

# Report to IIMAS trustees for the year 2020-21

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## 1 URKESH PROJECT. RESULTS

We were seriously impacted by the COVID pandemic in the implementation of some of these goals. On the other hand, the new use of communication technology made it possible for us to introduce variations and to establish new programs. What follows lists the goals we had set, and the results or challenges faced.

### 1.1 Programs that worked as planned

- \* Conservation at Mozan: the localized shelters placed over the walls of the palace have been maintained and the walls are in an excellent state of preservation. The record is up to date as one can see, for instance, for wall <http://urkesh.org/wall-C5-5>. Similarly, the monumental stone staircase of the temple has been also maintained and is in perfect order.
- \* Signage at Mozan: this, too, has been maintained and is in excellent condition.
- \* The School project was halted because of the COVID pandemic, however our initiative gained momentum in preparation for the time after COVID. This meant above all presenting the project to other venues, in Syria and abroad, and the Europa Nostra prize gave us many openings in this direction. We have presented this alternative in some detail in our proposal to Kaplan for 2021-22.
- \* One-on-One project. This project expanded with great success: originally developed as an extension of the School project, it took on a special significance because of the problems arising from the COVID pandemic. For a full report see [avasa.it/one](https://avasa.it/one).
- \* Young Scholars. This project, too, was highly successful, with two of our staff members completing their PhD – Yasmine Mahmoud at the University of Pavia in Italy and Yara Moualla at the University of West Scotland. We have also continued to support the research of three recent Syrian PhD's, Hiba Qassar, Arwa Kharobi, Samer Abdelghafour. In addition, our staff archaeologist at Mozan, Amer Ahmad, has been accepted in the graduate program at the at Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest: he will work on material from Mozan.
- \* Websites. Our work has continued very actively, in two directions. On the one hand, we have updated the information where pertinent, and on the other we have made significant progress in the final editing of of websites devoted to specific areas of excavation (in particular J1, J3, J5, A20, and we are now beginning on A9, A11, A12, A14, A20)
- \* Publications. A volume of studies in honor of Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati ([avasa.it/ZE730e](https://avasa.it/ZE730e)) includes a number of contributions dealing with the

archaeology at Tell Mozan and particularly with our heritage program. Six articles were published by members of our staff ([avasa.it/articles](https://avasa.it/articles)).

## 1.2 Programs impacted by the COVID crisis

- \* Site visits: these were canceled because of the COVID pandemic
- \* Public outreach – exhibits: these were canceled because of the COVID pandemic
- \* Public outreach – villages: these were canceled because of the COVID pandemic
- \* School project: this was canceled because of the COVID pandemic
- \* Music project: this was canceled because of the COVID pandemic
- \* Atelier: this was canceled in part because of the COVID pandemic, but especially because of two concurring overriding concerns that became explicit during this last year, and require a structural change. The first is that in the summer months the women find it more profitable to work in the field. The second, and most important, is that the women need to have a steady income from their work, and this is almost impossible now that there is no tourism in the area. So we have started researching possibilities for marketing their products elsewhere in Syria and abroad, and this, too, is very difficult at the moment. We may need to make an initial investment ourselves, purchasing their products with the intent of building up a stock for future sale to visitors or for sale abroad, when it becomes possible.

## 1.3 New programs

- \* Online lectures. One of the major side benefits of the COVID pandemic has been the greater use of technical means that in principle were available before but had not become common practice. Thus we have been able to present a series of impressive lectures offered live online which were then made available for permanent reference. What was unique about these lectures was the participation of members of the staff from three continents (the USA, Europe and Asia – both Syria and China), who harmoniously blended together in giving a unifying view of our work in cultural heritage during these years of crisis. In particular, the live presentations from the site itself were not only extremely informative, but very moving. They were hosted by institutions in Florence ([avasa.it/ZEy11e](https://avasa.it/ZEy11e)), Los Angeles ([avasa.it/ZF227e](https://avasa.it/ZF227e)), Turin ([avasa.it/ZF318e](https://avasa.it/ZF318e)) and Rondine, Rome ([avasa.it/ZF512e](https://avasa.it/ZF512e)).
- \* Remote visits to the site. Expanding on the notion of the online lectures, we proposed a remote visit to the site which we carried out in collaboration with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York ([avasa.it/ZF606e](https://avasa.it/ZF606e)). It lasted for an hour, and, while it had technical difficulties because of occasional poor connection, it was by all standards a resounding success (see below in Part Three). We have proposed this to other Museums that have expressed an interest, as it is a real first.
- \* Critique of Archaeological Reason special edition. While this program will take full effect in 2021-22, we have actively worked on preparing for it, especially in talking to interested colleagues who will take part in it. The main goal is to develop a theoretical approach to the question of archaeological heritage, with a very

substantial coverage of the pertinent literature and with the application of a new approach to website publishing, one whereby a full digital discourse is developed that includes multi-linear narratives along with intensive links to the pertinent informational base.

## 2 URKESH PROJECT. EVALUATION

We have received a number of unsolicited messages stressing how valuable some of our activities were. Here we quote only one by the Curator-in-Charge of the Ancient Near East at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Dr. Kim Benzel:

*"A note to say how moving and beautiful today's live visit to Mozan was -- despite the technical difficulties and perhaps even more poignant because of them. To feel as though one was in Syria for a moment and in contact with colleagues there was truly magical, especially during the long sunset we enjoyed towards the end. I had tears in my eyes the whole sunset; there is nothing more visceral than that moment at the end of a day in Syria, no matter the site at which one is working or where one is. Thank you for that alone! I can only imagine how emotional it was for those on the call who are Syrian. It was a gift to all, truly."*

Two further documents serve as a form of evaluation.

The first is the Ilucidare prize, which is the highest award given by the European Union for "Heritage-led International Relations" ([avasa.it/ZEy10e](https://avasa.it/ZEy10e)). Our project won the prize in November 2020, and this was the first time this particular prize was awarded. The citation given by the jury is particularly significant:

*"Through a shared vision of cultural heritage, Archaeology for a Young Future allows children, school staff and communities in Italy and Syria to forge bonds in a spirit of mutual understanding, respect and friendship. Its strong educational component and trans-generational impact can contribute to maintaining and improving relations between the two communities in the long-run. This bottom-up, easily replicable project demonstrates that heritage-led international relations can happen among people and communities on the ground, and are not exclusive of governments or international organisations".*

Our project has been identified as one of the "best practice examples for the heritage community as well as an inspiration for the broader worlds of innovation, entrepreneurship and international cooperation".

The second is a nomination by several parties for the Balzan Prize, which is one of the most prestigious awards in our field, and is possible only through nomination by institutions or internationally-renowned scholars. We are attaching the letters of nomination from eight institutions around the world: not only are these top-ranking institutions (such as the Getty Conservation Institute, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Science, the Museo Egizio in Turin), but the motivations they give in their letters are also very substantial and extremely

detailed, providing a strongly supporting critical overview of our work.

Our main measure of success is the vitality of the project in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles – a ten-year war and the latest pandemic crisis. Not only have we survived, we have accelerated the pace of our work and found new ways to meaningfully reach a vast audience, truly worldwide.

On a different scale, the support by various other organizations. In particular, we want to stress the support from the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MAECI) – while minimal in financial terms (1000 euros), it is of very high significance in that it shows the support of a major political body, all the more significant at this moment when relationships with Syria are fraught with uncertainty.

### 3 URKESH PROJECT. TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENTS AND CHALLENGES

There were three major aspects that emerged from our activities and struck us as being particularly significant.

(1) The first was the world wide connectivity made possible by the new utilization of media as a result of the COVID crisis. We describe these briefly above under Section 2. What this showed us was how our staff could be connected in ways that were unimaginable just a year ago, and how well we could project the cohesiveness of our project beyond the boundaries of our internal meetings.

(2) Reflecting on the theoretical nature of archaeological heritage became all the more poignant as we could see how deep the impact of this ancient Syrian site has on Syrians living abroad. This has inspired us to think about a new project, one aimed especially at youngsters of the Syrian diaspora, aimed at giving them a renewed sense of identity. It was like touching the real meaning of the title we had chosen for our project: The Pride of Heritage.

(3) We were also deeply moved by the prestigious recognition of the quality of our work as shown by the Europa Nostra Prize and the nominations for the Balzan Prize. There was clearly more than a casual acknowledgment of factual accomplishments. There was a vibrant synergy with the deeper motives that have inspired us all along in this difficult period marked by the long war in Syria and now by the COVID pandemic.

Our project has grown from the ground up: as a consequence, it is deeply rooted in experience and in the practical dimension. We responded to needs as we perceived them, and adjusted our aims in the measure in which the response to our initiative became clear. The challenge was always very concrete, and so was our response. The best example is how the School project morphed into the One-on-One project as the COVID crisis changed patterns of interaction.

The point is that we never set out to prove a point. "Heritage" was very much the thing we dealt with even if we did not use yet the term. We felt a compelling need to highlight the relevance of what we were doing. Our training and primary interest was addressed to

the scientific community with which we were familiar, and for which we had plenty of results to show: one of the earliest cities in history, with very distinctive traits relating to a hardly known civilization, monumental architecture of the first order, a highly distinctive miniature art as shown in a vast glyptic repertory, the earliest known texts in Hurrian. The scientific relevance was clearly established.

As the project grew, we came to realize more and more how strong the relevance of these data was for people today, in the region of the site in the first place, and then well beyond, literally the world over. So our challenge has become to study the theoretical underpinnings of "heritage." The archaeological dimension, especially for a site that predates by far all the ethnic groups living in the area, poses a real question of relevance: how can the raw archaeological dimension become a motor of social cohesiveness? How can, in other words, this physical heritage (the architecture, the art, the documents) be truly and properly "inherited"? We remain deeply rooted in this archaeological dimension, without indulging in the slightest in fantasies.

That is our primary challenge now: to develop a theory of archaeological heritage based on a very practical experience that has resonated loudly with, and has been conditioned by, the local stakeholders. What is it at stake for them, that we can unearth and make sense of?

## 4 OTHER PROJECTS

We have engaged in a number of other projects besides Mozan, which we will mention briefly here.

### 4.1 A new concept in website publishing

[4banks.net](http://4banks.net) is an ambitious bibliographical project, which introduces a new approach to the production of scholarly websites. The central idea is to show how a website can serve a purpose that goes beyond the standard of providing information in the form of databases. It is the notion of "digital discourse," that makes the most of the potential of the digital medium by implementing a multi-linear narrative. The approach was proposed by G. Buccellati in *A Critique of Archaeological Reason*, Cambridge 2017, and he is currently finishing the hub website ([4banks.net/hub](http://4banks.net/hub) ID 4banks, pw 4banks)

The first website in this cluster was [critique-of-AR.net](http://critique-of-AR.net), opened in 2017. We are currently working on a second edition of this website, and also on a new website [mes-rel.net](http://mes-rel.net). Both will open during the next year.

We are organizing round tables that present the project around the world, inviting colleagues in various disciplines to take part and critique our work. The first will be at the University of San Damaso in Madrid on September 22 (<https://indd.adobe.com/view/437558f7-fad6-4e6d-a678-ee144c9f1b70>) and the second at the Politecnico in Milan on November 16.

## 4.2 Urkesh Global Record and relative grants

We are also working actively on the Urkesh Global Record project, which on the one hand provides the full excavation record of our excavations at Mozan, and the other, contributes to the methodological approach described in 4banks.net.

We have received a significant grant from the Catholic Biblical Association for the publication of excavation unit A12 and a concurrent monograph. The project description from the proposal is attached: you may enjoy reading it!

We also have received two grants (one for Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati and the other for Giorgio Buccellati) from the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology to work on different aspects of the Urkesh record.

## 4.3 Lectures by staff members

Along with our staff members, we have been engaged in a number of lectures that are being presented in various venues in the US and Europe. You will find them listed at [avasa.it/events](http://avasa.it/events), with links to the sites where the events are available online.

One that was particularly noteworthy was a live tour of the site of Urkesh, which we organized for the Met in New York, please see [avasa.it/ZF606e](http://avasa.it/ZF606e).

## 4.4 Doctoral dissertations

Yasmine Mahmoud has completed with great honor her dissertation at the University of Pavia, under the direction of Profs. Clelia Mora, Mauro Giorgeri, Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati and Giorgio Buccellati. She had a roster of four very prestigious outside reviewers, who all commented very favorably on her work. You will find attached the PowerPoint that summarizes her research, which she used for her defense.

Yara Moualla is completing her dissertation at the University of West Scotland.

Both Yasmine and Yara are working on our projects, and their dissertations (which deal with material from Mozan) were supported by IIMAS.