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A New Ceremonial Practice at Ayanis Fortress: The Urartian Sacred Tree Ritual on the Eastern Shore of Lake Van*

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In the past two decades, the data obtained from Ayanis Fortress have changed our understanding of the culture of the Urartian Kingdom and have made it necessary that we reconsider it. Apart from providing very important information in the areas of economy, warfare and art in the reign of Rusa II, Ayanis Fortress (fig. 1), which is located on the eastern shore of Lake Van (fig. 2), has also shed light on the religious beliefs and practices of the Urartian state. As with many ancient Near Eastern peoples, religion in the Urartian state provided direction to political activities, even in terms of forming a foundation of legitimacy for the state, and played an important role in activities relating to warfare, agriculture, and construction. The numerous ritual ceremonies that took place in the Temple Area of Ayanis Fortress and the temple storage rooms have revealed this role in the clearest manner. This paper's purpose is to follow the footsteps of one of the new and indigenous ritual practices that Ayanis Fortress has revealed of Urartu's religious culture.

* The finds coming from the Ayanis Fortress presented in this article are recorded under the Van Museum inventory and have been used by the permission of Prof. Dr. Altan Çilingiroğlu, Director of Ayanis excavations. I am indebted to him for his generous sharing of the Ayanis excavation archive. I am also grateful to Yeşim Zoroğlu Batmaz from the Faculty of Fine Arts of Dokuz Eylül University for her attentive charcoal drawings.

While this ceremony was related to the sacred tree, it might not be independent of the cult of the god Haldi. Thus, we need to reconsider the status of the god Haldi apart from his relation to war and fertility. Therefore, I will also deal with what sort of relation existed between Haldi and prolonged life. Before presenting new ritual practices at Ayanis Fortress and the connection between life and Haldi, we need to briefly look at the indicators in Ayanis Fortress which point to other cults of Haldi.

Religious activities at Ayanis Fortress took place in the name of the god Haldi and were performed in the 35 × 35 m Temple Area (fig. 3) dedicated to him.¹ In many ceremonies held for the god Haldi at Ayanis Fortress, we observe that a variety of weapons were dedicated to him, such as quivers, helmets, spearheads, and bronze shields hung on the temple walls and the piers in the Temple Area.² The oft-repeated

¹ A. Çilingiroğlu, "Temple Area," in *Ayanis I: Ten Years' Excavations at Rusabinili Eiduru-kai 1989–1998*, ed. A. Çilingiroğlu and M. Salvini (Rome, 2001), 45–47, figs. 1–2; Z. Derin and A. Çilingiroğlu, "Armour and Weapons," *ibid.*, 155–87; Z. Derin and O. W. Muscarella, "Iron and Bronze Arrows," *ibid.*, 189–217; A. Çilingiroğlu, "Silah, Tohum, Ateş," in *Anadolu'da Doğdu: 60. Yaşında Fabri Işık'a Armağan* (İstanbul, 2004), 257–67.

² Çilingiroğlu, "Temple Area," 45–46; Derin and Çilingiroğlu, "Armour and Weapons," 159, 161. The deformations on the shields



Figure 1—General view of Ayanis Fortress from the east. Author's photograph, 2008.

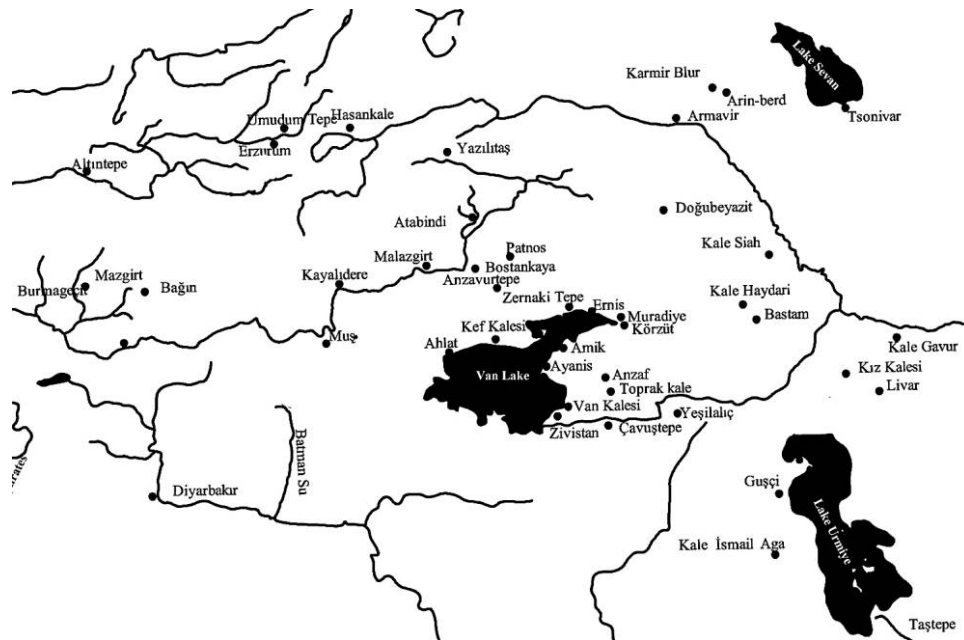


Figure 2—Urartian sites and localization of Ayanis Fortress.

inscriptions written on these arms indicate that they were dedicated to Haldi.³ Therefore, it may be deduced that the principal god Haldi embodied various powers and authority, the most notable and predominant of which was warfare.

show that they might have fallen from the heights of the temple walls.

³ M. Salvini, "The Inscription of Ayanis (Rusahinili Eiduru-kai) Cuneiform and Hieroglyphic: Royal Inscriptions on Bronze Artifacts," in *Ayanis I*, ed. Çilingiroğlu and Salvini, 275.

Apart from his warrior status, the god Haldi also had the power to provide affluence and abundance to the Urartian lands. The quiver, caldron and animal bones filled with millet in the Temple Area of Ayanis Fortress have led to a scholarly connection between seeds and Haldi or, in a wider sense, between fertility and Haldi.⁴ The effectiveness of the Haldi cult would

⁴ Çilingiroğlu, "Temple Area," 46; A. Çilingiroğlu, "Ayanis Tapınak Alanında Bir Ocak ve Bereketlilik Kültü İlişkisi," in *Studies in Honour of Refik Duru*, ed. G. Umurtak et al. (Istanbul,



Figure 3—Temple area and core-temple of Ayanis from north-west (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).



Figure 4—Cella of Ayanis temple (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

have been obvious in the crop and vine harvest seasons.⁵ The reservoir, pond, canal, agricultural land and other works were thought to have been constructed and sanctified by Haldi. With these features, he assumed the image of a god who provided continuity with the land's vital activities and provided agricultural productivity. Thus, Haldi was associated with agriculture and animal husbandry.⁶

It is clear that the god Haldi was a vital celestial deity. Until 2008, the excavators believed that the rituals at Ayanis Fortress were only performed in the Temple Area, which included the square core-temple (4.58 × 4.62 m in size) built for God Haldi (fig. 4).⁷ The excavations carried out to the west of the Temple Area in 2008, however, have provided strong clues to the existence of different religious areas and applications at Ayanis Fortress. One particular structure (Room 10) and other associated structures that were revealed have markedly different features compared to

other parts of the fortress (fig. 5).⁸ Room 10 is not very distant from the Temple Area, but it is located in an area adjacent to the domestic structures of the fortress (fig. 5) which includes nine rooms (Rooms 1–9). Most of these rooms contained simple storage places, sacks and small-sized jars for grains and pots for daily use. These structures contained archaeological material such as flat stone slabs—presumably for cheese production—grinding stones, pestles and basins that can be associated with domestic activities and production.⁹ Despite the fact that these domestic quarters were very close to Room 10, they were physically not connected to each other; indeed they were separated by a 1.7m thick wall.

On the other hand, the relics that the room contained make it stand out from the other structures.

2007), 266; A. Çilingiroğlu, “Ritual Ceremonies in the Temple Area of Ayanis,” in *Anatolian Iron Ages 5, Proceedings of the Fifth Anatolian Iron Ages Colloquium held at Van, 6–10 August 2001, British Institute at Ankara Monograph 31*, ed. A. Çilingiroğlu and G. Darbyshire (Ankara, 2005), 31–37.

⁵ G. A. Melikishvili, *Urartskiy Klinobraznyye Nadpisi I* (Moscow, 1960), 65; G. A. Melikishvili, *Urartskiy Klinobraznyye Nadpisi II* (Moscow, 1960), 281; hereafter abbreviated as UKN I or II.

⁶ Çilingiroğlu, “Silah, Tohum, Ateş,” 258; M. Salvini, *Urartu Tarihi ve Kültürü* (İstanbul, 2006), 53, 161.

⁷ Çilingiroğlu, “Temple Area,” 37–66; A. Çilingiroğlu, “Ritual Ceremonies,” 31–37.

⁸ A. Çilingiroğlu and A. Ü. Erdem, “Ayanis Kalesi Kazıları, 2006–2008” in *3. Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı 1.Cilt* (Ankara, 2009) 16–17; A. Çilingiroğlu, “Ayanis: An Iron Age Site in the East,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Anatolia*, ed. S. R. Steadman and G. McMahon (Oxford, 2011), 1061–62; A. Çilingiroğlu, “Ayanis Kalesi (Ayanis Fortress),” in *Urartu: Doğu'da Değişim (Urartu: Transformation in the East)*, ed. K. Köroğlu and E. Kanyar (İstanbul, 2011); A. Batmaz, “Ayanis Kalesi'nden Hayat Ağacı İnancına İlişkin Yeni Bulgular,” *Arkeoloji ve Sanat* 141 (2012): 39–50.

⁹ The Ceremonial Aisle is located to 15–20m west of the Temple Area. The floor level of the corridor is about 80 cm lower than that of the Temple Area. For the domestic quarters of Ayanis Fortress, see A. Çilingiroğlu, “Ayanis Kalesi'ndeki Eysel Mekânlar” in *Doğudan Yükselen Işık-Arkeoloji Yazıları, Atatürk Üniversitesi 50. Yıl Kuruluş Yıldönümü Arkeoloji Armağanı*, eds. B. Can and M. Işıklı (Erzurum, 2007), 37–43; A. Çilingiroğlu and A. Ü. Erdem, “Ayanis Kalesi Kazıları, 2006–2008,” *3. Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı 1.Cilt* (2009): 9–12; A. Çilingiroğlu, “Ayanis: An Iron Age Site in the East,” 1058–61.



Figure 5—Plan of Ceremonial Aisle and adjacent architecture.

At this point, it should be emphasized that Room 10 is clearly separated from the domestic dwellings and that there is no entrance from that area. The other walls belonging to the structure are 1.5m in thickness. Of the two entrances to the room, one is through a 1.0m wide gate on the south wall. The other is on the west wall and is 0.8m in width. With a length of 9.3m and a width of 3.15m and two direct entrances to Rooms 11 and 12 (fig. 30), this room, unlike the other rooms in this area, resembles an aisle. Thus, it has been named the “Ceremonial Aisle” (fig. 5, 6).¹⁰ The Ceremonial Aisle (Room 10) and Room 11 were constructed on substantial foundation walls consisting of limestone blocks on the bedrock. The only entrance to Room 11 is through Room 10. Thus, Room 11 can be considered an extension of the Ceremonial Aisle

and obviously directly related to it, which is the focal point of this article.¹¹

The importance of this room for us lies in the finds recovered inside (see Table 1). In front of the north and south walls of the structure, about thirty-five bronze rosettes covered with gold foil were discovered (fig. 7). These rosettes were far more numerous near the north wall, and one can infer that they were used as part of the decorations on the walls. Gold rosettes with either pins or two to five hooks on their backs were found previously near the walls of the Temple Area. Hooks may indicate that they were attached to soft material such as textiles or tapestries. It is also proposed that the rosettes with hooks may have been sewn on to a material like cloth or attached as buttons by their hooks.¹² Yet those found in the

¹⁰ The name of the “Ceremonial Aisle” was given by A. Çilingiroğlu (pers. communication).

¹¹ The architecture of Ayanis will be presented in the second volume by A. Çilingiroğlu, *Ayanis II* (forthcoming).

¹² H. Sağlamtimur, G. Kozbe, and Ö. Çevik, “Small Finds,” in *Ayanis I*, ed. Çilingiroğlu and Salvini, 222.

Table 1—List Of Small Finds, Rooms 10–12

| <i>Ceremonial Aisle (Room 10)</i> | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|----------|------------|
| Name | Material | Quantity | Figure No. |
| Mosaic | Stone | 10 | 10 |
| Rosette | Bronze and Gold | 30 | 7 |
| Leaf | Gold | 2 | – |
| Sun Disk | Gold | 1 | 23 |
| Star | Bronze | 1 | 24 |
| Lamp | Bronze | 1 | 27 |
| Ornament fragment | Stone, wood, bone | 5 | 22 |
| Bowl | Bronze | 1 | – |
| <i>Room 11</i> | | | |
| Weight Stone | Stone | 1 | – |
| Fan Handle | Gold | 1 | 12 |
| Sharpening Stone | Stone | 1 | – |
| Bulla | Clay | 1 | – |
| Mosaic | Stone | 1 | – |
| Rosette | Bronze | 1 | – |
| <i>Room 12</i> | | | |
| Human Fist | Bronze | 1 | 32 |
| Nail | Bronze | 2 | – |
| Mushroom-headed Nail | Iron | 1 | – |
| Arrowhead | Iron | 2 | – |
| Disk with umbo | Bronze | 1 | 31 |
| Mosaic | Stone | 4 | – |
| Bead | Onyx | 1 | – |
| Axe | Iron | 3 | – |

Ceremonial Aisle had only pins behind them. One example was attached directly to the plastered wall with its pin behind it, while another example was anchored to a piece of burnt wood. Therefore, it has been suggested that they could have been attached to several wooden bands fixed along the wall.¹³ Because such gold rosettes appeared only in the Temple Area and the Ceremonial Aisle, clearly they were exclusively used as ornaments in elaborate ritual areas. The walls where these rosettes were hung were painted, as plaster pieces found contained residues of paint in blue and brown colors.

In the northwest corner of the aisle, there was an altar-like chalkstone feature with a grooved interior (fig. 8). This rectangular chalkstone, which has a central hole, is an *in situ* architectural element (fig. 9). It is sunken into the floor and surrounded by a raised clay architectural element 40cm in length and 20cm



Figure 6—Ceremonial Aisle (Room 10) and Room 11. Author's photograph 2008 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

in width; the hole in the middle is 5cm in diameter (fig. 37). It is not known for certain whether the hole was a drain hole or a socket, but the finds, which will be discussed below, suggest that it was, in fact, a socket.

¹³ A. Çilingiroğlu, personal communication.

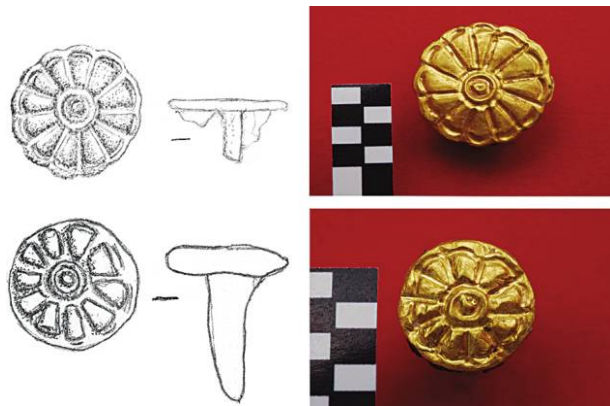


Figure 7—Examples of bronze rosettes covered with golden foil from the Ceremonial Aisle (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).



Figure 8—Chalkstone structure (altar) on the north-west corner of the Ceremonial Aisle viewed from south-east. Author's photograph 2008 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

In the immediate vicinity and on top of the floor were teardrop-shaped (or almond-shaped) interlocking mosaic-type stones (fig. 10). These stones were sometimes found singly, but also often in twos or threes. In addition to their generally paired form (with a chalkstone exterior and a black stone interior), there were also a few examples where the exterior of the stones was black and the interior was chalkstone white. Of the stones recovered, only one was designed as an interlocking three-piece stone. The function of these stones has not been fully understood. However, their numbers were too few to form a wall mosaic, nor was there any evidence that they were parts of any other item, such as the eyes of statues. In addition, all of them were uncovered near the vicinity of the chalkstone socket area at the northwest corner of the aisle.



Figure 9—Chalkstone structure on the north-west corner of the Ceremonial Aisle viewed from top. Author's photograph 2008 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).



Figure 10—Drop-shaped stones found at the corner of the Ceremonial Aisle. Author's photograph 2008 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

Could these stones represent the symbolic buds (or the fruits) of a tree of life? The answer to this question is again hidden in the same location: the back surface of the hollowed area of the drop-shaped stones was filled with wooden pieces. Furthermore, the back surfaces of these stones show marks of a cavity (or a dent) indicating that they were mounted in some way (fig. 10).

In fact, many such pieces of stone were found together with wooden fragments of varying sizes. A considerable number of such wooden remains were present, in fact, immediately to the east of the chalkstone socket; among these were several larger pieces of wood resembling branches. This could indicate that the drop-shaped stones were mounted on a stick



Figure 11—Example of the tree of life motive on the alabaster podium of Ayanis cella (Çilingiroğlu, “Temple Area”, 57–59, figs. 19–23).

which represented the trunk of a sacred tree. As it was subjected to a fire, whether the stick or pole formed the trunk of the sacred tree, and whether the wooden pieces from the wooden pile belonged to it, cannot be commented on. However, from inside the perforated section of the chalkstone feature many burnt wood and branch pieces were gathered.

Sacred tree motives in which buds or pine cones are shown in the shape of drops are frequently encountered in Urartian art. Many samples of these were found in Ayanis Fortress. Numerous sacred tree depictions are visible on the alabaster platform (fig. 11)¹⁴ within the cella of Ayanis temple, and on a solid gold artifact¹⁵ belonging to the queen (fig. 12).

A good example of a sacred tree motive comes from the Altintepe Fortress. An ivory plaque (fig. 13) from Tomb III there shows an Urartian sacred tree.¹⁶ Some of the buds that make up the sacred tree have an intriguing shape identical to the shape and type of the stones found in Ayanis Fortress. The depictions on the Urartian seals and seal impressions also carry this motif (fig. 14).¹⁷ Sacred tree motifs

¹⁴ Çilingiroğlu, “Temple Area,” 57–59, figs. 19–23.

¹⁵ A. Çilingiroğlu (with an appendix by M. Salvini), “New Contributions to Urartian Archaeology from the Ayanis Fortress,” in *Anatolian Iron Ages 7. The Proceedings of the Seventh Anatolian Ages Colloquium Held at Edirne, 19–24 April 2010*, ed. A. Çilingiroğlu and A. Sagona (Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement 39; Leuven, 2012), 99–112; Çilingiroğlu, “Ayanis: An Iron Age Site in the East,” 1062.

¹⁶ T. Özgüç, *Altintepe II: Tombs, Storehouse and Ivories* (Ankara, 1969), 56, fig. 57, pl. L.

¹⁷ For Ayanis examples see M. Salvini, “The Inscription of Ayanis (Rusahinili Eiduru-kai) Cuneiform and Hieroglyphic: Inscription

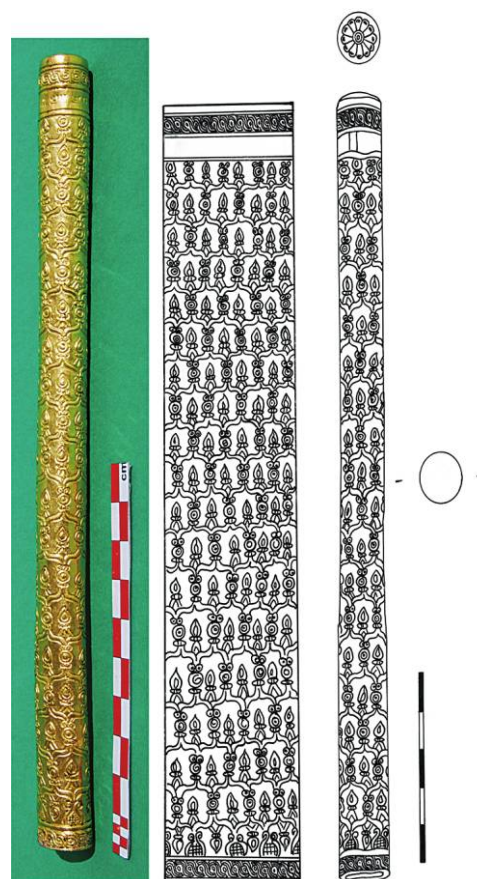


Figure 12—Solid gold object from Room 11, drawing of the tree of life motives on it. Property of Queen Qaqli (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

with buds played a significant role during fertility rites as ornamental items. Consequently, the carved ivory plaque at Altintepe and other data strengthen the possibility that the stones found at the Ceremonial Aisle at Ayanis were the buds of the sacred tree. In the sacred tree with buds, the buds are always of the same shape and the pointed part stands upwards. In the Altintepe ivory artifact, buds consist of three concentric stones: the outer stone is black, the next is

tions on Clay,” in *Ayanis I*, 316, Seal Ay-2-4, fig. 8c-f; E. Abay, “Seal and Sealings,” in *Ayanis I*, 323–24, figs. 1–3, 15, pl. II/1; for examples from Bastam, see U. Seidl, “Die Siegelbilder,” in *Bastam II: Ausgrabungen in den Urartäischen Anlagen 1977–1978*, ed. W. Kleiss (Berlin, 1988), 145–46, A3–A6; for examples from Karmir Blur, see B. B. Piotrovsky, *Karmir-blur III: rezultati rasskopok 1951–1953 godov* (Erivan, 1955), 14, fig. 7; B. B. Piotrovsky, *Urartu*, (Geneva, 1969), fig. 34; M. N. van Loon, *Urartian Art, Its Distinctive Traits in the Light of New Excavations* (İstanbul, 1966), 156, fig. 19. E7–E9.

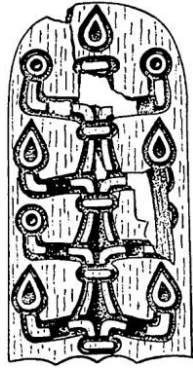


Figure 13—Ivory plaque from Altintepe, Tomb III (after Özgüç, *Altintepe II*, fig. 57, pl. L).



Figure 14—A bulla from Ayanis (after Salvini, “Inscriptions on Clay,” 316).

white, and the innermost stone is again black. There is only one example of these three interlaced stones at Ayanis (fig. 10). It is possible that this grouping created the bud at the very top of the tree (fig. 28b). Ten buds were found at the Ceremonial Aisle. Nine buds can be counted in the carved ivory plaque at Altintepe. It can be surmised from the many wood pieces found at the Ceremonial Aisle that the buds were attached to the trunk of the sacred tree through wooden branches and cordage found nearby. Thus, in the tree fertilized in the Adilcevaz relief (fig. 15) and in the ivory artifact found in the Altintepe grave, the trunk and the branches of the tree are overlaid; our



Figure 15—Adilcevaz relief (after Çilingiroğlu *Urartu Krallığı Tarihi ve Sanatı*, 138, çiz.1).

observation points out that branches were probably combined with attachments made up of wooden rings.

If we assume that a sacred tree existed in the Ceremonial Aisle, it is not difficult to determine where it stood and in what manner. Thus, the function of the chalkstone hollowed feature with a hole sunken into the floor where the north and the west walls meet becomes apparent—the portable sacred tree was planted there. The sacred tree, placed in a similar socketed base, can be found in various Urartian art works. Such bases, where a sacred tree was placed, can be found in the impression of a seal from Toprakkale (fig. 17),¹⁸ in a seal at the Elazığ Museum (fig. 18),¹⁹ and in a seal from Karmir Blur (fig. 19).²⁰ Again, the sacred tree seen on the Adilcevaz relief is on a pedestal-like platform. Similar bases with central holes were discovered at Ayanis Fortress. Another example can be seen at the Altintepe open-air sanctuary (fig. 16). At Altintepe in front of one of the four planted stelae, a round stone object with a cone-shaped hollow in its center was discovered.²¹ It is suggested that a

¹⁸ C. Işık, “Neue Beobachtungen zur Darstellung von Kultszenen auf urartäischen Rolltempelsiegeln,” *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 101 (1986): 3, abb. 1.

¹⁹ Ibid.: 4, abb. 2a.

²⁰ Piotrovsky, *Urartu*, fig. 39.

²¹ Özgüç, *Altintepe II*, 28.

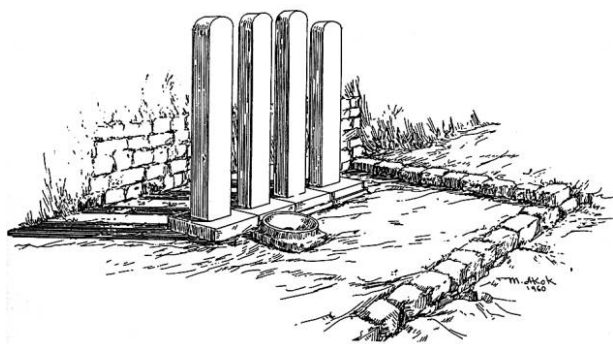


Figure 16—Altintepe, open air sanctuary (after Özgüç, *Altintepe II*, 28).



Figure 17—Seal impression from Toprakkale (after Işık, “urartäischen Rolltempelsiegeln”, abb. 1).

sacred tree was placed in this stone object and a liquid libation was poured out.²² While T. Özgüç²³ and C. Işık²⁴ claim that the liquid offering was done without the sacred tree, N. Çevik²⁵ associates this procedure with it. The latter suggestion seems to be valid for the previously-mentioned sunken chalkstone installation at Ayanis Fortress, even though previously it was proposed that this was used as a place for ritual cleaning.²⁶

Certain evidence that liquid offerings took place where the sacred tree was placed can be found in this aisle in the Ayanis Fortress. This must be the purpose of the three red polished trefoil rim jugs²⁷ discovered on the floor of the north wall of the area, as the jugs are located only 2m away from the perforated chalkstone structure in the corner (fig. 21). In a similar way,

²² N. Çevik, “Hayat Ağacının Urartu Kült Törenlerindeki Yeri ve Kullanım Biçimi,” *Anadolu Araştırmaları XV* (1999): 344–48.

²³ Özgüç, *Altintepe II*, 33.

²⁴ Işık, “Neue Beobachtungen”: 3.

²⁵ Çevik, “Hayat Ağacı,” 350.

²⁶ Çilingiroğlu and Erdem, “Ayanis Kalesi Kazıları,” 17; Çilingiroğlu, “Ayanis: An Iron Age Site in the East,” 1061.

²⁷ One of them bears two dots on a bowl, a sign corresponding to 2 *liš*.



Figure 18—Seal impression from Elazığ Museum (after Işık, “urartäischen Rolltempelsiegeln”, abb. 2a).

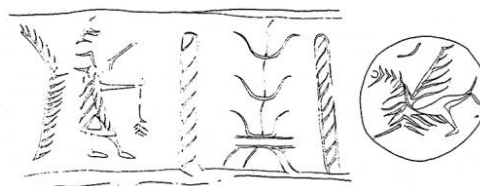


Figure 19—Seal impression from Karmir Blur (after Piotrovsky, *Urartu*, fig. 39).

the Toprakkale seal impression shows a jug next to a person standing opposite the altar in which the sacred tree is placed. There must be a reason why the person doing the sacrifice was depicted in the same scene with the sacred tree and the jug. It is probable that these people would shortly provide the liquid to revive the sacred tree whose branches are turned down.

Depictions on the seals related to this subject enable us to better understand the position of the sacred tree and the nature of the rituals. On the seals of Toprakkale and the Elazığ Museum, there is one commonality: both have three stelae behind the sacred tree whose branches point down. Another cylinder seal impression from Karmir Blur illustrates a sacred tree with upright branches between two celestial figures (fig. 38),²⁸ with their hands raised towards the sacred tree. The figure standing on the right of the sacred tree must have carried out the libation with the bucket located just below his right hand. In my opinion, the upright branches of the sacred tree indicate that the tree had come to life following the libation ceremony carried out with the bucket. Another figure standing on the left end of the scene carries another sacred tree whose branches droop down. Probably, this tree

²⁸ B. B. Piotrovsky, *Karmir Blur II* (Yerevan, 1952), fig. 22, no. 19.

would be the next to be planted and revived. To sum up, one of the sacred trees was the result of a ritual performance which brought it to life, while the other one still awaited the same procedure: a circular ceremonial procedure existed in the scene.

There is no data about the nature of the liquid that was poured as an offering. It is possible that this liquid was water, or sacrificial blood or wine symbolizing blood.²⁹ If the liquid was water, this reminds us of the “water of life” given in order to revive the Tree of Life after it had been set in place.³⁰ However, in many Urartian inscriptions it is known that instead of water, wine offerings were made. For example, in the records of the Eighth Campaign of Sargon II it is written that a bronze *ḫarû* (a large metal basin/cauldron) filled with wine was offered to Haldi at his temple in Muṣaṣir.³¹ At this point a question may arise: Was the libation liquid drained away by a drainage system? It should be stated that the round libation altar at Altintepe has no drain system.³² It is reasonable to think that a drainage system running beneath the floor at Ayanis would not have been a necessity, since the liquid used during libation would have been symbolically absorbed by sacred tree; however, it has not yet been possible to investigate this feature further.

The burnt wooden remains found in this room were dense only in the northwest part of the room (figs. 8–9). Hence, it would be difficult to state that all of this belonged to the roof structure. Furthermore, these wood pieces did not consist only of beams—wooden planks and branches were also observed. Among the wooden remains, straw matting pieces were also found. The remains in question are assumed

²⁹ The blood of a sacrificed animal must have been used in the course of the ritual. A. Çilingiroğlu, *Urartu Krallığı Tarihi ve Sanatı* (İzmir, 1997), 102; A. Çilingiroğlu, “Urartu’da Tapınma ve Tapınma Yerleri,” in *Karatepe’deki Işık: Halet Çambel’e Sunulan Yazılar*, ed. G. Arsebük et al. (İstanbul, 1998), 230, 237. On the stone block of the *susi*-temple complex at Karmir Blur, an offering made with the blood of a sacrificed animal is shown. I. Diakonoff, “Sacrifices in City of Teişeba (UKN II 448): Lights on the Social History of Urartu,” *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 24 (1991): 14, 16. It is known that blood, just as in the Urartian religion, played an important role among many other ancient religious beliefs since blood was accepted as the essence of life. M. Eliade, *Dinsel İnançlar ve Düşünceler Tarihi*, trans. Ali Berktaş (İstanbul, 2007), 190.

³⁰ Çevik, “Hayat Ağacı,” 350–57.

³¹ R. Merhav, “Everyday and Ceremonial Utensils,” in *Urartu: A Metalworking Centre in the First Millennium B.C.E.*, ed. R. Merhav (Tel Aviv, 1991), 226.

³² Özgüç, *Altintepe II*, 28.

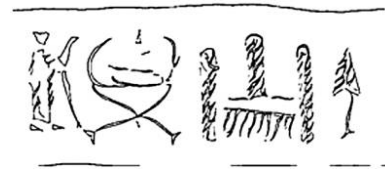


Figure 20—Seal impression from Van Museum (after Calmayer, “Some Remarks on Iconography,” fig. 5).



Figure 21—Jugs and a bronze lamp found in the Ceremonial Aisle. Author’s photograph 2008 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

to be from wooden furniture. The most acceptable interpretation for material found in this area is a portable wooden table and/or a stand. On the other hand, it is possible that the find was a portable wooden stool. The suggestion that these were the remains of furniture has been verified by the depictions on the cylinder seal at the Elazığ Museum.³³ What is interesting with this seal is the presence of a table with curved legs in front of a stela and a sacred tree. In the example of a seal in the Van Museum (fig. 20), a crosswise, two-legged table in front of the stela is prominent.³⁴ In addition, in the ceremonial scenes depicted on certain medallions, pectorals or belts, similar tables and stools can be observed.³⁵ Aside from this, the three-legged

³³ Işık, “Neue Beobachtungen”: 1.

³⁴ P. Calmayer, “Some Remarks on Iconography,” in *Urartu*, ed. Merhav, 317, fig. 5.

³⁵ H. J. Kellner, “Grouping and Dating of Bronze Belts,” in *Urartu*, ed. Merhav, 161, fig. 17; R. Merhav, “Secular and Cultic Furniture,” in *ibid.*, 248–9, fig. 2.1–2.5; 252, fig. 4.1–4.; 253, fig. 5.1–5.3; U. Seidl, *Bronzekunst Urartus* (Mainz, 2004), 143, abb. 102; 187, abb. 138, Faltafel A–4.

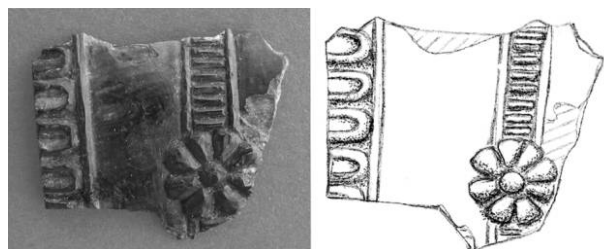


Figure 22—Example of an ornament fragment from the Ceremonial Aisle (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

tables discovered in a burial at Adilcevaz³⁶ also indicate that these might be related. Furthermore, many table remnants have been discovered at different burial grounds and settlements as well.³⁷

It should be stated that within this section of the excavated area, decorative pieces that make up the furniture parts were present. Amongst the wooden remains were discovered decorations with carvings and embossments (fig. 22), gold leaves, wooden remains decorated with mother of pearl inlays, bronze pieces, a gold sun disk (fig. 23) and a bronze rosette in the form of a star (fig. 24). The gold winged sun disk can be connected with the god Haldi. In opposition to this view, there are those who state that the winged gold sun disk symbol is not a symbol of one particular god, but a general symbol of divinity.³⁸ Under both possibilities, however, the sun disk is a celestial symbol and is likely to be a piece of the portable sacred tree (fig. 28a). There is, for example, a sun disk in the shape of an emblem at the top of the sacred tree that is depicted on the small box found at Karmir Blur (fig. 25).³⁹ Likewise, the bronze belts from Giyimli⁴⁰ and Çavuştepe (fig. 26),⁴¹ showing the



Figure 23—Gold sun disk from the Ceremonial Aisle (Courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

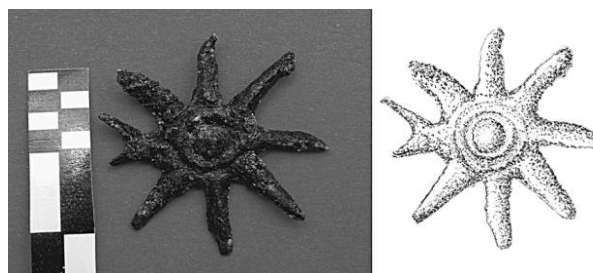


Figure 24—Star-shaped bronze rosette from the Ceremonial Aisle (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

sacred tree with buds, have sun disks at the very top. Other examples of portrayals of a sun disk symbol on the sacred tree can be provided from Urartian art and other cultures.⁴² An emblem-like sign on the top of the trees portrayed in the seal impressions of Elazığ and Toprakkale may indicate that a disk was placed on top of the ritual sacred tree. The sun disk found in the aisle, however, does not present any evidence of how it was affixed.

If there was a table inside the Ceremonial Aisle in the Ayanis Fortress, was there something on top of it? The answer to this question cannot be definitely answered. However, two artifacts nearby were conspicuous. One of these was a bronze lamp (fig. 27); the other was a bronze vessel. The lamp was behind the three jugs mentioned above and next to the north wall, while the bronze vessel was nearer the west wall.

³⁶ C. Işık, “Tische und Tischdarstellungen in der urartäischen Kunst,” *Belleten* 197 (1986): fig. 7, 9.

³⁷ Van Loon, *Urartian Art*, 88; B. Piotrovsky, *Urartu: The Kingdom of Van and its Art* (London, 1967), 34–35, fig. 19; R. D. Barnett and N. Gökçe, “The Find of Urartian Bronzes at Altintepe, Near Erzincan,” *Anatolian Studies* 3 (1952): 127; Işık “Tische,” 413–45; Merhav “Secular and Cultic Furniture,” 246–72.

³⁸ N. Özgüç, “The Decorated Bronze Strip and Plaques from Altintepe,” in *Mansel’e Armağan, Mélanges Mansel II*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Dizi VII (Ankara, 1974), 859.

³⁹ Piotrovsky, *Urartu: The Kingdom of Van*, 69, Fig. 48; Piotrovsky, *Urartu*, fig. 112.

⁴⁰ O. A. Taşyürek, *Adana Bölge Müzesi’ndeki Urartu Kemerleri*, (Adana, 1975), no. 25, fig. 24.

⁴¹ A. Erzen, “Van Bölgesi’nde Yeni Urartu Araştırmaları (1974’den 1976’ya Kadar),” *VIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi* (1979),

fig. 7; Seidl, *Bronzekunst Urartus*, 167, abb. 118.

⁴² Kellner, “Bronze Belts,” 152, figs. 11, 12; R. Merhav, “Personal Adornments: Some Observations on Pectorals and Medallions,” *Urartu*, ed. Merhav, 174, fig. 10c; Seidl, *Bronzekunst Urartus*, 165, abb. 115.



Figure 25—Tree of life motive on the small box from Karmir Blur (after Piotrovsky, *Urartu: The Kingdom of Van*, 69, fig. 48).

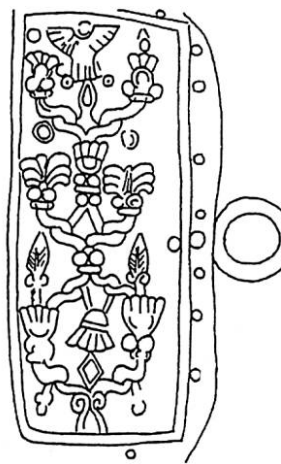


Figure 26—Tree of life motive on the belt from Çavuştepe (after Seidl, *Bronzekunst Urartus*, 167, abb.118).

All of the mentioned items were found *in situ* and lay on the floor.⁴³

The tables in Urartian depictions are, in general, not bare; food and drink containers appear on the tables. This is to be expected, and it may depict the feast section of the religious ceremony. The utensils found at Ayanis were positioned on the floor in an orderly manner. Although it is not possible to give a reason for this, it would not be wrong to say that the aforementioned utensils were on the table during the ceremony. Moreover, in front of the west and north walls were a number of potsherds that were adequate for about three or four different pots. The animal bones on the floor in the vicinity of the pots leave no doubt that it was related to a religious feast

⁴³ Çilingiroğlu and Erdem, “Ayanis Kalesi Kazıları,” 17.

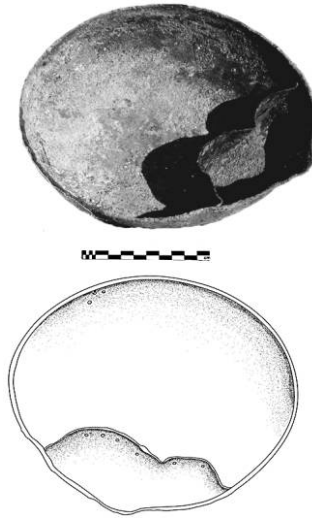


Figure 27—Bronze lamp from the Ceremonial Aisle (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

which took place here. A goat offering in front of the revived sacred tree depicted on the seal impression of Karmir Blur (fig. 38) and a cross-legged table portrayed on the seal from Van Museum (figs. 20, 28b) may also illustrate that feasts were integral parts of these ceremonies there as well.

All of the information stated above indicates that a religious rite was conducted inside the Ceremonial Aisle (fig. 28). In that case what type of rite was it? The possible rites that took place at the Altintepe sacred area have often been associated with the cult of the dead due to the three tombs nearby.⁴⁴ However, there is no evidence at Ayanis Fortress to associate the feast rite with the cult of the dead. As stated before, the domestic quarters to the north of the Ceremonial Aisle are not associated with this area. A large section of the area to the south of this room has been excavated, but no other evidence is available that is related to funeral practices. Nonetheless, if a ritual was performed with the sacred tree inside the room, it is unavoidable to conclude that this ritual has to be compatible with the sacred tree's meaning.

As with many ancient religions, it is likely that plants in the religious beliefs of the Urartian kingdom symbolized life. The sacred tree image was an

⁴⁴ Özgüç, *Altintepe II*, 33; Işık, “Neue Beobachtungen,” 3–7; Çevik, “Hayat Ağacı,” 344, 350.

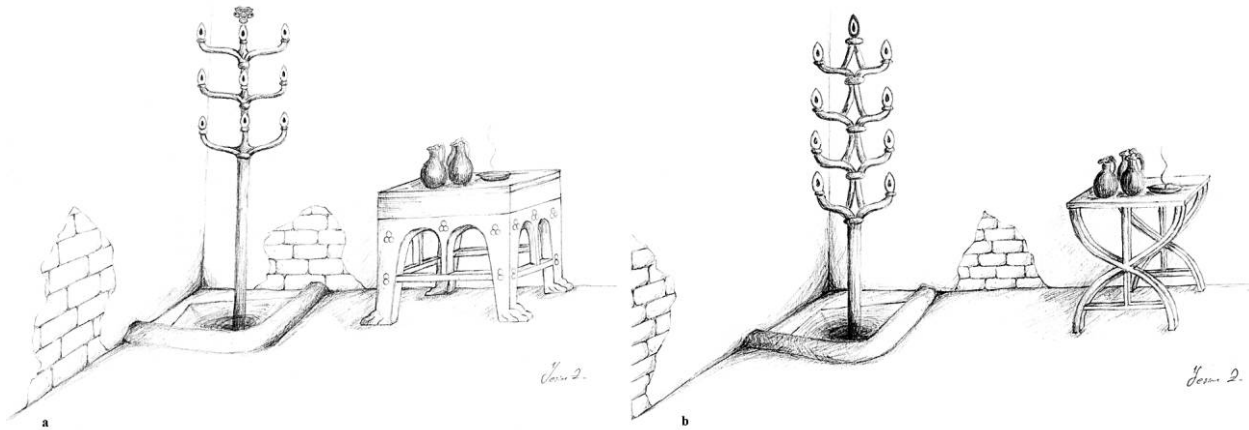


Figure 28a and b—North-west part of the Ceremonial Aisle. Two reconstructions of artifacts found at the corner (drawing by Y. Zoroğlu Batmaz).

important symbol in the religious beliefs of Urartu.⁴⁵ A tree was an intermediary for the renewal of life; when worldly life came to an end, it represented a new life in the other world. This was not only valid for a dead person but, in a cosmic sense, symbolized the renewal of the world.⁴⁶ A tree was filled with sacred powers because it was vertical, developed, grew, lost its leaves and then regained them, and thus was repeatedly resurrected.⁴⁷ Consequently, the sacred tree was filled with power. For this reason, as with the other religions in Anatolia and Mesopotamia, the filling or pollination of the sacred tree with power was applied in the religion of Urartu as well.

Aside from the relationship that has been found between the sacred tree and the cult of the dead in Urartu's religion, the sacred tree may have also played a role in rituals of renewal for the king, the kingship,⁴⁸ and the Urartian lands. In this way, the sacred tree was an intermediary of the worshipper's expectations of life from the god.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Regarding the sacred tree in Urartian culture, see F. Hančar, "Das Urartäische Lebensbaummotiv: Eine neue Bedeutungstradition?" *Iranica Antiqua* VI (1966): 92–108; O. Belli, "Urartular'da Hayat Ağacı İnancı," *Anadolu Araştırmaları VIII* (1980): 237–46; Işık "Neue Beobachtungen"; Çevik, "Hayat Ağacı."

⁴⁶ Eliade, *Dinsel İnancılar*, 60.

⁴⁷ M. Eliade, *Dinler Tarihi: İnancılar ve İbadetlerin Morfolojisi*, trans. Mustafa Ünal (Konya, 2005), 318.

⁴⁸ According to Hančar ("Das Urartäische Lebensbaummotiv," 321) one of the meanings of the sacred tree was the kingdom or lands of the kingdom. For the arguments about the meanings of the sacred tree, see *ibid.*, 92–108.

⁴⁹ Çevik, "Hayat Ağacı," 336.

The sacred tree of Urartu has also been depicted on certain Urartian artifacts. In the Kef Fortress relief (fig. 29), Trees of Life were placed on a pedestal on both sides of Haldi, who gave them life.⁵⁰ In the Adilcevaz relief (fig. 15), Teisheba, mounted on a bull, was depicted as providing life to a stylized sacred tree.⁵¹ The pollination of the sacred tree, the libation and offering scenes in front of them, or the sacred tree motive by itself, also occur on cylinder and stamp seals.⁵² In recent years, striking examples of this on seals, seal impressions and other objects from Ayanis Fortress have been identified.⁵³ One of these seal impressions on a bulla, which was found in the Temple Area, depicts the pollination of a sacred tree by two male figures. A cuneiform inscription on the top of the bulla is noteworthy. The inscription says that "*this is the seal of*

⁵⁰ Çilingiroğlu, *Urartu Krallığı Tarihi ve Sanatı*, 141, fig. 32. The tree depicted here resembles the Huluppu (willow?) tree known from Sumerian culture. In the myth of Gilgamesh, Inanna plants the Huluppu tree, which she got from the bank of the Euphrates in the garden of the gods. Upon the enormous growth of the tree, Gilgamesh cuts it down and Inanna builds a throne for herself from its wood: S. N. Kramer, *Tarih Sümer'de Başlar*, trans. Muazzez İlmiye Çığ (Ankara, 1998), 169. Inanna was a goddess of war as well as love and fertility in Sumerian religion; it should be borne in mind that Haldi was also a god of war and fertility. It is important to note that in some images, the god Haldi is depicted with trees resembling a Huluppu tree.

⁵¹ Çilingiroğlu, *Urartu Krallığı Tarihi ve Sanatı*, 138, fig. 1, res. 89.

⁵² Işık, "Neue Beobachtungen"; Çevik, "Hayat Ağacı."

⁵³ Abay, "Seal and Sealings," 321–53.



Figure 29—Kef Fortress relief (after Çilingiroğlu, *Urartu Krallığı Tarihi ve Sanatı*, 141, fig. 32).

[x] house.”⁵⁴ Both the ritual scene with the sacred tree and the content of the inscription may be related to the Ceremonial Aisle and its unknown proper name.

The symbol and cult of the sacred tree obviously is not particular to Urartian culture. In many cultures (including Sumerian, Babylonian, Hurrian, Hittite, Late Hittite, Assyrian, Phrygian and Mitannian culture), its existence is widely known. Our concern here, however, is the local manner and purpose of its existence, and the nature of the religious ceremonies in Urartian culture. It is logical for the sacred tree to be part of religious ceremonies, and it is even possible that a real tree was used in ceremonies. However, it is quite normal that evidence is not available or is unattainable for the archaeologist. Only one archaeological sample is available that represents the sacred tree particular to Urartu. This is a symbolic sacred tree from

⁵⁴ Salvini, “Inscriptions on Clay” 317 (Seal Ay 6); Abay, “Seal and Sealings,” 329, fig. 7.

Toprakkale made of cast metal.⁵⁵ This symbolic sacred tree has revived the suggestion that artificial trees symbolized live ones and were carried in Urartian religious ceremonies depicted on Urartian works.⁵⁶ A similar suggestion has been made for Ayanis. Two alabaster pedestals with holes in their middles were found on either side of the east entrance in the Temple Area. It has been suggested that these bases carried a painted wooden sacred tree.⁵⁷ Yet, aside from the Ceremonial Aisle at Ayanis Fortress, none of the examples given above has provided sufficient data about a ceremony. The Ceremonial Aisle at Ayanis Fortress, with the evidence we have provided above, is important in indicating where, and in what manner, ceremonies with a sacred tree took place.

In fact, the performance of such an important ritual also required the existence of other structures attached to this room. It is possible that a few of the rooms situated in an area to the south and the west opening to the Ceremonial Aisle had functions related to it. These most probably can be characterized as the front rooms of the Aisle or related ceremonial rooms (fig. 30). Significantly, in one of rooms in question, Room 11, on the western side, discoveries included decorative pieces from bones and stones, rosettes, an inscribed clay bulla,⁵⁸ and an inscribed, solid gold, tube-shaped object, which is considered a fan handle or a handle of a fly-whisk⁵⁹ belonging to the Urartian Queen Qaqli (fig. 12).⁶⁰ In my opinion this gold artifact is important not only because it belonged to the queen, but also as a part of the ritual. The find spot of this item, which has a length of 20.6cm and a diameter of 1.35cm, is telling. As stated above, Room 11 was connected to the Aisle and it must have played

⁵⁵ R. B. Wartke, *Toprakkale: Untersuchungen zu der Metalobjekten im Vorderasiatischen Museum zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1990), 87–88, pl. 25.

⁵⁶ Çevik, “Hayat Ağacı,” 338–39.

⁵⁷ Çilingiroğlu, “Temple Area,” 38, 46.

⁵⁸ The bulla bears a depiction of a sacred tree between two winged gryphons holding buckets. On both sides of these depictions, there are inscriptions. M. Salvini reads the inscription as “Seal of Rusa.”

⁵⁹ Çilingiroğlu, “New Contributions,” 99–112; Çilingiroğlu, “Ayanis: An Iron Age Site in the East,” 1061.

⁶⁰ This item has an inscription on it reading “Tanaši of Queen Qaqli” (MUNUS *qa-qu-li* MUNUS.LUGAL *ta-na-a-yi*). Çilingiroğlu, “New Contributions,” 106–108; A. Çilingiroğlu, “Artifacts Belonging to Queen Qaqli and Mr. Tigursagga from an Elaborately Decorated Quarter of the Ayanis Fortress,” in *Studies in Honour of Oscar White Muscarella* (forthcoming).

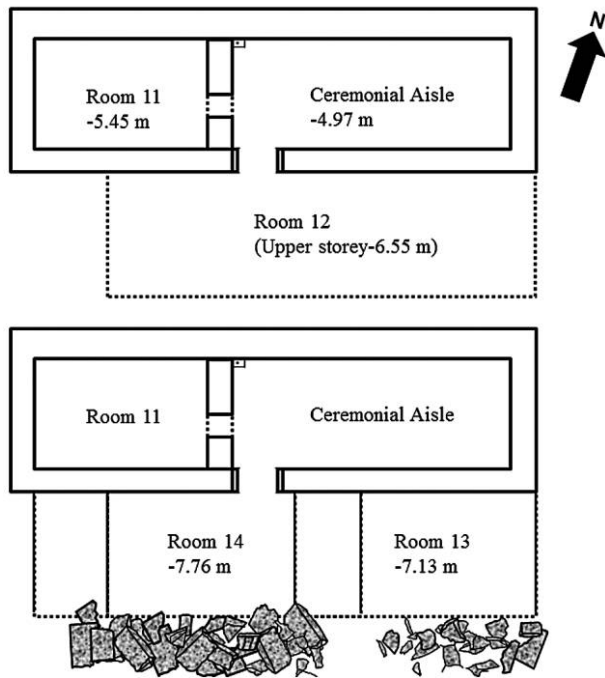


Figure 30—Sketch plans of the Ceremonial Aisle and related structures; relevant room widths indicated.

a significant role during ceremony. Thus, the content of Room 11 must have been sacramental. Therefore, I think that this gold object must be an extraordinary item, perhaps the handle of a standard to be used during ceremonies rather than a fly-whisk, which seems to be an item for daily use. There were no solid archaeological finds in the room connected with the upper portion of a standard, except remnants of wood inside of the gold handle, though the decorative stone and bone pieces which were found nearby might have been part of such an object. In Urartian art there are depictions showing that short-handled, rectangular standards were carried by women, especially on the votive plaques found in Giyimli.⁶¹

Through excavations of the higher elevations of another place (Room 12), situated to the south of the Ceremonial Aisle (fig. 30) and just outside the gate, it is noteworthy that finds of a gold rosette, a stone decorative piece, iron nails, a bronze disc bearing a starburst motif (fig. 31) and ornaments were made. The findings here were not limited to this. An onyx bead

⁶¹ E. Caner, *Bronzene Votivbleche von Giyimli*, Archäologie in Iran und Turan 2 (Rahden, 1998); O. Belli, "Bronze Votive Plaques," in *Urartu: War and Aesthetics*, ed. F. Özdem (İstanbul, 2004), 248–59.

with Babylonian cuneiform script and a cast bronze artifact in the shape of human fist (fig. 32), which could possibly be a candelabrum or a door latch,⁶² was also found in this area.⁶³ Probably several pillars bordered Room 12 to the south, since a number of collapsed andesite blocks were unearthed from east to west. This area, however, had no walls on the east or west. Thus, "Room" 12 was not an actual room bordered by four walls: it was an area which can be described as a hall or a passage oriented east–west in front of the Ceremonial Aisle (fig. 30).

The finds in Room 12 have led to others in two adjacent rooms on the lower levels (fig. 35). In the room to the west, Room 14 (fig. 33), numerous buff slipped utensils were found, and to the east, Room 13 (fig. 34), there were high quality red polished wares. It should be noted that to the south of the Ceremonial Aisle and next to the south wall of the Aisle, a gate opens to the area where these rooms are located (figs. 5, 35).⁶⁴

Thus, the Ceremonial Aisle was not made up of a single structure. Certain rooms in the south and west must be related to this Aisle. The three red, polished, trefoil-mouthed jugs in the Ceremonial Aisle were most probably taken from Room 13, filled with red polished wares (fig. 36) in front of the area. In short, a jug was most probably taken from this room to be given to the person who would undertake the liquid offering during the ceremony.⁶⁵

⁶² In the records of the Eighth Campaign of Sargon II, it is stated that a human hand-shaped gold latch was seized. B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, MD, 2005), 810.

⁶³ These special artifacts will be discussed by A. Çilingiroğlu in "Artifacts Belonging to Queen Qaqli" and "Ayanis Urartu Kalesi'ndeki İç Aydınlatma ile İlgili Yeni Bulgular," in *Taner Tarhan'a Armağan Kitabı* (forthcoming).

⁶⁴ These two rooms, however, could not been excavated entirely on the south, since many huge andesite blocks collapsed down into the southern part of these rooms.

⁶⁵ In this room, up to the 2011 excavation season, more than 120 complete trefoil jugs were found. Such a quantity of pottery is too great simply for use a corridor. Thus, it may be reasonable to think that the pots from this room supplied the general requirements of the fortress. Alternatively, it may signify that more than one person practiced liquid libations in different instances. In such cases, each person who practiced libation would have used a different jug. Another possibility is that priests or kings performing the ritual might have used different jugs at every turn. It is not possible to determine what happened to used jugs. However, it should be remembered that huge numbers of jug fragments (especially handles) were found in a *bothroi* placed not far away from the room

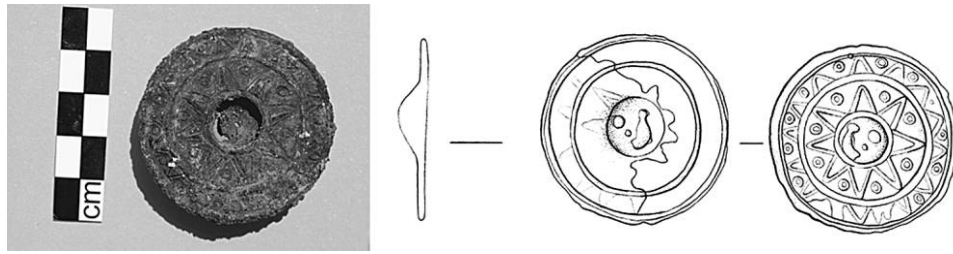


Figure 31—Bronze disk with umbo from Room 12 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

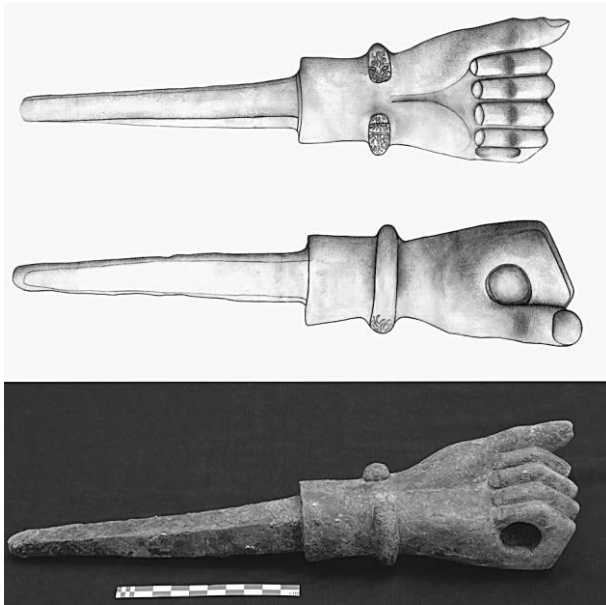


Figure 32—Bronze object in the form of a human fist from Room 12 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

It is not easy to identify what person might make the liquid offering with the jug. However, it can be said that this person would be no ordinary or common person. On the seal impressions with the sacred tree scene found at Bastam⁶⁶ and Ayanis,⁶⁷ the figures fertilizing the sacred tree are winged genii. But in the Elazığ and Toprakkale seals, instead of winged creatures, humans standing in front of the sacred tree were depicted. The

in question. Regarding the disposal areas in Ayanis Fortress, see Ö. Çevik, “Ayanis (Van) Urartu Kalesi’ndeki Keramik Atık Alanları,” in *Muhibbe Darga Armağanı*, ed. T. Tarhan et al. (İstanbul, 2008), 178–86.

⁶⁶ U. Seidl, “Die Siegelbilder,” in *Bastam I: Ausgrabungen in den Urartäischen Anlagen 1972–1975*, ed. W. Kleiss (Berlin, 1979), 137–49; Seidl, “Die Siegelbilder,” 145–54.

⁶⁷ Salvini, “Inscriptions on Clay,” 316–17; Abay, “Seal and Sealings,” 323–24.



Figure 33—Buff slipped ceramics in Room 14. Author’s photograph 2010 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).



Figure 34—Red Polished ceramics in Room 13. Author’s photograph 2009 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

Bastam and Ayanis seal impressions bear inscriptions indicating that they belonged to the king. Some of the seals containing inscriptions have a specific word, *Ašuli*, which corresponds to the members of the royal family. This evidence might indicate that this particular ceremony might be directly related to the dynasty. It can be said that the individuals and the administrators participating in a religious ritual in the fortress can be expected to have been members of the royal fam-



Figure 35—Rooms 13 and 14 from the south-east. Author's photograph 2011 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).



Figure 36—Examples of the pottery from Room 13. Author's photograph 2009 (courtesy Altan Çilingiroğlu).

ily. The property of Queen Qaqli found in the next room (Room 11) is a very convincing indicator of this interpretation.

It should be kept in mind that the Ceremonial Aisle was very small, covering only 30m², especially when compared to the temple courtyard which covered more than 1000m². Therefore, the Aisle was not large enough to provide space to more than a few people. This, however, does not mean that the rituals practiced inside were less important than ones in the Temple Area. On the contrary, the practices in the Aisle would have addressed a small but very important status group. To conclude, it would not be wrong to say that the aims of ceremonies within the Aisle dif-

fered from the ones in the Temple Area. There must be a reason why a separate ritual room in the fortress beside the Temple Area was built. Clearly certain rituals that were not performed in the Temple Area took place specifically here.

No matter who the person leading the ritual was (the king or the priests entrusted with this duty),⁶⁸ its purpose must have been very important. Since no evidence was found relating to the cult of the dead in

⁶⁸ With respect to the cultic performers for such a sacred tree ritual, see Hančar "Das Urartäische Lebensbaummotiv": 98; Belli, "Urartular'da Hayat Ağacı İnancı": 245–46; Çilingiroğlu, "Urartu'da Tapınma ve Tapınma Yerleri"; Çevik, "Hayat Ağacı."

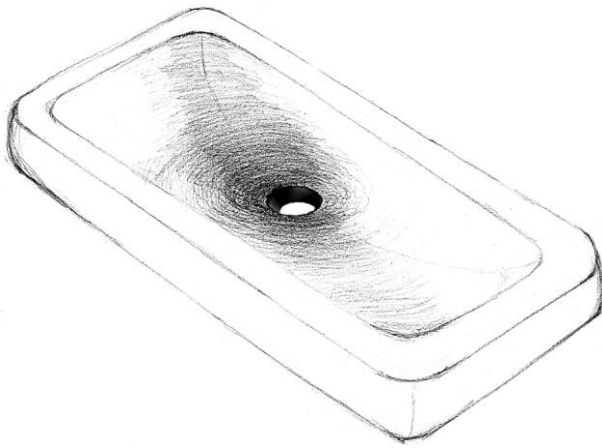


Figure 37—Drawing of chalkstone feature (drawing by Y. Zoroğlu Batmaz).

the area, what was the purpose of the ceremony with the Tree of Life? In my view, the ceremony performed here, suitable to the meaning of the Tree of Life, must have been for the *continuation of life*: the perpetuation of the universe, the cyclical renewal of life on earth, for the royal family, the king and the Land of Urartu must have been the purposes of this religious ceremony. The actual person performing the ceremony carried out the liquid offering to the Tree of Life and prayed for *life* from the god Haldi.⁶⁹

Many Urartian inscriptions involve prayer requests to the gods. In the last lines of the Meher Kapı inscription the following sentence is related to this idea:

*From the side of the god Haldi, from the side of all the gods may there be life for Išpuini, son of Sarduri, (and) Menua, son of Išpuini.*⁷⁰

In the Karahan inscription, other sacred beings, apart from the god Haldi, also bestowed life:

*From Haldi, from the Door of Haldi, from the god Ua, must be life for Išpuini Sardurihi (and) for Minua Išpuinihi and for. . .*⁷¹

⁶⁹ I suggest that such ritualistic activities in Ayanis were performed in the name of god Haldi. As it has been proposed by V. Sevin, Ayanis was the cult center for the national god Haldi ("Urartu Devleti," in *Arkeoatlas 4*, ed. N. Karul [İstanbul, 2005], 63–123; V. Sevin, "A Comment on the so-called Urartian Capital City of Toprakkale," *Aramazd-Armenian Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 1 (2006), 143–49.

⁷⁰ UKN I: 27

⁷¹ M. Salvini, "Reflections about the Urartian Shrines of the Ste-lae," in *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and its Neighbors, Studies in Honour of Nimet Özgüç*, ed. M. Mellink et al. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1993), 546.

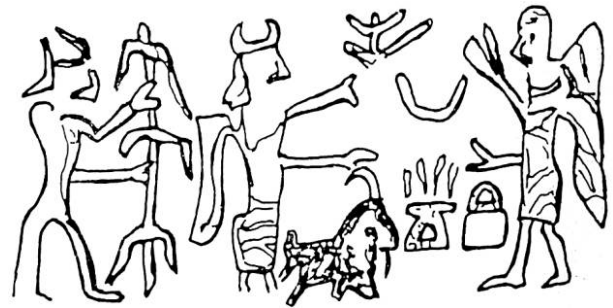


Figure 38—Seal impression from Karmir Blur (after Piotrovsky, *Karmir Blur II*, fig. 22/no. 19).

The Bostaniçi inscription dating to the Menua period also conveys similar expressions.⁷² Apparently, the request for life from the gods is found in Urartian culture starting from the early period of the kingdom. To give life was one of the requirements of being a god.⁷³ In certain inscriptions, it can also be observed that Haldi, apart from granting life, also granted happiness and grandeur. Amongst the joint inscriptions written for Ishpuini, Menua and Inishpua in the Tebriz Gate inscription, the god Haldi was asked to bestow life, grandeur and joy on the kings.⁷⁴ Similarly, the inscriptions in the subsequent period for Menua and his son Inishpua, life, happiness and grandeur were requested from the god Haldi for the three kings.⁷⁵ During the Sarduri II period, apart from long life for the king, power, might, joy, happiness, and joyful days were requested from the god Haldi.⁷⁶ The supplication of these kings continued during the Argishti II and Rusa II periods in the seventh century B.C. In the temple inscription of Karmir Blur, life, joy, grandeur and power were requested for Rusa II from Haldi and the Haldi gates.⁷⁷ Similarly, the same formula is found in the Ayanis temple inscription.⁷⁸ On the shield with a lion's head recovered in front of the north wall of the temple at Ayanis Fortress is the inscription: "dedicated to life."⁷⁹

The life requested from the god Haldi might also correspond to the souls of ancestors and their life in

⁷² UKN I: 97.

⁷³ This function can also be observed amongst the gods of the Hittites. The Hittite kings tell that the Storm God and Sun God added many years to their lives.

⁷⁴ UKN I: 18.

⁷⁵ UKN I: 93–95.

⁷⁶ UKN II: 418.

⁷⁷ UKN II: 448.

⁷⁸ M. Salvini, "The Inscriptions of Ayanis. Cuneiform and Hieroglyphic: Monumental Stone Inscriptions," in *Ayanis I*, 259, 260.

⁷⁹ Salvini, "Royal Inscriptions on Bronze Artifacts," 272.

the other world, apart from worldly life, for Haldi is also considered the god of the “other world” (the underworld). In the Meher Kapı inscription, the expression *DILU aluse urulili ne šinali* cannot be translated exactly. However, it has been put forward that the expression can be translated as “the god that directs the souls” and that this god is Haldi.⁸⁰

In conclusion, it has emerged that outside the Temple Area at Ayanis Fortress there was a complex of sacred structures where religious ceremonies at the

royal level were performed. Ayanis Fortress provides concrete archaeological evidence of where, and in what manner, the sacred tree ritual took place. For this reason, having established a monarchical administrative system, evidence of the existence of different religious ceremonial areas within Urartian fortresses belonging to the state has been positively verified. Such a ritual area in Ayanis Fortress supported a type of religious rite conducted with a sacred tree that was devoted to the continuation of life. These types of religious rites, however, could not provide for the continuation of the kingdom after the catastrophic decline following the rule of Rusa II.

⁸⁰ Y. Grekyan, “The Will of Menua and the Gods of Urartu,” *Aramazd-Armenian Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 1 (2006): 157, n. 53.