URARTIAN GARDENS

VELİ SEVİN*

In ancient times, both in the Eastern and Western worlds, to be the owner of a garden or orchard was considered a privilege and cause for pride. Which is why not only kings, lords and nobles but also the temples would give much effort and attention to the lying out orchards, vineyards, gardens, plantations and the like whilst bards would put equal effort into praising them. In the old Testament (*Ecclesiastes* 2: 4-6; Wiseman 1983: 183) there is mention of Solomon's vineyards, gardens, orchards and plantations; elsewhere Homer (*Odyssey* VII 111 f.) describes the garden of king Alcinoos of Phaician in detail. Further east, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon reached sufficient fame to be classified as one of the seven wonders of the world[1]. Efforts to plant gardens were evident from the time of Adad-Nirari (1307?1275 BC), the Assyrian king, onwards (Grayson 1972: 478). Amongst the wide variety of plants and trees in the gardens no small number had been brought from foreign countries (Grayson 1972: 47.[vii.17]). So much so that the governors of the Assyrian provinces were given the responsible of gathering saplings for the gardens of the capitals such as Nineveh, Calah and Khorsabad (Parpola 1987: Nrs. 222, 226)[2].

The gardens of Assyria served a number of purposes. One type was that of the large botanical and hunting parks (*kirû , ambassu*) mainly to be found outside of the capital cities. Another consisted of the smaller flower and fruit gardens (*kirimahu*) which adjoined palaces and which were used for relaxation. First seen in the time of Sargon II (721-705 BC), they would contain "kiosk" or a small "summerhouse" (*bitanu*) and were always laid out

* Prof. Dr. Veli Sevin, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Çanakkale TURKEY.

This work was supported by the Research Fund of The University of İstanbul. Project number: 613/210494

[1] For all the ancient sources on the Hanging Gardens of Babylon see Stevenson 1992. For the possibility that the gardens may have been in front of Sennacherib's Palace in Nineveh see Dally 1994.

[2] In the reliefs of Sennacherib's Palace at Nineveh can be seen scenes of fruit tree saplings collected for the royal gardens, being carried in pots: Parpola 1987: fig. 37.

on rising ground (Oppenheim 1965; Wiseman 1983) (Figs. 1-2). Hence in a much later period (mid-first century BC) Diodorus Sicilus (II, 10) explains that the gardens at Nineveh rose up like a theater. These pleasure gardens laid out from the end of the eighth century onwards are in many ways comparable with those of the Ottoman period[3]. For example Evliya Çelebi (*Seyahatname* 1, 88 ff) tells how Topkapı Palace was surrounded by gardens containing 20.000 trees of the likes of cypress, plane, juniper, fir, and box, and with pavilions, meant for privacy, set on a hill of pleasent aspect.

The Urartians must also be listed amongst those nations who gave priority to the formation of orchards and gardens. From at least the time of Ishpuini (830-820 BC) it is clear that the kings of Urartu gave emphasis to the formation of vineyards (^{GIŠ}ul-di/e, ^{GIŠGEŠTIN}), fruit gardens (^{GIŠ}za-ri, ^{GIŠ}TIR) and vegetable gardens (?) ($^{GAN.GIŠ}$ú-še, $^{GAN.MEŠ}$ú-še, $^{GAN.MEŠ.GIŠ}$ú-še), particularly in the Lake Van basin (Burney 1972; Zimansky 1985: fig. 11)[4]. In fact all the Urartian kings from Ishpuini to Rusa II (675-650 BC) have left inscriptions pertaining to the laying out of these types of gardens (UKN Nrs. 27, 65, 99, 111, 137, 167, 172, 268, 275, 281; Balkan 1960: 150 f.; Belli, Dinçol 1980: 178; Dinçol, Kavaklı 1978: Nrs. 1-2; Çilingiroğlu, Salvini 1995: 118 f.; Zimansky 1985: 69 f.) It would seem that the recording of the laying out of orchards and gardens along with the recording of the founding of the city had become standard practice. Furthermore the Assyrian king Sargon II, in the account of his famous eighth campaign (714 BC) gives a long description of the irrigation canals, orchards and vineyards laid out by the Urartian king Rusa I (730-713 BC) in the city of Ulhu in the Lake Urmia region (LAR II, 160; Zaccagnini 1981: 265 ff.) The fifth century historian Moses of Khorene (3. 1) says that many fruit gardens, plantations, vineyards and terraced gardens can be found to the north, east and south of Tushpa (?) on the shores of Lake Van.

[3] For Ottoman gardens see M. Erdoğan, "Osmanlı Devrinde İstanbul Bahçeleri", *Vakıflar Dergisi* IV, 1958: 149 ff.; S. H. Eldem, *Türk Bahçeleri* , Ankara 1976; G. Arslanoğlu Evyapan, *Eski Türk Bahçeleri ve Özellikle İstanbul Bahçeleri* , Ankara 1972.

[4] The inscriptions of Ishpuini and his son Minua at Karahan near Lake Van mention a "bur-ga-na-ni" along with the vineyards and fruit gardens. The meaning of this word is not certain but could possibly be translated meadow, clover field or ploughing field. Cf. Dinçol, Kavaklı 1978: Nrs. 1 and 2 with Balkan 1960: 144 ff.

The royal gardens laid out by the kings of Urartu are usually named after them: e.g. ^{m}Me-i-nu-ú-a-i ^{GIŠ}ul-di-e (Minua's Orchard) or $^{m.d.}$Sàr-du-ri-ni-i ^{GIŠ}ú-du-li-e-i (Sarduri's Orchard). Some of the gardens were set up in the name of the gods. The Meherkapı inscription says that Ishpuini and his son Minua had a vineyard planted for the god Haldi (UKN Nr. 27). This vineyard was probably to be found in the vicinity of Meherkapı on the southern foothills of Mount Zimzim (Belli 1998: 31).

In Urartu, besides the kings, the palace ladies and noblemen had a right to own gardens. For example the vineyard planted alongside the famous irrigation canal (^{m}Me-i-nu-a-i pi-li=Minua's Canal) later known as the Shamram canal carries the name of the daughter (^{SAL}si-la) (Zimansky 1985: 69, note 136) or, more likely, the wife (Salvini 1998: 97 ff) of king Minua (810-785/80 BC). Her name is Tariria and the vineyards name is *Taririahinili* (UKN nr. 111). A second example of ownership of a garden by someone other than the king comes from a stele found in Van (UKN Nr. 277) where the arrow of Argishti, son of Rusa (713- ? BC), let off in the fruit garden (^{GIŠ}TIR) of Gilurani landed in the garden (^{GIŠ}NU.SAR)[5] of Ispili, son of Batu. On a clay tablet from Bastam is mentioned a plantation (^{GIŠ}ú-u-du-ute-e) which is a cause of strife between Lubsuiani, the governor of the fortress and his rival Adiabdi (Salvini 1979: 118, 121). From such examples we can conclude that it was not only kings who had the right to own orchards and gardens.

Apart from the written evidence we have little information about the situation or style of Urartian gardens. It is known from Assyrian reliefs from the time of Sargon II onward, that the *kirimahu* gardens contained pavilions with load-bearing features resembling columns with capitals and pedestals. These are sometimes to be found beside water (Fig. 1), sometimes by a wood (Fig. 2), and have altars and holy places in them. Could there have been similar summer houses or pavilions and similar religious features in Urartian gardens ? If so what were they like ? It is not easy to answer these questions.

It is unfortunate that no parks or gardens have been depicted upon the Urartian reliefs. There is, however, no doubt that orchards and gardens were always located in well watered areas. For example in the description of Ulhu

[5] According to König (HchI 151 note 9) the meaning of this word is not completely clear.

by Sargon II, he mentions gardens watered by offshoots of an irrigation canal so large and full of water that it resembled the river Euphrates (Laessøe 1951; Zaccagnini 1981: 265). Ashurnasirpal II says that the Calah fruit gardens were to be found alongside an irrigation canal called the *Patti-Hegalli* which was drawn off from the River Zap (Grayson 1976: 591. [III 132]; 619.[v 1]; 678.[37]). In a similar vein the Urartian king Argishti I (785/80-760 BC) on an inscription found near Armavir (UKN Nr. 137) declares that he has laid out vineyards and fruit gardens alongside four canals drawn from the River Araxes. An inscription of Rusa II (UKN Nr. 268) found near Keshish-Göl on Mount Erek says that he has planted vineyards and fruit and vegetable gardens in the region of *Rusahinili* (Toprakkale) thanks to a canal draining out of Lake Rusa (Keshish-Göl).

A similar close relationship between irrigation canals and gardens is seen in that of Minua's famous canal and the above mentioned orchard of Tariria. Since this inscription located at Kadembastı (formerly Katepans) near Edremit, 14 km south of Van, is to be found *in situ* on the retaining wall of the canal we can assume that the garden was located on the artificial terraces descending from the base of the canal wall at that point (Lehmann-Haupt 1926: 108; Öğün 1970: 34; Salvini 1992; Belli 1995: 54 f.; 1997: 15 f). It would seem therefore that Urartian gardens were laid out beside the royal canals and watered by small ditches drawn from them (Belli 1997[c]: 637 f). So it can be assumed that there would be a number of orchards and gardens laid out along the length of the 51 km long Minua Canal in its journey from the Gürpınar Valley to the Plain of Van.

Like other rulers of the Near East the Urartian kings built artificial reservoirs and dams to supply the orchards and gardens with water during the dry summer months. Argishti II (UKN Nr. 276) and Rusa II (UKN Nr. 268) both lay claim to such building activities. The remains of many Urartian dams can be seen to this day in the Lake Van basin (Öğün 1970; Belli 1994; 1995[b]; 1997[a]; 1997[c]). In that part of the Van plain laying against the western foothills of Mount Erek beyond the reach of the Minua Canal, are to be found many small dams dating to the Urartian period, from which we can deduce that many gardens must have existed in that eastern section of the plain (Garbrecht 1980: 310 ff., fig. 3; Belli 1997[b]: 164 ff., diagram 1,6; cf.

Öğün 1970: 27)[6]. Even today, fertile villages such as Bostaniçi (Sıhke), Karpuzalanı (Zırvandanis) and Kavuncu (Choravanis), can be found in this part of the province. In summary, Urartian gardens were located out of town, by irrigation channels or reservoirs.

There is also no information on the types or sizes of Urartian gardens. We do not know whether there were large botanical or hunting parks as to be found in Assyria at that period or whether the Urartian version was always a produce garden, purely functional and on a somewhat smaller scale. These questions cannot be satisfactorily answered. The arrow of Argishti son of Rusa (713- ? BC) shot from the forest of Gilurani landed in the garden of Ispili, son of Batu after traveling 950 1-Ú. Even though we do not know the exact length of this measurement, it still suggests that private gardens were no more than a few hundred meters wide. Both Urartian and Assyrian written sources seem to suggest that small fruit gardens rather than large hunting or botanical parks were popular in the land of Urartu. For example Sargon's descriptions of Ulhu, the Urartian town, and the location of orchards at Kadembastı (Taririahinili) and at Meher Kapısı, although hardly conclusive as evidence still tend to suggest that gardens were on the small scale[7].

We may know little about the location and size of Urartian gardens but when it comes down to considering what buildings were to be found in them we have no information at all. Nevertheless the stone column base which was unearthed during a renovation work on the irrigation canal to the south of Çavuş Tepe Urartian fortress (*Sardurihinili*) in the second half of the eightees supplies some evidence on this matter (Fig. 3). The base is made of soft grey sandstone, 1.20 m in diameter and about 0.30 m high (Figs. 4, 5a). Its upper part has unfortunately been smashed by the villagers so that its present height is only 0.24 m. Apart from the bottom 0.11 m which are only roughly worked, the quality of the workmanship is high. It is apparent that

[6] A. H. Layard (*Nineveh and Babylon* , London 1853: 392) says that when he visited Van in the middle of the nineteenth century, the town was surrounded by orchards and fruit gardens irrigated by artificial rivulets derived from the streams rising in the Yedi Kilise (Erek) mountains. It will be helpful to bear this note in mind when considering the system of dams to be found on Mount Erek.

[7] According to Diodorus Sicilus (II, 10) and Strabo (XVI, 1.5) a vineyard in Babylon was 400 *plethron* (c. 300 m) in both directions.

the lower part is designed to be out of sight and to help provide a stable base. One's first reaction is that the base has rolled down the hill from the fortress, along with the hundreds of stone blocks from the city walls which are to be seen on the slopes of the hill. The difference is that this piece is of easily broken soft sandstone and so it is rather doubtful that it could have rolled from such a height to its resting spot on the lower slopes in one piece. Furthermore, even though much of the lower fortress has been excavated no evidence has been found that such a large object was ever located there. The cylindirical stone column bases used in the wine cellar to the east of the Irmushini temple and set directly onto the bedrock are of a well documented type (Erzen 1978: Pl. IX/a). Until now there has been no evidence of a base of such a large circumference or of such poor quality material being used in Urartian architecture. The andesite column bases of Altın Tepe are 0.70 m in diameter (Özgüç 1966: 3, Pls. X/1-2, XI/1-2, XII/1). Those of Kayalıdere are 0.77 m in diameter (Burney 1966: 67, Pls. XVII/c, XXI/c).

In Urartu pedestals expected to carry heavy loads are normally made from basalt-andesite and if these have to be placed on a soft surface then the lower, hidden parts is roughcut and bulbous (Fig. 4b). The intention is to spread the download as much as possible by giving the pedestal a broad base. On the other hand if the pedestal is to sit on the bedrock, or if it is not being called on to carry a great load than it is cut in a simple cylindrical shape (HChI, Pl. 114). The pedestal in question comes into this second category on account of both the poor quality of its material and its cylindrical shape (Pl. 4a). As stated above both its size and its undamaged condition mitigate against it having rolled down from the fortress. Rather I believe that it could have been used in a building in this area at the base of the south facing slope of the fortress. In which case we need to consider what purpose it could have been used for.

According to the inscription on the Irmushini Temple,[8] when the Urartian king Sarduri II built this city in the late mid-eight century BC it would seem that he also had vegetable gardens ($^{GAN.MEŠ.GIŠ}$ú-še), vineyards and orchards planted (the later two being a conjecture as the third

[8] For a rough translation of this otherwise unpublished inscription see A.Erzen "Çavuştepe Kazıları", *VII^th Congress of the Turkish Historical Society* I (Ankara 1972) 68.

stone of the inscription is missing). These were watered from a canal fed by the Hoshab Cay. A number of very old irrigation channels can be seen flowing parallel to the southern flank of the fortress and the column base under discussion was found beside one of these (Fig. 3). These channels, of which one was still used until a few years ago to supply water for the modern village or Çavuş Tepe being only of earth cannot be dated (Figs. 6-7). But we can assume that just as this sheltered south facing slope is a most attractive for agriculture today, so too it would have been for the Urartians. Indeed the marks of ancient usage can be seen along the canal in the form of surface finds.

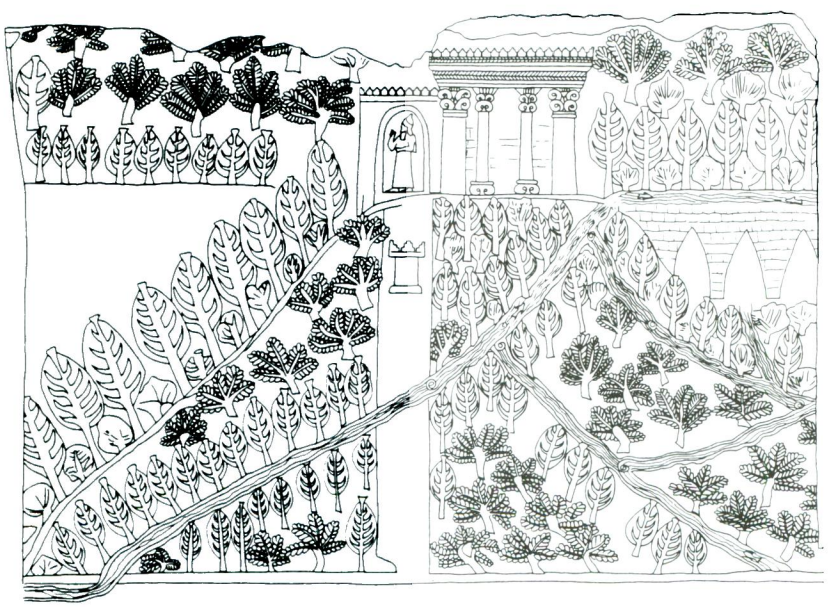
Once we have accepted that the vegetable and fruit gardens of Çavuş Tepe stretched along the irregation channels under the sunny southern slopes sheltered from the north wind, then it becomes possible that our pedestal had something to do with such a garden. As we mentioned above Assyrian reliefs, particularly in the regions of Sargon II and Ashurbanipal, showed garden pavilions constructed with a double row of columns (Fig. 1-2). These summerhouses look as though they were constructed for hot weather with wide eaves and flat rooves and were obviously small[9]. It is quite possible that the column base from Çavuş Tepe should be from a similar round bases can be seen in Van Museum. One was found in a stone lined well on the southwest slopes of Upper Anzaf Fortress (Hulin 1960: 205, Pls. XXVII/a, c), another is from a house garden in the city of Van (UKN Nr. 85; HChI Nr. 53b, Pl.114). The first is 0.89 m in diameter, the second is 0.72 m in diameter. The height of neither of them is clear as both are broken, the present height of both is about 0.20 m (Fig.8). They are of soft sandstone. On the upper surface of the first one there is a rough hewn circular area having a diameter of 0.66 m and a height of 3 cm. It is obvious that the column stood on this raised part (Fig. 5c). The fact that a need was felt for a second level for the wooden column to stand on again suggests an open air location since this must be some sort of basic measure to protect the wood from rain and damp. Since the top surface of Çavuş Tepe base is broken we cannot say whether it had the same design.

[9] Evliya Çelebi (4 558f) tells us that in this time the plain immediately south of Van, from the district known today as Shamranaltı as far as Edremit was solid with gardens, orchards and rose gardens, each one having a "delighful summerhouse" next to its spring, pool or fountain.

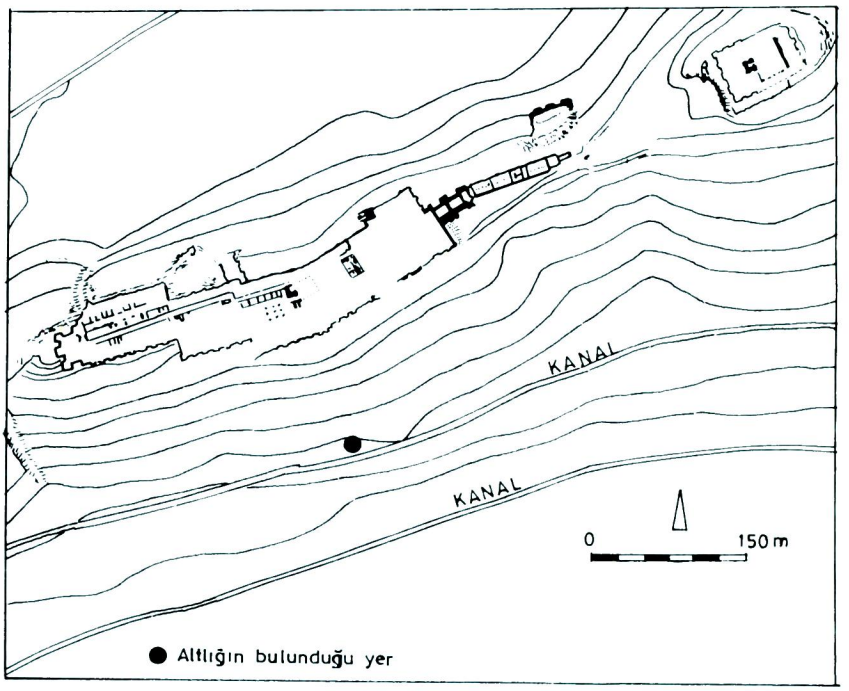
Both the Anzaf and the Van bases have inscriptions around their sides. The first attributes itself to Ishpuini, the second to Minua, and on each it is said that the king built an É. Although neither of them is as wide as the Çavuş Tepe example, their non-durable material and cylindrical shape suggest that they were not intended to carry an enormous weight. The fact that the inscription on each speaks of the king building an É, literally a house but with the meaning of an house for the god or temple, possibly a cult area dedicated to Haldi, indicates that each one came from a building used for some religious purpose. The Urartians sometimes planted orchards specifically for the gods and sometimes had ceremonial sacrifices in their own orchards (UKN Nr. 65; Taffet, Yakar 1998: 146). In other words we can say that for the Urartians gardens had a religious dimension to them, just as they did in other parts of the Near East (Wiseman 1983: 143ff). A bronzs votive plaque from Giyimli which was taken illegaly to Munich and which the writer has been unable to trace since, possibly depicts such a garden (Fig. 9). A fancy, heigh and wide base with a narrower column on it with in front of it a god on a bull, can be seen in part. It is known that in the Urartian architecture this type of tectonic elements is not widespread, with the exception of the gallery of the Altın Tepe temple, it is mainly used in rectangular plan storerooms and in stables (Forbes 1983: 56f). So it is possible that the free-standing column to be seen opposite the god on the votive plaque is something to do with a garden pavilion. Possibly an orchard was to be dedicated to a god on this plaque which can be dated to the end of the eight or to the seventh century BC.

In conclusion: it is known that small wineyards and fruit gardens were planted near to irrigation systems in Urartu. It can also be said that from the end of the ninth century onwards columned buildings were sometimes located in these gardens which were laid out for kings, noblemen and gods. This idea of a garden being solely for practical purposes, also seen in the early Assyrian period, is in a different tradition to the showy pleasure gardens of the Sargonide period. Although it has been suggested that the idea of the small garden which arose in the Sargonide period reached Assyria, along with the *bit-hilāni*, from the west (Oppenheim 1965: 333), I believe that, as has previously been suggested (Wiseman 1983: 137ff) the influence of the Urartians in the development of this tradition should not be discounted.

Resim 1 - Dur-Sarrukin'den II. Sargon'un bahçesi.
Fig. 1 - Royal Garden of Sargon II from Dur-Sharrukin.

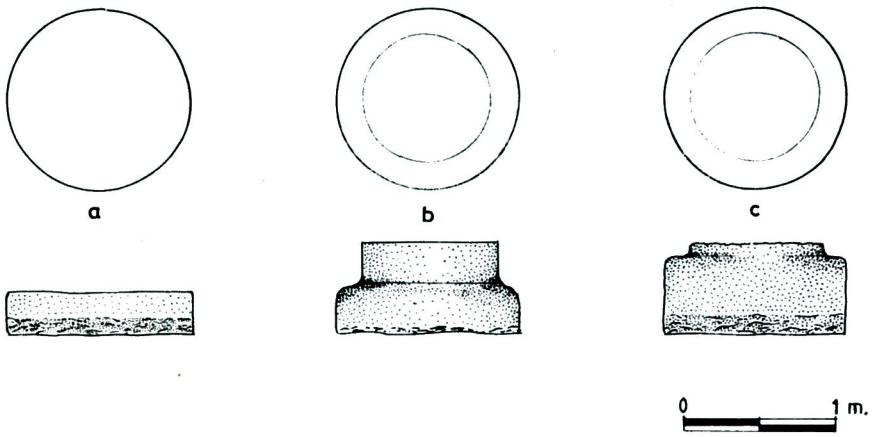


Resim 2 - Ninive'den Sennaherib'in bahçesi.
Fig. 2 - Royal garden of Sennaherib from Nineveh.



Resim 3 - Çavuştepe Kalesi, kanallar ve altlığın buluntu yeri.
Fig. 3 - Plan of Çavuş Tepe. Irrigetion canals and the findspot of the column base.

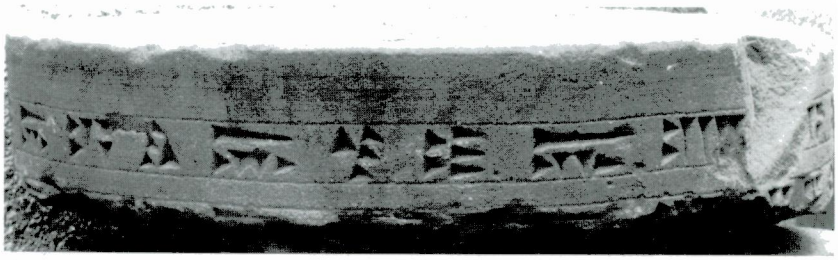
Resim 4 - Çavuştepe'deki direk altlığının bugünkü durumu.
Fig. 4 - Present wiev from the column base of Çavuş Tepe.



Resim 5 - Urartu'dan çeşitli altlık tipleri.
Fig. 5 - Different types of Urartian column bases.

Resim 6 - Çavuştepe Aşağı Kale ve Kanallar, doğudan.
Fig. 6 - Çavuş Tepe lower fortress and irrigation canals from the east.

Resim 7 - Çavuştepe Aşağı Kale'den güneydeki su kanallarına bakış.
Fig. 7 - A view from the lower fortress of Çavuş Tepe to the irrigation canals.



Resim 8 - Anzaf'tan yazıtlı direk altlığı. Van Müzesi.
Fig. 8 - An inscribed column base from Anzaf. Van Museum.

Resim 9 - Giyimli'den bir adak levhası üzerinde taş altlık ve direk.
Fig. 9 - A votive plaque from Giyimli showing the stone base and a pillar.