

The Balance Between the Urban and the Rural in the Urartian Heartland¹



Can AVCI²

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The statement “The land was barren and nothing was built” can be considered as the commencing expression of the systematic settlement program, is important for both showing the inhospitable geography of the area and stressing the projects undertaken: Foundation of a Urartian city always took place after agricultural infrastructure had been laid out and this was a rule for all royal cities. An Urartian city can be described as a settlement which brings a palace complex, a temple complex, tombs and the lower settlement populated by the common people in a citadel. Rural Urartu was every piece of land as soon as stepping out of its cities. The existence of a complementary bridge between Urartian countryside and royal cities can be explained by the “principle of mutual benefit”. Although rural settlements were necessary elements for city economies to survive, they managed to endure without them. Following the departure of Urartian dynasty from the Van Lake Basin, it was never easy for a central government to administer the rural settlements indigenous to the region which still exist today.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: İskan politikası, Kent, Kırsal yerleşmeler, Urartu, Van Gölü Havzası

Sistematiik bir şekilde ilerleyen iskânın geçerli başlangıç cümlesi olarak alabileceğimiz “yer çoraktı ve hiçbir şey yapılmamıştı” ifadesi gerek seçilen alanın durumu gerekse gerçekleştirilen işlerin vurgusu bakımından önemlidir. Öncülsüz kabul ettiğimiz Urartu kentlerinin inşasına başlanmadan zirai alt yapısı hazırlanmakta ve bu sıralama tüm krali kentler için geçerliliğini korumaktadır. Urartu için kent; sitadelindeki krali ve aşağı yerleşmesindeki halkı bir araya getiren, etrafı surlarla çevrili sitadelinde saray kompleksi, tapınak kompleksi ve mezarları bulunan bir iskân biçimi olarak tanımlanabilir. Urartu kırsalı ise kentleri dışındaki her yerdir. Urartu kırsalı ile krali kentleri arasında birbirini tamamlayan bir köprünün varlığı “karşılıklı fayda ilkesiyle” açıklanabilir. Kırsal yerleşmeler, kentlerin ekonomilerinin ayakta kalabilmesi için gerekli unsurlar olmasının yanında kentler olmadan da varlıklarını sürdürebilmişlerdir. Urartu hanedanının Van Gölü Havzası’ndan ayrılışından sonra karakteristik olarak bölgede olduğunu bildiğimiz ve günümüzde de varlığını sürdüren kırsal yerleşmelerin herhangi bir merkezi erk tarafından idaresi hem kolay olmamış hem de hakimiyet altında tutulması önemli bir konu olmuştur.

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Although the Turkish word *iskân* means to “settle someone, provide one a shelter or home”, it was actually derived from the Arabian root *sekene* (inhabitants), *sükûn* (stillness/immobility), which basically means ‘to become an inhabitant of a place’, hence ‘to settle’. (Kanar 2003:661). Therefore, it could be understood as ‘one’s adherence to a place even though one has the potential to move.’ Taken together with its etymological meaning, the definition ‘tying the itinerant to the land’, it can be said that *iskân etmek* (the verb form of *iskân* in Turkish) acquired a philosophical character in the hands of the central government. It is therefore possible to take the concept of settling in a broader sense to include shelters constructed by human communities, the environment they built and the area where their lives and actions take place. Hence we must also include both the temporary settlements of earlier societies, tent-dwelling nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples and permanent settlements like cities, towns and villages (Geray 1978: 803-804). In this perspective, we can say that the cultural achievement that includes everything humans created and destroyed in their environment, have distant and close relationships with each other sustaining a delicate balance. It is important to define both concepts in order to conceive that balance between the Urartian city and its countryside.

As cities contain a more diverse population compared to village societies and thanks to the need of artisans’ expertise on production and the existence of a ruling class and religious elements, they are far from being haphazard settlements. No matter which state they belong to, cities that were built within a planned and controlled development scheme and envisioned to evolve, got their share from their own countryside, forced settlements, and other regions. What separates these cities from their countryside is the state-funded public buildings. The difference of the Urartian countryside can be better understood if we consider temples, royal warehouses and administrative structures as Urartian public buildings¹. A recent study discusses the existence of public buildings primarily in relation to population management, grounding itself on the population density instead of total surface area of the settlements and qualifies a settlement as a city on the condition that it was built according to a plan by an administrator (Göney 1984:1).

In the Van Lake Basin (Fig. 1) – the Urartian heartland – a systematic settlement policy was pursued from the establishment of the Kingdom. The most important obstacle in the success of this state-run settlement program was the harsh environmental conditions where the settlement activities was taking place.

The continuity of a settlement program depends on the fulfillment of economic requirements. Agricultural infrastructure, which forms the basis of funding the settlement program, can be assessed by the sustainability of the yield and its management under the central government. Draining swamps for farming, farmland improvements, pond

¹ Although the notion of a city changes with states, time, level of civilization, social structure, geography and even personal opinion, its conceptual opposition to a rural settlement never changes (Emiroğlu 1975:126-127). For the rural structure in this sense: Bakırcı 2007.

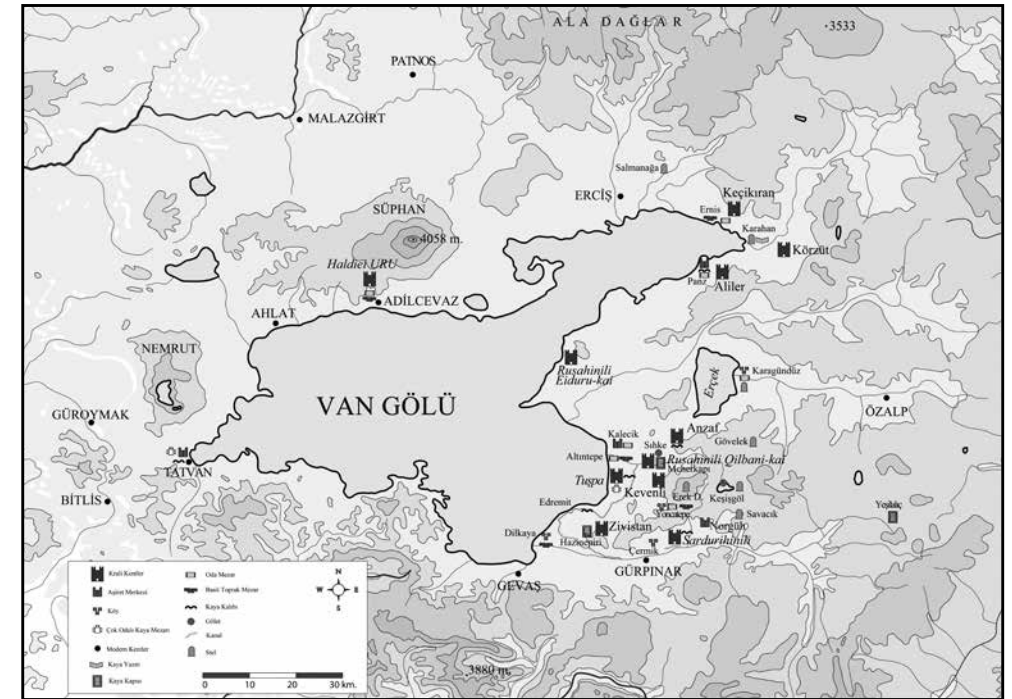


Fig. 1

Map of the settlements of Van Lake Basin. (Armağan Tan-Rıza Gürlük Akgün- Can Avcı).

constructions, vineyard and orchard establishments and human-managed forests are important activities that only can be carried out by a kingdom.

The tradition of royal building inscriptions begins with Sarduri I. Similar inscriptions with on rocks, temple walls, stone blocks and stelae narrating the founding of cities, establishments of vineyards (Payne 2006:250: CTU: 436, A 9-11), gardens and farms (Payne 2006:250: CTU: 436, A 9-11), fountains (Payne 2006: 119-122, 5.4.17; CTU: 241-242, A 5-58A-C; Konyar et al. 2013:195ff.; Konyar et al. 2014: 362ff; Konyar et al. 2015) and channels (Erzen 1972a: 66-68; 1984: 34-35, 83; Payne 2006: 253; CTU: 442, A 9-17; Erdoğan 2006) continued until the end of the reign of Rusa, son of Argishti. After the end of his reign (c. 645 BC), we do not see any evidence of such state-sponsored construction projects.

The statement “*The land was barren and nothing was built*” can be considered as the commencing expression of the systematic settlement program, is important for both showing the inhospitable geography of the area and stressing the projects undertaken: Foundation of a Urartian city always took place after agricultural infrastructure had been laid out and this was a rule for all royal cities.

“*I dug this channel. I built walls around this city and called it ‘Menua City/Menuahinili’. Nothing was built there. I moved the people and settled them there. Menua says: Whoever damages this inscription, whoever commits a crime, whoever makes someone else to do these...*”

(Dinçol-Kavaklı 1979: 19-23, no. 3; Payne 2006: 87, 5.2.22; CTU: 215-216, A 5-24).

As stated in the Karahan Inscription in the Van Museum, cities were found on empty lands, where there were no building activities before with security provided and agricultural infrastructure established. The population was brought from other places and settled. This is actually a summary of the Urartian settlement policy.

It is understood that settlements with pre-planned infrastructure and economic framework were without predecessors. The existence of settlements with a settlement tradition without a plan in the Urartian geography, however, is known, and these were the villages and tribal centers that existed before the establishment of the Urartian Kingdom². With the foundation of the kingdom, “ad hoc” settlements of villages and tribal centers began to imitate the royal practices, and were even revised by the royal authorities. Regardless of these developments, there are two types of settlements that can be clearly discerned: While they are distinguished by their walls from the villages, tribal centers have similar rural characteristics that place them among the rural settlements (Fig. 2) against the royal cities.

The reason for naming the Urartian royal settlements as cities is that their planning and development were conducted according to a plan. Contrary to modern definitions of city, we have enough data to offer the definition “regional city” for Urartu. If we are to define a settlement according to division of labor and specialization, kinship relations, public buildings built by the people under the supervision of a ruler, and where the production finds political meaning within the central government a city, then an Urartian city can be described as a settlement which brings a palace complex, a temple complex, tombs and the lower settlement populated by the common people in a citadel (Fig. 3,4,5). The traditional distinction between the people and the king/ruler even influenced the site selection of the state. Due to security concerns the citadels were constructed on higher ground (Fig. 6).

It should be noted that the structures in the citadel of an Urartian city are magnificent public buildings. These are public buildings where soldiers, clergymen and highly prominent people live and artisans working according to a professional labor division create their works. All of this magnificence is surrounded by high fortifications, as if they are the guarantor of the continuity of production and services (Fig. 7). In order to secure its permanence, the central government used domestic and foreign trade organizations and elements of religious oppression. It owes this ability to its rural population, which utilize state’s agricultural potential via royal administrators. The builders of these cities were actually their very residents, without whom the Urartian King would not be able to provide security, food and shelter for them. It is the citadel that divides the people from the countryside. Thanks to its infrastructure, a settlement, whose farmlands are improved, irrigation problems are solved, tools are provided, seeds are stored, security established, and where people live and work to please their king, is not a mere village, but a true Urartian city.

During the reign of Rusa, son of Argishti, one can observe some standard practices in

residential dwellings in the lower settlements. As understood from the inscriptions from the Temple of Haldi, the first residential dwellings in Ayanis/Rusahinili Eiduru kai were located in the lower settlement (Salvini 2001: 253-270; Payne 2006: 295-297; CTU: 566-570, A 12-1). Judging from the current state of the excavations (Zimansky-Stone 2004), however, it is hard to speak of a planned development. The workforce needed for the years-long construction were most likely provided by slaves (Çilingiroğlu 2013:82,84). The first settlers in the city, therefore, could have been these slaves. The population growth could have caused the ad hoc additions to the dwellings. Slave quarters should have been planned during the city’s construction and their relationship with the rural areas should have started then. Given that the rural population had already been brought under control before the foundation of the cities, the central government must have paid special attention to winning rural population’s loyalty, who resided in the winter quarters and pastures and sustained the agricultural economy.

It is generally accepted that Urartian cities were built by royal administrators as a part of royal projects. Since settlements with fully-functioned infrastructure would require continuous services and control, numerous factors would be at play ranging from the product types, the road system, security for both urban and rural population, to tools of religious oppression and satisfaction of different social classes. Perhaps the Urartian idea of centralization of power rather meant allowing the tribes dispersed in the region to live on their own while drawing from them labor power, soldiers and trade goods, all accomplished without the direct control of the central government. Otherwise, these settlers/tribes, who recognized only their own leaders, would continue to live by their traditions and never find a common ground, even with persistent use of power.

If we assume that Urartian royal cities have trade connections, we can think that their hinterlands also benefited from this. With the introduction of common wares, there is no reason to think that they did not trade with other contemporary neighboring states of Anatolia. An interpretation ruling out the trade for the use and production of goods such as ivory from southwest and fibula from the west is against the evolution of urbanization. Instead of thinking that the increasing appeal of cities, which are becoming centers of attraction, moving beyond its countryside with materials used in their products as the result of Urartian raiding campaigns, accepting that the Urartian state trade operations are the reason is more preferable to dialectic.

The destruction of the land by the cities that alienated themselves from the countryside so much that they fail to sustain their rural population, is self-evident. When materials required by the countryside from the cities cannot be produced by artisans, rural activities are disrupted. In order to be self-sufficient, the rural settler would spend more time to produce the tools needed instead of working in the fields. The result is the use of more primitive tools than those of the pre-urban period. The chaos caused by the city that lost its countryside and the countryside that alienated itself from its city would be disastrous and result in destruction.

² For Kalecik, Panz, Ernis, Kavuncu, Tatvan tribal settlements and villages: Avcı 2015.

In this context, it can be claimed that Rusa son of Argishti, transformed the regions to east of Van Lake into desirable areas for settlement by expanding the cities of his predecessors and founding his new ones. As population overgrowth due to migration pushed the capacities of the settlements to their limits, all the planning collapsed went out of control. A city without control would lose its connection with its countryside, whose ramifications would be visible as the throngs of immigrants piling up outside the city proper. Many centers where slave populations were settled also would not tolerate new waves of immigrants, resulting in the loss of influence of the central government. The absence of any sign of abandonment due to war at the excavated settlements in the Van Lake Basin, points to a planned retreat. Moreover, it might be seen as a precaution taken by the state, which could not reach to its rural areas and therefore were unable to feed its cities. It must have continued to exist in the cities within the Aras and the Sevan lake basins. Urartian Kingdom exploited the plain's economic return by using former rural fields which had already been transformed by the cities. It can be said that Urartian settlement policies never aimed to transform the entire countryside, but tried to make use of its economic potential, which makes it imperative to take peripheries into consideration when considering the issue.

We can evaluate the size and importance of cities, which should have had close economic and cultural ties with their peripheries, by the size of their economic and cultural area of influence. Just as it would not be wrong to regard Mushashir as a city, whose cultural influence was great, so it would not be far-fetched to consider every Urartian royal city exerting great economic and cultural influence over an extensive area. No city that provided the goods that its countryside could not produce and that required the goods produced in the countryside became self-sufficient³. On the contrary, it continued to exist as a center of a variety of services for surrounding regions. The larger the regions that were affected by these services, the more important the city became. The existence of a complementary bridge between Urartian countryside and royal cities can be explained by the "principle of mutual benefit".

Urartian royal centers, which are composed of a citadel and a lower settlement, were the representative of the central government and guarantor for the economic life. Royal storehouses of such centers, where farming is more systematic and effortless and production is more fruitful due to services provided by the state, cannot be compared to granaries in a village (Fig. 8,9). A settlement, where the people consume the entire annual agricultural production so that there is no surplus and guarantee for the next year, is simply a village settlement. In the Van Lake Basin, there is not much difference between the characteristics of modern rural settlements such as farmsteads, pens, stables, granaries and even highland

³ Self-sufficient small economies has ruined the nature, caused deforestation in many regions via animal husbandry and forestry, resulting in the loss of fertile soil. It is interesting to note that, in a way, the cities owe their existence to the continuity of these closed economies. (Selen 1945:104)

tents and those of their antecedents⁴. Modern construction materials aside, mudbrick, stone and wood are still in use in the modern settlements. Locals who are trying to adapt to the environmental conditions, use the same materials to construct their houses in the same geographical conditions. Here we must speak of a dwelling tradition out of necessity, dictated by geographic conditions. These persisting habits facilitate the investigation of the aforementioned traditions in rural areas (Fig. 10,11).

Although they are self-sufficient (Childe 1983:47)⁵, rural settlements require the administrative functions and opportunities provided by the central government, and their existence is possible only with the permanency of such support. How rich it might be, any city is doomed to impoverish and lose its importance if it loses its rural settlements. Despite the evidence from the building inscriptions on Urartian roads and irrigation facilities, we lack archaeological data to illuminate the issues such as administration and protection of summer pastures, which are a supplementary elements of a rural settlement.

Although rural settlements were necessary elements for city economies to survive, they managed to endure without them. Following the departure of Urartian dynasty from the Van Lake Basin, it was never easy for a central government to administer the rural settlements indigenous to the region which still exist today. The issue of their subjugation was of great importance for any state. State control over rural activities was essential for both economic and security reasons. Even in the Ottoman Era, migration of some nomadic tribes into Iran due to infertile pastures, was considered a loss that cannot be compensated.⁶ There is a group of people, regarded to be both financial commodities and guarantors for the continuity of economic return, and who described sometimes as captives, sometimes as forced laborers, and occasionally as tenants, who were – with some exceptions – never considered as independent beings (Tunçdilek 1986:40). Say the least of it, the villagers and the land as a whole became the property of every political power and changed hands from state to state.

The reason for the simplicity of the people living in the Basin is related to the geography's

⁴ Although the term "settlement" can be described as "a living space composed of nature, humans and their creations", it should not be understood merely as a habitual space. The term has come to refer to "a site where private and distant relationships, a firm workforce, social institutions and culture exist (Geray 1968:2). A settlement includes houses for human communities, the environment they created and all the areas of human life and activities.

⁵ We agree with Childe on the self-sufficiency of villages. In his work, he states that "every village was self-sufficient. They grew their own food and made all of their tools using materials that can be found around the village" (Childe 1983). Villages exactly meet the meaning of self-sufficiency. All agricultural activities including farming, horticulture, animal husbandry and forestry are made by every village family without a division of labor (Selen 1945:100). In a limited scope, we may say villages with a population low enough to cultivate the adequate land can be said to be self-sufficient.

⁶ In a decree sent to the Van Beylerbeyi, an Ottoman subject tribe named Halidi is said to have migrated to Iran and he was ordered to return and resettle them. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Mühimme Defterleri No: 26, 28 safer 982/19 Haziran 1574 hüküm. No: 78 s.29.

conditions only adequate enough to survive.. Before the settlers went under the authority of the Urartian central government, They were engaging in farming, grazing, going up to the highlands, making pottery and storing the goods according to their need. They lacked, however, the ability to establish a central power with this simple way of life. The only condition for their continued existence in this central authority is the continuity of their production and this was not difficult for the rural areas. Protecting the balance created by the mutual satisfaction between city and countryside was necessary for the continuity of the state. The disruption in the balance created an environment which prevented the realization of the habitation prerequisites and hindered the Kingdom's success in all areas of activity. After the time of Rusa, son of Argishti, plunder campaigns could not continue, thus it resulted in the prevention of new settlement establishments while the already existing ones were destroyed.



Fig. 2

The western walls of Panz tribe settlement shaped by the topography. (VANTAM archive).



Fig. 3

Citadel of Tuşpa and its lower settlement. (VANTAM archive)



Fig. 4

Royal rock-cut tombs from Old Van City. (VANTAM archive).



Fig. 5

Citadel of Ayanis/Rusabinili Eiduru kai and its lower settlement. (VANTAM archive).

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Fig. 6

View from lower settlement houses to Tuşpa Citadel. (VANTAM archive).



Fig. 7

Walls rising on terraces of Tuşpa citadel. (VANTAM archive).

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Fig. 8

The Royal storage room in Anzap City. (VANTAM archive).



Fig. 9

A storage room in Trench N26 of Tuşpa lower settlement. (VANTAM archive).



Fig. 10

Black tent on highland. (VANTAM archive)



Fig. 11

A sample of stone architecture in Yoncatepe- Yukarı Bakraçlı Village. (VANTAM archive).

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