

INTEGRATING CONSERVATION, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND COMMUNITY AT TELL MOZAN (URKESH)

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Abstract

The conservation model for archaeology that emerged in the 1970s as a response to loss of sites was a seminal development in the practice of archaeology. In the present era of challenges, the integration of conservation, archaeology and community at Tell Mozan exemplifies a compelling evolution of the model for excavated sites.

In the 1970s there evolved a philosophy of archaeology referred to as the ‘conservation ethic’ that posited a conservation model to replace what had been the practice of exploitative archaeology, dependent on excavation, since its beginnings. In the face of widespread destruction of sites from uncontrolled development, as well as from post-excavation abandonment and neglect, excavation came to be seen as an unwise use of a finite resource. In response, the conservation ethic promoted survey and non-destructive means of investigation over excavation, giving priority to threatened sites over research excavation, incorporating specialist studies and thereby slowing the excavation process while increasing information extracted, publishing results, and taking responsibility for preserving sites after excavation.¹ In the 1970s this was new thinking. Although never fully realized, and slower to take root in Old World archaeology, many of these ideas are now part of mainstream archaeological thinking. But that was then. We now live in even more destructive times for archaeological sites, threatened by war and its fellow-traveler looting, huge infrastructure and development projects, climate change, as well as attrition and intrusion caused by mass tourism, all of it ultimately fueled by population growth.

Thus, while there is still a need to practice and elaborate on the conservation ethic, we are also challenged with developing new approaches and practices to preserving the past in tandem with excavation. The work of Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati for over 30 years at the site of Tell Mozan (ancient Urkesh) in northern Syria has met this challenge and stands as an exemplar of a new development in the conservation ethic – let us call it ‘Conservation qua Archaeology’ to appropriate the title of Giorgio’s 2006 article in the proceedings of

WAC-5 (5th World Archaeological Congress).² At Tell Mozan the Buccellatis have woven a beautiful tapestry, integrating archaeology, conservation and community from their deep attachment for the place and people.

1. CHALLENGES OF CONSERVING EARTHEN MATERIALS

The huge site of Tell Mozan, some 150 hectares in size, dating from the 3rd millennium, was an important urban center of the Hurrian civilization. It preserves monumental structures, many constructed with earthen materials. Excavated earthen sites pose one of the greatest conservation challenges in the field of archaeological site conservation, and one that suffers from the absence of effective solutions to long-term preservation. Mudbrick archaeological sites are ubiquitous throughout the world; there are many thousands in the Middle East, Central Asia, North and South America, and Europe. Mudbrick is a wonderful and versatile material, but once excavated or left exposed it is extraordinarily fragile and susceptible to rapid deterioration. Preservation of exposed mudbrick structures in a climate such as Tell Mozan is well-nigh impossible. All the assaults of nature come into play that had been kept at bay in the buried environment - insects, birds, burrowing animals and most destructive, rain, snow, wind, and capillary rise of moisture carrying salts that lead to basal erosion and eventual collapse back to the earth.

Over many decades on archaeological sites throughout the world, a great many methods and materials have been tried to protect exposed ruins, from sheltering – an expensive option not without its own drawbacks³ - to chemical and various natural

¹Lipe 1974.

²Buccellati 2006a.

³Mari is one of the few, and an early (1974) example, of a shelter over a well-preserved mudbrick complex in Syria. Stevens (1984) makes brief mention of its construction – a lightweight, metal-framed roof with plastic, molded modules – as part of a general discussion of conservation and reconstruction practices on Near

consolidants, and depending on the type of site, reburial, which is undoubtedly the most effective, but removes the site from public view.⁴ There is no panacea for protecting earthen structures and faced by this challenge, archaeologists have generally opted for partial reconstruction, sacrificial coatings, or encasing original material with new mudbricks (fig. 1). While this has become an increasingly common approach to a difficult problem, it is an inherently unsatisfying one. This method introduces an ambivalence with respect to authenticity and which over time, with repeated cycles of repair, maintenance, and reconstruction, inevitably leads to loss of original fabric. This was not the solution adopted by the Buccellatis in addressing this challenge.

2. THE BUCCELLATI APPROACH

In 2003, Giorgio Buccellati was invited to give two presentations in the week-long Conservation Theme at WAC-5 in Washington DC, organized by the Getty Conservation Institute. The purpose of the Getty's theme at a WAC congress was to seek to draw archaeology and conservation into a closer relationship, in fact to endeavor to move the two fields toward better integration. It had long been archaeological field conservators' observation and complaint that conservation at archaeological sites was an after-the-event activity and the same was true for the excavated artefacts. Giorgio's presentations were exactly on target and as we have followed the work at Tell Mozan since that time, they have remained on target as the circumstances have changed in the field. His elegant title for the first presentation, "Conservation qua Archaeology," embodies Giorgio's philosophy that conservation is the precept whereby archaeology is conducted at Tell Mozan.⁵

Our first-hand experience of the work at Tell Mozan, in 2004, resulted from the Buccellatis' invitation to advise on aspects of conservation, particularly condition monitoring and methods of protection of the excavated mudbrick walls that had already been developed and put into place. On site it was apparent there were multiple facets to the work, in technical conservation protection and through involvement of the local community. Community archaeology and conservation mean to

the Buccellatis the participation and involvement of all members of the community, men and women, in the many functions required by excavation, conservation, interpretation, and protection. Giorgio and Marilyn cast their net wide. It was clear from the moment one was on site at Tell Mozan that they have an intuitive grasp of the notion and importance of inclusiveness. This philosophy affords a very practical approach to success, but unfortunately it is one that is put into practice too infrequently in all manner of endeavors that depend upon committed and sustained participation. It was not only because of witnessing the inspirational enthusiasm of the team the Buccellatis had built in those halcyon days before the civil war in Syria, but the spirit of the place somehow provided a solace to us as visitors to reflect on the immense history of the site and the dedicated care being given to it by the present day local community workers and employees.

Our role was to review and advise on the measures that had been created and implemented for protection and interpretation of the excavated mudbrick and stone ruins and on methods of monitoring. Giorgio had developed his now well-known system of protective covers (fig. 2) on a scaffolding of steel piping (iron trellises, as Giorgio called them) that display the form of the mudbrick walls, and yet are low-cost, renewable, constructed by skilled local workmen in local workshops (fig. 3). Monitoring (photographic and visual inspection) of the condition of the walls, which has been carried on throughout the war years by the local community, coupled with meteorological data, have proven the effectiveness of these measures that have protected the site from some very severe winter storms. The covers are easily opened to allow inspection of the condition of the walls (fig. 4).

In addition to the primary purpose of protection, the covers allow the buildings to be more easily understandable and interpreted to the visitor in quite compelling ways; especially in an early iteration using colored materials to reflect building periods (see fig. 2). Although the site was not visited by many tourists, Giorgio's other presentation in the WAC-5 publication - "Presentation and interpretation of archaeological sites: the case of Tell Mozan, Ancient Urkesh" - addresses the importance of presentation at all levels of society, from the local to the professional and political, both within Syria and beyond⁶. With the community they had developed simple means of providing interpretive signage on the site and they have been indefatigable in promoting the site to an external audience, including most recently in China where their work at the site received a research award at the Third Shanghai Archaeology Forum in 2017.

Eastern mudbrick sites. An assessment in the mid-1990s noted problems of rapid drying of the interior walls of the palace causing disintegration, drainage problems, and the passage of children and animals on the roof (Aslan 1997) – all of which pale into insignificance in the face of recent destruction resulting from the civil war.

⁴For a general overview see Correia *et al.* 2015. For the decision-making that went into the use of reburial at large mudbrick sites in Egypt and at Merv in Turkmenistan see Barnard *et al.* 2016 and Cooke 2007, respectively.

⁵Buccellati 2006a.

⁶Buccellati 2006b.

There was little, in truth, that we could offer by way of substantive advice – it had already been thought out and put into practice at as sophisticated a level as commensurate with the resources available, and adapted where needed. Our comments dealt with refinements of the protection system, more durable options for the type of cover material used, if and when imported materials might become available, methods of long-term monitoring of effectiveness, and analysis of mudbrick samples. We also advised on an experimental design for test walls to monitor the effectiveness of different types of materials being used to protect the walls (fig. 5), which were monitored for several years by Samer Abdel Ghafour. The material we recommended to replace the burlap or canvas, both of which are easily available but short-lived in the outdoor environment, is an inexpensive (by American standards), knitted, synthetic fabric commonly used as a shade cloth.⁷ This material, with a life of 20-25 years, has been used by the authors effectively in wind-blown sand-control fences in the Gobi Desert of NW China and for a modular temporary shelter prototype in Cyprus.⁸ As always, Giorgio was enthusiastic to try it and ordered material from the US to ship to Syria, since it was not available in Europe or the Middle East. Politics, however, intervened and the shipment was stymied by the embargo imposed on the country by the US, although a small quantity was hand-carried and used on the test walls (fig. 6).

Giorgio's creative mind had thus developed new ways of protecting the walls and interpreting them at the same time. His approach stands in contrast to the encasing and partial reconstruction of excavated mudbrick structures, as is commonplace throughout the region as mentioned earlier. The Buccellati innovation, utilizing local, inexpensive materials, like burlap, canvas, galvanized sheet steel, and piping, may not be appropriate for all sites, but it works for Tel Mozan, and that is its brilliance – Giorgio sees the problems, is aware of the solution being used elsewhere, questions whether there might be a better way to achieve protection of these ancient walls, and finds an alternative. And like all good preventive measures, this solution does not preclude a different approach in the future: the intervention is reversible and has not changed the ancient fabric. Giorgio's innovative approach was recognized by the Archaeological Institute of America in 2011 when he was given the award for best practices in site preservation.

⁷ This fabric (distributed as Weathashade or Solartex) is a polyethylene knitted aerotextile incorporating three-way lock knit construction, UV stabilization, and reinforced edges that make it quite durable.

⁸ See e.g. Agnew, Coffman 1991.

3. COMMUNITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The emphasis on community relations and utilizing and enhancing community based skills has paid off handsomely with sustained commitment of the community to the site through the turbulence of war that followed. The community connects with the site, identifies with it, values it, protects and sustains it. The Buccellatis have imbued in the people of the village, a few kilometers from Tell Mozan (fig. 7), a connection across three millenia. It would be valuable to undertake a survey today of community attitudes to the site. The voice of the community, we suspect, would reflect a strong, prevailing connection because, in a country ravaged by war and riven by fundamentalist groups, in reduced circumstances, ancient Urkesh acts as an anchor.

The Buccellatis' extraordinary network, a gossamer web of communication, has held for eight years of war though excavation in their absence has not, of course, been possible. Instead, the emphasis has shifted to maintenance, condition monitoring backed by a constant flow of photographs, data processing, publication, and continuing research and analysis on the ceramic collection from past excavations. Being aware of the danger to the site, the Buccellatis took all necessary steps to keep up momentum of work. This included contriving to funnel funds to site custodians acting in absentia. Cycles of weeding and repointing the monumental staircase with mud, and repairing the protective covers. When one ponders the extraordinary resilience of their approach, all conducted by remote control, so to speak, one can only stand in awe. We can learn from this. The project did not collapse, though war came within 60 kilometers, it was not even put "on hold" – it has continued even in their absence, sustained by the earlier investment in community participation. Nor has there been looting, an all-too-common occurrence in the region. Indeed, Tell Mozan the site, and its survival as an ongoing success story is borne out by the commitment to community, which has become another means of the site's survival. As Giorgio wrote about their response to the challenges of war: "We were ready, though we had clearly not been expecting war. And yet it was as if we had."⁹ They had already laid the foundation of preparedness and resilience in the community.

Where Tell Mozan sets the standard is in the comprehensive approach to archaeology and conservation as one close-knit activity. It is not possible to put site maintenance and monitoring aside; there is a tipping point in the life of an excavated site where beyond a certain point of delayed protection or treatment a cascade of deterioration becomes

⁹ Buccellati 2014, 102.

irreversible leading to utter ruination and, eventually, abandonment. Too often archaeologists on site have been concerned with the excavation and the finds and less with what remains behind and issues like preservation and presentation – they come later, or sometimes not at all. The environment of Tell Mozan is severe: summer heat, rain and wind, winter freeze-thaw cycles and snow affect weak and friable mudbrick and mortar drastically. A site in its setting, the landscape, is inherently an integral component and is worthy of careful thought in the planning for presentation. If not so considered, the excavation is merely a mine for the extraction of resources – the exploitative model of archaeology that Lipe sought to get beyond in his conservation ethic. The Buccellatis' progression to community archaeology has been from practical needs to a theoretical understanding – not the other way round. This has proven to be a triumph of commonsense in the face of the civil war's recent daunting setback to their work.

Always thinking ahead, Giorgio and Marilyn have conceived plans for an eco-archaeological park encompassing the site and some 50 square kilometers of the surrounds. This, of course, must await felicitous times for realization. If this were to transpire and one must remain sanguine in the face of events in Syria, an eco-archaeological park serving the region might conceivably also nucleate a measure of economic and social benefit beyond the confines of the park itself. It would also be another feat of integration with the intent to incorporate the bio-diversity of the region.

There are yet further aspects of the holistic approach pursued at Tell Mozan. The economic aspects and potential for the site have been addressed through the support and encouragement of local women who produce for sale traditional handicrafts.¹⁰ Education of students from the local university through site visits have been addressed and scholarships for local students have been provided. They have sought funding for digital implementation with the primary purpose to complete publication in order to make accessible the total record of excavation for the period 1984 to the present time. Is there anything lacking? From our many decades in the field of archaeological site conservation and management, we think not.

What then has characterized the Buccellatis' approach to Tell Mozan? To sum up, their work reflects an extraordinary blend of scholarly erudition and pragmatic commonsense. They see near and far. Practicing archaeologists who have embraced both site and artefact conservation, innovators and experimentalists, brilliant networkers across multiple disciplines with the ability to engage help effortlessly

from others with different expertise - these are the attributes of Giorgio and Marilyn. Their contribution to the integration of preservation, archaeology, and community comprises a milestone. Their record of accomplishment is stellar. We stand in admiration of their inventive ways of harnessing the benefits of archaeology for a larger purpose and in ways they never would have imagined – as a bulwark against the ravages of war.¹¹

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¹⁰ Buccellati, Mahmoud 2017, 33-35.

¹¹ The sites in the Kurdish north have been relatively protected from the type of damage done to sites in other parts of the country (for assessment of war damage see e.g. AAAS and ASOR web sites). The recent bombing of Afrin that resulted in destruction of Ain Dara saw the Kurds defending their record of protecting cultural sites, citing Tel Moza (sic) as one example (van Wilgenburg 2018).

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Fig. 1. An example of encasing ruined mudbrick walls with new mudbrick is seen in the Ramesseum on the West Bank of Luxor, Egypt.



Fig. 2. The protective covers on the palace walls in two colors to indicate different periods of construction are best viewed and interpreted from the high point above the palace.



Fig. 3. The local workshop of the ever-inventive Sabah who creates or adapts whatever is needed for the protective system.



Fig. 4. The protective curtain open for inspection and photography of the walls.



Fig. 5. Test walls, seen here during construction in 2004, were established for comparative evaluation of materials and methods of protection.



Fig. 6. The aerotextile recommended for trial being held up on one of the test walls.



Fig. 7. Although temporally distant, the nearby village is geographically and associatively proximate to Tell Mozan.

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Thank you all!

Stefano Valentini & Guido Guarducci

FOREWORD

STEFANO VALENTINI - GUIDO GUARDUCCI

Since the first time I met them at Tell Mozan in Syria, I think it was the Summer 1993, Marilyn and Giorgio have been a constant presence for me, not only in the field of archaeology, but also, and perhaps above all, from a human point of view. When I worked at Tell Barri under the direction of Paolo Emilio Pecorella, until 2005, we always met in Jezirah, every summer, during the excavation campaigns. It was precisely that year, on the tragic death of my Professor, that my relationship with Marilyn and Giorgio became elective. In those dramatic days, I was able to appreciate their affection, their great friendship, their human depth. In the following years, despite the physical distance and the vicissitudes of life, which unfortunately brought us elsewhere from Syria, I always felt them close to me. Whenever I asked them for advice, an opinion, they have always shown me their sincere closeness, with those manners that are so courteous and affable. Of Marilyn and Giorgio, I have always appreciated their empathy and their intellectual honesty, supported by an innate ability to communicate, share and involve the scientific community with the ultimate goal of giving life to an archeology full of humanity: made up of people and of faces, not only of pottery and of dust. Thanks to them, I gained the awareness that the archaeologist, wherever he is working, must also fulfill his task as cultural mediator: between the cultures of the past and those of the present, and between our Western culture and that of the countries that we host.

Long life to both!

Stefano

It is for me a great honor to have curated together with Stefano this volume dedicated to Giorgio and Marilyn. I had the pleasure to meet them during the tragic event that took place at Tell Barri in 2005. Not only they were the first to visit us after the loss of our *Müdir*, Pamî, they stood next to us, consoling and cheering us up. Last but not least, we receive a huge crate of ice-cold beer from Tell Mozan. It may not appear as so, but that was a very special gift coming after a month of hard work and the loss of our professor, besides the rarity of such a commodity! Trust me when I say that all of us who were there, still remember that crate, almost as a symbol of solidarity for our grief, and the words of comfort expressed by Giorgio and Marilyn. That same year we went to visit their site and I was amazed by the welcoming atmosphere of the Mission House and greatly fascinated by the site of Urkesh that Giorgio, Federico and Marilyn thoroughly illustrated us. Thank you very much for your kind and fundamental support during those days. Finally, I would also like to deeply thank Giorgio for accepting since the very first day, back in 2010, to become a member of Scientific Committee of the newborn Center for Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies, CAMNES, as well as his and Marilyn's constant support in the following events that we organized. Thank you Giorgio, thank you Marilyn, for your remarkable academic and scientific effort and for your precious friendship.

Con affetto e stima,

Guido

GIORGIO BUCCELLATI & MARILYN KELLY-BUCCELLATI

Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati have worked for many years in the Near East, especially in Syria, Iraq and Turkey. They are at present co-directors of the archaeological expedition to Tell Mozan/Urkish in North-Eastern Syria. They work closely together both in the field and on the publication reports from their excavations, of which five volumes, plus audio-visual presentations, have appeared so far. They lead an international staff comprising colleagues and students from the US, Europe, the Near East and Asia and have given joint lectures on the excavations, and workshops on methods used, at major archaeological centers around the world as well as holding positions as visiting professors in various European universities.

GIORGIO BUCCELLATI

Giorgio Buccellati studied at the Catholic University (Milan, Italy), Fordam University and received his Ph.D. from the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. He is Research Professor in the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, and Professor Emeritus in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and in the Department of History at UCLA. He founded the Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, of which he served as first director from 1973 until 1983 and where he is now Director of the Mesopotamian Lab. He is currently the Co-Director of the Urkish/Mozan Archaeological Project as well as Director of IIMAS – The International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies and Director of AVASA – Associazione per la Valorizzazione dell’Archeologia e della Storia Antica.

His research interests include the ancient languages, the literature, the religion, the archaeology and the history of Mesopotamia, as well as the theory of archaeology. His publications include site reports, text editions, linguistic and literary studies as well as on archaeological theory, historical monographs and essays on philosophy and spirituality. He has published a structural grammar of ancient Babylonian, two volumes on Mesopotamian civilization (on religion and politics; two more are forthcoming on literature as well as on art and architecture), a volume on archaeological theory dealing with the structural, digital and philosophical aspects of the archaeological record. He has authored two major scholarly websites on the archaeology of Urkish and on archaeological theory. As a Guggenheim Fellow, he has traveled to Syria to study modern ethnography and geography for a better understanding of the history of the ancient Amorites. In his field work, he has developed new approaches to the preservation and presentation of archaeological sites and to community archaeology. He has spearheaded the Urkish Extended Project, responding to the crisis of the war in Syria by maintaining a very active presence at the site.

MARILYN KELLY-BUCCELLATI

Professor Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati has been excavating and conducting research on the archaeology and art history of the ancient Near East for over 50 years. Her Ph.D. from the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago was on the third millennium B.C. in the Caucasus. She taught archaeology and art history in California State University, Los Angeles and is now Visiting Professor at the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA.

She is Director of the Urkish/Mozan Archaeological Project, a site spanning the fourth to the second millennia BC which has provided crucial to our understanding of the history, art and architecture of northern Mesopotamia.

Her research interests include Syro-Mesopotamian seal iconography, ceramics, ancient identification markers, pre-history in the southern Caucasus. She has published many site reports based on work in Terqa and especially Mozan/Urkish, and is currently finishing a digital volume on the excavated ceramics from Urkish, to be published within the Urkish Global Record website. One of her important publications was on the function of the necromantic pit excavated in Urkish, unique in its monumentality and significance; her research on the seal impressions of the AP Palace has brought to light the artistic value of these objects as well as the complex royal court to which they give witness.

With the cessation of excavations in Syria due to the war she has returned to the Republic of Georgia to work with the Italian team from the Ca’ Foscari University, Venice. This fieldwork activity lead her to curate an exhibit entitled “Georgia Paese d’oro e di fede. Identità e alterità nella storia di un popolo” on the archaeological and artistic heritage of the Republic of Georgia.

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Marie Claude Trémouille is a philologist whose research mainly focuses on the Culture of the Hittites, the Hurrians and the Urartians. His primary interests concern the history and religion of those peoples, who lived in the Eastern Near East between the third and first millennium BC.

One of his specific research programs is dedicated to the region called in the Hittite texts "Kizzuwatna country", that is today's flat Cilicia. She also carries out specific studies of onomastics, lexicography and toponymy, as well as on important deities such as Hebat, Šarrumma or Haldi.

She collaborated on the Hethitische Forschungen project of the Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur of Mainz, with the publication of two volumes of copies of tablets from Boghazköy (the ancient Hittite capital Hattusa)

She was acting director of the Institute of studies on the Civilizations of the Aegean and the Near East (ICEVO) of the CNR; today she is a member of ISMEO.

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