

## Urkesh beyond Urkesh.

The relevance for today of a Hurrian city from the third millennium B.C.

Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati

Cotsen Public Lecture – February 16, 2023

*What does it mean to find not just a city, but a new civilization behind it? And this not on the moon, but in an area, ancient Mesopotamia, that is otherwise already known in the minutest of details? That is what happened with Urkesh, a Hurrian city that sinks its origins in the distant past, when cities first began to take shape. We had been extracting all of this from the ground in northeastern Syria, when the war came to stop our excavations. In retrospect, the results of the first twenty-five years of work at the site seem even more impressive, and we want in the first place to share these with you.*

*But with the pause of the excavations, since 2011, another face of archaeology came forcibly to light. It was the counter-face of plundering and intentional defacing. While ISIS was engaging in this, to affirm an ideology of denial, Urkesh emerged to affirm an ideology of identity, becoming a beacon of hope for the local communities: we were more present than ever, if from a distance – and the second part of our talk will describe this intense and highly successful approach that brings out as never before the current relevance of even the most remote broken tradition.*

*At the same time, we have engaged in a digital publication effort of the Urkesh record that has been widely recognized for its impact even beyond archaeology. We will bring this out with the help of Maryanne Wolf, an authority in cognitive neuroscience and celebrated author. Unexpectedly, archaeology can point the way in a direction that helps meet the challenge posed by the digital turn and in particular by the website culture of the Internet.*