

Tomba n. 233: 40° 30' 22.3" N 44° 57' 02.7" E

Si trovava a nord della tomba 231, era stata violata ma vicino erano stati deposti frammenti non utilizzabili dai clandestini (fig. 6).

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Iranian – Italian archaeological survey in Eastern Azerbaijan

The Iranian – Italian Archaeological Survey in Eastern Azerbaijan, organized by this Institute and the Group of Archaeology of the Tarbiat-e Modarres University, carried out its field season between 24th October and 24th November 2006. The main aims of the survey were the determination of the south-eastern frontier of the Urartian kingdom in the area east of the Urmia lake, in the light of the new evidences from the Javanqal'eh inscription of Argishti I (Salvini 2005: 241-248) and on the information of new fortifications found in the area, the study of the Iron II hill-forts and the enrichment of the few data available for the area between the eastern shore of the Urmia lake and the Sahand massif (Kroll 1984: 30-31 maps 3-4, 33-37, maps 5-6, with preceding literature).

The work of the mission was possible only due to the kindness of the Tabriz section of the Sazeman-e Mirath-e Farhangi-e Keshvar, who supplied us with all the information concerning the sites discovered by its archaeologists in the last years and never published.

The Iranian – Italian Archaeological Survey carried on its fieldwork in the northern shore of the Urmia Lake, from the border with the *ostan* of Western Azerbaijan to Shabestar, and on the north-western, western and south-western slopes of the Sahand massif, with a particular attention to the areas of Khosrovshahr, Osku, Azarshahr, Ajabshir and Bonab, reaching the city of Leylan.

21 sites not mentioned in the literature were visited. The most important among them are listed below, disposed from north to south. Please note that the dates are based on a cursory visual examination of the pottery, and that an in-depth study will doubtless change some of the attributions.

TOPCHI. Location: 38° 19' 13.8" N 45° 10' 14.4" E. Small fort on a natural hill about 15x75 m and 10 m high, poorly preserved. On the Eastern side there are remains of a wall. Immediately East of the main hill there is a lower hump very rich in pottery, but without traces of structures. Periods: Iron II-III. Achaemenid, Parthian, Sasanian (?), Islamic. A few sherds of Urartian Toprakkale ware were found on the lower hump.

NARIN QAL'EH. Location: 38° 01' 13.6" N 46° 08' 49.8" E. Site on a natural hill, diameter about 50 m. No structures are visible on the site, but the presence of large heaps of stones suggests the presence of walls. Due to the character of the location any settlement existing there was doubtless a fortification. Periods: Chalcolithic, Iron I-II-III, Achaemenid (?) Parthian/Sasanian, Islamic. A few sherds of Urartian Toprakkale ware were found on the site.

BÖYÜK QAL'EH. Location: 37° 48' 59.0" N 46° 17' 59.2" E. Large fortress on top of a natural hill, with a surface of about 4 hectares. The upper part of the hill is surrounded by a stone wall (fig. 1) and on the very top of the site there is a citadel about 30x50 m. The walls are 3.50-3.80 m thick, formed by two faces of large stones (up to 75x70x40 cm), partly worked, with a filling of smaller stones and follow the relief of the hill. In places they are con-

served to a height up to 170 cm (fig. 2). Rocky outcrops determine the presence of small towers. The site, which has evident similarities with the Armenian fortresses of the Early Iron Age (see for instance Smith 1996: 166-170, figs. 4.17, 4.18; Biscione, Hmayakyan, Parmegiani, Sayadyan 2002: 126-27, 154-55, but B y k Qal'eh is much larger than the Armenian counterparts), was doubtless the capital of a political entity, probably a complex chiefdom or a proto-state. Periods: Architecture surely Iron II; pottery Chalcolithic, Iron I-II, Achaemenid, Parthian/Sasanian. At the feet of the hill there is a megalithic necropolis, surely connected with the fortress.

QADAMGAH. Location: 37° 40' 35.5" N 46° 00' 51.0" E. Hemispherical hall excavated on the side of a hill, diameter about 15 m, height 11 m. On the top there is a circular opening, diameter 1 m. On the south-western part a *mihrab* is carved in the rock. The access is through a vaulted corridor, 9.40 m long, 1.70 wide and about 2.50 high, which in the inner side opens on a vaulted chamber 3.40 x 4.30 m. The lower part of the room is painted white to a height of 2 m. Local informants attribute the excavation of the hall to Mithraists. Outside the hall, beyond a small stream, there is a pottery scatter and north-west of the artificial cave there is a small Islamic cemetery with interesting gravestones of Safavid period. According to local informants the hall is used as a mosque, but only during the month of Moharram. Date of the hall: Probably Parthian/Sasanian. Pottery from the scatter: Chalcolithic, Parthian/Sasanian, Islamic.

QAL'EH TAMASHA. Location: 37° 39' 13.1" N 45° 57' 04.8" E. Fort on the top of a steep hill (fig. 3), almost totally destroyed by illegal diggings. On the top of the hill there are much disturbed remains of mudbrick structures and on the eastern slope the remains of a stone wall are visible. Periods: Chalcolithic, Parthian/Sasanian.

CHAMAN TEPESI. Location: 37° 00' 46.3" N 46° 13' 01.1" E. Rounded tepe with flat top (fig. 4), about 4 m high and with a diameter of 50 m. The sides are incised and cut by agricultural activities, excepted the western one. On the site an animal clay figurine was found. Period: Chalcolithic.

Among the other unpublished sites are noteworthy a Parthian/Sasanian fort (Qyz Qal'eh) and some reasonably large tepes, mainly dating back to the Chalcolithic period (e. g. Sheikh Vali Tepesi, Haft Cheshmeh South, B y k Tepe). Other seven sites already known in the literature were also visited, almost the totality.

On the basis of a first exam of the data is already possible to draw some conclusions on the objectives of the survey. The main question, the fixation of the south-eastern frontier of the Urartian kingdom, was already solved. The lack of the typical Urartian fortifications in the areas east and immediately north of the Urmia Lake confirms the fact that these regions were not part of that kingdom, even if the areas of Tabriz, Khosrovshahr, Osku, Azarshahr, Ajabshir, Bonab, Malakan and Leylan have optimal characters for agriculture and/or stock raising. As the Marand area was clearly included into the Urartian kingdom, on the basis of the archaeological evidence it is reasonable to think that the frontier ran along the watershed of the mountains immediately north of the lake, then ran north-eastwards to include the areas of Varzeghan and Ahar, and from there north to the river Araxes. The surveyed region was anyway in the influence zone of the Urartian kingdom, as it is witnessed by the raids mentioned in the Javanqal'eh inscription and by the presence of a luxury item like the red-polished Toprakkale ware, typical of the Urartian elite complex. These Toprakkale ware sherds were found at Topchi and at Narin Qal'eh, small Iron II-III forts, i.e. on one half of the Early Iron Age sites. The presence of such luxury item in small sites, whether imports or gifts, testifies a widespread diffusion. It is also possible that a further study of the finds will reveal other types of Urartian pottery, giving more data on the Urartian presence in the region.

The discovery of Böyük Qal'eh, a large hill-fort dating back to Iron II is not a new fact for north-western Iran, as these fortifications, characterized by thick walls built with stones and not with mudbricks, and situated on hilltops instead of the bottom of valleys, are quoted in the literature, even if they are practically unpublished. These fortifications, which did not have purely military functions but also residential and administrative ones, were diffused in Eastern Anatolia, in the mountainous part of Georgia, in Armenia and in parts of Iranian Azerbaijan, and the largest were capitals of well-defined political entities, either complex chiefdoms or (less likely) proto-states. The new fact is the presence of an hill-fort on the western slopes of mount Sahand, because in Iran up to now they were known only in the areas west of the Urmia lake and north of the line Astara – watershed of the Sabalan range – Marand, coinciding almost totally with the one of the immediately later Urartian fortifications, and only in Iron III their distribution expanded in every direction (Biscione 2006 in print). The Iron I-II distribution is a further indication that the Urartian kingdom, the first real state of the Caucasian area, occupied and unified politically an area that was homogeneous from the political and socio-cultural point of view, and that it was strongly rooted in this local tradition.

It is also to be remarked that until now the earliest hill-forts – or the earliest frequentation of such sites – were attributed to the Early Bronze. The Iranian-Italian survey found Chalcolithic pottery on two hill-forts, Boyuk Qal'eh and Tepe Tamasha. It is evident that any village located on these two sites or on similar ones, given the character of the places (figs. 1, 3), had to have functions and defence structures different from those of the villages in the plain or in the valley bottoms (fig. 4), being an early form of the later hill-forts. Their origin therefore is earlier than previously thought, at least in the area between Mount Sahand and Urmia Lake.

16 new sites out of the 21 visited by the Iranian-Italian survey had Chalcolithic (Dalma) pottery. Only a limited number of Geoy N sherds was found, and always in association with the Dalma ones. Such a widespread presence of Chalcolithic settlements was absolutely unknown (the only site mentioned in the literature is Yanik), and shows that the area immediately north and east of the Urmia lake was one of the focal areas for this period.

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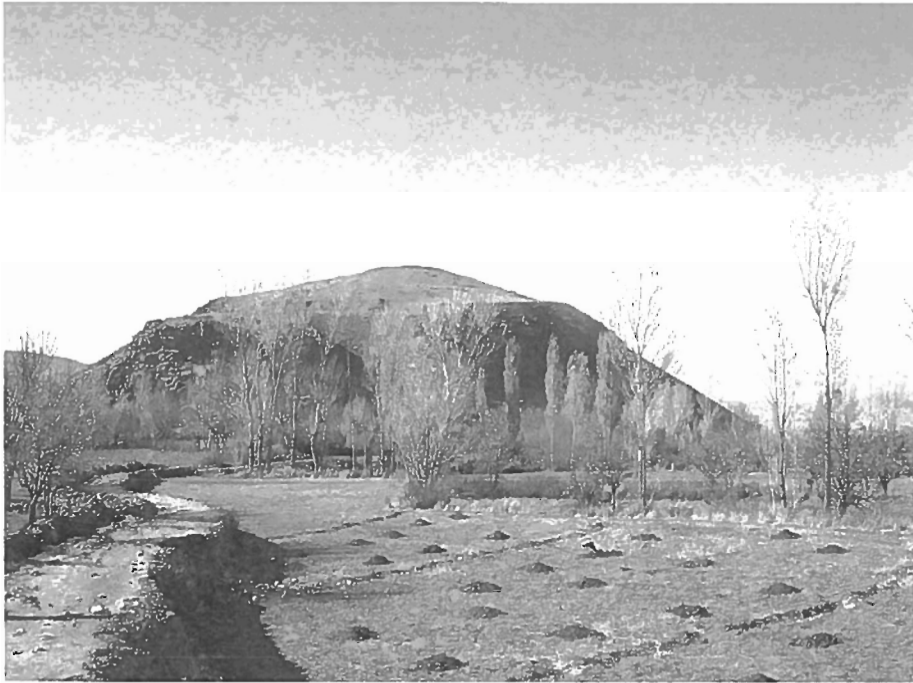


Fig. 1. – The eastern side of the hill where Böyük Qal'eh is located. The upper part is surrounded by a defence wall and the citadel is on the top of the hill.



Fig. 2. – The walls on the north-western side of Böyük Qal'eh. Here they are preserved to a height of 1.70 m. The irregular rows of partly-worked stones of different size are typical of the pre-Urartian fortifications.



Fig. 3. – The north-eastern side of the hill of Tamasha. The remains of the fort are located on the uppermost part.



Fig. 4. – The unfortified chalcolithic site of Chaman Tepe, in the Leylan plain.