

The occurrence of standardized objects characterized by either high quality of manufacturing, or their artistic value is one of the typical features, being characteristic for functioning of various ancient empires. The pottery is considered to be one of the most important among those objects, since it usually constitutes main 'imperial find' in the archaeological record. In the case of the Urartian empire, the main characteristic pottery group is connected with the so called, 'palace ware' pottery which consists mainly of thin-walled, standardized forms of bowls and jugs characterized by shiny red or dark red slip. This group of pottery was being used during the whole period of the Urartian empire and has begun to disappear already during the territorial expansion of another Near eastern empire – Achaemenid Empire. The occurrence of the palace ware pottery is connected with the existence of Urartian fortresses which were, mainly in the Transcaucasian provinces (present-day Armenia), the administrative enclaves of imperial culture in the midst of territory dominated by indigenous communities. Although the system of enclaves had survived almost two centuries in this region, their internal organization is still unknown. In this matter the most important problem is connected with the lack of studies on widespread and standardized types of objects, such as the palace ware pottery. So far the research upon the Urartian pottery were being limited mostly to typological studies, or analysis of pottery inscriptions. In this regard the lack of studies concerning the function of the palace ware pottery in the highly organized socio – economic system of the Urartian empire and addressing research issues is the main reason for undertaking of this project.

The project is the first attempt to investigate the palace ware pottery as a technological and stylistic group in the regional context, using broad-spectrum of archaeological methods of classification, together with petrographic analysis. The main aim of the project is to determine the organisation of production and distribution of the palace ware vessels inside the area, where the Urartian settlement were scattered and surrounded by non- Urartian population. Equally important is to estimate the scale of import of this pottery group, directly from the empire core located on the eastern shores of lake Van in present-day eastern Turkey. Therefore, it will be possible an archaeological verification of hypotheses about centralised or decentralised character of the Urartian empire.

From the perspective of provincial society, interesting aspect of the project will be determine the function of the palace ware pottery in economic and cultural contacts between Urartian and non- Urartian population, including the problem connected with existence of local imitations of the palace ware pottery. Another essential aim of the project will be elaboration of a new method of dating the Urartian period in Transcaucasia, using combined typological and technological analysis of the palace ware pottery. Consequently, it will be possible investigate evolution of the palace ware pottery from the initial stage, when it was a product reserved for elites, up to the final stage after the fall of the Urartian empire, when the palace ware pottery became ordinary tableware product used by new inhabitants of Transcaucasia.