

Tell Mozan
ancient Urkesh

A self-guided tour
to the site

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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 site that it is our privilege to be excavating. We also 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. And that is because 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.

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. But 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.

At the site, two detailed printed flyers are available to all our visitors, and in addition there is a folder with larger plates that is available for inspection during the tour. If you would like to prepare ahead of time for your visit, you will find online the full text of the two flyers as well as of the folder. They are given as a single .PDF file that you can easily print if you so desire.

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

Giorgio Buccellati
Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati
Jamal Omar

The excavation of Urkesh at Tell Mozan started in 1984
and through the year 2003 there have been 16 seasons of excavation.

Excavations are carried out under a permit from, and with the collaboration of,
The Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums,
The Ministry of Culture,
The Syrian Arab Republic

The expedition is under the aegis of
IIMAS – The International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies
Istituto Internazinoale per la Mesopotamia e l'Alta Siria
with the participation of the
Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft

Faculty , staff and students from the following institutions have participated in the excavations:

The University of California, Los Angeles
The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA
California State University, Los Angeles
Harvard University
Eberhard-Karls-Universität, Tübingen
Università La Sapienza, Roma
Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia
Università degli Studi, Firenze
Università degli Studi, Trieste
Facoltà di Teologia di Lugano
Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles
L'Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Firenze
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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

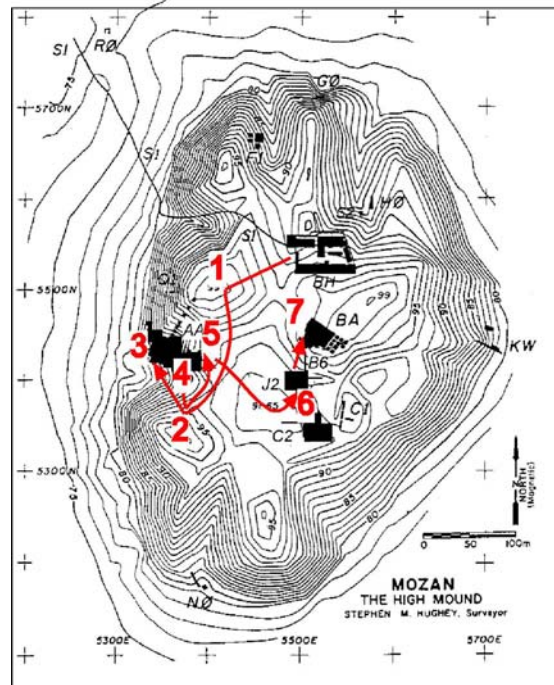
Jay and Brenda Jarmakani

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 | Akkadian | construction of AP palace : Tupkish and Uqnitum 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 |

TELL MOZAN URKESH

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.

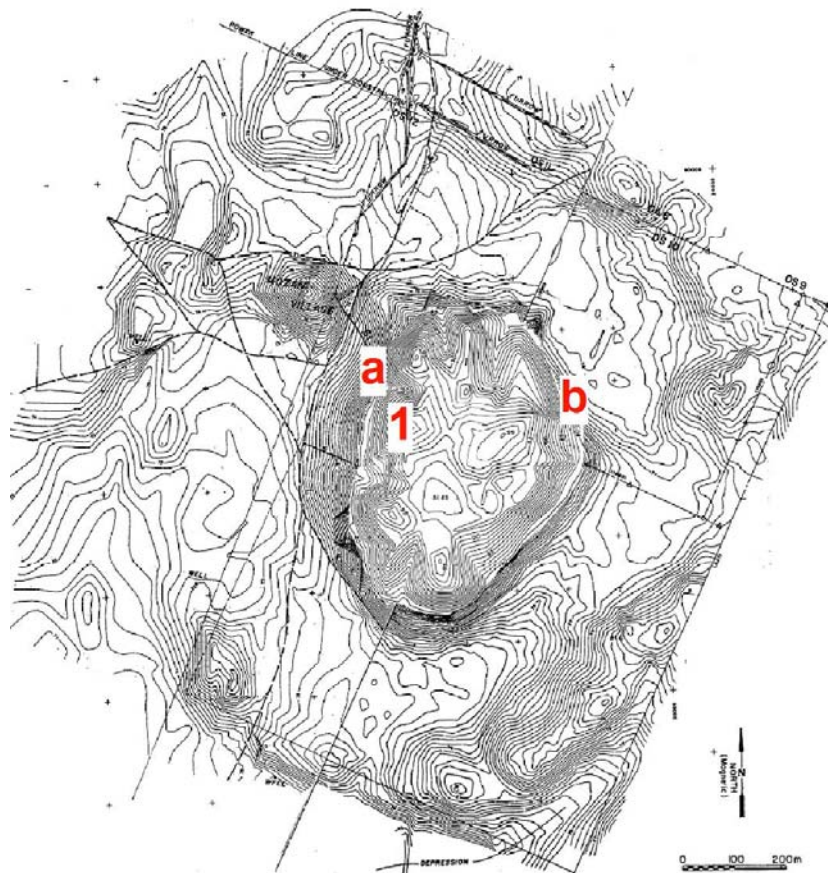
The site map shows the major areas where excavations have taken place on the High Mound. This is about 600 meters in length, and the Outer City almost a kilometer and a half, so that the ancient city reached an extension of some 150 hectares. The maximum height of the mound from virgin soil is about 28 meters. The site is accordingly one of the very largest of third millennium Syria.

This flyer is intended to help visitors on a self-guided tour, which follows the arrow shown on the map above. The stops along the tour are highlighted on the inside of this flyer. Points of particular interest are discussed in greater detail in two other flyers devoted to special topics and to background information, and additional illustrations are contained in a folder (to which we refer here by plate number). The folder is 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 continuous line that can only be interpreted as the stone foundations of the outer city wall.

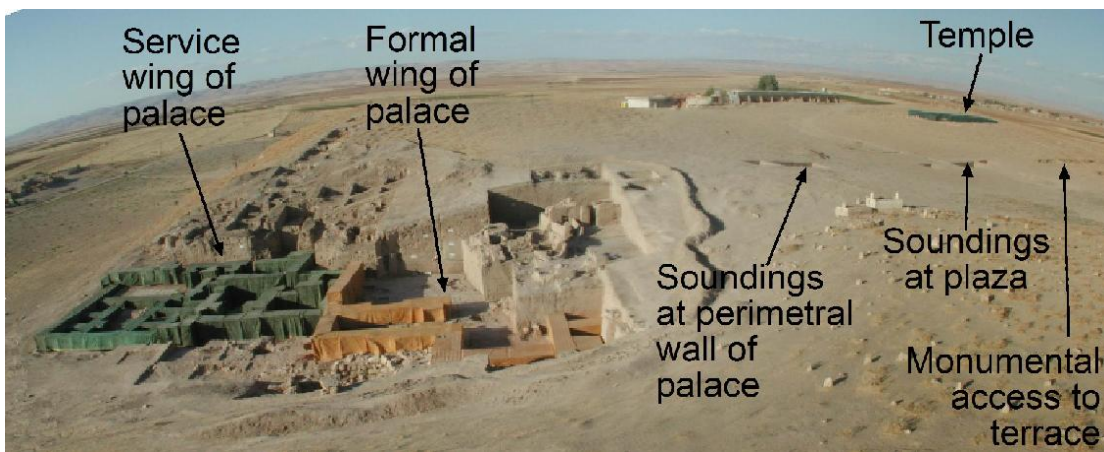


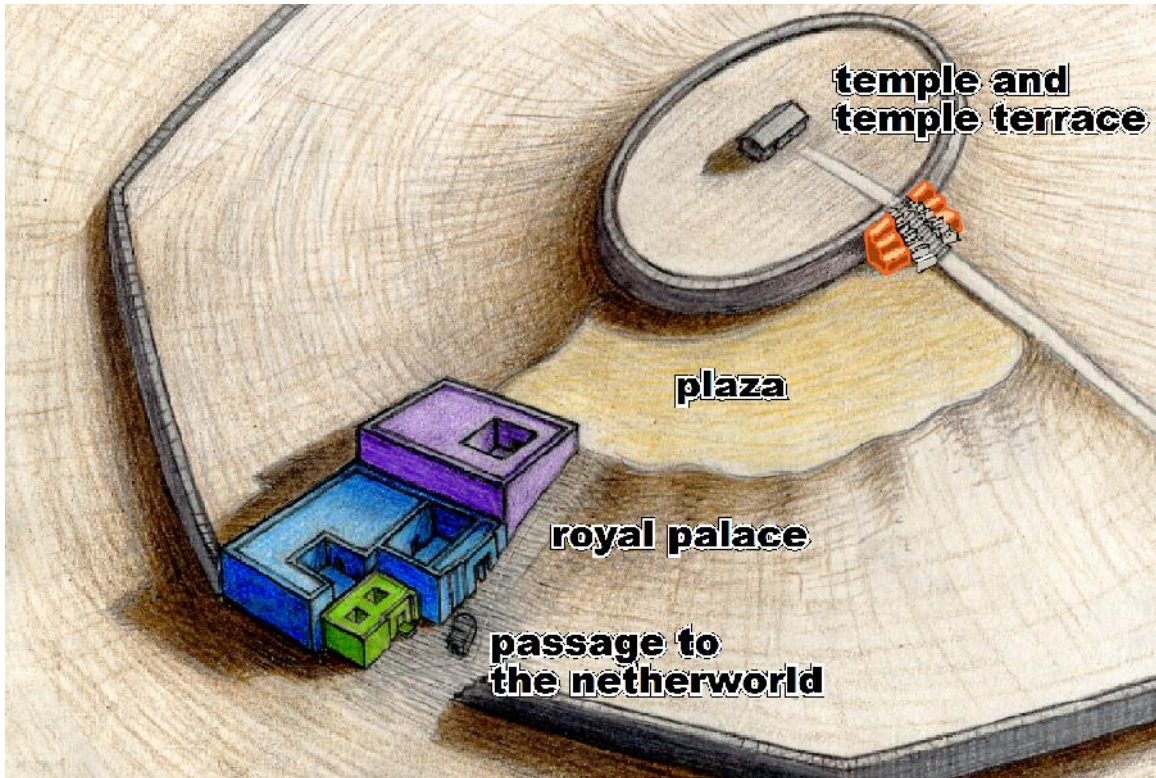
The Outer City developed to its fullest extent about the middle of the third millennium. At that point in time, an earlier city wall which had been built around what is now the High Mound became inoperative, though it continued as a boundary between the inner and the outer areas of the city (and contributed 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 Tupkish 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.

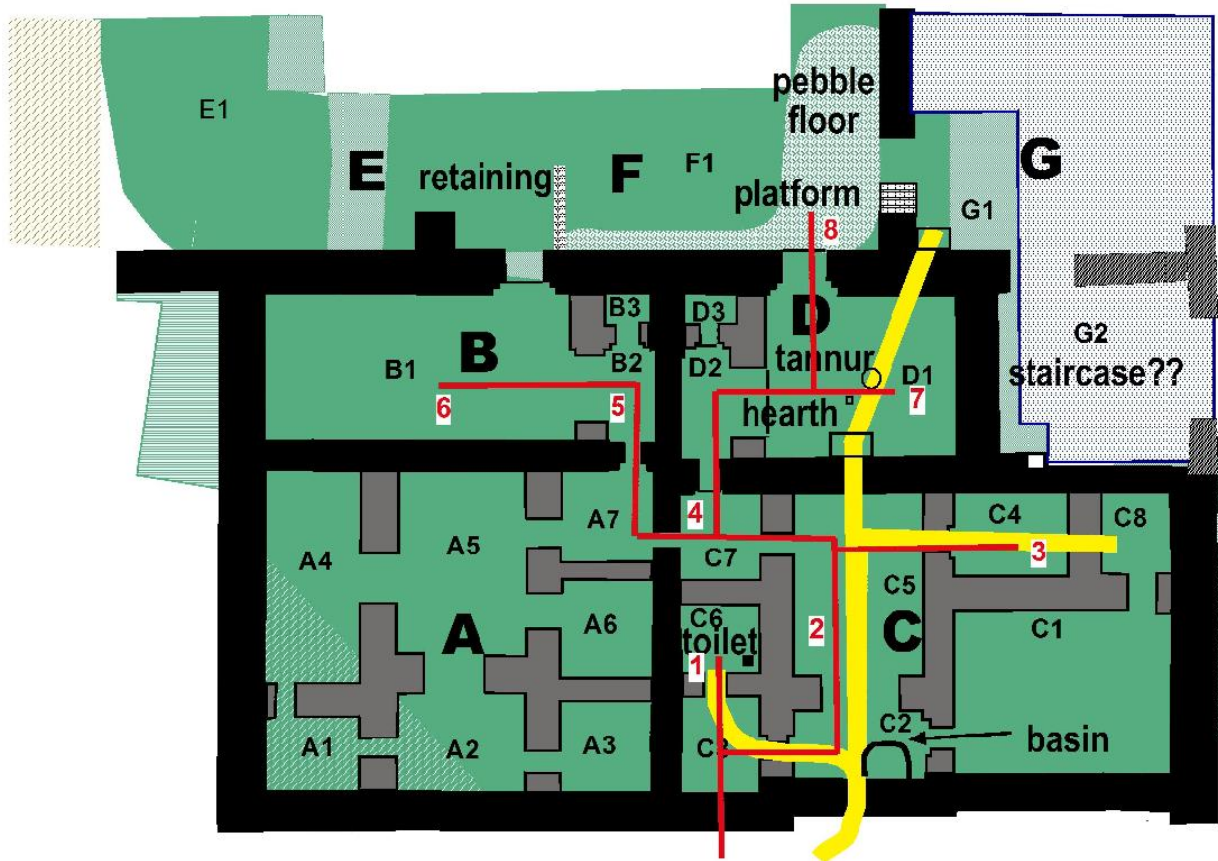
A wide plaza linked the Palace and the Temple, so that the whole ensemble constituted an organic whole of vast proportions (almost 250 meters from west to east). While such a type of urban planning is by no means exclusive to Urkesh, the ambitious use of stone and the degree of preservation are indeed 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 would have drained 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” (see page 6 in the Folder). 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).

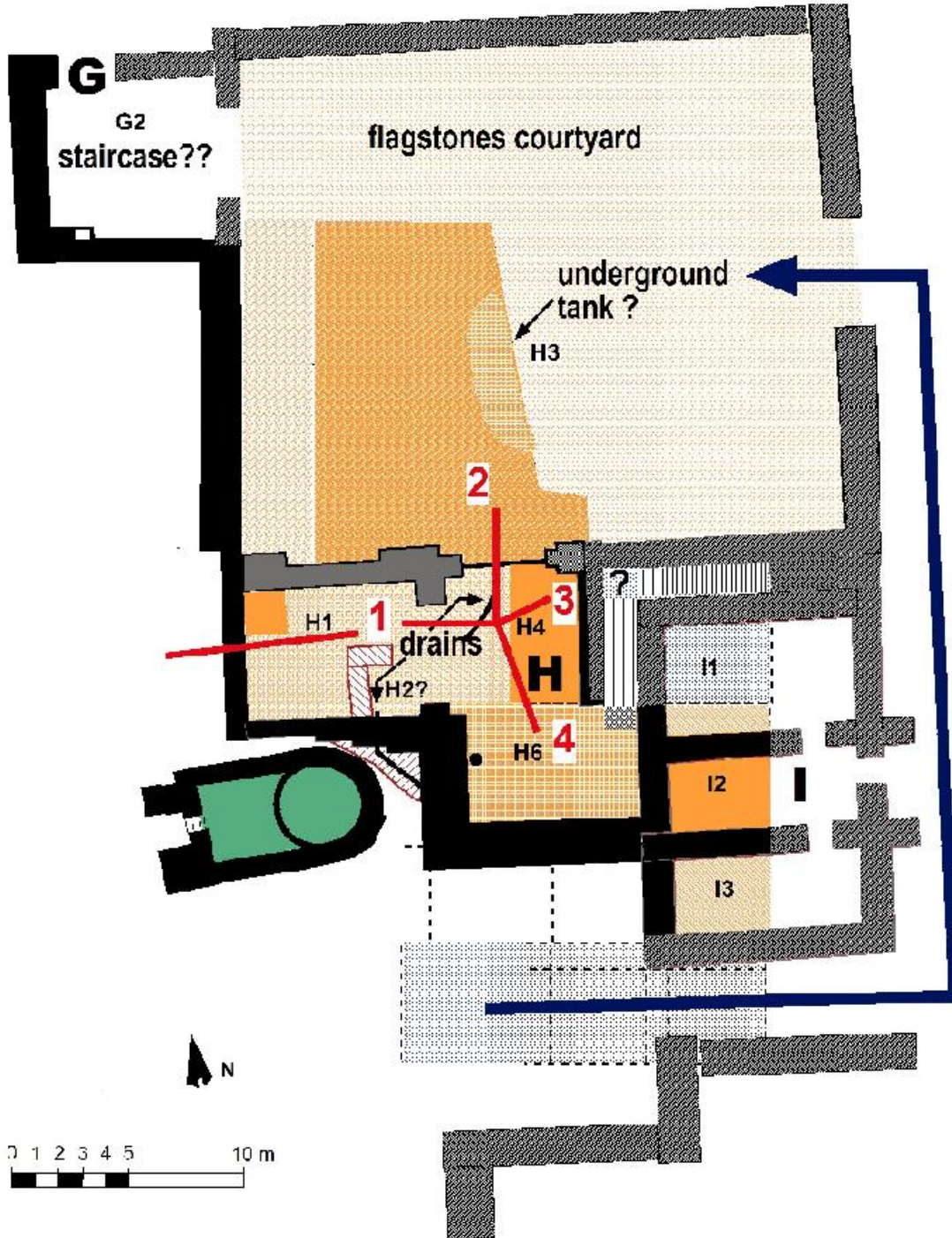
Rooms A7 and C7 (N.4), very small and with three doorways, could not have allowed any activity but for a guard to control access to inner sectors of the Palace.

Stop N.5 is an *iwan* (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. 3). They were used to seal containers where with goods for the royal household, and were dropped when the contained was opened. The wall the 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 “cook of the queen” (see Folder N.9). 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 3a, 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. This observation will help explain a

detail of the *âbi* history. And it is only because of the way the original have pre-
served 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. (We assume that it is to the south, and that it leads 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 p. for 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 (Folder p.) 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 that was 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 even 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 (Folder p.) and the spout of another jar in the shape of a pig's head (Folder p.).

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 (Topics p.). Many vessels were found whole: they may have served the purposes of the rituals conducted inside the âbi. This may also suggest that there was some kind of enclosure that delimited the sacral area.

Such a possible enclosure would 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 stone drain that does not continue to the north, hence it may have served a purpose connected with the platform. We have hypothesized that this may be what is known from the later Hurrian texts as a KASKAL.KUR, a Sumerian logogram that means "road to the Netherworld." If so, it is the counter-part 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 very different notion of the divinity from what is typical of 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, such as to require a medium who can interpret the folder gives you 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. Of great importance was also the find of a seal impression with the name of a new endan of Urkesh.

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. So here you gain a good idea of how a tel 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 in 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, is no longer Hurrian. But the people most likely retained a strong sense of Hurrian ethnic identification, and several of the artifacts in the houses of this period bear witness to this. Some of these objects are illustrated in the Folder (p.). 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* (p.).

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 in-

terruption, the settlement of the Mittani period, the last one of ancient Urkesh. Excavations of the 2004 season showed that this was more than mere village, even though small in size. There is a stone pavement that served as a border to the houses (you can see a portion of it 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 mil-

lennium 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 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.