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Southern California Chronicle

UCLA Honors Professor for Archeological Discoveries in Syria

By Pat and Samir Twair

Each year since 1925, the University of California at Los Angeles has presented its most distinguished scholars to the public through its faculty research lecture. On April 27, Prof. Giorgio Buccellati received this distinction for his research techniques and discovery of the legendary Hurrian city of Urkesh in Syria.

While lecturers in this series have been Nobel Peace Prize winners in biochemistry, nuclear physics or medicine, UCLA's Institute of Archeology took special pride in the selection of Dr. Buccellati, who was founding director of the institute, which he headed from 1973 to 1983.

Dr. Buccellati's world renown as a specialist in the Akkadian language and his innovative use of computers in the field of archeology were factors in his selection. We recall, firsthand, the amazement of Syrian customs inspectors in 1976 and 1977 when he brought large unwieldy computers for his early research at Terqa. The electronic equipment was a first in Syrian archeology and saved countless hours of statistical research when the electricity was working.

The identification of Tell Mozan as Urkesh, which he made with his archeologist wife, Dr. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, is regarded as a significant milestone in the field of archaeology.

In discussing the more than a quarter-century he has excavated in Syria, Dr. Buccellati praised the hospitality of the Syrian government and people, who are proud of their long continuous history and are willing to share it with the rest of the world.

For more than a century, scholars of the Middle East were aware of the Hurrian myth that centered around Kumarbi, the father of the gods, who resided at Urkesh, but archeologists had been unable to locate any tell (an artificial mound marking the ruins of ancient continuously occupied settlements), that could be identified as the legendary capital.

The noted British archeologist Max Mallowan had dug test trenches at Tell Mozan in northern Syria in the 1930s, but dismissed it as a Roman site. In 1984, when the Buccellatis investigated pottery shards at the enormous mound, they realized the fragments belonged to the 3rd millennium bc.

They began excavations.

A decade later, in 1994, they recovered a seal impression, which Dr. Buccellati read as "Enden Tupkish" (King of Tupkish). It was only when his wife urged him to read the inscription in a mirror that he read "Enden Urkesh" (King of Urkesh).

Scholars of the ancient Near East concur with subsequent materials the Buccellatis have excavated that Tell Mozan indeed is Urkesh.

The tell, which rises 90 feet above the plains and covers 300 acres, was occupied from the early 4th millennium; temple remains at the top are dated to 2500 B.C.

This has pushed back the history of the Hurrian civilization more than 1,000 years.

The more than 2,000 seal impressions studied by Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, an art historian, reveal the relatively independent role the queen enjoyed at Urkesh, with her own titles, servants and storerooms filled with goods.

One dilemma for the archeologist, Dr. Buccellati stressed in his address, is that each time a piece of evidence is dislodged from the stratigraphy, the corpus is destroyed "much like an attorney killing his witness."

“Archeology is a discipline like no other in that stratigraphic analysis is a highly abstract method,” he explained. “One must record the emplacement of an object in the ground.”

Drawing an example, he said that in antiquity clay containers were sealed. When the jug was opened, the sealing was broken and fell on the floor, where over time it became embedded in the dirt.

“We interpret broken traditions,” he continued. “It is our challenge to understand the moment of brokenness...to interpret broken traditions—traditions that are no longer embedded in the continuous stream of living cultures.”

Following the lecture, UCLA Chancellor Albert Carnesale opened his residence for a reception which also served as a reunion for many former graduate students who have participated in the Syrian expeditions since 1976.

In October, the Buccellatis will be honored at a symposium in Syria celebrating their discoveries at Tell Mozan/Urkish and Ashara/Terqa.

Panel Explores Patterns of Change in Middle East

Possible scenarios for post-Oslo events in the Middle East were discussed at an April 25 panel discussion arranged by Prof. Kathy Shamey at Santa Monica College. Panelists were Dr. Galia Golan of Hebrew University, Prof. Mahmood Ibrahim of California State Polytechnic Institute, Pomona, Prof. Najwa al-Qatan of Marymount University, and Stanley K. Sheinbaum, a board member of the International Center for Peace in the Middle East. The moderator was radio host Warren Olney.

When queried how the death of Jordan’s King Hussein has changed political dynamics in the region, Sheinbaum commented that newly installed King Abdullah appears to be reaching out to neighboring Arab states.

Professor Ibrahim commented that a significantly younger leadership is coming to power as well in the Gulf. He expressed hope this new generation of decision makers will keep its attention on demographics that project a half-billion people in the area by the year 2020. He predicted a doomsday scenario if Arab governments do not adequately fulfill the needs of their populations, which are expanding beyond what their resources can supply.

Sheinbaum noted that the 20th century focused on oil and the 21st century will be concerned with water resources.

“Jordan and Syria have been suffering from severe drought, which is a harbinger of the future,” added Professor Ibrahim. “The Palestinians don’t control their aquifer and Israel is limiting and withholding water it agreed to share with Jordan.”

When asked to express their concerns, Professor Qatan took a pessimistic look at the Palestinians. “Arafat might just as well announce a Palestinian state on Mars,” she said. “To have an airport [in Gaza] and a Palestinian police force does not constitute a state.”

Professor Golan noted that all the Palestinian expectations of the Oslo accords to negotiate refugees, water, borders and final status never took place after Binyamin Netanyahu came to power.

“When things are bad, it is difficult to see the difference between Labor and Likud,” stated Golan, who is a member of the leftist Meretz party. “However, they represent two different streams of Zionism. Likud only cares about the land. Labor evolved from a socialist tradition concerned with the quality of life. Under Labor, there were only 20,000 settlers on the West Bank, today there are 160,000.”

Professor Golan initiated the topic of compensation for the Palestinians when she said that in 1998 for the first time, during programs celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Jewish state, a TV series showed actual film footage of Palestinians being driven out of their villages.

“Revisionist historians who deal with this matter are still an isolated group, but for the first time, there has been a public discourse on what happened to the Palestinians,” she continued. “I don’t think there can ever be full justice, but we should strive to reach some agreement.”

Professor Golan said the U.S. should acknowledge the enormous role it must play in pressuring governments to move forward in the peace process.

Sheinbaum concluded: “The failure of Israel is its inability to understand the American separation of church and state.”

Islamic Information Service Awards

Warith Deen Mohammed, the imam who brought the Nation of Islam into the fold of mainstream Islam, was honored May 8 by the Islamic Information Service during its sixth annual Outreach Awards banquet in the Los Angeles Marriott Downtown Hotel. The son of the late Elijah Mohammed, Imam Mohammed disbanded the Nation of Islam after the death of his father, an act that brought more than 1.5 million American Muslims into mainstream Sunni Islam.

In accepting the award, Imam Mohammed said Islam has prepared him to work with all Muslims and he called for the more than 350 people present to respect each other and work together for the future of all humanity.

An award also was conferred on Dr. Abdullah Omar Naseef, who was unable to attend. However, he sent a message stating that early in life he had many questions about religion and he read everything from Marx to the Bible to the Qur’an.

“After reading the Bible twice and studying the mythologies of many cultures, I came to the conclusion that none respected the soul and intellect of humans in the way the Qur’an did,” his message stated.

A Saudi who is national president of East-West University in Chicago, Dr. Naseef concluded Muslims are experiencing better times in the world because information is getting out about Islam. Today, he wrote, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Muslims are sitting together to discuss how to work together and respect one another.

IIS produces a weekly one-hour video program, "Islam," that is broadcast in 120 cities in the U.S. as well as in Malaysia, Indonesia, Qatar, the Philippines and Saudi Arabia. Its objectives are to encourage Muslims to reach beyond images and rituals and focus on the essence of Islam and to create a bridge of understanding between non-Muslims and Muslims. Its Web site is <<http://www.islam.org/>>.

UCLA Near East Ensemble Opens Festival

At the first session of a three-weekend Spring Festival of World Music at UCLA, Dr. Jihad Racy's Near East Ensemble led off with Middle Eastern music. Ethnomusicology is entering its fourth decade on UCLA's Westwood campus and encompasses music of India, China, Indonesia, Latin America, Africa and the Near East.

At the May 20 performance, classical Kurdish numbers, popular songs by the Rahbani brothers of Lebanon and Egyptian orchestral classics were featured. Professor Racy fascinated the audience with a solo on the *mijwiz* (a double pipe), which he played through a technique of circular breathing which gave the impression that he never paused to take in air.

Sahra, who holds a master's degree in dance from UCLA and has performed professionally in Cairo, brought round after round of applause for her interpretation of the *raqs sharqi*.

A highlight of the evening was the appearance of Sudanese artist Mohammed Wardi, who was in Los Angeles to record a CD entitled "Longing for Home," which will be released in August.

Series Explores Women's Roles in Antiquity

For five Mondays this spring, antiquity buffs have been gathering at Barnsdall Park Theater for a series of lectures on "Women of the Ancient World" presented by the California Museum of Ancient Art.

The series opened with "Gender, Women and Sexuality in Ancient Mesopotamia," by Dr. Jerrold Cooper of Johns Hopkins University. On the basis of the lavish burial of Lady Puabi at Ur on the lower Euphrates River in present-day Iraq, Professor Cooper theorized that at least wives and daughters of the elite were indulged with luxuries in ancient Sumer.

Tablets from the 18th century B.C. city of Mari on the upper Euphrates in present-day Syria revealed that King Zimri-Lim allowed his consort to operate his kingdom when he was absent. In one case, he wrote to his queen and notified her he was sending a shipment of slave girls and asked her to pick the prettiest to serve as musicians. Zimri-Lim evidently thought the matter over and the next day wrote to his wife that, instead, he would select the girls himself upon his return.

For the most part, royal daughters were used as diplomatic pawns in their fathers' political endeavors. Contrary to this, Egyptian pharaohs would never allow their daughters to marry a foreign emperor, stated Dr. Betsy Brian, who spoke on the roles of ancient Egyptian women at the fourth lecture.

"Enheduana: Princess, Priestess, Poetess" was the topic of Dr. Joan Westenholz of the

Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem.

Enheduana, who lived around 2250 B.C., was the daughter of King Sargon, founder of the Akkadian Empire. After her father appointed her priestess of the moon god Nanna at Ur, she composed at least six hymns which epigraphers have attributed to her because of the similarities they share.

As the pre-eminent female cultic figure at Ur, Enheduana was charged with compiling hymns for the 42 temples in Akkad. Her long narrative hymns describing the feats of Inanna, the goddess of love and war, made Enheduana the first recognizable poetess in history. Her hymns served to consolidate cultic centers of Akkad and were used to prevent a rebellion against her nephew, Naram-Sin, who succeeded her father on the throne.

Throughout antiquity, wives were expected to remain faithful to their spouses and any who were caught in an adulterous liaison were murdered. This, of course, left husbands with few outlets for extramarital affairs, Dr. Cooper pointed out, except for female slaves or prostitutes.

With the introduction of the harem system and decrees against these women seeing or talking to men other than their husband, an institution was initiated that bode no good tidings for single men, Dr. Cooper stressed. If men were to oversee these harems, they could not be tempted by the women, hence they were mutilated and became eunuchs. The eunuch phenomenon began around the 14th century B.C. and influenced later imperial systems for millennia.

Pat and Samir Twair are freelance writers based in Los Angeles.