Surveys in Ardahan on the Turkish-Georgian Borderline in 2013 and 2014

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Sami PATACI* and Ergün LAFLI**

SURVEYS IN ARDAHAN ON THE TURKISH-GEORGIAN BORDERLINE IN 2013 AND 2014

The Transcaucasus is bordered on the west by the Black Sea and Turkey and it includes the Caucasus Mountains and surrounding lowlands. This region is one of the native areas of the wine-producing *vitis vinifera* and perhaps the birthplace of wine production. Archaeological excavation and carbon dating of grape pips from the area have dated back to 7000-5000 B.C.¹ The Province of Ardahan lies on the northeastern border of Turkey to Georgia and has an important geographical position that conjoins Eastern Anatolia with Transcaucasia. The city is neighboured with Artvin, the hindermost city of Turkish Eastern Black Sea area in the west, with the cities of Erzurum and Kars in the south and with Georgia and Armenia in the east.

The first surviving record about Ardahan is attributed to Strabo, who calls it as 'Gōgarēnē' and mentions that it was a part of Caucasian Iberia². In the Armenian geography (Asxarhac'oyc'), the city was a district of the province of Gugark (Գուգարք)³. The oldest archaeological sites in Ardahan are dated to the Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age. According to the results of some recent studies Ardahan plain was an important landscape for the Transcaucasian cultures of the Bronze Age. Traces of a nomadic culture in Transcaucasia and especially in Georgia have been identified by some archaeological researches and as a result of these today we know that the nomads of this area had existed before the Iron Age.

In some publications Urartians, Cimmerians and Scythians are mentioned in the relationship of the

Iron Age of Ardahan. However, most of the archaeological sites which were attributed to the Kingdom of Urartu have not been studied well in detail and so far there is no archaeological evidence of Cimmerians or Scythians in this region. Apart from a few exceptions, Iron Age seems to be almost entirely a blackout for the plain of Ardahan, especially for the central district of the province. Likewise, there is almost nothing left on surface from the Roman period. On the other hand, Medieval archaeology of Ardahan is quite rich. Medieval Ardahan (Արტაანი / Artaani in Georgian) is located within the boundaries of the historical region, called 'Tao-Klarjeti' ("ტაო-კლარჯეთი"). In this area there were some important geographical districts, such as Samtskhe, Javakheti, Artaani, Erusheti, and Kola. Georgian culture played a significant role in the region since the 4th century B.C. The region was under control of Roman Empire until the 4th century A.D. and Persians ruled over Tao-Klarjeti between the 4th and 6th centuries A.D. Georgian King Vakhtang Gorgasali founded an episcopate during the 5th century in Erusheti which is located in the north of modern Ardahan⁴. Tao-Klarjeti was under the domination of an Arab emirate between the second half of the 7th century and the 9th century. By the end of the 8th century A.D. Georgians take the control around the region and they were most powerful during the 11th-12th centuries A.D. According to the Arab historian Yahya of Antioch, the Byzantines razed Ardahan and slaughtered its population in A.D. 1021⁵. The Mongols took hold of the city in A.D. 1230s, but the

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1) Johnson 1989: 17.

2) Γωγαρινή: Strabo, *Geographica*, 11, 14, 4f. Also at Ptolemy, *Γεωγραφικὴ Ὑφήγησις*, 5, 12, 4; χωρίον μεταξύ Κόλχων καὶ Ἰβήρων ανατολικῶν, Stephen of Byzantium, *Ἐθνικά*, 216.

3) Baumgartner 2009: 185.

4) Chant'uria 2014: 165.

5) SAE 1976: 7.

Map 1 : Map of surveyed sites in 2013 and 2014 and archaeological surface find spots in Ardahan (S. Pataacı, 2015).

Georgian princes of Samtskhe-Saatabago were able to recapture it in 1266. The principality of Samtskhe-Saatabago was annexed by the Ottoman Empire in 1555 and Ardahan was included as a sanjak to the Ottoman *vilayet* (province) of Akhaltsikhe.

An archaeological field survey has begun in this landscape in 2013 by a team mainly consisted of academics from the University of Ardahan⁶. So far the city borders of Ardahan represent a zone that has been studied scholarly at the very least. The landscapes of Ardahan are important especially for the Bronze and Iron Ages and archaeological surveys in 2013 and 2014 have revealed that there are still undiscovered archaeological finds belonging to these periods in central district of Ardahan. At the same time the region seems to be quite rich of Medieval archaeology. Long term scientific excavations are crucially needed in order to specify the exact construction and occupation dates of several sites and monuments and to reveal how the ancient settlement patterns were in this region. In the first place, within the bounds of

possibility, a map of the archaeological surface properties of Ardahan has been prepared (Map 1). Since our archaeological knowledge of the provincial centre of Ardahan is very limited, the major aim of our surveys in 2013 and 2014 campaigns was to ascertain the undiscovered archaeological properties in the city centre. Therefore, in the first two seasons concentration is given to the western part of Ardahan and 22 sites were visited (Map 2). These are Tepeler, Yalnızçam, Çeğilli, Yokuşdibi, Ovacınar, Edegül, Dedegül, Arıçdere, Dağevi, Çatalköprü, Çimenkaya, Akyaka, Ağzıpek, Sugöze, Gürçayır, Sulakyurt, Açıkyaşı, Çetinsu, Sarıyamaç, Çataldere, Değirmenli and Kartalpınar. Our archaeological discoveries are as follows: three towers near Çeğilli; three fortified high plateau sites in Çeğilli, Değirmenli and Sulakyurt; remains of a fortress at Yokuşdibi; a Bronze Age site in Sulakyurt; a fortified Bronze Age site and a cemetery in Kartalpınar; a circular monument in Değirmenli; a nearly rectangular monument in Kartalpınar and an unidentified archaeological site in Çataldere.

6) Pataacı and Laflı 2014; as well as Pataacı 2015a.

Map 2 : Location of Ardahan with surveyed areas in 2013 and 2014 (S. Pataci, 2015).

Fig. 1a-c : Plans of the Çeğilli Towers (S. Patac1, 2013).

Ardahan is very rich in term of religious and secular architecture of Medieval and Post-Medieval periods. Several Medieval and Post-Medieval sites were visited during 2013 and 2014 seasons. Two inscribed gravestones in Greek from the 19th century A.D. were found in Çetinsu. In Sulakyurt 14 inscribed Molokan gravestones were discovered that should be dated to the end of 19th and early 20th centuries A.D. In the following sections major finds of these two seasons will be presented briefly.

THREE TOWERS IN ÇEĞİLLİ (REVAS)

The Village of Çeğilli (Revas) lies 16.5 km west of the city centre of Ardahan. Almost 2 km west of this village a tower structure has been found. A second tower has also been found at 500 m northeast of the first one. These finds are called as 'Çeğilli Towers 1 and 2' (Fig. 1a-b). A third one was discovered northwest of Çeğilli and called as 'Çeğilli Tower 3' (Fig. 1c). These towers were built with dry wall technique using regular cut big-sized basalt stones. According to their masonry they are similar to Late Bronze-Early Iron Age structures. In Çeğilli Tower 3 pottery of Bronze and Early Iron Ages and obsidian sherds were found.

FORTIFIED HIGH PLATEAU SITE OF ÇEĞİLLİ

During the 2013 surveys a Bronze/Early Iron Ages archaeological site called as 'Büyük Tepe' has been found 600 m northeast of the Village Çeğilli. These remains are located on a terrace at the peak of Büyük Tepe with an altitude of 1970 m (Fig. 2). The residual mass consisted of embankment stones on the terrace of the hill and regular-cut large sized

stones in small quantities have a radius about 16 m. The stack of stones makes a circular form, indicates remains of a fortified settlement. Few pottery fragments have been documented essentially in the northeast and southern slopes and on the peak of the hill, but it is difficult to suggest an exact date for them. At the same time on northwest slope of the hill some obsidian fragments are encountered. An archaeological excavation is necessary to comprehend the function of the remains and to date them accurately.

YOKUŞDİBİ (LORİ) FORTRESS (?)

Some field researches were done in Yokuşdibi (Lori) Village and its surroundings which is located in 13 km northwest of the city centre of Ardahan. A fortress or a site was identified which seems to have Bronze Age characteristics⁷. Remains of Yokuşdibi have been ascertained on a ridge which lies about 2 km north of the village centre and 1 km south of Artvin-Ardahan highway, on an altitude of 2105 m. In the centre of the remains an almost square planned tower structure with dimensions of 12 x 13.5 m lies along the northeast-southwest direction. The distance between the inner and outer walls of the tower that was built with large sized basalt stones in dry wall technique, varies from 1.70 m to 2.20 m. Beginning from few meters outside the northeastern edge of the tower and extending along the southwest-northeast direction, remains of another wall with almost 20 m length and about 2 m width were found (Fig. 3). Furthermore, 25 m south of this place, there are possible traces of a fortification wall extending around 50-60 m in east-west direction in a scattered state. Numerous pottery finds have been documented on the same level with these remains.

7) Patac1 2015a; 2015b; Patac1 and Laflı 2014: 32-34; as well as Tunç 2015.

Fig. 2 : Fortified high plateau site of Çeğilli; view from the east (S. Patacı, 2013).

Fig. 3 : Yokuşdibi Fortress; view from the northeast (S. Patacı, 2013).

Fig. 4 : Bronze Age site of Sulakyurt; view from the north (S. Patacı, 2014).

BRONZE AGE SITE OF SULAKYURT (SARZEP)

Sulakyurt (Sarzep) is situated 9.5 km northwest of the Ardahan city centre and this site can be reached via Artvin-Ardahan highway. A very little site located 300-400 m northeast of Sulakyurt Village with an altitude of 1987 m has been called as ‘Bronze Age Site of Sulakyurt’ (Fig. 4). The peak of this site is *ca.* 70 x 40 m, is in the form of a natural terrace. There are remains of a wall surrounding this terrace. Numerous pottery sherds from this terrace belong to the Bronze Age (Fig. 5) whereas a small portion of sherds may belong to the Early Iron Age. In almost all parts of the site obsidian fragments were documented which was the largest assemblage of the site.

FORTIFIED HIGH PLATEAU SITE OF SULAKYURT (SARZEP)

Archaeological remains of an high plateau site has been discovered at an altitude of 2125 m at the southward peak of a mountain, 850-900 m north of Bronze Age site of Sulakyurt (Fig. 6). A tower is located on the terrace of the mountaintop (Fig. 7).

Large and small sized stones had been used in this tower which was built in dry wall technique. Some further wall remains must belong to a terrace wall and to other types of structures (Fig. 8-9). In an area of about 75 m around the tower a small amount of pottery fragments of the Bronze Age and possibly Early Iron Age has been documented. It seems that an archaeological excavation is the only option to figure out when the site was really in use and if there was a relationship between this high plateau site and the Bronze Age site of Sulakyurt which is located just 900 m south of it.

FORTIFIED HIGH PLATEAU SITE OF DEĞİRMENLİ AND A CIRCULAR MONUMENT

Değirmenli Village which is located 13 km northwest of the city center of Ardahan lies between Yokuşdibi and Sulakyurt sites. Some archaeological remains on a hill called as ‘Ziyaret Tepe’ were discovered 1.3 km southeast of this village. There are three staged terraces on Ziyaret Tepe (Fig. 10). A tower structure is located at the center of the uppermost terrace of the hill (Fig. 11). Architectural posture of this tower does not differ from the other

Fig. 5 : Pottery finds from the Bronze Age site of Sulakyurt (S. Patacı, 2014).

Fig. 6 : High plateau site of Sulakyurt; view from the northwest (S. Patacı, 2013).

Fig. 7 : A tower of the fortified high plateau site in Sulakyurt (S. Patacı, 2013).

Fig. 8 : Architectural remains of the high plateau site of Sulakyurt (S. Patacı, 2013).

Fig. 9 : Fortified high plateau site of Sulakyurt; remains of a terrace wall (S. Pataci, 2013).

Fig. 10 : Fortified high plateau site of Değirmenli; view from the north (S. Pataci, 2014).

Fig. 11 : A tower of the fortified high plateau site of Değirmenli (S. Pataci, 2014).

Fig. 12 : High plateau site of Değirmenli; remains of a fortification wall (S. Patacı, 2014).

towers around the region. It was built in dry wall technique and it has a nearly rounded plan. There are two entrances in different levels in the southern part of the tower. At the same time there are two varying fortification wall remains which surround this tower in different levels (Fig. 12). A large portion of Early and Middle Bronze Age pottery and obsidian sherds are documented.

A circular monument is located on the southern slope of Ziyaret Tepe and 360 m south of the high plateau site of Değirmenli. Dimension of this area with the monument is 45 x 37 m. Walls of the monument were almost completely damaged. No pottery has been found which makes it difficult to date this monument. The function of this monument is not clear; perhaps it was used as a settlement or a sheepfold during the Bronze or Early Iron Ages.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AT ATTEPE

Çataldere Village (Kundzeti) is located 16 km northeast of the city center of Ardahan. During the surface surveys around this site an archaeological unit was discovered at a peak of a hill called ‘Attepe’

which is 1.6 km northeast of Çataldere. It covers a terraced area of 60 x 40 m. Remains of a wall surround this terrace and an ellipse-shaped monument has been found on the ground level inside the northern part of the terrace (Fig. 13). This archaeological place is just across the Kunzut Fortress which is located on the north and was studied by K. Köroğlu in 1997⁸. Attepe could be used as a watchtower. A sheepfold or a high plateau site also seems to be possible. Unfortunately no pottery or other type of small finds were found.

FORTIFIED BRONZE AGE SITE AND CEMETERY OF KARTALPINAR (FAHRER)

Kartalpinar Village is situated 7-8 km north of the city center of Ardahan and it has been surveyed in 2014 campaign. There is a Bronze Age site and a cemetery 1.2 km northeast of Kartalpinar⁹. This archaeological area is only 170 m north of Kura River at 1827 m of altitude (Fig. 14). The size of the site is 88 m at east-west direction and 63 m at north-south. The site has two main parts in the north and south. The southern part was also separated in two sections

8) Köroğlu 1999: 148.

9) Patacı and Laflı 2015a.

Fig. 13 :
Plan of Attepe
(S. Patacı, 2014).

Fig. 14 : Aerial photograph of the Bronze Age site and cemetery of Kartalpınar
(S. Patacı, 2014).

Fig. 15 : Bronze Age site of Kartalpınar (S. Patacı, 2014).

by a wall at north and south directions. The walls of the site were built with dry wall technique using large and small sized stones. Piles of stones which belong to the walls of the site are spread over the ground (Fig. 15). This area must have been used as a fortification. Its close position to Kura River makes it an appropriate location for a possible protohistoric site. A small amount of Bronze Age ceramic and obsidian fragments are found around the site.

A Bronze Age cemetery, located just north of Kartalpınar Site has been found and is 75/100 x 65 m (Fig. 14). This cemetery is one of the largest Bronze Age cemeteries in eastern Anatolia. Numerous Bronze Age pottery and obsidian sherds are documented (Fig. 16). Some of the tombs are unearthed by recent illicit excavations (Fig. 17). It is possible that some of the graves had been built in *kurgan*¹⁰ type.

A nearly rectangular monument is located 800 m northeast of Kartalpınar site and cemetery which lies in east-west direction with the dimensions of 70 x 33 m and was built in dry wall technique. Nevertheless, there is not much left from it and no pottery sherds have been found to suggest a date for it.

MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN ARDAHAN

In 1977 and 1983 R. W. Edwards, has organized two expeditions to Erzurum, Artvin and Ardahan and their neighbourhood to inspect Medieval architectural remains¹¹. A second researcher in the area

was an Austrian, B. Baumgartner, who had surveys in Tao-Klarjeti in 1980s and in the year of 1990, and studied the surface evidence of the Medieval Georgian architecture¹². A project focused on Medieval Georgian architecture at Tao-Klarjeti zone has been carried out by M. Kadiroğlu¹³ between 1996 and 2005; thereafter the project has resumed by F. Bayram¹⁴. At the beginning in the project two Turkish provinces, Artvin¹⁵ and Erzurum, were included; then Ardahan was also incorporated. Numerous Georgian religious architectural examples were examined based on observations of Ekh. T'aqaishvili (ე. თაყაიშვილი in Georgian; 1863-1953), a Georgian historian, archaeologist and public benefactor who organized a series of archaeological expeditions to the historic Georgian region of Tao-Klarjeti¹⁶ and wrote numerous scholarly works on the history and archaeology of Georgia and the Caucasus which are of special value even today. In the survey campaigns of 2013 and 2014 several Medieval sites and monuments in central district of Ardahan were documented: A Medieval church in Yalnızçam (Sindiskom) district, four chapels in Çetinsu (Beberek), Yokuşdibi (Lori), Sulakyurt (Sarzep) and Kartalpınar (Fahrer) villages, and a possible bath in Kartalpınar¹⁷. The church at Yalnızçam was built in infill wall technique with basalt stones and architecturally it is a typical Medieval Georgian church of 10th-12th centuries (Fig. 18). In the city center of Ardahan single-naved chapels had been substantially destroyed apart from

10) 'Kurgan' is the Russian word of Turkic origin for *tumulus*; with its use in Soviet archaeology the word is now widely used for *tumuli* in the context of Transcaucasian and Central Asian archaeology.

11) Edwards 1986: 165-182; 1988: 119-141.

12) Baumgartner 2009: 183-187.

13) Kadiroğlu-Leube, Yazar and Karaca 1997: 397-421; Kadiroğlu-Leube 1998: 97-125; Kadiroğlu 1999: 8-19; 2000: 81-86; as well as Kadiroğlu *et al.* 2005: 93-106.

14) Bayram and Yazar 2008: 263-284; 2011: 1-18; 2013: 321-336.

15) Bayram 2005.

16) T'aqaishvili 1909; 1924; 1938.

17) Patacı and Oral 2015.

Fig. 16 : Pottery finds from Kartalpinar cemetery (S. Patacı, 2014).

Fig. 17 : A grave found by illicit excavations at Kartalpinar cemetery (S. Patacı, 2014).

the one in Çetinsu (Fig. 19) which demonstrates characteristics of the Medieval Georgian religious architecture. The bath/residence in Kartalpinar village (Fig. 20) seems to be the only Medieval civic architectural example that was discovered during our researches. A chapel located 30 m north of this building makes us to think that there had been a functional relationship between these two buildings.

A re-used Medieval (9th-10th centuries) Georgian inscription is discovered on the fortification wall of Ardahan Fortress which was built in the city centre during Turkish-Islamic period (Fig. 21). This four-lined inscription by local limestone, located on inner facade of north fortification wall of the fortress is approximately 3 meters above from ground level

and made by volcanic tuff. The inscription is in a rectangular frame of 45 x 31 cm. Height of each letters ranges between 3 and 8,5 cm. Translation of this inscription is as follows:

*Sacred
stone.
Jacop's
rock.*

Although we cannot judge about the function of this very short inscription, it is probable that this stone was obtained from a religious structure around the area during the building of the fortress.

Another Georgian inscription is found in a small village, called 'Kumlukoz' in Posof district of

Fig. 18 : Plan of the Yalnızçam (Sindiskom) Church (S. Pataçı, 2014).

Fig. 19 : Chapel at Çetinsu (Beberek); view from the southeast (S. Patacı, 2014).

Fig. 20 : A Medieval bath/residence from Kartalpınar (S. Patacı, 2014).

Fig. 21 : A Medieval Georgian inscription from the fortress at Ardahan (S. Patacı, 2014).

dated to the 10th-12th centuries; but for the date of the epitaph a more detailed study is needed. It was engraved on a limestone stele which is used as a stair in front of a house (Fig. 22). The stele was surmounted by a cross which was fixed at the top. Transcription and translation of the epitaph are as follows:

„ო(ვფაღ)ო, | მ(ეო)ხ | ეფ(ა)ვ |
ხ(უ)ლს(ა) | ზ(ა)ჟ(ა)რ(ია)ს(ა), | ა(მე)ნ“.

*God, have mercy
upon the soul of Zakaria, amen*¹⁸

POST-MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN ARDAHAN

The region of Ardahan on the Turkish-Georgian borderline is significant for its archaeological heritage of Molokans (in Russian ‘молokane’ for ‘milk-drinkers’), members of a Christian sect that evolved from ‘Spiritual Christian’ Russian peasants who refused to obey the Russian Orthodox Church. At the end of the 19th century there were about 500,000 Molokans within the Russian Empire. Before World War I there was a well-known colony of Molokans

Fig. 22 : A Georgian inscription from Kumlukoz (S. Patacı, 2015).

Ardahan and it is a funerary text. Kumlukoz village was one of the Georgian settlements in the region and its original name was ‘Gume’ that must be associated with the Georgian word ‘Gwime’. In this village there is a Medieval chapel which must be

that had been exiled to the Caucasus, an area long within Russian hegemony, mainly to what is now Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and northeastern Turkey, i.e. Kars and Ardahan. During the field surveys in 2013, 14 Molokan inscribed gravestones

18) We would like to thank to Assoc. Prof. Teimuraz (Temo) Jojua and Mr. Lado Mirianashvili for their assistance in transcription and translation of this epitaph.

Fig. 23 : A Molokan inscription from Sulakyurt; late 19th cent. A.D. (S. Patacı, 2014).

in Sulakyurt and three Greek inscribed gravestones in Çetinsu Villages were documented (Fig. 23-24). These Molokan gravestones are the archaeological evidences of the Molokan exiles to the region after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878¹⁹.

CONCLUSION

The main subject for the field surveys in Ardahan in 2013 and 2014 was the Bronze Age sites of high plateau people whose daily bread was livestock²⁰. It is obvious that usual *höyük* sites of the Bronze Age are not many in our survey area and our main settlement pattern in Ardahan is Bronze Age sites or

Fig. 24 : A Greek inscription from Çetinsu; late 19th cent. A.D. (S. Patacı, 2014).

shelters of high plateau people on mountaintops which seem to be a unique feature for this part of eastern Anatolia.

The first extensive researches about the pottery traditions in eastern Anatolia were the studies of A. Çilingiroğlu in the basin of Lake Van²¹. Short-termed studies of the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age pottery by C. A. Burney in 1956 is significant for the northeastern Anatolian cities²². So far the pottery tradition of the high plateau culture in 2nd Millennium B.C. was clarified mostly by the finds from burial sites and limited numbers of settlements. Our surveys in Ardahan provided further examples of already-known pottery types of the Bronze Age from the settlements as well as a few of Karaz pottery²³.

The discovery of the Bronze Age cemetery site of Kartalpınar in the central district of Ardahan was the most important contribution to Transcaucasian archaeology of the region. Although recent researches

19) Patacı and Küçük 2015; as well as Patacı and Lafli 2015b.

20) For the researches of high plateau people in eastern Anatolia *cf.* Özfirat 2001a; Özfirat 2001b: 326-330; and Polat 2013.

21) Çilingiroğlu 1984: 129-140.

22) Burney 1958: 157-209. *Cf.* also Burney 1989: 45-51 as well as Burney and Lang 1971.

23) For the early Transcaucasian pottery tradition *cf.* Işıklı 2011.

on burial traditions in eastern Anatolia have slightly increased²⁴, the ones in Ardahan region remain still much more limited where we also know *kurgans* of Kurtkale and Akçakale²⁵.

Several Medieval chapels were found in Ardahan; Yanlızçam seems to be the major Medieval Georgian church so far. Also Medieval building in Kartalpınar is the sole civic building in Ardahan since the rescue excavations at Medieval Sazpegler in the region²⁶.

In terms of Post-Medieval archaeology Molokan and Greek gravestones of 19th and 20th centuries are the major evidences of their archaeological existence in the region. A further and systematic study of these inscriptions will be published soon.

A NOTE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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S.P. and E.L.

24) Akyurt 2014: 80-82; Köroğlu 2000: 2-11; Özfırat 2003: 343-356; 2009: 635-644; 2010: 42-43, 2012: 113-127; 2014: 319-326.

25) Kökten 1944: 671f; 1953: 177f; Köroğlu 1997: 378-380; 2000: 2-11; Yükmén 2003: 28-30. Gündoğdu 2000: 13-16; 2001.

26) Tekinalp and Ekim 2006: 34-64.

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