

2007 Excavations at Tell Mozan, Ancient Urkesh and Plans for 2008



The Urkesh excavations represent one of the most high profile archaeological projects in Syria. The 2008 season will mark the important beginning of a new phase that will explore broader vistas and propose to the public attractive presentation models.

Together, *the Royal Palace and the Temple Terrace* form an enormous urban complex that rivals the contemporary pyramids of Egypt (2400 B.C.), the likes of which cannot be seen anywhere else in Syro-Mesopotamia. We now understand the broad plan of the city. The new excavations will flesh out the content of this cityscape.

The well-known American actor, *Martin Sheen*, has joined our project and will develop a program for a high level popularization of our finds. It will be the first time that a highly visible personality will interpret, from within, an ancient culture and the archaeological effort that brings it to light.

An increased participation of individuals and institutions from Syria, Saudi Arabia and Qatar will highlight the *extraordinary regional significance* of our finds. We have an unmatched tradition of site conservation and presentation, which we will enhance even further with the institutional collaboration of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The World Monument Fund has recognized Urkesh as one of the 100 most endangered important sites in the world, and we will propose the establishment of an Urkesh Archaeological Park to protect its pristine environment.

Our *digital publication*, known as the Urkesh Global Record, has been acknowledged as one of the most innovative in the field of archaeology, and we will add many more digital volumes to this entirely new series.

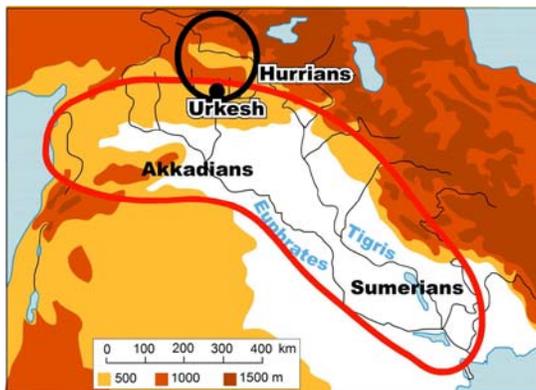
Mozan/Urkesk: Preliminary 2007 Report with Perspectives for 2008

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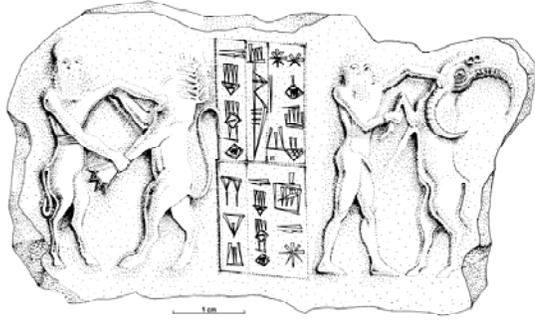
1. The Hurrians: A new chapter in Syrian History



The Hurrians
at the northern edge of the Fertile Crescent

The discovery of ancient Urkesk has shed light on a very important chapter of ancient Syrian history. We know now that the Hurrians, until now a very elusive population of the ancient Near East, had developed a major urban culture already in the fourth millennium. With the Sumerians, they represent a seminal force in the shaping of the earliest civilizations.

The Akkadians came onto the scene after the Hurrians were well established in this area. Around 2300 B.C. they unified all of Syro-Mesopotamia within the first empire of history. All of Syria fell under their sway – except for Urkesk. This kingdom alone remained independent, thanks to a long standing alliance with the royal house of Akkad. Given Naram-Sin's enormous power, this was a very remarkable event. An important reason was the fact



The seal of the daughter of Naram-Sin, the great king of Akkad. She was married to a king of Urkesh, where we found the impressions of her seal.

have learnt a great deal about their religion, their customs, their art and architecture – all of which are highly distinctive within the large mosaic of cultures of ancient Syro-Mesopotamia. Our continued excavations at Urkesh, this great center of their civilization, will fill in more and more the exciting picture of an emerging new phase of ancient Syrian history.

2. Excavations in the Temple and Temple Terrace



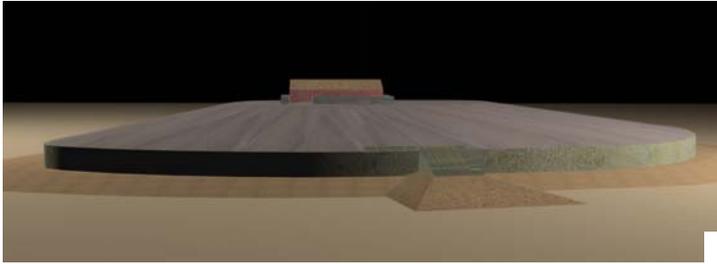
The monumental Temple staircase: the night lighting is part of our special presentation for visitors. It dramatizes the monumental aspects of the structure by emphasizing the shadows.

that Urkesh controlled the mineral resources of the Tur-Abdin, the mountains immediately to the north. Naram-Sin realized that, while he could easily have conquered the city, he could not have overcome a mountain insurgency (as we would call it today). The mountain populations were no match even for the greatest king of ancient Mesopotamia, and he was wise enough to realize it.

Urkesh has given us the most information about the formative periods of this population of ancient Syria. We

The Urkesh Temple Terrace is one of the most monumental and best preserved structures of the third millennium in Syro-Mesopotamia, dating back to at least 2500 B.C.. Already by the middle of the third millennium, the Temple Terrace had a breadth of 60 meters, and the Temple at its top stood to a height of at least 12 meters above the level of the Royal Palace and the Plaza. The Terrace wall was built with massive stones that would have been seen from great distances. The impact must have been stunning. In some ways, the structure has the monumentality of an Egyptian pyramid, however different in every other respect. The staircase served as the ideological bridge between the human and the divine world, such as it is

described in the Biblical episode relating the dream of Jacob.



3-D reconstruction of the Temple Terrace and of the Temple on top (2500 B.C.)

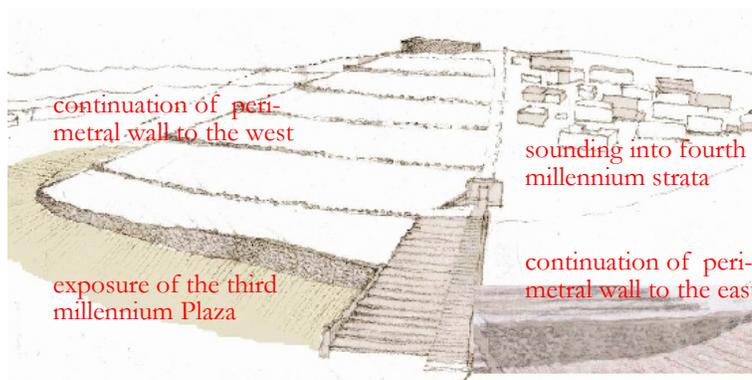


Bronze lion from the Temple, now at the Metropolitan



The Hurrian divine world was very different from that of the other Mesopotamian religions. One aspect was the role of the volcanoes in their mythological landscape.

The temple at the top of our Terrace was dedicated to the main god of the Hurrian Pantheon. We believe that his name was Kumarbi, and that he was the god of the magma, from which derived the gods of the lava and of silver (his children) among others.



Architectural reconstruction of the monumental Temple staircase (2008 excavations shown in red)

Two beautiful bronze lions (found long before our excavations and now on exhibit at the Metropolitan and the Louvre) were dedicated (in our interpretation) to Kumarbi and we suggest that they had been placed in a foundation box at the entrance to this Temple. Clearly, this was a central

point of reference for Hurrian religion, and we know this monument lasted for more than 2000 years, almost untouched, from at least 3500 B.C. to 1300 B.C., when the site was abandoned.

The 2008 excavations will clarify some important points that remain still hidden (they are shown in red in the figure). The result will serve to test some hypotheses which are the basis for the current reconstruction. We will also add immeasurably to the visual impact of the monument as a whole, and to the fruition on the part of visitors of its unique architectural proportions. In particular, we will be able to see the towering structure from the original level of the third millennium Plaza, and to test our proposal about the existence of a much older Temple Terrace with similar dimensions and function.

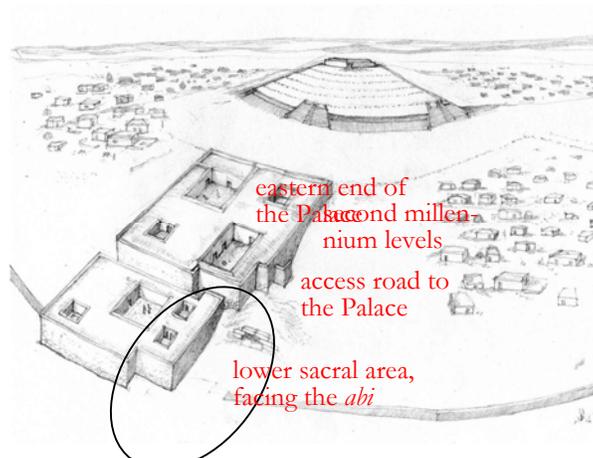
3. Excavations in the Royal Palace

The Temple Terrace was built at the beginning of the city's history, before 3500 B.C.

There must have been a royal palace dating to earlier times as well, but the one we have been excavating was built around 2300 B.C. It is a very

large structure, on two terraced levels. The lower level is the service wing, with the kitchen, the magazines and the royal wardrobe. The upper level is the formal wing, where the king lived and directed the government.

Our excavations so far have aimed at exposing the key



The monumental urban complex: the Royal Palace in the foreground, the Temple Terrace in the background, with a Plaza in between.

In red, excavations planned in 2008.

The circle indicates the portion excavated so far.



View of the excavated portions of the Royal Palace (2300 B.C.):
in green the service wing, in gold the formal wing

architectural nexus between Palace and Temple. This is, in fact, one of the best preserved monumental urban complexes in third millennium Syro-Mesopotamia, and it is important to understand the whole before we bring to light the individual component parts. This we have accomplished and as a result we now have the wider frame of the complex. Our plan for the next three years is to tighten the nexus and to increase thereby our understanding of the details. In third millennium levels, we plan to excavate the access road to the Palace (in search for the main entrance), and to widen the sounding that corre-



Inscribed seals of the royal couple, the cook and the nurse



The Passage to the Netherworld, (*abi* in Hurrian), an exclusively Hurrian ritual place attached to the Palace

communicate, through a medium, with the king and the queen. The rituals are known in detail from later Hurrian texts. Ours is the only known monumental structure where these rituals would take place. It is also more than one thousand years older than any other attestation known so far. In 2008, we plan to complete the excavation in the open area that leads to the entrance to the *abi*.

sponds to the eastern perimeter of the Palace. In second millennium levels, we plan to expose entirely the Mittani period houses that overlay the formal wing of the Palace.

The Palace has yielded the most significant finds from Urkesh, in particular more than one thousand seal impressions, two hundred of which are inscribed. It is from this written evidence that we have been able to piece together the life of the court and, most importantly, to identify the ancient city as Urkesh and to reconstruct its royal dynasty. As we advance in our excavations of the formal wing of the Palace, we expect to find even more significant documents and works of art that will shed a bright new light on this new chapter in ancient Syrian history.

Another major discovery linked with the Palace was the *abi*, a Hurrian word that describes a gate to the Netherworld, i.e. a place where the spirits were summoned to communicate,



Martin Sheen on the excavations, with one of two television channels sent to cover his stay at Mozan.

4. Martin Sheen program

The significance of the results obtained by our excavations has attracted much public attention from the media. The most recent development in terms of public interest has been a four day working visit by Martin Sheen, a most distinguished American actor who was the protagonist, among others, of the landmark motion picture *Apocalypse Now*, and of

the extremely influential TV series *The West Wing*. In the Spring of 2007 he joined the Board of Trustees of our Foundation (IIMAS), and decided to join us in the field to explore the possibilities of developing a program about our project. During his four day stay in Syria he was hosted by the Minister of Culture in Aleppo, on which occasion he gave a well attended press conference. As a result, he was also invited as a guest of honor to the Damascus Film Festival in November 2007.

During the winter of 2007-8 we will elaborate the details of the program that he will host on our excavations. He plans to be back during the summer season of 2008, so that the season of excavations will already become part of the program. We intend to highlight not only the historical and archaeological aspects of our project, but also the excavation life, the methodological innovations, the human geography and the physical landscape. While the current plans concern the coverage of the 2008 season, we think that this may become a program spanning several years. In any case, what will distinguish our approach is that Martin Sheen intends to identify with the internal workings of the project so that he is not only a spokesman from the outside, but truly an insider. To be sure, there is no other program of this sort, where a first rate personality becomes involved from within with an archaeological project and helps to present it to the wider public.

5. The local presence

One of our Assistant Directors is Prof. Jamal Omar of King Saud University in Riyadh, and Ms. Rasha Endari, of Damascus, serves as Assistant to the Directors. With their help, we have developed an extensive bilingual resource for site presentation (see below, 8). They also serve as an interface with the Syrian colleagues and the local communities, in addition to helping in the conduct of the field school for Syrian students of archaeology.

This school is structured as a three year program, during which time the students are exposed to a well defined plan of studies, covering all aspects of field work. At the end of the program, we hope to be able to provide scholarships on a regular basis to the best students, so that they can work on the publication of some of our material. In the last three years, five Syrian students have participated in this program, and they have all been performing with a high degree of excellence. One of these students, Rasha Endari, has successfully terminated the program, and she is the first recipient of the full scholarship devoted to the publication of material excavated in the past years.

Another significant step forward: Hiba Assar, a student in archaeology at the University of Aleppo and a member of our staff for the last two years, is a resident of Qamishli, the city near us. She will begin to monitor the site during our absence, in order to follow problems as they arise (especially in the area of wall conservation), and to initiate a local maintenance program that is indispensable for an effective long term implementation of our site preservation program.

The directors of the project, Drs. Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati have been invited to the newly established University of Qatar, for an extensive visit during which, besides presenting lectures on the excavations, they will hold consultations on the possibility of a collaboration in the field of archaeology, including the possible institutional participation of the University in our project. This would obviously add to our project's visibility within the region.

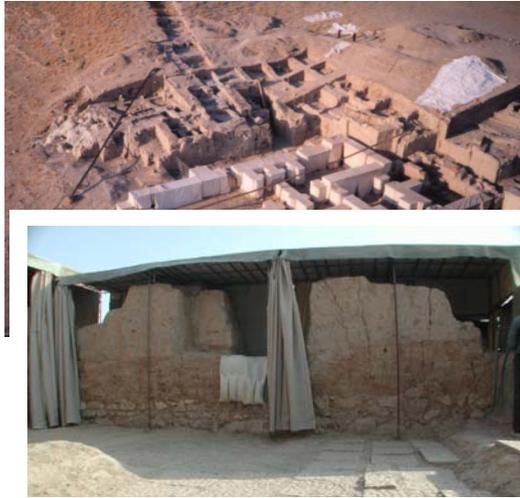
6. Exhibits

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has participated for the last three seasons in our project, and we plan for this collaboration to continue over the next sev-

eral years. In particular, they intend to assist in two important events during the next two years. In 2008, we have been asked to mount an exhibit in the National Museum in Damascus. We will present some one hundred of the major objects, with an effort to embed the individual pieces in their original archaeological context. This will be as if a counterpart to the site itself, where our effort is to show how the context (i.e. the excavations as visible in the ground) refers back to the Museum pieces.

In 2009 (or possibly 2010) the new regional Museum in Hassaka is scheduled to open. One hall has been reserved for ancient Urkesh, and we have already submitted plans, developed in conjunction with the Metropolitan, to present our objects within the same specific perspective we are proposing for the Damascus exhibit – a lively interchange between the art-historical pieces and the archaeological context.

We have also been asked by the Regional Government of Lombardy to prepare the same exhibit to be held in Milan on the occasion of the International Fair of Tourism.



When covered, the walls show at its best the architectural design. When the curtains are drawn, one can see the original document as it was when first excavated.

is preserved. As a result, mudbrick walls retain their configuration exactly as seen when first excavated. There is no other site where this procedure has been used. The significance and value of the system is now being recognized as a groundbreaking initiative, e.g. by the Getty Conservation Institute.

The system has developed over the years, and we have improved the original attempts. In 2008, we intend to upgrade some portions of the wall covers, in order to have a uniform system throughout.

Also in 2008, we will publish a comprehensive monograph that details the specifics of the system, its history, and especially the results. These are in the form of a long term monitoring, which includes photographs (overall and close-ups) of each wall. This monitoring documents the high rate of success of the system. Started as a way to provide temporary shelters to the walls, the Urkesh system has evolved as a highly successful, permanent solution.

7. Site Conservation

We have undoubtedly the best record in the region for the protection and conservation of the original architecture. During each excavation season, we cover the individual walls in such a way that the architectural layout is enhanced, and the original document

Cups for a royal toast

The most frequent motif on the seals is a toast, and the most frequent ceramic vessel is a conical cup, just like the one shown on the seals. You can imagine this scene being enacted many times in the spaces where you are now walking.

24 أكواب لشرب الخبز الملكي

الموضوع المنكر في الأختام هو شرب الخبز أما الأنية الفخارية الأكثر تكراراً هي الأكواب المخروطية تماماً كالتي تظهر في الأختام. يمكنك تخيل أن هذا المشهد كان قائماً مرات عديدة هنا في هذا المكان الذي نمشي فيه الآن.



One of some 100 plates that accompany the visitor to the site. They describe what the visitor actually sees, and they place in their context the most important objects. Articulated along different levels of detail, they allow the visitor to delve into the details, or to absorb only the essentials.

to the booklet, visitors are exposed to different levels of explanation, so that they can either delve into details and truly “study” the site, or simply skim the surface and find answers to their most immediate questions. Also, all of this material is posted online, so that one can also prepare ahead of time and “customize” one’s visit to the site as desired.

This is a whole new approach to the fruition of an archaeological site. Our ambition is to continue developing the presentation system to such a point that it will in effect serve as one of the *forms of publication of our data*. Already now, visitors are able to obtain a documentary view of the excavations such as is not readily



Martin Sheen viewing the excavations from an observation point where descriptive plates are displayed.

8. Site Presentation

The “reconstructed” walls speak for themselves, but in addition we have made a major effort to better present our excavations. Since the start, we always had flyers for visitors. In 2004 we produced (with the assistance of Prof. Jamal Omar of King Saud University in Riyadh, one of our Assistant Directors) an 80 page brochure in English and in Arabic for the visitors.

Besides revising this booklet, we have introduced in 2007 a wholly new system to allow visitors to “read” the site as they would a book, even when the Expedition is not in session. With about one hundred plates available in a variety of formats, in addition

possible at most other sites in the Near East. In 2008, we will continue and further enlarge the system. For instance, we will add more languages besides English and Arabic. We will also refine our presentation of particular places in the excavations which are significant for stratigraphic reasoning. Stratigraphy deserves being conserved as much as monumentality does, and our existing structures lend themselves particularly well to achieving this goal. As a result, the normal visitor is educated in the real concerns of archaeology, while scholars can find a documentation not otherwise available in standard publications.

Another distinctive aspect of our project is the presence of an extensive collection of materials that do not have a museographic value (hence are not sent to the Museum), but are of importance to scholars. We have a full catalog of almost 11,000 pieces, plus several tens of thousands of pottery sherds, all easily available for study by specialists interested in the material from our site or in a regional context. In 2008, we plan to create a new curatorial position so that this material may be cared for on a long term basis and be made more fully available to interested scholars.



Tell Mozan viewed from the south, with the fields just harvested, a flock of sheep grazing, and the mountains in the background. This is a picture that mirrors conditions in existence at the time of Urkesh. It is the landscape we wish to preserve and endow with new meaning through the new concept of a proper Archaeological “Park.”

9. Archaeological Park

A new initiative that we plan to develop in 2008 is a true Archaeological Park. By this term one refers generally to an archaeological site that is open to visitors. To this extent, Mozan is already an Archaeological “Park.” But we feel that the term should more properly refer to the site *and* its environment. Mozan offers a unique opportunity in this regard, because the landscape all around the site is still pristine. This is in contrast with neighboring sites like Tell Halaf, Tell Fekheriya, Tell Brak, Tell Beidar, which have been badly affected by uncontrolled development. As a result, we see silos, cement factories, housing projects, not to mention small shops, gas stations, houses, creep up to the very edge of a tell, in some cases even encroaching on the tell itself. Mozan is still free of this. And there is no reason why it should fall prey to the same destiny. There is plenty of space away from the site, where the development can take place without in any way endangering local economic growth.

We have already discussed with the local municipality the need to include such protective goals in their master plan. We plan now to propose to the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums two additional steps. The first is to propose a legislation that prohibits industrial and semi-industrial development not only in the immediate area that corresponds to the ancient city, but also preserves the landscape in its broad environs. In the case of Mozan, this would mean an average of five kilometers in all directions.

For our part, and this is the second proposal, we would commit ourselves to include this landscape in our program of site presentation. The same approach that we have applied to the site (well defined itineraries, brochures, fixed posters, detailed reading stands) would be developed for the landscape. We would highlight special aspects of the ancient landscape, show how it relates to the modern, explain the interaction between the cultural development of the ancient city and its natural resources. This will be a unique new project, which can still be implemented at Mozan – provided the landscape itself is saved

from the intrusions that have irreparably, and needlessly, harmed the majority of other sites in the area.



The masthead of our website (at urkesh.org), where the Global record is housed.

10. Digital publications

A major achievement of our project has been the development of a digital system of publication that is unlike any other in the field of archaeology. The “Urkesh Global Record” offers a sophisticated, yet easily accessible, system of information that presents the totality of all observations made during the excavations, but in a browser format that anyone, specialist or not, can immediately master. It is a truly “digital” system, and not just a conventional publication

offered in electronic format. It is, in other words, conceived and born digital from the start, and offers the closest possibility ever to the goal of repeating the experiment of the excavation. It is also, as some colleagues have remarked, a courageous step forward in the direction of “radical transparency,” whereby the full gamut of evidence is provided, instead of a synthesis, however vast, such as is otherwise common in the field.

The full website is currently available in a beta version, accessible through a password only (ID <Tupkish>, password <beta>). In the winter 2008, we will remove the password and use will then be open freely to all. In 2008, we will add several new components to the website, as the beginning of a plan that will include every single excavation unit we ever worked on at the site.

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12. Acknowledgments

Support for our project comes from a variety of sources, a list of which is displayed in our publications. Major foundations and contributors have included the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Geographic Society, the Catholic Biblical Association, the Getty Conservation Institute, the S. H. Kress Foundation, the Skaggs Foundation, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation, Neutrogena Corporation, The Cotsen Family Foundation, Syria Shell Petroleum Development B.V.

Participating institutions during the last three seasons included staff and students from the UCLA Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, from the Metropolitan Museum (New York), the Universities of Tübingen and Berlin (Germany), Florence, Venice and Trieste (Italy), Cambridge (UK), from the Istituto per le Tecniche Applicate ai beni Culturali and the Istituto per gli Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici (Rome), from the Opificio delle Pietre Dure (Firenze).