

The home is often likened to a living organism. As the dwelling place of a family, it evolves alongside their changing circumstances, constantly adapting to shifting conditions. From an archaeological perspective, the biographies of houses frequently mirror, on a micro-scale, the transformations experienced by the communities inhabiting them over decades or even centuries. A particularly intriguing aspect is the period of state collapse and political instability and its influence on the daily life carried out within the confines of the home. The project focuses on reconstructing the daily life of the inhabitants of large residential buildings at the Argishtikhinili (modern-day Armenia) during the decline of the Urartian Kingdom in the 7th and 6th centuries BC. Argishtikhinili, situated on St. David's Hill (Surb Davti Blur) in the western part of present-day Armenia, is one of the largest and most renowned Urartian sites discovered so far. This prominence is largely due to archaeological research conducted primarily in the 1960s and 1970s. After a long hiatus, Argishtikhinili has once again become the focus of archaeological exploration, with the Armenian-Polish Archaeological Expedition launching new research there in October 2024. The findings from this initial work form the foundation for the research described here. Argishtikhinili uniqueness lies in the fact that it is one of the few Urartian sites where, alongside the fortified citadel, elements of daily life have been preserved in the form of free-standing residential structures. The houses of Argishtikhinili are large residential complexes with a relatively regular internal layout, whose design resembles that of representative public buildings. This sets them apart from other domestic structures in the region at the time, which were typically two- or three-room terraced houses. It has been suggested that the houses from Argishtikhinili may have been inhabited by the elite of the Urartian Kingdom. According to a popular hypothesis, these houses were constructed in the early 7th century BCE as part of a larger construction project subsidised by the king and intended for individuals associated with the kingdom's administration. However, this hypothesis has not been sufficiently substantiated archaeologically. Furthermore, research, including studies conducted in 2024, has identified two phases of house settlement, between which significant differences can be observed in the organization of living spaces and domestic culture. A clear impoverishment of the inhabitants is evident in the later phase, suggesting that their economy may have become increasingly reliant on agriculture.

The aim of the project is to identify the causes and directions of the changes evident in the functioning of houses between the 7th and 6th centuries BC. A key question is whether shifts in the domestic culture may reflect potential demographic changes in Argishtikhinili during the decline of the Urartian Kingdom. At the same time, this represents an important thread in the study of the history and culture of the Urartian Kingdom, which has often overlooked its inhabitants and their daily lives. The proposed project will be the first attempt to move beyond previous frameworks, leveraging the broad range of possibilities offered by modern micro- and macro-scale household research. The study of the houses from Argishtikhinili will aim to reconstruct several important aspects of the daily lives of their inhabitants. The first goal is to identify the livelihoods and potential economic relationships of the inhabitants with the state apparatus residing in the citadel. Another focus is to understand the factors shaping the living spaces, including practical considerations such as heating during the winter and social dynamics, for example, the presence of multi-generational families. Other equally compelling aspects of the project include identifying domestic activities carried out within the households, reconstructing the inhabitants' approximate diet based on micro- and macro-debris found on floors or in household waste, and, finally, attempting to determine how long the houses of Argishtikhinili were in use. The planned research will adopt an interdisciplinary approach. The analysis of archaeological remains, combined with spatial documentation and sampling of floor layers and domestic rubbish dumps, will play a crucial role during the excavations. These elements will form the foundation for subsequent laboratory investigations employing a wide range of methods, including geochemical, traceological, petrographic, and palynological analyses. The outcome will be an exceptionally rich and diverse dataset, offering significant insights into one of the most enigmatic societies of the ancient Near East.