

## Prealpina

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### **"A mountain village becomes an international research center"**

BACENO – A mountain village is transformed into an international center for scientific research. In Baceno, in the Antigorio valley, in Verbano Cusio Ossola, it was born six years ago the *Associazione per la Valorizzazione dell'Archeologia e della Storia Antica* [Association for Furthering Value Archeology and Ancient History] (AVASA), on the initiative of two of the greatest worldwide scholars in this discipline: Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly, husband and wife, both professors at the University of California Los Angeles. Many people from Baceno are involved in the association, including one of the former mayors of the village. "The origin of this predilection for Baceno dates back to when I was studying at the Catholic University, in Milan – explains Buccellati – I used to come here with other young students and the ecclesiastical Assistant, father Luigi Villa. I went back years later with my wife and son; the link with the village remained, albeit for a long time I had been away. We first rented, then bought a house in the Beola hamlet; we are happy, we have several friends, there is an intense local life and we are well connected for the trips we have to do also abroad." In Beola, next September, the association will organize a few days of study at an international level. The attitude to involve the local people in their activities is not new for the Buccellati couple. They proved it in Syria, where they unearthed the remains of Urkesh, a city founded by the Hurrians and forgotten for more than 3000 years. In the midst of the civil war, they continued to involve the local populations in the protection and enhancement of their historical heritage, also organizing meetings in the villages near to the excavations. The results are extraordinary: "In many abandoned archaeological sites vandalism has arrived – says Buccellati – in ours, no. Indeed, the people of a village near to one of our sites asked us for permission before digging a well: they need it against drought. This involvement – underlines the scholar – is the best antidote to terrorism: none of our collaborators would ever want to be part of ISIS. Terrorism responds to ideological needs to which the West has offered nothing as an answer." Their link with Baceno led the Buccellati couple to choose the nearby city of Domodossola in 2018 to start an educational project that they are expanding to other areas. "Archeology for a young future," this is its name, brings together Italian and Syrian school groups. An exhibition at the Rimini Meeting also told about the relationship between the students of the "Floreanini" middle school in Domodossola and their peers from Qamishli. The Buccellati spouses have received various international awards; the last one just yesterday, in Bern. The foundation named after the journalist Eugenio Francesco Balzan awarded them the "2021 Balzan Prize for Art and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East," both for the successes obtained with the excavations in Syria, and for having promoted the digital approach to the study of archeology.

**Mauro Zuccari**

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