

ORCHARDS OF THE
URARTIAN QUEEN TARIRIA
AND THE LEGENDARY
MINUA IRRIGATION CANAL



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**ORCHARDS OF THE URARTIAN
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MINUA IRRIGATION CANAL**

**Prof. Dr. OKTAY BELLİ - Prof. Dr. RANDALL W. YOUNKER -
VEDAT EVREN BELLİ (M.A.)**

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I - FOREWORD

Many civilizations have been established throughout history on the coastal plains around Lake Van, one of the largest and most beautiful lakes in Turkey. Although the water of Lake Van is soda, its geographical location, which moderates the cold climate, and its unique beauty have contributed positively to the development of well-established civilizations through history.

The most magnificent of the civilizations established around Lake Van in ancient times is the Urartian Kingdom. Van Castle, the capital of this famous kingdom, is located right on the eastern shore of Lake Van. The Van Castle cliff, rising in the east-west direction, continues to fascinate its viewers today, just as it did in ancient times.

Van City and Castle, which hosted the Urartian civilization founded in antiquity, formed the central territory of the state that would eventually spread over a wide region. No city in Eastern Anatolia has served as the capital of such a magnificent kingdom like Van. Due to the historical role undertaken by the city and castle of Van, many western historians and researchers have also named the Urartian state the *“Kingdom of Van”*.

In order to meet the water needs of field agriculture as well as fruit and vegetable gardens in the unirrigated southwestern part of the Van plain of the Urartu capital, which had a very large population, King Minua built the 51 km long canal bearing his name. Its sources are found in the upper mountains above the Gürpınar Plain, located 50 km south of the Van Plain.

This famous canal, which carries the water from the powerful spring near Kaymaz (Mecingir) Village to the Van Plain through a canal, has been operating successfully without interruption for 2800 years! In the 14 cuneiform inscriptions placed on various parts of the support walls of the canal, it is written that the name of this irrigation canal is the *“Minua Canal”*.

In these cuneiform inscriptions, which are nearly repetitive, it is commanded that no one should damage this canal and its name should not be changed. It is emphasized that those who act contrary to this request will be punished by the gods. Interestingly, people throughout the ages have respectfully accepted this order of King Minua, and no one has interfered with either the route nor the name of the canal.

Kadem Bastı Mevkii is among the most important places along which the 51 km long Minua Irrigation Canal passes. In Kadem Bastı locale, the hollow, lower parts of the land were filled by special soil fill.

Gradual terraces were formed on the trampled lands facing towards Lake Van. For hundreds of years, the local people have called this place “**Kadem Bastı**”, which means “**The Place Where One Steps with Good Luck**”.

The dazzling beauty of the vineyards and orchards planted on lands arranged as artificial terraces in Kadem Bastı locale have been identified with the hanging gardens of the Assyrian Queen Semiramis, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and, thus, have become legendary.

In the cuneiform Urartian inscription at the Kadem Bastı location, King Minua emphasizes that he established a vineyard for his beloved wife Tariria and that its name was “**Tariria Vineyard**”. This valuable cuneiform inscription, which shows the importance men gave to women 2800 years ago, should be an example to most everyone. Due to our respect for history, we aim to not let the name of Queen Tariria be forgotten, to preserve the site’s traditional values, to contribute to the economic development of the people, and to highlight sustainable tourism.

We have aimed to establish the “**Tariria Culture, Art and Gastronomy Center**” which we constructed on the northern outskirts of Kadem Bastı Mevkii. This Center will ensure that a 2800-year-old love legend is remembered. This important love legend, which has almost been forgotten, has great historical value as it reflects the oldest and most meaningful love legend of Anatolia. We believe that the “**Tariria Culture, Art and Gastronomy Center**”, which we have established by extracting from the depths of history, will make a great contribution to the culture of the Lake Van Basin.

I wish to congratulate Prof. Dr. Oktay Belli, Prof. Dr. Randall W. Younker and Vedat Evren Belli., who wrote and published the book “**The Vineyards of Urartian Queen Tariria and the Minua Irrigation Canal, the Subject of Legends**”. I thank once again the authors who have brought to light the Taririan Legend, one of the important topics virtually forgotten by history, to the readers, and wish the authors success in their work.

With kind regards,

Bekir KAYA
Kaya on Coast
İstanbul - 2024

II - PRESENTATION

The Urartian Kingdom, whose capital was *Tuşpa* (today's Van Castle) and *Rusahinili* (today's Toprakkale) in the Van Plain, dates back to between the 9th and 7th centuries B.C. During this time it maintained its dominance over Eastern and Northeastern Anatolia, as well as over the Southern Caucasus and Northwest Iran regions. The important construction activities carried out by the Urartian Kings in Eastern and Northeastern Anatolia brought this region into its golden age during antiquity.

Many dams, ponds and irrigation canals were built in Eastern and Northeastern Anatolia by the Urartian Kings. Especially small dams built on streams and rivers are of great importance as they are the first examples—the precursors—of large and modern dams built by the modern Republic of Turkey on rivers such as the Euphrates, Tigris and Aras in Eastern and Northeastern Anatolia. For this reason, the dams and ponds built on rivers in Eastern and Northeastern Anatolia reflect 2800 years of historical dam engineering knowledge and experience.

Those dams, ponds and irrigation channels originally established in the water basins of Eastern and Northeastern Anatolia 2800-2700 years ago gave life to agriculture on the small plains and valley bottoms. Thanks to ancient irrigation-based agriculture, the products obtained from fruit and vegetable gardens were gathered in the warehouses and cellars of large castles established for economic purposes. Large storage jars for food and wine and sesame oil jars which have been unearthed in the ancient warehouses and cellars of castles during modern archaeological excavations show how successful was the ancient agricultural practice.

In storage rooms and cellars, were found many storage jars, each half buried in the ground. According to a cuneiform inscription engraved on one of them, we know that the jar held more than a thousand liters of wine and sesame oil. Barley, wheat, millet, lentils, vetch, rye, oilseed crops, chickpeas, sesame seeds, wine and sesame oil, stored in hundreds of large jars, met the nutritional needs of tens of thousands of people during the long winter season. The amount of wine accumulated in the warehouses and cellars that were unearthed during the archaeological excavations in the Upper Anzaf Urartu Castle alone is estimated at 42,000 tons, while the amount of oil is more than 55,000 tons.

During the archaeological surveys we carried out since 1987 to expose the canals in Eastern and Northeastern Anatolia in the Republic of Turkey and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Region, we have discovered the existence of 157 irrigation structures from the Urartian Kingdom period including dams, ponds and irrigation channels. One hundred and fifty-five are located in Eastern and Northeastern Anatolia, and 2 of them are in the territory of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. More than half of the irrigation structures are located in the lands of the Lake Van basin, which formed the core of the ancient Urartian Kingdom.

Thanks to the minor repairs that have been undertaken over time, 11% of the Urartian irrigation structures in the Van Lake Basin continue to operate successfully up to the present. The most important of these are the Rusa Dam (Keşiş Lake), the Sihke Pond (Bostaniçi Pond) and the Minua (Semiramis) Irrigation Canal, which still meet the water needs of the agricultural areas and fruit and vegetable gardens in the Van Plain.

It has been thought that the Urartian King Minua had the vineyards and gardens he arranged for his wife Tariria at Edremit's Kadem Bastı locale were actually built in the name of the Assyrian Queen Semiramis, with whom it was believed by the public that there was a secret love affair, and this immortal love has been told from generation to generation so that it has become legendary and passed on from generation to generation.

The Urartu King Minua recorded his purpose for building the famous vineyards and gardens for Queen Tariria in Edremit's Kadem Bastı with cuneiform inscriptions on large stone blocks. However, since the people believed that there was a secret love affair between Minua and the Assyrian Queen, they also believed that the hanging gardens at Kadem Bastı locality were actually built in the name of the Assyrian Queen Semiramis, not for Tariria. For example, Movses Khorenatsi, originating from Mus, who wrote this love legend in the 5th century, and it has a great influence on the love legend believed to have occurred between Minua and Semiramis, which has been passed down from generation to generation until today.

Sadly, today's groves of vineyards and orchards planted on the gradual terraces of Kadem Bastı locale reflect this immortal love.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our esteemed colleague, Prof. Dr. Randall W. Younker, Director of the Institute of Archaeology at Andrews University, for arranging support for the publication of this book.

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