

EXCAVATIONS AT ALTINTEPE*

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Altuntepe is a steep hill 60 M. high and 500 M. long situated in the eastern half of the fertile plain of Erzincan, 20 Kms. east of Erzincan, on the road to Erzurum. On this hill inhabited since the Early Bronze Age can still be seen traces of Urartian fortifications. During the Middle Ages and especially at the time of the Akkoyunlu principality Altuntepe was again inhabited but finally deserted at the end of this period. It became known in archaeological literature after the accidental discovery in 1938 of Urartian objects, a few of which, namely the ones in good condition, were taken to the Museum¹. No research, scientific or otherwise has been made there since. In 1956, a second grave, consisting of three chambers, was found again by accident close to the place where the first discovery had been made in 1938, but none of the objects were brought to our museums. In 1959 while clearing the floor of these funerary chambers we found still in situ a few remaining objects which proved to be an important contribution to Urartian archaeology (Fig. 15). Unlike the first, this grave had not been destroyed. Rectangular in plan, it consists of three adjacent rooms and its interior measurements are 8 × 3 M. The door leads from the exterior to the central chamber. The interior height of the rooms is 2.50 M. They are well built of dressed stones in the usual Urartian style and have a vaulted roof (Fig. 14). There are two, three and six niches in each room (Fig. 1).

Excavations at Altuntepe were started in September 1959 under the auspices of the Department of Antiquities and the Turkish Historical society. The expedition consisted of myself and Prof. Dr. Nimet Özgüç, the architect Bay Mahmut Akok, our asistant Bayan Kutlu Emre and the photographer Bay Selâhattin Öztartan. The graves

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¹ V. d. Osten, VI. Int. Kongress für Arch. 1939, *Neue Urartäische Bronzen aus Erzincan*.

had been dug into the east slope of the hill, 40 M. above the plain and approximately all on the same level. We had no difficulty in tracing a third tomb 1. 50 M. below the surface of the ground and 25 M. west of the grave discovered in 1956. The problems hitherto presented by Altuntepe were thus solved and another great Urartian centre uncovered besides Toprakkale and Karmir-blur.

The grave had been constructed as follows:

First of all a shaft 7 M. wide and 8.50 M. long had been dug into the slope of the hill and the monumental stone grave was built inside it (Fig. 5). For protection against robbers and landslides, it was then surrounded by a wall of large stones and covered with earth. We thus find ourselves confronted by a subterranean tower containing funerary chambers. Although different in plan from the one mentioned previously, it also consists of three rooms (Fig. 2). The first measures 4×2 M. The door on the northeast facade is 1 M. wide and the entrance 1. 25 M. long (Fig. 6). We found in situ the stone slab which closed this doorway. On the outside, an accumulation of heavy blocks made entry into the tomb very difficult. In the centre of the chamber was a large bronze cauldron containing two bronze discs, the bronze parts of a war chariot, horse trappings, statuettes depicting a horse which were placed at the end of the chariot poles (Fig. 16) and iron weapons. Two stools with silver-plated wooden legs had been placed between the cauldron and the door (Fig. 8). In the western half of the chamber were deposited a third table, pottery vessels, horse bits (Fig. 17), harnesses, three bells and a few bone objects. From there a second door leads to the chamber, measuring 4×2.50 M., which contains the coffins (Fig. 7). The stone slab blocking the entrance was disturbed by an earthquake and had slid down to the floor. One of the coffins stood in front of the long wall and the other in front of the narrow wall. The lids of these trough-shaped coffins could be opened and shut and were curved. They bore no decoration or inscriptions and contained the skeletons of a man and a woman respectively. Nothing had been deposited with the male body. Outside the males coffin were gold, silver and bronze buttons which had been sewn onto a garment (Fig. 18) and iron arrowheads. This woman had been buried fully dressed and the gold buttons and spangles as well as the necklace of gold (Fig. 19) and precious stones were entirely

preserved. A faience vase (imported from Assyria), pottery vessels, another stool, wooden objects in bad condition, trinkets and bone tools had been deposited in an orderly way on the floor. In the long wall were five and on the narrow wall three empty niches.

A third and more narrow door leads into the third and smallest chamber, measuring 2×2.50 M. This door had no leaf and must have always remained open. There is a single niche in each wall. The objects found in this room are as follows: A wooden couch reinforced with 8 pairs of bronze rings, a large table on four legs (Fig. 9), four pottery vessels and a rod of solid silver measuring 17 cms. and decorated with a lion's head at each end.

Built of well dressed stone in a technique comparable to the best Urartian workmanship, this grave, unlike the other, had a flat roof. An earthquake had caused it to collapse into the chambers underneath and the objects had been crushed and damaged both by the fallen blocks and by earth and water which had seeped in.

The discovery of these subterranean chambers has greatly increased our knowledge of Urartian funerary customs and graves, about which we knew nothing. In the course of this study of underground tombs it is impossible not to be reminded of the rock-cut chambers at Van.

Several wooden stools and tables were discovered in each room. Their height never exceeds 50 cms. The chairs had no backs and the legs of wood (Fig. 15) were enclosed in metal casing (Fig. 21). The legs of all the furniture are shaped like bull (Fig. 20) or lion's paws, usually in bronze and still in very good condition. The part resting on the ground is conical and usually of silver (Fig. 21). The wooden crossbars joining the legs to one another (Fig. 22) are adorned with double volutes in bronze (Fig. 8). Corners of both tables and chairs are decorated and strengthened with metal corner-pieces. It was possible to restore them correctly as the wood was well preserved.

All the weapons are made of iron. They consist of flat axes, battle axes, arrow and lance heads, daggers, knives and three-pronged forks, all of which are typically Urartian.

The most important group of objects in the tomb are the bronze horse and war-chariot trappings from the first chamber. Their disco-

very enabled us to acquire a thorough knowledge of the type of the harness used by the horse-breeding, warlike Urartians. Unfortunately the leather and wooden parts had completely disintegrated. The horse bits can be divided into four types, the first belonging, with a few unimportant variants, to the type from Karmir-blur, bearing the name of Menuas². No parallels for the others have as yet been found in Eastern Anatolia. Their main characteristic consists of two metal rods on each side of the mouth, adorned with horse, eagle and bulls' heads (Fig. 17). Each bit therefore was decorated with four animal heads. There are numerous and varied bronze pieces for the attachment of the wooden parts and leather things. The bells are of various sizes. Like the Assyrian ones, the bronze horses' heads at the end of the chariot poles are very elaborate and measure 7 cms. (Fig. 16). The manes are depicted with straight and wavy lines. The pointed ears, the muscular forehead, the protruding eyes and especially the bits are shown in the smallest detail. These statuettes represent the local, Altuntepe, development of Urartian art, and show that first rate artisans were to be found as far as the western frontiers of Urartu.

Gods, human beings and animals play an important part in the decoration of two bronze discs, a belt and a silver rod with a lion's head at each end. Of the two thin discs, 8 cms. in diameter, the first was decorated with a winged god wearing a long and elaborate garment and mounted on a winged bull running towards the right. On the second disc was a winged god wearing a similar dress and mounted on a winged horse galloping at full speed towards the left. Holes along the edges of these discs shows that, as with the Assyrians, they had been attached to a harness. A guilloche pattern on the edge enhance their beauty. We have here the first representation of a god mounted on a winged horse in Urartian art. It provides us not only with an important clue to the origin of *Pegasos*, but is also unique in the art and religion of Urartu.

The belt which had been folded inside the cauldron in the first chamber (Fig. 23) measures no less than 90 cms. Its width is 10. cms. On both edges is a guilloche pattern and a row of holes. It is decorated

² B. B. Piotrovsky, *Kormir Blur III, Akademii Nauk Armyanskoy S. S. R.*, Erivan, 1955, Fig. 34.

with 45 designs in three registers, spaced 4 cms. apart. They represent horsemen in action, centaurs, lions running with open jaw, winged horses galloping at full speed (Fig. 24), running goats, bulls and a mixture of lion and bull, a winged and horned monster-lion, all rapidly moving either from left to right or from right to left. It is possible to see every detail of these designs which are executed in a linear style. The horsemen hold the rein in their left hand and their lance in the right. They wear pointed helmets covering the ears and nape of the neck and long dresses with short sleeves. There is no difference in style between the winged horses and the cavalry ones. This motif of winged horse and winged god is very popular at Altintepe. The winged centaurs are depicted shooting arrows, and their head-gear varies. Like the bulls, the lions are shown infuriated and rushing forward with all their might as on the belt from Kuşçu³. There is constant movement and struggle. The belt had been folded up into the cauldron in such a way as to render it unusable. The same treatment had been applied to the other objects and this must have been a burial custom.

The silver rod, 17 cms. long and 1 cm. thick was found next to the table in the small chamber containing one table, one couch, and four vessels. There was more silver on this table than on the ones from the other rooms and the silver rod must have been part of its decoration.

Statuettes were not joined on to the plain bodies of the bronze vessels with short necks, large cauldrons, pots of various sizes and mugs. The pottery vessels are red-slipped and burnished. They consist of jars with or without handles, one jar with a spout, jugs and large vessels with a short neck and round or ovoid body. They all are similar to the bronze vessels discovered in the other grave. There is no difference between funerary vessels and pottery in ordinary use. The only faience vessel is an import from Northern Mesopotamia.

Gold and silver jewelry, decorated with precious stones was quite abundant. Large buttons decorated with granulations forming a rosette pattern had been sewn on to the dead woman's dress (Fig. 18). Buttons of the same type in silver and bronze were numerous. The gold components of a necklace are of varied designs.

³ M. A. Hanfman, *Four Urartian bull' heads* (*A. S. VI, 1956, P. 211, Pl. XX, 2*).

A great many gold plaques with four holes (Fig. 19) for threading indicate that four necklaces had been placed in the tomb. The gold and silver objects brought to light in this grave alone are far more numerous than all those ever found in the whole area of Urartu and it is worth noting that the site is called *Altuntepe, Hill of Gold*, a remarkable coincidence.

Although most of the wood had disintegrated, its quantity shows that there had been many wooden objects, all decorated with geometric patterns either incised or in relief. The model of a turret is exactly similar to the one from Toprakkale. Decorated bone objects are few.

The Altuntepe finds belong to the best period of Urartian art. Although parallels to some of them are known from city-sites like Karmir-blur, and Toprakkale, a great many are peculiar to the Altuntepe. Far from being provincial, their workmanship is equal to that of the best creations from the main Urartian centres. Altuntepe seems to have been the administrative centre of a principality within the western frontier area of Urartu and subject to its kings. The Urartian state was divided into provinces and one of the most strategically important areas must have been the fertile region with Altuntepe as its centre. Nearby the Urartians also controlled the most important pass on the main road to the west. We do not yet know the ancient name of Altuntepe and further excavations will reveal more clearly its importance in the eyes of the Urartian kings.

Cuneiform inscriptions on some of the bronzes have made it possible to date the tomb and its contents correctly. Although these inscriptions were incomplete, by a lucky coincidence the kings' names had been preserved and will be the subject of a separate publication by the Turkish epigraphist. According to them, the prince buried in the tomb was contemporary to Argistis II (713-679), son of Rusas I (732-714). This date is in accordance with the style of the funerary offerings and also confirms the date which had been put forward by R. Barnett and N. Gökçe for the objects discovered in 1938⁴. This shows that little time had elapsed between the actual construction of the grave and the burial of the dead with their furniture and

⁴ *A. S. III, 1953, p. 129.*

also that all the graves were monuments of a single dynasty or family. Belonging to the period of Argistis II, the objects from Altintepe thus form a valuable link between the art of the first brilliant period of Menuas (810-785), Argistis I (785-760), Sardur III (760-733) and Rusas I (732-714) and that of the next and later phase.

The Urartian town itself lies on the summit of Altintepe, within a large and easily defensible citadel. The owners of the tombs must have lived there, within large houses or palaces, the contents of which might still be preserved. Further excavations should enable us to explain the relationship between the graves on the slope of the hill and the fortified city on the summit of Altintepe.

At present the objects are in the process of being treated in the museum and excavations still continue. We are therefore only at the beginning of our researches, but we have tried, however, within the limit of our time, to describe to our listeners the tomb of an Urartian prince.

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Addenda:

In 1960 excavations at Altintepe were resumed by the same expedition. In this connection, the following explanations might prove useful.

The tomb:

In the cemetery, we investigated some points which could not be entirely made clear last year and a study was made of the tombs and their grouping. The tomb placed between the two graves described above and opened in 1938 by peasants who sent part of the contents to the Archaeological Museum in Ankara, was systematically studied. Its plan and characteristic features are different from the two other graves. The interior consists of a corridor and a rectangular chamber lined with well dressed stones in Urartian style (Figs. 3, 10). The orientation is east-west and the entrance faces east. The length of the chamber is 4 m. and the width 2.40 m. The interior height does not exceed 2 m. The grave is built on rock but the floor is of earth. In each long wall of the chamber are three niches, with two more in the short west wall. Their height is 1.23 m., their depth in the wall 95 cm. and a shelf was formed inside each by placing a

flat stone in the middle (Fig. 11). Two round hollows were made on the upper shelf in order to prevent vessels with a round base from falling over. Measuring 15 cm. in diameter, these hollows exactly fit the base of the bronze vessels found both in 1938 and 1960. The lower part of the niches was reserved for other funerary offerings. The length of the dromos is 2.20 m. and its width 90 cms. (Fig.10). Here also are two niches, but with a single compartment. The height of the corridor does not exceed 1.25 m. and it is covered with two stone slabs. The exterior entrance also was covered with two stone slabs one behind the other, standing upwards at a distance of 46 cms. from one another. In the center of the interior slab is a small aperture measuring 50×25 cms. This might have been a window for looking inside the grave, as a person could just squeeze into the cavity. The exterior of the entrance was shored up with stones.

The dead lay on the floor in the western half of the grave. There was no stone sarcophagus and in this respect the arrangement resembles that of the next tomb. The body was so placed that the head looked east. In spite of the robbers, interesting finds were made. Some of these are complementary to objects discovered in 1938, others are quite original.

The list is as follows:

- 1) Round and cylindrical beads made of coloured and veined stones, all part of a necklace.
 - 2) Fragment of a silver belt with geometric decoration.
 - 3) Ivory carving representing a hand.
 - 4) Gold plaque on which is depicted a winged bull with bearded human head.
 - 5) Wooden parts of chairs and tables.
- Objects similar to the ones mentioned above had not been brought to the Museum in 1938.
- 6) A large bronze vessel which appears to have fallen from a shelf.
 - 7) Bronze fragments of a breastplate.
 - 8) Bronze decoration and cornerpieces of chairs and tables.
- Similar pieces had been brought to the Museum in 1938.

It was possible to establish that the large bronze cauldron with bulls' heads standing on its tripod, the other high tripod and the quiver, found in 1938, had been placed in the west half of the chamber, the bronze vessels in the niches, the shield and breastplate in the west half. The pieces of furniture had been distributed all over the tomb.

The funerary chamber is hewn out of the rock. Owing to the level of the ground, its floor is higher than that of the other tombs. In order to prevent the earth from the summit from slipping into the tomb, a thick retaining wall had been built, as in one other grave.

The chamber, which had a flat roof, was closed with five very large stone slabs, and covered with earth, 1.50 cms. thick, upon which was placed a thick layer of stones. The neighbouring vaulted grave is covered in similar fashion. The distance between the two is 1.70 m. and a high wall of well dressed stone linked one to the other. This relationship between the two graves and the building technique of the wall show that the grave described above is later in date than the three-roomed grave.

The fortress :

The Urartian town at Altintepe was surrounded by a strong wall fortified with towers. The masonry was of Urartian type⁵. The towers do not measure more than 5.25 m. In the area investigated, they project 1 m. beyond the face of the wall at intervals of 11 m. The wall was constructed in casemate fashion, the box-like compartments of varying size being filled with stone and earth. The thickness of the city-wall does not exceed 12 m. The upper part is of large mudbricks, 52 cms. long and 15 cms. thick. Today, the mudbrick part of the wall still retains its original height of 3.80 m. It is absolutely similar to the typical Urartian fortresses of Eastern Anatolia and here the good condition of the caissons and of the mudbrick part renders possible a thorough study of this type of construction. The wide road for horsemen and chariots which, coming from the east, winds up to the top of the hill, is clearly traceable but the city-gate has not yet been excavated.

⁵ For the most recent study of the Urartian fortresses see C. A. Burney, *A. S. VII, 1957, P. 37 ff.* and *X, 1960, P. 177 ff.*

The temple :

The most important result of the 1960 excavations is the discovery of an Urartian temple. Up to now, the only temple excavated in the Urartian area was the temple of *Haldi* at Toprakkale⁶. Now it is no longer unique, and we have definite evidence for plan and construction of Urartian temples. As in the temple of *Haldi* at Toprakkale, the door of our temple, which is orientated north-south, faces south. The building is square, each side measuring 13.90 m. (Fig. 4). The walls are lined with three courses of well dressed stone. Their height is 1.15 m. A tower-like effect was achieved by the construction of a recess, half a metre deep, on each of the four sides (Fig. 13). The entrance is 1.15 m. wide and approached by two steps set between two "chevet" blocks (Fig. 12). A passage, 3.80 m. long and 1.50 m. wide led into the *cella*, which was square and measuring 5.20 m. in either direction. Built up against its north wall stood a pedestal lined with dressed stone, measuring 1.95 × 1.45 m. (Fig. 12). The floor was of mud-brick on a foundation of rubble. In front of the west side of the pedestal a stone formed a step.

In the temple of *Haldi* at Toprakkale, the altar lay in the front part of the temple and the same arrangement may have existed at Altuntepe. However, the area in front of the temple and the sides have not yet been sufficiently excavated to reveal an altar. It is hoped that further work in 1961 will settle this problem. The floor of the *cella* is of beaten clay. Offerings placed in the front part of the pedestal consisted of numerous iron and six bronze spear heads, four sceptres or maceheads, two of bronze and two of iron, iron arrowheads, three similar red slipped and burnished pottery vessels and a carved slab of wood. These objects are typically Urartian. Parallels for the sceptres or maceheads are depicted on Assyrian reliefs. There are no inscriptions on the walls. The upper structure of the temple is entirely of mudbrick and the walls of the *cella* were painted red and blue, but it was not possible to record the designs. The building was not burnt, but has suffered from earthquakes which caused it to crack and have displaced the stones lining the walls. Excavations at Altuntepe

⁶ R. D. Barnett in *Iraq XII*, p. 13 ff. and *XVI*, p. 3 ff., Fig. 1.; for the most recent discovery temple at Arin-berd see: B. Piotrovsky und K. Ohanesian, *Die Ausgrabungen in Arin-berd und Karmir-blur*, P. 6 (XXV. Int. Orient. Kongre ss. Moskau 1960).

thus help to study the effects of earthquakes and add to our technical knowledge in this field. Although all the walls are thick and massive, that of the facade is not particularly massive. As the area around the temple has not yet been excavated, it was not possible to find column bases in front of the facade. However, thick round wooden columns which had fallen down in this area, in front of the facade, were uncovered and show that the temple must have had a front portico, that is it was a *prostylos*. We can already say that no buildings existed in front of it and therefore a wide area was available for worship. The thickness of the wall and the presence of columns indicate that the temple at Altuntepe, as on the relief of Sargon II at *Kharsabad*, might easily have been covered with a gabled roof.

West of it is a stone wall 2.10 m. thick, orientated north-south. A stone column base remained *in situ* between it and the temple. As we did not excavate a large enough area in this direction, we cannot yet say whether other such bases exist and the same applies to the other sides, also unexcavated. It is probable that the wall surrounded the temple, thus forming a courtyard around it. The upper part is of mudbrick and need not have been very high. It cannot yet be claimed that the temple was a *peripteros*, but this possibility should not be overlooked in the course of further excavating.

The spearheads depicted on the relief from the palace of Sargon II at *Khorsabad* showing the temple of *Haldi* in the Urartian town of *Musasir*⁷ as well as those from the *Adilcevaz* relief⁸, show the spearhead as the symbol of the god *Haldi*. At Altuntepe, the fact that the great majority of offerings consists of spearheads strongly suggests that the temple was dedicated to *Haldi*. In plan and building characteristics, it is the exact parallel of the *Haldi* temple. This shows that Urartian temples were everywhere built according to a standard type.

The Urartian buildings here all belong to a single building level. They show no signs of repairs and the floors remained unchanged. All can be assigned to the best period at Altuntepe, namely that of the rich tombs of the end of the 8th and the first quarter of the 7th century B. C. (713-679).

⁷ R. Barnett in *Iraq XII*, Fig. 11.

⁸ C. A. Burney in *A. S. VIII*, 1958, p. 211 ff. Fig. 2.

The storage building:

East of the temple and near the road leading to the fortress a large storehouse was discovered. Large storage vessels of a type resembling those found at Karmir-blur were placed on the floor in three rows. The round stone base of one of the wooden columns supporting the roof was found *in situ*. This is one of the largest Urartian storehouses known to date to be found on a site which like Altuntepe could also be a military base. As in all the other buildings described here use was made of the soft stone called andesite.

The Early Bronze Age culture at Altuntepe:

The Urartian fortress had been built on top of a building level of the Early Bronze Age. For the moment it is the only one yet known at Altuntepe and its houses were found to have been burnt. The Early Bronze Age pottery is handmade and the clay contains sand as a degreasant. Most of it has a black interior and exterior, but a black ware with a grey interior or a burnished ware with brown interior and exterior also exists. The use of red slip is very rare. The decoration is linear and consists mainly of triangles, parallel lines and zigzags. Grooves are rare. The pottery bears local characteristics peculiar to the plain of Erzincan. Certain traits differentiate it from the Karaz ware. In our opinion the pottery from Altuntepe would seem to be earlier than that of Karaz and to represent a local Early Bronze Age type intermediate between that of East, Central and in particular Northern Anatolia.

Two kilometres away, between the large village of Cimin and Altuntepe lies the small mound of *Küçüktepe*. The pottery collected on the surface is partly like that of Altuntepe and partly like Karaz ware. This shows that Karaz pottery also exists at Altuntepe but the foundations of the fortress were sunk into the remains of the last Early Bronze Age period which they destroyed, and only the earlier phase (s) of the period was preserved. It will be possible to find and investigate these various levels on the summit of the hill.



Res. 5 — Fig. 5



Res. 6 — Fig. 6

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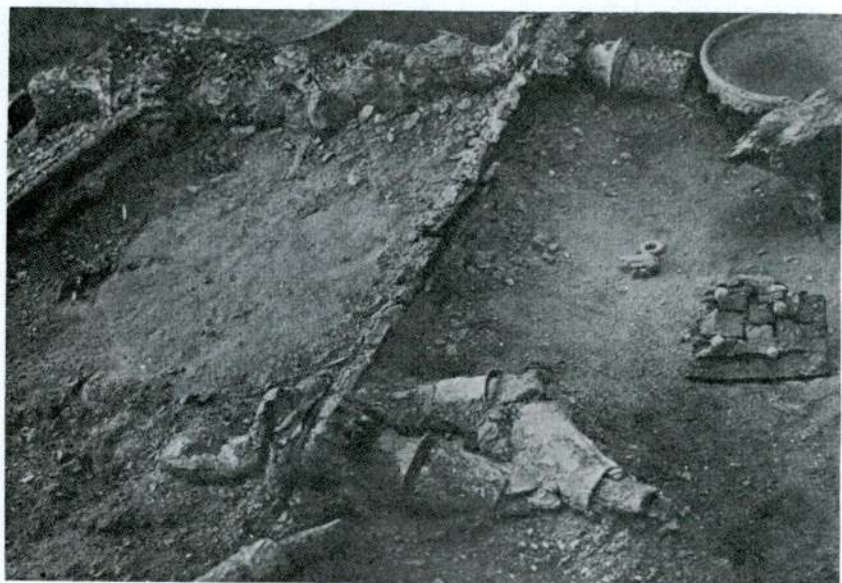


Res. 7 — Fig. 7



Res. 8 — Fig. 8

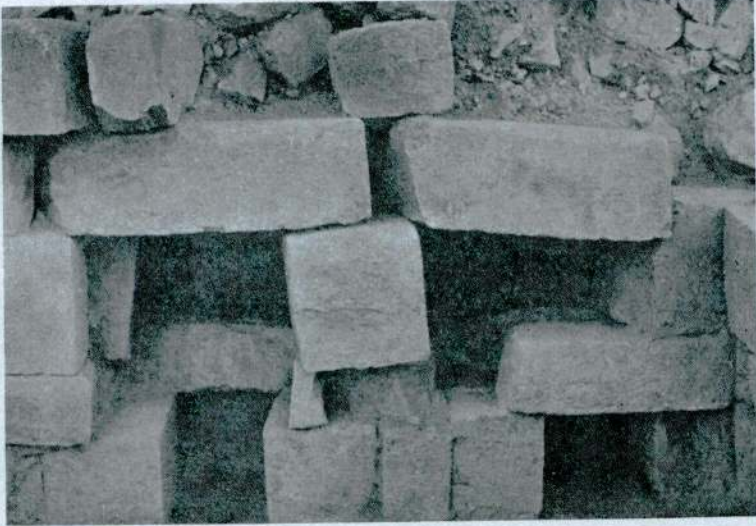
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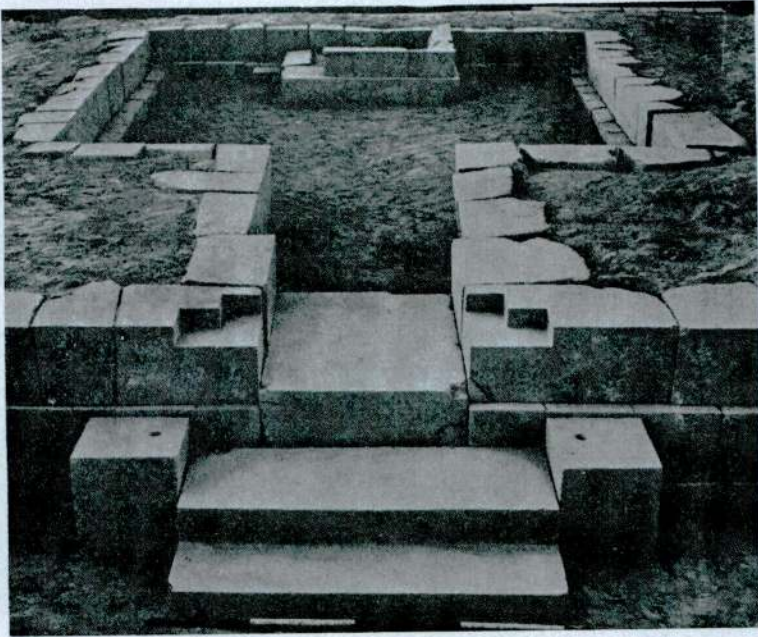
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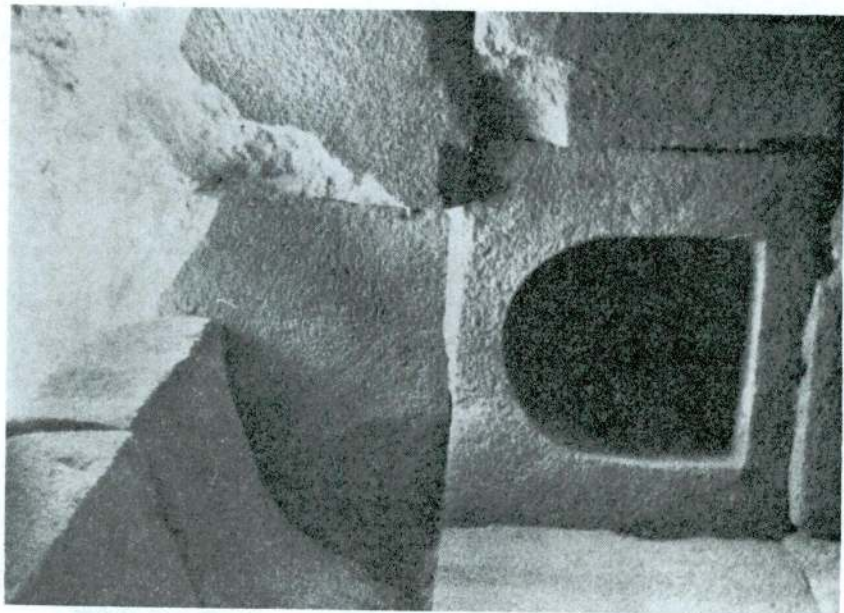
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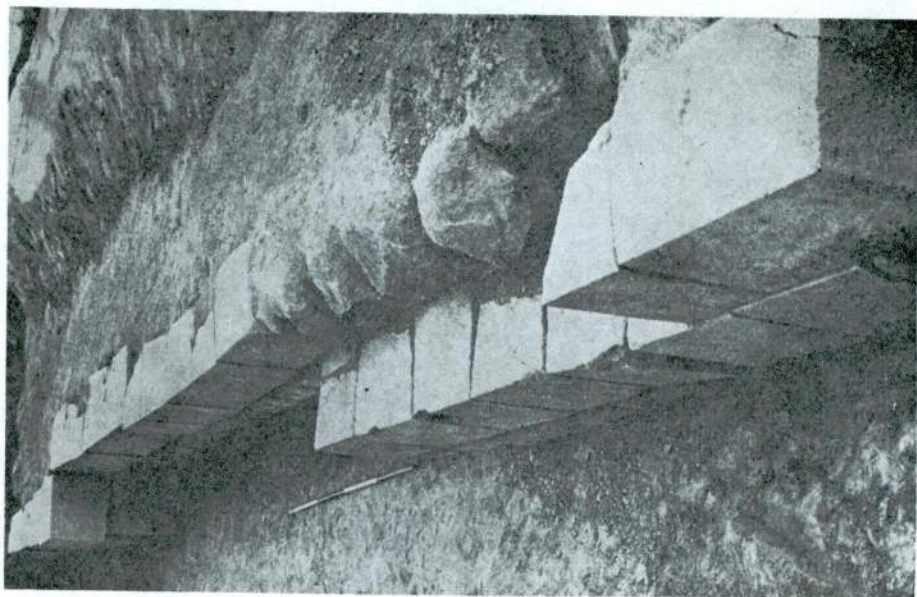
Res. 11 — Fig. 11



Res. 12 — Fig. 12



Res. 14 — Fig. 14



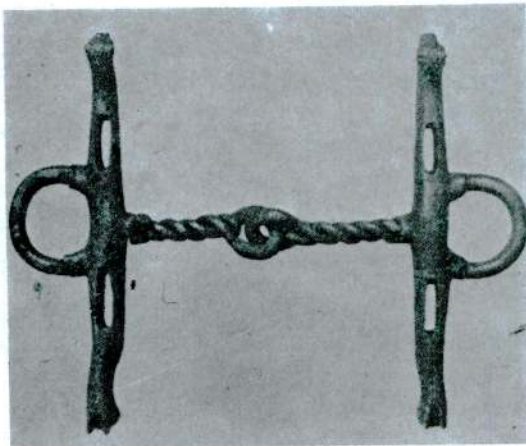
Res. 13 — Fig. 13



Res. 15 — Fig. 15

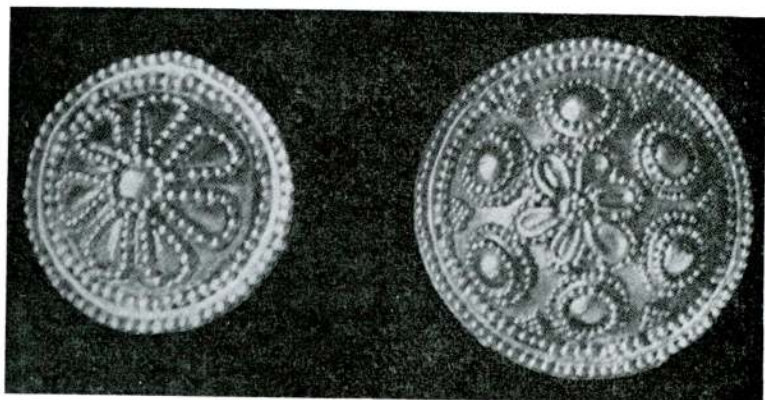


Res. 16 — Fig. 16

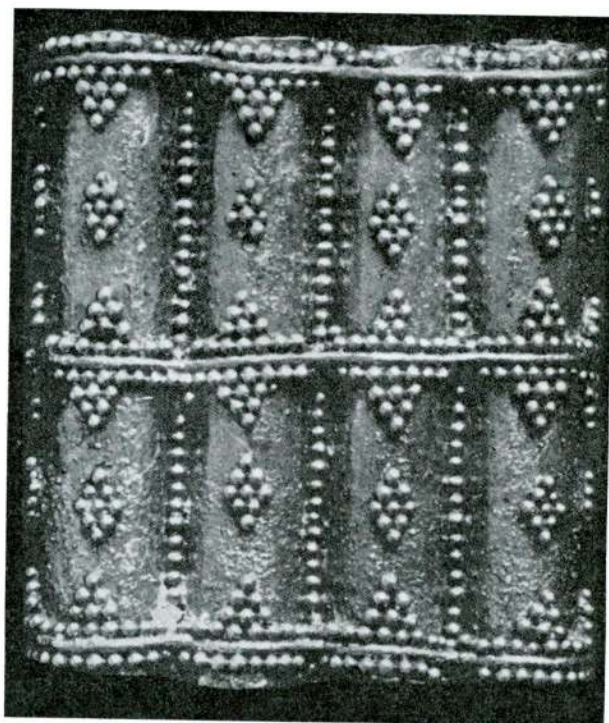


Res. 17 — Fig. 17

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Res. 18 — Fig. 18



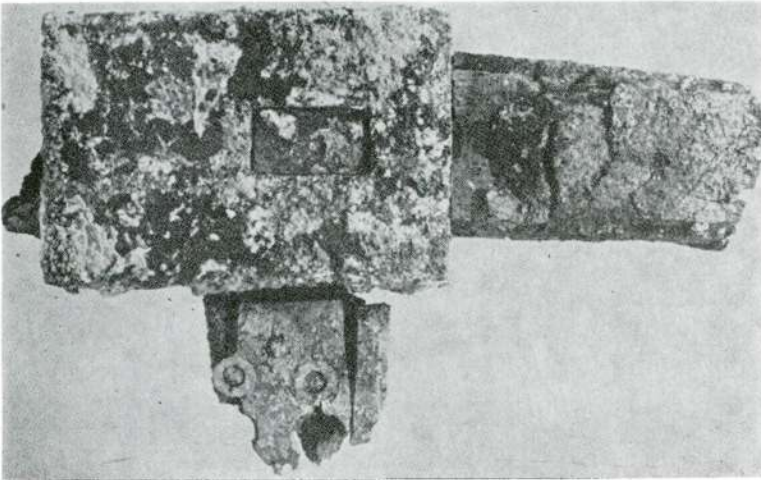
Res. 19 — Fig. 19



Res. 20 — Fig. 20



Res. 21 — Fig. 21



Res. 22 — Fig. 22

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Res. 23 — Fig. 23



Res. 24 — Fig. 24