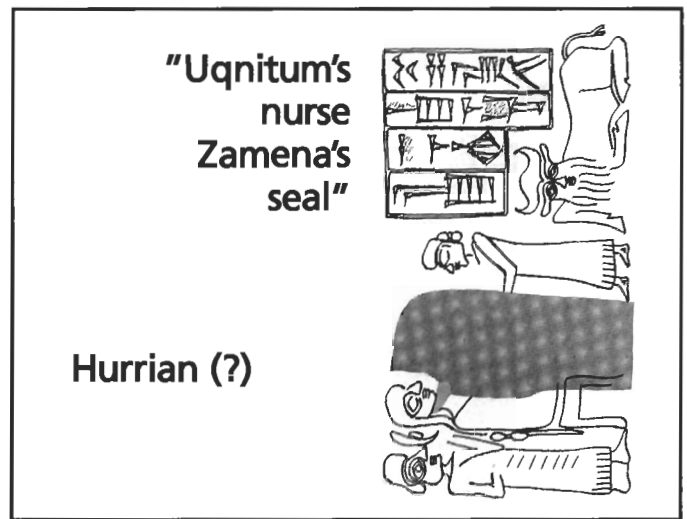
Mirror Imaging and Mirror Writing.

There is a second feature which is unique to Urkesh glyptics—unique in the third millennium, and quite rare later: mirror imaging. In our corpus, there are three different types of such practice.

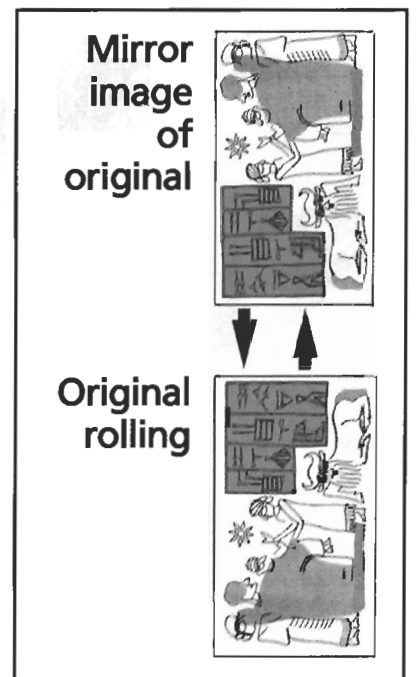
The first type consists of paired matches. We have, in other words, two different sets of seal impressions which are the mirror image of each other. Clearly, we have the same scene in the seals of the queen with her daughter (q4 and q5) and of the bird man (p. 84), except that in each pair one scene is the mirror image of the other.

The second type consists of a single set of seal impressions, which can be identified as being mirror images because the writing can only be understood when it is reversed. Such is the case for the king's seal with the bearer of a globular object (k1). One can appreciate now the point made earlier about the writing in a seal inscription being normally from top to bottom, rather than from left to right. When reading the text as a mirror image of the original impression, what is reversed is not the sequence of signs on a line, but rather the sequence of lines in a box. On the seal impression as we have it, the cuneiform signs are upside down (for example, the *en* and the *da*); and the sequence does not make sense, since the title *endan* is followed by a personal name, as if it said the king of Tupkish. But in the mirror image of the same seal impression the signs are right side up, and the text reads in the proper sequence: **Tupkish, king of Urkesh.**

A possible explanation for such a doubling up of seal designs may be the desire to identify different but related seal users while retaining the same basic iconographic motifs. But we might also consider another, quite different explanation, which is suggested by the third type of mirror imaging: an epigraphic doublet. Exemplified by the pair of seals belonging to the queen's nurse, Zamena, this kind of doublet presents a difference only in the inscription box and not in the scene (top boxes). The two seals from which these composite seal impressions derive are almost indistinguishable. The iconography is identical, and so is the sequence of lines in the legend box. But the size of one is slightly larger than the other, and some variations appear in the writing. The signs on the one seal (middle box) are right side up on the original seal impression, whereas the signs on the other seal are for the most part upside down. This clearly suggests that only the seal at top would have to be read as a mirror image. But what about the sequence of words? This is precisely what may give us a clue for the origin of this very curious Urkesh habit of mirror-image writing. It *may* be (and we must stress the hypothetical nature of our suggestion) that the seal at top was read with an inverted word order, of a type which is found in Hurrian noun phrases.¹⁰ If so, the seal at top would be the Hurrian version, so to speak, and the one below the Sumero-Akkadian version of one and the same prototype: Uqnitum's nurse-Zamena's seal versus the seal of Zamena, the nurse of Uqnitum. Alternatively: the version at top would be read in Hurrian on the *seal impression* and in Sumerian or Akkadian on the *seal itself*; and conversely for the version



Another case of two seals with a special type of reversal: while the scene is the same in both seals, in the seal at top the cuneiform signs are reversed in the impression (hence they would have been in the positive on the seal). The tentative suggestion is advanced that the same inscription might have been read with differing word order depending on whether it was understood as Hurrian or as Akkadian.





Building AK during excavation. A light canvas cover, draped over a light structure of poles and ropes, protects from the heat and the blinding light of the Summer sun. Excavations are regularly held in the Summer, because of the greater availability of workmen, who are for the most part either students or farmers. As excavation proceeded northward (to the left in the photo), the incorporation of the storehouse into a much larger complex became increasingly likely. Floors continued on the other side of the storehouse wall for nearly two dozen meters. At that point, excavators exposed traces of steps leading up to the floors, and the floors were thus able to be perceived as the threshold or porch of a monumental entryway.

below. This is a mere hypothesis, but, if correct, we would have evidence of a rather sophisticated use of multilinguism in the royal court of Urkesh and in its scribal circles.

The Architectural Setting of Building AK: Storehouse or Palace?

The building which we have labeled AK is located at the lowest end of the stepped trench on the east side of the mound. We had assumed that we were digging in a storehouse, to judge from the nature of the finds (especially the discarded sealings) as well as from some aspects of the architecture (for example, the fact that the walls were not plastered). It must have been, however, an important storehouse, given its large dimensions and the organic arrangement of its plan. In fact, the large number of inscribed seals referring explicitly to the king, his wife, and her retainers left no doubt that it served the needs of the royal court.

Because the southwestern portion of the building had been badly eroded, with rainwater settling in the south-

western corner, little if anything was found there, except for the foundations of the walls and the subfloors. However, this situation afforded us a good view of the stratigraphic sequence before we even started excavating within the room. In anticipation of what these floor deposits might contain, we planned for a particularly careful excavation. It was only in this manner that we could retrieve a rich glyptic harvest, after collecting and reviewing individually thousands upon thousands of clay lumps, all potentially qualifying as seal impressions.

During our last season, in the summer of 1996, we had planned to extend our excavations to the north, assuming that we might find a few service rooms clustered around a courtyard. But it was to be quite different. There was no trace, in Sector F, of a wall to the west. In the place where we had expected a perimeter wall, the floors continued as if over a threshold. Some 22 meters to the north, we found clear remnants of steps leading up to this threshold. A round brick platform, and another possible platform, seemed to suggest the presence of column bases, though this remains quite

uncertain. Abruptly, our conception of the building had changed. And so had our perspective: instead of orienting our plan north, we now look at it from the point of view of the entrance. Clearly, such a monumental entrance could not be in keeping with a mere storehouse. In the end, we were only able to pose, but not really to test, a hypothesis: the whole building may indeed be the royal palace. It is for testing this hypothesis that we are gearing up in preparing for the excavations in the summer of 1997.

The Palace Hypothesis

Let us review some of the comparative material that assists us in formulating the palace hypothesis. There are four key components of the building plan for the part in which we are interested: (a) the entrance; (b) the ceremonial area accessed from the entrance (serving also as a transition element to other sectors); (c) a service area accessed directly from a and/or b; (d) a parallel service area, found only in certain cases.

Disengaging ourselves from the two-dimensional footprint mentality against which Jean-Claude Margueron (1982) has eloquently argued, we can ask: What is the perceptual function of the entrance for such a building? One type found in the north and represented especially in the much later *bit hilâni* model¹¹ gives great architectural relief to the entrance: it serves both as a focal point in the exterior facade and as a decompression chamber to the inside (both psychologically and climatically). In the south, instead, the entrance is like a panel which matches spaces between buttresses within the exterior wall, and the decompression takes place through long, narrow corridors which lead to a deep and recessed interior space as a terminal point of arrival. Excellent examples of the *bit hilâni* type of building existed at Zinjirli (see the reconstructions recently published in Parker 1996:215): the impressive porticoed entrances of the two buildings are, precisely, classical examples of *bit hilâni* structures—but some 1500 years later. The earliest known example of such a structure, apart from this possible Urkesh example, is the one from Emar (Margueron and Sigrist 1997).

Whether or not the interpretation of building AK as a royal palace is valid we will find out during our upcoming season, but in any case excavations there are extremely promising. Several concomitant factors lend special significance

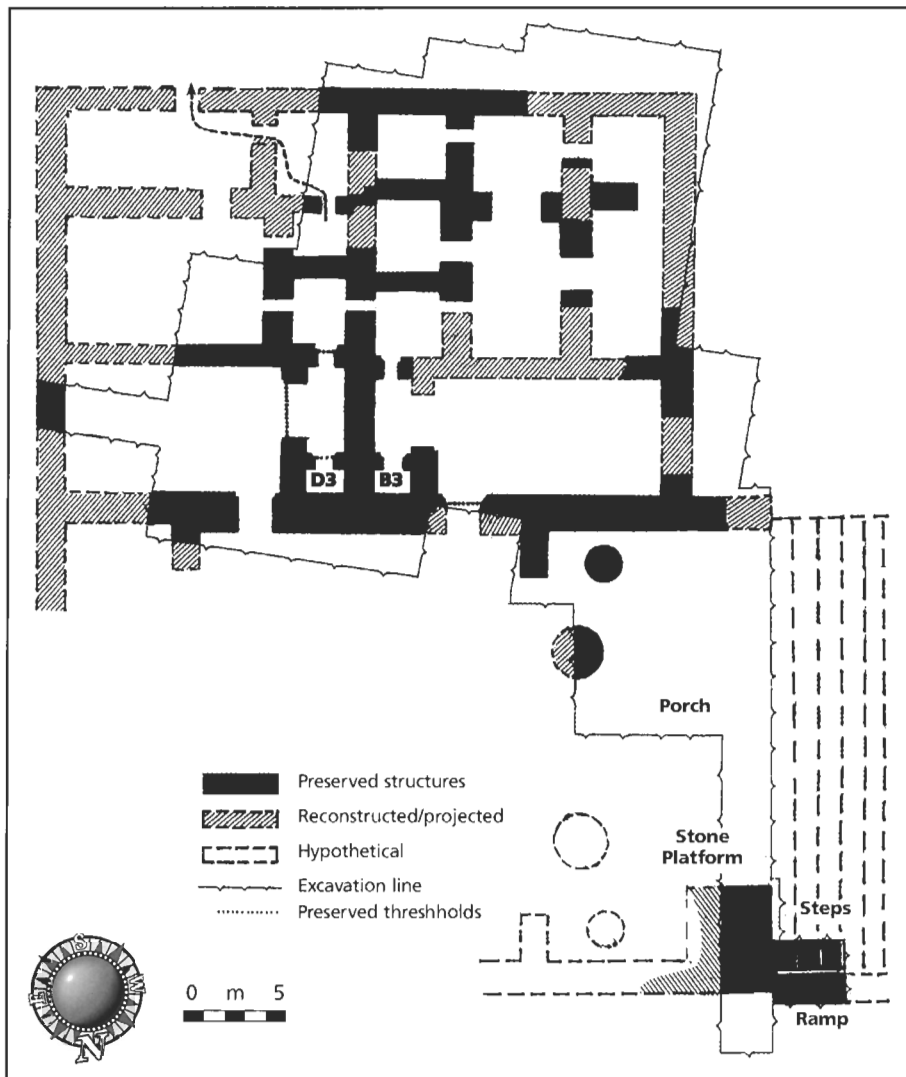


Kite photograph of AK with the traces of the monumental entrance on the lower right (1996 excavations). The sand bags replace "negative walls," i.e., ancient walls which were robbed of their stones subsequent to the abandonment of the building. (The sand bags at bottom serve to protect the excavation area from heavy water runoff during the winter.)

to the stratigraphy of building AK:

(1) The storehouse was built *de novo*, according to a unified building plan, and it is likely that the same obtains for the remainder of the building.

(2) The earliest floor deposit of the building is very well preserved.



Plan of the AK building as excavated and projected by us before the 1996 season.

(3) Later floor deposits contained within the walls of the same building rise to a height of almost two meters: this indicates a long and continuous period of occupation.

(4) The building extends well into the mound, so that it is a reasonable expectation that we may recover it in its entirety, and preservation promises to be excellent as one proceeds to the east and north of the area exposed so far. It is true that the mound is sloping up in the same direction. This means that we should brace for many a season of excavations if we want to uncover the entire building, and if we want to proceed with the care to which we are accustomed.

From all indications, the process will be well worth it. The strata that overlay the building belong in the late third and early second millennium, and such stratigraphic continuity is of particular interest in view of recent theories about a possible environmental catastrophe at the end of the third millennium (Weiss, Courty et al. 1993) The earliest floors

of our building date to about 2200 BCE: to be more precise, Carbon-14 determinations favor a slightly later date (2175 BCE), while stylistic and epigraphic considerations favor a slightly earlier date; 2200 is a preliminary and arbitrary average between the two measures. Obviously, the lower the date, the greater is the amount of deposition to be compressed in the centuries marking the turn of the millennium.

In the coming season (summer 1997), we will literally cross the threshold of the palace, entering thereby into the nerve center of one of the great seats of power of ancient Syro-Mesopotamia. We expect to encounter, on the basis of ample, if later, comparative material from northern Syria, a monumental stairway and porticoed entrance leading into a ceremonial reception area, where the throne room was presumably located. To the right of the ceremonial reception area, the two service quarters functioned, as we originally assumed, as storage areas, but for goods that were destined to immediate use by the royal court. In this sense, our "storehouse" is not a long-term warehousing depot, but rather the provisioning center for the immediate needs of the court. Because of the presence of many sealings belonging to the female cook of the queen (i.e., the chief supervisor of the royal kitchen), and because of the large number of seal-

ings that had been placed on jars, the commodities stored might have been predominantly foodstuffs destined for the royal kitchen.

Urkes and the Hurrians

Even before our excavations and the consequent identification of the site, Urkes was well known as the earliest documented Hurrian urban center; as the only city for which we have a known sequence of Hurrian kings during the third millennium; as a mythical city, in the proper and specific sense that it was identified in Hurrian mythology as the residence of the primordial god of their pantheon, Kumarbi. We can add now that it is also the only Hurrian capital clearly matched with an actual archaeological site—since doubts exist regarding the possible capital(s) of that confederation of Hurrian states known as the Mitanni kingdom.

Together with the Sumerians and the Akkadians, the Hurrians gave rise to one of the major new types of the earliest urban civilization, about 5000 years ago. What characterized Hurrian culture was its dependence on the vast mountain hinterland which begins in northern Syria. Urkes was the

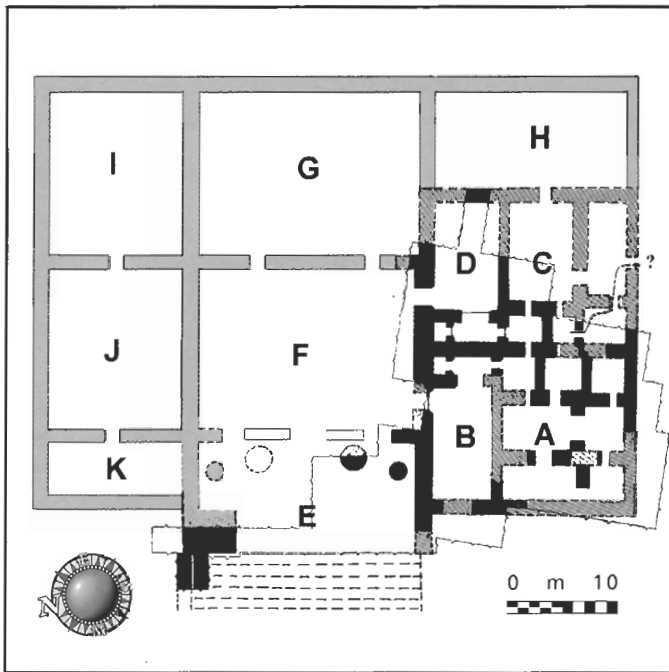


central gateway on the major communication routes which brought south the resources of the Anatolian plateau (especially metals, timber, stone). At the same time, Urkesh was situated in a privileged climatic niche, with abundant rainfall and a rich water table allowing for an extremely productive dry-farming regime. The new insights that the Urkesh evidence makes possible on archaic Hurrian civilization are of great significance for the history of the ancient Near East. Hurrian civilization was oriented towards the northern mountainous regions (the Outer Fertile Crescent), and as such represented a distinctive type of early urban civilization, distinct, that is, from the two other major types of urban culture (Sumerian and Semitic, as at Ebla). Its mythology exercised a major influence on later Hittite religion, which preserved many Hurrian texts and borrowed specific deities and myths. Customs first documented by the material found in our excavations (e.g., the importance of the queen and of the dynastic symbolism pertaining to the royal family) are also to be traced in later Hittite iconography. Hurrian onomastics extended all the way down to Palestine in the Amarna period. So did a type of third millennium ceramic ware (Early Transcaucasian, known as Khirbet Kerak in Syro-Palestinian archaeology). The first musical score, as preserved in Ugarit, was used to commit to memory the tune of a Hurrian religious hymn.

View of the AK building (looking North) with the two small "vaults" (B3 and D3 on the top plan, p. 91) on the right. On the other side of these vaults, excavators expect to find the well-preserved remains of a palatial reception area.

Conclusion

What specifically have we established so far in Urkesh, and what can we expect in the foreseeable future? We are, unfortunately, not too sanguine about finding tablet archives or important artifactual inventories within building AK; even if it is the royal palace, we may have to be resigned to just discards, like the seal impressions, however informative. The reason is that we have found no trace yet of a massive destruction at the site, and especially not within the presumed palace. For our misfortune, the city does not seem to have been sacked in antiquity. There is, in fact, no clear-cut mention of it in the records of Akkadian conquests¹²—just as there is, on the other hand, no mention of it in the archives of Ebla. This is all the more remarkable in that, by contrast, Tell Brak/Nagar, which is not all that far from Mozan, had come under direct Akkadian rule and was in direct contact with Ebla. It would appear that a sharp cultural and political boundary divided the Khabur plains into a Northern and a Southern half, in spite of the total absence of geographical barriers between the two. This might suggest that, in the third millennium, the Hurrian urban sphere extended only along the piedmont

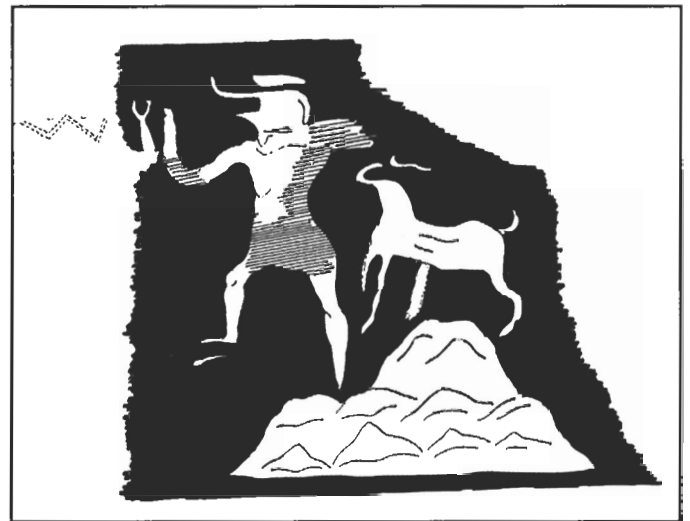


Plan of the AK building as we have excavated and projected it after the 1996 season. Sector E is understood as a monumental entrance, but this is still tentative. Sectors G-K are purely hypothetical, and serve only as a possible scenario for our next season of excavations in the summer of 1997.

region of the Tur-Abdin, in what may be called the urban ledge of the vast rural hinterland in the mountains to the north.¹³ When ancient documents employ the title, "King of Urkesh and Nawar," it is to the northern highland that the term Nawar refers, in our view, rather than being an equivalent of Nagar, the ancient name of Tell Brak. The title "King of Urkesh and Nawar" would then refer to the main city and its hinterland, somewhat like the title of "King of Mari and Khana."¹⁴

Urkesh may well have been the major center of such a Hurrian urban ledge, and it would have dated back to the beginning of urban history. Such antiquity is suggested by the depositional continuity in the areas excavated so far at Mozan. The major architectural evidence we have to date from Mozan consists of an inner city wall, a temple, and the presumed palace dating respectively, and of course approximately, to about 2700, 2450 and 2200 BCE. Only the presumed palace can be shown to be associated with an explicit Hurrian presence. However, all stratigraphic indications point in the direction of a strong depositional continuity, and on this basis it seems possible to infer a fundamental Hurrian nature to the beginning of the settlement.

The antiquity of Urkesh is also suggested, as we have seen, by the fact that the city enjoyed a central position in Hurrian myth. When the god Silver, in the story with which we began, eventually made his way to Urkesh to seek out his father, he failed to find him because he was away,



A Hurrian myth tells of the city god Kumarbi, the father of the city of Urkesh, whose son, Silver, fails to find him at home upon a visit to his city. Kumarbi had trekked off to the highlands; his roaming the mountains may be depicted in this Urkesh seal impression.

roaming in the mountains. Whether or not one of our seal impressions does represent Kumarbi roaming in the mountains we cannot say for sure—nor will we try to follow him there. There is enough work ahead of us in his home city!

Acknowledgments

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A Lexical Tablet

We have found some forty cuneiform tablets, complete or broken, all dating to the late Akkadian period. The most interesting one is a school tablet, which had broken in antiquity, but could be reconstituted from three pieces found within a short distance of each other on the floor of the building. This suggests that the tablet was discarded by its user who must have been a scribal apprentice. This leads us to assume the presence of a scribal school connected with the building. The text preserves a section of the lexical list LU E, a glossary of Sumerian profession names. The complete list has been found at Abu Salabikh in Southern Iraq and at Ebla. A comparison of the three texts shows similarities (the sequence and in some cases the entry are identical) and differences (the Urkesh text has a greater incidence of determinatives and syllabic spellings).

Notes

¹ The Akkadian motif of the lion under the feet of the goddess Ishtar (Boehmer 1965: 382, 387) or as a decoration of her throne (1965:384, 387, 389) is quite different in spirit from the Urkesh lion reclining at the foot of the dynast.

² With such a carefully presented composition, aiming to articulate clearly the dynastic message, it is inconceivable that the position of the bull was an oversight on the part of the artist.

³ Braids hanging on both sides of the face are shown in the frontally depicted heads of both deities and humans (both male and female) in Early Dynastic plaques (Moortgat 1969:pls. 114-16) and possibly the figure of Enheduanna on her votive disk (1969:pl. 130). A shell seal from Mari renders a bearded head with side braids (Parrot 1956:pl. LXV: 329). The heavy framing of the face in this hair style is very different from the long, ornamented braid of the queen and the princess at Urkesh.

⁴ This example is not properly dynastic but does indicate the extension of

the power of Sargon. See Winter 1987.

⁵ This is also true in the case of the soldier grasping a bearded enemy in the Akkadian stela from Telloh (Moortgat 1965:pl. 135) and on a variety of Akkadian cylinder seals including presentation, animal combat, and scenes depicting battles between the gods. The gestures on the Telloh stela are paralleled on a recently published Akkadian seal (Bleibtreu 1996).

⁶ In Akkadian art, the instances of the compositional integration of the text and the seal design are few, if the vertical framing aspect of Akkadian inscription boxes is not taken into consideration. One early Akkadian seal with a motif under the inscription which is part of the theme of the main composition belongs to the scribe Kalki (Boehmer 1965:717). A beautiful seal of a scribe from the reign of Sharkalisharri has the inscription framed over the backs and between the horns of two water buffalo. In this case we have a compositional integration but one which does not carry an overt cultural meaning. In some Urkesh seals the text and its visual equivalent are integrated both in terms of the composition and on a level which conveys a heightened cultural meaning.

⁷ Her method of churning is different from that shown in the Akkadian Etana seals (e.g., Boehmer 1965:701).

⁸ Specific iconographic elements, especially in the king's seals, have parallels in Akkadian iconography, e.g., the god with his foot raised or the warrior with a pointed hat (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1996b:75-77).

⁹ While there are at least eight seals with deities or other figures holding a child, the overall concept is quite different from the integrated themes in the Urkesh dynastic program (Boehmer 1965:483, 555-60, and one unpublished seal in the collection of the Biblical Institute of the University of Freiburg, Switzerland).

¹⁰ Compare		
<i>ashti-nshen-iff-we</i>	vs.	<i>shen-iff-we-ne-n tiza-unn-a shir-a-she</i>
wife brother+my+of		brother-my-of
=		heart-pleasing-relative
"the wife of my brother"		=
		"pleasing to the heart of my brother."

¹¹ Frankfort 1952. The correlation of the architectural model and the term as used in the Assyrian royal inscriptions still remains conjectural, but seems quite likely, and is in any case largely adopted in the literature. The meaning of the term remains uncertain, though it appears to be of Hittite etymology (s.v. *hīlānu* in *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* and W. Von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*), and it almost certainly would not have applied to the Urkesh building which is older in date and belongs to a different linguistic tradition.

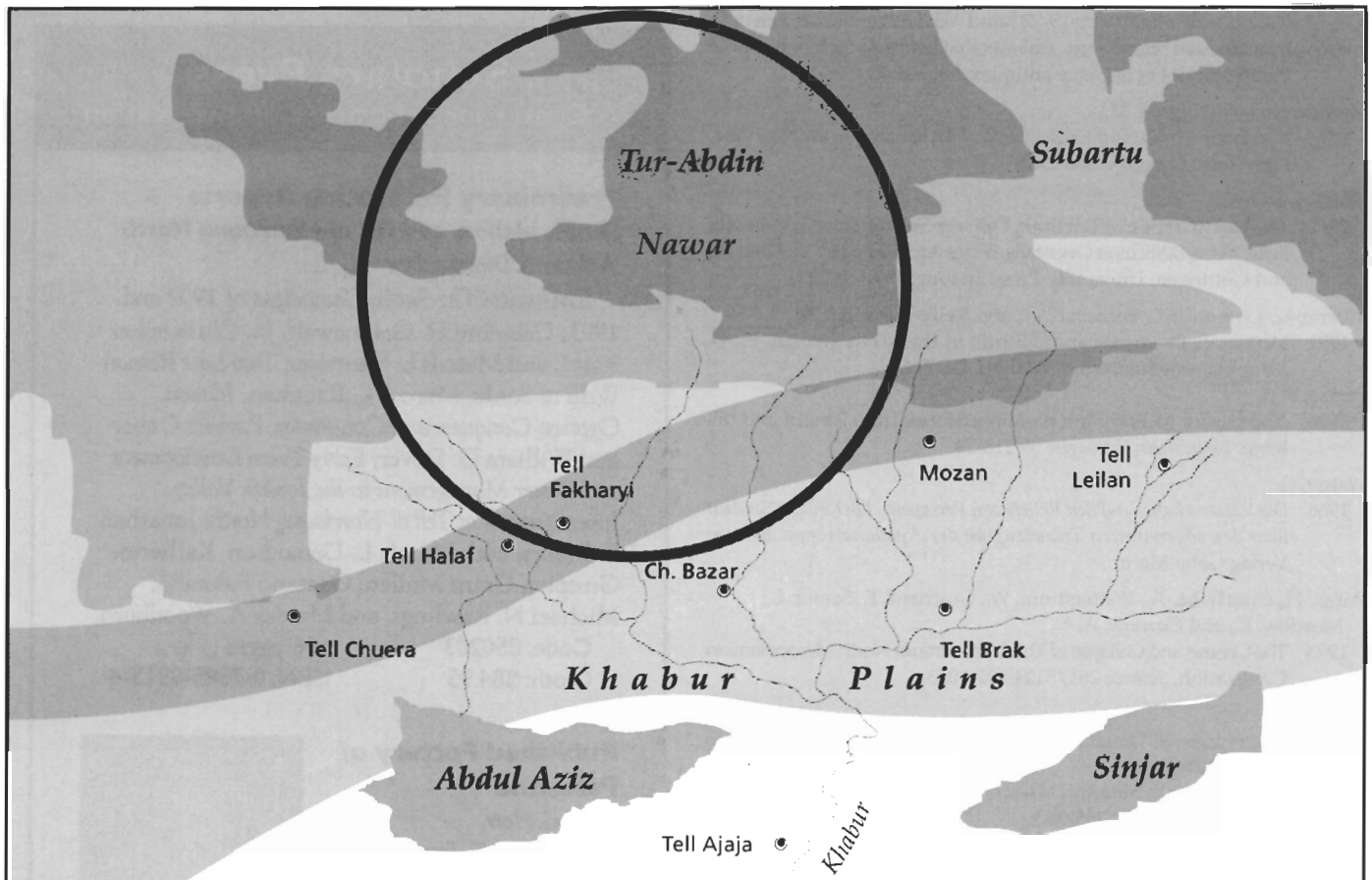
¹² Except for a single possible reference, proposed by Steinkeller, which is fragmentary and in an uncertain context, see Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1996b:71, n. 27.

¹³ This was nicely shown in a satellite picture published a few years ago in the *Biblical Archaeologist* 58:3 (1985).

¹⁴ This follows a pattern which remains at home in the political tradition of royal titulature in Syria and Palestine; see Buccellati 1967:140-42.

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Map of the Habur region with the "Hurrian Urban Ledge" indicated as a band stretching along the piedmont area of the Tur Abdin. While most scholars assume that the title "king of Urkesh and Nawar" refers to the two ancient cities corresponding to modern Tell Mozan and Tell Brak, we assume instead that Nawar refers to the mountainous hinterland as approximately comprised within the circle.

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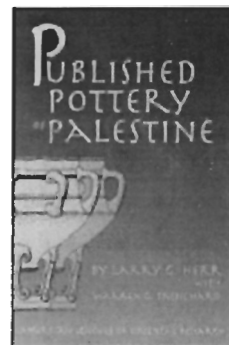
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