

NOTIZIARIO

Excavations at the Urartian Fortress of Ayanis in 2004 Season

Between 1st July and 13th August a team from the Ege University, directed by Prof. Dr. Altan Çilingiroğlu, carried out the 2004 season of excavation at the Ayanis fortress, 38 km north of modern Van (ancient Tushpa). The Temple Area (Area VI) and two unexcavated sections of the fortress, one in the east of the temple (Area IX) and then a part of the fortress west of the temple (Area III) were excavated, in order to understand the architectural connection of the temple complex with the possible buildings in the west and in the east.

It was not possible to uncover the southern part of the temple courtyard because we found there a Medieval stone wall running from east to west. As we already gathered all archaeological data about the wall we decided to take it out, in order to reach the floor of the courtyard or possible storerooms beneath the floor, as it happened in 2003 south-west of the Temple area. East of pillar VI a beaten clay floor was reached at the level of -4.55 m (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 – The beaten clay floor near pillars VI and VII.

The same floor was found near pillar VII at the level of -4.79 m. A number of burnt wooden beams laid on the floor, showing the presence of carpentry on the wooden portico in front of the pillars. It seems almost certain that there are no storerooms beneath the floor of this part of the courtyard.

Excavations continued north-west of the temple area, where in the previous years a number of archaeological artifacts were found. A wooden staircase, leading from the courtyard to the storerooms beneath it, was built on the main bedrock. It seems certain that an opening leading to the staircase connected the courtyard and the storerooms. It seems cer-

tain that there was no other opening to the storerooms, where a number of sacrificial artifacts dedicated to God Haldi were kept. Two bronze inscribed shields (Fig. 2), a bronze helmet, an iron quiver decorated by bronze plaques and hundreds of iron arrowheads were among the artifacts unearthed next to the staircase.



Fig. 2 – One of the bronze shields found in the storerooms.

One of the aims of the season was the solution of a long lasting problem, i.e. to discover buildings between the Temple complex and Area VIII in the east, excavated some years ago. In order to do this we began to excavate a trench (Area IX) in the eastern part of the fortress (Fig. 3). Two pillars, very similar to those of the temple in shape and dimensions, were unearthed in the level of -4.94 m. The pillars, which were constructed on masonry bedding of natural rock with help of stones and wooden beams, were 3.80 m far the one from the other. The previously excavated pillars in the Area VIII should belong to the same building. Considering that we had found no inscriptions on the pithoi in the storerooms of the Area VIII this newly discovered building may belong to the temple property, and might be used by the priests.

We think that we may find the buildings, if they existed, between the buildings in the east and the storage rooms in the west, in a flat and unexcavated area west of the temple. A new sector (Area III) in the trenches E19-20 was chosen as the site of our new excavations. A stone wall just beneath the surface, which destroyed an Urartian mudbrick wall running east – west, should belong either to the Medieval period or to a period after the destruction of the fortress. A complete horse skeleton (Fig. 4) lay on the stone wall and we found no possible explanation for its presence. A room south of the stone wall was used as a pottery disposal area, where 15000 Urartian sherds were found. It is interesting to remark that several of them have a painted decoration, very uncommon in the Urartian pottery tradition. We still have no definite idea about the origin of the painted pottery. An inscribed bulla from the same disposal area is very important because it gave us an Urartian year name: year when the *ašihusi* building was constructed.

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Fig. 3 – Area IX with the two pillars.



Fig. 4 – The horse skeleton found on the stone wall in area III.