

A NEW URARTIAN INSCRIPTION FROM ELAZIĞ/BAHÇECİK, EASTERN TURKEY

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A previously unknown Urartian site was identified in 1987 in the village of Bahçecik in the Karakağan district of the province of Elazığ in eastern Anatolia (fig. 1). The site is 35 km south-west of Bingöl and 30 km north-west of the famous Urartian fortress at Palu (ancient Šebeteria). The ruins lie immediately to the north of Bahçecik village on the top and flanks of a low ridge (fig. 2). About 500 m north of the ridge there is a mound (Bahçecik I) which has Iron Age levels (Sevin 1987: 8, figg. 22/1-7).

The site contains one noteworthy building measuring 63 m by 10 m and divided into various compartments. Lying as it does on the important road network which passes through Bingöl and Palu on its way to the Euphrates river, it is quite likely to be a staging post (Sevin 1988a; 1988b; 1989, 1991). In fact, Urartian staging posts have been identified at 25-30 km intervals all along this road.

Apart from some Urartian rock signs carved into boulders lying on the plain (fig. 3), some 100-150 m south of the building, no other ruins are to be seen. Only this building and the rock signs provide evidence of the site being settled in the Urartian period.

In the 1990s experts from Elazığ museum identified an Urartian inscription in Bahçecik village. The inscription is in Urartian cuneiform on a basalt block which was then reused as part of the wall of a villager's home. It has since been removed to Elazığ museum. The block is 59 cm high, 90 cm wide and 30 cm thick and is slightly broken on its lower left side and at the very base. The inscription is on one face and is 12 lines long. The lines are spaced at 4.5 cm. The last six lines are partially broken (figs. 4-5).

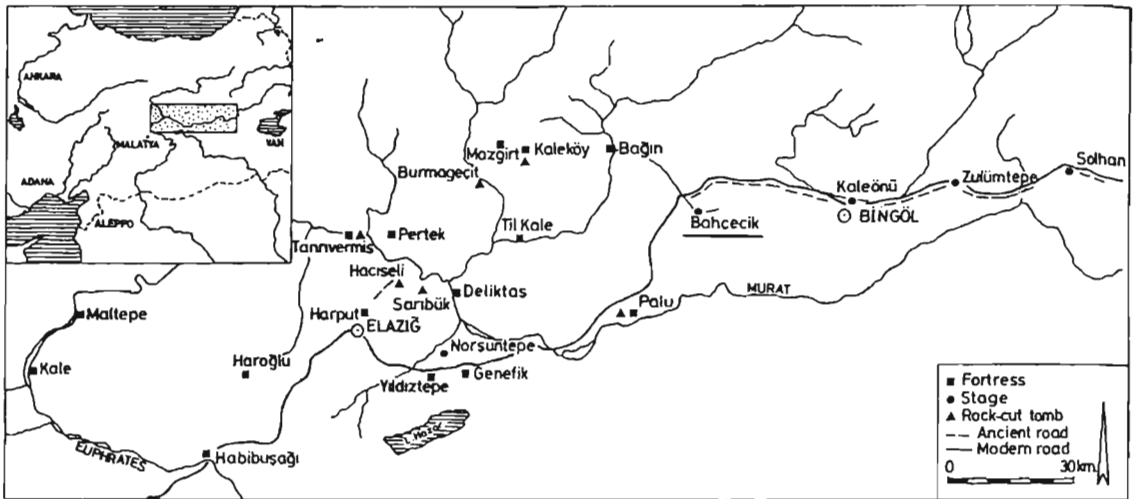


Fig. 1 – Map of the Elazığ-Bingöl regions.



Fig. 2 – General view from the road-stage at Bahcecik.

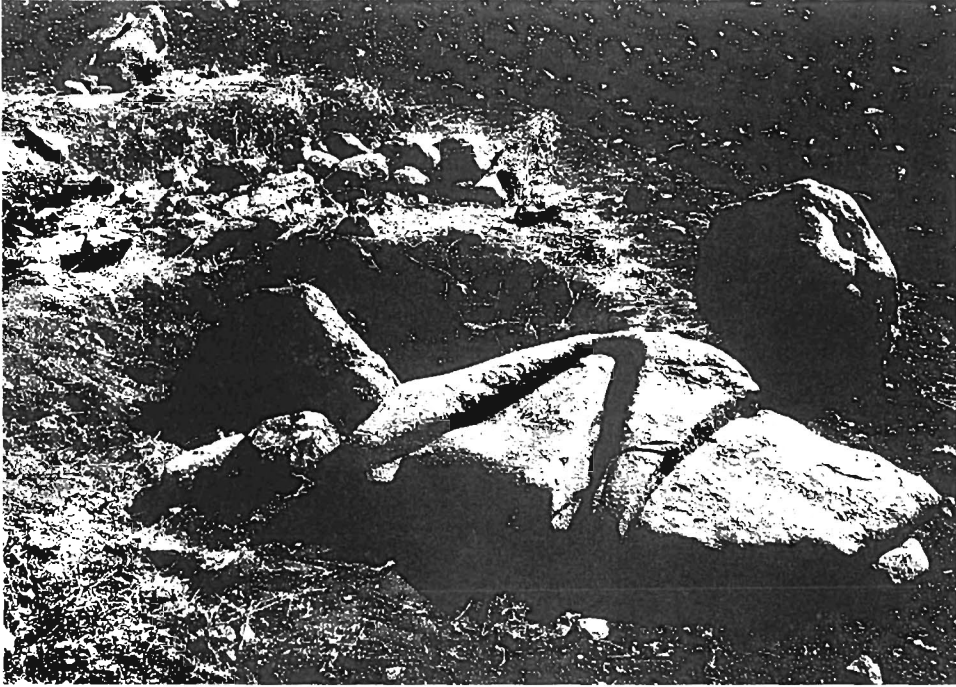


Fig. 3 – A rock-cut Urartian sign from Bahçecik.

Transliteration:

1. ⁰Ḫal-di-i-e e-ú-ri-i-e
2. i-ni ^Ésu-si-e ^{mD}sar₅-du-ri-še
3. ^mar-giš-ti-ḫi-ni-še ši-di-iš-tú-u-ni
4. e-³a ^É.GAL ba-du-si ši-di-iš-tú-u-ni
5. te-ru-ni ^{mD}sar₅-du-ri-ḫi-ni-li ti-i-ni
6. ^{mD}sar₅-du-ri-še a-li-e te-ru-bi
7. ^mza-ia-ni ^{LÚ}EN.NAM iš-ti-i-n[i]
8. mī-ir-tar-šú-ú-e ^{KUR}e-ba-a-ni p[a-ri]
9. ^{URU}Me-li-tè-a pa-ri ^{URU}Qu-[ma-ḫa (?)]
10. pa-ri ^{URU}Ni-ḫi-ri-a ^{KUR}Ar-[me-e-i]
11. pa-ri ^{KUR}Ḫa-ši-me-e-[x x x x]
12. [^D]Ḫal-di-ni-ni [x x x x x]

Translation:

“Sarduri, the son of Argišti, built this *susi* for the lord Haldi. He also built a fortress perfectly (and) named it ‘Sardurihinili’.

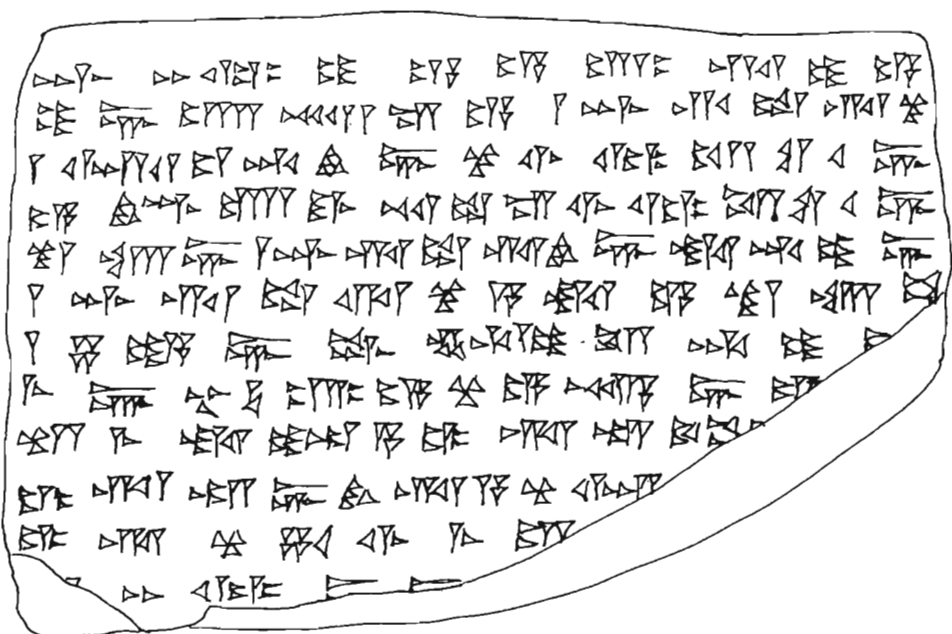


Fig. 4-5 – The inscription of Sarduri II from Bahçecik.

Sarduri says: I appointed Zaia(ni) as governor of the land up to the city of Meliṭea, up to the city of Qu[maha (?)], up to the city of Nihiria in the land of Ar[me], and up to the land of Hašime[], in order to keep order (?). By [the greatness (?)] of Haldi ...

Commentary:

l. 7 *ištini*. Either the meaning 'there' or the meaning 'in order to' would fit the meaning of the sentence.

l. 8 *mī-ir-tar-šū-ú-ē*. The meaning of this word is not clear since this is its first appearance in known Urartian texts. It could be a relative of a verbal infinitive and mean something like 'to keep control, to govern'.

l. 9 ^{URU}*Me-li-tè-a* is the city of Malatya.

^{URU}*Qu*[] could be ^{URU}*Qu*[*maha*]: 'Commagene', Assyrian *Qummuhi*, or ^{URU}*Qu*[*tume*], a city mentioned in the Patnos-Anzavur inscriptions (Balkan 1960: 150) as being in the region of Alzi. Since it seems that in this text the state boundaries, that is those borders of the province which are also the borders of the state, are being delineated, Qumaha seems very possibly the town intended, as in the annals of Sarduri II². Here, it is always referred to as a land thus: ^{KUR}*Qu-ma-ha-ha-li-i* ^{KUR}*-ni* 'the land of the Commagenians', and its variant ^{KUR}*Qu-ma-ha-ha-li-ni-e* ^{KUR}*e-ba-ni*, also ^{KUR}*Qu-ma-ha-al-hi* 'the Commagenians' (UKN no. 155 reverse of stele, lines 43, 47 and 54; Diakonoff and Kashkai 1981:70), as the Assyrians referred to both the land and city of Kummuh, the city not apparently being reached by Sarduri in his invasion from the north (Astour 1979:74).

However Qutume in the Elazığ plain (Köroğlu 1996: 15) could also be the town intended on the inscription; for on the Assyrian stele of the *turtanu* Ašur-sēzibani (Andrae 1913: 62-63 no. 66) he is described as the *turtanu* of ^{māt}Ninua (Nineveh), ^{māt}Kutmuhi and ^{māt}Nihria. The placing together of the cities of Kutmuhi and Nihria as on this stele would fit very well with the placing together of a possible Qu[tume] with Nihiria in our text. Dossin (1939: 116-117), followed by Bilgiç (1945-51: 1-37), however, places Kutmuhi east of Nihria.

¹ Mirjo Salvini has put forward the following theory: He suggests that *meri-* could be the first element of a complex word having the same root *meri-* as the word *meripte*, of unknown meaning found in UKN no. 143: p. 10 e no. 448 p. 17. The derivation of *meripte* would then be comparable with that of the abstract noun *ušipte* from the verbal root *ušta-* and the abstractising suffix *-ipte*. The second element *taršua*, of the complex word would then simply be the known word *taršuani*, 'man'. We thank M. Salvini for this suggestion.

² The only other occurrence in Urartian texts.

l. 10 ^{URU}Ni-hi-ri-a is the city of Nihiria of the land of Arme, known from Kültepe (Smith 1924, no. 22), from the Mari letters (Dossin 1950: 54-55 no. 19, 106-107 no. 103), from Assyria e.g. the above mentioned stele of the *turtanu* Ašur-sêzibani, and from Urartian Surb Poghos stele (UKN no. 156, right side of stele) where it is named as the royal city of the land of Arme. We know from this inscription that Sarduri conquered this land after having defeated the Assyrian king Ashurnirari (753-746 B.C.).

^{URU}Ar[] must be the land of Arme of the Surb Poghos stele, 'Haldi ... defeated Ashurnirari son of the Assyrian king Adadnirari. He took the land of Arme and he took (this) land's royal city of Nihiria. He threw them down before Sarduri son of Argisti ...'. It would appear from this that the land of Arme should be to the south of Urartu neighbouring, on and under the Assyrian sphere of influence. The land of Arme may be in the area of the modern city of Diyarbakır, possibly on the north bank of the river Tigris. This lies within the region of the Aramean city states. A location in the vicinity of modern Hazro north-east of Diyarbakır, on the south slopes of the South-East Taurus Mountains has been suggested for the Aramean city of Nihiria (Diakonoff and Kashkai 1981: 11, 60). Other suggestions place it somewhere in the Mardin-Siverek-Diyarbakır triangle (Dossin 1939: 116-117, followed by Bilgiç 1945-51 and Orlin 1970: 82) and equate it with Amida / Diyarbakır (Astour 1979: 73). The text would in either case be describing a boundary running south and then east from Meliṭea.

l. 11 ^{KUR}Ha-ši-me-e[]. This place appears for the first time in Urartian cuneiform texts. Its being listed after the land of Arme may suggest that it should be located a little to the east of that land. Whether ^{KUR}Ha-ši-me-e[] is the same as the ^{KUR}Hašimur, mentioned in a neo-Assyrian inscription (ARAB I: 581), cannot be ascertained.

l. 12 This line could be completed as [ᵀ]Ḫaldinini [alsuišini] or as [ᵀ]Ḫaldinini [ušmašini] and implies the start of a new sentence. This forces us to assume the existence of a second block.

The Bahçecik inscription clearly refers to the founding of a new fortress by the name of 'Sardurihinili' in the vicinity of Bahçecik, Elazığ, and to the building of a new temple of Haldi. In fact, the reference to *i-ni* ^ᵀsu-si-e (this temple) in the first sentence identifies the stone as coming from the wall of the temple itself. It is very doubtful that the Urartian ruins at Bahçecik mentioned above could be the fortress in question for, as stated previously, these ruins appear to be nothing more than a staging post. The basalt block must have been brought from somewhere else. It is known from elsewhere

that staging posts on important Urartian roads can be found in the vicinity of a major fortress. An example is that of Çermik, a staging post located only about 500 m west of the fortress of Çavuştepe (Erzen 1978: 29, fig. 13).

The inscription was probably written by Sarduri II in the same period as the Surb Poghos (UKN no. 156) and Habibuşağı (van Loon 1974). In these inscriptions, after the siege, or threat of siege of Melitea, Hilaruada, the king, is described as being forced to submit to Sarduri and agree to pay him tribute. After this expedition which resulted in the subjection of Hilaruada, the line of small military posts along the east bank of the Euphrates opposite Melitea, which includes Habibuşağı/Izoli, Kaleköy and Maltepe, was strengthened (Köroğlu 1996: 24ff).

The Hazine Kapisı inscription (UKN no. 155), which must also have been completed after the occasion of the Bahçecik inscription, does not mention Melitea at all but refers to the land of Qumaha being entered for the first time, and the taking of various towns in the region such as Wita, lakeside Halpa and Parala. The king, Kuštašpili, is likewise forced to submit and pay tribute. The province under question would thus have been bounded on the west by two kingdoms reduced, at least for a time, to vassalship. The inscription must have been written at a period when Urartian power was at its height, that is in the middle of the eighth century, before the major defeat suffered by Sarduri II and his allies at the hands of Tiglathpileser III in 743 B.C. (ARAB I: nos. 760, 785, 797, 813), in which Sarduri lost power over all lands west of the Euphrates.

One interesting aspect of the inscription is that the boundaries of a province are delineated. We know of the appointment by Minua of a governor named Titia (Schäfer 1973-74) in either this region or perhaps one lying a little further north. Whilst we do not have much information about Titia's province, it does seem from the Palu inscription that it should include the regions of Huzana (around Hozat) and Şupa (classical Sophene). The inscription which refers to Titia comes from Bağın, only 30 km north-west of Bahçecik. The question remains open whether the provinces of which Titia and Zaia were governors were basically one and the same, or not.

There are several possibilities for provincial seats. Immediately to the south of both Bağın and Bahçecik the Urartian fortress at Palu can be found on the banks of the Arsanias. The ruins at Palu indicate that this site, which is known to date back to Minua, must have been an important provincial centre. In particular, the monumental burial chambers carved into the almost vertical north-west face of the outcrop are indicative of the presence of the ruling classes (Sevin 1994). If governors were seated there it would have been a possible seat for both Titia or Zaia. However, if Palu were the site of Sardurihinili, then it must have changed its name during the Urartian

period as the Palu inscription (UKN no. 39) makes it clear that the name of both the city and the land, at the time of their conquest by Minua, was Šebeteria.

Another possibility as a provincial seat is Bağın fortress. The Burmageçit fortress on the Munzur river, where bronze finds inscribed by Minua were discovered in a badly damaged burial chamber (Belli 1993), could be the seat of a more north-westerly province which Titia may have governed. In fact, there may simply have been a number of provinces on the western front of Urartu, the one mentioned in this text being the extreme south-western one. And, of course, in the period from Minua to Sarduri there could have been a revision of the provincial system (Zimansky 1985: 91).

It is, however, clear from the Bahçecik inscription that the newly founded city of Sardurihinili was the capital of a large province. This text is notable also in that it supplies us for the first time with some firm indication of the size of Urartian provinces.

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