

Proceedings
of the 6th International Congress
on the Archaeology
of the Ancient Near East
May, 5th-10th 2008, “Sapienza” - Università di Roma

Volume 2
Excavations, Surveys and Restorations:
Reports on Recent Field Archaeology in the Near East

Edited by
Paolo Matthiae, Frances Pinnock, Lorenzo Nigro
and Nicolò Marchetti
with the collaboration of Licia Romano

2010
Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN THE MT. AĞRI REGION: BRONZE AND IRON AGES

AYNUR ÖZFIRAT

ABSTRACT

Our campaigns in the region of Mt. Ağrı contain survey for the period from the Late Chalcolithic to the Late Iron Age and a new excavation at the Bozkurt kurgan cemetery. The region is located on the Eastern Anatolia district. The sites we explored around the Mt. Ağrı all show comparable traits, whether it be in their locations, their architectural structures or their material. They are all situated within the lower lava ridges of the mount, at a point where the lava flows meet with the plain. The fortresses stand a top the lava mounds, where they dominate the plain. They are surrounded with large fortification walls. The cemeteries extend along the foot of the fortresses, mostly in the depressions formed between the lava mounds. They contain mainly kurgan type burials. They compare closely with the sites of Southern Transcaucasia and Iranian Azerbaijan sites.

Archaeological investigations that we have been conducting at the eastern borderland of Eastern Turkey have carried on survey of Van Lake basin and at the Mt Ağrı region and a new excavation in Bozkurt kurgan cemetery.¹ The region is located on the high plateau of the East Anatolia district. East side of the Euphrates valley is known as 'high plateau' in the Eastern Anatolia. Our survey is comprise for the period from the earlier to the end of the Iron Age.

Results of survey indicate that Mt. Ağrı and Araxes-Iğdır valley sites was important for the region (Fig. 1). Mt Ağrı is surrounded by Araxes valley on the north side and Doğubayazıt plain on the south side. The slopes of the Mt. Ağrı notably stand out for their numerous settlements which consist of fortresses-cemeteries and mounds. They are all situated within the lower lava ridges of the mount, at a point where the lava flows meet with the plain. Most of them were evidenced in the in the north slope of Mt.

1 Our survey and excavation have been carried out with the permission of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate for Monuments and Museums. I wish to express my appreciation to the General Directorate for Monuments and Museums for granting me permission and support. Projects also was supported by TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey, Project No. SBB-CNRS-2011 and SOBAG-105K063) and TTK (Turkish Historical Society). I wish to thank the for their support of this project. I am especially grateful to Veli Sevin for providing considerable and valuable assistance.

Ağrı in other word in the Araxes-Iğdır valley where fertile land suitable for agriculture is available. Their occupation span seems to extend from the Late Chalcolithic Period² to the Late Iron Age. There are similar sites also on the mountain slopes surrounding Mt. Ağrı. The most remarkable ones for the Bronze and Iron ages are (Fig. 1): Aktaş (I74/3), Karakoyunlu (I73/7), Lanetlitepe (I73/14), Kasım Tığı (I73/3), Kültepe (I73/1), Gıcık (I73/10), Bozkurt (K73/6), Ömerağa (K73/1) and Suluçem (K72/16).

Early Bronze Age and Late Chalcolithic Period settlements are concentrated on the very low lava hills where the mountain lava streams meet the plain. Their stratigraphy is comprise Late Chalcolithic layer and a kurgan cemetery or a fortress on the top which lies on the lava hills. Early Bronze Age material found at Kültepe, Gacerdoğanşalı (H73/1), Yaycı (I72/1), Gökçeli (I73/8), Ziyaret Tepe-Sağlıksuyu (K73/5) and Bozkurt. Kültepe mound lies on the mountain, where lava streams meet the plain, the other multi layer mounds in the Araxes-Iğdır plain are Gacerdoğanşalı, Yaycı, Gökçeli and Ziyaret Tepe-Sağlıksuyu in Doğubayazıt plain.³

Kültepe seems the most important site for this period owing to its stratigraphy, it is uninterrupted from Early Bronze to Late Iron Age (Fig. 2). Excavations were conducted by Petrov in 1914⁴ and Balkan in 1966⁵ in Kültepe, but only in the Urartean cemetery which top of the mound were made some soundings. Surveys were conducted respectively by K. Kökten⁶ and Ch.A. Burney⁷ in the region, Kültepe, Yaycı, Gacerdoğanşalı, Gökçeli mounds have been investigated in these surveys. Unfortunately Gacerdoğanşalı, Yaycı and Gökçeli destroyed for agricultural purposes. Bozkurt is a kurgan cemetery which situated on the western slope of Mt. Ağrı, some Early Bronze Age pieces found on the low lava hills without context. Early Bronze Age pottery which we collected all these sites is Kura-Araxes type.

Middle Bronze, Late Bronze and Iron ages sites are considered together, owing to some of them showing continuity from Middle Bronze to Middle Iron Age. Aktaş (Fig. 3), Karakoyunlu (Fig. 4), Kasım Tığı (Figs 5-6) and Ömerağa⁸ are the most remarkable fortresses and cemeteries. All show comparable traits, whether it be in their locations, their architectural structures or their material. However, the foundation date of such monuments is often difficult to establish with certainty. The fortresses stand a top of the lava hills, where they dominate the plain. They are surrounded with large fortification walls. On the whole, such walls do not display craftsmanship. Walls surrounding the upper part of the citadels extend to enclose the lower terraces located on the slopes of the hills. Only Urartean fortresses have different features, owing to their Urartean characteristic.

The cemeteries extend along the foot of the fortresses, mostly in the depressions

2 Marro, Özfirat 2005; Özfirat 2006.

3 Marro, Özfirat 2003.

4 See Barnett 1963.

5 See Mellink 1967; Alkım 1968.

6 Kökten 1943.

7 Burney 1958.

8 Marro, Özfirat 2003.

formed between the lava hills. More than 300 tombs are defined, most of which have been plundered. As far as we could see in spite of the damage, most tombs were cist graves made of unworked stones. They contain mostly a single inhumation buried under a very low kurgan (Fig. 7). Each grave is covered with two, three or four large slabs topped with smaller stones or pebbles. There are also chamber graves for more than one person, but not as much as the other one. Some graves formed small *cromlech*, as they were surrounded by one or two circles of uneven stones. Large kurgans which sometime with platforms also seen in the region. At least two rectangular platforms were listed at Kasım Tıǵı. The largest measures some 60 by 25 m in size, in the middle stands a kurgan.

Bozkurt and Suluçem shows being different in these sites which taking place only kurgan cemeteries and not existing of settlement traces. In Suluçem on the Balık Lake valley across the Mt Ağrı have been discovered large kurgans.⁹ There are 6 kurgan at least, with high heaps. One of them shows differences when compared to all the other small ones with its 60 m diameter and an average of 6 m height. Some small sherds found in this kurgan that belong to Late Early Bronze Age tradition. Another one was completely damaged with illegal excavations. The grave located under the piled is for one person and covered by the large stones. The vessels that were found in this grave belong to the Middle Bronze Age.

Excavation of Bozkurt kurgan cemetery has been started in 2007. It is a big cemetery on the western slope of Mt. Ağrı. There are no settlement traces nearby. Surface material belongs from Late Chalcolithic to Middle Iron Age. 7 kurgan and 2 grave were excavated but just one of them had not been excavated by villagers. Their diameter is between 8-12 m, and an average of 1 m height, graves under kurgan were cist graves made of unworked stones; there is no trace of large slabs that covered graves (Fig. 8). They contain a single inhumation buried. Bozkurt seems a most important site for the Middle Bronze Age in the region.

The sherds that from fortresses and their cemeteries show that they have been used from Middle Bronze to Late Iron Age. A few material dated to the Middle Bronze Age has been found. Some pottery is attested from the cemeteries of Karakoyunlu, Kasım Tıǵı nearby fortresses. Middle Bronze Age pottery mainly invented from Bozkurt and Suluçem kurgans.

Middle Bronze Age pottery consist of two group: red-brown burnished ware and black burnished ware (Fig. 9). Monochrome painted pieces which in red-brown burnished ware with wavy lines and bands in black on a red slip, they belong to 'Araxes Painted Ware' culture, black-burnished ware has combed decoration. Late Bronze and Early Iron ages pottery show very close relationships. Moreover, most of the material coming from badly damaged graves, architectural features specific to each period could not be clearly separated. For this reason, it seems wiser for the time being to discuss material from both periods as a single group. There are two pottery

9 Özfirat 2001a; 2001b.

group, grey-black ware (Fig. 10) and red-brown ware. Apart from a few pieces of red-brown ware, all pottery is grey-black ware. Decoration is mainly grooved and incised with wavy lines.

The settlement system, which in the form of fortresses and cemeteries located on the mountain slopes and pottery of these sites are similar those of Southern Transcaucasia and Iranian Azerbaijan.¹⁰ Mountain slopes and depression borders seem to be the most favoured places. Their intensive use seems to start from the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age in the region. Middle Bronze Age sherds from these sites a few and mainly comes from kurgans.

The most remarkable Urartean site is the fortress of Karakoyunlu (Fig. 4). There are two fortresses in Karakoyunlu, one of them belong to Middle or Late Bronze-Early Iron Age (Fortress I) and the other one is Urartean (Fortress II). A. A. İvanovsky and M. V. Nikolsky made a limited excavation in the Urartean fortress at the end of the 19th century.¹¹ Karakoyunlu must be *Minuahinili*, the regional capital of a Urartean province founded by the Urartean King *Minua* after conquered *Erikua*. According to inscriptions which found in the region King *Minua*, he conquered *Erikua* which a small Early Iron Age kingdom and built a new Urartian province center named *Minuahinili*.¹² The another remarkable site is Kasım Tıǵı which lies on the west of Karakoyunlu covers a large area *ca* 2 km with settlement, fortresses and cemetery (Figs. 5-6). Kasım Tıǵı shows characteristic Late Bronze-Early Iron Age architecture. This site must be *Luhiuni* capital of *Eriqua*. Architecture and location of Karakoyunlu and Kasım Tıǵı fortresses convenient to *Erikua* and *Minuahinili* which mentioned inscription of King *Minua*. Another Early-Middle Iron Age site is Aktaş which is on the east of Karakoyunlu has an Urartean fortress.

Aktaş (Fig. 3), Karakoyunlu, Lanetlitepe and the Urartean cemetery of on the mound of Kültepe show the value that the Urartean kingdom has given to the region. Apart from these large center, the sites of Ziyaret Tepe (L73/4) and Çetenli (L73/6) in the Doǵubayazıt plain shows Urartean architectural characteristics.¹³

Urartean pottery is very few except for Kültepe cemetery: most of them are red-polished, also called Biainili ware. In spite of being part of the Urartean kingdom, this region yielded very little Urartean pottery or architecture. The Middle Iron age pottery and architecture attested in the Mt. Aǵrı region is generally of local character. Many fortresses and cemeteries show traces of occupation dating to the from Late Bronze to the Middle Iron Age, the continuity of architecture and burial tradition can be seen inside to Middle Iron Age. The presence of Urartean pottery in the kurgans in

10 Rubinson 1976; Khachatryan 1979; Kleiss, Kroll 1980; Ismayilov 1981; Abibullaev 1982; Edwards 1983; Kroll 1984; Aliev 1991; Lordkipanidze 1991; Djaparidze 1995a; 1995b; Khanzadyan 1995; Simonyan 1996; Badaljan *et al.* 1997; Bahsaliyev 1997; Kushnareva 1997; Smith 1998; Özfirat 2001b; Biscione *et al.* 2002; Badalyan *et al.* 2003; Kerimov 2003; Smith, Thompson 2004; Smith *et al.* 2005; Devedjian 2006; Simonyan 2006.

11 See Nikolsky 1896; Ivanovsky 1911.

12 Payne 2006: 5.1.3-6, 5.3.12.

13 Marro, Özfirat 2005.

these sites is quite exceptional. Kurgan type burial tradition quite alien to the Urartean features, the presence of such sherds in the kurgans may be explained by some regional specificity.

It can be accepted that, generally, local Middle Iron Age pottery was used except the central district of the Urartean Kingdom; only the fortresses located in the province centers and on the main roads had used their own pottery together with local ones. Such as Aktaş, Karakoyunlu, Kültepe on the north side-Araxes valley and Ömerağa, Ziyaret Tepe and Çetenli located on the south side of Mt. Ağrı on the Iranian road in the Doğubayazıt plain.

CONCLUSION

Results of our survey and excavation in Mt. Ağrı region show the region occupied extend from the Late Chalcolithic Period to the Late Iron Age. The most important sites were evidenced in the north side of Mt. Ağrı-Araxes/Iğdır valley, where fertile land suitable for agriculture is available.

Early Bronze Age settlements are few. It contrast to the situation in Armenian and Nakhichevan sides of the Araxes valley. The large number of multi layer pre-classical settlements registered such as Metsamor, Kızıl Vank, Kültepe I and II in Armenian and Nakhichevan sides of the valley. It must be owing to geographical features of the Turkish side of the valley, east part of the valley is not suitable for agriculture, because of swamp and bulrushes. The settlements are highly concentrated west part of the valley, around of Melekli which lies Karakoyunlu, Kasım Tığı and Kültepe etc.

In the Middle Bronze Age a clear change in the settlement pattern is visible throughout the region after the Early Bronze age, as sedentary life seems to be abandoned until the Early Iron Age. At the end of the Early Bronze age, human communities seem to leave the valleys and the plains and shift to pasture land in higher areas, as suggests the presence of numerous large cemeteries located at the foot of such areas. However, settlements are conspicuous by their absence in the pasture lands too. Possibly, the Middle Bronze Age nomadic or semi-nomadic communities occasionally gathered around centers, such as those attested in Araxes Valley at Şahtahtı-Gavurkale, Kültepe II in Nakhichevan or Metsamor, Elar and Garni in Armenia. In the Middle Bronze Age, it is obvious that there had been many changes with the arrival of the groups using these kurgan type graves to the region.¹⁴ With the introduction of the kurgan graves, the settled life was interrupted; the plains were left; and a pastoral life had begun on the mountain slopes. Why, from which way and who had started this migration which had ended the Kura-Araxes culture is still a question-mark and a subject which needs a separate research and analysis.

The transition from the Middle Bronze, where evidence for sedentary life is quite rare, to the Late Bronze Age is associated with a number of marked changes: among them, the development of metallurgy, the increase in size and number of the

14 Özfirat 2001b; 2006b.

cemeteries, the development of a network of citadels which may be indicative of a higher level of social organisation, together with the disappearance of painted pottery. The settled life which was interrupted with the effect of the kurgan cultures seem to have restarted during Late Bronze-Early Iron Age. Many fortresses and cemeteries lies in the region of Mt. Ağrı, however, the foundation date of such monuments is often difficult to establish with certainty. Pottery of these sites is from Middle Bronze to Middle Iron Age, but Middle Bronze sherds are very rare. According to pottery and architectural peculiarities, their intensive use seems to start from the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age on in the region. Middle Bronze Age evidences mainly from the kurgan cemeteries on the mountain slopes. Mt. Ağrı region clearly reached an incredible density during the Early and Middle Iron ages, unmatched in both earlier and later periods. Remains dating to the first millennium BC have been encountered in almost all sites and it looks every ecological niche is occupied. It appears that into the Early Iron Age, the nomadic population began to gather around certain organizational and economic centers like those of Southern Caucasia and Iranian Azerbaijan. This period had also prepared the foundation of the Urartean Kingdom are accepted as the period during which small kingdoms had come across.

For the Middle Iron Age-Urartean Period we may say that apart from the large regional capital and important sites which established by the kingdom of Urartu the architecture, burial tradition and the pottery maintain their regional character.

Bibliography

- Abibullaev, O.A.
1982 *Eneolit i Bronza na Territorii Nahıçevanskoi ASSR*, Baku.
- Aliev, V.G.
1991 *Kultura Epokhi Sredneii Bronzi Azerbaıdjana*, Baku.
- Alkım, H.
1968 Explorations and Excavations in Turkey, 1965-1966: in *Anatolica* 2, pp. 1-74.
- Badaljan, R.S. *et al.*
1997 Horom 1995: Bericht über die amerikanisch-armenisch-deutsche archäologische Expedition in Armenien: in *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan* 29, pp. 191-228.
2003 The Emergence of Sociopolitical Complexity in Southern Caucasia: an Interim Report on the Research of Project ArAGATS: in A.T. Smith, K.S. Rubinson (eds), *Archaeology in the Borderlands: Investigations in Caucasia and Beyond* (= University of California, Cotsen Institute Monograph 47), Los Angeles, pp. 144-166.
- Bahsaliyev, V.B.
1997 *Nahçıvan Arkeolojisi/The Archaeology of Nakhichevan*, Istanbul.

- Barnett, R.D.
1963 The Urartian Cemetery at Igdyr: in *Anatolian Studies* 13, pp. 153-198.
- Biscione, R. *et al.*
2002 *The North-Eastern Frontier: Urartians and Non-Urartians in the Sevan Lake Basin*, Rome.
- Burney, C.A.
1958 Eastern Anatolia in the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze: in *Anatolian Studies* 8, pp. 157-209.
- Devedjian, S.G.
2006 *Lori Berd II (Bronze Moyen)*, Erevan.
- Djaparidze, O.M.
1995a Die Zeit frühen Kurgane: in A. Miron, W. Orthmann (eds), *Unter Wegs zum goldenen Vlies: Archäologische Funde aus Georgien*, Saarbrücken, pp. 69-78.
1995b Mittlere Bronzezeit: in A. Miron, W. Orthmann (eds), *Unter Wegs zum goldenen Vlies: Archäologische Funde aus Georgien*, Saarbrücken, pp. 79-94.
- Edwards, M.R.
1983 *Excavations in Azerbaijan (North-western Iran) I: Haftavan, Period VI* (= BAR International Series 182), Oxford.
- Ismayilov, G.
1981 *Guruçay ve Köndelençay Vadisinde Gedim Medeniyet İzleri*, Baku.
- Ivanovsky, A.A.
1911 *Po Zakavkaz 'ya'* (= Materialy po Arkheologii Kavkaza 6), St. Petersburg.
- Kerimov, V.
2003 *Oboronitelbnye Sooruzheniya Azerbaidzhana Drevnego Perioda*, Baku.
- Khachatryan, T.S.
1979 *Artikskii Nekropol'*, Erevan.
- Khanzadian, E.
1995 *Metsamor 2. La Necropole: Les Tombes du Bronze Moyen et Recent 1* (= Académie Nationale des Sciences d'Arménie, Civilisations du Proche-Orient Hors Serie 1), Neuchâtel-Paris.
- Kleiss, W., Kroll, S.
1980 Die Burgen von Libliuni (Seqindel): in *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 13, pp. 21-61.
- Kökten, I.K.
1943 Kars'ın Tarih Öncesi Hakkında İlk Kısa Rapor: in *Belleten* 7(27), pp. 601-613.
- Kroll, S.
1984 Archäologische Fundplätze in Iranisch-Ost-Azerbaidjan: in *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 17, pp. 13-134.

- Kushnareva, K.
 1997 *The Southern Caucasus in Prehistory: Stages of Cultural and Socioeconomic Development from the Eight to the Second Millennium BC* (translated by H.N. Michael) (= The University Museum of Pennsylvania Monograph 99), Philadelphia.
- Lordkipanidze, O.
 1991 *Archäologie in Georgien (Von der Altsteinzeit zum Mittelalter, Quellen und Forschungen zur prähistorischen und provinzialrömischen Archäologie 5)*, Weinheim.
- Marro, C., Özfirat, A.
 2003 Pre-Classical Survey in Eastern Turkey, First Preliminary Report: the Ağrı Dağ (Mount Ararat) Region: in *Anatolia Antiqua* 11, pp. 385-422.
 2005 Pre-Classical Survey in Eastern Turkey, Third Preliminary Report: Doğubayazıt and the Eastern Shore of Lake Van: in *Anatolia Antiqua* 13, pp. 319-356.
- Mellink, M.J.
 1967 Archaeology in Asia Minor: in *AJA* 71, pp. 155-174.
- Nikolsky, M.V.
 1896 *Klinobraznye nadpisi Zakavkaz 'ya'* (= Materialy po Arkheologii Kavkaza V), St. Petersburg.
- Özfirat, A.
 2001a Erste Betrachtungen zum ostanatolischen Hochland im 2. Jt. v.Chr.: in *Istanbul Mitteilungen* 51, pp. 27-60.
 2001b *Doğu Anadolu Yayla Kültürleri (M.Ö. II. Binyıl)* (with summary in English), Istanbul.
 2006 Pre-Classical Survey in Eastern Turkey. Fifth Preliminary Report: Van Lake Basin and Mt. Ağrı Region: in *Studi Micenei ed Egeo Anatolici* 48, pp. 177-207.
- Payne, M.R.
 2006 *Urartu Çivi Yazılı Belgeler Kataloğu*, Istanbul.
- Rubinson, K.S.
 1976 *The Trialeti Culture* (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation), Ann Arbor.
- Simonyan, A.E.
 1996 Pasteurs et chefs de guerre au Bronze Moyen (XXIII-XXII siècle avant J.C.): in J. Santrot (ed.), *Arménie: Trésors de l'Arménie ancienne, des origines au siècle* (de l'exposition Musée Dobrée), Paris, pp. 54-69.
 2006 *Verin Naver I (The Results of the Excavations of 1976-1990)*, Yerevan.
- Smith, A.T.
 1998 Late Bronze/Early Iron Age Fortresses of the Ararat and Shirak Plains, Armenia: Typological Considerations: in *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 5-2, pp. 73-97.

Smith A.T., Thompson, T.T.

2004 Urartu and the Southern Caucasian Political Tradition: in A. Sagona (ed.), *A View from the Highlands: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Charles Burney* (= Ancient Near East Studies Supplement 12), Leuven, pp. 557-580.

Smith, A.T. *et al.*

2005 Early Complex Societies in Southern Caucasia: a Preliminary Report on the 2002 Investigations by Project ArAGATS on the Tsakahovit Plain, Republic of Armenia: in *AJA* 108, pp. 1-41.

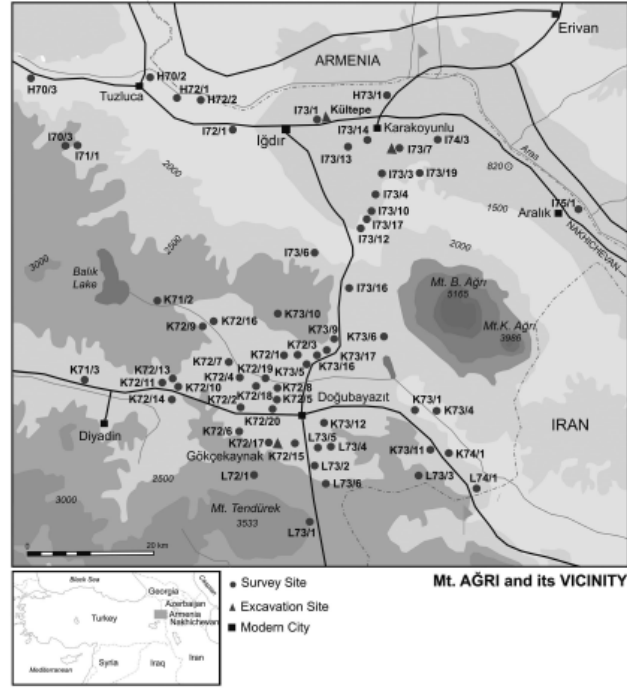


Fig. 1: Survey map.



Fig. 2: Kültepe mound.



Fig. 3: Aktaş fortress.

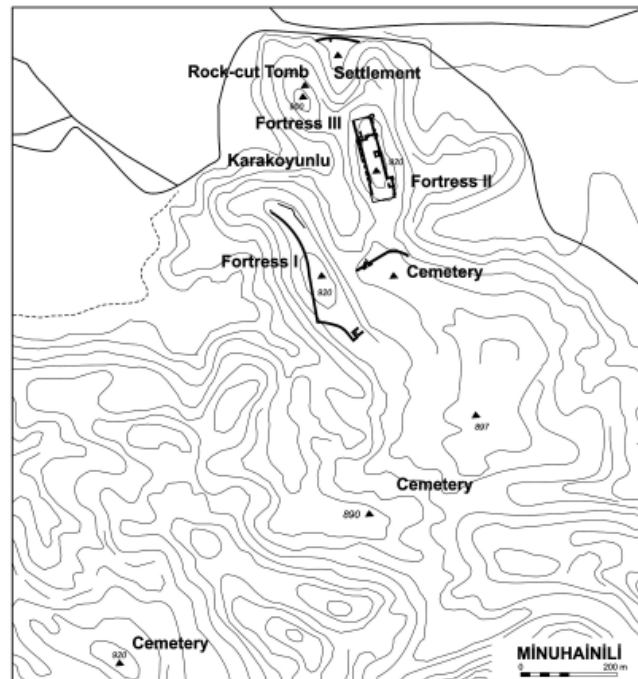


Fig. 4: Karakoyunlu/Minuahinili fortresses and cemetery.



Fig. 5: Kasımtığı fortress.

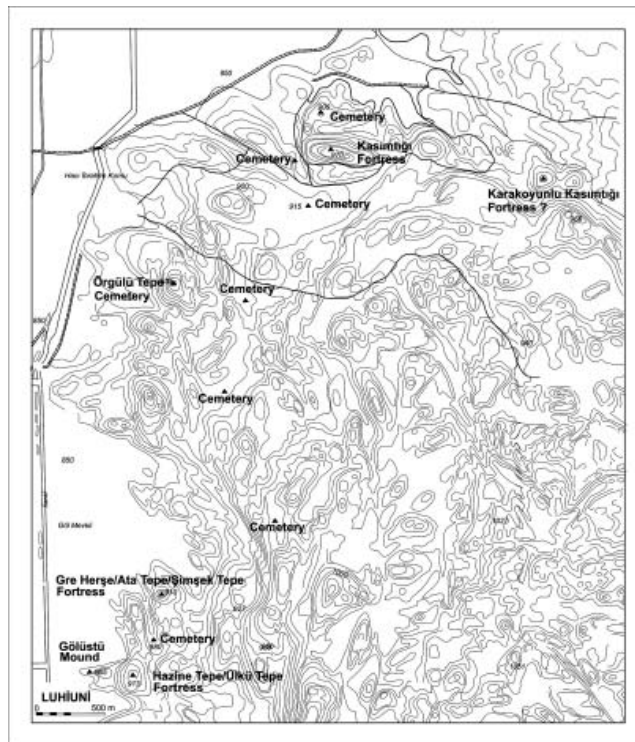


Fig. 6: Kasımtığı/Luhiuni fortresses and cemetery.



Fig. 7: Kasımtığı Kurgan .

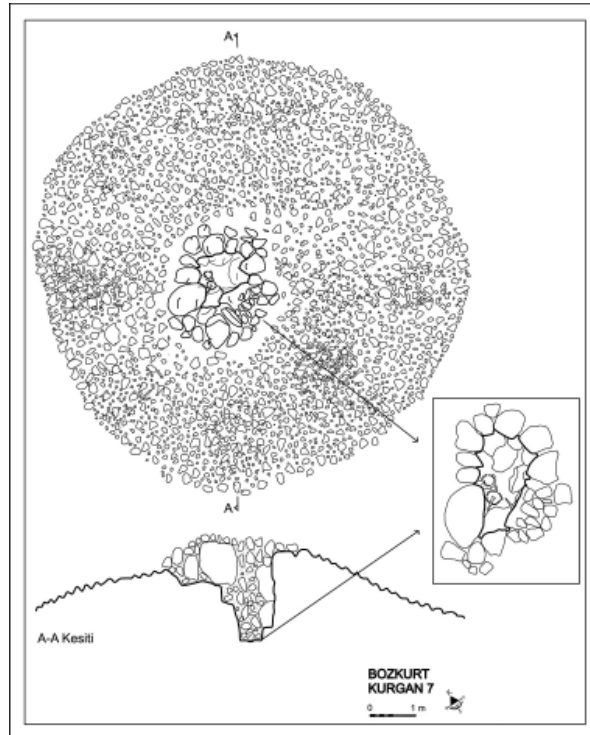


Fig. 8: Bozkurt cemetery, Kurgan 7.

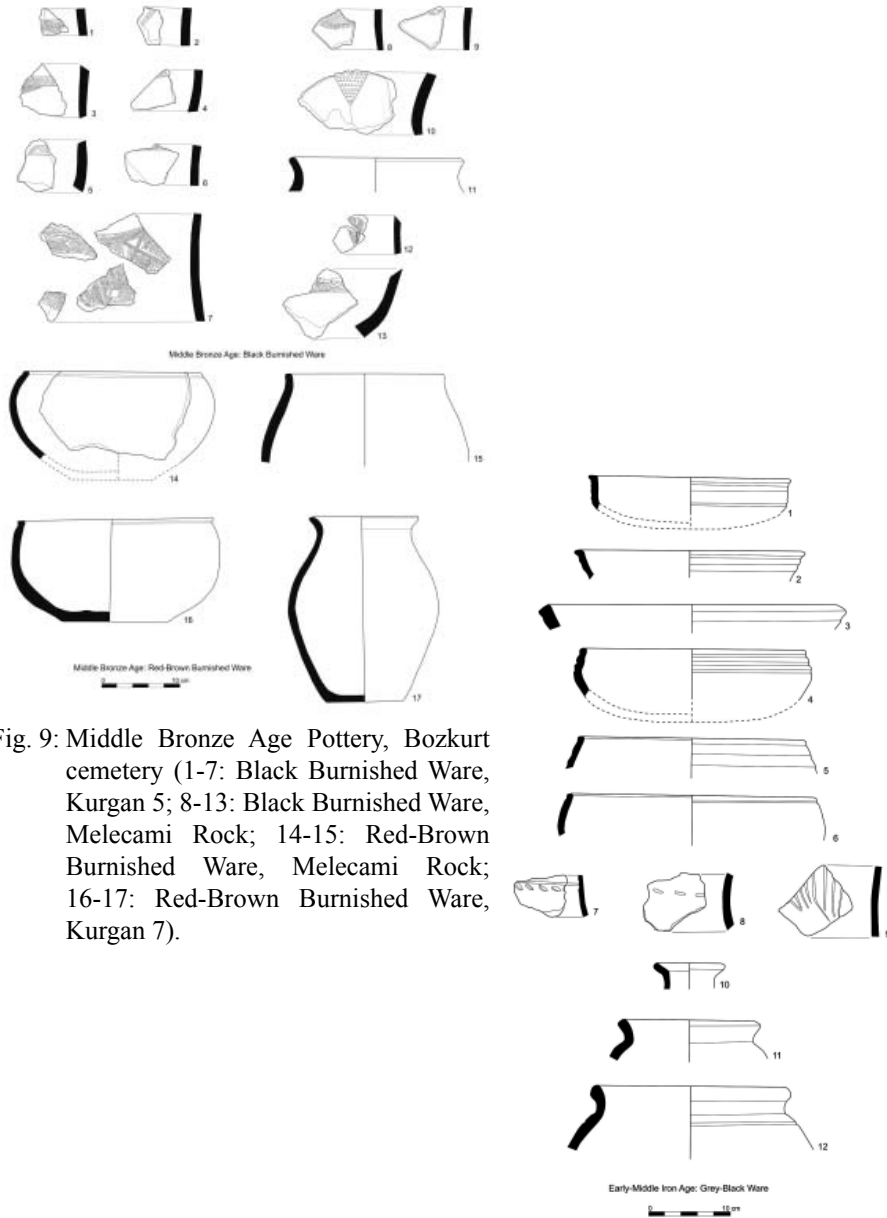


Fig. 9: Middle Bronze Age Pottery, Bozkurt cemetery (1-7: Black Burnished Ware, Kurgan 5; 8-13: Black Burnished Ware, Melecami Rock; 14-15: Red-Brown Burnished Ware, Melecami Rock; 16-17: Red-Brown Burnished Ware, Kurgan 7).

Fig. 10: Early-Middle Iron Age Pottery, Aktaş Fortress (Grey-Black Ware).