

SCHRIFTEN DES ZENTRUMS FÜR ARCHÄOLOGIE UND
KULTURGESCHICHTE DES SCHWARZMEERRAUMES 22

AUSTAUSCH UND KULTURKONTAKT
IM SÜDKAUKASUS
UND SEINEN ANGRENZENDEN REGIONEN
IN DER SPÄTBRONZE-/FRÜHEISENZEIT



SCHRIFTEN DES ZENTRUMS FÜR ARCHÄOLOGIE UND
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Herausgegeben von

FRANÇOIS BERTEMES und ANDREAS FURTWÄNGLER

AUSTAUSCH UND KULTURKONTAKT IM
SÜDKAUKASUS UND SEINEN ANGRENZENDEN
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Survey on the settlements of Late Bronze/Early Iron Age in the northern shore of Lake Van Basin

Aynur Özfirat

During the survey of Van Lake Basin, more than 250 sites were examined (fig. 1)¹ which are concentrated within the Late Chalcolithic – Late Iron Age period. Even though most of these sites dated to the Early Iron Age (EIA) and Middle Iron Age (MIA), this article deals with Late Bronze (LBA)/Early Iron Age settlements of northern shore (Erciş region) of the Van Lake Basin. This Basin is basically framed by the volcanoes of the Nemrut and Süphan Dağ to the west and the Aladağ and Tendürek Dağ to the east and north. At the same time, these volcanoes constitute some important pasture land for nearby or more distant villages. The northern shore of the basin is situated between volcanoes and slopes of Aladağ and volcanoes of Tendürek, which also function as a large barrier separating two major communication axes: the road running alongside the lake and the inland road running eastwards from Erzurum to Doğubeyazıt. The sites are concentrated within the Ilıca and Deliçay valleys, which are the most important rivers of the region.

The explored sites fall in the range from the Early Bronze Age (EBA) through the Late Iron Age (LIA) in the Erciş region². The increase of settlements and fortresses from the LBA/EIA and

MIA/Urartian period is striking as it is remarkable in the whole region. Almost all of the sites are fortresses, located on rocky hills in the plains or on the skirts of mountains bordering. Mostly they settled from the LBA/EIA through the MIA, but almost all listed sites occupied in the MIA. There are very few sites of only a single phase.

The fortresses are surrounded by defence walls made of half-worked stones, but it is not clear whether they were built according to a predetermined plan. As said above, the fact that the material collected within the fortresses is a mixture of EIA/MIA has a negative effect on the dating of the remains. It is only possible to say that the partly preserved walls testified at Ganiyi Neso (M69/1), Zinarizer (N69/8) (fig. 2), Mino (N69/7), Top Tepe (M69/9) (fig. 3, 1), Kengerkor (M70/6), Meydan Tepe (M69/4) (fig. 3, 2), İt Kalesi (M70/2) (fig. 4), Aşağı Karaçay (M70/7) (fig. 5), Alacahan (N71/2) (fig. 6) and Evdi Tepe (N71/1) (fig. 7) show some characteristics of the MIA/Urartu architecture, owing to their rectangular plan and the technic of walls, whereas the fortress seems to date back to the EIA.

The second group of fortresses is located in the highland and consists of sites with the same characteristics in terms of topography and construction, such as Şekerbulak (M70/12) (fig. 8, 1–3), Tırmıklı (M71/3) (fig. 5), Zirçlitaş (M71/6) (fig. 8, 4), Bakırtas (M71/5) (fig. 9, 1. 2) and Teketaş (M71/7) (fig. 9, 3) fortresses. There is no material from these fortresses. They are situated on the top of quite high rocky hills. Mostly they are of small size with plans determined by the terrain. In general the fortifications were built only of one or mostly two sides because there was no need to build them on such sides with sheer cliffs.

1 We would like here to thank warmly Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate for Monuments and Museums for giving us permission to work in this area and support. – Survey also was supported, TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey, Projects No. SBB-CNRS-2011 and SBB-105K063), Turkish Historical Society and the University of Van (2002-FED-093) projects, I wish to thank them for their support. Our thanks also go to Prof. V. Sevin for his kind help.

2 Marro – Özfirat 2004; Özfirat 2006b; Özfirat 2009; Özfirat 2010a; Sevin 2003; Sevin 2004.

The walls were built of rough worked stones. Mostly no rooms or other installations were found inside the fortresses. This type of fortresses may have been used only for military purposes due to their size, plan, absence of pottery and lack of cemeteries. Even there is no material from these fortresses, they can be dated to the EIA/MIA because of technical characteristics.

Two types of graves are attested in the cemeteries: as far as we could see in spite of the destructions caused by illicit digging, one group is composed of single cist-graves, made of crude stones and covered with large slabs e.g. at Evdi Tepe (fig. 7), Top Tepe and Kengerkor cemeteries. Another group includes chamber tombs, but because of the plundering it is difficult to find out whether they contained one or several individuals. Chamber tombs basically occur in two kinds: the tombs belonging to the first category are larger than the cist graves, of a squarish shape and show some kind of vault. They are also covered with large slabs. The second category consists of graves found at Ganiyi Neso, İn Mevkii (M70/1), İt Kaleşi (fig. 4), Alacahan (fig. 6) and Evdi Tepe (fig. 7), which are characterized by their careful construction: they show regular walls of well-cut stones and are covered by large slabs varying in number between three and four. Together with the material we collected from the surface, they show architectural parallels with the chamber tombs from Early Iron Age cemeteries in the region Aliler and excavations of Evdi Tepe, Karagündüz, Yoncatepe, Dilkaya and Hakkari. According to the results from the excavations or the surveys conducted on the above-mentioned sites, the chamber tombs from the Lake Van basin in the Early Iron Age are characterized by many inhumations often associated with burial gifts.

The most difficult problem concerning the cemeteries yielding EIA/MIA material is to understand the distinction between MIA and Urartian tombs. Except from one, all tombs, which were examined within the surveyed area on the shore and northwest side of the Erciş region, did not reveal any Urartian features. It is difficult to solve this matter with the data collected from a survey only. But if illicit digging had not destroyed all the evidence, it might have been possible to analyse this situation in terms of a continued local tradition into MIA.

The number of inhabited settlements were very large in the LBA/EIA and MIA. Whereas

fortresses increased also a dense occupation of these fortresses appeared during the EIA/MIA, as large numbers of collected sherds from some sites show. As mentioned above, these sites were used particularly during EIA through MIA. It is difficult to distinguish them more precisely than in those of single phased ones and others with MIA and Urartian features as well. The fortresses were built of roughly worked stones and their layouts matched exactly with the natural topography. Fortresses of the MIA usually have a regular, mostly rectangular layout; and walls consist of larger stones on the outside and a filling of smaller stones in the middle. Urartian sites were constructed employing the standard building techniques of the Urartian Kingdom³. The number of sites rapidly increase from the LBA/EIA onwards as seen on the Eastern Anatolian high plateau. EIA- to MIA-sites generally consist of a fortress flanked by cemeteries on their slopes. In the region the architectural features do not change much until the MIA/Urartian Kingdom and it seems that the local fortresses were used during the Urartian period as well beside new Urartian structures administrative centers etc.

It seems that at the transition to the LBA/EIA, nomadic population of MBA began to settle around certain organizational and economic centers like those of Southern Caucasus and Northwestern Iran⁴. The sedentary life which was interrupted with the emerging of the kurgan cultures of MBA seem to have restarted in the LBA/EIA as many fortresses and cemeteries in the regions, like the Eastern Anatolian High plateau show. At the same time the previous period (MBA) settlement system of the Eastern Anatolian high plateau seemed to continue in the LBA/EIA⁵. In respect of the results obtained from the excavations of the cemeteries of Karagündüz⁶, Ernis/Evdi Tepe⁷,

3 For the Urartian sites see: Keçikıran (Sevin 2006) and Delicay (Burney 1957; Burney - Lawson 1960).

4 Микаелян 1968; Kleiss - Kroll 1980; İsmayilov 1981, 39-46; Kroll 1984; Kohl 2001, 324-325; Aliev 2003; Biscione - Hmayakyan 2002; Biscione 2003; Керимов 2003; Seyidov 2003; Бахşелиев 2002; Бахşелиев 2007; Badalyan et al. 2003; Badalyan - Avetisyan 2007; Smith 1998; Smith - Thompson 2004; Smith et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2009).

5 Özfırat 2001; Özfırat 2005; Özfırat 2006a; Özfırat 2010b; Sevin 2003; Sevin 2004; Sevin 2005.

6 Sevin - Kavaklı 1996; Sevin 2003; Sevin 2004, 185-188.

7 Sevin 2003; Sevin 2004, 180-185.

Hakkari⁸ and our surveys conducted around the Lake Van and Mt. Ağrı regions⁹, there were no major changes in the socioeconomic system until the occurrence of the Urartian kingdom. The MBA pastoral culture (c. 2000 BC – c. 1400/1300 BC) was gradually replaced by a different culture model. In the transitional phase of the LBA/EIA (c. 1400/1300–900 BC) while the pastoral system still has remained steps were taken towards a new social and political organization on the contrary to MBA nomadic formation. The LBA/EIA should be seen as a period when small kingdoms in the region occurred, which set the foundation of the Urartian Kingdom.

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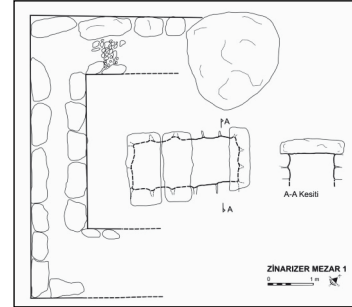
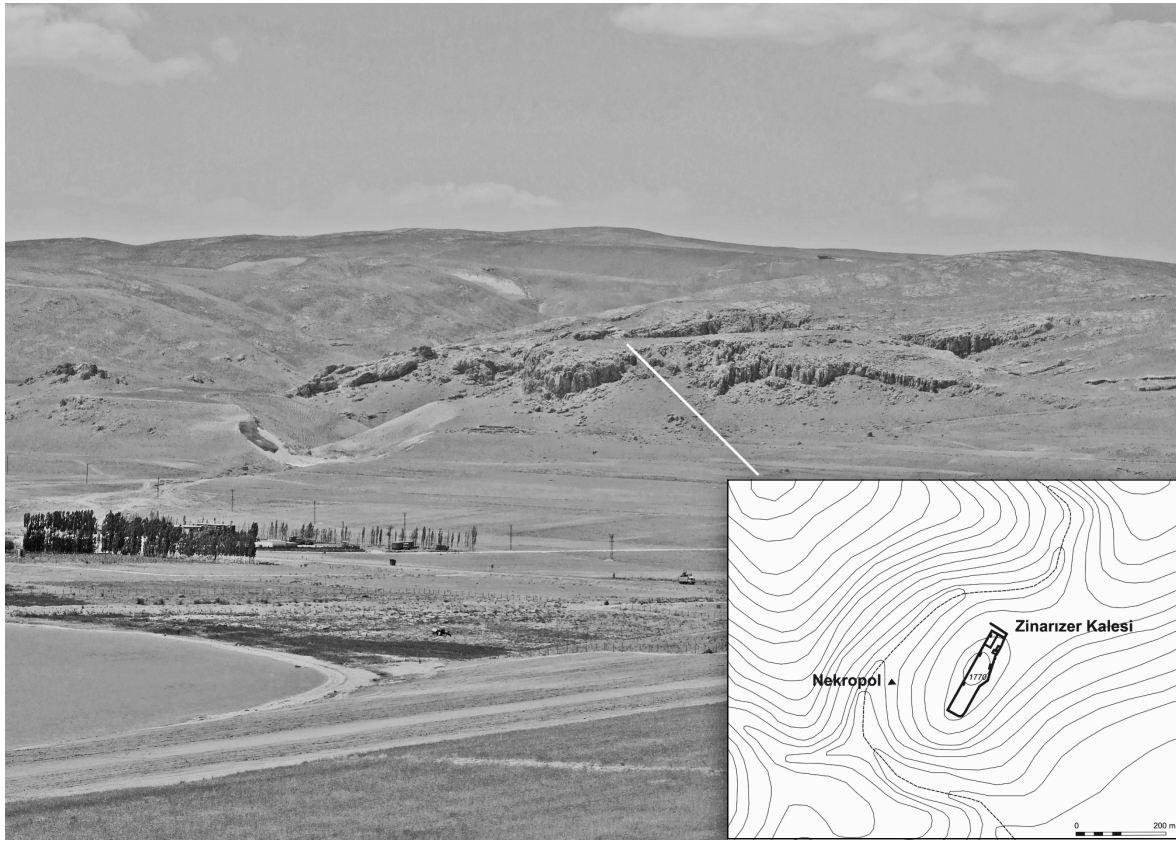


Fig. 2 Zinarizer fortress.



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2

Fig. 3 1 Top Tepe fortress; 2 Meydan Tepe fortress.

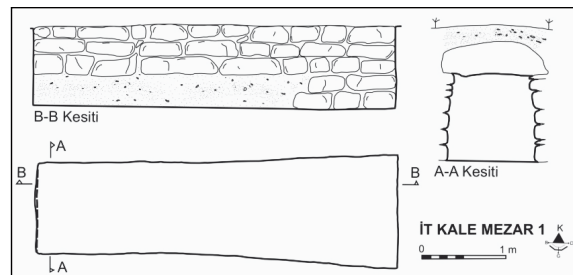
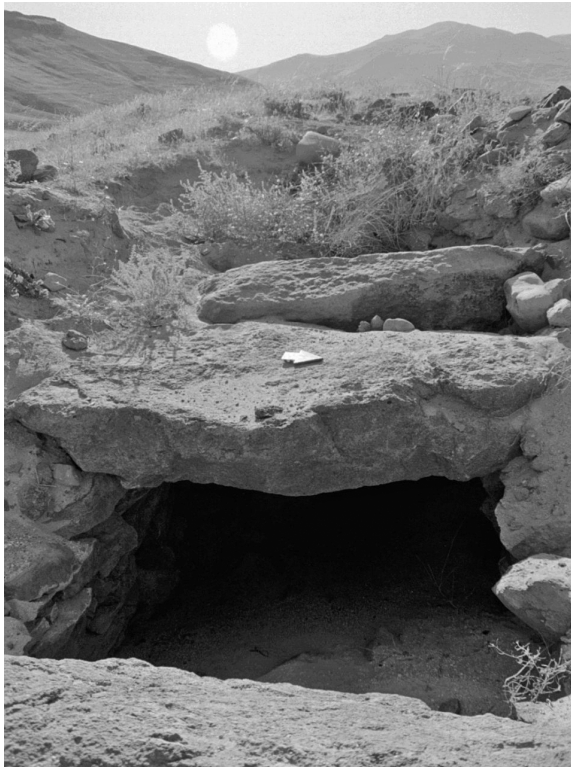


Fig. 4 İt Kalesi fortress.



Fig. 5 Tirmikli fortress.

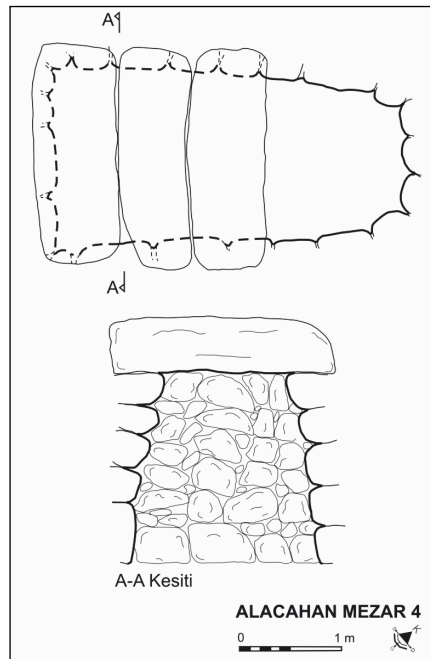
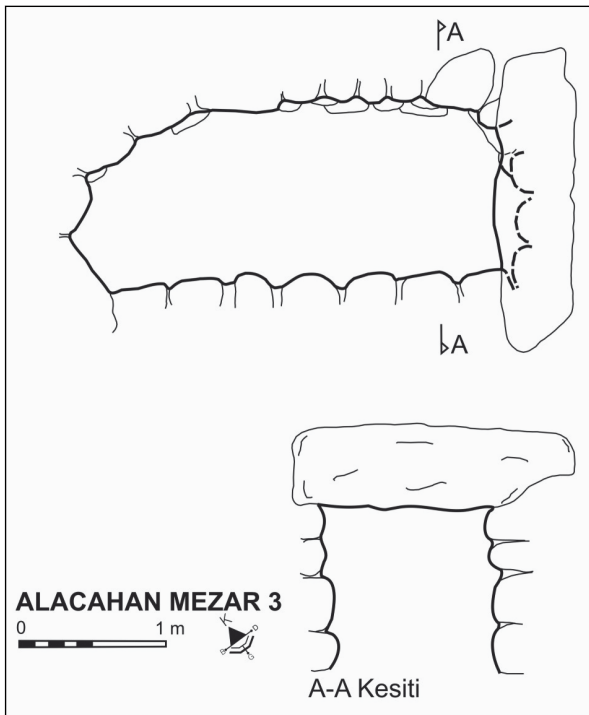
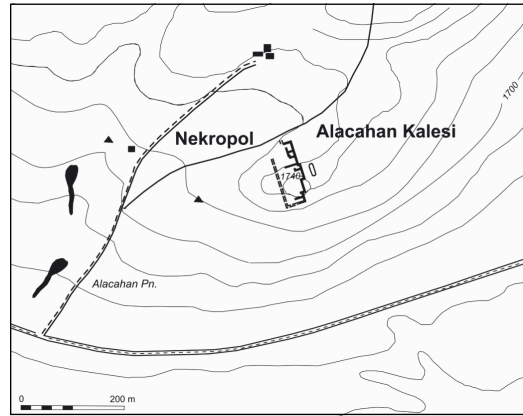
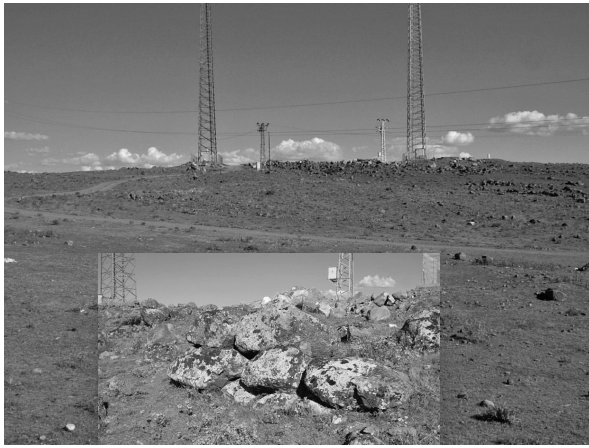


Fig. 6 Alacahan fortress.

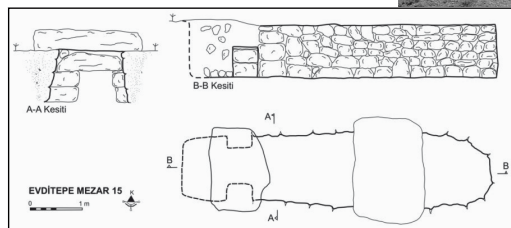
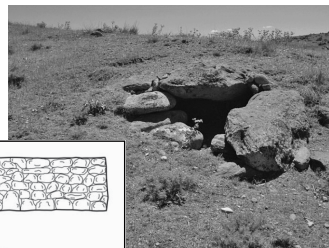
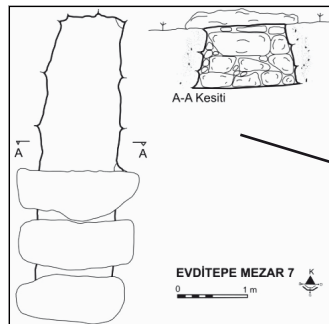
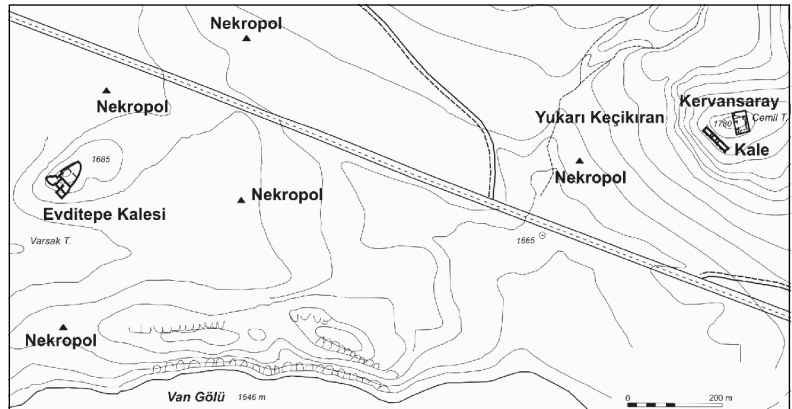
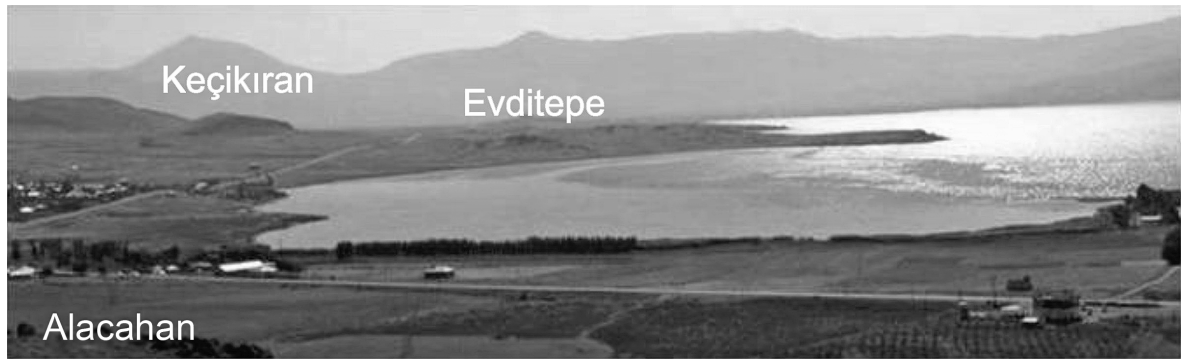
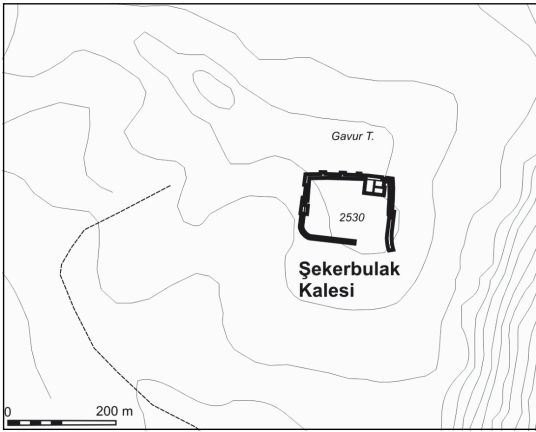


Fig. 7 Evdi Tepe fortress.



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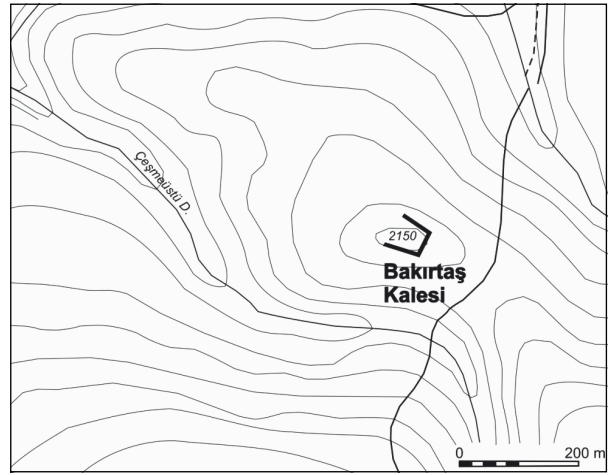


4

Fig. 8 1-3 Şekerbülak fortress; 4 Zirçlitaş fortress.



1



2



3

Fig 9. 1. 2 Bakirtaş fortress; 3 Teketaş fortress.