

Comments on the Early/Middle Iron Age Chronology of Lake Van Basin

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Abstract*

In the Van Lake basin, or in Northeast Anatolia in general, Early Iron Age denotes pre-Urartian times. Although the beginning of this age is rather obscure, it is generally accepted that it came to an end with the establishment of the Urartian Kingdom in the middle of the ninth century BC. Following the focus on a number of large, well-planned Urartian sites over the last hundred years or so, there has been a shift in the last twenty years to small, rural settlements and necropoleis, like Dilkaya, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe in the hope of finding pre-Urartian Early Iron Age remains. In this paper we shall discuss 'grooved pottery' and other important finds used to date these sites and necropoleis to the Early

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Iron Age, and suggest a new chronology for them. Accordingly, we will determine whether these necropoleis really belonged to the ancestors of the Urartians, or to a rural village population contemporary with the Urartian Kingdom.

Introduction

For the last hundred years or so the excavations carried out in the Van region have, in general, concentrated on large Urartian centres. Large and well-planned sites like Van fortress, Toprakkale, Çavuştepe, Ayanis, Patnos/Aznavurtepe and Adilcevaz/Kef Kalesi, which were built by the state, have been excavated, thereby contributing much to our understanding of Urartian culture. These centres did not, however, produce archaeological material that can be used to define the origins of the Urartian state, or the lifestyle of the rural Urartian population. Rather, attempts were made to understand these subjects in the light of somewhat inadequate information from Urartian and Assyrian inscriptions.

In the hope of finding answers to the problem on the origin of the Urartians, small, rural settlements and necropoleis, like Dilkaya, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe, isolated from larger cities, have been excavated over the last twenty years.¹ The rich finds recovered from these cemeteries, including vessels, jewellery and weapons, have been interpreted as evidence for the existence of a developed population with an advanced metallurgical technology, established a few centuries before the Urartian kingdom. In this way, a pre-Urartian Early Iron Age sequence is accepted as being, to some extent, clarified.² It would be hard to say, however, that this approach and the dating methods used have been discussed in detail.

In this paper we will first attempt an evaluation of the geographical location of the so-called pre-Urartian centres like Dilkaya, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe, in relation to the larger Urartian centres. Second, we will try to show the differences and similarities in the finds from these modest cemeteries and the major Urartian centres. We shall discuss the 'grooved pottery' used to date these cemeteries to the Early Iron Age and other finds, and suggest a new chronology for them. Accordingly, we will determine whether these necropoleis really belong to the ancestors of the Urartians, or whether they belong to a rural village population contemporary with the Urartian kingdom. Although the terminology is not yet fully established,

¹ Çilingiroğlu 1991; Çilingiroğlu 1993; Çilingiroğlu 2001; Sevin and Kavaklı 1996a; Sevin and Kavaklı 1996b, Sevin 1999; Sevin 2004a; Belli and Konyar 2001; Belli and Konyar 2003.

² Sevin 2004b.

we use the term 'Urartian' to mean Middle Iron Age, 'pre-Urartian' to mean Early Iron Age and 'post-Urartian' to mean Late Iron Age (Fig. 11).

Geographical Location of the Iron Age Sites

The following sites — Van fortress, Toprakkale, Anzaf, Çavuştepe, Ayanis, Patnos/ Aznavurtepe and Adilcevaz/Kef Kalesi — in the Van basin are situated in agricultural areas, on main roads, and appear to have been planned and constructed by the state. Defensive walls, palaces, temples, cisterns, and storerooms were built according to a particular plan. If you include the lower cities, some of the cities cover an area of 70 hectares. Most of the finds from these centres reflect the taste of the elite class.³

On the other hand, cemeteries like Dilkaya, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe appear to be related to villages and to be the result of a rural life style. Dilkaya is 35 km away from the capital city and 25 km from the nearest Urartian centre, Çavuştepe. Karagündüz on the Van-Iran highway is located 34 km away from Tushpa and 24 km from Anzaf. Finally Yoncatepe, is 9 km away from Tushpa (Fig. 1).

At Dilkaya, an Iron Age (Urartian) settlement consisting of the remains of a few buildings and three chamber graves, dated to the Early Iron Age, were unearthed.⁴ At Karagündüz, a destroyed Urartian building and nine chamber graves assumed to be pre-Urartian, with *in situ* finds were brought to light.⁵ The building excavated at Yoncatepe, with its storerooms and open courts, is a mansion. Its necropolis has eight underground chamber graves. Both the mansion and the necropolis are said to belong to the pre-Urartian period.⁶

These three sites were located in rural areas but they were not completely isolated from the major Urartian centres. If the graves belong to the Early Iron Age, one would not expect to see finds there that only appeared in the region after the foundation of the Urartian Kingdom. If, however, these necropoleis and related small settlements are contemporary with the Urartian Kingdom, we should not be surprised if we encounter new artifacts used by the Urartians. The rich collection of finds that we discuss below gives us a chance to solve this problem.

³ Forbes 1983; Zimansky 1998.

⁴ Çilingiroğlu 1991; Çilingiroğlu 1993.

⁵ Sevin and Kavaklı 1996a; Sevin and Kavaklı 1996b; Sevin 1999; Sevin 2004a.

⁶ Belli and Konyar 2001; Belli and Konyar 2003; Belli and Tozkoparan 2005.

Underground chamber tombs

Many of the so-called ‘Early Iron Age’ finds in the Van basin come from ‘underground chamber tombs’, of a more or less standard plan, which consists of a rectangular room, a narrow door and a dromos (Figs 2–8). The tombs were used for more than one burial (106 bodies in Karagündüz 8).⁷ To place each body in the tomb the dromos must have been re-opened each time. Most of the tombs at Dilkaya, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe fit into this plan.⁸ If no dromos existed, the body was placed in the tomb by removing one of the covering stones of the main chamber. Yoncatepe (M2, M5, and M6) and Ernis have produced these types of burials.⁹ Some tombs have smaller second, third, and even fourth rooms dug into the soil adjacent to the main chamber. The earlier burials and burial gifts were stored in these rooms in order to clear space for new burials. These tombs are numbers 6 and 10 at Karagündüz,¹⁰ and 4 (two side rooms), 6 and 8 (three side rooms) at Yoncatepe.¹¹ In all three necropoleis the tombs have the same plan. In our opinion, the dromoi and small siderooms of these tombs are the modest reflections of the multi-roomed rock cut tombs at major Urartian centers, specifically Van fortress, Kayalıdere, Palu and Malazgirt/Kaleköy.¹²

Grave assemblages

The three cemeteries resemble each other not only in their architecture, but also in their small finds. The main groups of finds consist of grooved pottery, iron daggers, pins and bracelets, bronze pins and earrings. But in some of the tombs red polished pottery, in one tomb at Yoncatepe (M3) two bronze fibulae (Yoncatepe M3), a Scythian type iron arrowhead (Yoncatepe M 6), an Urartian type stamp (Karagündüz) are found together with these dominant groups (Figs 2–10). As we will discuss below some of these small finds have distinctly Urartian features.

Bright Red Polished Ware

The first solid clue that prevents us from dating the Dilkaya, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe tombs to the pre-Urartian period is the red polished ware.¹³

⁷ Sevim *et al.* 2002.

⁸ Belli and Konyar 2003.

⁹ Belli and Konyar 2003.

¹⁰ Sevim and Kavaklı 1996a; Sevim and Kavaklı 1996b.

¹¹ Konyar 2004; see also fig. 3.

¹² Köroğlu and Konyar 2005; Köroğlu 2007.

¹³ Konyar 2004.

A few of the tombs yielded carinated and well-burnished red-brown polished bowls, small vases with flaring rims, and trefoil-mouthed jugs. Some of them are poorly burnished (Figs 4, 7–8). The red polished pottery is a recognizable group in the Iron Age building levels of the mounds associated with the necropoleis and in the storerooms of Yoncatepe.¹⁴

As previously documented, bright red polished ware is seen in Eastern Anatolia and its vicinity, in administrative and religious buildings of the major Urartian centres, hence it is sometime named ‘Urartian, Biainili or palace ware’. There is no evidence to date indicating that these examples go back to the pre-Urartian period or, to be more precise, to before the eighth century BC. This quality ware never forms the bulk of the wares produced in these centres.¹⁵ For instance, at Ayanis, the bright red polished ware constitutes only 18 percent of the total.¹⁶ The smaller amount of red polished ware, and its poorer quality, at Dilkaya, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe, can be explained by the rural character of these sites.

Fibulae

Fibulae are the most important finds for determining the chronology of the necropoleis. Four bronze fibulae have been found in the great hall and in the Grave M3 at Yoncatepe (Fig. 9).¹⁷ Although we have not been provided with a photograph or drawing, a fibula was also reported at Dilkaya, near the chamber tomb.¹⁸ These fibulae were found along with the local wares and red polished vessels.

Being foreign to the region, the most explicit evidence for their date of arrival in East Anatolia is to be found at Toprakkale, Karmir Blur and Ayanis, whose foundation dates are fixed, by inscriptions, to Rusa II.¹⁹ The fibulae presented here (Fig. 9) are examples from these centres built by Rusa II. A silver fibula was unearthed in the Urartian rock cut tomb at Kayalidere.²⁰ The dating of several sites — the mound belonging to Van fortress,²¹ Çavuştepe, Adilcevaz,²² Patnos-Dedeli,²³ the Nor Aresh necropolis

¹⁴ Konyar 2004; Belli and Tozkoparan 2005.

¹⁵ Burney and Lang 1971, p.129; Kroll 1976; Zimansky 1998, p. 192.

¹⁶ Kozbe *et al.* 2001.

¹⁷ Konyar 2004.

¹⁸ Çilingiroğlu 1991, p. 31.

¹⁹ Wartke 1990, p. 79/b (Toprakkale), Piotrovsky 1952, fig. 18 (Karmir Blur), Stone and Zimansky 2003, fig. 11: 15 (Ayanis).

²⁰ Burney 1966, fig. 23.

²¹ Tarhan 1994, fig. 21: 1.

²² Ögün 1978, pl. 31: 15.

²³ Ögün 1978, fig. 53.

near Karmir Blur,²⁴ and Hasanlu III²⁵ — to the same century as Rusa II, was based on the presence of fibulae.

The Yoncatepe fibulae are exact parallels of the Kayalidere and Nor Aresh examples. Most of the fibulae are bronze, with a few constructed from gold, silver, and iron.²⁶ The presence of iron fibulae at Dilkaya and Van fortress mound indicate that iron jewellery was still in use when fibulae reached the Van region.

Scythian type arrowheads

Another find that dates to the last days of the Urartian kingdom to the seventh century BC is an arrowhead from Grave 6 at Yoncatepe.²⁷ This arrowhead belongs to the ‘Scythian’ or ‘socketed’ type and, as discussed by Muscarella and Derin in the Ayanis report, they are only found in the destruction levels of Çavuştepe, Anzaf, and Ayanis.²⁸ Thus, it would seem that the Yoncatepe graves were used until the end of the kingdom.

Grooved Pottery

As we stated above, the main reason for dating the necropoleis to the Early Iron Age has been the presence of a particular type of pottery variously referred to as ‘grooved ware’, ‘groovy pottery’ or ‘grooved pottery’. The term comes from the horizontal grooves between the rim and the shoulder of bowls. It is the most dominant type in three necropoleis (Figs 3, 7–8).

Firstly, however, we would like to draw attention to a few details concerning the distribution and dating of this ware. Grooved pottery appears in Eastern Anatolia — the Elazığ-Malatya region, Karakaya dam reservoir, Upper Tigris region, Lake Van region — and in Transcaucasia and Lake Urmia basin.²⁹ Korucutepe and Norşuntepe, near Elazığ, provide us with solid stratigraphical data for a reliable dating. Within these centres, grooved pottery appears in the village-like architectural remains, immediately above the Late Bronze Age levels. Accordingly, it was dated to the Early Iron Age

²⁴ Barnet 1963, fig. 42.

²⁵ Muscarella 1965, pl. 57: 2.

²⁶ Ögün 1979.

²⁷ Konyar 2004, pl. CCXIV: 14; See also fig 5.

²⁸ Erzen 1978, p. 54, fig.39, (Çavuştepe), Belli 1998, p. 29 (Anzaf), Derin and Muscarella 2001, p. 189 ff.

²⁹ Sevin 1991; Bartl 2001; Köroğlu 2003; Konyar 2004.

and this stratigraphy was confirmed by the radiocarbon readings from Korucutepe.³⁰ It is, however, not clear when grooved pottery disappeared from the region, since these settlements do not have any Middle Iron Age (*i.e.* Urartian) level above the Early Iron Age levels. At Norşuntepe, the Urartian buildings were built on the western slope, where there is no trace of an Early Iron Age settlement.³¹

However in certain other centres in the region, grooved pottery continued throughout the Middle Iron Age. At Köşkerbaba and İmamoğlu mounds in the east of the Euphrates, for instance, similar vessels were found in Middle Iron Age levels, along with painted wares of middle Anatolian origin.³² At Habibuşağı, where an inscription of Urartian King Sarduri II is located, a grooved bowl was used as the cover of an urn.³³

Grooved pottery is observed in the tenth–eighth century levels at Tille, now submerged within the Atatürk dam reservoir,³⁴ and in eleventh–tenth century levels at Lidar.³⁵ It also appears in the post-middle Assyrian levels of Üçtepe,³⁶ Ziyarettepe,³⁷ and at many other sites in the Upper Tigris region. But how long it remained in use is unclear. Finds from northwestern Iran and Caucasia do not add anything to the discussion.

In the Elazığ-Malatya region, Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris, grooved pottery is encountered in simple village settlements, particularly in pits. It should be noted that most of the grooved pottery from these settlements is handmade. The most common surface colour is reddish brown. The grooved pottery assemblage from the necropoleis in the Van region is of a different character. Pottery from Dilkaya, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe necropoleis is pink-buff slipped and largely wheel-made.³⁸ The fact that the pottery is wheel-made is a significant evidence for technological differences and may well point to a different dating.

In addition, in graves 3, 5, 8 at Karagündüz, and 3 and 4 at Yoncatepe, the grooved pottery was found in the same chambers along with red polished ware.³⁹ Similarly, at the mound of Van fortress, these two wares were found together in a pit associated with the Urartian building level.⁴⁰ Although we

³⁰ Van Loon 1978; Winn 1980.

³¹ Hauptmann 1969/70.

³² Ökse 1992.

³³ Işık 1987.

³⁴ Blaylock 1999, pp. 263–286; Müller 2003, p. 137–149; Bartl 2001, p. 391.

³⁵ Müller 1999, p. 404 ff; Müller, 2003, p. 138.

³⁶ Köroğlu 2003.

³⁷ Roaf and Schachner 2005.

³⁸ Konyar 2004; Konyar 2005.

³⁹ Konyar 2004, p. 195 ff, 230 ff; Konyar 2005.

⁴⁰ Tarhan and Sevin 1994, p. 851, fig. 18; Tarhan 1994, p. 44 ff.

are ill-informed about the Ernis necropolis, the situation appears to be the same.⁴¹ Ayanis fortress, dated to the first half of the seventh century BC by its cuneiform inscriptions, architecture, metal objects and dendrochronological data, has also yielded grooved pottery.⁴²

The abundance of the grooved ware in the graves might suggest that it is the product of a traditional rural culture. That the fibulae, red polished ware, and Scythian arrowhead were found together with this type of pottery clearly shows that grooved pottery was in use throughout the seventh century BC in the Van region.

Conclusion

At first glance, the rich finds from the necropoleis of these small villages appear different from the examples found in royal towns. This difference, however, emerges because they are the products of rural and small settlements, not because they are earlier.

The red polished pottery, the fibulae, the Scythian arrowhead, and some other small finds in Yoncatepe, Karagündüz and Dilkaya graves makes it clear that these sites were used right up until the end of seventh century BC, that is, up until the last days of the Urartian Kingdom. The above-mentioned finds are important since they show us that there was a close cultural relationship between the graves and the major Urartian centres (Fig 11).

The grooved pottery found in graves probably represents a rural tradition that was widespread at least until the end of seventh century BC. The fact that this pottery is wheel-made and found together with datable objects means that it cannot simply be categorised along with the Early Iron Age grooved pottery of the Elazığ and upper Tigris regions.

In order to decide whether or not these necropoleis started to appear prior to the Urartian period it is necessary to look at the chronological sequence of the Iron Age settlements on the mounds and at Yoncatepe. The settlements at Dilkaya, Karagündüz, Van, as well as Yoncatepe appear in the Urartian period. There is no hint of a pre-Urartian presence.

It appears that with the establishment of the Urartian Kingdom, large royal settlements such as Van, Çavuştepe, Kaleköy and Ayanis were built near the fertile plains, while villages like Dilkaya and Karagündüz were built on the sites of earlier, that is Early Bronze Age, settlements. Yoncatepe,

⁴¹ Sevin 1996.

⁴² Kozbe *et al.* 2001, pl. 9: 1–30.

however, differs from these two. Here, a thick-walled mansion with paved courts and storerooms shows a closer relationship to the royal settlements. In the light of the issues mentioned above, it is necessary to review the Early Iron Age dating claimed for various fortresses and necropoleis in the area. It may be more productive to search for traces of the pre-Urartian period in the pasturelands occupied by the semi-nomadic communities rather than in mounds.

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Fig. 2: Underground chamber tomb 8 at Karagündüz
(after Sevin-Kavaklı 1996a, fig. 5).

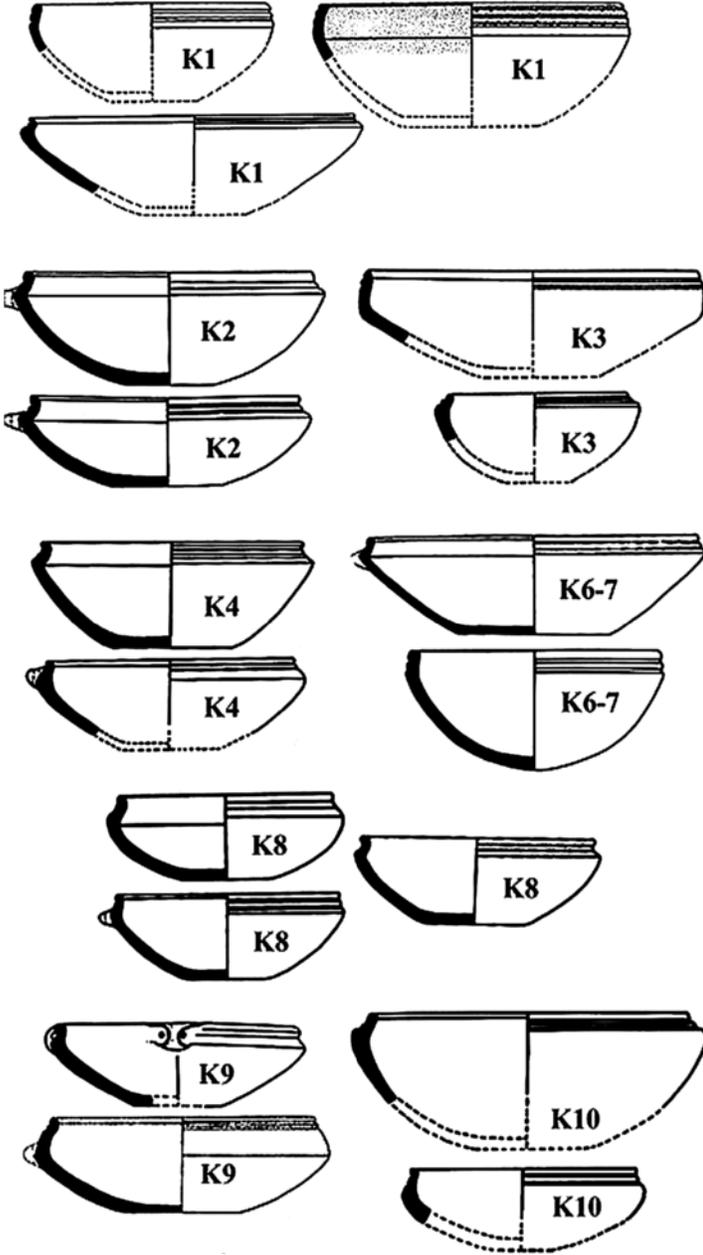


Fig. 3: Grooved pottery from Karagündüz tombs
(after Sevin-Kavaklı 1996b, Sevin 1999; Sevin 2004a).

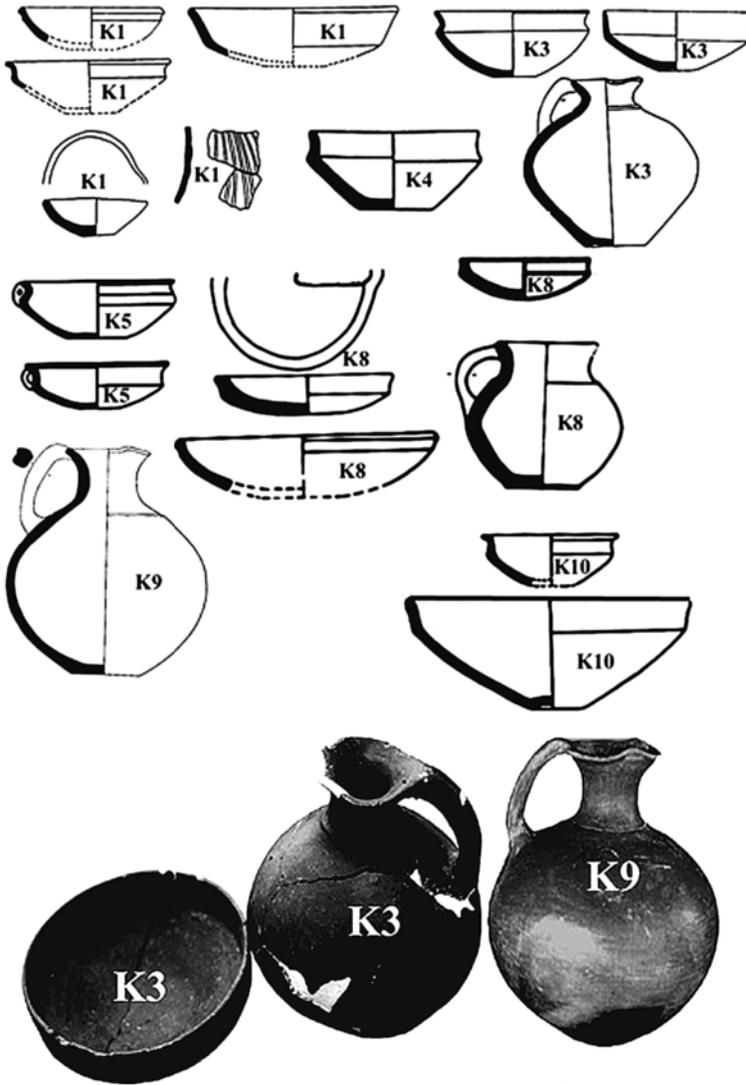
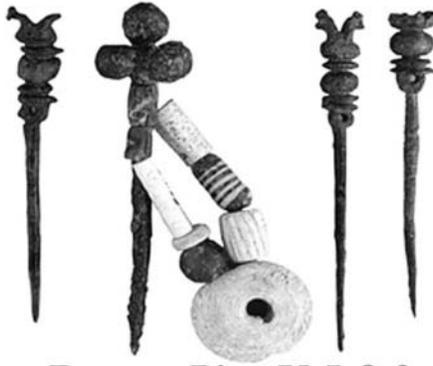


Fig. 4: Red polished pottery from Karagündüz tombs
(after Sevin-Kavaklı 1996a; Sevin-Kavaklı 1996b, Sevin 1999; Sevin 2004a).



Bronze Pins K 5-8-9



Iron Pins

Fig. 5: Bronze and iron pins from Karagündüz tombs
(after Sevin-Kavaklı 1996a, figs. 20, 26).



Iron Bracelets



Iron Daggers

Fig. 6: Iron bracelets and daggers from Karagündüz tombs
(after Sevin-Kavaklı 1996a, figs. 16, 24).

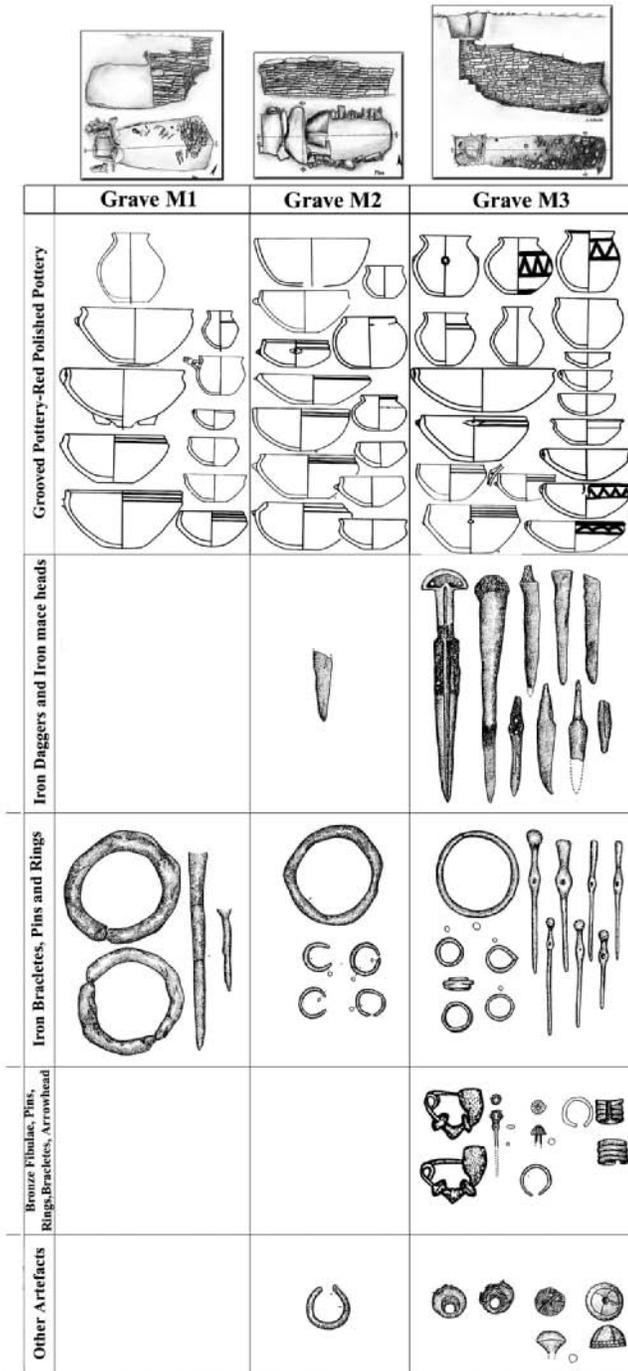


Fig. 7: Plans, sections and small finds of Yoncatepe M1-M3 underground chamber tombs (after Belli-Konyar 2001; Belli-Konyar 2003; Konyar 2004).

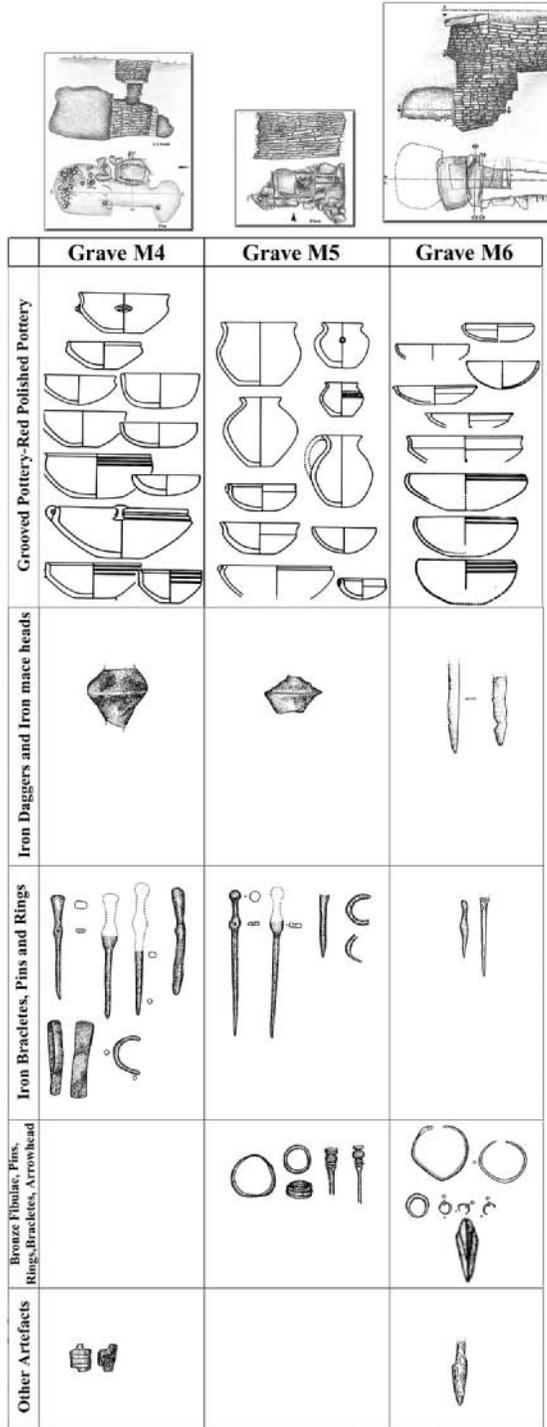


Fig. 8: Plans, sections and small finds of Yoncatepe M4-M6 underground chamber tombs (after Belli-Konyar 2001; Belli-Konyar 2003; Konyar 2004).

**Kayalıdere****Yoncatepe****Nor-Areş****Dedeli****Van Kalesi****Adilcevaz****Karmir-Blur****Hasanlı****Toprakkale****Ayanis****Bastam**

Fig. 9: Fibulae from the Urartian centres and necropoleis.

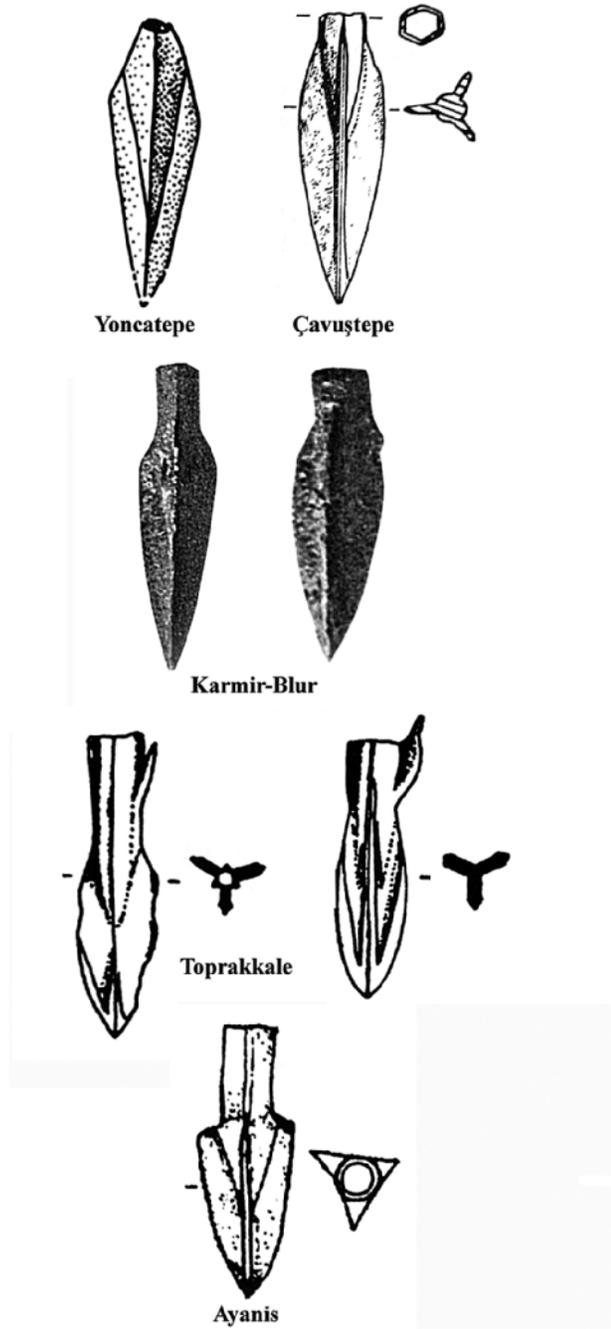


Fig. 10: 'Scythian' or 'socketed' type bronze arrowheads from Urartian sites.

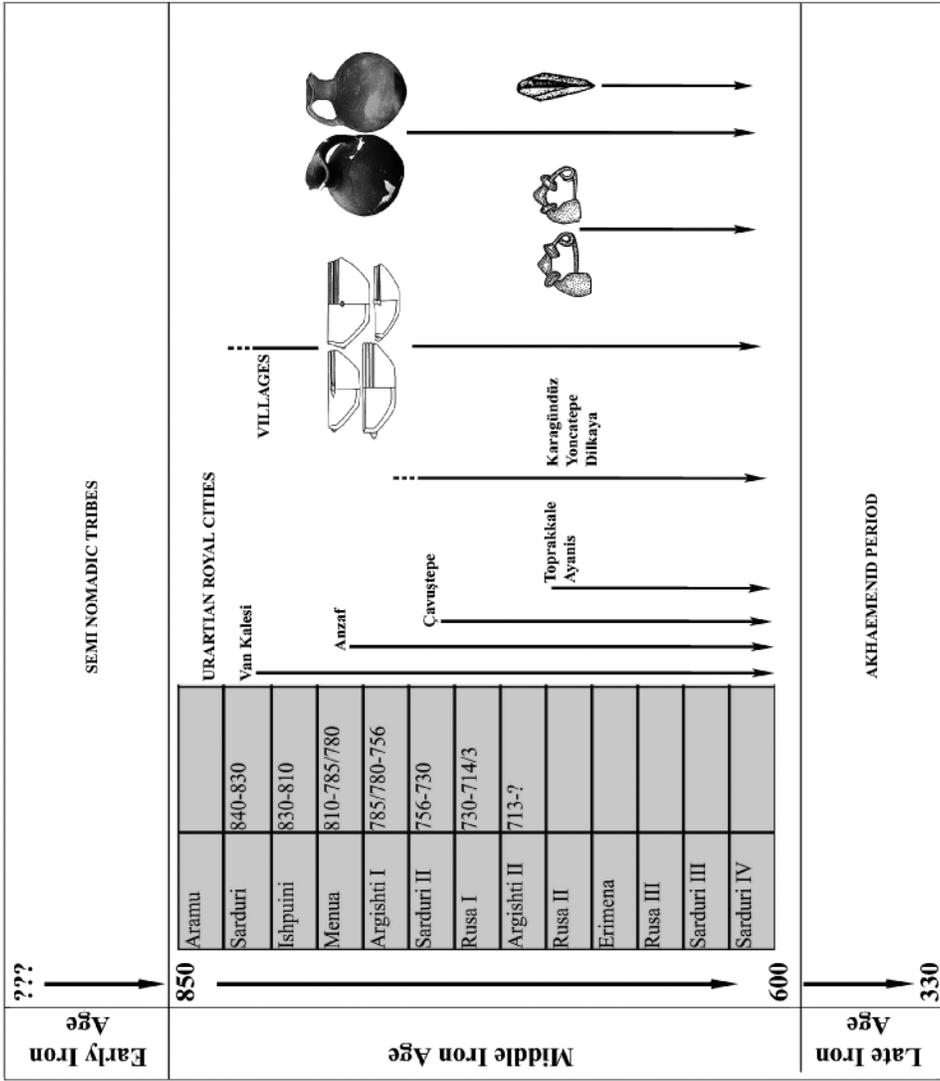


Fig. 11: Chronological table for the Van Region in relation to Iron Ages