

THE PLAIN OF ERZNKA IN THE II-I MILLENNIUMS BC

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Introduction

In our previous study dealing with the contact zone which proceeds along the western and southern reaches of the Armenian Highland it was mentioned that the geopolitical role of its northern section (the plain of Erznka including modern Kemakh [= Arm. Kamakh-Ani]), probably had to be determined not by its economic potential but rather by geographical factor. This part of the eastern highlands was a natural bridge linking Transcaucasia via the Erzurum plain with classical Sophene, and through the latter further with Asia Minor and Mesopotamia-Syria¹. Thus, the plain of Erznka we have entitled as the «northern gates», a determination which is proved by available textual and archaeological evidence through centuries.

In this article a general outline of the political and cultic-religious realities observed in the region under study should be presented. The chronological frames of the study covers the period from the II mill. BC until the first centuries of the I mill. AD.

During the whole historical period under study several characteristics could be distinguished in regard to the plain of Erznka:

1. The plain of Erznka represents a «highway» for different migrations at least from the IV mill. BC.
2. The plain of Erznka was not a home to more or less prominent and stable political entities.
3. The authority of any neighboring statehood over this region seem to be rather nominal than actual.
4. The plain of Erznka at least from the mid-II mill. BC until the early Middle Ages (pre-Christian and Christian Armenian periods) was known as an important cultic-religious center (see below).

The plain of Erzincan. Archaeological

Despite of the strategic importance of the plain of Erznka, strikingly it possesses only with limited number of archaeological sites located in the eastern part of the region. Besides Altintepe, Jimintepe and two sites located in their neighborhood (see below), other remains of settled life are yet to be discovered. Indeed, hardly this fertile plain lying on the main route from east to west was populated sparsely; most probably in this case we deal with insufficient archaeological surveys combined with the geological

¹ Kosyan 2010 (on the religious role of the Urartian site of Altintepe and the plain of Erznka); Kosyan 2016a (on the geopolitical role of the plain of Erznka ` p.70) u 2018 [in press]; Kosyan 2017 (on the general outline of the contact zone).

peculiarities of the plain. The latter is covered by thick alluvium, as a result of numerous rivulets originating from the mountain ranges, and also variations in the Karasu streamflow or changes in its riverbed. Thus, the traces of archaeological sites are not easy to observe².

Swampy areas could be seen everywhere, like in the neighborhood of the abovementioned site of Saztepe. Worth to refer to M.İşıklı's terminology («Bird Paradise») in regard to the mosaics discovered on the floor of the VI century Byzantine church located on the eastern slopes of Altıntepe³. References to swamps in the central, lowlying areas of the plain of Erzinka are registered by earlier visitors to this region⁴.

In this regard an important idea was put most recently by Massimo Forlanini in the study dealing with the localization of Hayaša mentioned in the II mill. B.C. Hittite texts⁵.

«In fact, the plain occupies the gap produced by a pull-apart basin along the Northern Anatolian Fault, and is filled by very deep alluvial deposits produced by the Euphrates and many small water courses flowing from the steep mountains all around it. A similar basin in the Eastern Anatolian Fault is occupied by the Hazar/Gölcük Lake. A pull-apart basin is a rhomboidal gap in the earth surface produced by slipping along a fault line having a zed shape. The bottom of the plain is completely flat with residual marshes, and the Euphrates leaves the plain through a narrow gorge; year after year the river has dig his way out in the gorge, lowering it, and discharged alluvial deposits in the plain. Therefore, if we go back in the past, we can assume the presence of a prehistoric lake that gradually silted up because of the continuous discharge of materials and the digging of the exit gorge by the Euphrates. But, since this area is subject to disastrous earthquakes, we cannot run out also a sudden, quick, transformation of the plain».

M. Forlanini's suggestion is in accordance with the description of the Taurus mountain system made by E. Huntington as early as in 1901⁶. Regarding the plains encircled by mountain ranges from Alashkert (modern Turkish Eleşkirt) to Malatya (he calls them «Interior plains»), he wrote. «I am inclined to believe that the basins, of which the plains form the floors, have been formed by depression and faulting or folding, and have been filled by waste from the mountains, brought in by streams and deposited partly by the streams themselves, but more generally in lakes, as is shown by the uniformly fine character of the deposit in the centre, and by the marshy tracts which still persist as witnesses of the former lakes. Most of the population naturally centres in these fertile, easily-tilled regions».

² İşıklı 2010: 267.

³ İşıklı 2010: 269. The mosaics pictures a swampy landscape and numerous birds (the restoration of the mosaics see in Can 2007; 2009).

⁴ Brant 1836: 202 («The centre of the plain was rather swampy, and showed indications of salt»).

⁵ Forlanini 2017: 8-9.

⁶ Huntington 1901: 302-303.

The idea that the plain of Erznka once formed a bed for a lake, recalls a suggestion made not too long ago regarding a flood happened in the XVIII century BC which was fixed archaeologically at least in two sites located in the general area of Elâzığ (Imikuşağı and Değirmen-tepe)⁷. If the waters of the Upper Euphrates (modern Karasu) could have reached a level which was enough to cover a site of about 40 meters in height, then one could only imagine what could happen in the plain of Erznka.

If the plain of Erznka once was partly under water or comprised a series of swamps, then this could explain the lack of ancient settlements. Consequently the latters should be looked on mounds or the slopes of bordering mountains.

Below we shall present an overview of archaeological investigations conducted recently in the eastern part of the plain.

Altintepe

Still the first archaeologists who had studied the mound of Altintepe, located at about 17 km to the east of Erznka⁸, mention its important strategic position⁹. The impressive columned building of Post-Urartian, Achaemenid phase (Altintepe II and Jimintepe II), fortifications, painted pottery and other features of the site had lead to a suggestion that probably this was the center of the Achaemenid administrative division (i.e. satrapy)¹⁰.

Until recently the archaeological history of the plain of Erznka mostly was considered to begin with the Urartian period, that is approximately from the end of the VIII century BC and continued, not to count the gap after the Urartian period, into the Achaemenid period. But recent discoveries and studies¹¹ prove that here exist some extensive sites dated with the Early Bronze Age (Kura-Araxes period)¹². These are Küpesik Höyük (at about 500 meters to the west of Altintepe [measurements - about 200x100 meters, depth of cultural layer – about 6 meters]), Küçük Höyük, 2 km to the north of Altintepe, towards Üzümlü¹³, and Saztepe, 2 km to the west of Altintepe (height

⁷ Sevin 1995: 2f.; Sevin 1998: 383ff.; Konyar 2006; also Kosyan 2014. It should be mentioned that the current height of the mound of Imikuşağı is 38 meters, and the thickness of the flood layer (4-5 metres) speaks of the large-scaled catastrophe. This flood is thought to have been the cause for the end of the Mesopotamian-type settlement.

⁸ On excavations of Altintepe see Barnett and Gökçe 1953; Özgüç 1961; 1966; 1969; Emre 1969; Burney and Lang 1971: 158-160; Summers 1993; Karaosmanoğlu, Can, Korucu 2007; Karaosmanoğlu, Can, Korucu 2008; Karaosmanoğlu, Can, Korucu 2012; Işıklı 2010 etc.

⁹ Özgüç 1966: 38 («it seems to have been the most important administrative center of a principality within the western frontier area of the kingdom of Urartu»).

¹⁰ Summers 1993. According to the author here might have been located the centre of the XIII Achaemenid satrapy (p.96). On the early stages of excavations of Altintepe its II layer also was considered to be Urartian (Urartian = Altintepe I and the nearby Jimintepe I as well) (Özgüç 1966; 1969).

¹¹ The description of Altintepe and its neighborhood is based on the article of Prof. Dr. Mehmet Işıklı (Işıklı 2010 and personal communication throughout recent years).

¹² Işıklı 2010: 267.

¹³ Excavations of this site had revealed a considerable number of Early Iron Age pottery (Ceylan 2005: 23).

- 40 meters)¹⁴. Besides these sites, from the fields lying between Altıntepe and the Esence mountain was discovered some portion of pottery whose provenance is difficult to establish due to its eroded condition.

Archaeological studies of the abovementioned sites and accidental finds of different artifacts in their neighborhood could be taken as a proof that this region was populated, after the Kura-Araxes period, also in the Middle Bronze Age (XX-XVIII c. BC). The pottery of this period suggests that the plain of Erzinka was definitely connected with the Transcaucasian cultural world, possibly comprising its part¹⁵.

Considering the plain of Erzinka from the archaeological point of view and taking into account its geographical position one encounters an essential problem – the possible route or routes of the expansion of the Transcaucasian Kura-Araxes culture from its original area which begins at the end of the IV mill. BC and continues in the next millennium¹⁶. The most visible traces of this expansion are numerous impressive sites located in the Upper Euphrates basin, on both sides of the river (Norşuntepe, Korucutepe, Tepecik, Arslantepe-Malatya etc.).

Three possible routes could be offered for the gradual expansion of the Kura-Araxes population groups towards the west and south-west (to the Upper Euphrates basin, and from here to Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Syria).

First and the most direct route is the plain of Erzinka which borders the western extension of the Kura-Araxes homeland (Erzurum and Tercan). Numerous sites located in this region testify on the presence of Kura-Araxes culture in here¹⁷, which speaks in favor of this route.

The second and more difficult route is that which proceeds from Erzurum to the south, south-east. After passing the sources of the Araxes river, the plain of Khnus (modern Hınıs) and the passes of the Bingöl mountains it enters the plain of Muş, further to follow towards the west¹⁸. Despite the difficulties (mountainous landscape, cold weather etc.), archaeological evidence in favor of this route could be found not far from the northern and north-western shores of Lake Van and in the Muş plain as early as about 3000 B.C.¹⁹.

¹⁴ Like in Küçük Höyük, here also a number of the Early Iron Age ceramics was unearthed, but serious damages does not allow to reconstruct the architecture of the site (Ceylan 2005: 23):

¹⁵ This information was supplied to the author recently by Dr. Mehmet Ali Yılmaz (Atatürk University of Erzurum, pers.comm., 29.03.2018), to whom I am grateful.

¹⁶ About the causes of the Kura-Araxes expansion and its geography numerous studies are extant (Kushnareva and Chubinshvili 1970: 49-50; Sagona 1984: 99-102; Batiuk 2005: 10-45[on the theory of migrations and the Kura-Araxes migrations as well]; Kohl 2007: 86-102; Palumbi 2008: 7-12 [detailed history of this problem]; Rothman and Kozbe 1997 etc.).

¹⁷ For the map of the Kura-Araxes archaeological sites (both excavated or fixed) located in the plain of Erzurum and neighboring areas see Işikli 2015.

¹⁸ The detailed description of this route is contained in the account of the journey of the British officer J. Kinneir who travelled through this region in 1814 (Kinneir 1818: 365-380).

¹⁹ The list of the Early Bronze Age sites of Muş (Kura-Araxes II and III) established by M. Rothman and G. Kozbe (18 sites) (Rothman and Kozbe 1997: 115) shows that the Transcaucasian emigration (better to use the word outpour of population) did not bypass this route.

Indeed, the third possible (southern) route could not be excluded, that is from Ararat plain (central Armenia) to the south, and along the northern shores of Lake Van to join the second route.

Anyway, the first route leading from Erzurum directly to south-west seems more preferable due to an easy landscape.

Concluding this brief archaeological history of the plain of Khnus it should be pointed that until now we lack any evidence in favor of the Late Bronze Age occupation. It is more than strange since the II mill. BC Hittite texts contain clear references about the military undertakings of the Hittite kings in the southern part of this region (in Kamakh) against Hayaša, not to mention that the same area was at least in the XIII century BC was under the Hittite control (see below).

The plain of Erzincan. Historical scetch

General remarks

While discussing the plain of Khnus a question arises connected with the nature and contents of available written data – what was the main role of this region in the context of historical development?

Should it be determined by its position on the road connecting east and west, which could facilitate the population to be in close and constant contacts with immediate and remote neighbors, which might have influenced the political, economic and cultural life, thus leading to historical realities in the formation of a contact zone (including a wide spectrum of economic activities - agriculture, crafts, exchange of goods, transit trading, also an easy access to technological novelties, culture etc., extant in the neighboring regions), and also negative effect (migrations through its territory, campaigns conducted by neighboring countries).

Taking into account the comparatively small territory and the position between the plain of Erzurum and the Upper Euphrates basin (Elâziğ and surrounding areas), also an early involvement in the eastern expansion of the Hittite empire, it could be suggested that the political entities located in this region hardly could have possessed with significant military potential. Tentatively it could be regarded as a contact zone located on the fringes of Hittite Anatolia and the southern part of the Upper Euphrates region (Išuwa of Hittite texts). Probably, the same could be said about the following historical periods (Urartian, Hellenistic-Armenian, Armenian, from the VIII-VII c. BC until the III-IV c. AD).

The II millennium BC: The plain of Erzinka during the Hittite empire

First written sources referring to the plain of Khnus go back to the second half of the II millennium BC. These are the Hittite cuneiform texts dated with the XV-XIII centuries BC. Although this data sometimes is too scanty to allow one to offer well-founded suggestions, anyway the region under discussion appears to be the area which

during the whole history of the Hittite expansion and domination in the east had close contacts with Hatti. Here and in its close neighborhood are reported some political entities. Indeed, our poor knowledge of the political geography of this part of the Upper Euphrates basin limits the possibilities for far-going suggestions.

The Hittite cuneiform data regarding the plain of Khnus could be divided into two main spheres - military-political and cultic-religious.

When and in which political context this region fell under the Hittite political (maybe also cultural) dominance? Some indirect evidence which is dated with the second half of the XV century BC is contained in the texts of the Hittite kings Tudhaliya II and his successor Arnuwanda I.

The corresponding section of the «Annals» of Tudhaliya II, although badly damaged, mentions the conquests of the king in the Upper Euphrates basin, particularly that of Išuwa; the latter is said to have been an «extensive» country which had revolted against Hatti aided by Hurri (= Mittani) and consequently was conquered by the Hittite king²⁰. In the preamble to the treaty signed between Tudhaliya II and Šunaššura, king of Kizzuwatna²¹, some details concerning the conquest of Išuwa are mentioned. Although in both texts nothing is said about the geography of the Hittite conquest, namely the plain of Khnus, but some other texts of the same Tudhaliya and Arnuwanda prove the suggestion that this part of the eastern highlands, neighbors of Išuwa, also might have been conquered²². These are KUB XXIII 72+, IBoT I 36 և KUB XXVI 62.

Of these three especially an important data is contained in KUB XXIII 72+²³, which comprises some sort of «Instruction» given in Hattuša, the Hittite capital, to the representatives of eastern political entities, vassals of Hatti. The plot of this instruction was the revolt in Pahhuwa, one of the eastern countries; the text mentions an existing earlier treaty or treaties with Pahhuwa and eastern countries²⁴.

The location of Pahhuwa until now is a subject for discussions²⁵. All suggested localizations mostly are concentrated in two distinct regions 1) to the west of the Euphrates, near modern Divriği, 2) to the north of Išuwa, in the general area of the Bingöl massive or in its neighborhood. Leaving the question of the localization of Pahhuwa for future studies, anyway we are inclined to look for it in more easterly part of

²⁰ KUB XXIII 11/12 Rev. 27'-34' (= Carruba 1977: 161ff.): The same event is referred to in the «Annals» of Arnuwanda I (KUB XXIII 14 Obv. 1-8 = Carruba 1977: 172). On the campaigns of Tudhaliya see Houwink ten Cate 1970: 58ff.; Bryce 2005: 123ff.; Klengel et al. 1999: 109ff. etc.

²¹ The treaty (CTH 41 և 131) is preserved in two variants – Akkadian and Hittite where the conquest of Išuwa is mentioned in the former (Weidner 1923: N.7, S.88ff.; complete translation of the texts including new joins see Beckman 1996: N.2, 13ff.).

²² Houwink ten Cate 1970: 62.

²³ Sayce 1930: 5ff. (transl.); Gurney 1948: 32ff. (transl.); Kosyan 2006: 72ff. (complete edition), also Kosyan et al. 2018 (revised edition).

²⁴ The Hittite text KUB XXXI 103 (= CTH 212.1) could have been one of these.

²⁵ On the location of Pahhuwa see RGTC VI.1: 296; Kosyan 2004a: 75ff., 114ff. (attestation, references to previous studies etc.), also Kosyan 2018.

the Upper Euphrates basin. This suggestion could be supported by the next consideration; in the same text the city of Duggama is mentioned as one of the guarants for the loyalty of Pahhuwa in the future. This Duggama is listed as one of the localities of Hayaša captured by the Hittite king Muršili II during his campaign²⁶. It would be rather difficult to explain how could Hayašaeon city take a responsibility to secure the loyalty of Pahhuwa, located in the distant Divriği.

In this same text the city of Kummaha is mentioned twice as a locality where the Hittite troops had encountered the rebellious forces. Probably, before the revolt of Pahhuwa and its allies at least the southern part of the Erzinka plain should have been under the Hittite control which was fixed by a treaty.

Two other texts - IBoT I 36²⁷ and KUB XXVI 62²⁸ contain information concerning the military contingents from Kummaha and some other localities under the Hittite service.

The former text mentions the soldiers from Kummaha who serve as part of the troops located in the Hittite royal palace at Hattuša.

KUB XXVI 62 is a list of soldiers recruited from the settlements located approximately along the north-eastern and eastern periphery of the Hittite-controlled (or supposedly Hittite-controlled) regions. Here is mentioned ^{URU}Temiya, which in KUB XXIII 72+ is attested in the form of ^{URU}Timmiya²⁹; long ago this toponym was suggested to correspond to Tsimenos of Byzantine sources, located in the eastern part of the Erzincan plain (later Jimin, modern Üzümlü)³⁰.

The abovementioned Hittite data does not allow to speak about the advanced integration of the Upper Euphrates region with the Empire. Probably, it would be more realistic to suggest the existence of some obligations (military and political) imposed on the eastern principalities (loyalty, military contingents, prohibition on relations with other states on their behalf, etc.)³¹. At this early stage of the Hittite involvement in the recently conquered regions of the east (also in the Western Anatolia) hardly any should expect integrity. The best illustration to this conclusion is the case of Madduwatta, the Hittite subject from the Western Anatolian state of Zippašla³². The consequences of the limited authority over its possessions at the newly-conquered periphery were dramatic. During the reign of Arnuwanda I, the successor of Tudhaliya, and later that of Tudhaliya III the

²⁶ For attestations and suggested localizations of this city in the Hittite texts see RGTC VI.1: 435-436; Kosyan 2004a: 98-99. In connection with this locality in the fragmentary Hittite-Hayašaeon treaty (KUB XXVI 39) is mentioned its deity (^dBaltaik).

²⁷ Jakob-Rost 1965: 166ff.; Güterbock and Van den Hout 1991, also Kosyan 2002: 229.

²⁸ Von Schuler 1965: 145; also Kosyan 2004b (for the passage and discussion of toponyms).

²⁹ Textual references and proposed localizations see RGTC VI.1: 423; Kosyan 2004a: 97.

³⁰ Khachatryan 1971: 86-87; TAVO, Bd.24, Map B IV 6; ASVOA 4.3; Kosyan 2004a: 97.

³¹ For responsibilities of the Hittite vassals is fixed in treaties see Kosyan 2016b: 129-133 (with references to earlier studies).

³² The «Indictment of Madduwatta» (Götze 1928, full edition of the text); also Beckman 1996: 144ff. (translation); for the story of Madduwatta see Bryce 2005: 129-136.

separatism of conquered countries was culminated in major disaster described in the text of Hattušili III (XIII c. BC)³³. All neighboring countries began to invade the Hittite-controlled regions of the Empire, including the Hittite heartland with the capital city of Hattuša³⁴.

In the context of the relations of Hatti with the countries of the Upper Euphrates basin in the XIV c. BC and also for the purposes of our study the location of Hayaša is of utmost importance³⁵. If this principality should be looked in the plain of Erznka and to the east of it, as it was suggested recently by M.Forlanini³⁶, or even in the plain of Erzurum (not to mention the Black Sea coast according to some early authors)³⁷, then it could be in place to propose that the plain of Erznka might have had regular contacts with the Hittite empire, located along the strategically important route linking Asia Minor with the Transcaucasian world. Not excluding such possibility for the location for Hayaša, another geographical milieu could be referred to, which points on the more southerly location of Hayaša, between Išuwa and Lake Van³⁸.

Leaving aside the problem of Hayaša, it should be stated that the plain of Erznka clearly was under the focus of Hatti during the XIV-XIII c. BC. The question here arises - why in the mid-XIII c. BC the region of Kamakh was under the firm Hittite control. One of the texts of Hattušili III (KUB LV 1) mentions the «guard of the Mount of Kummaha» (Obv. II 8')³⁹. Definitely, here we deal with a mountain located in the neighborhood of Kummaha, while the “guard” should be understood as the Hittite military post or its commander.

To summarize the data provided by the Hittite texts some conclusions could be suggested.

In the context of the eastern expansion of Hatti the Hittite presence in the plain of Erznka, at least in its southern part (Kummaha) is quite visible. The problem is the next - what kind of interests were pursued by the Hittites in this region? Whether political (as a base against Hayaša or some other political entity located to the east or north-east of the plain), or its cultic-religious importance. During the Hittite expansion in the east at least two battles are reported near Kummaha. First against the rebellious city of Arhita,

³³ The full edition of the text see in Kosyan 2016b: 69-81.

³⁴ On this events see Bryce 2005: 145-148.

³⁵ Besides Hayaša, the Hittite texts sometimes mention Azzi, which often mistakenly is identified with Hayaša (for the discussion of this problem see Kosyan 2008: 264-266).

³⁶ Forlanini 2017.

³⁷ For opinions regarding the location of Hayaša see RGTC VI.1: 63-64; RGTC VI.2: 22; Kosyan 2004a: 48-50.

³⁸ Kosyan 2013: 57-60; 2011: 90-92; 2015: 273-274. For this proposal the data contained in one XIII c. B.C. Hittite oracle text (KUB XLIX 11) where, in the context of the campaign of the Hittite army against Azzi. Here two toponyms are attested (^{URU}Ut-ku-ni-ša and ^{URU}Hi-im-mu-wa), which at least linguistically correspond to two country-names - members of the Uruatri confederation according to the Middle Assyrian texts and are located in the mountainous Taurus region but not to the north of it (i.e. in the plain of Erznka).

³⁹ For this part of the text see Kosyan 2002: 233.

the ally of Pahhuwa (see above), the next in the mid-XIV c. BC against Hayaša⁴⁰. The answer to this question has to await for a while.

Along with political-military spheres, the Hittite texts contain valuable information about the plain of Erznka (probably also in the surrounding regions).

1. IBoT I 33 - The Middle Hittite oracle text (MUŠ oracle)⁴¹.

This text comprises the oracular question regarding the Hittite king. As it is told, some times before an evil omen happened in the city of Kummaha which was followed by more similar omens. The purpose of the oracular inquiry is to determine whether these signs could affect the king in subsequent years. In this regard the mountain of Darutena⁴² is mentioned. Thus, it appears that in Kummaha was located a temple where some priests were busy with oracular duties.

2. KUB LV 1 – Hittite text of cultic character⁴³.

This XIII century text mentions É.GAL hekur Pirwa («palace of the Pirwa-temple») in connection with the [(LÚ)]EN.NU.UN HUR.SAG^{URU} Kummaha («the guard of the Mount of Kummaha»). The text shows that in Kummaha or its neighborhood exists the temple of the god Pirwa, one of the prominent Hittite deities, and that the “guard” was responsible for performing the required offerings.

3. KUB XXVI 39 – A treaty between the Hittite king and the ruler of Hayaša⁴⁴.

In this defective text is preserved the list of deities, both Hittite and Hayašaeen(?) - as divine witnesses to the treaty. In the case if Hayaša was the treaty partner of the Hittite king, a view which is commonly stated by scholars, could point on the plain of Erznka or its neighborhood as the place where these deities were worshipped. Two toponyms listed along with the names of deities are associated with Hayaša. [URU]Duggamma corresponds to^{URU} Duggam(m)a of the „Annals of Muršili II“ and KUB XXIII 72 Rev. 1, and^{URU} Arhita appears in connection with the battle near Kummaha (see above).

The list of deities:

U.GUR^{URU} Hayaša, IŠTAR, Zagga(-)[?], Tarumuš, Terittituniš, Unagaštaš, ^dU takšannaš Baltaik, Unaggaštaš, Šilli-...]. Two more names are preserved partly.

The texts quoted above could be supplemented by several others dealing with sacrifices in Hattuša where some eastern (Hayašaeen and of Azzi) deities are referred to.

^dU.GUR^{URU} Hayaša – KBo IV 3 VI 33; KBo XIX 128 II 10, VI 19.

^dU^{URU} Hayaša – KUB XII 2 I 24'.

⁴⁰ Kosyan 2016b: 92-93.

⁴¹ Edited by E.Laroche (Laroche 1958).

⁴² See «The plain of Erznka in the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic periods» below in the text.

⁴³ A report of a Hittite dignitary (probably a priest) regarding cultic negligence fixed in several parts of the Empire (for transliteration see Groddek 2002: 1-5).

⁴⁴ In this fragmentary treaty the list of Hittite and Hayasaeen deities is preserved (Forrer 1931: 6-8; Jahukyan 1987: 327-330; Haas 1985: 24; Petrosyan 2004: 222-224; Kosyan 2005). The consensus is still to be reached regarding the date of this treaty (a time span from Tudhaliya III until Muršili II [XIV c. BC]). Its dating with the time of Muršili II looks more probable (Anniya, king Hayaša)(Carruba 1988: 69-75).

^dU^{KUR}Azzi – KUB XXXVIII 6 IV 13, KUB XXXVIII 10a 12'.

The plain of Erznka in the Urartian period

Unlike the second half of the II mill. B.C., the following extensive time span of about half millennium (late XIII c. BC - late VIII c. BC) lacks any written source about the plain of Erznka. In addition, our poor knowledge of the archaeology of the region during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages could not fill this large chronological gap. Thus, we do not have a single clue for the study of the area after the disintegration of Hatti and the establishment of Urartian supremacy over the Upper Euphrates region.

The Urartian presence in the plain of Erznka connected with the erection of the Altintepe fortress and susi temple could be taken as an argument in favor of some interests of Urartian kings here, though until now they remain unknown. By the way, the same could be said beforehand about the following Achaemenid and Armenian periods (see below).

One thing is clear, for Urartians this region was of considerable importance, if one takes into account the impressive building activities. Urartians built inner walls, then an Achaemenid outer wall had come up into presence⁴⁵. The measurements of the latter (12 m. thick) could point on the importance of the site. The socle of the wall is composed of rectangular blocks up to 3.80 m. high with a mudbrick superstructure. The buttresses were spaced at the interval of about 11 m.⁴⁶

The arrival of Urartians into the plain of Erznka, judging by the chronology of archaeological findings⁴⁷, might have taken place later than their expansion into the Ararat plain and that of Išuwa (the region of Elâziğ and its neighborhood), which probably could be explained by the isolated location of this region.

For the discussion of the place of the plain of Erznka in the political and economic system of the Urartian empire one encounters a problem first discussed by P.Zimansky⁴⁸. He doubts the proposal that this region might have been integrated into the Empire or even regarded as its part. His main argument is the absence of symptomatic defensive system which is extant in other parts of Urartu where one could speak about their military-political and economic integration⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ T. Ozguc thinks that both were erected during the Urartian presence (Özgüç 1966: 60).

⁴⁶ Forbes 1983: 21.

⁴⁷ The chronology of the establishment of Urartians in Altintepe is debatable. R.D.Barnett and N.Gökçe, later also Ch.Burney and N.Özgüç and others had placed this event in the reign Argishti II (Barnett and Gökçe 1953 ["late 8th or early 7th century BC"]; Burney and Lang 1971: 144, 146 etc.; Özgüç 1974: 859-860; Klein 1974: 92-93), which rests on the name of Argishti appearing in the inscriptions found here. But T. Özgüç had preferred an earlier dating (Özgüç 1969: 70-71 [the period of Argishti I – early VIII c. BC]).

⁴⁸ Zimansky 1984: 10-12, 27-28.

⁴⁹ «... at the present time, Altintepe appears to be an isolated site, far removed from the nearest place that was indisputably in the hands of the Urartian crown» (Zimansky 1984: 27-28). Mentioning the existence of typical Urartian character of archaeological findings here he anyway states that they are not enough to conclude «that Altintepe was under the direct control of the Urartian monarch» (idem: 10).

It seems that this proposal rests on the existence of different models of Urartian supremacy throughout the Empire. Extensive building activities in Altintepe, the standard Urartian *susi*-temple, storerooms, plans of tombs akin to rock chambers at Van and other symptomatic Urartian artifacts by themselves could point on the existence of some interests here. Hardly the eastern part of the plain of Erzinka could have functioned as a defensive facility located in the eastern limits of the Empire. The absence of fortifications along the roads leading to the plain could be explained by gaps in the archaeological studies (see above). The same could be stated for the case if here, before the Urartians had survived some local principality which was forced to adopt the Urartian hegemony; here actually everything is Urartian. Maybe the solution to this problem rests in the definition of Urartian interests forcing them to expand into this direction.

If one compares the plain of Erzinka with that of the north-eastern possessions of Urartians, namely the Ararat plain, the next should be stated. The latter have solid economic potential in terms of agriculture (about 200 thousand hectares of fertile soil) and was vital for Urartians, which had to be protected from the north and east. Accordingly, here a great number of fortifications were established along the northern and eastern limits of the plain. In the case of Erzinka the interests of Urartians might have been different.

The plain of Erzinka in the Achaemenid period

At some period during the disintegration of Urartu Altintepe was abandoned by its residents due to unspecified causes (either as a result of the wholesale crisis in the Empire or a natural disaster)⁵⁰. That the crisis had affected negatively and significantly different regions of the Urartian empire at least during the first half of the VII c. BC are seen in several important fortresses (Argishtihinili, Ayanis, Karmir blur, Cavushtepe, Kayalidere, Bastam etc.)⁵¹. Quite a few number arrowheads found in the walls of some Urartian fortresses are not enough for the suggestion that these well-fortified cities were captured by some enemies. In the case of Altintepe we lack any trace of the enemy attack⁵². After the Urartian period, an considerable occupational gap is fixed (about 150 years if we place its abandonment by the Urartians somewhere in the mid VII c. BC and the arrival of Achaemenids - in late VI c. BC) which ended by the appearance of the typical Achaemenid Altintepe II (fortifications, apadana etc.)⁵³. Fundamental building

⁵⁰ T. Özgüç was first to suggest that the abandonment of Altintepe was a result of a disastrous earthquake (Özgüç 1961: 278-279; Mellink 1962: 79), which is normal for the plain of Erzinka.

⁵¹ Archaeological studies conducted in the abovementioned sites had revealed some interesting processes which characterize these fortresses in VII c. BC - erection of additional walls, fortification of settlements existing or recently founded „outer cities“, increase in the number of garrisoned soldiers, and of significant amount of food storages, the shift of population of small settlements to the fortified cities (see Grekyan 2013).

⁵² Since no traces of destructions are extant, T.Özgüç thinks that Altintepe was abandoned by its inhabitants towards the end of Urartu (Özgüç 1966: 38; also Sinclair 1989: 431; Summers 1993: 93, 95).

⁵³ First archaeologists working at Altintepe does not regard it as such (see above footn.16).

activities held by Achaemenids seem to favor the idea that the site was abandoned by its settlers⁵⁴.

How long did the Achaemenids stay in Altintepe? Logically, the eastern campaigns of Alexander the Great, particularly the battle at Arbela in 331 BC could be taken as *terminus ante quem*. Although we lack any clue for the end of the Achaemenid presence after this event, it could be speculated that since this region lay beyond the route of Macedonian army, and also the absence of archaeological traces for its destruction, the palatial complex of Altintepe might have survived for some time, until the period of Artaxias I of Greater Armenia at the beginning of the II c. BC⁵⁵.

The plain of Erzinka in the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic periods

During this time span the plain of Erzinka might have been under the rule of the Seleucids, at least nominal, until the battle of Magnesia in 190 BC., then it was incorporated into the Greater Armenia⁵⁶. For the latter period, according to early medieval Armenian sources, its territory was divided between two sub-provinces of Upper Armenia (Bardzr Hayk) – Daranali and Ekeleac (Classical Akilisene).

Quite a few if nothing is known regarding the role of these provinces in the political life of Greater Armenia; all references to them are connected with religious activities⁵⁷. In the studies of the early medieval Armenian historiographers, in the passages dealing with the details of the adoption of Christianity, we find numerous references which directly point on the exceptional role of the plain of Erzinka in the religious life of the state⁵⁸.

Agatangelos (V century AD)⁵⁹.

The destruction of pagan temples by Tiridates III, king of Armenia, contains important information regarding the plain of Erzinka:

1. «In the first year of the reign of Trdat in Greater Armenia, they went to the province of Ekeleats to the village of Erēz to the temple of Anahit in order to sacrifice there. And when they had completed this unworthy deed, they went down and encamped on the bank of the river called Gayl» (par.48, p.61).

*The companion of Trdat III in the trip is St.Gregory the Illuminator, before the adoption of Christianity.

**Erēz = Arm.Erzinka, modern Erzincan.

***Anahit = chief goddess of the Armenian pantheon, the spouse of Aramazd⁶⁰.

⁵⁴ According to G.Summers, after the Urartians here exists an occupational break (Summers 1993: 94).

⁵⁵ See HZP 1971: 530-534.

⁵⁶ See the previous footnote.

⁵⁷ Neither Daranali nor Ekexeac are listed in early medieval Armenian literature as belonging to any chiefdom (i.e. priestly family). On the contrary, the northern part of the plain of Erzinka is referred to as «Anahtakan gavar», i.e. «the province of Anahit (mother-goddess)» (see below in the text).

⁵⁸ This information was discussed briefly in our recent studies (Kosyan 2010; Kosyan 2018 [forthcoming]).

⁵⁹ Textual references are cited after English edition of Movses of Khorenatsi and other authors made by R.Thomson.

****River Gayl = the northern tributary of Karasu, flowing through the the plain of Erzinka, to the west of the modern city.

2. «Then he (Gregory) entrusted them to the all-protecting grace of God, while he himself, taking the king, hastened to the other regions of the whole territory of Armenia that they might sow the word of life. He came to the province of Daranalik' in order to destroy the altars of those falsely called gods, where in the village of T'ordan there was a famous temple of the glorious god Barshamin. First they destroyed this and smashed his image; they plundered all the treasures, both of gold and silver, and distributed them to the poor. And the whole village with its properties and territories they devoted to the name of the church» (par.784, p.323).

*T'ordan - location unknown⁶¹.

**Barshamin - a Mesopotamian god (Ba'alshamin) whose statue was brought by Tigranes the Great in the I c. B.C. and a temple was erected for him (se below).

3. «When he had further confirmed these people (the province of Khaltik', to the north of the plain of Erzinka - A.K.), then he went to the fortified site of renowned Ani, the site of the royal burial ground of the Armenian kings. There they destroyed the altar of the god Zeus-Aramazd, called father of all the gods. And there they set up the Lord's sign, and the town with its fortress they devoted to th eservice of the church» (par.785, p.325).

*Ani - a fortress on the right bank of Karasu (Arm. Kamakh/modern Kemakh on the opposite bank); to be distinguished from other Ani on the Armenian-Turkish border.

**Aramazd - the chief god of the pre-Christian Armenian pantheon.

4. «After this he came to the neighboring province of Ekeleats. Here the demons appeared in the places of worship of the most important shrines of the Armenian kings, in the temple of Anahit in the town of Erēz. The demons gathered together and gave battle in the form of an army carrying shields; with a tremendous shout they made the mountains echo. They were put to flight, but as they fled the high walls collapsed and were flattened. Those who had arrived, Saint Gregory, the king and the pious army, broke into pieces the golden image of the female deity Anahit, and they completely destroyed and pillaged the place, seizing the gold and silver. From there they crossed over the river Gayl and destroyed the temple of Nanē, the daughter of Aramazd, in the town of T'il (par.786, p.326-327).

*T'il - a prominent religious center located approximately in 8 km to the north-west of Erzincan. In the same IV c. became the seat of head of Armenian church (catholicos). It was donated to Gregory the Illuminator as his personal domain; here were buried several catholicoses and also the king Pap in 374 (see below)⁶².

5. «Then he hastened to the province of Derjan in order to spread there also the message of the apostolic preaching by works of labor, and to free them from the

⁶⁰ Fort he cult of Anahit and her sanctuaries see Melik-Pashayan 1963.

⁶¹ See Kosyan 2018 for a tentative attempt to identify this place-name with ^{URU}Darutena of Hittite texts.

⁶² HHSTB 1986: 449.

beastliness of their abominable and demon-possessed way of life. He came to the temple of Mihr, called the son of Aramazd, to the village called Bagayarich in the Parthian tongue» (par. 489-790, p.329).

*Mihr – Iranian Mithra

**Bagayarich – to the east of Erzincan and to the north of modern Mamahatun⁶³.

Movses Khorenatsi (V c. B.C.)

1. «After illuminating the whole of Armenia with the light of divine knowledge ... he left his own son Aristakēs as his successor and remained himself in the province of Daranalik' in the Mountain 'Caves of Mane'. Saint Gregory lives in seclusion in the Cave of Mane for many years and on his death was transposed to the ranks of the angels. Shepherds found him dead and buried him in the same place without knowing who he was. But when the faith had become firmly established in these regions, after a long time Saint Gregory's relics were revealed to a certain ascetic called Garnik, who took them and buried them in the village of T'ordan» (Book II.91, p.244-246)⁶⁴.

*Caves of Mane – in Armenological literature usually located in one of the ravines of the mountain Sepuh/Gohanam (modern Karadag, to the west of Erzincan).

2. «Tigran consented and raised the statue of Zeus Olympus in the fortress of Ani, that of Athena in T'il, the second statue of Artemis in Erēz, and that of Hephaistos in Bagayarinc. He himself went down to Mesopotamia, and finding there the statue of Barshamin, he embellished it with ivory, crystal, and silver. He ordered that it should be brought and set up in the town of T'ordan» (par.14, p.149-150).

The information contained in the abovementioned sources gives us a clue for some proposals.

1. In the plain of Erznka and to the east of it (Terjan) at least from the II c. BC onwards were located several important cultic-religious centers of pre-Christian Armenia (Erez, Til, Tordan, Bagayaric, Kamakh and Ani). Here were worshipped all main deities – the chief god Aramazd, Anahit, Nane, Mihr (= Mithra). Later on in these temples were worshipped also Greek deities – Zeus, Athena, Artemis and Hephaistos. Nowhere in ancient Armenia such a concentration of cultic centres are attested.

2. To this should be added the royal cemetery of Armenian kings (near Kamakh, on the right bank of the river.

3. After the Christianization of Armenia the plain of Erznka was given to Gregory the Illuminator as a domain, which is also symptomatic.

Taking into account the information referred to above, and also that contained in the II century BC Hittite texts, it could be suggested that it seems unlikely that the cultic landscape of the plain of Erznka had come into presence only in the Hellenistic period.

⁶³ HHSTB 1986: 531.

⁶⁴ In Book III.2 is told that the tomb of Aristakes, son of Gregory was in the province of Ekefeats, in the town of T'il and in III.8 that catholicos Nerses the Great, one of the offsprings of Gregory was also buried in T'il. The same is reported in P'awstos Buzand's (IV century) study (1989: Book III.2).

The northern contact zone: summary

Resuming the discussion of written and archaeological sources regarding the northern contact zone, several suggestions could be offered.

1. The plain of Erzinka is situated in a strategically important region. By this part of eastern highlands proceeds the easiest and most comfortable route which connects Transcaucasian region, via the plains of Kars and Erzurum, with the Upper Euphrates region. The trade routes as well as military campaigns and migrations proceeding from the east and north-east to the west and south-west and vice versa mostly does not bypass this region. The other route in this direction which passes via the northern shores Lake Van is difficult and uncomfortable due to the relief.

2. The role of the plain of Erzinka in the religious life of the Armenian Highland could not be doubted, especially in the context of the II mill. BC Hittite cuneiform data which mention at least two cultic centres in this region (an unnamed temple where the priests perform oracle procedures by the order of the Hittite king, and also the temple of Pirwa).

Further evidence for the religious status of this area is found in the Urartian period (VIII-VII c. BC *susi* temple of Altintepe). Several centuries later, in the Hellenistic period we encounter here a large number of temples of major Armenian deities which speaks about continuity.

During the II mill. BC and until the early Middle Ages the plain of Erzinka was an important religious centre, unlike the political status of the region which at present is not easy to determine.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AJNES - Aramazd. Armenian Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Yerevan (since 2017 -Oxford).
- AnSt - Anatolian Studies (London).
- ASVOA.4.3 - Atlante storico del Vicino Oriente antico, Fascicolo 4.3, Anatolia: l'Impero Hittita, Pavia, 1986 (M.Forlanini, M.Marazzi).
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