

ARXEOLOJİ EKSPEDİSİYALAR

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2008 EXCAVATIONS IN OGLANQALA

Oglanqala Citadel

The highest surface on the rocky hill of Oglanqala is marked by the remains of stone walls that once formed a major monumental building complex. In 2008 the Oglanqala project opened two 10 meter by 10 meter excavation units (operations A and B), as well as a 2.5 by 2 meter sounding (operation D), adjacent to the excavations undertaken by Veli Bakhshaliyev in 1988.

Earlier Excavation

The 1988 excavation was laid out following the orientation of two substantial stone walls which were visible on the surface. These masonry walls—built of very large, roughly-finished masonry with smaller stones wedged between large trimmed stone blocks—created the northern and western borders of the operation.

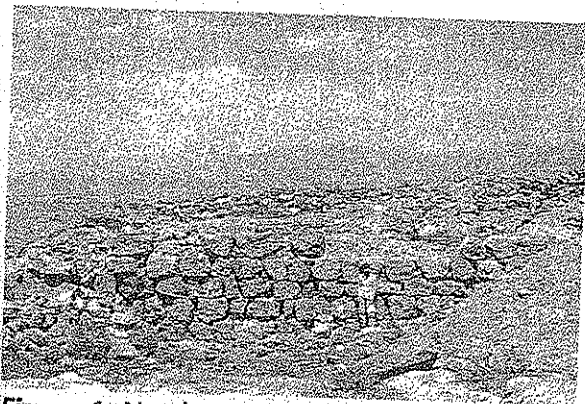


Figure 1. Northern wall marking limit of citadel excavation area

This construction technique is found widely at Oglanqala in association with the outer fortification and tower walls, which are probably contemporary with this wall. It is also well attested at a variety of other

Iron Age fortress sites including Bastam, Ayanis and Hasanlu IIIb. The wall that lines the western end of the citadel is made of smaller unfinished stones of a variety of sizes with mud mortar filling in the gaps between the masonry. This wall appears to be less well-made than the northern wall but is also in keeping with fortress architecture of the 8th to 6th centuries BC.



Figure 2. Western wall marking limit of citadel excavation area

The 1988 excavations revealed that the western wall was built on fill that runs up against the northern wall, and is thus probably a later addition. Bakhshaliyev identifies four building periods in the citadel area. The latest construction phase, probably dating to the medieval to modern periods, consists of the remains of walls made of unfinished stone that directly parallel the stone enclosures found in 2008 in Operations A and B. The phasing of the following three construction periods is complicated by the fact that in the eastern half of the excavation bedrock was apparently reached at a depth of only about 1.5 meters whereas in the western portion of

the square occupation extended to at least 3 meters below the surface. Bakhshaliyev assigns two square, stone column plinths, one base and two drums to construction phase 3 and one plinth to construction phase 4 on the basis of their absolute levels, but it is possible that a single building or portico simply stepped down at this point and that all of these stone column elements belonged to the same architectural complex.



Figure 3. Column plinths, drums and base lying in area of 1988 excavation

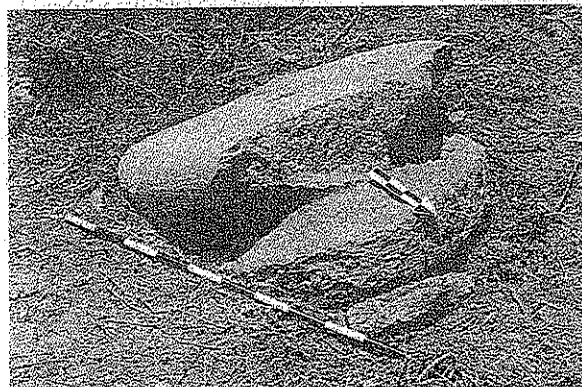


Figure 4. Column base excavated in 1988

The 2008 Excavations

Operations A and B In 2008, we laid out Operations A and B to the south of Bakhshaliyev's old excavation area, with the western edge of Operation A again running along the western wall

that had been uncovered in the old excavation.

The surface of operations A and B was dotted with unfinished stones that sometimes formed circular enclosures. These stone enclosures may have been the remains of huts or animal pens built by pastoralists in the medieval or later periods, although, with the exception of a few grinding stones and ash concentrations, there was little evidence for any cultural activity associated with these stone circles. Four modern burials containing gun cartridges, buck shot, and Russian-made ceramics were sunk into these stone enclosures.



Figure 5. Stone enclosures in Operation B

The columned building In Operation B, one stone column drum was found at the same level as the stone enclosures in what was clearly a secondary context. This column drum, which would have made a perfect table, may have been moved and reused by the pastoralists who built the stone enclosures, or it may simply have been left where it lay in the fill when the column collapsed and been used opportunistically by the newcomers. An almost identical column drum was recovered at approximately the same level lying on its side at the very edge of the Operation A square, such that most of the drum actually remained, seemingly suspended, in the baulk of the square. Again this drum

was clearly not *in situ*, but it is not clear if it had been moved here by later occupants, had rolled to this spot in the course of surface erosion, or simply lay where it had fallen when the column collapsed.

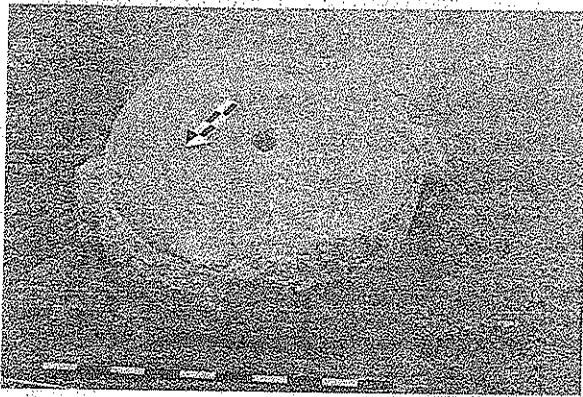


Figure 6. Column drum from Operation B



Figure 7. Column drum suspended in baulk in Operation A

These two column drums, along with three others excavated by Bakhshaliyev in 1988, are very unusual in shape and finish, with two large opposing bosses along their outer edges. These are similar to the lifting bosses of Greek and Achaemenid masonry, but here they appear to have been left intact when the column was in use. The stone surface at the top and bottom of the drums, where superimposed drums would have met, is smoothed, but the sides of the drums, which should have been visible when the columns were intact, are only very roughly trimmed. The drum from Op-

eration B still had hard white plaster adhering to its outer surface, and we assume that a very thick layer of plaster or some other covering such as brick or tile would have obscured the side bosses so that the final effect was a smooth column surface. The bosses themselves may have been left in place after the columns were assembled in order to secure this outer covering better. We can find no good parallel to these unusual column drums. An apparent column capital with similar side bosses but with drafted margins on its top surface was also found in Operation A. The small size of this capital makes it unlikely that it was originally attached to the recovered column drums, unless the columns tapered dramatically towards the top.

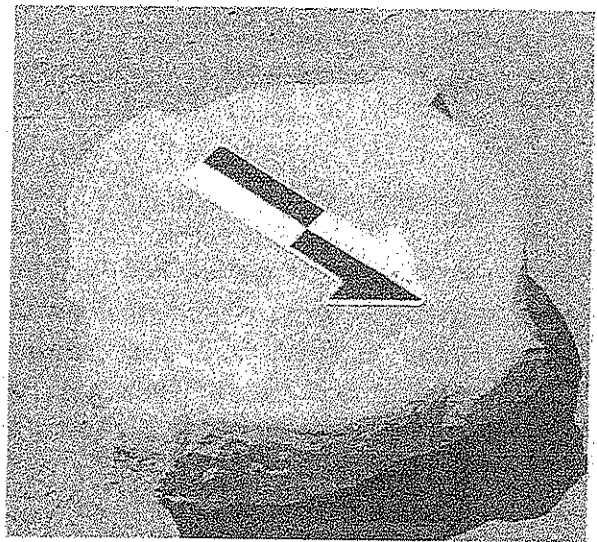


Figure 8. Capital from upper level of Operation A

The stone column capital, base, drums and plinths recovered in seemingly secondary context in the 1988 and 2008 excavations all seem to belong to a monumental building complex, but we have found nothing yet that would give us any indication of the plan or nature of this building or even its chronological or cultural context. We assume that it is connected to the late to post-Achaemenid pottery that was found in small numbers in

the upper fill in Operations A, B and D, and in larger amounts in the surface survey of the site as well as in Operation C, but there is as yet no clear stratigraphic sequence that would allow us to make this connection unequivocally. Further excavation should help to clarify the plan and date of this monumental columned structure.

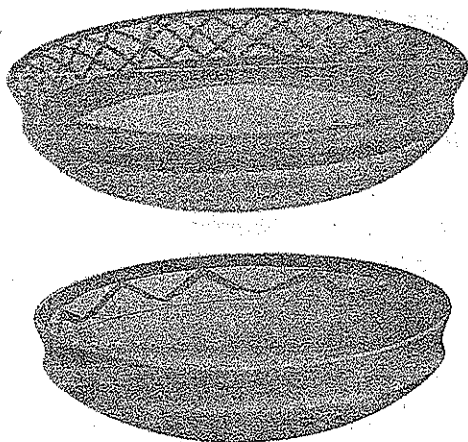


Figure 9. Painted bowls of the late Iron Age from the citadel area

Iron Age occupation in Operation A

In Operation A, below the level of the fallen column drum, a series of pits and hearths were sunk into sloping fill or abandonment/erosion strata. These deposits ran up against the western wall and must have been deposited after that wall had already gone out of use. It was impossible to identify clear floors associated with these features, which were built into sloping exterior surfaces. One very large hearth contained the remains of what appeared to be a sizable feast with numerous charred cooking pots, a whole bowl and a large quantity of animal bone. At the close of the 2008 season excavations in Operation A had not yet reached an occupation level associated with Wall E.

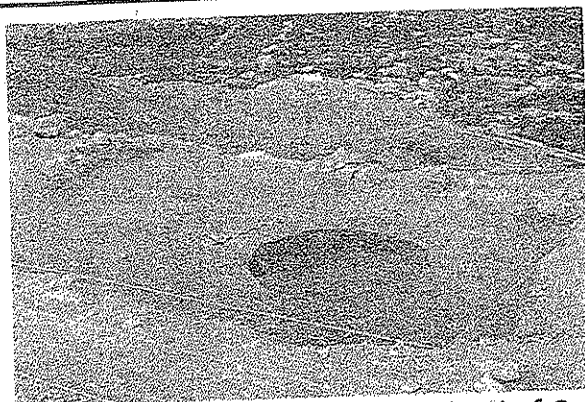


Figure 10. Large hearth in upper level of Operation A

The pottery in these deposits included many sherds of large storage jars with molded decoration similar to those found at Bastam and Ayanis in the 7th century BC. We also recovered a few sherds of very finely polished red-ware with strong links to the “palace-ware” found at these sites. A jar handle with impressed circles and an incised wedge-shaped triangle also provides a link to Urartian-period citadels.

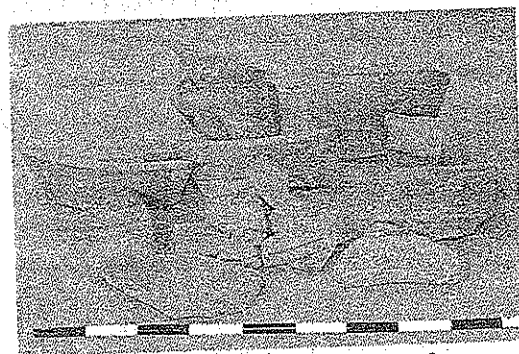


Figure 11. Large storage jar sherds from Operations A and D



Figure 12. Inscribed handle with cuneiform from Operation A

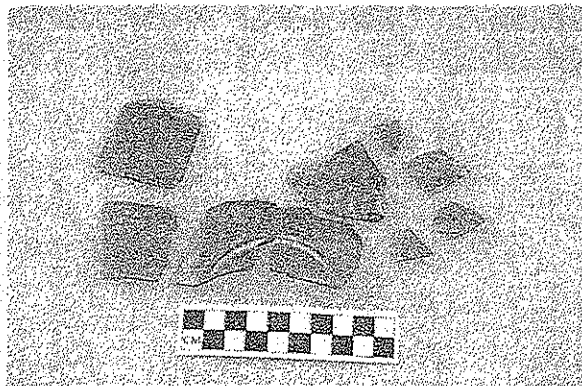


Figure 13. Highly polished palace ware from Operation A

The Deep Sounding of Operation D

Operation D was a 2.5 by 2 meter sounding that was placed between the old and new excavations in order to obtain a complete stratigraphic sequence of the citadel area. In the small area of Operation D the sloping surfaces that were encountered in Operation A were easier to identify and define. Each stratum sloped slightly from north to south and sharply from east to west, following the slope of the hilltop. All clearly ran up against the western wall and were almost certainly deposited after the latter had gone out of use. These deposits were composed of debris that appeared to have eroded from mud-brick architecture or features and washed down the slope to the wall.

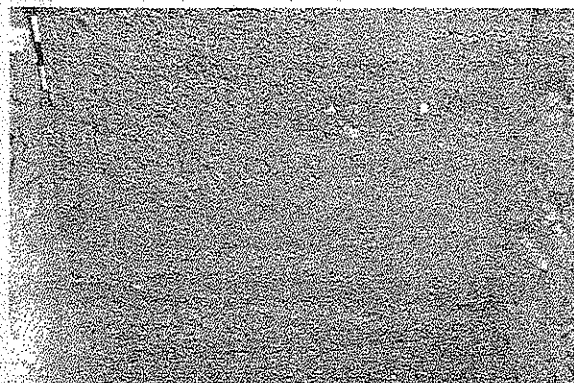


Figure 14. Sloping strata running against western wall in Operation D with clay platform below wall

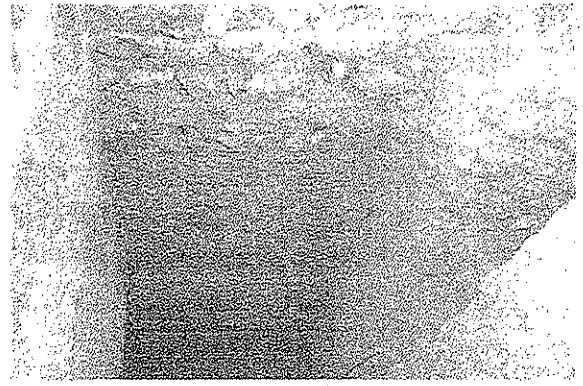


Figure 15. Clay platform and leveling fill below western wall

These erosion layers included many sherds of very large storage jars including one complete flat base and two fragments with very precisely impressed Urartian-period cuneiform signs. Lying below these sloping strata and the bottom of the western wall, was a 70cm thick platform made of clayey fill, topped by a layer of untempered well-levigated clay bricks. The western wall was built on top of this flat level of clay which seems to have served as a foundation to the wall and perhaps to the building as a whole. Some rocks and one large, burnt brick lay on top of this platform, which appears to have served as the floor to this area when it was in use, since no other floor could be detected. Between the platform and the bedrock of the hill was a more than two-meter layer of clayey fill that included lenses of pebbles and larger rocks. Unlike the steeply sloping strata that accumulated over the platform, under the platform the deposits were more or less level or followed the tip lines of deliberate fill. Large sherds of very large storage jars continued to appear in these fill levels, which may have been the remains of leveling operations undertaken before the construction of the western wall. We anticipate finding this platform and leveling fill in Operation A when excavations are continued next season.

Oğlanqala is located atop a 140m high hill (Karatepe, black mountain) which lies near the northern edge of the Sharur Plain, the largest fertile area in Naxçıvan, adjacent to the Arpaçay river. The site lies just south of one of the major passes through the Zangezur mountains. Oğlanqala is thus in a position to control one of the major north-south passes through the Lesser Caucasus, between Lake Urmia and Lake Goyce, as well as one of the largest fertile plains in the southern Caucasus. The main fortification walls at Oğlanqala enclose an area of about 10 hectares, although extra-mural occupation on the mountain covers an additional 2-5 hectares.

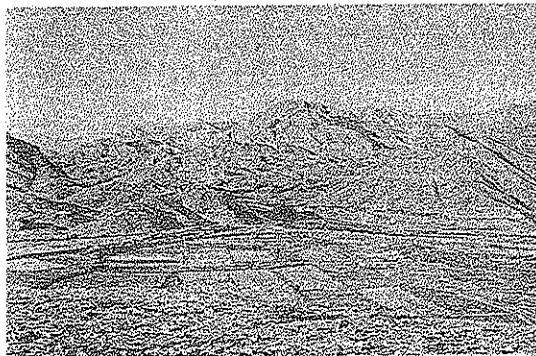


Figure 1: The view to the north from Oğlanqala.

Architectural Survey

In 2008, we focused on mapping and surveying this complex site. Robert Bryant (GSU) used a total station to produce a topographic map of the mountain and to map all of the standing architecture. He also recorded some off-site features, including an Early Iron Age burial mound located immediately northwest of the site. The architecture on the site dates to a number of different periods. In many cases we were able to identify distinctive architectural features to specific periods, based on evidence from excavation. Middle Iron Age fortification walls, late Iron Age house walls and Medieval rubble architecture were all recorded by total station and

incorporated into a GIS. By comparing the standing architecture to the Quickbird imagery of this area, we were able to fill in some of the gaps in the fortification walls.

Oğlanqala 2008: Site Plan

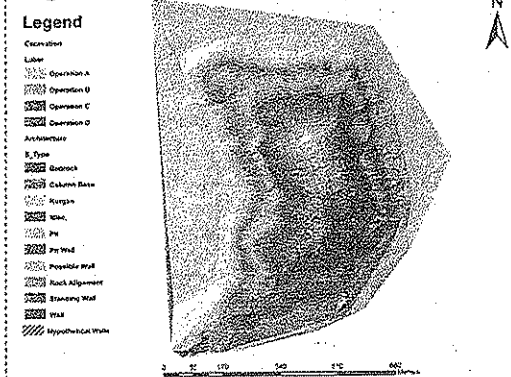


Figure 2. Oğlanqala 2008 Site Survey.

Surface Collection

In addition to this map, Lauren Ristvet undertook a systematic sherd collection of this site. The site was divided up into 22 different major collection units based on standing architecture and topography. Many of these units were further subdivided, particularly if they included dense ancient architectural remains. Five periods were recognized in the course of survey—Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Middle Iron Age, Late Iron Age and Medieval. By mapping where we found pottery from different periods, we were able to see how the size and use of the site had changed over time.



Fig. 3. Survey Collection Units

We found only a couple of painted sherds at Oğlanqala that may belong to the Late Bronze Age. This limited material could suggest that the site was first occupied at the end of the second millennium BC. Similarly, we encountered very little Early Iron Age pottery on the site itself. Gray groovy ware sherds were present on a burial mound northwest of the site; and a few similar sherds were found on top of the citadel. It is possible that the citadel was originally built during this period, but there is no evidence to support this hypothesis yet from the excavated areas.

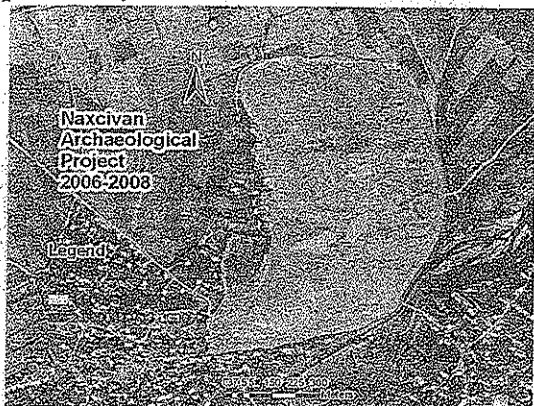


Fig. 4. Early Iron Age pottery (gray groovy ware) at Oğlanqala.

Middle Iron Age pottery, in contrast, was much more common—occurring in nearly every collection unit on the entire site. Most of the larger fortification walls—and the initial construction of the citadel probably dates to this period.



Fig. 5. Fortification walls at the citadel entrance at Oğlanqala.

Late Iron Age pottery was similarly very common across the entire site; it is possible that the extensive areas of private houses recognized in the south and southwest all date to this period, given the almost complete lack of earlier material in this area.

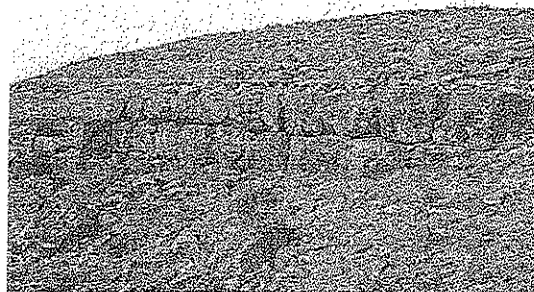


Fig. 6. Outer fortification wall in Oğlanqala Southeast, an area of domestic houses.

Finally, the Medieval occupation was clearly concentrated in the center of the hill and in the citadel area, but little Medieval architecture or pottery was found in the south and southeastern quadrants of the site.

Conclusions

The Oğlanqala GIS allows us to explore some of the diachronic changes in the nature of settlement at this site. We can see the transformation of this area from a fortified citadel, with probably very little non-public architecture in the Middle Iron Age period to a thriving urban settlement in the Late Iron Age that continued to use the massive fortification walls their predecessors had built. In some cases, they shored them up—building new fortification walls using different masonry techniques, for example. At some point, perhaps during the Hellenistic period, the site was probably abandoned for several centuries. Hundreds of years later, people—perhaps a mix of shepherds and semi-sedentary farmers—returned to the site and used it for sheepfolds and graves.