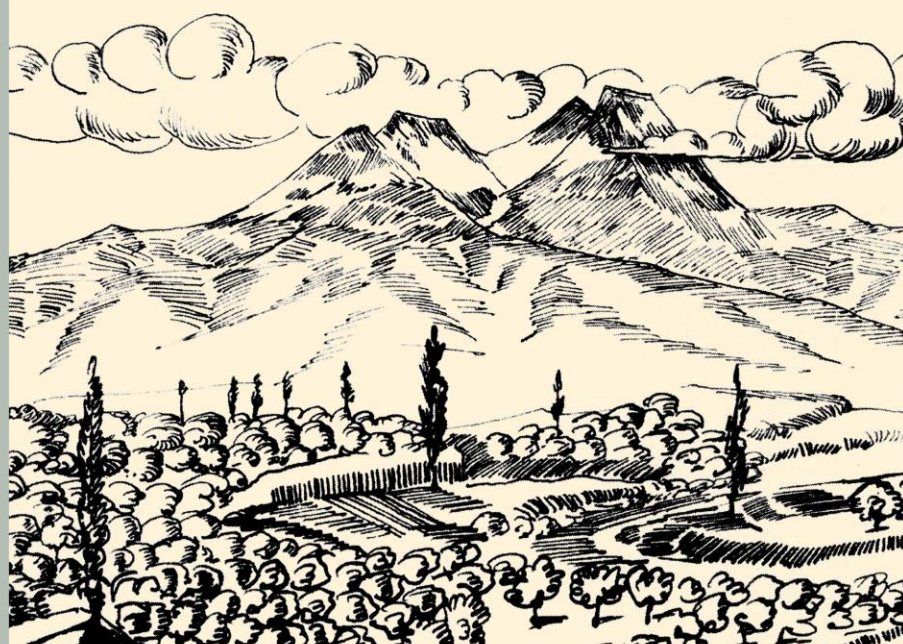


ARCHAEOLOGY OF ARMENIA  
IN REGIONAL CONTEXT



National Academy of Sciences of Republic of Armenia  
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography

## **ARCHAEOLOGY OF ARMENIA IN REGIONAL CONTEXT**

Proceedings of the International Conference dedicated to the 60<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography  
Held on July 9-11, 2019 in Yerevan

Edited by  
**Pavel Avetisyan and Arsen Bobokhyan**

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# The Fortress of Aramus in its Historical Context

Walter Kuntner<sup>1</sup>, Hayk Avetisyan<sup>2</sup>, Sandra Heinsch<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Innsbruck, Austria

<sup>2</sup> Yerevan State University, Armenia

*Abstract.* Recent archaeological evidence of the material culture of Armenia in the Middle Iron Age contradicts the historical picture from the cuneiform sources of an overwhelming and ubiquitous Urartian kingdom. This is certainly due to our still deficient understanding of the development of the material culture from 9<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC as well as during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Another, equally pertinent factor is that this lack of knowledge is bridged by a sometimes overly literal interpretation of Urartian cuneiform rock inscriptions, and, for the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, by the mixing of different historiographic traditions that hinder the archaeological interpretation of findings. The continuity of the settlement, recently determined in the stratigraphy of the Iron Age fortress of Aramus, and dated by radiocarbon evidence from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, offers a new perspective on the nature of the Urartian dominance in Armenia. Not only are there no abrupt breaks in material culture, relatable to political conquest or declines in population, which currently help define the limits of Middle Iron Age periodization, but there is also no clear, archaeological separation discernible between conquerors and conquered. This is all the more remarkable given that the Aramus fortress was largely rebuilt by Argišti I in connection with mass deportations related to the foundation of Erebuni, and that the stronghold was afterwards used as basis for the military expansion of the Urartian kingdom to lake Sevan. Rather, the evidence of Aramus suggests that the conquest and long-term control of the Ararat plain was achieved through a prospective policy that aimed to incorporate existing power structures, and which used violence only as last resort, and for the benefit of the alliance if at all. The looting of Sargon II of the main sanctuary of Haldi in Mutsatsir marks a turning point in the history and material culture development of Urartu, in that it initialised a process of re-politicisation. Therein, the rise and fall of Biaini represents only one aspect, whose overall significance remains one of the most pressing problems in the archaeology of Urartu.

*Keywords:* Armenia, Aramus, Iron Age, fortress, Urartu, Biaini, Etiuni, Lchashen-Metsamor, Karmir Blur.

## Introduction

The image conjured up by the ingeniously stylised Urartian rock inscriptions continues to exert a strong influence on the impression of imperial massiveness frequently encountered in historical references to Urartian military expansion into modern day Armenia. It is a picture, occasionally true indeed, of an inexorable and well-organised army (cf. Konakçı, Baştürk 2009). Its brilliant logistics not only enabled this army to cross high mountains and the imposing Araxes river, but also to establish, under adverse conditions, two masterfully built administrative centers, complemented by extended systems of irrigation and fortification. These served, once again, to prove supremacy not merely over the local population, but over nature, too (Smith 2004, 14 – 18).

However, this picture suggests that “Urartians” moved *in vacuo*, while their opponents are mentioned only in passing, often by nothing more than their often singularly attested names. However, is it conceivable that the seizure and, in particular, the long-term control of such a vast and fertile region, rich in history, which was one of the most important transitions and focal points in the history of the South Caucasus, really occurred without any active involvement of the local

population? Has archaeology focused too much on Urartian (biased) cuneiform sources when attempting to retrieve this region’s past (cf. Badalyan, Avetisyan, Smith 2009, 33, 40 – 41)?

Awareness of this possibility has recently increased, due to a deepening understanding of the local Iron Age material culture, starting with the evidence for the continuation of the Early Iron Age traditions of ceramic production up to their influence on Middle (Avetisyan et al. 2019) and Late Iron Age assemblages (Kuntner, Heinsch, in press). Thence, there has come a growing need to question existing terminology, in order to better cover the situation of sources and findings. This has led to a certain abstraction of terms. The term Urartu, an original Assyrian toponym used to name the region between lake Urmia and lake Van, has now been suggested to find use only as a geographical unit, de-

noting the sphere of cultural emergence and political influence of the kingdom of Biaini. This use, denoting a sphere of cultural emergence and political influence, finds a firm footing in its first mention in Middle Assyrian cuneiform sources of the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, which continues until a last attestation in the Behistuni inscription of Darius I in the 20s of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Zimansky 1998, 6 – 8; for the relationship between Urartu and Armenia see Areshian 2019). The same applies to the Urartian toponym Etiuni for the territory of modern-day Armenia, which again comprises a large number of entities, interacting both with each other and the kings of Biaini, at different levels and with different intensity and interests (for a scholarly development of the term Etiuni, see Arešjan 1977, 103 – 105; more recent discussions suggests Etiuni to be a general term for Transcaucasian tribes (Salvini 1995, 40) occasionally coalescing into loose political confederations (Smith 1999, 48, 54). Finally, the term Biaini is used in its political meaning, to define the period of leadership the city lords of Tushpa had in Urartu (Kroll et al. 2012a, 1).

Worth mentioning in this context is the fact that the hegemony, so vigorously declared in cuneiform writings by the city lords of Tushpa on Urartu, left an indisputable imprint on every-day material culture only during the reign of its last powerful member, Rusa Argishti (Kroll et al. 2012, 33 – 38). This is highly significant, not only for the archaeological periodization of the Middle Iron Age, but also for our understanding of the rise and fall of Biaini. The suggestion is that the proposed material imprint of Biaini, that is Zimansky's (1995a) so-called state assemblage, could, ultimately, be nothing more than a short-term cultural phenomenon, reflecting the reform of the contemporary political system (Bernbeck 2003/2004, 303 – 304; Zimansky 2012), itself made necessary by the pillage of Haldi's main temple at Mušašir by Sargon II in 714 BC. While the consequences of this event remain one of the most discussed topics in Urartology, this discussion has hitherto focused mainly on the fate of Ursa, and his identification with Rusa Sarduri or Rusa Erimena (Salvini 2007; Kroll 2012; Roaf 2012; Seidl 2012; Fuchs 2012, 136 – 137; Rollinger 2018). However, the political repercussions the loss of control on Haldi's main temple exerted over, in particular, the legitimizing polity of the city lords of Tushpa has not been touched on in detail, so far (cf. Salvini 1989, 80). The sometimes astonishing observation of the dynasty's persistence might have been due to a temporary emergency situation which was mastered through a comprehensive

reform of the political system and in particular of its administration (Zimansky 1995c). However, these reforms seem to have become obsolete or to have been considered excessive (cf. Hellwag 2012, 237) once the Assyrian pressure decreased again under Ashurbanipal, in turn due to the Babylonian revolts in 652 BC and the subsequent wars against Elam.

The decline of the kingdom of Biaini could therefore not have been caused by violence, as is generally assumed, due to the appearance of supposedly simultaneous horizons of destruction, but may, in contrast, reflect the withdrawal of these, now no longer required reforms (which would offer a much more cogent explanation for the absence of legacy to and reception of Biaini by posterity). However, ultimately, it fell back to a stadium comparable to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, accelerated by the decline of the Neo-Assyrian empire after Ashurbanipal's death in 631/627 BC and the final collapse in 614/612 BC. The often-quoted submission of Issar-duri may, thus, not have been a desperate appeal for help against invading equestrian steppe nomads, whose impact in the South Caucasia remains highly controversial (Pogrebova, De Sonneville-David 1984; Mehnert 2008). It may, in fact, have been but an appeal for help in legitimizing Issar-duri's political position within an increasingly decentralized political system.

### **The Foundation of Aramus in the Context of Etiuni**

The lack of contemporary written sources for the given period does, of course, leave room for ample speculation, which the authors do not intend to further engage in. The opposite is the stated intention. The point, specifically, is to determine whether we do in fact do well to solve the issue of the fall of Urartu by trying to bring different historiographic traditions together (cf. Hellwag 2012), and thence synchronizing the resulting picture with the fall of Biaini. Meanwhile, the end of literacy in Urartu, which is inherent in the definition of Biaini, and thus practicable in helping to mark its end, does not provide a solid base to validate the historicity of a Scythian invasion nor of a Median empire on Urartian territory. Noteworthy in this context, moreover, is that the cuneiform tradition attesting the perception of this region as a “country”, Urashtu/Armina, is met with scepticism. However, such critics have so far largely misunderstood the suggested persistence of some kind of “residual polity” in Urartu (Rollinger 2008), erroneously inferring that this idea

aims to question and redefine the date of Biaini's downfall (Kroll et al. 2012, 446, Fn. 4; cf. Hellwag 2012, 232; see now Rollinger, Kellner 2019.). In contrast, this approach rather suggests that the local population seems to have reorganised to a level sufficient to make military campaigns to Urashtu strategically necessary for the control of Assyria.

In Armenia, 'Etiunians' could have played such a prominent role as result of a regained political autonomy, which is shown to be incipient in the development reflected in the flourishing of the so-called Ararat valley wares in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (Smith 2005, 270; see in more detail Avetisyan 1999 – 2000; Avetisyan et al. 2020). These show a vitality not widely known in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, marked by the persistence of traditions rooting in the Late Bronze Age, but that, on the other hand, clearly dominates the material assemblages of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Kuntner, Heinsch *in press*). An interesting question regards the extent to which the first mention of the name (unfortunately not preserved) of a king of Etiuni in the time of Argishti Sarduri (Salvini 2008: CTU A11-3 Vo 1 – 2) and the perception of Etiuni as an enemy country in the time of Rusa Argishti (Salvini 2008: CTU A12-1 VI 10 – 11) can be interpreted as evidence for some kind of complex ethno-genesis (cf. Ter-Martirosov 2004).

However, it must be admitted that the current interpretation is based on findings dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, if not to very last years of the kingdoms' existence. This circumstance certainly distorts our understanding of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC material culture, which remains one of the most pressing research desiderata in Urartian archaeology.

The evidence from Aramus on the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC occupation gathered so far is also problematic (Fig. 1). In fact, only a limited extent of the oldest levels could be examined, not only due to spatial restrictions, but because these levels were often removed due to the reconstruction of large parts of the fortress in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The Central Fort at the top of the outcrop appears to have been almost completely rebuilt. The discovery of so-called pre-Urartian Lchashen-Metsamor – LM V ceramics in conjunction with fragments of local red-polished wares is most remarkable in this context, as it confirms the view that LM V ceramics existed not merely during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, but even stretching into the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.

The interpretation of this finding as evidence for the parallel persistence of two distinctive cultural

spheres, in which an Urartian elite can be inferred to have ruled from the fortresses over a subjugated, rural population, cannot be confirmed in Aramus. Firstly, no evidence has so far come to light for a rural population around Aramus. Second, the percentage of even the local red-burnished ware, commonly interpreted as imitation of the so-called Toprakkale or Biaini ware, is extremely low (cf. Smith 2005, 270). This fact is remarkable, given the size (Biscione, Dan 2011, 107 – 109) and proximity of Aramus to Erebuni and Karmir Blur, as well as its geostrategic importance for the military expansion of the Urartian kingdom to lake Sevan during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Kuntner et al. 2017).

An explanation of the 'cultural autonomy' of Aramus from Biaini can find a third pillar in the radiocarbon results concerning the founding of the fortress of Aramus, and in particular in the historical implications derivable from its contextualisation with the Elar rock inscription and the Horhor Annals of Argishti I at Van Kalesi. This new approach combines and partially resolves the partly contradicting interpretations suggested by Khanzadyan and Avetisyan for the importance of Aramus as part of the fortified landscape of the Kotayk plateau (Fig. 2).

Both have dated the founding of this stronghold to the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, due to its proximity, of just 2.2 km, to the cuneiform rock inscription of Argishti I at Elar. The difference between the two interpretations arises from the opposite meaning they attach to the rock inscription itself. Khanzadyan derives a *terminus ante quem* from it, due to the results of the investigations at Elar, where a continuous sequence was ascertained from the Early Bronze to Early Iron Ages, and because of the absence of the characteristic Biaini ware, otherwise well known from the main Urartian centres of the Ararat plain. Therefore, she regarded the fortress of Aramus to be part of an extended Etiunian bulwark, founded to prevent the advance of the Urartians north of the Araxes river (Khanzadyan 1979, 168). In contrast, Avetisyan determined a *terminus post quem*, owing to the identification of the local variant of red-burnished Biaini ware at Aramus. Hence, he suggests Aramus to be an Urartian stronghold founded anew by Argishti I with the aim of controlling Uluani (Smith, Kafadarian 1996, 36 – 37).

Common to both approaches is that they consider the beginning of the Middle Iron Age have witnessed a sudden change in material culture. However, as mentioned above, we are currently far from being able to distinguish between 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries pottery assemblage, regardless of the supposed parallelism of



two cultural entities (Avetisyan et al. 2019, 89). Furthermore, the appearance of the local variant of red-burnished ware in Aramus seems to date to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The two radiocarbon samples KIA 46887 and KIA 46886 taken in 2011 from the founding horizon of the

North Fort in NB-I trench show that the period to be taken into account could well go back to the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC (Fig. 3). The largest matching period covered by the sigma 2 values (935 – 835 BC) is, therefore, still too early to assume safely, as Khanzadyan has, a relation between the founding of

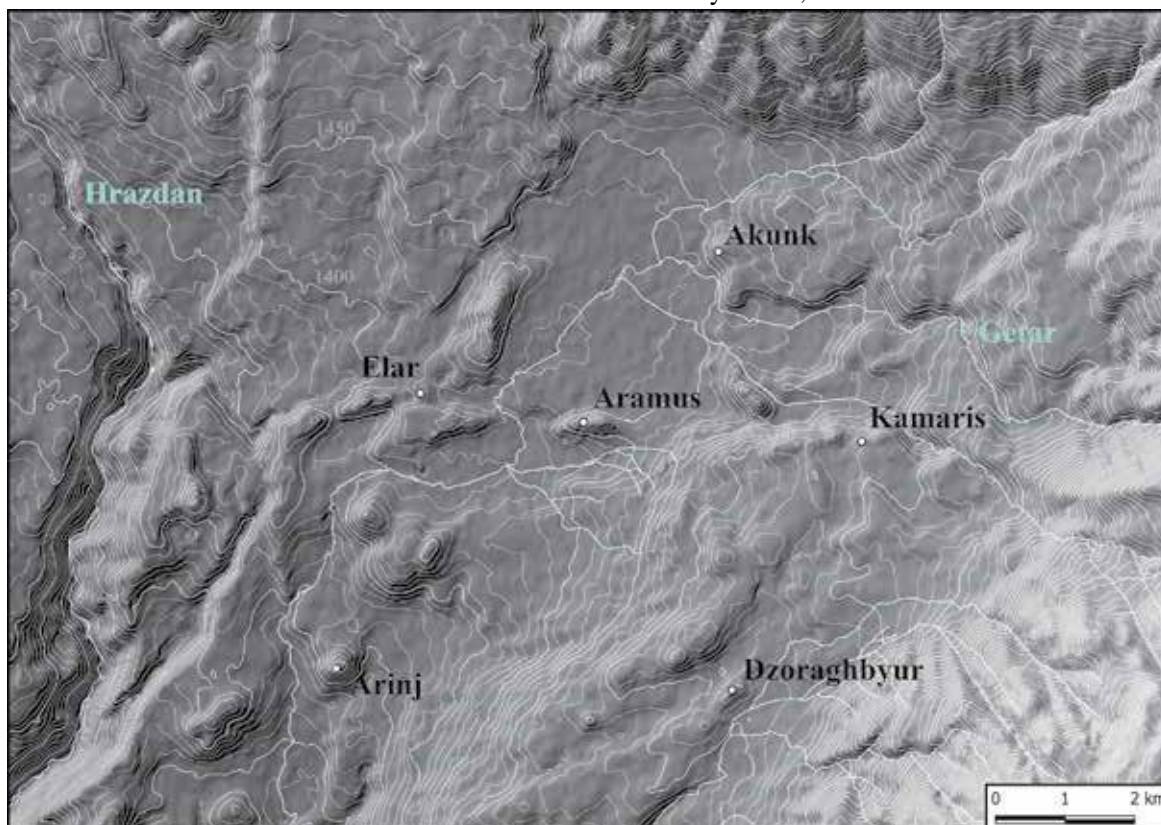


Fig. 1. Fortified landscape of the Aramus basin (Map: W. Kuntner).

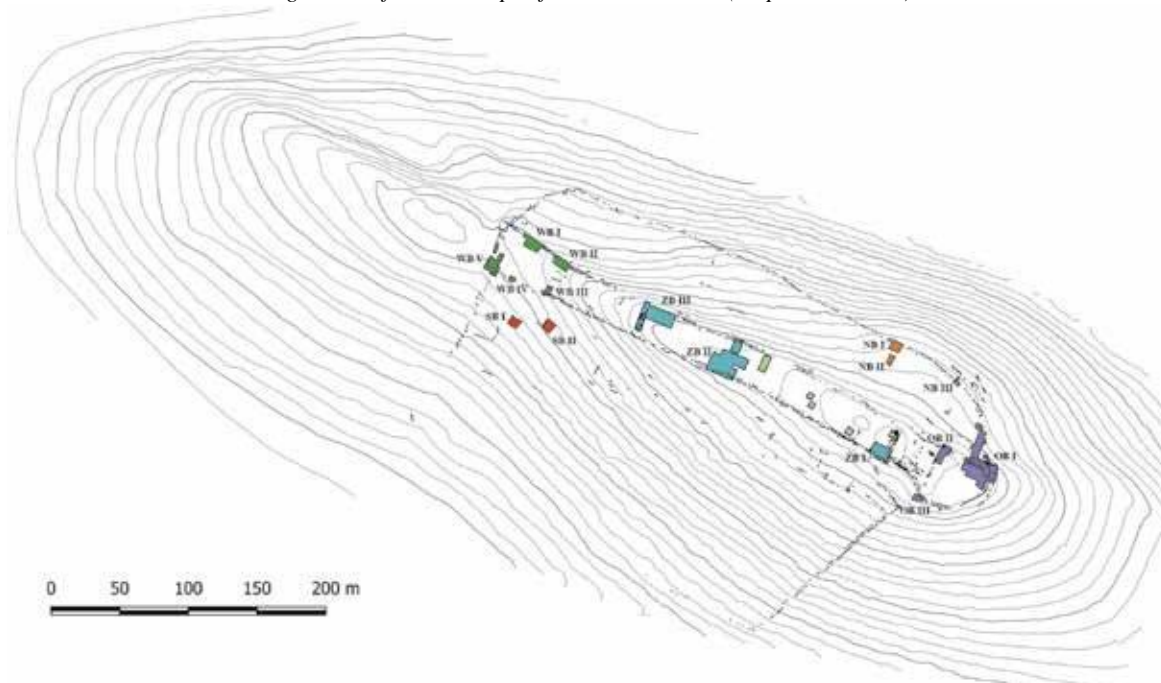


Fig. 2. The fortress of Aramus (Map: W. Kuntner).

Aramus and possible military aspirations by the city lords of Tushpa on the Ararat plain. A further observation requires definite mention, which is that the fortification wall of the North Fort of Aramus is characterized neither by counterforces nor by a straight alignment or right angles, altogether typical features of Urartian military architecture, as evidenced by all other enclosing walls of the stronghold. The smooth curtain façade, following the natural topography, is instead characteristic of the Early Iron Age, or of local building traditions that are much more functional than aesthetic. Smith and Kafadarian (1996, 36), by comparing Aramus with Horom, Dovri and Tsovinar, suggest the existence of a “frontier style of fortress architecture”.

The problem that arises from the long time between the construction of Aramus fortress and the conquest of Uluani can be put into perspective by considering the broader historical context of this military campaign in the Annals of Argishti I.

The attack on Uluani relates to the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Argishti I. It was recently re-dated by Grekyan (2015) to 782 BC. The campaign brought about the conquest of the land of Darani, of the lands Uria, Țerşubi and Muruzuqai, whose people were deported, and finally of the royal city Ubarugildu (Salvini 2008: CTU A8-3, I 24 – 27). None of these names is ever mentioned again in Urartian inscriptions. The greater importance attached to Uluani in the Horhor inscription, which does not mention Darani, suggests that Uluani did not belong to Darani, as commonly inferred from the Elar Inscription (Salvini 2008: CTU A8-8), but rather vice-versa. It is tempting to reduce the localisation of Uluani to the basin of Aramus and to identify the mentioned places Darani and Ubarugildu respectively with Elar and Aramus. Similarly, Uria, Țerşubi, Muruzuqai might refer to either of the fortresses of Avan, Akunk and Kamaris.

The seizure of Uluani successfully completed a long series of campaigns against Diauehi and Etiuni, which stretched back to the times of the co-regency of Argishti's ancestors Ishpuini and Menua, dated to 820 – 810 BC (Salvini 1995, 48 – 49). The success of the city lords of Tuşpa in this long standing advance of influence over the Ararat plain, initially through the control of its main gateways, is characterized by the foundation of the administrative centres of Menuahinili (cf. Özfirat 2017), Erebuni and finally Argishtihinili in 774 BC. The foundation of Erebuni was the intermediate step in the formation of the second bridgehead, which from now on ensured the long-term crossing of the Araxes river. The

importance of this event, in marking the beginning of a new period, the Middle Iron Age, is widely recognized by scholars.

But how was the foundation of Erebuni accomplished? Here too, the Horhor inscription shows a well thought-out and systematic approach to the period immediately preceding the founding of Erebuni in 780 BC. Nothing was left to chance. In the year after the conquest of Uluani, Argishti I. launched a raid on Țate (Hatti) and deported its population on a large scale. The next year we find him, unexpectedly and unprecedentedly, again back in Etiuni, from where he leads a campaign against Qihuni and Alishtu on the northern shore of lake Sevan, again deporting parts of the populace. Thereupon, we are informed of the foundation of Erebuni, the “accomplishment there of mighty undertakings” as well as the re-settlement of 6600 soldiers(?) from Țate and Şupa (CTU A8-3, ii 32 – 36). At that time, Argishti I had already extended the fortress of Aramus, through the construction of the forts located on top of the outcrop and their reinforcement by regularly built buttresses. The radiocarbon samples KIA 46884, Erl 17818 and Erl 17819 taken from the foundation horizon of the East Fort confirm a date at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Fig. 3). Hence, the fortress of Aramus created the conditions for the city lords of Tushpa to gain the measure of political influence north of the Araxes river necessary to conduct the military campaigns aimed at establishing Erebuni. The exertion of this influence on Etiuni, therefore, stretches back to the time of Menua, as suggested by the rock inscription of Tsolakert, where Menua claims to have “put the land Etiuni under tribute” (CTU, A5-1: 14). It was, however, only the extension, built by Argishti I, which secured control both of the large water supply system of the Getar river, necessary for the irrigation of Erebuni's countryside, and of the routes to lake Sevan, necessary for the further expansion of the Urartian kingdom (Kuntner et al. 2017).

### The Fortress of Aramus in the Context of the Fall of Biaini

The contextualisation of the archaeological situation at Aramus, summarized above, with the Elar inscription and the Horhor annals of Argishti I, suggests that different, local and deported entities, as well as members of the Urartian elite were equally integrated in the governance of this stronghold. Admittedly, this interpretation might appear speculative. However, it must be stressed that no attempt is made here to identify barely defined ethnicities by their ceramic products. Instead, our interpretation tries to offer a conceivable explanation for the strong regionalism that characterizes the material culture of Urartu and the Ararat plain (Heinsch et al. (eds), in press). The idea of a cultural autonomy of Aramus from Biaini might, if viewed in

which stretches up into the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. In contrast, the evidence for an Early Iron Age occupation has so far remained limited to Elar, not least because of the above-mentioned problem of identification (Khanzadyan 1979, 168 – 175).

The long-term Armenian-Austrian investigations at the Iron Age fortress of Aramus has finally also offer a new perspective on the complex subject of the fall of Urartu, which, as recently emphasized, cannot be synchronised with the fall of Biaini (Kuntner, Heinsch 2020). As mentioned above, Urartu is an abstract term that summarizes different material cultures that are closely connected to a polity characterized by extended fortification and irrigation systems (Smith, Thompson 2004; Smith 2012). Biaini refers to the time of some of Urartu's best-known interlocutors with the present, the city lord of Tušpa, whose dominance over Urartu is

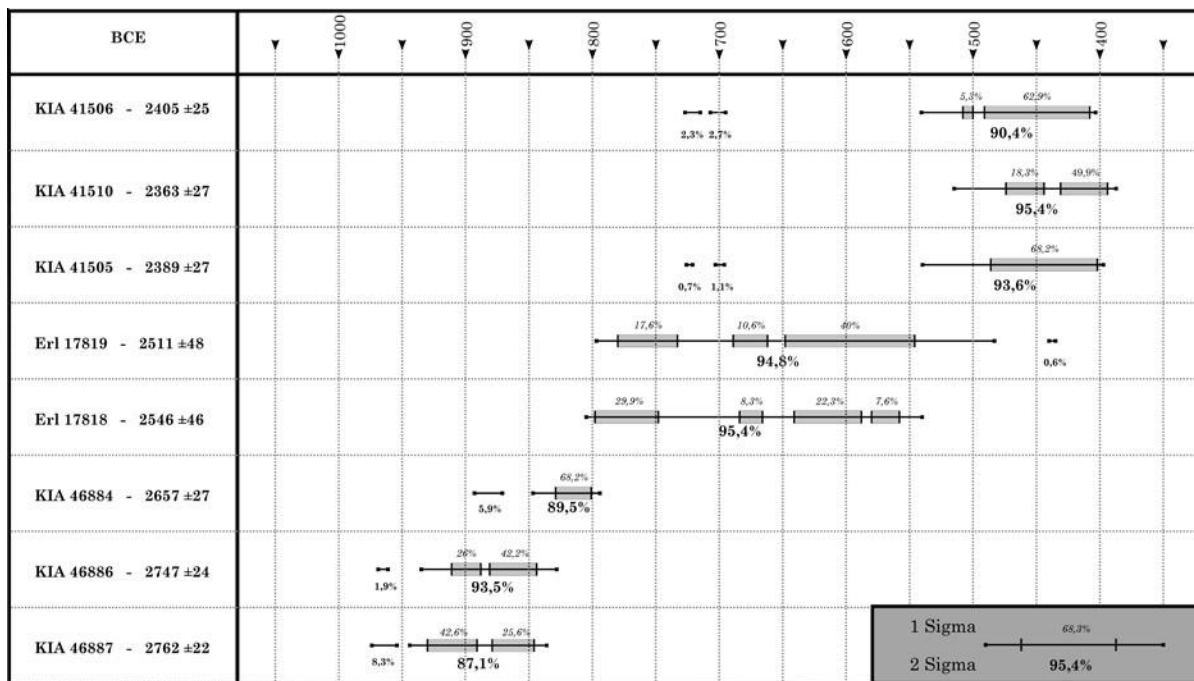


Fig. 3. Radiocarbon sequence of the fortress of Aramus (Schedule: W. Kuntner).

this light, thus reflect a heterogeneous ethnos, which accepted the rule of the city lords of Tushpa, even participating in its military raids for their own benefit.

Fourth and finally, this interpretation is confirmed by the fact that the fortress of Aramus was preserved and rebuilt despite and long after the decline of the alleged vanquisher, until the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Recent investigation of the surface material from the fortresses in the Aramus basin, furthermore, has revealed that all fortresses were used both during the time of the Urartian kingdom, and long after its decline. Specifically, we are referring to the period defined according to the stratigraphy of Aramus as building period Aramus III,

mainly expressed or better recognized through their literacy, but which may have continued to play a political role in the region after their abrupt silence (cf. Zimansky 2006 with regard to the meaning of literacy in Urartu).

The question of how long the so-called South Caucasian political tradition, or, in other words, the *Urartian* polity, continued to shape the Armenian Highlands is, from an archaeological standpoint and without regard to historical preconceptions, still unanswered, even if strides are being made towards its possible resolution (Katchadourian 2008, 265 – 270).

The assessment that an abrupt end may have befallen the polity in Urartu is, however, not offered so much because of the absence of written sources. This circumstance is easily explained by the decline of the Neo-Assyrian kingdom as the main referent on Urartu. Furthermore, considering the number of Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid references, which in sum and compared to the time span covered do not turn out to be much lower than in Neo-Assyrian times (Fuchs 2012; Rollinger 2008), this absence may sometimes be more felt than proven.

Rather, the assumption that most important Urartian centres were destroyed concurrently is based on the occurrence of bronze-socketed arrowheads in the destruction debris at several Urartian centres. In particular, it hinges on their finding context with Biaini ware especially at Karmir Blur, Bastam and Ayanis

finding situation at Karmir Blur is particularly characterized by their association with trilobite-socketed arrowheads both with protruding as well as winged sockets (Esayan, Pogrebova 1985, 53 – 79). However, the latter type is generally dated to the Achaemenid period (Cleuziou 1979).

The limitation of the chronological meaning of bronze-socketed arrowheads to the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, as archaeological confirmation of the date of the fall of Biaini, results from the date of their first concurrent occurrence in the Kelermes kurgan not before 660 BC (Galanina 1997, 173 – 193), and its historical contextualization with the classic tradition of Herodotus. This concerns the histories on the Cimmeric-Scythian raids from the Pontos to the Near East, and the struggle between Scythians and Medians for supremacy in Asia (Barnett, Watson 1952, 134;

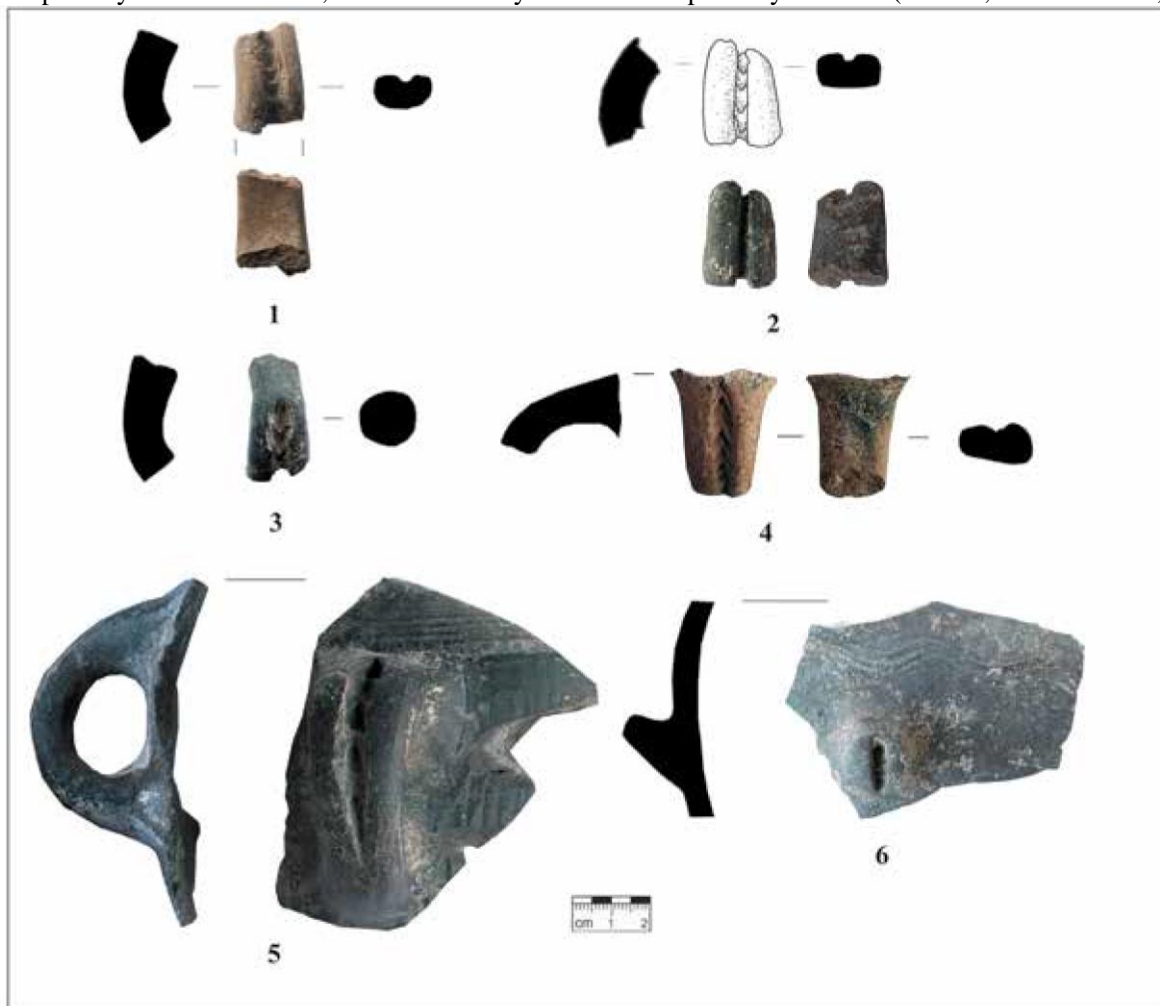


Fig. 4. Handled jar with step-like incision (Photo: S. Heinsch).

(Kroll 2012, 183). However, it should be noted that, in the destruction horizons of Bastam and Ayanis, only bilobate-socketed arrowheads were found in situ (Kroll 1979; 1988; Derin, Muscarella 2001). In contrast, the

Sulimirski 1954, 313 – 316; cf. Ivantchik 1999 for a more critical reading of Herodotus). However, the archaeological evidence clearly attests an occurrence of bronze-socketed arrowheads from the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup>

to the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Ivantchik 2001) until the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (Yalçıklı 2006), as well as their wide-spread production (Daragan 2015). While coarse chronological divisions and geographical distributions are possible, no ethnic identification is sustainable due to archaeological evidence (Derin, Muscarella 2001: 196 – 203).

All in all, it is, however, not surprising, as Piotrovsky emphasized, to find artifacts typical of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, such as Biaini ware, their imitations or bronze-socketed arrowheads, in Urartian fortresses of the time of Rusa Argishti, such as at the above-mentioned sites of Bastam, Ayanis and Karmir Blur. However, while the date of the destruction of Bastam and Ayanis can be fixed around the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC due to the absence of bronze trilobite-socketed arrowheads, the archaeological date of Karmir Blur's destruction must be derived from those findings that clearly stand in close relation with the attack itself (Salvini 1966, 169 – 171).

For Karmir Blur, these are essentially two groups of findings. Both were found together in the destruction debris of the dwellings built along the defensive wall near the north gate of the citadel courtyard. The first is the bridle of the so-called assaulter's horse, found together with three other horse skeletons, but without harness components (Dal' 1947, 42). The second tranche of evidence are the mostly black fired jugs with handles, decorated with a furrow including stepped wedge-shaped incisions (Fig. 4), which were, moreover, found in great number in the destruction debris of the cellar rooms of the citadel as well as of the urban houses there, suggesting a single destruction event (Piotrovsky 1950, 36).

The horse bridle consists of two pairs of bronze strap-crossings and a largely preserved silver shoulder phalera (Fig. 5; Rybkova 2012, 378 – 379, fig. 5, tab. 1/2-4). Although the origins of the phalera lie in Assyria and Urartu, most were made of bronze and were always attached to the halter (Curtis 2013, 94 – 96, 120, 144, 319, pl. LXXIV, 745; Pfrommer 1993, 7; Belli 1976). According to Zasetskaya, shoulder phalerae were unknown in the Scythian parade dress of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, and begin to appear only in the Sarmatian period (Dedyulkin 2015, 128). However, the example of Karmir Blur has no décor that corresponds with the examples of the Sarmatians. Mordvintseva (2001, VIII) ascribes the origin of Sarmatians shoulder phalerae to the Scythians, but underscores that silver was used only from Hellenistic times onwards, and that undecorated phalerae are typical for the Kuban and Bosphorus regions

(*ibid.* 39). It is worth noting that another example for an undecorated silver phalera was discovered in Argishtihinili (Martirosyan 1974, 169 – 174).

Hauptmann was the first to typologically differentiate the so-called hook-shaped strap crossings. Together with the trunk and the beak-shaped strapcrossings, he regards them as imitations of belt tuskbelt crossings. In contrast to the two latter types, only the hook-shaped strap-crossings were made of bronze (Hauptmann 1983, 263). Recently, Grechko (2013) and Makhortykh (2017) discussed the hook-shaped strap-crossings. Both compare the specimen from Karmir Blur with exemplars from the Akhmylovsky grave no. 70 and the Shumeyko Kurgan. Another exemplar is probably known from Kasraant Mitsebi grave no. 22 near Kavtishveli in Georgia (Beradze

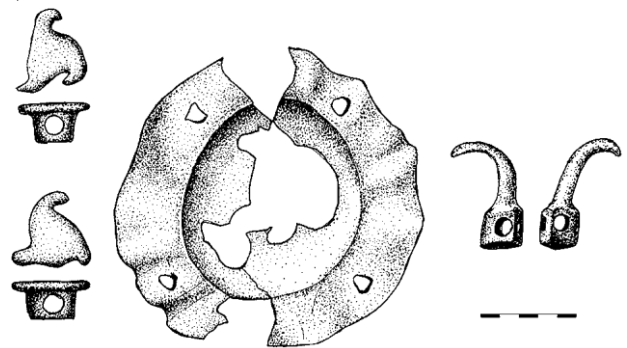


Fig. 5. Bridle of the assaulter's horse from Karmir Blur (Ivantchik 2001, 33, fig. 12).

1980, 21, pl. XIX/7), dated by Lordkipanidze to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC at the earliest but most likely belonging to the 5<sup>th</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century BC (cf. Bill 2003, 185, fn. 1398; taf. 91, 13). The identification of the strap-separator by the excavator, Beradze, as a bell is unlikely, since no typological parallels are so far known from Georgia (cf. Chanishvili 2015).

The parallels described by Grechko and Makhortykh confirm the close relation, already suggested by Piotrovskij (1973, 16), of the Early Scythian objects recovered at Karmir Blur with the material culture of the Upper Sula in the Dnepr area. However, the dating of the Akhmylovsky grave no. 70 is problematic. The hook-shaped strap-crossings come from a secondary burial, or at least a pit disturbing the main grave, which is dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (Khalikov 1977, 40 – 42). It is worth noting the comparison with the Shumeyko kurgan, dated from the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> BC (Ivantchik 2011, 82; Grechko 2013) until the turn from the early to the middle Scythian period around 500 BC (Topal 2018, 61 – 62).

Erlikh (2010, 58 – 62, fig. 11) assigned the hook-shaped strap-crossings to the Sialk group, which is believed to originate from Iranian forms of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, but which only spread in the early days of the Achaemenids.

A date into the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC for the bridle of the assaulters` horse of Karmir Blur is, finally, confirmed by their finding context they share with the one-handed jugs with step-like impressions. Avetisyan regards this type of vessel as one of the youngest representatives of the ceramic tradition of Lchashen-Metsamor (Avetisyan 2009, 64 – 65, no. 1. Badalyan, Avetisyan, Smith 2009, 92, no. 1). The proposed date in the 7<sup>th</sup> century is based on the generally accepted date of Karmir Blur's destruction (Avetisyan, Bobokhyan 2012, 377; Avetisyan et al. 2019, 94). However, evidence from Aramus shows that the characteristically decorated one-handed jugs only occur during the Aramus IIIa period,

In sum, more than 30 specimen have actually been found in situ in the East and Central Forts. The widespread distribution of single-handed jugs with step-like impressions in fortress contexts suggests that several fortresses continued to be used after the fall of Biaini in Armenia (Fig. 6), which contradicts the view of deliberate “repudiation” of Urartian politics in Achaemenid times (Katchadourian 2016: 89 – 90). At Aramus, such a tendency can be inferred only from the 4<sup>th</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (cf. Katchadourian 2007).

### Aramus in Late Urartian Times

Recent archaeological investigations continue to strengthen the evidence for the continued existence of Urartian politics despite the decline of Biaini (cf. Zardarian, Akopian 1994); so in fact in the region of

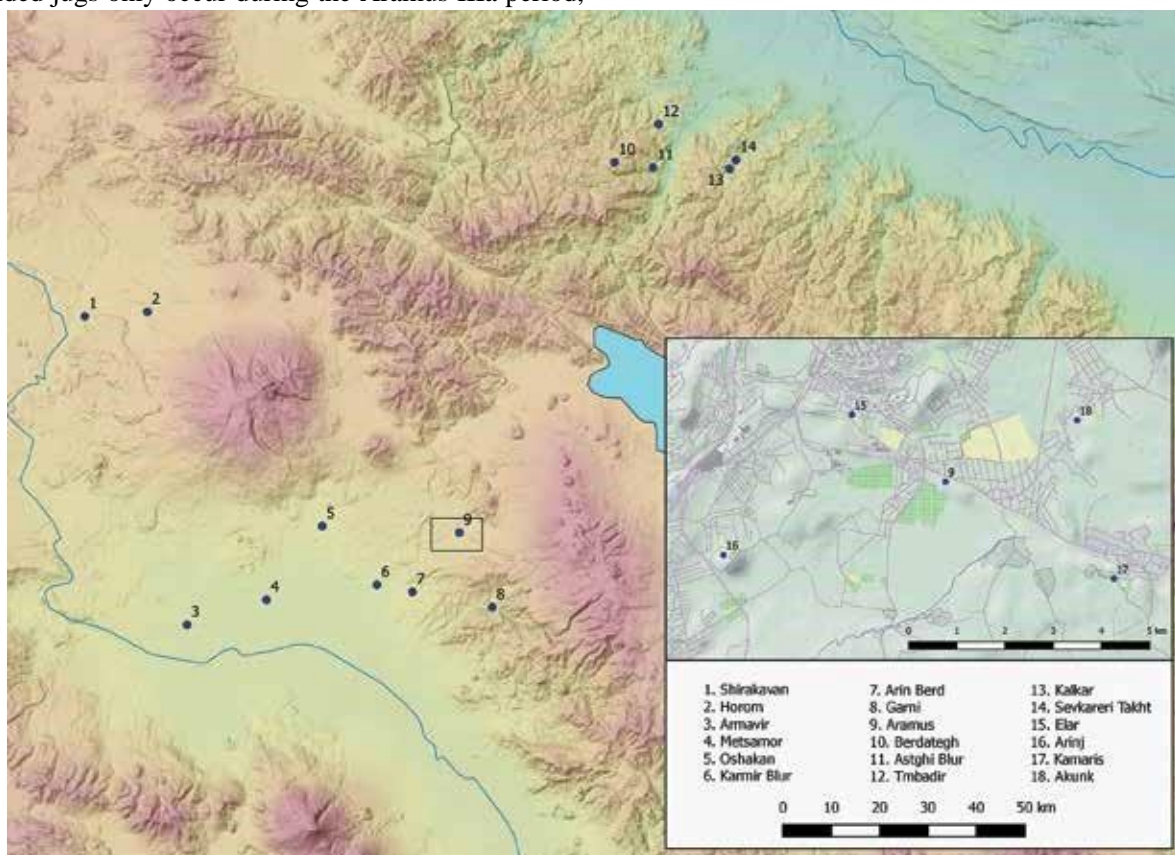


Fig. 6. Distribution of handled jars with step-like incisions (Map: W. Kuntner).

which dates based on three radiocarbon samples to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (Fig. 3; samples KIA 41505 and KIA 41510 were taken from level III d and sample KIA 41506 from level II). Recently, Herles (2019) has also suggested a higher date for Oshakan tomb no. 25, which represents a key finding for the definition of the youngest phase of the Lchashen-Metsamor pottery tradition (cf. Avetisyan 2009).

lake Sevan (Biscione 2002; Karapetyan 2003; Badalyan et al. 2016), across the Ararat plain (Deschamps, Fichet de Clairfontain, Karapetyan 2019; TerMartirosov 2020; Heinsch et al. 2012; Kuntner et al.

2012; 2019; Dan, Vitolo, Petrosyan in press) and the Mt. Aragats massif (Herles 2015). The Shirak plateau and Tsaghkahovit plain seem, on the contrary, to have been marked by a settlement hiatus during the Middle Iron Age (Ter-Martirosov, Deschamps 2007; Mauermann et al. 2013; Katchadourian 2014). However, for the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC the saying “not to see the forest for the trees” seems to be correct. It is not just about recognizing this fact, but also about rethinking previously upheld historical patterns of interpretation (Muscarella 1973, 75). The destruction of Karmir Blur and probably Argishtihinili is related more to Achaemenid politics in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC than to Scythian or Median raids in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The destruction of these centres might be the result of direct suppressions of revolts, similar to those seen before, in the reign of Darius I, or it may be related to internal struggles between local entities seeking influence over the relationship to the Achaemenid king of kings. The political tradition that has characterized

Urartu since the Late Bronze Age did not cease to exist (contra Zimansky 1995b). On the contrary, the Achaemenid kings relied on this long standing political system from the beginning, in order to control and rule the Satrapy of Armenia.

The Aramus Fortress complements this picture, which was previously mainly characterized by the results of the excavations in Erebuni (Stronach 2018). Like Erebuni, Aramus quickly adapted its architecture as an expression of the new balance of power by the construction of a free-standing column building almost in the midst of the Central Fort. To the north is a large courtyard laid with pebbles. The outlines, roughly defined by the regular alignment of eight column basalt bases found in situ, measure 6,5 × 5,5 m. The column bases mostly ground on the former stone wall substructures of the Biaini occupation, which continued to be used as shallow thresholds in order to subdivide the covered living area marked by an up to 10 cm thick mud floor. The bases are only roughly hewn round and

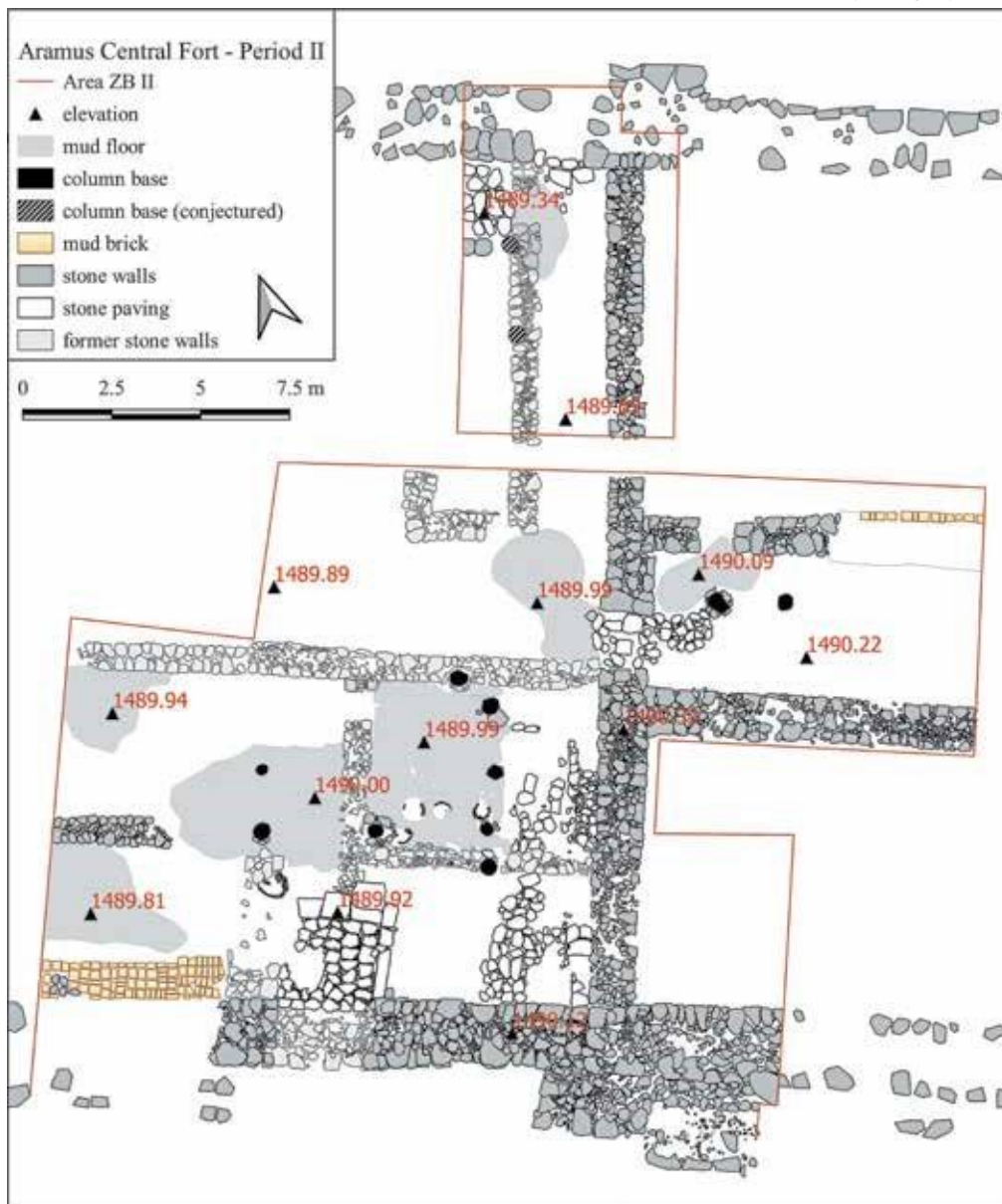


Fig. 7. Plan of the free-standing columned building in the Central Fort of Aramus (Drawing: W. Kuntner).

have the characteristic conoid shape of “terminal or post-Urartian date” (Stronach et al. 2007, 203, Pl. 5. cf. Ter-Martirosov 2020). The diameter is between 38 and 42 cm (except once with only 28 – 30 cm) and the height ranges between 22 and 30 cm. The shaft, if present, is between 5 and 15 cm high. The free-standing building is accessible through doorways on three sides, clearly proving that the fortress’ defensive structures remained intact until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (Kuntner et al. 2019). The southern entrance is characterized by a three-tiered, stone paved area. The stairs were carefully built with tuff spolia. Among these, the stela-like block has attracted special attention (Avetisyan 2016). Remains of a stone paved path lead east of the freestanding building to the northern and eastern doorways. Their thresholds were carefully paved with stones and the door hinges preserved in situ. The entrance from the northern fort was again characterized by at least three steps. The approximately 2 m wide pathway was roofed and bordered to the west by a 15 – 20 cm high platform, which was built by filling the former room with stones. The eastern doorway is supplemented by a 1,50 cm wide portico at the inside, which leads in a room to the north later repaired with a mud brick wall (Fig. 7).

## Conclusions

Archaeological research at the Iron Age fortress of Aramus revealed a continuous occupation from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Within this sequence, the presence of the kingdom of Biaini is ascertained in military architecture featured in the extension of the fortifications and in the occurrence of red Ararat valley wares. However, both aspects are integrated within a wider cultural context characterized by local Early Iron Age traditions of pottery production and construction techniques that persist the period of the kingdom of Van. This result demands for a critical reassessment of our understanding of Urartu beyond a mere mirror of the history of Biaini.

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