

In the Eye of the Storm

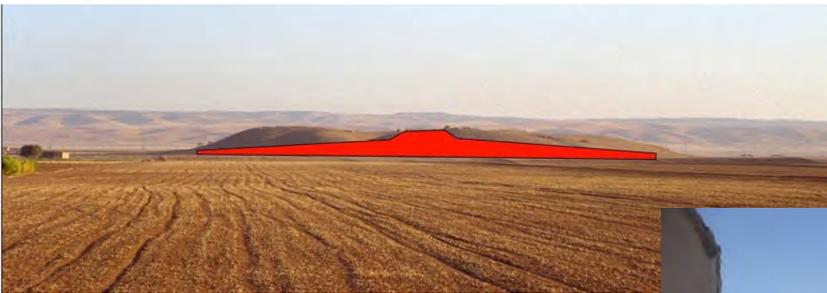
The Urkesh Folio
2012-13

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The forever changed horizons - revisited

In the last Folio
the title "Forever Changed Horizons"
referred to a very remote past:
we had discovered that Urkesh went back in time to five millennia ago!
The earlier mound would have looked as in the red silhouette below.



But this same title acquires a whole new meaning today.

The "forever changed horizons"
are no longer those of ancient Urkesh,
but of modern day Mozan.

War and strife have seared the horizons of the Syria
we knew and love so well.

There was no slowly gathering storm.
The storm gathered as a sudden explosion,
a thunderbolt that starkly changed what we once knew.

Against the backdrop of five millennia,
three years are a very short time.

But it is precisely our being accustomed to a different scale of time
that makes us sensitive to the vast implications of sudden change.
And yet we had, as if unwittingly, prepared for these new horizons.

Table of Contents

Preface: The forever changed horizons – revisited.....	1
Table of Contents.....	3
1 Introduction: A moral presence.....	5
The abiding relevance.....	5
Midwives to the past.....	6
Grassroots empowered.....	7
2 Urkesh open city.....	8
3 The awakening of consciousness.....	11
4 The Mozan “scholarly support group”.....	15
5 Recalling an expatriate.....	17
6 Monitoring as sharing.....	21
7 (Im)possible plans.....	23
8 The vigor of the women.....	25
9 A mosaic of identities.....	31
10 Bridging the distance.....	33
11 The young Syrian future.....	35
12 The Gulfsands Urkesh scholars.....	39
13 “Sette paia di scarpe...”.....	41
14 Conclusion: Unplanned planning.....	43

1 Introduction: A moral presence

An archaeological project explores the past. But it lives in the present.

It is not only that history, extracted from the ground, speaks to our immediate concerns, revealing the profound continuity that binds us today with *them*, the humans of yesteryear.

It is also (perhaps: especially) that our collective identities rest on the vertical sense of self that only our past can give us. We *are* our past. And caring for it is the responsibility we share, archaeologists and not.

It is, then, with tender care that we must nurture a project like ours – aimed at a remote Syrian past, and yet so full of meaning for the Syrian present. We had to design wholly new ways of showing how much life there is in the remoteness of a buried past. *It is a moral presence*. But not in the rhetorical sense that we only *speak* about it. Rather, in the very concrete and real sense that we are transforming culture into a social glue.

We were ready, though we had clearly not been expecting war.

And yet it was as if we had. With the clearest sense of purpose.

It was the attention we gave, over the years, to a central concern: the need to raise local awareness for the subtle richness of a long since hidden culture.

Training in conservation and education at all levels were the mechanisms to meet these concerns. Our previous folios witness the regular recurrence of our efforts – and successes.

We were ready. And it was through major grants from Gulfsands, from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor of Research at UCLA, and the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, that we were enabled to live up to our readiness. Through their support, our moral presence has become ever more real on the ground where ancient Urkesh stood millennia ago, and where today's inhabitants are keeping guard, with our help, protecting the silent witness of their ancient territorial forebears.

The results are far reaching. From politics to economics, from social awareness to, certainly, the *scholarly* dimension as well, our project has set new standards and has become a model. Putting together all the strands that derive from it, reveals the richness of its message and defines the uniqueness of its scope.

The abiding relevance

Times of turmoil encourage an intense reflection on the ultimate validity of our field work in foreign lands. Identified as we become with the people, committed as we are to recover their territorial past, engaged as we still remain in the more esoteric dimensions of our research – the question of relevance emerges with urgency.

It is the case, today, with regard to our field work in Syria. We are identified, we are committed, we are engaged – to where we feel foreign no more. Because of our attitude, because of their openness. Our heart is very much in Mozan while our mind dwells on Urkesh. Our heart is in the streets of Syria today even while our mind seeks to define something as seemingly remote as Late Chalcolithic 3 pottery.

“Seemingly” remote? You might object: how can one claim relevance for ancient pottery when people are dying in the streets? But even ideas do, strongly, matter, because the whole effort ultimately evokes and nurtures the sense of dignity that sustains us humans when everything else around us is in doubt.

Archaeologists, we serve as purveyors of a past in which the present sinks roots that are all the deeper when the sense of identity is under attack. We come to feel that in some unexpected way, the Syrians of today can also lean on the Syrians of yesteryear, those ancient Syrians we help bring back to light.

Almost unbeknownst to us, we had prepared for this. We had prepared as we were striving to conserve the fragile mudbrick walls of four and more millennia ago, as we were endowing this remote past with faces and names, as we were showing how the delicate disentangling of ruins from the grip of the earth is laden with meaning.

We had prepared because, in doing this, the people affected – we who dig, and they who *live* the results – have become jointly empowered with the richness of memory. And this memory is *the* treasure to be defended.

Thus it is that we feel confident about the Syrians of Mozan having become the guardians of memory, enabled to protect the Syrians of Urkesh from the ravages of war. Thus it is that the Syrians of yesteryear can in turn lean on the Syrians of today.

Midwives to the past

Communication is the start of preservation. Alongside conservation, alongside interpretation. Communication conceived as education. An education that educates *us* as much as “them,” as we all learn, together, that to attribute meaning is to affirm relevance.

Ours is a lifelong project. And it is projected into the future as well. Certainly, all archaeological projects should be conceived in this manner, even those that are planned for a limited time period. Because the incidence on people’s lives endures well beyond the tenure of the excavations. That is what we are experimenting now at Mozan.

Events have, de facto, imposed a substantial time limitation on our project. We have been absent from Mozan for three years now. But “absent” is the wrong word. For indeed we have been, and we are, present. It is because we had communicated, effectively, the sense of our joint belonging to the past. In this sense we were truly

midwives to the past: we did not invent it, we only helped in bringing it to the light of consciousness.

It was a simple recipe. We were, all along, committed to values.

It is these very values that are now affirming us.

Grassroots empowered

This Folio is a witness to the resilience of the people in and around Mozan, and to the validity of an approach we have systematically marshaled over the years.

I will speak, below, of the effectiveness of our site preservation program, in all its aspects. Maintaining the status quo was significant enough. But, as you will see, we went beyond, introducing new approaches, interacting creatively with our “Mozanians” on the ground, with the wonderful dialectics that commonly available technology, from digital cameras to internet connections, makes possible.

I will speak of the awakening of consciousness – how, throughout our three year absence from the site, instead of fatigue and neglect, a much greater sense of initiative developed that spurred an effective long distance dialog. Colored with nostalgia, it strengthened a professional and human bond we had strongly felt all along but which, put to the test, gained in even greater intensity.

I will speak of the vigor of the women. They have always been in the background for us. It was a special sense of dignity, I believe, that kept them from working at the tell (villages from other areas do not have this limitation). But now they have found their own niche, and have taken hold of the idea with real vigor.

In our Mozan experiment, terms like “stakeholders,” “sustainability,” “grassroots,” “bottom-up” come across with a whole new forcefulness. No theory, here.

Or rather. Theory is vindicated by the natural impulse that life brings to the fore. Reality precedes the words.

2 Urkesh open city

Scholarly and public interest has been overwhelming. Reaching across boundaries from the academic to the political venues, the project addresses complex issues that have a profound resonance in the archaeological world and, at the same time, it speaks to the hearts and minds of large segments of the public. We have seen this in the remarkable string of venues where we have been called to present the Gulfsands/Urkesh project.

The level of interest is well documented by the large number and the extreme variety of our presentations. Particularly significant were those highlighted below in bold face, both because of the number of people in attendance and because of the high quality of the event. The reception has been enthusiastic everywhere. It literally brought tears to some, because of the starkly unique image cast by the work being done in Mozan. "Urkesh, open city" echoes the title of the famous Rossellini movie. I choose it to echo the sense of strength and hope that the film evoked.

I will list here the events in which various members of our staff have been engaged, from mid 2012 until the end of 2013, and I will anticipate the major events planned for 2014.

1. May/June 2012: three scholarly papers presented at two international congresses in Warsaw and Berlin, and at the University of Frankfurt.
2. **September 2012: four major scholarly papers at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. The Director General of Antiquities and Museums, Dr. Bassam Jamous, was invited but was unable to attend. The Director of Antiquities from Hassaka, Dr. Abdel Mesia Bakdou participated.**
3. October 2012: a scholarly paper presented at the American Schools of Oriental Research in Baltimore Maryland.
4. **November 2012: two workshops at the Politecnico University in Milan and at the Ambrosiana Gallery in Milan. Gulfsands' CEO and President, Mahdi Sajjad, and the Commercial Director, Kenneth Judge, participated, as well as Mr. Marwan Midani (formerly of Souria Holding), Mrs. Leila Kabab (of Total) and Msgr. Antranig Ayvazian (from Qamishli).**
5. December 2012: a paper at the University of Florence and a presentation in London to the Directors and Management of Gulfsands.
6. January 2013: a presentation at the Archaeological Institute of America in Seattle and at the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology in Los Angeles.
7. **February 2013: a presentation at a meeting called by UNESCO in Amman, Jordan, on the preservation of Syrian antiquities. The participants included the Director General of Antiquities and Museum from Damascus, Dr. Maamoun Badel Karim, four other archaeologists, and a number of**

- representatives of customs and police officers in charge of controlling smuggling activities.**
8. March 2013: presentations at New York University and the Catholic University of America.
 9. **April 2013: presentation at an international meeting organized by the National Geographic Society for the Government of Guatemala in Guatemala City. The meeting catered to a very large public audience, and it marked the first time (since the end of the civil war) that leaders of the native Mayan community appeared in public on the same podium along with two ministers of the Guatemala government and with the Vice-President of the National Geographic Society.**
 10. May 2013: a paper at Rome's Università Tre.
 11. June 2013: A paper sponsored by the Georgian Academy of Sciences and held at the National Museum in Tbilisi, Georgia.
 12. **July 2013: a presentation at a meeting on the Syrian situation called by the Italian Minister of Defense, Mario Mauro, where, in addition to the Minister, there were the Vice-President of the European Parliament, an under-secretary of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, two ambassadors, and a member of the European Commission. I was the only academic on the panel.**
 13. **August 2013: two presentations at the International Meeting for Friendship among People in Rimini. This is one of the largest cultural events in the world, with about 800,000 attendances during an entire week. This year it was inaugurated by Prime Minister Letta. Our presentations were in front of an audience of almost 900 people each.**
 14. **September 2013: a one week intensive course at the Iraqi Institute for Archaeological Conservation at Erbil. This was organized by the World Monuments Fund on behalf of the US State Department. It provided an in-depth review (five hours a day for six full days!) of our project to a restricted and highly selected audience of Iraqi archaeologists. Among them were the four directors of the Babylon project, the most important preservation effort undertaken by the Iraq antiquities department.**
 15. October 2013: two papers at a meeting of the prestigious Accademia dei Lincei in Rome and at the University La Sapienza of Rome.
 16. November 2013: a paper at the University of Venice, Italy, and a presentation at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva, Switzerland.
 17. December 2013: a book presentation at the Università Tre of Rome, and a paper at the University of Rome, La Sapienza

18. **June 2014: plans for a second course presented at the Iraqi Institute for Conservation in Erbil (a continuation of the one offered in September 2013), preceded by a presentation at the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, organized by the Italian Embassy.**
19. **August 2014: plans for a major exhibit on our project at the same Meeting in Rimini where we gave presentations in August 2013, to which the Gulfsands CEO and President and Gulfsands' Commercial Director have expressed their intent to participate. Also, the Director General of Antiquities and Museums from Damascus, plus three Directors of Antiquities of the regions of Aleppo, Idleb and Qamishli have already accepted our invitation to participate.**
20. **September 2014: a presentation at the Archaeological Film Festival in Rovereto, Italy. This is one of the world's largest events for archaeological film. Even though we will not present a film, they have asked ask to offer a special session devoted entirely to our project.**

3 The awakening of consciousness

Mozan, as a hill, has always been there, for over three millennia. It has become Urkesh again thanks only to archaeology. The evidence is so fine and fractured that no one but an archaeologist would have been able to recognize the reality deeply hidden in the ground.

The next question is how to preserve this fragile gift of time. Preserve it physically, so that is not destroyed by rain and snow. But preserve it morally as well, so that it is not destroyed by war.

The answer is that the site has to be embedded in the consciousness of the people who are now the immediate heirs to this remote richness. We had been nurturing this consciousness, with a very explicit and concrete program long before the troubles started in 2011. This meant eliciting a sense of importance for a seemingly evanescent, and certainly very remote, past. It also meant training. For a patterned maintenance system is the indispensable human ingredient for the success of any such project.

Here are our local collaborators, Kurds and Arabs, working on a common goal.



What I find extraordinary is the complete lack of a sense of fatigue and disaffection.

It is almost three years that there are no excavations at the site.

A civil war has been raging in the country.

And we get pictures upon pictures of damages to the mudbrick, of plastic that shrivels and needs to be replaced; of tarp covers that slowly disintegrate .

All of this carefully documented on a floor plan, or with marks on a photograph to highlight the nature of the problem.

And these are all pictures of 2013, not of 2010!

It may seem either epic or surrealistic, depending on the point of view...

And it is instead the result of a most admirable sense of commitment to a job well done, the sense of pride in their effort: *"in order to see the hill Mozan of the most beautiful and the best archaeological sites in the world..."* as our photographer, Diadin, writes in one of his reports.





Motivation is one of the main ingredients of this whole enterprise. We had nurtured it while we could work together; we are nurturing it now from a distance with our intense correspondence. But it is ultimately nurtured by the sense of accomplishment that comes from seeing the results.

There is like a loud tone of victory in these pictures, with which they show us, and really show to themselves in the first place, how the site can continue to be managed and maintained in spite of all odds.

The grass on the stone steps is removed and new mud plaster set in place to protect the stone joints from rain and snow. The mudbrick walls are protected again. The sun shows no fatigue when dawn comes again. Nor do our trusted Mozanians...

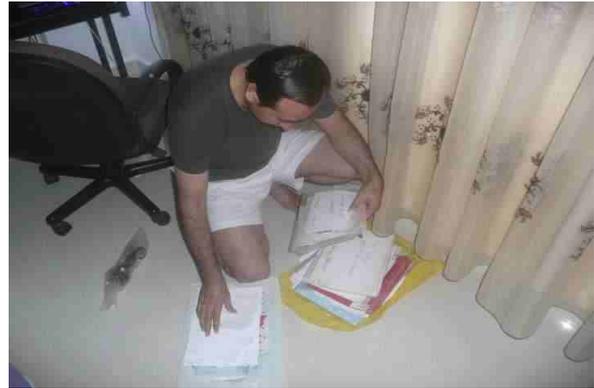
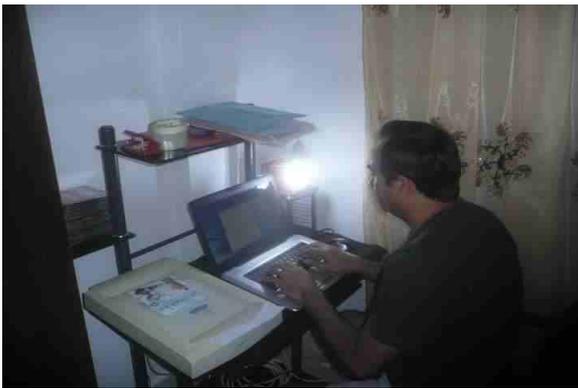


4 The Mozan “scholarly support group”

Our ambition was always to involve as directly as possible our “workmen” in the research activities of our project. Now that we are not able to interface with our Mozanians directly, this intent has been put to the test. And we have met our match.

We have already seen Diadin at work as a skilled photographer and recorder. During the last three years we have logged in some 10,000 photos – and what mattered was not only taking good pictures, but documenting each and every one of them, processing them on the computer, and sending them to us via the Internet. We have already seen ample evidence of this in the way in which they have been monitoring the wall conservation project.

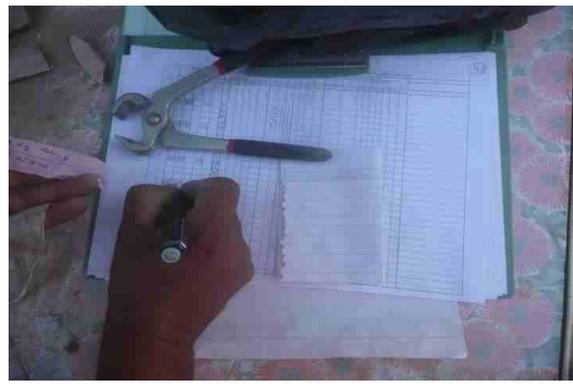
But then there is the work on our old files that had not been digitized yet. Kameran goes through these records, scans them and sends them to us.



We need measurements taken in the field? We get the figures (for instance, size and weight of a brick), and the photo that goes with it to show Ibrahim at work.



And then there are the large quantities of pottery excavated in previous years. So here is Hammade, in the company of his chicken, measuring and classifying, transposing our sherds onto coded sheets – which are of course entered in the data base in Qamishli and sent to us via the Internet...



5 Recalling an expatriate

The reach of the Mozan spirit is ambitious. Here is one story that brings this home very vividly.

The *abi* is one of the most significant structures: a deep shaft, lined in stone, where the sacredness the ancients felt still evokes our awe. It is also one of the best preserved religious structures of Syro-Mesopotamia. We had covered it with a dome-like trellis, covered in turn with carefully laid tarp material, which imitated the ancient corbelled vault that had in antiquity protected the inside for centuries. But, quite understandably, the two years since our last work at the site had wreaked more damage than the centuries had to the original dome. The tarps lay tattered, the trellis bare.

Our faithful local collaborators sounded the alarm. And took what measures they could to protect this ominous *abi*: sheets of plastic, packed with earth at the base, to prevent rain and the first snow from drenching the shaft and undermine its stones.

But clearly it was not enough. The response had an epic ring to it.

Every one who had been on the excavations at Mozan knew Sabah Kassem, the smith and the poet of our project. He had in the meantime moved to Mardin, the city across the Turkish border from Mozan. Through many a phone call with our local collaborators in Mozan and with him in Mardin, it was agreed that the best was to entrust the saving of the *abi* to him.

In so doing, we were making a larger statement. Despite all the tragedy, we would *not* settle for temporary remedies. Through an intense, if often interrupted, telephonic and telematic dialog between the US, Italy, Turkey and of course Syria, we agreed to place a firmer protection than we had ever done while we were in Mozan. A metal sheet cover to our trellis! So, catching the right moment between heavy rainstorms and the first snowfall, Sabah was once more atop one of his fabulous constructions!





It was spider man in Mozan. In fact, spider *men* in the plural, because our trusted Mozanians were obviously all there to lend a hand.

Isn't it beautiful, even from the inside? The sun came out just to mark the end of a well done job. But also to show that there were some fissures where the light shone through, to show where to inject some silicon.



Some paint to give it the tone and feeling of the surroundings, and behold! A prodigious accomplishment, indeed.

Not only, of course, because it can withstand the heavy snow (that promptly followed); not only because of all else that is otherwise happening in this martyred country.

But also because it gives witness to the human will behind it. The will to accomplish something valuable surmounting all odds, all distances, all dangers.



6 Monitoring as sharing

The human will. That is the great bond that has kept us together, across the yawning gulf brought about by the events. One can tell from an accomplishment such as the *abi* dome that the Mozan chemistry is fully at work. We have a strong sharing of what the important goals are, and that is how we come to share as well, seamlessly, the necessary procedures.

Another remarkable human dimension of this incredible adventure we are living together emerges from the way in which we correspond. We have a strict recording system, with detailed time sheets where every hour is accounted for. And we review them carefully. Not at all out of suspicion, because our mutual trust could not be greater. But because this gives the measure of our reciprocal commitment to professionalism. It gives great dignity to our common endeavor.

And so it is that the monitoring becomes often a very moving testimony to the real life that is lived behind the work, and makes work worthwhile and beautiful. Well beyond the financial remuneration, important (and of course welcome) though that is.

The prize goes to this time sheet. We use them to record the hours spent on any given job, and to calculate thereby the compensation to be paid.

In this particular one, Kameran records zero hours for six days in a row.

And the explanation is as terse as it is eloquent:

I marry, my wedding.

Day	Hours	Description
1	8	sorted the work and scanning J01 body and shape sherd because thy was mixed
2	8	sorted the the work belog send to GB meeting with Diajin about the photo to be sent to GB
3	7	Going to net work send work to GB and Alan bad net work very slow
4	8	body sherd J01 by feature (body sherd J01 by feature(2005-2009-2010))
5	FR	
6	0	I marry My wedding
7	0	I marry My wedding
8	0	I marry My wedding
9	0	I marry My wedding
10	0	I marry My wedding
11	0	I marry My wedding
12	FR	
13	7	body sherd J01 by feature(2005-2009-2010)
14	7	body sherd J01 by feature(2005)
15	8	body sherd A15 by feature
16	10	body sherd A15 by feature
17	7	sorted the work and scanning J01 - Shape Sherd J01 by feature(2006)
18	8	searching for drawing if it is interred to pc or not -and look for if it is freghanded or not
19	FR	
20	0	
21	7	Make the work and going to jnd work net - what does this mean?
22	0	

The few excerpts that follow, from June and December 2013, speak louder than any editorial ever could.

*I've visited the hill: a lot of visitors and they marveled that the mission did not come two years ago but still keep excavations initial shape
12 need to jader new and very necessary [twelve walls need tarps]
We hope to see you soon in Tall Mozan you are always in our hearts
Hello to Mr. Samer
Thank you
Diadin*

*Temple Abe and as we told you earlier in dire need of jader new and expensive process of restoration and we need money for repair Otherwise, you will lose this magnificent archaeological site. [this accompanied the early photos of the damaged abi tarp covers]
We are pleased with our work with you until now, despite the difficult circumstances
The work continues...
Thank you
Ibrahim Khalo*

*I told Diadan about the images [the photographs he sends at the end of the month]
He said the images ready but can not bring me the pictures
because the road cut off by snow
He said when opening the way will bring me
Thank you
Kameran*

*I am very happy to work with you so far, despite the distance between us
We work in Mozan as a team in terms of our good work and like you are us exists in Mozan [as if you were with us here in Mozan]
We have some difficulties at work but still worked continuously
Very interesting work and also tired because of the circumstances in which pass in Syria
But it remains always work with you interesting and nice to you wonderful people
Thank you
Kameran*

*We have a lot of difficulties we are working and there is no one support us something
Not financially or morally, but for the sake of Urkesh will bear all this in order to stay alive
Workers who work with you are the best workers and they are doing their duty by their potential
But the increase in salary was very little hope that aided them little [we had provided a small increase, and this gave them some additional incentive]
We use old nylon and harvested over the palace walls and Alripan old cut of Jawader [we use old plastic that we collect all over the palace excavations, and strips made out of the old tarps]
Muhammad*

7 (Im)possible plans...

We know that Ismail, Muhammad, Kameran, Diadin, Ibrahim would do their best to protect the site, carrying out their work, even if we were no longer able to remunerate them for their effort. But, far from even contemplating such a possibility, we have been working hard to make a case, even under the current circumstances, to develop a sustainability plan for Mozan and its area.

It seems like an impossible plan to think of it now. But we do not accept the impossible. Precisely because things seem hopeless, we are leaning heavily on even the smallest strand of hope.

In 2012 colleagues from the Office of the First Lady and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums picked up where we could no longer be. They went several times to Mozan, and met in our house and in the villages with local people, especially the young people, to explain the notion of the Park. They gave this part of the project a beautiful name: The Gates of Urkesh.

The lunch was prepared by the local women, Arab and Kurdish. And the message was conveyed that, even as events were overtaking the country, the Park was meant to serve as a beacon of light and hope – to be for sure implemented at some point in the future



Also in the summer of 2012, the provincial government began to implement a plan to which they had committed – to provide the villages in the Park area with running water. Here one can see the trenches and one of the boxes that house the valves for the distribution of the water to the first village chosen, that of Mozan itself.



8 The vigor of the women

One of the goals of the DGAM visit was to encourage local activities that could eventually develop into a venue of interest to visitors. Our colleagues selected two houses between the villages and the tell, and the owner made them available at no charge to local women – the sign above the door proudly proclaiming that these were the “Gates of Urkesh.”



The rooms were set up with care to house the products being produced, as if in a store ready for visitors.



There are photographs, as if in a Museum; and even a plaque to honor the individuals who contributed, especially Mr. Hamdan Abd el-Razzaq al-Shellal who allowed the group to use the Atelier at no cost. So even in Mozan we have a named building!



The Gates of Urkesh project for social development based on cultural heritage thanks all the volunteers from Umm er-Rabia and Mozan villages who participated in the accomplishment of this work.

A special thanks to Mr. Hamdan Abd al-Razzaq al-Shellal for offering to the Urkesh workshop the use of the houses at no cost.



The room was also meant to be used as a workshop. We call it "atelier," and it is that part of the Gates Urkesh project that takes care of the production.

Through their own initiative, the women set it up as a well organized system, with instructions and schedules spelled out on the chalkboard in the background.

We are now beginning to interface more directly with it so as to maximize its potential.

By all standards, this is a remarkable accomplishment.

The thrust comes from the base, with a strong sense of commitment and purpose. The women of Urkesh – Urkesh is the ancient name, but we use it for the larger enterprise that subsumes the villages around the archaeological site. So, it is the women of “Urkesh” who have picked up with vigor where no more guidance could be provided from the outside.

It is a model of initiative at the grass root level.

We can now be partners in *their* initiative. And we have found a way.

We have “ordered” a number of items produced by them, and have received our first shipment – courtesy of Mr. Samer Kabawat of Skynet in Damascus. It was with great emotion that we opened this modest little package. They had placed products inside a typical black garbage bag, and sent them to Damascus, from where they were in turn sent abroad.

The quality of these products is no less astonishing than the simple fact that they were produced and shipped under the circumstances we all know so well. We are now preparing ways to make them available to our common friends, and to place an order for more.

I will let them speak for themselves in the next pages...

But first, another small, significant detail. The packaging and the logo! Some of the items are carefully wrapped in a bag with a burlap backing and a cellophane cover. In the corner, a beautiful logo, which uniquely identifies the project, and gives in beautiful handwriting the name of the “Urkesh Atelier of Handicrafts” and their telephone number!...







9 A mosaic of identities

Syrian multicultural identity is rooted in history. Urkesh is witness to this. It was a thriving hub of Hurrian culture at the time when Ebla and Mari were dominant centers of Semitic culture and when Sumerian was prevalent throughout the country as the *lingua franca* for administration.

It is so today, as well. The one-sidedness of extremism would want us to believe otherwise in today's conflictual situation. But it is not so. The hope for tomorrow is rooted in the healthy reciprocal respect that defined Syrian culture yesterday.

The openness with which foreigners like ourselves have been warmly welcome at all bears testimony to this. I am fond to say that the Syrian adage "My home is your home" has acquired an even greater depth when it comes to mean "Our history is your history." It is in this spirit that we, the archaeologists, feel like a catalyst for unity, never like outsiders indifferent to the present.

Archaeology in general, and Urkesh in particular, have contributed to this in the past. The year 2014 marks the thirtieth anniversary of our presence at Mozan. In all these years, we have not had one single incident relating to ethnic conflict. And yet we have constantly integrated every such identity in the routine of our work, with intentionally mixed crews and open channels to all communities.

In recent years, we had been planning to develop a more explicit outreach to the Kurdish community. We began with a guided tour to the grammar school children, to whom our explanation were translated from English and Arabic into Kurdish.

We wanted to expand our signage system so that it would include portions in Kurdish as well. We were interrupted by the sad turn of events. But we have now resumed this effort, and even from a distance we are putting together a multilingual booklet of which the next two pages offer a sample.

Some 50 pages long, it describes the salient features of the excavations and helps the visitor understand the value of the past and its meaning for the present, in all its facets.

Its realization wants to offer another indication of our commitment to continuity in the midst of the anguished interruption that Syria is suffering – and that we are suffering from a distance. It is precisely the intent to overcome this distance, with whatever means are available to us. We, the archaeologists, want to welcome afresh the new visitors to the tell even as we cannot be there to greet them in person.

An Invitation to Tell Mozan Ancient Urkesh



A multilingual guide to the site



Concept and text by Giorgio Buccellati
Layout and Arabic translation by Rasha Elendari
Kurdish translation by Ahmad Slivi

Preliminary version January 2014

The message of a simple niche

What we have found is a corner of a building, with a niche on either side. This architectural pattern is well known for large temple of the fourth millennium B.C. as the reconstruction shown in the image.

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.

رسالة من محراب بسيط

ما تم العثور عليه هو زاوية لبناء، مع محراب بكلا الجانبين. يعتبر هذا النمط المعماري معروف جداً لمعبد يعود للألف الرابع ق.م. كما المجسم المعاد عمارته في الصورة.
يُورخ معبد جنوب بلاد الرافدين تقريباً لنفس فترة زاوية البناء التي اكتشفناها، مما جعلنا نعتقد أن البناء ممكن أن يكون فعلاً معبد، وهذا قد يكون شكله عندما كان قائماً.



Name ya ji kulekê

Tuştê hate dîtin ew di qorzî ya avahîyê de bû weku kulek yek ji herdû alîya de. Ev reng yê avahîyê pir navdare ji perestgeh yên hazarsalî ya çaran berî zayînê. Ev xwyaye li ser nûveavahî ya li ser wênê.

Ev nûveavahî ya perestgehê ji Mesopotamia başûr, di yek damê de wek ya vê qorzîkê deye. Ji ber wilo em guman dikin ku ev avahî ya perestgehê ye.

10 Bridging the distance



Globalization comes as a blessing in our case. Dislocated though we are across three continents, we are in direct contact via the internet. Whether it is conference calls, or exchange of photographs (some 10,000 in three years!), or checking our websites, or simply e-mailing each other – we have a Mozan global net that is extremely active and productive.

And we even meet in person... Through a number of venues, we have gathered in small and larger groups a number of different times. The common goal is to carry forward our continuous involvement in Mozan, no matter the odds. Archaeologists, we are used to the silence of the past. But we hear more and more the sound of life, a sound that truly echoes across the distance, whether of time or of space.

A cadre of young Syrian students are working on their advanced degrees in various parts of the world, and they work alongside a number of post-docs. Together, we aim to blend the needs of their research programs with the needs of our project. And this is working out extremely well and productively.

We are also reaching beyond scholarly research. An interesting example is a project we are just beginning in which an Italian post-doc (Stefania) works along with a Syrian student (Yasmine) to train a group of Italian High School students to develop sections of the Urkesh website in Italian. As it happens, Yasmine knows Italian perfectly, and has been to one of our study seasons in Italy. She is working on rendering in Arabic a selection of the pages from the website, and the idea came that the same could be done for Italian. So we will have a Syrian student in Damascus, under the general supervision of an Italian post-doc in Venice, supervising in turn a group of Italian high-schoolers... All of this through a direct connection via the internet...

11 The young Syrian future

We all know that the future is in the hands of the young. But it is in our hands, too. For there is no age barrier when we share the purpose in the same way that we share the means.

I will give here unedited excerpts from the statements they sent me in which they summarize their experience with the project. The scholarly dimension is documented in the publications, the lectures, the website. But now we hear the voice of their commitment – and of their hope. It is catching.

Yasmine Mahmoud (Damascus)

I started working in the Mozan project in 2008. I continued with the team through the seasons of 2009, 2010 and the study season in Italy in 2011.

To me working in the project is the biggest opportunity of my life. It gave me a chance to understand the true work of archeology, from the moment of discovery to the final publication. It also gave me a chance to be a member of the Mozan family. And most of all, it gave a chance to contribute, even if only in a modest way, to my legacy as a Syrian.

As a member of the Mozan project, I had the pleasure of traveling to Italy to work on the documentation. This trip was of great importance. It made me feel a sense of belonging to this project, and it made me feel that even though a war was starting in my country, we will continue on with our work even from a distance.

Right now, I'm working on the record with other team members. And I have to say that this work in these times of hard ships in Syria is one of the things that keep feeding me hope. It's a way to stay in touch with Mozan and with members of the team. Even though no one can come to Mozan in this period, we will keep working until one day we can all be reunited in a beautiful and peaceful Syria.

Hiba Qassar (Qamishli-Florence)

Working in Tell Mozan changed my view to the potentials of archaeology in Syria. In my second year of archaeology I start working in tell Mozan in excavation and pottery analysis, a year after I got involved in site presentation and interacting with visitors and locals as well. This oriented my way in looking at archeology in Syria and made me aware of the problems that Syrian archeology is going through.

After few years in Mozan an idea of an archeological park came out and how locals can get direct benefits from the site, this crystalized my ideas of what I want to do in archeology. After two years I started my PhD program in museology in Florence University. The background as an archeologist in general and the experience I got from Mozan in particular beside the critical situation that my country is going through were my guidance in choosing my thesis topic.

Despite the difficulties I went through from losing my scholarship and other academic obstacles, I never lost the enthusiasm or faith in the research topic I want to do.

My research idea was based on what I experienced in Mozan which is how to bridge the relation between Syrians and the ancient past of the country by introducing this past properly through museums, and the positive results we can get out of it starting from appreciating the ancient past and protecting it to strengthening the sense of belonging to one ancient past of the country.

Working in the project didn't change and improve my perception to the ancient past

only, but looking at workmen from different villages and different ethnicities excavating together the ancient past of their country and caring about it changed my view also to the future. It made me believe in the potentiality of this past to gather people from different ethnicities in different ways and levels.

Syria is suffering a bad conflict since almost three years which was called "a civil war in Syria" by most of the media. Almost a year ago the project of Urkesh gate gathered again women from different ethnicities to work together and produce some handmade objects. Looking at the project with its simplicity and these women together is so inspiring, and gave me hope to keep believing that these people are able to combat any political theory or social analysis that others think could be valid for them.

Samer Abdel Ghafour (Aleppo – Rome)

When science combines with humanitarian.

There is no slightest doubt about the advanced organization when it comes to talk among us as a community of archaeologist and cultural heritage specialist, about the scientific and administrative level of the Tell Mozan project. The relation with the local communities in the regions where we conduct our scientific projects, differs from one case to another. In a way or another its related to the wish and will of the directors more than any other reason.

As I grew up within the team of this project I recognized the importance and care about the humanitarian side in the relation with the local workmen and collaborators. That was obvious to me during my long term of participation in times of tranquility. Unemployment, inflation, and losing the hope for better future; these elements and more, accompanied the local workmen of the project, during the past three year of unrest in my home country Syria. Some of them scattered in the neighboring countries or even in the Europeans countries.

As I moved by the end of 2012 to Italy I continued my participation and collaboration. More or less I'm in the center where I see, feel, and touch the tremendous efforts of the directors to offer whatever help or assistance for them. These current efforts are double fold of what it was before the unrest due to the difficulties in communications, fund raising.

Rasha Elendari (Sueda - Toronto)

Sometimes the greatest things in our lives start with very small coincidences. It was on the street when I run into my friend and his cousin, who was the photographer of Tell Mozan. Chatting with them I mentioned that I was looking for a site where I can do fieldwork, to which the photographer recommended I should apply to work at Tell Mozan. Having heard about Tell Mozan I still didn't know what working there would be like. On faith, I sent my application the day after and got accepted to join the dig in the coming summer. That was 2003 and it was my third year of undergrad in archaeology.

The significance of going to Tell Mozan was more than it being the furthest and most isolated place I have ever been to at that time. It was more being involved with one of the most progressive digs I've ever seen; adopting the newest technology and educational methods while offering meaningful diversity and a homelike environment. Since that first summer, Tell Mozan has been a part of my life and a turning point for my future.

With the support of directors Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, who themselves welcomed me with open arms into their family, also encouraged me to follow a career in archaeology. In 2007, I started working full-time at the Tell Mozan Project and was fortunate to be a part of the Urkesh Global Record (UGR) publication, translation and organizing several events. One of the events was an exhibit of tell Mozan in conjunction with the American Embassy and American Center in Damascus.

Through this work, I was introduced to the Fulbright Scholarship and started

working on the application to continue to pursue a master degree in the United States. Of course, Giorgio and Marilyn were a big support as they wrote recommendation letters and even invited me to Los Angeles to work on the UGR in their lab at UCLA. This was my first experience with the American university system and western student life. The two months I stayed there was a great experience where I met many friends and professors that shared my interests.

In 2009, I was awarded the Fulbright Scholarship and started university applications. Again it was the Buccellatis who helped me through this foreign process and get set up at the University of Arkansas to do my Master's degree. Now I am at the University of Toronto, pursuing a PhD, and it is in large part due to the impact that Tell Mozan, Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, and their continued support through good and bad times that have gotten me to where I am today. For that I am thankful. Even as I am finishing my studies – I hope to always be a part of the Tell Mozan Project.

Ani Eblighatian (Aleppo-Geneva)

During my bachelor at the University of Aleppo, the site of Urkesh had the reputation for being the best scientific archeological mission in Syria. In summer 2008, I got the chance to participate in the excavations of Tell Mozan, which remained a unique experience, for the quality of the organization, the work, as well as the richness of the site itself.

Although I couldn't participate in the following years, the contact with the team, especially the directors Prof. Giorgio Buccellati and Prof. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, remained naturally, due to the respect and the friendly social, as well as their supportive spirit to the young archeologists. I was always looking forward to get the opportunity to work within the Urkesh team again.

In November 2013, while their conference in Geneva, once again I got amazed, this time by the constructive realistic approach in the painful depressive period of Syria, the way to keep the work go on by the cooperation with Syrians in Syria, in restoring the site, founding a museum, to keep the value of Syria's identity and culture by concentrating on the positive energy. The example inspired me in my personal project, to keep on and aim doing the positive goal despite of the complicated situation, yet getting the opportunity to contribute for the Urkesh project made me honored as I may do something for Syria through this important project which is the base in preserving the roots of Syria, the mosaic of cohabitated cultures during millenniums.

12 The Gulfsands Urkesh scholars

The young post-docs who are working on our project are both carrying forward their own research and providing guidance for the Syrian advanced students, who are working alongside them. A number of publications are in the offing: they will leave a permanent mark in the field as a document for the uniqueness of the project we are undertaking.

Caitlin Chaves Yates (Boston)

I have been a member of the Mozan team for the last 7 years, with my first season in Mozan during the summer of 2007. Over the 7 years I have worked in various capacities for the project working on projects ranging from site presentation, to excavations, to digital publication, to survey, and to the development of the Urkesh Park.

Over the years I have found the work at Mozan has served as an excellent education and a form of personal and professional enrichment. Excavating such a large site with intact stone architecture has taught me a lot about excavation techniques, team leadership and data recording. Additionally, some of the work would later go on to be incorporated as the primary data of my dissertation, which was completed in December 2013.

While receiving my PhD was certainly personally fulfilling, I find my work on the Urkesh Park to be the most inspiring. The Park work has brought me in contact with numerous people around the world who are all working together on the various aspects of the Park development, all with the goal of providing a positive, beneficial, and authentic form of tourism, development and archaeology to Tell Mozan. The international scope of the project, particularly the involvement of Syrians, is the kind of cooperative project that is absolutely necessary for the protection of sites and the rebuilding of heritage infrastructure.

For all 7 years I have also worked on publishing the excavation results. While this work may seem tedious to non-archaeologists, it is – in actuality – one of the most important works an archaeologist does. Producing a full digital record of the excavations means that researchers, interested laymen and excavators of the future can have access to both the data and our interpretations.

Overall, when reflecting on my work at Mozan I feel a mix of sadness and hopefulness. A sadness for the projects that have gone unrealized in the past 3 years and a hopefulness that the kind of collaboration I am now taking part in will form a basis for future work and for the rebuilding of Syria's heritage.

Laerke Recht (Copenhagen)

I have now been working on the Urkesh Project for a little over two years (since September 2011). Initially, I was to be part of the excavation team in 2011, but as we were not able to go that year due to the crisis, I instead participated in the study season in Italy. Here I became familiar with the large amount of data collected during the field excavations, and the digital manner in which the data is being processed and presented.

These are both highly unusual for archaeological 'publication', and the 'digitality' of has the great advantage of not only allowing the display of a lot of information, but also of easily moving around and between the data and thereby placing it in its correct and broader context. I have repeated seen the use that can be made of this, both within the project and in my personal academic research.

Stefania Ermidoro (Venice)

My involvement in the Urkesh/Tell Mozan Project started in 2008, as a member of the archaeological expedition. Since then, my participation in the activities both in the field and for the UGR and the Urkesh website has increased: today, it includes a broad series of tasks related mostly to the Site Presentation and Site Conservation Projects.

Meanwhile, my scholastic career has proceeded on a quite different direction: in fact, I have recently defended a doctoral dissertation which had a strong historical nature and focused on the History of Food, specifically on royal banquets in first millennium BC Assyria.

I do not consider my involvement within the Mozan Project as merely complementary to my studies: on the contrary, the three years that I have spent working actively in Mozan and the ones that have followed, during which I dealt with the UGR and the Urkesh website, have greatly contributed to my personal and academic growth.

This could happen because, in my opinion, one distinctive feature of the work concerning Mozan is a peculiar attention to every moment of the archaeological expedition, from its ideation and strategy to its more practical aspects (excavation and conservation), to its presentation to the public and publication. In each of these phases, experts and specialists are involved: this system has allowed me to meet many people who helped me in learning and improving my knowledge on archaeology, conservation issues, even information technology and digitalization of data.

Moreover, I have always acknowledged to the Urkesh/Mozan Project a special attention as for the relationship with the local community in Syria, which is based on mutual respect and confidence: indeed, I am personally experiencing such unique connection in particular since the beginning of our work away from Syria. I am, as a matter of fact, in charge of two projects which could never have continued during this particular and difficult historical moment, if it wasn't for such deep-rooted and long-lasting relationship with local workmen.

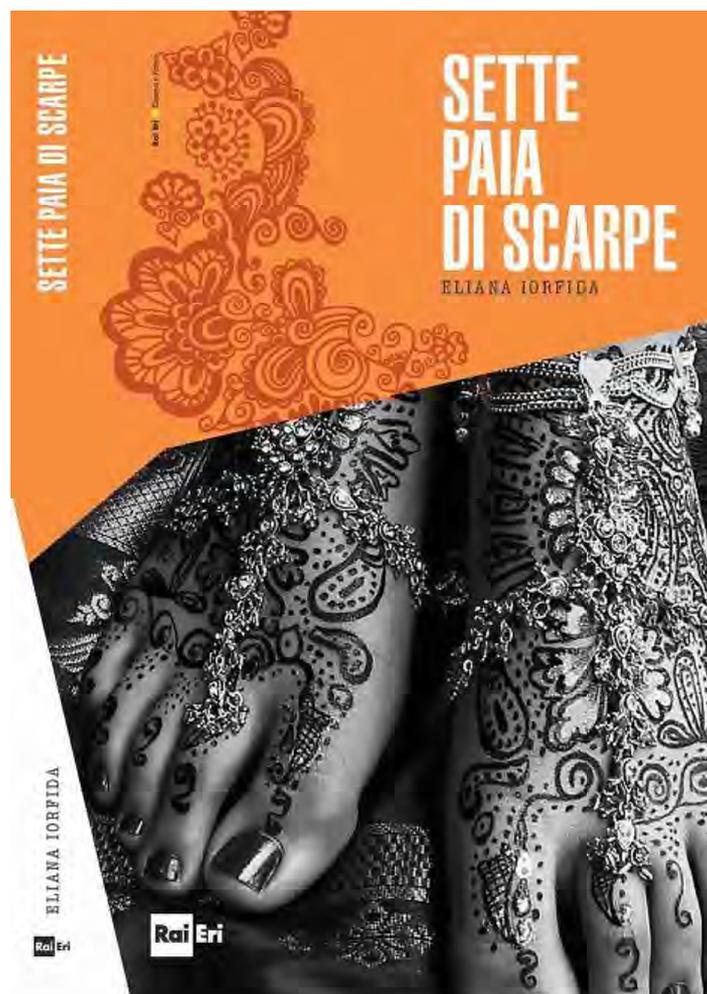
For both the Conservation and Site Presentation in fact, we are in constant need of photos and written reports sent from the field, which we can use to monitor the conditions of the archaeological remains and of the ancient architectures. Thus, our assistants in the field are indispensable: I have always considered them extremely efficient, thanks to the experience gained after years of cooperation with the expedition - but also on the basis of personal knowledge and of a sensitivity that has grown even stronger now that they feel as the only guardians of the site.

Within the Urkesh/Mozan project, the theoretical aspects of archaeology, in its broader meaning, have always been crucial during each decisional phase from excavation to publication and presentation. For this reason, as a member of the group and as an active participant to the system I feel that I'm learning a method and some working skills which will be extremely useful for every other aspect of my personal and academic career.

13 “Sette paia di scarpe...”

On July 25th, 2013, a Mozan staff member, Eliana Iorfida, received a national award for her novel *Seven Pairs of Shoes*. It is a moving story based on her participation in our excavations at Tell Mozan. It narrates the encounter of a young Syrian girl coming back from Lebanon to her mother’s village, next to the site of Tell Mozan, and discovering what archaeology had meant for the village and its inhabitants. The book will appear in print in April 2014. You can read more about it in (<http://www.premioletterariolagiara.it/libri/eliana-iorfida/sette-paia-di-scarpe>).

The book opens a wide window onto the relationship between the past and the present, but also about the impact that a group of foreign scholars can have on the local perception, the people’s perception of themselves and the perception of what the undiscovered past hiding in their backyard can mean for their personal and collective sense of self-identity.



14 Conclusion: Unplanned planning

The developments that have taken place at Mozan in the wake of the tragic Syrian upheaval have been remarkable. We had planted a seed. And a consciousness took root that validated our efforts. We had of course never anticipated the disaster that would ensue. But the commitment to the goal was so profound, that there was no question about the results. Our planning was unplanned as to words. But it could not have more clearly planned as to the intent.

This was possible because there was, in the first place, a dimension of trust. We had laid out concrete mechanisms for maintaining contact with our local collaborators, whom we expected to carry out various activities while we were there. But we could not anticipate all details, nor could we micro-manage the situation from afar, once it became impossible for us to return regularly. What made up for it was the reciprocal trust, that helped us, on both sides of the great chasm, to interpret the essence of what was needed, even when explanations could not be forthcoming.

The heart warming and comforting result was the realization that out of the worst can come the best. The dynamics of human situations is like a spiral, and the initial direction of the movement is perhaps the defining moment. If it spirals downwards, one is sucked into a progressively more negative trend. It is therefore important to lay the groundwork so that the thrust is upwards from the beginning. That is what happily happened in our case.

I will close with two e-mails dated November 2013, from Ibrahim and Kameran of our Mozan staff. They add more light on the attitude with which they see the joint commitment we share for the site.

"Excavations good, but always lacking materials and most of the time I do I bought on my account such as threads, needles and oil and other materials"
Ibrahim

Hello Dear Samer

We the workers we bought materials, such as nylon and other materials debt, from when our friends [they bought plastic sheets with their own money] in order to cover the walls And Abe before the rains, to come Mr. Sabah and covering Abe well

We've temporarily covered with nylon and also some of the walls [they wanted to cover the underground structure in anticipation of heavy rains expected before Sabah, the smith, could complete his new cover for this structure]

After we finished the coverage was really there was a heavy rain, but we got back up in a timely manner and there was no damage to the site

Thank you

Kameran