

## Trip to Qamishli / 26 April- 28 April 2018

### Report- ZC429 yM

This is an informal report to tell you about the events of my trip to Qamishli and Mozan and my impressions.

The full set of photos will be sent in a separate file.

#### Day 1

We arrived at 10 AM. Amer was waiting for us at the airport with a car and a driver from the self-administration (I did not like using their car or moving around in a mini van with military license plates, but it was the only way, because I could not ask Amer to move around with a taxi, it would have been suspicious and rude to refuse, plus, it is safer for Amer to travel in one of their cars because he is trying to avoid military service).

We went to the hotel, placed our stuff and went to the exhibit.

This was the second day of the exhibit. There I saw Mohammed Omo, Ibrahim, Hammade, Ristom, Hemrin, Dr. Khaled Ahmo and Dr. Souleiman. There were many people there, all students from the universities.

The meeting with our friends was very emotional and wonderful.



There were many cameras and people filming and doing interviews. I thought that the setting was nice and organized, but I expected more when Amer was describing what they will do. Amer ended up not using the full amount we sent him and I will send you the invoices later (later I will mention Father Antranik's comments on the exhibit).

Amer asked me to say hello to few people, who are ministers in the Kurdish self-administration.



We went from the exhibit straight to Tell Mozan. On the way, there is a check point for the Kurdish military. Other than that it's all the same. Getting closer to the Tell was so moving. Everywhere you look you see green fields.



We reached the house, and outside there is a guard called Haiez, he is very nice and he is responsible for guarding the girls who are in the house.

From what I understood (not from the girls because they are very discrete) is that these girls go to the mountains from a young age (some voluntarily and some are kidnapped or forced) where they train to be fighters. The ones in our house are all non-fighters anymore because of injuries. Most of them are not from Syria (from Turkey or Iran) and most of them do not speak Arabic. They were very nice to us and very hospitable (they offered us tea, coffee, fruits all 3 days we went there, so Ritta and I bought them on the last day a box of cookies).

If it wasn't for Amer being associated with the self-administration, going inside the house would have been IMPOSSIBLE!

I walked around in the house, took a few photos. They made some changes in the kitchen, like a new sink, fridge, and removed the yellow station that was in the middle, but they kept all the photos and information on the kitchen wall.



The gardens are still amazing, they planted more flowers and vegetables.

They installed new doors to all the rooms. And the only major change in the house is the library. They kept the books and ceramics and covered all with plastic covers. They carpeted the room and got a TV and sofas. This room is full of photos of their martyrs and leaders. But other than that, the house is in a great condition.







I went to the ceramic lab, and everything is still in place. They even have a note hanging on the shelf that Amer translated for me. It says do not move any of the pieces from their place.



From there we went to the Tell to check on the situation. It is very good (more on that on the last day).

Then we went to the general storage room. Here we have the problem.

You know how all the boxes have a ZSB number. The boxes there start from the animal figurines ZSB 2 and continue in order. ZSB 1 which is the ZSB number for human figurines is not there. We looked everywhere for them, between the sherds, on the shelves, between the boxes of animal bones, but we found nothing. We climbed to see the dirt on the boxes of animal figurines if it is new or old, because we thought that the boxes should have been on top of these, because everything is in the right order, but the dirt is obviously very old and not disturbed. We looked everywhere in the house, and found nothing. MKB's office, conservation lab and photography room were locked, and the girls said that they don't have the keys.



So we went to Mohammed Omo's house who invited us for lunch. They were so generous and wonderful. Abou Mousa came as well, I showed them the photos of Marianna and gave them the letter. They were very happy, and they all miss you so much. We talked about work and asked them a few questions I had in mind for conservation.





We went back to the storage and continued looking but no luck. In one of the rooms of your section in the house, there were few ZSB boxes, one of which is for human figurines. The box is labeled ZSB1 but the things inside have a ZSB3 on their label. I found in it one of the pieces that I had



on my list, and other 2 that I did not know that they existed. I photographed and measured them. Other than that, nothing.

I can't say that someone took the boxes, because if someone is going to steal these, thinking that he could sell them, he would have chosen a few and not take all the boxes (on my list I have 75 piece, so there should be at least 5 boxes) and they could have taken other things, like from MKB's office.

We went back to Qamishli where the head of the Haiaa (the association or I don't know how they call it) wanted to meet with me because she has a project to talk to us about. We sat in the hotel's restaurant where she came with other 2 girls (by the way, she is Amer's boss). She is 26 years old young woman. She studied in the agriculture institute (I don't know why she is responsible for tourism and archaeology). She is very smart and nice. She wanted to propose, as you know, to turn the house of the expedition into a research center. I told her that we think that the house has symbolic meaning, and that I would ask you. She said that this center could be anywhere in the village, they just want it to be in Urkesh. She also talked about the women's exhibit. They want the expedition to finance the projects. According to Amer, the idea is stupid because there are no experts in the region to run or work in the center.

I think that they just want to collaborate with the mission in an official way, because collaborating with some one of your status, would give them a lot of validation. I think we need to find a way to let them know that we will not collaborate with any one not recognized by the government. We need to do it in a way that would not offend them or make them suspicious.

## Day 2

We went to the Tell at 9 AM. We looked again in the storage. I asked to open MKB's office and the adjacent rooms. The leader of the girls there said that we need to call their superior. Amer called him and he said that he can't make it today. So we went to Oum al Rabbia to see Amira who asked to see me. She and the girls are very excited about working again, you can see how much she is eager in her eyes. I explained to her that we want to upgrade the level to compete in the market. I told her that we will provide them with ideas and help. Her husband is very supportive as well. (There is a general resentment from the Kurdish domination there, even our friends in Mozan are not happy about it)

Then we went to Hammade's house for lunch, where we saw Ibrahim Mousa. And while we were eating, the military leader called Amer and said that he came to the house with the keys (even though he said that he can't come until tomorrow). From the way they were acting, and from the fact that he came quickly, you can tell that they were afraid of being accused of stealing stuff. Apparently, they report to their higher leaders about everything, and news of this reached them. So they were trying to be very cooperative. I asked Amer to tell them that we are not accusing anyone, and that these boxes could have been sent to the museum or transferred somewhere and we did not pay attention. I did not want to accuse anyone.

We had tea with these 2 young men. They are Kurdish from Turkey. One of them is very tall and has no lower teeth. The other one looks like a fox. His face is haunting me. There was a very strange vibe in the room. Not good, not bad, just strange and surreal. We went to the rooms, and he got them keys from inside the house (they told us they don't have the key, but they did, they just did not want to open these 3 rooms without the presence of their leader). I found nothing in the rooms. They were helpful, and the tall guy climbed the shelves to get me the boxes and bags to look inside them. When I asked him to open MKB's office, he said that there is nothing but seal impressions there, which means that they did take a look at everything there. He opened the room. One of the closets was open, but nothing was removed.

The other one was locked. The fox said the he can break the lock for me. I said no. I was able to take a look inside through the other closet. From what I saw (it will require an inventory to know for sure) nothing is removed from the rooms.



I did not take many photos from inside the house because I did not want to tick them off.

I asked to go into your section of the house and to gB's office. All your books are covered with plastic covers. The paintings and photos are still on the wall. I even took a photo with the Limoncello's bottle in you liquor cabinet.

The thing that bothered me there is silly, but it made me want to cry (I held together though). Seeing all you books and stuff and being so nostalgic because your presence there is very strong, and then in the middle of the office there is a huge photo of Ojalan with the YBJ banners. This was horrible for me. It is just a photo, and it could be removed in a second, but still it really bothered me.



We thanked the people who were very apologetic because they were not able to help more, and we went back to the hotel. I went and saw my aunt for an hour and then we went to see father Antranic.



He is such a wonderful person. He was very hospitable and nice. He went to the exhibit with his people because he did not want to turn your invitation down. He had to convince his people to go because apparently, the exhibit is in a Kurdish area ( Qamishli is now divided, you have neighborhoods for Siriaks, where they have barricades surrounding them, and then you see a neighborhood with the president's photos, and others with Ojalan photos. But life there is normal despite this division). They went there, and Amer took good care of them. But Father Antranic was not happy, and said that we should have asked him for a venue and that it could have been so much better (he hated the area, the hall of the exhibit and the people who were there). Putting aside the fact that Father Antranic was upset, I think that it was a good thing that he went. It is a good image and message to have him visit the exhibit in a Kurdish area.



He sends his regards to all of you. I called Dr. Droubi, but he was out of town. He says he misses you so much, and he sends his best regards. He asked me to give the letter to the pharmacist next to his office. Unfortunately, I did not have time to see Noura Shammass. I will send her the letter on what's app. I apologize for this, but I really had no time. In the evening, I met with Ristom and Amer, and talked about their projects in the region. They have good ideas and they are hard working.

It is worth mentioning that at night, Ritta and I were trying to find a good place to eat, so we went into a store to ask for directions. There I saw the guy who used to own the Penguin supermarket. He recognized me and told me that his kid is going to Father Antranic's school and that Amer came and proposed a project (our school project) to the kids. He said that he was afraid to let his son participate because he knows that Amer is associated with the self-administration and that he would never let his son participate in anything related to them. I explained to him that Amer works with us as an archaeologist, and not as a member of their administration and that this is our project, funded and organized by us. He was relieved and agreed to let his son participate, and we exchanged phone numbers in case he has an inquiry.

### **Day 3**

Mohammed Omo insisted that we have breakfast at his house because he wanted us to try the products of his sheep. That was the best breakfast I had in my life. Our friends were so generous, hospitable and welcoming.







We all went to the Tell to do a thorough check. I took a look at the walls that I already know are in a slightly fragile condition and took Photos.

The palace is in a very condition. The roofs of the protective shelters needs fixing because kids stand on them sometimes and cause damages, but this work will be done before the rain season.



The mud brick wall that the guys built next to the Abi to protect the wall behind it and prevent the dirt from being washed away, is now collapsed. But it is very compact. Now this mixture of dirt and mud brick became very solid so there is no need to re-build the wall, because this bulk is now doing the same job.





The Abi is also in a good condition, but it is impossible to stop people from throwing bottles and other things in the site. Our friends are always cleaning, and yet you find all sorts of rifiuti in there. Someone even started a fire there and scorched one of the stones of the Abi and then scratched his name on it!

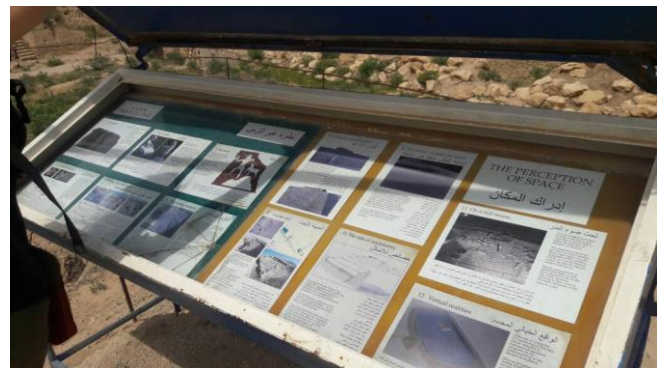
The monumental staircase, the temple, J2, J3, J7, J6 and J1 are in good conditions. The only thing I am worried about is J1. The section is in a bad shape. Rain water would gather in J1 and causes the lower parts of the section to crumble and dissolve in the water. This is why the level of the floor in J1 is so much higher than it used to be, because of all the dirt that collapsed from the lower part of the section and now covers the floor.



The rain washed the dirt between J1 and J5, thus revealing a burial. Many bones are found in the section under the stones.



Panels are in constant need of maintenance. The panorams are in a good condition. Hammade will paint the temple panorama, because the paint is scraped off in many places.



Next we went to the storage again. I explained to Amer how we organize things and how we label and number everything. This way, if we decide that we want him to work on the storage lists and inventory, he has a clear idea. This would have been impossible to explain over the phone.

I looked at random boxes to see the contents and check if anything is missing. The bone artifact boxes are missing one. The place where it used to be on top of another one (in order) is empty, and the dirt on the box underneath it left a clear shape of the box that used to be there. The dirt indicated that it was recently removed.



This is why I think that it is extremely important for Amer to do this inventory and cross check the contents of the boxes with the number of the items on the boxes. In this case, if someone was actually taking things from the storage, they would know that we are checking. And in some of the boxes I found 2 lists. One with 10 items and one with 3. And the items in the box are only 3. So it would be very confusing for anyone who is looking for an item in the storage lists that we have on the server, because there are too many lists and some of them are no accurate.



At 2 PM, we had a meeting with the kids. They are very sweet. I talked to them about the project and asked them about their impression on their visit to Urkesh. When I asked them what was the thing they liked best, they all screamed ABI. I think it would be very interesting to let the kids participate in a musical project inspired by Urkesh with Domo kids, because as you know, some of them play with the Rojava orchestra.

I asked Amer to take me to the director of this language institute where the kids are meeting for our project, so I can thank him for his help on this. He is an extremely nice person, and he sends his regards.





At that point, Father Antranic called me and asked if he can send his passport with me to Damascus, so I went to his office to get the passport, and stayed there for a while, because he told us strange and very entertaining stories about ISIS and his trip to Deir el Zor.

At 4 PM, I met with Dr. Souleiman. He will start working on the conservation of Tell sha'ir after the harvest season. He did not start earlier because there are no workmen left in the area, and if there are any, they charge a lot of money for a day's work. He said that if dose not find workmen, he will hire workwomen. I really encourage this idea.

After the meeting with Dr. Suleiman, we headed to the airport.

### Notes:

- ❖ The Kurdish guard Haiez gave me 2 pieces of seal impressions that he found on the surface. I gave the pieces to Mohammed Omo who is keeping all the surface finds (I gave him the pieces in secret because I don't think that they want Omo to keep the pieces). On the 3 day, he gave me a find which I photographed and gave to Amer to give to Omo.
- ❖ I asked Hammade about the missing q lots. He said that he analyzed them. If they are missing, then it is because Ibrahim Mousa did not enter or send them. I asked Ibrahim Mousa to look for them and send them.
- ❖ I propose that we raise Ibrahim Mousa's salaries and make it like the salaries of the others (600 SYP instead of 450 SYP).
- ❖ We need to find a way to increase Hammade's hours. The financial situation is very very difficult on all of them.



- ❖ The self-Administration (Birivan in particular, Amer's boss with whom I met) insisted on paying for our stay there. I refused and insisted on not doing that. I told them that I am on an official mission from the expedition and that no one should pay for anything. I did not want them to pay so it would not be interpreted as if I was going there to work with them based on an invitation from them. This could cause problems that we do not need. I was very diplomatic and kind in the way I refused their offer. I paid for everything except for the car that we used for transportation, but there was absolutely nothing I could have done in this regard. Birivan was so nice, and she sent us 2 scarfs with Amer as a gift or souvenir from her.

- ❖ Kamiran came to the exhibit, but I had already left, so I stopped by his pharmacy to say hello. He sends his best.



- ❖ You wanted me to ask the photographer who is accompanying Amer on the awareness campaigns if we can mention his name in the website. He was very happy about that. Please note that the photographer also works for the self- administration.

- ❖ Dr. Suleiman was very helpful in the exhibit. He spent a lot of time explaining to the visitors about the excavation and about this mission's work. He was also always ready to answer the questions of the students.



- ❖ It is worth mentioning that when we arrived to the house on the first day, we saw a white van leaving. In it, there were 2 Americans who are not visitors or archaeologist. They came to see the girls in the house (I can't tell if these foreigners have access to the rooms, or if they can take anything from the house)
- ❖ It is also worth mentioning that on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, when these 2 leaders came, I saw a jeep parked outside the house with 2 people just sitting there in the car (they were parked uphill and this was not the car of 2 leaders to say that maybe they were waiting for them. The 2 leaders car was parked in front of the house)
- ❖ I would like to write a report for DGAM about this trip, because Dr. Hammoud was very supportive. I need your advice on what to mention, and what not to mention.

I want to tell you about my impressions, but I don't know what to say. The situation is strange yet normal. There is a lot of mystery surrounding the people in the house. From the brief time there and the quick look, I can say that nothing was taken from the house. They are taking care of it. I think that their presence there is keeping people from ruining the excavations and stealing from the house (not the people from Mozan or Oum al Rabia I mean) like what happened to many other places.

The self-administration is run by idiots who are hated by Kurdish people more than other ethnicities. Everyone there (even non Kurds) have to go to the military service (my cousin had to get a paper that says he is still studying from the Syrian government and from the administration). According to Father Antranic, They had to put (property of the church) on many houses, so the Kurds would not cease it (apparently they did this a lot).

For my personal experience, I had a pleasant time. No one bothered us. Things went in a smooth way, and all people we met were very nice and cooperative.



Amer is a wonderful person. He is very nice, smart and honest. I felt bad for him because he is torn between the self-administration (which he does not support most of its ideas) but at the same they are able to do good work with them. He really took very good care of us, and I am very grateful for him.

I am so glad I went there and saw the situation with my own eyes. And I am so happy to see our friends there who all remember you all the time, and cannot wait until you go back there.

Being in Tell Mozan, brought back so many great memories. I owe this place and you, so much. I felt so sad that you were not there with me, but I am confident that we will all go there soon.

I have to say that being on the Tell, with everything around is a green meadow, baby sheep and goats everywhere, gray sky, and light rain which made the place smell so wonderful, was in deed therapeutic. Rita and I are considering buying a house there and spending spring and autumn there!