Rendering the Political Aesthetic: Political Legitimacy in Urartian Representations of the Built Environment

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Anthropological investigations of legitimacy in ancient polities have generally appealed to self-interested assessments of costs and benefits to explain the commitments of subjects to a political apparatus. But ideological programs also strive to create affective ties between regimes and those they rule by rendering the political aesthetic. From the mid-ninth to the late seventh century B.C. the Urartian Empire controlled the highlands of eastern Anatolia and southern Transcaucasia from the headwaters of the Euphrates to the Lake Urmia basin, forwarding claims to legitimacy that redefined the political apparatus. This study investigates Urartian representations of the built environment in pictorial and epigraphic media in order to broaden anthropological understandings of legitimacy, pluralize our understanding of ideological production in ancient polities, and politicize the relationship between artistic renaissance and state formation.

There is an intriguing contrast in Urartian representations of the built environment between those carried in words and those conveyed in images. In epigraphic renderings, the kings of Urartu (a.k.a. Biainili), a southwest Asian empire which ruled the highlands of eastern Anatolia and southern Transcaucasia from the mid-ninth to the late seventh century B.C., called attention to the personal heroism of their building activities:

The earth was wilderness; nothing was built there; out of the river I built four canals, vineyards, and I planted the orchards, I accomplished many heroic deeds there. Argishti, son of Menua, powerful king, great king, king of the lands of Biainili, ruler of the city of Tushpa (Melikishvili 1960, #137).

Urartian monarchs described construction activities as episodes of conquest, forwarding a claim to political legitimacy based on the power of the king to subdue the “wilderness” and call forth an ordered built environment. This ideological program stakes the political order on what might be called the tectonic charisma of individual kings. The built environment is represented as historically specific in its production and explicitly political in its sources.

In Urartian pictorial representations of the built environment (e.g., Fig. 1), the person of the king is largely absent, replaced by generalized renderings of the political apparatus in the form of the fortress, often in association with depictions of deities. In these images, the fortress serves as a backdrop for scenes depicting ritual devotion and veneration. This built environment is represented as historically specific in its production and explicitly political in its sources.

1 The Urartians referred to their kingdom as “Biainili.” It was the Assyrians who used the term Urartu, but due to the history of research and discovery in southwest Asia, it is, perhaps unjustifiably, the Assyrian term that is most often used.

2 By charisma I mean a “quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber 1968, 48). By “tectonic charisma” I mean a unique capacity (derived from supernatural or other sources) to transform an “uncivilized” or undisciplined natural world and make it fit for human social life through the production of built environments (cf. Kus 1989, 142).
environment is represented as transcendent and sacred, a locus of the manifestation of the gods and their blessing. Rather than an image of landscape constructed through the martial heroism of a particular king situated within a royal lineage, pictorial representations describe the built environment of the empire as an ahistorical, apolitical site of beatification.

This disjunction between narratives of conquest and scenes of blessing in Urartian representations of the built environment reveals a surprising multivocality in the ideological programs which claimed legitimacy for the structure and operation of political power, surprising because ancient states, on the relatively rare occasions when they are discussed as political formations invested in ideological production, are generally described as speaking in one voice—what Liverani (1979, 299) has termed the “official ideology.” Despite their differences in narrative, the two programs share a common appeal to emotion and imagination, rather than rational calculation, as triumphalism and beatification operate most powerfully on an affective level of understanding. Such emotional dimensions of political life are largely unaccounted for in anthropological understandings of legitimacy in early states (although their potency is uncontestable to the student of modern politics).

Although at one time considered a central concept in anthropological analyses of political life (e.g., Eisenstadt 1963, 5; Fried 1967, 21; Hoebel 1954, 26–27), during the 1970s and 1980s legitimacy came to be relegated to secondary status and, with a few exceptions (e.g., Cohen and Toland 1988, Haas 1982, Smith 1978), largely ignored in discussions of early state formation (e.g., Claessen 1978, Friedman 1979, Johnson and Earle 1987, Sanderson 1995, Skalnik 1978, Wright 1978). This situation is changing as an increasing concern with ideology has encouraged a return to issues of political legitimacy (e.g., Ashmore 1989, Bauer 1996, Conrad and Demarest 1984, papers in Demarest and Conrad 1992, Schele and Friedel 1990).

Three primary concerns organize this investigation of Urartian representations. The first concern is to broaden anthropological understandings of legitimacy to include affective dimensions of feeling and imagination. Investigations of legitimacy in ancient polities have generally appealed to self-interested assessments of costs and benefits to explain the commitments of subjects to a political apparatus. But political ideologies also strive to create affective ties between regimes and those they rule by rendering the political aesthetic. The second concern of this study is to splinter the analysis of legitimacy in ancient states so that divisions within a state apparatus can be understood as potentially discrete sources of ideological production. While recent theoretical contributions in archaeology have pluralized our understanding of political power, allowing a multiplicity of factions to intrude upon monolithic definitions of the state, political legitimacy remains largely unproblematized.3 The third con-
cern of this analysis is to detail the political content of representations in early complex polities and so destabilize residual antiquarian assumptions regarding artistic production. The aesthetics of ancient “civilizations” continue to be rendered as explosions of human creativity. That these bursts generally accompany periods of political formation and extension was noted long before Childe (1936, 185; cf. Adams 1966, 10) included representational art as a trait of urban society; but only with recent art historical investigations of the Assyrian empire, Urartu’s primary geopolitical rival, have the two been explicitly articulated in archaeological analysis (e.g., Marcus 1995, 201; Porter 1993, 132; Russell 1991, 262, 1998, 663; Winter 1983, 26).

THE URARTIAN EMPIRE

The Kingdom of Urartu appears to have emerged during the early first millennium B.C. from a collection of local polities in the highlands of eastern Anatolia (Fig. 2) centered in cyclopean stone masonry fortresses perched atop steep rock outcrops. Unfortunately, very little archaeological research has been focused on the pre-Urartian formative period in eastern Anatolia and the handful of Assyrian references to happenings in the region are episodic and confusing. As a result, at this time we simply do not have enough information to chart the course of protohistoric Urartian political development.4

By the mid-ninth century B.C., the Urartian kingdom controlled an as yet poorly defined territory in the highlands around the eastern shore of Lake Van from its capital at Tushpa (Van), just west of the modern city of Van. During the imperial period (between the mid-ninth and late eighth centuries B.C), the Urartian kings embarked on a program of imperial expansion, conquering rivals from the headwaters of the Euphrates to the south shore of Lake Urmia. As they expanded, the Urartian kings inscribed declarations of their presence on stone outcrops and stele and built large stone masonry fortresses across the occupied territories.5

Three primary categories of cuneiform inscriptions dominate the historical record of the Urartian empire: ownership inscriptions on metal (such as those reported by Belli (1976–1977, 1991), Salvini (1981), and Zahlhaas (1993)), letters and documents on clay tablets (examples reported in Arutyunian (1966), Diakonoff (1963, 32–40), and Salvini (1979, 1988)), and display or founding inscriptions on stone (numerous examples reported in Melikishvili (1960, 1971), cf. König (1955–1957)). Although over 290 inscribed metal objects are currently attributed to Urartian manufacture, only a handful have secure archaeological proveniences. The inscriptions generally contain a short statement of ownership claiming the object as property of a named king and, in some cases, a dedication to Khaldi, chief deity of the Urartian pantheon (Belli 1991, 46). Cuneiform inscriptions on clay tablets are relatively rare, highlighting the very different use of writing in Urartu than in Mesopotamian polities, such as Assyria. These inscriptions can be generally described as royal letters and “economic” texts (Diakonoff 1963, 17).


5 General outlines of Urartian political history can be found in Barnett (1982), Piotrovskii (1959), Salvini (1995), and Wartke (1993).
The last category of Urartian inscriptions, those made on stone, is the primary epigraphic focus of this study (Fig. 3). It is in these declarative contexts that we can most clearly see political programs advanced by the kings of Urartu to secure legitimacy. Urartian display inscriptions have a very limited narrative range, focusing either on warfare or on construction. The most extensive display inscriptions are the annals of kings Argishti I and Sarduri II, which provide summaries of major military and architectural accomplishments. The majority of stone inscriptions are short military declarations, usually erected in outlying districts after a campaign, that record specific lands and cities defeated and tribute taken in rather standardized terms. The last type of inscription on stone is the representation of the built environment, such as the declaration of King Argishti that opened this article. As a general measure of the relative significance of representations of the built environment within the known corpus, of the inscriptions on stone published by the Soviet epigrapher G. A. Melikishvili (1960, 1971) (a catalog now dated in its contents but unsurpassed in its scope), 35% include references to construction and building.

The Urartian emphasis on construction described in the epigraphic record is clearly visible in the archaeological record. The landscape that was produced as the empire expanded and regularized its occupation of conquered provinces included fields, vineyards, canals, monuments, residences, and tombs. But the built environment of the empire was dominated by large fortresses of ashlar or semiashlar masonry (often surmounted by mudbrick) constructed atop rises, hills,
Urartian fortresses were typically rectilinear in layout with sharp angles and a distinctive system of buttresses and towers protruding from the curti
tine (Forbes 1983, 11; Kafadarian 1996, 92). A recent spatial analysis of fortresses constructed in the Ararat plain, such as the eighth-century sites of Erebuni and Argishtihinili (Fig. 4), suggests that the Urartian imperial apparatus comprised three primary institutional components encompassing religious, political, and economic spheres that were planted on conquered regions in the wake of military conquest (Smith 1999). The era of imperial expansion was brought to a close by a series of military defeats in the late eighth century B.C. Urartian military and diplomatic incursions into the southern Urmia basin provoked Sargon II to reassert an Assyrian presence in the region. His campaign climaxed in the defeat of an Urartian army led by King Rusa I.  

The archaeological record for the period that followed Rusa I’s defeat indicates a reconsolidation of much of Urartu’s territory, a resurgence of Urartian resolve to challenge Assyrian pretensions in the highlands, and a reinvigoration of the power of Urartian authorities. The reign of Rusa II during the mid-seventh century B.C. was the apogee of this period of reconstitution. Thanks to foundation inscriptions, five major fortresses, built on a grand scale, are directly attributable to him (Zimansky 1995, 94), including Ayanis (Çilingiroğlu and Salvini 1995), Bastam (Kleiss 1979, 1988) and Karmir-Blur (Oganesian 1955, Piotrovskii 1955).

Dynastic succession following Rusa II is unclear, leaving some confusion over the last rulers of the empire and the dating of collapse. The fate of Urartu during the late seventh century B.C. is not well understood but an inscription of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, dated to 643 B.C., records the submission of the king of Urartu (Thompson and Mallowan 1933, 95). Although this is not an adequate date for collapse, Urartu was never again a significant force in the geopolitics of southwest Asia.  

AESTHETICS AND LEGITIMACY  

Urartian representations of the built environment are not mimetic recreations of the landscape constructed by the Urartian kings. They are figurative renderings that convey meaning through discursive turns and bridges which organize the divergence of a representation from its source, in this case the created environment we know from archaeological research. It is in this divergence that we can locate ideological production. I use the term ideology to refer to a programmatic presentation of the world directed towards promoting the legitimacy of an existing socio-political order.

Since Rousseau (1977 [1762], 46–47) phrased the problem in terms of the free individual versus the political subject, legitimacy has referred to political cohesion. Anthropological accounts of legitimacy in early states have generally located the problem in what Weber (1947, 116) referred to as self-interested motives, where consent is generated in reference to rewards and consequences (Beattie 1967, 357; Claessen 1988, 24; Kurtz 1981; cf. Hayek 1972; Parsons 1941, 768; Rogowski 1974, 35).  

The costs of noncompliance arise from the coercive capacities of the  

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7 For a discussion of the semiashlar masonry style of Urartian fortresses in southern Transcaucasia and the contrast with ashlar masonry fortresses in the Van region, see Smith (1996, 224–225).  
8 Sargon recorded this campaign in the form of a letter to the god Assur (Thureau-Dangin 1912).  
9 See Salvini (1995, 109ff) for a summary of the problems in dating the Urartian collapse.  
10 Several noteworthy accounts have also located political legitimacy as an outgrowth of larger problems of social solidarity as defined by Durkheim (1947, 131–132; cf. Cohen 1988, 82; Kertzer 1988, 46) but in general these have not held great sway in the study of early states.
state apparatus (which may include both military and spiritual sanctions) while the benefits of acquiescence may include security from enemies, spoils of war, and a sense of moral propriety. This calculated, self-interested, cognitive sense of legitimacy is certainly useful in many cases for understanding the reproduction of political regimes in ancient states, particularly as they invoke legal and traditional bases for an existing order.

However, purely self-interested accounts of legitimacy limit the analysis of political cohesion to the sociology of consensus and thus lend little insight into, to use Turner’s (1967, 30) phrase, the conversion of the “obligatory into the desirable” which arises from the sense that political authorities warrant not only the obedience of subjects, but their compassion and allegiance, even when this requires their own destruction. This dimension of political cohesion lies in what Hegel (1977 [1807], 222) referred to as the “blessed unity of the law with the heart.” This is an aesthetic sense of legitimacy in that commitments of subjects to the polity are born of affective understandings of political relations rooted in emotion rather than calculation. The creation of this aesthetic legitimacy, where subjects do not simply tolerate a regime but actively desire its continuance, can only occur where political ideology operates less through persuasion, and more through aesthetic appeals to affective dimensions of emotion and imagination (Eagleton 1990, 23–24; cf. Bauer 1996; Groys 1993).

We can locate the foundations of an aesthetic approach to political legitimacy in Geertz’s (1980) study of political performance in 19th century Bali. In this investigation, Geertz yields central interpretive position in explaining political fragmentation and cohesion to the mustering of the symbols of rule through political performances of the king and lesser political officials. Although by no means a generally endorsed interpretation of the Balinese situation in the 19th century, Geertz’s argument for the transformation of questions of political order from Weberian mechanics (“Weber’s iron cage” (Geertz 1980, 133)) to problems of poetics is an important foundation for an investigation of the emotional commitments of subjects to a polity:

To understand the negara is to locate those emotions and construe those acts; to elaborate a poetics of power, not a mechanics (Geertz 1980, 123).

Unfortunately, Geertz’s emphasis on political competition through pomp gives us little understanding of how political symbolics percolate into everyday life beyond the rather restricted realm of royal ritual. Particularly important in this respect is the use of material culture as a medium to convey a more sustainable account of the nature of politics than performance (usually a fleeting affair) is able to provide (cf. Miller and Tilley 1984, 4). Enduring expressions of political symbolics, in media such as texts and art, can provide the basis for an archaeological approach to political aesthetics. But before media can be understood as in service to the state, the political subject must be considered a sensate and sensuous being.

A number of archaeologists have called for a more nuanced understanding of subjects than has traditionally been offered by strict materialist understandings of early states, arguing for their reconceptualization as sensuous agents.11 As Conrad and Demarest (1984, 201) have argued, materialist frameworks, such as that constructed by Harris (1979), not only deny the action of human will, they also rely upon invented psychological universals

11 For discussions of the importance of incorporating agency into archaeological theory from various theoretical perspectives, see Brumfiel (1992, 558–560), Hodder (1986, 8), Saitta (1994, 202–206), and Shanks and Tilley (1987, 133).
where emotion merely serves rationality: “the priest/mechanics of cultural materialism must invoke a ‘mentalist’ phantasm to energize their demographic machine.” Kus (1992, 172) has been particularly eloquent in making a case for a sensuous approach to the past, one which understands individuals as emotional rather than purely optimizing beings.

Opening archaeology to actors whose emotions are as involved in the production of the material culture as their subsistence requirements is by no means a simple task. Such a program, when posed as a political investigation, must begin with an appreciation of the emotions to which political authorities appealed. What type of programs were designed to provoke a heartfelt commitment to the polity? Urartian representations of the built environment in word and image offer an opening on this question because at their center we find appeals to discrete dimensions of human emotional life that have a long political history: triumphalism and sacrality.

WORD

The production of display inscriptions appears to have been a royal prerogative in Urartu. As Zimansky (1985, 50) notes, “Display inscriptions were intended for the glorification of the ruling monarch, and consequently the name of the king and his patronymic were essential elements . . . .” It is largely thanks to the parentage statements contained in these texts that we can trace the dynastic succession of Urartian kings from the mid-ninth century B.C. through the reign of Rusa II two centuries later. The prevalence of patronymic details in all but the most damaged display inscriptions suggests we can safely conclude that they were political productions closely linked to the institution of kingship.

There are two different types of Urartian inscribed representations of the built environment. In the first group are simple founding inscriptions associated with the construction of fortresses and individual buildings, such as houses, granaries, and temples. In general they are brief texts, giving the name of the king responsible for the construction and his pedigree (son of . . . ).

| Ishpuini, son of Sarduri, built this house (Melikishvili 1960, #4–10, 13). |

On occasion, foundation inscriptions are embellished with a standardized recitation of royal titles. For example:

| By the greatness of Khaldi, Argishti, son of Menua, built this fortress perfectly. By the majesty of god Khaldi, Argishti, son of Menua, mighty king, great king, king of the lands of Blainili, ruler of the city of Tushpa (Melikishvili 1971, #390). |

The earliest known inscription of an Urartian king was simply a foundation inscription preceded by an elaborate titulary:

| Inscription of Sarduri, son of Lutibri, great king, mighty king, king of the universe, king of Nairi, king who has no equal, wonderful pastor, fearless in battle, king who subdues the intractable. (I), Sarduri, son of Lutibri, |

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14 Texts from the collections of Urartian inscriptions published by Melikishvili (1960, 1971) have been translated by the author from the Russian; they are not based on readings of the original Urartian. These translations were then reviewed by Mirjo Salvini who graciously offered modifications based on his reading of the original Urartian texts. Any errors remain solely those of the author. Notations within parentheses are those of Melikishvili; those set within brackets are mine.

15 Although Melikishvili (1960, #1) describes the inscription as written in “the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian,” Michalowski (personal communication, 1998) suggests that the text was written in Akkadian.
king of kings, who obtained tribute from all kings. So speaks Sarduri, son of Lutibri, I brought this stone from the city of Alniunu. I erected this wall (Melikishvili 1960, #1).16

Although this text may seem strangely anticlimactic to the modern ear (though this wall is impressive, its construction seems somewhat inconsequential for the “king of the universe”), foundation and construction are rendered as actions which demonstrate the majesty of the king referred to in the titulary. Thus the latter portion of the inscription provides an example supporting the boasts of the former.

The dominant figurative device at work in these very simple declarations is a reduction of the apparatus of the state to the person of the king; all construction is accomplished by and through the king. Although an instrumental role is often given to the deities (particularly Khaldi), it is only through the king that building takes place. As a literal discourse, these texts can be read as event markers. But as figurative renderings of the built environment, the poetics of the texts establish the more profound thesis that the ability to accomplish construction projects, from granaries and houses to complete fortresses, lies solely with the king. This transformational power is the foundation of tectonic charisma.

The second type of epigraphic representation of the built environment is the landscape inscription. These texts, while also recording founding events, are marked by a concern not simply to establish the ability of the king to build, but to evoke an impression of his more encompassing power to transform undifferentiated spaces into politically constituted places.17 These can be rather direct accounts, such as an inscription which reads:

Ishpuini, son of Sarduri, built this burganani.18 By the favor(? of Khaldi, Ishpuini, son of Sarduri, built this building. Nothing of such perfection was [here] built [before] (Melikishvili 1960, #17).

Or they can be much more extensive expositions, such as an inscription of the seventh-century B.C. king Rusa II that reads:

To Khaldi, his lord, Rusa, son of Argishti, erected this stela. By the might of Khalid, Rusa, son of Argishti, speaks: the earth of the plain [or valley] of Kublini was unoccupied (?), nothing was there. As (?) god Khalid ordered me, I planted this vineyard; I planted here new fields and orchards, I built here a city. I diverted a canal from the river Ildarunia—(its) name “Umeshini.” On this valley of Rusa, when the canal overruns, let a kid be sacrificed to Khalid, a sheep—let it be sacrificed to Khalid, a sheep—to Teisheba, a sheep—to Shivini. […] Rusa, son of Argishti, powerful king, great king, king of the universe, king of the land of Biainili, king of kings, ruler of Tushpa. Rusa, son of Argishti, speaks: whoever obliterates this inscription, whoever moves (it), whoever removes (it) from (its) place, whoever buries (it) in the earth, whoever throws it in the water, whoever says to another: “I accomplished (all this),” whoever obliterates (my) name (from here) (and) supplies their own, whether he is an Urartian or a barbarian [enemy], let the gods Khalid, Teisheba, Shivini, (all) of the gods allow neither him nor (his) name, nor (his) family, nor (his) progeny to remain on the earth (Melikishvili 1960, #281).

A similar, though more economical, landscape inscription from the early eighth

16 This translation is a composite of renderings by Melikishvili (1960, #1) and Wilhelm (1986, 101) with additional assistance from Michalowski (personal communication, 1998). See discussion by Salvini (1995, 34–38).

17 By place, I am referring to a space invested with experiential and symbolic meanings which give it both a sense of position within a society and identity that comes from emotional investments and memories associated with a locale (cf. Tuan 1974, 245–246).

18 From Salvini (personal communication, 1998): “the text has burganani, which is difficult to translate, but it does not mean “fortress,” usually rendered with E2.GAL.”
century B.C. marked the founding of first Urartian fortress on the Ararat plain:

By the majesty of god Khaldi, Argishti, son of Menua, built this fortress perfectly; and [gave to it] the name Irpuni (Erebuni); (It was built) for the greatness of Biainili (and) for the humiliation of the enemy lands. Argishti says: The earth was wilderness; I accomplished great deeds there (Melikishvili 1960, #138).

We can identify three dominant figurative processes in the extant landscape inscriptions. While not every inscription will necessarily include all three elements, we can identify them as aspects of the representational discourse which were mustered in varying combinations or in toto.

1. Evacuation. One of the most striking elements of these inscriptions is their relentless emphasis on the emptiness of the landscape prior to the arrival of the Urartian kings. This emptiness can be interpreted either narrowly or broadly. The narrow interpretation suggests that these texts simply refer to the lack of a preceding structure on the immediate site on which Urartian fortresses were constructed. Archaeological excavations tend to bear out suggestions of an Urartian preference for constructing on bedrock rather than atop cultural levels deposited by preceding occupants. The primary thrust of the narrow interpretation is to interpret Urartian emphasis on emptiness as purely descriptive of the condition of the building site.

A broad interpretation, in contrast, would argue that when the Urartians referred to an empty wilderness prior to their arrival it referred to a more encompassing sense of landscape. According to this interpretation, the emptiness emphasized in these inscriptions is more poetic than descriptive—a figurative description of a locale unincorporated into the more "civilized" world of the Urartian Empire. We know from archaeological investigations that numerous early Iron Age fortress-states occupied the Armenian highlands centuries before Urartian expansion (Smith 1999). Furthermore, the regions portrayed in landscape inscriptions as vacant were simultaneously described in military annals as crowded with vanquished foes. Thus, in the broad interpretation, Urartian claims to the vacancy must be interpreted as primarily figurative rather than purely descriptive statements.

The latter seems a much more compelling interpretation, particularly when we note inscriptions which declare entire regions vacant, not just a specific locale. In the inscription of Rusa II above, the entire "plain of Kublini" is described as empty, not just a particular building site. It is important to point out that even if the texts hold descriptive significance, this in no way mitigates their figurative operation as a prominent recurring tropic element of landscape inscriptions. Just because a statement holds descriptive accuracy does not preclude it from oper-

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20 There are exceptions to the Urartian pattern of building only on bedrock, such as the site of Horom North in western Armenia. It is also unclear to what degree Urartians may have scraped away evidence of preceding occupations as they cleared sites down to bedrock for construction. This is a problem of archaeological control over formation processes. We see clear evidence of substantial earth moving prior to Urartian construction at Horom North where Urartian walls were built atop early Bronze Age levels, the intervening middle Bronze and early Iron Age deposits having been removed.

21 Compare, for example, Argishti I's founding inscription for Erebuni (Melikishvili 1960, #138) with a military inscription recovered at the site of Elar, just a few kilometers to the north (Melikishvili 1960, #131). While the former describes the region as empty, the latter records the defeat of the land of Etiuni and the city of Darani of the land of Uluani.
ating on a poetic level as well. The fact that the Urartian kings thought it vitally important to emphasize the emptiness of the preexisting landscape, whether descriptive or not, reveals the relationship they sought to forge between the built environment of the imperial apparatus and local understandings of place.

While most Mesopotamian regimes went to great lengths—both genealogically and geographically—to demonstrate their articulation with a continuous political tradition, Urartu described itself as filling a void. By positing an emptiness which preceded Urartu, these inscriptions construct a powerful, if suspect, opposition between wilderness and empire mediated by the tectonic charisma of the king. Without presuming too far on contemporary cultural constructions of wilderness, the metaphor expressed in this opposition can be drawn out to read the expansion of the Urartian empire as a triumph of the king’s power to impose order on the untamed. In addition, by defining a preexisting locale as a tabula rasa, rival understandings of place that might compete with, undermine, or question those advanced by Urartu were excluded.

2. Reduction. As in foundation inscriptions, agency in construction is firmly located in the king as symbol of the state. The reduction of the political apparatus to the person of the king is fundamental to any regime that stakes its legitimacy on charisma—tectonic or otherwise. The king is specifically situated within a dynasty through parentage statements which emphasize the historicity of his building activities. Urartian rulers were so concerned that the historical specificity of the act of construction not be obscured that they placed a curse upon their descendants who would undo construction or the record of construction. In other words, it was of paramount importance that a built structure be attributed to a specific king who led Urartu at a specific time rather than simply acknowledged as a product of a generalized political apparatus.

3. Integration. Urartian kings took great care to detail what they built. This concern extended beyond large-scale monuments to include the layout of vineyards and fields. In so doing, the parts were established in preparation for articulation within a larger domain of the empire. The purpose of building, these texts suggest, is not to glorify the king, although it is his charisma which makes it possible. Instead, construction is meant to increase the “greatness of Biainili” (Melikishvili 1960, #138). In this way, the built environment of a particular locale is integrated as a portion of empire, situated within the larger political whole as specific places which testify to the glory of the empire. Fortresses and canals, granaries and vineyards, are given meaning through their inscription in the larger body politic. Particular places are described as meaningful in reference to their integration into the imperial whole.

What emerges from the epigraphic sources is a sense that the built environment of Urartu was a political production, narrated as a triumph of the king over wilderness. As Mitchell (1994, 17) has noted in reference to European pictorial landscapes and Cheyfitz (1991, 4) has described in an account of the poetics of American foreign policy in the early 20th century, the narrative of the expansion of an empire is often related as a victory of order over wilderness. The champion of American imperialism, Theodore Roosevelt, presented the case for expansion in words which echoed those used by Urart-

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22 Examples of Mesopotamian concern with continuity rather than evacuation include Assyrian genealogies which extend into mythic animals and Neo-Babylonian emphases on regular continuity.

23 Curse formulae are well known throughout ancient southwest Asia, but observation of their popularity is not in itself sufficient to forge an understanding their role in particular contexts.
tian kings, albeit in distinctly 20th century tones: “the object lesson [of expansion is] that peace must be brought about in the world’s waste spaces . . .” (Beale 1956, 32).

In Urartian landscape inscriptions, the movement from the evacuation of the landscape to the integration of politically constituted places into the empire defines an implicit narrative of triumphal conquest. The king, through his personal heroism, subdues the wilderness, establishing a built environment which is “civilized” by virtue of its inclusion within the constituted political whole. Construction is rendered in emotional tones which describe the transformation of unregulated space into political place as a personal triumph of the king. This narrative is quite different from the rendering of the built environment carried in images.

IMAGE

While epigraphic representations ranged in their topologic detail from fields and vineyards to houses and granaries, Urartian pictorial representations of the built environment dwelt almost exclusively on rendering the built form of the fortress.

The large majority of Urartian art recovered to date can be classified as “state art” (Piotrovskii 1967, 15; van Loon 1966, 166). While little is known about the relations between political authorities and the artisans who accomplished artistic production in Urartu, well-provenienced representations of the built environment have been recovered from only two archaeological contexts—fortresses and tombs. While materials from fortresses can be rather directly attributed to state production, materials from tombs are somewhat more problematic. Van Loon (1966, 166) suggests that the corpus of Urartian art may be divided into two groups: a court style directly connected with the Urartian governmental apparatus and a popular style more closely linked with “commoners or provincials.” In a gross sense, van Loon separates these two styles by provenience, the popular style primarily represented by bronze belts from tombs of people presumed to not be connected with the political apparatus and the court style tied to fortress contexts. This would seem to require that we exclude images of the built environment known from bronze belts from a discussion of state art. But in a more subtle definition of his terms, van Loon (1966, 166, 168–169) defines the court style on the basis of its preference for straight horizontal and vertical lines defining rectangular panels over the diagonal networks of lozenge-shaped sections typical of the popular style. While several belts accomplished in the rectilinear court style contain representation of fortresses, no representations of the built environment are known from artifacts accomplished in the popular style. We are thus on relatively safe ground in treating the extant corpus of Urartian representations of the built environment as more closely associated with the state than any other domain of Urartian social organization.

It is very difficult to assess what portion of the total corpus of Urartian art includes representations of the built environment. These images are relatively rare on belts, but somewhat less so on bronze plaques. Overall the portion of the corpus devoted to such representations is probably small, though by no means insignificant. As outlined in Tables 1–3, this analysis is based upon 34 distinct artifacts. This list cannot claim to be exhaustive of all objects attributed to Urartu bearing representations of the built environment, but it does include the large majority of the most complete and relevant pieces.

Three compositional types of representations of the built environment can be identified in Urartian art: fortress elements, fortress images, and fortress scenes. Fortress elements (Table 1) appear in various media but share a common fo-
cus on stylized towers and abstracted stepped crenellations. Incised on the interiors of several bronze bowls from Karmir-Blur (Fig. 5), a stylized tree rises from the crenellated battlements of a simply rendered fortified tower.\textsuperscript{24} Several of the bowls also include short cuneiform inscriptions, encircling the tower, which specify the monarch to whom they belonged. This tower and tree motif also appears stamped into the handles of ceramic vessels, leading Vajman (1978, 104) to suggest that the symbol may have denoted “fortress” as part of the as yet undeciphered Urartian system of hieroglyphics (an interpretation accepted by Movsisyan (1998, 78) in his broader examination of Urartian hieroglyphs).

The close association between the stylized representation of fortress elements and the state apparatus is further supported by the appearance of crenellation motifs in wall paintings recovered from Erebuni (Oganesian 1973, 45) and Altintepe (Özgüç 1966, Figs. 28, 29). Like Assyrian examples from Nimrud and Khorsabad, Urartian wall paintings were divided into “orderly panels and framed friezes” in which repeated motifs were regularly distributed (Azarpay 1968, 21). Fragments of painted plaster recovered at Erebuni (Oganesian 1973, Fig. 18) indicate that a register was composed of a row of repeated crenellations set atop a zigzag decorated cornice supported by projecting beams (Fig. 6). Rendered in black, blue, and white, the painted architectural elements at Erebuni appeared on the back wall of a columned hall thought to have been the throne room.

In these two examples of the use of fortress elements, a very simple substitution is advanced as the most distinctive architectural dimensions of the Urartian fortress are mustered to give a tangible aspect to political relations. The political

\textsuperscript{24} For a discussion of the iconography of the sacred tree in Urartu see Belli (1980).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Location of find</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fortress</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Incomplete. Fortress has two towers with two-tiered crenellations and zigzag cornice. Central gateway in curtine wall, windows in tower and curtine.</td>
<td>Prähistorische Staatsammlung 1971.1823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortress</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Fortress at one end of belt, leans severely from left to right. Three towers with central gateway. Decorated cornice and two-tiered crenellations.</td>
<td>Photo in Prähistorische Staatsammlung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two fortresses</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Giyimli?</td>
<td>Both fortresses are incomplete but have at least three towers, two-tiered crenellations, decorated cornice and central gateway. Windows on curtine and tower.</td>
<td>Mu. Anatolian Civ. 3-10-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortress</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Fort in center of belt. Unique triangular crenellations without decorated cornice. Central gateway.</td>
<td>Prähistorische Staatsammlung 1971.6112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two fortresses</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>One fortress near center of belt, other near left end. Both carry two-tiered crenellations, decorated cornice and central gateway. Left fortress has four towers of varying heights.</td>
<td>(Kellner 1991, #279)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortress</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Çavuştepe</td>
<td>Large fortress with six towers, two-tiered crenellations on towers only, decorated cornice, and central gateway. Unusual large windows in curtine.</td>
<td>(Erzen 1988, pl. XXXIV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortress</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Incomplete. Fortress has at least four towers, triangular crenellations on tower and curtine, and decorated cornice. Gateway is on right side.</td>
<td>Prähistorische Staatsammlung 1971.1603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortress</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Fortress, located at left end of belt has two towers flanking curtine with central gateway. Two-tiered crenellations on towers and curtine, cornice is undecorated.</td>
<td>(Kellner 1991, #255)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortress</td>
<td>Bronze model</td>
<td>Toprakkale</td>
<td>Two-tiered crenellations atop curtine with zigzag decorated cornice and repeated gateways. Three rows of windows in both curtine and tower base.</td>
<td>British Museum 91177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tower</td>
<td>Bronze model</td>
<td>Toprakkale</td>
<td>Attachment to above model. Two-tiered crenellations atop decorated cornice with projecting support beams.</td>
<td>British Museum 91250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortress</td>
<td>Carved bone</td>
<td>Karmir-Blur</td>
<td>Incised fortress with two-tiered crenellations, cornice with wavy (zigzag?) decoration and tower windows.</td>
<td>(Kleiss 1982, 57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldiers and fortress</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Incomplete. Three towers are visible. Two-tiered crenellations and decorated cornices on both towers and curtine. T-shaped windows in curtine and tower bases. To the left of the fortress, two registers of warriors advance from left to right.</td>
<td>British Museum 1989-12-9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Location of find</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two fortresses and procession</td>
<td>Bronze belt</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Fortresses positioned near ends of composition. Both carry two-tiered crenellations and central gateway. Left fortress has three towers, right has four.</td>
<td>(Kellner 1991, #282)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votive scene</td>
<td>Bronze plaque</td>
<td>Giyimli?</td>
<td>Top of plaque cut to shape two-tiered crenellations. Zigzag decorated cornice inscribed below. Possible lines of tower base inscribe along sides. Scene shows winged deity bearing standard accompanied by ram.</td>
<td>(van den Berghe 1982, #114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votive scene</td>
<td>Bronze plaque fragment</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Bottom right corner of plaque only. Shows front half or bull with leg of figure (probably a deity) next to tower base.</td>
<td>Photo in Prähistorische Staatsammlung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votive scene</td>
<td>Bronze plaque</td>
<td>Erebusi</td>
<td>Top of plaque cut to shape two-tiered crenellations. One winged deity portrayed.</td>
<td>Erebusi Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votive scene</td>
<td>Bronze plaque</td>
<td>Giyimli?</td>
<td>Top of plaque cut to shape two-tiered crenellations. No cornice. Scene shows winged deity atop lion holding a bow facing supplicant bearing a standard.</td>
<td>Louvre AO 26086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votive scene</td>
<td>Bronze plaque</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Top of plaque cut to shape two-tiered crenellations. Decorated cornice inscribed below. Scene shows winged deity facing supplicant bearing standard.</td>
<td>Photo in Prähistorische Staatsammlung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
apparatus is considered from the perspective of its most prominent architectural signature.

Representations of fortress elements have been documented across the empire and in a variety of media, including a carved stone from Bastam (Kleiss 1974, Fig. 8), a seal from Toprakkale (Wartke 1993, Fig. 89), and an ivory fragment from Altintepe (Özgüç 1969, 89). Although these fortress elements do suggest that representations of the built environment were deployed to create associations between the state and built elements, they tell us little about the nature of the relationship established. For that we must turn to more detailed renderings.

Urartian fortress images (Table 2), the second class of pictorial representations of the built environment, provide considerably elaborated renderings of built facades, portrayed in strict frontal elevation, without compositional links to an explicit visual narrative. The best known of these representations is a bronze fortress model recovered from the site of Toprakkale, near Van, now in the British Museum (Fig. 7; Barnett 1950, 5–6). Only two fragments of what was likely a much larger composition now survive. The largest piece rep-
represents a substantial segment of a fortress's lower facade, including the recessed curtine and projecting tower footings. The second piece is part of a large projecting upper tower which was once fixed atop the lower facade. The architectural elements of the model included crenellated battlements, projecting towers, and zigzag cornice decoration (marked by a double row of triangular slots which may have held colored inlays). In addition, we can also see an arched gateway (which seems to have been repeated in the adjacent curtine) and three rows of rectangular windows.

Elements of a detailed fortress rendering were also found on pieces of carved bone from Karmir-Blur (Fig. 8, Oganesian 1955, Fig. 40). In the two fragments which survive, we can see projecting towers, evenly spaced around a recessed curtine. The wall is surmounted by battlements built up from projecting ends of support beams, a cornice with a frontal zigzag frieze, and stepped crenellations. Additionally, two lines of windows descend each tower.

Fortress images are also known from bronze belts, although few have secure archaeological proveniences. In one belt
fragment (Fig. 9), a fortress is shown set between double rows of embossed and engraved circles which are in turn flanked by a double row of hillocks incised with a scale pattern (Erzen 1988, 32, Pl. XXXIV; Kleiss 1982, Abb. 1b). The fortress itself is composed of six projecting towers flanking five recessed curtines. Each panel of the curtine is surmounted by a zigzag cornice while the towers are capped by both a cornice and stepped crenellations. An arched double winged gateway, with its right door closed and left door open occupies the center curtine panel; one large rectangular window opens from each of the other panels. Small embossed circles and inscribed triangles surround the composition, giving a sense of elevated topography to the entire image.

A second belt fragment (Fig. 10), currently in the collections of the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara, Turkey, portrays a fortress, flanked by panels depicting parades of griffin and fish. The fortress itself is composed of two towers projecting from a curtine wall. Atop both curtine and tower are the now familiar zigzag decorated cornice and stepped crenellations. Rectangular windows open from both the curtine and tower. Off center in the curtine is an arched double-winged gateway with its left half closed. This structure is set off from other panels by a row of embossed circles on each side. In the panel to the left is a parade of four winged creatures with hooked beaks that resemble griffins. In the panel to the right are three fish, positioned end to end.

Only a limited repertoire of figures and scenes are depicted surrounding the fortress in these contexts. In the belts cataloged by Kellner (1991) we can see flanking panels with images of:

\[\text{FIG. 7. Bronze fortress model from Toprakkale.}\]
a. fish; a winged beast; two figures on both sides of a large jar (Kellner 1991, #255);
b. fish; winged beasts; birds; sheep; and a figure (perhaps a deity) on a throne (Kellner 1991, #261);
c. fish; birds; two figures, one holding a small spouted flask, flanking a large jar (Kellner 1991, #269);
d. fish; birds; sheep; two figures, one holding a spouted flask, flank a large jar; a partial scene with two standing figures bearing various items approaching a figure seated on a throne in front of an altar with dishes placed upon it (the altar is surmounted by bulls horns) (Kellner 1991, #269);
e. sheep; goats; two panels of processing figures holding “offerings”; a large panel with two processing figures bearing “offerings” approaching an altar with dishes on it (the altar is again surmounted by a set of bull’s horns); on the other side of the altar, a figure sits on a throne while being fanned by an attendant (Kellner 1991, #279);
f. In two long registers without division into separate panels, two fortresses anchor a long procession punctuated by what seem to be ritual scenes (Kellner 1991, #282).

The animals surrounding the fortresses might contain geographic information linking the fortresses to specific places (e.g., geese and swans signify Lake Van or Sevan) but they also embed these constructions in the symbolism of the natural world. The primary activities depicted with the fortress images were religious rituals, often explicitly focused on what appear to be deities. However, only in the last example (f) are the fortress and the ritual scenes explicitly conjoined, incorporating the fortress into the religious performance. In most of the belts, panels separate the fortress from the other scenes, thus making it difficult to define the exact relationship between religious ritual and the built environment of the Urartian state that these images construct.

All of the fortress images share several common architectural features: stepped crenellations atop the battlements, zigzag friezes on the cornice, and high, narrow towers projecting from recessed curtain walls. Kleiss (1982, 54) has suggested that these three architectural elements compose the core repertoire of symbolic elements in Urartian fortress representations. Because of this repeated core repertoire, Kleiss cogently argues that these images portray Urartian fortresses rather than those of rival polities. The core elements are complemented by a more variable set of details, such as rectangular

Kleiss (1982, 54) points out that the zigzag friezes depicted on the cornices are a distinctly Urartian artistic element, unknown elsewhere in contemporary southwest Asia.
windows in the curtine wall and tower base and arched, double-winged gateways (often with one side open).

Kleiss (1982, 54) suggests that Urartian fortress images were symbolic expressions of the strength of the state. However, as Calmeyer (1991, 316) points out, the depiction of fortresses with gateways half-open hardly promotes an image of them as inviolable. The elements that accompany the fortress images on belts described above seem more intent on placing the fortress within a repertoire of natural symbols and ritual performances than advancing claims of the martial power of the state. Only in one known example, a belt fragment currently in the British Museum (BM# 1989-12-9.2), do we see a fortress associated with warriors, suggesting that there may well have been media which advanced martial images of the built environment. But the coercive power of the Urartian state does not seem to be the dominant message conveyed in the large majority of fortress images. The use of stylized mountains and parades of griffin and fish inscribes the fortress within a larger context, proclaiming a specific relationship between a built form and the natural world. The emphasis on religious rituals embeds the fortress in a supernatural landscape, rather than a political one. By naturalizing (or supernaturalizing) the fortress, its political content was downplayed.

In contrast to the generally static composition of fortress images, fortress scenes (Table 3) used architectural elements as backgrounds for figures engaged in some form of action. The clearest, not to mention most monumental, known example of a fortress scene was found on several stone blocks from the site of Kef Kalesi, on the northwestern shore of Lake Van (Fig. 1; Bilgic and Oğün 1967, 16–18). Each square (approx. 1.40 × 1.40 × 1.10 m) stone block was carved with the same scene on all four sides, depicting the fa-

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27 Warriors and hunters can be seen on a number of belts including Kellner (1991, #182, 175, 174, 117) so we know that these figures were a part of the Urartian representational palette.
The fortress is composed of three projecting towers flanking two recessed curtine walls. The curtine walls are largely obscured by the deities, but do include five T-shaped windows placed around the figures. The battlements atop the curtine are set atop projecting support beams rendered in evenly spaced semicircular pairs. A double rowed zigzag cornice surmounts the support beams and is itself topped by stepped crenellations. Perched atop the crenellations, a symmetrical pair of winged monsters clutch rabbits in their beaks. The towers project 0.7 cm out from the curtine. They are divided into three vertical panels by a recessed center. Set in each of these recesses is the Urartian sacred tree—a thin vertical stalk set in rectangular planters with concave sides sheathed by a hatched lanceolate body—and three T-shaped windows. The battlements atop the tower are built upon two rows of projecting support beams. The battlements include a zigzag cornice and stepped crenellations. Across the top of the stone is a fragmentary inscription which reads:

Rusas, son of Argishti, has built this place [E2.ashihusil],29 thanks to the grandeur of god Khaldi. Its foundation was ill maintained...was not. I, Rusas, have built. No matter whoever destroys this inscription...whoever place..., and the things

28 While each side of the block bears an identical scene, there are some small stylistic differences in each, raising the question of whether this piece was accomplished by one or more artists. More detailed consideration of the carving of this important piece might reveal significant insights into the organization of Urartian artistic production.

29 Salvini (1969, 14–15; 1998, personal communication) suggests that Bilgiç and Öğün’s translation of “E2.ashihusil” as “place of cult for drinking and sacrifice” is incorrect. The correct translation is not known but likely refers to a building part close to the fortress storage rooms.
entrusted to me by god Khaldi, let him be annihilated by Utu (god of the Sun) (Bilgiç and Ögün 1967, 18; Salvini 1969, 14–15).

The symmetrical figures in front of the fortress appear to be supernatural figures, perhaps the god Khaldi (Burney 1993, 108) or more minor protective deities or genies (Seidl 1993, 559; Wartke 1993, 66). The lions on which the figures stand are shown striding towards each other—toward the center of the composition—and are decorated with a scale-like motif. Each figure, with one foot on the lion’s back and one on its head, is garbed in a decorated skirt-like garment extending to the ankle on the back leg and midthigh on the forward leg. On their head, each wears a crown with horns on each side, topped by a disc set on double volutes. The wings of the supernatural figures, marked by feather-like hatching, are attached to the figure’s back, with the front wing extending down and the back wing protruding up to suggest compositional depth. Each figure holds a cup in the left hand and the Urartian sacred tree in the right (the use of particular hands must be of ritual significance since the artist compromised the symmetry of the piece to keep the bowl and tree in the left and right hands respectively).

The narrative of this fortress scene appears to be devotional. The god(s) appear astride a lion, offering their blessing and their protection. Not only does this transform the fortress—an explicitly political locale—into a place infused with religious significance, it offers up the activities of the political apparatus as ritual activity. The primary figurative process at work in the image represents the relation between the political apparatus and the cosmos as mediated by the beatifications of the deity.

Fortress scenes assembled on similar figurative lines also appear in a host of bronze plaques. While it is useful to consider the general compositional elements of these artifacts, only a small number, such as the plaque recovered at the site of Erebuni (Fig. 11), boast a well-described provenience (Khodzhash et al. 1979). As a result, the sizeable corpus of plaques is not sufficiently robust in its archaeological detail to support high-resolution stylistic analyses. However, the fortress scenes rendered on these plaques are worth discussing on a general level as they deploy figurative elements very similar to those rendered in the Kef Kalesi reliefs and the fortress images discussed above. The overall composition of the plaques is significant in that they suggest some attention to foreground and background. The spatial convention used in the scenes places a zigzag cornice and stepped crenellation along the top border of the composition, thus tying the scene to the built environment of the fortress. The architectural elements rendered in plaques

30 The plaque from Erebuni was recovered during excavations of room D in the Urartian settlement outside the fortress walls.
are highly stylized but recognizable as part of Kleiss’s core elements of fortress representation. The crenellations are always two-tiered and are typically either inscribed or cut out of the top of the plaque, as in the case of the plaque from Erebuni. A cornice is a more variable feature that is often left out of the composition. Cornices are embossed or incised. Despite their generally stylized form, both the crenellation and the cornice (when included) are still recognizable as elements of the core repertoire of fortress features that were mustered individually as fortress elements or as details of fortress images.

The figures that compose the narrative content of the scene occupy the remaining lower space of the composition. The scenes presented in the plaques show deities and supplicants engaged in devotional ritual. While all of the scenes in these plaques carry a nominal sense of action—a devotional ritual—what appears to be of greatest significance was simply the portrayal of the deity in front of fortress walls. Indeed in many cases, such as the example from Erebuni, the figure of the supplicant, whose entreaties would presumably comprise the narrative focus, is left out of the composition.

In looking at all three classes of pictorial representations—fortress elements, fortress images, and fortress scenes—we can outline a narrative on political legitimacy that differs significantly in its aesthetic appeal and ideological content from that detailed in the epigraphic sources. This narrative has three dominant elements:

1. Extension. In the deployment of fortress elements, the incorporeal entity of the state is lent a materiality in the shorthand form of architectural elements of the fortress, suggesting that the state apparatus can be apprehended in relation to its built environment. Given the prominence Urartian fortresses would have had on the physical landscape, it is unsurprising that their form might hold, from a phenomenological point of view, considerable poetic significance.

2. Reduction. Fortress images and scenes situated the imperial apparatus within a broader discursive field. In so doing, the state was reduced, nameable in reference to one part of its domain. In fortress elements and fortress scenes, the primary locus of imperial power was removed from the particular time and place of its construction by rendering only the most generalized sense of the built environment—bereft of any historical specificity and only a very general sense of location (possibly keyed by the animals surrounding fortress images). The semiotic potency of the fortress to stand in for the broad set of relations and referents which defined the political apparatus, as revealed by the glyphic use of architectural elements alone, lent it a remarkable portability.

3. Integration. The realization of the political ideology carried in pictorial representations of the built environment can be seen in both fortress images and scenes as the fortress is removed from the political domain and sacralized. Fortresses are not rendered as sites of war, bloodshed, and domination; they are places of the deities. It is through integration of the part (fortress) with the whole (the transcendent world of the deities) that Urartian pictorial representations of the built environment make their sternest arguments for the legitimacy of the political order.

What is fundamental to understanding the use of these figurative processes to secure legitimacy is an identification of the transcendent principles presumed to link the fortress with devotional ritual. The legitimacy of the Urartian state system flowed, these scenes seem to argue, not from the tectonic charisma of the king, but rather from supernatural sources, specifically the beatification of the gods. The fortress was removed from its specific po-
political and historical circumstances and transformed into a sacred place, apolitical, ahistorical, and depersonalized. Rather than outlining a narrative of conquest, the aesthetics of these images construct a narrative of blessing.

BLESSING AND CONQUEST

Urartian representations of the built environment present (at least) two distinct ideological programs for securing political legitimacy which differ in critical respects. While representations of the built environment in word emphasized the historical specificity of the landscape and its emergence at the hands of the conquering king, pictorial representations of the built environment portrayed the created environment as a transcendent, ahistorical, and depoliticized site of devotion and blessing. One appeals to a triumphal aesthetic of conquest, the other to a transcendent aesthetic of the sacred. The Urartian political ideologies carried in representations of the built environment seem to indicate that views on the world produced by a political apparatus to secure legitimacy do not have a singular aspect. Instead they may forward quite distinct accounts of the reality of political life. It is impossible in the case of Urartu, and I think likely in other ancient complex societies as well, to speak of a state ideology directed towards securing legitimacy. It seems we must instead expose the operation of political ideologies, addressing how they intersect with each other and the apparatus they purport to represent.

Urartian representations of the built environment are complex and multivocal and so the descriptions of their role in generating an aesthetic commitment to the political apparatus should not in any way be taken to exhaust the interpretation of these images or texts. Urartian fortresses were likely rich and complicated symbolic locales, simultaneously the loci of imperial instruments of martial coercion and sites of protection from opposing armies and raiders.

Ultimately we must pose the question, to what can we attribute this division in the aesthetics of two ideological programs which sought to secure legitimacy for the Urartian state? Three possible interpretations come to mind. The first looks to differences in the media carrying each program. Such an account would focus on inherent formal possibilities and restrictions within the two modes of discourse—such as the difficulty in presenting a depersonalized state apparatus in word. This is not a compelling account since we know from Assyrian contexts that pictorial media certainly lend themselves to carrying the charismatic claims to legitimacy that we find only in Urartian epigraphic sources (cf. Winter 1983, 24).

Second, it is possible to account for varying ideological programs in reference to differing constituencies to which they were directed. It must be forthrightly admitted that the audience for written and pictorial discourses produced by ancient states is perhaps the most problematic issue in any study of ideology (Michalowski 1990, 1994; Postgate et al. 1995). In order to embrace this model, we must assume that the epigraphic and pictorial programs were accessible to distinct segments of the general populace. However, both programs seem to have been directed to an elite. Pictorial representations are primar-
ily known from within Urartian fortresses and thus would have been viewed only by those allowed within their walls, an undoubtedly restricted corps of imperial officials, foreign emissaries, local governors, and courtiers. Literacy in Urartu was likely restricted to an elite scribal class, severely limiting the number of people who could directly read the words of the king. However, problems of dissemination of information carried in word and image are easily overcome either through public recitations or, in the case of images, by opening rituals to the public (cf. Manguel 1996). 32 The discovery of a bronze plaque from Erebuni outside of the fortress walls also testifies to the ease with which more portable media can carry images across even the most solidly built of boundaries.

The third, and to my mind most compelling, interpretation looks to differing sources of ideological production within the state apparatus. What seems clear is that the epigraphic messages come directly from the monarch. However, the pictorial representations are not so directly attributable to the king. Indeed, many pictorial representations, such as the reliefs from Kef Kalesi are more directly associated with religious rather than royal contexts. In this interpretation, the differing ideological programs for securing legitimacy are the products of distinct institutions within the state apparatus seeking legitimacy for the state in terms most favorable to its factional status.

It should be noted that a distinction between royal programs in word and temple programs in image cannot be overdrawn. The royal inscription on the Kef Kalesi stones and the use of fortress elements in the royal receiving hall at Erebuni mitigate against drawing solid boundaries between these two programs. Furthermore, I do not want to give the impression that Urartian inscriptions do not deal with religious matters. In fact, many Urartian texts contain discussions of religious, beliefs, rituals, and the pantheon. 33 As a further caution, the institutions of king and temple should not be conceptually disarticulated, a point emphasized by a recent study of the links between King Ishpuini and the emergence of the cult of Khaldi as a state religion (Salvini 1989, 88–89).

The suggestion that the dominant ideology is not always unified, singular, and coherent adds some complexity to investigations of political legitimacy as statements of elites may or may not be expressive of the group as a whole. As archaeology has moved to examine problems associated with ideology, it has tended to treat elite expressions of the right to rule as rather unitary phenomena. Writers such as De Marrais et al. (1996, 17), Friedel (1992, 116), Joyce and Winter (1996, 37), and Kolata (1992, 70) have rightly pointed out different loci of ideological production across society as a whole—from kings to commoners—but they tend to define a rather singular group of elites bent on securing the legitimacy of the existing order. This study suggests that the political elite in early complex societies may not always speak with one voice and that arguments for political reproduction may be phrased in various, possibly conflicting, terms (a point noted in theoretical terms by Adams (1992, 207)). It is unfortunately impossible at present to evaluate the success of the ideological programs advanced in Urartian representations of the built environment without a

32 Russell (1991, 238–239) notes that Assyrian texts from the reigns of Assurnasirpal, Sargon II, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon refer to festival occasions when palaces were opened to a more general audience of Assyrian subjects.

33 The Meher Kapısı Monument (König 1955–1957; Salvini 1994) is a particularly important source for interpretations of the Urartian pantheon. For more general discussions of Urartian religion see Hmayakian (1990) and Salvini (1989).
clear understanding of their audience. Without evidence as to how state media were perceived by subjects, examination of state media can only provide one side of a multifaceted set of political relationships.

Although they use very different poetic devices, the Urartian political programs for securing legitimacy contained in word and image have important similarities in their overall figurative processes. Both are aimed at securing legitimacy for the Urartian state not by appeals to rational assessments of costs and benefits but through appeals to triumphalism and sacrality. These are affective dimensions of political life in that they are aimed at provoking, to use Weber's dichotomy, a disinterested emotional response rather than a self-interested cognitive assessment (Weber 1947, 115–121). Both programs culminate, in a figurative sense, in the integration of territory into the empire. Although the specific content of the two programs was strikingly different, their shared emphasis upon the coalescence and coherence of empire provides a key basis for positing a degree of complementarity. This is not surprising since the interests of various institutions within the Urartian political apparatus would only diverge up to a point.

To return to the general problem of legitimacy in early states, Urartian representations of the built environment suggest that purely rational models are incomplete. They neglect to provide an account of how authorities attempt to forge emotional, rather than (or in addition to) self-interested, commitments to the state. By rendering the political aesthetic, the Urartian state was neither attempting to outline the benefits conveyed to subjects by Urartian rule nor threatening the imminent use of force to intimidate the recalcitrant (although the coercive devices at the disposal of the state were prominently on display). Urartian political programs appealed to emotions in order to stimulate an embrace of and identification with charismatic triumph and a sense of reverence and deference towards the sacred. The product of such programs, if successful in commanding subjects, is not consent to the state, but a profound interest in its continuance as it is the vehicle for "civilizing" the wastelands and making manifest the gods on earth.

It is important to keep in mind that the relationship between subjects and state is not reducible to the aesthetic, as Geertz (1980, 125) seems at times to suggest in his vision of the transformation of 19th-century Balinese power struggles into a "continual explosion of competitive display." Observation of an affective dimension of political legitimacy need not lead to a purely idealist conception of the state. The programs for securing political legitimacy described above would have been meaningless without the built environment they purport to represent. Similarly, the built apparatus of the empire would have been merely a locus of power without programs such as those described here to transform them into places of legitimate authority. The distributive and discursive elements of political life are complementary components of the same project—the constitution of authority—not rivals in competing accounts of the state.

The question remains of the practical consequences for regimes that resulted from the creation of affective links between the subject and the polity. The creation of a belief in the legitimacy of the imperial apparatus is not an end in itself. Rather, legitimacy allows the furtherance of political goals in other domains (Carneiro 1992, 193; Friedrich 1989, 301). As Benjamin (1968, 241) posited on the eve of World War II, "All efforts to render the political aesthetic culminate in one thing: war. War and war only can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale while respecting the traditional property
In other words, the goal of an aesthetic political authority is to achieve a sense of self-identification with the polity such that subjects not only will assent to existing relations of distributive inequality, but will sacrifice themselves to preserve and extend these systems.

One cannot fail to note that the Urartian era was a time of extreme political violence and constant warfare across southwest Asia. Large-scale slaughter, population resettlements, and intimidation reigned as tools of political formation and expansion contemporaneous with a remarkable florescence in art and writing. The association between political violence, state formation, and aesthetic renaissance can be pushed much further back in time, to the Sargonid Empire and possibly even the early third millennium B.C. city-states of Sumer. What remains insufficiently explored, yet of vital importance for archaeological accounts of state formation, is, first, whether artistic renaissance centers upon affective representations of regimes and, second, whether the aestheticization of the political apparatus is fundamental to the reproduction of early complex societies. What does seem clear is that the story of artistic expression in the ancient world can be articulated with a processual discussion of an emergent poetics of subjection, of the rise of the politicized imagination, and of affective claims to legitimacy. This is undoubtedly a more grisly tale than we have come to expect from the arts and letters of the ancient world, but potentially one of considerable utility in expanding anthropological understandings of political life.

The connections between art and politics in the emergence of Mesopotamian states were recently explored by Hans Nissen in a lecture entitled “The Emergence of Writing and Major Art in Early Mesopotamia” delivered at the University of Michigan, October 19, 1998.

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