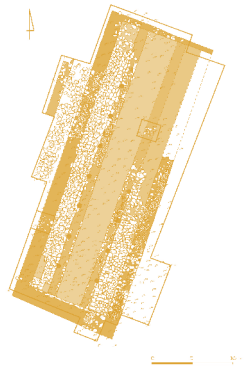
Newly discovered tripartite columned structure at Karmir Blur (Armenia). Preliminary observations



Abstract: At the archaeological site of Karmir Blur, between 2021 and 2024, a tripartite columned structure was excavated by the Armenian-Austrian archaeological team. This building closely resembles the tripartite pillared structures of the ancient Near East (e.g. Arslantepe, Megiddo, Sarissa) and appears to be a counterpart of the *Hallenbau* excavated at Bastam. The tripartite columned structure at Karmir Blur dates to the mid-7th century BCE. In a later phase, the function of the structure changed, with the columns enclosed by low parallel walls. Artifacts from the medieval period, found in a mixed layer, suggest that the area was also inhabited in the Middle Ages. While not dismissing the prevailing view that such a building could have served as a horse stable, we suggest that it might instead have functioned as an inn, caravanserai, marketplace, or a structure with similar purposes. The newly discovered tripartite columned structure at Karmir Blur undoubtedly formed a significant infrastructural element of the city of Teishebaini. Its location, very close to the fortress gates, implies that it served an important function. The discovery of medieval pottery sherds and a coin of Iranian Shah Hoseyn further indicates human activity in the area during the medieval period.

Keywords: Urartu, Bastam, Sarissa, caravanserai, marketplace, stable, *Tabula Peutingeriana*

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INTRODUCTION

The Karmir Blur archaeological site is located in the southwestern part of Yerevan, the capital of the Republic of Armenia, on the left bank of the Hrazdan River [*Fig. 1*]. Its name, Karmir Blur (meaning "Red Hill"), derives from the distinctive reddish hue of the soil (a consequence of the burning of the mud-brick superstructures during an attack). Systematic excavations of the settlement commenced in 1939 under the co-leadership of Boris Piotrovsky and Karo Kafadaryan and, with interruptions between 1941 and 1945, continued until 1971. More recently, between 2013 and 2016, parts of its necropolis were excavated by Hakob Simonyan (Piotrovsky 1969: 53; Badalyan 2023: 20–21). Since 2019, the site has been the focus of an Armenian-Austrian joint expedition, co-directed by Mikayel Badalyan and Walter Kuntner.

The archaeological site of Karmir Blur comprises a fortress, an outer town, and a necropolis [*Fig. 2*]. The Urartian settlement was founded in the first half of the 7th century BCE by Rusa, son of Argishti, the last powerful monarch of the Urartian kingdom and a contemporary of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (680–669 BCE). Rusa established the city as one of the northern centers of the Urartian kingdom, naming it Teishebaini, or "city of the storm-god", in honor of Teisheba (Badalyan 2023: 20–21). Within the Urartian pantheon, Teisheba held dominion over weather and storms, ranking second only to the supreme deity, Haldi (e.g. Hmayakyan 1990: 41; Badalyan 2015: 125).

In March 2021, following heavy rainfall, remnants of structures became visible in the hilly terrain southeast of the main

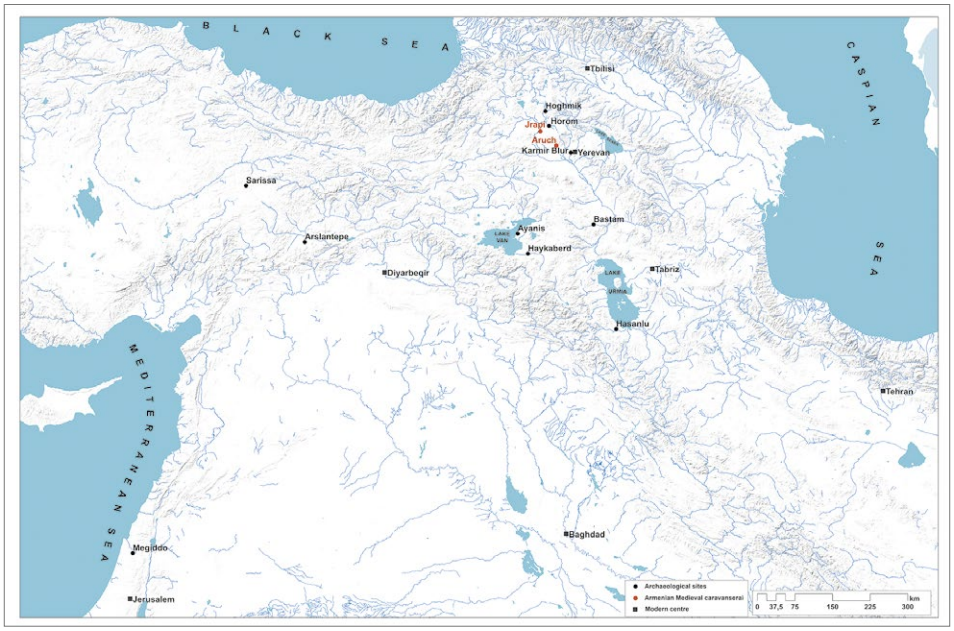


Fig. 1. Map showing the modern centers and site names mentioned in the text (G.I.S. map H. Danielyan)

entrance to the citadel at the Karmir Blur archaeological site, situated between the citadel and the present-day football field. Subsequent investigations, including an analysis of aerial photographs from the Armenian-Austrian expedition, confirmed the presence of a monumental structure with parallel walls in the area [*Figs 3, 4*].

Notably, this area has served as an apricot orchard since at least the 1930s. During the Soviet era, locals referred to it as "Vasak's Apricot Orchard", named after a man called Vasak, who tended the trees and ensured their irrigation. Throughout the Soviet period, the orchard functioned as a communal retreat for nearby residents. However, especially in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union — when the newly established Republic of Armenia grappled with severe economic and energy crises— the apricot trees were felled and used as firewood.

EXCAVATION OF THE TRIPARTITE COLUMNED STRUCTURE

Excavations in this area, termed D, by the Armenian-Austrian archaeological team were launched on 7 October 2021 and remain ongoing. In 2021, the excavations began in the southeastern part of the presumed structure within an 8 m × 8 m square [*Fig. 5*]. It soon became evident that the upper layers of the

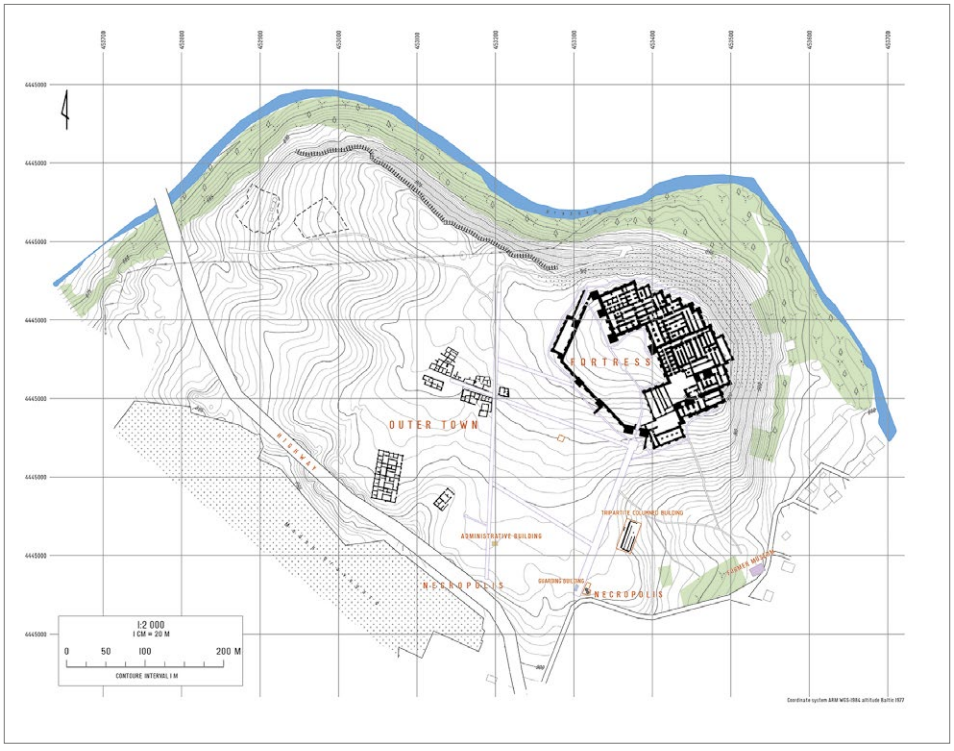


Fig. 2. Topographic map of Karmir Blur (G.I.S. map H. Danielyan)

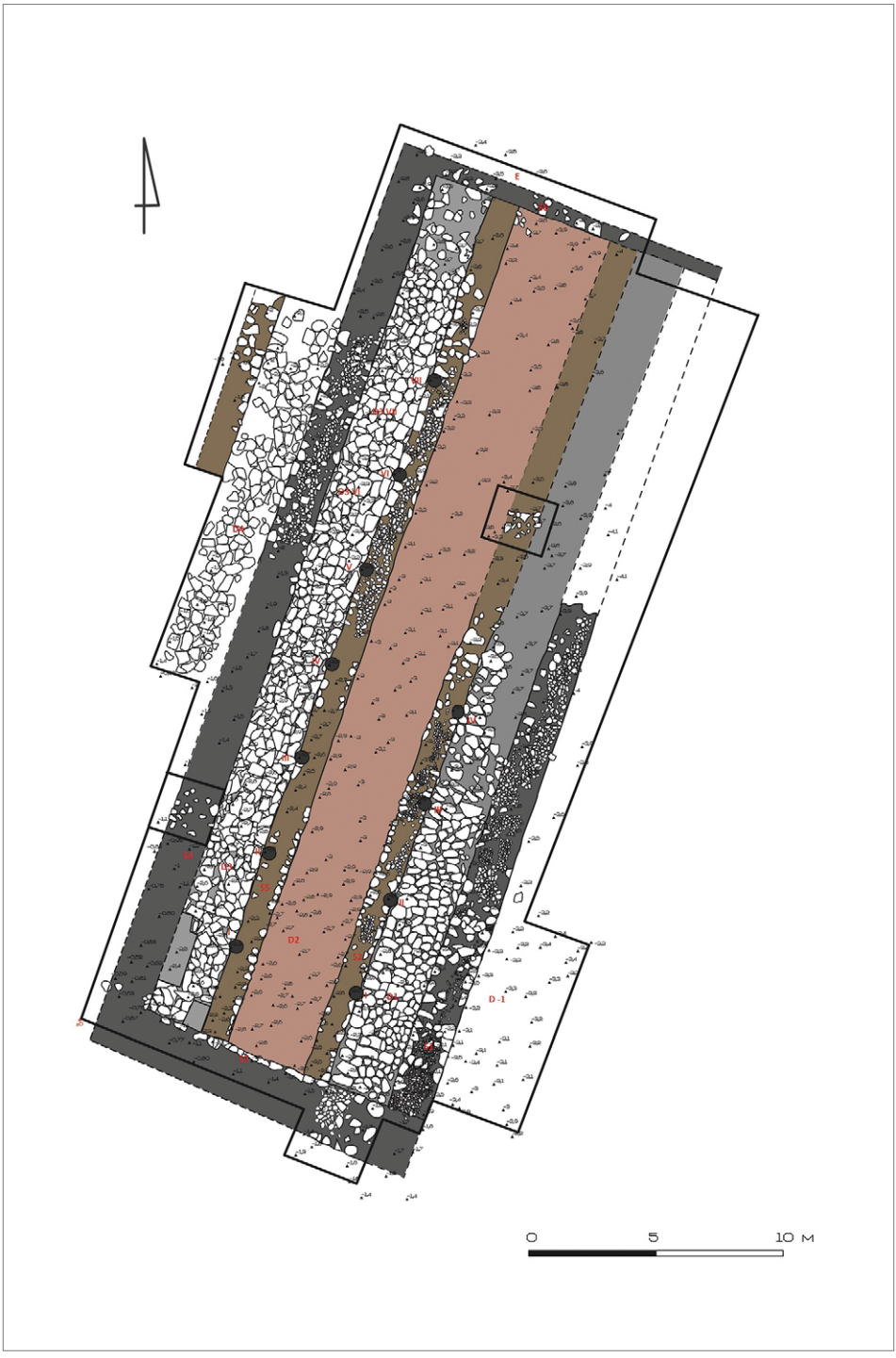


Fig. 3. Plan of the tripartite columned building at Karmir Blur (Drawing H. Danielyan)

structure had suffered extensive damage from the roots of apricot trees. A mixed Soviet-era layer was identified, yielding artifacts such as Soviet-era coins, bottle fragments, and remnants of shoes. Beneath this, successive clay layers were uncovered, primarily containing black-surfaced pottery fragments associated with the local Lchashen-Metsamor or Etiunian culture.

Fig. 4. Tripartite columned building at Karmir Blur (Centre of Geospatial Technologies, Armenia | aerial photo A. Stepanyan)

Within excavation area D, a wall (S 1) was exposed, constructed using a semi-cyclopean masonry technique. Large stones were bound together with clay and small stones, while the central section of the wall was packed with medium- and small-sized basalt, river stones, and gravel. Below these layers, a burnt layer was discovered. Parallel to the first wall (S 1), another lower wall (S 2) was unearthed, along with two column bases positioned four meters apart. In the southern part, these walls connect to a third wall (S 3), which was built similarly to S 1. However, as it extends westward, the wall rises higher. Once the burnt layer was largely removed, a pavement composed of various types of basalt flagstones and tuff was revealed between walls S 1, S 2, and S 3. Scattered atop this pavement were remnants of burnt plant material, which might have belonged to the structure's collapsed roof or may have been deliberately spread on the pavement as bedding for livestock. Along S 3, a heavily burnt mud-brick structure, possibly a bench, was discovered in the southeastern corner. In the same area, adjacent to S 3 and the pavement, the charred remains of a horse bone were also found [*Fig. 6*]. Excavations were also carried out to the east of S 1, revealing a notably different stratigraphy. Beneath the mixed Soviet-era layer, a gravel layer was documented in this area. The results from the trench, placed in the southeast corner of square D, clearly indicated that S 1 was constructed directly atop this gravel layer. This suggests that the area to the east of S 1 was likely an exterior, unused part of the structure.

It quickly became evident that the excavated structure bore a strong resemblance to the *Hallenbau* at Bastam,

Fig. 5. Area D before the start of excavations (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo W. Kuntner)

which is widely interpreted as a horse stable (Kroll 2018: 137). To verify this hypothesis, a test trench was opened along the northern boundary of the excavation area, extending westward [*Fig. 7*]. The findings confirmed the similarity to the *Hallenbau*. West of S 2, a Soviet-era layer was once again identified, followed by clay layers containing mud brick fragments and traces of animal dung, succeeded by a burnt layer containing charred wood remains. Beneath this, a mud-brick floor was uncovered. Further west, another substantial wall (S 4) was uncovered, while to the west, a parallel lower wall (S 5), was revealed, closely resembling S 2.

An additional sondage was made north of the second column base in area D 1, where a third column base and the continuation of S 2 were identified. Similarly, a fourth column base was also documented in area D 1. Following these discoveries, the excavation area was systematically divided into distinct zones. The section located east of S 1 was designated zone –D 1, while the area between S 1 and S 2, bounded by S 3, was labeled zone D 1. The area spanning between S 2 and S 5 was identified as zone D 2, and the section between S 4 and S 5 was designated zone D 3. These zones were further divided into subzones according to the arrangement of the column bases. For example, in zone D 1, the area up to the center of the first column base was named D 1 I, while the area up to the center of the second column base was named D 1 II, and so forth, following the same principle [see *Figs 3, 4*].

Fig. 6. Area D 1 I. Context of the burnt bone of a horse on the pavement and part of a burnt mud brick structure, possibly a bench attached to S 3 (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Badalyan)

Fig. 7. Test-trench along the northern boundary of the excavation area, extending westward (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Badalyan)

BRIEF PRELIMINARY REPORT ON 2021–2024 EXCAVATIONS

ZONE D 1

The southern section of S 2 consists of four rows of stones, bonded together with clay and small stones. The stones in the uppermost row are flatter in shape. This wall is constructed with two casings, with a central layer made of medium and small basalt, river stones, and gravel. Beyond the D 1 II section, the wall transitions from a double-casing to a single-casing structure. The pavement is made of large and flat, medium-sized flat, and semi-circular basalt stones, as well as tuff. The pavement is preceded by a thin burnt layer, followed by another burnt layer. Just slightly north of S 3, burnt animal bones were discovered on the pavement, likely remnants from a fire. In the D 1 II section, traces of burnt straw were also identified on the pavement, with the burnt layer extending the entire length of the pavement. In the eastern part of the D 1 IV section, the pavement does not continue. Here, the column base appears square rather than round, suggesting a later adaptation, and the pavement slopes toward the north. In the northern part of the D 1 zone, no evidence of pavement was found. We suspect that the northern part of S 1 and this area were damaged during the planting of the apricot orchard.

Fig. 8. Burnt pieces of plant material from area D 2 I (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Badalyan)

The layers on the pavement in this zone predominantly contain local pottery with black surfaces. The thin burnt layers on the pavement are covered by the clay layers and the mixed Soviet-era layer, as previously mentioned. Traces of ash and fragments of red-fired mud bricks were also noted, with several such fragments being documented. These mud bricks likely originated from either the wall or the ceiling of the structure, with the latter possibility seeming more plausible given the thickness of the mud bricks — approximately 5–6 cm. S 2 features a horizontal, two-layered, double-casing wall made of basalt stones, with a central layer of fine gravel and mortar. A row of mud bricks rises atop this wall, indicating that S 2 does not belong to the initial construction phase of the structure. The distance between the bases remains consistent at four meters, suggesting the possibility of additional bases that may have been removed during the apricot orchard's planting.

ZONE D 2

The northern part of the zone has largely been preserved, while it is probable that the southern part of this zone sustained damage during the planting of the apricot orchard. Here, a Soviet-era mixed layer is overlain by clay layers that contain traces of fallen mud bricks. This zone represents the central aisle of the overall structure, which, based on our initial observations, likely had a mud-brick floor in its early stages. Within this floor, burnt beams, plant material [*Fig. 8*], and remnants of wood were found in the southern section. This context allows for several hypotheses regarding the structure's roof. It is likely that the roof consisted of horizontally arranged wooden beams, with thinner round wooden pieces placed at the center. In the middle of the D 2 I section, both straight and approximately 45-degree-angled burnt beams were identified. On top of these beams, plant material was laid and subsequently covered with leveled clay. Naturally, the mud-brick walls of the structure would have supported the roof beams. The established context leads us to conclude that the structure's roof was either gable or slanted toward the east. In the southern part of the zone, a concentration of large ceramic fragments from jars was observed. In the D 2 II section, a bronze object, likely fragments of a bronze bracelet, was found on the burnt floor. Additionally, in the D 2 III

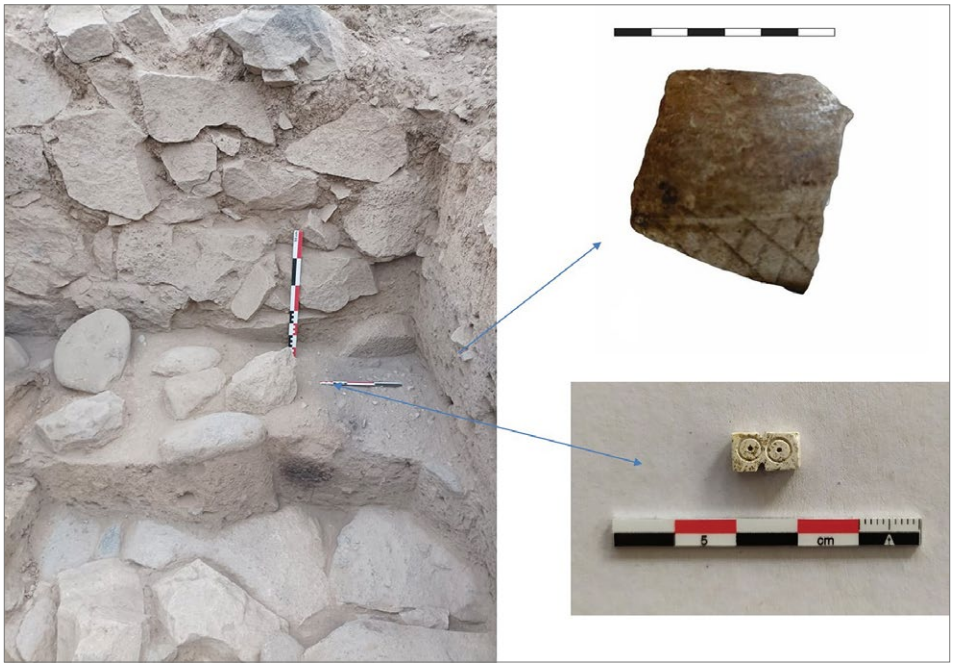


Fig. 9. D 3 II section, just west of S 4, showing a domino-style bead found on the burnt layer above the stone pavement. Medium-sized stones were discovered on this layer, along with a fragment of a brown-glazed ceramic vessel adorned with net-like decorations, characteristic of the post-Urartian period (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Badalyan)

section, fragments of red-polished pottery from the Urartian period and a piece of a Urartian-era bowl were discovered on the floor. To the north of D 2 III, only the Soviet-era mixed layer was removed from this zone.

Fig. 10. Tuff idol fragment discovered in the D 3 VII section (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Badalyan)

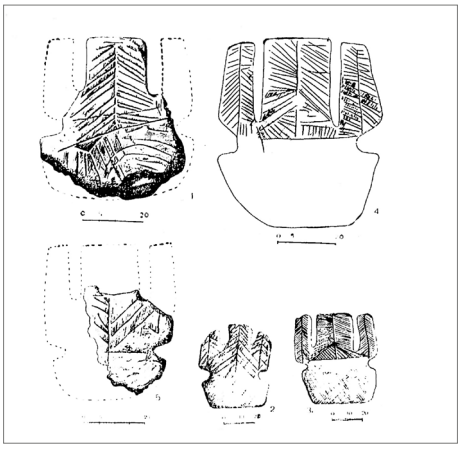


Fig. 11. Tuff idol fragment discovered in the D 3 VII section, with parallels to similar idols from Karmir Blur (After Yesayan 1980: Table 24, 1–5)

ZONE D 3

This section exhibits significant differences from D 2. In the initial phase, S 3, S 4, and the pavement were constructed, with at least seven column bases installed along the eastern edge of the pavement, each spaced four meters apart. The first four of these bases are perfectly parallel to the four column bases uncovered in the D 1 zone. Additionally, the pavement slopes toward the north and is primarily made of basalt and flattened tuff stones. A thin burnt layer has been identified on the pavement, particularly in the D 3 I and D 3 II sections, where plant material and wood fragments were discovered. In this section, only small quantities of locally made ceramics with a black surface were found. Notably, in the D 3 II section, just west of S 4, a domino-style bead was found on the burnt layer above the

Fig. 12. Clay object with tripartite crenelations unearthed in the D 3 V section (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Ghalachyan)

stone pavement [*Fig. 9*]. Medium-sized stones were also discovered on this layer. This bead has parallels among artifacts found in Armenia and other regions of the Caucasus, primarily dating to both the Early and Late Iron Ages (Avetisyan, Yengibaryan, and Sargsyan 1998: Fig. P; Martirosyan 1964: 210, Fig. 82.7). A fragment of brown-glazed ceramic adorned with a net-like decoration, characteristic of the post-Urartian period, was also uncovered in this context [see *Fig. 9*]. In the D 3 VII section, a tuff idol fragment from the pre-Urartian period was discovered on the layer preceding the pavement [*Fig. 10*]. Such idols and idol fragments have been found in excavations of the pre-Urartian settlement at Karmir Blur [*Fig. 11*]. This particular idol fragment, featuring fertility motifs, appears

Fig. 13. Fragments of red-polished Urartian ceramics found on the D 3 VI pavement section (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Badalyan)

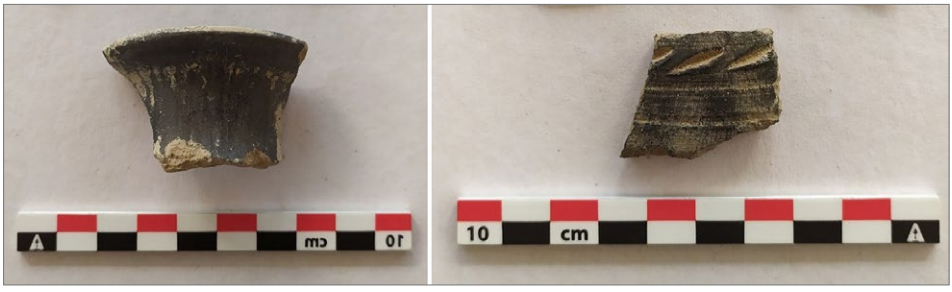
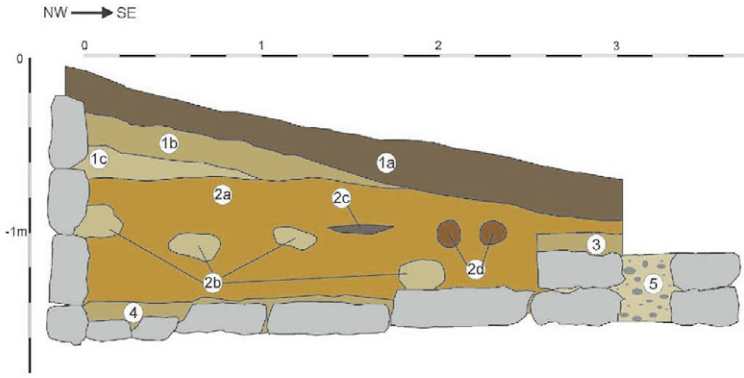


Fig. 14. Pottery fragments typical of the local Lchasen-Metsamor or Etiunian Culture (8th–6th centuries BCE) (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Badalyan)

to have been repurposed as raw material. Additionally, it is possible that some of the flattened tuff stones that constitute the pavement were originally part of an idol. A clay object with tripartite crenelations was unearthed in the D 3 V section [*Fig. 12*]. Fragments of red-polished Urartian ceramics were found on the D 3 VI pavement [*Fig. 13*], while the preceding layer predominantly yielded ceramics



Description of the stratigraphy

1a. 10YR 4/2 dark grayish-brown loam and humus, with sub-angular debris and fine rounded alluvial pebbles (partly technogenically altered "A" horizon of soil).

1b. 10YR 5/3 brown loam, with very limited sub-angular debris ("B" horizon of soil).

1c. 10YR 6/2 light brownish-gray loam with limited sub-angular debris ("C" horizon of soil).

2a. 10YR 5/2 grayish-brown aleurite and ash, with limited fine sand and angular block fragments (zoogenic and human activity sediments).

2b. 10YR 6/2 light brownish-gray loam with limited sub-angular debris (animal bioturbation sediments).

2c. 10YR 4/3 brown organic clay (remains of decayed wood).

2d. 10YR 5/1 gray ash.

3. 10YR 6/2 light brownish-gray loam with very limited sub-angular debris.

4. 10YR 6/3 pale brown clay with very limited charcoal (zoogenic and human activity sediments).

5. 10YR 6/2 light brownish-gray alluvial pebbles with loam (wall-filling sediments).

Fig. 15. Geomorphological section of D 3 III (Drawing S. Nahapetyan)

Fig. 16. Iranian fals (copper) – coin of Shah Soltan Hoseyn, minted in Yerevan (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Ghalachyan)

with a black surface [*Fig. 14*]. Medium-sized stones were also discovered in these sections. The pavement is bordered by a low wall, designated S 6, which connects to S 4. Along the southern edge of the excavated section of this wall, medium-sized river stones were located, associated with an underlying ash layer. The thick burnt layer preceding the pavement is followed by clay layers, with zoogenetic and human activities, and is ultimately covered by mixed layers from the Soviet era and modern period [*Fig. 15*]. Walls S 3

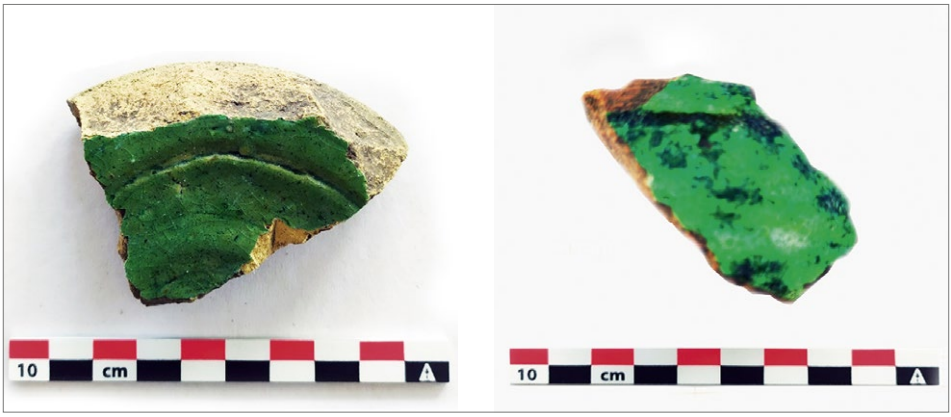


Fig. 17. Fragments of medieval glazed pottery (12th–13th centuries) discovered from mixed layers of sections D 3 I and D 3 II (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Badalyan)

Fig. 18. Area D 3 I–III. Enclosed column bases by S 5 (Armenian-Austrian Archaeological Expedition at Karmir Blur | photo M. Badalyan)

and S 4 were constructed in a cascade-like manner. S 3 consists of two layers, then three layers, and culminates in four layers. In contrast, S 4, from south to north, initially features four courses, then three courses, and finally two courses where it connects to S 6.

In the D 3 VI section, on the upper part of S 4, a coin of the Safavid Shah of Iran, Hoseyn (1694–1722 CE), minted in Yerevan, was discovered at the top of S 5 [*Fig. 16*]. Additionally, on the upper surface of S 5, two fragments of medieval glazed ceramics dating to the 12th–13th centuries were unearthed in the D 3 I and D 3 II sections [*Fig. 17*].

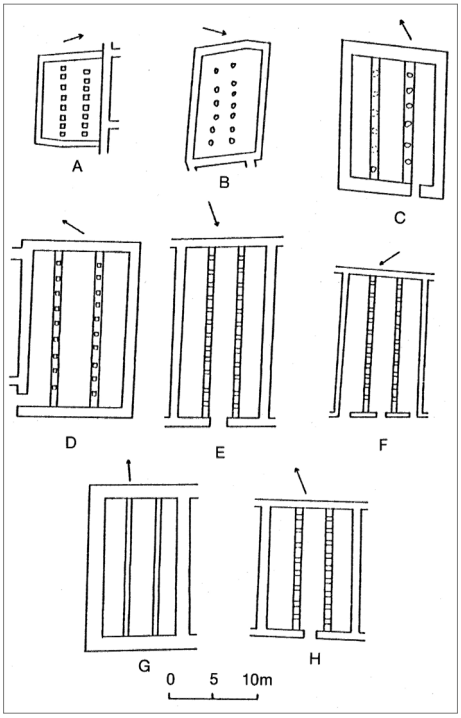


Fig. 19. Tripartite pillared buildings of Palestine: A. Tell Abu Hawam, B. Tell Qasile, C. Beth Shemesh, D. Hazor, E. Meggido, F. Beer Sheba, G. Lachish, H. Tell el-Hesi (After Herr 1988: 49, Fig. 1, with cited literature)

It is probable that after the fire, the S 4 wall was constructed, covering the column bases and indicating a potential change in the function of the structure [*Fig. 18*].

ZONE D 4

To the east of the D 3 IV–D 3 VI sections, at the elevation of the upper surface of S 4, another pavement was uncovered [see *Figs 3, 4*]. A carnelian bead was found at the boundary of S 4. The pavement is consistent in width with those found in D 1 and D 3. Additionally, a fragment of a Urartian pithos was identified on the pavement. West of this pavement, another section of a wall, termed S 7, was uncovered, bearing a strong resemblance to the walls S 2 and S 5. This section has only been partially excavated, and further excavations are planned for the 2025 season.

ZONE E

Zone E refers to the sloping section north of S 6, which connects to another wall, designated S 8. In this area, only a portion of the wall ascending toward S 6 has been cleared, revealing gravel stones arranged at an angle. It is highly probable that S 8 serves as the northern boundary of the newly discovered structure at Karmir Blur. To the south, it likely forms a sloping rampart made of gravel that connects to S 6.

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN PARALLELS

The structure discovered at Karmir Blur exemplifies a recurring architectural layout, tentatively termed a tripartite columned structure. Comparable structures

have been identified in modern Turkey (Arslantepe, Sarissa), Palestine and Israel, the Republic of Armenia (Horom and Hoghmik), and Iran, particularly at Bastam and Hasanlu. Significant insights into the parallels and functions of these structures have been provided by Holladay (1986), Herr (1988), Kroll (2018), Liverani (2012), Akobjan (2000), Çifçi (2023), and others. It is widely accepted that these tripartite columned buildings were likely utilized as horse stables. For the Urartian period, similar structures were excavated at Ayanis (Kroll 2018: 140) and Horom (Kroll 2018: 140–141). Additionally, it is plausible that the structures with flagstone pavements discovered at Haykaberd (Çavuştepe) (Çifçi 2023: 57) and Girik Tepe (Çifçi 2023: 62) may also belong to this building type. The highest concentration of tripartite columned buildings is found in Palestine and Israel [*Fig. 19*] (e.g. Tell Abu Hawam, Tell Qasile, Beth Shemesh, Hazor, Megiddo, Beer Sheba, Lachish, Tell el-Ḥesi, and Tel Malhata). These buildings are primarily dated to the Iron Age. It has been proposed that these structures may have served various functions in antiquity, such as storehouses, stables, or barracks. Additionally, it has been suggested that tripartite columned buildings could have functioned as marketplaces (Herr 1988).

The newly discovered structure at Karmir Blur exhibits striking similarities to the three-aisled structures excavated at Bastam, particularly the *Hallenbau* [*Fig. 20*]. The tripartite columned structures at Karmir Blur and Bastam can be considered "twins". In both locations, there is a layout indicative of a later phase of use, characterized by the construction

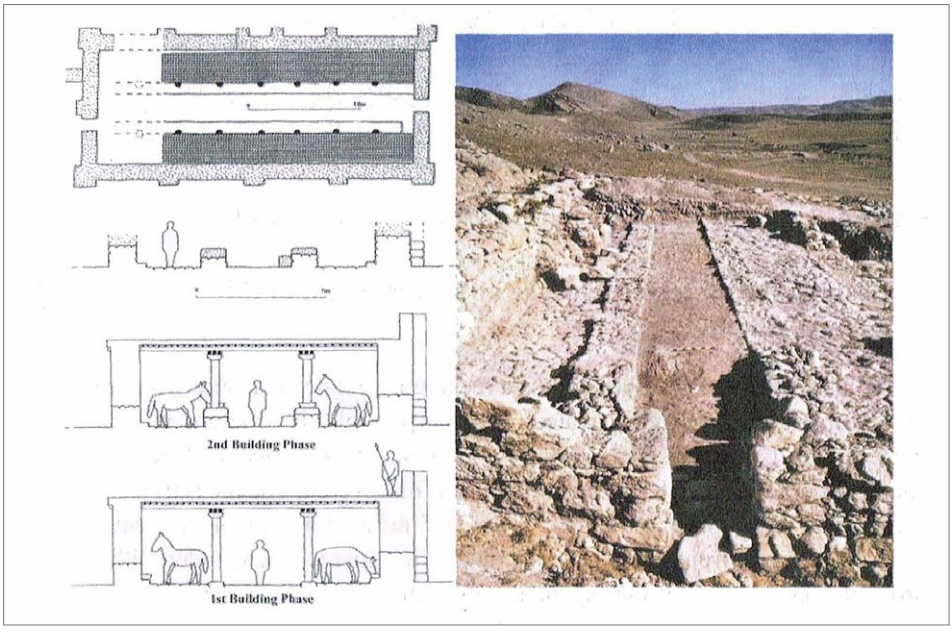


Fig. 20. Bastam, the *Hallenbau*, a paved tripartite stable near the northern gate (After Kroll 2018: 137, Fig. 3)

of two banquet walls measuring 30 cm in height and one meter in width. These walls partially enclose or cover the column bases of the original occupation, significantly reducing the width of the central aisle and aligning it with that of the lateral aisles. The construction of these banquet walls suggests that the wooden pillars had been removed by this time. However, traces of ash and charred wood on the surfaces of the bases in the *Hallenbau* at Bastam do not necessarily indicate fire damage (Kleiss 1972: 14, 16; 1979: 35) as seen at Karmir Blur.

SOURCES CONCERNING ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL ARMENIA

Herodotus, while describing the section of the Royal Road in Armenia during the Achaemenid period, mentions royal staging-posts and very fine inns (French 1998: 27). The 5th-century historian Movses Khorenatsi recounts that King Yervand (Orontes) of Armenia, during his struggle for the throne against Artashes I (Artaxias) (approximately 189–160 BCE), passed the inns on the road from his camp to his capital, changing to fresh horses at each stage in his flight (Khorenatsʿi 2006: 183). The same historian further records that the Armenian Catholicos

Fig. 21. Suggested tripartite structures depicted in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (After Hakobyan (Tarumian) 2024: 21)

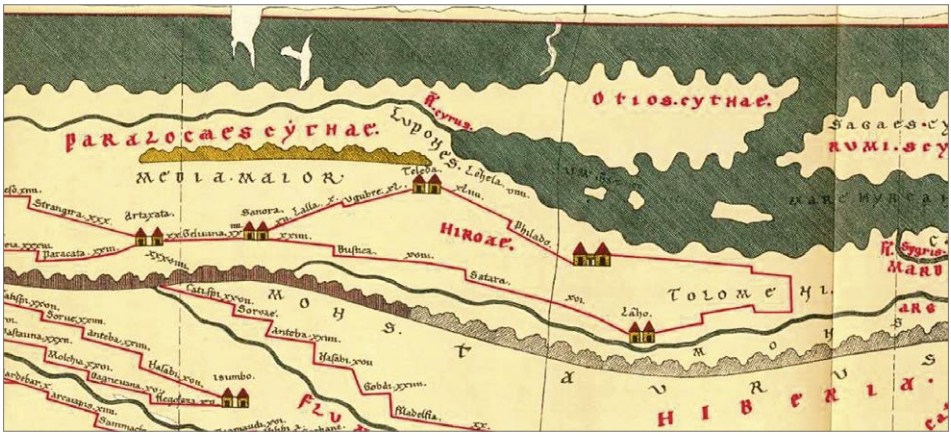


Fig. 22. Armenia in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (After Hakobyan (Tarumian) 2024: 23)

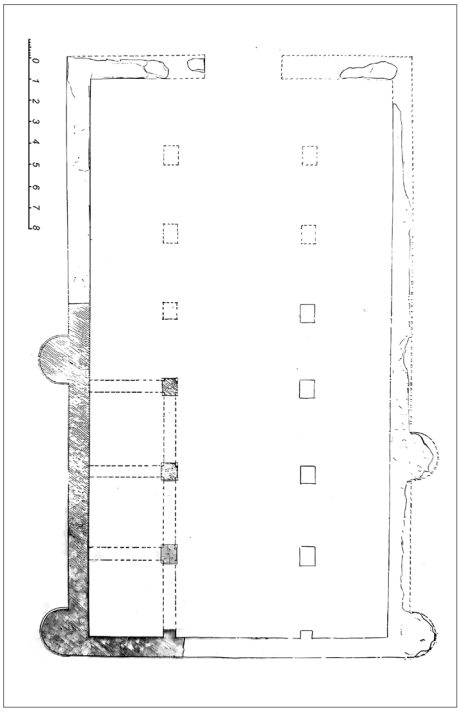


Fig. 23. Plan of the Armenian medieval caravanserai at Aruch (After Harutyunyan 1960: 31, Fig. 22)

Nerses ordered the construction of inns for strangers (Khorenatsʿi 2006: 271). Interesting information about markets in ancient Armenia is provided by the 9th–10th-century Armenian historian Tovma Artsruni, who reports that King Artashes of Armenia built a fortress near Lake Van, in Artamet, for his beloved wife Satenik, with bustling streets suitable for commerce (Artsruni 1985: 117).

In our opinion, the structures marked on the *Tabula Peutingeriana* may have some connection to the aforementioned tripartite buildings. For instance, the unnamed station on the Circular Road or the structure marked near the glorious capital of Sassanid Iran, Ctesiphon [*Fig. 21*], strongly resembles the tripartite structures we discussed. Armenian researcher Ruben Hakobyan (Tarumian) believes these structures were more luxurious guest houses than others. Similar structures

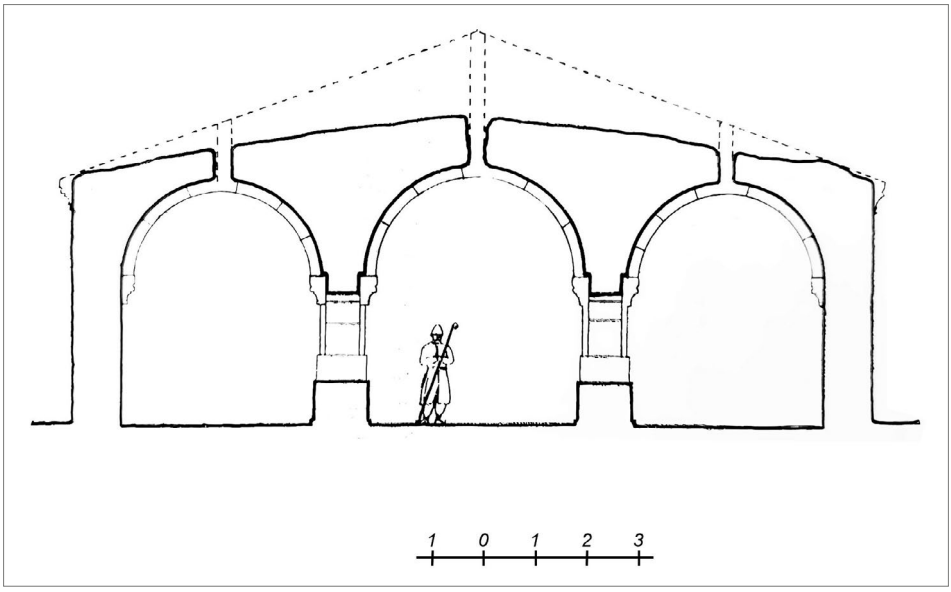


Fig. 24. Section of the Armenian medieval caravanserai at Jrapi (After Harutyunyan 1960: 39, Fig. 34)

are also marked on the *Tabula Peutingeriana* along the roads of Armenia [*Fig. 22*] (Hakobyan (Tarumian) 2024: 21).

It is particularly intriguing that the architectural plan of the structure at Karmir Blur closely resembles the Armenian medieval single-hall and the three-nave caravanserais [*Figs 23, 24*], such as those found at Selim, Jrapi, and Aruch (Harutyunyan 1960: 17–52).

DISCUSSION

The data presented above does not imply the identification of these structures as horse stables should be disregarded. The layout of the *Ostbau* at Bastam, with its large courtyard, strongly supports this interpretation. Nevertheless, certain aspects of feasibility remain unaddressed in the reconstructions, especially concerning access to the stable facilities, which, in both the *Ostbau* and *Hallenbau*, is provided by similarly narrow entrances, approximately one meter in width. This might be impractical for moving horses, as is the arrangement of the horses in the side aisles next to each other, making it impossible to remove one without moving all those standing in front — except in the original columned version of the three-aisled hall in the *Hallenbau*, where the side aisles opened directly onto the central aisle, allowing for easier access, as in Sarissa [*Fig. 25*] (Müller-Karpe 2017)

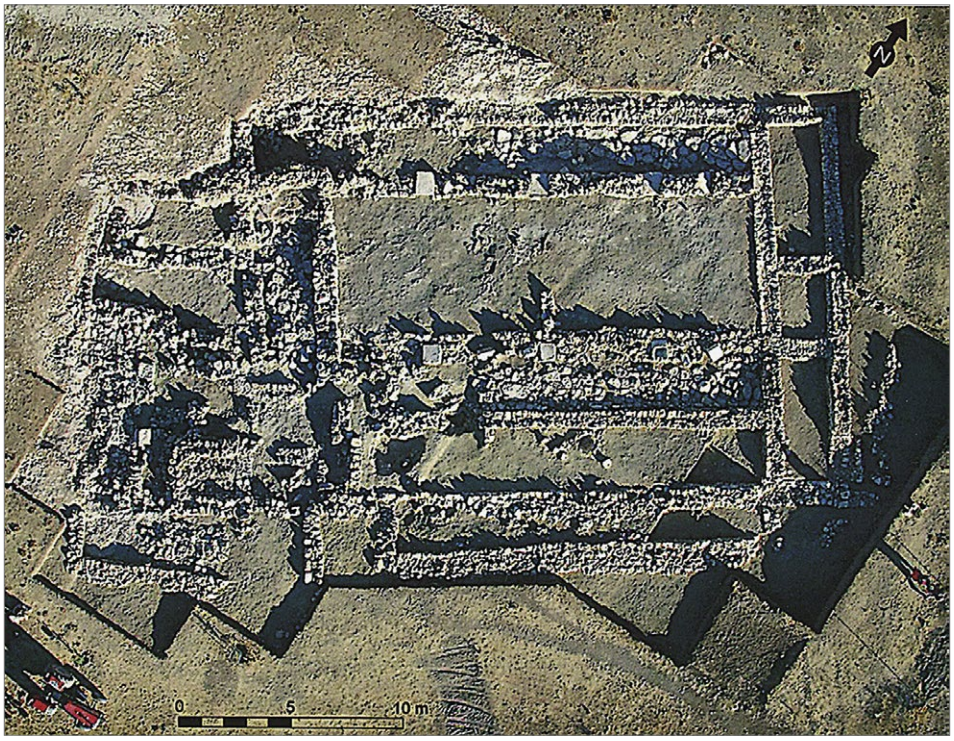


Fig. 25. Tripartite building at Sarissa (After Müller-Karpe 2017: 131, Abb. 128)

and Hasanlu (Kroll 1992). However, modern perspectives can also be misleading. The absence of gutters for collecting and draining manure and urine, along with the irregular surface of the stone-paved floor —which from today's perspective might be considered disadvantageous for mucking out and cleaning the stable, let alone the potential discomfort it might cause the horses— would seem impractical. Yet, this arrangement appears to have been well documented in the horse stables of Sarissa, providing evidence that such stone pavements might indeed have been used in horse stables without drainage channels. These and similar questions have long been central to the identification of horse stables in the Roman military, highlighting how difficult it is to generalize based solely on architectural floor plans and soil analyses (Rubel and Mischka 2023: 98–101).

The lack of direct parallels for the tripartite columned structure at Sarissa in Hittite Anatolia complicates a clear determination of whether this structure served military or civilian purposes, such as a caravanserai — a possibility that Müller-Karpe does not entirely exclude, probably given its proximity to the city gate, only seven meters away. However, based on written sources mentioning the presence of war chariots and 16 horses in Sarissa, as well as comparative floor plans of similar structures, primarily from Egypt, Müller-Karpe ultimately argues for interpreting the building as a royal horse stable. It may have functioned as one of several military assembly points used in war preparations by garrisons across the kingdom, particularly for housing and provisioning valuable chariot horses. As suggested for Roman-period stables (Rubel and Mischka 2023: 107–109), Müller-Karpe (2017: 134) also considers that, in Sarissa, the chariot crews were quartered in this same building.

CONCLUSION

The newly discovered tripartite columned structure at Karmir Blur undoubtedly served as a significant element of Teishebaini's urban infrastructure. The fact that it is located very close to the fortress gates suggests that it must have had an important function. In our opinion, the structure should be dated to the period of Rusa, son of Argishti. Three radiocarbon samples were taken from the tripartite columned structure at Karmir Blur for analysis at the Accelerator Mass Spectrometry Laboratory in Vilnius, Lithuania [*Fig. 26*]. Sample KB22-$C14_{02}$ (FTMC-NH79-2) originates from charcoal found on the stone pavement in zone D 1. Samples KB24-$C14_{01}$ (FTMC-BF70-1) and KB24-$C14_{02}$ (FTMC-BF70-2) were taken from remnants of charred wood within the burnt layer in the southern part of zone D 3 — specifically KB24-$C14_{01}$ from above the lower wall S 5, and KB24-$C14_{02}$ from the central aisle between the lower walls S 5 and S 2. All calibrated dates fall within the so-called Hallstatt Plateau, preventing a more precise chronological determination within the 8th to 6th centuries BCE. Nevertheless, the results support

both the proposed dating to the reign of Rusa, son of Argishti, based on the historical context of Karmir Blur, and the possibility of continued use beyond the fall of the Urartian kingdom. This is also supported by the presence of Urartian red-polished pottery sherds found on the flagstone pavement. In the initial phase, the column bases were aligned along the length of the pavement, and it is likely that the structure had a gabled or east-sloping roof. At some point, the structure experienced a fire, likely linked to the destruction of the fortress of Teishebaini (Piotrovsky 1969: 199).

Excavations at Karmir Blur showed that the settlement was captured and set ablaze by an army using arrowheads of the so-called Scythian type. The attack was likely swift and unexpected. Some scholars propose that the Scythians themselves were responsible for the destruction of Teishebaini, while others contend it was the Medes. It remains challenging to attribute the destruction definitively to the Scythians, the Medes, or another ethnic group. In this context, the timing of the fire at Teishebaini remains uncertain, potentially occurring anytime from the second half of the 7th century BCE to the last quarter of the 6th century BCE. These uncertainties necessitate further investigations and interdisciplinary research (Kuntner et al. 2025).

In the next phase, the function of the structure evolved. The column bases were enclosed with low walls, and our preliminary observations indicate that the structure may have been transformed into an open area designated for livestock. The discovery of medieval pottery sherds and a coin of Shah Hoseyn suggests that human activity also occurred in this area during the medieval period. Notably, the Teshebaini area was extensively utilized at this time (Hmayakyan, Melkonyan, and Zohrabyan 2017: 158–160), with a medieval chapel located in the upper part of the fortress. While we do not dismiss the possibility that these structures served as horse stables, we lean toward the belief that both the Karmir Blur and Bastam structures could have had alternative functions. They may have served as inns, caravanserais, marketplaces, or other types of buildings.

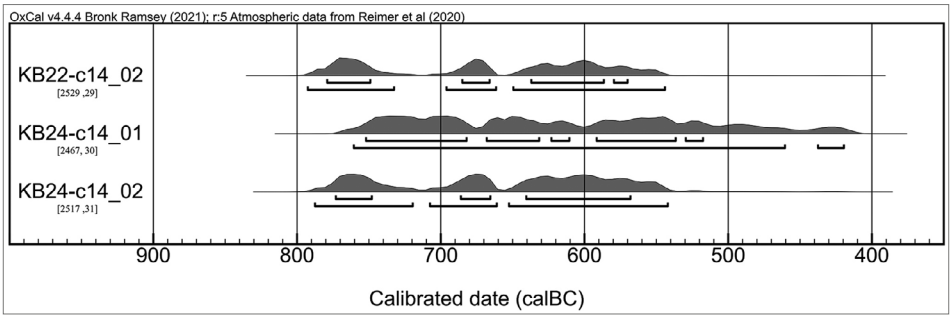


Fig. 26. Three radiocarbon samples taken from the tripartite columned structure at Karmir Blur, analyzed at the Accelerator Mass Spectrometry Laboratory in Vilnius, Lithuania

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