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Author(s): R. D. Barnett and W. Watson

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RUSSIAN EXCAVATIONS IN ARMENIA

By R. D. BARNETT AND W. WATSON

THE most important contribution to the subject of Urartian archaeology is the publication in 1950 of a preliminary report on the excavations at Karmir-Blur. This (*Karmir Blur*, I) is a short work of 97 pages accompanied by 16 half-tone illustrations and 64 text figures by B. B. Piotrovsky (*Akademii Nauk Armyanskoy S.S.R.*, Erivan, 1950). Its importance lies in the fact, first, that it is the first controlled excavation of any importance which has taken place in Urartian territory, and second, in the nature of the material discovered and described. The care with which the excavation was evidently conducted further adds to its importance. As copies of this work outside the "Iron Curtain" must be exceedingly rare, we have thought fit to present a detailed and illustrated summary for the benefit of Western students. The book, too, may be condensed with some profit, as it repeats itself in different chapters yet lacks enough cross-references.

Karmir-Blur is an ancient site on the left bank of the River Zanga below Erivan and opposite the village of Jaferabad (fig. 1). On the west of it lies a wide waterless plateau, on the south are irrigated gardens and fields. The plateau is covered with crumbled walls forming red earth, from which the local name meaning "Red Mound" is derived. On the top of the site are remains of mediaeval farm-houses, and, abutting the *tall* on the west, are remains of a large town covering about 60 hectares, in which at least three straight streets with *insulae* on either side can be distinguished. The site was much robbed until 1936 by peasants seeking earth who found many vases and in 1936 a fragment of an inscription mentioning Rusa, son of Argišti (c. 680-645 B.C.). The same year an expedition began work under the joint leadership of Piotrovsky (for the Hermitage) and Kafadarian (for the Armenian Commission for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments) and by representatives of other bodies. Work was concentrated on a huge building on the central mound which turned out to be the domestic wing and storehouses of the citadel (fig. 2). The citadel was found to be a massive structure, the walls of which were built in a series of alternate recessed niches and buttresses, while along the steep slope facing the River Zanga they formed a series of towers proceeding in stepped fashion, one leading in front of the other. The inner face of the citadel building was also treated in this indented fashion and recessed to form a huge courtyard entered through two gates. This courtyard area enclosed the homes of the richer part of the community.

In the small area of the town which was opened, a little information was gained concerning the *insulae*. They represented each a single structure containing several dwellings of the same type; one included as many as five.

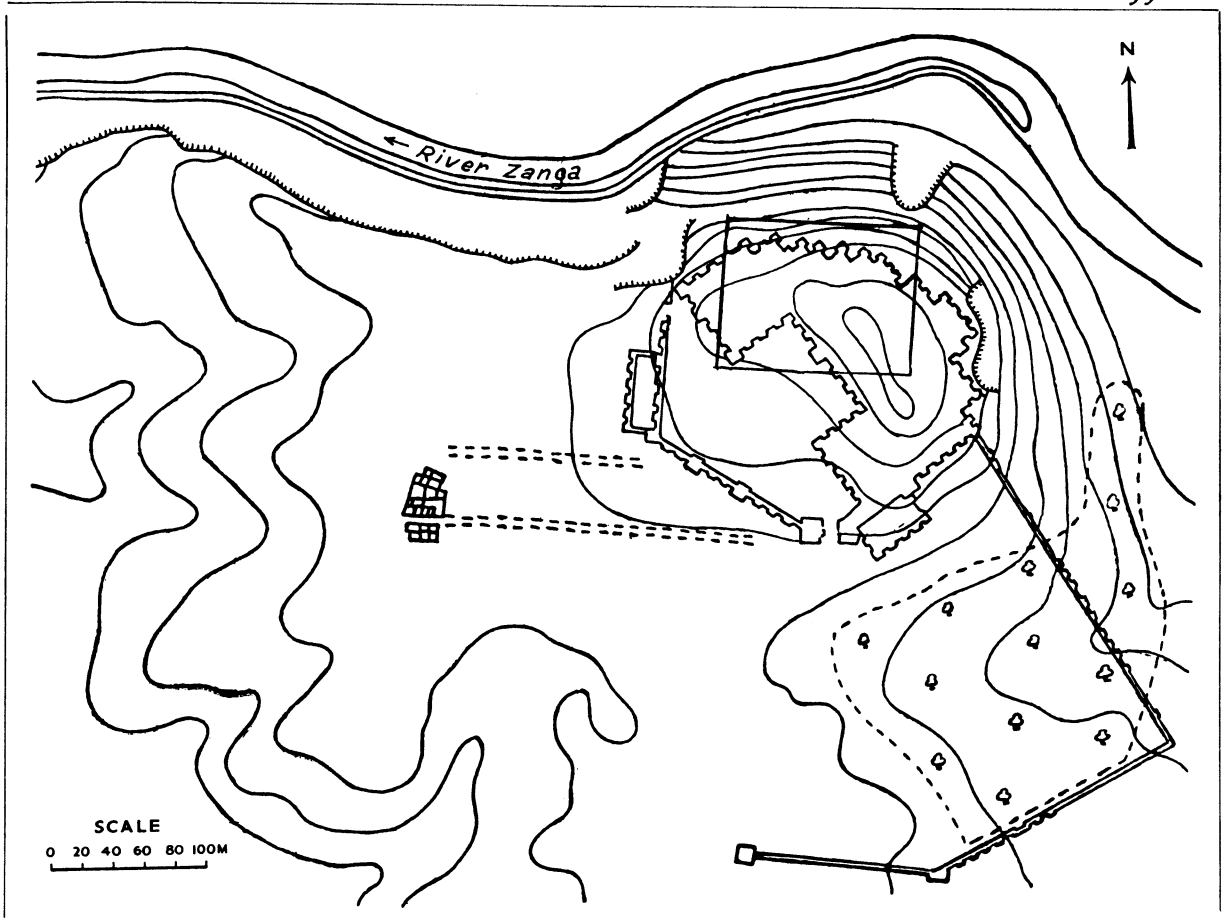


Fig. 1. Plan of the city and citadel of Karmir-Blur.

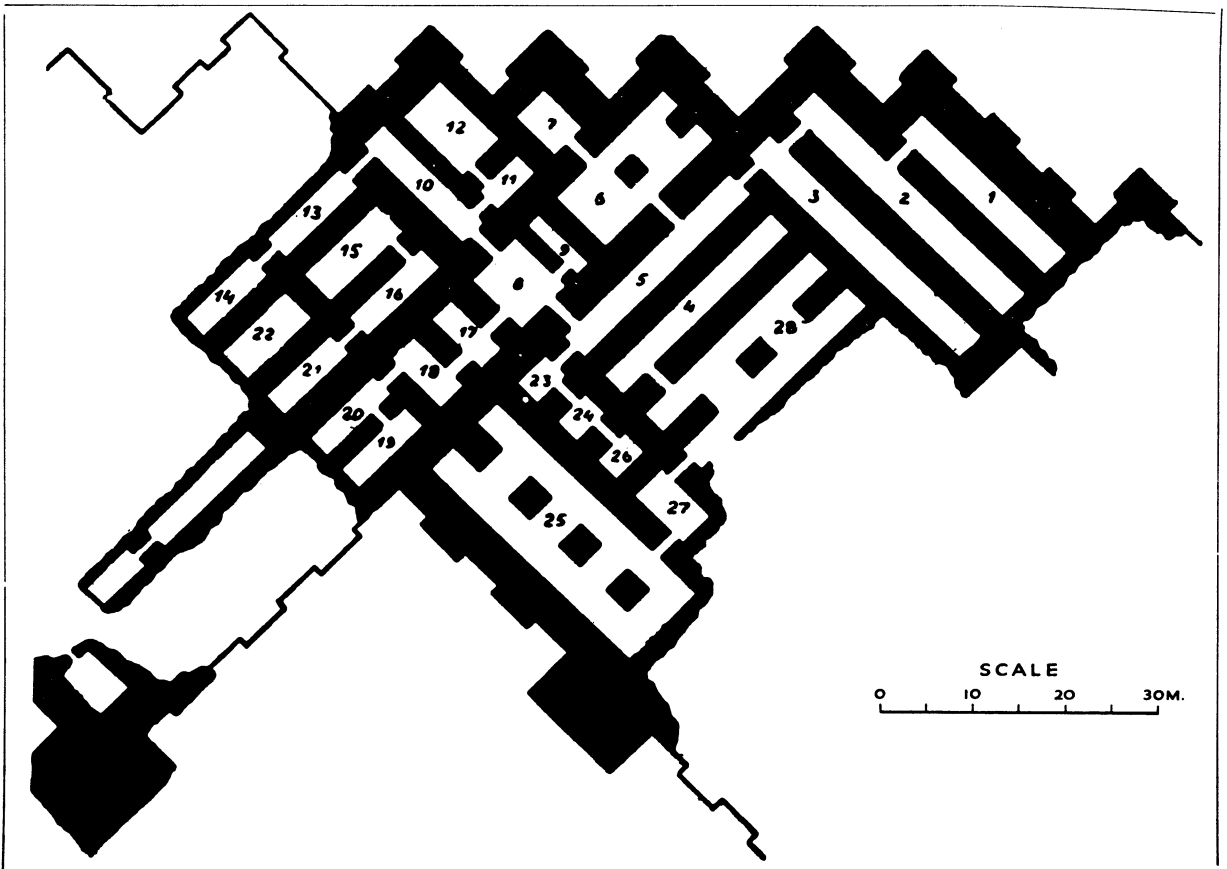


Fig. 2. Plan of the citadel of Karmir-Blur.

Each had its separate entrance, an open court and two living-rooms. The buildings were apparently wholly built of stone, with wooden pillars supporting the roof. The pillars rested on bases of tufa. Whereas the character of the citadel architecture was strongly reminiscent of Mesopotamia, that of the town had closer analogies to the buildings of the ancient Caucasus. Clay pots and a potter's wheel of clay, iron objects and a "stamp-cylinder"¹ were found. A double-sided mould of stone for casting an axe of Transcaucasian type was picked up here on the surface. It would seem that the buildings are contemporary with the citadel.

A cemetery of the Hellenistic period was also excavated, containing skeletons placed in a crouched position in cist graves, in some cases more than one skeleton being placed in the same grave.

There are also traces of graves of a pre-Urartian period to the south-west of the grove of trees outside the citadel. They may, however, have overlapped into the Urartian period. In these the bodies were laid in a crouched position inside a circle or semicircle of upright stones covered with thick stone slabs. In the graves were deposited clay vessels, bronze objects and in one case obsidian arrow-heads.

The Citadel.—The citadel, which formed the main area of excavation, is said to belong to two periods. The date of the earlier is not stated, but from the presence in it of objects bearing the name of Menua, it would seem to us to belong to the late ninth or early eighth century. The main building period however is ascribed to Rusa son of Argišti (c. 680-645 B.C.). It seems to have been destroyed in a violent conflict which took place, according to the excavators, at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. Many arrow-heads of a type recognised as Scythian (see below, p. 147 and fig. 12, local arrow-heads are seen on fig. 13) were found around the West gate, a large number being imbedded in a great mass of fallen brickwork with their tips bent or broken. The excavators date this type of arrow head between 600 and 575 B.C. There is however some reason to doubt this dating, and to place this destruction of Karmir Blur, as T. Sulimirski will show,² in about 625 B.C., connecting it with the beginning of the Scythian invasion of Western Asia before the fall of Nineveh. Remains of fruits, such as pomegranate, grapes and water-melon seeds were found in nearby houses, and from this and other indications the excavators judge that the fall of Karmir-Blur took place in the first half of August.

Inside the courtyard were small temporary living rooms, built against the inner façade, roofed originally with light branches and earth, which were used for habitation during the siege. They stood near the north west gate and at the

¹ For this nomenclature see below, p. 145.

² In an article which is at present in preparation.

south west corner. The former were burnt and the latter, though unburnt, were plundered, and contained the bodies of the slain defenders. In these rooms were found large quantities of millet, used for making beer, barley, wheat and peas, also fragments of a bronze quiver, which originally hung on the wall.



Fig. 3. Scaraboids.

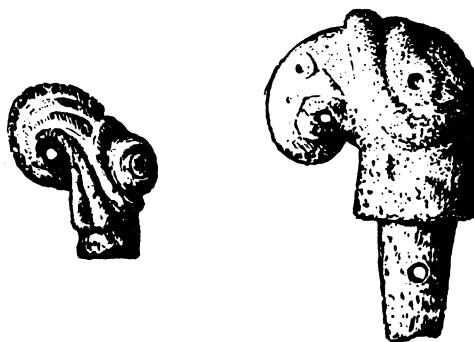


Fig. 4. Griffin heads of horn.

Another dwelling near the west gate contained remains of three wicker shields with bronze conical omphaloi, two of which were inscribed "Argišti¹ son of Menua."

The citadel is thought by the excavators to have been the court of the Uartian viceroy or other royal representative, and contained a number of rooms which were apparently used for storing tribute and supplies. Some of these, however, had been used for temporary habitation during the last days of the siege in which the city was destroyed. At the south side of the courtyard were the residences of the officials. The building as a whole covered 1,600 square metres and contained at least 120 rooms, of which 30 have been so far excavated. The walls are of large unbaked bricks containing chopped straw, which measured $52 \times 35 \times 14$ cm. The bases of the walls consist of huge unworked stones. Some of the walls are preserved up to a height of 7 metres and are about 4 metres in width. The original height of the rooms is thought to have been about 10 metres. The roof was flat and was made of beams of pine, poplar, oak and beech. According to the excavators there were two systems in which these were laid, both of which are still used in the Caucasus. According to the one, the beams are planed on one side and laid close together, and on top of them layers of reed, twigs and rushes, and finally beaten earth, are placed. According to the other, there are transverse beams across which longitudinal beams are laid, and above these a layer of reeds. Windows were inserted in the walls high up near the roof. There are also the remains of light wells. The central part of the palace was two storeys high, and in some

¹ c. 785-760 B.C.

parts it appears that there was a cornice with crenellations, as on the bronze model from Toprak Kale (*Iraq*, XII, pl. 1). The building as we have said seems to have been built in two periods, the earlier belonging to the time of Menua, and the later, containing storehouses of different kinds, to the time of Rusa son of Argišti (c. 680-645 B.C.).

Rooms 1, 2 and 3 have whitewashed walls, with a decoration imitating brickwork. Room 2 contained cakes of sesame and refuse of sesame oil, apparently used for fuel or fodder, stone rubbers and a pestle and mortar.

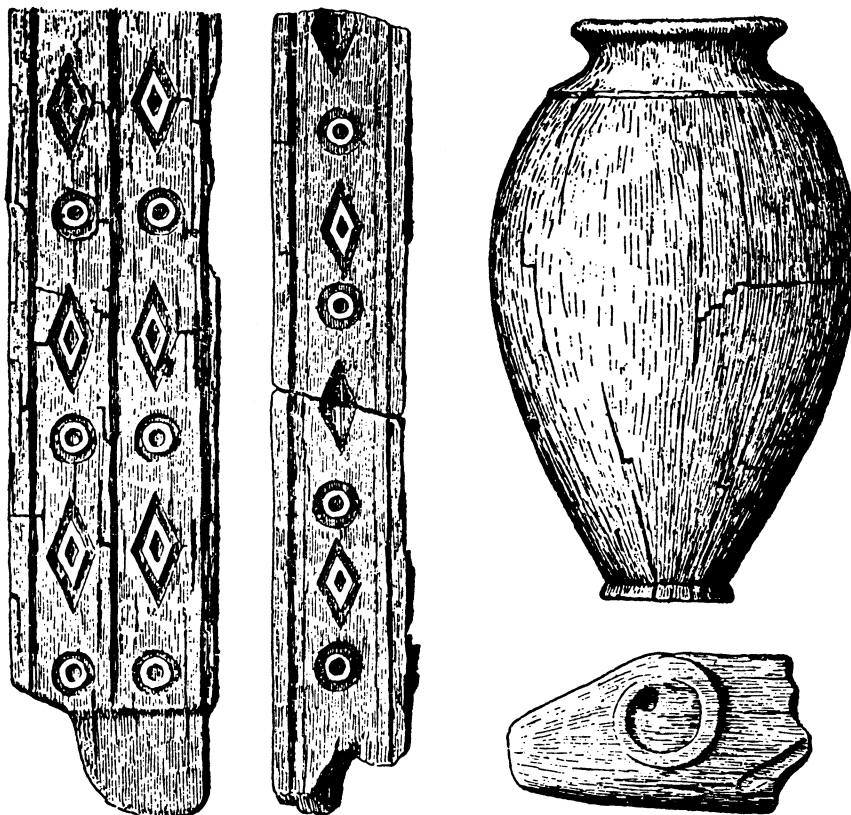
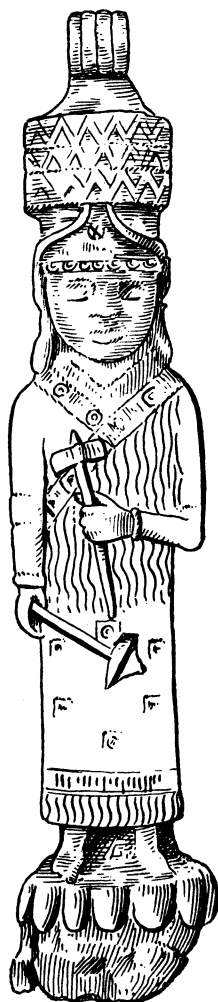


Fig. 5. Wooden objects.

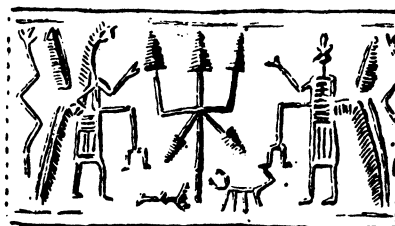
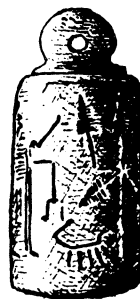
Near the door leading to Room 3 was a large shield of bronze about 1 metre across with a conical centre which had apparently fallen from the wall. It was inscribed "From the fortress of Argišti,¹ son of Menua; this shield Argišti, son of Menua, powerful king, great king, king of Biaina, ruler of the city Tušpa; (dedicated) to the god Haldi."

¹ c. 785-760 B.C. The text is published by Piotrovski, *Epig. Vostoka*, II, 84: (m) *Ar-gi-iš-ti-ni u-ri-iš-ḫu-si-ni-i* (m) *Me-nu-a-ḫi-ni i-ni a-še* (m) *Ar-gi-iš-ti-ni* (m) *Me-nu-a-ḫi-ni* ŠARRU DAN.NU ŠARRU *al-su-i-ni* ŠAR MAT *Bi-i-a-na-u-e a-lu-si* (alu) *Tu-uš-pa* (alu)

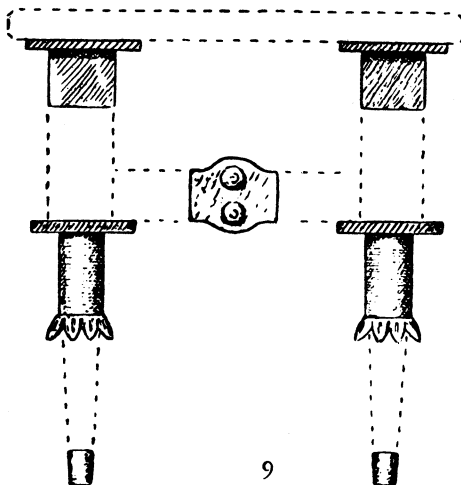
(ilu) *Hal-di-e e-u-ri-e i-ni a-še* (m) *Ar-gi-iš-ti-še* (m) *Me-nu-a-ḫi-ni uš-tu-ni* (ilu) *Hal-di-ni-ni al-su-i-ni* (m) *Ar-gi-iš-ti-ni* (m) *Men-nu-a-ḫi* ŠARRU DAN.NU ŠARRU *al-su-i-ni* ŠAR MAT *Bi-a-na-u-e a-lu-si* (alu) *Tu-uš-pa* (alu).



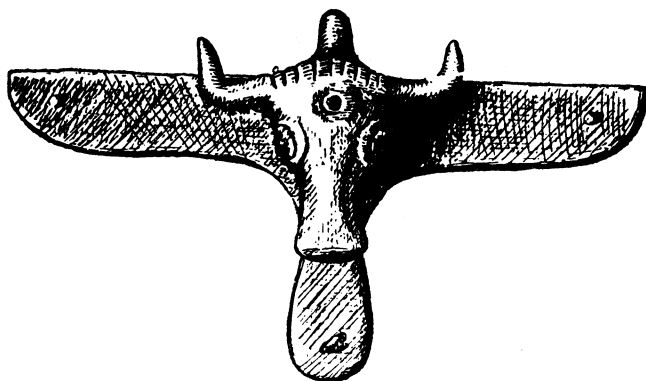
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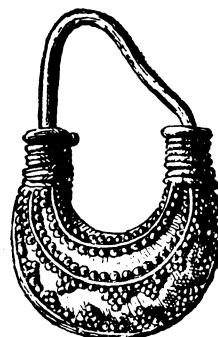
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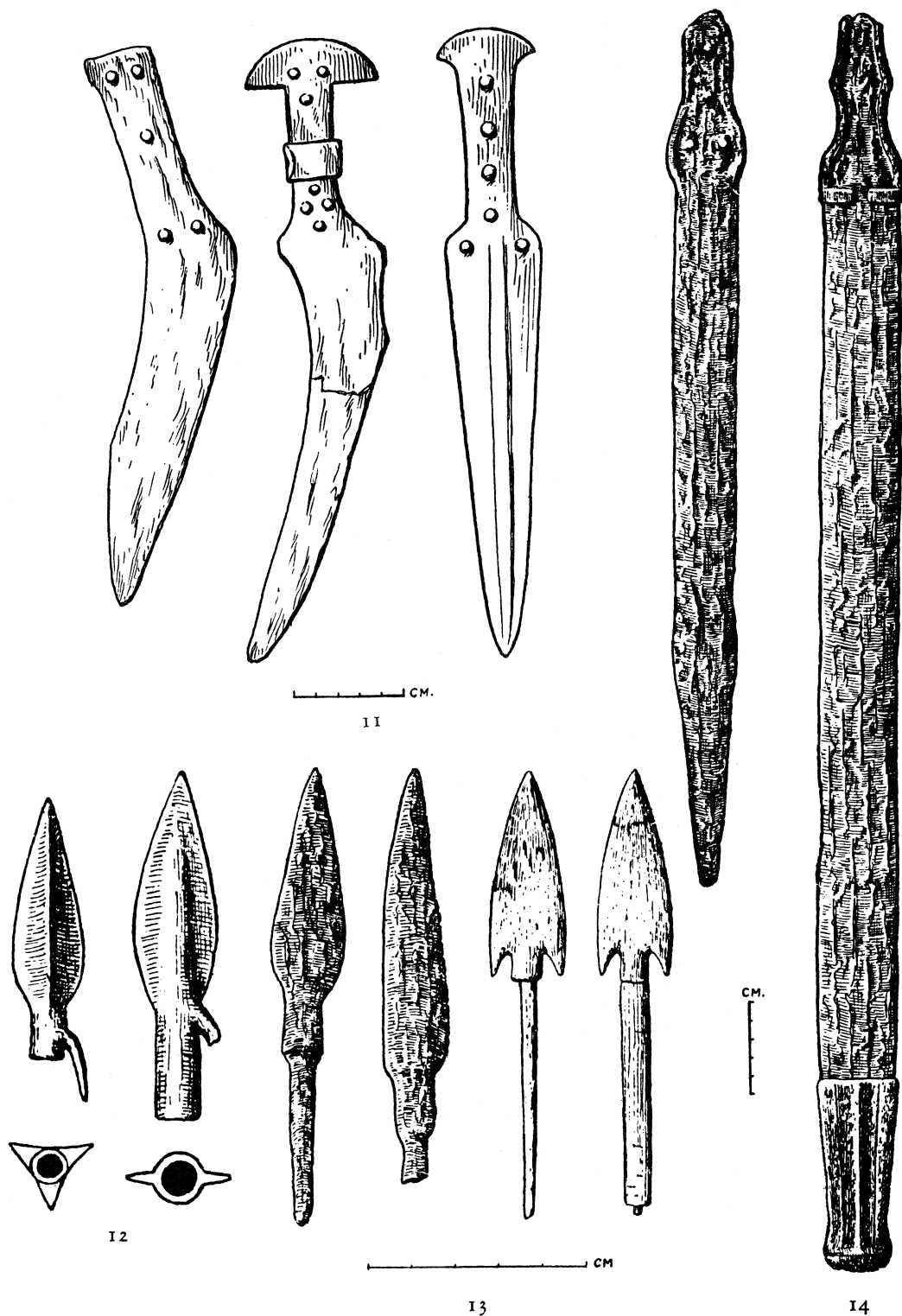
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Figs. 6-10.

6. Bronze figure of Teišeba. 7. Stamp cylinder. 8. Bronze ornament of vase. 9. Bronze fragment of furniture. 10. Gold earring.



Figs. 11-14.

11. Iron knives and sword. 12. Scythian arrow heads. 13. Arrow heads.
14. Iron sword and scabbard.

Room 4 contained a vat with a gutter leading out of the citadel. Small finds found in it included a bronze belt made of plates ornamented with dotted lines (of a type also found elsewhere in Urartu, at Goloveno and Malaklyu near Igdir, Mt. Ararat), fragments of an iron saw and a griffin's head of Scythian style made of horn and remains of another unfinished specimen (fig. 4).¹ There were also cut basalt blocks, which appear to have been lodged in the upper part of the southern wall of the room.

Room 5 had four doors. In it was found half a bronze quiver (the other half being in *Room 13*) about 66 cm. long (Plate XXXII, 1), decorated with eight bands of horsemen, chariots and ritual scenes, and dedicated by Sarduri²; also a bronze statuette of the god Teišeba, apparently the head of a standard (fig. 6). This figure is 25 cm. high. His garment is decorated with small squares like the figure from Toprak Kale (*Iraq*, XIII, Pt. 1, pl. VII), and he holds in his right hand a disc-shaped mace and a double axe in the left. On his head there is a capital pierced with a horizontal hole. He stands on a base which was fixed to an iron rod. In the western part of the room were a quantity of beads, Assyrian cylinder-seals and an Urartian "stamp cylinder."³

Room 6 lay below 5 and was reached by descending a staircase. The roof of the room was supported on a central pillar which stood on a stone base. In the western part were heaps of wheat.

Room 7 contained remains of six *pithoi* holding sesame seed and three much damaged cuneiform tablets, now published by I. N. Diakonov, *Epigrafika Vostoka*, II, 1948, 86. Two contained personal names (one is Ištagi), apparently witnesses to a contract, and one has traces of a cylinder-seal impression. The third tablet mentions sending of artisans and oxen.

Room 8 was empty; it led into 9, which had been destroyed by fire. *Room 8* gave admittance to *Room 10* by means of a staircase or ramp. In *Room 10*, apparently used as a living-room during the siege, were found stone querns and various iron and bronze implements, including curved iron knives (type of fig. 11), whetstones, a short iron sword (fig. 11) and a superb bronze helmet ornamented with a broad frieze of chariots and ritual scenes protected by lion-headed snakes (fig. 15 and plates XXXII, 2, XXXIII, 2). This decoration is executed in repoussé, and there is an inscription "To the god Haldi, Sarduri, son of Argišti, for his life" followed by two hieroglyphs. An Assyrian faience cylinder-seal showing a man fighting a monster was also found.

Room 11 contained a bronze loop for latching the door, which bore the inscription "Rusa son of Argišti, fortress of Teišebaina."⁴

Room 12 was filled with about 20,000 litres of wheat to a depth of 25-45 cm.,

¹ On p. 96 of the book however these objects are described as found in the "room of the gate-keeper of the citadel."

² c. 760-733 B.C.

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³ For this nomenclature, see below, p. 145.

⁴ (m) Ru-sa-a-i (m) Ar-gišt-te-ḫi-ni-i (bišu) u-ri-
[išt-ḫu-si-ni(ahu)(ibu)] Te-i-še-ba-i-ni(ahu). Published by
Piotrovski, *Epig. Vostoka* II, 84.

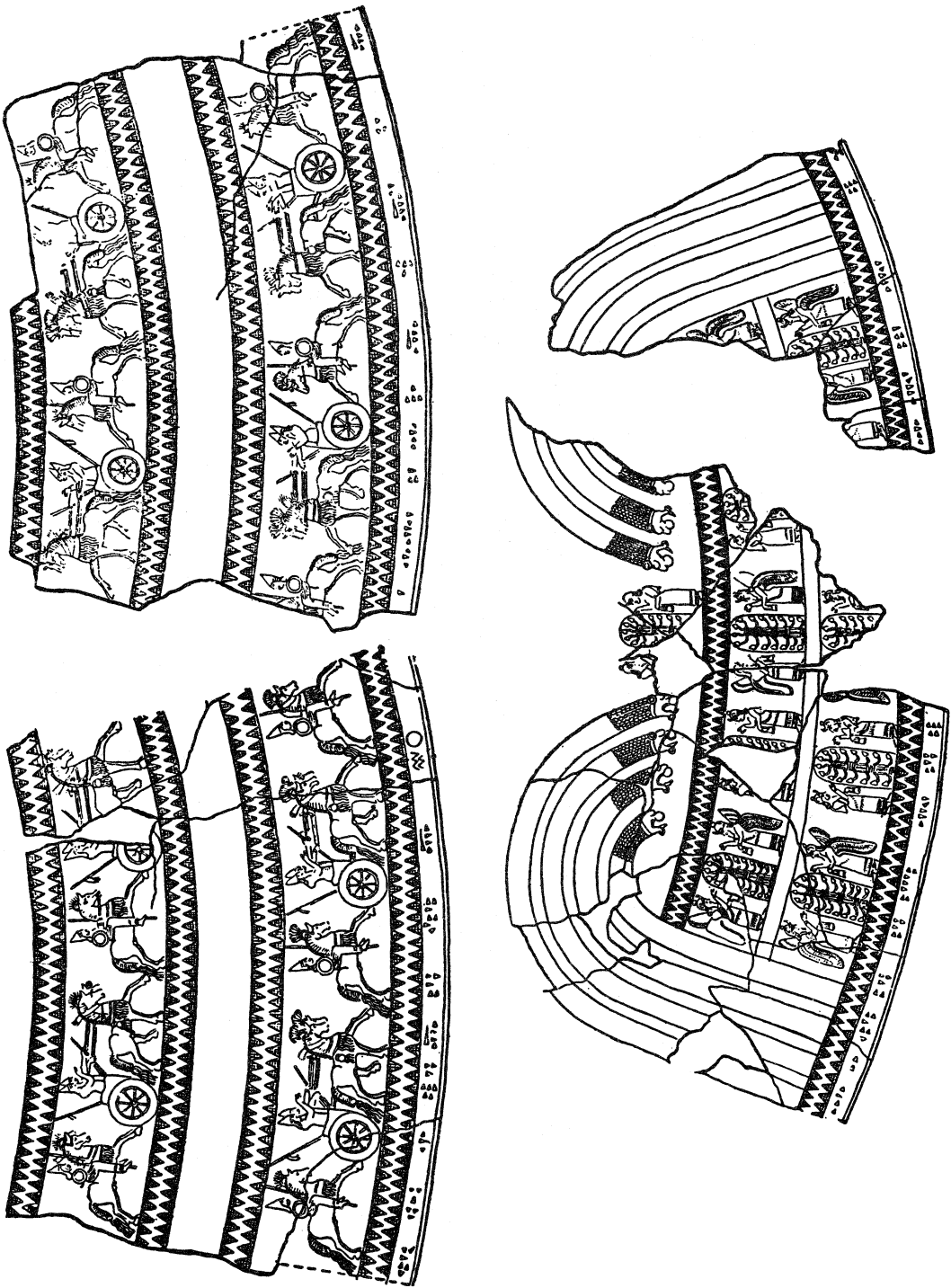
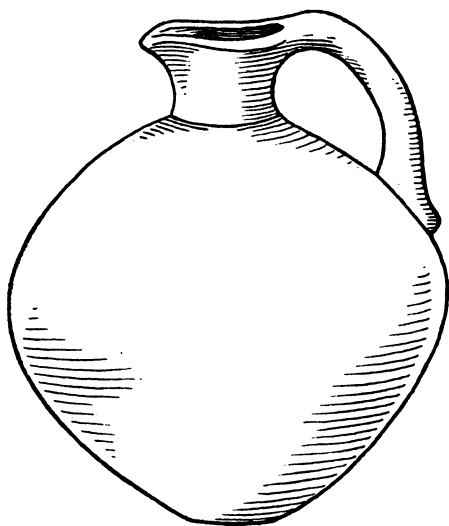
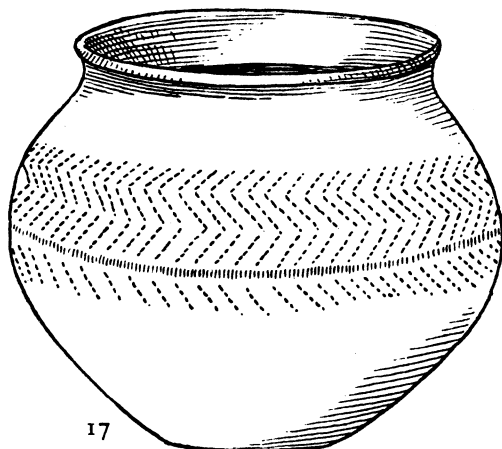


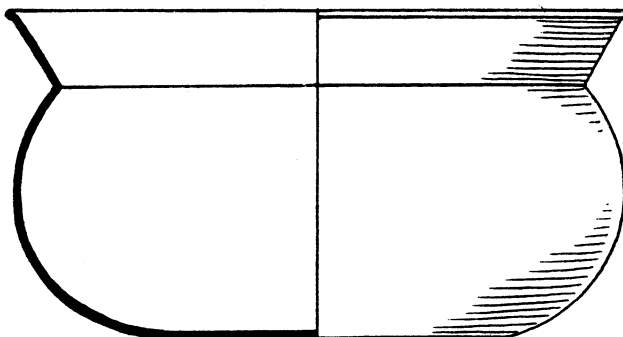
Fig. 15. Decoration of bronze helmet of Sarduri.



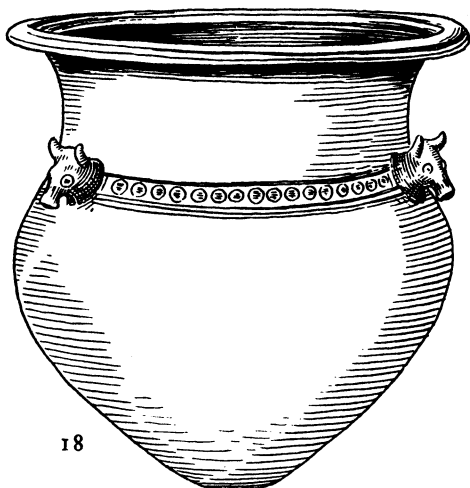
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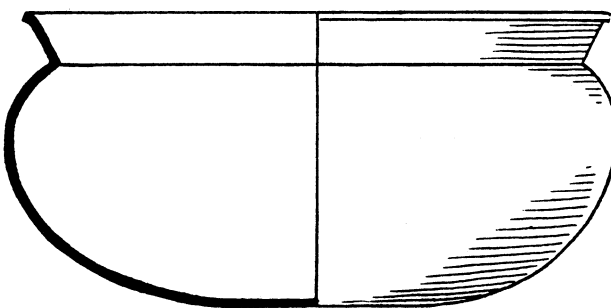
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18



Figs. 16-19. 16. Red burnished ware. 17. Coarse ware. 18. Black burnished ware. 19. Bronze bowls.

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and amongst it were remains of insects and weevils. In the southern part of the room, on a wooden platform, were bronze pieces of furniture (fig. 9), some cups and *phialae* of Assyrian type, small bells and bracelets and fragments of a bronze belt decorated with a design of a bull and a sacred tree in a cartouche. Inside a cup were some fine gold earrings, decorated with granulation (fig. 10)¹. A bronze bucket was found, ornamented with two bulls' heads in relief, and also an isolated bull's head of the same type (fig. 8).

Room 13 was also a store-room but had been used as a living-room during the siege. It contained querns, vessels of grain, including one wooden vase turned on a lathe (fig. 5), a wooden handle shaped as a ram's head (fig. 5) and fragments of wooden panelling, perhaps from furniture (fig. 5), inlaid with geometrical shapes in horn, also fragments of an iron javelin. Some pieces of woollen textiles, balls of woollen thread and a distaff with unspun yarn and fragments of net and remains of grass matting were also found.

The same room contained a "huge" quantity of bronzes, fragments of a second belt of thin bronze, ornamented with dotted lines, fibulae², a long iron sword of Transcaucasian type, 72 cms. long, with bronze-rimmed handle and a scabbard having a bronze tip (fig. 14), knives, sickles and daggers, many beads and fish bones. Included amongst them were two Urartian seals and a paste bead, hemispherical with ribbing, which is said to be of Scythian origin. A steatite finial, perhaps from a wand, in the shape of a lion's head, and one half of a quiver, the other half of which was found in Room 5, lay in the doorway of this room (see above, p. 139).

Room 14 contained a lamp-stand of iron, 1.45 m. high, with a tripod foot, somewhat similar to one found at Toprak Kale (Iraq, XIII, Pt. 1, fig. 13).

Room 15 was apparently used as a brewery. On the floor was a deep vat with a gutter running through Room 13 to the outside. Above this was a stone funnel resting on a wooden structure, and nearby lay an iron shovel with a long handle and a clay pot. In the pot were barley seeds and a filter of straw and twigs covering a hole in the base. This was used for making beer.

Room 16 contained a large burnished black vessel, 50 cm. high, with a painted shoulder-band having concentric circles of black and brown on yellow and bulls' heads in high relief (fig. 18). This also appears to have been used for beer.

Room 17 was empty except for part of an iron lamp and of an iron chain.

¹ The excavators consider this pair of earrings to be Western Anatolian or Ionian, of the sixth century B.C., but one may disagree with this opinion. They would seem to be Oriental, perhaps 625-575 B.C. The closest parallels seem to be Phoenician earrings from Tharros (end of seventh century?)—Marshall, *Catalogue of Greek, etc. Jewellery in the British Museum*, Pl. XXIII, 1495, and a pair from Ur, from below the Persian floor of E-nun-makh (Woolley, *A.J.* III,

No. 4, pl. XXX, 1923). Cf., a Cretan example (late seventh century: *J.H.S.*, 1944, pl. IX). For Ionic types, see Vinski, *Jahrbuch für kleinasiatische Forschung*, I, 1950.

² The excavators say that whereas a fibula with thickened arc was the type made locally, another type with flattened arc was used in Urartu proper; but a fibula of this type was found by S. I. Makalatya in the Dran Cemetery (W. Georgia).

Room 18 contained a bronze helmet of Assyrian type originally held by a thong passing under the chin from two metal loops, also six bronze cups with offset rims (fig. 19), knives, sickles, two iron pitchforks, 83 and 54 cms. long, iron bridles and characteristic Scythian horse trappings with bone cheek-pieces (fig. 22) and beak-shaped buckles of bronze.¹ Two paste scaraboid amulets with imitations of Egyptian hieroglyphs were also found (fig. 3).

Room 19 contained a curious padlock of bronze in the shape of □ with a cross-bolt.

Room 20 contained four bronze wall-nails of Assyrian type.

Rooms 21-22 contained nothing of importance. Room 23 contained the remains of a wooden door, the planks of which were bolted together with wooden nails. There were also remains found of the iron latch in which it was held.

Room 24 contained a bronze helmet similar to that from Room 18 but decorated with a symbol in relief, perhaps of the god Teišeba (fig. 21), also some Scythian arrow-heads (fig. 12) and a "stamp cylinder" (fig. 7).

Room 25, the roof of which was supported on three columns painted with frescoes in several colours, representing a sacred tree between winged figures surmounted by a (winged?) disc, was a wine-store. It contained 82 *pithoi* half buried in the ground (Plate XXXIII, 1). All are marked with measures of capacity, 62 being in hieroglyphs, 20 in cuneiform, and were evidently meant for wine, which, owing to the season (early August), was not yet made. Of these, a few were filled with wheat, barley and sesame. One, however, contained 97 bronze cups, all inscribed variously with the names of Menua, Argišti, Rusa and Sarduri.² The inscriptions on Menua's six cups state that they belong to his fortress. 83 are inscribed "belonging to Sarduri," and five out of six belonging to Rusa also claim to belong to "the fortress" and bear a tree, a turret and a lion's head (fig. 20). One cup refers to the "small town of Rusa," and five, inscribed "Belonging to Argišti" add two hieroglyphs, an eagle and a rhombus.

In the centre of this room was a sacrificial stand with traces of burning and a censer, also five figures of gods in clay in the form of bearded men wearing fish skins. Iron implements, clay lamps, a clay funnel, a bulla with two seal impressions, and a cuneiform inscription, a Scythian iron bridle, beak-shaped

¹ These beak-shaped buckles for crossing straps were apparently taken over in the harnessing of Persian or Median horses, and may be seen illustrated on the sculptures of Persepolis, Pope, *Survey of Persian Art*, Pl. 94B, 99B, cf. 110; Herzfeld, *Iran in the Ancient East*, pl. LXVII. They are apparently related in function to the cross-over pieces ornamented

with figures of animals, in either bronze or ivory, from the Greek coast of Asia Minor, such as that in form of a boar, or that in form of a wild goat, Hogarth *Ephesus*, pl. XXIII, 2, 3, fig. 33, datable to the sixth century B.C.

² Most probably Rusa II (660-625) and his son Sarduri III (645-625 B.C.).

buckles (fig. 22), a silver phalera and an ornament in the form of a three-armed swastika, were also found. Among them were the skeletons of four horses which had fallen through the roof, one of which wore horse-trappings of the above-mentioned Scythian type, while the others were bare. The excavator suggests that the horse with Scythian trappings had been captured by the besieged before the fall of the citadel (—he does not explain how these animals, with others mentioned below, found their way on to the roof).

Room 26 was filled with burnt bones, apparently of large and small horned cattle which had been sacrificed, the skulls and legs of the oxen and cows being

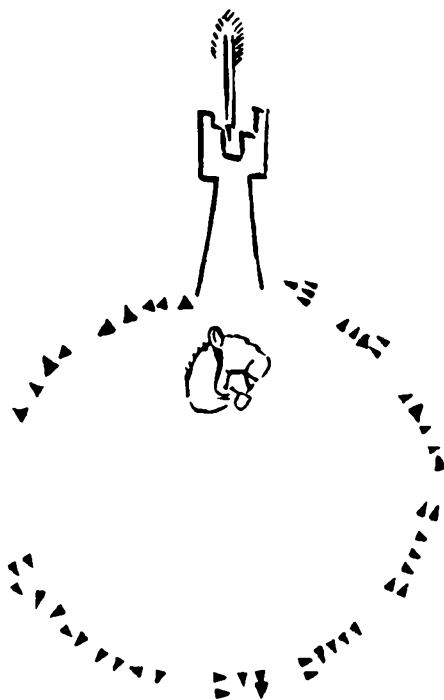


Fig. 20. Inscription and monogram of Sarduri, from bronze bowls.

missing. This was a storeroom, and the bones appear to have been collected from sacrificial pyres. The bronze fittings of a wooden stool with decoration of pendant leaves were also found (cf. fig. 9).

It is mentioned that there were also asses on the roof of the palace which collapsed into the rooms below. Parts of their flesh and skin were found, and, in one case, fragments of a stomach containing water-melon seeds. It is also mentioned that the heavy horned cattle resemble *bos primigenius* and that the horse is of an extinct species smaller than the Scythian horse as known from the South Russian kurgans, while the bones of the ass are identical with those of the

aboriginal type of ass found in Transcaucasia. Remains of a goat and of a pig and of two types of sheep were also found, but where it is not stated.

This concludes the list of things found in various rooms. The excavators mention under the heading of agriculture that grain included remains of *Triticum vulgare vill.*, soft wheat and barley (*Hordeum vulgare L.*) and rye (*Secale L.*) and millet (*Setaria italica*). In a vase found in a house near the west façade was a store of seeds of *Camelina microcarpa* and some fragments of Transcaucasian thyme, while stores of sesame were found in four large vases in Room 1 of the palace. Two kinds of beans, *Cicer arietinum* and *Ervum lens*, were also found. A plum-stone is also mentioned from Room 14 as are remains of pomegranate seeds in a house near the north-west corner of the fortress.

Pottery was of three kinds: (a) *Red burnished ware*, consisting of one-handled pitchers, profiled cups and small double vessels. It is remarked that the burnish is less than that on pottery from Central Urartu¹, and that the pitchers often have a hieroglyph stamped under the handle (fig. 16). (b) *Coarse black ware* vases with wide neck and herringbone combed design (fig. 17). (c) *Plain ware*. The burnished pottery, which was found both in the citadel and in the town, has analogies in Transcaucasian cemeteries of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. in the Debed Valley, at Şhaytan-dağ excavated by de Morgan, a cemetery at Goloveno, and from finds of Lalayan in the Sevan region.

Among miscellaneous finds described by the excavators are seals of seal-cylinder type but with a second design on the bottom—a combination of cylinder- and stamp-seal (cf. fig. 7) which was christened “stamp-cylinder” by R. D. Barnett in a recent article.² The guess made there that these stamp-cylinders came from Urartu has been amply verified; 18 were found at Karmir Blur, 14 being of steatite, 3 of faience and 1 of bronze. Some were four-sided and some bell-shaped. Assyrian cylinder-seals were also found.

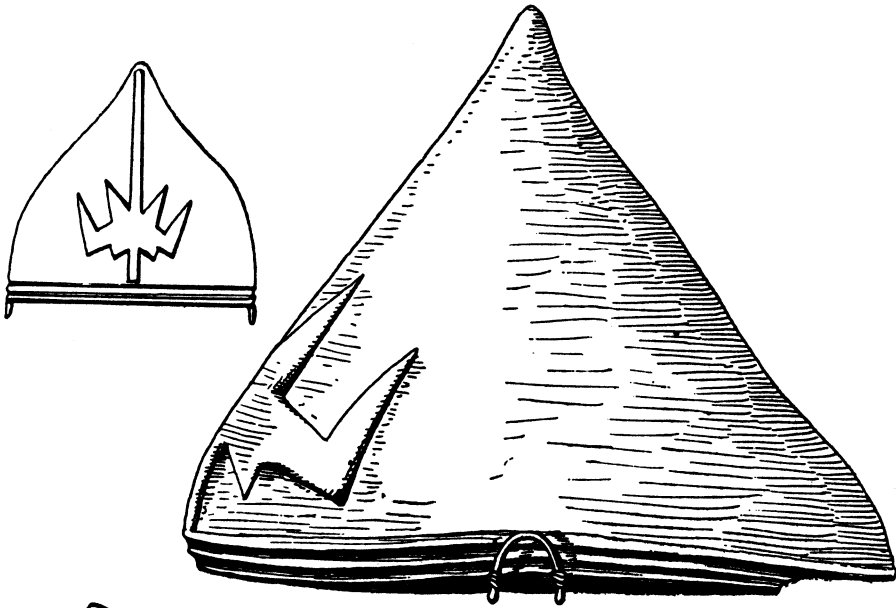
The excavators mention that beads of carnelian, sardonyx, rock crystal and steatite were found in huge quantities, and that the carnelian spherical beads have a funnel-shaped perforation which shows them to be Assyrian, whereas three barrel-shaped beads of golden carnelian are bored with a diamond, giving a strictly cylindrical perforation. An article of Lemmlein³ is quoted suggesting that they are from Iran or India. A box of birch bark was found in the western part of the palace containing a necklace of agate beads, three Urartian seals and a bronze pendant bearing an inscription in cuneiform.

Scaraboids of Egyptian type have already been mentioned showing connections with Phoenician or Egyptian circles. In addition a small pendant of glazed paste representing Sekhmet was found. (The excavators mention

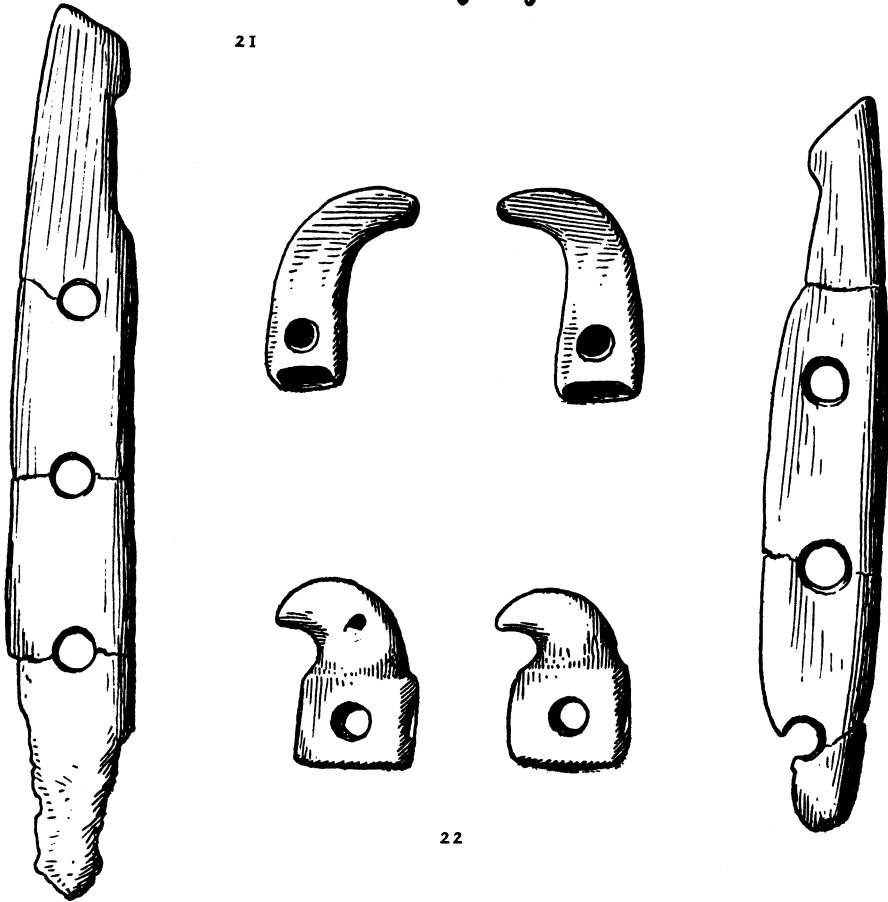
¹ For this see e.g. H. H. von der Osten, *Der Urartäische Töpferi aus Van*, I *Orientalia*, fasc. 21, 1932. (Part II has not yet appeared.)

² *J.H.S.* 38, 1949, 13.

³ *Krat. Soob. I.I.M.K.* XVIII, 1947, 22.

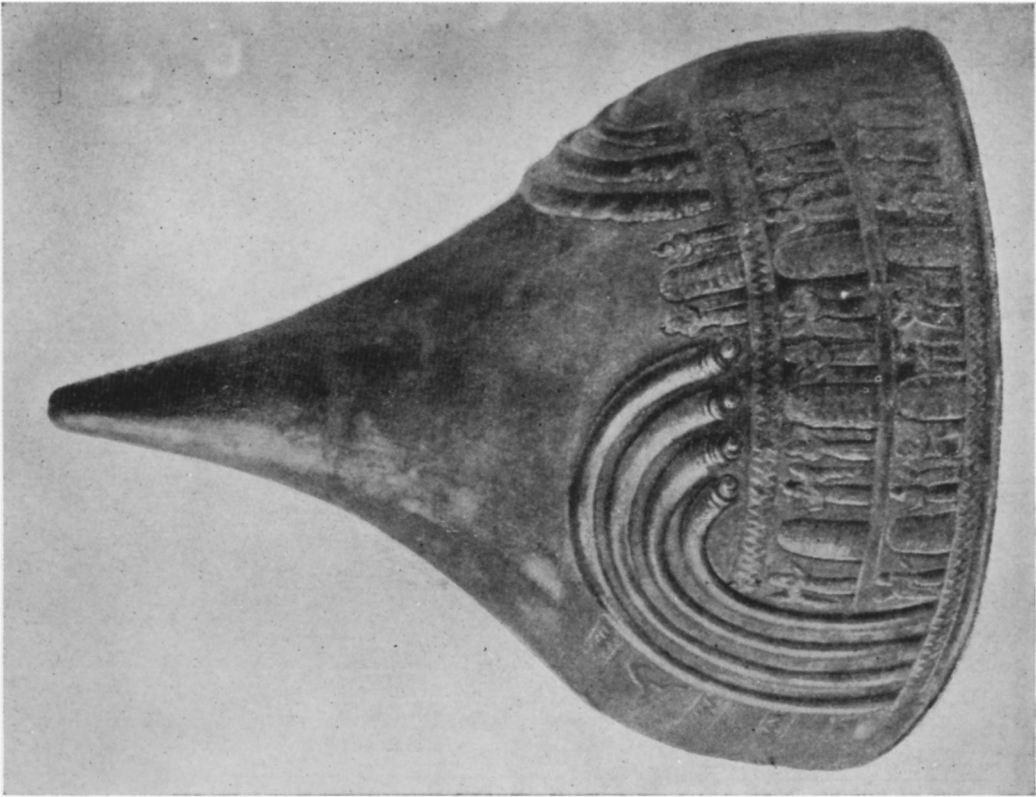


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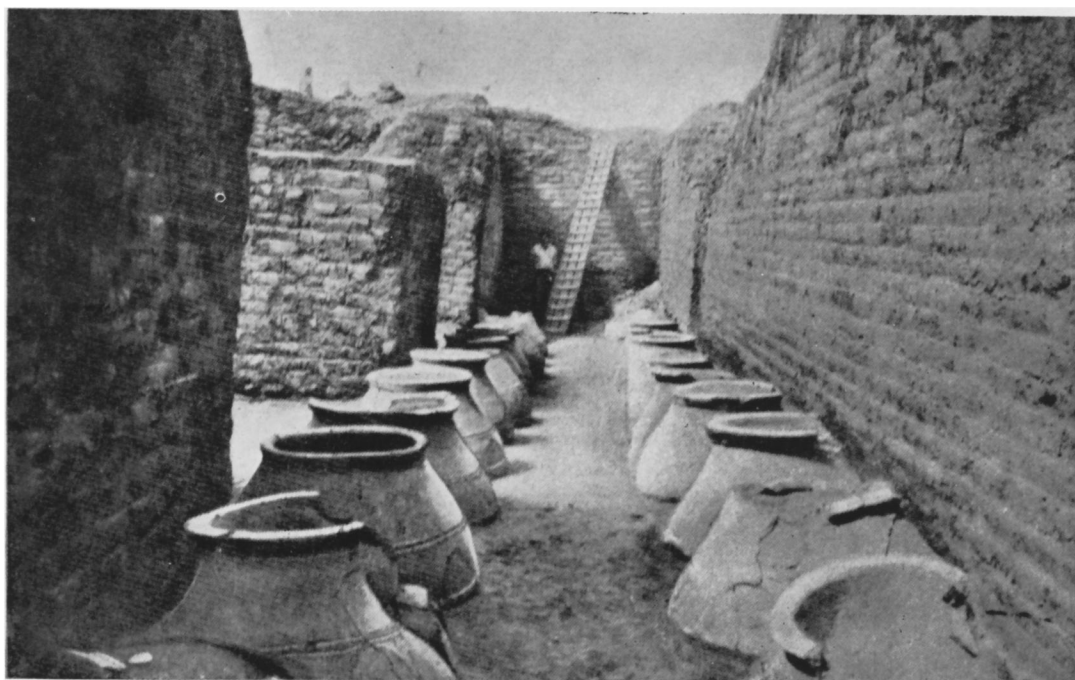
Fig. 21. Bronze helmet.
 Fig. 22. Bone pieces of Scythian bridle and bronze buckles.



2. Bronze helmet with inscription of Sarduri, from Room 10.



1. Quiver with inscription of Sarduri, from Room 5.



1. View of Wine Store in Room 25 at Karmir Blur



2. Detail of bronze helmet from Room 10

similar Egyptian objects found at Van and various parts of the Caucasus. In the cemetery of Mingechaur on the River Kur an *ujat* eye was found, and in the upper valley of the River Chegen in the Kabardin republic, 19 scarabs of Naucratic type were found).

Among the most interesting remains are those of Scythian origin associated with the destruction of the city. The room of the gate-keeper in the gate of the citadel contained a griffin's head of deer's antler apparently rubbed by long use (fig. 4). Nearby was another example which had apparently been made on the spot together with the remains of an iron saw.¹ Scythian arrow-heads and harness have been mentioned above.

The excavators report that bones of the following animals were found, apparently used as food: *Bos taurus*, the domestic ox; *Bos bubalus*, the humped ox; *Equus caballus*, the domestic horse; the pig; a gazelle, *Gazella subgutturosa*; a wild ram; a type of large goat resembling the Daghestan Tur (*Capra cylindricornis*); and some small horned cattle. Bones of a domestic dog (*Spitzhund*) (*Canis familiaris palustris*) and of a stone-marten, probably a pet, were also found. In the storehouse of the palace was found the skeleton of a wild cat which had fallen into it while chasing a mouse.

It is clear from this report that these excavations, conducted with very considerable care and skill, are of quite unusual interest and importance. It is much to be hoped that the excavator will in due course follow the work which we have studied, with a full-length publication and adequate photographic illustrations.

NOTE: The line illustrations to this article are all from Piotrovsky's *Karmir Blur* though several have been redrawn. The plates however are reproduced from his article *Urartu* in a collectaneous work, *Po Sledam Drevnikh Kultur* (1951) as the illustrations of the same subjects in *Karmir Blur* are too bad. In obtaining access to these publications we have been greatly helped by our colleague, Mr. J. C. W. Horne.

¹ But see above, p. 139, where according also to the excavators these are said to be from Room 4.