



The Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology launches the second research project in Armenia

The Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Warsaw has initiated its second research project in Armenia. The Armenian-Polish Archaeological Expedition recently completed its first field season at the site of Argishtikhinili, a city founded in the 8th century BCE, renowned for its monumental architecture and cuneiform inscriptions of Urartian kings.



The settlement was established on the summit of Davti Blur Hill around 774 BCE by King Argishti I of Urartu. Between the 9th and 7th centuries BCE, the Kingdom of Urartu was one of the most powerful states in Eastern Anatolia and the South Caucasus, with its core located near Lake Van. At its height, Urartu expanded its borders from Lake Urmia in the east, through Lake Sevan in the north, to the Taurus and Zagros Mountains in the south.

Urartu was a formidable rival to the Assyrian Empire, with which it waged wars for control over Syria and southern Anatolia. The kingdom is renowned for its inaccessible stone fortresses and numerous bronze artifacts, now displayed in museums worldwide

The city of Argishtikhinili

During the 8th and 7th centuries BCE, Argishtikhinili was one of the key administrative centers of Urartu. The city featured two citadels surrounded by residential districts and an irrigation system that supplied water from the Araxes River. The best-preserved parts of the city lie in the eastern area of the Davti Blur Hill, where the Armenian-Polish Expedition focuses its research.

The expedition is co-led by Dr. Mateusz Iskra, head of the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the PCMA UW and Hasmik Simonyan, an archaeologist from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia and the Service for the Protection of Historical Environment and Cultural Museum-Reservations of Armenia.

Previous findings and current challenges

Excavations in the 1960s and 1970s uncovered an administrative-religious complex with artifacts revealing Urartian history, religion, and culture, but the residential areas are still largely unexplored. – “The site is somewhat forgotten today, which unfortunately contributes to its gradual destruction” – admits Dr. Mateusz Iskra. For years, the area has suffered neglect and has been used as an illegal



dumping ground and by treasure hunters. – “This may be the last chance to thoroughly study and save this site,” – the archaeologist adds.

Goals of the expedition

The expedition has three main research objectives:

- To investigate the daily lives of the city's elites living in houses situated near the palace complex.
- To reconstruct the history of the city and the processes leading to the decline of Urartu, a period that remains poorly understood.
- To analyze the impact of climate change on life in the city between the 8th and 6th centuries BCE.

Discoveries and future plans

During the first field season, the team employed geological and remote-sensing methods complemented by test excavations. They discovered the remains of two large residences, preliminarily dated to the 6th century BCE. An unexpected find was a cemetery located near the residential area, where burials were conducted in two distinct practices: cremation and skeletal inhumation.

– “Excavations at the cemetery have the potential to explore the sacred landscape of Argishtikhinili, shedding light on whether it reflects purely Urartian burial practices or a mix of traditions from different periods. This research will deepen our understanding of regional funerary customs over time. In the residential area, the focus is on preserving the excavated structures and studying them to uncover insights into the architectural and cultural practices of the community”– explains Hasmik Simonyan.

As part of a collaboration with the Sardarapat Ethnographic Museum in Armenia, all finds from the Armenian-Polish Archaeological Expedition will be cataloged and featured in permanent and temporary exhibitions, ensuring their preservation and accessibility to the public.

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW) coordinates Polish archaeological research in the Eastern Mediterranean since 1959 (since 1990 under the present name). In recent years, it broadened its scope of interest into the Arabian Peninsula and the Caucasus. Currently about 20 projects are ongoing in [Egypt](#), [Sudan](#), [Tunisia](#), [Morocco](#), [Cyprus](#), [Lebanon](#), [Kuwait](#), [Oman](#), [Georgia](#) and [Armenia](#). The PCMA UW also runs Research Centres in Egypt, Sudan, Cyprus and Georgia.

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