

Obituaries

Altan Çilingirođlu (1945-2021)

In the mid-90's of the past century, when Armenia was in extreme economic crises due to war and the blockade, when one might have felt 'lucky' if his home had electricity even for a few hours, these 'lit' hours were doubly luck for a young man fascinated by cuneiform scripts and one who spent his childhood on the top of a hill called Arin-Berd, the well-known Urartian fortress of Erebuni, situated just a few hundred meters from his paternal house in the homonymous district of Yerevan, as they coincided with a TV program called, if I remember correctly, 'Anadolu beŝiđi' in Turkish (*i.e.* 'Anatolian cradle'), a quite fascinating and popular program which aired on TRT 2 TV channel. One of the episodes was devoted to Urartu, and I first 'met'



Photo 1: Prof. Altan Çilingirođlu
(Courtesy of Atilla Batmaz)

Altan Çilingirođlu in this program, when he was talking about excavations at Ayanis (another well-known Urartian fortress near the village Ađartı, to the north of Van in eastern Türkiye) and representing the circumstances of discovery of the 'susi'-temple inscription of Ayanis: after a rainy day, when he was resting against debris of the fallen mud-brick walls, a part of the soil suddenly fell off revealing cuneiform signs on the surface of a basalt block...

Altan Çilingirođlu's interest in the Urartian culture developed long before the 1970's, when he was working towards his doctoral degree at the University of Manchester, UK, which he completed in 1976. His interest peaked soon after his entrance into the İstanbul University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Classical Archaeology (1965-1969), which gave him an opportunity to take part in the excavations of the Urartian fortress Sardurihinili near Van, memorialising his participation in a few B&W photographs. The palette of his *ca.* fifty years' scientific activities includes around a hundred publications, mostly devoted to the Urartian culture, covering a wide area of topics – from excavation reports to political history and historical geography, from arts and material culture to beliefs and state religion. 'Urartu ve Kuzey Suriye: Siyasal ve Kültürel İliŝkiler' (Bornova – İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi

Photo 2: Altan Çilingirođlu at Ayanis, 1997 (Courtesy of Atilla Batmaz)



Basımevi, 1984), ‘*Urartu Tarihi*’ (Bornova – İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1994) or ‘*Urartu Krallığı Tarihi ve Sanatı*’ (İzmir: Yaşar Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı Yayını, 1997) are a few of his summarising publications. For Altan Hoca (as he signed his name in his e-mails sent to me) the excavations of Ayanis were the next and probably the most important stage of his studies. The archaeological team headed by Altan Çilingirođlu from the very beginning of the excavations in 1989 until his retirement in 2012, made an invaluable contribution to understanding this unique culture, in fact, starting a new, let’s call it an ‘Ayanis phase’ in Urartian studies.

Another aspect of his scholarly life was closely connected with Ege University in İzmir, where he established the Department of Protohistory and Near Eastern Archaeology (1986), holding various academic positions for a while. He also headed the excavations at the Neolithic site of Ulucak Höyük near İzmir.

As an intellectual person, organizer of many colloquiums, including a series called ‘Anadolu Demir Çağları’/‘Anatolian Iron Ages’, despite the existing historical and political problems in the region, he was thinking of bringing together scholars from the neighbouring countries, by organising the next conference of the ADÇ/AIA in Yerevan (personal communication in 2012, during a meeting in Erzurum).

He often wrote about his illness and his will and expectation to overcome it. Sadly, his struggle ended on 18 June 2021, at the age of 77. I am sure that his colleagues, friends and students keep his memory alive, and hence I have nothing to add except to say: Ruhun şad olsun, Altan Hoca.

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