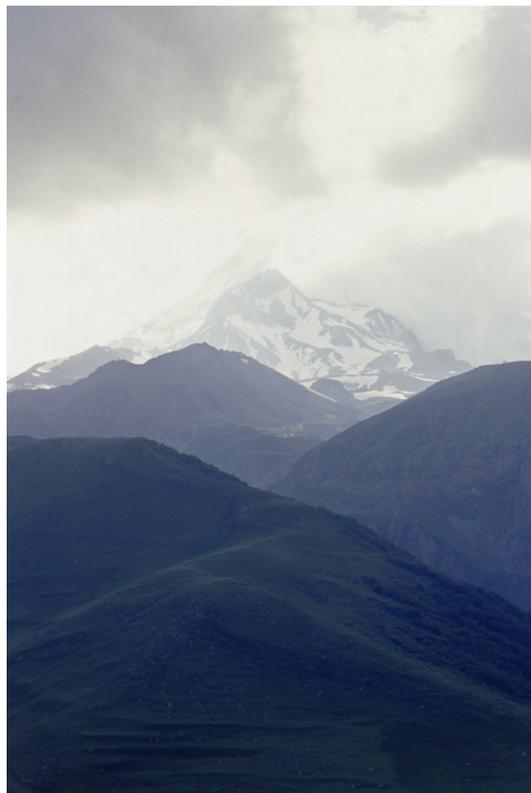


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KULTURGESCHICHTE DES SCHWARZMEERRAUMES 22

AUSTAUSCH UND KULTURKONTAKT
IM SÜDKAUKASUS
UND SEINEN ANGRENZENDEN REGIONEN
IN DER SPÄTBRONZE-/FRÜHEISENZEIT



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SÜDKAUKASUS UND SEINEN ANGRENZENDEN
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The origins of political complexity in Naxçıvan – Excavations and survey at Oğlanqala 2008–2010

Lauren Ristvet – Veli Bakhshaliyev – Hilary Gopnik – Safar G. Ashurov

The nature of political complexity in the Caucasus before the rise of Urartu has become a major research question in Near Eastern archaeology. New evidence documenting the emergence of fortresses beginning in the Late Bronze Age indicates a long prehistory for this type of polity¹. Until recently, however, archeological developments in the Naxçıvan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan have been left out of this discussion. This paper presents Early and Middle Iron Age material from the first three seasons of excavation and survey at the major fortress site of Oğlanqala, Naxçıvan. Situated on the mountain Qaratəpə, Oğlanqala controlled the fertile Şərur Plain. Additionally, the site oversaw the Arpaçay river pass through the Dərələyəz mountains of Armenia, part of a route between Lake Urmia and Lake Sevan. The northern half of the Şərur Plain represents a complex Iron Age landscape, dominated by Oğlanqala, including four other fortresses, discontinuous fortification walls encircling much of the valley, and extensive kurgans and cemeteries lining the boundary between the sown and the steppe (fig. 1, 1). 15 km to the west of Oğlanqala, outside of the plain, lies another 8 ha fortress, Sədərəkqala. Directly across the Araxes river from both Oğlanqala and Sədərəkqala are two more fortresses, Verahram and Sarandj Qal'eh, which are probably contemporary². Oğlanqala's size and evidence for administration here makes it likely that it was the dominant political center in the Middle Iron Age (fig. 1, 2).

The fortification walls of Oğlanqala enclose an area of 12 ha, but there is an additional 2–5 ha area of architecture beyond the walls. Pottery and other archaeological material is scattered over the entire 50 ha mountain and in the plains north and west of the site. Survey focused on documenting archaeological material across the entire hill, with limited off-site investigation. Surface collection provided intriguing evidence for the settlement history of Oğlanqala, with a probable Early Iron Age foundation (period V, 1200–800 BC), construction and use of the citadel during the Middle and Late Iron Age (period IV and III, 800–250 BC), and an extensive town during the Parthian period (period II, 200 BC – 100 AD) (tab.). There is also evidence for Medieval and modern occupations, probably dating to the 13th and 20th centuries, respectively (period Ia and Ib, 1200–1920). Broad horizontal excavations have been undertaken in three areas: in the 4,700 m² northern citadel building, along the northern towers, and in a small domestic area in the southeast, dated to the Parthian period³. Here I will summarize the survey and excavation result for periods V and IV and discuss the implications of this material for our understanding of Urartu and its neighbors.

Survey

In 2008, we used a total station to map Qaratəpə and document standing architecture on this site.

1 Smith et al. 2004; Ristvet et al. 2012a.

2 Kleiss 1973; Kleiss 1974.

3 In addition, a small 2.5 m × 2.5 m sounding documented part of a domestic building in the southwest, just north of the southern round tower. This sounding, and another one located in the citadel, revealed that cultural remains at the site are up to 5.4 m thick.

Fundort	Oğlanqala	Hasanlu (Urmia)	Azerbaijan	Iran	Armenia	Periodization	Historical
1200–800	V	V–IV	Xocalı-Gədəbəy	Iron I–II	Lchashen-Metsamor	Early Iron Age	
800–600	IV	IIIb	Mannaean	Iron III	Urartu	Middle Iron Age	Urartu
330–250	III	IIIa	Albania/ Media Atropatene	Iron IV	Yervandid-Orontid	Late Iron Age	Achaemenid and Hellenistic Armenia/Albania/Media Atropatene
200 BC – 100 AD	II	II	Late Media Atropatene/ Albania/ Arsacid	Arsacid	Late Hellenistic	Classical	Arsacid/Armenia/Media Atropatene/Albania
1200–1400	Ia	I	Medieval	Medieval	Medieval	Medieval	Medieval
1880–1920	Ib		Modern	Modern	Modern	Modern	Modern

Tab. Oğlanqala Periodization and Regional Chronology.

The architectural survey recorded 647 different architectural features, while systematic surface collection yielded 906 diagnostic sherds from 48 areas, defined by topography. Small quantities of period V pottery were found on top of the citadel, particularly along the western fortifications, perhaps as a result of slope wash (fig. 2, 1 [a]). These ceramics are characteristic of the Xocalı-Gədəbəy complex, which is widespread throughout Azerbaijan and well attested in Naxçıvan⁴. They also have clear parallels with Iron I and II assemblages in Iranian Azerbaijan and eastern Anatolia⁵. Preliminary petrographic analysis indicates that this pottery was probably made locally⁶.

Middle Iron Age pottery, in contrast, was more common – occurring in nearly every collection unit on the site, although in greatest quantities in the north and west, near the citadel and fortification walls (fig. 2, 1 [b]). We securely dated 167 sherds to this period, when the fortification walls and the citadel were probably built. The most typical Middle Iron Age pottery we found included red and gray wares, usually burnished, with parallels at Godin Tepe, Ak Kale, and other sites in Iranian Azerbaijan⁷. The lack of domes-

tic architecture from this period in soundings in the south and southeastern areas of the site may indicate that the function of the site was entirely administrative/religious during the period from ca. 800 to 600 BC. Middle Iron Age sherd scatters found in the fields north and west of Oğlanqala may derive from scattered settlements around the site or from off-site activities. When A. Alekperov first surveyed the region in the 1930s, there were clear traces of a town at the foot of the hill⁸. It is certainly possible that this is a lower town, which intensive agriculture has obscured⁹.

Excavations

Citadel

Clarifying the plan of the northern administrative building in the Oğlanqala citadel was the major focus of excavation from 2008–2010 (fig. 2, 2). An area of 1,500 m² was opened during these three seasons, while the adjacent 300 m² exposed in 1988–1989 was cleaned and planned as well¹⁰. Radiocarbon determinations from charcoal associated with the foundations of the northern outer wall and the courtyard walls date the construc-

4 Асланов – Кашкай 1991; Вахшалиев 2002, 7–123.

5 For the definitive account of Early Iron Age I and II pottery in Iran, s. Young 1965. For similar material from the Muş Plain of eastern Turkey, s. Sagona 1999.

6 S. Fishman, Technological Change in Political Context: A Petrographic Analysis of Oğlanqala Ceramics. Presented at ASOR, Chicago, 17 November 2012.

7 Gopnik 2009, 77–80; Kroll 1984, 59.

8 Алекперов 1960; Алекперов 1937, 255 no. 1.

9 A cursory walking survey of the fields north and east of Oğlanqala was performed in 2009 under the direction of K. Nicoll and B. Parker of the University of Utah, a more intensive survey of this area was undertaken in 2012, directed by E. Hammer.

10 Novruzlu – Вахшалиев 1993; Бахшалиев 1994.

tion of this building to around 800 BC¹¹. Roughly shaped limestone blocks were laid on top of the uneven bedrock of the mountain to form the outer surfaces of foundation walls. These walls were 1.7–2.5 m thick and had a rubble core, while the limestone blocks ranged in size from 35–90 cm² (fig. 3, 1). No effort was made to carve the bedrock, unlike in contemporary Urartian constructions. Instead, blocks were placed either directly atop the bedrock, on a concrete surface (made of limestone and pebbles), or on a floor of smaller stones that smoothed out the uneven bedrock. Above these foundations, a mudbrick superstructure would have formed the actual walls of the palace. Purple, yellow, red, and white plaster fragments were found in a layer of debris underlying the later phase of the palace. The plaster had most likely fallen from the walls, which were probably painted with vivid designs, as in contemporary sites including Erebuni, Karmir Blur and Ayanis¹². The excavated area was dominated by a large square courtyard, 1,122 m², which was probably the main ceremonial space in this public building (fig. 3, 2). East of the courtyard, narrow rooms may have served as storage depots or as offices. On the western and southern sides of the courtyard we found fragments of large pithoi, which had diameters of up to a meter, and may be compared with the enormous pithoi from Ayanis and Bastam¹³. Four of these fragments were inscribed with cuneiform signs, while an additional hieroglyphic inscription was found on the handle of an imported jar (fig. 4, 1). We can reconstruct numbers as well as the common signs »a-q[ar]« and »ru«, which likely came from the words *aqar-qi* and *terusi*, two Urartian volume measurements. In period IV, this building probably stored large quantities of grain, wine and other agricultural products, similar to contemporary administrative buildings in Urartu and Assyria. Preliminary analysis of the animal bones found in period IV levels reveals that inhabitants of the site relied upon sheep and goat, with little evidence of other species, perhaps reflecting formal provisioning, consistent with a palace economy¹⁴.

Northern towers

In 2010 we opened a 300 m² excavation area at the two round northwestern towers and one of the square buttresses in order to investigate these features (fig. 4, 2). In addition, we placed three soundings in front of both round towers and the square buttress in order to investigate their foundations and retrieve radiocarbon samples to date their initial construction. The two round towers have a diameter of 14 m. Both towers are built of large, well-hewn stones that have been shaped to fit together, and are preserved up to 2 m high (fig. 4, 3). The outer walls of the towers were built of two rows of large stones, with a rubble core, 2–3 m thick. These large stones were laid on bedrock that showed signs of burning. Within the tower, several alternate layers of large and medium stones were used as fill. A layer of large mudbricks, 40 cm × 40 cm × 20 cm square was laid on top of these stones, although this surface had eroded in most places. It is likely that there was once an additional mudbrick superstructure, but no sign of this could be detected. The buttress was built in a similar manner and was about half of the size of the towers, measuring 7 m × 4 m. Once again, two rows of large stones, 2 m wide, were used as the outer wall of the buttress. Between these walls, layers of medium and large stones provided a foundation for a mudbrick superstructure. The pottery found mixed into the fill of the towers and the buttresses generally dates to period V, while radiocarbon dates retrieved from this area indicate an early period IV date for the construction of the wall.

Survey of the northern side of Oğlanqala indicates that this entire area between the towers and the citadel was terraced with mudbricks, rubble fill, and retaining walls. Together with the fortification walls, this formed a single massive construction, probably dating to ca. 800 BC¹⁵. The terraced area covered at least 78 m × 164 m, while the difference in elevation from the outer wall of the citadel to the fortification wall was 35 m. The labor involved in terracing this area, which comprises 2.42 ha and included the quarrying and working of large quantities of limestone and the construction and delivery of tens of thousands of mudbricks was immense. It would have required the labor of hundreds of individuals. The monu-

¹¹ Ristvet et al. 2012a, tab. 2.

¹² Пиотровский 1950; Çilingiroğlu – Salvini 2001; Smith 2003, 248.

¹³ Kozbe et al. 2001, 92

¹⁴ Ristvet et al. 2012a, 354.

¹⁵ Ristvet et al. 2012b, 42 f.

mentality of this building project emphasizes the strength of Oğlanqala's Period IV leaders. The imposing construction itself displays political power, but so does the ability to assemble a workforce to build and maintain it.

Conclusion

Data retrieved from survey and excavations at Oğlanqala in 2008 and 2009 provide new evidence for the organization of a small Iron Age polity. The local character of the material, which provides evidence for considerable autonomy despite contact with large empires, provides a new perspective on political developments in the Southern Caucasus.

It is likely that the site was founded as a fortress in the Early Iron Age. The amount of gray ware at the northern fortifications may indicate that this was still the dominant type of pottery used during the construction of this feature, despite the radiocarbon dates which are similar to the period IV determinations from the citadel. Moreover, these walls follow the natural topography of the hill, like other Early Iron Age fortresses and unlike Urartian examples¹⁶. Ceramic evidence and radiocarbon dates indicate that the round towers were constructed at the same time as the wall, but they have no parallels in either Early Iron Age or Urartian sites.

Our earliest evidence for construction at the citadel dates to the Middle Iron Age, the same period as the 9th century expansion of Urartu from its center near Lake Van to Iranian Azerbaijan and Armenia to the east and the Euphrates to the west. It is still uncertain whether Oğlanqala was incorporated into Urartu, and, if so, when this may have happened. Although there is some evidence of Urartian influence, in general, Oğlanqala's pottery and architecture have few parallels with Urartian material culture. Many Urartian architectural features – ashlar masonry, regular buttressing, wall footings, and staircases carved from bedrock are absent. The organization of space on the citadel – where there are probably at least three period IV administrative buildings – also differs from the excavated Urartian centers in the southern Caucasus, which are all characterized by a large, single administrative

building¹⁷. The small quantity of Urartian pottery at Oğlanqala, where there is just a handful of exports, also differs from the situation in most Urartian administrative centers. Finally, there is only one Urartian rock inscription known from Naxçıvan, a campaign inscription of Išpuini and Menua¹⁸. Although other inscriptions may await discovery, their rarity in this region and the absence of building inscriptions may suggest that the territory was never fully incorporated into Urartu.

The best parallels for Naxçıvan are other areas located on or immediately beyond Urartu's frontier, particularly Tsovinar and Horom¹⁹. Tsovinar is an early Iron Age fortress that was later conquered by Urartu. Like Oğlanqala, the fortifications at Tsovinar were irregularly buttressed, and its walls were built of unworked stones. In its dimensions, construction techniques, and overall plan, Tsovinar resembles pre-Urartian sites in the region, not Urartian centres²⁰. Similarly, Horom, a fortress on the Shirak Plain, was a very large outpost beyond the typical area of Urartian control. The Urartian fortress at Horom also combined local and Urartian features²¹. Its fortifications, for example, follow the natural terrain of the hill, although they include typical Urartian buttresses, while only 1 % of the ceramic assemblage is Urartian²². Survey during the 1970s in the province of East Azerbaijan in Iran also established the presence of several fortifications with little Urartian pottery or architecture, probably the centers of small polities along Urartu's borders²³. In these three areas on the northern and eastern borders of Urartu, we thus have evidence for considerable independence. These sites contrast clearly with those known from Van, the Ararat Plain, and west of Urmia, all of which bear an Urartian stamp.

The lack of these typically Urartian features is significant because, unlike many polities, Urartu had a »state assemblage«, a distinctive combina-

17 As Erebuni, Argishtihinili, and Karmir Blur, Smith 1999, 63–70; Smith 2003.

18 Hmayakan et al. 1996; Salvini 1998. Another very badly eroded cliff inscription is located in the exclave at Fərhat Evi, Bakhshaliyev – Marro 2009, 58.

19 Biscione et al. 2002.

20 Sanamyan 2002.

21 Badaljan et al. 1993; Badaljan et al. 1994; Kohl – Kroll 1999.

22 Smith 1999.

23 Kroll 1984.

16 Smith 1998.

tion of architectural features, pottery, inscriptions, and luxury metalwork²⁴. The uniformity of the fortresses – imperial centers that were founded *ex novo* and did not survive the empire's fall – was an ideological strategy allowing Urartu to create and maintain political unity²⁵. Whether or not Oğlanqala was ever officially incorporated into Urartu, the monumental remains of this site and its associated landscape challenge most reconstructions of this empire. If Oğlanqala was never subordinated to Urartu but continued to exist as the capital of a small polity based on the Şərur Plain into the eighth or even early 7th century BC, then we have to envision the political landscape of the Iron Age Caucasus as a collection of separate polities rather than as a uniform staging ground for empire. In this case, Oğlanqala may have been a stronghold of a tribal confederation, an example of secondary state formation²⁶. If Oğlanqala was conquered, on the other hand, the preponderance of local features indicate that Urartu's integration policies along its borders were more fluid than usually believed and suggest that this area maintained some independence despite conquest. In either case, understanding Early Iron Age political practices in the region is critical to answering question about the projection of power during the later 1st millennium BC.

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²⁴ Zimansky 1995; Smith 2003.

²⁵ Zimansky 1995, 111.

²⁶ Diakanov 1984; Smith 2005; Ristvet et al. 2012a; Ristvet et al. 2012b.

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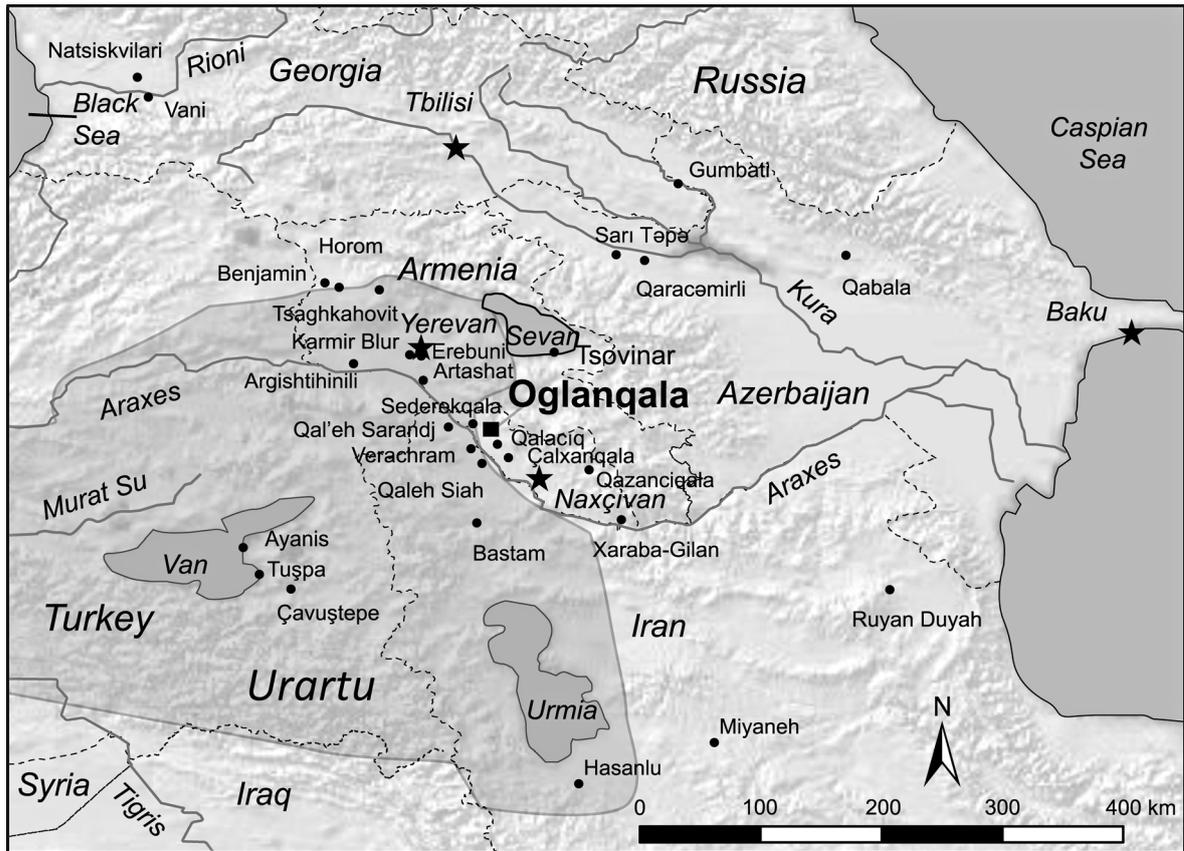
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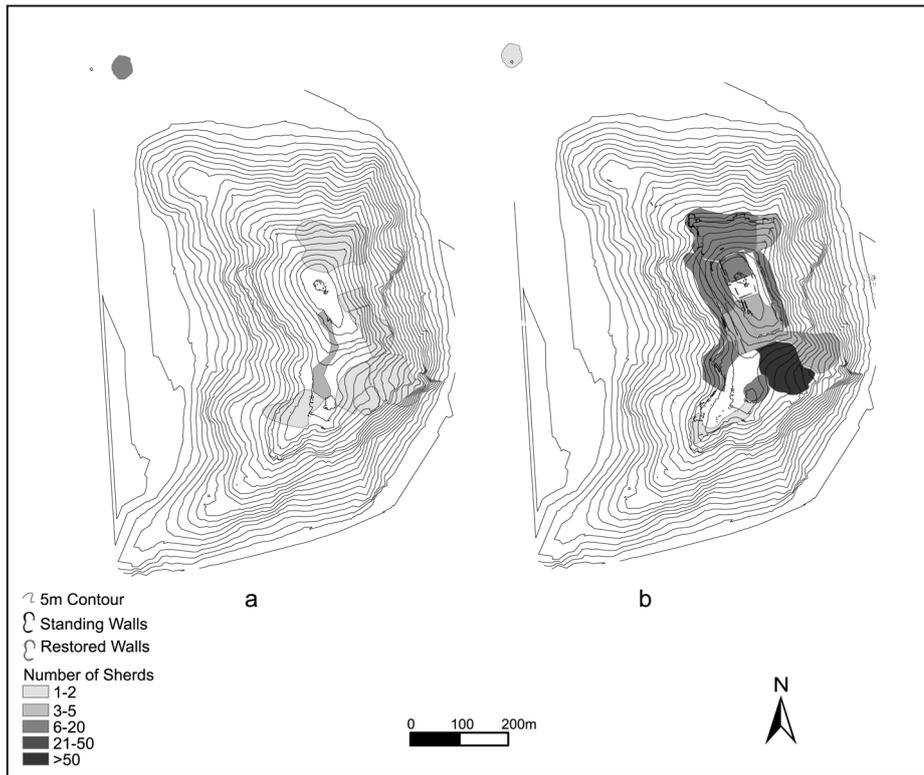


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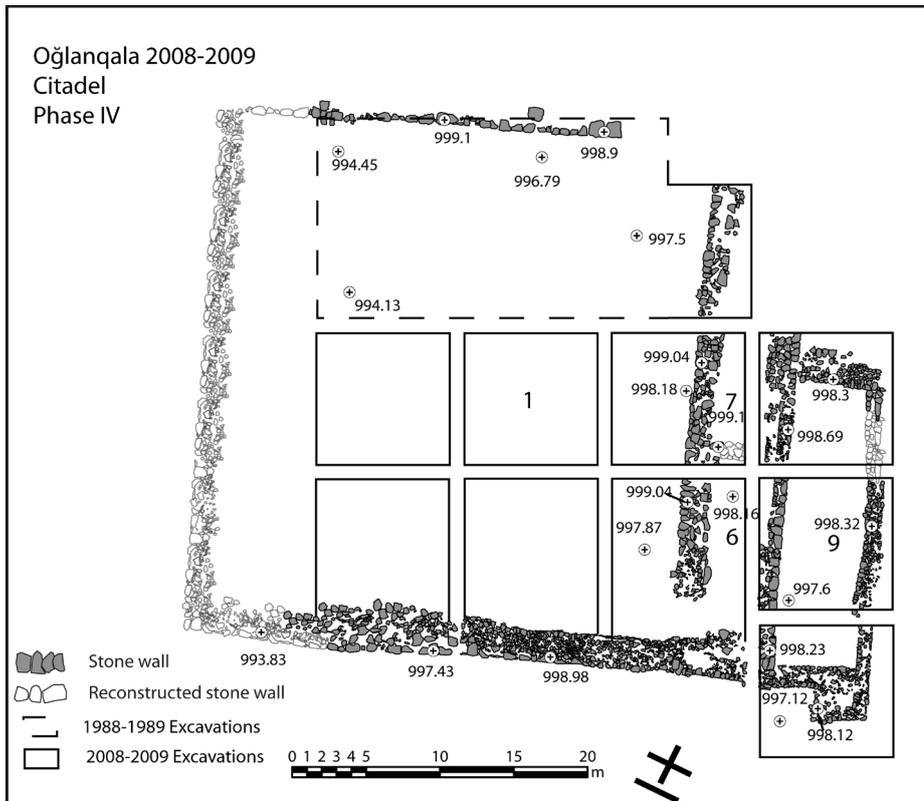


2

Fig. 1 1 Map of the Southern Caucasus with sites mentioned in the text; 2 The citadel at Oğlanqala during excavation in 2009.



1



2

Fig. 2 1 Oğlanqala site survey (period V [a]; period IV [b]); 2 Plan of Period IV administrative building.



1

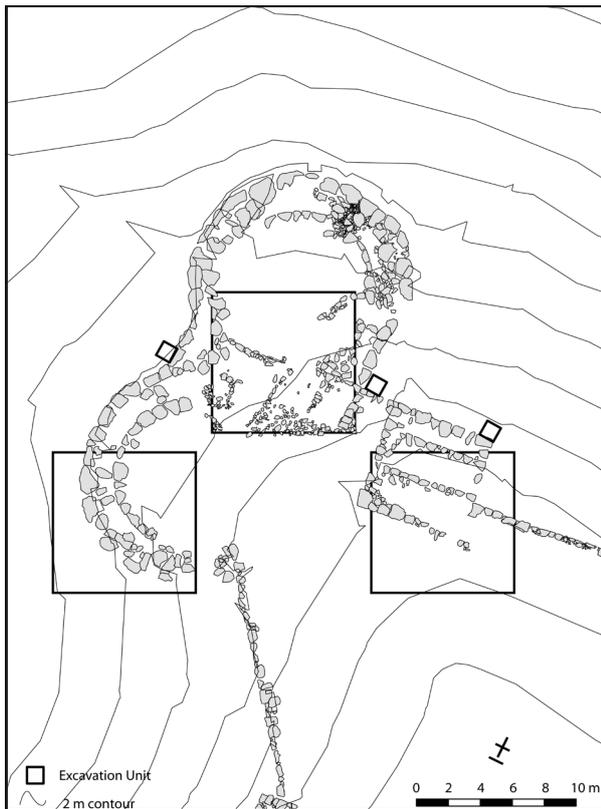


2

Fig. 3 1 West wall of palace; 2 The period IV courtyard.



1



2



3

Fig. 4 1 Cuneiform inscription on period IV sherds; 2 Plan of the northern towers; 3 The northern towers.