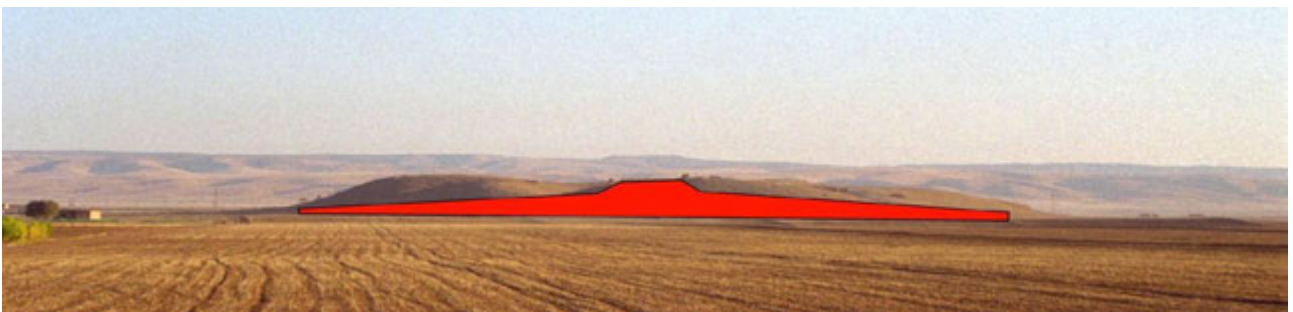


The Sleeping Giant



The Urkesh Folio – 2011

The sleeping giant

Physiognomy of the 2010-11 seasons

Only four years ago, the known history of Urkesh stretched from 2500 to 1500 B.C. - one millennium.

In four years, we have added one millennium at the beginning, and two centuries at the end... Think of it: the modern skyline is not very different from what it was in 3500 B.C., almost five and a half millennia ago! The *sleeping giant* is the fourth millennium B.C., which lurks a few centimeters below the surface...

Our 2009 Folio was prophetic. We spoke of the *floodwaters* of ancient Urkesh, and modern day Mozan gave us a dramatic re-enactment of the ancient floods. In 2010, portions of the excavations were turned to lakes with the worse winter flooding in memory.

There were no excavations in 2011, but we took up the challenge of giving a new lease on life for ancient Urkesh, transferring, as it were, the ancient monuments into new ones of paper. We reach out with a major effort at *communication*, to the scholars and to the wider public. With the abiding dedication of our young Syrian colleagues, the *Urkesh Eco-Archaeological Park* is becoming a reality, showcasing the direct involvement of a number of local stakeholders, all working for a bright new future for Syria in these otherwise uncertain days!

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When it All Began

A very early date for Urkesh,
and why does it matter.

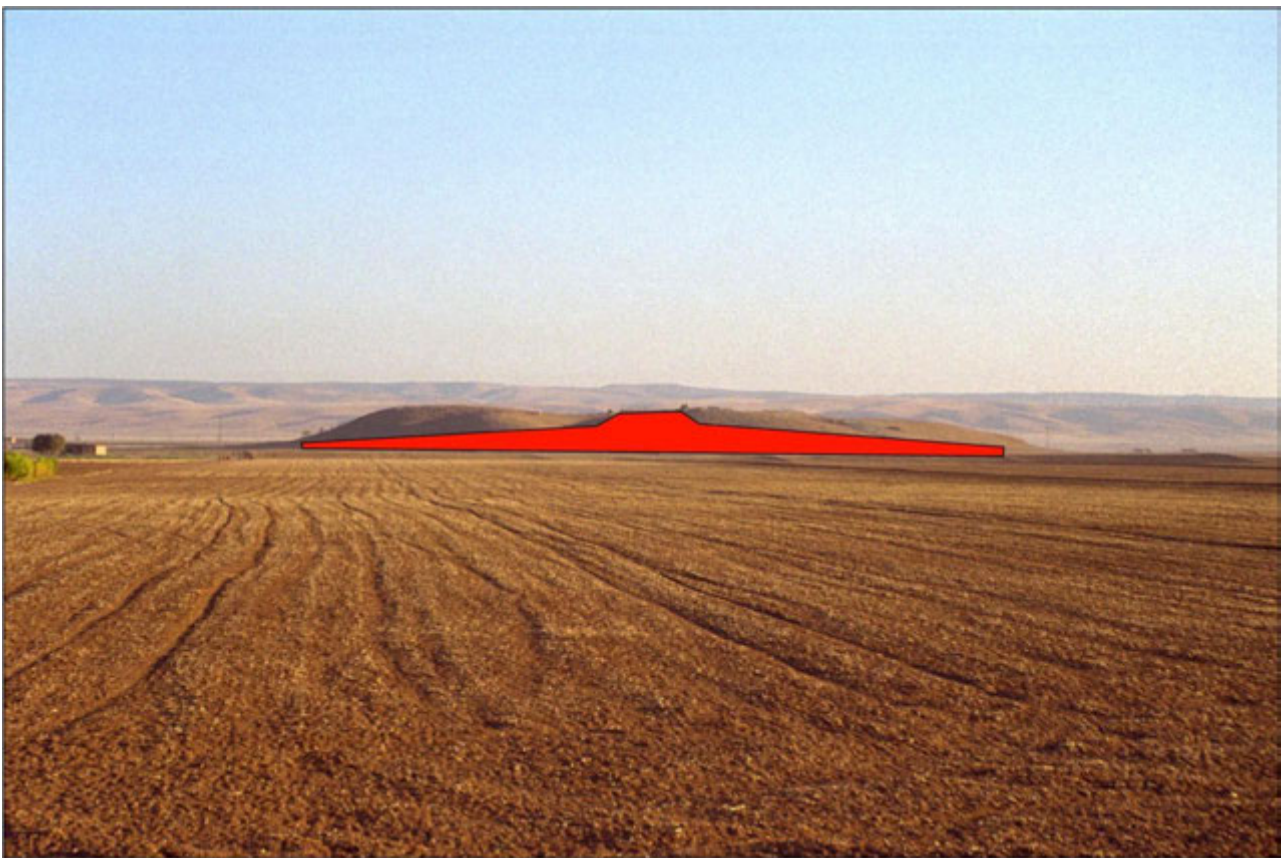
When it all began

The forever changed horizons

5000 B.C.:

imagine a level plain, without our tell.

It was then that Urkesh began,
quickly growing to the size
of a man-made hill
matching the mountains in the distant horizon.



3500 B.C.:

ancient Urkesh is now in place.

By then its shape is likethe one
sketched here in red.

The skyline it etched against the distant horizon
more than five millennia ago
was not very different from the one
we still see today...

When it all began

The enchantment of archaeology



Do you just stumble
on five millennia
of history?

Sometimes, perhaps.

But not this once.

Earlier work here
had yielded
a larger share
of pottery
unlike any other
we had found so far.

"Let us go deeper"
says our director.

More of the same unusual
pottery.
And seal impressions
of the same period.

And then...

A building!
This is the
enchanted moment.
Suddenly the fragments
have found a home...

The pottery now tells
a larger tale,
we can now link it
with a brick structure,
and a massive one at that.

How do we know?



When it all began

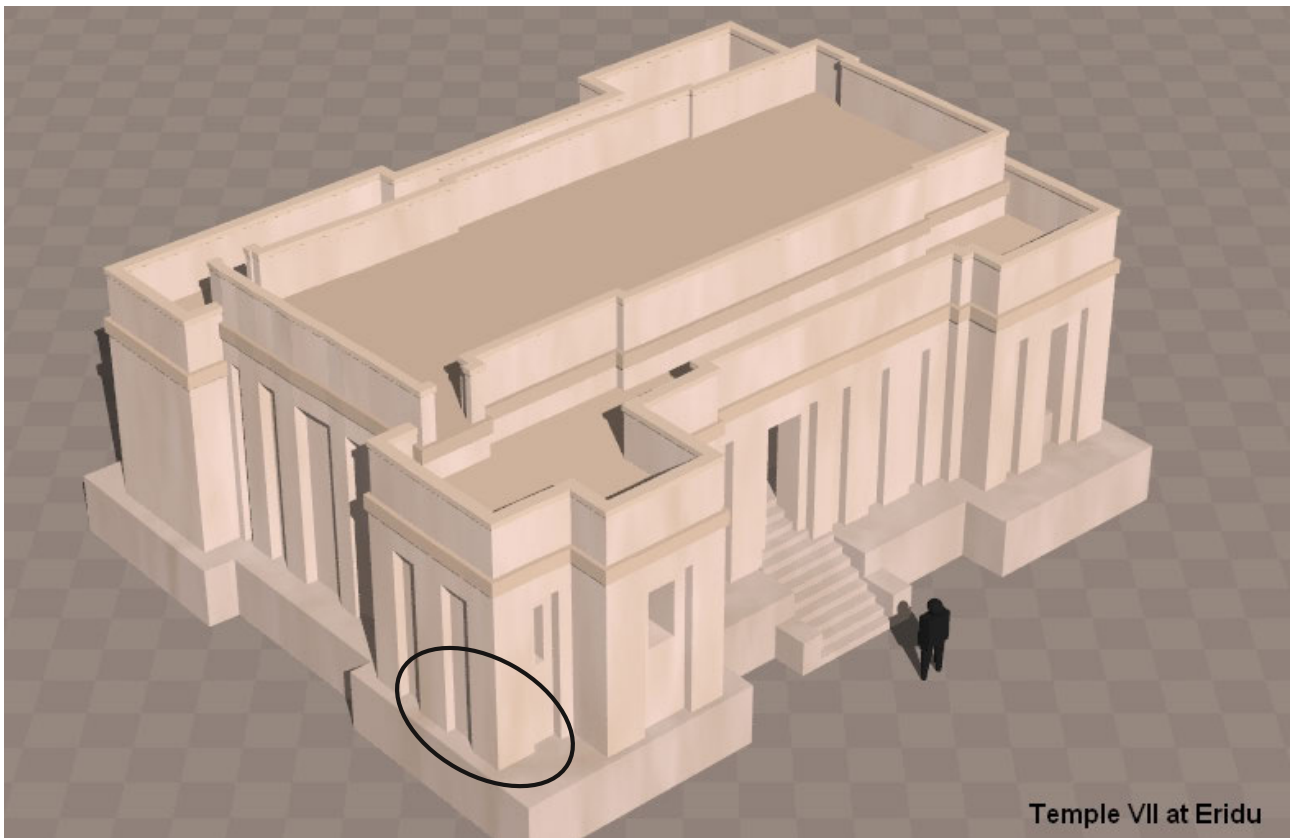
The message of a simple niche



What we have found is the corner of a building, with a niche on either side.

This architectural pattern is well known for large temples of the fourth millennium B.C. as in the example shown below.

See what a tall tale two simple niches can foretell...



This reconstruction of a Temple from southern Mesopotamia, dating to about the same period as our "corner," shows why we think our building may indeed be a temple, and what shape it might have taken when it was standing.

When it all began

Even without a crystal ball...



Knowing what we know today,
it is plausible to look into the future, as it were

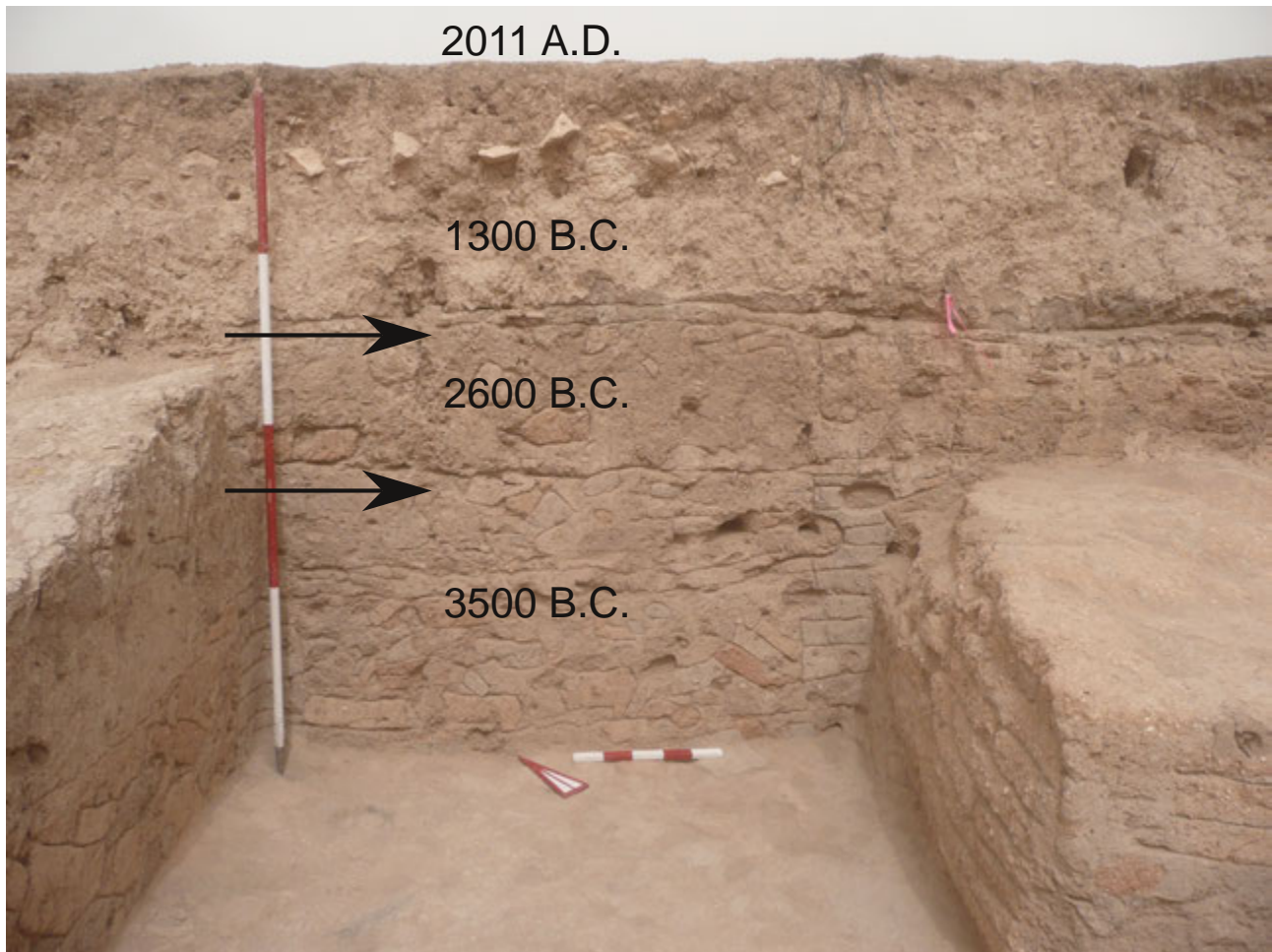
A temple the size of the Eridu temple,
like the one on the preceding plate,
would extend east as shown here.

Whatever the dimension,
it should be easy to expose the whole structure,
which is immediately below the surface.

It should also be as well preserved as the single corner we have so far,
yielding for us a pristine fourth millennium
within easy reach.

When it all began

A "stratigraphic seal"



The technical term is useful here,
and the detail of the section will help understand it.

During the use of the mud brick wall on the right,
various materials accumulated in front and against it.

These were then covered by a hard surface,
marked by the lowermost arrow.

This hard surface acts as a "seal,"
because it caps the material below it:
there were no intrusions from above.

The other arrow marks an equivalent seal from a later date.

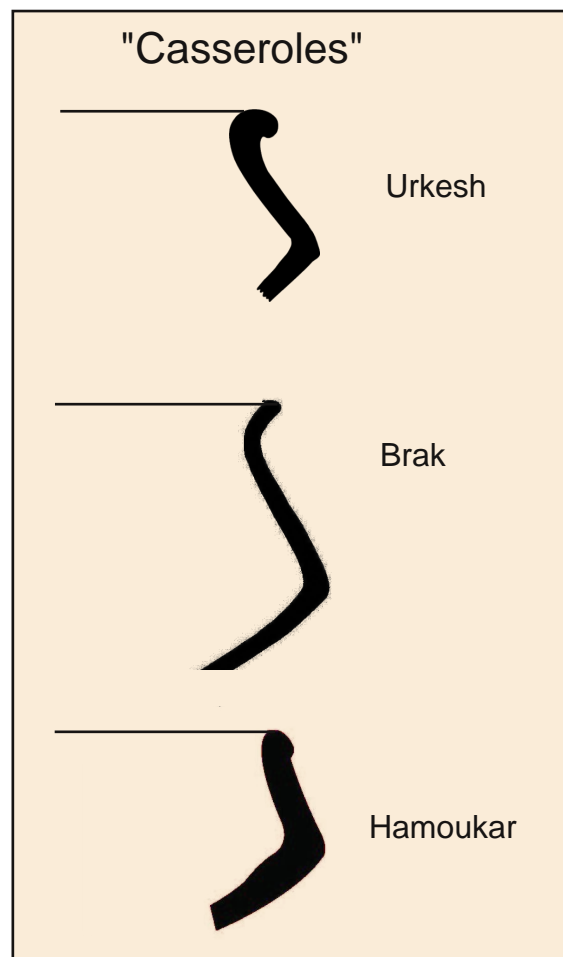
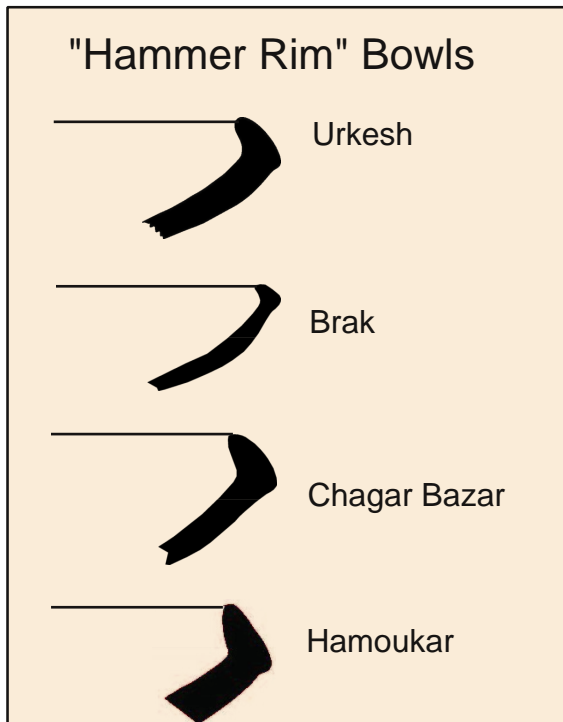
This is how we define the "stratigraphic" sequences
that correspond to neatly identifiable periods in time.

But how can we assign actual dates to these particular accumulations?

We need a ... "time machine"!

When it all began

A poor man's "time machine" – sherds



How can we be so sure when we say "3500 B.C." as if we were looking it up on our pocket calendar?

We have, of course, a "time machine"! In fact, two... The first relies on sherds.

Pottery is ubiquitous in any excavation: the sherds from just one season easily reach a total of several tens of thousands.

Pottery is also very distinctive, for its shapes and its paste.

By carefully comparing the types from our site with those of another we can establish a typological "seriation" that reflects a coherent time sequence in any given cultural area.

Look at the two types of vessels shown to the left.

The name of the first, "hammer rim," refers to the distinctive hammer-like shape that is shown very clearly in the profile drawings.

The name of the second, "casserole," derives from the presumed function these vessels had.

The similarity across different sites is apparent, and what is more significant is that these two particular shapes occur only in the period around 3500 B.C.

The sites other than Urkish had been excavated earlier, and thus a comparison of the shapes gave us a date when we first found these same shapes in our excavations.

When it all began

The other "time machine" – C14



The real "time machine" is in the laboratory. Measuring the decay of C14, an element found in organic remains, we can arrive at absolute dates.

In our case, these remains were seeds found next to an infant burial, which in turn was next to our presumed Temple.



The top of the jar had collapsed, crushed by the material that accumulated on top of it.

Of course we did not know what was inside, until we opened it, as shown in the illustration below.

The burial was placed at this spot when the Temple was beginning not to be in use any longer, so the date of seeds found near the burial would effectively date the end of the Temple.



And here are the dates, that fully support the date already reached on the basis of the pottery: between 3645 and 3530 B.C. – right on target!

With two millennia to go before the abandonment of Urkesh, imagine how many generations walked right on top of these so much more ancient layers!

When it all began

Why it all matters...

There is an instinctive fascination
at facing details of human life that date back
so early in time.

The small infant burial, so unassuming in its broken jar,
gives us access to a dimension of humanness
that seems to touch us personally,
so remote in time,
yet so close in its emotional impact.

But there are deeper intellectual grounds
why this matters.

We unearth, in Urkesh, the depth of ancestral roots
that explain our civilizational being:
we are, indeed, our history,
and the farther back this history reaches,
the more stable is our stand,
the better we can understand what we are today.

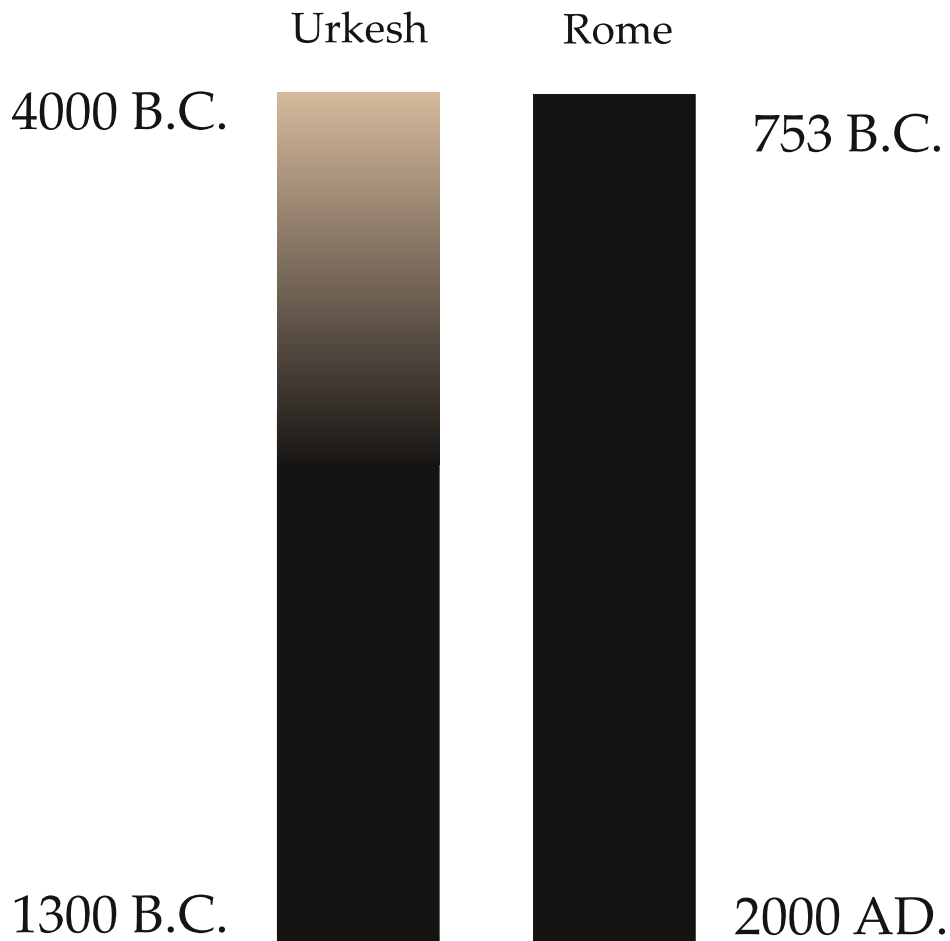
This is a tall order of things.
It calls for reflection even as we bend to the ground
to cope with humble fragments of a life
that has long since been spent.

Cities have come and gone,
but the urban experiment is with us still,
each one of its phases influencing the next.
The first was, till now, the Sumerian model.

In Urkesh,
we see now an alternative ambitious experiment.

When it all began

Ab urbe condita



The ancient Romans started their calendar
"from the founding of the city" – *ab urbe condita*,
which conventionally stands for our 753 B.C.

To gain a sense of perspective,
we may compare the two trajectories in time.

The time stretch from today back to the founding of Rome
is the same as the time stretch
from the beginning of Urkesh (a few centuries before the 3500 B.C. Temple)
until its end at the hands of the Assyrians, around 1300 B.C.

When it all began

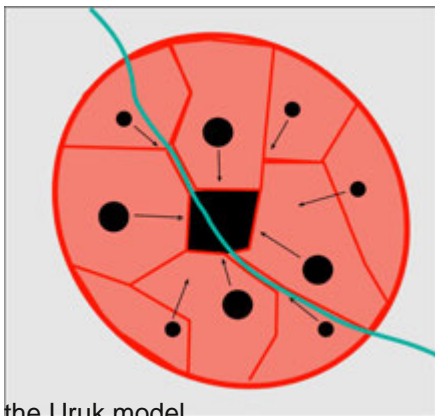
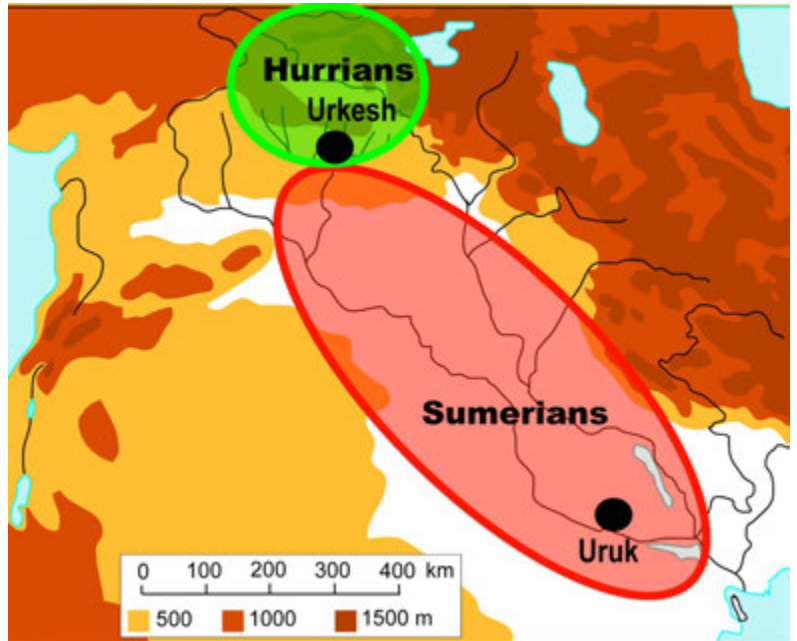
The other "urban revolution"

The date we assigned to our Temple corner is not a date like any other.

Around 3500 B.C., a major event occurred that changed human history forever: cities developed then for the first time

So far, the only known model was that of the Sumerians, in Uruk.

Urkish now offers an alternative northern model, that of the Hurrians.

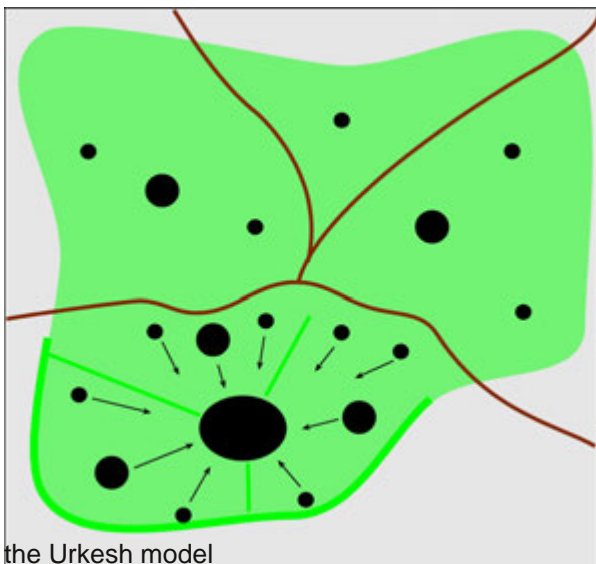


the Uruk model

We can explain the difference in terms of the respective relationship to the territory.

In the Sumerian model, the landscape is flat. Anywhere within it, one can see the central high Temple within the city (symbolized by the arrows in the graphic).

Physical, territorial contiguity is essential among the smaller towns and villages. They also share boundaries and waterways.



the Urkish model

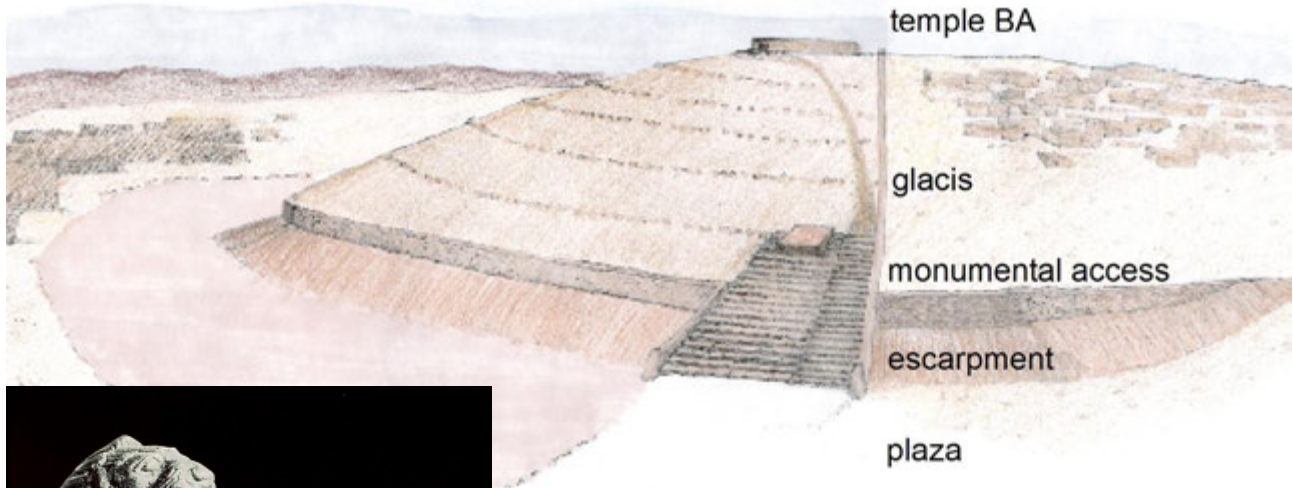
The Hurrian model hails from the mountains.

The territory is much larger, and visibility of the urban center is possible only in the flat, piedmont area. Otherwise, towns and villages are scattered in mountain valleys (the watershed lines are in brown).

The bond of solidarity derives not from contiguity (except in the plain), but from ethnic self-identity.

When it all began

Evidence and inference



We have good evidence for assuming that the third millennium monumental complex (as shown above) is *Hurrian*: the two bronze lions belong with it, and they have an inscription in Hurrian.

But what about the fourth millennium complex that lies beneath it?



Our inference is based on three facts:

1. Cultic continuity may be assumed.
2. There is no evidence of a break between the fourth and the third millennium structures.
3. The myths speak of Urkish as a very archaic Hurrian religious center.

On this rests our hypothesis that the fourth millennium layers at Urkish belong already in the Hurrian tradition.

When it all began

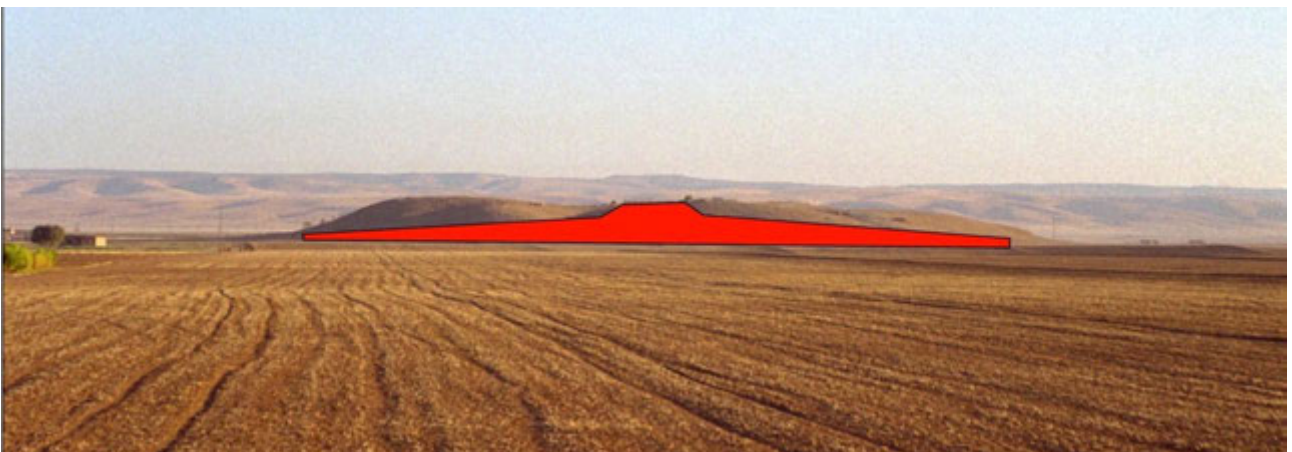
The sleeping giant



"Strategy" refers to how we plan our next excavations.

As we look at the third millennium temple complex, knowing that immediately underneath it there lies its "sleeping" antecedent, we combine the eagerness to explore the older levels and the commitment to save the monument already exposed.

Our next report will tell how we went about it.



Aftermaths: Floodwaters revisited

A modern flood
puts us to the test

Aftermaths: Floodwaters Revisited

A modern "lakeshore" lapping at the ancient staircase



March 2010.
A storm the likes
of which has
never been
seen before
hits Mozan.

The lower part of
the staircase is
totally engulfed
in water, to a
depth of almost
two meters.



Aftermaths: Floodwaters Revisited

The plaza as a lake



The plaza in front of the Temple Terrace is also submerged.



The only damage is to the sections, which are being undercut.

Aftermaths: Floodwaters Revisited

The violence



Besides the rain,
the wind blew with
a violence worthy
of Teshub,
the ancient storm
god of Urkesh.

The damage affected only
structures that were set in
place to mark the line of
walls no longer in existence.



The cause was the empty
space under the metal
structures, which allowed
the wind to twirl around
unimpeded.



Aftermaths: Floodwaters Revisited

The irony of the spring rebirth



The stillness after the storm is marked by the new growth, turning the tops of the protective structures into a turf that seems pleasant even in the midst of the destruction.



Another deceptively pretty sight: a fox peering out of its hole that undermines the archaeological soil...

Aftermaths: Floodwaters Revisited

The safety of the protective system



That the weather is harsh at Mozan is a simple fact.
That in the aftermath of a storm the appearance of the excavations
may seem quite desolate is also a sad reality.

But the comforting fact is that our protective systems work.
There was no damage to any of the ancient structures
following the great storm.

With each debacle, something is learned.
Between 2010 and 2011 we accelerated a course of action
we had already embarked upon:
the training of local assistants who could repair before our return
the damages to the protective structures.

Using the internet to exchange pictures and instructions,
our local team has bravely taken on the ancient god Teshub
and tamed the effects of its recurrent violence.

Aftermaths: Floodwaters Revisited

The Archaeological Institute of America Best Practices Award



The effectiveness of our effort was recognized by a prestigious award from the AIA, the first ever for best practices in the preservation of archaeological sites.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE of AMERICA AWARD FOR BEST PRACTICES IN SITE PRESERVATION

GIORGIO BUCCELLATI

The ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE of AMERICA is pleased to present its 2011 Award for Best Practices in Site Preservation to Giorgio Buccellati.

The Site Preservation Committee recognizes Buccellati for his exceptional work at Tell Mozan (ancient Urkesh) in Syria. Buccellati leads archaeologists and the field of site preservation by example through his responsible approach to the challenge of conserving mudbrick, by making conservation an integral part of the excavation process, and through his dedication to publication and dissemination of information. Also impressive is Buccellati's innovative and efficient approach to protecting the delicate material he works with and his careful monitoring of the entire process. In training local workers and creating plans for an eco-archaeological park, he has demonstrated a strong commitment to the local community that the ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE of AMERICA hopes his colleagues will strive to emulate.

Buccellati is professor emeritus at the University of California, Los Angeles, a co-director of the Mozan/Urkesh Archaeological Project, and the director of the Mesopotamian Lab at the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology. As the author of articles such as "Urkesh: Archeologia, conservazione e restauro" (*Kernos* 13 [2000] 41-8), "Conservation at the Core of Archaeological Strategy: The Case of Ancient Urkesh at Tell Mozan" (with S. Bonetti [*The Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter* 18 (2003) 18-21]), "Conservation *qua* Archaeology at Tell Mozan/Urkesh" and "Presentation and Interpretation of Archaeological Sites: The Case of Tell Mozan, Ancient Urkesh" (in N. Agnew and J. Bridgland, eds., *Of the Past, For the Future: Integrating Archaeology and Conservation* [Los Angeles 2006] 73-81, 152-56), Buccellati has demonstrated his commitment to sharing best practices with his colleagues for the betterment of the field of archaeology as a whole.

On behalf of the ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE of AMERICA, it is an honor to present the 2011 Award for Best Practices in Site Preservation to Giorgio Buccellati.



C. Brian Rose

C. Brian Rose
President
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE of AMERICA
January 7, 2011

From data to meaning

The power,
and the duty,
of communication

From data to meaning

Aere perennius...

Our scholarly publications are more durable than bronze – *aere perennius* in the words of Horace.

Many new volumes are in preparation, and will appear in 2012.

It is only on the basis of data firmly established, that we can go beyond the facts and search for the deeper meaning.

Bibliotheca Mesopotamica
Primary sources and interpretive analyses for the study of Mesopotamian civilization and its influences from late prehistory to the end of the cuneiform tradition

Editor: Giorgio Buccellati

Published under the auspices of
IIMAS
The International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies

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Bibliotheca Mesopotamica
Volume 30

Urkesh/Mozan Studies 6

A Modern Face for an Ancient City
Conservation and Site Presentation
at Tell Mozan, ancient Urkesh

Giorgio Buccellati
and Stefania Ermidoro

Undena Publications
Malibu 2012

Bibliotheca Mesopotamica
Volume 31

Urkesh/Mozan Studies 7

The Urkesh Countryside
An Introduction to the
Urkesh Eco-Archaeological Park

Giorgio Buccellati
and Caitlin J. Chaves

Undena Publications
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Volume 32

Urkesh/Mozan Studies 8

Pottery Kilns
from the Khabur Period

Lorenzo Crescioli

Undena Publications
Malibu 2012

Bibliotheca Mesopotamica
Volume 33

Urkesh/Mozan Studies 9

Ceramic Analysis

Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati

Undena Publications
Malibu 2012

From data to meaning

The maieutics of archaeology

"Maieutics," the Greek word for midwifery, refers to the way in which Socrates would elicit from his interlocutors the knowledge they already had within themselves.

This speaks to the fundamental respect we must show for all those who approach our work, knowing their interest is as serious as our effort at making sense of the data we gather out of the ground.

It is in this vein that we aim to bring out the archaeologist in our visitors.

OVERVIEW PROJECT WEBSITE EDUCATION - METHODOLOGY BACKGROUND STRATIGRAPHY TYPOLOGY INTERPRETATION - PRESERVATION RECORD E-LIBRARY
SEARCH

? contract
disable music

back to main portal

OVERVIEW

IN BRIEF
The site
The website

PREFACE
Guide for first timers
Guide for the perplexed
Highlights

INTRODUCTION
Audience
Broader public
Scholars
Outline
Contents
overview
1. introductory
2. synthesis
3. documentation
digital monogr.
Urkesh/UGR websit

Authorship
main author
webmaster
IT support
section editors
contributors

Preface

Were you to drop by at the *physical site* of Tell Mozan, ancient Urkesh, my welcome would be warm and personal.

By necessity, my welcome to the Urkesh *website* remains, alas, anonymous – for I cannot sense how fleeting the time of your visit might be, or, conversely, what a full measure of interest you might be bringing to this website.

Anonymous, perhaps, but still warm and personal – because I have had both of you in mind during my long work on this project – you, the casual tourist and the purposeful visitor, the hurried and the deeply interested.

Hence the use of this preface as a threshold, a point of encounter. (The very notion may seem anachronistic at first because, fragmented and non-linear, a website does not seem to be a structure with a starting point. But one may argue to the contrary.)

Next to the physical site, the Urkesh website is the chief place for such encounters, and a unique one of its kind.

The website is progressing steadily with the support of a major grant from the Mellon Foundation, and will serve as a key gateway around the world to learn about our excavations and about archaeology in general.

From data to meaning

The Urkesh Exhibit

A large poster exhibit on Urkesh, sponsored by the US Embassy, was displayed first in the gardens of the Embassy on the occasion of the 4th of July celebrations in 2010, and then in the National Museum in Damascus.

Aiming to show the strength of cooperation, it hardly could anticipate the many changes that were to follow. But we hope that the spirit that animated it will once again prevail.

The exhibit in the National Museum in Damascus

(from the US Embassy website)

<http://damascus.usembassy.gov/media/pdf/eaato/pdf/February-2012.pdf>

The Urkesh Exhibit

The Urkesh exhibit, a collection of 33 posters depicting the American-led excavations at Tel Mozan, a historic site in northeastern Syria, will be on display at the Damascus National Museum through 8 March. The Opening Ceremony on 1 March, attended by the DCM and Syria's Deputy Minister of Culture, attracted an audience of students, journalists, professors, and government officials.



The exhibit on the grounds of the US Embassy for the 4th of July reception



From data to meaning

In tune with the past

The flyer that welcomed the visitors to the exhibit.

Syria has always been, Syria still is today, a crucible of civilization, of human experience.

Archaeology brings back the ancient witness of this experience, and in so doing it gives it a new voice, one that resonates alive in our ears today.

It is the voice of Urkesh we want to listen to in this exhibit.

It was a great city at the dawn of civilization, around 3500 B.C. – the seat of a new urban, and very Syrian, civilization, that of the Hurrians.

Since 1984, it has been our privilege to probe for the Syria of yesteryear working alongside the Syria of today.

With our joint efforts, we celebrate the past as we help together to forge the future.

Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, Director – Giorgio Buccellati, Co-Director

بالتناغم
مع الماضي
أوركيش:
حضارة سورية
قديمة جديدة



In tune
with the past.

Urkesh,
a new
Syrian
civilization.

Poster photos by Ken Garrett of the *National Geographic*

الصور من قبل المصور كين غاريت من ناشيونال جيوغرافيك

سوريا كانت دائما ، و لا تزال حتى يومنا هذا ، بوتقة الحضارة و التجربة الإنسانية.

علم الآثار يعيد الشاهد القديم على هذه التجربة

فيعطيها صوت جديد ، يتردد صدها حياً في آذاننا اليوم.

انه صوت أوركيش الذي سنستمع له في هذا المعرض.

أوركيش المدينة العظيمة من فجر الحضارة ، حوالي 3500 ق.م

والتي كانت مقر الحضارية الجديدة ، والحضارة السورية جدا، حضارة الحوريين.

منذ عام 1984 ، كان لنا شرف البحث في سوريا أمس

إلى جانب العمل لسوريا اليوم.

مع جهودنا المشتركة ، نحفل بالماضي ونحن نعمل معا لصياغة المستقبل

From data to meaning

The relevance of the past

Archaeology is not an ivory tower discipline.

The awareness of reaching deep into a vast remoteness and the sensation of touching history in a very physical sense awaken in everyone feelings of identity with a past we can now call ours.

There is a relevance in Urkesk that transcends mere erudition.

We are delighted to share this conviction with a business community that identifies with our goals and aims with us to achieve them.



Gulfsands brings to light the geological riches of the Syrian soil and treasures the cultural wealth of its archaeological past. Our joint Exploration Fund is an ambitious partnership in the pursuit of this common goal.



Souren Vartanian was first intrigued by what he had heard about Urkesk and lent us support even from a distance. His personal visit turned him into an honorary Mozanian, committed to find ways to make our excavations proceed at a smoother and faster rate!

From data to meaning

The relevance of the future



It may seem strange to speak of the intellectual pull of the children.

But it is a fact that their curiosity knows no bounds, and that their questions are often the most intriguing. Do you notice how in all the pictures below it is the adults who are listening?

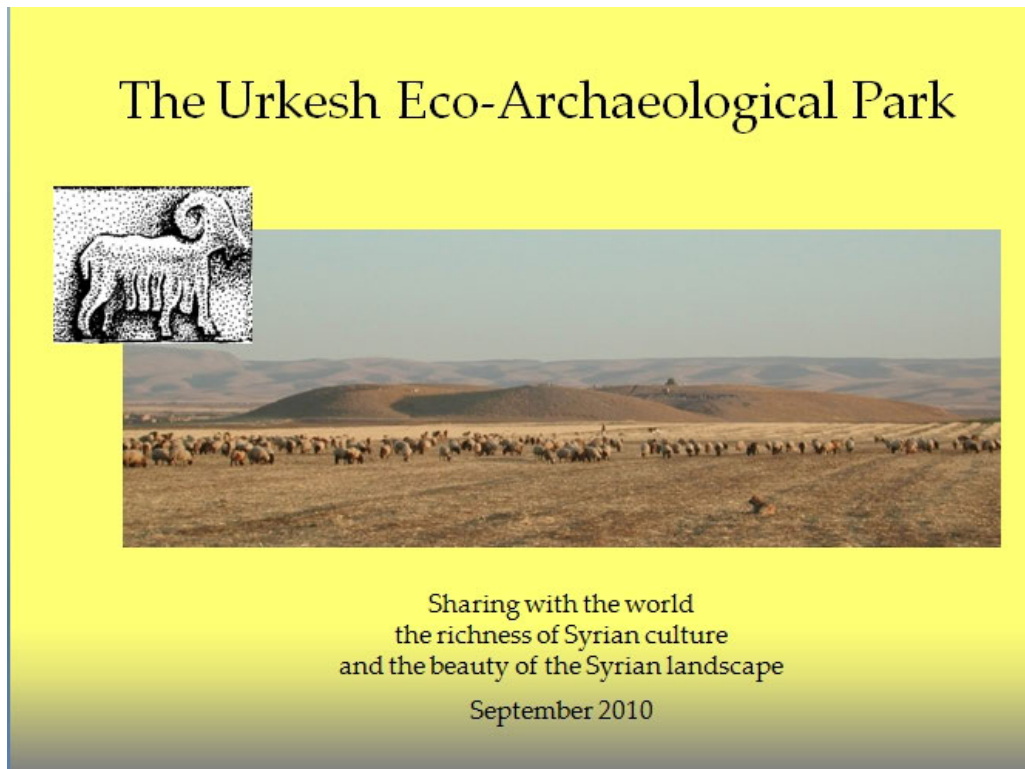


From data to meaning

The Urkesh countryside

Plans for the Urkesh Eco-Archaeological Park are progressing rapidly.

The images below are from a PowerPoint presentation shown to the Governor of our province, who has since worked concretely towards implementing a large scale program to improve the infrastructure in the Park area.



A group of colleagues from the Politecnico University of Milan came to work on the Park: together, we developed the framework for future work on the project.



The Italian Ambassador, Dott. Amerio, and his wife came to visit when the Politecnico group was in Mozan.

From data to meaning

The social impact

Our co-workers come from the villages nearby.
Among them there are also shepherds who come from the south,
and live in tents near our site.

We have developed a close relationship with them and their families:
the Expedition provides them with more than just the supplementary income,
it helps develop a sense of rightful pride in the land where they live.

The Park will expand this perspective even further,
and offer new resources for sustainable economic activities, year round.



From data to meaning

Mirrors

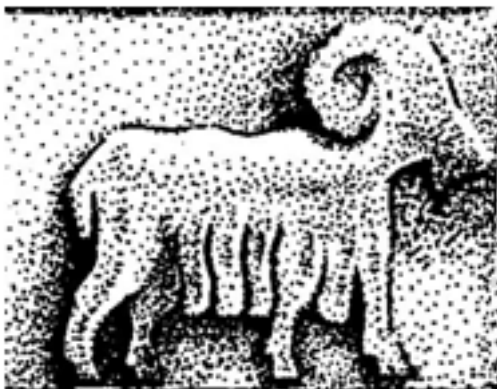


They did have (bronze) mirrors in Urkesh, but the term is taken here metaphorically.



It echoes the logo for the Park shown on an earlier plate.

The modern and ancient world mirror each other very closely, and it is this continuity that we aim to highlight with our interpretive work.



front cover

