

Old Data and New Investigations The Urartian and Orontid Fortress of Körzüt in Muradiye Plain, Turkey

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Abstract This article presents an important archaeological site located on the north-eastern shore of Lake Van, Turkey. The site was one of the first to be associated with the kingdom of Urartu, thanks to the grandeur of its characteristic architecture and the pottery visible on the surface. Körzüt is composed of a vast fortified complex, within which there were certainly a temple, palatine structures, storage rooms, a settlement, and a necropolis. Presumably contemporary hydraulic works have been documented near the site. Körzüt has been the subject of numerous illegal excavations in past and present times, which over the years have brought to light a considerable amount of epigraphic material. This has allowed us to attribute the construction of the complex to King Minua, between the end of the ninth and the beginning of the eighth century BCE. Numerous recent illegal excavations on the site have led to emergency excavations. These investigations have led to the discovery of important remains, which are discussed and contextualised in this paper, together with what was already known in terms of epigraphic and architectural evidence. Furthermore, Körzüt can be added to the list of settlements that were also used in the post-Urartian era in the years in which the Armenian Highlands was dominated by the Orontid dynasty.

Keywords Körzüt fortress. Cuneiform Inscriptions. Urartu. Orontid. Turkey.

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1 Introduction

This article discusses an important archaeological site already known in the literature, whose architectural, epigraphic and pottery evidence has allowed it to be reliably dated to the era of the kingdom of Urartu. It is located on the north-eastern shore of Lake Van in Turkey and is locally known as Körzüt Kalesi,¹ literally the Körzüt fortress.² The site is one of the first to have been identified as Urartian thanks to the spectacular nature of its military architecture and the finds collected on the surface. The site is located at the southern end of the Muradiye/Berkri plain, approximately 3 km north of the village of Uluşar, in the Muradiye district of Van province in eastern Turkey [fig. 1]. The Muradiye plain is a fertile area of approximately 9100 hectares, irrigated by the River Bendimahı (Sinclair 1987, 264). In ancient times the plain must have been much more extensive than it currently appears. This is due to the rise in the water levels of the lake which has occurred in recent centuries and which has had considerable effects on the north-eastern area of the current lake, especially that which corresponds to the Muradiye plain.³ The toponym Körzüt represents an alteration of the original Armenian name of the village of Uluşar, namely Gortsot, which over time changed to Kortsod/Kordzot/Körzkürt until it became the currently employed toponym. Recently it has been proposed that the name of the site in Kurdish was Pértak (Işık, Genç 2021, 4). In all eras this has been an important transit area that connected the eastern shore of Lake Van with the northern shore and was located on the road that gave access to the Ararat depression.⁴ This contribution was made possible by the recent advancement of knowledge of the site resulting from new emergency excavations, which have confirmed certain theses proposed in the past and brought to light completely new aspects of the site.

The author would like to express his gratitude to Mirjo Salvini, with whom he had the honour of visiting the site and the Van region on multiple occasions. He also extends his thanks to Bülent Genç and Kenan Işık, with whom he engaged in extensive discussions about the site and Urartological matters related to Van during his visits. Additionally, he is grateful to Marie-Claude Trémouille for her valuable suggestions and countless conversations on the topics addressed in this text. For an introduction to the remains of the site, cf. Dan, Vitolo 2016a, parts of which are summarized here, along with a review and update of the information and sources, primarily based on recent excavations at the site. Unless otherwise noted, all images are by the author.

- 1 Coordinates: 38°54'48.82"N 43°44'40.94"E; altitude: 1759 metres a.s.l.
- 2 Other local variants of the site's name are Arapzengi/Arab-ı Zengi and Zengibar Kalesi (Burney 1957, 47; Tarhan, Sevin 1976-7, 276).
- 3 On the changes of the water level in Lake Van, cf. Trémouille, Dan 2022.
- 4 For a preliminary study of travel routes in this area during the Urartian period, cf. Gökçe, Kuvanc, Genç 2021.

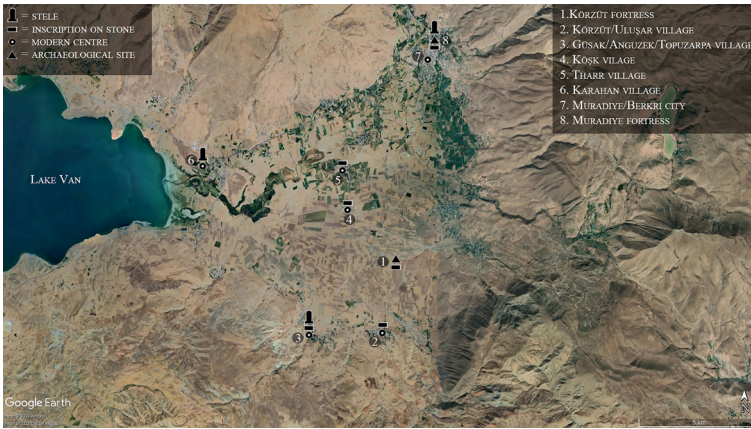


Figure 1 Map of the Muradiye district in Van region, with the sites and inscriptions referred to in the text (satellite picture from Google Earth)

2 History of Studies and Investigations

The oldest mention of the discovery of Urartian inscriptions connected to the Körzüt site and surrounding area date to 1892, and refer to the scientific mission conducted by Müller-Simonis and Hyvernats between 1888 and 1889 (1892). In fact, the volume contains a catalogue of cuneiform inscriptions (541-66) divided in two sections, the first devoted to the inscriptions already known (I-LXVIII) and the second to unpublished specimens (I-XXX), for a total of 98 epigraphs. Among these, Hyvernats reports some inscriptions from Khorzot/Kordzot (Körzüt: XVIII, XX) and Guzek (Güşak: XIX) (564), some of which were not seen directly by the scholar. In the same period Belck reported the discovery of four inscriptions from Güşack (Güşak), two from the village church (one of 32 lines and one of ten),⁵ and another two from other churches, not seen directly by him (Belck, Lehmann 1892a, 125). Belck mentioned the Körzüt fortress in 1891, associating it with Urartu (1892b, 480), but it was only in 1956 that it entered the scientific literature thanks to Burney, who visited it during his pioneering reconnaissance around Lake Van, when a first schematic plan of the site was created [fig. 2A].⁶ The site was described by Burney in these words: “this is the most impressive of the fortresses visited, because part of the wall still stands 8 metres high on the outside” (1957, 37,

⁵ Probably is CTU A 5-36.

⁶ This plan has an incorrect orientation, being rotated by approximately 90°.

47-8, fig. 6, pls 5b-c.; cf. Burney, Lawson 1960, 177; Burney 1998, 143, 146, 149-50, fig. 14.1).⁷ During these surveys, approximately 3,000 potsherds were collected, of which 71 came from Körzüt itself and were studied and published a few years later by Russell (1980, 50, pl. 6). The site was later reinvestigated by Tarhan and Sevin, who produced a more accurate plan of it [fig. 2B],⁸ as part of the reconnaissance activities directed by Afif Erzen in eastern Turkey, which took place in 1969 and 1972-3 (Tarhan, Sevin 1976-7, 277, pl. 1). Also, part of the expedition was philologist Dinçol, who published some cuneiform inscriptions from the site and its surroundings (1976). The site was subsequently listed as number 19 in the catalogue of Urartian sites published by Kleiss and Hauptmann (1976, 11). Other inscriptions were published by Başgelen and Payne in 1985 and 2009 (Başgelen 1985, 17, fig. 6; Başgelen, Payne 2009). In 2008, Körzüt was visited again as part of research activities conducted in the region by Özfırat (2010, 227-8).⁹ The author of this contribution visited the site twice, on 7 August 2008 and 1 August 2010, as part of the research activities concerning Urartian inscriptions in eastern Turkey, directed by Salvini on behalf of the Institute for the Studies of the Aegean and Near Eastern Civilisations of the National Research Council (ICEVO-CNR). In 2008, and subsequently in 2018, Salvini (2008; 2018) republished all the epigraphs known from the site and its surroundings up to that point, which formed the *Corpus dei Testi Urartei* – henceforth CTU. In 2016 the first overall study of the site was published (Dan, Vitolo 2016a), followed a few years later by a second short descriptive contribution by Danışmaz (2020, 84-6). The continuation of illegal excavations on the site finally led to rescue excavations being carried out in 2016 under the supervision of the Directorate of the Van Museum.¹⁰ Illegal excavations had in fact exposed the remains of the tower temple of Minua many years ago, which led to the reuse of the temple stones, including the inscribed ones found in numerous surrounding villages. Furthermore, these illegal excavations brought to light the remains of a palace building with multiple rabbits on the facade and a large storage room. These new investigations are discussed in a specific section of this contribution. In 2017, during a survey in these territories a new inscription of Minua was discovered in the village of Gusak/Topuzarpa/Anguzek.¹¹ This inscription too originally came from the Körzüt

⁷ Site no. 212 among those registered by Burney.

⁸ This plan also has an incorrect orientation: the fortress is rotated by almost 90° compared to its correct position.

⁹ Site inventory number N71/13.

¹⁰ On the results of these excavations, cf. Kuvanç, Işık, Genç 2020 and Uslu 2021.

¹¹ On the field activities in general, cf. Gökçe, Kuvanç, Genç 2021; on the new inscription, cf. Işık, Genç 2021.

fortress. In 2023, new emergency excavations were conducted by the Directorate of the Van Museum, uncovering the tower-temple from which the epigraphs dispersed around the site came, and leading to the discovery of three new inscribed blocks still *in situ*.

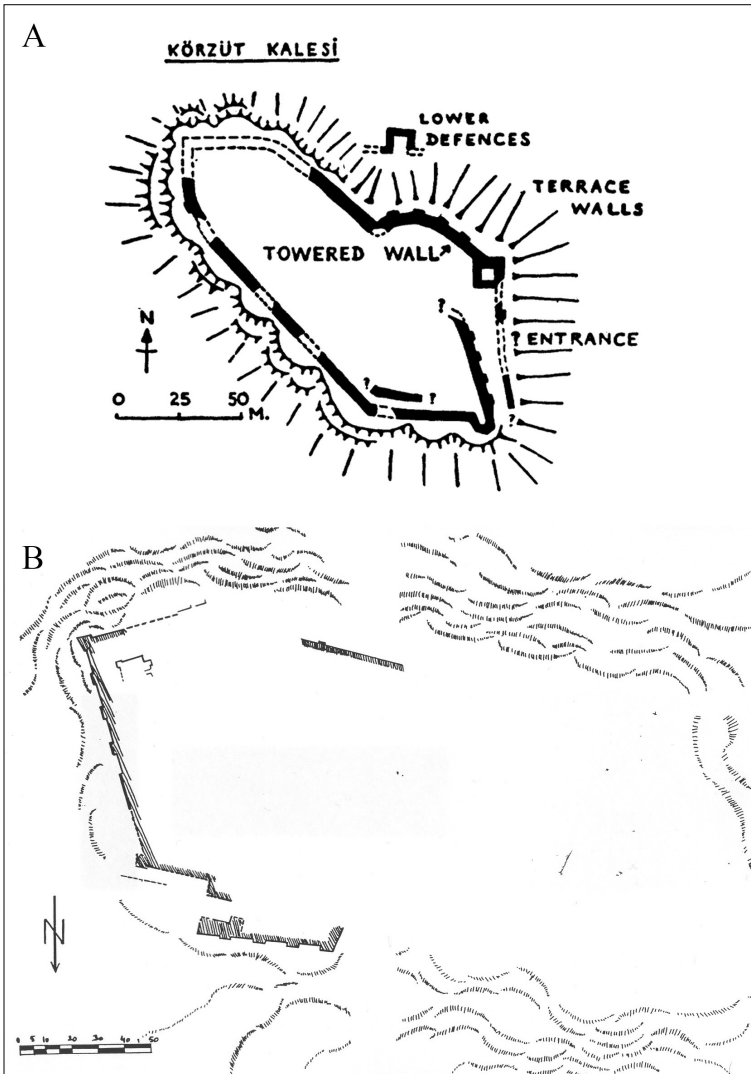


Figure 2 Plans of the Körzüt site (A: from Burney 1957: fig. 6; B: from Tarhan, Sevin 1976-7, pl. 1).

3 Inscriptions of Minua in the Muradiye Area

Over the years, numerous fragments of Urartian cuneiform inscriptions have been identified in the area of the Muradiye plain, in particular in the surroundings of the Körzüt site [figs 1, 3]. All the inscriptions date to the reign of Minua, son of Išpuini (r. 810-785/0 BCE),¹² i.e. the end of the ninth and the beginning of the eighth century BCE. At the current state of research, the reign of Minua is the period in which the greatest number of inscriptions on stone and rock were produced. Overall, 26 inscriptions pertaining to building blocks or stelae come from Körzüt area, excluding the Karahan stelae from this count. The greatest number of epigraphs – ten – were found in the village of Körzüt/Uluşar, which is the closest to the site. Seven inscriptions come from the village of Güşak/Anguzek/Topuzarpa. Six equally distributed epigraphs come from the villages of Berkri/Muradiye and Köşk [fig. 3], while one comes from the village of Tharr. The only three inscriptions from the Körzüt site were discovered in 2023 following emergency excavations conducted on the site. The excavations and epigraphs discovered on this occasion are discussed in a specific section of this paper. Most of these inscriptions probably came from the Körzüt fortress, although some almost certainly came from other known Urartian sites in the area, i.e. epigraphs not directly associated with the tower-temple of Körzüt, but pertinent to a second structure which perhaps was located at the site known as Muradiye fortress (Burney 1957, 48; Burney, Lawson 1960, 183-5; Burney, Lang 1971, 139). The most conspicuous group of epigraphs (CTU A 5-2 A-E), which contained most of what can be reconstructed from the annalistic texts of King Minua, must originally have been located on the facades of some temple structures, one of which was certainly built inside the Körzüt fortress.¹³

¹² The chronological references of the kings of Urartu are taken from Salvini 2008, 23; 2018, 18.

¹³ The reconstruction of the original positioning of the stones was published for the first time by Dinçol (1976); subsequently, Salvini presented a new version of the layout of the blocks (1980), recently revised (2008, 184-5). The updated graphic rendering of the temple façade proposed in this article, contained in the third volume of the CTU, is the work of the present author.



Figure 3 Uartian inscriptions and stones from the tower-temple of Körzüt, reused in the corners of modern houses in the Köşk village

Table 1 Uartian inscription of king Minua, son of Išpuini, from the area of Muradiye plain.¹⁴ In the following table the inscriptions are ordered on the basis of their codes in the CTU. For the reconstruction of the position of the texts on the façade of the Körzüt temple-tower, cf. [fig. 16]

CTU Code	Concordance	Findspot and context	Place of conservation	Original location	Bibliography
A 5-2A Stone-1	/	Körzüt village	Van Museum	Körzüt left side tower-temple	Dinçol 1976 (Stone-1)
A 5-2A Stone-2	/	Körzüt village	Walled in a house	Körzüt left side tower-temple	Dinçol 1976 (Stone-2)
A 5-2A Stone-3	/	Körzüt village	Walled in a house	Körzüt left side tower-temple	Dinçol 1976 (Stone-3)
A 5-2A Stone-4	/	Körzüt village	Walled in a house	Körzüt left side tower-temple	Dinçol 1976 (Stone-4)
A 5-2A Stone-5	/	Körzüt village	Walled in a house	Körzüt left side tower-temple	Dinçol 1976 (Stone-5)
A 5-2A Stone-6	/	Körzüt village?	VANTAM Research Center	Körzüt left side tower-temple	/
A 5-2A Stone-7	/	Körzüt village	Van Museum	Körzüt left side tower-temple	Dinçol 1976 (Stone-6)

¹⁴ The many stelae from Karahan are not included in this list because they come from an open-air sanctuary that is not directly connected to the site discussed in the text.

CTU Code	Concordance	Findspot and context	Place of conservation	Original location	Bibliography
A 5-2B Stone-1	CICH 25, UKN 34, Hchl 18b, KUKN 51	Berkri altar in church	Istanbul Archaeological Museum	Körzüt right side tower-temple	/
A 5-2B Stone-2	/	Köşk village	Walled in a house	Körzüt right side tower-temple	Dinçol 1976 (Stone-7)
A 5-2B Stone-3	/	Köşk village	Walled in a house	Körzüt right side tower-temple	Dinçol 1976 (Stone-8)
A 5-2B Stone-4	/	Köşk village	Walled in a house	Körzüt right side tower-temple	Dinçol 1976 (Stone-9)
A 5-2C Stone	CICH 30, UKN 38, Hchl 20, KUKN 55	Tharr village	Istanbul Archaeological Museum	Körzüt right side tower-temple	/
A 5-2C Stone	/	Körzüt village	Walled in a house	tower-temple	/
A 5-2D Stone	CICH 23, UKN 32, Hchl 19a, KUKN 49	Güşak altar in new church	Van Museum	tower-temple	/
A 5-2D Stone	CICH 24, UKN 33, Hchl 19b, KUKN 50	Güşak altar in old church	Unknown	tower-temple	/
A 5-2E Stone	CICH 26, UKN 35, Hchl 18a, KUKN 52	Berkri (Dzorovank)	Unknown	Körzüt right side tower-temple	Dinçol, Kavaklı 1978 (Muradiye-1)
A 5-16 Stele	CICH 47, UKN 57, Hchl 32, KUKN 74	Berkri	Unknown	Körzüt?	/
A 5-33 Stele	CICH 56, UKN 65, Hchl 41, KUKN 82	Güşak church	Van Museum	Körzüt?	/
A 5-35 Stone	CICH 58, UKN 67, Hchl 42, KUKN 84	Körzüt in a mill	Unknown	Körzüt?	/
A 5-36 Stone	CICH 70, UKN 66, Hchl 58, KUKN 83	Güşak in new church	Unknown	Körzüt?	/
A 5-36 Stone	/	Körzüt	Unknown	Körzüt?	Başgelen 1985, 17; Başgelen, Payne 2009
A 5-100 Stone	/	Körzüt village	Unknown	Körzüt?	Başgelen, Payne 2009
/	/	Güşak in church	Van Museum	Körzüt?	Işık, Genç 2021
/	CICH 173 a-b, Hchl Inc. 6	Güşak	Berlin	/	Unpublished
/	CICH 173 a-b, Hchl Inc. 6	Güşak	Berlin	/	Unpublished

CTU Code	Concordance	Findspot and context	Place of conservation	Original location	Bibliography
/	/	Körzüt	In situ	Körzüt tower-temple	Unpublished (discovered in 2023)
/	/	Körzüt	In situ	Körzüt tower-temple	Unpublished (discovered in 2023)
/	/	Körzüt	In situ	Körzüt tower-temple	Unpublished (discovered in 2023)

The main text reported information about an expedition of the Urartian army north of the River Araxes:

[Through the protection of the god Իմուա, son of Իժուանի, says: when I lay [lit. gathered/compiled] the foundation of the gate of the god Իմուա, when I built the gate of the god Իմուա, I prost[rated] before the god Իմուա. I pr[ayed] to the god Իմուա. I ca[me] to the [la]nd [of the Erkuahı]; I went to war [against the tribe Erkuahı, I conquered the city Luḫıuni of the land of the [Er]kuahi, I devastated the land Etiuni. Minua, [son of] of Իժուանի, says: the city Lu[ḫı]uni, ci[ty] of the royalty of the Erk[ua]hi, [which nobody had (ever) besieged (before)], the god Իմուա gave it to Minua, son of Իժուանի. He took Luḫıuni [and] pu[t the land] Etiuni under tri[bu]te. 50 myr[iad + x thousand and x hundreds of men and women, peo]ple [per year]; some I killed, some I deported alive. 1,733 horses, 7,616 oxen, 15,320 sheep arrived from there to the ki[ng], save for what the soldiers [plundered when I occupied? the land]. Through the protection [of the god Իմուա, son of Իժուանի, says: the harem(?) of the city Դոսթա [where] no king before[?] had brought so many women, inde[ed] Minua], son of Իժուանի, [from] the city Luḫıuni [did it]. [A group(?) of women and men] from the city Դոսթա [are *gurdari* of the women in the city Aelia of the land Diruni; *gurdari* city 'Altuquia of the land Զիադի. Through the greatness of the god Իմուա] I am Minua, son of [Իժուանի, strong king, [great king, king of the Bia lands, lord] of Դոսթա-City. (CTU A 5-2 A-F)¹⁵

Of particular interest is the beginning of the text, in which King Minua speaks of the construction of the temple structure dedicated to the god Իմուա, the greatest divinity of the vast Urartian pantheon, which was located right inside the site of Körzüt and which is discussed below. Another erratic inscription by King Minua might refer to the same temple structure, i.e. a stele found walled up in a private

¹⁵ The English translation of CTU A 5-33, which has some parts that are difficult to interpret, especially in the final lines, is taken from <http://oracc.org/ecut/Q006900/>.

building in the village of Güşak (CTU A 5-33), once disappeared but recently rediscovered (Işık, Genç 2021, 4-5), which provides the possible name of the fortress, not present in the previous texts:

For the god Țaldi, the [or, resp., his] Lord, Minua, son of Işpuini, erected this stele. When he built a gate of the god Țaldi he built [also] a fortress to perfection. He gave it the name 'City of the god Țaldi' [dȚal-di-i pa-a-ta-ri]. He planted this vineyard, [and] he planted an orchard. 'Vineyard of Minua' is [its] name. Through the greatness of the god Țaldi,

[I am] Minua, son of Işpuini, strong king, great king, king of the Bia lands, lord of Țuşpa-City. Minua says: when they harvest the vineyard, they shall sacrifice one ox and 3 sheep for the god Țaldi, they shall offer the fruit[s] both at the gate of the god Țaldi and in front of the stele. When they gather the new grapes, a libation[?] shall be offered for the god Țaldi and the gate of the god Țaldi, a [li]bation[?] for the goddess 'Arubani, and a libation[?] for the god Țaldi in front of the stele. (CTU A 5-33)¹⁶

Although this is yet to be verified, it could be hypothesized that the 'city of Țaldi'¹⁷ was the Körzüt fortress itself, certainly the most important site in the area currently known (Dan 2012, 174), as indeed already tentatively proposed by Salvini.¹⁸ Of three other inscriptions of similar content discovered in the villages of Uluşar (CTU A 5-35; IV A 5-100) and Köşk (A 5-36), again attributable to King Minua, the former may be considered inscriptions of the foundation of the fortress, probably located on the main entrance door of the fortress, while the last one adorned some prestigious building and is important because it also mentions the 'city of Țaldi':

For the god Țaldi, the [or, resp., his] Lord, Minua, son of Işpuini, built this building to perfection. He also built a fortress, and he gave it the name 'City of the god Țaldi'. Through the greatness

¹⁶ English translation of CTU A 5-33 available at <http://oracc.org/ecut/Q006931/>.

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that a text by Işpuini (c. 830-20 BCE), son of Sarduri (CTU A 2-9A), father of Minua, is known in which the construction of a 'city of Țaldi' is mentioned; it comes from Karahan area, not far from the Muradiye plain. This circumstance suggests that it could have been the same city, perhaps founded by both sovereigns in the period of coregency (Salvini pers. comm., 2008), which is believed to have occurred between 820 and 810 BCE.

¹⁸ Salvini, analysing the possible localization of some toponymies mentioned in the inscriptions of Körzüt and Karahan, advanced a preliminary hypothesis of association between the toponymies of Țaldiei URU and Arşuniuni, and the fortresses of Körzüt and Muradiye, without proposing exact identifications (Salvini 1995, 123), although he later identified Arşuniuni with the site of Kevenli (2008, 70). On the different proposals related to the ancient name of Körzüt, cf. Dan 2020, 183.

of the god 𐎶𐎠𐎺 [I am] Minua, strong king, king of the Bia lands, lord of 𐎲𐎶𐎶𐎠𐎺-City. (A 5-36)¹⁹

All the inscriptions from the Muradiye plain area date to the time of Minua; there is evidently no doubt as to who built the fortress. Recently Salvini presented an interesting analysis of the palaeography of the cuneiform inscriptions from the time of Minua, which are the largest in number among all those of the kings of Urartu that have come down to us. All the texts from Körzüt and surrounding areas are characterized by a homogeneous ductus attributable to what Salvini calls canonical texts, with a ductus that anticipates that of the time of his son Arġišti (I) and grandson Sarduri (II) (Salvini 2012, 318-20). This circumstance allows us to hypothesize that the construction of Körzüt and the organization of the Muradiye plain occurred in a mature/late phase of his reign, probably in the early years of the eighth century BCE.²⁰

4 The Architectural Structures

The site is characterized by the presence of a large fortress, a settlement and a necropolis [fig. 4]. The fortress was built on a large natural basalt hill, 50 m high, which dominates the surrounding plain known as Arapkale Tepe (Tarhan, Sevin 1976-7, 276). The dimensions of this rock outcrop are approximately 310 m from north to south and approximately 100 m from east to west at the widest points²¹ [fig. 5]. Currently, important remains of the fortification walls are visible on the eastern side of the hill, the most easily accessible, while on the western side there are visible remains of walls and foundations dug into the rock, which skilfully exploit the natural conformation of the land, according to the traditional canons of Urartian architecture. On the southern side, a natural ditch defends the access to the Arapkale hill. The most impressive fortifications are located on the south-eastern side of the hill [figs 6-11], where a stretch of walls approximately 60 m long still has a height of approximately 7 m, with

¹⁹ English translation of CTU A 5-36 available at <http://oracc.org/ecut/Q006934/>.

²⁰ There is a problem relating to the ductus of Upper Anzaf, where inscribed stones of Minua with different ductus appear to coexist in the same building. Compare the images of the inscriptions CTU A 5-42 with more recent ductus and fuller wedges and CTU A 5-43 with archaic ductus. CTU A 5-43 is included in the arrangement made by Salvini of the inscriptions (2012, 318), while the blocks under the code of CTU A 5-42 are not reported in this systematization.

²¹ Tarhan and Sevin reported measurements of 250 metres east-west and 100 metres north-south (1976-7, 277, tab. 1), the orientation of the plan being incorrect. Uslu reports measurements of 325 × 110 metres (2021, 126).

nine courses of blocks. The drystone masonry is composed of large, well-squared blocks of basalt rock.²² It may be said that the fortifications of Körzüt are among the most impressive built in the Kingdom of Urartu. The dimensions of the blocks are similar only to those in the so-called ‘Sardursburg’, the monumental propylaeum leading to the capital Դušpa built by King Sarduri (I) in the mid-ninth century BCE.²³ The walls, 4 m thick, were built using a technique that involved the construction of external facings with large squared stones, with an internal fill of loose material. The walls are reinforced by the presence of four large bastions/buttresses between 5.35 and 5.15 m wide, projecting 1 m from the wall and spaced between 7.15 and 7.65 m apart [fig. 7]. Successive courses of blocks are placed up to 5-6 cm (Tarhan, Sevin 1976-7, 279) further inwards than those immediately below to ensure greater stability. This technical measure was necessary not only because of the wall’s notable height, but also because this was a retaining wall for the hillside. It is not possible to know if this was the original height of the stone wall or if it was surmounted by a mud brick upper wall, in accordance with a characteristic practice in Urartian architecture. The largest stone blocks are 2.10 m wide and 1.20 m high, with a depth of approximately 1.10 m. On some blocks [fig. 11], the unremoved lifting tenons are still visible.²⁴ These were protrusions in the stone left by the stonemasons to which the ropes were attached for the transport and installation of the blocks, a technique used by the Urartians throughout their history. In fact, the lifting tenons are also visible in the walls of Karmirblur in Armenia, a fortress built in the seventh century BCE (Dan, La Farina 2012, 257, figs 7, 11). On the south-eastern side of the hill, at the end of the visible part of the large fortification wall, after the last buttress, a section of wall 10 m long with a different orientation from the main one constitutes part of the main access door to the fortress. This 5.80 m-wide wall constitutes the eastern side of a quadrangular area of approximately 9 by 10 m, probably a sort of

22 For a study of the building stones laid in several fortresses in the region, including Körzüt, cf. Karabaşoğlu, Karaoğlu, Kuvanç 2021, 208, 210, fig. 4e-f, pl. 1.

23 This is the oldest Urartian building currently known and was located at the western end of the Van cliff (Bilgiç 1959, 44-7; Naumann 1968, 53-7, fig. 4; Tarhan 1985, 305-6, dis. 10, fig. 11-13; Dan 2010, 51, 53, fig. 3). It has been interpreted differently on several occasions: as the base of a temple, a monumental propylaeum giving access to the fortress, or a mooring pier for boats (Naumann 1968, 53-7; Salvini 1995, 141; 2001, 302-4; 2002, 71-5), on which King Sarduri (I) engraved six duplicates of a text in the Assyrian language (CTU A 1-1A-F).

24 Burney 1998, 150, fig. 14.1; these tenons were mistakenly interpreted by Tarhan and Sevin as one of the earliest examples of Urartian ashlar (1976-7, 281). The possible use of ashlar, even if it is probably a condition of incompleteness in the processing of the blocks, can be limited exclusively to the seventh century BCE. On the Urartian ashlar masonry, cf. Dan 2015a; 2015b, 49-52.

courtyard in front of the actual entry door.²⁵ On the western side, which is not fully comprehensible, there are remains of walls, currently preserved for three courses of blocks (Burney 1957, 48, fig. 6; Tarhan, Sevin 1976-7, 281-2; Dan, Vitolo 2016a, 133, figs 11-12). Despite the uncertainty relating to the exact definition of the structural system of the door, it may be hypothesized that it was an entrance in which one section of the surrounding wall passed parallel in front of another, so the doorway passed between the two surrounding walls.²⁶ Examples in Urartu of this type of ‘chicane’ gate are present at Armavir-blur in Armenia and Qal’eh Aladagh, in Iranian Azerbaijan (Hejebri-Nobari 1997, 76). Another well-preserved stretch of wall is located on the south side of the rocky spur. This too, approximately 35 m long, is reinforced by the presence of three buttresses jutting out 1 m from the wall. The buttresses are between 3.50 and 5 m wide and spaced between 9 and 8.40 m apart. On the western side, as mentioned previously, which is most protected by the natural conformation of the hill, there are remains of rock foundations and stretches of low walls. The foundations have the characteristic stepped shape [fig. 12], which is identifiable in most Urartian fortresses, in particular in the capital Դւշփա, near Van. These drystone walls would probably have been surmounted by mud brick standing walls. Among the rock foundations on the western side of the site, a channel for rainwater drainage is clearly distinguishable. The blocks in these foundations, clearly smaller in size than those of the eastern fortifications, have been progressively removed and reused in the construction of houses in the nearby villages. Remains of buildings made of mud bricks are visible in many parts of the site, exposed by the washing away of the hill caused by weathering or as a result of the illegal excavations identifiable in many points of the site. In particular, a large room made of mud-bricks was unearthed; it was probably a rectangular storeroom used for storing food. On the surface, in fact, remains of characteristic Urartian *pithoi* have been found.²⁷ In the southern part of the hill, in correspondence with a large illegal excavation, remains of well-squared basalt blocks emerge.²⁸ This

²⁵ 8 × 10 metres according to Tarhan and Sevin (1976-7, 282).

²⁶ It was not possible to find the remains of two bastions at the sides of the gate reported by Sinclair (1987, 267).

²⁷ On Urartian *pithoi*, cf. Dan 2016, 597-8. An almost entire Urartian *pithos*, probably discovered in Körzüt, is kept in the warehouse of the Van Museum (Genç, İşik pers. comm., 2010). It might have come from this illegally excavated room. On this storeroom and the *pithoi* fragments on the surface of the site, cf. Dan, Vitolo 2016a, 134, figs 16-17.

²⁸ According to Tarhan and Sevin, this would have been the cella of the temple and a part of its facade, of which the side of a corner measuring 2.03 metres long was recognizable (1976-7, 283). Today the situation, due to the abandonment and degradation of the site, is extremely difficult to interpret. The Urartian temple was called *susi*

is the actual location of the Urartian tower-temple, as hypothesized already in 2016 (Dan, Vitolo 2016a, 134-5, fig. 18), and subsequently confirmed by excavations carried out in 2023 in this area, which led to the discovery of the remains of the structure and three epigraphs still *in situ*. The blocks with the cuneiform inscriptions of King Minua dispersed in the villages of Uluşar, Köşk and Tharr undoubtedly came from here. The quality of the workmanship of these blocks clearly marks an improvement in the construction techniques used for these structures. This circumstance suggests the hypothesis that the Körzüt temple was built after that of the Upper Anzaf fortress, the blocks of which were much less refined (Belli 1999, 24-8, figs 14-16). Near this building, the presence of bumps created by the accumulation of rubble indicates the presence of another rectangular construction, the plan of which can be partially traced on the ground. Near the temple area, at the precipice on the southern side of the hill, remains of the foundations of stepped rock walls are visible. Scattered across the surface of the site, Burney recognized remains of medieval-era structures (1998, 150). On the east/south-east side of the hill that houses the fortress, the remains of a vast unfortified settlement were found, which seemed to extend over an area of around 8 or 9 hectares, with the remains of large houses rather distant from each other (1957, 47-8; Tarhan, Sevin 1976-7, 285-6). In the south-west area, the remains of another non-fortified settlement area develop, with an area of approximately 1 hectare. Remains of stone-built buildings are visible on the ground. The structures appear highly irregular and rather close together, with walls approximately 1 m thick on average (285-6). Currently these residential areas cannot be dated, although occupation in the Urartian period is probable. The surface pottery was studied by Özfirat, who identified the typical Middle Iron Age pottery of the region and Urartian palace pottery with red slip (2010, 228). During the exploration of the site conducted by the author, two characteristic Urartian ‘T-shaped niches’ carved into the basalt rock were seen on the southern side of the spur on which the site stands; these can be added to the list of these rock structures known in numerous Urartian sites, especially in the Van area²⁹ [fig. 13].

in antiquity, which means tower. On the *susi/itsu* equivalence based on a back-translation from Assyrian to Urartian of an inscription from the fortress of Aşağı Kevenli (CTU A 5-44), cf. Salvini 1979, 581-2. The Urartian temple was a single-celled rectangular structure with sides measuring between 10 and 15 metres overall, of considerable height. For further information on Urartian tower-temples, cf. Dan 2015b, 39-41.

²⁹ On these niches, cf. Işık 1995, 16, figs 60-1.



Figure 4 Map showing the features of the Körzüt fortress discussed in the text (satellite picture from Google Earth)



Figure 5 General view of the site from southwest



Figure 6 Aerial view of the eastern fortifications (picture available online at <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/kultur/korzut-kalesi-kalintisinda-urartu-krali-menuanin-insa-ettirdigi-ikinci-tapinak-bulundu/2766699>)

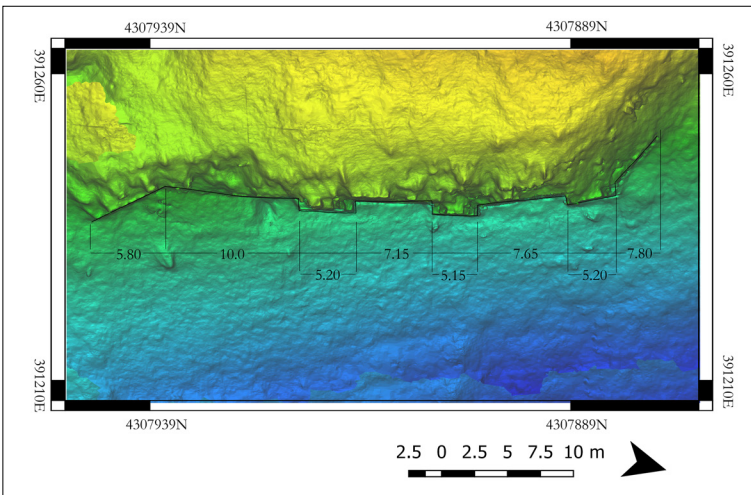


Figure 7 Digital Elevation Model and measurements of the eastern wall (© O. Gasparro)

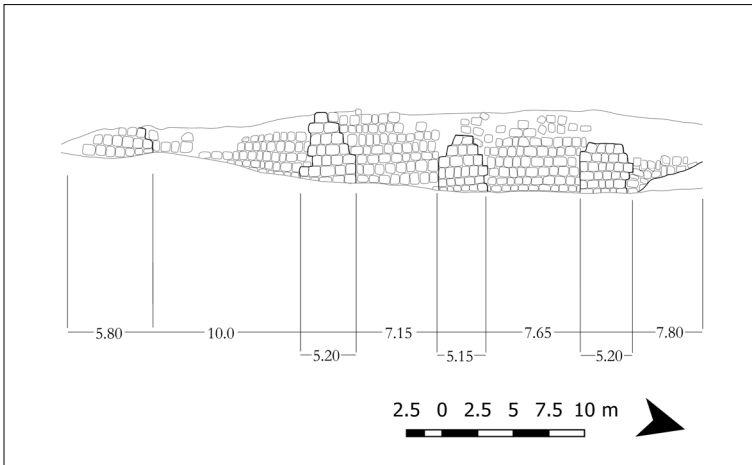


Figure 8 Drawing and measurements of the eastern wall (© O. Gasparro)

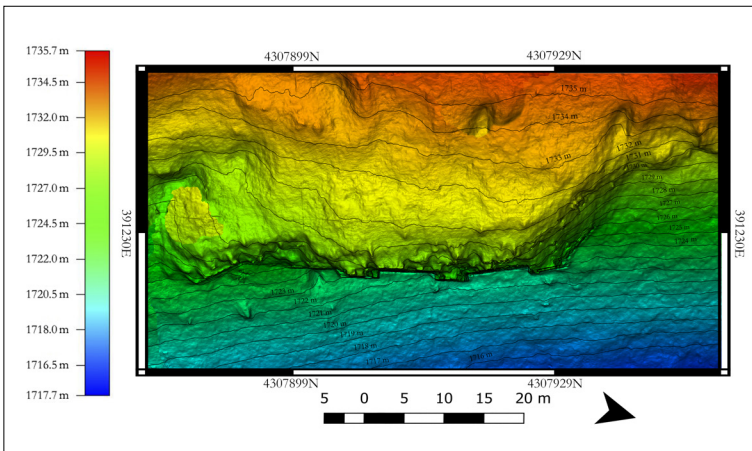


Figure 9 Digital Elevation Model of the eastern wall (© O. Gasparro)



Figure 10 View of the eastern fortification walls



Figure 11 Detailed view of one of the buttresses. Note the lifting tenon on the left side of the buttress



Figure 12 Rock-cut foundation steps in the south-western side of the site and the Muradiye plain in the background

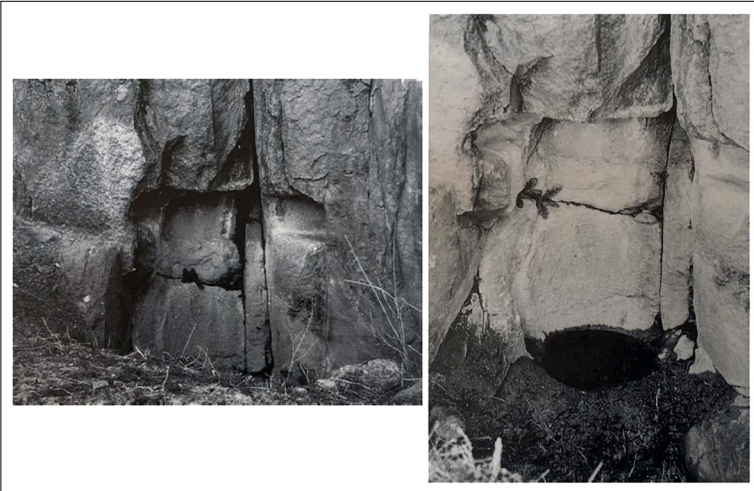


Figure 13 T-shaped rock-cut niches in the southern part of the site (adapted from Işık 1995, figs 60-1)

5 The Hydraulic Works for the Supply of the Muradiye Plain

The efforts made by Minua for the water supply of the Körzüt fortress and the Muradiye plain were notable [fig. 14]. We are informed of these construction activities by some ancient inscriptions. In this regard, an inscription found near Muradiye (CTU A 5-16) refers to the construction of a canal and to another found near Karahan (A 5-24), and the construction of a second canal near the city Minuaḥinili. The main work was undoubtedly the Süphan Gölü, from whose southern side a canal branches off on which some dams perhaps dating back to the Urartian era have been identified.³⁰ The canal reaches the plain where it branches into several sections. Part of this dense network of canalisation is still partially visible today. Another hydraulic work attributed to the Urartians is the Süs Barajı, now completely dried up, which is located in the western foothill area of the Köseveli Dağı, about 1.30 km south-east of the Körzüt fortress. The remains of the previously described ancient settlement extended between the basin and the southern slopes of the Körzüt fortress (Belli 1997a, 115-17). Two other works are located on the eastern flank of the İsabey Dağı; these are the Kızkapan Göleti (2000, 93) and the Kelle Barajı (92), both dated on an architectural basis to the seventh century BCE; these works were used for the water supply of the Körzüt fortress. In fact, the waters of the River Mezarlık, on which they were built, were channelled into an artificial canal that still runs around the northern slopes of the hill that houses the fort. Only further investigations will provide more detailed information on the dating of these works, but it seems probable that some can reasonably be attributed to the Urartian era.

30 Belli 1991, 114-15; 1992, 481; 1994a, 80, 82; 1994b, 9-10; 1995, 27; 1997b, 645.

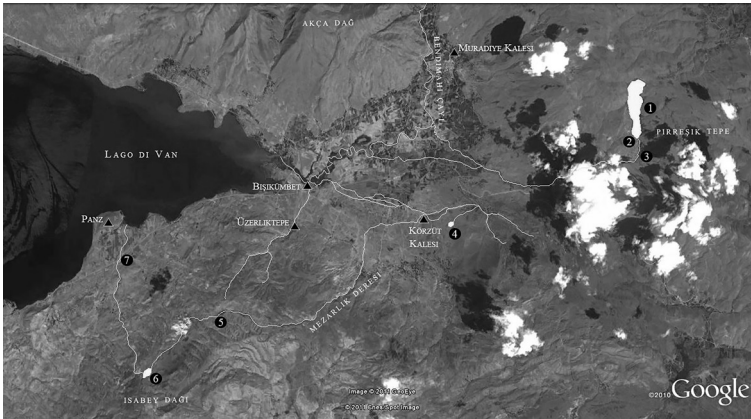


Figure 14 The hydraulic works in the Muradiye plain (after Dan 2012, fig. IV.10.3)

6 Recent Archaeological Investigations in Körzüt Fortress: A New Building and an Old Temple

As already mentioned, the site had never been subjected to archaeological excavation until 2016 as a consequence of the systematic lootings, also documented in scientific contributions (Dan, Vitolo 2016a). The most evident result of these illegal activities is the partial destruction of the tower-temple: over the years, the inscriptions that adorned its façade have been scattered and found mounted in the walls of private houses in the villages of Berkırı, Güşak, Köşk and Tharr, located not far from Körzüt. In around 2010, a huge excavation (about 15 × 7 m) in the northern portion of the site exposed a large rectangular room with stone-based brick standing walls in which the remains of Urartian *pithoi* were found.³¹ Other illegal excavations not far from this area were conducted in 2015, uncovering the remains of a stone wall with the northern part of a gate characterised by multiple rabbets. To avoid the complete destruction of the building, the Van Museum Directorate performed a salvage excavation to expose the structure.³² The excavation area measured about 12 × 8 m (approximately 100 square m). The excavation revealed the presence of a single rectangular room measuring 8.10 × 6.91 m [fig. 15]. The single entrance has a width of about 1.3 m and a depth of about 2 m. The gate is flanked by multiple recesses with sides

³¹ I would like to thank Bülent Genç who told me of the transfer of an almost entire Urartian *pithos* from the Körzüt site to the old museum in Van.

³² On these excavations, cf. Kuvanc, Işık, Genç 2020; Dan 2021, 26-8; Uslu 2021.

measuring about 0.25 m. Part of the south side of the gate is broken and only one of the three original rabbeted stones is still *in situ*. In the short corridor there is a beautiful rectangular basalt step (1.30 × 1.57 m), partly broken by the illegal excavations. The lower parts of the walls consist of four courses of worked stones, with a mud-brick upper portion. In the eastern wall, in correspondence to the gate, three courses of stones are visible, while in the back wall four may be seen. The best-preserved parts of the wall, especially in correspondence to the gate on the east side, are about 2 m high, but the original bricks have largely been washed away over the millennia and what remains of the walls is little more than debris. Flat stones were used to divide the stone foundation from the upper mud-brick portion, as is usual in Urartian architecture.³³ The walls were built using regular medium-sized stones, well worked on the outer faces, with rather coarsely finished horizontal surfaces and interstices filled with small stones. The drystone walls are double-faced, with medium-sized stones in the outer parts and an internal fill of soil and stones. The average thickness of the eastern wall, the only one completely exposed on both sides, is about 2 m. It is clear that this was an important Urartian era building whose dating is indicated by the presence of multiple rabbets. Unfortunately, the fact that the excavations were limited to the interior of the room – plus a small rectangular area in front of the doorway, pertaining to another room – means that we lack information about the structure’s external characteristics (the possible presence of external and corner buttresses, for example). Only in the western part of the building was it possible to determine the width of the wall, which was 3.80 m. It is in any case clear that this was not an isolated building, but that this room was part of a complex. Due to the destruction of the area by illegal excavations, very few finds were collected. The most interesting include a fragment of blue painted plaster, typical of many Urartian sites, and pottery that can be attributed to the Middle Iron Age/Urartian period, but also Late Iron Age/Orontid and Medieval glazed pottery. In addition, a Byzantine coin was identified (Kuvañç, Işık, Genç 2020, 118, figs 13-14). The excavators defined the structure in question as an Urartian temple, which would make Körzüt the oldest Urartian site currently known to feature the coexistence of two temple structures. This interpretation assumes that rabbeted passages or niches are always associated with temples in Urartian architecture.³⁴ It is

33 Cf. this detail in Kuvañç, Işık, Genç 2020, fig. 7.

34 We must consider that the interpretation of these multiple rabbets, which is a cultural element resulting from a progressive and constant Assyrianizing process of the territories beyond the Taurus and the Zagros, is far from being fully explored. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to remember what Roaf has written on the use of the multiple-rabbets: “Elaborate niches and façades with multiple rabbets are also

clear that this proposal is difficult to sustain, on one hand because of our imperfect knowledge of Urartian palace structures. On the other hand, one of the comparisons used to support this interpretation, that is the building of Girik Tepe, features multiple rabbets on doors and niches and certainly cannot be defined as a temple, but rather as a small palace (Dan, Vitolo 2016b, figs 4-5, 7-8). In addition, further comparisons between the Körzüt structure and other buildings of difficult interpretation, such as the so-called temple of Șaldi at Arin-berd/Erebuni (Kuvaç, Işık, Genç 2020, 119), do not seem to be decisive for this attribution. The Körzüt building is only partially excavated, devoid of inscriptions, and its overall characteristics are not known due to the incompleteness of the excavations and the absence of relevant finds inside. At the same time, the parallels for the Körzüt building suggested by the authors, taking up old hypotheses of Ussishkin and Forbes concerning the possible influence of the Levant and northern Syria on Urartu (124), have little substance, as likewise the chronological speculation based on these. At Körzüt there was certainly a temple dedicated to Șaldi, as evidenced by the various inscribed stones illegally excavated from the site, which adorned the façade of the temple itself. There is currently no epigraphic or architectural evidence of the existence of a second temple at this site. The excavated structure was part of a palatine context of some importance, as evidenced by certain architectural details, such as the multiple rabbets and the stone threshold. However, the data are too scarce to postulate the existence of other types of temple buildings in Urartian architecture in addition to the classical tower-temple, whose development independently of other architectural traditions has recently been shown.³⁵ Recurring attempts to demonstrate the existence of other types of temple structure in Urartian architecture have been made; we recall the type of double temple suggested by Tarhan, near Çavuştepe and Șuşpa, the capital of Urartu (2007), a hypothesis which is interesting but far from certain. The most important aspect of these excavations, more than the interpretative remarks on the function or chronology of individual buildings, is undoubtedly the clear evidence of the continued use of the Urartian sites, in the period defined as post-Urartian, and later at various times during the Middle Ages. The continuation of illegal excavations in the area of what had already been indicated in 2016 as the tower-temple from which came the inscriptions that today are

characteristic of religious buildings in Mesopotamia from the Ubaid period on, but they also occur in secular buildings (e.g. the Throne Room of the Southern Citadel in Babylon). Doubly recessed niches are often represented on fortification walls depicted on the Assyrian and Urartian reliefs" (1998, 65).

35 On the origin and evolution of the Urartian tower-temple, cf. Dan 2017.

scattered in the villages around the site, made new excavation interventions necessary to save what remained of the structure. The excavations, which took place in 2023 and are currently unpublished, documented the existence of a temple largely destroyed by illegal excavations, but of which the first Urartian inscriptions ever found on the site were still preserved *in situ*. The inscriptions belong to the left side of the façade³⁶ of the tower-temple of Minua and constitute duplicates of the known epigraphs that ran on the right side of the temple façade (CTU A 5-2 B) [fig. 16]. One of the blocks of which images are circulating is an exact copy of one of the epigraphs published by Dinçol and said to come from Muradiye (Muradiye-1) (Dinçol, Kavaklı 1978, pl. XV), which therefore also came from the right side of the same temple.³⁷ Excavations have documented the existence of fragments of blue paint within the cella, a phenomenon seen extensively in Urartian temples, of both the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. The temple of Körzüt appears, due to its architectural characteristics and the nature of the epigraphs, to be more recent than the other known temple of Minua, namely that of Upper Anzaf.³⁸ The blocks of which the latter is made are roughly worked; the only well-finished ones were those bearing the inscription, whose surface emerged from the block to then be plastered in such a way as to cover the rough unscribed parts and the other blocks. The position of the inscriptions at the corners of the temple (and on a block inscribed on two faces), rather than on the facade and in the corridor as in Körzüt, testifies to the greater age of the Anzaf temple. The epigraphs on the facade and in the corridor, although variable elements in Urartian architecture, became a constant feature of subsequent tower-temples. Furthermore, investigations were also conducted in the necropolis area of the site, where looted chamber tombs were discovered (Kuvanç, Işık, Genç 2020, fig. 5).

36 It concerns the first three missing blocks in the reconstruction presented by the author of this contribution in Salvini 2008, III: 110.

37 On these new inscriptions, cf. Trémouille, Bonfanti, Dan, forthcoming.

38 On this temple, cf. Belli 1999, 24-8, figs 14-16.



Figure 15 Aerial photo and a view of the gate of the building excavated in 2016
(adapted from Uslu 2021, 124, 133, fig. 8)

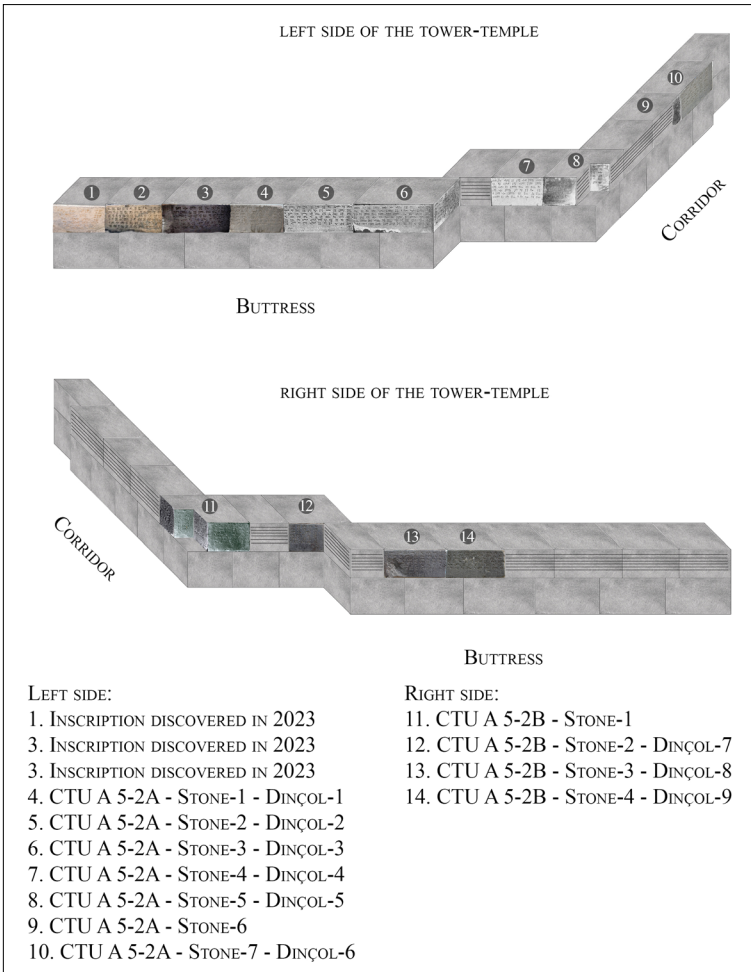


Figure 16 Reconstruction of the façades of the Urartian tower-temple with the old inscriptions and new ones discovered in 2023

7 Conclusions

The Muradiye region was an area of great importance in Urartu. The vast, fertile plain was among the territories that can be considered as part of the original core of Urartu, together with the eastern and northern shores of Lake Van more generally. It is therefore not surprising that such a central, important area - also for subsequent developments in Urartian politics - was equipped with a large economic-administrative centre. In this regard, the Körzüt fortress must have had considerable importance in the Urartian era. It was clearly built with a dual function: to protect the road that ran from the north towards the capital, and to exploit the fertile Muradiye plain [fig. 1] (Burney, Lang 1971, 139). It must be taken into consideration that the plain in the Urartian era was certainly wider, given that the water level of Lake Van was certainly lower and the ancient road that led towards Van did not run directly alongside the lake in Urartian times. Körzüt also constituted an important bridgehead for the expeditions of Minua and his successors towards the Ararat Valley. It may have been built by Išpuini and finished by his son Minua, as has been speculated in the past (Tarhan, Sevin 1976-7, 284-5), or during the period of coregency, or by Minua alone. In any case, while the attribution to Išpuini is based only on architectural comparisons of tenuous foundation, the epigraphic evidence indicates Minua as the probable commissioner of the fortress. Furthermore, as we have seen, the epigraphic data allow us to associate the construction of the fortress with the later reign of Minua and therefore probably date it to the beginning of the eighth century BCE. This might perhaps be identified with the 'city of Țaldi' which, as we have seen, is mentioned in several texts by Minua himself. Körzüt was certainly one of the most important fortresses, as well as being one of the oldest currently known built by the Urartian rulers. Archaeological excavations could now provide important information on the conformation and use of the site over time, not only with the continuation of the Urartian era, but also in subsequent epochs. Recent excavations have finally allowed us to architecturally define some of the buildings on the site, namely a probable palace building (excavated in 2016) and the remnants of the tower-temple (excavated in 2023) already known from the inscriptions scattered in the territory of the Muradiye plain. The discovery of these new remains finally *in situ* provides confirmation of what has been known for some time, namely the existence of a tower-temple built by King Minua in this place. Particularly important is the discovery of late Iron Age pottery, attributable to a chronological horizon that can be defined as Orontid/Achaemenid. This is further confirmation that most of the large Urartian centres, including Körzüt, were reused in the post-Urartian era by the first indigenous

dynasty of the Armenian Highlands.³⁹ It is to be hoped that, in addition to these emergency excavations, which are certainly very important, we will proceed in the future with excavations in undamaged areas so as to be able to have a clear architectural picture of the site – and above all to document uncompromised stratigraphy which sheds light on the multiple phases of the site’s occupation.

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³⁹ On the continuity of use of Urartian sites in the post-Urartian, Orontid/Achaemenid era in the Van region, cf. Dan 2023, 157-204.

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