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Edited by
Paolo Matthiae, Frances Pinnock, Lorenzo Nigro
and Nicolò Marchetti
with the collaboration of Licia Romano

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THE EBLA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK.
NATURAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ARTIFICIAL ITALIAN
PORTRAIT OF THE ANCIENT SYRIAN CAPITAL

MARCO RAMAZZOTTI

ABSTRACT

The paper focused on three interacted topics. At least will be critically discussed the methodological guidelines of the Ebla Archaeological Park that were listed in Paris during the Third ICAANE; second will be presented some of the archaeological discoveries strictly related to those methodological guidelines; third will be presented some of the last archaeological monuments and landscapes visual transformations of Tell Mardikh strictly related to the archaeological and conservation works activities.

Since the Berlin ICAANE where has been presented a theoretical and operational model for creating an Archaeological Park at Ebla,¹ many years passed and now we can discuss a general profile of the three main resources that are characterizing its peculiar organization:² the natural, the archaeological and the artificial setting of the Tell and the Landscape (Fig. 1).³

Indeed to sketch the effective structure of the theory, of the model and of the results, the Italian Archaeological Expedition in Syria of the University La Sapienza of

- 1 The main project of University La Sapienza of Rome, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Ministry of Instruction and Scientific Research on Archaeological Park started at Ebla in 1998-1999 under the Direction of Prof. Paolo Matthiae, with the collaboration of the companies Panstudio Architetti S.r.l. (Architect Dr Cesare Mari) and Wunderkammer S.r.l. (Restorer Dr Ugo Capriani) and my scientific-administrative coordination of the archaeological field activities.
- 2 Now the works goes on following coherently some contemporary aesthetic (Winter 2002), ideological (Matthiae 1994), anthropological (Augé 2003), political (Winter 1997) and administrative principles (de La Torre [ed.] 2002) well discussed - of course in a quite similar way since Seventies - also in the theoretical field of Italian Archaeology (Carandini 1979) and Art History (Argan 1983), naturally involved also on the institutional, administrative and juridical preservation of the urban cultural heritages. Ramazzotti *in press* e.
- 3 The first part of Ebla Archaeological Park was inaugurated in October 2002 by the First Lady, Dr Asma al-Assad and the Minister of Culture Dr Najwa Qassab Hassan when an approximately 15.000 sq. m-wide area had been completely restored and its visit tracks had been equipped with information tools written in Arabic, Italian and English. It was the result of the first six years of hard work of projecting, experimenting and researching, which was later useful for restoration sites and for other effective actions. The second inauguration of the Archaeological Site Park held in October 2004 concluded the structural works on the site and at the same time opened a large range of perspectives in favor of the organization of the tourist visits and the eventual completion (when the planned works come to an end, the restored area will exceed 25.000 sq m).

Rome (MAIS)⁴ proceeded since 1999, thanks to the support of the Syrian Ministry of Culture and the General Direction of Antiquities (DGAM),⁵ to coordinate on the field the application of different disciplinary sectors: the creation of a site-museum,⁶ the restoration and conservation of monuments, archaeological materials and art objects;⁷ the digital topographical position of each features⁸ and the general geophysical, mag thermic and palaeoecological profiles of the *Tell* (Fig. 2).⁹

This process aims to the complete arrangement of the mud-bricks architectures excavated in the past campaigns;¹⁰ to the creation of visit routes of each monument and of the entire site; to the geological comprehension of the subsoil; to the planning of a specific informatics support right for a dynamic management of the archaeological elements.¹¹ What has been accomplished till now required a huge effort and a continual,

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- 8 Archit. Riccardo Franceschetti (Architetti & Associati S.r.l.), Dr Cesare Schiatti (Arco Studio S.r.l.), Dr Emiliano Barletta.
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- 10 The problems related to the conservation of earth architectures and to the techniques of clay cities digging, restoration and preservation see the specific articles in the acts of the ten International Conferences regularly planned in different countries since 1972 (Yazd, Iran), 1980 (Ankara, Turkey), 1983 (Lima, Peru), 1985 Peijing (China), 1987 Rome, 1990 La Cruces (New Mexico), 1993 Silves (Portugal), Torquay (United Kingdom), 2003 (Yazd, Iran), 2008 Bmako (Mali) and: Chiari, Balderrama 1986: 121-129; Chiari 1990: 217-227; Liegey 1991: 62-73; Netzer 1992: 17-27; Bendakir, Vitoux 1993: 317-323; Bendakir 1999; Richter 2004: 150-161; Politis 1993: 388-390.
- 11 The vector-programme of the new topographical map of Ebla has been projected and realized by a team of topographers directed by arch. Riccardo Franceschetti. The aim is to verify the uniformity and proportion of the existing topographical map of Ebla, drafted during the seventies by arch. Carlo Cataldi Tassoni, and to devise the new digital cartographic frame. The work, which has been fully accomplished in two excavation campaigns, makes possible the set up of a new profile showing the geometric differences of the two topographic grids; a map that points out the gradual change of the morphology and dynamism of the site in proportion to the modern alterations; a mathematical model

lively interchange among scholars, technicians, students and professional workers of different cultural formation such as: archaeologists, art historians, architects, restorers, topographers and others as well, but a major resource was the help of the extraordinary workers of Mardikh with their knowledge of local and very traditional building techniques and raw materials and building materials not to mention the collaboration of women of the village who let technicians into the secrets of the *Tin*, the plaster made of soil, straw and water.¹²

At Ebla, the restoration and the preservation of the large mud-bricks buildings has required until now many propaedeutic and specific archaeological activities:¹³ the planning of intervention strategies in order to synchronize the archaeological works and following restoration works on the buildings; the use of the graphical and digital information of the initial archaeological excavations on some particular structures (Fig. 3); the removal of the accumulated debris in the archaeological areas; the surveying and the digging of the old baulks of the single squares (originally left in order to protect the buildings); the digging of the external areas around the structures in order to control the vertical limits with retaining walls; the digging of the new stratigraphic units inside each monument and the survey and digging of the new stratigraphic units put to light by wind erosion in some exposed surfaces (Fig. 4).¹⁴

We can summarize that at the moment, the present-day Archeological Park at Ebla follows three convergent guidelines:

- a. the maintenance of the major sacred areas already restored;
- b. the broad spectrum recovery of the major buildings in the Lower City;

that arranges the points on the surface creating factual polygons whose datum points can then be used for intra-site spatial analysis, and - finally - a three-dimensional pattern of the tell that aims to offer a different visual perspectives of the landscape.

- 12 The study of the earth structures is one of the most interesting subject of the contemporary architectural research (see Delcroix 1972; Eaton 1981; Galdieri 1982; Dethier 1986; Houben, Guillaud 1989, Richter 2004: 150-161), but has been frequently approached in many different ways also in the fields of the Near Eastern Archaeology, Philology, History, Anthropology and Art History (see: Gasche, Birchmeier 1981: 1-46; Edzard 1987; Lambert 1987; Cooper 1989; Oates 1990; Scholl, Campbell 1990; Aurenche 1993; Margueron 1993; 1995: 10-16; Sauvage 1998; Mazar 1999; Buccellati 2000: 41-48; Liverani 2000; Friberg 2001; Matthiae 2002; Buccellati 2003: 18-21; 2006: 73-81 Ramazzotti *in press d*).
- 13 For this propaedeutic and specific archaeological activities we considered the classical literature: Howard, Pagliero 1966; Torraca, Chiari, Gullini 1972; Lewis 1980; Butterbaugh, Piggott 1980; Lewin, Schwartzbaum 1983: 71-81; Stevens 1984; Stevens (ed.) 1985; Liégey 1988; Chiari 1990; Bendakir, Vitoux 1993; Margueron 1993; Liégey 1997: 181-192; Bendakir 1999; Mazar 1999; Leriche 2000: 11-30.
- 14 In each monument, the new situation obtained after the propaedeutic field work, which also referred to the end of the first dig realization, have been analytically compared. Whenever it was necessary, the original plans of the monuments have been integrated with the new details and each situation has been again photographically documented. In a second step all this graphic information (maps, plans, overlays) will also represent some layers of a digital cartography set up to be used on Geographic Information System (GIS), as a support instrument for analyzing and monitoring the earth architectures of the site.

c. the preservative intervention on some particular urban sectors.¹⁵

At the same time, the precious archaeological discoveries that coming up in the new archaeological areas identified analysing geomagnetic anomalies or in occasion of protecting and consolidating the existing buildings with the retaining walls needs fast and high professional supports.¹⁶

The last case are the huge mudbrick architectures of the so called Temple of the Rock in the South-Eastern sector of the Lower City (Fig. 5),¹⁷ but since the beginning we would remember the royal basalt statues fragmentary discovered in the North East wing of the Middle Bronze Age Princess Palace Q (Fig. 6),¹⁸ the extraordinary geometric paintings in L.8729, the western sector of the Building FF2, probably dated on Early Bronze IVA (Fig. 7),¹⁹ some new reasonable hypothesis on the functional

15 The park zones which have already been restored and equipped includes the areas of the Northern, Archaic, Western, Southern and Archives Palaces; the service areas and the defense areas, such as the Damascus Gate, the Fortress V and the housing areas B and P-South; the places of worship of the goddess Ishtar, like the Great Platform, the Temple D, the Temple P2, the Temple B of the Ancestors and the Temple N of the Sun.

16 Five new EBIVA areas were identified during the last campaigns: 1. the Building FF2, presented at the last ICAANE held in Madrid, can be understood as a fragmentary part of an important complex probably conserving a Royal Chapel and dated to the EBIVA period (Matthiae 2004; Ramazzotti *in press c*); 2. a new square room (L. 2982) in the south-western limit of the Royal Palace G identified during the 2003 spring campaign and excavated in the summer campaign (Matthiae 2004: 311; Ramazzotti *in press b*); 3. the north-eastern corner of another room in the Southern Quarter of the Royal Palace G, room L. 8490 that was identified and excavated during the 2004 spring campaign (Ramazzotti *in press b*); 4. the large area in the western section of the Court of Audiences L. 2752 that was opened during the 2003 spring campaign and closed with the construction of a retaining wall as a western limit of the restored Palace (Ramazzotti *in press b*); 5. the complex L. 8496 + L. 8778 in the eastern retaining wall of the inner Throne Room L. 2866, which was identified and excavated during the 2004 spring campaign (Ramazzotti 2005; Matthiae 2008: 67-68).

17 Matthiae 2007; 2008: 23-37; Ramazzotti 2008a: 191-205; 2009: 12-15.

18 In the end of October 2001, during the excavation of the north east wing of the Western Palace, particular attention was given to the removal of level 1 as it was meant to exploit, at least in part, the interesting Byzantine installation; thus L.7919, the basin made of slabs of plastered limestone and communicating with three northern cisterns, has been entirely reassembled in the Rest House, in the place of the actual guard room, to welcome tourists. During the removal of the foundations of level 2 we discovered many royal basalt statues and fragments; the iconographic and iconological study of these materials is currently in progress, but an initial stylistic observation would seem to confirm that all of the fragments can be dated on MBII, for their stylistic quality and for the absence of common antiquary elements in the well known MBI documents. See Matthiae 2002.

19 In the end of October 2002 the investigations revealed that the walls of the Citadel and the Southern Palace were separated by a large road. Beneath this road, in front of the so-called Southern Sector of Royal Palace G, a monumental building was discovered. This building is placed at a lower level than Palace G, and shows with it no structural connections (Matthiae 2004: 325, Fig. 27). The building has been named "Building FF2" (Bâtiment FF2) since a more precise functional interpretation is currently too difficult (Matthiae 2004: 318, fn. 34). The stratigraphy of Building FF2 is largely disturbed by the foundations of the Middle Bronze Age "Southern Palace" and by a number of later pits. So, its architectural plan, as well as its collapse levels and its complex wall decoration program, can be only partly reconstructed. In any case the Building FF2 is a multifunctional structure with some quadrangular rooms of different dimensions; its spatial setting can be understood evoking principles similar to those well known in some Royal Palace G sectors, but the semantic relation between the two

articulation of the spaces in the northern part of the so called kitchens area Royal Palace G;²⁰ to the very precious objects (such tablets, steatite, lapis and gold inlays) discovered under the eastern prospect of Throne Room of the Royal Palace G (Fig. 8)²¹ as well - of course - the two extraordinary composite miniature statues, masterpieces recently founded in the now so called Northern Quarter of the Royal Palace G.²²

A kind of professional intervention that made possible to save all the details of those art objects (discovered in an archaeological context well dated) and to reproduce their original shape and posture (Fig. 9).

The issues concerning the accessibility and fruition of the archaeological site are real and concrete problems since they involve a complex communication relationship between the local population and the archaeological monuments, between the potential tourist and the accessibility to the site, between the Mardikh economy and that of the entire region, and even more between the tourist requests and the needs of all companies working there.²³ Despite the limited economic resources, it was possible to use up-to-date technologies and equipment, like specific computer hardware and software adapted in order to plan a multimedia virtual reading as an

buildings can also be hypothesized on the basis of their typical Early Bronze IVA building techniques. See: Ramazzotti, Di Ludovico *in press*.

- 20 The discovery of a new room located behind the kitchens in the northern sector of the Palace, presumably not coeval with the kitchens (L.8127). Since the plaster on the leaves of the entry door extends under the top of the level of ash and carbon above the platform and the western face of the newly found wall (M.8126) is visibly earlier than the construction of the *mastaba* in the kilns, this means that it was laid against a remake of the eastern wall only when the discovered room, for reasons which future research may unveil, was sealed on purpose. Of this is true, we may believe that originally all three rooms to the north of the Monumental Staircase were directly connected to each other during one of the phases of the building previous to its destruction and that it was only at a later date that the one more towards the East was set up as a kitchen.
- 21 In May-June 2003 a nucleus of two rooms beneath the great containing wall was found, next to each other, but not communicating each other, both opened towards the great hall previously identified as the Throne Room of the Administrative Quarter. The discovery, in the small northern room, of 14 tablets (From L.8496: TM. 04. G. 73; 74; 145; 146; 147; 148; 149; 150; 151; 154; 160; 168; 180) some other fragments and 2 *bullae* (from L.8496: TM. 04. G. 172; 173.), probably all located at a higher level - since none were found on the floor - indicates (as we said earlier) that one of the primary activities carried out concerned "complex" administrative aspects. In fact, although the limited number of documents hardly constitutes proof of another Small Archive, the presence of tablets and *bullae* together implies that at least two functions were carried out there: that of collecting documents and that of sealing goods. Moreover, the discovery of one of the most extraordinary items of Early Bronze jewellery on the floor of this room, unique in its kind and without any known comparison, could, on the one hand, confirm that the two rooms were used by important dignitaries. See: Ramazzotti *in press* c.
- 22 A new revealed sector of the famous Palace that has been explored since the necessity of containing the earth collapses on the northern sections, beyond the Audience Court. See: Matthiae 2008: Pls 29-31.
- 23 Three routes have been programmed with different times (an indicative time of 90, 150 e 210 minutes) in order to offer the tourist different choices of the visit depending on his time. In order to avoid any interference with the environment of the archaeological park elements of vertical signals have been excluded also the descriptive panels of the various monuments and areas have been place on reading-desks placed just above the round. Each panel has a brief description in three languages (Italian, Arabic and English) with maps, drawings and photos useful for the comprehension of the site. Ramazzotti 2008a.

historical, economical and archaeological guide of the area.²⁴ As we can observe confronting the aerial views taken and displayed in chronological order, the Ebla landscape - after these complex operations - is really changing: considering the photos succession, is particularly evident through observing the perspective from the different look-out points studied in relation with the Archaeological Site Park project (Fig. 10).²⁵ Concerning the relationship between the local economy and that of the neighboring regions, the Archaeological Site Park of Ebla promoted the exploitation and the regaining of the entire region around (environment, culture, and economy). This regional approach can thus balance the economical centrality of Mardikh village and offer possible solutions to an eventual unsteady situation. The close co-operation between Italian and Syrian scholars and workers, which arose during ten years of restoration and archeological activities focused on Archaeological Park problems, is one of the results to be most proud of.²⁶ On the other hand the most important thing is that the entire village population became gradually more and more emotionally involved in this great adventure, which is part of its life from 1964. People share responsibility for the preservation and future enhancement of ancient Ebla with archaeologists and restorers.²⁷

For all these reasons the proposed model for Syrian cultural heritage's promotion can support also different areas to develop their social, economic, environmental,

- 24 Since the Royal Archive reconstruction, till now exhibited in the Idlib Museum, it is now possible to realize some visits in augmented reality and enter in the main museums of the area. Indeed Aleppo, Damascus and Idlib museum itself will take part in the park project with their partial or complete new setting up and with the planning of a real-time information network able to show some important art objects, the development of the archaeological research in their areas and the restoration activities. Using the same information network will be possible to access also at some particular (artificial and real) images of the monuments in order to promote their real visit and to show some of their hidden peculiarities; on the same level - a range of readable information will be available both for tourists and researchers according to their needs: it will include the general description of archaeological structures which has been brought to light during more than 40 years of excavation and which is still spreading; a detailed survey of the excavation sites together with recent information resulting from geochemical, geomagnetic and other scientific data.
- 25 At the same time also the reconstruction of the environment, the analytical formalization of the data, the aesthetics of its appearance, the visual system communication are in continuous transformation, and this transformation can only be followed and supported with the help of modern disciplines that study the natural, the historical and archaeological changes. These disciplines need a meta-disciplinary co-ordination and an analytical structure that can then be archaeologically applied and controlled, since only considering the space and its measurability it is possible to catch the peculiar synchronic relations between the urban structures, the diachronic changes of the settlement composition, the evidences of continuity of the architectural and building practices, and finally the marks of the significant breaks in the long occupation's sequences.
- 26 With the passing of the years, at least ten chief bricklayers reached a European skill level and more than fifty students were trained to accomplish difficult tasks carefully in these excavation sites. Moreover young technicians, architects and engineers who had been sent by the Syrian Monuments Service to attend a work stage specialized.
- 27 The relationship between the Cultural Heritage and its modern ethnological tradition shouldn't be intended as a nationalist appeal, but as a fundamental part of the international cultural memory. For any problem related to this specific aspect see: Assman 1997, 99-112.

cultural and work conditions and the applying of the Ebla archaeological park operational concepts is, therefore, an important chance to test its efficiency.²⁸ Observing this ancient Syrian capital by the proposed method of work, by the tested model of work, by the operational concept of Archaeological Park point of views, respecting the theoretical principles exposed, is now natural to compare our programme with other interesting approaches on Archaeological Park problem (Moza, Leilan, Beydar, Qatna, Mari, Emar, Ugarit, Tell Sheikh Hamad) and to emphasize a Development and Social perspective of our enterprise²⁹ which goes out from the site as archeological identity because touch, directly, the economical, political and cultural interests of an entire region and, of course, the responsibility of one generation of archeology in Syria.³⁰

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28 Dreams are coming true with the passing of the years: the creation of an effective circle able to enhance the skills of each of the persons bound together and to produce surprisingly good results: now: archaeological excavation - restoration - setting up (that means knowledge - training - employment) and thus archaeological park (tourism - employment and income); future: widespread economic growth (that means better living conditions - social services - health service - etc.) and thus social improvement (education - emancipation - etc.).

29 The touristy development of Syria has been sustained by an effective cultural policy for archaeological excavations, among which Ebla is one of the foremost and best known. Its cultural priority has been recognized not only at a scientific level, but also by the ever increasing attention which press and tourists give to it. Ebla is now one of the sites regularly visited by tourists and represents one of the symbols of the Syrian cultural heritage.

30 These observations intends the cooperation process as a Development principle and, in this specific meaning the ambition could be interpreted also as a politic frontier, strongly allusive, as well as an ideal auspice. See again: Ramazzotti 2008a; 2008b.

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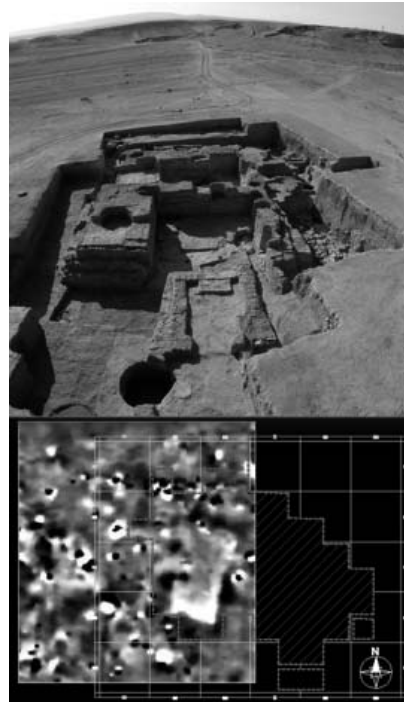


Fig. 5: The white positive geomagnetic anomaly in the South East quadrant of the Lower City and the Temple of the Rock dated on EBIVA.
Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome.



Fig. 6: The North East wing of the Royal Palace Q (L.8278 + L.8277) and two MB basalt royal statues discovered (TM.01.Q.35; TM.01.Q.431).
Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome



Fig. 1: Aerial northern view of the Ebla landscape.
Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome.

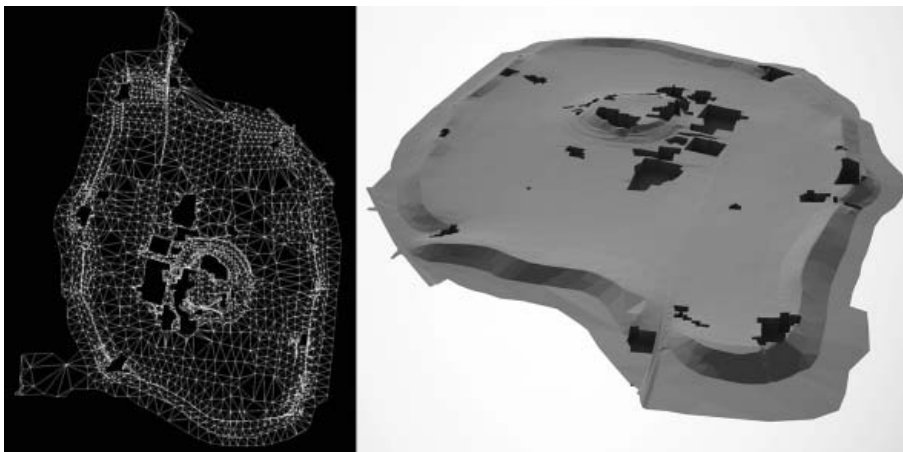


Fig. 2: The polygons of the new topographical map and a 3D model of the Tell.
Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome.

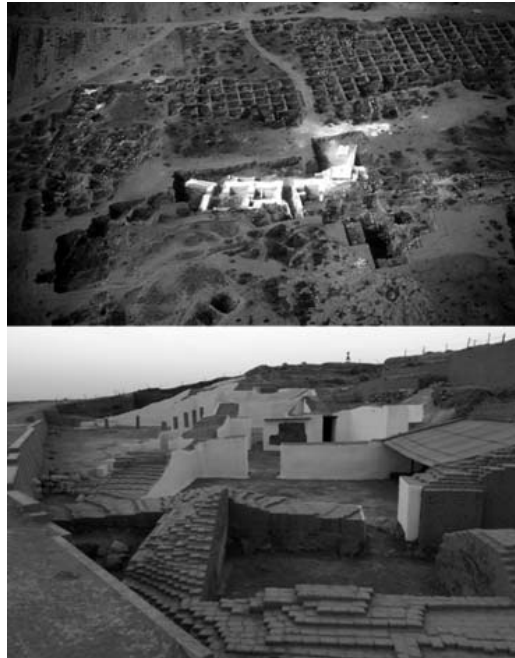


Fig. 3: The eastern aerial view of the Royal Palace G before the restorations and a southern view of the Palace after the last works.

Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome.



Fig. 4: The Central Sector (G3 Nord) of the Royal Palace G after the last restorations.

Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome.



Fig. 7: The Building FF2 and an hypothetical virtual reconstruction the geometric painted niche in L. 8729.

Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome.



Fig. 8: The Small Archive (L. 8496 + L. 8778 + L. 8495) discovered in the eastern sector of the Throne Room (L. 2866) and a 3D hypothetical reconstruction of the entire architectural complex.

Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome.



Fig. 9: The conservation state of the composite miniature statue discovered in the Northern Quarter of the Royal Palace G.
Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome.



Fig. 10: The Northern Quarter of the Royal Palace G (Area G-Nord) recently revealed and restored.
Source: MAIS Archive - University La Sapienza of Rome.