

# ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN STUDIES

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## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements . . . . .	vii
Introduction . . . . . Altan ÇİLİNGİROĞLU and Antonio SAGONA	ix
The Eastern Sector at the Fortress of Ayanis: Architecture and Texture in the Pillared Hall. . . . . Mahmut Bilge BAŞTÜRK	1
War and Identity in the Early History of Urartu . . . . . Atilla BATMAZ	23
Thrace Between East and West: The Early Iron Age Cultures in Thrace . . . . . Elena BOZHINOVA	51
A Blacksmith's Workshop at Klazomenai . . . . . Hüseyin CEVİZOĞLU and Ünsal YALÇIN	73
New Contributions to Urartian Archaeology from the Fortress at Ayanis . . . . . Altan ÇİLİNGİROĞLU (with an appendix by Mirjo SALVINI)	99
Regional Variations in Iron Age Grooved Pottery in Eastern Anatolia . . . . . Aylin Ü. ERDEM	113
The Apadana of Altıntepe in the Light of the Second Season of Excavations Mehmet KARAOSMANOĞLU and Halim KORUCU	131
The Kingdom of Urartu and Native Cultures . . . . . Kemalettin KÖROĞLU	149
Archaeometric Investigations of Basaltic 'Grinding Stones' from the Iron Age Settlements of Udabno, Georgia . . . . . Rene KUNZE	167

Ritual Pit Complexes in Iron Age Thrace: The Case Study of Svilengrad . . . Georgi NEKHRIZOV and Julia TZVETKOVA	177
Urartian Helmets in Reza Abbasi Museum, Iran . . . . . Reza Sabouri NOJEHDEHI	211
Phrygian Semi-Iconic Idols from Gordion . . . . . Lynn E. ROLLER	221
Remarks on the East Anatolian Iron Age . . . . . Antonio SAGONA	253
Late Iron Age Pottery From Northwestern Iran: The Evidence from Yanik Tepe. . . . . Geoffrey D. SUMMERS and Charles A. BURNEY	269
Bronze Animal Figurines from Gordion . . . . . Maya VASSILEVA	317

## THE KINGDOM OF URARTU AND NATIVE CULTURES

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### INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Urartu seems to have come into existence suddenly and without a predecessor, rather than being the continuation of a pre-existing Eastern Anatolian tradition. The structure of the state, urban planning, architecture, writing, and art are just a few examples of areas in which there is an absence of any antecedent. It is not easy to explain the sudden appearance of Urartu; the power behind it, the cultural influences upon it and, in particular, how the ruling class acquired governmental experience. It seems that Urartu's powerful southern neighbour, Assyria, was in many ways a model for it. The innovations which reached Eastern Anatolia with the foundation of the Urartian State were not compatible with the traditional lifestyle of the region and required radical changes. Major developments included a good part of the population being forced to live in cities, the development of irrigation agriculture, and the creation of a settled village lifestyle; all achieved despite the difficult geographical conditions.

The major centres of the Urartian State are usually referred to as fortresses. Settlements are not clearly differentiated in Urartian texts, other than in the case of Tušpa. Determinatives and words such as URU and É.GAL are used; the former is presumed to be applied before the names of cities and the latter before the names of fortresses.<sup>1</sup> However, in some cases these terms seem to be used for centres with predominantly local characteristics which do not really conform to the specifications for either a city or a fortress. It would appear that the official scribes of the Urartian State did not choose their words selectively. Similar terms are used to describe both local building achievements and major state building projects. However, settlements which have now been discovered and the archaeological data they have produced have made it possible to show that there is a distinct difference between sites developed as direct projects of the Urartian State and those where local practices continued with the state's permission.

In this discussion, to be able to distinguish local developments we must first establish the criteria to identify projects of the State of Urartu; in other words, those projects which were directly built by the state. After that, we will attempt to show which fortresses and villages can be considered products of the lifestyle of the local tribes and peoples within the Urartian kingdom and describe how they differ from projects of the state. Known Urartian period settlements can be roughly divided into three groups:

- 1) Cities
- 2) Local administration centres (fortresses built by local tribes and centres that may have had an appointed governor)
- 3) Rural settlements/villages (villages built for deportees and villages that were inhabited by the local population)

#### CITIES

Unlike the other Anatolian Iron Age kingdoms, which focused on improving their capitals, the Urartian State built many settlements which were larger than the capital in many locations across the country. These city-building projects reflected the kingdom's distinctive administration style and its efforts to change the traditional Eastern Anatolian lifestyle. We have defined 12 settlements as cities: Van (Tušpa), Çavuştepe (Sardurihinili), Anzaf, Toprakkale (Rusahinili <sup>KUR</sup>Qilbanikai), Ayanis (Rusahinili <sup>KUR</sup>Eidurukai), Körzüt and Kef Kalesi (Haldiei URU) in the Lake Van basin; Aznavurtepe to the north in the Murat River basin; and Armavir Blur (Argištihinili), Arin Berd (Erebuni), Karmir Blur (Teišeбай URU) and Bastam (Rusai-URU.TUR.) in the Aras River basin (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup>

All the criteria typically used to define Urartu — such as characteristics of the architecture, art, technology, metalwork, and pottery — can be fully observed in cities, along with irrigation channels and reservoirs which were constructed by the state in association with the development of cities.<sup>3</sup> There is evidence that all cities were designed and built directly by the government. Common characteristics can be summarised as follows: Cities usually consisted of two sections: a citadel and a lower settlement outside it. The protective value of the citadels seems to have been the main reason for building the cities, and only a few of the lower settlements have been studied.<sup>4</sup> The construction of the citadels probably took many years and several thousand workmen in the challenging conditions of Eastern Anatolia, and their survival and maintenance would only have been possible with the existence of a large population.

<sup>1</sup> Zimansky 1985, pp. 60–76.

<sup>2</sup> For references, see Zimansky 1998, pp. 241–261, 267–272, 279–282.

<sup>3</sup> Garbrecht 1988; Dalley 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Stone 2005; Stone and Zimansky 2009.

Moreover, the absence of any kind of military barracks in the citadels makes us think that security must have been in some way dependant on the lower city. In the case of Ayanis, the area of the lower city exceeded 80 ha,<sup>5</sup> while the citadel occupied only a few hectares.

Another feature of royal building projects is the artificial improvements made to the topography where citadels were built. In the cities listed above, the upper section of the crag upon which the citadel was constructed was almost completely leveled. The resulting platform was subsequently used for the building foundations. The most fundamental difference between Urartian state projects and centres established by local governors is architectural sophistication and efforts such as the creation of these platforms, which required a large labour force. At fortresses like Palu, Mazgirt/ Kaleköy, Doğubeyazıt and Karakoyunlu, which were built as local administration centres, there is no sign of any effort having been made to alter the natural shape of the crag (Figs 7–8). Rather than limiting the size of the citadels at state-built cities due to topography, the builders cut wide terraces into the crags creating level areas of the required dimensions. Another criterion which can be used to differentiate royal projects from local government centres and fortresses is the building style of the citadel's walls. In the local government centres the walls follow the shape of the crag, whereas in the royal projects the walls were moved outwards onto the slopes of the crag in order to enable the citadel to be built to the required size. This is an important detail that demonstrates the scale of the labour force used by the Urartian State in its citadel projects.

The stones used in the city or castle walls were not always standardised. The cyclopean masonry used in the Madır Burç at Van Fortress and the basalt stones used at Çavuştepe, Ayanis, and Kef Kalesi are prestigious Urartian products, far exceeding local workmanship in both size and quality (Fig. 4).

Planned structures like palaces, temples (Fig. 5), depots, large cisterns, and sewer systems were constructed in the citadels.<sup>6</sup> The tower-type temples with square plans found there are products of the Urartian State's efforts to create a state religion.<sup>7</sup> In the cities planned by the state, particularly on the temple walls, there are cuneiform texts either referring to building projects or providing annals of the king's career, inscribed on architectural stone blocks.

As we will show in detail below, of the 12 royal cities we have listed none but the capital, Van (Tušpa), has multi-roomed rock-cut tombs, although each has all the other criteria for a Urartian city. In addition, there are no multi-roomed rock-cut tombs in any settlements near those cities either. Cities were probably directly ruled

<sup>5</sup> Zimansky 2005, p. 237.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Stronach 1967; Kleiss 1989; Ussishkin 1994.

by members of the royal family and when they died they were taken to the capital and buried in the multi-roomed rock-cut tombs built for the king himself; in other words, they were buried beside the monarchs. In this manner the bodies of the kings and the other members of the royal family, along with the rich gifts placed in the tombs, were kept within the security of the capital's fortification walls. If this interpretation is correct then we have an important criterion for distinguishing Urartian cities (ruled by members of the royal family) from local administration centres (ruled by local governors).

#### LOCAL ADMINISTRATION CENTRES AND FORTRESSES

Many of the fortresses built in the regions ruled by the Urartian kingdom have construction styles reminiscent of the citadels of cities. But most of these local fortresses are not of an equivalent standard to those we encountered in the cities, where the state's power, architectural sophistication, and competent labour force are apparent. Moreover, the local centres have local characteristics. We believe that most of the castles there were built by local tribal leaders who survived by integrating themselves into the Urartian governmental system. Their tribes had probably been living in the area before the existence of the Urartian kingdom. With the establishment of the Urartian State they participated in the system by controlling their region on behalf of the state: collecting taxes, joining the campaigns of the Urartian army, and taking a portion of the booty.

As we stated before, there are 12 royal centres in Urartu that can be defined as cities. We consider there to have been 22 local administration centres. We will discuss the many criteria used to define these 22 sites, but the most basic is the existence of multi-roomed rock-cut tombs (**Fig. 6**). The features of the fortresses that we have defined as local administration centres can be summarised as follows: There is little attempt to alter the topography of the crag upon which the local administration centre is built. The plan of the fortress and its ramparts is shaped according to the structure of the crag and the walls are usually built around the edge of the crag. The masonry of the walls is usually of a local character. Some of the local centres have elements which are also seen in the cities, such as nearby inscribed stelae, bedrock inscriptions and petroglyphs. Some have outer settlements. There are multi-roomed rock-cut tombs inside the citadels of local administration centres (**Fig. 7**).

The choice of site for local administration centres and fortresses is similar to that of the city citadels; usually high crags are preferred. But we don't see much effort to alter the topographical structure of the crag in the building of the fortresses (**Figs 7–8**). The foundations for the ramparts, the defensive trenches, the cisterns, and the small number of rock-cut platforms reflect the limited labour resources available; this could also be the reason why the citadel walls follow the shape of the crag. The inscriptions

that can be found near some of these local fortresses relate to military campaigns against the region. They are not building inscriptions like those in the cities.

The main evidence for defining a local administration centre and dating it to the Urartian period is the presence of multi-roomed rock-cut tombs. Rock-cut tombs are monuments that imitate royal ones and it is possible that experts may have been brought from the capital to carve them. They seem to have been placed in the citadels to express the privileges of the ruling class in the Urartian period (Figs 7, 9). Multi-roomed rock-cut tombs both at the capital, Van (Tuşpa), and at the fortresses of the local administration centres are built within the walls, or on high cliff faces of the crag, where they are protected. The locations of the rock-cut tombs are indicators of the social status of their owners. It is evident that the four multi-roomed rock-cut tombs on Van Fortress belong to kings. In particular, there is an inscription recording the activities of Argishti I before the entrance of one of the tombs.

The plans of the multi-roomed rock-cut tombs have characteristics that can be defined as Urartian. They consist of a platform at the entrance, a big main room accessed by a large door and a side room or rooms surrounding it (Figs 7, 9). The maximum number of rooms is seven, as seen at the tomb of Argishti in Van. Most of the tombs comprise two rooms. In many tombs, the main room exceeds 90 sq. m, a size suitable for the performance of a ceremony; one such example is Neftkuyu. In five of the tombs (Argishti I, Palu I, Kayalıdere, Çelikli, and Kale Hodar in Iran) there are deep pits in the floor of one of the rooms, probably used to dispose of old, unwanted burial remnants. Also, there are stone-cut benches and niches in the side walls of most of the rooms. It seems that these monumental tombs were built not only for the rulers but for all of their family.<sup>8</sup> The underground chamber tombs found at Dilkaya, Karagündüz, and Yoncatepe in the basin of Van Lake demonstrate that the idea of family tombs was widespread in the Urartian period. Karagündüz tomb number 8, which is only 7 sq. m in floor area, contained approximately 106 skeletons.<sup>9</sup> Extending this example to the much larger and multi-roomed royal rock-cut tombs, we can guess that they contained a great number of bodies.

Multi-roomed rock-cut tombs are unique to Urartu and should not be confused with the single-roomed rock-cut tombs which are common in Eastern Anatolia. The single-roomed tombs, which have traditionally been dated to the Urartian period, have many attributes that identify them as belonging to the Late Iron Age and Hellenistic periods of Eastern Anatolia.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that, apart from the capital, no Urartian royal city has in its citadel any multi-roomed rock-cut tombs is a strange circumstance that needs careful examination.

<sup>8</sup> Köroğlu 2007, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Sevin and Kavaklı 1996; Sevim *et al.* 2002, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Köroğlu 2007, 2008.



As we stated above, there are also no rock-cut tombs in any of the fortresses near to the cities. We believe that the cities, along with the areas around them, were governed by members of the royal family and that these individuals were buried in the monumental multi-roomed rock-cut tombs in the capital city when they died. For this reason there is no rock-cut tomb tradition in the royal cities outside of the capital.

The Urartian State built six cities to the east of Lake Van: Van Fortress, Anzaf, Çavuştepe, Toprakkale, Ayanis and Körzüt (Fig. 1). Apart from at Van, there are no rock-cut tombs in the cities of this area or their surrounding fortresses. The same is true for Kef Kalesi and Aznavurtepe. But at Tatvan Fortress at the western end of the lake, where the investment of the Urartian State would have been less, there is a two-roomed rock-cut tomb.<sup>11</sup> It would seem that a local ruler was in power there. No fortress with a multi-roomed rock-cut tomb exists in the cities of Armavir Blur, Arin Berd, Karmir Blur, or Bastam, or their surrounding areas. On the other hand, leaders of local tribes who had undertaken the task of ruling their territory on behalf of the Urartian State seem to have built multi-roomed rock-cut tombs as a sign of their authority, following the model of the Urartian kings. Local administration centres are found in regions where there are no royal cities.

There are two fortresses in the west of the Urartian Kingdom that can be defined as local administration centres. Palu (Şebeteria?) on the Murat River has three sets of multi-roomed rock-cut tombs (Fig. 7) and an inscription describing the conquest of the area by Minua, making it one of the earliest examples of a fortress with a local governor.<sup>12</sup> A rock tomb in Mazgirt/ Kaleköy (Fig. 9) has, as proof it was governed locally, an inscription from the reign of Rusa II at its entrance.<sup>13</sup> In this region there are a number of single-roomed rock-cut tombs and an associated series of small fortresses. These features were formerly attributed to the Urartian period; however, they show characteristics of later periods.<sup>14</sup>

North of Lake Van, in the region of the source of the Murat River, around Ağrı, the fortresses of Atabindi, Dönertaş, Çelikli, and Hasanova show characteristics of being local administration centres.<sup>15</sup> The multi-roomed rock-cut tombs in these places are very similar to those in the capital from the point of view of workmanship, design, and detail. The northernmost fortresses that can be considered Urartian local administration centres are found to the east of Erzurum, in the Aras valley. They are Pasinler, Marifet,<sup>16</sup> and Yoğunhasan.<sup>17</sup> All three have multi-roomed rock-cut tombs and walls

<sup>11</sup> Özdoğan 2009, pp. 423–438.

<sup>12</sup> Sevin 1994; Köroğlu 1996, pp. 36–39, 48–49.

<sup>13</sup> Schäfer 1977; Ögün 1978.

<sup>14</sup> Köroğlu 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Çevik 2000, pp. 116–124.

<sup>16</sup> C. Sagona 1999, pp. 117–118; Çevik 2000, pp. 123–124.

<sup>17</sup> Belli and Ceylan 2002.

which have been built following the shape of the terrain. But at Pasinler, the Urartian period walls are not visible because of a medieval castle on the crag, only the two-roomed rock-cut tombs there are of Urartian style. In the large area between Erzurum and Erzincan/Altın-tepe there are no castles that could be defined as Urartian local administration centres apart from Şirinkale and Pekerçiç,<sup>18</sup> which show some indications that they were founded in the Urartian period. There are two fortresses built as local administration centres in the area east of the Lake Van basin and the Aladağ Mountains that bound it. They are Doğubeyazıt Fortress and Karakoyunlu Fortress in the area between Mount Ararat and the Aras River.

North of Bastam in Northwest Iran, which we have classified as a city, there are two fortresses that have multi-roomed rock-cut tombs: Verahram and Sangar. However, in the Urmia basin, on the west side of the lake, there are a number of centres that meet criteria to suggest that they have cultural and political ties to the Urartian State. Hodar Fortress, Şarık, and Rezaiye all dated to the Urartu era and are local administration centres that have rock-cut tombs (Fig. 6). Apart from these centres, there are other fortresses in the same area which can be ascribed to the Urartian period due to their wall building techniques, rock-cut steps, and some pottery forms.<sup>19</sup>

Within the boundaries of the land of Urartu, we see, in several fortresses, buildings very similar to the ones found in royal projects. For example, the square temples, depots, and citadel walls found at Erzincan/Altın-tepe<sup>20</sup> and Varto/Kayalidere<sup>21</sup> have features very like those in the cities. But we consider the absence of Urartian inscriptions in those centres to be an important difference. Urartian kings engraved cuneiform inscriptions at the farthest points of their campaigns, on the walls of canals and reservoirs that they built, and in their open air cult centres. In this context, the absence of any inscriptions referring to the contribution of the state to such large projects as Altın-tepe and Kayalidere is worthy of note. Furthermore, the existence of a multi-roomed rock-cut tomb at Kayalidere, along with three underground tombs of a rock-cut tomb design, may show that these settlements were built by local governors appointed from the capital.

#### VILLAGES/ RURAL LIFE

In many places in Eastern Anatolia, mounds/höyükü abandoned after the end of the Early Bronze Age were repopulated in the Middle Iron Age. This circumstance seems largely to have been associated with the resettlement policies of the Urartian State in the areas where it built cities. The resettlement policy to which Urartian written

<sup>18</sup> Işık 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Kleiss 1971, 1974.

<sup>20</sup> Özgüç 1966, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> Burney 1966.

sources refer seems to be concerned primarily with security, and in particular the need to populate the new cities and recruit soldiers. This policy is probably derived from the Neo-Assyrian Kingdom, which also undertook major deportations during its period of expansion.<sup>22</sup> It would appear that a portion of the deportees were settled in the regions around the cities in order to create villages.

Yoncatepe (Fig. 10) and Giriktepe near Lake Van,<sup>23</sup> and Haftavan Tepe<sup>24</sup> in North-west Iran are a few of the examples that can be considered in this group. The most prominent structures in these settlements are mansions that reach up to 1600 sq. m in size. These multi-roomed structures have at least one courtyard, a kitchen, and depots, and resemble similar structures found in the city citadels. The mansions are built in a high position, dominating the settlement. Furthermore, characteristic bright-red polished pottery found amongst the common ware and the presence of typical Urartian jewellery makes the similarity to Urartian culture stronger. There are no walls around these three mansions on the mounds. The masonry of the wall of the mansions has local characteristics. We think that this type of building belonged to the feudal lords who controlled the civilian settlements created by the Urartian State; this would explain why the mansions have only produced finds from the Urartian era. As far as we understand it, the tribal leaders who joined the Urartian system and were resettled in some part of Eastern Anatolia experienced a major change of lifestyle.

During the Urartian period it appears that alongside the resettled deportees, some of the tribes continued to live a semi-nomadic life, settling on mounds near the cultivated areas and creating villages. Village settlements examined during excavations at Dilkaya<sup>25</sup> and Karagündüz<sup>26</sup> in the Lake Van basin can be included in this group. The architecture on these two mounds is limited to village building styles, sizes, and types. On the mounds and in the adjacent cemeteries the presence of red polished pottery and of bronze and iron items shows that the villagers were in contact with the cities and were aware of innovations in production techniques brought in by the government. But in this type of village the traditional grooved pottery from before the Urartian period continued in everyday use.

The Kingdom of Urartu caused significant changes in the daily lives of the people of the Lake Van basin, Patnos region, and the Sevan and Aras basins, where cities were built. The rural population in these areas was also affected by the changes in the cities and became acquainted with the new products which emerged from them. Significant signs of cultural change can also be seen in the centralised large local administrations. These changes should be interpreted as indicators of a state policy which encouraged

<sup>22</sup> Oded 1979; Zimansky 1985, pp. 53–60; Konakçı 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Köroğlu 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Zimansky 1985, p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Çilingiroğlu 1993.

<sup>26</sup> Sevin and Özfirat 2000.

the spread of urban life. It is hard, however, to find signs of Urartian culture in the uncultivable highland, far from the cities. There are few traces of the criteria that help us define the era of the Urartian State in regions far from the cities, such as at Sos mound near Erzurum.<sup>27</sup> Many settlements that have been traditionally dated to a pre-Urartian period because of the presence of “grooved pottery” may in fact be Urartian period rural settlements that, because of their distance from the cities, were unaware of the innovations and preserved their traditional ways.

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<sup>27</sup> A. Sagona 1999, p. 157.

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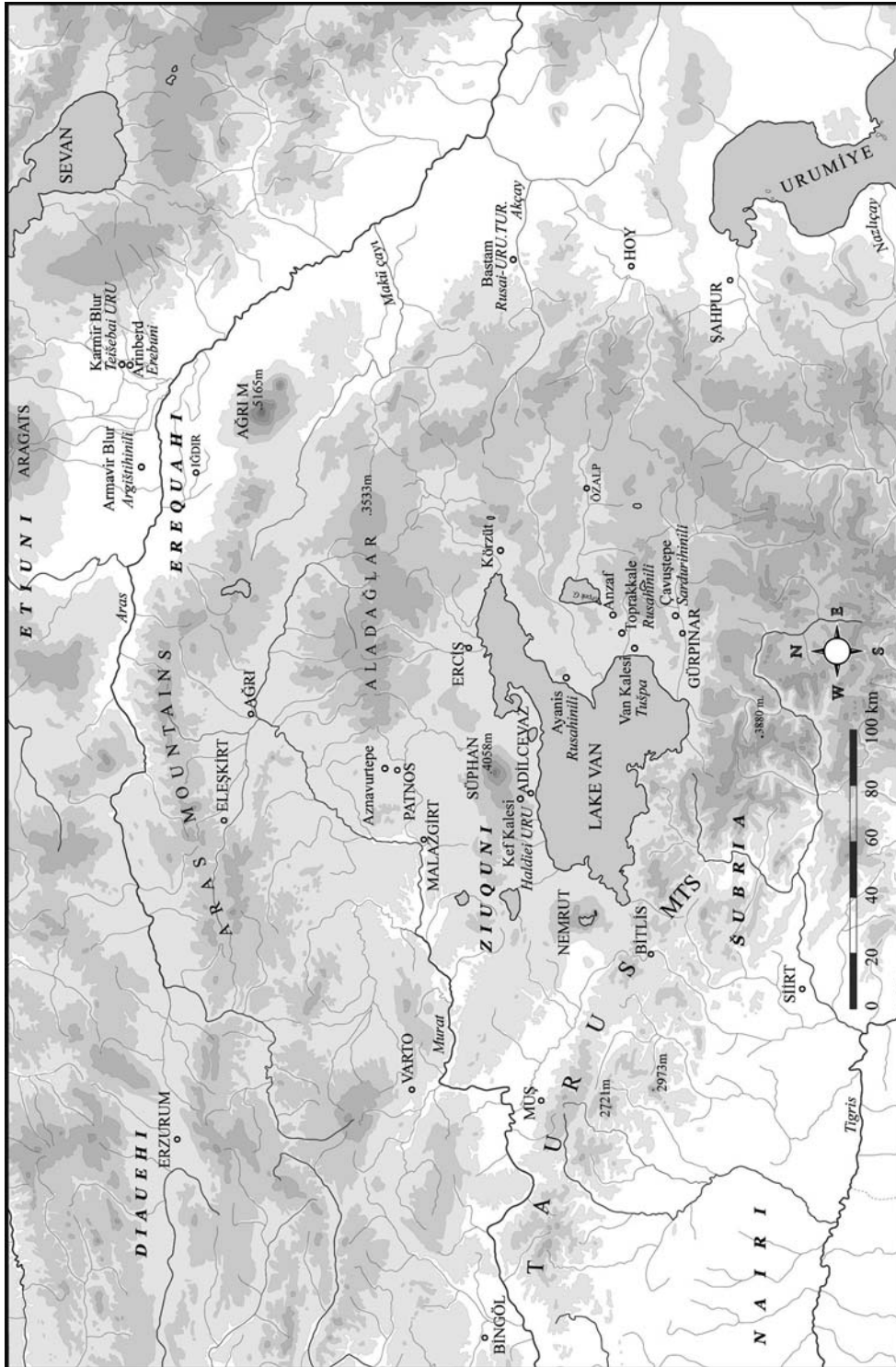


Fig. 1 Urtian centres that can be defined as cities.



Fig. 2 Van fortress citadel from the west.



Fig. 3 Çavuştepe citadel and cisterns.





Fig. 4 Adilcevaz/ Kef Kalesi and basalt building stones.



Fig. 5 Reconstruction of the Çavuştepe temple (created by S. Kuşu).

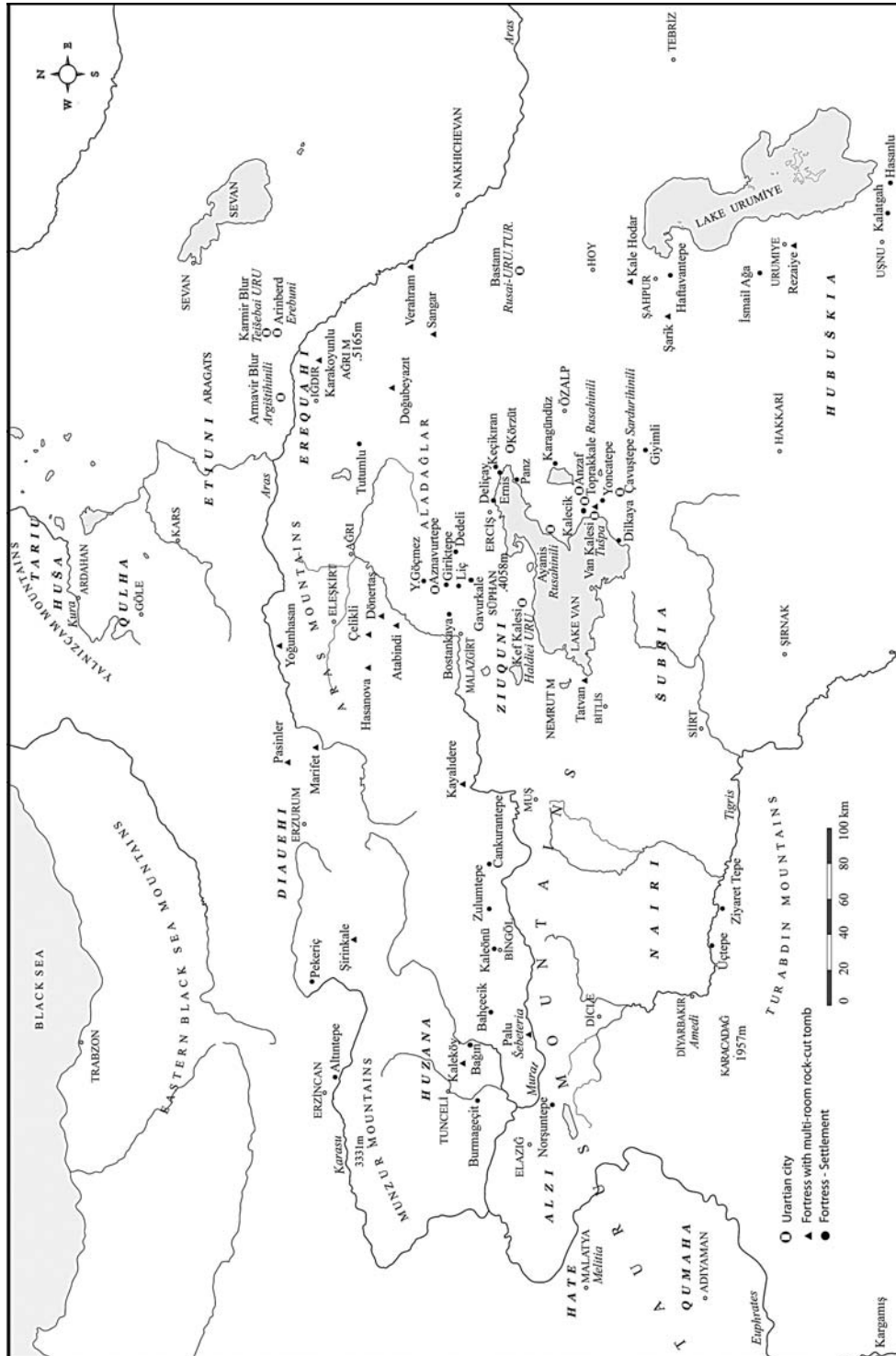


Fig. 6 Urartian cities and local administration centres with multi-roomed rock-cut tombs.



Fig. 7 Palu castle and three multi-roomed rock-cut tombs.



Fig. 8 Doğubeyazıt fortress.



Fig. 9 Entrance to Mazgirt tomb and the doorway to the second room on the left.

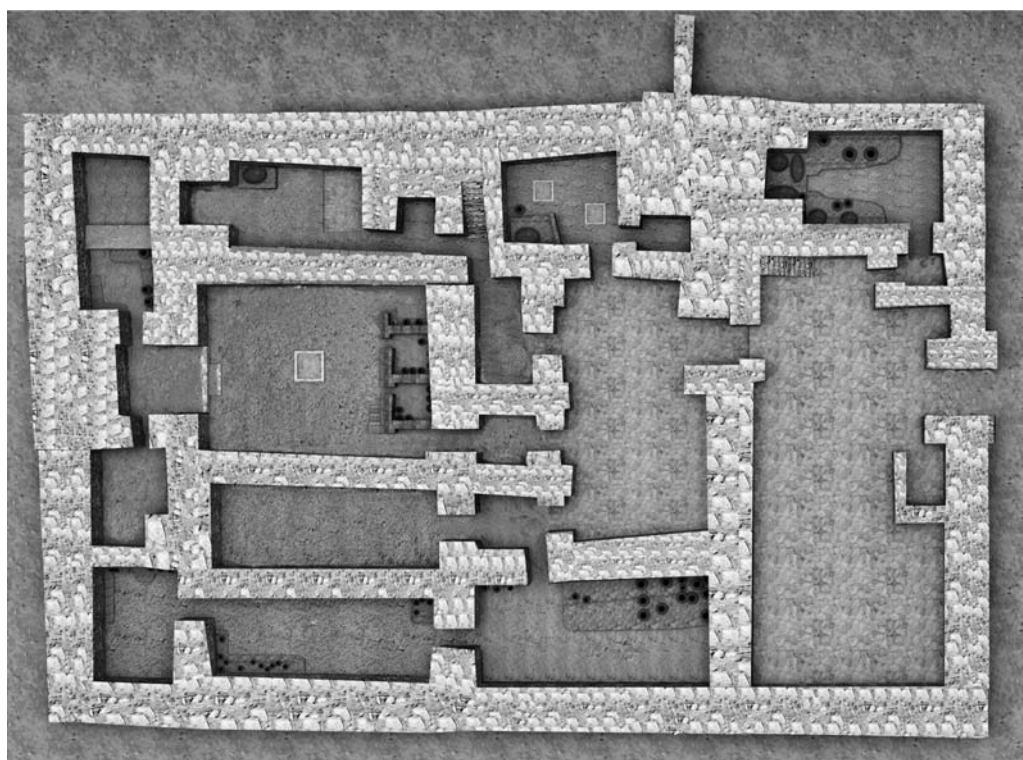


Fig. 10 Yoncatepe mansion (after Köroğlu 2009).