Qalatghat:
An Urartian Site
in Northwestern Iran

Oscar White Muscarella

Modern archaeological interest in Urartu and its culture has several phases. The first, which lasted until around 1945, started in the 1870's, when, after several objects reported to have come from Urartu appeared on the market, the British Museum began to dig at Toprakkale in modern Turkey. After a short time, D. Raynolds, an American missionary, and E. Clayton, a British vice-comis, resumed work at Toprakkale for the Museum. Meanwhile, objects were continuously being purchased by various people from local inhabitants, and these, together with the few objects and architectural fragments being excavated, formed a corpus of Urartian art. When in 1898 C. C. Lehmann-Haupt and V. Belck began what may be considered the first attempt at scientific excavation of Toprakkale—the others could only be called treasure hunts—they had a good idea what they expected. In 1913-19, two Russian scholars, M. J. Mitr and I. A. Orbeli, did some more digging at Toprakkale, and at nearby Van, but interest soon petered out. Serious excavation did not begin until 1937-38, when an American expedition led by Kirsopp Lake undertook a campaign at both Toprakkale and Van. Russian scholars became interested in that part of ancient Urartu presently situated within the Soviet Union's borders, after 1930. At that time survey teams began to seek out and record Urartian sites and inscriptions. In 1939, B. B. Piotrovski began one of the most significant excavations ever undertaken in Urartian archaeology: the site of Karmir Blur (Red Hill), near Erivan in Soviet Armenia. Work there continues to the present and one may argue that the results achieved by Piotrovski have played a large role in reviving interest in the Urartian sites. We see, then, that British, American, German, and Russian archaeologists were initially involved in the discovery of Urartu's past. The period after the Second World War begins the second, and more intense, phase of Urartian scholarship. This phase is marked by very active archaeological campaigns led by Turkish scholars working within their borders. Intensive and extremely important surveys were also conducted mostly by British scholars, who discovered many Urartian sites and who made it possible to define the borders of Urartu within Turkey. At the same time, Russian archaeologists surveyed and excavated other Urartian sites and cemeteries within their borders. American scholars played little or no active role in Urartian archaeology at this time.

A third phase of Urartian archaeology began with recent discoveries in northwestern Iran that made it clear, not only that Urartians set up inscriptions in that area, but also, and more important, that they built cities there. In 1859 the Hermitage Museum received a group of Urartian objects said to have come from Alishar (modern Shusha) on the Iranian shore of the Araxes River, near Mt. Ararat. And in 1905, at Guschi on the northwestern shore of Lake Rezaliyeh, peasants found a hoard of Urartian objects in a tomb. These objects, and a handful of scattered inscriptions, were all that scholars could study if they were interested in the problem of Urartian penetration into Iran. But it is of interest to note that no archaeologists seem to have taken an interest in seeking out possible Urartian sites in Iran. In 1964 the situation began to change. The Hasanlu Project of the University Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, under the general direction of R. H. Dyson, Jr., and the field direction of T. Cayler Young, Jr. and the author, excavated a small fort at a site we called Agrab Tepe, situated near Hasanlu in the Soltuz valley. Here we unearthed pottery that has good parallels at sites in Urartu. While we are still not sure what the nature of the fort was, we were aware at the time of excavation that the site was a cultural contacts with Urartu. In 1968 the German Archaeological Institute conducted the most important survey of northwestern Iran to date, and Wolfram Kleiss, the leader of the survey published his results in 1970. Kleiss discovered about a dozen Urartian sites north of Shapur, and he began to excavate one called Bastam, north of Khoy. In the same year Charles Burney, who had worked in Turkey on surveys and who excavated an Urartian site there, found evidence of Urartian culture at Halivan, near Shapur. And again in 1968, the Hasanlu Project team discovered the Urartian site of Qalatghat, which is the subject of this article. We look forward to continuous cooperation with our Iranian hosts and colleagues in northwestern Iran. Joint work on the part of all scholars interested in ancient Iran will, we trust, generously expand our very limited knowledge about both Urartian history in Iran and the nature of the material and spiritual culture developed there.

When travelling or excavating in the Near East, archaeologists often hear from local villagers or workmen reports about the existence of stones with writing, or the whereabouts of an ancient city. Too often the stone with writing turns out to be a rough boulder covered with grooves and scratches caused by weathering, or a weathered gravestone, or a millstone no longer in use; and the alleged ancient city is actually a hill with outcropping rocks, or a deserted Moslem cemetery.

View looking north toward Qalatghat (rioting to the right behind the trees) seen from Geyan.

Nevertheless, one is sometimes given valuable information about an object or site, and it is the duty of the archaeologist not to be cynical after many false alarms, but to investigate every claim about ancient remains made by local peoples. Thus, a few years ago T. Cayler Young, Jr. heard from his workmen at Godin Tepe in central western Iran about a stone statue. As a routine matter he went to the place where the statue was said to be and found there a stone stele of Sargun II of Assyria (722-704 B.C.), thereby making an important historical discovery. In July 1968, I was directing the Hasanlu Project's excavation of some tumuli at S'E Girdan, situated near the modern village of Cheshmeh Gil in the Ushjin valley of northwest Iran. For several days after the beginning of excavations, workmen pointed to a cluster of trees to the northeast, on the slopes of a mountain that formed the eastern boundary of the Ushjin valley. There, they said, was a very important place, an ancient city, and that the area was called Qalatghat, or place of the fortress. On July 23 one of the local landholders also talked of the site, and he added that there was a road there and that in 1967 local peasants had found a large stone, broken into three pieces, all of which had writing engraved. His description of "stuck like" writing suggested that he had seen cuneiform. Yes, he had himself seen the stones and he was able to tell us that one or two pieces had been taken by a local antiquities dealer (who never paid the promised money), who in turn sold the stones to a dealer from Tehran; the third piece was taken to the authorities in Ushjin, the valley's chief town. He knew the exact place where the stones were found and would be glad to take us there. At last on July 30, I first visited Qalatghat, along with Agha Z. Rahmatian, the representative of the Archaeological Service of Iran, and Carol and Christopher Harlan, at that time graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania.

Qalatghat is a large and steep site consisting of several high spots. A few hundred metres up from the modern road, two magnificent springs gush forth from a vertical rock outcrop situated behind a cluster of willow trees. The remains of one or more buildings are still visible on the surface to the north of the springs but we do not know their date. Many thousands of stones litter the site over a wide area, and in at least two places on the slopes to the northeast of the springs are stretches of fortification walls formed of large, well-cut boulders, running east-west. (These walls were the "road" of the landlord.) Further up the steep slope holding the walls, we found a level area at the top and evidence of more walls just...
protruding from the surface. From this highpoint we could see the whole Ushmu valley and a great part of the Solduz valley to the east, as far as the modern town (and ancient Iron Age tepe) of Nagadeh.

On the eastern slope of the site, not visible from the Ushmu side, there is a large open rectangular rock chamber, apparently natural in origin but showing signs of having been worked by man; the open area is now used as a shelter by shepherds. In his recent article "Urttitsche Plätze in Iranisch-Azerbaizan" Wolfram Kleiser reports that at the Urartian site of Kale Wazi, at the north-west corner of Lake Rezaiyeh, there is a "Felsöhle," an open rock chamber, that was natural in origin but showed signs of human working. Surely these two chambers had similar functions, which may be known to us after Qalatgah's excavation and more research.

Of the many sherd s we picked up over an extensive area of Qalatgah, all appear to be Iron III types (post-9th century B.C.), painted wares with plain or hatched triangles decorating the inner rim of cups and bowls and monochrome plain buff and red-burnished wares, well known from nearby Hasanlu in Period III. Hollow-based bowls, simple, outward curving plain bowls, carinated rim bowls, and cups, are among the shapes represented by the Qalatgah sherds. Similar inner-rim painted triangle decoration has been found at such sites as Hasanlu and at Ziwije farther to the south-east, and in Urartu at Altintepe, in the final upper level, and in the Van area at Van itself and at nearby Tilke Tepe. The red-burnished wares may also be related to similar types of ware found in several Urartian sites. Moreover, in addition to the painted-triangle ware and red-burnished ware sherds, at home in northwest Iran and Urartu, we also found some very fine, highly polished red-ware sherds known to archaeologists as "Toprakkale Ware," so-named after the site in Urartu where they were first found, but since recognized at other Urartian sites, and also recently found by C. Burney at Halavani Tepe, near Shapur in Iran.

A second trip on August 9th to the site with the whole staff of the Hasanlu Project proved to be more rewarding. Not only did we find more diagnostic sherds of the types just discussed, but I found a white stone stamp-cylinder seal of characteristic Urartian type and motif. More important than this was the finding made by Christopher Hamlin: an Urartian inscription on a broken stone block. The stone was found, together with other plain stones, built into a modern dam holding back a pool of water, fed by the two springs of Qalatgah, and used for local irrigation.

The seal is a conacave cylinder, free of decoration, with a stylized horned animal running to the right carved at the base; a loop for suspension is at the top. Seals of this type have been called stamp-cylinders by R. D. Barnett, and they have been excavated at Karmir Blur and Toprakkale in Urartu, and at Igydr and Kelikran in the southern Caucasus, made there, no doubt, under Urartian influence. I believe the example from Qalatgah is the first from northwest Iran.

Although they have been handicapped both by the weathering of the stone and by its fragmentary state, Christopher Hamlin and Mauritius van Loon have been studying the inscription. Van Loon has sent me a preliminary translation which I am quoting here; he will shortly publish a more extensive commentary and discussion in the Journal of Near Eastern Studies:

1) When, relying upon the god Haldi and upon the god T(csheba), Ishpuni,]
2) son of Sardu, king of Urartu and Menasa]
3) son of Ishpuni, of the country Sapaya [ .. . ]
4) the king? they too [k? .. . ] both the god Haldi and [ .. . ]
5) for the god Haldi they change[d to</i> bils? city Ushbe? of the country [ .. . ]
6) to the trees of .. . they carried .. .

The text, therefore, had been set up for public viewing by Ishpuni and his son Menasa, sometime during the co-regency of these kings, that is sometime around 810 to 805 B.C. It should also be recalled here that during the co-regency of Ishpuni and Menasa they set up an inscription written in both Assyrian and Urartian within the Kel-i Shin pass. That inscription is therefore from the same period as this Qalatgah inscription found in 1968 and published above.

In the 1969 issue of the Archäologische Mittellungen aus Iran, J. Friedrich published an incomplete stone inscription found in the Ushmu valley in 1967. Friedrich says the fragment, now in the Tehran Museum, is one of two stones recovered and that the other is in the hands of an
Studies of ancient geography are ventures into the unknown and much difference of opinion exists. All one need do is compare the various maps published by cartographers, each of whom assigns different ancient sites to the same geographical regions. Therefore, it would be premature and dangerous to speculate at present that the ancient city of Qalatghar was built in the land of Barusa, or Manna, or in a Merman-controlled area such as Ushibish or Subi, states known to us from Assyrian records. At the same time, it would certainly now be incumbent on those concerned with ancient geography to take into account the archeological evidence of Urartian control over the area west and south of Lake Rizeyeh in the eighth century B.C. With this thought in mind, I throw out for discussion a tentative suggestion with respect to one aspect of ancient geography that could emerge from our new knowledge about Urartian control in Iran.

The great French scholar Thureau-Dangin published the text of a letter describing Sargon II's eighth campaign that took the king into Iran, and, according to Thureau-Dangin, into Urartu, before he returned south to sack the Urartian temple site of Musisir, somewhere in northern Iraq. The text mentions the many rivers, mountains, cities, and regions passed by Sargon on his campaign. Thureau-Dangin had worked out the route and made a map to illustrate it. His map shows Sargon travelling north along the east shore of Lake Van before returning south to Musisir and later home. Saracenia mentioned to the east, however, mention going around any lake, and it has always seemed strange to me that Sargon did not mention Lake Rizeyeh (a large lake) if in fact he passed by it, especially when his text is quite explicit with regard to geographical features. Sargon also only casually refers to Urartian cities on the shore of a sea, without naming it. The sea, Thureau-Dangin and most scholars have taken that sea to be Lake Van because, one assumes, of the mention of Urartian cities. But must it be Lake Van? Is it not possible that Sargon never left northwest Iran and that he referred to those Urartian cities we now know existed near Lake Rizeyeh when he talked of attacking Urartian cities by the sea? If possible, Sargon would have gone to Musasir from the Lake Rizeyeh region via one of the several passes existing in the Zagros connecting Iran and Iraq. Indeed there are problems con-