

Tell Mozan/Urkish: Archaeological Preservation in the Eye of the Storm

A report on the course given at Erbil on
September 5-12, 2013

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1 Intended goals

The course was meant as a component of a wider program aimed to established Iraqi archaeologists, with the intent to present work done by other colleagues, especially from the US, who share the same concerns about the preservation and maintenance of important archaeological sites.

2 Course structure

The course followed a tight schedule, that included a daily contact time from 9 A.M. to 2:30 PM, over five days, plus a one day field trip.

During our contact time, we provided three lectures each day, according to a prospectus that is attached as an Appendix. Each day, there was a brief introduction to the theme to be treated, explaining the three different contributions relating in turn to Conservation, Site Presentation and the Eco-archaeological Park.

Thus there were a total of fifteen lectures, plus two giving an introduction and a conclusion. A PowerPoint version of each lecture will be provided to WMF, for inclusion in the DVD to be given to the course participants.

3 Course content

The course was an extensive case study about our work at Tell Mozan, ancient Urkish. The prospectus given as an Appendix below outlines the substance of the themes developed in the course along the three parallel lines just mentioned. The content was drawn primarily

from Tell Mozan, with a considerable amount of comparative material only for the sections dealing with the Eco-archaeological Park.

A full visual documentation was given, with ample details about even the more technical aspects of the project. The idea was to show not only how our approach is conceived, but also its actual implementation, realistic feasibility and future promise.

As indicated in the title, a central theme was the way in which our approach is weathering the current Syrian crisis. Put to the test in the harshest, and most unexpected, way, our effort at conservation, presentation and development has proven to be built on solid foundations.

There were three major underlying dimensions.

(1) A concern for *simplicity* in the design and its implementation. If there is a “state-of-the-art” concern in the project, it is only with regard to method, not to techniques. Even the digital dimension of the project (presented on the last day), relies on aspects that are technically simple, but provide information and analysis unparalleled in our field.

(2) An attention to both *scholarly and popular interests*. Precisely because each of the approaches (conservation, presentation, development) are inscribed in the initial moment of the archaeological excavation, there is a full integration on all levels. We avoid any sort of “extrinsicism” whereby the intended result is overlaid from the outside on the data. A strong interest in theory has developed, but closely wedded to the practice, which has also given it its originality.

(3) Total reliance on *local skills and resources*. This has been the major guarantee for a successful continuation of the project in the time of crisis. This rested in the first place on the development of a mutual relationship of trust and respect, and secondly on the establishment of a clear communication framework, that has continued in full force through the Internet during this long period when we have lost any possibility of face-to-face contact.

4 Organization

The course benefited from a superb organization at the local level.

The logistics were handled with the greatest professionalism, resulting in the smoothest possible operation of the course. This made it possible to interact very actively with all the participants, in a way that fostered the building of a shared interest in the central topic.

The WMF staff was admirable in all respects, in particular Dr. Peruzzetto. In the first place, her efficiency meant that there was not a moment when the functioning of the course was in doubt. This was especially noticeable given the fact the venue was Kurdistan. While this is by now very developed, there remain some gray areas, which the WMF staff was able to take into account, and deal with, at all times.

As a result, the relationship with the local staff, especially that of the Iraqi Institute that hosted the course, was also very warm and, indeed, productive: we were introduced to a whole new world of Near Eastern archaeology, a veritable new “frontier” where we were able to meet an unexpected large number of colleagues, Kurdish and foreigners,

5 The participants

Besides members of the WMF staff, we enjoyed the participation of some key members of the Babylon project, and of two Kurdish archaeologists.

We were impressed with the level of attention and involvement they showed. Both in class and outside, we had an opportunity to share views about the core concerns of the program, as we have faced them in our various experiences, and we were impressed with how candid their comments were: we talked about the reality of the existent projects, and about how best to reach goals and ideals that seem now difficult to contemplate.

Thus we feel that the course obtained its intent not only in offering an extensive description of our own efforts in this area and at this particular site, but also in sharing different shades of sensitivity for the central themes.

6 The field trip

A very important component of the course was the field trip to Dohuk. Prof. Morandi Bonaccossi gave us a superb introduction to the project he is directing in that province, which entails an extensive archaeological survey, an excavation at a site covering periods from neolithic to Islamic, and the development of a large Park that will safeguard the immense archaeological treasures of the region. This includes especially the impressive water resource system of ancient Assyria: it is extremely ambitious to undertake such a plan, given the state of some of the monuments and the way in which they are scattered in the landscape.

The relevance for the course was precisely the way in which these difficulties were clearly perceived and articulated, and the way in which proper planning was described even at this early stage. During our presentations in the days that followed our field trip we were thus able to refer back several times to the problems faced by the Dohuk project, the solutions that we had heard, and the general import that all of this has for the very concrete aspects we were otherwise discussing in class.

We recommend highly that a similar field trip may be included in every portion of the course, because it greatly encourages the hands on dimension. Especially if it takes place towards the beginning of the course, it favors the development of the personal relationship among all the participants. This was again made possible by the perfect organization of the trip itself, which allowed for a very relaxed atmosphere, in spite of the great distances covered.

7 Overall assessment

Through the course we were able to offer, we have come to see how valuable the entire program is. We have seen a process that leads to a very solid formation of key members of the Iraqi cadre of archaeologists, from whom the future of the country depends as it concerns its archeology and in general its cultural resources.

Some of us were in Iraq when major cultural (as well as political) transitions were taking place in the country, as far back as the early and mid sixties. It was the time when the new Iraq Museum was opened in Baghdad, and some foreign institutions were beginning to establish a large cultural footprint in the country. Now that there is a whole new beginning in Iraq, also considering the success story of Kurdistan, it was heartening to see how a program like this can establish the best foundation for a constructive and proud new cultural development.

Looking at our particular course, it seems valid to say, at least from our perspective, that we achieved our goal. There was a sustained level of attention to our presentations throughout the course, so much so that one of the participants, even though suffering from some problem for which at the end of the course he had to be taken to the hospital, never missed a beat of the entire course.

Upon leaving, two participants told us that they were bringing back with them ideas that were important and that they felt could be implemented in their own work. We were especially pleased because it sometimes happens that more weight is given to advanced technology than to concepts and ideas, because such technology is seen as a status symbol even when its real functioning is not fully understood. We stressed instead, as indicated above, the simple and the concrete, bringing out the significant implications and the theoretical value. It was gratifying, therefore, to see how precisely this approach was well understood in its full import.

Certainly, the degree of reciprocal empathy was impressive. The best indication of how well received our presentation was came from one of the members of the Babylon team, who said that he could see how we were really “talking to” our site, and how our site “talked back” to us. Isn’t this the message we are aiming for the new Iraq, south and north, to put across to its growing audience, national and foreign?

Tell Mozan/Urkish:

Archaeological Preservation in the Eye of the Storm

A Three Part Course
Erbil, September 5-12, 2013

		Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati	Giorgio Buccellati	Federico Buccellati
1	General introduction		The project as a case study	
	History and philosophy	Conservation	Site presentation	The eco-archaeological park
2	The audience	Communicating volumes	Relationship to visitors	Spaces and villages
3	The narrative	Understanding the ruin	A challenging sequence	Tying the modern with the ancient
4	Dealing with the crisis	Creative responses	The awakening of awareness	Our shared motivation
5	Beyond field work	The Urkish Global Record	The wider audience	Comparative evidence
	General conclusion		A moral presence	