

The Floodwaters of Urkesh



The Urkesh Folio – 2009

The Flood Waters of Urkish Physiognomy of the 2009 season

It seemed strange, in the middle of an extremely dry summer, to think of flood waters, strong enough to affect in antiquity the massive stone constructions of the Temple Terrace.

But that was the surprise of the 2009 excavations. It was clearly evidenced by the telltale signs of the vast damage inflicted, and of the remedies sought. This also enlightened us as to the structural make-up of this vast monumental complex, in ways quite unexpected.

A great coherence in the urban landscape emerged from all this. We also derived an even greater impetus to our long-standing effort at developing Mozan as a transparent window onto ancient Urkish. Conservation and site presentation have elicited a growing commitment on our part, culminating, in 2009, in a new formula: The Site as a Book.

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Echoes of Mountain Landscapes

Picture yourself present at creation –
the creation, that is, of the first cities.
The landscape uncluttered by high rising structures,
only small clusters of houses,
their low profile hardly visible on the horizon.

And then,
within a short time span,
you see a new landscape emerge
the built environment bursting onto the scene
rivaling nature all around you.

Urkesh, the city,
was born as a mountain,
a divine mountain that echoed those
on the northern horizon.

It rose from the ground
to house Kumarbi.

Echoes of Mountain Landscapes: The mental template



This terraced mountain top
overlooks Mozan today as it did Urkesh in the past -
Did the builders of our great Temple Terrace
have this in mind as their model
when they conceived of the Urkesh divine mountain?

Echoes of Mountain Landscapes: The great ascent

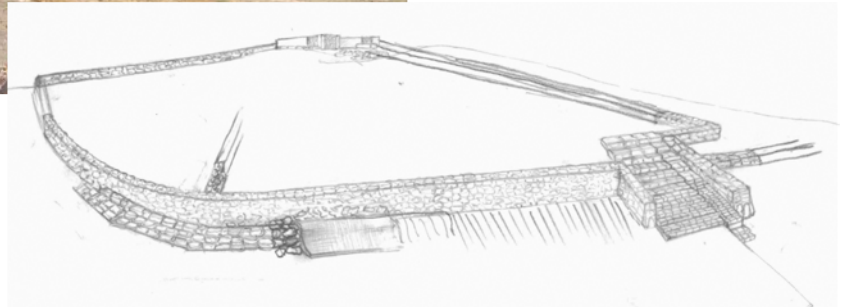


The mountain slopes to the north look like a rough staircase not very dissimilar from the one built for ascent to the Temple.

Echoes of Mountain Landscapes: Precincts... ancients and modern



In the highlands to the north, one finds today vast areas penned in by stone precinct walls constructed in a peculiar style, with a triangular pattern.



It is the same design that we find around our Temple Terrace.



We assume that the same type of walls served, 5000 years ago, as the model for the Urkesh divine mountain.

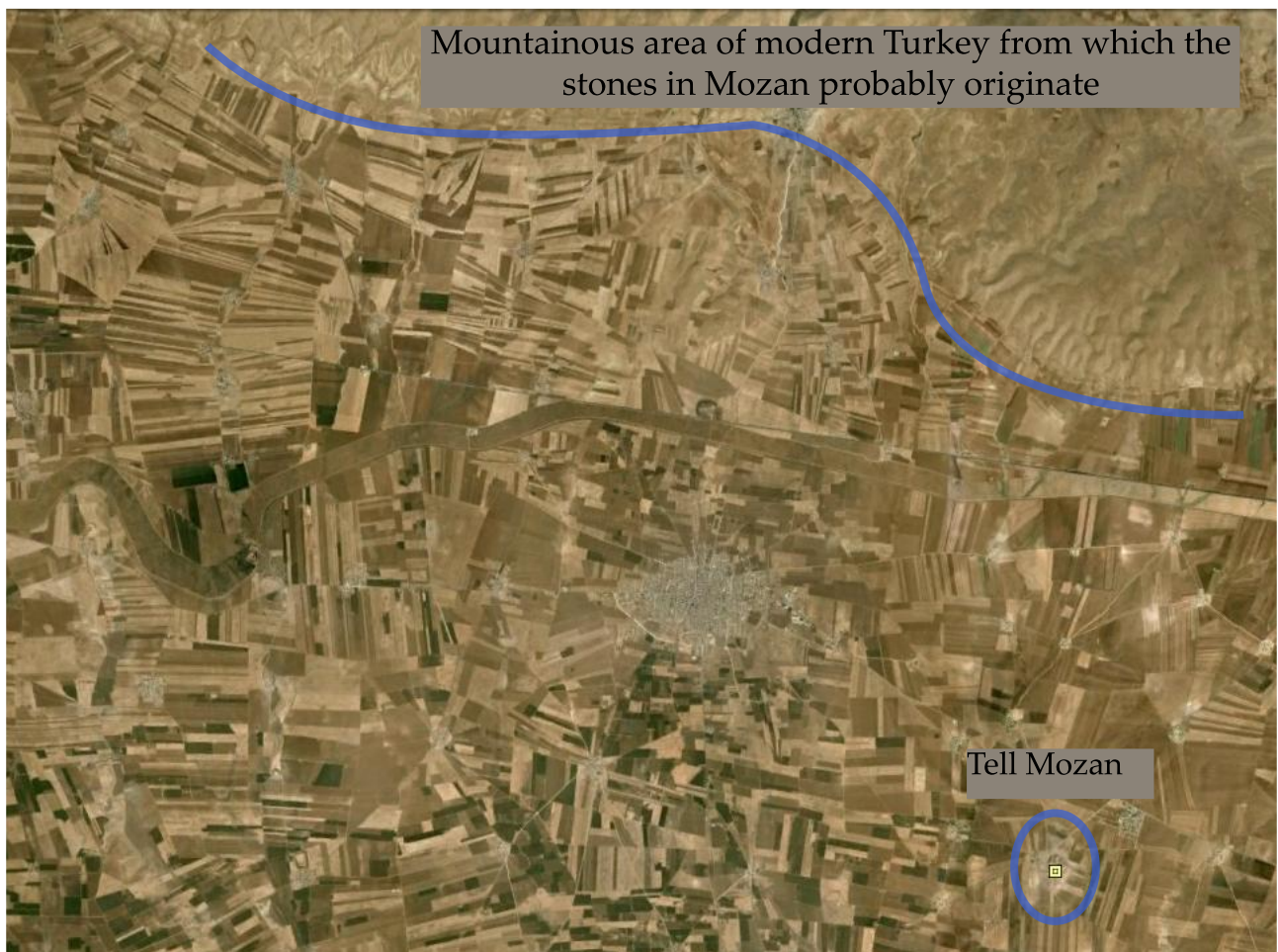


Echoes of Mountain Landscapes: A Road for Stone

The quantity of rough-hewn stone used in monumental constructions in ancient Urkish is truly... awesome.

Not only for the aesthetic contrast between the earthen bricks and the white stone, but also when we imagine the effort it must have taken to transport them!

The ancient quarries were probably about 10 to 15 kilometers away, a considerable distance considering the tools available at the time.



Mountainous area of modern Turkey from which the stones in Mozan probably originate

Tell Mozan

Protecting the Divine Mountain

The newly built height
rose to face the sky in its glory
and to withstand the weather's fury.

It was the onrush of the waters
cascading down its slopes
that posed the greatest problem.

The mountain abode of Kumarbi
needed protection –
the more so
the higher it rose skywards.

The ground unravels,
as we dig through it today,
the truly millennial struggle
to protect their divine mountain.

A struggle successful,
as the built mountain stood,
unsullied,
for a long string of centuries.

The Divine Mountain:

On the Threshold of History



As if seeing
the bottom of a stream
through clear water,
a remote past appears
below the escarpment.

A difference of 900 years
is here compressed
in less than a meter of accumulation:
the collapsed wall – 3500 B.C.,
the standing wall – 2600 B.C.



The Divine Mountain:

Waiting for the Flood

At the base of the massive revetment wall

we find a solid stone escarpment -
a defense against the onrush of water
coming from higher ground
to the northwest..



The Divine Mountain:

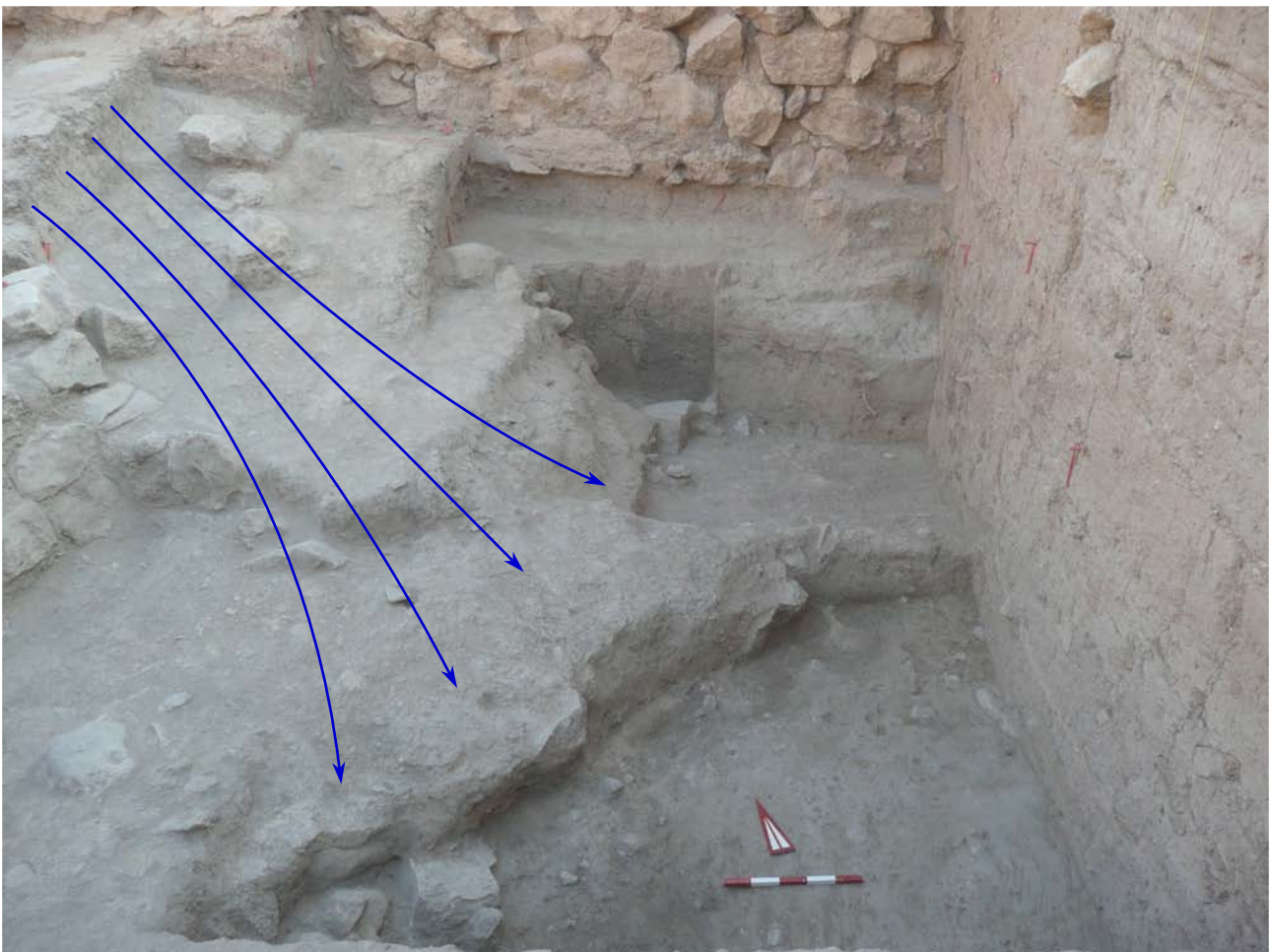
The Onrush of the High Water



The initial protection afforded by the stone escarpment proved lacking...

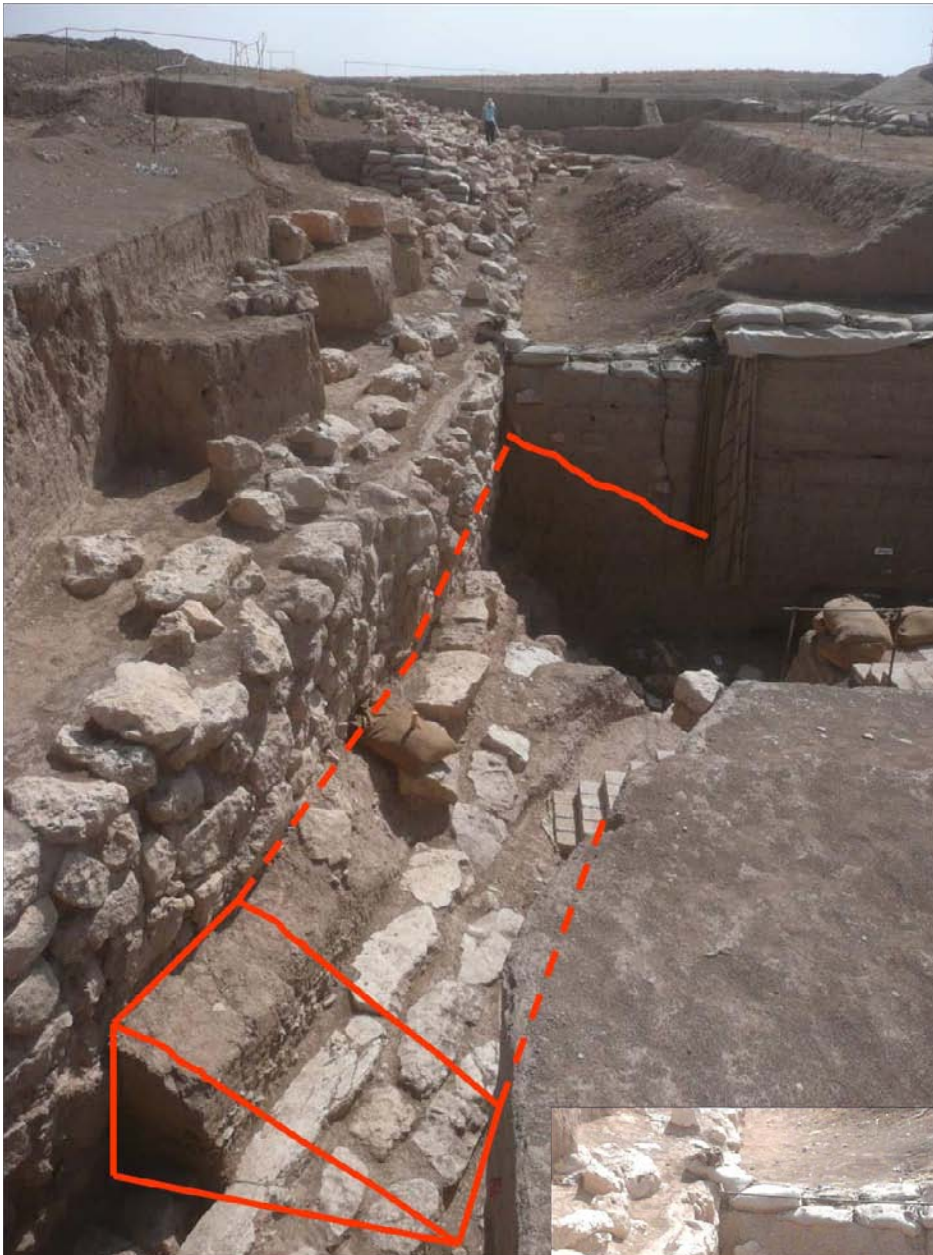
The water onrush undermined the stones, pushing them towards the plaza.

The water cut through the accumulations, exposing the much earlier Late Calcolithic layers.



The Divine Mountain:

Preparing for the next 1000 years



Eventually, the stone escarpment turned out to be insufficient for the great waters that came flooding from the higher ground.

So they built a second clay escarpment – which we have largely removed and is now visible in section.

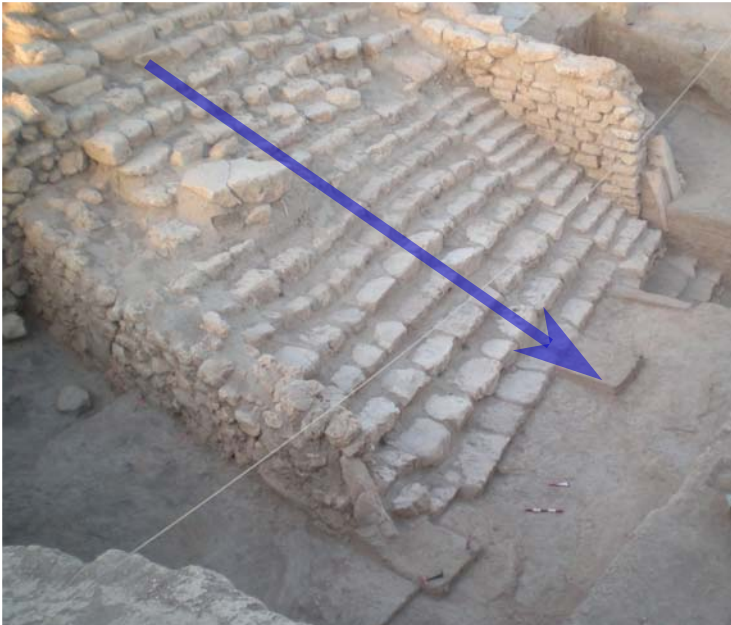
This clay escarpment was built only a century after the stone escarpment around 2500 B.C. It was meant to last

And last it did – for twelve centuries, until 1300 B.C.



The Divine Mountain:

The Staircase as a Cascade



Can you imagine
how much water
rushed down this staircase
during the rainy season?

We found that the floors
in front of the staircase
had been damaged
by the rushing water...



The Great Plaza Façade

Picture yourself again
as you climb from the fertile plain
towards the built heights
where the Temple stands.

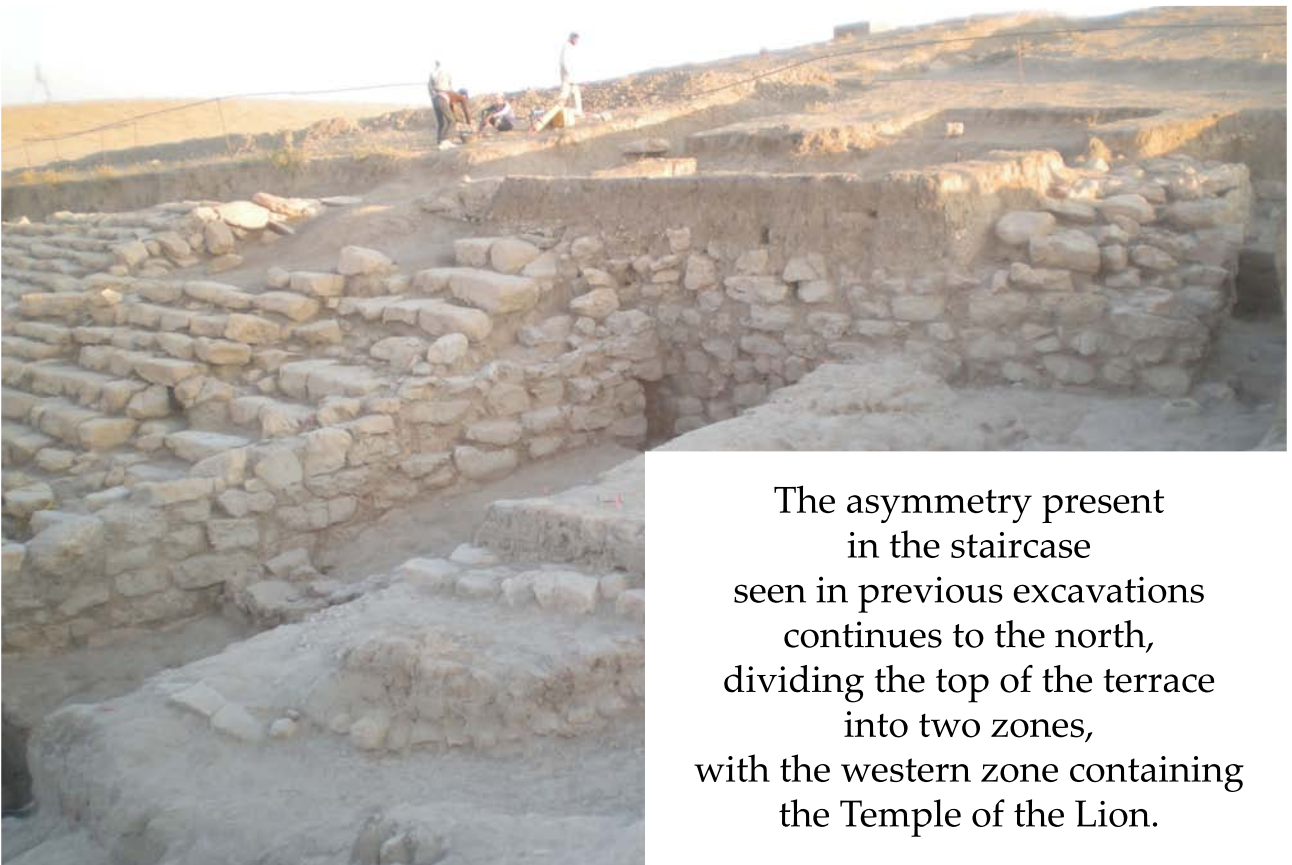
You are now in the wide open space
of the great Plaza,
half way up,
facing the summit.

At the northern end of the Plaza,
a great façade limits the horizon
as it defines the sacred space
that encircles the top of the hill.

The 2009 season has brought to light
unexpected new elements
of this final boundary
between the human and the divine.

The great Plaza façade:

The eastern rim

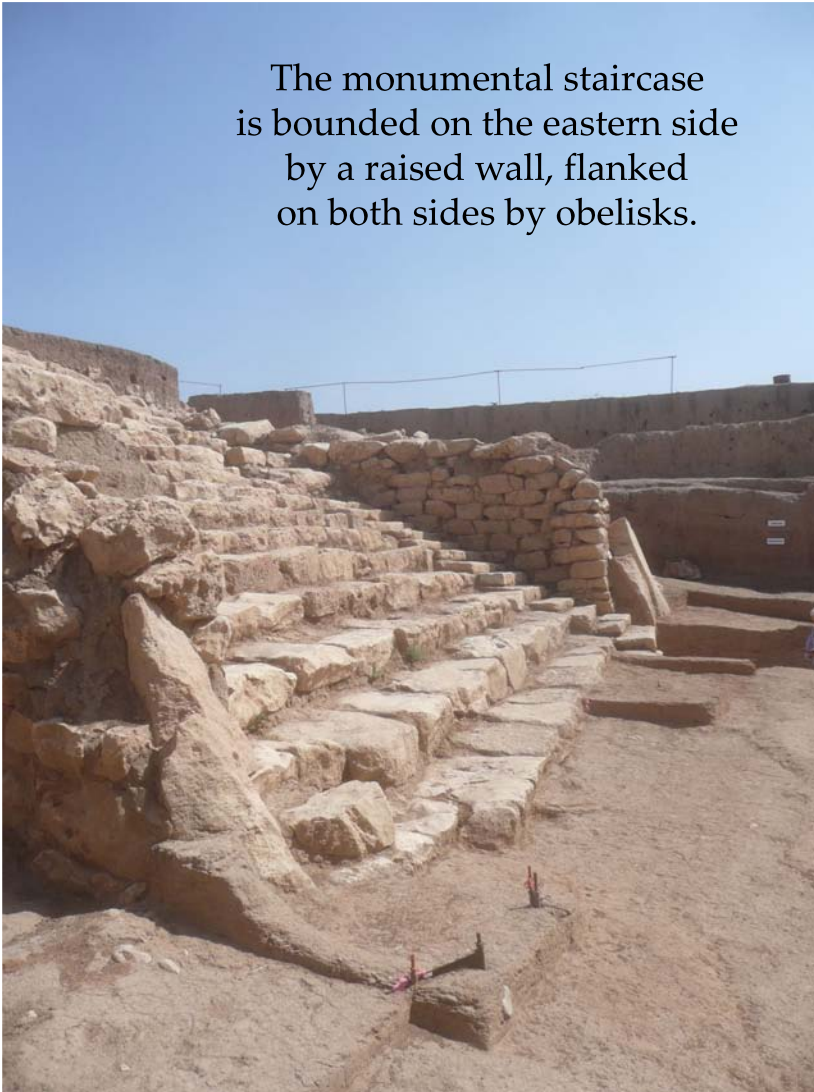


The asymmetry present in the staircase seen in previous excavations continues to the north, dividing the top of the terrace into two zones, with the western zone containing the Temple of the Lion.

The great Plaza façade:

The Pivot and the Hinge

The monumental staircase is bounded on the eastern side by a raised wall, flanked on both sides by obelisks.



The metaphor of a door is appropriate:

this staircase serves as both boundary and access between two very disparate portions of the city we are bringing to light.



The great Plaza façade:

In their footsteps (literally!)



With all the water coming off the staircase, the area in front must have been very muddy...

and over four thousand years ago, someone was walking along and left footprints for us to find!



Not only did we find human footprints, but also those of a canine.

Conservation vs. Reconstruction

It is a hallmark of our work at Mozan that we should preserve the architectural document as carefully and thoroughly as an archivist would an old codex.

We have developed the concept of localized shelters to great lengths, and this year, through a special project supported by the World Monument Fund, we have finalized our system.

Conservation vs. Reconstruction:

The new image of the Palace



Here the southwest corner of the palace, which had been completely eroded in ancient times.

We re-built the obliterated portion of the ancient structure,

learning a lot in the process about the problems ancient masons would have faced...



Conservation vs. Reconstruction:

The Urkesh wall conservation model



A central concern of our approach to conservation
has been to preserve the document,
while at the same time
enhancing the visitors' ability
to visualize the ancient architectural volumes.

Here we peer *inside* one of our localized shelters.
The mudbrick wall was badly eroded in antiquity
by a water course that cut its way
through the Palace walls.

The burlap panels are an innovation of the 2009 season.
To utilize this inexpensive local material,
we have chosen to make panels that are
small in size and well taught at the sides,
to withstand the strong winter rains and the winds.

Conservation vs. Reconstruction:

In the footsteps of the ancient builders



In measuring for the project, in making the bricks and in constructing the wall

we tried to 'be in the shoes' of the ancients, learning from them, as it were, what steps they took to erect this impressive structure.

Conservation vs. Reconstruction:

An anniversary



The 2009 season marked
the 15th anniversary
of the "new birth" of this wall –

a "new" birth because the excavations
brought it back to light
in the same condition as
when first encased
in the matrix of the earth
some 43 centuries ago.

And this is how the wall still looks today,
15 years after excavations,
fully preserved by our localized shelter model.

The Site as a Book

Conservation
is for fruition.

And we are opening
the site so that,
conserved,
it can be read.

Like a book.

The concept was refined in 2009
and fully implemented.

We will expand this further
in coming years
not only for the archaeology
but for the environment as well –
as we prepare to work on a vast
Urkesh Eco-archaeological Park
that will bring the surroundings
fully into the picture.

The echo of the mountain landscapes
regained once more
for those approaching
the divine mountain of Urkesh,
newly alive
reflecting ancient times.

The Site as a Book:

Fine-tuning our design



We have saturated the site with simple panels, unobtrusive but resistant to wind and rain and snow.



The panels are so situated that they provide a running commentary to the features visitors see in front of them.

The view and the comment are fused in one moment, transforming the whole site into a book to be read.



The Site as a Book:

Elite Tourism: The Urkesh model



A small group of visiting scholars gains a synthetic view from a high vista point.

This panel develops the broad outline of the history of the Palace the visitors have in front of them.



The high vista points provide in depth coverage of essential points of history, in addition to the archaeology. You feel as if looking at time from outside of time.

The Site as a Book:

Itinerary as Narrative



The physical path leads you through space.

But it also punctuates the narrative you walk in your mind.

The stations along the way are chapters which develop an explicit story line.

They keep you exploring as you proceed from one to the next.