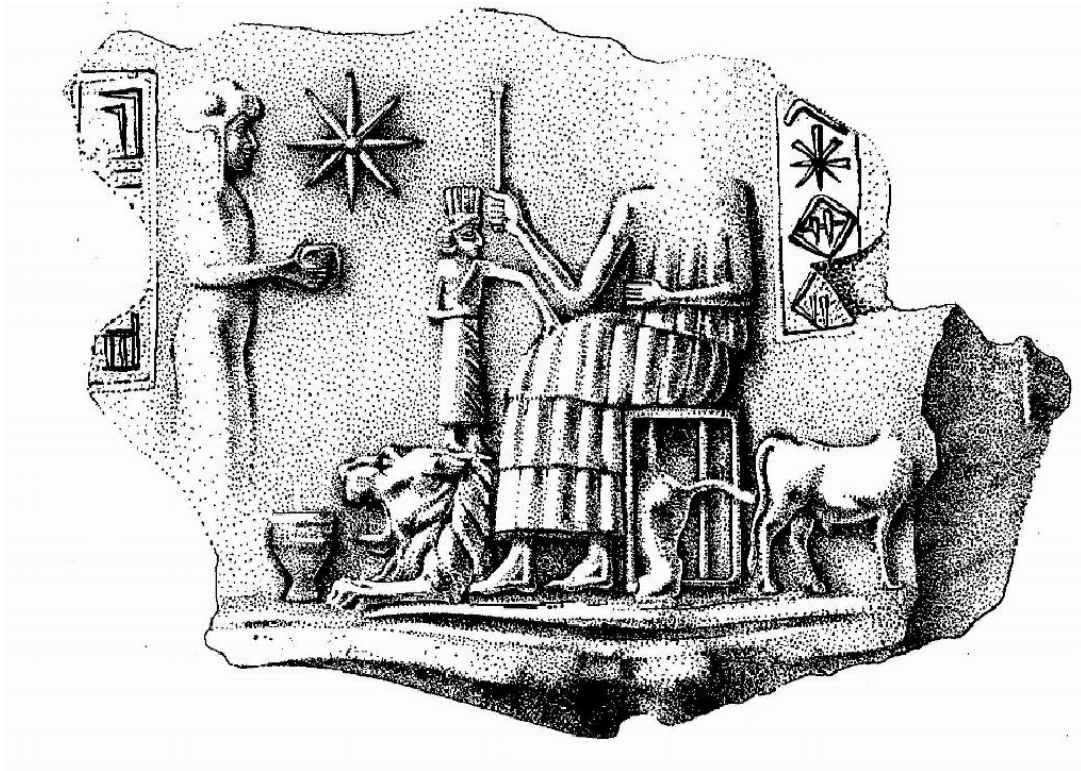


TELL MOZAN

URKESH

special topics



The site of Urkesh has yielded significant new information about a very im-portant period in early Syrian history. The Hurrians built a civilization that proved to be very influen-tial for the whole of the ancient Near East. And Urkesh is the only city of the third millennium that can safely be considered as a major religious and political center of the Hurrians.

In this flyer, we present some of the highlights that define this civilization, such as they have emerged from our excavations. It is in

the nature of an archaeological project that every new turn of the spade yields new insights, on the strength of which we must redefine our earlier understanding. As a visitor to our site, you are privileged in sharing this sense of discovery: with us, the archaeologists, you, too, are on the crest of a wave that moves relentlessly forward. We hope you will enjoy being part, through your visit, of this exciting intellectual adventure.



Topic 1. Urkesh and the Hurrians

The Hurrians were a small, but very influential, population of the ancient Near East. Until our excavations, they were known primarily from the second millennium (most scholars assumed that that was when they first came into the region). The discovery of Urkesh has now pushed back the earliest evidence for the Hurrians well into the third millennium. This is no small feat: Urkesh is not just another city along the many we know from Syro-Mesopotamia; it is a window into a new civilization, in many ways alternative to that of the Sumerians, the Akkadians and the Amorites.

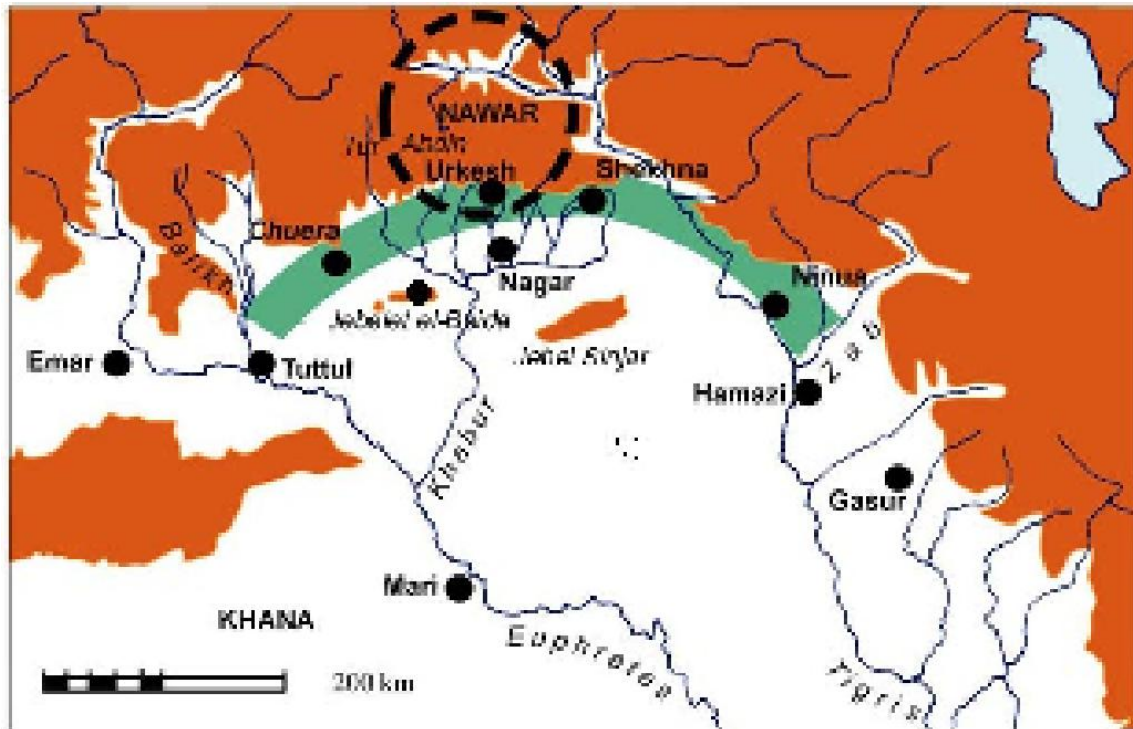
The most distinctive trait is their language, which is wholly unique, unrelated to any other known ancient or living language. We do not have many Hurrian texts as yet from Urkesh, but they are the earliest known.

Also very distinctive is their religion. Their myths were preserved in later periods by the Hittites, and they reflect a mountain environment, with particular reference to volcanic phenomena that are, understandably, unknown in the southern mythologies. Urkesh plays a central role in these myths as the seat of the ancestral god of the Hurrian pantheon, Kumarbi. Even more important is the cult. The *âbi* is a wholly unique structure that gives evidence of necromantic rituals in clear contrast with the religious mentality of the Sumerians and the Akkadians (see Tour p. 4). Thus it is not just that the Hurrians had deities with different names: rather, they had developed quite an alternative conception of the divine world and of the means through which humans can get in touch with it.

Politically, it is significant that the rulers of Urkesh used a Hurrian royal title not otherwise known for any other Syro-Mesopotamian kingdom – *endan*. This amounted to an explicit affirmation of ethnic identity and political self-assertion, all the more significant since at that very moment the Akkadian empire was expanding throughout Syro-Mesopotamia. And the only third millennium Hurrian text known so far, the inscription of Tish-atal, is a political text recording the building of a temple in Urkesh.

As of now, no other archaeological site can claim the same type of evidence for Hurrian identity as we have for Urkesh. To some extent, this is because there were probably only few properly Hurrian cities, distributed along the piedmont arc of what is now northern Syria – which we have called the Hurrian urban ledge. This points to the centrality of Syria in the history of civilization. It is more appropriate to think of it as a pivot, rather than a crossroad (as is often said), of civilizations. One does not go through Syria to get somewhere else.

Rather, fundamental new patterns of political organization and ideological conceptualization originate here. And excavations like those of ancient Urkesh are the only way in which we can understand this fundamental role of Ayria in world history.



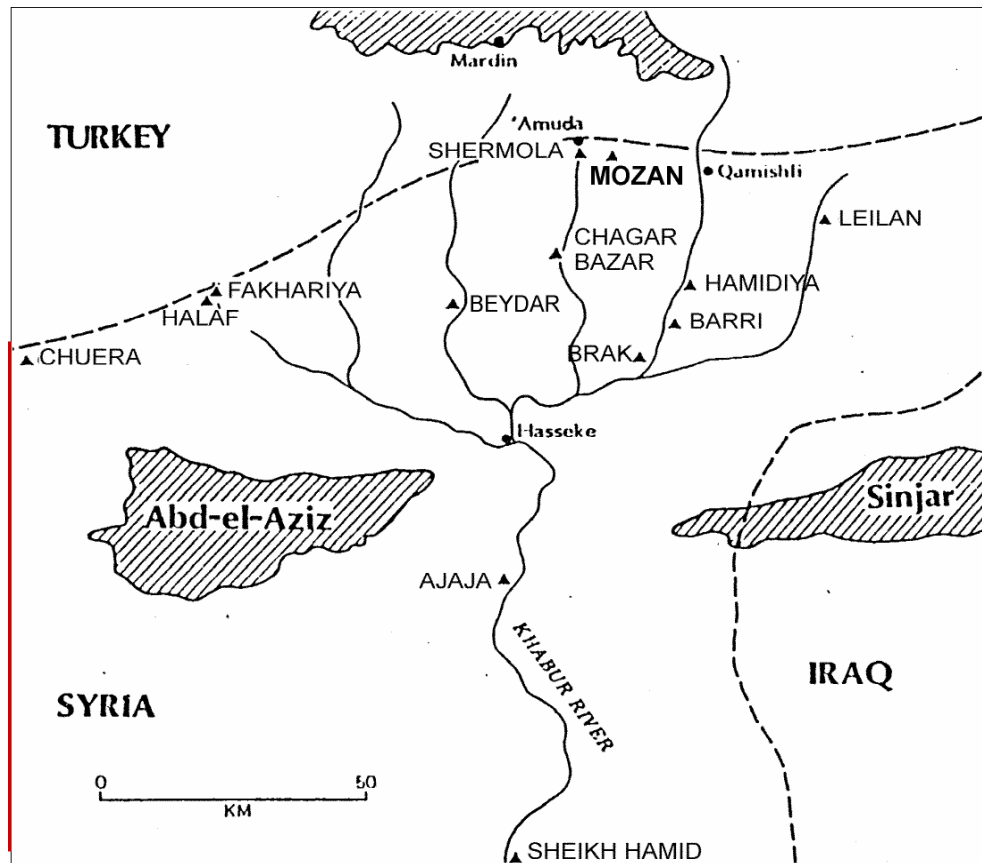
Topic 2. The region

The Khabur plains of Eastern Syria played a major role in the development of early urban civilization. On some level they may have rivaled the high civilizations of the Sumerians in the alluvial plains to the south. *Agriculture* is one of the factors that accounted for this development. The area was as fertile in antiquity as it is today, and farming has always been possible by relying on rainfall alone, without the need for irrigation. This provided a rich hinterland for the growing new cities that reached very large sizes in the very first stages of urban history. The great sites of Chueza, Brak, Mozan and Leilan pay eloquent witness to this.

It is a safe assumption that one main reason for the rise to power of a city like Urkesh was its key position on the *trade* routes between the Anatolian highlands rich in copper and the great urban civilizations to the South. The saddle of Mardin, so visible today in the Mozan landscape, is symbolic in this respect. The

large amount of bronze objects found in our excavations may also be due to the significance of ancient Urkesh as a major gateway for the metal trade in ancient Syrian history.

The regional role of Syria has often been described with reference to its neighbors. In this perspective, Syria is viewed typically as a crossroads of civilization. That is a valid assessment, in that it addresses the historical dynamism of the country and its people, but it is quite incomplete if from it we deduce that Syria was primarily a stepping stone to some other more important reality. In fact, Syria has typically been not so much a crossroads as a *pivot of civilizations*. And nowhere else is this more applicable than in the case of Urkesh. In the third millennium, the Hurrians of Urkesh developed an alternative model to the southern urban experiment of the Sumerians, a model based on ethnic identity more than on territorial contiguity. The cultural uniqueness of Urkesh is in part the result of its geographical uniqueness: against the backdrop of the mountains, it combined the urban potential of the plains with the ability to exploit less easily accessible resources of the highlands. This contributed to shape its unique religious and political traditions, and to safeguard it from the aggressive expansionism of the empire of Akkad.

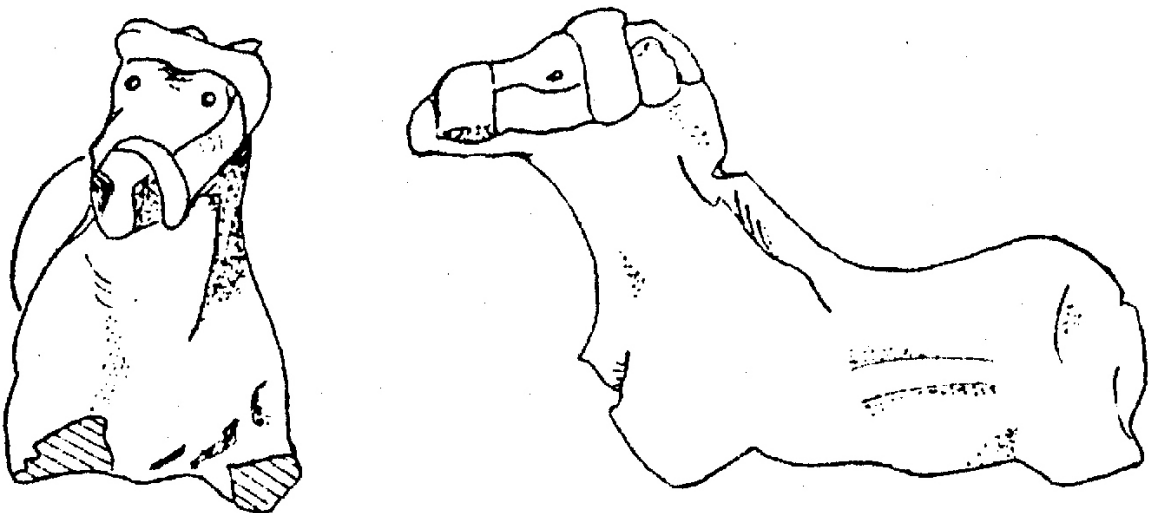


Topic 3. Figurines

The figurine corpus from ancient Urkesh is large. These small figures made of clay are remarkable for a straightforward realism that documents the fauna of the area. They are made by people who know animals. A paleozoologist can identify many species by body type and anatomical detail. Whether a knee joint is expressed or not, for example, distinguishes carnivore from herbivore. The way animals behave is accurately observed. A sheep in a flock holds its head high so as not to get caught in brush; an equid brays, muzzle thrust up and out.

Some of Mozan's figurines represent wild species (bones have been found of at least 24) –wild sheep, as well as bears and other carnivores – lean and muscular cats, hyenas with striped pelt. Domestic species can also be recognized – bulls and fat-tailed sheep and goats and curly-tailed dogs.

Less certain as to species but also present among our figurines are the equids, probably three of four members of the genus – wild horses and hemions and asses. Stratified material remains can not put the date of domestication of equids much beyond the beginning of the second millennium. Among the figurines of Mozan, we have preliminary evidence of earlier domestication of equids and likely of the horse itself. While gestural reality can startle (a stallion's head caught in half-turn to the right, as example), it is the detail which we take as diagnostic, changes which came with taming – long mane lying along the neck on rider's left, forelock, well-defined eye-ridges, sharp breast-line. An analysis of stance has also contributed to the identification of domesticated animals. And, at



Mozan, a number of equid figurines have harnesses – small circular marks or more realistic gear.

Technical characteristics – color, medium, manufacture – may hold clues to function. Size, too, must be important, for a large number of the Mozan figurines are quite small, miniatures in effect. Domestic objects – bowls, jars, beds – are also represented in miniature.

By contrast with animal figurines, human representations in clay are rare at Mozan. While recognizable, most are simple and highly stylized, as if they were defined by function – gaming pieces, perhaps, or tokens. [R. Hauser].

Topic 4. Ceramics

Excavations in the palace have yielded rooms and courtyards with large numbers of ceramics in situ. From the permanent installations within rooms and courtyards and the large quantity of sherds and whole vessels excavated in them we have been able to determine the function of several of these spaces. Generally long term storage is done in large shouldered jars with flat or convex bases (A15.253, 246). Since they had a narrow neck they may have been used for storing either liquids or solids. Large wide mouth jars were convenient for scooping out solids and are often decorated with rope decoration (A15.244). Short term storage vessels are smaller and have restricted entry because the contents (either liquid or solid) can easily be poured out. They usually have a rounded base (A15.311) and may have occasionally been placed in a stand as we do find a few in the ceramic record. While there are few large serving trays found at the site, we do have a large number of medium and small bowls (A15.304) that could have been used for the serving of food. Often the bowls are quickly made and cut off the wheel leaving string marks on the base. Conical cups predominate in the palace strata; most were thrown quickly and also cut from the wheel with a string (A15.305). Experiments we have conducted show that if the clay is prepared ahead, a single potter can produce 500 conical cups a day. One of these store-rooms of the formal wing of the palace, dating to Phase 3, contained all of the vessels just discussed, so we are certain that the ceramic assemblage was in use during the same period.

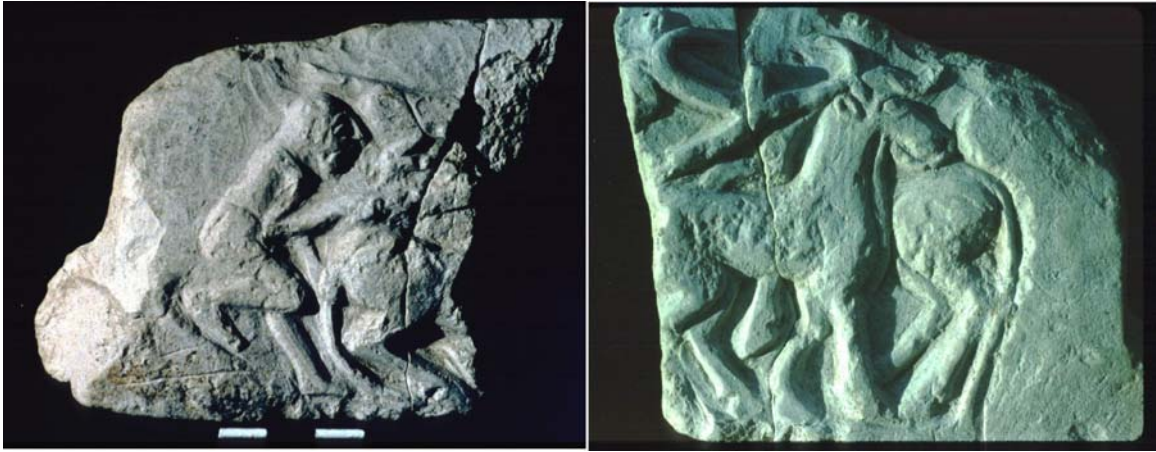
Some ceramic vessels are rare in the excavations and may have been imported or only used in a ritual context. Two such vessels come from the strata near the entrance of the *âbi*. They have a short neck, globular body and round base. What makes them unusual are the two vertical handles with horizontal holes pierced in them, attached to the widest part of the body (A14.122). Even more striking is the fact that dark brown paint is applied to the body and base

and then the firing was such that a darker horizontal line appeared between the lower part of the vessel and the unfired bright orange neck and rim. This type of paint and firing have only been found previously in shallow bowls.



Topic 5. Sculpture

In a burnt level above and slightly behind the main altar of temple BA we discovered a small statue of a lion dated to the last quarter of the third millennium on the basis of stratigraphic evidence. While lions are found in the sculptural repertoire of the Sumerians, whose artistic tradition is contemporary with our lion, the style is however quite different. The Sumerians depict lions with highly patterned manes which look more like a medieval ruff than a lion mane. Their eyes are also very stylized. It is almost as if they had never seen a lion! Our Urkesh lion may not look as neat as its southern counterparts, but it does look much more like a real lion. The overall impression of the Urkesh lion is one of a combination of unsophisticated charm, in part due to his fuller proportions, and a sturdy vitality quite lacking elsewhere in this time period. The only possible comparisons for our lion are the two Urkesh lions, now in the Metropolitan and the Louvre. These bronze lions are more realistically rendered and are created by a more sophisticated artist, but their liveliness and vitality are the same as the one excavated at the site.



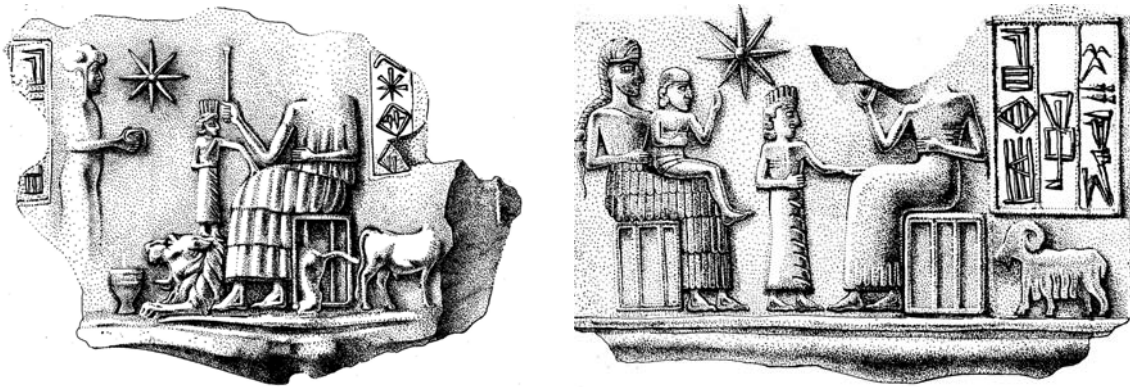
Also from the area of the temple came a small stone stela carved on both sides. This freestanding monument depicts on one side a group of animals with the unusual feature that all the animals are shown in movement. On the opposite side of the stela all the animals are depicted in a naturalistic composition that gives the feeling of a milling animal herd. On the opposite side of the stela the theme is even more striking. A plowman is shown holding his plow behind a draft animal while his dog is placed above him. The plowman is positioned at one end of the scene with a diagonal line behind him. Dramatically the plowman has his right foot against this line as if he is pushing off, as it were, from the diagonal. This forward thrust is accentuated by the forward bend of the body and head of the plowman and the movement shown in the legs of his draft animal. This emphasis on movement is not found in Sumerian art but appears in battle reliefs of the Akkadian period.

From a later stratum dating to the last years of the third millennium came a clay statuette, 29cm tall, of a nude female with a bowl-like depression on the top of her head. She wears a necklace, has pierced ears and double lobed earrings. This type of earring is found in gold at other third millennium sites such as in the Royal Cemetery at Ur. The depression on top of her head may have been the anchor for a headdress or may have contained another object during certain periods of time, as would possibly be necessary for cult functions. Two other heads are striking, one of stone with deep holes for eyes) and a second painted example of a man with painted moustache and kafiah-like headdress.



Topic 6. The seals

The Urkesh/Mozan excavations have yielded a large corpus of seal impressions, mostly fragmentary, which in antiquity sealed boxes, jars, or baskets. Some of these impressions were used to seal doors of buildings or individual storerooms. At this point over a thousand impressions from rollings of over 100 different seals have been found. Of these impressions about 150 contain seal inscriptions. In addition a number of cuneiform tablets from the Old Akkadian period have been excavated; they include for the most part administrative texts, but also school texts, one with a portion of a Sumerian dictionary (a list of professions), also found at Ebla.



Five seals belong to one of the kings of Urkesh, named Tupkish, eight belong to his queen, Uqnitum, and five more belong to courtiers connected with their household. These scenes emphasize the royal family as the figures of the family appear in them. In addition to the family scenes from the royal court are depicted, as for instance, in some scenes of the Queen Uqnitum she is surrounded by her daughter and female servants while a lyre player and singer entertain them. Other kings of Urkesh have seals represented in our corpus, the latest found in the 2004 season. This new endan, (the Urkesh kings identified themselves with the Hurrian title for king), takes up a theme found in the Tupkish seals of a lion at the court. In both, the lion reclines before a basin into which liquid is being poured in what appears to be a recurrent court ritual. The scene in the new endan seal is striking in that the small figure standing with the deity is not facing the deity (as in all other Akkadian seal iconography) but rather faces the ritual enactment. In other words the small figure is equated with the god! Who is this figure? Certainly a human and more than likely the endan whose seal it is!! So it appears that our new endan is equating himself with a god!!

We know that the Akkadian king, Naram-Sin, considered himself a god and from Urkesh we have door sealings of one of his daughters, Tar'am-Agade. She is more than likely in Urkesh as a queen because she has a combat scene on her seal related to the political expression of Akkadian power in the south. In the same cache as the seal impressions of Tar'am-Agade were impressions on door sealings of a Hurrian official; he too has a combat scene, only the second non-Akkadian known to be granted this privilege! Included in this cache too are impressions of an official with an Akkadian name, Ishar-beli. His scene is unique in that it shows a prancing equid before a seated deity. We do have a number of equid bones from our excavations as well as a large number of equid figurines. The presence of the daughter of Naram-Sin's daughter in the Urkesh court, probably as its queen, is evidence, we think, that he had an alliance with Urkesh. That is that he did not conquer it in the same way he conquered Ebla and Nagar (Tell Brak). Urkesh was the only major third millennium Syrian city not conquered by him, and if this is indeed the case indicates that this city had an independence not accorded to the rest.

Topic 7. Conservation

By nature, archaeology is destructive, in the specific sense that we must "ex-cavate" – i.e., we must draw out of the earth what is hidden. But the cover that "hides" the goal of our search cannot be removed the way we lift a blanket. For it is itself part of our goal: this "blanket" consists of later accumulations, which we also must understand. And most of what we retrieve from the grip of the soil is itself fragile and highly perishable. It is a shame for us to make such an effort at the excavation, and then to loose the excavated!

Thus conservation becomes an integral part of our job as archaeologists. At Mozan, we have made since the beginning a great effort at protecting what we have recovered. As a result, we are today better equipped than most to deal with the imperative needs of conservation. The objects are treated in a special three room lab inside the Expedition House, before they are sent to the Museum in Der ez-Zor where our objects are housed at the moment.

The conservation of the architecture, on the other hand, is something you will directly appreciate during your visit. This is because our goal has been not only to protect the original walls as documents that preserve the evidence, but also to give a good idea of what the ancient buildings looked like. The system we have adopted has been to place a metal trellis over the wall, and then to cover it with a tailored tarp. As a result, you see the walls in their original dimension, much as you would through a reconstruction done on the computer in virtual

reality... If we were able to do all of this as you see it, it is because of the great skill of the local craftsmen, in particular Sabah Kassem, a master smith from the nearby town of Amuda who has spent countless hours in making this project a reality.

As a result, we have, as it were, two sites in one. You see it now all covered. But it is easy to lift the tarps and see the original walls – if you are accompanied by our guard, he will do that for you. But it is also possible to remove the entire metal structure and to see the entire building as it was when first excavated, some of it going back fifteen years ago! You will see how the Palace looks without its protective covers in a couple of pictures (taken with the kite).



Our system is still evolving, and you will see some new experiments on your current tour. They address two problems. The first is that the tightly fitted tailored tarp as we have it now can easily rip in strong winds, on account of both the resistance that

the tarp makes to the wind and the fact that the tailored whole can more easily act as a sail. The second is that the current system of opening the tarps by pulling them up is awkward and slow. Hence, we have introduced three design changes: (1) the “roof” is now an independent unit, in either metal or cloth; (2) the cloth can be pulled sideways, just like a curtain; (3) the material lets more air through. In the Palace, we have two such experimental areas, in room B1 and D1. As for the Temple, we have built two experimental walls (where none was left from antiquity), and have placed on them different types of cover: the fact that the walls are oriented in two different directions will provide an excellent test of the effect of rain and wind during the winter season.

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A comprehensive website is in preparation. An interim website can be found at the address www.urkesh.org.