

Some Iron Age and Medieval Sites in Göle District of Ardahan

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Abstract

In this paper, an evaluation of some Iron Age and Medieval sites in Göle district of Ardahan is contained. The results of the field surveys conducted by us in Ardahan in 2016 and 2017 are effective in this assessment. The archaeological sites forming the subject of the article are located between the villages of Kuzupınarı and Bellitepe in Göle. The archaeological sites in question are an Iron Age fortress and its settlement in Kuzupınarı, two Iron Age towers, an ancient pen and a Medieval church in Bellitepe and a Medieval archaeological site in Dedeşen.

Keywords: *Iron Age, Medieval, Ardahan, Fortress, Tower, Church, Fortification.*

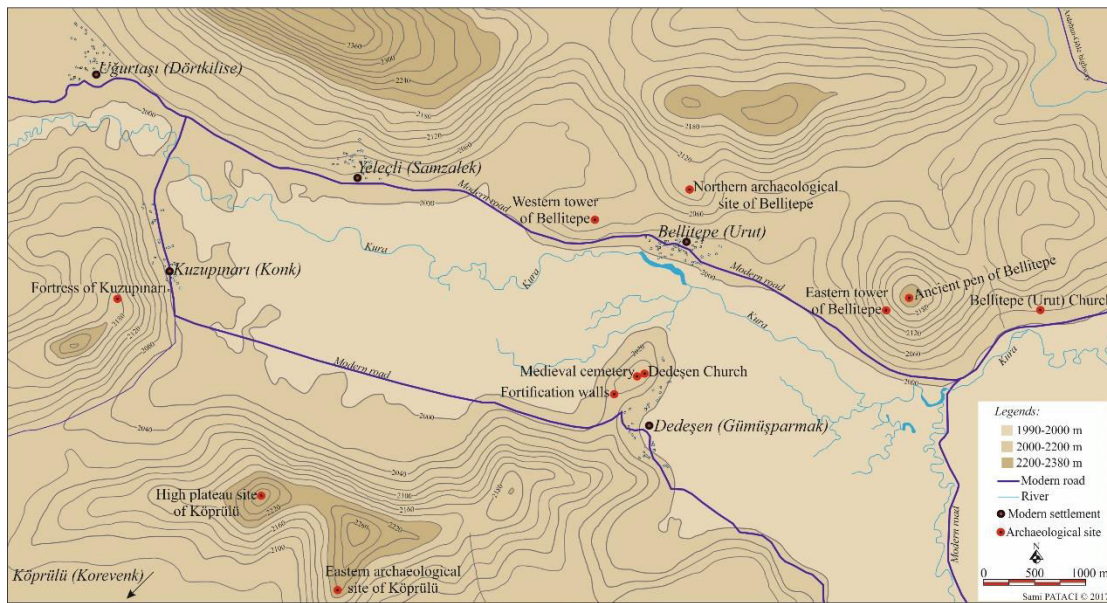
Introduction

A large number of archaeological sites dating to the Bronze and Iron Ages and medieval period have been researched during the archaeological field surveys conducted by us in Ardahan between the years of 2013 and 2017.¹ In these researches, it was understood that the central district of Ardahan was an important region especially for the Bronze Age archaeology. The most important archaeological finds belonging to the Kura-Araxes culture have been observed on the hilltops around the villages of Değirmenli and Sulakyurt which are among the modern settlements of the central district. As a result of

¹ For the results of the field surveys in Ardahan in 2013 and 2017, see Patacı, 2014: 99-116.; Patacı, 2015a: 467-480.; Patacı, 2015b: 52-86.; Patacı, 2016a: 81-100.; Patacı, 2016b; Patacı *et al.*, 2017: 175-200.; Patacı and Küçük, 2015: 487-498.; Patacı and Lafli, 2015: 229-248.; Patacı and Lafli, 2016a: 191-210.; Patacı and Lafli, 2016b: 281-297.; Patacı and Lafli, 2017: 115-126.; Patacı and Oral Patacı, 2014: 260-263.; Patacı and Oral Patacı, 2016: 172-175.

our surveys we can claim that the Iron Age sites in the central district are in a minority comparing to the sites of the Bronze Age. It seems that the archaeological sites dating to the Iron Age are more intense in Göle, located to the south of Ardahan.

Specifically, our studies have focused on an important area between Kuzupınarı and Bellitepe in Göle (Kola) in 2017. This area consists of a fertile plain extending for at least 7 km in the east-west direction and hills having an altitude of about 2200 m in the west, north and south of the plain (map 1). Besides, a branch of the Kura River flows in the east-west direction on the north side of the plain. There are five modern settlements around the lowland. These villages are Uğurtaş (Dörtkilise), Kuzupınarı (Konk), Yeleçli (Samzalek) and Bellitepe (Urut) from west to east. The fifth village, Dedeşen (Gümüşparmak), is located in the southern center of the area (map 1). There are seven different archaeological sites around these villages. Two of them located in Bellitepe and Dedeşen are dated to the medieval period and the others located in Kuzupınarı and Bellitepe must be dated to the Iron Age. In addition, there are two more findspots in the south of the region. We detected plenty of Bronze and Iron Age ceramics in one of these ruins that were discovered in the vicinity of the village of Köprülü in the 2016 survey. Only two of the nine archaeological sites have not been extensively studied yet. These are the northern archaeological site of Bellitepe and the eastern archaeological site of Köprülü. We plan to continue the field survey in this area in 2018 again.



Map 1. Archaeological sites between Kuzupınarı and Bellitepe.

An Iron Age Fortress and Its Settlement in Kuzupınarı

Kuzupınarı is located 26.7 km northwest of the center of Göle. An archaeological site has been detected at the summit of a hill with 2170-2182 m in altitude, on the western border of this village (map 1). The fortress that dominates the lowland between Kuzupınarı and Bellitepe is situated on the east edge of the hill. At the center of the archaeological site there is a fortress with a rectangular plan, located in northwest-southeast direction (figs. 1-3). The structure was built with dry wall technique using polygonal, rectangular and square cut medium and large sized basalt stones. The eastern walls of the fortress rise over a rocky ground. There are nearly semi-circular bastions positioned at the corners of the structure (fig. 4). The same architectural feature is also observed in the western tower of Bellitepe which is located 4,7 km of the fortress of Kuzupınarı. However, the fortress of Kuzupınarı has one more bastion in the center of its western outer wall.



Fig. 1. Plan of the archaeological site at Kuzupınarı

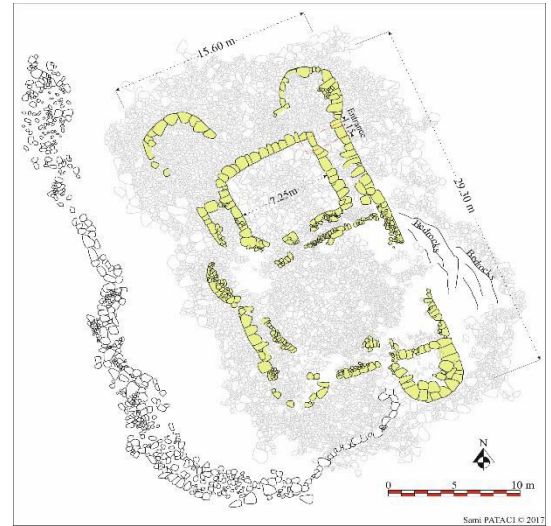


Fig. 2. Plan of the fortress of Kuzupınarı



Fig. 3. Aerial photo of the fortress of Kuzupınarı.



Fig. 4. The Fortress of Kuzupınarı. View from the north.

The fortress of Kuzupınarı has the dimensions of about 30 x 16 m. Thickness of the walls varies from 2.20 m to 3.40 m. Maximum height of the preserved walls changes between 2.50 m and 3.00 m. There is an entrance on the northeastern edge of the fortress

(fig. 5). Width of the entrance is 1,14 m and height of it is about 1.00 m. The entrance corridor has the length of 3,47 m, width of 1,38 m and height of 1,10 m. The fortress has two rooms situated in the north-south direction. The northern room of the structure has the dimensions of 7.42 x 6.20 m and the southern room has the dimensions of 9.15 x 8.12 m. The pile of stones fallen from the fortress cover almost entire the structure and they are scattered around the land surrounding the fortress. The stones belonging to the bastions of the fortress are slightly larger than those on the other walls and the best preserved walls of the structure are also seen on the bastions (fig. 6). Measures of the bastions are as follows:

Southeastern bastion: width: 4.75 m; preserved height: 2.50 m.

Northeastern bastion: width: 4.00 m; preserved height: 2,57 m.

Northwestern bastion: width: 4.45 m; preserved height: 3.40 m.

Southwestern bastion: width: 4.00 m.

Central bastion on the western side of the structure: width: 3.90 m.



Fig. 5. The entrance of the fortress of Kuzupınarı.



Fig. 6. The northwestern bastion of the Fortress of Kuzupınarı.

A remains of another wall preserved on ground level and extending in the north-south direction can be observed throughout the west of the fortress of Kuzupınarı (figs. 2-3). There is a distance of 8-9 m between this badly preserved wall and the western wall of the fortress. This perimeter wall ends at the center of the southern wall of the fortress. Because the eastern edge of the fortress is bounded by the steep slope of the hill, there was no need an extra defensive wall at this point of the archaeological site.

Another group of ruins in the archaeological site suggests us that this area might have been used also as a seasonal highland settlement which was established for animal husbandry. There are two groups of architectural structures which were preserved in bad condition with ground level in the northern zone of the fortress (fig. 7). The first architectural ruins which consist of rooms with rectangular and square plan observed at a few meters from the north outer wall of the fortress and they extend about 30 m towards the north. The second group of architectural remains are 28 m northeast of the fortress. We think that there must be more than 20 rooms in the northern zone of the fortress. Additionally, there are a few remains of graves in the south area of the fortress, but they were destroyed because of the illicit excavations.

The last group of ruins in the archaeological site of Kuzupınarı is located on the western zone of the fortress and is observed about 30 m in the east-west direction. Unfortunately, it is not possible to develop an appropriate evaluation about the function of this area because of the lack of data. The total size of this archaeological site in Kuzupınarı is approximately 100 m in the north-south direction and 60 m in the east-west direction. Few pottery fragments documented around the fortress belong to the Iron Age; yet due to the lack of sufficient surface material, it is not possible to have a more precise dating (fig. 8). It is also observed a group of pottery fragments in the vicinity of the fortress, which exhibits the features of the medieval ceramics. However, there is no architectural evidence showing that this archaeological site is also used in medieval period.



Fig. 7. The northern area of the fortress of Kuzupınarı.



Fig. 8. Pottery finds from Kuzupınarı.

There is a modern pen about 170 m northwest of the fortress of Kuzupınarı. It has been observed by us that some locals of Kuzupınarı stayed here with their tents for the animal husbandry activities during the summer season. Essentially, the hill where the archaeological site is located must have been used for these kinds of activities for thousands of years.

Iron Age Towers in Bellitepe

There are two Iron Age towers in the vicinity of Bellitepe that is located 20 km north of the center of Göle in Ardahan. Our survey team discovered an Iron Age tower, on a hill with a low-altitude, which is 600/650 m west of the Bellitepe in the 2017 survey (map 1). This tower that has been named as the western tower of Bellitepe by us, is located just 160 m north of the modern road linking the villages of Yeleçli and Bellitepe.

The tower with a square plan and semicircular bastions at its corners, is like a smaller version of the fortress of Kuzupınarı (fig. 9-10). Because of their architectural features, the western tower of Bellitepe and the fortress of Kuzupınarı are among the unique defensive structures in Ardahan. In our opinion both structures must have been built in the same period. The fact that these two structures are located close to each other

at a distance of 4.7 km suggests that there may be a relationship between them. Apart from them, another tower to the east of Bellitepe was also discovered during the 2017 survey. Existence of the Kura River, high plateau settlements established for animal husbandry, a possible trade road and also the large lowland which is suitable for farming between Kuzupınarı and Bellitepe must have affected on the numbers of the defensive structures and their positioning (fig. 11). Besides, there must have been seasonal settlements especially established for animal husbandry in the highlands of this territory.



Fig. 9. Plan of the western tower of Bellitepe.

Fig. 10. Aerial photo of the western tower of Bellitepe.

The western tower of Bellitepe has the dimensions of 21.4 m in the north-south direction and 18.6 m in the east-west direction. Although it is defined as a tower by us, this structure is larger than the typical towers of Ardahan. It must have been used as a military outpost in Iron Age. It was built with dry wall technique using medium and large sized stones. Dimensions of some of the *in situ* stones belonging to the structure are 1.90 x 1.00 m, 1.30 x 0.60 m and 1.90 x 1.10 m. Thickness of the walls of the tower changes between 2.77 m and 2.90 m and the maximum height of its preserved walls varies between 1.50 m and 2.00 m (fig. 12). The entrance of the tower which has the width of 1.00 m, is located at the center of the south wall of the structure (fig. 13). The entrance corridor with its length of 3.40 m and width of 1.30 m shows similarity with the one in the fortress of Kuzupınarı (fig. 14). The tower has only one room, that has the dimensions of 10 x 9.40 m.



Fig. 11. The western tower of Bellitepe. View from the east.



Fig. 12. The west wall of the western tower of Bellitepe.



Fig. 13. The entrance of the western tower of Bellitepe.



Fig. 14. The entrance corridor of the western tower of Bellitepe.

Except the tower itself, there is also a perimeter wall surrounding the archaeological site but we couldn't detect a trace belonging to this wall on the east of the tower (fig. 9-10). A few meters to the east wall of the tower, there is a group of ruins that has been protected in ground level and consist of nine rooms with square plan. Another group of ruins consisting of 7-8 rooms, can be observed on the land situated in the south and southeast of the tower. The total size of the archaeological site is 60 m in the north-south direction and 70 m in the east-west direction (fig. 15). A few numbers of Iron Age and Medieval ceramics were detected around the western tower of Bellitepe in the 2017 field survey.

The eastern tower of Bellitepe which is heavily damaged over the years, was another tower discovered in the vicinity of Bellitepe in 2017. The tower, located about 2.2 km east of Bellitepe and 500 m north of the modern road was built on the southern slope of a hill with an altitude of 2129-2138 m (map 1). The structure is positioned in the north-south direction and has an almost rectangular plan with rounded corners except its southwestern corner (figs. 16). The tower has been built in accordance with the topographical features of the land, which it rises on (fig. 17). Medium and large sized

basalt stones were used building the structure which was constructed in dry wall technique. Dimensions of the tower is 14.30 x 10.50 m and thickness of its walls is around 2.30 m. Height of the walls of the tower is preserved at maximum 1-1.5 m on the north side of the structure.



Fig. 15. The west facade of the western tower of Bellitepe.

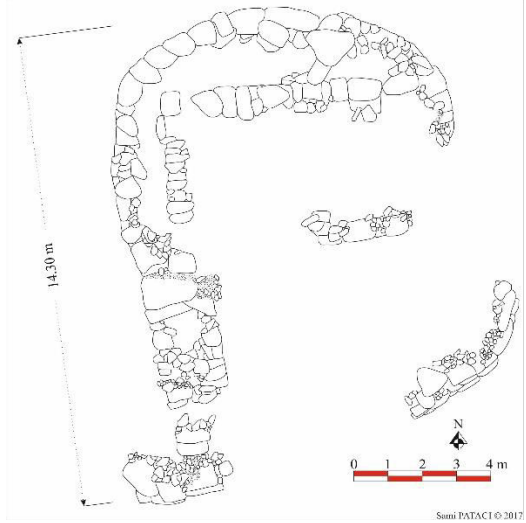


Fig. 16. Plan of the eastern tower of Bellitepe.

A few of ceramic fragments dating to the Iron Age and Medieval period were observed in the tower and its close surroundings. But amount of these small finds is not enough to date the archaeological site in detail. It doesn't seem to be possible to claim that the tower was also used in Medieval Period when we evaluate its architectural condition; yet, it is more appropriate to wait until an excavation is conducted in this archaeological site to make a better comment about the usage phases of the tower.



Fig. 17. Aerial photo of the eastern tower of Bellitepe.



Fig. 18. The eastern tower of Bellitepe. View from the north.

The tower is situated in a location where the whole lowland in its eastern, southern and western directions can be easily observed (fig. 18). The most important reason to build a military outpost such as the western and the eastern towers of Bellitepe must be a desire of controlling the stream which is a branch of the Kura flowing 700 m south of this tower.

Ancient Pen of Bellitepe

There is another ancient archaeological site we define as a pen (fold) which must have been built for animal husbandry on the top of the hill where the eastern tower of Bellitepe is located. Today, this area continues to be used as a pen. There is a short distance of 185 m between this site with the altitude of 2200 m and the eastern tower (map 1). A modern wall with the maximum height of 1 m is built in dry wall technique by the locals using the collapsing stones of the pen. The stone stacks are scattered all over the boundaries of the structure in width of 2-3 m. Unfortunately no pottery or other type of small finds were found in the archaeological site.

Medieval Church of Bellitepe (Urut)

Bellitepe is one of the villages of the Township of Çayırbaşı in Göle. The area where this village is located was one of the Armenian settlements at the beginning of the 20th century. This area which is the subject of the article is also important in terms of Medieval archaeology. There is a Medieval church 4 km east of Bellitepe (map 1). This well known church has been studied several times in previous surveys by different researchers. The church is situated 150 m north of the modern road and 215 m north of the Kura River, on a slope of a hill with the altitude of 2010 m (fig. 19).



Fig. 19. The church of Bellitepe. View from the northeast.

The church with the dimensions of 10 x 6.80 m was built in infill wall technique. There is an adjacent annex to the north of the structure probably used as a *pastophorion* with the dimensions of 5,40 x 2,50 m. The total dimension of the land covered by the church, increases to 10 x 9.15 m with this additional room. The wall thickness of the church is approximately 80 cm and the preserved height of its wall is maximum 4.60 m. The entrance of the church is on the western edge but there is a great destruction on the walls of the structure including this entrance. Unfortunately, all the cut stones on the surface of the walls were taken by the locals of the area over the years. There is also a pit of a recent illegal excavation 10 m south of the church and a Medieval grave destroyed by the treasure hunters.

Medieval Archaeological Site in Dedeşen

Dedeşen is one of the important archaeological sites dating to the Middle Ages in Ardahan. This village is in the south center of the plain between Kuzupınarı and Bellitepe and 4.5 km east of Kuzupınarı (map 1). Archaeological site of Dedeşen is located on a hill which is just on the north of the village. This site was defined as a fortress in a book published as a result of a former research² but the function of this Medieval ruins is not clear yet. Artvin and Ardahan which are parts of the historical region of Tao-Klarjeti have very important religious places in their boundaries; but many of the cultural assets dating between the 10th and 13th centuries has been preserved in bad condition in Ardahan. One of these was the Basilica in Erusheti where a bishopric was established during the reign of Vakhtang I in the 5th century.³ In our opinion, this Medieval site which rises on a *höyük* (mound) in Dedeşen was a major fortified religious center (fig. 20).

The *höyük* in Dedeşen with the altitudes of 2020-2050 covers an area of 420 m in the east-west direction and 230 m in the north-south direction. The ruins on the *höyük* site can be observed through 330 m in the east-west direction. Two fortification walls preserved in several meters length draw the attention on the southwest edge of the mound (fig. 21). This point must be the entrance of the site. Unfortunately, the fortification walls of the site have been almost completely destroyed. Nevertheless, if an archaeological excavation is conducted, at least the foundations of the walls can be uncovered in the limits of the *höyük*.



Fig. 20. The *höyük* site in Dedeşen. View from the north.



Fig. 21. The fortification wall of the *höyük* site in Dedeşen.

² Gündoğdu, 2000: 66-71.

³ Kartlis Tskhovreba, 2014: 165; Thomson, 1996: 217

A Medieval church with the dimensions of 14.4 x 9.9 m is located in the eastern side of the *höyük* site (map 1). This church, which is one of the rare religious buildings in Ardahan with its length of more than 10 m, has been heavily damaged. The northern wall of the structure built in infill wall technique has been preserved at a maximum height of 3.30 m. Other walls of the building have been protected in foundation level in general and the wall thicknesses are about 70 cm. There is an additional room that must have been used as a *pastophorion* on the northern edge of the church (fig. 22). There must be another symmetrical room at the southeast side of the church but the existence of a collapsed wall on the land hasn't allowed us understand this possible room in detail.



Fig. 22. Aerial photo of the church in Dedeşen.



Fig. 23. The cemetery of the *höyük* site in Dedeşen.

The area just west of the church is a Medieval cemetery and a great number of gravestones can be easily observed in this area (fig. 23). Besides of the gravestones, some architectural remains in foundation level were noticed in the west of the cemetery in the 2017 survey. But it is not possible to define them without an excavation. In Dedeşen, A small number of pottery finds dated to the Medieval period was studied by our research team. We plan to publish some detailed articles of Bronze and Iron Ages and Medieval potteries that we detected during our field surveys between 2013 and 2017.

Conclusion

The main reason of the existence of the fortress of Kuzupınarı which has a function as a medium sized military base is that, secure the large plain on its eastern side, the Kura River that extends in the east-west direction and the settlements around the lowland and the river (fig. 24). The Fortress of Kuzupınarı and the towers in Bellitepe are similar to the Urartian fortresses and towers in terms of their positioning features. Urartian fortresses have also been built over a rocky ground on the summit of the hills that dominate the large lowlands where the agricultural activities were organized.⁴ Security of the trade roads, water resources and the cities were provided in this way. In addition, agricultural

⁴ Çilingiroğlu, 1997: 48.

products collected from the settlements which were in the vicinity of the defensive structures were saved in the storages of the fortresses. The Urartian Kingdom, which is a very important Iron Age civilization for the history of the eastern Anatolia, northwestern Iran and Armenia, had an necessarily influence on the local cultures in its close vicinity. However, we would like to emphasize that we have no intention to claim that the archaeological sites between Kuzupınarı and Bellitepe located in Göle were used by the Urartians. The absence of Urartian evidences in our surveys made us to think that Ardahan had an isolated and local position during the period of Urartians. Due to the small amount of archaeological data one can assume that Ardahan was meaning a tribute and pillaging zone, rather than a residential area for the Urartian Kingdom.



Fig. 24. A Panaromic view of the lowland from the fortress of Kuzupınarı.

The field surveys we have conducted in Dedeşen and Bellitepe have shown us once again that the cultural assets of Ardahan dated to the Medieval period are more damaged in recent years than we thought. For this reason, along with archaeological studies, restoration and conservation activities are needed at the same time. It is absolutely necessary to conduct such studies especially in Dedeşen. In this respect, maybe the most important Medieval Church is the Church of Yalnızçam (Sindiskom) with its complicated plan and dimensions of 18.50 x 18.30 m in the central district of Ardahan. However, apart from the church, the other ruins such as some unidentified architectural units which are observed on the ground level, the fortification wall and the cemetery are quite striking in Dedeşen. Most probably, Dedeşen will become the first place where important and interesting datas can be obtained in the name of the medieval archaeology of Göle (Kola) if an comprehensive project is started.

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Figure Captions

Map 1. Archaeological sites between Kuzupınarı and Bellitepe.

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Fig. 3. Aerial photo of the fortress of Kuzupınarı.

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Fig. 5. The entrance of the fortress of Kuzupınarı.

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