

HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE COUNTRIES IN
HISTORICAL TAO-KLARJETI, MODERN ARDAHAN REGION, ACCORDING
TO URARTIAN WRITTEN SOURCES AND EXISTING MONUMENTS OF
MATERIAL CULTURE

ისტორიულ ტაო-კლარჯეთში, თანამედროვე არდაჰანის რეგიონში
არსებული უძველესი ქვეყნების ისტორიულ-გეოგრაფიული ანალიზი:
ურარტული წერილობითი წყაროების და არსებული მატერიალური
კულტურის ძეგლების მიხედვით

LEVAN TSIKARISHVILI

PhD Candidate (History), Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University,
1 Chavchavadze Ave., Tbilisi, Georgia;
Associate Professor, Caucasus University, Paata Saakadze St., Tbilisi, Georgia.
<http://orcid.org/0009-0001-0603-0329>

Abstract

The existence of numerous early polities, tribes, and tribal confederations within the territory of Tao-Klarjeti is well attested. Some of the most important information concerning the earliest peoples and countries of Georgia is preserved in Urartian cuneiform inscriptions, in which numerous countries, cities, and tribes are mentioned in the context of military campaigns and marching routes. With regard to the localization of the places mentioned in these sources, scholarly literature offers a wide range of interpretations. Some of these localizations have been established with relative accuracy, while others remain at the level of assumptions and hypotheses. Consequently, we encounter divergent and often mutually contradictory views among researchers. Owing to the scarcity of sources, the precise localization of these countries constitutes a particularly difficult task. The issue requires a complex approach which, in addition to the correlation of written sources, necessitates the integration of various types of data—such as the historical geography of the region, archaeology, toponymy, and other related fields—within a single analytical framework.

In the present study, the countries mentioned in Urartian sources are examined from a historical-geographical perspective, focusing on those whose location is connected, or may be connected, with the area of Tao-Klarjeti that corresponds to the territory of modern Ardahan. Over different periods, several dozen research expeditions have been conducted in Tao-Klarjeti and its adjacent regions. In recent years, expeditions were organized in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Adjara with the support of the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia [within the framework of grant PHDF-23-4235]. As a result, more than 500 cyclopean dry-stone structures have been recorded in historical Meskheta, which encompasses the territories of Georgia and Tao-Klarjeti. These structures should represent the material culture of the tribes and countries mentioned in Urartian written sources.

The methodology of the research is based on the analysis of sources with the aim of determining the location or approximate location of ancient “countries” and correlating them with modern data from the study area. As a result, the possibility increases to localize, or further specify, the location of

ancient countries and cities. At the same time, such an approach enhances the potential for providing additional arguments in support of existing hypotheses. Through analysis conducted using this method, the study reveals a coherent picture of the countries associated with the Ardahan region, which, on the one hand, refines previously held views and, on the other hand, generates new opportunities for research.

Keywords: Tao-Klarjeti; Ardahan Region; Urartian Written Sources; Cuneiform Inscriptions; Diauehi (Daiaeni); Historical Geography; Localization of Ancient Polities; Cyclopean Architecture.

ლევან წიქარიშვილი

ისტორიის მიმართულების დოქტორანტი, ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, ილია ჭავჭავაძის გამზ. 1, თბილისი, საქართველო
ასოცირებული პროფესორი, კავკასიის უნივერსიტეტი, პაატა სააკაძის ქ. 1, თბილისი, საქართველო
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0603-0329>

აბსტრაქტი

ტაო-კლარჯეთის ტერიტორიაზე ადრეული პერიოდის მრავალი ქვეყნის / ტომის თუ ტომობრივი გაერთიანების არსებობა დასტურდება. ერთ-ერთი ყველაზე მნიშვნელოვანი ცნობები საქართველოს უძველეს ხალხთა და ქვეყანათა შესახებ დაცულია ურარტულ ლურსმულ წარწერებში, სადაც სალაშქრო მარშრუტებისას დასახელებულია მრავალი ქვეყანა / ქალაქი თუ ტომი. აქ ნახსენები პუნქტების ლოკალიზაციასთან დაკავშირებით სამეცნიერო ლიტერატურაში არსებობს მრავალი მოსაზრება. ზოგიერთი მათგანი მეტ-ნაკლებად ზუსტადაა ლოკალიზებული, ზოგი კი ვერსიის და ჰიპოთეზის დონეზეა. ამდენად, ვხვდებით მკვლევრების ერთმანეთისგან განსხვავებულ და ურთიერთგამომრიცხავ შეხედულებებს. წყაროების სიმწირის გამო, აღნიშნული ქვეყნების ზუსტი ლოკალიზება რთულ ამოცანას წარმოადგენს. საკითხი კომპლექსურ მიდგომას და, გარდა წერილობითი წყაროების შეჯერებისა, მრავალი ისეთი მონაცემის ერთ კონტექსტში გააზრებას მოითხოვს, როგორცაა რეგიონის ისტორიული-გეოგრაფია, არქეოლოგია, ტოპონიმიკა და სხვა.

აღნიშნულ ნაშრომში ისტორიული-გეოგრაფიის ჭრილში განხილულია ურარტულ წყაროებში ნახსენები ქვეყნები, რომელთა მდებარეობა კავშირშია ან შესაძლოა კავშირი ჰქონდეს ტაო-კლარჯეთის ტერიტორიის იმ არეალთან, რომელიც თანამედროვე არდაჰანის ტერიტორიას მოიცავს. სხვადასხვა დროს ტაო-კლარჯეთისა და მისი მომიჯვანე არეალის მიდამოებში განხორციელდა რამდენიმე ათეული საკვლევო ექსპედიცია. მათ შორის ბოლო წლებში რუსთაველის ეროვნული სამეცნიერო ფონდის მხარდაჭერით მოეწყო ექსპედიციები სამცხე-ჯავახეთსა და აჭარაში [PHDF-23-4235 გრანტის ფარგლებში]. შედეგად, ისტორიულ მესხეთში, რომელიც საქართველოს და ტაო-კლარჯეთის ტერიტორიას მოიცავს დაფიქსირდა 500-ზე მეტი მშრალი წყობის ციკლოპური ნაგებობა, რომელებიც ურარტულ წყაროებში ნახსენები ტომების / ქვეყნების

მატერიალურ კულტურას უნდა წარმოადგენდნენ.

კვლევის მეთოდოლოგიას წარმოადგენს წყაროთა ანალიზის საფუძველზე უძველესი „ქვეყნების“ მდებარეობის / მიახლოებითი მდებარეობის განსაზღვრა და მათი დაკავშირება საკვლევი არეალის თანამედროვე მონაცემებთან. შედეგად იზრდება შესაძლებლობა ლოკალიზდეს ან მეტად დაკონკრეტდეს უძველესი ქვეყნების თუ ქალაქების მდებარეობა. ამასთანავე, ამგვარი მიდგომა ზრდის შესაძლებლობას არსებული ჰიპოთეზების დამატებითი არგუმენტირებისათვის. ნაშრომში, აღნიშნული მეთოდით ანალიზის შედეგად, არდაჰანის რეგიონთან დაკავშირებული ქვეყნების შესახებ ერთიანი სურათი იკვეთება, რაც, ერთი მხრივ, აზუსტებს აქამდე არსებულ მოსაზრებებს, მეორე მხრივ, კი წარმოშობს კვლევის ახალ შესაძლებლობებს.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ტაო-კლარჯეთი; არდაჰანის რეგიონი; ურარტული წერილობითი წყაროები; ლურსმული წარწერები; დიაუხი (დიაოხი); ისტორიული გეოგრაფია; ქვეყნების ლოკალიზაცია; ციკლოპური ნაგებობები.

Introduction

The historical landscape of South-West Georgia, particularly the region of Tao-Klarjeti, represents a complex mosaic of early polities, tribal confederations, and nascent state formations. Within this broader geographical framework, the modern Ardahan region of Turkey emerges as a critical area for understanding the socio-political dynamics of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. This territory, which encompasses historical Georgian provinces such as Artani, Erusheti, Kola, and portions of Samtskhe and Javakheti, served as a primary theater for the military and political expansions of the Urartian Kingdom. The study of these ancient entities is fundamentally reliant on Assyrian and Urartian cuneiform inscriptions, which provide indispensable records of various "countries," royal cities, and ethnic groups encountered during imperial campaigns. However, the scarcity of these primary written sources, coupled with the inherent ambiguities of ancient toponymy, has led to a wide range of scholarly interpretations and often contradictory hypotheses regarding the precise localization of these entities.

Two of the most prominent formations mentioned in these records are the tribal confederations of Diaieni (Diauehi) and Kulḫa (Kolkha), both described as early state-level organizations. While Diauehi appears in Urartian sources as a formidable rival, its exact boundaries and the locations of its subordinate lands remain subjects of intense academic debate. The challenge is exacerbated by the chronological shifts in territorial control; as neighboring empires like Urartu and Assyria exerted pressure, the borders and political centers of these local polities frequently fluctuated. Furthermore, the terminology used in cuneiform inscriptions is often fluid, where the designation of "country" may apply to a vast territorial unit or a single fortified city. To address these complexities, researchers have increasingly looked toward natural geographical features—valleys, rivers, and mountain ridges—as the most stable indicators of ancient political boundaries.

Recent scholarly efforts have focused on identifying specific "royal cities" and strategic fortresses that anchored these ancient countries. In the Ardahan region, inscriptions from the reigns of Urartian kings such as Menua, Argishti I, and Sarduri II offer vital clues. These texts mention numerous sites, including Tariumi, Khusha, Bia, and the city of Zua, which was at various times designated as the royal center of Diauehi. Despite this wealth of nomenclature, the precise geographical placement of these sites has remained elusive. Some scholars have proposed localizations along the Tortum valley

or the Araxes River, while others argue for locations closer to the Lake Childır basin or the headwaters of the Mtkvari River.

The present study seeks to refine these localizations by conducting a comprehensive historical-geographical analysis focused specifically on the Ardahan region. By examining the sequence of campaign routes described in the "Annals of Argishti" and other key inscriptions, this research aims to reconstruct the most logical itineraries of the Urartian armies. This approach is supplemented by the integration of archaeological data, specifically the vast corpus of cyclopean dry-stone structures discovered during recent expeditions in historical Meskheta. Through this multidisciplinary lens, the paper evaluates existing hypotheses and proposes new models for the spatial arrangement of ancient polities like Igani, Fuzunia, and Tariuni. Ultimately, the study provides a coherent picture of the region's ancient political geography, offering a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between written records and the physical monuments of material culture.

Methods

The methodology of this research utilizes a multidisciplinary approach that synthesizes textual analysis with historical geography and archaeological data. The primary phase involves a critical examination of Urartian cuneiform inscriptions, specifically those recording the military campaigns of kings Menua, Argishti I, and Sarduri II. By analyzing the sequential listing of "countries" and cities within these texts, the study reconstructs ancient march routes based on the logic of geographical proximity and the constraints of local topography. Special attention is paid to indicators of scale, such as "royal cities" and "fortresses," to assess the territorial extent of each polity.

The second phase integrates these textual findings with archaeological evidence, focusing on more than 500 cyclopean dry-stone structures recorded in the region. These monuments are categorized into twelve distinct "local areas" based on their spatial concentration and geographical features. By correlating these archaeological clusters with the campaign itineraries, the study seeks to localize ancient sites like Tariuni and Bia. This comparative method allows for the validation of existing hypotheses and the formulation of new arguments regarding the boundaries of ancient Georgian polities.

Results and discussion

Tao-Klarjeti is a collective term used in modern scholarship to refer to those historical and geographical regions of Georgia that are today located within the territory of the Republic of Turkey. Depending on the historical and political realities of different periods, these regions were at times described as large, consolidated geographical units, and at other times as smaller entities—micro-regions or so-called "countries." In various periods, the broader territorial unit encompassing this area was referred to as Meskheta or Upper Kartli.

According to modern Turkish administrative divisions, Tao-Klarjeti fully includes the Ardahan region, while extending partially into the regions of Artvin, Erzurum, and Kars. The present study focuses on the Ardahan region, which contains the Georgian historical regions of Artani, Erushti, Kola, Samtskhe (partially), Javakheti (partially), Palakatsio (partially), and Phoso (partially).

For the study of the location of ancient polities, the principal sources are Assyrian and Urartian cuneiform inscriptions, in which numerous tribes, countries, and settlements connected with the territory of Tao-Klarjeti are mentioned. Among these, the most powerful tribal confederations appear to have been Diaehi, also known as Diauehi (Georgian *Diaokhi*), and Kulḫa (Georgian *Kolkha*), which are often described in historiography as early state-level formations. Due to the scarcity of available evidence, it is difficult to define the exact boundaries of Diauehi and Kolkha. Scholarly literature offers a number of differing hypotheses regarding their approximate

localization and the identification of specific border zones.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that within the chronological span during which these entities are mentioned, and against the background of powerful neighboring polities such as Assyria and Urartu, their territories were likely subject to change. As a result, sources from different periods often contain divergent information, making it especially difficult to reconstruct these dynamics over time.

In addition to these major political formations, Urartian sources refer to a number of other countries and tribes, which in many cases appear as components of larger tribal confederations, while in other instances they are mentioned independently. References to these countries and tribes occur predominantly in campaign inscriptions, in which the victorious ruler describes the territories he subdued and devastated. Although in such cases the exact location of individual countries or the sequence in which they are listed in the inscriptions may lack precision, a comprehensive analysis of the corpus as a whole nevertheless allows for the formulation of certain conclusions and for the approximate localization of some of these entities. The question of identifying the location of countries mentioned in cuneiform inscriptions has long attracted scholarly interest, and as a result, the academic literature contains extensive discussion of this problem.

The geographical scale of individual countries mentioned in Urartian sources is not clearly defined. In some cases, as with Diauehi, a large state-level political formation is designated as a “country,” while in other instances a single city is referred to in the same way—for example, the “country of the city of Shashilu” or the “country of the city of Khaldirulhi.” An indirect indication of the scale of settlements is provided by the differentiation, found in Urartian sources, of three types of constituent points within a country: the “royal city,” the “city,” and the “fortress.” From a modern perspective, however, it is difficult to determine the actual scale represented by each of these categories.

In attempting to assess the territorial extent of these countries, particular attention should be paid to information preserved in the inscriptions concerning the number of devastated fortified cities and the amount of booty taken. Such data, however, are recorded in detail for only a small number of countries, making it difficult to reconstruct a comprehensive picture. It is nevertheless important to assume that geographical realities—such as valleys, rivers, mountain ridges, and other orographic features—were very likely taken into account when defining the boundaries of these countries. The principle of drawing borders along natural geographical features has been a fundamental criterion both in historiography and in modern territorial studies, and it is reasonable to assume that the polities of this period were no exception.

As for the size of these countries, they may have controlled and exercised authority over certain territories, but it is unlikely that their entire area was densely or intensively settled. It is clear that each country must have possessed a particularly well-protected center—a principal city or royal city—where the ruler or king resided. The existence of such centers is indirectly confirmed by Assyrian and Urartian inscriptions, in which the rulers of individual countries are explicitly referred to as kings. Access to these key centers would have been secured by additional fortification structures. It therefore seems likely that the concept of a “country” did not denote a vast, continuous territory, but rather, in most cases, a relatively small and localized area, defined—as noted above—by specific geographical characteristics.

As noted above, Diauehi appears in Urartian sources as one of Urartu’s principal rivals, and it seems to have had numerous allies or to have incorporated a number of smaller countries and tribes. Among the allies of Diauehi are Uiterukhi, Luha, and Qatarza, all of which are mentioned frequently already in the joint inscriptions of Ishpuini and Menua (ca. 820–810 BCE), even

before the Urartians explicitly refer to Diauehi itself. Scholarly literature offers differing views regarding the localization of these entities.

The most widespread hypotheses include the localization of all three along the upper course of the Araxes River, on its right bank, in the vicinity of the city of Anashe mentioned in Urartian sources (Diakonoff & Kashkai, 1981, pp. 48ff.; Arutyunyan, 2001, pp. 496, 512, 528); the identification of Uiterukhi / Uitirukhi with the later Odzrkhe and its localization in Samtskhe (Uiterukhi–Uidzerukhi–Iodzerukhi–Odzrakhe) (Melikishvili, 1959, p. 113); the identification of Lusha (Lusha–Losa) with Lazeti, and its corresponding localization along the Black Sea coast (Melikishvili, 1959, pp. 67, 210); and the identification of Qatarza with Klarjeti.

The latter hypothesis has gained almost universal acceptance in scholarship (Melikishvili, 1959, pp. 113, 210; Diakonoff & Kashkai, 1981, p. 48; Salvini, 1995, p. 40; Arutyunyan, 2001, p. 512), with its principal argument derived from Greek sources. In Ptolemy, the toponym “Katarzene” is mentioned (Mikeladze, 1967, pp. 80–81), located in the vicinity of the Moschian Mountains, and due to the similarity of the toponyms—*Katarzene* / *Kalarzene* / *Klarjeti*—this has become a key argument in support of the identification (Melikishvili, 1959, pp. 113, 210; Diakonoff & Kashkai, 1981, p. 48).

With regard to the localization of these tribes and countries, L. Gordeziani considers the Urartian sources insufficient for their unequivocal identification (Gordeziani, 2019, p. 178). It should also be noted that attempts to localize these entities, even approximately, do not place them within the boundaries of the Ardahan region. Consequently, Luha, Qatarza, and Uiterukhi cannot be regarded as countries belonging to the study area.

In the independent inscriptions of Menua, the country of Diauehi appears for the first time, and it is presented as a powerful political entity. In a rock inscription carved near the modern village of Yazılıtaş (Horasan, Erzurum Province, Turkey), Menua mentions the royal city of Shashilu of Diauehi, as well as the cities of Zua—which is later designated as a royal city—and Utukhai (Gordeziani, 2012, pp. 90–91). Another inscription discovered in the same broader region, near the modern village of Süngütaş (Sarıkamış, Kars Province), records the capture of the city of Shashilu. In scholarly literature, this inscription is commonly referred to as the Zivin inscription, after the former name of Süngütaş (Gordeziani, 2012, p. 92).

The Yazılıtaş inscription also mentions the king of Diauehi, Utupurshi, and, in addition to Diauehi itself, refers to three other countries: the country of Shesheti, the country of Baltulḫi, and the country of the city of Khaldiriulḫi. According to the inscription, Urartu conquered Diauehi and its royal city Shashilu; however, the city was not destroyed, and tribute was imposed instead.

In other inscriptions of Menua, a different direction of his military campaigns becomes apparent. In this context, the country of Etiuni, the country of Erikuakhi, and its royal city Lukhuni are mentioned (Gordeziani, 2012, pp. 89–90, 92). The latter is localized on the northwestern slopes of Mount Ararat, and it was here that Menua later founded the city known as Menuakhinili (Gordeziani, 2012, p. 89ff). The country of Etiuni lay to the north of this area and, by the reign of Argishti, had already emerged as the principal political formation of the region.

Thus, during the reign of Menua, two main directions of military activity can be identified: one extending as far as the country of Shesheti and the city of Zua, and another directed toward the northwestern territory of Mount Ararat. Although the latter area is not connected with Tao-Klarjeti and, consequently, with the Ardahan region, these campaigns nevertheless remain important for the localization of Lusha and Qatarza.

In an inscription of Argishti, an episode of conflict with Diauehi is already described, in which he

campaigns against the city of Zua (Gordeziani, 2012, pp. 94–95). According to the inscription, Argishti first advances as far as the countries of Bia and Khushani, then devastates Zua, the royal city of Diauehi, and proceeds to the country of Ashkalashi. After plundering this territory, he incorporates three countries—Kadas, Ashkalashi, and the country of Shashilue (or their populations)—into Urartu. He also subjugates Shashqi, Ardarakhiḫi, Baltulḫi, and Kabilukhi, installing his own governors in these lands. Diauehi itself is spared by Argishti on the condition that it pays tribute.

Numerous views have been proposed regarding the localization of Diauehi. However, if one takes into account the military routes described in Urartian inscriptions and their remarkably wide geographical range, as well as the relatively well-established locations of several individual countries, it becomes evident that Diauehi must have encompassed a vast territory, extending at least as far north as Kola–Artani and as far south as Erzurum–Basiani. A political formation of this scale would necessarily have included numerous cities, and it is therefore possible that a city belonging to a subordinate country was at times referred to by Urartian sources as a “city of Diauehi.”

This interpretation is supported by the fact that during the reign of Menua, the city of Shashilu is designated as the royal city of Diauehi, whereas under Argishti, the country of Shashilue is mentioned separately, and Zua—localized near the country of Shesheti—is identified as the royal city of Diauehi. While it is conceivable that the territory of Diauehi shifted over time, or that its political center moved from Shashilu to Zua, such a radical change appears unlikely in light of the inscriptions of both Menua and Argishti, which indicate that Diauehi was subjected to tribute rather than completely destroyed. This suggests that control over certain territories was lost, a conclusion further supported by the wording of Argishti’s campaign inscription, which explicitly refers to the incorporation of Kadas, Ashkalashi, and Shashilue.

Regarding the location of the city of Shashilu, G. Kavtaradze points to the area of Tortum Fortress and the modern village of Esendurak (Kavtaradze, 2006, pp. 402, 406). His principal arguments are based on an Assyrian source describing the campaign route of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE), in which the king of Daiaeni, Asia, seeks mercy. This source mentions the royal city of Daiaeni and specifies its location at the sources of the Euphrates River (Kavtaradze, 2006, p. 396). In localizing this point, the scholar takes into account toponymic evidence as well as other historical and geographical considerations (Kavtaradze, 2006, pp. 402–403).

Kavtaradze places the city of Zua somewhat farther to the north. In one case, he proposes Ağcaqala as its possible location (Kavtaradze, 2006, p. 401), while in another he suggests the Klarjeti–Shavsheti area (Kavtaradze, 2006, p. 404). The main argument for this latter hypothesis is the identification of the country of Shesheti mentioned in Urartian sources with the Sheshe Mountain known from Assyrian sources, which is associated with Shavsheti. As for the city of Utukhai, located between Shashilu and Zua, N. Arutyunyan connects it with “Ukhta,” situated in the Tortum River valley (Arutyunyan, 2001, p. 512).

In general, most scholars place Shashilu and Zua in different parts of the Diauehi confederation—one to the south and the other to the north—a pattern that also seems to emerge from the sequence of locations mentioned in campaign inscriptions. L. Gordeziani shares Kavtaradze’s view, considering the localization of these cities within the Tortum valley to be the most plausible among the proposed hypotheses (Gordeziani, 2012, p. 372).

Although the route of Menua’s campaign is relatively clear and unambiguous, taking into account the long distances covered during Urartian military expeditions, it is possible that the cities of Utukhai and Zua were located at a considerable distance from Shashilu, potentially extending north of the Tortum valley as far as the Kola–Artani area. Consequently, it cannot be excluded

that Zua, as a terminal point of the campaign route, may have been located within the territory of modern Ardahan. It should also be noted that Bia and Khushani, which are mentioned together with Zua, are likewise likely to have been situated within the Ardahan region (see below).

Among the countries mentioned in connection with Diauehi, those situated in the southern belt, in the vicinity of the city of Shashilu, include Kadas, Ashkalashi, Shashqi, Ardarakhihi, Baltulhi, the country of the city of Khaldiriulhi, and Kabilukhi. Of these, N. Arutyunyan locates Baltulhi in the area between the headwaters of the Euphrates and the Chorokhi (Çoruh) Rivers (Arutyunyan, 2001, p. 501). The countries listed here were situated in the southwestern sector of Diauehi, and it is possible that some of them lay entirely beyond the boundaries of Tao-Klarjeti. The country of Sheriaz, which appears in another campaign of Argishti, should likewise be regarded as forming the southern periphery of Diauehi.

For determining the northeastern boundary of Diauehi, particular importance attaches to an inscription recording a campaign of Argishti, carved near the modern village of Ortakent (Hanak, Ardahan Province). According to this inscription, the king of Diauehi came to meet Argishti in

the province of Akhuriani (modern Arpaçay district, Kars Province). It is unlikely that the ruler of Diauehi would have traveled to a province located at a great distance from his own territory; therefore, it may be assumed that the area adjacent to Akhuriani formed part of Diauehi.

After the inscriptions of Argishti, Diauehi is no longer mentioned in Urartian sources. By the mid-eighth century BCE, Sarduri II, son of Argishti, was already engaged in warfare against the powerful kingdom of Kulḥa, which is identified with Greek Colchis and Georgian Kolkha (Gordeziani, 2012, p. 80). Historiography has advanced the hypothesis that Diauehi, weakened by Urartian domination, was subsequently defeated by Kulḥa, which may have annexed a portion of its territory.

In the inscriptions dating to the reign of Argishti, the country of Tariuni is mentioned. One of Argishti's inscriptions describing a campaign against Tariuni, as noted above, is carved on a rock near the village of Ortakent in the Hanak district. According to the text, within the context of the campaign against Tariuni, the countries of Khusha / Khushani and Bia / Biani are also mentioned. The wording of the inscription gives the impression that it was set up in Tariuni, a view further supported by another inscription of Argishti, which explicitly states that he erected an inscription in Tariuni (Gordeziani, 2012, p. 98). This makes it possible to hypothesize that the Hanak inscription was located within the territory of Tariuni. However, in light of parallels such as the Zivin inscription and the case of the city of Shashilu, the attribution of the Hanak inscription to Tariuni should be regarded as only one of several possible interpretations. An alternative hypothesis places the inscription along the route leading toward Khusha and Bia, a possibility that also seems to be indirectly suggested by the text itself.

It is evident that Khusha and Bia, which are mentioned together with Tariuni, should be sought in close geographical proximity to it. The most informative source for the localization of Tariuni is the rock inscription carved in the modern city of Van (Van Province)—the so-called Annals of Argishti—where various countries and cities are listed sequentially according to the campaign route (Gordeziani, 2012, pp. 95–96). From this inscription, it appears that the king of Diauehi was “left as king” by Argishti, meaning that no battle took place against him. Based on the campaign itinerary, it may be assumed that the country of Sheriaz lay in the southern part of Diauehi, while the city of Pute preceded the countries of Khusha, Bia, and Tariuni along the route. These were followed by the country of Zabaha, in the vicinity of which the city of Uzinabitārna and the country of Sirimutara were located. Along the approach to Zabaha, Khusha and Bia lay to the left of the route, while Tariuni was situated to the right.

The campaign route then continued toward Eriakha, where, along the way, the country of Igani and its city Makaltuni were located on the right-hand side. Finally, Argishti advanced to the farthest point of the campaign route, reaching the countries of Apuni and Uiterukhi.

The country of Zabaha is localized in the vicinity of Lake Childır and is identified by scholars with Georgian Javakheti (Melikishvili, 1960, p. 446; Arutyunyan, 2001, p. 530). Zabaha is mentioned only once in Urartian inscriptions and, according to the campaign route, was situated after Bia, Khusha, and Tariuni, while Iga lay to the right between Zabaha and Eriakha. D. Narimanishvili has further refined the localization of Zabaha, Sirimutara, Uzinabitārna, and Fuzunia (Narimanishvili, 2019, pp. 51–56). All of these, with the exception of Fuzunia, which appears in an inscription of Sarduri II, should be located in the northern sector of Lake Childır, within the territory of modern Georgia. Narimanishvili identifies Fuzunia with the medieval region of Poso and localizes it in the area surrounding Lake Kartsakhi (Narimanishvili, 2020, pp. 128–129).

In Urartian sources, Iga, also referred to as Igani or Iganiehi, together with its city Makaltuni, is localized by scholars in the vicinity of Lake Childır (Melikishvili, 1960, p. 430; Arutyunyan, 2001, p. 509). This localization is generally accepted in scholarship and is considered reliable. Particularly important for establishing the location of Igani are inscriptions dating to the reign of Sarduri II, one of which is carved on a rock near Lake Childır, close to the modern village of Taşköprü (Arpaçay district, Kars Province). This inscription explicitly mentions the city of Makaltuni. Another inscription of Sarduri refers to Diučini, the king of Etiuni, who is described as being from Igani. This passage indicates that, at that time, Igani formed part of the Etiuni confederation and constituted one of its principal components, as the ruler of the entire Etiuni alliance was an Iganian.

During the reign of Sarduri II, yet another king from Igani, Kapurini, is mentioned. In the course of this campaign, Sarduri, together with Igani, devastated the aforementioned Fuzunia and its two cities, Alkania and Tsudala, after which he returned and, apparently passing through the now-subjugated territory of Igani, proceeded toward Eriakha. Both under Argishti and Sarduri, Igani was situated in close proximity to Eriakha and Fuzunia. Since the location of Eriakha is well established and corresponds to the southeastern sector of Igani, it follows that Fuzunia must have been located in the western or northern sector of Igani, a conclusion that accords with D. Narimanishvili's proposed localization.

The earliest scholarly discussion of the localization of Igani is attributed to G. Melikishvili, who placed Igani in the southern part of the Lake Childır region (Melikishvili, 1960, p. 430), a view subsequently shared by other researchers. South of Lake Childır lies the village of Iznazori, mentioned in *The Great Defter of the Vilayet of Gurjistan* (modern Gönülalan, Arpaçay district, Kars Province) (*Great Defter of the Vilayet of Gurjistan*, 1958, pp. 408–409). S. Jikia notes that the Georgian form of the village name may have been Idznadzori, while its appearance as Ignadzori on Russian maps is considered by him to result from a mistranslation into Russian.

L. Tavadze connects Urartian Igani with the Dzağini Gorge (also known as Dzaghli Gorge) mentioned in *Kartlis Tskhovreba* and in *Azmani Sharavandedtani*, as well as with Iznazori, which he refers to as Ignadzori, noting that in Armenian the name means “the gorge of Igna.” One of the principal arguments supporting this hypothesis is a toponymic analysis tracing the transformation Dzaghina / Dzighani → [Dz]igani (Tavadze, 2020, pp. 7–16). Ultimately, the author equates Dzağini Gorge with the Urartian designation Igani and further suggests that the country of Igani, identified with Dzağini Gorge, originally encompassed the entire Lake Childır region. He also proposes that in the medieval period the name *Dzağini Gorge* survived only along the southwestern shore of Lake Childır (Tavadze, 2020, pp. 7–16; *Fortresses of Tao-Klarjeti*, 2020, pp. 156–157).

As noted above, the primary sources for the localization of Tariuni, Khusha, and Bia are the inscriptions of Argishti, including the inscription located in the Hanak area. L. Gordeziani interprets the route of Argishti's campaign as follows: “Argishti advances northward through the Tortum valley and then turns eastward (near Lake Childır)” (Gordeziani, 2012, p. 374). D. Narimanishvili further refines this reconstruction, particularly with regard to the route leading toward Zabaha, stating: “I believe that after passing near Biani, Khushani, and Tariuni, Argishti proceeded along the Mtkvari (Kura) valley, from where—after passing between the present-day village of Mirashkhan and the nearby ruins—he must have ascended onto the Javakheti Plateau, where he devastated the country of Zabaha” (Narimanishvili, 2019, p. 56). At the same time, Narimanishvili localizes Bia to the west of the city of Ardahan, Khusha to the northwest, and

Tariuni in the area extending from Hanak to the headwaters of the Mtkvari River (Narimanishvili, 2019, p. 52; Narimanishvili, 2020, pp. 121–130).

If such a spatial arrangement of these countries is accepted, Argishti's route would necessarily have crossed the territory of Tariuni, which renders problematic the reference to Tariuni as lying on the right-hand side of the route, especially in light of the Hanak inscription, where the author explicitly takes the location of the inscription itself into account when localizing Tariuni. Accordingly, if this inscription was indeed set up within Tariuni, it is highly likely that a major city or key point of Tariuni should be sought in the same area—something that Argishti's inscription would reasonably have reflected. Moreover, such a reconstruction of Argishti's route raises doubts when considered against geographical realities, since a more logical itinerary would have placed Bia on the right-hand side of the march, as suggested by Narimanishvili.

Under the most straightforward and practical route toward Zabaha, Argishti would have crossed the present-day Arsiani Pass and then advanced toward Javakheti via the Artani Plain. In this scenario, Bia and Khushani would lie to the left of the route, most likely within the northern sector of the Ardahan region, while Tariuni would be situated in the southern and western sectors. A hypothesis placing Tariuni in the area of the historical village of Toroshevi (modern Ardiçdere) has been proposed by Sh. Asatiani (Asatiani, 1992, pp. 77–80), and this localization does not contradict the reconstructed route of Argishti's campaign.

As noted above, the primary sources for the localization of Tariuni, Khusha, and Bia are the inscriptions of Argishti, including the inscription located in the Hanak area. L. Gordeziani interprets the route of Argishti's campaign as follows: “Argishti advances northward through the Tortum valley and then turns eastward (near Lake Childır)” (Gordeziani, 2012, p. 374). D. Narimanishvili further refines this reconstruction, particularly with regard to the route leading toward Zabaha, stating: “I believe that after passing near Biani, Khushani, and Tariuni, Argishti proceeded along the Mtkvari (Kura) valley, from where—after passing between the present-day village of Mirashkhan and the nearby ruins—he must have ascended onto the Javakheti Plateau, where he devastated the country of Zabaha” (Narimanishvili, 2019, p. 56). At the same time, Narimanishvili localizes Bia to the west of the city of Ardahan, Khusha to the northwest, and Tariuni in the area extending from Hanak to the headwaters of the Mtkvari River (Narimanishvili, 2019, p. 52; Narimanishvili, 2020, pp. 121–130).

If such a spatial arrangement of these countries is accepted, Argishti's route would necessarily have crossed the territory of Tariuni, which renders problematic the reference to Tariuni as lying on the right-hand side of the route, especially in light of the Hanak inscription, where the author explicitly takes the location of the inscription itself into account when localizing Tariuni. Accordingly, if this inscription was indeed set up within Tariuni, it is highly likely that a major city or key point of Tariuni should be sought in the same area—something that Argishti's inscription would reasonably have reflected. Moreover, such a reconstruction of Argishti's route raises doubts when considered against geographical realities, since a more logical itinerary would have placed Bia on the right-hand side of the march, as suggested by Narimanishvili.

Under the most straightforward and practical route toward Zabaha, Argishti would have crossed the present-day Arsiani Pass and then advanced toward Javakheti via the Artani Plain. In this scenario, Bia and Khushani would lie to the left of the route, most likely within the northern sector of the Ardahan region, while Tariuni would be situated in the southern and western sectors. A hypothesis placing Tariuni in the area of the historical village of Toroshevi (modern Ardiçdere)

has been proposed by Sh. Asatiani (Asatiani, 1992, pp. 77–80), and this localization does not contradict the reconstructed route of Argishti’s campaign.

On the basis of an analysis of the inscriptions, the following hypotheses may be proposed regarding sites that were likely located within the Ardahan region:

- Diauehi was a powerful country or state-level political formation whose sphere of influence extended over a wide area: southward and southwestward as far as Erzurum–Basiani, and northward and northeastward to Kola–Artani and Palakatio;
- The royal city of Diauehi, Zua, was situated in the northern part of Diauehi’s zone of influence and most likely corresponded to Shavsheti or an adjacent area, particularly Kola–Artani;
- The northern segment of Diauehi, which included the Ardahan region, was later incorporated into the kingdom of Kulḥa;
- Igani and its city Makaltuni were located in the vicinity of Lake Childir;
- Fuzunia was most likely situated in the area around Lake Kartsakhi, with part of its territory falling within modern Turkey (the Ardahan region) and part within the territory of Georgia;
- The country of Tariuni, which appears to have been a relatively strong political entity, should most likely be located in the western and southwestern sectors of the city of Ardahan.
- Khusha and Bia were likely located in the northern sector of the Ardahan region: Bia in the vicinity of the city of Ardahan, to the north and northwest, and Khusha in the area surrounding Hanak;
- Kuriani, probably identical with Guriani, should be located in the northeastern sector of the city of Göle.

Over the past twenty years, research conducted both in the territory of present-day Turkey and Georgia has documented and examined hundreds of dry-stone cyclopean structures. Within the territory of modern Tao-Klarjeti, more than three hundred cyclopean constructions have been identified (Reports of the 2012–2013 Research Expeditions on the Monuments of Tao-Klarjeti, 2019; Reports of the 2014 Research Expeditions on the Monuments of Tao-Klarjeti, 2015; Reports of the 2015 Research Expeditions on the Monuments of Tao-Klarjeti, 2016; Reports of the 2016 Research Expeditions on the Monuments of Tao-Klarjeti, 2017; *Tao-Klarjeti: Monuments of History and Culture*, 2017; Reports of the 2017 Research Expeditions on the Monuments of Tao-Klarjeti, 2018; Reports of the 2018 Research Expeditions on the Monuments of Tao-Klarjeti, 2019; Reports of the 2019 Research Expeditions on the Monuments of Tao-Klarjeti, 2021; Reports of the 2019 Research Expeditions on the Monuments of Bayburt, 2020; Reports of the 2022 Research Expeditions on the Monuments of Basiani, 2023; *Monuments of Meskheti Culture*, Reports of the 2023 Expeditions, 2024; *Monuments of Meskheti Culture*, Reports of the 2024 Expeditions, 2025), a portion of which have also been subjected to archaeological investigation.

In the majority of the studied sites, artifacts dating to the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age have been identified (Patacı, 2016). Research on cyclopean structures located within the territory of Georgia has yielded a similar picture (Narimanishvili, 2019). On the basis of these data, the principal period of construction and use of most of these structures may be dated to between the sixteenth and sixth centuries BCE. It should be noted, however, that archaeological evidence indicates that some of these constructions continued to be used during the Classical period and even into the Middle Ages.

Of particular importance for the study of cyclopean architecture is the work of D. Narimanishvili, who, on the one hand, has compiled, classified, and systematized the cyclopean monuments identified within the territory of Georgia, and, on the other hand, has developed a methodological framework and proposed interpretations regarding their correlation with the countries mentioned in Urartian sources (Narimanishvili, 2019). The author identifies a series of so-called “local areas,” which are defined primarily by geographical features and by the spatial relationships among the sites located within them.

Based on the concentration, scale, and geographical characteristics of dry-stone cyclopean structures, it is possible to distinguish a number of such areas within the Ardahan region, which may correspond to individual cities or key centers mentioned in Urartian sources. Each of these areas may, in turn, be subdivided into smaller micro-areas. Such an area may be understood as representing a single country, or alternatively, a country may have encompassed several such areas.

Area 1 – Northwestern sector of the city of Ardahan: the surroundings of the villages of Çataldere, Sulakyurt, and Kartalpınar.

Area 2 – Northern sector of the city of Ardahan, toward Hanak: the surroundings of the villages of Ortakent, Geç, Yünbüken, and Yamçılı.

Area 3 – Western sector of the city of Ardahan: the surroundings of the villages of Tepeler, Çeğilli, and Hasköy.

Area 4 – Northern sector of the city of Ardahan, toward Damal: the surroundings of the villages of Seyitören, Aşağıyidere, and Burmadere.

Area 5 – Eastern sector of the city of Ardahan: the surroundings of the villages of Ölçek and Tazeköy.

Area 6 – Southern sector of the city of Ardahan: the surroundings of the village of Kayaaltı.

Area 7 – Area north of the town of Göle: the surroundings of the villages of Sürügüden and Bellitepe.

Area 8 – Northeastern sector of the town of Göle: the surroundings of the village of Çobanköy.

Area 9 – Northwestern sector of the town of Göle: the surroundings of the villages of Köprülü, Dedekılıcı, and Dereyolu.

Area 10 – Eastern sector of the town of Göle: the surroundings of the village of Balçeşme.

Area 11 – The Lake Çıldır basin: the surroundings of the villages of Akçakale, Karakale, Gölebakan, Semihaşakir, and the town of Çıldır.

Area 12 – Northern sector of the town of Çıldır: the surroundings of the village of Kayabeyi.

The correlation of data derived from Urartian inscriptions with the areas outlined above provides greater potential for localizing, or at least more precisely defining, the locations of ancient

countries and cities associated with the territory of Tao-Klarjeti. On the basis of this integrated analysis, it may be suggested that Khusha, according to Urartian sources, was located within Area 1 and possibly extended northward as far as Area 4; Bia was situated within Area 2 and may also have encompassed part of Area 4; Tariuni, which appears in the sources as a powerful political entity, should be sought primarily within Area 3 and may have extended into, or even included, Areas 5 and 6; Kuriani was likely located within Area 8 and may have exerted influence over Areas 7 or 10 as well; Igani corresponds to Area 11; and Fuzunia occupied Area 12, where its principal cult center was probably Mount Zaden, located within this area.

Applying this methodological framework to the problem of localization not only increases the likelihood of identifying the positions of ancient countries and settlements, but also generates new questions and directions for further research.

References

- Asatiani, Sh. (1992). *Kartveluri tomemi dzv. ts'. II atasts'leulis meore nakhevras da I atasts'leulis pirvel nakhevras (dzvelagmosavluri ts'qaroebis mixedvit)* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Tbilisi.
- Baiburtis dzeglebis 2019 tslis sakvlevi ekspeditsiebis angarishebi. (2020). T. Khutsishvili et al. (Eds.). Tbilisi: Kavkasiis universitetis gamomtsemloba.
- Basianis dzeglebis 2022 tslis sakvlevi ekspeditsiebis angarishebi. (2023). T. Khutsishvili et al. (Eds.). Tbilisi: Kavkasiis universitetis gamomtsemloba.
- Berdzenishvili, D. (1985). *Narkvevebi Sakartvelos istoriuli geografiidan: Zemo Kartli – Tori, Javakheti*. Tbilisi: Metsniereba.
- Berdzenishvili, N. (1990). *Sakartvelos istoriis sakitkhebi*. Tbilisi: Metsniereba.
- Gordeziani, L. (2012). *Dzveli istoriis narkvevebi* (2nd ed.). Tbilisi.
- Gordeziani, L. (2017). Akhali urartuli ts'eratserbi. *Agmosavletmcodneoba*, 6, 129–132.
- Gordeziani, L. (2019). Samkhret-dasavlet Sakartvelos etnikuri suratistvis (lursmulu tekstebis mixedvit). In *Saertashoriso samecniro konferentsiis masalebi* (Batumi, 2018). Tbilisi.
- Gurjistanis vilaietis didi davtari. (1958). Tbilisi.
- Tavadze, L. (2020). Urartuli ts'qaroebis “Igani” da kartuli saistorio dzeglebis “Dzaghinis khevi”. *TSU shromebi, XVI*. Tbilisi.
- Melikishvili, G. (2004). *Rogor ametkvelda lursmulu ts'eratserbi*. Tbilisi: Sakartvelos matsne.
- Mikeladze, T. (1967). *Ksenopontis “Anabasis”: ts'nobebe kartuli tomebis shesakheb*. Tbilisi: Metsniereba.
- Narimanishvili, D. (2019). *Sakartvelos tsiklopuri simagrebi*. Tbilisi.
- Sakartvelos istoriis narkvevebi. (1970). Vol. 1. Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo.

- Tao-Klarjeti: istoriisa da kulturis dzeglebi. (2017). Tbilisi.
- Tao-Klarjetis dzeglebis 2012–2013 tslis sakvlevi ekspeditsiebis angarishebi. (2019). Tbilisi: Kavkasiis universitetis gamomtsemloba.
- Tao-Klarjetis dzeglebis 2014 tslis sakvlevi ekspeditsiebis angarishebi. (2015). Tbilisi: Kavkasiis universitetis gamomtsemloba.
- Tao-Klarjetis dzeglebis 2015 tslis sakvlevi ekspeditsiebis angarishebi. (2016). Tbilisi: Kavkasiis universitetis gamomtsemloba.
- Tao-Klarjetis dzeglebis 2016 tslis sakvlevi ekspeditsiebis angarishebi. (2017). Tbilisi: Kavkasiis universitetis gamomtsemloba.
- Tao-Klarjetis dzeglebis 2017 tslis sakvlevi ekspeditsiebis angarishebi. (2018). Tbilisi: Kavkasiis universitetis gamomtsemloba.
- Tao-Klarjetis dzeglebis 2018 tslis sakvlevi ekspeditsiebis angarishebi. (2019). Tbilisi: Kavkasiis universitetis gamomtsemloba.
- Tao-Klarjetis dzeglebis 2019 tslis sakvlevi ekspeditsiebis angarishebi. (2021). Tbilisi: Kavkasiis universitetis gamomtsemloba.
- Tao-Klarjetis tsikhe-simagrebi. (2020). Vol. 1. Tbilisi: Samshoblo.
- Kavtaradze, G. (2006). Samkhret-dasavlet amierkavkasiis istoriuli geografiis zogierti sakitkhi. Tbilisi: Nakeri.
- Kartlis tskhovreba. (1959). Vol. II. Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo.
- Diakonoff, I. M., & Kashkai, S. M. (1981). *Geographical names according to Urartian texts (Répertoire géographique des textes cunéiformes, B. 9)*. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert.
- Narimanishvili, D. (2020). Issues for localization of the “Tariuni” land. In *Tarih boyunca Anadolu–Gürcistan ilişkileri sempozyumu*. Ankara.
- Pataci, S. (2016). *Ardahan kale ve kuleleri*. Ardahan.
- Salvini, M. (1995). *Geschichte und Kultur der Urartäer*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Salvini, M. (2012). *Corpus dei testi urartei* (Vol. IV). Roma.
- Tomaschek, W. (1899). Caspeae. In G. Wissowa (Ed.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Vol. III, p. 1654). Stuttgart.
- Арутюнян, Н. В. (2001). *Корпус урартских клинообразных надписей*. Ереван: Гитутюн.
- Меликишвили, Г. А. (1950). Diauḫi. *Вестник древней истории*, 26–42.
- Меликишвили, Г. А. (1959). *К истории древней Грузии*. Тбилиси.
- Меликишвили, Г. А. (1960). *Урартские клинообразные надписи*. Москва: Наука.