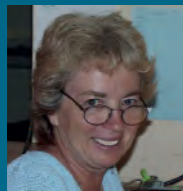


This book, just like the exhibit that it illustrates, presents the very particular story of an archaeological site in Syria, during the recent eight years of war. The ancient city of Urkesh, today Tell Mozan, in Northeastern Syria, became a center of activities that developed around the archaeological 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 became 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.



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**Stefania Ermidoro**, after a research doctorate in ancient history and archaeology at the University of Ca' Foscari, spent research periods in Heidelberg, Helsinki, Venice and Leuven. She currently holds a British Academy Fellowship at Newcastle University, United Kingdom. Her field of research includes food practices, hydraulic landscape, Mesopotamian literature and history of Assyriology. She took part in archaeological missions in Italy, Tunisia, Syria and Iraq. She has collaborated with the Tell Mozan/Urkesh archaeological project since 2008, and from 2011 she has been responsible for the conservation of the site and the interpretation system of the archaeological area. Since 2018, she is the director of the association AVASA.



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**Giorgio Buccellati**  
**Stefania Ermidoro**  
**Yasmine Mahmoud**

# The millennia for today

The millennia for today

Archaeology against war: Yesterday's Urkesh in today's Syria



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Società  Editrice Fiorentina

# The millennia for today

Archaeology against War:  
Yesterday's Urkesh in Today's Syria

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**Stefania Ermidoro**  
**Yasmine Mahmoud**

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Afterword  
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Archaeology against War:  
Yesterday's Urkesh in today's Syria

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Conceived and produced by  
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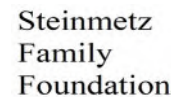
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# Foreword

## The value of archaeology for a united Syria

Our cultural heritage suffered and continues to suffer since 2011, with damage and destruction, and we hope that someday this crisis will be over, and we can have peace. Opposite to this negative condition, it gives me great pleasure to give praise to the Buccellati's project at Tell Mozan, ancient Urkesh, of which I am very proud.

Too often, archaeologists do not care about local communities, whereas in the case of this mission the commitment to this particular issue was truly unique – especially if one compares it to what happened in the other foreign missions active in Syria.

I think that Giorgio and Marilyn Buccellati are now harvesting the fruits of their wonderful relations with the members of the local communities because, ultimately, they are the ones who protect the site. We need to establish this kind of relationship also in the case of all the other missions. We have more than 10,000 archaeological sites in Syria: no army can keep them all safe and guard this considerable heritage. The project of Tell Mozan is so unique and important, and we are ready to support it to guarantee its continuity, hoping that very soon they will be able to go back to the field to continue excavating, and perhaps discover the archive of this ancient capital, Urkesh!

Day after day, the conditions in Syria are getting better. With our team and colleagues, we go to the field to document the damage and verify what happened, just as in the case of the museum in Palmyra, and draw a plan for the future. We did so also in Aleppo, for example, and here I should mention the help and support of the UNESCO office in Beirut, especially Cristina Menegazzi, who with great dedication went to the field everywhere, even in dangerous places, without fear.

We started our restoration work everywhere, in Maloula for example, where we finished the restoration of the

monastery of Saint Takla, the monastery of Serjious and Bakhous, as well as other churches and in the ancient town.

The situation is good at this moment. My aim now is to develop our cooperation with everyone, all the foreign countries and organizations active in our territory, to rebuild, restore, and reconstruct our heritage. A heritage that is not only Syrian, but one that belongs to all humanity: therefore, we need all the efforts available from everywhere.

Finally, I would like to convey this message for everyone: Syria will stay united, and the Syrians will remain united – no one can divide us.

DR. MAHMUD HAMUD  
*Director General of Antiquities  
and Museums, Damascus*

## The supporters as partners

The Cariplo Foundation has celebrated, at the end of 2016, twenty-five years of philanthropic activities. It is in fact since 1991 that the Foundation has devoted its efforts to supporting and promoting projects in the field of arts and culture, environment, scientific and social research. During these twenty-five years, the Foundation, with its philanthropic actions, has made it possible for more than 30,000 nonprofit projects to come into existence, investing over 2 billion and 800 million euros.

Many of these initiatives are linked to the Foundation's commitment to protecting the environment and the territory, and the support of intellectual and artistic endeavors.

The publication you have in your hands is an important testimony to what we mean when the Foundation engages in supporting projects for the preservation of works of

art and monuments of the past. The project described here, realized by the Buccellatis and their team, carries in itself many elements: study, science, concrete intervention with effort and passion.

With this initiative - where the merit goes entirely to those who set it in motion - our Foundation has given coherence to its mission, contributing to the preservation of a heritage that holds enormous value and is in danger of being lost, making an exception to the rules that normally keep us committed to supporting projects in Italy, mainly in Lombardy and in the provinces of Novara, Verbano-Cusio-Ossola.

The project was so beautiful and rich in symbolic meanings that the Foundation agreed to do its part in an enterprise that seemed impossible.

Therefore, we are proud and happy to be able to read the results of our efforts, which this publication abundantly shows.

GIUSEPPE GUZZETTI

*President, Cariplo Foundation*

## The promise of a young future

Archaeology deals with a remote past. But today, in Syria, it offers the promise for a young future.

A young future because the young ones are at the center of the dynamics that drives Syria forward.

It is also a young future because archaeology is being practiced with a new vigor. It is archaeology in itself that discovers how young it is.

The exhibition narrates a particular story of this new young archaeology, and its new young future. It is the story of an archaeological site that resisted against the test of the war and accepted it as a challenge - the site of ancient Urkesh, modern Tell Mozan. A story of extraordinary synergy between the archaeologists and the local community, all looking for a strong commonality based on shared values. This exhibition complements that of Rimini Meeting in 2014, *From the Depth of Time*, that was specifically dedicated to the proper archaeological part of our project.

We are proud that the monumental staircase of the main temple in Urkesh, dating back to forty-three centuries ago, is still in excellent condition, just as we saw it when we excavated it for the first time.

We are proud because this did not just “happen”: it

happened because of the care we gave to it - we, the “Mozanians” in loco and the “Mozanians” abroad, during these long years of war.

With all of its forty-three centuries, the staircase is “young” because, until today, it can welcome the vigor of young Syrians, just as they, in return, welcome us with their raised arms, as we see on the cover of this book. They greet us today with enthusiasm, showing us that they feel with us as a part of a shared past, and of a future to be shared.

Even though it may seem strange, it is correct to say that this exhibit is the fruit of twenty-five years of preparation. When we first excavated the great temple and the royal palace of the third millennium, in what turned out to be ancient Urkesh, we immediately engaged in preserving its walls, which are made of mud bricks. We did many simple experiments that ultimately evolved to become a full-fledged system, used to protect the walls from even the more extreme weather conditions in our area.

Educating the public was another important goal, beginning with our workmen. We needed them, and we knew that the more prepared they were, the more they would identify themselves with our common goals. Therefore, our team of workers gave a fundamental contribution to the success of the work. But it was not only about that: the education of the local population, and the consequent identification with the ancient site and its historic and artistic richness, filled the entire community with pride in preserving the site even in difficult times like those we are living through today.

None of us was expecting a war. But in this tragedy, we all reacted in a strongly positive way. The site was protected not only from the weather, but also from looters who could have damaged it for their own personal advantages.

Only with the maximum diligence and hard work on



The monumental staircase of the temple of Urkesh (2400 B. C.)



Mozan collaborators at work, cleaning the staircase (22 October 2015 A. D.!)

Young university students visiting Mozan, on the monumental staircase (April 2016)



everyone's side it was possible to obtain the extraordinary results that you see documented in the exhibit. We all worked together. We would have never overcome the challenges if we did not work as a team, with shared goals and methods – no matter how far away we are. When there were problems, the ideas would flow back and forth from east to west and from west to east. And we all share in the pride for our success!

In November 2017, we organized a preliminary version of this exhibit at the American University of Beirut, and we were guests of our friend and colleague Leila Badre, Director of the museum. The initiative was made possible entirely thanks to Hannibal Saad, within the context of a vast cultural program, *Oriental Landscape*, that intends to promote the Syrian culture, in the broadest possible meaning of the word.

The exhibition in Beirut benefited from the support of UNESCO, and it is relevant for us to remember the message of the Director of the Observatory for the Syrian cultural heritage, Cristina Menegazzi, in which she stressed the fact that our project, though not big in size, is very significant because of the symbolic elements it holds, and the important message that it manages to spread. There is, in fact, a great power in diversity: it is the diversity that reinforces the unity, and the project of Tell Mozan demonstrated it in these years of war, by protecting the heritage and encouraging the participation of the various local communities. Thus, the project of Tell Mozan shows how it is possible to work together as professionals – and professionals of heritage: working together with the same spirit, in accordance with the local community who shares the same profound goals, lives in the same places, and is aware that the heritage is important for its deve-

lopment, as much as it is important for its daily life.

We hope that you, visitors of this exhibit, will be able to see, through our efforts, the results of a cultural enterprise whose success goes beyond the purely cultural dimension. We consider our work as a model for the future.

This exhibit speaks about a synergy, unexpected at times, emanating around the site of Tell Mozan. The synergy between local communities of various ethnic backgrounds and different religions, the synergy between youngsters, Syrians and non-Syrians, the synergy between scholars and the public, the synergy between different mentalities and different generations.

We clearly take a hint from the theme of the Rimini Meeting 2018: the synergies of which we speak, are based on profound values, those “forces that move history” that in the end “make people happy” even in the Syria of today, put so harshly to the test.

MARILYN KELLY-BUCCELLATI  
*Director, Mozan/Urkes Archaeological Project*

GIORGIO BUCCELLATI  
*Director, Urkes Extended Project*



# The urgency to communicate

Giorgio Buccellati

## The theme of the exhibition

*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 immigrants do,  
Rather like sparrows, who know they will return.*

ADEL MAHMOUD

A large flock of birds, possibly sparrows, is shown in flight against a clear blue sky. The birds are scattered across the upper half of the image, with some appearing closer and larger, and others further away and smaller. The overall scene is peaceful and evocative of freedom and return.

*Let us take off like birds...*

*Let us look at the exhibit like an adventure that links us to the remote past of a lost civilization, while linking us at the same time to the very real present Syria, whose scarred face we all know.*

*With the poet, we are sure the Syrians will return, like sparrows to their nest.*

*In the exhibit, we will follow them, in the flight that will carry them back home “from the extreme ends of the earth”*

*And through archaeology, from the “extreme limits of time.”*

## The meaning of an exhibit

At the school of the *Rimini Meeting for Friendship among Peoples*, I learned much about the art of presenting the profound meaning of the past to a large public. The desire to communicate is an integral part of the project that we show in this exhibit. It is the urgency of our desire to share something which is important and not immediately accessible.

Thus, the photos to the right are indicative of our particular tradition: the weekly conferences with our workmen, in which Marilyn and I used to explain the meaning of the work we had done during the week that just ended. Difficult topics, such as stratigraphy and ceramic classification, were presented to a public that consisted mostly of farmers who at the beginning had just a limited interest for the non-agricultural richness of the soil, if we may say so. And yet, we experienced a renovated curiosity and awareness, that these men wanted to share with their families, even with the youngest ones, whom they brought to the excavation on their days off, so that they may see “their” excavations.

At the school of the Meeting, then, I learned to refine the modality of this urgency, in function of the concept “exhibition.” It is a concept that we can define as “holistic,” meaning that the exhibit itself, as a vehicle, is at the center of attention just as the materials that it displays. In this, there is an important conceptual component: the space itself is part of the exhibition content, and it serves to transmit a crucial concept. For this reason, exhibits at the Meeting are memorable in a special way.

I hope that this exhibit, with its narrative that describes an enterprise that developed in an unexpected and surprising way even for us, can be memorable for the visitors, and that this catalog can transmit its echo. We will now look at the exhibit’s itinerary.

One of the weekly meetings with the workmen, held during the excavations



During the weekly meetings, the staff discussed technical arguments, such as ceramic analysis



A workman visiting the site on the weekend, with his little sister



## The path

### 1. Why archaeology? The meaning of community archaeology

In bringing to light structures and objects that the ground has hidden and protected for thousands of years, we affirm that the past today has been regained, and it is therefore linked to the present and the future. It is a new face of archaeology: one that wants to show how the substance of ancient history has an immediate resonance in the awareness of today.

Just as the title of our exhibit says: the millennia for today.

In our specific case, we want also to give an answer to the ideology of violence that we all sadly experienced in the terrible images of destruction carried out by ISIS. In its systemic dimension, this violence aims to ruin the very foundations of culture.

In Urkesh, on the contrary, archaeology is truly public, uniting people from different ethnic origins. Our Hurrian city is proudly Syrian, and the ancient Hurrians are proudly felt as their Syrian ancestors. The Syrians of today share this with us.

In this, we are all “guests of history.”

### 2. Guests of history: what does “history” mean

We are “guests of history.”

In order not to fall into mere rhetoric, we have to consider what history really is, as we see it when it re-emerges from the excavations. When it is archaeology.

Our project, and the exhibit that illustrates it, refer to the effect of archaeology on the social fabric in the small microcosm in this part of Syria. But if such impact is valid, if our effort is not only based on a euphemism, it is thanks to the deep roots upon which everything is founded. The roots of an ancient civilization lost and forgotten, but now unearthed and brought back to life.

We must, even briefly, explain now what is Urkesh.

### 3. The dignity of the past: a value worth preserving

It is indispensable to protect what we discover. We affirm the dignity of the past as something that has an intrinsic value: this is what we have to reveal and protect until it can speak with its own voice to the community in

whose present it continues to live.

In this perspective, site conservation emerges as something more significant than a technique, as important as this may be. Even better, the technique itself becomes part of the sensibility. This is why I speak about “dignity”: if, as archaeologists, we engage in practice (“the technique”), in order to conserve the site and its structures, this means that we are the first to recognize their importance. (Where there is no conservation, this fact still transmits a message, of a very different kind: the message that in the end, the testimony of the past is valuable only for books and not for the reality experienced by those who live nearby, in the present. Why should we expect from others respect for the past, when the archaeologists themselves do not make the effort to show such respect in the first place?)

What is “excavated” is a heritage that speaks to the academic world, this is certainly true. But it also speaks to the community within which it is embedded – with a voice that needs to be heard.

### 4. A dead city, yet alive: reading Urkesh today

We want Urkesh to never stop telling its story to its visitors. Even when one might think that there could be no visitors.

Looking at the unceasing news and images from today’s Syria, who could imagine that people would be able to find the time and desire to visit an archaeological site? Yet, this is just what happens regularly at Urkesh.

It happens because there is something to see (because it is well conserved), and something to understand (because it is well explained). We believed in the value of archaeology, a community archaeology well inserted in the people’s hearts. It is for this reason that the “people” of Urkesh, as we might rightly call it, never failed.

Because the flow of visitors today is only, or for the most part, composed of local people, it is a “war tourism” that helps convey value where all values seem to be collapsing, a sense of hope for people living around the site.

### 5. The yesterday of today: for a sustainable future

Archaeology is the starting point, for us as archaeologists, and it is also the arrival point. Our competence remains that which we have seen so far: once we have

excavated, we have to protect and give meaning to what we found.

But the excavated is not only a material thing that could be separated and detached from the humus in which it is rooted today, no matter how remote the past is, in which these roots are sinking. Therefore, even as archaeologists, we find ourselves confronted with this humus, i. e. with a context which is much wider than that of the excavated materials. An archaeologist may or may not take a position in front of this context, but the context exists in any case, and it reacts to how we confront it: it reacts to the negligence as well as to the care.

For our part, we have put in action a variety of activities targeting those who live near the site today, and who hopefully will live in even better conditions tomorrow. It is a concrete way to conceptualize sustainability. We had in our program the idea to create a large eco-archaeological park: we did not have the time to finalize things ("from above," i. e., institutionally) before the war, but we did put in action ("from below" and during the war) some aspects that will flourish in the park of the future.

In this perspective, we illustrate two projects here: the handicraft production of a group of women and a capillary awareness campaign for the people around Urkesh.

## 6. Urkesh speaks Syrian: exhibits as a vehicle for sharing

An exhibit, especially an exhibit at the Rimini Meeting, offers a very particular opportunity for communication. The visitor is involved in an all-encompassing experience, which is more engaging than the reading of a written text, or the viewing of an action represented on screens. The visitor is always together with others, and yet the path is always personal. The space that encloses it, offers a context separated from the outer world. In a way, it is like being on a stage: but you are at the center of the entire context. Staging and sensory aspects are richer, they attract the attention and stick in memory because you become a protagonist in the narrative.

For this, at the school of the Meeting, as I was saying at the beginning, I developed a series of different exhibits (the first, in fact, took place before I became acquainted with the Meeting). We speak of exhibits in this very exhibit. But the reason is not purely documentary. We want instead to show, once again, the vitality of an idea like the one that we are promoting in Urkesh. Ano-

ther way to respond to the urgency to communicate.

## 7. Archaeology for a young future: centrality of education

Following the initiative by our local collaborators, and of colleagues in Italy, we implemented a series of unprecedented formative activities, on two fronts.

For the young students of the middle schools, we activated a one of a kind exchange, by putting in reciprocal contact two groups of youngsters, one in Qamishli (the city near the excavations) and one in Domodossola (a small equivalent city in Italy). The results were moving and profoundly meaningful, for them of course, but also for us. It is an exemplary way to contribute in widening everyone's horizons. We aimed in particular at the intellectual horizons – the knowledge of a particular moment of the past, seen firsthand, and even more, the encouragement to put to the test the youngsters' capacity to re-appropriate the values of the past. But there were also horizons which were more personal, with the emergence of a profound sense of appreciation, reinforced by feeling appreciated by others, and "others" who are far away, and in a radically different context.

For the young Syrian university students, we organized seminars and workshops that focused on the materials found at Urkesh. In this case, it is archaeology in the strict sense of the word. These are students of our discipline, and the idea that Urkesh may serve as a laboratory of excellence for their works (in particular the study of ceramics and topography, which today are both impracticable at other sites in the area) gives to our project an unexpected value on the scholarly level.

## 8. A darkness that shines with light, a silence alive with sound

The last room of the exhibit remains strictly linked to the sensory dimension: it is dedicated exclusively to music. But it is a special music.

When I started to think about the exhibit, I spoke to Enzo Sartori, who composed musical pieces of great beauty for the other two exhibits Marilyn and I organized in earlier Meetings (*From the Depth of Time* 2014; *Georgia, a Country of Gold and Faith* 2016). This time, however, the idea was different: we wanted to actively involve Enzo's students of the musical program from the middle school in Domodossola where he teaches. While

developing the concept, we saw its great educational potential: encouraging the youngsters to gain some distance from the confusion of the visual impulses that entrap us, and to identify with future visitors whom they will not meet - to explain to them, musically, the meaning of the exhibit. And so they did.

Five short musical pieces translate the feeling of these young composers, stimulated by the content of the exhibit to “think” about the Syria of today.

The invitation is for each one of us to compose, in a way, our own music, our interpretation. For this was meant as a challenge to the visitors of the exhibit. We invite them to separate themselves, in the same way, from the hauntingly visual dimension, and to gather in a moment of silence, in the dark, to give room to the musical interpretation of these young composers. Becoming sightless means to see better, inspired by the music - following in this the suggestion of an ancient Sumerian text where a blind person is seen as having the potential to become a “great singer,” because the blind is someone “to whom the light is forbidden, and yet he can see” (Legend of Enki and Namma/ Ninmah).

A surprise was in store for us, which we will describe below in chapter 8. And the music is now available online at [www.avasa.it/music](http://www.avasa.it/music).

## 9. ... and I? The last provocation

Music, then, is the last provocation of the exhibit. It is an invitation to reply, to understand. It confronts the visitors, asking each one of them to respond in the first person. In the exhibit, this did in fact happen: very moved by their experience, visitors were identifying from within with the message we wanted to convey.

Besides the music, the invitation to the visitors comes, in the exhibit, from the docents, who “accompany” them with an involvement that goes well beyond the simple communication of information. Their presence reflects an empathy with the message of the exhibit as a deeper whole, thus helping the visitors to find their own response to the meanings. To this final reflection, the reader of the catalog can only arrive through the written pages.

In its book form, the catalog compensates for the lack of music and guides by accentuating the dimension of poetry. Punctuating the transition from one topic to the next, the poems we include here succeed in provoking

an answer, personal and captivating.

## The poetry as a thread

I really wanted to have this poetry written by a great contemporary Syrian poet, Adel Mahmoud, as central theme of the exhibit, and I am very grateful that he consented to give us a brief anthology, which accompanies us through the exhibit and this catalog (in the translation of Yasmine Mahmoud and Stefania Ermidoro).

It is a thread that transposes in words one basic feeling: the sense of belonging to the past, to the territory, to the history rooted there.

The veil of nostalgia that underlies these texts reflects the feeling of the people who are there today.

“Nostalgia”: literally, the pain felt while waiting to return, that rises in our consciousness sometimes like a mirage.

Adel Mahmoud makes us participate in the great sensitivity of his people for their roots. And helps us to see the great unity that underlines different moments and aspects of our lives, where the “sense of time” invades our perception, from that of the artifact that comes out from the collapse of its original context to that of hope, of the people who do not want to lose the original context - which, ultimately, is the national context.

## The power of ideals

The “Center for the revival of the civil society.”

We are in Amuda (photo at the bottom of the next page), a small city near Urkesh, that in 2015 hosted our exhibition on Urkesh. The name of the center that hosted that exhibit is barely visible in the background of the scene in the photo. Yet, it is precisely this carelessness that speaks to us with great eloquence.

The “center for revival” is not waved like a flag in order to show off. The “civil society” is not a mirage. They are ideals translated into reality, alive and present.

Here, instead, (photo above on the next page) we are in Qamishli in April 2018. Another exhibit on Urkesh. With the texts written in Arabic and Kurdish, besides English. A distinguished visitor: Father Antranig Ayvazian, from the Armenian Catholic Church in Qamishli, to whom the Kurdish organizers of the event are giving a special welcome.



Father Antranig Ayvasian visiting the Urkesh exhibit in Qamishli

These are, as well, ideals translated into reality, alive and present.

## A unity that strengthens diversity

Thus, the past serves in uniting the community. It is a past that affirms diversity, because it is marked by its own history, even as history has often been conflictual. But it is also a past that unites, because these diverse histories are intertwined in countless ways.

From this polarity, two factors were born, which left a strong mark on the Syrian character.

The first is the sense of respect. It would be wrong to assume a euphoric flattening of differences, pretending that there are no conflicts. Instead, it is the respect for the differences that we have to learn from Syrians. A respect which is even more significant than tolerance: the latter accepts the "other" for lack of a better solution, while the former recognizes the "other" as a carrier of values.

This respect leads us to the second special aspect of the Syrian character. The lack of flattening means that they even aim to empower the difference, seeking not to gain a position of power in front of the other waiting for a conflict at the right moment, but rather to enjoy the diversity of the

other, even if one may not like it at a first glance.

## Why archaeology

The "community" of archaeologists

With our itinerary, we reached an answer for our initial question. It is undoubtable that the first "why" of archaeology must be found in the scholarly value of the enterprise: our exclusive competence, as archaeologists, always and mainly remains to articulate the excavated materials and understand the meaning of those broken



The Urkesh exhibit at the "Center for the Revival of Civil Society" in Amuda

traditions that are hidden in these materials.

Maintaining this identity as archaeologists is an essential factor. Yes, we do contribute in a small part to the economic development of the local people, by offering work and proposing programs for development. But our essential and irreplaceable contribution remains intimately linked to our primary competence. To think that the scholarly dimension of archaeology may transcend the real and live interests of the people who live there, may seem at first to hide a devious form of colonialism. But here lies instead our strength.

The war showed this to us. The site of Urkesh, as this exhibit shows, nourished the local people precisely by being an archaeological site that is totally preserved, and totally explained by us, the archaeologists. Because we remained faithful to our duty as archaeologists, we were able to offer something that contradicts, in our specific case, the perverted ideology of the so-called Islamic state. Public archaeology does not imply any reduction or flattening. On the contrary, the “difficult” elements (ceramics, stratigraphy, dating, and so on), are rightly perceived as the supporting data upon which our ideological conclusions can be based.

### Education as sharing

In this sense, we do not shy away at being considered “intellectuals.” It is instead our strength, a strength that we can share.

Explaining, educating and teaching do not imply the desire to impose something alien. It is simply a desire to share, in the belief that the values upon which we build our work (in this specific case, the value of a time past, that of Urkesh, which is full of meaning for the present) are values that speak in their own weight and profoundness. It is an aspect similar to Socratic maieutics: we are not creating values, rather we discover them and we can adopt them. The iconic image of the exhibit and of our catalog (on the cover) shows well all this. The joy that transpires from the joyful gesture derived by the sense of feeling at home on this staircase which dates to forty-seven centuries ago is a shared joy. We can never impose it. But we can motivate it, “provoke it,” because

it is our own joy.

### A community inside the communities

What emerges more and more clearly is the other side of “why archaeology.” The land hides a past that is all the more relevant, even though it is remote: its relevance derives from bringing to light the profoundness in a territory that does not belong to anyone else if not to those who live there today, like those who lived there in the past. In a concrete way, then, archaeology unveils new and unexpected roots of a community, an all-inclusive one which embraces, in a way, all the communities of today in an embrace that derives from its yesterday. To be “guests of history” thus acquires a highly significant value, embodied in very practical attitudes, devoid of any cultural or educational assumptions.

It is in this dynamic, that our presence as “foreign” archaeologists in Syria is embedded. I put the word foreign between quotation marks, because the Syrian embrace always included us as adoptive members, and more than adoptive, of their larger community. Even we, in Mozan, form a community, as other archaeologists in other sites around Syria do. Our community in Mozan is not superimposed on other communities, nor do we want to be more local than locals... Our “community” was co-opted, but not to be flattened, rather because we are different and we can contribute with something of our own.

We want for this exhibit to be able to co-opt you as well, visitors and readers, and at least make you feel virtually Syrians for one day, until the day comes when it will be possible, for all of us, to return there in peace.



# Why?

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*Dig an inch.... you will find a fistful of seeds  
Dig a meter... you will find a jar full of the water of the bygone ages  
Dig more... you will find your grave*

*At that moment... say a little prayer  
Made from the songs of life on this earth,  
Wrap yourself with the last ray of light...*

*Close the door...  
Lay down...  
And go deep  
Deep down to the roots.*

ADEL MAHMOUD



*Why?*

*Why excavate in search of a buried past?*

*We cannot answer the question “why the war”?*

*But we must ask: “why practice archaeology in the middle of a war?”*

*In this exhibit, we will give our answer.*

*And it is the answer that the Syrians of today are teaching us, the Syrians living out of a past rooted in millennia.*

*Millennia that, today, speak to us as well.*

*The unknown provokes us...*

What do you do when you are in front of a hill, that you know was an ancient city?

It is not enough to let ourselves be guided by a rainbow...

You have to let yourself be provoked to discover what is hidden beneath, but without violating it.

*The past provokes us...*

...it provokes us just by the fact that it exists: who were the people who lived here thousands of years ago, here where we live today?



**The unknown provokes us...**  
The rainbow settling on the Urkesh palace, before the excavations



**The past provokes us...**  
The staircase of Urkesh: the ascent towards the transcendence

**The present provokes us...**  
Excavations at Urkesh: 1000 years in 10 meters



**The future provokes us**  
School students visiting Urkesh during  
the excavation season



*The present provokes us...*

We are called to respond to those who ask “what is this?,” “who made it?,” “how do you know that it dates back to forty-seven centuries ago?,” and the question at the root of all the other questions: “why do you do it? And why in Syria in particular?”

*The future provokes us...*

If there are values in the past, are we indeed called to pass them on?

And how can we do it?

## Provocations

This exhibit is born from the urgency to respond to questions that we feel inside ourselves, and which we

are asked about openly. Thus, we try to give an answer.

“To provoke” does not only mean “to challenge, to compete, to rival”: the etymology of the term itself tells us that it also has a positive meaning “incite, stimulate.”

Of course, we are the first ones to be “stimulated.” We find ourselves fighting a battle that years ago, when we started our Syrian experience, we never thought we would have to face. But, because we were very much involved – and we still are – in an intricate fabric of human relations over the course of decades, and in the face of the war challenge, we see a valid continuation renovated by the validity of our efforts. The validity of wanting to give an answer.

Alone, we could not win the challenges that are born from the very nature of our work. For this, we trust the power that emerges from the cooperation of a dozen people who share the profound values that move our project. We learned to be provoked together, not to compete, but to

stimulate each other reciprocally in order to enhance our ability to respect the past from which we can continuously learn..

## The war provokes us

In fact, the war posed the ultimate question, tremendous in its simplicity and straightforwardness: "but now that there is a war, what will you do? Will you be able to work still?"

Urkesh is not in the direct crosshairs of war, but it is not far from it: the front arrived to within 37 miles of the site, without any natural barrier in the middle. The danger is all around us, and no one can predict what will happen. But there was no room for fear or discouragement.



Group photo of the expedition staff during the excavations, a presence that a contrasting ideology wants to eradicate



Deliberate destruction at the hands of the so-called Islamic state



The importance of a small surface find at Urkesh (April 2016)

Sometimes we felt frustrated and worried that all the efforts we had done to preserve these "ruins" could vanish in one moment. But we did not want to let the war cancel our presence, like the image to the side demonstrates symbolically. Eradicate us from the site? On the contrary. And this is the story that we narrate in the exhibit.

## Two prides in conflict

Eradicating us from the site is what the ideologies of the so called Islamic state wanted to achieve. And we know only too well its fury, evinced by images like the one here to the side. Are these men really proud while destroying our past, and theirs?

We, for sure, are proud to preserve our shared heritage, like the other image here at the bottom demonstrates: a modest vase found on the surface and shown with contrasting sense of pride by our assistant from Mozan...

It is a conflict between two different prides.

Men, women and even children of the area around Mozan feel profoundly connected with the past of their region, and they feel a great responsibility towards their land and its values.

We archaeologists share the same conviction with them.

They help us give a fuller meaning to the archaeological work, to the role that archaeology plays in the development of the sense of unity and belonging: the desire to oppose the pride of violence with the pride of culture, to carry us to a future of peace.

Hence, a peaceful archaeology, and an archaeology for peace.

In this lies the provocation. The provocation to understand that archaeology has roots more profound than even the deepest stratigraphic levels. It is the depth of social consciousness. This is what provoked us, and we would want you, the visitors of this exhibit, to be provoked as well.

## At war against the climate

The violence that we are witnessing today, aims to cancel a precise cultural identity.

But beyond the threat of violence, there is a more direct



Flooding in the Plaza at the foot of the monumental staircase



The Urkesh Palace covered with snow

and always present threat, which is that of the climate.

Therefore, the climate provokes us as well... the weather elements represent a strong threat.

Rain, wind, snow and the extreme heat cause damage to monuments in a potentially irreversible way.

Clearly, this was a provocation before the war, and to face it, we came up with a simple yet efficient strategy: an “arte povera” of conservation, as we like to call it, based on the local resources, both human and material.

The further provocation of war was that of our forced long absence. And here emerges the fact that “simplicity” had to be the guaranty of success during the crisis. At the beginning of war, we placed the conservation of the site

at the top of our priority list.

What was hard was maintaining the lines of communication open between all the team members, to ensure the survival of our ancient city and its monuments, its “ruins” as they had been brought to light by excavation.

## No longer, never foreigners

We, the archaeologists coming from outside, were never “foreigners” to our Syrian hosts. We want the Syrians who turn to us from the abyss of war, to not feel foreigners either

This is the ultimate, and in reality, the biggest provocation, even if it is in some ways hidden. It connects to the events that we hear heavily in our society, today, outside of Syria. And in this, Syria emerges as a school of life for us.

We were never foreigners in Syria, we were united in the search for a living past. And thus the phrase “no longer, never foreigner” acquires a truly deeper meaning. Think of what it mean - a forcibly imposed migration by external and extreme conditions, like the ones caused by an imposed war. It is more than a migration. It is an extraction that leaves men and women “foreigners” in their own land.

The activities presented in this exhibit aim to help them not to feel foreigners, there, where they desire to live, in their land of origin. They aim to help them welcome us again as “never foreigners” when we can go back again, and discover in their country, the beauty of their preserved identity.

# Guests of history

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## The ancient city

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

*We are going to the past  
Without riot  
Without banners  
Without medallions*

*We are going back...  
To....  
Our home.*

ADEL MAHMOUD



*To be guests of history means, in archaeology, to be guests of the land.  
Buried for three millennia, Urkesh is slowly returning back to light.  
structures and objects narrate its story.  
And out of this comes a value of a past we must, in the first place,  
decipher.  
We have to know the reality of this past, of which we claim to be the  
guests.*



## The task of archaeology

In the first place, archaeology entails the stratigraphic analysis of cultural remains, firstly as objects embedded in the ground, and then as the result of a process that brought them to be just where they are. The excavation is the corner stone of archaeology. And the excavation was the main activity in our project, which contributed in a substantial way to a revision of the history of the first centuries of urbanism in Syro-Mesopotamia.

The exhibit of the Rimini Meeting in 2014, *Dal profondo del tempo (From the Depths of Time)*, was entirely dedicated to the archaeological dimension, to ancient Urkesh. There was only space for a brief look at the Urkesh of today, in a section entitled “in the eye of the storm” – immersed as the site was in the war that had already started three years before. The exhibit of today, four years later, when the war is hopefully reaching its end, is instead entirely dedicated to the project “Urkesh beyond Urkesh.” But we must first review the main aspects of what lies at the origin of the

entire project.

## The excavations of Urkesh

Tell Mozan, the modern name of ancient Urkesh, is located in north east Syria.

At first glance, it is a Tell like many others in Mesopotamia: a hill on the plains, without particular characteristics. The central part has the shape of a hill which is 15 acres large, with an elevation of 85 feet above virgin soil, with steep slopes in the most of its perimeter. All around, there was a lower city of about 320 acres, the dimensions of a medieval city. The dimension and the altitude of the high mound had always suggested the presence of an important site underneath, and it was true.

The excavations started in autumn of 1984, under the direction of Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati (Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles), and continued with an annual frequency until 2010.

Tell Mozan is located in the central part of the northern Habur triangle, in a well irrigated plain. This area



Tell Mozan viewed from the plains with the Anatolian plateau in the background

has always been important because of its position on the direct commercial routes going in all directions (east-west and north-south).

Its position near Wadi Dara, the central part of the Habur triangle, makes it a crucial site, located immediately under the Mardin pass that served (and still serves) as an outlet to the Syrian plains from the route that leads to the region of Ergani, in today's Turkey, which is rich in minerals.

Tell Mozan is important because its excavations provided ample and detailed information about the oldest Hurrian civilization (previously unknown), that started in the fourth millennium B. C. The rediscovery of ancient Urkesh, then, was not simply the rediscovery of an ancient city. It was a rediscovery of an entire new chapter of the Syro-Mesopotamian history with its unique material culture, previously unknown. Thus the Urkesh excavations had as a result a new knowledge of the first phases of urban life in ancient Near East.

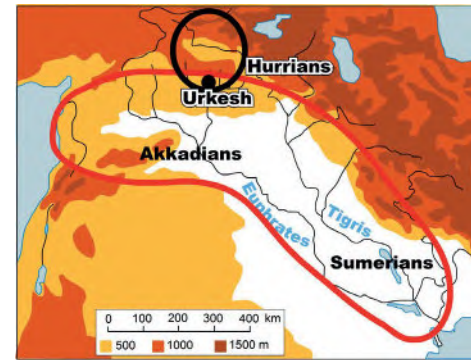
## The historical frame

The origins of Urkesh date back to the beginning of the fourth millennium B. C. In 2010, we found the archaeological evidence of the existence of a monumental structure dating back already to this period, in the form of a corner of a niched building, probably a temple. It was brought to light south of where the temple of the third millennium was, about 65 feet above the plain level that extends around it.

Unfortunately, we know very little about the origins of Urkesh - and the war prevented us from returning to continue our research in that regard. But we know very well the city of the third millennium: it is the one we liberated from the grip of the earth during the long years of excavation.

In the period of its maximum development, in the third millennium B.C., Urkesh was an urban center that governed the land around it, also including the mountains to the north. Being a flourishing city, rich with primary materials, conveniently placed on the communication routes that crossed Mesopotamia in all directions, Urkesh became a proud and essential interlocutor to all the other contemporary polities.

In particular, the powerful reign of Akkad (23rd and 22nd centuries B. C.), that subdued the entire Mesopotamian plain exercising a direct control on the main cities



The reign of Urkesh compared to the Akkadian Empire (2200 B. C.).

of the Near East, did not attempt to conquer Urkesh: it preferred, instead, to ally itself with it. The agreement was sanctioned through a dynastic marriage: Tar'am-Agade, the daughter of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin, was given in marriage to the king (*endan* in Hurrian) of Urkesh.

In the course of the second millennium, the prestige and the power of the city declined, until the moment when it occupied only the central raised part of the site, towards the end of the millennium. Finally, it fell first under the political control of the city of Mari, and then of Mittani, until it was abandoned with the arrival of the Assyrians shortly after 1300 B. C.

## The larger spaces

Overall, the urban system of the central part of the ancient city is characterized by three architectural components: the royal palace, a necromantic shaft, and a monumental temple terrace with a vast plaza in front. These areas are spatially connected and constitute a large urban monumental complex.

The architecture of the temple area, its unmatched conservation status, the ideological link with the palace area and in particular the necromantic shaft, all of this makes the Urkesh complex something extraordinary from Syro-Mesopotamia in the third millennium.

### The royal palace

The palace of Tell Mozan is located on the western side of the highest mound. It was built during the Akkadian period, around 2250 B.C., and its construction can be attributed to a king whose name we know, Tupkish, on the



The Urkesh Palace with the protective system for the mud brick walls (2250 B. C.)

basis on the seal impressions on sealings retrieved from inside its rooms.

The excavations brought to light the service area and part of the formal wing. It consists of a large structure constructed in one phase according to a careful and well documented architectural plan. The palace was used as a royal residence only during the reign of Tukhish and his wife, the queen Uqnitum. Successively, it was used as a storage and an administrative area by their immediate successors, among whom we know the queen Tar'am-Agade, daughter of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin. After this secondary use, the palace was abandoned.

#### The necromantic shaft

South-east of the palace, we found a unique structure that, on the basis of the finds and architectural elements, could be identified as a necromantic shaft, *Abi* in Hurrian.

It consists of a large circular shaft constructed with stones, where events took place regularly, as shown by its homogenous layers.

The excavation reached a depth of 26 feet, and still did not reach the bottom yet: this attests the continuous use for many centuries.

Its origins date back to a phase prior to that of the construction of the Temple plaza. Around 2300 B.C., the shaft was covered with a false dome made of stones, and an antechamber was added on the western part, with an entrance facing east, towards the rising sun. The *Abi* is then a dark and protected place, in some ways facing towards the bright outer world, but it was characterized by an intimate and rather mysterious atmosphere.

The necromantic shaft of Urkesh could be identified with certainty as the monumental frame of a Hurrian ritual, which aimed at establishing a connection with the netherworld.

#### The temple terrace

East of the palace, there is a large plaza, a vast space that leads to the base of the temple terrace, made up of various components: a sharp escarpment, a rampart with an exterior surface covered with a water resisting



The necromantic shaft of Urkesh, called Abi in Hurrian (2300 B. C.)



The revetment wall and monumental staircase of the Temple Plaza in Urkesh (2400 B. C.)

coating and (at least in part) with mud bricks; a massive revetment wall along the external face of the plaza, and a monumental staircase.

The temple stood at the highest point, almost 90 feet above the plain level, and 23 feet above the monumental plaza: the building was most probably dedicated to the ancestral god of the Hurrian pantheon, Kumarbi. The

great monumental staircase that leads to it, is composed of 27 steps, and it was flanked by ample parallel rows of wider steps, twice as large as those of the staircase: most probably, this structure did not have only an aesthetic function, aimed at providing a larger frame for the entire area, but it could also provide places to sit on, on the occasion of major religious ceremonies – and conversely it



Gilgamesh  
(stone plaque, ca. 2250 B. C.)

Details of a clay figurine from the Abi  
(ca. 2300 B. C.)



Clay figurine for ceremonial use  
(ca. 2300 B. C.)

could serve as a stage for a public assembled in the plaza (as in the case of the small concert of the young Qamishli orchestra who performed on this staircase... we will speak about this later, at pp 97 and 105).

The temple with its terrace, as we have them today, were constructed around 2400 B. C., but above older structures, namely above a temple with its relative terrace dating to 1000 years before.

## The faces of Urkesh

The inhabitants of the ancient city seem to come and meet us again with an extraordinary vitality, expressed by their faces, which are realized with great realism in sculptures, in the coroplastics (the clay figurines), and in the glyptic (seal impressions). These faces emerge from the ground, and they look at us. For some of them we even know their names: Tupkish, Uqnitum, Zamena,



Clay figurine (ca. 2250 B. C.)



Clay figurine (ca. 1800 B. C.)



Stone statue (ca. 1400 B. C.)

Portrait of queen Ugnitum and  
king Tupkish  
(seal impression, 2250 B. C.)





Carving made of mother of pearl  
(ca. 2300 B. C.)



Details of a roaring lion statue, in  
bronze, found before our excavations  
together with the Tish-Atal tablet,  
next page  
(ca. 2250 B. C., today at the Louvre)



Clay figurine of quadruped  
(ca. 1800 B. C.)

Tuli...

Those whose names we do not know, still speak to us with an eloquent personality, and their unique physiognomy. We also have very realistic representations of animals.

## The voice of Urkesh

The texts found in Tell Mozan, or coming from Urkesh, are relatively few but extremely interesting, and for some aspects very unique. The city was strongly cosmopolitan: within it, different languages were spoken, indicating different ethnic affiliations, cultural traditions, even political choices. The most common languages were Hurrian, Sumerian, Akkadian and Amorite; what united them is the use of the cuneiform writing for their graphic realization.

Two royal inscriptions were found before our excavations. The inscription of Tish-Atal was written probably towards the beginning of the Akkadian dynasty, when this dynasty ruled all the regions of Syro-Mesopotamia, imposing, besides its politics, also its own language: the proud choice of writing, in Urkesh, an official text in Hurrian appears therefore to be an important affirmation of identity. Even the administrative texts were probably “read” in Hurrian, even if they used an ambiguous writing: we have a clear proof of it, in at least one of these texts.

Urkesh was a city open to the outside world: letters were sent from it, and arrived there. We can infer this not only from two fragments of tablets discovered during our excavation, but also from the letters discovered in the archive of the city of Mari, some of which were sent from Urkesh.

Also the language of the culture of the Near East, Sumerian, is present at Tell Mozan: tablets bearing scribal exercises and lexical texts allows us to infer that there was a scribal school in the city, to train scribes who would then be placed at the service of the palace’s needs.



Royal inscription of Tish-Atal incised on a stone tablet found together with the bronze lion, previous page (ca. 2250 B. C., today at the Louvre)



Administrative clay tablet, with a Hurrian text (ca. 2200 B. C., from the palace)



School exercise: copy of a Sumerian lexical text (ca. 2200 B. C., from the palace)



# Dignity of the past

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## Site Conservation

*If you return from your exile one day  
To your city which you loved  
After a long absence,  
Smile to the streets,  
Maybe the sidewalk  
On which you passed  
Will remember you*

*If nostalgia ever brings you back  
To the tree under whose shadows you played  
And did not find it...  
Bend down a little  
To search for its mark on the soil*

ADEL MAHMOUD



*Discovering the past is not enough, we have to protect its traces.  
Paradoxically, the violence of ISIS taught us this once more.  
The contrast of their violence with the fondness with which we have taken care of the site, had the effect of proclaiming the intrinsic profound dignity of the past in all its authenticity.  
After the excavation itself, conservation and preservation are the fundamental presuppositions of any archaeology that calls itself "public".*

## Maintenance and local resources

Our approach to conservation is not technologically sophisticated, nor does it require much in terms of material.

The long physical absence of the archaeological expedition, caused by war, gave us a way to test our approach, which turned out to be quite effective. The two hinges of the system are the maintenance and the use of local resources. Had we trusted the modern complex technologies, all would have crumbled. Instead, by preparing our collaborators to use the simplest techniques, and by relying only on locally available materials, we ensured the continuation of the work even in the worst of situations.

This is what we call the “l’arte povera” of conservation. Poor but rich, judging by the results...

## The temple and its staircase

Situated on the highest point of the Tell, the construction materials are mostly stones. To protect the monumental staircase, two operations in particular are performed each year: the replacing of the mud between the stones and the removing of the vegetation. With these two simple methods, applied to the monumental staircase and the other stone structures, we guaranteed the security of the structures with all kinds of weather.

Even the stones suffer

The first operation consists in placing a new mud layer between the stones, positioned above the old mud which has first been covered by a layer of burlap.

On the one hand, the heat dries the mud between the

stones, causing it to crack and to become friable. On the other hand, the strong rain washes away this mud. This situation makes the stones vulnerable and subject to the danger of becoming loose, and in the worst case scenario, of being dislocated and lost. At that point, stones would be carried away by water and the entire structure, that seems very solid, would dissolve in a shapeless mass.



Refilling the mud between the stones of the Temple Terrace wall



Spring: new vegetation, before and after the removal

Back to a sandy color

Green is a beautiful color, but in the case of our archaeological site, light brown is the color we prefer. This is the goal of the second operation that we perform each year: removing the vegetation that grows after the rain. We do it by hand at the beginning of spring, to prevent the roots from growing deep and reaching the ancient mud. This vegetation includes bushes and thick shrubs that compromise the integrity of the monuments. If they are not removed, their roots could penetrate deep in the ground, causing the destruction of archaeological layers and weakening the structures.

In Mozan, these bushes are periodically removed, gathered and thrown outside the perimeter of the archaeological area. Even if the site seems beautiful when it's green, for us, it is a relief when we receive the photos after the removal of shrubs, and we see that Urkesh returned to its sandy color...



Autumn: new mud layer over the old one, on the monumental staircase of the Temple



The *Abi* and its burlap cover, completely destroyed by the wind (2013)



Working on making a new metal cover



The new "dome" completed, with openings at the base



The new "dome" under the snow

## The necromantic shaft

### Correcting the course

After the excavations, the *Abi* (cfr. above, p.26) endured years of climatic changes and always resisted thanks to the protective dome that we installed above it, which prevented the accumulation of water and trash inside it.

Our dome consisted of a metal grid structure, covered with a thick fabric. Even though it served its purpose, it clearly could not be a durable solution. The specific difficulty in this case was that, since the interior of the "dome" is completely empty, the strong wind easily destroyed the fabric. In little time, the fabric was reduced to miserable strands, as it can be seen in the photo to the left, above.

We could have continued with the same method, and simply replace the covering fabric. Instead, we decided to go ahead with a more durable solution. Adopting a completely different path, when we could not be present at the site, required a specific synergy, and the demonstration that we could indeed do it, was one of the most beautiful results of this experiment.

At the same time, we wanted to demonstrate that we were ready to take on a project that showed our long-term commitment.

### A long-term commitment

Everything started at the end of 2013: we decided to cover the entire metal grid of the dome not with burlap fabric, but with overlapping metal sheets.

We wanted to protect the structure. But we also wanted our "Mozanians in Mozan" to know that we are undertaking, together with them, a long journey. We did not want to repeat periodically what we had set up at the beginning, we also wanted to take advantage of this occasion and innovate.

Thus, the dome was entirely re-covered with metal sheets, and the gaps between them were filled with silicon, to maximize the protection and the impermeability of the structure. We cut out openings for ventilation at the base of the metal sheets, to guarantee the correct aeration of the inside; furthermore, the top edges of these openings were tilted upwards to form a small drainage channel, that carries the water away from the base of the dome.

## The journey of the Abi

The successive phase of the work took place in 2014, when we turned our attention to the Abi entrance.

The entrance was also covered with a fixed metal grid, covered with overlapping metal sheets. The edges of the metal sheets were tilted upwards in this case as well, to form a drain to channel the rain water away from the Abi.

The final touch that we decided to add reflects our commitment to the archaeological landscape as well.

The shiny metallic surface did not blend well with the rest of the site. Therefore, we did an experiment and we asked our collaborators to cover half of the renovated Abi dome with burlap, and the other half with dirt directly glued to the surface. Our goal was to find out which was the best technique to make the dome unobtrusive with regard to the splendid landscape that surrounds it.

After a few months, the solution with burlap seemed to be preferable, because the dirt, when it became wet from rain water, came off and disappeared. Afterwards, the further passing of the seasons demonstrated that the atmospheric elements were too strong also for the burlap, which was tested by water and wind, which ripped it off the surface of the dome.

Therefore, in 2016 we decided to re-cover the metal sheets with a coat of opaque paint, with a color that recalls that of the sand.

The glory of the Abi, finally restored, strongly resists today against time and war. Against all odds.

## The royal palace of Tuskish

The walls of this structure consist of stones at the base, but the upper part of the walls is made of unbaked mud bricks: 400 linear yards of very fragile mud bricks, incapable of resisting the rain, the snow and the heat.

In liberating the palace from the grip of soil, we exposed it to many dangers: without protection, its mud bricks would have melted in no time. Therefore, we had to find an efficient solution, which had to be also economic and durable. Thus, we came to the idea of building some protective structures all around the walls. These structures had a double purpose: the metal trellis aims to give a sense of the ancient volumes and transmit the perception of the original architecture, and at the same time, it protects the wall from deteriorating.

It's like having two sites in one.



Painting the entire metal cover in 2016, and new metal cover of the Abi entrance

## Sleeping walls

The protective structures constructed around the walls consist of a metal trellis, covered with fabric and a thick mud layer. All its sides are accessible, and covered with burlap curtains. The curtains open and close easily, thus allowing us at any moment to control the condition of the wall. The burlap curtains require some maintenance, but it is a very simple one. The curtains are regularly fixed, the holes patched and the tears sewn. But sometimes, the curtains are too damaged to be fixed.

In this case, they are entirely replaced with new ones, measured and tailored to fit perfectly on the metal structure.

The best system to maintain operative our conservation method, is to have a careful preventive monitoring system. Curtains are opened regularly to verify the con-



dition of the walls, to see if the plastic cover placed on the upper part of the walls should be replaced, to note and register the eventual damages or changes, and to intervene where some parts of the mud bricks are crumbling.

Intervention is usually limited to a replastering of the most vulnerable points, or reinforcing the wall faces by adding “saddle bags”: pieces of cloth filled with sand and mounted on the walls.

## Our “agents” in the field

One of the great advantages of having a group of collaborators in the field, from the nearby village of Mozan,

is the possibility for us to keep the situation of the site under control, even from a distance. They are our eyes, hands, and more importantly, the conscience of the project in every situation: for the ordinary maintenance, as well as in extraordinary circumstances.

We know that we can count on them in every occasion. Even as they always refer to us and wait for our approval for each project related to the archaeological site, in the last years they did develop a sensitivity for conservation and presentation, so as to react to every situation in an appropriate way, even autonomously.

Their principal task is daily maintenance. We established a protocol in 2010, during our last season in the field, giving each one of them a specific task. Each one has continued to develop a competence that he already learned



The Palace at Urkesh with its protective covering system completely removed, to show the walls as they were when first excavated

Resewing a curtain



Iron structures covered with burlap fabric

while working alongside the archaeologist.

Mohammed Omo has the main responsibility as an official guard and is the main point of reference for the entire system. We asked Diadin Mustafa to continue with his work as a photographer, documenting the condition of the palace and temple area, monitoring the condition of mud brick walls through a specific series of images, sending images of the site during all seasons, taking photos of visitors, etc.

We asked Ibrahim Khello to particularly take care of issues relating to the conservation project at the site. Mohammed Hamza (familiarily called "Hammade") continued his precious work on the ceramics (see below p.90), studying the sherds coming from various excavation units and helping the other team members when necessary.







Mohammed Omo  
inspecting a mud brick wall



Holes in the curtains caused by rain,  
wind and birds

The system proved to be a success: by clearly defining the role of each one, they all worked with an extraordinary commitment. Not only each one of them continued to do his assigned task, but they also arranged to go to the site together, collaborating in order to best develop their work.

The merit of this cooperative approach became evident in 2014 when Diadin Mustafa, our photographer, decided to leave Mozan, the only one who took this decision. Having worked with him in close proximity for years, Ibrahim Khello was able easily take over his task, beginning to take photographs of the site and of the various activities taking place there.

## Reports from the “trenches”

In establishing this system, we also asked them to send us detailed reports every three months, to maintain a good perception of what was happening in Mozan.

These reports, revealed to be more than simple descriptions: they transmit the sentiments of our collaborators ranging from hope to worrying, from pride to discouragement. They do not hide their difficult moments, they always express their gratitude for not leaving them alone, but they do not spare us blame when we are not quick enough in responding to their questions!

Time passes, but their sense of belonging and sharing a common goal is always present.

When curtains can no longer be patched, they are entirely replaced



Ibrahim Khello  
mending the holes in the curtain

Moreover, their very personal attachment to the directors and the other members of the archaeological project remain strong, despite the years of separation.

We want to give space to this testimony of professionalism and attachment to the site, retaining the original English wording as we received it.

The normality of work during the crisis

In 2013, Mohammed Hamza explained his daily work with these words, simple but clear in showing their com-

mon commitment (Abu and Umm Iskandar are the local names of the directors: “father” and “mother” of Alessandro, the son Federico Alessandro, who was the field director of the excavation):

30/06/2013

*Dear Abu Iskandar*

*I hope that you and your family are all well.*

*In the month of April and May, I worked on the fragments from A17. And in June, I worked on the ones from A18.*

*Three days ago, we went to the site, all of us, who work*

together with you.

*Greetings to Umm Iskandar and Iskandar.*

*Thank you*

*Mohammed Hamza*

In those days, in 2013, it was not easy for them to move around the site because of the presence of soldiers in the area. And the messages sent to us show how they did everything possible to not abandon their activities.

1/7/2013, from Mohammed Omo:

*I hope that all is well.*

*Here is my 3-month report.*

*I removed the vegetation and some plastic objects from the excavations.*

*I reinforced the areas around the site to protect it from heavy rain.*

*I help Ibrahim, Diadin and Hammade in the excavation area.*

*I maintain the responsibility of the site in the confrontations with the people who now live on the Tell.*

*I water the plants (...)*

Sometimes, their messages, transmit optimism and the idea of a normal daily life, almost without worries, in days when war was raging all around them.

30/06/2014:

*Dear Abu Iskandar,*

*I hope you are well. The work on the Tell continues well.*

*We work together to conserve the site, and make it the best and the most beautiful archaeological site in Syria.*

*The situation on the Tell is good, without big difficulties.*

*Tomorrow we will bring the fragment from the Tell to the village for Hammade.*

*Thank you,*

*Mohammed Omo*

The sense of control

The details they provided to us in these years are rich and precise: through their words, we obtain an exact image of the conditions, both of the palace walls and the stones of the revetment wall of the Temple Terrace and the monumental staircase:

29/4/2014, from Diadin:

*Greetings Abu Iskandar, Umm Iskandar and Iskandar.*

*I hope you are well.*

*We are maintaining the excavations like we maintain our houses. The palace walls are in good conditions, and secure as always, but there are small cracks. There is a small crack in A4, in the angle of the threshold between rooms C5 and C7. The crack is 10cm wide and 30 cm long. I think it is not on the actual wall seen from the threshold, because the stones begin only 20 cm behind it: therefore, the crack dose not endanger the stability of the wall (...)*

08/04/2014:

*Greetings Abu Iskandar, Umm Iskandar and Iskandar.*

*The conditions of the Lion Temple walls (the recent wall) are good and do not present problems.*

*We are always using mud to fill the spaces between the stones of the monumental staircase. The last time we did this was last autumn. We sent you the proofs that show this.*

*Regarding the damages caused by animals and birds, we try to avoid them though our daily work. There aren't many foxes nor birds anymore. We mange also to avoid the damages caused by weather elements. (...)*

*In the last months, we worked in areas A, C, D, P, J. We sewed new curtains for C5 and cleaned the excavations from the dirt that accumulated to keep the floor tiles put in D1, D2, D3, B2, B3 visible.*

*In general, the site appears as if the mission is still operative here.*

*In these months we cleaned the entire palace area, removing the shrubs.*

*The work is proceeding well, and the site appears to the visitors as if the mission is still there. (...)*

*Thank you,*

*Ibrahim Khello*

New discoveries

From time to time, our “agents” find new objects, figurines, ceramics, generally broken. When this happens, they immediately send us a description of the object with many photos taken in situ and after cleaning. Then they label the object and conserve it, waiting for the expedition's return to the field to study it.

Here is a recent example from a message that we re-

ceived from Mohammed Hamza, our ceramic expert: the numbers and codes used by him, which could be strange to a non-specialist, reflect exactly the codes used in our registers for ceramic analysis (the "fragments" are "sherds").

What Hammade is giving, then, is an extremely precise description of a vessel that was found:

20/11/2017, from Hammade:

*In the last three month we worked on the conservation of the various Tell area.*

*We also fixed the panels and glued the informative papers where they had fallen off.*

*Then, I analyzed the fragment of A20.*

*While removing the dirt from sector F of the palace, we found a vessel, 4 cm, with a round base: xrd*

*Form: jnf2*

*Material: ws*

*Opening diameter: 4 cm*

*Phase: 3*

*We also retrieved the head of a broken animal figurine, in sector F.*

*See the attached photos.*

"The work proceeds without problems"

We are reassured by the professionalism that transpires from these reports, from the results obtained and attested by the photos, and from their own trust. They tell us that things on the site "proceed without a problem" ...

28/04/2016:

*In the last three months, we carried on different tasks on the archaeological site of Mozan.*

*In February, we worked primarily on the restoration of the palace curtains. It was necessary to replace the old ones because it was no longer possible to simply fix them.*

*We also removed the vegetation and the herbs from the palace area to protect it. We did the same in the area J as well, and we still have to finish.*

*The excavations are in very good conditions, and the Panorama as well are in good shape.*

*The work proceeds without problems.*

*Thank you to all the people who are helping us to protect and preserve the archaeological site of Mozan.*

*Ibrahim*

Difficulties and punctual demands

29/06/2013:

*(...) we go to the site every day, to control the situation and make a list of what we need for the maintenance work or adjustments.*

*(...) the Abi, as we already wrote to you, needs a new cover. The restoration process of the dome is very expensive, and we need money to finish it, otherwise we risk losing this archaeological monument, so marvelous. (...)*

29/6/2014:

*Dear Abu Iskandar and dear Umm Iskandar*

*We are truly happy to be working together still.*

*There are some difficulties concerning our work, because the battery of the camera is not working anymore, and at the moment I am taking photos with my personal camera.*

*We hope to see each other soon in Tell Mozan.*

*Thank you*

*Diadin*

29/04/2014:

*(...) regarding the burlap for the curtains, we do not have any left. Yasmine knows about this. If it is difficult for you to provide it, we can proceed with an emergency intervention. We can bring the burlap sack that we use to collect the cotton (each one is 190x90 cm) and we can open them from one side, thus becoming 240cm long, and then we can sew them together (...)*

*I hope that you can provide the burlap that we need to protect the realm of Urkesh.*

*Thank you*

*Diadin*

29/04/2014:

*Good morning,*

*How are you? I hope you are well.*

*I almost finished the ceramic analysis. I have enough to work on for the month of May, but I do not have more work for the next month.*

*What can I do next? In the storage room there are bags with fragments from A20 and J6. Do I start working on those?*

*I wait for your answer.*

*Thank you*

*Mohammed Hamza (Hammade)*

"We wrote to you more than once..."

We do all we can to maintain the contact with our "field agents" and to respond to their requests in a prompt manner. But sometimes they feel that they do not receive an answer quickly enough, and they do not hesitate to make us realize their urgency. They certainly have their good reasons to do it, because they are the best judges of the situation at the site. They feel that they "have" to do whatever they can, and they show it with their messages.

08/04/2014:

*We already wrote to you asking you for help more than once (...)*

*Thank you  
Ibrahim Khello*

01/07/2013:

*(...) you can see all of these situations in the photo that Diadin is sending to you.*

*(...) I hope you can answer us before October (before the beginning of the rain season).*

*Thank you  
Mohammed Omo*

Sometimes, they used a more explicit tone, and for sure they do not hesitate to scold us if they think we are very slow in our reactions!

08/02/2015:

*Greetings Abu Iskandar  
In the last three months, we worked on the following activities:*

*In November we replaced the palace curtains that were torn. We sewed the curtains in my house, not on the Tell, because there was no electricity. (...)*

*We are waiting for your response regarding the idea of constructing a containment wall in mud bricks near the excavations.*

*(...) We sent you photos that show the 2 solutions with the burlap and the dirt on the two sides of the dome, but you never answered us. You take too long to respond to our questions. Therefore, if you do not answer us quickly, we will have to proceed with an emergency intervention. (...)*

*Thank you  
Diadin*

This scolding, besides stimulating us to ameliorate our work, is particularly meaningful in our eyes. They show how much we can really trust our "field agents." and they are proof that they are capable to confront emergency situations even when, for whatever reason, we cannot give them our immediate opinion.

"As if you were here..."

One of the phrases that frequently reoccurs in the reports sent to us by our collaborators in Urkesh, throughout all these years, is "we are working on the site as if you were here."

This sentiment reflects their sense of responsibility, and the result is years of collaboration and friendship between the members of the mission and the local community.

We have always considered our local collaborators as irreplaceable members of the project: we share with them our strategies and plans for the excavation, and we often ask for their opinion to resolve various situations. This interaction among us made them real collaborators, capable of carrying on the conservation of the site and to describe the excavations to a third party even in our absence. We are proud of this result, because it proves the appropriateness of our "bottom-up" approach, which we have been following for years.

Here are other communications in this regard:

29/06/2013:

*Greetings Abu and Umm Iskandar  
We are working on the excavations as if you were here.  
We hope that in the near future, you will return here with us. (...)*

*And we hope that the people who support this great project, continue to support us, in order to see Tell Mozan becoming the best and the most beautiful archaeological site in the world.*

*Many people come to visit the Tell, and remain very impressed by the fact that the mission did not come here for two years, and yet, the site is very well maintained. We hope to see you soon in Mozan. You are always in our hearts.*

*Please give my regards to Mr. Samer.  
Thank you.  
Diadin*

30/10/2013:

*Dear Abu Iskandar, Umm Iskandar and Iskandar  
We miss you very much. And when we work, we feel  
that you are here with us, and it is a wonderful feeling.  
Now I am working on the fragments of A17, and work  
is going well.  
Thank you  
Mohammed Hamza*

"The work goes on..."

Equally moving is to recognize in these messages their gratitude, not only in the interaction with directors and the members of the archaeological project, but also towards all those who contribute to the continuation of the activities in Urkesh.

Their letters invariably end with a simple but meaningful "thank you." and sometimes this sentiment is expressed in a more extensive manner. In 2013, Ibrahim Khello wrote to us:

29/06/2013:

*(...) We are really happy to work with you, despite the  
difficult situation.  
The work continues... (...)  
Thank you  
Ibrahim Khello*

In the same week, our guard on the site, Mohammed Omo, expresses this desire:

01/07/2013:

*I wish that our friends who support this project, would  
help us so we wouldn't lose this amazing site*

And the work has truly continued, and our friends are still supporting the project! The gratitude of our assistants for this coherence, became even more profound with time passing, and only few months ago Ibrahim wrote to us:

4/02/2018:

*In the last three months we worked on the restoration and  
conservation especially in the palace area. We fixed some  
curtain that were torn, and we replaced others.*

*We also cleaned the entire site. We removed the vegeta-  
tion and we took it outside the excavation area.*

*The site, as well as the 2 panoramas, are in good con-  
dition.*

*The Temple and Palace areas are both in good condition.*

*We appreciate all the efforts of the people who help us to  
maintain and protect Tell Mozan.*

The great "team" of Mozan: Amer Ahmad (archaeologist from Qamishli), Mohammed Hamza (ceramic specialist), Mohammed Omo (guard and coordinator), Ibrahim Khello (photographer and administrator), Yasmine Mahmoud (archaeologist and supervisor in Syria, Damascus)



# A dead city yet alive

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## Tourism of war

*Don't go to airports,  
don't leave in ships,  
don't travel with trains,  
don't be absent in cities.*

*If you really must leave,  
then fade in the air  
like the perfume of the linden  
and let from you spring forth*

*nature uncontaminated...*

ADEL MAHMOUD



*Urkesh remains alive, and it is an open city:  
open to fulfill its commitment to transmit its hidden values;  
open to a tourism of “war”  
that contrasts the violence of the present with a hidden glory;  
open to accompany adults, youngsters and children  
towards the appropriation of their own past;  
open to facilitate the construction of a sustainable future.*



## Broken traditions

We cannot limit ourselves to liberating the buried remains from the matrix of the earth that hides them, we need to interpret these remains as well, by inserting them in their correct historical and cultural context. At times, we find ourselves filled with a sense of awe in the confrontation with these silent witnesses of such a remote past.

In a wider sense, then, archaeology can be understood as a study of broken traditions. Today, in the majority of cases, there are no more living witnesses of the culture, to which the structures and objects that the archaeologist finds in the ground pertain. For sure, there are no more Hurrians. Recomposing the cultural whole, in which they can again acquire meaning, is the duty of the archaeologist.

Here, we want to demonstrate, on the one hand, the interpretative system that we have

put in place with particular signposts, and on the other hand, just as for the conservation, the continued presence of our local assistants who insure their maintenance.

## The site as a book

Interpreting the meaning and purpose of ancient monuments gives them back their voice. And this is why Urkesh is no longer immersed in the silence of the centuries: today, it narrates its story to those who visit it. For this purpose, we worked year after year during the excavations, to produce a presentation and an interpretative system of the site that gives visitors the possibility to



1.  
The thematic path,  
with the Palace on the left  
and the Temple Terrace on the right

2.  
Large panel offering a synthesis,  
with a panoramic view of the palace  
from above



3.  
Detailed panel related to a specific  
element – in this case, the revetment  
wall of the Temple Terrace





Repair work of the panoramic panels: replacing the glass, laminating new pages, repainting the metal structure



see from within what the site seems to hide from us. We wanted to make Urkesh transparent in what it has to offer, from scholars all the way to children. The site opens up to visitors like a book. And we have many visitors who continue to read it.

Without a doubt, a guided visit would be the best choice. But when there are no intermediaries, a stronger emotional bond emerges between the visitor and the site. One remains alone with Urkesh. And even if today the war is seeking to silence it, we, together with our local collaborators, remain beside our city, to prevent this from happening.

In total, there are about 200 pages of information on the site, discretely distributed along a walking path, at the foot

of the stairs, at the entrance of the temple, and between the rooms of the palace.

Through this window, Mozan allows us still to look at ancient Urkesh.

## The itinerary and the two visual approaches

There are three components of the system. (1) A thematic path that proposes fourteen stops, briefly illustrated to explain in a few words what might interest the visitor. (2) A panoramic and elevated observation point proposes a synthesis of what can be seen in front of the viewer:



Repair work of one of the reading stands: welding the metal structure and repainting



it is a viewing point that the ancients could not enjoy, and it provides a synthesis of the whole, with extensive historical references. (3) Descending, instead, to the level that coincides with the view that the ancients had, there are small reading stands that illustrate in detail what the visitors are seeing directly in front of them. In our absence, this signage serves for the purpose of a guided visit: it narrates the events that took place in the palace and the temple, accompanying the visitor on a journey of the ancient city, across time and space.

The structures we use are very simple, made from iron and with a cover to protect the printed pages from weather and birds. The texts and illustrations are made

with a normal printer, thus making it easy to reproduce or update each and every page. Here, we want to illustrate the process of maintenance as it was carried out in these years, then we will show the result, namely the flow of visitors, truly surprising in these years of war.

## A simple beauty

Our strategy regarding the panels and the presentation

of the site is similar to that of conservation: extremely simple and based on local resources, regular monitoring and ordinary maintenance.

Sometimes the weather wins the battle. The panels break because of the wind, lose their color in the sun, rust under the rain. The glass that covers the pages breaks, and the pages crumble and become dirty. In this case, we have to substitute the laminated papers that are placed inside the glass sheets, fix and weld the metal structure, and paint them regularly.

During the first years of war, we gave priority to conservation, and because of this, many of the panels were damaged and removed. In the beginning of 2017,



Small groups of people visiting the site, 2015-2018



Families visiting the site, 2015-2018





Other groups  
visiting the site, 2015-2018

we wanted to reopen this window through which it is possible to see ancient Urkesh. Therefore, we decided to repair all the panels and place them back at the site where they belong. The panels were fixed, welded and cleaned. A simple coat of paint restored their beautiful color. Then, the pages were reprinted, laminated and glued on the panels.

It is a simple beauty, the one that emerges from all of these efforts, but it is an eloquent one. The photos in the pages 50-51 illustrate the continuity and coherence of this commitment.

## An oasis in the midst of war



Young middle school students of Qamishli visiting the site, March-June 2018

Each panel, then, returned to its place on the Tell, reunited again with the protagonist of its story, our ancient city. Urkesh will not be silenced. If one visits Urkesh today, the site continues to narrate its story just by the simple fact of being there, with an eloquence that is becoming more noticeable, the longer we are forced to remain physically absent from the Tell.

Everything is ready to receive visitors, who were never absent from the Tell. There are people who believe in what we do (as you will see in the images, that all refer to the years of war).

In December 2016, we even published a guide to the site in Arabic, Kurdish and English, the first of its kind.

## The future explores the past

The young face of archaeology, is that of the dozens of children who visit our site week after week. These are visits that we organized on purpose, by providing buses and guides to the local schools. These visits give even more life to the city, and more hope for the future.

This young generation who visit Urkesh, do not only learn something new about their past and the history of their ancestors: these youngsters also learn the value of







Organized visits for young middle school students of Qamishli, March-June 2018



As if on a holiday...

respecting their roots and protecting their cultural heritage. This is the ultimate goal of what we do.

Here are a few examples of what the children wrote after their visit:

Aso Issa

*When we went on this trip, I was very excited to see the monuments. It is very nice to be in a place so rich in archaeological sites where our ancestors lived. The monumental staircase was constructed in two phases in 2750 and in 2500 B.C. The Abi was constructed in 2400 B.C and the palace in 2250 B.C. The people who lived here were Syrians. I was very happy to have the possibility to go to this fantastic site and see the archaeological monuments.*

Hanan Ahmad

*We went to visit Tell Mozan (Urkesh), where we visited the Abi that dates back to 2400 B.C, and it was used to at the time of king Tupkish in 2250 B.C. ...I cannot describe my feelings when we arrived there. Mr. Amer explained to us about the palace. It was very nice to be there, and I am very proud to have visited Urkesh. Thank you for everything Mr. Amer, and I hope that the coming days will be better. Thank you.*



Diana Khalil

*We went on a trip to Urkesh with Mr. Amer, the supervisor of the exploration group. The visit was full of historic information. ... The way the supervisor narrated the story was very exciting, and we felt as if we went back in time thousands of years. We visited the temple and the staircase that was constructed in 2 phases in 2750 and in 2500 B.C. Urkesh was inhabited for the first time in 3500 B.C and it all pertains to the Hurrian civilization, that was considered the center and the capital of the historical civilization of Urkesh.*

Samir Riad Saiegh

*Me and my friends visited Tell Mozan with our supervisor*



Explanatory panels and structures fully stimulate the curiosity of children

*to get to know the archaeological monuments there. Mozan is located between Amouda and Qamishli. The native inhabitants of this area were the Hurrians. ...I felt how precious this archaeological site is, especially because it is still standing against the threats for thousands of years, and it will stay for years to come in all of its glory and great history.*

Solin Aso

*We visited Tell Mozan with Mr. Amer. The excavations started in 1937 by the famous English archaeologist Max Mallowan. Then the excavation resumed in 1984. Mr. Amer explained to us the archaeological monuments of Tell Mozan.... It was nice to see these monuments that pertain to ancient history. I look at them with so much pride because I know that I have a great history that tells me who I am.*

Sara Topal

*My name is Sara Azad Topal from Afrin. I currently live in Qamishli. I will be happy to tell you about the trip we made to Tell Mozan (Urkesh) on Saturday, 14th of April 2018. I was very excited. On that day, my father was busy, so i decided to surprise my mother and take her with me to Tell Mozan. We waited for the rest of the group, then we took the bus and went to Tell*

*Mozan at 9.30 in the morning. We were very anxious to see Urkesh and its monuments. When we arrived, we were full of joy. We started to see the monuments, and we found our selves at the base of the temple staircase where the supervisor told us information about Tell Mozan and its inhabitants. I was writing down everything he was saying. Then the supervisor told us to go to the temple, and I stood in a high place to see things from above. It was a beautiful site. The supervisor told us that the Hurrians used to worship their gods here, and that it was constructed in 2 phases in 2750 and in 2500 B.C. Then we went to the palace and we saw the ancient walls, I don't know, maybe these are not walls. Anyways, it was old and fragile with a great history.*





"...I was very enthusiastic to see the monuments: ...people who lived here were Syrians"

*Then we went to see the kitchen which I really liked. Anywhere we went, there were panels with information and beautiful drawings. Then we went to the Abi, a deep hole with a narrow staircase. We went down and it was very beautiful there. We had much fun. The supervisor stood on the steps and told us that the Abi is very old (2400 B.C) and that king Tupkish used to go there and speak with the spirits. This Abi was used in the time of Tupkish in 2250 B.C. We got on the bus and we went home. I was astonished, and I asked myself: Where were the Kurds in that moment of time? I had so much fun, and at the end I was full of awe.*

Hiwa Abdul Aziz

*Syria is the cradle of civilizations and the birthplace of the alphabet, where the first alphabet was found. There are many archaeological sites, citadels and ancient cities such as Palmyra, Ugarit, Aleppo Citadel, Salah al Din Citadel and Crack de Chevalier... etc.*

*I live in Qamishli where there are many archaeologi-*

*cal sites in the villages, like Tell Arbid and Tell Mozan. In Mozan, we visited the Abi (2400 B.C) used by king Tupkish in 2250 B.C. We also visited the staircase of the temple, which was constructed in 2750 and in 2500 B.C, and the palace of Tupkish constructed in 2250 B.C. I am very proud of our Hurrian ancestors who constructed monuments that testify to our great civilization and its treasures.*

Hishan Al Sharif

*Tell Mozan is a historic and archaeological site dating back to 2500 B.C. Tell Mozan is a hill with many archaeological monuments like the temple, the royal wardrobe... etc. Tell Mozan is located in the north of Syria and many foreign visitors come to visit it. We have to preserve these great monuments that our ancestors left for us, and all the archaeological monuments of Syria.*

# The yesterday of today

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## Fruition and sustainability

*Don't ask me how I could be knitting,  
in the heart of darkness  
the wool sweater  
which you will use come the next winter:  
I know, stitch by stitch,  
the cold places of your solitude.*

ADEL MAHMOUD



*The archaeologist interprets the traces of the past to create something new: a new meaning, a new narrative, a new image. Something that speaks to us about the past, while being deeply rooted in the present. In doing this, archaeology can become an instrument that goes beyond scientific research and becomes a motor of development for the society of today.*

## The hinterland of Urkesh

Next to an archaeology conceived as the study of the past, there is an archaeology that offers a strong motivation to those who live today in the same territory of the ancients.

Whether archaeologists make the effort or not, archaeology has a strong impact on those who live close to the excavation: the necessity to deal with this is one of the concerns that we strongly felt in Mozan.

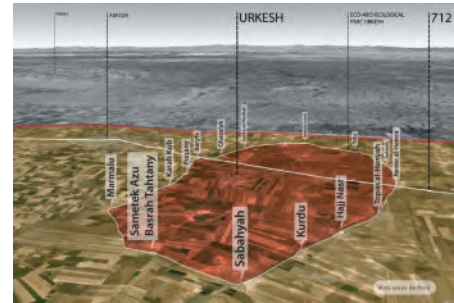
Therefore, we launched the idea of creating a large eco-archaeological park. We did not have the time to finalize it before the war started, but the project remained, and in the meantime, we started working on two of the park's goals that, despite the difficult current conditions, continued with great vitality: a workshop to create traditional craft products and a program to raise awareness about the value of archaeology in the immediate context of the villages around the site.

## The eco-archaeological park of Urkesh

In 2009, we launched the idea of the eco-archaeological park of Urkesh, with a twofold purpose: (1) to preserve the landscape around Tell Mozan, and (2) to develop sustainable economic projects in the 22 villages around Urkesh, localized in an area extending over 54 square kilometers.

In collaboration with the "Politecnico di Milano" and the faculty of the economics department at the Tor Vergata University of Rome, and with the support of the Office of the Vice-Chancellor of Research at the University of California, Los Angeles, we developed a detailed project, that was received with enthusiasm by the various competent authorities. The idea was to plan for a niche tourism, one meant to avoid a development that could

Eco-archaeological park project



The landscape around Urkesh



degrade the landscape and the cultural context in general, but which could, at the same time, bring substantial benefits to the people in the park area and beyond, in all the region, thus contributing to the formation of a truly sustainable dynamics.

### “Urkesh gate”: a microhistory of Syria By Hiba Qassar

The park in transition

The beginning of war stopped the park project, but in 2012, the work group for the “development of local



The building initially used for the women's atelier. The sign above the entrance reads: "Urkesh gate"

society" from Damascus visited the site and the villages around it, with the collaboration of the archaeological expedition.

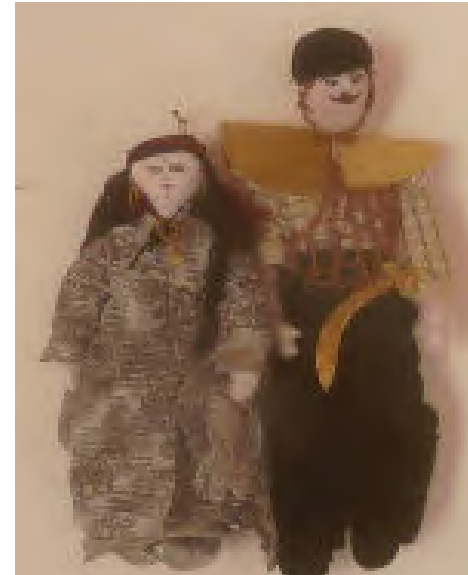
One of the objectives was to evaluate the potentials of the local community and to verify the effective desire of the locals to be involved in a future initiative.

One of the main characteristics of our project was the direct involvement of the local community in the park activities, which includes the development of each village in function of a particular aspect of the life and the culture of Urkesh in parallel with the current situation. One of these aspects was the ancient production of textiles which would have been associated with current production of clothing and traditional objects. On this basis, the work group from Damascus served as a catalyst for the creation of a group of women who would start with the craft production, and who would be able in the future to develop a sustainable base for the kind of niche tourism we have imagined.

«Urkesh gate, for local development»

In order to start, a place was located for them to meet and carry on different activities. Thus, two one room mud brick houses were chosen, constructed according to the traditional architecture of the region, located not far from the archaeological site but easily accessible from the villages. Above the entrance, a sign gives the name "Urkesh gate, for local development": a beautiful title, chosen by them, for our project.

The atelier took off with the participation of thirty women from Kurdish and Arabic villages near the site: specialists from Damascus taught the women different techniques for making sweaters, embroidery and sewing. The group from Damascus provided the materials that they



Dolls produced by the first group of the women's atelier



The new group of women at work

needed such as the fabric and wool, books and journals from which they can be inspired and extract patterns. Thanks to this activity, the women could start to sell their products in the local market.

As soon as the atelier was launched, the women decorated the room in which they were working, by placing photographs on the walls as if it were a small museum, and a plaque on the wall that gave credit to those who



contributed to the project.

## The power of women

With time passing, and without the active presence of the Damascus group, the women continued with discipline and team spirit: they organized turns for their meetings, so that the women of the Kurdish and Arabic villages could continue to meet to work together and share their knowledge of the craft. Their collaboration in a multicultural context brought them to produce valuable objects, that reflect the multicultural past of Syria. These same beautiful objects, produced in a difficult moment, constitute the major proof of the strong Syrian will to survive and collaborate.

The project had to face various difficulties resulting from the conflict in Syria. Besides the fact that it was impossible for the Damascus team to return to the site and provide materials, there was also the difficulty on the women's part to purchase locally what they needed. At the end, some of the women from the initial group left the villages together with their families. Even the two buildings chosen originally, were no longer available.

In this new situation, it became even more important to demonstrate our closeness to the women and to find a way to help them morally and financially, in order to not lose the results that we obtained thus far. Therefore, in October of 2016, we decided to start a school near the village of Um al Rabia, where women aged between 19 and 35 could meet to continue and give a new face to the "Urkesh gate" project. The teacher was Amira, one of the women from the original group. We offered them the materials and a building where the women could meet, and in less than five weeks, they were able to create a new catalog of objects.

*"The young ones usually have difficulties and they don't know how to get out of them because of the difficult financial situation in which they live. For this reason, they are very anxious to learn, to be able to ameliorate their conditions"* (Amira, October 2016).

The acquired competence by the women from the school, permitted the women to plan their production as a team, and to ameliorate the possibility to sell the objects in the local markets. *"The girls learn quickly, and they are impatient to finish their work to learn another new technique, as soon as possible... therefore we are thinking about widening our market to reach the nearby villages. One of the ways to achieve that is through a roaming merchant. We have*

*offered him a percentage on the objects that he manages to sell. This way, we can distribute our objects in other villages and widen our market"* (Amira, October 2016).

## A mirror for a future Syria

The atelier that was conceived inside the broader frame of the eco-archaeological park, was initially a portion of a larger whole. However, it proved to be big enough to unite women from different ethnic groups who worked and still work together, having created a team spirit among themselves and having developed a sense of belonging to the archaeological site located near them. This situation mirrors the past, as it was planned originally. The result that was not planned, was the fact that the atelier would become a mirror for a future Syria, in a present that today seems cloudy.

## Bringing Urkesh to every village

As it has been impossible to create formally ("from above") the eco-archaeological park, we are seeking to develop ("from below") a local sensitivity for the factors that motivated the park initiative. The idea was suggested by Ristom Abdo during a meeting in Beirut in November 2017. We supported it with enthusiasm, and Ristom himself engaged in carrying it forward together with another collaborator from Qamishli, Amer Ahmad.

Their reports testify to their extraordinary involvement on the one hand, and on the other to the effect that their visits had on the population. They gathered the inhabitants of each village in a private home made available for the purpose, or in the local school. And they talked to them about the history of Urkesh, of the things that were discovered there, and of the expedition's work during the years of Syrian crisis, to protect the ancient city and preserve it for the generations to come. They brought to light the importance of archaeology, and of Urkesh in particular, for their social identity, and highlighted the importance of protecting the landscape and the local traditions – a precious heritage that will contribute to the rebirth of the entire area at the end of the war.

## A touching response

The initiative, and the results that derived from it, are a proof and a validation of the work we did in all these years. The photos in the two following pages show the settings in which these presentations took place. They are not the large halls we are used to for our conferences. But what a human richness flows from these photos! We touch the richness of the commitment of our new colleagues, willing to take the challenge to reach and touch everyone, the richness of the response that we perceive from the attention which is visible on the faces of the participants.

Urkesh is touching the life of the people who live near it, and they are responding in an extremely positive way to the campaign that aims to raise the awareness of those who live in all the region, about the importance of preserving the natural landscape and protecting the land and the ancient monuments that it hosts.

Clearly, this is not a fertile ground for the ugly propaganda of perverted ideologies to which we became sadly used by looking at the hammering reports in the media of these recent times.

## The awareness campaigns in the villages

By Ristom Abdo

The war raging in Syria from 2011 cast its shadows on the human heritage of the country, and many of its archaeological sites and world heritage sites were a victim

of the conflict on the Syrian land, because of the chaos, the lack of supervision and law and spread of the army.

During this crisis, the number of violations against archaeological sites increased, so we had to work to spread the culture of archaeological awareness among the people, especially the inhabitants of villages and small cities, and involve them in the process of protecting the archaeological sites. They are in fact the most capable and efficient power that could intervene in these circumstances, because they are the closest and have the right to resist all violations and defend the sites that constitute an essential part of their past and present.

Consequently, we had the idea to give presentations aiming at raising the awareness about the past and archaeology. We wanted the land around Urkesh to be the focal point of this initiative, because of its richness in sites that testify to an ancient civilization dating back to thousands of years.

With a group of specialists, we started this work that lasted for 2 months (April and May 2018). We visited 21 villages around Tell Mozan. We held one or two lectures each week, in which we addressed briefly the history of sites in the upper Khabur area, and we talked about the importance of Urkesh describing its main phases of settlement, the most important discoveries and the role of the archaeological expedition. So, we concentrated on the importance of protecting and preserving these monuments, combining into one our various efforts..

These presentations were aimed at all the people of the



Amer Ahmad in a school during the awareness campaign in the villages



Men and women of all ages, together with many children, participating in the awareness campaign in the different villages





The places that were made available in the villages for the campaign were both private houses (left and p. 66) and schools (right and p. 65)

village, without exceptions: men, women, children and senior people. The number of participants was different from village to village, also based on the density of the population and the preparations that were made before our lectures. In some cases, there were not many people attending, because of the lack of the element of awareness in that specific area, besides the pressures of the difficult conditions of life imposed by war, the lack of stability in the area, the financial difficulties of those who live there and the fear of the unknown.

But despite all of this, we managed to deliver our message to the people, of all ages, who participated. After each session, many expressed their happiness to have received this information about their past, and demonstrated a great interest to participate to the maximum in the protection of their archaeological sites.





On the road in the surroundings of Urkesh to reach the inhabitants of each village



# Urkish speaks Syrian

## The exhibits

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*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 exhibits represent a version of that "star" that the traveler of our poem tries to grasp.*

*A fixed point in which we recognize ourselves.*

*In these years, exhibits were an important vehicle through which we conveyed our message, as we produced them on a yearly basis, in Syria and abroad.*



## Why the exhibits

### A particular frame

Exhibits offer a special perspective and, with the indispensable participation of our colleagues in Qamishli, we were able to set up three exhibits in that city. In addition to the ones in Qamishli, there were others in Mozan itself, in Damascus, in Rimini, in Beirut, in Leiden, for a total of eight. All in preparation for this ninth and lastest exhibit at the 39th Rimini Meeting in August 2018, which was then in turn translated into Arabic and brought to Damascus.

The exhibits in Qamishli allowed us to open a new window for the local people, especially because the city can easily be reached by the different communities who live in the region. In fact, exhibits represent an exceptional vehicle to respond to the public's curiosity and stimulate a new sensibility.

Each exhibit is an event. This means that it is something that takes place. Limited in time and with a staging that has been well thought out (no matter how modest the event can be), an exhibit focuses on a specific argument, addressing the entire community and aiming to involve all of its members in an active cooperation. Ideally, the exhibits speak not only to those who already know their content, and who visit them to deepen a previous knowledge, but they also aim to address the amateurs, the unexpected visitors and even the guests in a hurry.

When an image or a segment of an exhibit remains in the memory of a visitor, together with the meaning that this image or segment conveys, then we can say that the event has reached its goal.

### A series of exhibits

Clearly, our experience with exhibits has a long history: it dates back to about ten years ago and it has taken different shapes. We produced exhibits that had an intimate tone, as well as larger ones, reaching tens of thousands of visitors, in Europe and in the Near East, in four different languages. We were in

- Syria: in Damascus (2010–2011, 2018), Mozan (2012), Qamishli, Amuda and other centers of the Syrian Jazirah (2015; 2018)
- Italy: in Rimini (2014; 2016; 2018) and Domodossola (2015; 2018)
- Lebanon: in Beirut (2017)
- Netherlands: in Leiden (2018)

These events have all been different, and they are illustrated briefly here.

### The social impact

The success of these exhibits is indicative of their impact. In all cases, we were asked to produce them, and the request came from different sources. The ways in which they have been produced have been different, as well. The participation of the public was generally high. It should be noted that in several cases this happened in Syria, in a war context, where initiatives of this sort would have seemed unthinkable. It is true that Qamishli and its region were spared from bombing, but they were never far from it, and in any case for no other archaeological site in Syria, even for those spared from bombing, was a similar initiative ever envisaged by the archaeologists.

This means that, when the possibility is offered, it is welcomed with a strong sense of support and enthusiasm. There is a recreational factor that brings people to visit an exhibit. But in our case there is an even stronger sense of



The 2010 exhibit set-up in the residence of the American ambassador in Damascus



The Syrian flag next to the American one, on the occasion of the 2011 exhibit

A simple exhibit set up in 2012 near the site of Urkesh, in a modest room with a hard packed dirt floor

fulfillment in feeling exposed to values that speak one's own language. For this reason we say that the exhibits "speak Syrian": they offer a mutual understanding that brings us together – something that we experienced in particular on the occasion of the last exhibit in Qamishli, which affected communities that do not otherwise have many occasions to meet. The archaeology of Urkesh effectively provided the people of the area an opportunity to gather around an ideal which is profound and shared because it does not belong to anyone, exclusively giving them the opportunity to maintain and strengthen their loyalty to the land.

## The exhibit of the two flags

Conceived and organized upon the request of the American embassy in Damascus, the exhibit *In Tune with the Past. The Discovery of a New Ancient Syrian Civilization* was first set up in the residence of the US ambassador for the national holiday of the United States on the 4th of July 2010, and then in the following year it was displayed in the Damascus National Museum, from the 1st to the 11th of March 2011: it was the last event to witness the two flags, Syrian and American, being shown side by side.



## The smallest, yet the biggest exhibit

Here is one of the most valuable and meaningful exhibits: a small room near the site of Urkesh, with simple photos chosen by the locals and exclusively for them. A pavement of hard packed dirt, plain white-washed walls, photos of small dimension. What else can we desire to demonstrate the pride in one's own past?

This was the exhibit setup in 2012 as a component of the "Park" project.

## "From the Depth of Time" at the Rimini Meeting

In 2014, we had our first experience of the Rimini Meeting, with an exhibit entitled *From the Depth of Time: Communication and Community in Ancient Syria*. The main question that we faced on that occasion was: what is the material link that maintains the human communities united? In search of an answer, we analyzed and described three periods of human development, defined respectively by perception, language and writing. These three moments were displayed through the results of the excavation at Urkesh, with the addition of a reference to the Paleolithic period of the Dmanisi excavations in the Republic of Georgia.

The story of human civilization was represented through various passages of the history of communication from before the beginning of articulate language (in particular the group attested in Dmanisi), through the beginning of city life (as evidenced at Urkesh) all the way to the Syria of today.

In this context, we proposed a reflection on the importance of archaeology as a constructive discipline for national unity in contemporary Syria.

The catalog has been translated into Arabic, and both the Italian and the Arabic version are available online at [avasa.it/publications](http://avasa.it/publications).

## "From the Depth of Time" in Qamishli

On the occasion of the 2014 exhibit in Rimini, we held a conference with guests joining us from Syria: our goal was, in the middle of the war that was ravaging the country, to speak about hope for peace, and especially of the positive role that archaeology can have, not only for the safeguarding of cultural heritage and the country, but also in building a future of peace.

After participating in one of these conferences, spur-



The exhibit at the Rimini Meeting in 2014 (above) and the round table organized with the Syrian colleagues (below)



Catalog of the Rimini Meeting Exhibit in 2014, available in Italian and in Arabic (available online at [avasa.it/publications](http://avasa.it/publications))

red by the experience lived in Rimini, Dr. Suleiman Elias from Qamishli, proposed to bring a simpler version of the exhibit, in Kurdish and in Arabic, to his city and various other cultural centers around it.

Thus, between the end of 2014 and 2015, this simpler version of the exhibit presented at the Meeting "toured" in different Syrian cities, among which "the center for the revival of the civil society" in Amuda – simpler, and yet, in its simplicity, perhaps even richer in meaning.

## A twinning of archaeological sites

Before the outbreak of the war in 2010, Dr. Suleiman Elias directed an excavation at the site of Tell Sha'ir, an important site east of Qamishli. Empowered by the experience in Rimini, and spurred by the success of the first exhibit that he had produced, he organized a new event aimed at involving the local community in an area other than Mozan.

Thus, with our support, in 2016 Dr. Elias set up a new exhibit in Qamishli, on his excavations at Tell Sha'ir. At the height of the Syria conflict, the success of this initiative may indeed be considered as a small miracle.



The set-up of the Urkesh exhibit in Beirut, November 2017

The energy of our Syrian collaborators has allowed the organization of an exhibit on Urkesh in various cities and villages in Syria between 2014 and 2015

## "The young future" in Beirut

In November of 2017, we organized an exhibit in Beirut entitled *Archaeology for a Young Future*, meant to serve as a "preview" of the exhibit in Rimini in 2018. It was especially significant for us to be so close to Syria, and to be the guests of the American University of Beirut,



and in particular of Dr. Leila Badre, the director of the archaeological museum of the University.

Also very important was the contribution of UNESCO in this exhibit. We are very grateful to Cristina Menegazzi, the UNESCO project officer for Syria, for having made possible the participation of nine Syrian colleagues, who came from Damascus and Qamishli. The exhibit was conceived and proposed by Hannibal Saad, of the Music and Beyond foundation, within the context of the Syrian Music Festival that he created. Without him, this Lebanese anticipation of the Rimini exhibit of 2018 would not have been possible.

We wanted this exhibit to embody a very specific message, indicating how our abiding and strong moral presence stands in contrast with our physical absence and the interruption of excavations, caused by the war. And in this, we wanted especially to give hope to the younger generation. The organization of this event represented a significant moment, because it showed what power archaeology can have in bringing together very different people, who share the same goal with the same determination.

This was particularly evident on the occasion of the round table organized for the exhibit's inauguration, which saw the participation of members of the American University in Beirut and of UNESCO, the directors of the project from the University of California Los Angeles, the General Director and two department directors from the Directorate General of Antiquity and Museum in Sy-



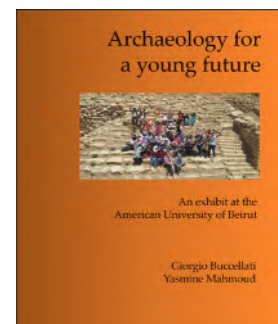
One moment of the round table in Beirut

ria who joined us from Damascus, our colleagues from Qamishli, students from Damascus and members of the religious and cultural Syrian community.

For this occasion, we also published a catalog in English. It was, just like the exhibit, an anticipation of this catalog (and it is also available online at [avasa.it/publications](http://avasa.it/publications)). Even if modest in form, it still has a special significance, because it was printed in Damascus. The catalog itself is part of the "young future" described in the exhibit: we have named the "publishing house" behind it the Urkesh Press, an enterprise set up in function of the "park" project, for which we plan to have in the future a small printing and binding establishment in Mozan village, next to a room dedicated to the history of writing at Urkesh and in Syro-Mesopotamia.

## "The young future" in Qamishli

The exhibit in Beirut was not only an anticipation of the exhibit at the Rimini Meeting in 2018. It generated, just like the one at the Rimini Meeting of 2014, its own "daughter" near Urkesh itself. On the 25th of April 2018 the Syrian version of *Archaeology for a*



Catalog of the Beirut exhibit (available online at [avasa.it/publications](http://avasa.it/publications))



Urkes exhibit organized in Qamishli in April 2018. The panels were written in English, but on the red pages a translation in Arabic and Kurdish was also offered.



Father Antranig Ayvazian visiting the exhibit



Ristom Abdo explaining one of the panels of the Qamishli exhibit to two visitors

*Young Future* was officially inaugurated in Qamishli.

It was organized thanks to the efforts of two of our local collaborators, Amer Ahmad and Ristom Abdo. It was also meant to demonstrate the role played by archaeology in fostering a sense of pride in a shared past and a shared territory, showing how values rooted in the past can help overcome the violence of the present, looking at the future with renewed hope.

The Syrian local communities played a major role. On the one hand, these communities are a focal point of the descriptive texts of the panels, which show how men, women and youngsters all concur in a strong sense of responsibility towards the site. On the other, members of these communities came in large numbers to the inauguration and then to visit it, an exceptional result considering the conditions of their daily life in the harsh conditions of a wartime situation.

Our desire to communicate the content of the panels to the largest possible audience is proven also by the fact that all panels, originally written in English, were translated into both Arabic and Kurdish. At the entrance of the hall, there were also leaflets in Arabic and Kurdish which were distributed to the visitors, for them to bring home. In this way, the message born from an ancient and seemingly remote city, known only from excavations, has been diffused to all the

communities of the surrounding area.

## Reflections By Amer Ahmad

Showing the panels of the exhibit in Qamishli was a good idea. I was very enthusiastic from the beginning, despite the fear that I felt sometimes, because I thought that the crisis we are going through and the difficult living conditions of people could have prevented them from participating in this event. But this fear did not stop me from trying to convey the ideas of the exhibit to the Syrian city closest to Tell Mozan. I tried to reach this goal at the lowest cost. I have relied on young people because they are the ones who are most directly involved in this exhibit. Therefore, I decided to invite archaeology students from the University of Al-Furat, from the city of al-Hasakah, in addition to the universities and institutes recently established in Qamishli, after the crisis. I also worked with other people.

The organization began a week before the inauguration of the exhibit, which was to take place on 25 and 26 April 2018 in the youth center of Qamishli.

I helped the carpenter in the process of preparing the



Mohammed Omo, the guard at Mozan, being interviewed for a local TV program at the exhibit's inauguration

wooden beams that were used to fix the background fabric on the wall. I also gave the photos and a brief introduction about the goals of the exhibit to a graphic designer, explaining to him that he should focus on the images of the young students in particular. The day before the inauguration date, the carpenter and I stayed up late in the hall to complete the exhibit. I was afraid it would be a failure, for the reasons I mentioned earlier. I constantly asked the carpenter: do you think this set-up is good? And do you think I will succeed in this task? He told me that everything was going well, but I thought he said it just to comfort me.

Actually, the next day I was very surprised to see the number of students waiting for the exhibit to open. They were very excited to see the panels, and I was happy to see them. But what surprised me most was the presence of Father Antranig, the head of the Armenian community in Qamishli. His participation in the inauguration was what made me feel that I had managed to reach the most important goal of this exhibit that it should be inclusive of all local communities. I am very grateful to him for accepting the invitation.

The first day was particularly impressive. We registered a number of attendances of 500 people, mostly students. At that point I felt reassured that I had fulfilled my assignment in the best way I could, but I waited to see what would happen on the second day, which I considered equally important. About 400 people attended the second day, including 50 students from the Department of

Archaeology of the University of Al-Furat. On both days, while explaining the panels to the students, I felt very good. I noticed a great deal of interest from the students, and some of them, who had not yet been able to visit Tell Mozan, insisted that a visit to the site be organized as soon as possible. Many students were Kurds, so they were happy to see the panels translated into Kurdish and Arabic.

I am very grateful to the members of the archaeological project of Urkesh, for their constant interest in the site and for giving me the opportunity to hold the exhibit in Qamishli, and for providing me with the best possible images of the expedition's work in Urkesh, showing maintenance work, exhibit and workshops held on the site. All this proves to the world that Urkesh is still alive, despite all the difficulties.

Finally, I would like to thank the archaeologist Montaser Qassem, for his irreplaceable role in the process of documenting the exhibit with images and videos, and Dr. Suleiman Elias, who assisted me in the process of explaining the panels to the students, especially while I was busy presenting to other groups the activities related to the exhibit.



# Archaeology for a young future

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**Educating 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 history that archaeology helps reveal sheds light on the past, contributes to our understanding of the present, and illuminates the future.*

*The last stop of our path is, in some way, the first.*

*Because everything should start from the children and youngsters who will invent the future of tomorrow.*

*This last stop of the path illustrates our commitment to education, at the roots of society.*

## At the roots of tomorrow

History, as Cicero teaches us, is "testament of time, light of the truth, life of the memory, master of life, interpreter of the past" (*Historia verso testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis* – De Oratore II.IX.36).

The earth, which as archaeologists we know well, is a great matrix of history. The more into its depth we go, the more we find fragments of an ancient history, alive in its ancient rediscovered life, still alive today through its impact on our very lives. This is what the exhibit is bringing back to life.

History and archaeology, when they are not communicated, internalized, valued, lose their formative value. For this reason, in these past years, we have been launching a series of broad range activities aiming to reach the children and youngsters of the region around Tell Mozan.

Our goal is not just to narrate to them the historic events that led to the flourishing of the Hurrians and of their capital Urkesh; above all, we want to "accompany" them, through the process of this discovery, towards the acquisition of a new consciousness of the value of the past for the present, to help them build their future.

## The youngest ones

One of the fundamental teachings of archaeology is the sense of continuity. Continuity of our social identity, of the space in which we live, of the traditions in which we are rooted.

These children are too young to have visited us on the excavation before the war. But in the meanwhile, here is a storyteller who went to Mozan to narrate to them the fascinating story of Urkesh.

A future not just young, but very young! The children

A storyteller who narrates the story of Urkesh to the children (2012)



The young school children of Mozan (2012)



must be the first to absorb the values of the past that we bring back to life. And we should learn how to listen to them. With awe and joy. Just as they, for their part, raise and open their arms, to welcome us in their world...

These are scenes from the trip of the work group for "the development of local society" who visited Mozan from Damascus in 2012.

## The "school" project...

Three schools in two small cities in Syria and Italy.

Two groups of children of the same age, with the same enthusiasm even though they have extremely different sensibility and habits.

The first, students of two schools near the city of Qa-



Two moments of the face-to-face Skype meeting between the students in Qamishli (live from their classroom) and their peers in Domodossola in Italy, on the laptop screen (June 2018)



Students involved in the school project: the students of the English school "New Horizon" in Qamishli during the teleconference by Profs. Buccellati (February 2018)



Profs. Buccellati's lesson in the middle school of Domodossola (October 2017)

mishli, are anxious to widen their horizons.

The second, students of a middle school in Domodossola, discovering what it means living at their age in a country at war.

These children started to reflect.

What is the past? Why should we study it? What are the traditions that link them to the previous generations? They are reflecting, and writing. They are exchanging their thoughts. They met and spoke through photos and two Skype meetings. In these pages you can see the images of some essays written by the Syrian and Italian children in these first months of work. And observe their faces, their bright eyes, read their words.

The profoundness that they demonstrate despite their young age is genuinely impressive and moving. And this is only the beginning...

## Seen from Italy by Enzo Sartori

The idea of proposing a project of international scope in a middle school in Val d'Ossola – what is more, a project that had archaeology as its focus –, may seem strange. We were in June 2017 and the G. Floreanini Middle School of Domodossola, with the principal Prof. Chiara Varesi and all the faculty, accepted with great interest this proposal, even though it went beyond the normal school planning. The project was carried out from autumn 2017 throughout the entire school year 2017/2018, in several stages. Seizing the availability of Profs. Buccellati, during their stay in Ossola, the school immediately experienced, in October, an unforgettable day with two conferences: one dedicated to the first and second grades, and one for the "adults" of the third. Our school, which is a musical school, has a large auditorium, often used for children's concerts. For the occasion, this space became a center where young students were told of distant civilizations, of a necromantic shaft, of seals and stairways of a temple.

### The children's response

We were amazed by the tangible attention and interest that archeology can still elicit, even today, amongst the very young (11-13 years): it revives in them the idea of adventure, of treasures to be found, of objects of inesti-

mable value and mysterious tombs. In part, this vision is probably due to the fame of films like Indiana Jones, but I also believe in the immutable charm that Ancient History radiates, although this discipline has been, quite questionably, removed from the school program of lower elementary schools. Certainly, the vision of the Buccellatis' is far from this model, and the boys and girls have thus been able to think about the value and dignity of each single find, from a fragment of pottery to the very fragile seals, thin threads capable of bringing the youngsters back to an almost incomprehensible time, far, but alive. The greatest emotion, for many students, was to imagine the ancient faces conveyed by the figurines, or by the reconstructions of scenes of the seals, that were projected in the room. Faces of a cook, a musician, a butcher. Men who had desires, impulses, who sang and ran just like them.

From this first meeting, which ended with the archaeologists being overwhelmed by questions from the students – and with a lot of "super selfies" – we moved on to a second, more active phase. One month later, a group of classes, two seconds and a third, representing the entire school, had a new meeting, with Marilyn and Giorgio: we were in the school library, and the more intimate environment was favorable to a more dynamic exchange. There were things to see and touch: this time contemporary objects, just arrived from Syria – handicrafts made by the women of Tell Mozan, and a model of the covering of a wall in the Urkesh site. I especially remember a detail: a cloth still impregnated with earth, with dust from the site. By shaking it up a little, so much was left on the desk that the kids collected and kept it in a small plastic cup until the end of the year. Even that dust had a value: it had a different color from the Ossola soil, very fine grain and a new smell. The artifacts were much liked: both for the colors and for the power to approach an ideally distant reality; some were then used in December to create the nativity scene which the school prepares at its entrance each Christmas.

### The exchange of essays

From this second meeting, the last one before the departure of our archaeologist friends for the USA, the students began a phase of the project which was more introspective and complex to assimilate.

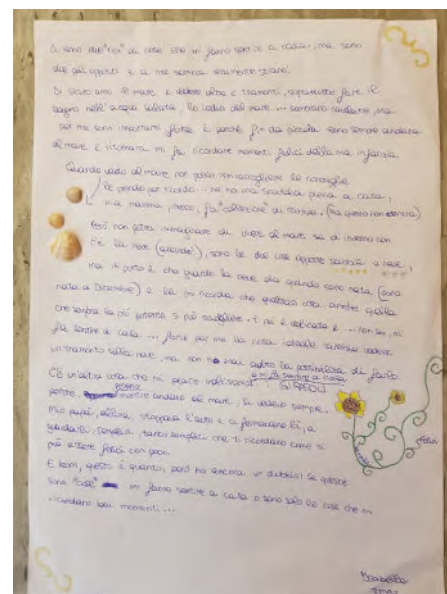
The fascinating proposal was to write to their peers around Mozan. Well, about what? About trying to find

within themselves those links with the artistic and natural landscape, which made them feel "at home". A subtle argument, which required from each a moment of reflection upon his or her own personal and community history. In my opinion, this was the moment of greatest difficulty encountered by the classes, above all by the eighth grade. The subject was a personal reflection, certainly, but the effort to reason starting from unusual thoughts, to discover something of oneself, is a rare exercise today – and for this very reason it is interesting and should be strengthened.

I thought of this phase as of a sort of inner archaeological excavation, in which, among the many superficial thoughts that surround us every day – even rightly –, it was necessary to organize the ideas and try to get to know each other better. What makes me feel at home? What aspects of the landscape, natural and man-made, I would not be able to give up because I consider it as a silent but constant part of my own being? These are big questions for preteens.

For some of them it was easier to focus and recognize a connection between everyday events and what they see and experience from the outside: bell towers, woods, blue skies, rain, music, dialects ... The same mountains, with clear and woody profiles around Domodossola, create contrasting feelings in each one: curiosity to know them better, indifference, security, oppression. For other students, the path was more tortuous and unsettling, it brought out fears or feelings of emptiness, it made them recognize that they never thought about their own roots, with the effort to get out of a blind "daily superficiality," made up of mostly self-referential thoughts (cell phone, clothes, friends), or even made them realize that sometimes they feel alone, with no connection whatsoever with what surrounds them - a sort of invisible outline that they don't know how to unravel and confront. However, these thoughts have flowed into splendid letters that all the children have written and animated with photos, personal stories, that they then addressed to Syria. Finally, it was great to see these texts translated into Arabic, and then to receive the answers.

Syria in Domodossola



Examples of the essays written by the students in Domodossola

And here we added another face: that of Yasmine Mahmoud, archaeologist and doctoral student, who came from Damascus. Hers is an intense face, that unintentionally narrates the beauty and nobility of her people. The children got to know her and Stefania

Ermidoro, Director of AVASA, with Rodolfo Signorini, its secretary.

It was already spring. Yasmine had translated many letters from the Syrian children, and spoke firsthand about her experience as a scholar and a Syrian. The different questions on political issues and on the conflict were so complex and confusing. It was another rare moment through which the students were faced with different points of view, outside the media perspective and independently of mass information. The clearest memory? Yasmine having showed us a stone that her boyfriend, in the military, had given her. A gem? No, a stone from the Euphrates. Thus, we came to think about our river in Ossola, our Toce which flows by mixing the waters of the streams of the seven valleys. From each of these valleys, the river brings stones and pebbles with different shapes, that narrates different tales and stories. How much dignity and value can one river stone really have!

#### Face to face

One last step of the project was waiting to be developed: the preparation of the meeting, via Skype, with students from the surroundings of Mozan. A real small challenge, from preparing the connection, setting the timetables of the various classes, preparing the students to hold an interview on the subject in English, if possible. Each class worked with their teachers, studying different topics: a presentation of our school, instruments played by the kids of the musical class, hobbies, traditional foods, links with the territory, etc. Only at the end of May and beginning of June we managed to connect through the Internet. It was really exciting and a heartfelt moment for all the students, to see the faces of their Syrian peers appear on the LIM of the computer room. The first attempt failed due to an audio problem. We could see and write but not hear each other. A contact, however, positive and gestural: how many things in common between these kids! A second meeting was better from a technical point of view, and allowed us to talk to each other live. However, understandably the emotions dominated this circumstance, and the texts which we had prepared in English were difficult to sustain in a real conversation. Yet, from the simple self-presentations among the students of Italy and Syria, to a live performance

with the guitar or the clarinet, to the final laughter and applause, a sympathy was born, along with the desire to be able to meet in person one day.

## Seen from Syria

### By Amer Ahmad

The "grandchildren of Tupkish"

The Urkesh Archaeological Project did not want this ancient city to be only a city under the dust that needs someone to unveil it, but they wanted it to be a city that tells stories about the ancestors to the present generations. They wanted it to link our past with our present and future. They are interested in the smallest details, which are very important. This city is one of the largest and oldest cities in Syria and the world and it is located in a multi-ethnic region.

Sadly, Syria has witnessed the devastation of many other sites. In contrast, Urkesh is showing today to the whole world how much its sons love it and how attached they are to the heritage of their ancestors. They are the grandsons of Tupkish, who was once the protector of his city, despite all the greed around him, just like in these days where the destruction around Urkesh is everywhere. That's why its people are proud of it as it is proud of them.

#### A noble mission

All this led us to exchanging ideas between young Syrian students and young Italian students who are far from everything that happens in Syria. This idea of communication between these students is the first of its kind in Syria. I have never heard of such thing before.

At the beginning it was a very difficult task because I had to look for students who speak English. Then I had to see if circumstances allow this project to continue. The difficult task was, how can I convince the people of our noble mission? I had to go to the houses or schools and tell them about our project. The second obstacle was to stimulate these students about this project. I visited several language learning centers and schools.

Some of them refused to participate, but I noticed a great interest from both Al-Salam School and New Horizon Center in Qamishli. They agreed to participate gladly.



I met the students, and they were enthusiastic despite the fear that some of them had. I met them several times and explained to them the idea. These students are still young and they had never communicated with anyone outside their country.

### The confrontation

Some of them were not knowledgeable about Italian civilization, and others spoke about the glory of Rome which they might have seen in a movie. Some of them thought that their country is less important than Italy from the historical point of view.

They didn't know that their Urkesh city is as important as any site in the world. They didn't realize the depth of the relationship between their past and the present, or they were unable to express it. What they acquired of customs and traditions they learned it instinctively, and all these customs and cultures need to grow. This is what the Urkesh Archaeological Project is doing. Many traditions have been inherited to this day, and this is an evidence of the continuity in preserving the ancestor's legacy and the strengthening of pride in the homeland, which results in a strong solidarity among the people of one nation.

The project entailed sending handwritten letters expressing their ideas. I didn't influence them and never intervened with what they wrote. We also visited Tell Mozan to acquaint them with their great past. In addition, we had a meeting with the Italian students via Skype, and the students were very excited about the meetings especially the second one. When one of the Italian students played his guitar it was a great moment, and it made them very happy, because some of them play musical instruments. They even wanted to further develop the relationship with Italians, so they could play music together and give an idea of their musical heritage.

Finally, I would like to thank New Horizon Center for their help in this mission...



Examples of the essays written by the students in Qamishli

## "What is it that makes me feel at home?"

This is the argument proposed as an initial topic by Enzo Sartori for the students. It turned out to be a great instrument to get closer to the main question, the one on the value of the past in general and archaeology in particu-

lar. Here we present two essays for each group (you can find more essays on the website [www.avasa.it/en](http://www.avasa.it/en)).

*David (Domodossola, 13 years old)*

*What makes me feel at home? It is surely the dialect of my grandparents, precisely the dialect of Val Formazza, in short, who never heard from their grandparents at least one sentence in dialect? I think no one. Maybe when your grandparents speak to you suddenly in a strange dialect and you don't understand anything and you just nod your head.*

*The only regret I have is that the dialect is not in common use as it used to be and that young people today do not know it (myself included); because it would be nice to remove some words used by us youngsters and use expressions that remind us of the dialects of our grandparents, I also think that it will be a good way to tell where we come from.*

*Isabella (Domodossola, 13 years old)*

*There are two "types" of things that make me feel at home, but they are two opposite poles and to me it seems really strange!*

*Certainly, I love the sea and to see the dawn and sunset there, and especially to swim in the salty water (...) ever since I was little, I always went to the sea and when I return there, I remember happy moments from my childhood. (...) but I can't imagine living by the sea if in the winter there is no snow (absurd!), these are the opposite things, sand and snow (...)*

*There is another thing that I like very much and makes me feel at home: the sunflower, because going to the sea I see them all the time. My father, would stop the car and we would watch them, a simple, very simple thing that reminds us how we can be happy with so little (...)*

*But I still have a doubt: if these are "things" that make me feel at home or if they are things that remind me of beautiful moments (...)*

*Diana (Qamishli)*

*My name is Diana Huseein Khalil, and I go to "Zaki Arsouzi" school in Qamishli. I live in Qamishli, but I am from Habbo village where my grandparents live.*

*I love my family and I can never live far away from them because I will miss them too much. I feel that I belong to my family, just like I belong to my country; the culture, friendship and the shared memories are what keeps' us united. (...)*

*In my village there is a Tell, and my father says that the archaeologists, Syrian and international, want to excavate it. And in our region, there are many*

*archaeological sites like Tell Beydar, Tell Mozan, Tell Halaf and Tell Leilan. My father says that there is a Tell in almost every village in this area, and that this is a sign of a great civilization that prospered in this area thousands of years ago. This makes my area very important from the historical point of view, even if at this moment it does not seem like this from the landscape point of view. (...)*

*Soline (Qamishli)*

*My name is Soline Abdel Baset Aso, and I'm 14 years old. I live in Qamishli but my village is called Sofia. I live with my mom, dad, one brother and one sister. My small family means a lot to me, and we stay united together in these difficult times. (...) I think it is important to maintain the tradition that expresses our authenticity and identity. And I am very proud when I learn about the innovations of our ancestors, and their cultural level, both in agriculture and handicraft: they were very advanced. (...) in my region we still make some things the way they used to in the past: for example, knitting, creating dolls, carpets and embroidery. We also celebrate Nowruz. (...)*

*I believe that my region is very beautiful and full of archaeological monuments. And my village is very close to these sites. Every archaeological site in my country has a special place in my heart. This is the only way we can learn more about our history, to be able to progress...*

## The research project

The sherds

Our commitment to research is stronger than ever, despite the war and the distance. And there are 65,000 documents to demonstrate it, which is the number of sherds analyzed by our local ceramic expert: Hammade.

These fragments narrate the history of the land in which they remained buried for a long time. They help to complete our database and contribute to understand better the complete framework of the site.

We have an intense publication program that we carry forward from our workplaces in the United States and in Europe.

But what we want to show is how our research is based on the work that is carried out today, actively and constantly, in Urkesh itself.

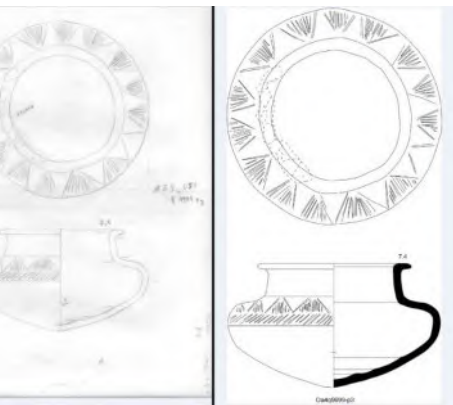
It is as if we have one global campus, in which Mozan



Hammade working on the ceramics during an excavation season



Ceramic fragment with a bird representation (ca. 1400 B. C.)



Drawing of ceramics found in Urkesh, with scan done in Mozan during war

is perfectly integrated with Damascus, Los Angeles, Milan, Berlin, Paris or Copenhagen.

It is a research community that resists the war and the distance.

### A human time machine

We introduce to you Hammade, the man who has been responsible for the analysis of sherds in the last seven years.

His work begins by organizing the ceramic bags based on the excavation unit from where they come. Then, Hammade analyses each fragment according to a complex series of codes, through which he identifies the form and the production material. Hammade inserts this information by hand on a detailed log that is then digitized and sent via internet, in order to be inserted in the central database on the server in Los Angeles (see above p.43).

In the following phase, photos are taken of the special objects, such as the beautiful fragment with a representation of a bird, here to the left.

We also have hundreds of drawings of objects and ceramics that have been discovered in the course of the archaeological campaigns of previous years.

These were scanned and then sent during the last seven years. Many of them were also digitized in vector format by Kamiran Beg and Amer Ahmad.

### Monitoring

The conservation program of walls is monitored regularly, and photographically documented in an exemplary manner. In the past seven years, we received more than 12,000 photographs: internet and digital photographs are the highest technology level that we use...

The photos on p.91 illustrate how we document one of the palace walls. This monitoring system dates back to 2001, when we started it following a trip to Mozan by Neville Agnew and Martha Demas of the Getty Conservation Institute. Here we give the complete series of photos of one single wall, to demonstrate how the methodological system was never interrupted even during the years of war.

The same approach was used to monitor the level of temperature and humidity which are registered by hand twice a day, by one of our assistants in Mozan, Ibrahim



2001



2002



2004



2005



2006



2007



2008



2009



2010



2011



2012



2013



2015



2016



2017



2018

The annual monitoring for the conservation state of the palace walls represents a unique document, and has been carried out regularly even during the war, in the last seven years. This is wall C5-5 of the palace. The documentation was not taken only in 2003 and 2014. We received the photo of 2018 just in time for printing. See [urkesh.org/wall-conservation](http://urkesh.org/wall-conservation).

Khello.

The data are then inserted in a computer, sent to us via the internet, and saved on the Los Angeles server (see on the next page).

These simple methods permitted an uninterrupted continuity of the project throughout the years of the war.

## The University project

Urkesh seminars

Having gained a long experience over the years working in the field with the expedition, in October of 2016 Hammade was able to conduct a workshop on ceramic analysis for archaeology students at Qamishli University. The young generations of the region are learning,

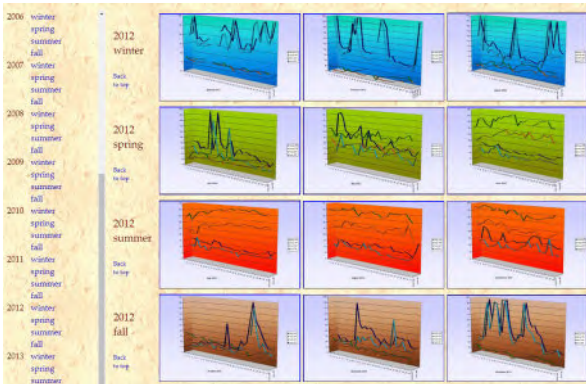
**Temperature and humidity: full record**

Date	Temp	Humidity	Wind	Cloud	Notes
2007/01/24 1300/2200	17.1	3.6	27	36	Dry
2007/01/25 1300/2200	18.7	3.5	28	35	Dry
2007/01/26 1300/2200	18.3	6.3	33	48	Dry
2007/01/27 1300/2200	17.1	3.8	32	38	Dry
2007/01/28 1300/2200	11.2	6.3	39	68	Rain 6
2007/01/29 1300/2200	13.1	0	43	51	Dry
2007/01/30 1300/2200	4.1	3.1	51	76	Snow + Rain
2007/01/31 1300/2200	8.1	-1.3	40	62	Dry
2007/02/01 1300/2200	9.3	4.1	39	61	Dry
2007/02/02 1300/2200	8.3	4.2	39	61	Dry
2007/02/03 1300/2200	7.2	5.2	60	98	Rain 18
2007/02/04 1300/2200	12.1	6.1	64	89	Dry
2007/02/05 1300/2200	11.1	8.1	75	98	Rain 5
2007/02/06 1300/2200	8.1	8.1	98	98	Rain 36
2007/02/07 1300/2200	10.1	3.6	88	86	Rain 1
2007/02/08 1300/2200	13.4	3.6	50	77	Dry
2007/02/09 1300/2200	19.1	5.7	47	70	Dry
2007/02/10 1300/2200	15.9	2.5	39	76	Dry
2007/02/11 1300/2200	14.2	5.1	43	60	Dry
2007/02/12 1300/2200	16.3	5.2	35	67	Dry
2007/02/13 1300/2200	8.3	7.3	75	89	Rain 15
2007/02/14 1300/2200	16.1	8.3	49	80	Dry
2007/02/15 1300/2200	12.1	8.1	83	92	Rain 8.5
2007/02/16 1300/2200	11.1	5.1	73	91	Rain 0.8
2007/02/17 1300/2200	11.1	8.1	64	86	Dry
2007/02/18 1300/2200	12.1	5.9	62	84	Rain 4
2007/02/19 1300/2200	16.1	6.2	37	69	Dry
2007/02/20 1300/2200	16.2	8.3	34	59	Dry
2007/02/21 1300/2200	17.7	8.5	37	58	Dry
2007/02/22 1300/2200	18.1	7.7	36	67	Dry
2007/02/23 1300/2200	18.1	8.3	42	73	Dry
2007/02/24 1300/2200	18.2	10.1	41	70	Dry
2007/02/25 1300/2200	19.1	10.2	33	70	Dry
2007/02/26 1300/2200	17.7	9.2	26	38	Dry
2007/02/27 1300/2200	16.1	9.3	24	37	Dry
2007/02/28 1300/2200	17.7	10.3	37	38	Dry
2007/03/01 1300/2200	19.1	7.4	33	60	Dry
2007/03/02 1300/2200	19.8	7.3	32	56	Dry

*Handwritten record of temperature and humidity data.*

Date	Temp	Humidity	Wind	Cloud	Notes	
R201	1300/2200	17.1	3.6	27	36	Dry
R202	1300/2200	18.7	3.5	28	35	Dry
R203	1300/2200	18.3	6.3	33	48	Dry
R204	1300/2200	17.1	3.8	32	38	Dry
R205	1300/2200	11.2	6.3	39	68	Rain 6
R206	1300/2200	13.1	0	43	51	Dry
R207	1300/2200	4.1	3.1	51	76	Snow + Rain
R208	1300/2200	8.1	-1.3	40	62	Dry
R209	1300/2200	9.3	4.1	39	61	Dry
R210	1300/2200	8.3	4.2	39	61	Dry
R211	1300/2200	7.2	5.2	60	98	Rain 18
R212	1300/2200	12.1	6.1	64	89	Dry
R213	1300/2200	11.1	8.1	75	98	Rain 5
R214	1300/2200	8.1	8.1	98	98	Rain 36
R215	1300/2200	10.1	3.6	88	86	Rain 1
R216	1300/2200	13.4	3.6	50	77	Dry
R217	1300/2200	19.1	5.7	47	70	Dry
R218	1300/2200	15.9	2.5	39	76	Dry
R219	1300/2200	14.2	5.1	43	60	Dry
R220	1300/2200	16.3	5.2	35	67	Dry
R221	1300/2200	8.3	7.3	75	89	Rain 15
R222	1300/2200	16.1	8.3	49	80	Dry
R223	1300/2200	12.1	8.1	83	92	Rain 8.5
R224	1300/2200	11.1	5.1	73	91	Rain 0.8
R225	1300/2200	11.1	8.1	64	86	Dry
R226	1300/2200	12.1	5.9	62	84	Rain 4
R227	1300/2200	16.1	6.2	37	69	Dry
R228	1300/2200	16.2	8.3	34	59	Dry
R229	1300/2200	17.7	8.5	37	58	Dry
R230	1300/2200	18.1	7.7	36	67	Dry
R231	1300/2200	18.1	8.3	42	73	Dry
R232	1300/2200	18.2	10.1	41	70	Dry
R233	1300/2200	19.1	10.2	33	70	Dry
R234	1300/2200	17.7	9.2	26	38	Dry
R235	1300/2200	16.1	9.3	24	37	Dry
R236	1300/2200	17.7	10.3	37	38	Dry
R237	1300/2200	19.1	7.4	33	60	Dry
R238	1300/2200	19.8	7.3	32	56	Dry

*Total: 70-3*



Record of data related to temperature and humidity in Urkesh, in the original hand-written form, and in the tabular and graphic forms. Even this documentation continued regularly during the years of war. See urkesh.org/temp

thanks to the materials coming from Urkesh.

Among the students who successfully completed the workshop there was Hamrin, the daughter of Mohammed Omo, our guard at Urkesh. Hamrin grew up with the expedition, she took her first steps to become an archaeologist with us, and now she is ready to benefit from this personal experience and transform it into a profession.

In the summer of 2017, we gave to a group of twenty students from the same University the possibility of a two-day seminar in excavation techniques: in fact, Urkesh is the only site in the region where it is still possible to study excavation techniques directly in the field. Other archaeology students came to Urkesh from Erbil, the Iraqi city where they attend the University.

Colleagues at a long distance

Because of the impossibility to be present in person at the site, in these years we relied on the energy of young scholars in loco, whom, until now, we only know from a distance. The aggregate power of our archaeological project becomes particularly evident in the sense of empathy and the involvement of some of these colleagues who, even though they were never with us on the excavation during the active years of the expedition, today are taking part in our initiatives.

An example of this profound identification with the values that originate and radiate from Tell Mozan is given by Amer Ahmad, who contributed two sections of this catalog. After studying archaeology at the University of Damascus, he returned to his original city, Qamishli.



University students at the ceramic analysis workshop led by Mohammed Hamza



Mohammed Omo with his daughter Hamrin when she was little (above) and Hamrin with the other students of Qamishli university at the end of the workshop (last row, first from the left)



Qamishli university students in Urkesh for the topography class



Amer contacted us in June 2017, and asked to start a collaboration with our project. And by doing so, he has become today a pillar of the entire project.

# A darkness that shines with light, a silence alive with sound

Enzo Sartori

*Oh stranger...  
do not knock on any door in this city:  
all are closed...because of sleepiness, or out of fear.*

*Knock only with a musician's fingers,  
because if she wakes up  
she will pour out her love on you...*

*A love so strong that, today, it  
can consume you.*

ADEL MAHMOUD



*Flooded, as we are today, with continued sensory stimuli, we propose some moments of reflection in the dark, a sort of anti-exhibition.*

*A musical creation written by children of a music class in the middle school G. Floreanini of Domodossola (Italy), where they translated into music their thoughts on the major themes of this exhibit.*

*It is an invitation to all of us, as adoptive non-seeing people for a while, to reflect on the substance of what the exhibit proposed to us.*



## OrcheStrana in action

During the 2016/2017 school year, as part of the workshops entrusted to each teacher, I had organized a small group dedicated to the creation of original music composed by the youngsters, linked to a theatrical performance of the school, on Dante and hell in the Divine Comedy. The ensemble, initially composed of 11 elements (percussion, flutes, guitars, cello, clarinets, flutes, electric bass, keyboards) was called OrcheStrana, precisely to highlight one specific peculiarity: the music was created by the youngsters without having the notes written on paper.

In fact, I wanted to maintain in the students an active and lively approach to music, between improvisation and composition, without falling into the dynamics of following a fixed score. Too often, in this way, one involuntarily slips into a passive attitude in which thoughts like "did I play the right note?" or "I was wrong," prevail

But art can give more to those who approach it. OrcheStrana has thus become a laboratory that knows how to welcome, in rehearsal and performance, disabled and foreign boys and girls who have found a space in which they can make music with their peers, starting from what they could give, instrumentally and humanly. We did not choose "the best ones." OrcheStrana has closed its first year of life with two beautiful theatrical performances with live music.

## The "music" project

In 2018, a whole class asked to be part of OrcheStrana. not an easily manageable process with a group of 24 students, but in line with the type of open and creative dialog on music that we were looking for and creating in each specific situation. We chose, as a theme, the texts of the panels and the overall content of the exhibit, which were still evolving when we began to work, and we set for ourselves a clear but fundamental rule: everyone had to contribute to the pieces that we were going to compose, even if with just one note, one dynamic, or a small theme. The piece could only be concluded when each and everyone had added what they could. The result of this journey is moving, at least for me as their teacher: listening to the suite, made up of 4 pieces, I can see again the faces of each student: Luca's theme on the guitars, the theme of Isabella and Riccardo, the sounds of Jason's

clarinet, Gaia's explosion of music. The setting that we created gave life to a positive internal attraction and there has never been any problem of discipline or time management.

In the end, thanks to the availability and the semi-professional equipment that was put at our disposal by the colleague in music education, Antonio Manti, the children recorded the result of their composing activities: it was an afternoon in June, after the end of the school year and before the exams, in the Aula Magna where it all started with the first meeting in October. They were splendid: organized, motivated, and wearing the red uniform of the musical course.

## The suite "Urkesh beyond Urkesh"

But what did these students think of creating? It is difficult to describe a music in words: there is the risk of defining it, taking away its original meaning and assigning a subjective vision to it. Therefore, I will try to be clear but not too sharp, with this premise: the verses of the poem that opens the exhibit speak of a return, of a desire to go home. I believe the young students were inspired by this, in a more or less conscious way. (You can listen to the music at [avasa.it/music](http://avasa.it/music).)

The first piece, *Two Worlds*, begins with a very "western" sound, with percussion, a catchy rhythmic theme and a "solo" of the electric bass. This is us, we are here and carefree. Here, however, comes Isabella's theme, a small fragment that enters quietly, and overturns the situation. In a few moments we find ourselves in another environment, much more "oriental," with sinuous movements and a more feminine gentleness.

The second piece, *Explosion*, brings a drama with it: an impossible, distorted dialog begins from a musical fragment; a war, an annihilation that culminates with a large and dark explosion. For our young musicians, this piece has been very touching.

From the silence that follows, other noises are slowly born: footsteps, indistinct sounds that become more and more distinct, in different tones: the words "friendship," "peace," are recited in many languages from all continents (*New Life*). A new, clean explosion is created, which tries to balance the horrible previous one.

The last piece, *Towards home*, begins with a rhythm of body percussion: the whole orchestra participates in

this superimposition of rhythms, in which two initial instruments return: the electric bass, and the drums. Instruments of a western nature, playing together with a new color, which seems to desire and know how to unite the two different souls of the two worlds. Edoardo's theme with Anthony on drums welcomes this return, which, as in every story, has changed us a little and made us grow.

## Visualization

As a last step, the children then drew what they "saw" in their musical idea: thus, I collected small drawings – a sort of unconventional musical notation, colored and mostly abstract – which completed the circle of the compositional journey of this workshop: from the darkness of plain listening, to the creative sound gesture, to executing a piece that is structured even if it is without a score, up to a visible and personal expressive sign. Like the tiles of a mosaic, which are not necessarily "beautiful" in themselves, but which know how to give dignity to the whole journey, when united together.

These few words certainly do not do justice to the energy lavished by the students in giving life to this music. One needs an act of imagination and willingness to see something that cannot be seen. To find connections below appearances. Therefore, I urge the readers to listen to the actual music at [www.avasa.it/music](http://www.avasa.it/music) and to find their own way of interpreting this music, thus "seeing," thanks to the sounds of the OrcheStrana, above and beyond what I have written here.

## The project "Urkesh in music" – for the future

At the beginning of July we were welcomed to a surprise. It was something totally unexpected and unthinkable. A video of a forty seconds footage, on the monumental staircase of Urkesh, a large group of young musicians with a director, Mohammed Saleh. We were not dreaming: it was an orchestra of whose existence we had no intimation, and which had been probably reinvigorated by the idea of friendship with the Ossola land, and twinned with OrcheStrana. They played a variety of musical instruments we did not even know existed around Mozan: violin, cello, contrabass, clarinet, flute and percussions. Some of them were students whom we

met over Skype, to whom we told about the beauty of our middle school with its musical educational character. Very powerful synergies were indeed on the move: I immediately placed the video on the WhatsApp group of OrcheStrana (see below, p. 105, and visit [avasa.it/music](http://avasa.it/music)).

They were astonished, and could not believe that they could actually see on their smartphones music from an archaeological site and a "twin" group in Syria. This reminds us of the famous phrase "music is a universal language," even though I do not believe it to be completely true, because music is a symbolic language, related to the innermost structure of each civilization and culture.

I believe that what largely unites these youngsters is an attitude that precedes the very fact of music: the curiosity, the desire to create something together, in synergy, and the beauty of feeling normal. Of course, in 2018, "normalcy" also consists in having in one's pocket small yet great technologies that can allow exchanges like the one I have tried to describe. I feel a strong intensity in this project: an exploration that, in the middle of the daily life that each child lives in school or in summer in vacation time, opened a narrow window, and allowed, so it seems to me, new and different thoughts to enter, images and sounds of faces that are no longer anonymous or far away. I wish that this story, which is true and still developing, will be told, and leave a mark in the feelings of its young protagonists, and in those who hear it, and that as in a movie, one day, not too far away, these young musicians will meet, smile and play music together.

*Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues who, with little or much time, with concrete help, with even just a word or a smile, have collaborated in the realization of what is told here – in the midst of the whirlwind of activities which fill every school day, which are the incessant flow of a river full of thousands of other proposals and topics pertaining to the canonical programming. Here are the names of the colleagues: Prof. Cinzia Pigniatello, Prof. Miria Sanzone, Prof. Flora Valterio, Prof. Laura Di Pietro, Prof. Marianna Angelino, Prof. Monica Grossi, Prof. Antonella Marcuzzi, Prof. Antonio Manti, Prof. Lucio Meazza. A special thanks goes to our principal, Prof. Chiara Varesi, for having supported the initiative, for her trust in us and for giving important support to the project.*

# ... and I?

## Reflections

*I am a light, made from the first darkness,  
I am the darkness in the last year of the candle,  
I am the dawn in a storm that rages  
in the feathers of the birds...*

*I am the sunset seen from a boat lost at sea,  
I am the water that flows out of the springs of war,  
I am the grass of your soul with its young flower,  
I am the bee that never loses its way...*

*I am ....  
And now, companion of my life...  
Will you tell me...  
who are you?*

ADEL MAHMOUD



*At the end of our journey,  
and thinking back to the birds of first poem...  
did I learn to fly?  
Did I come to appreciate the value of having a nest?  
Looking at myself in the mirror, do I see the traces of my past in my  
own reflection?*

## The lesson of darkness

If you looked at yourself in an imaginary mirror and reflected on what this exhibit meant to you, would you see a different "you" from when you started the visit?

What you experienced is, in a sense, the life of ancient Urkesh. But an Urkesh that seems to have found a new life by projecting itself into the future.

The musical interlude wanted to teach us to reflect in the calm of the dark, to enjoy a music that is born out of silence.

Even for us, the archaeologists, the "lesson of darkness" has shown us how to think about our work in these years of war. We never expected we would end up doing "community archaeology." It was a natural and gradual process, strongly punctuated by war. And we appreciated the real meaning of what we do when we saw the ripple effect generated by this grand idea: the past, when explained, becomes a motor for growth.

We will first refer here to two particular moments in our experience: an effort that starts from the bottom, and a result that is based on values. And then we give voice to significant reflections by our Syrian friends.

## Starting from the bottom

Archaeological sites are powerful means to raise the self-awareness of a community. By being full of symbolic meaning, these places play an important role in the construction and expression of national, regional and local ethnic identities. For this reason, we actively involved local people, not only from Mozan, but also from villages and cities around the archaeological site, in a large project of conservation, valorization and promotion of the site.

In this way, we want especially to promote a participatory approach, one that starts from the bottom. Reading the hundreds of messages received from our local collaborators from 2010 until today, we can see how their sense of identification with the site is becoming stronger with the passing of the years. They believe more and more in the potential for development, not only for

their villages, but for the whole area. The idea of the eco-archaeological park gave them a new prospective for the future, and now they are sending ideas, projects and suggestions. The idea of the park is "theirs" as much as it is "our" idea.

By identifying common cultural roots that contribute in outlining a new local identity, men and women of villages around Tell Mozan are fighting to re-appropriate the world that they know, and take back control of it. By giving a face to the Hurrians and bringing out their ancient way of living as well as the crucial political and cultural role they played, the Syrians of today in the region of Mozan are, in the final analysis, finding a new face for themselves.

## Values and counter values

Ours is not empty rhetoric. The value of this enterprise "from the bottom up" emerges more clearly, even for us, by contrast with the other powers that violently inserted themselves on the Syrian scene in the past few years.

The so-called Islamic state forcibly proposed counter values. And they proposed them from above. It is illuminating to see the inverse relationship between the two approaches. The real values are those that we share universally. We cannot impose them from above. This was the profound error of colonialism. And it was the error of this violent outbreak represented by the so called Islamic state which was also, at the root, colonialist.

For this reason, our effort throughout all this exhibit is in no way simply rhetorical. Values have emerged in sharper focus for all of us involved in the project - a shared past, the bond with the territory, respect for differences, inclusivity within diversity, commitment to one's own area of competence.

This is truly archaeology for a young future. An archaeology that our exhibit wanted to celebrate, and a future that responds to the real values, and invites us to share them.

## The power of archaeology as an inclusive effort

By Yara Moalla

An inclusive society

The Urkesh/Mozan Archaeological project has shown the power of archeology in transforming societies that are in principle distant and different from each other. This has been possible thanks to projects that aim at empowerment at a personal and community level, which allows to strengthen social ties, increase dialog, increase awareness and build mutual understanding. In this way, a change in the way of thinking and in the attitude of the entire community is promoted. As a result, the site of Tell Mozan today is perfectly preserved and protected from an archaeological point of view, with the absence of destruction despite the period of war and confusion – a situation favored precisely by the presence of a conscious and inclusive society.

Archeology, in other words, has the power to influence the behavior of communities residing near archaeological sites, obtaining the desired result without applying pressure from the outside. The archaeological expedition at Tell Mozan has demonstrated the ability of archaeology to contribute to the development of more conscious policies regarding archaeological finds coming from the site, within the communities residing in the area. This dynamics made it possible to effect the inclusion of the archaeological site in the social fabric, obtaining as a consequence not only the protection and conservation of the entire archaeological area but also the development of a more inclusive society, with a stronger social and cultural base.

The expedition's trust in the capability of locals resulted in a simple yet effective conservation system of the site, that proved in the long term to be perfectly sustainable. This sustained approach, that attributed fundamental roles for the site's maintenance to the locals, had a social and economical consequence in the entire area. These community policies contributed to the development of a major sense of inclusion, through facilitating mutual understanding and constructing a sense of familiarity based on a common history and geography.

The social shift in the villages

One of the merits of the project implemented at Tell

Mozan was to make the communities of the 22 villages around the site involved and enthusiastic about the archaeological discoveries coming from it and the role that the center held in the past history, such as to modify the geopolitical map of Syro-Mesopotamia in the third millennium B.C.

The case of Tell Mozan shows the shift in the social behavior in the villages in rural Syria, which constitute a society open to conflicts related not only to the various ethnic groups in the area but also to the inequalities between social classes and gender. Furthermore, the acceptance of a foreign archaeological expedition on the territory was also at risk. The "bottom-up" strategy adopted by the archaeological expedition has instead allowed the creation of a climate of understanding, acceptance and mutual trust within the communities, as well as between the locals and the international expedition active in the area. A place that was originally considered a potential source of conflict and clash of identities, has become a center full of meaning.

The closeness and the positive dynamics established with the local inhabitants have allowed the archaeological expedition to understand local needs and interests, leading to the plan for an eco-archaeological park, the purpose of which was to safeguard the integrity of the landscape by contributing to the socio-cultural development of the region based on local characteristics, necessities and capacities. In this context, an atelier, called "Urkesh gate," was born: it consisted in a cultural center at a national and international level, where it is possible to transfer to the locals new skills, the awareness of the importance of active citizenship, and the desire to protect the site in time of conflict.

The awareness of a common past

"Community" archaeology can play an important role for the construction of a bridge between past and present communities since public participation in archaeological practices actively contributes to the removal of different types of barriers.

The archaeological expedition has succeeded in bringing the communities together, strengthening their relationships and their social network for all phases of the project and encouraging people to take an active role in the communities of origin.

The involvement with the archaeological site has gi-

ven the various communities of the area an awareness of the existence of long-standing cultural traditions. It has thus helped them to give greater value to their history and their future, uniting people to discover shared goals. This new strength has led the modern "people of Urkesh" to listen to each other, comparing their own stories and visions, their own problems and hopes. This process led them to identify themselves with a common territory.

## A small United Nations

By Mons. Antranig Ayvasian

Speaking of Tell Mozan is to speak of the Buccellati family: a family that we consider Syrian or "Mozanian," if we can say so. This familiar tone has a strong relevance for the local community and for this entire project in a particular way, especially because it contributes to a sense of reciprocal trust that permits reaching results that would have been difficult to reach otherwise.

I would like to take stock of the situation, in particular regarding the positive results of these archaeological excavations, which have lasted for 25 years now – they started in 1984 but, due to the conflicts that are still taking place in Syria, their fieldwork had to be interrupted for now. But if someone visits Mozan today, one can still meet and see the faces of their workers. They are young people who did not attend any school, who have no knowledge of history in a scholarly sense – yet, Mozan shows how the joy and enthusiasm that reign there belong to workers of all kinds: Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Yazidis. It is a small miniature United Nations, grouped around the Buccellati family, and around excavations dating back to the third millennium B. C.. And from this we can measure the crucial role of youth: when an object is found – regardless of its type or importance, even without knowing what it is and how it is connected in the larger picture – a reaction of joy bursts out of them, applause, mutual hugs: this shows that there is a place for everyone in the world.

Mankind, since its inception, since the first appearance as described in the Bible and in the Holy Scriptures (Christian and Muslim), has aspired to the Divine. Man has always tried to improve himself. It is for this reason that he has "humanized" God, in order to "deify" the human being. In Urkesh, we can find a large family in which the king, queen, princes and people – all together – have created a great family where a common and joyful

sense of commitment reigns. It was indeed such serenity that showed to humans the closest face of God, and the clearest idea of God that we can have – we, human beings who are on earth not to make war, but to create peace, and love each other.

## For the renewal of civil society

By Suleiman Elias

The crisis in our country is very hard, and affects not only human beings but also the cultural heritage of our country. Syria, as you know, is one of the most important countries in terms of archaeological and cultural heritage. It is the land of the first alphabet. The beginning of time has re-emerged from the soil of our country. Therefore, our mission is very difficult, especially in the Jezirah region where the archaeological sites, the "Tells," extend throughout its territory. When you climb one of these Tells, the view can range over at least ten other archaeological sites, villages and remains of villages, ancient kingdoms and cities. This is why our mission, which consists in preserving these sites, is so difficult. Therefore, we started working on the dissemination of archaeological awareness among local communities.

The focal point for us was to raise awareness about the importance of archaeology for culture and society, so that those who live near these sites do not harm or endanger them.

The exhibits illustrated in this catalog were the beginning of our work to raise awareness among the people who live in this area, and our efforts had a positive outcome. A large number of posters have been exhibited in the streets of Jezirah cities such as Qamishli, Malkieh, Ras-al-Ain, Amouda, to raise the citizens' awareness, and I think we have been successful. We have also organized seminars and workshops for students of archaeology at the Al Furat University of Hassake: in the exhibition you can see photos of these activities.

I want to thank our great Syrian friends, the Buccellati family. We, in Jezirah, call them Abu Iskandar, Umm Iskandar and Iskandar.

## Collaborative archaeology

By Hiba Qassar

Community archaeology

Understanding what archaeology does outside of the academic world is important for understanding the political and social consequences of it. The way of interpreting the archaeological heritage is connected to the creation of the cultural identity of society; consequently, archaeologists cannot work separately from the local community and its needs, for purely academic interests. Recently, many archaeologists from around the world have tried to take into account the values and interest of local communities. This interest has led to concepts and methodologies such as "public archeology," "community archeology" and "collaborative archeology."

We have many examples of this type of archaeology in the world in general and in the Middle East in particular. These projects aimed to foster historical and archaeological knowledge within local societies and open the possibility of having economic benefits to help people who live near archaeological sites. Many of these projects have been driven by the desire that archaeology may incorporate educational and social values by bringing the knowledge of the past into the present. However, one of the most important issues concerning most projects of this type was the lack of research to decide whether these projects are effective or not? Are they bringing further benefits to society? Can they positively influence people's perception of the past and, consequently, their sense of identity? Another important question concerning these projects was whether they have a lasting impact beyond the duration of the project?

We can find important examples of this type of projects in Quseir in Egypt, Jericho in Palestine, Deir Alla in Jordan etc. Most of them have shown, through publications, the successful part of the project at the beginning. Unfortunately, none of them evaluated how these projects are proceeding later and if collaborative archeology is reaching the expected results beyond the duration of the project in these countries.

Collaborative "organic" archaeology

In this regard, the Tell Mozan project represents an example of a collaborative organic archeology that has developed over the years to reach to the level of the involvement of the local community in archaeological knowledge and has led, as a result, to a better appreciation and protection of the Syrian archaeological heritage. The main components to achieve this goal can be summarized by the conservation of the site, the site's maintenance system, the site presentation, the commitment to promote knowledge and economic benefits.

First, considering conservation as an essential element during the archaeological excavation was the basis for transforming ancient Urkesh to a visually attractive site, a different situation than most archaeological sites in the region. The beautiful site led locals throughout the year to visit the ancient city of Urkesh, to enjoy the scenery near the temple and have some conversation while watching the sunset. This context has created an emotional bond with the monuments maintained and a sense of leisure connected to the historical site.

The second aspect is site maintenance. One of the positive elements of the maintenance method followed in Mozan is its simplicity, so the locals that have collaborated with the archaeological expedition are able to maintain it without the physical supervision of the archaeologists. The maintenance system allowed a continuous interaction between the locals and the ancient structures, and consequently, gave the possibility to the locals to have a leading role to protect the archaeological site. The archaeologists have not been able to visit the site since 2011, but a team of four of the local people is always checking that the ancient structures are maintained and that the walls are not damaged. They assure us through the images that come to us almost every day since 2011. This has generated a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the site.

The third element is the good presentation of the site. Tell Mozan is presented in Arabic and English through various panels distributed around the site which help local visitors to appreciate the historical value of the site even during the absence of archaeologists. A situation that is rather rare in the region, given that most archaeological sites are difficult to read even for archaeologists. The presentation of the site transformed the visit into a unique experience for us Syrians, since it was probably the first time that we could read history through archaeological monuments. After the visit, I personally witnessed the change in the level of involvement and



interest between visitors in general and the Syrians in particular. Despite the conflict in Syria, the site continues to receive local visitors even now, transforming itself for schools, universities and tourists into a local destination that allows them to learn a part of Syrian history and live a unique experience among ancient monuments.

The fourth element, which subsumes the previous ones, is to favor the historical and archaeological knowledge within the nearby local society. The expedition directors dedicated two conferences each year to explaining to the local stakeholders the history of the site, the new discoveries of the season, the archaeological plan of the current year in Arabic, explaining why it was decided to excavate some areas, what we are looking for exactly and which are the new discoveries that add to the entire knowledge of the site's history. In addition, the directors gave a weekly presentation to the workers to explain in detail the development of the excavation throughout the site. Sharing archaeological knowledge with the locals encouraged local workers to discuss the new discoveries and visit other excavation units to connect what they had discovered in their own unit. They already have excellent techniques in the use of the instruments due to their long experience, this technique combined with the knowledge of the history of the site has led them to a greater awareness of the importance of their work. This policy has helped to increase their knowledge and become active participants in the archaeological process. The process of disseminating archaeological knowledge has generated awareness of the value of the site, an impact that goes far beyond the duration of any project.

### The peculiarity of Tell Mozan

The work conducted over the years at Tell Mozan can answer the previous questions regarding the impact of collaborative archeology. Although it did not start with a clear "collaborative archeology" plan as was the case in other projects like Qusier or Deir Alla it developed gradually over the years to show an exceptional method in which the various elements of the system became better articulated. The war then interrupted the primary activity of the excavation and forced a physical distance between the archaeologists and the locals, but favored a reflection on the presuppositions and a better knowledge of their work from the archaeologist's point of view. But war also demonstrated the measure of the project's sustainability

that was still not possible to verify in other projects.

The sense of belonging and pride among local societies, modified their perception of cultural heritage and created a collective belonging to a common ground on which the various ethnic groups can collaborate and belong in the same way. The value of the Tell Mozan project is not just because it has proven to have an impact beyond the duration of the project and has created a positive behavior towards the site. It is also in the fact that it has shown in the critical time Syria is experiencing how the cultural heritage, if presented well, can be a social glue to reunite different segments of society. The Tell Mozan project has become an icon of hope for the future of Syrian cultural identity.

## The adventure of constructing an exhibit

By Emma Florio

"If you want to construct a ship, you should not weary yourself with calling people to gather wood and prepare the tools. Do not distribute tasks. Do not organize the work. Instead you must, in the first place, awaken in men the nostalgia for the distant and endless sea. When this thirst will be awakened, they will immediately start working to construct the ship" (Antoine de Saint-Exupery).

Every exhibit with Marilyn and Giorgio is characterized by this spirit. It is always an adventure, constructed not by consulting an already written manual, but it rather derives from the curiosity of knowing and discovering something new and charming.

The same spirit is shared by the many researchers, workmen, local people, women and men who work daily with Marilyn and Giorgio, on site and from a distance.

Therefore, this exhibit that follows from the method applied in the previous ones, wants to immediately offer the perception of the total space, a space that fascinates and excites curiosity. Then, while following it slowly, the visitor discovers and understands. Until the exit, when one has acquired a better comprehension of what was initially only perceived.

Our work, as planners, graphic designers, volunteers, developed like this, slowly constructing an experience. This was always and in the first place, a personal experience. It followed a path that had to be defined in every aspect every technical detail in the final implementation. It thus became an experience that could also reach every visitor.



Just before printing the catalog, we heard the news of an unexpected and touching event: in Qamishli, an extraordinary orchestra formed by young musicians wanted to offer us the view and the sounds of a concert which they recorded on the monumental staircase of the Urkesh Temple. Enzo Sartori mentioned this (p.97) and here we want to offer you some images. This event was possible only thanks to the initiative of our colleague from Qamishli, Amer Ahmad. This extraordinary enterprise of the orchestra is credited to its director, Mohammed Saleh, whom we see in the photo above. You can find the video of the concert online at [avasa.it/music](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).



# «...the face of the city»

Domenico Quirico


*Oh stranger... for how long have you been in this street  
searching for an address you once knew?*

*The face of the city has changed during your long absence:  
prepare for yourself a place where to sit, in the garden of the past.*

*Sit, as if you were waiting for the ones you love...  
be only careful not to be caught by the oriental boredom.*

*They will come, for sure, they will come.  
For a bird never forgets a window of a house he knows,  
nor the branches of the tree on which he lived,  
in that distant spring, a long time ago.*

ADEL MAHMOUD



*«The face of the city...».*

*This last poem by Adel Mahmoud reminds us of a Sumerian text dating back to forty-five centuries ago.*

*A city at war risks to be attacked and destroyed.*

*Its ruler says that they need to fight until the end, even  
«if my city were to become become a Tell,  
and I a sherd buried within its ruins...».*

*The consonance of the feeling of belonging to the city is accentuated by the lexical consonance. Our word “Tell” (the modern term for a hill that hides a city) comes directly from the Sumerian word that appears in our text: dul ...*

In Syria, men and stones have been killed, during these years made of iron and blood. They killed the stones, to better kill the men. Past and Present together, confused in crime. Because the two of them, as the acute malice of the murderers knows, can only survive if they remain together.

In the Near East, whose history is too ancient and whose present is too present, we have been forced to be fearful witnesses of this crime, for seven years! Forced to choose between men and stones. As if crying because of the explosion of an ancient column or the shattering of a millenary statue would imply offending the flow of blood, the red, frothy and throbbing blood of a human victim. And this was another crime: having to compare the terrible horror in front of Palmyra and a group of hostages reduced to headless rags ... There is no greater blasphemy, impossible to hide, like a sin before the eye of God.

Seen from the thousands and thousands of years of its history, the land between the two rivers is like a sheet of paper that can be read in every sign, even the terrible ones left by the men of today. The caravan routes beaten by horses and camels in a row, seem, from this height of Time, to be streaked as if by a harrow, straying straight into the mist and the dust of centuries. The signs of men, monuments, cities, tombs and fortresses are more unstable. They revolve around each "tell," each well or patch of trees, thin like strings that tie these marks to the man's hand. But the man seems invisible. Thus desert, steppes, dazzling green beds of immemorial and wandering rivers give the idea of a world in formation or in agony under the whim of the wind. And we, fragile contemporaries of times that are impregnated with iconoclastic fanaticism

and ignorant forgetfulness, feel a reverence similar to the feeling which one has for the immutable sea, that keeps coming and going from a time prior to the appearance of men and that will continue its movement until the last man will have disappeared from the earth. The vegetation here is unnatural. The true nature of this land is the barren soil, without shadow, and swollen with these stones and sherds: the only one that animates this soil that has been stepped on for centuries, like a geological life.

Among my painful memories of Syria there is this one: still intact amongst men who fight, kill and are killed in the whirlwind of entire cities whose cement becomes dust (and perhaps in a century other archaeologists will walk through them in an astonished silence, looking for the secret behind that anger and of those massacres) – there is the memory, in a remote and yet pertinent time, of when I passed by the abandoned sites of the archaeologists who had been driven away by the war: where the ground exudes abandoned stones that speak Akkadian and Assyrian, Greek and Roman, desperately still in their place like fallen sentinels who did not surrender, who can never be gone and never disappear, lost in the night of memory. Unbreakable even to the hoes and hands of predators who want to turn them into money, bullets and weapons.

From this exhibit you will learn that brave men, when unfortunately the echo of the shots and the cries of death have not yet been extinguished, continued to take care of that buried time and are now ready to grab the humble tools that gently scratch the earth, so that time may resonate once again – a time that is not mythical, but a recovery of the eternal way of being of the spirit.

# Acknowledgments

While all of us working on this project feel Mozanian in spirit, the real Mozanians are those who carry out the project, untiringly, in Mozan itself: Mohammed Omo, Ismail Musa, Ibrahim Khello, Mohammed Hamza, Ibrahim Musa, Diadin Mustafa, Kameran Beg. We give them credit for this exhibit more than anyone else. Similarly, we are grateful to our colleagues from Qamishli, the city near Mozan, the local archaeologists who became pillars of our project: Amer Ahmad, Ristom Abdo, Suleiman Elias. Mons. Antranig Ayvazian has always been committed to keeping the Armenian community alive and open to all the other communities in the area of Qamishli, and he has remained equally close to our community of archaeologists searching for a present alive in the past of a shared land.

The General Directorate of Antiquity and Museums continues to work with the same great professionalism that has always characterized its activities. In our own small way, the specific case of the project “Urkesh beyond Urkesh” is very significant. We experimented in Beirut, in November 2017, the feeling of unity of which Dr. Hamud spoke in the foreword of this volume. With the support of UNESCO, the General Directorate was present in the person of the General Director, the Director of excavations, the Director of sites and monuments, and the Director of the office in Hassaka; at that time, we also had with us representatives of the Kurdish and Armenian communities from Qamishli. The numerous meetings we had in Beirut strengthened the sense of the strong commitment that we have in common towards this site in particular and even beyond, towards Syrian archaeology in the broadest sense of the word. The future we speak about is rooted in a suffered present that is rich with promise.

Our collaborators became, with us, adopted Mozanians ever since the beginning, or for the moment, they are so in pectore, in our hearts. Federico Buccellati contributed with his archaeological competences, Elena Croci helped us in the realization of the exhibition, and Ruggero Spa-

gliarisi in the communication activities. There are also some young Syrians who are very actively involved in the project: Samer Abdelghafour, Yara Moualla, Hiba Qassar.

The organizations acknowledged on the copyright page are the ones that gave us the support for the exhibit and this catalog. They became partners in what they feel, with us, is a worthy effort for the future, the new young future to which this exhibition points. This is eloquently expressed by President Giuseppe Guzzetti of the Cariplo foundation in his foreword to this catalog. In particular, this partnership was possible thanks to the warm participation of Francesca Zanetta, member of the Cariplo Foundation central commission for grant making. – A very special debt of gratitude goes to our friends at AVSI, with whom we have found a great consonance of intents and spirit in the shared effort at sustaining the resurgence of Syria in all aspects of life. Giampaolo Silvestri and Marco Perini have shown, through their personal interest in our project and their generous support, how thoroughly they identify with our goals and how committed they are to help us achieve them.

In a similar way, a special affinity has developed in the form of partnerships with other supporters:

- The Steinmetz foundation for the education of the youngest.
- The Yard firm for the support of sustainability, environmental and social.
- The Gianmaria Buccellati Foundation for its support of young researchers.
- The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, for the IT support (server and website maintenance)
- ARCA for their contribution in the conservation of cultural heritage.
- IIMAS for the support of the research on excavation materials.

AVASA – *Associazione per la Valorizzazione dell'Archeologia e della Storia Antica* coordinated the entire project. On the website ([www.avasa.it/en](http://www.avasa.it/en)) there is a more detailed description of our activities, including a wider acknowledgment of our supporter's contributions. To its secretary, Rodolfo Signorini, goes our heartfelt gratitude for the tireless work he does to make the functioning of the association possible.

The synergy with Hannibal Saad, the director of Music and Beyond Foundation, had a special meaning for us. He made the realization of the exhibit in Beirut possible, and he also brought the same exhibit to the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden: his enthusiasm opened for us a wider horizon, that of the festival he has conceived and organized, so that such a festival mostly dedicated to music could come to include the seemingly silent witness of the archaeological dimension.

Special thanks are due to the director of the UNESCO Observatory for the Syrian Cultural Heritage in Beirut, Cristina Menegazzi, who shared our vision of an archaeology capable of uniting various communities. The support she gave to the exhibit in Beirut was fundamental for the conception and realization of the 2018 event in Rimini.

The debt of gratitude we owe to the Meeting of Rimini is not just for the conceptual contribution on the exhibit itself, as illustrated elsewhere in this catalog, but also for making the concrete realization of this exhibit possible, in the prestigious and extremely stimulating context of the Meeting, which profoundly marks the culture of Italy and beyond.

For a bibliography of the project and notes on the catalog's text, see [www.avasa.it/en](http://www.avasa.it/en).

# Credits

We are grateful to Kenneth Garrett for the photo of the Palace at page 26, for the photos of the figurines at page 28 (bottom left) and 29 (above left), and for the details of the Tish-Atal lion at page 30. (The complete series of Kenneth Garrett's photos of Urkesh can be found at: [www.photoshelter.com/c/kennethgarret/gallery/urkesh/G0000Ezewo597cqI/P00003tmjIW.oR6s](http://www.photoshelter.com/c/kennethgarret/gallery/urkesh/G0000Ezewo597cqI/P00003tmjIW.oR6s); you can also see a series of his photos on the cover of National Geographic and other prestigious magazines (including a cover on Urkesh): at the following address: [Kennethgarret.photoshelter.com/gallery/covers/G0000qcfC9J06irE/](http://Kennethgarret.photoshelter.com/gallery/covers/G0000qcfC9J06irE/). For a personal profile please see [photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photographers/photographer-Kenneth-garret/](http://photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photographers/photographer-Kenneth-garret/)).

We are grateful to Montaser Qassem, archaeologist and photographer in Qamishli, for the photos of visitors on the site, the exhibit in Qamishli, and the young Qamishli students of the "school project." The organization of the school project itself was due to Amer Ahmad in Syria and Enzo Sartori in Italy.

The other photos and drawings, if not in a public domain, belong to IIMAS and are the work of various photographers of the mission, in particular Giuseppe Gallacci, Diadin Mustafa, Ibrahim Khello, Federico Buccellati, Giorgio Buccellati, Stefania Ermidoro.

The drawings of seal impressions on page 29 were done by Pietro Pozzi.



