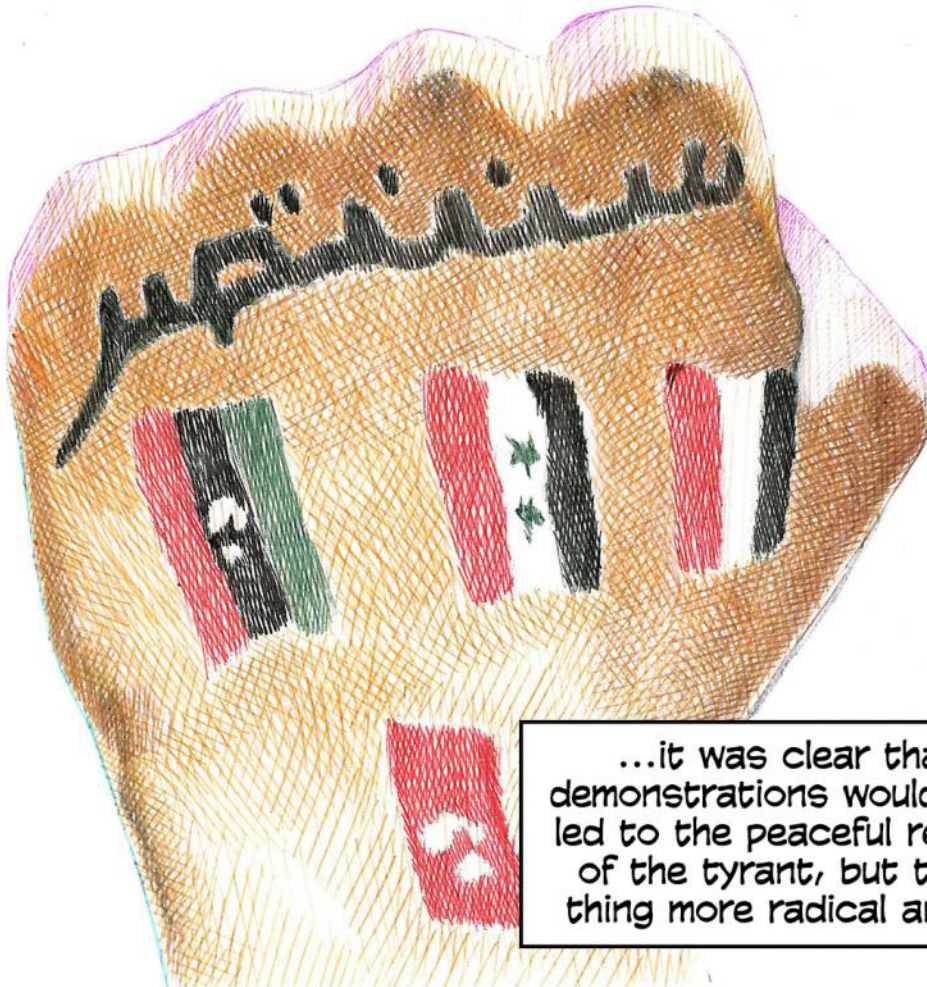


THE HELL OVER EBLA

EMILIANO BARLETTA & GIANLORENZO DI MAURO

When in March 15, 2011
the great wave of the Arab
spring arrived in Syria...



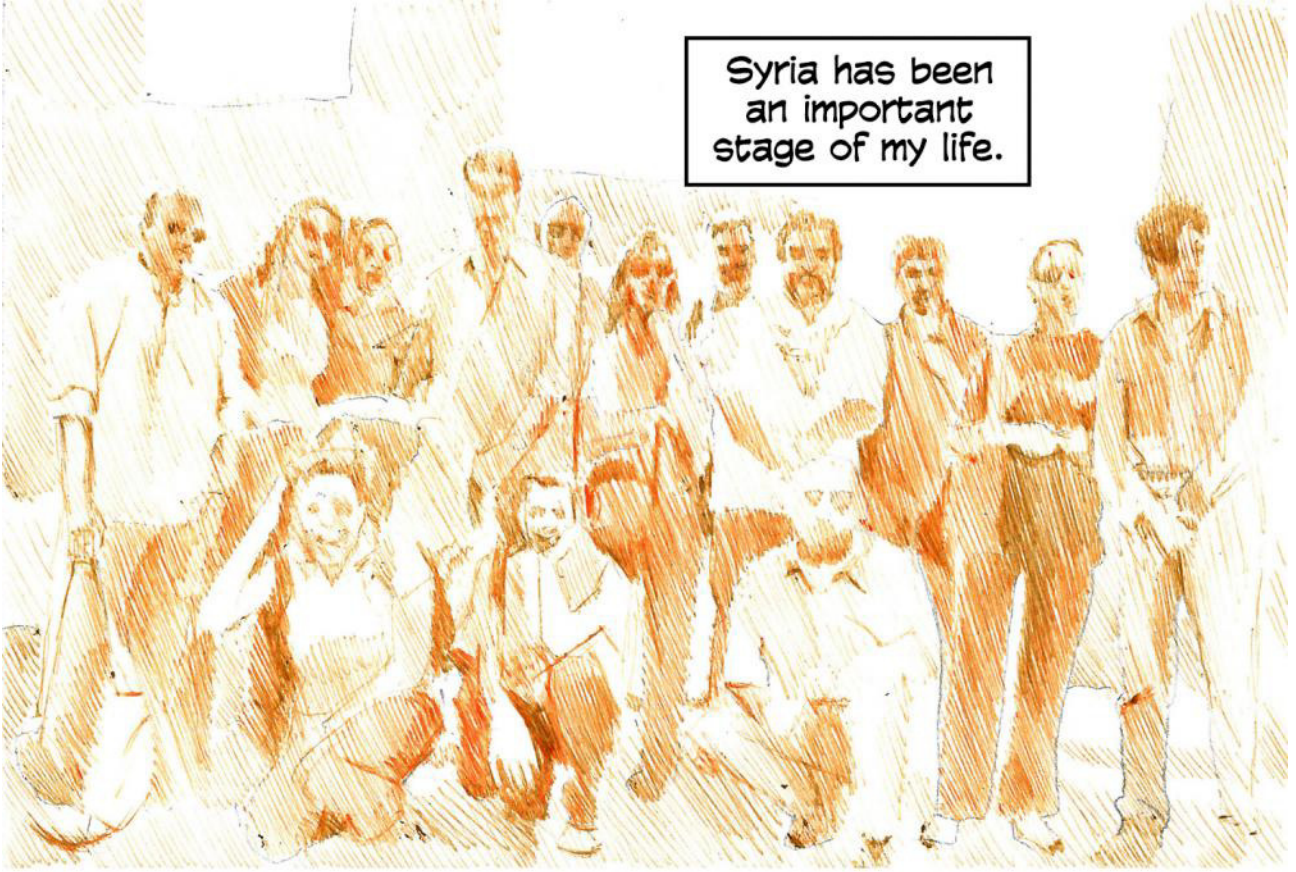
...it was clear that such demonstrations would not have led to the peaceful resignation of the tyrant, but to something more radical and scary.

WE'LL
NEGOTIATE
WITH ANYONE WHO
WILL BE WILLING
TO LOWER THEIR
WEAPONS



Syrian President
BASHAR AL-ASSAD

Syria has been an important stage of my life.



From 2000 to 2005, I was part of the archaeological mission that worked on the site of Tell Mardikh Ebla.



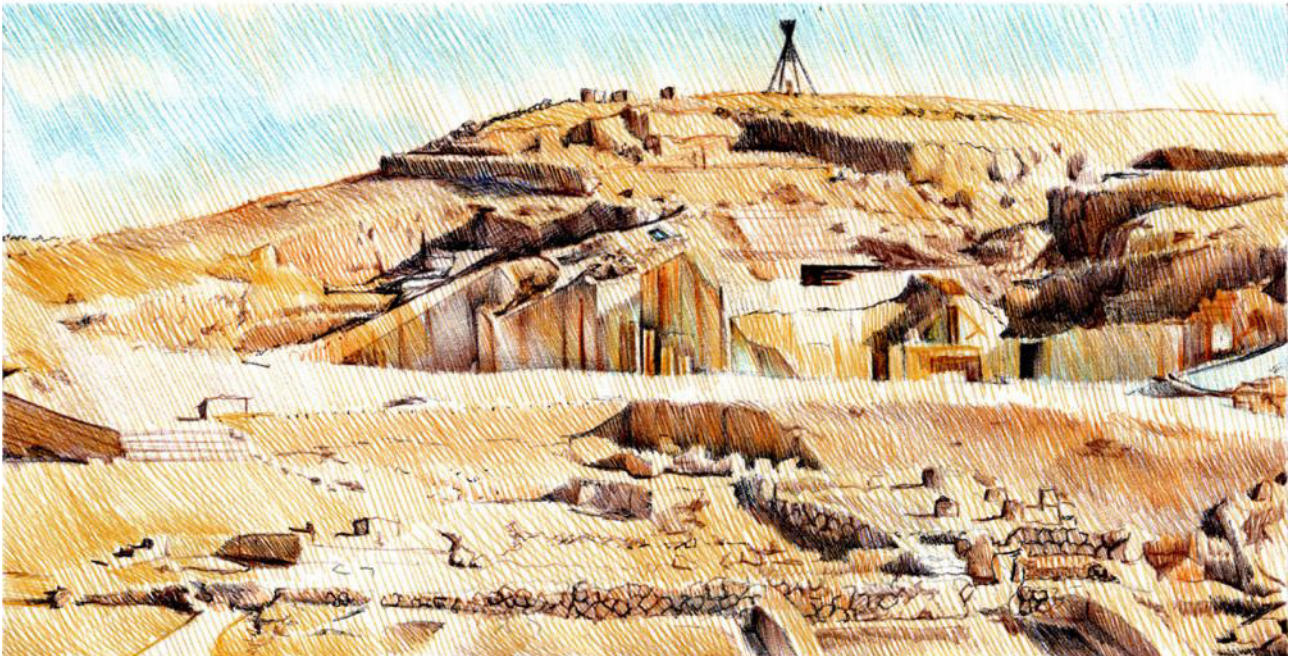
In those years in the village of Tell Mardikh I made friend with many people, mostly site workers.

In 1975 the team of Italian archaeologists discovered five thousand cuneiform tablets.

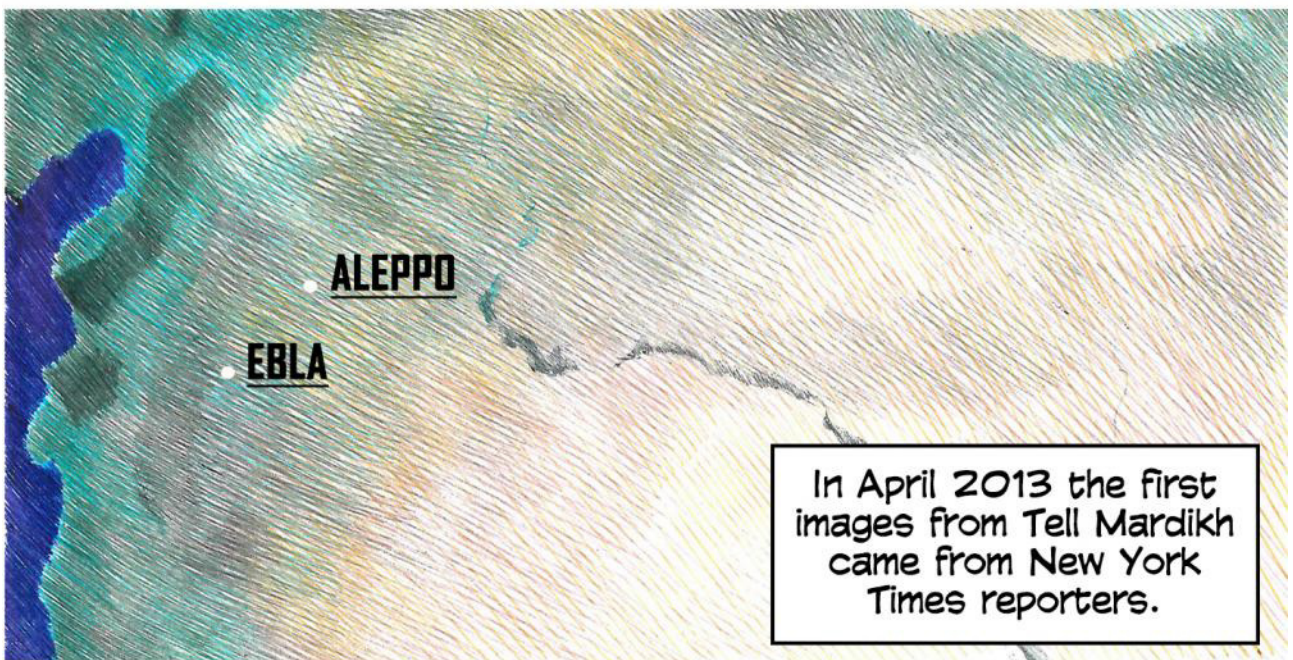
The archives dated from the first phase of the urban centre, between 2500 and 2300 BC.



Before this discovery, everyone believed that pre-classical Syria did not know writing, until shortly before the age of Hammurabi of Babylon, in 1810 a.C.



Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, the news about Ebla, arrived increasingly fragmented and third-hand.



In April 2013 the first images from Tell Mardikh came from New York Times reporters.

REC ●

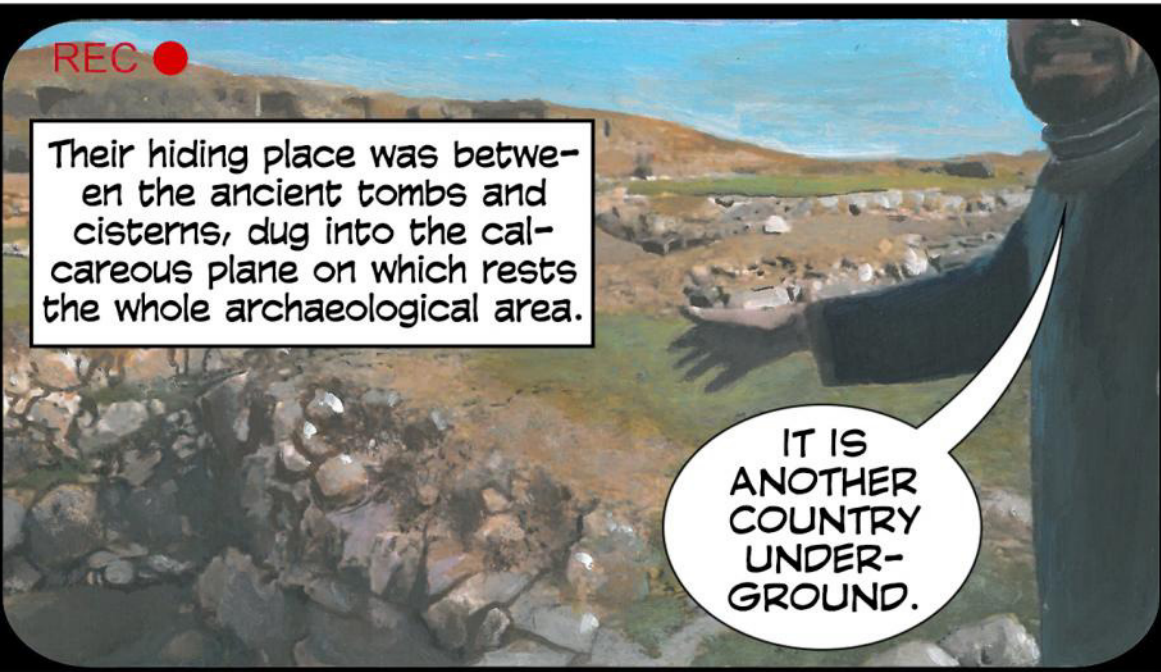
Ebla was occupied by rebels which called themselves "The Arrows of the Right".



The site became ideal for spotting passing government military planes.

REC ●

Their hiding place was between the ancient tombs and cisterns, dug into the calcareous plane on which rests the whole archaeological area.



IT IS ANOTHER COUNTRY UNDERGROUND.

They said they were protecting Ebla from full-on looting by thieves looking for artifacts to sell on the black market.



GRAVE SITES ARE POTENTIAL SPOTS TO FIND JEWELRY OR FIGURINES, AS SOME CORPSES WERE INTERRED WITH OFFERINGS AND POSSESSIONS.

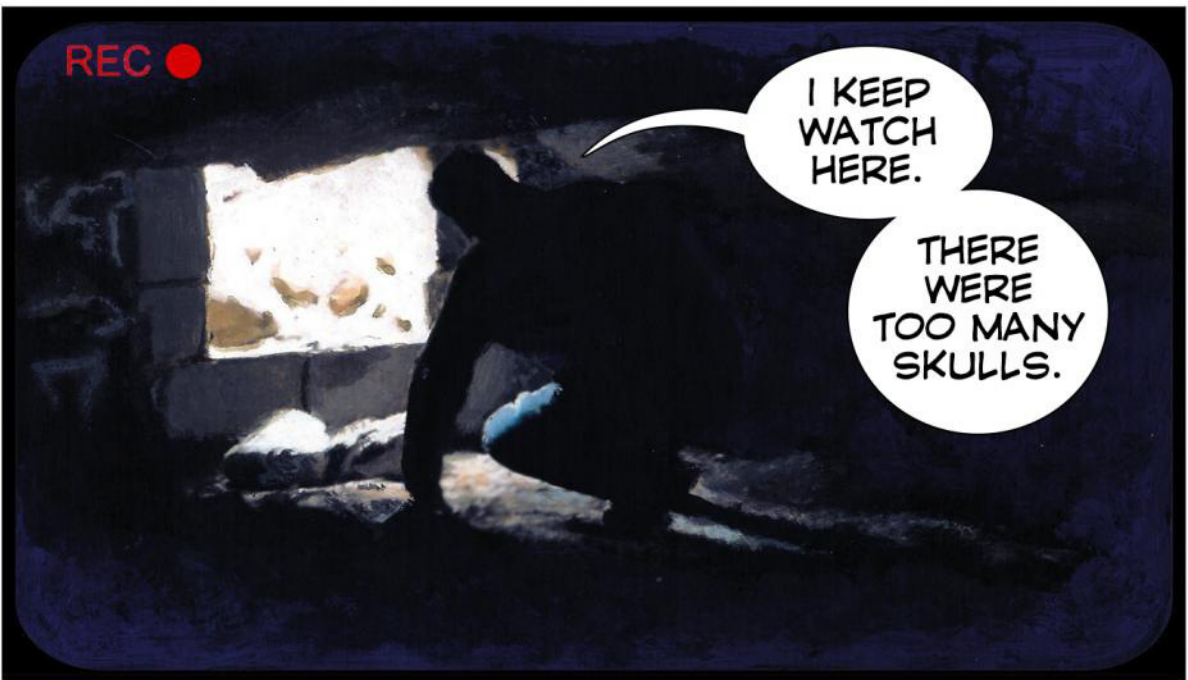
But these first pictures revealed something no one was expecting.



REC ●

I KEEP WATCH HERE.

THERE WERE TOO MANY SKULLS.



REC ●

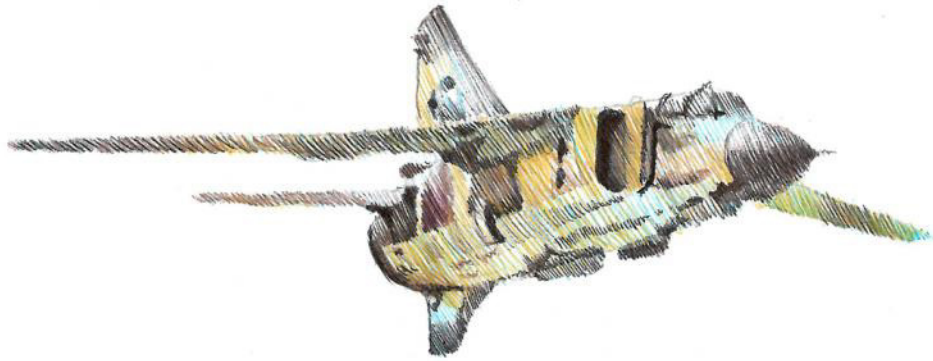
THE CAVE WAS FULL OF THEM.

WE HAD TO THROW THEM AWAY TO HAVE SPACE



With a negative impact on the archaeological site.

In July 2013, the first bombing
on the village of Tell Mardikh
took place by the planes of Assad.



In the video published on the YouTube channel "Project Syrian Archaeology" and subsequently removed due to the crudity of the images, were shown the bodies, the bombs and the fire that devoured most of the buildings of the village and its inhabitants.



In seeing those images I had the strange feeling, perhaps a suggestion, to recognize the faces of all the people who had been hit by the bombs.



For a strange association of ideas, my thoughts returned to October 20, 2004, when the same population had welcomed the president's wife, Asma al-Assad, on a visit to the archeological site of Ebla.

On the day of awarding an Honorary Doctorate in archeology at the "La Sapienza" University of Rome.



AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE "LA SAPIENZA" UNIVERSITY OF ROME I AM HAPPY TO DELIVER AN HONORARY DOCTORATE IN ARCHEOLOGY TO ASMA AL-ASSAD FOR THE GREAT DEAL OF WORK THAT SHE HAS PUT INTO USING CULTURE TO PROMOTE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN PEOPLE.

I STAND HERE TODAY IN THIS PLACE THAT HAS ENABLED SYRIA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ADVANCEMENTS IN ARCHAEOLOGY AND ITS ROLE IN HISTORY TO BE FULLY RE- COGNIZED.

I STAND PROUD TO ACCEPT THIS DOCTORATE IN ARCHAEOLOGY, HONORIS CAUSA, NOT ONLY ON MY OWN BEHALF, BUT ON BEHALF OF MY COUNTRY.



REC ●

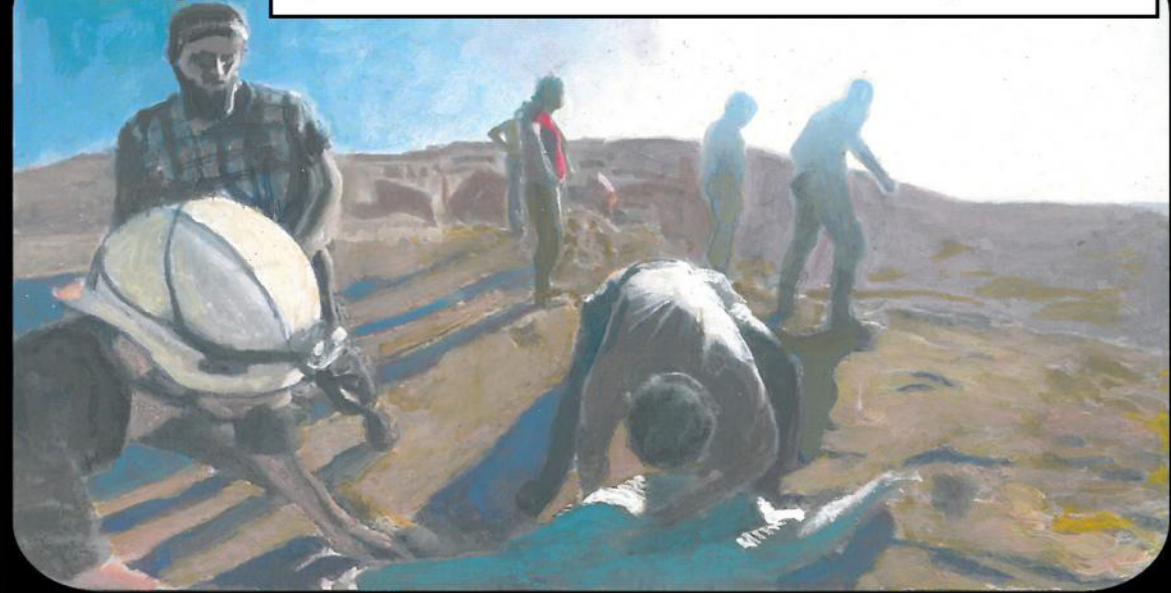
These wonderful words
have been forgotten
a few years later.

The video is dated
September 23rd 2017.

REC ●

The images show the bombings carried out
by the government and by the russian fighters,
with the aim of hitting the opposition leaders,
gathered in a cave in the archaeological area.

REC ●



REC ●



They hit an area near to the palace archives of the ancient city.


In yet another attack to the cultural heritage of the Near East...



REC ●



...completely unknown by the international media.



A silence that lasts despite the continuous bombardments.

Despite the fact that in February 2018 the Tell Mardikh villagers had abandoned their homes.

They talk about chemical weapons, gas, but not the people and their destiny.

Makes you wonder why such events don't have more news?

I often find that to the people I talk about Syria it seems normal for an arab country to be at war.



The life before the civil war is something that they don't think about in the least.

But apart from what the newspapers say or do not say, that little village in the heart of Syria was made up of people.



People disappeared in silence together with one of the most important archaeological sites of the last fifty years.



People I care about.