

Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati

For their achievements in the study of Hurrian culture and for highlighting its importance as the foundation of a great urban civilization, among the most flourishing in the ancient Near East in the third millennium BCE; for promoting a digital approach to the study of archaeology; for enhancing theoretical reflection on the nature of this discipline.

Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati's personal and professional partnership developed over the course of nearly five decades in Syria. Their first excavations, from 1976 to 1986, involved the city of Terqa, the main center of a province of the kingdom of Mari and later capital of the kingdom of Khana. The excavations brought to light a temple, a vast fortification system, and a few neighborhoods of private dwellings. The two scholars' interests thus shifted to the site of Tell Mozan (ancient Urkesh), which had already been the subject of surveys undertaken in the 1930s by Sir Max Mallowan. Located near the Taurus Mountains in northeastern Syria and founded in the fourth millennium BC, the city was the main population center of the Hurrians. Previous knowledge of the Hurrians was limited to mythological reports and sparse artifacts of unknown origin. The two scholars' co-directed excavations revealed that the population, about 5000 years ago, had developed an important urban civilization, among the most thriving of the Ancient Near East. Hundreds of clay seals exhumed by their archaeological mission illustrate the life and traditions of the royal family and convey precious information about the history of the site. The monumental structures brought to light include a palace, a temple, an open square, and a vast underground structure dedicated to religious rituals. The scholars have published a series of findings from these excavation campaigns, starting with the first account, *Mozan 1: The Soundings of the First Two Seasons* (Malibu 1988).

In addition to their important scholarly discoveries, Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati's work has been admired for its success in site preservation by actively involving local populations, via widespread cultural education and participation in conservation work, extended to younger generations. Giorgio Buccellati also invented new methods for reversible protective covering for excavations, which allow access to the site while preserving its

integrity and fostering its understanding, even from a chronological perspective. The problems of site conservation during the recent Syrian War are illustrated in Giorgio Buccellati's book, *I millenni per l'oggi. L'archeologia contro la guerra: Urkesh di ieri nella Siria di oggi*, Florence 2018 (*The Millennia for Today: Archaeology Against War: Yesterday's Urkesh in Today's Syria*, Arabic and English translations, 2019).

Pioneers in digital approaches to archaeology, Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati were among the first in the early 1980s to realize the profound theoretical and intellectual implications of the use of computational techniques in modeling archaeological information. This theoretical reflection, developed over the years particularly through field experience, culminated in Buccellati's book *A Critique of Archaeological Reason. Structural, Digital, and Philosophical Aspects of the Excavated Record* (Cambridge 2017). Thanks to his abundant erudition and deep philosophical background, the author addresses a multiplicity of theoretical issues, defining the very evocative and rich concept of "archaeological reason," which has also interested archaeologists working in other fields.

More generally, the two scholars stand out for the capacity of their approach to pull, from the distant past of Urkesh, keys to understanding the political forms of today. "The origins of politics," Buccellati states, "are still with us... and the specific case of Urkesh offers itself to our attention as a great laboratory due to the exemplarity of its history" (*Alle origini della politica. La formazione e la crescita dello stato in Siro-Mesopotamia*, Milan 2013). The same perspective has been applied to the study of languages (few scholars besides Buccellati have been able to master both archeology and ancient linguistics. His interpretation of Babylonian structural grammar (*A Structural Grammar of Babylonian*, Wiesbaden 1996) has highlighted phenomena that allow us to frame that language not as dead but alive in its organic structure.

Giorgio and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati have conducted most of their research in close collaboration. This, however, has not prevented them from pursuing their own specific interests in parallel. Marilyn has particularly devoted herself to the study of glyptics, based largely on the numerous finds from Tell Mozan relating to the architecture of that site. Recently, given the interruption of the Tell Mozan excavations due to the war, she has resumed studies from her early career (her thesis on the Caucasus in the third millennium) by

participating in an Italian mission to the Republic of Georgia. Part of this experience is illustrated in the catalogue of an exhibition she curated, *Georgia Paese d'oro e di fede. Identità e alterità nella storia di un popolo* (Florence 2016).