

The Kingdom of Urartu belongs among these ancient states that scholars still know surprisingly little about and its history is even more obscure for the general audience. Urartu emerged in eastern Anatolia when small tribal communities began to unite. After the statehood consolidated and incorporated the area around the Lake Van, it became a new political and cultural phenomenon at the northern frontier of the Near East. Currently, we know quite a lot about the development of the central part of the Urartian state and to some extent, thanks to studies conducted in Iran in the 1970s, about the dynamics of its expansion and exploitation of the conquered lands of the so-called 'Iranian Azerbaijan'. However, we know next to nothing about how Urartu dominated the lands currently belonging to the Republic of Armenia. The opinions forged in the 1930s, when the prominent Urartian fortresses, such as Karmir Blur or Erebuni, were discovered, still linger today. Results of these studies suggested a complete domination on the verge of extermination of the local population.

However, the recent studies performed at the site of Metsamor call for a thorough verification of the previously accepted conclusions. The latest research indicate that the autochthonous communities inhabiting the Valley of Ararat, which later formed the core of the Urartian state, were not exterminated. Excavations in Metsamor discovered clear traces of a continued local pottery-making tradition, which contradicts the earlier conclusions quite decisively. It is worth mentioning that the local vessels are found in the same chronological layers as a typical pottery of the Van and Toprakkale types reflecting the period of Urartian domination.

The proposed research project has a chance to bring breakthrough observations and provoke reinterpretation of the ways and conditions of the political and cultural expansion of the Urartians in the Valley of Ararat. Therefore, the project will harness multi-faceted and interdisciplinary research to enable an unquestionable reconstruction of the environment as well as economic base of the community inhabiting this small but exceptionally important urban centre. The investigation will make use of isotopic analyses to determine whether Metsamor was inhabited by a local population or newcomers, who came there from around the Lake Van during the conquest.

We are given an exceptional opportunity to find answers to these questions, since the projected elementary research, intended to provide us with the material necessary for analyses, will concentrate on unearthing sequences and settlement phases directly predating the Urartian invasion and supremacy, as well as destruction phases commonly related to the fall of the Kingdom of Urartu. In the course of this elementary research, faunistic material will also be collected in order to reconstruct the diet of the local inhabitants over several hundred years of the functioning of the town. Moreover, a petrographic analysis of the pottery will expand our knowledge about production and distribution of ceramic vessels. Environmental studies, in turn, will shed light on the question whether in the past the direct vicinity of the town was a marshland, as it is in the present. This may enable reconstruction of climatic conditions and assessing the significance of agriculture for the inhabitants of Metsamor.