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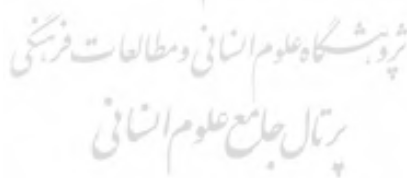
A Newly-Discovered Urartian Rock Inscription in Qarajalu: The First Piece of Evidence about Rusa I's Presence in the East of Urmia Lake

Maryam Dara¹ , Hossein Naseri Someeh² , Mohammadreza Rokni³

Abstract


Urartians ruled over the shores of lakes Van, Çildir, Sevan, and Urmia ca. 900 to 700 BC. Their presence in the east of Lake Urmia has been previously studied according to the inscriptions of Argišti I in Javanqale, Sarduri II in Seqindel, and Argištri II in Razliq, Nashteban, Shisheh, and Sarab, in addition to the inscribed discs from Varzeghan. There was not a single piece of evidence of Rusa I's dominance over the region, unless the discovery of Qarajalu Urartian inscription. The severely damaged rock inscription contains his conquest of the region in Qaradaq area, along with constructing a fortification to the east of Urmia Lake. A possible route for his campaign through the east could be Ahar Chay Gorge and Qaradagh mountains, as they were well aware of the significance of the eastern shores of the lake. The authors aim to describe and analyze this inscription as the first footprint of Rusa, Son of Sarduri, in the region as the conqueror and constructor.

Keywords: Qarajalu; Rock Inscription; Rusa I; Son of Sarduri; East of Lake Urmia.



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Introduction

Northwest of Iran witnessed Urartian campaigns, constructions, and dominance in Iron Age III. Urartian discovered artifacts and constructions lead to more insight of the era. Additionally, their inscriptions could bring significant information about the Urartians' presence in this region.

Numerous archaeological excavations and research projects have been conducted on Urartians (see Dara, 2024; Dara, 2025). Qarajalu rock inscription was discovered in recent years and is one of the most significant documents regarding Urartian dominance of the regions in east of Urmia Lake. The rock is located close to Yeddi Otaq fortification (Balli Qya), East Azarbaijan Province.

Salar Alipour, a mine engineer, sent photos of the rock inscription to Dara on 18th March 2022 that was reported and published by her (Dara, 2022b). Then, Naseri Someeh took extra pictures and Rokni processed them by Photogrammetry to achieve better illustrations and pictures. But, still, the damage to the inscription was harsh and caused difficulties for the studies.

The authors suppose the inscription could shed more light on the presence of the Urartians on the eastern shores of Urmia Lake. This paper aims to study, compare, translate, and analyze this rock inscription. The main questions are as follows: Which

Urartian king ordered this inscription? What is the relationship between the inscription and the nearby site? What are the king's other monuments in the region? What are other pieces of evidence of the king in the eastern region of Lake Urmia?

Qarajalu

Qarajalu is located close to Yeddi Otaq fortification (Balli Qya), at about 10 km by road to Ahar-Meshginshahr, East Azarbaijan Province (Fig. 1). According to Omrani and Rahmatpour (2008: 54-55), there is a fortification in this place with dimensions approximately 200 to 100 m. It is constructed on the rocks, looking at Ahar Chay River. Its highest point is about 70 m above the river bed. Its general plan is not clear, and only a few remaining walls of it are left, which are constructed of irregular and huge rocks in the form of drywalls.

It seems that the defense walls were in two rows, and the possible entrance was at the northern foot of the mountain.

There is a cemetery in the west of the fort with rectangular graves, sometimes along with steles that are no longer standing. It seems that a large part of the fortification and the cemetery were damaged and destroyed by the construction of the road and illegal excavations in recent years.

Several polished gray ware vessels,

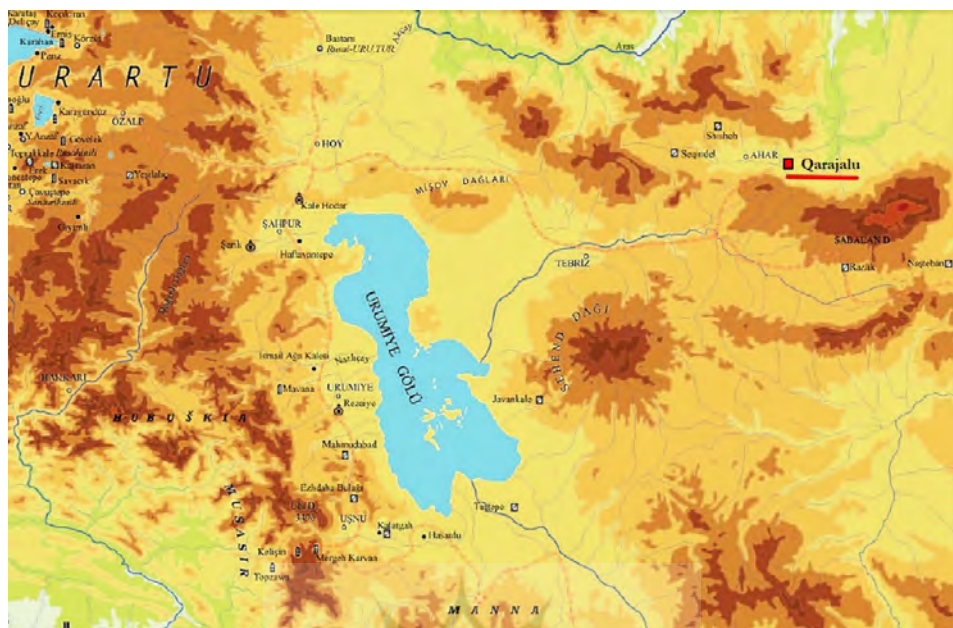


Fig. 1a. Qarajalu (Danişmaz, 2018: 297)

probably related to the late 2nd millennium to Iron Age 2, were recovered.

Several polished gray pottery vessels, probably related to the late second millennium to Iron Age II, were discovered during the survey of the fort and cemetery. Additionally, there are bronze arrowheads discovered (Omranı and Rahmatpour, 2008: 54-55). The findings are now preserved in East Azarbaijan Archaeological Museum.

Qarajalu Rock Inscription

Qarajalu rock inscription is at 1420 m above sea level (Fig. 2). The inscription is located on the highest point of the fort, facing northeast. Below the inscription, there are traces of illegal

excavations (Fig. 3). The frame of the inscription is 75 to 45 to 1 or 2 cm.

The inscription is severely damaged due to the rock material, cold weather, biological causes, lichen, humidity, fractures, losses, and erosion. The right side of the frame is also broken, but did not damage the inscription (Fig. 4).

The inscription contains 10 lines of Urartian cuneiform inscription, each line includes 11 to 12 signs. Although the space between lines 8 to 10 decreases while the number of the signs increases. Line 8 contains roughly 13 to 14 signs, and lines 9 and 10 bear about 15 signs. Lines 8 to 10 are almost impossible to reconstruct result to the severe damages (Fig. 5). Additionally, the beginning and end-



Fig. 1b. The Landscape of the Site (By Naseri Someeh)

ing of most of the lines on the inscription are badly damaged.

The epigraphy of the inscription was utilized in the co-reign of Išpuini and his son, Minua (*ca.* 820-810 BC), and also Rusa I's reign from *ca.* 730 BC to the end of Urartians' dominance. There are no pieces of evidence regarding Išpuini and Minua's presence in the east of Lake Urmia, but stone and rock inscriptions in Razliq, Nashteban (Dara, 2017: 107-116), Shishe (Dara, 2017: 117-122), and Sarab (Dara, 2022a) by Argišti II (*ca.* 713 BC) are recognized.

Qarajalu inscription is as following:

1. [ᵀᵇᵃl-di]-ni-ni uš-ma-ši-ni EN-si-ni-ni
2. ᵐru-sa-a- ᵀšeᵀ ᵐᵀsar-du-ri-ḫi-ni-ᵀšeᵀ
3. ᵀaᵀ-li-i-e i-ni KUR-ni ḫa-ú-ᵀbiᵀ
4. x sa/za x x(fraction) ᵀšeᵀ iš-ti-ni te-ru-ú-bi

5. x x x (fraction) ᵀiᵀ-ni É.GAL ši-di-iš-ᵀtúᵀ-bi

6. [iᵀ-niᵀ] DUB?-te? (fraction) x x x e la-li x ri-i-x

7. [MAN DAN-NU ^{KUR}]bi-a-(fraction)i-na-ú-e ᵀuᵀš-maᵀ-[a-še ᵐru-sa-še]

8. x aᵀ x x x x ᵀiᵀ-niᵀ x duᵀ x li xx

9. x x x x x piᵀ?-túᵀ?-li x x niᵀ? x x x x

10. x x x x x x x x x x x x x x

1. Ḫaldi, the mighty, the lord
2. Rusa, son of Sarduri,
3. says I conquered this region.
4. ? (fraction) I found here
5. ? (fraction) I constructed this fortification.
6. (unclear)
7. mighty king (of) Bia country (fraction), the mighty. [Rusa]
- 8-10. (unclear)

Analysis

The inscription's epigraphy is poor, as the space between the signs and even the space of the wedges in a single



Fig. 2. The Place of the Rock Inscription (By Naseri Someeh)

sign of lines 1 to 7 is more than the space between the ending lines. It seems that the scribe did not intend to create a picturesque monument and just had to place the text inside the frame.

There are other recognized inscriptions from Rusa I in Iran. Mahmoudabad stone inscription, in Urmia Museum, on the contrary to Qarajalu, is very well inscribed and is one of the most well-done examples (Dara, 2017: 83-86). Additionally, Merge Karevan (Dara, 2017: 87-94) and Movana (Dara, 2017: 95-106) are recognized in Western Azarbaijan Province in Iran.

Line 1 is destroyed at the beginning. Line 2 includes the name of the reigning Urartian ruler as Rusa I, son of Sarduri II (*ca.* 730-713).

Line 3 contains the event of King

Rusa conquering the region, which was not recognized before in east of Lake Urmia. His presence was only witnessed by the above-mentioned inscriptions on the western shores. According to Line 4, he not only conquered the region but also founded a construction here. At the beginning of this line, possibly the name of the region he conquered was mentioned.

Line 5 started, possibly by the name of the city, followed by Rusa's announcement of a fortification construction here. This illustrates that the previous findings of the site could belong to the same era or the people who lived here before the construction of the fort.

It is possible that *ti-ni* was written at the beginning of line 6, and the name of the fort was mentioned as well. It is also possible that the in-



Fig. 3. The Illegal Excavation at the Foot of the Rock (By Naseri Someeh)

scription was hereby mentioned. Although it was more appropriate that the name of the king was again mentioned here but the preserved wedges were not similar to Rusa's name.

The ending of line 7 to the end of the inscription could contain about 50 signs, and it is very difficult, most challenging, and almost impossible to reconstruct. It is possible that a cursing formula was inscribed here, but the space and the figure of the rare preserved wedges of the signs did not match any recognized cursing formulae. There are several recognized Urartian cursing phrases (Dara, 2023), but sadly, the number of the signs or the remaining wedges were very much different. If the ending of the seventh line was the beginning of a curse it could have

been *^mru-sa-še*. Accordingly, the authors also tried *a-li-e a-lu-še (ti-ni-ni tú-li-e a-i) i-ni DUB-te pi-tú-li-e*, but the space between the signs was the obstacle. *a-lu-še i-ni-li du-li-e* (Salvini, 2008: A 5-1 § 15-24) also did not seem proper as it was not used at the beginning of a cursing formula. The space did not match *a-lu-še DUB-te i-ni su-ú-i-du-li-e* (Dara, 2017: 42 §30-41) either. The phrases *DUB-te tu-li-e* (Salvini, 2008: A 5-1 § 15-24) and *[DUB]-te pi-i-tu-l[i-e]* (A 3-4 vo § 21'-34')-even disregarding *DUB-te*-did not match the remaining wedges. Regarding *a-lu-še a-i-ni-e-i ú-li-e-i* (Dara, 2017: 42 §30), the form of the wedges did not match.

li is the only really clear sign in lines 8 and 9. Accordingly, the best match could be *a-lu-še i-ni-pi-tú-li-e*,



Fig. 4a-b. The Rock Inscription (By Naseri Someeh)

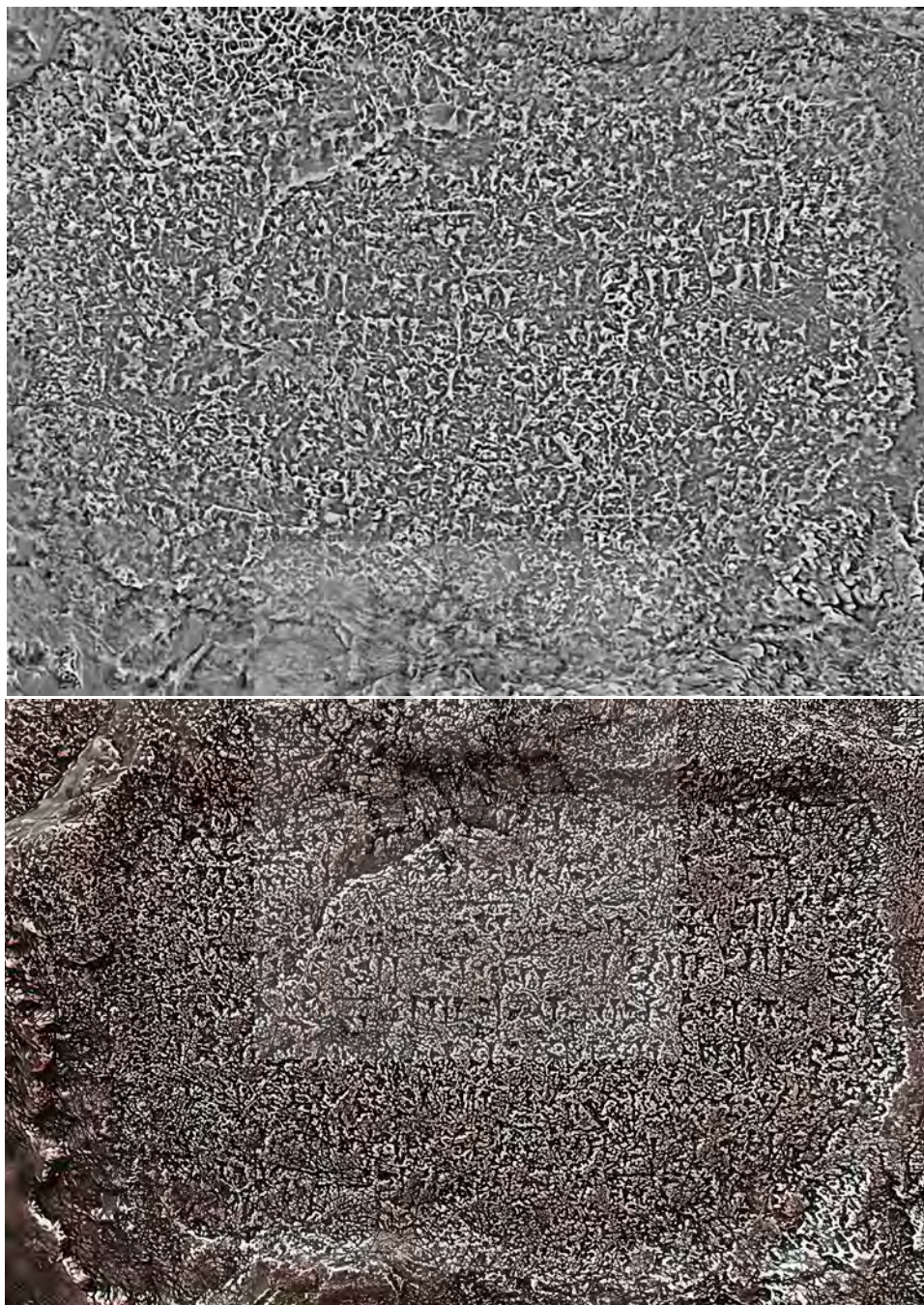


Fig. 5a-b. The Results of the Photogrametric Process (By Rokni)

disregarding the space between the signs and the remaining wedges.

If we recognize line 10 as the ending of the cursing *^DUTU-še DINGIR^{MEŠ}-še*

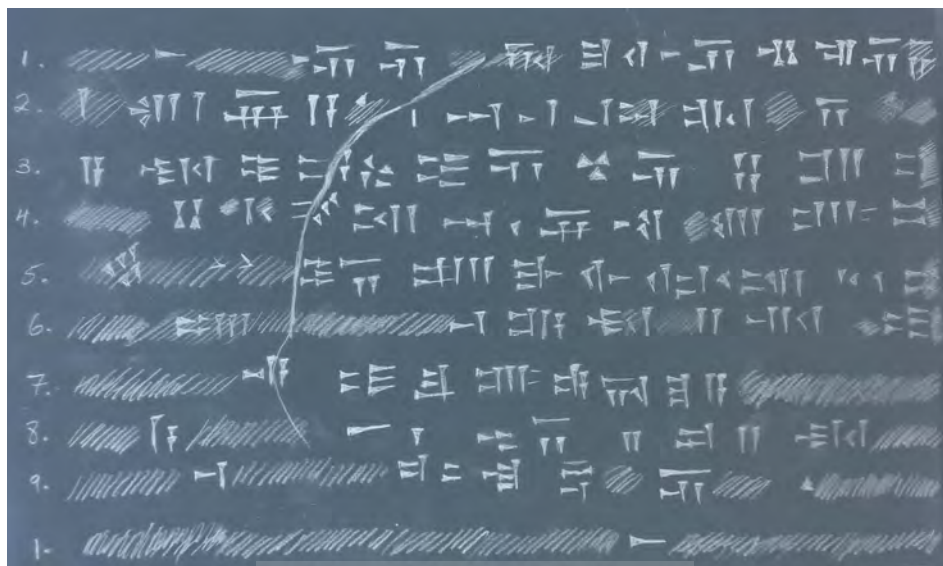


Fig. 5c. The Drawing of the Inscription (By Dara)

ma-a-ni ^DUTU-*ni pi-i-ni* could match the number of the signs but ^D*hal-di-še IM-še* that was mentioned before the phrase could not match line 9.

The famous form of *mì-i- ar-hi-e ú-ru-li-a-ni* was also inappropriate regarding the spaces and the wedges.

Conclusion

So far, only the presence of Argišti I (ca. 785/780-756 BC) in Javanqale or Ajabshir (Dara, 2017: 75-78), Sarduri II (ca. 756-730), his son, in Seqindel (Dara, 2017: 79-82), and Argišti II in Razliq (Dara, 2017: 107-110), Nashteban (Dara, 2017: 111-116), Shisheh (Dara, 2017: 117-122) and Sarab (Dara, 2022a), were recognized by the assistance of discovered Urartian cuneiform inscriptions in east of Lake Urmia. Additionally, the discovered bronze discs of Argišti I from Varzeqan (Dara,

2015; Dara and Naseri Someeh, 2023) were the only discovered Urartian inscribed artifacts in East Azarbaijan.

The rock inscription of Qarajalu, despite the poor epigraphy and severe damages and losses, is the first piece of evidence of Rusa I's (ca. 730-713 BC) conquering the region not so far from Ahar in the east of Lake Urmia and constructing a fortification. Merge Karevan and Movana steles, along with Mahmoudabad stone inscriptions by Rusa, son of Sarduri, were discovered in Western Azarbaijan Province before. Therefore, there was no footprint of his campaign on the eastern shores of the Lake. This rock inscription could be a turning point in his presence in the region that was not thought to be. This could be of help to the studies of Urartian presence in East Azarbaijan. One of the roots of Urartian progress

in the region is possibly Ahar Chay Gorge and through Qaradagh mountains that could continue to Ardebil and Talesh regions (Naseri *et al.*, 2015: 156; Naseri *et al.*, 2022).

The inscription could also be regarded as proof that Urartians were well aware of the significance of Eastern shores of Lake Urmia and were interested in having control over the region

in Rusa I's reign. Building a fort could assist them in having control over the people and managing the administration of a place in east of the Lake.

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