
Çifçi, Ali: *The Socio-Economic Organisation of the Urartian Kingdom*. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2017. XX, 354 S., 67 Abb. 8° = Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 89. Hartbd. € 94,00. ISBN 978-90-04-34758-8.

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The book is based on the PhD thesis of the author, submitted to the Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology of the University of Liverpool. The work was supervised by Alan M. Greaves and Christopher Tuplin and completed in 2014 (see British Library's Electronic Thesis Online Service (<https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.617532>, retrieval date 17.12.2018; in the book itself this information is missing).

According to the acknowledgements (pp. XI–XII), the author stood in contact with numerous specialists on Urartu while working on his dissertation, and also participated in the Ayanis excavation led by Altan Çilingiroğlu.

The book is divided into three main chapters followed by a conclusion. The chapters are preceded by lists of figures, tables and maps as well as abbreviations (pp. XIII–X). At the end of the study there are two appendices, both dedicated to the still controversial issue of Urartian chronology. The first one concerns the two rulers Rusa, son of Erimena, and Rusa, son of Argišti (pp. 305–309). The second consists of a table listing the Urartian and Assyrian rulers, their (presumed) reigns, and synchronisms (p. 310). A bibliography (pp. 311–341) and an index (pp. 342–354) complete the book. The latter's usability is somewhat restricted by the fact that all keywords (i. e. old and modern place names, personal names, Urartian words etc.) are presented in one single alphabetical list. It would also have been helpful if the author had included a list of the texts discussed in the volume with the text numbers of Mirjo Salvini's edition (*Corpus dei Testi Urartei I–IV*, Rome 2008 and 2012). In the alphabetical index only a few texts are listed by their location and/or by terms referring to their content (such as "Horror chronicle").

Chapter 1 "A Critical Review of the Material" is opened by an introductory section (1.1, pp. 1–13) which describes the subject matter and objectives of the book. The author points out that a comprehensive study of the socio-economic structure and the economic resources of the Urartian kingdom has so far been missing, although various scholars "have touched upon these subjects" (p.2). He further points out that many of the relevant studies had not yet taken into account important new findings. Whereas the latter statement is true, the first is somewhat misleading, especially since Paul Zimansky published a detailed study on the subject in 1985 which, along with some other studies, served as a starting point for Çifçi's investigation (Paul E. Zimansky, *Ecology and Empire: The Structure of the Urartian State*, *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 41, Chicago, Illinois 1985).

The author's objective is to evaluate all the relevant data currently available to us, taking into account not only archaeological and written sources, but also geographical and climatic parameters. In addition, he uses ethnographic observations as a tool of interpretation to analyse the organisation of the administration and the economic structure of the kingdom of Urartu (pp. 1–3).

The author continues to outline the history of research (pp. 2–11) and previous interpretations, also indicating their socio-political context. He identifies the question of whether the Urartian kingdom was centralised or decentralised in socio-economical terms as a core issue in the research. He states that two key hypotheses can be distinguished: While Soviet and Turkish researchers assumed a strongly centralised structure, Western scholars tended

to argue, at least for certain phases of Urartian history, in favour of a decentralised structure, and to emphasize the role of trade. The author also centres on this question and seeks to answer it on the basis of the increased evidence.

In the following sections of Chapter 1, Çifçi describes his approach and the structure of the book (1.2), and outlines the topography, hydrology, climate and ecology of Urartu (1.3), as well as the relevant archaeological and written sources (1.4).

By doing so, he points out the problems related to the source material. He emphasizes that archaeological research has long concentrated on the citadels and thus the archaeological remains of the ruling elite, whereas the settlements of ordinary people, burial sites, water supply facilities and mines received only little attention until the second half of the 20th century. Furthermore, most archaeological sources come from sites such as Karmir-Blur, Ayanis and Bastam which date to the reign of Rusa, son of Argišti, and thus the middle of the 7th century, whereas material from earlier sites such as Armavir and Arinberd is much scarcer. In addition, the findings of earlier excavations were only poorly documented and the results of some excavations, such as those of Çavuştepe and Giriktepe/Patnos, were only made available to the public through brief or partial reports.

As for the written sources, the author emphasizes their limited number, their restricted range of contents, and their uneven chronological distribution (1.4.2). In contrast to other regions of the ancient Near East, most written sources from Urartu are display inscriptions of the rulers, whereas only a few administrative texts have come down to us. Most of these sources, which include clay tablets, seals and seal impressions, were discovered in citadels built by Rusa, son of Argišti, in the middle of the 7th century.

With regard to the display inscriptions, Çifçi makes the surprising claim in Section 1.4.2 that they do not contain any information about the administration of the Urartian kingdom (p. 25), which is evidently not correct. Some rulers, for instance, mention in their display inscriptions that they appointed provincial administrators (^UEN.NAM) in certain areas or called them in for campaigns. In addition, the display inscriptions provide information about the booty seized in war campaigns, the foundation of cities and fortifications, the construction of canals, buildings, and other infrastructure. Various rulers even indicate the quantities of grain they stored in silos. However, since the author himself draws on this evidence in order to reconstruct the administration of the Urartian kingdom, his own evaluation of the material implicitly contradicts his introductory statement.

As a third group among the Urartian texts, Çifçi enumerates the inscriptions on metal objects which he classifies as “short dedicatory inscriptions” which were mostly found in temples (p. 25). It should, however, be noted that there are also other inscription types among this group not mentioned by Çifçi, including proprietorial notes and an inscription which, similar to several stone and rock inscriptions, states the filling of a silo by the ruler (B 5–10).

A separate section (1.4.3) is dedicated to the Assyrian texts, emphasizing their high relevance to the subject. Aside from the royal inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian rulers and the letters of the Assyrian secret service, the monolingual Assyrian and the Urartian-Assyrian bilingual texts stemming from Urartu are also mentioned in this section. However, since these texts, along with the written sources in the Urartian language, were composed by the rulers of the Urartian kingdom, they should actually have been listed in the preceding section 1.4.2 “Urartian Texts” (or, respectively, “Texts from the Urartian Kingdom”).

Chapter 2 (“Control of Capital in Urartu: Economic Resources and Movement of Commodities”) deals with agriculture (2.1), animal husbandry (2.2), metallurgy (2.3), trade (2.4) and crafts (2.5). The individual sections are divided into subsections, with the first one providing an introduction and the last a summary.

In chapter 3 (“Economic and Administrative Structure of the Urartian Kingdom”) the administrative divisions (3.1), the ruler’s building activities (3.2), the military (3.3), the military spoils (3.4), and the monarchy (3.5) are discussed.

Both chapters are well-structured and provide a good overview of the data and the current state of research. The summaries at the end of each section allow a quick overview of their content.

As for the key question of whether the Urartian kingdom was socio-economically centralised or decentralised, Çifçi comes to the conclusion that neither was the case. Rather, the environmental conditions, as well as the archaeological and written sources, suggest that the degree of centralisation varied from region to region and between different periods.

The author argues that in the early period of formation and expansion, Urartu was “neither centralised nor decentralised” and continues by stating that “the administration of Urartian territory may have been arranged according to the specific needs of certain regions rather than imposing a centralised structure” (p. 302). But if the latter was the case, why not classify the structure as decentralised? Since Çifçi does not provide a clear definition of the terms “centralized” and “decentralized”, the statement remains unclear and somewhat confusing.

The author further claims that after a period of crisis in which the Urartians suffered two major military defeats from the Cimmerians and the Assyrians, the kingdom was restructured during the reign of Rusa, son of Argišti, and the administration was shifted towards a more centralised system. According to Çifçi, this is indicated by the introduction of clay tablets and bullae and the construction of large citadels and administrative buildings as well as storerooms.

With respect to this division of the socio-economic development of the Urartian state into three phases, but also in other aspects, the author is in agreement with other scholars. Especially in comparison to Zimansky’s study from 1985 (see above), the deviations are not as large as the author’s introductory remarks may suggest.

However, since in the meantime significant progress has been made both in the archaeological and philological research, a new comprehensive study such as Çifçi’s is certainly welcome. This is also true in view of the fact that the evidence has been published in numerous journal articles and edited volumes, as well as in several different modern languages (Armenian, English, French, German, Italian, Russian, and Turkish). Furthermore, Çifçi is undoubtedly right in pointing out the regional differences and changes over time.

Nevertheless, many questions remain unanswered or can only be answered hypothetically. Although the author himself points out that his observations or conclusions must be considered tentative and provisional (p. 304), it would have been preferable if he had also discussed alternative interpretations more frequently and explained in more detail how he arrived at his conclusions.

This applies, for instance, to the statement that the temple complexes “are likely to have been accessed by only a few individuals, as opposed to rock-cut niches or open-air shrines which were probably intended to serve the general public” (p. 227). To support his assumption, Çifçi only refers to the commanding positions of the open-air shrines beneath prominent rock spurs and further points out that they “are dated to the reign of king Išpuini and coincided with the first decades of the kingdom as well as to the introduction of Urartian state religion”. The author therefore assumes that these cult sites played a vital role in “the establishment and popularisation of the newly created state religion and, most importantly helped to define the concept of kingship and strengthen his legitimacy through participation in ceremonies in front of a large audience” (p. 228). It should, however, be noted that it remains unclear whether Urartian state religion was only introduced during Išpuini’s reign, since the written evidence from the reign of Išpuini’s predecessor Sarduri I

is too scarce. Nor can the assumption regarding visitors to the buildings be sufficiently supported by the sources. The ritual instructions give no indication of any public participation, and the architectural structure of the buildings does not supply sufficient evidence either. Rather, it should be noted that also the temples were built in places visible from outside the fortresses, and that their entrance areas were presumably similar in design to the open-air shrines and likewise served for the performance of rituals (see, e.g. Stephan Kroll et al., Introduction, in: Stephan Kroll et al., *Biainili-Urartu, The Proceedings of the Symposium held in Munich 12–14 October 2007* [Acta Iranica 51], Leuven 2012: p. 32, and Altan Çilingiroğlu, *Urartian Temples*, in: Stephan Kroll et al., *Biainili-Urartu*, Leuven 2012: p. 295–307).

On p. 297 Çifçi argues that the governors (^{LÜ}EN.NAM) who had been appointed by the king in order to administer certain conquered regions “may have been appointed from among the leaders of powerful tribes for the political and socio-economic stability of the kingdom. The local leaders along with members of the royal family also must have been appointed as provincial governors to ensure their loyalty to the kingdom”. However, the inscriptions do not contain any evidence supporting this assumption. The fact that their names are given in the inscriptions A 5–8 (Minua) and A 9–18 (Sarduri II) may also indicate that they were members of the Urartian royal court. We should further be careful to refer to the regions as “provinces”, using the Assyrian administrative concept as a model. This is also suggested by the fact that the Assyrians called these administrative units “*nagû*” and not “*pāḫātu*”.

In addition, it would have been desirable for the author to discuss in more detail the question of why so few administrative documents from Urartu have been passed down to us and why they were only introduced during the reign of Rusa, son of Argišti, as the author assumes (p. 13). If this was really the case, the question arises of how the administration had been organised prior to this point. Is it conceivable that this was done entirely or largely without written documentation? Is it conceivable that king Minua and some of his successors listed the quantities of grain stored in various silos recorded only in stone and rock inscriptions, but not in archival documents? Was the use of the cuneiform script in Urartu before Rusa, son of Argišti, really limited to the production of monumental inscriptions and inscriptions on metal objects? And what about the hieroglyphic script(s) known from Urartu as well? Since writing played a central role in the administration of other areas of the ancient Near East, these questions are of vital importance. Although it is problematic to attribute the lack of administrative documents entirely

to the randomness of preservation, it should be considered that before the reign of Rusa, son of Argišti, perishable materials were widely used as writing media, such as wooden boards covered with wax, as has been documented for other regions. Yet the meticulous and elegant design of the inscriptions on clay tablets suggests that the scribes also had extensive experience with this writing medium (see also Gernot Wilhelm, *Urartu als Region der Keilschriftkultur*, in: Volkert Haas [ed.], *Das Reich Urartu. Ein altorientalisches Staat im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* [Xenia 17], Konstanz 1986: p. 98). A degree of participation in the ancient Near Eastern scholarly tradition is also indicated by a fragmentarily preserved clay tablet from Ayaniš which on its obverse contains parts of the Mesopotamian S^a syllabary and on its reverse a scribal exercise (CTU IV CT Ay-1).

In section 3.2.4 “Cultic Structures (KÁ/Šeištli, susi and É.BÁRA)”, Çifçi argues that the term É.BÁRA in A 12-7 from Bastam is “evidently applied to the whole site and just not (sic) a ‘religious structure’” (p. 224). This, however, is very unlikely. Rather, the verb *šidištumi* in line 6 refers to the cultivation of the previously barren land, as is the case with other inscriptions (cf., e.g., A 5-24, A 5-34, 9-17), and thus rather to the building of the city named “Small City of Rusa” than to the É.BÁRA.

On p. 249 Çifçi claims that the form ^{KUR}šú-ra-a-ni, which is attested in column VII of the Hazine Kapısı inscription A 9-3 vii 3, “is the plural of the Urartian word ^{GIS}šuri, meaning ‘lance or sword’, referring (sic) to the armed guard of the Urartian royal palace which was part of the army (sumerogram KUR.KUR^{MEŠ})”. This, however, is not correct. The form ^{KUR}šurani is the ablative plural of the word ^{*KUR}šuri “lands, regions” which corresponds to the sumerogram KUR.KUR^{MEŠ}. It is thus to be kept apart from ^{GIS}šuri “weapon, lance” (see Salvini, CTU V: 415 f. with further literature). Line 3^b of the translation of A 9-3 vii 1’-13’, which is discussed afterwards, has erroneously been left out without being indicated by omission marks.

As far as the structure of the book is concerned, it would have been more reasonable to deal with chronology at the beginning of the book. This is not only true in view of the ongoing research debate on the succession of the rulers from Sarduri II, son of Argišti I, onwards, but also in view of the different phases of Urartu’s socio-economical organisation as stated by Çifçi.

Nevertheless, the book offers a good overview of many different aspects of the Urartian kingdom and will certainly stimulate further research on the kingdom of Urartu. Most welcome are the numerous tables (31 in total) and maps (9 in total). Among the tables are, for example, overviews of the excavations, the water facilities, the buildings of the Urartian rulers, booty lists, metal objects and their places of discovery, as well as climatic data. In addition to a map showing the Urartian kingdom and its neighbouring regions, there are maps showing the most important settlements, the distribution of water facilities, granaries, agricultural buildings, foundations of cities,

fortifications and cultic structures. The author is to be thanked for having the courage to dedicate his PhD thesis to this difficult yet very important topic.