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GÖKÇE LAKE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS ACCORDING TO URARTIAN WRITTEN TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Gökçe Göl, which means Blue Lake, is located in eastern Armenia. It is surrounded by long mountain ridges separating Armenia from Georgia and Azerbaijan, and to the south by the Akhmangan volcanic plateau, which in places reaches an elevation of approximately 12,000 feet. The lake itself is 6,340 feet high and has freshwater. Salmon trout, known as Ishkhan or "Prince Fish," are also present. Our article, "Gökçe Göl and Its Surroundings According to Urartian Written Texts," examines the written history of the lake's immediate surroundings. Following an examination of Urartian and Assyrian inscriptions, it has been understood that the region's written history began with the Urartian Kingdom. In this context, based on tablet number 6.1.3 found near present-day Iğdır-Taşburun, it can be said that Urartian influence reached the Gökçe Göl area during the reign of Menua. Among the texts we examined are inscriptions that remain within the borders of present-day Armenia, including texts 7.1.5, 7.1.8, and 8.1.6. These inscriptions were translated by Margaret Payne and incorporated into ancient history and are included in our study. The texts mention place names, and suggestions for their localization have been made by scholars such as Dianokoff, Kashkai, and Salvini. The opinions of these scholars are also included. Thus, our study utilizes the fields of philology and historical geography as methods. Our analysis concludes that various cities and states existed in the region during the Urartian period. However, it has been understood that there was no power in the region that could politically oppose or rival the Urartian or Assyrian Kingdoms. The Urartian texts also indicate the establishment of cities within Armenia. Considering that Scythian and Cimmerian communities arrived via the Caucasus, it can be argued that this was also a means of establishing a defense against attacks from the Caucasus.

Keywords: Urartu, Gökçe Lake, Iğdır, Assyria, Urartu inscriptions

INTRODUCTION

Lake Gökçe, also known as Lake Sevan, is geographically situated in the Gegharkounik Province of the Republic of Armenia. The lake is bounded to the north by extensive mountain ranges that form a natural divide between Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, while to the south it is bordered by the Akhmangan volcanic plateau, which rises in places to approximately 3,600 meters above sea level. Positioned at an elevation of about 1,900 meters, Lake Gökçe is distinguished by its freshwater characteristics and its endemic trout species, *Salmo ischchan*, commonly referred to as the "Ishkhan" or "Prince Fish" (Lang, 2022, pp. 28; Vardaryan, Danielyan and Muradyan, 2021, pp. 2.).

Morphometrically, the lake extends approximately 70 km in length and 50 km in width, making it one of the largest high-altitude freshwater lakes in the South Caucasus. Hydrologically, it is fed by twenty-

eight rivers and two springs, while its primary outflow is the Hrazdan River, which originates from the northern shore of the lake. The Hrazdan flows northward and subsequently merges with the Aras River near the Armenia–Turkey border, ultimately continuing southeastward toward the Caspian Basin (Wilkinson, 2020, pp. 35-36).



Lake Gökçe and its Surroundings (Wilkinson, 2020, pp. 37)

Most of the depressions in the region are situated along river valleys. While their elevations generally exceed 1,200 meters, some depressions descend to approximately 200 meters above sea level (Pınarcık, 2012, pp. 116; Saraçoğlu, 1989, pp. 300). Owing to the fertility of these lowlands, the areas have historically supported dense human settlement. The abundance of alluvial soils and the accessibility of water resources enabled the region to be continuously inhabited since prehistoric times (Pınarcık, 2012, pp. 116; Sagona, 1984, pp. 26). While Gökçe Lake was an important water source in the region, there are few studies on the historical geography of the region during the Urartian period. Our article aims to clarify this issue and understand the settlements surrounding it. This aims to understand the geography and the political situation during the Urartian period.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our study examines the historical geography of the region during the Urartian period. The Urartian texts we used as primary sources were translated by Payne and identified as 6.1.3, 7.1.5, 7.1.8, 8.1.2, 8.1.6, 8.1.7, and 9.1.3. The Surp-Pogos Church in the Old City of Van was also used as a source. These inscriptions were selected because they contain historical descriptions that can be linked to Gökçe Lake. Our sources are generally located in the province of Van in Turkey and within

Armenia. In addition, the works of scientists who conducted scientific studies on historical geography, especially in the Ancient Age, were also examined.

RESULTS

Archaeological investigations conducted in the vicinity of Lake Gökçe attest to its long-term occupation. Excavations on the Artanis Peninsula, located to the north of the lake, have yielded artifacts spanning from the Early Bronze Age (ca. 3500–2400 BC) through the Classical Period and as late as the twelfth century AD. The cultural assemblage of this region has been associated with the Karaz (Kura–Aras) cultural horizon of the Early Bronze Age (Bobokhyan & Kunze, 2021, pp. 505). The region continued to be inhabited in both prehistoric and historic times. Urartian cuneiform texts attest to this.

When we look at the history of Urartu in general, it is possible to say that it is divided into two main periods. The first encompasses the Uruatri–Nairi Confederation, extending from the first quarter of the thirteenth century BC to the first half of the ninth century BC. This era is also referred to as the Protohistoric or Archaic Phase of Urartu. These confederations were formed by dominant feudal principalities located around Lake Van in Eastern Anatolia (Tarhan, 1982, pp. 69–70; Karageçi, 2015, pp. 65–66). Although scholarly opinions differ concerning the precise locations of the Uruatri and Nairi lands, Uruatri is generally placed in the region encompassing Tatvan, Muş, the Bingöl Mountains, Malazgirt, and Bulanık, whereas Nairi is believed to have extended from Kırhi, Hubüşkia, and Tumme—south and southwest of Lake Van—to the lands of Diauehi in the north (Çilingiroğlu, 1994, pp. 9; San, 2000, pp. 19ff.; Karageçi, 2015, pp. 72).

The earliest references to Uruatri and Nairi are found in Assyrian royal inscriptions. The term Uruatri first appears during the reign of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser I, who records that he conducted a campaign against the land of Uruatri, conquering eight countries and burning fifty-one cities within three days (Salvini, 1967, pp. 24; Pehlivan, 1991, pp. 23; Sivas, 1991, pp. 3; Ceylan, 1994, pp. 167; Karageçi, 2015, pp. 72). The term Nairi emerges in records dating to the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208 BC), who describes a military expedition in which he defeated the Nairi lands (Luckenbill, 1926–1927, pp. 142; Melikishvili, 1960, pp. 173; Karageçi, 2015, pp. 74–75).

By the mid-tenth century BC, the Uruatri and Nairi confederations—stimulated by economic development and pressured by Assyrian expansion—fell under Assyrian influence during the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser I and Assur-bel-kala. Eventually, they unified under Ashurbanipal, forming what became the Kingdom of Urartu (Tarhan, 1978, pp. 1ff.; Tarhan, 1982, pp. 69ff.; Çilingiroğlu, 1994, pp. 29; Salvini, 2006, pp. 34; Karageçi & Günaşdı, 2019, pp. 787; Ceylan, 2017, pp. 525). This transition marks the beginning of the second phase of Urartian political history (Tarhan, 1982, pp. 73).

The present study, titled “Lake Gökçe and Its Surroundings According to Urartian Written Texts,” aims to examine the historical geography of Lake Sevan—identified with ancient Lake Gökçe—based on Urartian epigraphic evidence. Since Urartian inscriptions constitute the principal corpus of written data for the region, they serve as the primary sources of this research. Several of these inscriptions were first catalogued by Margaret R. Payne in her master’s thesis and later published in her monograph *Catalogue of Urartian Cuneiform Documents*. These works, together with other archaeological and historical studies concerning the Urartian presence in and around Lake Gökçe, constitute the foundational sources of the present analysis.

Early Period of the Urartian Kingdom extends from the reign of Arame, traditionally regarded as the founder of the state, to the reign of King Menua. According to extant cuneiform inscriptions, the

Urartians' strategic and political interest in the northern territories began during this formative phase. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence from Patnos (ancient Anzavurtepe), including temple remains and inscriptions, demonstrates that this region was incorporated into the Urartian domain during the reign of King Išpuini (ca. 830–810 BC). An inscription discovered in the Old City of Van, known as the Kasimoğlu Stele, together with another inscription unearthed at Toprakkale near Ağrı/Eleşkirt and dated to the late ninth century BC, both attributed to Kings Išpuini and Menua, refer to a northern campaign originating from the Patnos region (Köroğlu, 2001, pp. 718). Furthermore, a basalt stele inscribed on both faces—currently preserved in the SurpPogos Church in the Old City of Van—records the details of the joint expedition undertaken by Išpuini and Menua. The text proclaims:

"This stele was erected for the lord god Haldi by Ispuini, son of Sarduri, and Menua, son of Ispuini. God Haldi went on a campaign with his own spear, defeated the Uiteruhi tribe, defeated the Lusha tribe, and defeated the Katarza tribe. God Haldi is strong, and the spear of God Haldi is strong. By the power of God Haldi, Ispuini, son of Sarduri, and Menua, son of Ispuini, went on a campaign against the Lusha tribe... They repelled the Lusha and Katarza tribes... They advanced towards the city of Anashe and towards the Great City of Kuquru. The Uiteruhi, Lusha, and Katarza tribes... Reinforcements from the kings of the land of Etiuhi came to their aid... God Haldi went on a campaign with his own spear against the Uiteruhi, Lusha, and Katarza tribes and the kings of the land of Etiuhi... X,720 men, X,670 women, X, 126 horses, 13,540 cattle, 20,785..." (Payne, 2006, pp. 35-37)

This text, from the joint kingdoms of Ishpuini and Menua, reveals that the Urartians launched an expedition against the Uiteruhi, Lusha, and Katarza tribes. It is understood that the Etiuhi nation came to their aid, but was defeated. The capture of thousands of men and women as captives and the acquisition of horses, cattle, and other spoils during the expedition indicate that the region was both wealthy and densely populated. Therefore, the text suggests that during the Ishpuini period, the Urartians organized expeditions to the Gökçe Lake region for economic reasons. It is plausible that the captured captives were used for various purposes, primarily agricultural, within the Urartian lands, while horses were used in military expeditions and transportation, and cattle and other livestock contributed economically to the Urartian lands. Dianokoff and Kashkai, who are mentioned in the text, place them in the Eleşkirt district of Ağrı, and Anaşe similarly near Eleşkirt (Dianokoff-Kashkai, 1981, pp. 8, 116); the Luşa and Katarza tribes are placed in Ağrı/Karaköse by Dianokoff-Kashkai, Barnett and Burney-Lang (Dianokoff-Kashkai, 1981, pp. 48-52; Barnett, 1982, pp. 340; Burney-Lang, 1971, pp. 133); and Çilingiroğlu says that they are located west of Gökçe Lake (Çilingiroğlu, 1994, 48; Çilingiroğlu, 1997, pp. 30). Dianokoff-Kashkai places Uiteruhi in or around Kâğızman on the Upper Aras River, while Etiuhi is shown as the geographical name of a large region in Southern Transcaucasia; it is placed in the region from Sarıkamış in the west to the northwestern borders of Gökçe Lake, adjacent to Gökçe Lake (Dianokoff-Kashkai, 1981, pp. 35, 102-103).

Based on this information, Etiuhi in the text can be said to be a place bordering Gökçe Lake. However; the cities mentioned in the text, Luşa, Katarza, Büyük Kuquru, and Anaşe, should be located in the Ağrı region. Because the Išpuini-Menua kingdoms date back to the early period of Urartian history, it is quite difficult to travel from Tuşpa to the Gökçe Lake region and back using ancient means.

It is known that during the Menua period, the Urartian borders reached the Euphrates River in the west, the Aras plain in the north, and the Assyrian lands in the Upper Tigris Region in the south; and the lands of the Manna country in the Zagros region began to be threatened (Salvini, 2006, pp. 60; Karageçi, 2015, pp. 88). When considering the campaigns conducted during Menua's reign, inscription number 6.1.3, found north of Iğdır on the northern slope of Mount Ararat descending towards the Aras

River, between the villages of Taşburun and Karakoyunlu on the right bank of the Aras River, and among the ruins of Solagert Castle, 8 km from Taşburun, mentions a campaign against Erikuahi and Luhiuni (Payne, 1993, pp. 20). Dianokoff-Kashkai places Erekuah on the northern slopes of Mount Ararat (Dianokoff-Kashkai, 1981, pp. 31-32).

Therefore, it can be assumed that the Urartians did not conduct military campaigns as far as the Gökçe Lake area during Menua's reign. However, it is possible to suggest that Urartian cultural influence reached the region during this period. In fact, during the 1947 excavations at Karmir-Blur near Yerevan, the name Menua can be read on six of the 97 bronze inscriptions inscribed on the lower faces of house number 25. His name can also be read on harness pieces in the 1952 excavations at Karmir-Blur. Also in the 1952 archaeological excavations at Karmir-Blur, the name Menua can be read on a bronze horse bridle (Payne, 1993, pp. 45-46). This may be attributed to both the expeditions to Ağrı and the fact that they reached Armenia as a result of commercial activities. For this reason, it can be said that the cultural and economic influence of the Urartians reached the Gökçe Lake area during the İşpuni and Menua periods.

During the reign of Argishti I, who succeeded Menua as the Urartian ruler, expeditions to the Gökçe Lake area appear to have continued. These expeditions are known from the inscriptions and annals left by the Urartians in the region. Our study focuses on the Urartian expeditions to the Gökçe Lake area, their consequences, and a closer understanding of the region's historical geography. These inscriptions have been translated and incorporated into ancient history and are used as primary sources in our study. Based on written texts, it can be said that the Urartians' campaigns into Armenia began during the reign of Argishti I. Inscriptions belonging to this king have been found in Armenia during this period, and some place names mentioned in the texts date to Argishti's reign.

Following Argishti I's accession to the Urartian throne (786-756 BC), groups of texts known as Annals began to appear. The inscriptions written during this period are known as the longest Urartian inscriptions, and each section of the text group relates to a military event (Yıldırım, 2019, p. 32).

Urartu Kings	Reign	
Aramu	850-840 BC	Urartu KrallığınınKuruluşu
I. Sarduri	840-830 BC	Assyrian Conflicts
İşpuni	825/824-815 BC	Expansion Era
Menua	810-786/80 BC	Expansion Era
I. Argiştı	786/80-764 BC	Expansion Era
II. Sarduri	764-735 BC	Expansion Era
I. Rusa	735-714/3 BC	Assyrian Conflicts
II. Argiştı	714/3-685 BC	Assyrian Conflicts
II. Rusa	685-645 BC	Construction of Karmir-Blur
Erimena	625-605 BC	
III. Rusa	629-615 BC or 590 BC	
III. Sarduri	639-635 BC	
IV. Sarduri	615-595 BC	Collapse of Urartu

Table I: Urartu King List (Özgül, 2011, s. 102)

Continuing the political policies of his father Menua, Argiştı I expanded the borders of Urartu and continued his construction activities (Günaşdı, 2016, p. 121; Özgül, 2016, pp. 144; Ceylan, 2018, p. 528; Bingöl, 2003, p. 110). In the first years of his reign, Argiştı I fought against Malatya and other Hatti countries in the west and carried out expeditions against the tribes between Leninakan, Erivan and Gökçe Göl on the Aras River in the north (Belli, 1982, pp. 158ff; Erzen, 1992, pp. 30; Salvini,

1995, pp. 58; Özgül, 2011, pp. 106). Annals from the reign of Argishti I and inscriptions discovered in Armenia provide us with information about the expeditions to the region.

The inscription numbered 7.1.5, located near the village of Elar on the road between Erivan and Gökçe Lake, 20 km northeast of Erivan, is dated to this period and is translated as follows (Payne, 1993, pp. 56):

“God Haldi went on a campaign with his own weapon. He defeated the land of Etiuni. God Haldi is strong, and the weapon of God Haldi is strong. With the power of God Haldi, son of Argishti Menua went on a campaign. He defeated the land of Uluani (and) the land of the city of Darani. With the greatness of God Haldi, son of Argishti Menua is a mighty king, a great king, the king of the land of Biainili, the ruler of the city of Tushpa.”

Based on the text, three geographical names appear: Etiuni, Uluani, and Darani. Etiuni is defined as the general name, title, or geographical term for a large region in Southern Transcaucasia. When examined in terms of location, it is located in the western part of the Sarıkamış district of Kars, adjacent to the northwestern shore of Lake Gökçe, or in the area between Astu and Uluane in Sarıkamış (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, pp. 34-35). Salvini also considers Etiuni to be a general name for a large region extending from Sarıkamış to the northwestern shore of Lake Gökçe (Salvini, 2002, p. 37).

Uluane is located around the village of Elar, 20 km northeast of Yerevan, with Dara as its center (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, p. 94). When this tablet, dating from the reign of Argishti I, is examined, it appears that the king does not claim to have conquered the region, but merely defeated its enemies. Therefore, it can be said that the region had not yet come under Urartian rule with the campaign. Various campaigns against Armenia are also known to have been launched during the reign of Argishti I.

A tablet found on the northwestern edge of Lake Gökçe, on the northwestern shore of the Gökçay River, near its confluence with the Zanga River, and a few kilometers from the city of Sevan, near the village of Ortaklı, on the road between Sevan and Nor-Beyazit, mentions another expedition to the region. Argishti I describes the expedition in inscription numbered 7.1.8 as follows (Payne, 1993, p. 56):

“By the greatness of the god Haldi, Argishti says: I conquered the land of the city of Qiehuni. I advanced as far as the city of İştikuniu. On the shore of the lake... Argishti, the mighty king, the king of the land of Biainili, the ruler of the city of Tushpa.”

The term "İstikuinu" mentioned in the text should not be confused with "İshkigulu," a different geographical name found in Urartian texts. These two places are distinct place names. İshkigulu is geographically located north of the Armenian city of Gyumri/Leninakan, between Spitak and Kirovakan. The text we cited places İstikuniu southwest of Lake Gökçe (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, 45-46). Based on this text by Argishti I, it can be concluded that this expedition was aimed at plunder, and that the region had not yet been taken under control as the Urartian king did not use such terms.



Lake Gökçe and Surroundings

During the reign of Argishti I, there were also various other expeditions to the area around Lake Gökçe. One of these is described in the inscription numbered 8.1.6, discovered at a height southwest of Gökçay in the village of Atamhan, on the southwestern shore of Gökçe Lake, and now in the Georgian Museum (Payne, 1993, pp. 73-74):

“By the command of God Haldi, Sarduri Son of Argišti says: I defeated the city of Tulihu, its king, the city of Sinalibi of the Luehu tribe, by force. I drove out Sinalibi, its king (and) its people. I advanced as far as Uduru-Eti(u)ni.”

It is suggested in the text that Luehu and Lueru/Luero may be the same place. Lueru also appears during the reigns of Sarduri II and Rusa I and is located on the southwestern shore of Lake Gökçe. Uduru-Eti(u)ni is considered a general name for the Lake Gökçe region (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, 50-51, 74). Based on the text, it appears that after the fall of Sinalibi, its people were deported to a different location. However, the Urartian king did not use words that would allow us to understand that the people were deported somewhere within the Urartian Kingdom. Therefore, it can be assumed that the people were deported to a different location, and that the place in question was not within the borders of the Urartian Kingdom. Among the deported were not only the people but also the king. Inscription number 8.1.7, found on a large rock block in the village of Zagalu, located on the southern shore of Lake Gökçe and southeast of Gökçay, recounts another expedition to the region (Payne, 1993, p. 74):

“The god Haldi went on an expedition with his own weapon. He defeated the land of Arquqi(w). Sarduri says: I went on an expedition (and) defeated the land of Arquqi(w). I advanced as far as the land of Urtehini. By the greatness of the god Haldi, Sarduri, son of Argišti, is the mighty king, the great king, the king of the countries, the king of kings, the ruler of the city of Tushpa.”

Urte/Urtehini, mentioned in the inscription, is located southeast of Gökçe Lake and borders Arquqi(u/o) (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, p. 96). An examination of these texts from the reign of Argishti I reveals that the Urartians conducted expeditions to the Caucasus region during his reign, and that some expeditions into Armenia were also undertaken within this period. Based on available information, it appears that the region in question was not a centralized, powerful kingdom, but rather comprised various smaller tribes. Since the Urartian king does not state that he conquered the region or that a rebellion broke out, it can be assumed that the expeditions were of a plundering nature.

Inscriptions found in Van also provide evidence of Urartian expeditions to Armenia during the reign of Argishti I. In the Horhor Yearbook, carved into the bedrock in Van, one of these expeditions is described as follows (Payne, 2006, pp. 169-170):

“God Haldi went on a campaign with his own spear, captured the Land of Mana, and captured the Land of Etiuni. He struck them down before Argishti. God Haldi is powerful, God Haldi with his greatness, thus says Argishti, son of Minua: I went on a campaign against the Land of Mana, I devastated the land and burned the cities... The gods listened to me. I went on a campaign against the Land of Etiuni, I captured the Land of Eriahi and the Land of Katarza, and I advanced as far as the Land of Ishqigulu... the Land of Uiteruhi... 1,200 X ten X horses, 29,504 head of cattle, and 60,000... small cattle.”

Based on the Horhor inscription, it appears that the expedition targeted the land of Mana, located south and east of Lake Urmia (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, pp. 53-54). After Mana, the expedition turned north, moving to the land of Etiuni, then conquering the lands of Eriahi and Katarza, and advancing to the land of Ishqigulu. A large amount of booty, including 29,504 head of cattle, was seized. Dianokoff and Kashkai indicate that the Eriahi mentioned in the inscription was a tribe and its territory in the Gyumri/Leninakan region of Armenia (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, pp. 30-31). Based on the locations of Eriahi, Lusa, Katarza, and Uiteruhi, it is possible to conclude that the land of Ishqigulu was located near Lake Gökçe.

The Horhor Annals also contain information about various expeditions to Armenia during the reign of Argishti I. Inscription 8.1.2, found on two fragments thought to belong to a stele in the Surp Sahak Church of the Old City of Van, describes the campaign as follows (Payne, 2006, pp. 177-178):

“Haldi went on a campaign with his own spear and captured the land of Etiuni. He struck it down before Argišti. The god Haldi is strong, and the spear of the god Haldi is strong. With the power of the god Haldi, Argišti, son of Minua, went on a campaign. The god Haldi went first. Argišti says: I destroyed the kings who came to the aid of (the king of) Diauhi (the land). Within a year, I captured the land of Luša, the land of Katarza, the land of Eriahi, and the land of Gulutahi. I captured the land of Uiteruhi, and I advanced as far as the land of Apuni. I had the king of the Land of Luša castrated. I subdued the king of the Land of Iga and left him in his place. He paid tribute to Argišti...”

Based on the text, it is suggested that during the reign of Argishti I, expeditions were launched against Etiuni, capturing places such as Lusha, Katarza, Eriahi, and Uiteruhi. As mentioned, Etiuni covers a wide area roughly from Sarıkamış to Gökçe Lake. Based on the Diauehi inscription in the text, it can be assumed that the area near Gökçe Lake was not reached. Based on the information we have, it can be said that the expeditions to the Gökçe Lake region during the Urartian period had both economic and strategic reasons. Argišti I claims to have captured thousands of horses and cattle as a result of his expeditions to the region. It can be argued that these animals, such as cattle, were used in economic matters, while horses were used for transportation and military purposes. The strategic reasons must have been related to the Scythians. It is known that Scythian and Cimmerian communities entered Urartian territory during the reign of the Urartian kings following Argišti I. Scythian and Cimmerian communities were also active during the reign of Argišti I, and therefore, it can be assumed that Argišti conducted expeditions to the region to protect Urartian land from danger.

Several expeditions into the region are also known during the reign of Sarduri II, who ascended to the Urartian throne after Argishti I. One of these is a niche in the bedrock known as Hazine Kapı

(Treasure Gate) and Analıkız (Analıkız), with a seven-column inscription on a pedestal and a stele within (Payne, 2006, pp. 208-210, 212, 223-224, 226):

“...That same year I went on a second campaign: against the Land of Etiuni and the Land of Liqiu. I captured Edia, the fortified royal city of the Abia (clan), by force... I exiled 3,500 young men, 15(?), 000 women, and 4,000 warriors. I drove away 8,525 head of cattle and 18,000 small cattle...The god Haldi went on a campaign with his own spear. He defeated the king of the Land of Eriahi. He captured the Land of Abiliani Sarduri says: I went on a campaign against the Land of Eriahi, I captured the Land of Eriahi... That same year I went on a third campaign, against the Land of Uiteruhi. Three governors were summoned. I declared war in three places... I exiled men and women. I built a fortress in the City of Uraia and there I left... a man. The man of the Land of Uitiruhi... I settled them there. Sarduri says: I performed such heroic deeds. I took 8,100 young men and exiled 9,100 women, a total of 17,200 people. I killed some and took some alive. (I also) drove away 1,500 horses, 17,300 head of cattle, and 31,600 sheep... God Haldi went on a campaign with his own spear and defeated four kings in the Ueduri-Etiuni Land: the king of the Arquqiu tribe, the king of the Kamaniu tribe, and the king of the Lueruniu tribe...”

According to the records of the campaigns described by Sarduri II on Hazine Kapı, it appears that campaigns were also launched against certain locations within Armenia during this period. Among the places mentioned here, Arquqiu is located at Zagalu on the south side of Lake Gökçe, Kamaniu on the southern shore of Lake Gökçe, and Lueruniu on the southwestern shore of Lake Gökçe (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, pp. 12, 47, 51). It is possible to attribute the Scythians as the reason for these campaigns. Based on texts from the period of Argishti I, it is known that the land of İşqigulu was very close to Lake Gökçe. It can be argued that the Urartians' campaigns in the region were aimed at strengthening the region and protecting their own country. It is known from written texts that expeditions to the region were also carried out during the reign of Rusa I, who ascended to the throne after Sarduri II. In response to the Assyrian blows against Urartu during the reign of Rusa I, the Urartians made some progress, entered a period of reorganization and recovery, and achieved military successes. (Özgül, 2011, pp. 111). One of these is inscription number 9.1.3, found on two sides of a cornerstone of the castle wall of the Berdi-Gluch hill fortress, near Nor-Beyazit on the western shore of Lake Gökçe. The inscription describes the campaign as follows (Payne, 1993, pp. 86-87):

“By the power of the god Haldi, Rusa Son of Sarduri says: I defeated the king of the land of Velikuhi, took him captive, and exiled him from the land. I left a governor there. I built the gates of the god Haldi and a magnificent castle. I named it the city of the god Haldi. I built it to strengthen the land of Biainili and to subdue the enemy's land. Rusa Son of Sarduri is the mighty king who rules the land of Biainili”.

Velikuhi/Velikuhe, mentioned in the text, is geographically depicted as a region in the center of the western shore of Lake Gökçe, located near present-day Nor-Beyazit (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, pp. 100).

Various expeditions were launched into the region during the reign of the Urartian king Rusa I. Inscription 9.1.4, found near the ruins of a Urartian fortress near the village of Tsovinar (Kolagran), located on the southwestern shore of Lake Gökçe, at the foot of Mount Otsapent, describes one of these. The inscription, stamped in the Armenian State Museum, reads as follows (Payne, 1993, p. 87):

“By the divine power of God Haldi, Rusa Son of Sarduri says: I conquered these countries in a single campaign. From the other side of the lake, I subdued the kings of the lands of Adahu, Veliku, Lueru (and) Arquiv, and from beyond the lake, from the high mountains, I subdued nineteen kings of the lands of Gurqumeli, Shanatua, Teriwisha, Rishua, []zwa, Aria, Zama, Irqima, Ela, Erieltua, Aidamaniw, Guria, Alzira, Pirua, Şila, Widua, Ateza, Eria (and) Azamerum. I conquered all twenty-three of their kings in a single year. I deported the men (and) women to the land of Biainili. I came to the year of the tribute. I built these fortresses for this land. I built the magnificent fortress of the god Teisheba. I named it the City of God Teisheba. I built it to strengthen the land of Biainili and to subdue enemy lands. Rusa says: Whoever destroys this inscription...”

An examination of the places mentioned in the inscription suggests that expeditions were conducted into Armenia. Among the places mentioned, Veliku, as mentioned above, is shown as a central region on the western shore of Lake Gökçe.

An examination of the other places mentioned in the text places Adahu in the northwestern corner of Lake Gökçe, in the region of present-day Kamo (Nor-Beyazit). Aidamaniw/u/o, Zama, Teriwisha, Pirua, Şila, Widua, Rişua, Sanatua, Guria, Gurqumele, Ela, Ereltua, Ataze, Azamerune, Alzira, Ere/ia, and Aria are located east of Lake Gökçe, in the Lesser Caucasus Mountains of Azerbaijan. As we mentioned, Arquı (u/o) was a tribe on the southern shore of Gökçe Lake, around modern Zagalu (Dianokoff and Kashkai, 1981, 4, 7-8, 11-12, 15, 28, 30, 37, 71, 73, 85, 100). Based on these locations, it appears that during the reign of Rusa I, the Urartians launched expeditions not only to the Gökçe Lake area but also to areas near Gökçe Lake within Azerbaijan. Based on the Urartian king's accounts, after defeating the tribes in the region, the Urartians deported them to various locations within Urartu. Because he claims to have seized the region and built fortresses, it can be concluded that the Gökçe Lake area came under Urartian rule during the reign of Rusa I. Based on the inscription, the castles were built not only for the protection of the region but also to strengthen the Urartian land. It can be said that the castles were built as a precaution against the Scythian and Cimmerian communities, as Assyrian records from this period indicate that the Cimmerians suffered a major defeat.

When we look at the reign of Rusa II, we see that the written sources related to the land consist largely of reports of construction activities, religious ceremonies, and sacrificial activities. Furthermore, based on texts from the period of Rusa II, the names of some regions around Gökçe Lake are known. A temple inscription found in Ayanis Castle reads as follows (Pınarcık, 2012, 143):

“Rusa, son of Argishti, says: I brought men and women from the lands of Lulu, Assyria, Targuni, Etiuni, Tablani, Qainaru, Mushki, Hate, Halitu, and Shiluquini”

Rusa II's account indicates that he brought people from various regions, including Assyria. The Shiluquini mentioned here is located south of Gökçe Lake by Arutyanyan (Pınarcık, 2012, 143). The Rusa text does not mention a war, and instead mentions bringing men and women from countries such as Mushki, Assyria, and Khata. Therefore, it is possible that no expedition was undertaken, and that the people brought there were brought by other means. When the texts belonging to the Urartian period are examined, there is information about various structures built in Karmir-Blur, as well as small pieces belonging to the city of Teişebaini that were unearthed in Karmir-Blur. (Payne, 2006, 284-299). It is understood that the king undertook construction projects during the reign of Rusa II. Therefore, it can be said that the Urartian cities in Armenia were also involved in these projects. Therefore, it appears that the king undertook construction projects during the reign of Rusa II. It can be said that the Urartian cities in Armenia were also involved in these projects.

CONCLUSION

Archaeological finds and Urartian texts found around Gökçe Lake indicate human settlement in the region. However, there is a lack of sufficient research on the settlements located in the surrounding area. This article aims to address this gap. Our research has revealed that there were no strong, centralized kingdoms like Assyria or Urartu. While some texts mention the subjugation of kings, it appears that the region was inhabited by various tribes of varying sizes. Based on Urartian texts, it can be said that the region included cities such as Etiuhi, Uluani, Darani, İştikuniu, Qiehuni, Tulihu, Arquqi, Urtehini, Adahu, Aidamaniw/u/o, Zama, Teriwisha, Pirua, Şila, Widua, Rişua, Sanatua, Guria, Gurqumele, Ela, Ereltua, Ataze, Azamerune, Alzira, Ere/ia, and Aria. While these are located around Lake Gökçe, their exact localization is not yet established, as various sources providing information about these cities are lacking. However, based on the inscriptions, it can be said that the cities here were small and that the people living in the surrounding area lived a more tribal lifestyle. Therefore, it can be argued that Urartian expansion was easier in the region. Expeditions to the area around Gökçe Lake can be said to have begun roughly during the reign of Argishti I, but it can be said that it came under definitive Urartian rule during the reigns of Sarduri II and Rusa I. Based on written texts, it appears that the Urartians built various fortresses in the region, and it is possible that they also settled in existing fortresses. The Urartian Kingdom's aim in this was not merely to seize the region and exploit its resources. The texts mention "*Strengthening the Land of Biainili*," indicating that the Urartians also conducted these expeditions to protect Van and its surrounding areas. Furthermore, the lake's nature as a freshwater lake must have also been a strategic factor. Records of expeditions to the region during the reign of the Urartian king Argishti I suggest that the region was particularly rich in horses and cattle. Therefore, Gökçe Lake was not only economically important but also strategically important as well. The primary reason for this is the region's richness. Urartian texts indicate that they took numerous animals during their expeditions to the region and brought them back to the Urartian lands. It can be argued that the region supported the Urartian Kingdom economically. It's also possible to say that Gökçe Lake played a significant role militarily. Among the animals acquired were horses, which were used in both cavalry units and civilian transportation.

However, it is also possible to argue that the Urartians' expeditions around Lake Gökçe served the purpose of ensuring security. Based on the texts of Argishti I, it can be said that the land of Ishkiqulu began just north of Lake Gökçe. It is known that Rusa II made an agreement with the Scythians and Cimmerians, but this agreement was not permanent, and the Scythians began to attack Urartian settlements after a while. Therefore, the Urartian kings must have organized these expeditions to prevent Scythian raids. It can also be suggested that the area around Lake Gökçe was lively due to the arrival of the Scythians, leading to intense migrations, and that the Urartian kingdom organized extensive military expeditions to avoid being affected by these migrations. Therefore, it can be said that the Gökçe Lake area played a significant role in Urartian defence and was considered a buffer zone. It can be noted that the Urartians viewed the Gökçe Lake region in the north as a natural defensive line.

It is unknown how long the Urartians held control of the region after their conquest. However, it is known that Scythians and Cimmerians entered Anatolian territory via the Caucasus. Therefore, it can be said that the Urartians lost their control of the area around Lake Gökçe after the arrival of the Scythians and Cimmerians.

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