

*The millennia
for today*

*Archaeology
against war:*

*yesterday's Urkesh
in today's Syria*



*Now that we are
at the extreme edge of the earth,
my companion asked me, crying:
do you think we will ever return?*

I told her:

*Let us cross now,
but not as migrants do,
rather like sparrows,
who know they will return.*

Adel Mahmoud

**The millennia for today.
Archaeology against War:
Yesterday's Urkesh in today's Syria**

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Meeting per l'amicizia fra i popoli
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With the collaboration of
"New Horizons School" in Qamishli (Syria)
"Scuola Media Statale G. Floreanini" in Domodossola (Italy)

**We call this remarkable effort in community archaeology
the URKESH BEYOND URKESH project
and UCLA has played a major role in supporting it:**

the COTSEN INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY
is hosting the project and its server in the Mesopotamian Lab
and has provided financial support
through its Ahmanson Field Grant program

the OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH
has provided financial support in 2011-13 for the project
"The modern face of an ancient city"
within its program "Seeding Transdisciplinary Work"

the COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE
has provided financial support for the development of
the main website of the Urkesh project
and for the website dealing with its theoretical aspects

For details please visit urkesh.org/support

The major sponsors of the project and of the exhibit are



with the contribution of



For details please visit avasa.it/founders

This exhibit presents the very particular story of an archaeological site in Syria, during the recent eight years of war.

The ancient city of Urkesh, today Tell Mozan, in Northeastern Syria, became the center of new and varied activities around the archaeological site, a strong and unexpected synergy between a variety of communities and social groups.

In strong contrast with the destructive violence of war and the intentional and perverted iconoclastic fury of ISIS, Urkesh has emerged as a source of hope and a reason of pride for the people who live in the area.

In this perspective, the project has become a model of this new sensitivity that archaeology as a discipline is developing – a sensitivity towards the value of the land as a shared element between the ancients and the people who live there today.

Tested by the war, the Urkesh project has affirmed the value of what community archaeology means.

For more information please visit www.avasa.it/en

A dead city, and yet alive

Conservation and tourism in time of war



*We are going to the past
to be alone in it
to return to it,
to the traces it left in us..*

We are going...

*We are going to the past
without riot,
without banners,
without medallions..*

*We are coming back...
we are coming back...
to....
our home*

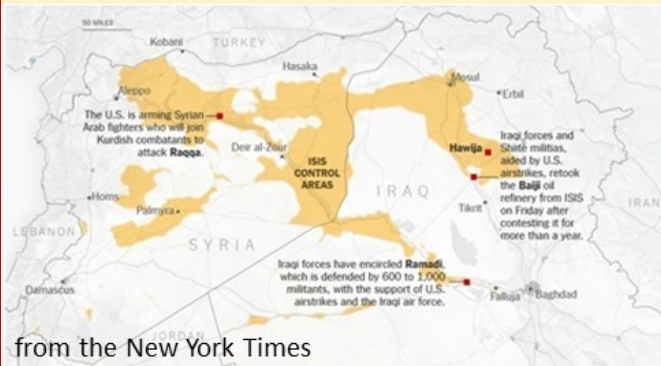
Adel Mahmoud

The past provokes us...

An ancient monument
provokes us:
what relevance
does it have for our present?

Does it make sense
to protect an ancient staircase
when such overwhelming forces
threaten to take over?

22 October 2015



from the New York Times

On the same day,
when ISIS came to within 35 miles of our site,
our workmen are repairing
the great staircase of the temple

War provokes us...



How can we protect
our staircase
from the other enemy,
the autumn storms?

The other war



And how
can we protect
the Royal Palace
from the winter snow?



A simple beauty

We cover the palace walls with localized shelters: metallic frames whose sides are made of burlap – a natural, local material.



The emphasis is on simple maintenance, regularly carried out.



The stones also suffer ...



On the monumental staircase to the temple, we must remove the vegetation growing among the stones, and cover the old mortar made of mud with new layers of mud.



If left exposed to rain and snow, the entire structure would fall apart.

Urkish, during the war



Offering normality in a time when nothing is normal is not impossible.

That an ancient site like Urkish can become a tourist destination while all around war is raging is a good omen for the future of Syria.



All images are from 2016-18

An inexhaustible curiosity



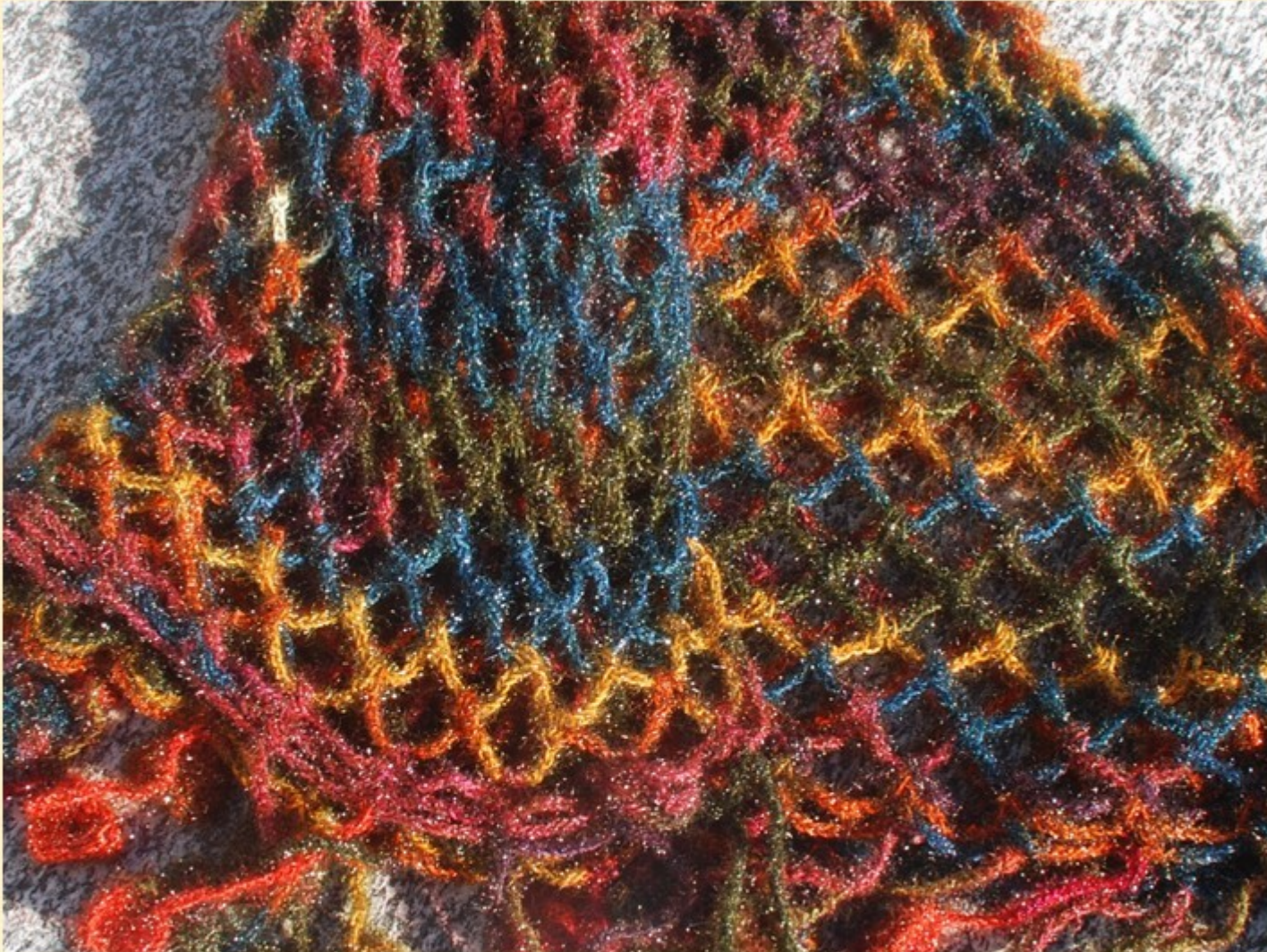
Nowhere is the joy of discovery as clear as with the youngsters who come by the hundreds.

This is what one of them wrote after visiting Urkish:

*"I was so excited to see the monuments...
The people who lived there were Syrians!"*

The yesterday of today

Fruition and sustainability



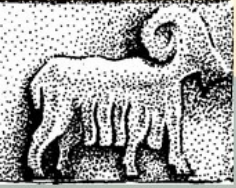
Don't ask me

*how I am knitting,
in the heart of darkness,
your wool sweater
for next winter.*

*I know,
stitch by stitch,
the cold places
of your solitude*

Adel Mahmoud

The idea of a park



Today's territory, with its landscape and human geography, has a relationship of synergy with the Urkesh of yesterday.

To preserve it, we launched the idea of a large eco-archaeological park: 54 square kilometers and 22 villages.

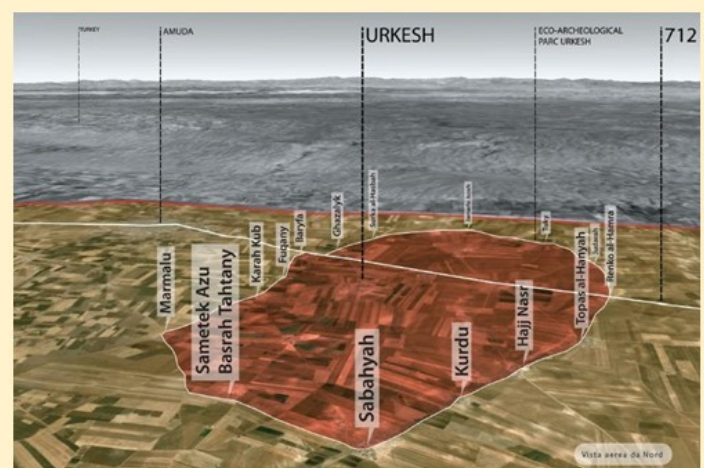


From the bottom up



We did not have time to create the legal structures for the park before the war.

So we started two new programs:
in 2012 –
a handicraft atelier for women
in 2017 –
archaeology lectures in the villages



The women's atelier

What does a doll have to do with archaeology?

The answer lies in the inscription on this building made of mud:
"The portal of Urkesh".

Here we organized an atelier for the women of the villages to gather and work on handicrafts.



Traditional craftsmanship will serve to guide the villages of the "park" towards a sustainable system.

We are in the Atelier of Urkesh!

Identifying themselves with the ancient city, the women of the villages meet to produce dolls and clothes, teaching this art to the younger generations.

Packaging with their own logo





Mozan village

Bringing Urkish to every village

Our “awareness” program explains to local communities the concrete value of the Urkish archaeological project.

The newly found pride in their past is the best guarantee for the protection of the site and the environment.

The meetings are in schools or homes, the cells of tomorrow’s society.

Two young archaeologists from the area, Ristom Abdo and Amer Ahmad, have joined our project and have become our spokespersons, laying the foundations of the future.



Semitik Ezzo



Karah Kob



Umm al Rabia



Hajji Nasr



Kurdo



Topez

Urkesh speaks Syrian

The exhibits



*No one knows the secret
it is hiding –
this white, blue and black gravel –
under the words it speaks,
upon which silence is sprinkled.*

*The heart of the traveler
falls in the abyss
and remains hanging from a star...
until he can come back.*

*Sometimes, it happens
that the traveler does not come back.
Then the traveler's heart remains
as if a refugee
on a star, forever!*

Adel Mahmoud



The beginnings

We produced the first exhibit for the American Embassy in Damascus.

Thirty-three panels rich, it held great significance because of the venue where it took place: the Ambassador's residence.

Just as significant was the occasion: the reception for the diplomatic corps on July 4th, 2010, Independence Day.



The Embassy's exhibit acquired an even greater significance when it was displayed a year later in the National Museum in Damascus, on March 2, 2011.

On March 15 the crisis began which resulted in the war and the break-up of relations between Syria and the USA.

Our exhibit was thus the last time when the two flags have been seen together.



In 2012, the smallest and yet the biggest of all our exhibits...

A collection of photos of the excavations, organized and set up by the villagers around Mozan in a mudbrick house close to the "Gate of Urkesh" atelier.



From Italy to Syria

August 2014:
the first major exhibit in Italy, at the
“Meeting for Friendship among Peoples”
in Rimini.

Entitled *From the depths of time*, it
attracted more than 22,000 visitors in
one week.



Among the Syrian
colleagues present as
guests,
Dr. Suleiman Elias
proposed to
take the exhibit
to Qamishli and other
cities near the
excavations.

And it did not take
long...

At the end of December 2014
and in the first two months of
2015, the exhibit toured a dozen
cities in north-eastern Syria.

Here we are in Amuda, the
nearest town to Urkesh.
Note the name in the
background: "The Center for
Renewal of Civil Society".
How much eloquence in a few
words!



From Syria to Italy – and to Los Angeles!

November 2017 – Beirut

April 2018 – Qamishli

July 2018 – Leiden

August 2018 – Rimini

May 2019 – UCLA

The UCLA exhibit is a modified version of these earlier exhibits.



Above, the room at the American University of Beirut during the opening ceremony.

Below: the exhibit in Qamishli.



In Qamishli, the original English panels were translated into Arabic and Kurdish (see the red pages).

The Rimini version drew five thousand visitors in one week.



Archaeology for a young future

Education as sharing



*I will walk
and walk and walk
until I see
with my own eyes
the creator of frost
in this world.*

*And then...
I will light
the idea of fire,
in his house.*

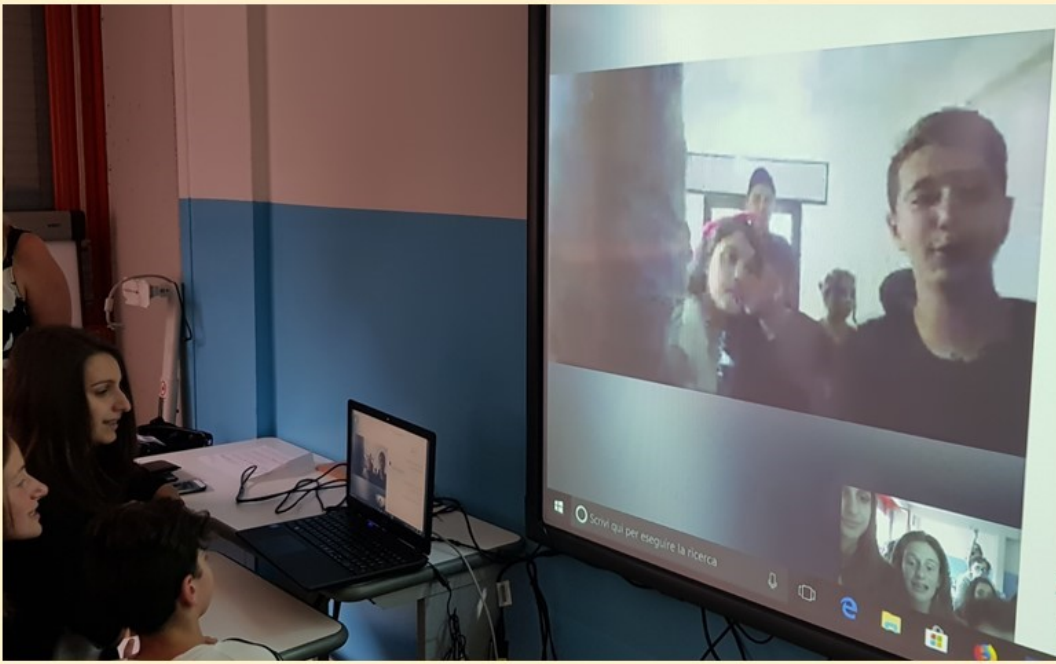
Adel Mahmoud

The roots of tomorrow

June 2018

← Domodossola, Italy

Qamishli, Syria



Two groups of middle school students, connected by a simple technology: Internet and Skype.

Together, they started to reflect on a common theme: what makes you feel at home? It was a gateway to the study of the past – and of archaeology.



More than eighty of their essays give us unexpected insights into a young world facing the war, whether near or far.



In Arabic and Italian, they are witness to the ingenuity and creativity of two cultures meeting one another.

Urkesh – a university training ground



Ours is the only one, out of more than a hundred foreign projects in Syria, that has remained active throughout the war.



And Urkesh is the only site where local university students can study archaeology.



So we organized workshops in ceramic analysis and surveying at our site, the only one where they can have a direct hands-on experience. It is a wonderful synergy between UCLA and the Syrian students.

Here is a note sent by a young female student:
"We came to Tell Mozan, Urkesh... Now we are learning to work with coordinates and archaeological mapping... as students of archaeology, we need to experience it in practice"



The Urkesh Suite



We asked the students of the musical Middle School Floreanini of Domodossola to compose a musical suite that could interpret this exhibit.

We wanted to invite them (and all of us, with them) to reflect, taking a distance from the obsessive visual inputs that characterize our culture.

**They did, under the guidance of their teacher Enzo Sartori.
So now close your eyes, and listen...**

In counterpoint...



July 3rd, 2018.

Echoing the musical project of their Italian counterparts, the students of our Syria school project, with their music teacher, Mohammed Saleh, organized a concert on the monumental staircase of our temple..

... you can share in these two small but extraordinary musical adventures by joining us and listening to this special experiment in counterpoint...

